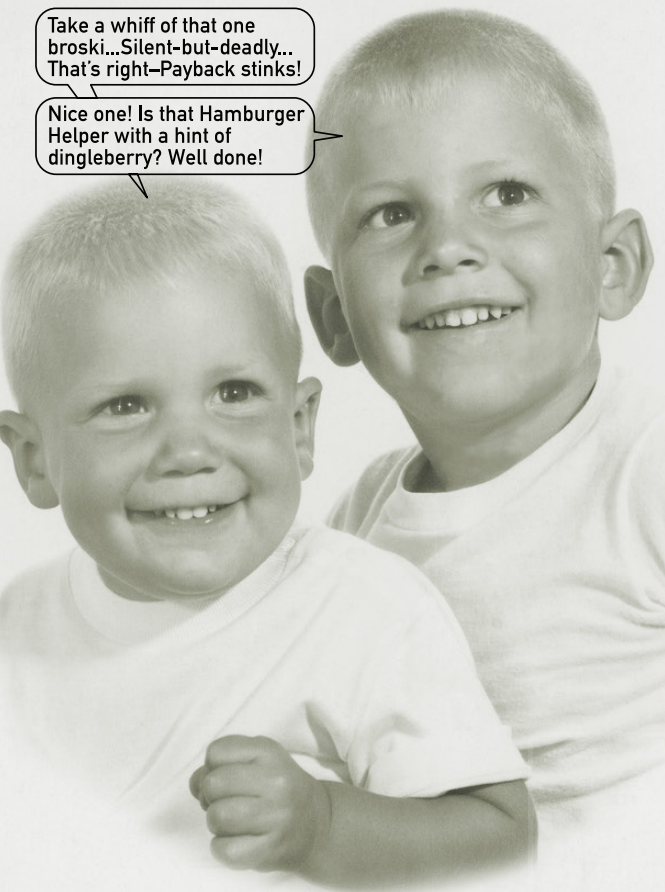


Take a whiff of that one broski... Silent-but-deadly... That's right-Payback stinks!

Nice one! Is that Hamburger Helper with a hint of dingleberry? Well done!



**THOMAS BJELLAND** presents a unique format that includes design, illustration and photography to visually enhance the sometimes humorous, sometimes painful, but most often perplexing situations imparted within the insightful text in his latest work: *Dementia Mom.*

Observations on related family "fun" include cultural, spiritual, and life altering events—including the Big D (Divorce!)—and are made personal with the aim of universally resonating with readers all the more.

BJELLANDESIGN  
NEWPORT BEACH, CA



176 pps+ (current draft) with 2C Foil and blind embossed Kraft slipcase. 5.5" x 8" Deluxe Paperback cover. Full color Matte coated stock w/spot varnish images.



A SoCal creative documents the treacherous twists and turns that arise when a parent (Mom) of a Boomer Generation family suffering with Dementia—as many of this age group are dealing with nowadays—struggles to cope with new memory and cognitive skill challenges.

Sibling (brotherly) angst abounds when opposing character is exposed to levels never experienced heretofore, when sorting out how to help Mom—who being of stubborn proclivities—refuses ever to admit there's anything wrong—memory or otherwise—and stop trying to constantly trip-her-up—as you will be accused of shortly!)



# dementiamom

THOMAS BJELLAND



dementiamom

©BJELLAND DESIGN 2023  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED / DRAFT@1/16/24  
WRITTEN, ILLUSTRATED, DESIGNED AND PRODUCED IN CALIFORNIA • USA  
BY THOMAS BJELLAND  
P.O. BOX 1482, NEWPORT BEACH, CA 92659  
[www.thomasbjelland.com](http://www.thomasbjelland.com)



dementiamom

THOMAS BJELLAND

## CONTENTS

### INTRO

PART 1 • I'm OK to be the AHOLE!

### THE RANCH

[The Scariest Day of My Life]

### CORONER'S REPORT

[PREFACE/See You in Heaven "Chirp"]

PART 2 • The Trouble Begins in Earnest

### DEMENTIA MOM

[Dating, Accusations, and So Forth]

### GOLDEN CHILD

[Just Wants It All to be Over!]

### WHIRLING DERVISH

[It's Not My Job to Have Friends!]

PART 3 • Where to From Here?

### LE DIVORCE

[Insights Gained/Lost]

### SUNDAY RELIGION

[If You Don't Go to Church You Will Go to HE-double-toothpick!]

### ME, MYSELF AND I

[Mr. Infallible—hardly!]



# dementiamom

[and sons]

Grapple with how to help “Chirpy” deal with a progressing dementia—that she stubbornly denied ever having to the bitter end(!)—exposing the personalities and actions of all involved to the point of literary notation. (or at least noteworthy consternation?)



# intro

# INTRO

**You might notice the book you are holding is (extra quality!) paperback.** Replete with photos, illustrations (for your added viewing pleasure) and evidence; anecdotal and otherwise, of the joys and possible afflictions of the family dynamics of one boomer-generation American family. It is not published in hardcover as a symbolic gesture to signify to any MATH is REALITY hardcores that it is satirical in nature and not to be taken too seriously—except perhaps for those who have suffered thine slings and arrows upon thine souls and/or conscience. Please use your imagination if necessary to get beyond all doubts that the events described within may or may not be fictitious, rhetorical, ironic, sarcastic, anecdote, or wholly accurate; but honest and generally in the ball park for a middle son’s recollections after decades of self-medicated (and fun!) Marijuana use (and don’t forget the boozin’—thanks Dad!). In some way it is a love letter from a middle son’s viewpoint to the halcyon days of growing up in post-hippy Southern California suburbia—I was still a boy when all that was going on, but there were plenty of good vibes still in the air—for those who sniffed them out when I came of age. If you are still with me after this first paragraph, hang in there and prudes beware, there may be salty language and opinions are rendered.

It’s a few days into 2018 California and Marijuana is FINAL-  
LY! legal here as I write to you from the townhouse owned by Mom (who’s currently eighty-seven and a Cuckoo’s Nest bird—she’s still got it boys—look out!—and I hope you’ll enjoy/share the pain of her peculiarities in chapter 2—love you Chirp!) in my hometown of Long Beach (why I’m here you might share a cringe in chapter 3—hey, it was good for awhile!). Kudos California voters! For any folks not familiar with pot or those who imbibe in “the gateway/evil weed” please take a trip to a dispen-

sary and you will encounter every type of person; young, old, professional and otherwise. You will see folks who look just like your neighbors, friends and acquaintances from all walks of life. Cannabinoid receptors are located in the body that accept pot as an anti-cancerous, healing agent. There are no receptors in the brain stem (like alcohol and opioids) so it is impossible to overdose if smoked and never has Marijuana caused cancer. I can fully understand that some folks can never change their mind about medical or recreational use period—whether through stubbornness or ignorance. That’s OK, but we all know that prohibition never has or ever will work. Could we then just get together and look at the benefits of reducing the importation and gang violence across the entire USA and focus on the billions of dollars in taxes California will reward itself with for voting for the future in this first year? Surely that’s enough to warm any Republican’s heart? If that’s still too much for some to consider (again, I can understand—but sadly disagree)—I’ll quote the words of LB friend from the baseball days Mike June (RIP “*the June Bug*”) “Fuck ‘em if they can’t take a joke!”

**Amen brother.**

Thomas E Bjelland 1/5/18

Look. Smile big and make it look like we like each other or its smuggy murphels and piggle-wiggles for you.

Again? Geez. You're gonna dick with me our entire lives, ain't ya?

Hell yes! I'll never change...

Crap. How about a couple noogies and a charley horse to boot then?

No problemo.

[PART 1]

**I'M OK  
TO BE  
THE  
A'HOLE**  
*love, oldest*

# THE Ranch



The local favorite. Made from hand-picked wild Oregon blackberries. Sweet!

## THE RANCH

Dad eased the big blue Buick off the two-lane highway onto a gravel-covered dirt road. The gravel crunched beneath the tires, a faint trail of dust floated up behind the car. The warm dry air carried the scent of dried grass. On the drive up to Oregon from Southern California we stopped for lunch at rest stops along the way, carved out of the endless sea of green Spruce. Dad prepared sandwiches directly on the warm hood of the car: cold cuts, cheese, Dijon mustard. A beer or two for him, us boys—my two brothers and I, drank cokes and snacked on beef jerky. Eric, youngest brother with the age apt sweet tooth, gave Dad inspiration for a classic family line in the rest stop bathroom while he stood drinking Orange Crush as he peed in the urinal. Dad chuckled “going in one end—coming out the other!” We stayed in motels over-night on the two-day trip. Of course it had to have a pool for us boys to swim in, and an ice machine for Dad to cool down the rest of the sixer. Any negotiations with motel managers were smoothed over when Dad pulled a couple bottles of Bjelland Vineyards from the trunk. Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Johannisberg Riesling, Gewürztraminer and the local favorite—sweet as heck—Wild Oregon Blackberry.

We drove down the dirt road past a century old barn, sparse young vineyards and the small house that Dad built himself with the help of local friends. No need for blueprints, (permits?) pour foundation, two-by-four framework left bare on the inside bedrooms (for shelving!), a pot belly stove in the small “living room” for winter heating. We crossed a dry creek bed on a small bridge formed by packing earth around large diameter corrugated metal pipes. Dad stopped the car noticing something down in the creek bed. He got out, opened the trunk and pulled out a 22 rifle. We piled out. He aimed down into the creek bed and fired. The rattlesnake’s head jerked backward, a



President and founding member of the OWGA. Sounds pretty high falutin'... Now, did I put that sixer in the fridge?

Lets see. Did I give Tommy four or five charlies?

Sharpenin' my pencils. You're next E!

Goin' in one end, comin' out the other! That's right!

direct hit. He retrieved the reptile, cut off it's head and buried it—for the safety of other Ranch animals—so they wouldn't eat it and bite into a fang full of poison—the headless body still writhing in the dirt, a gentle death rattle. I've had plenty of snake dreams over the years since, fortunately subsiding over time, but the occasional serpent still visits.

So began the first memory of many summer visits spent at "The Ranch." Mom and Dad were divorced when we were young—Eric an infant still. Dad moved up to Oregon, a country atmosphere more befitting his Erskine Minnesota upbringing. They had both moved to California upon graduating from college and Dad's short military stint as many other young adults did then to start careers and found teaching and education jobs readily available in the burst of growth on the west coast where if you had any professional skills, you could find employment.

Back then—the late sixties to mid-seventies, video games, computers, ubiquitous electronica designed to ward of the desperation of free time with nothing to do of today's youth—not even on the radar yet. We were three boys with no sisters for any softening levity. We ate Hamburger Helper, toaster oven snacks and drank endless gallons of milk at home in our pleasant middle class SoCal suburban track neighborhood in Long Beach, a burgeoning aviation industry bolstered development second only in size in the U.S. to neighboring Lakewood at the time. Our pleasant tract neighborhood had Jacaranda, Evergreen Pear or Carolina Cherry trees, one per parkway. Three bedrooms, two baths, hardwood floors, the one story floor plan repeating every four or five houses along the street. New for twenty-five grand, now worth half a million, even fifteen miles inland from the coast. California real estate is the single best investment you could ever want. Period. We played on Little League teams at nearby El Dorado Park, whiffle ball in the front yard, customized bikes or made up other games for entertainment to pass the long melancholic days of youth. Mom remar

Dad and his sons. Tim, Tom and Eric Circa 74? Dad was instrumental in the founding of The OWGA—Oregon Wine Growers Association and was one of many feathers in his cap as an organizational administrator and salesman.



Precious and few (on second thought – let's stay together!) are the moments we two can share...



Dad pours the juice. As the winery days were before my time as adult connoisseur (thank God he's tipping a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon—in my book there's that ethereal Red and then every other variety—if you want to even consider Whites! Yuck!—And at just the moment of one of my favorite sounds too boot—when air fills the neck of a 1.5 mil bottle in those first hi-pitch glugs), I never got to appreciate the State Fair Medallion winning vintages but think they were pretty good. Modest bottlings, too expensive to drink at home in the quantities consumed on the Ranch. He spent decades in those pinstriped overalls, largely commando—swinging free! It was pretty funny to hear him tell how once he had to get a tick removed from under his nut-sack, and the time he had to get a muscle-relaxer shot in the arse to offload an entire block of sharp cheddar he consumed in one sitting. Good Stuff!

ried—an awesome step dad Marshall for us. Dad also found a fine companion up north, fellow Tenmile, Roseburg teacher affectionately “Red Snapper”-“Mother Mary.”

Summer trips to the Ranch exposed my brothers and I to a whole new world. Indian Guides, Little League, and Gray-Y back home were now augmented with guns, mini bikes and bow hunting. We shot 22 rifles and 410 shotguns, eradicating the digger squirrel population and anything else that moved in a couple seasons. Exhausting milk carton size BB containers with crank or pump BB guns, tin can target practice—entertainment for the day. Hunting quail, grouse, joking whose buckshot was crunched on when eating the exquisitely cooked game. Dad loved fishing and would pick us up from Mom's house when he came down for his visits that might involve a trip up to Big Bear in the local mountains for the weekend or Idylwild where his brother, Newport Beach principal uncle Earl Bjelland had a cabin. And it would be best to avoid Marshall for his own safety as they naturally had their conflicts. He would trade wine to fisherman friend Frank for fresh caught large-mouth bass from Lake Tahkenitch in Oregon and grill to perfection, or smoke salmon when he could get it. We swam in the pine shaded “swimming hole” on hot afternoons, formed by damming the creek that ran year round through the property; garter snakes skimming across the surface, orange crawdads in the clear cool water, a tasty snack boiled later if you could catch one. Shetland ponies roamed the “back forty” to be called in daily for a dinner of oats, “Come horse, come horse, come horse!” while Peacocks cried their song for help. New were the endless chores of country life; feeding cows, goats, roosters, chickens and collecting their eggs. Thrills could be found; one day I took the mini bike on an Uncle Toads Wild Ride when I careened down the steeper than I thought dirt “back road” frantically digging in my tennis shoes in a desperate attempt to slow down, barely hugging the lip at every corner and astonished to find myself in one piece at

the bottom. Fresh picked corn from the big garden, grilled with butter and salt. Dad contentedly pulling huge bunches of garlic fresh from the earth in the small garden off the screened porch; enjoying the simple pleasure in life of sorting out which delicious meal he would incorporate them into.

One lunch in particular stands out, Dad grilling an olive oil slathered steak on a small hibachi out front of the house overlooking the vineyards and mountains that bordered and were included in the two hundred acre property. The beef had been raised on the Ranch, butchered and frozen for winter stores, smoke rising from the grill into the pristine cerulean sky. Dad looked out across the property at his years of labor (later his trade off for a somewhat lonely end game—sans sons for company), vineyards, winery, rickety PVC plastic water system that always needed mending and exclaimed, “It doesn’t get any better!” For him—true. For me, I’ll never eat a finer steak in any five-star restaurant. Dad even gave a shot at opening a hoity-toity “French” restaurant (despite never going there or having formal training—but legit, where bro Eric mentioned having his penultimate steak one day) on the coast in Bandon to serve the seasonal tourists, but *Château Splendide* didn’t catch on. I always thought he could’ve just made the stuff he made at home like BBQ chicken and handmade cornmeal tacos along with his delicious steaks and regular folks would have loved it. Our classic dessert; large bar Hershey’s roughly broken in pieces, divvied out with Planters dry roasted peanuts. Sweet and salty (don’t even try to pass off-brand store-label nuts and waxy volume chocolate!) Jeez—missed the whole point!

During one of those summers at The Ranch came about the scariest day of my life. I seem to recall that younger brother Eric was not there that year for some reason, two-year older brother Tim and I were in our middle teens. All brothers growing up have their fights. There were more kids in Tim’s grade in our neighborhood—enough to have opposing Gray-Y teams,

BJELLAND VINEYARDS  
ROUTE 4, BOX 931  
ROSEBURG, OREGON 97470

No. **365-40** Date 8-23 19 76

Name Tim Bjelland, Tom, Paul Eric

Address Long Beach, Cal.

SOLD BY		CASH	C. O. D.	CHARGE	ON ACCT.	MDSE. RETD.	PAID OUT
QUAN.	DESCRIPTION					PRICE	AMOUNT
1	Shares in						
2	Bjelland Vineyards						
3	Tim						113 -
4	Tom						195 -
5	Paul						69 -
6	Paul Eric Bjelland						
7	Tom Bjelland						
8							
9	Red Bjelland						
10	Chairman - Board of						
11	Directors						
12							

Customer's Order No. \_\_\_\_\_ Rec'd By \_\_\_\_\_

**KEEP THIS SLIP FOR REFERENCE**  
5H 527 Rediform

Dad’s receipt #365-40 for shares owned in “The Ranch” determined by how many letters were written by his sons the rest of the year between summer visits (no email back then!) Clearly I’m in the lead as confirmed by mine and Eric’s signatures. My favorite part is Dad’s title below his autograph—Chairman—Board of Directors of exactly two members—he and Red Snapper (love you Mary!). Classic! I never did cash in those shares! Mom changed Eric’s name to Eric Jon after she decided the surname Paul Eric was a bit much. It probably had to sting Dad (although having heard Mom say Tim’s empathy deficiency is “The same as his father’s!” he maybe was un-fazed?) some when Eric named his first born Marshall out of love for our stepdad after his mesothelioma diagnosis and not any spite for Dad while he was still around.

including next door neighbor Greg Thomson, (who would later become a great surfing buddy for me) but was on the Braves rather than Tim's Colts. I was on the Jets with school friends from my grade and had only Darrel Fong around the block—whose parents were young Americans of Chinese heritage who were not so far removed as to include and enjoy authentic foods, etc. in their house. Looking back, that exposure—little as it was—gave me one of my first experiences of being interested in and accepting of other cultures all through my life later. My favorite snack they shared was Le Hing Mui—sweet, salty dried plums you'd never find in Quigley's at the nearby plaza stores. My oldest friend Scott McIntosh lived three blocks down on Ostrom Avenue, far enough that he wasn't in range for hanging out in the early days. One of the main themes that always seemed to be included to some degree whenever Tim and any other friend got together was: "Let's fuck with Tommy." I can clearly hear to this day family friend's older brother Bob Hasson when he was with Tim at their house and I was in younger brother Randy's adjoining bedroom "Tommy and Randy are such pussies"—for no frickin' reason!

Tim was a tough customer, his first-born overbearing competitive nature was then and continues to be the main driver in his life, including the time he needed to physically wrestle and win a fight with our step-dad Marshall in the back porch next to the washer/dryer/outside freezer area as a senior at Millikan High. He and his friends took it pretty far—with seemingly never a break—grinding me to outrage like the time I got the long curved-blade "genie" knife out of the kitchen drawer and chased him and family friend Stevie Strong over the brick wall that separated the Thomson's backyard from ours. I pursued them through the yard, around the lemon tree and caught Stevie before he could get out the wooden gate on the other side. What was I going to do—stab him? Jeez! I, in turn, worked four-year younger brother Eric. My particular twist of the



Yours truly, aka "mot" standing tall outside the (fairly creepy inside) 100 year old barn up near the house as a young man with unfettered idealism and the world at my feet. I used to lay on my back as a young boy and draw pictures on the underside of the coffee table, signing my name backwards, mot.



A little one-armed swagger from "Big E" with a couple bottles of BJVIN champagne and a fresh cast from laying his Kawasaki 750 down going around that bitchen curve one time to many. Thank god he had his brain bucket on! Eric still loves the occasional RPM thrill on the Holton, Kansas backroads.

knife was being a lifelong artist I added illustrations to the evil notes & stuff I teased him with for an extra emotional jab. Wish I could see those now! (I saved some of my son Sean's drawings which he did of me when he had to take sides in my own painful divorce, but that is a whole 'nother story for a different time—chapter 3!). I can honestly say that my tortures to Eric (and I hopefully estimate they were less than half of what I got if that's any solace—sorry E!) were a direct progression of the family dynamic of people repeating what they knew as normal experience growing up and it's not nearly as much in my nature although we all know, no one is ever innocent of all malice.

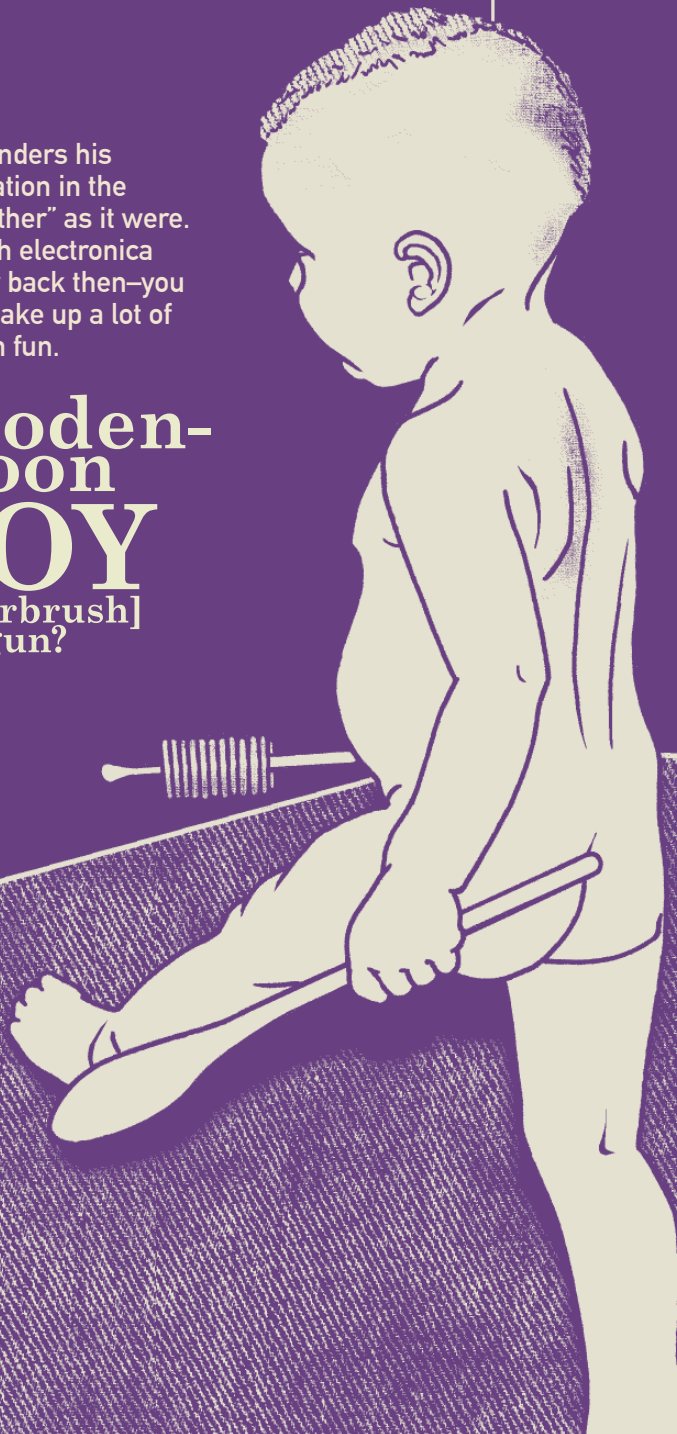
That summer day at the Ranch, I can't recall what the situation was (did it ever vary much?) that had me frothed-up to a point of rage. Tim was walking down towards the winery after once again needing to dominate me, and I was up by the house with a .22 rifle in my hands. I knew I could hit him in the shoulder—not kill him—but finally show the bastard what's what. Slightly elevated on the driveway near the house, about seventy-five yards, I knew I had the shot just as I had previously squeezed off the single shot right between the eyes of a vineyard marauding deer during a night-time hunt the previous summer. The deer's eyes were frozen and glowing in the spotlight that mother Mary held on it. I sighted the scope, pulled the trigger—lights-out! Dad took it out on the back road (off season?) hung it from a tree, and cleaned it for the delicious foods it would provide, including my all-time favorite Ranch snack that he made—oak wood smoked venison jerky. I remember thinking if I did just graze him, then what? I was in a precarious psychological state that thankfully I have never had to return to since that moment. A fucking lifetime of being badgered. Whatever it was of free will power that caused me not to do it came from a place so deep down I never want to go anywhere near again. Although I have had many a close call when challenging myself in big surf—that is an entirely different exercise in fear.

To think back of that situation is undoubtedly the single most intense and scariest thing I have ever experienced.

Later days there were of course continued tussles. One time when he was a senior at Millikan and I was a sophomore, I was pissed at Tim for something/everything and put the front hose with sprinkler attachment inside his Vdub Bug parked in the front driveway, but he caught me before I could turn it on. His retaliation the next day (still pissed and needing to always win) was to find my bike in the school parking lot and loosen the front wheel fork nuts so I would eat it on the way home, but I detected the wobbly ride starting out and avoided any serious injury of going over the handlebars. Why did he have to go to that extent of physical harm? It was good when he finally went to UCLA on a baseball scholarship and I could finish out high school in relative peace dealing with the ubiquitous social pressures of adolescence, although I'm not sure of Eric's view of that time or what he ever did to exercise any hurts from being the youngest with no one else to pass on the grief. One thing I did was to unintentionally destroy the two surfboards Tim had left at home. I rode one until it broke, cut the other down and re-glassed it into a bellyboard. Was it some kind of—at least unknowingly at the time—retaliation? I AM a surfer, there is the world-class surf break Malibu in easy striking range of the UCLA dorms—he ain't no real surfer if he left 'em home anyways. Tim was always the star of baseball teams and leagues growing up, I fully expected to be bringing dates to free box seats to see him play in the big leagues. At Millikan, Coach Artie Boyd came to my P.E. period one day and put me in at third during JV practice to scout if there would be two Bjellands to make a name there, but I was all over the place and I could stick to my surfing and art. When bro suffered the career ending knee injury in competition for the shortstop position with teammate Mike Gallego turning a double-play as the opposing runner slid in hostile with cleats exposed, Gallego turned out

"mot" ponders his next creation in the "all-together" as it were. Not much electronica gadgetry back then—you had to make up a lot of your own fun.

## wooden- spoon BOY [&hairbrush] ray-gun?



to be the one who did make it to the show and he didn't. (His son even plays pro!) One could surmise (having been exposed intimately to his adult behavior in all situations handling the recent family difficulty of Mom's dementia you'll soon hear about) that since he was forced to follow a different path other than star athlete and entertain an albeit very hard-worked successful career in sales; it seems like that all encompassing competitive nature in combination with a life-long chip on the shoulder is going to make everyone Tim encounters in business (and unfortunately otherwise) pay for it! Allegedly!

Some of the competitive nature instilled in this dynamic upbringing has served me well as a surfer; as catching the best waves in good conditions (or on an everyday basis) means years of experience and outmaneuvering everyone else who is trying to do the same thing. Opposite some non-authentic media portrayals—surfers don't hold hands and sing *Kumbaya* while frolicking in the sun. I remember catching a few of the best set waves of one of the biggest swells in a string of good summers; one in particular which was about fifty yards outside and about twenty-five yards behind the normal outside takeoff zone. This day I had seen a few break way out there, so ventured out to sniff around and found I was the only taker. I caught the behemoth way out there and rode it backside (my back to the wave rather than facing the wave as determined by which foot is forward in stance), and carved it all the way to the inside. Exhilarating! Then I learned I was the session stand-out as the respected surfer/lifeguard Jeff Kramer who was watching congratulated me when I came in for "Best Wave of the Season!" at the now world-famous Lowers Trestles spot in San Clemente. I mentioned it to Tim, the feat held no purchase; apparently as it was not something that could be written on a scorecard or officially added up to conclude a "win." It didn't happen in a contest. MATH is REALITY. If it doesn't add-up it is irrelevant!

A fun example of our different point of view came when Tim, friend Randy Speer and I enjoyed a stay in their family time-share on Maui for a week and the first huge winter swell of the season hit Honolua Bay and was triple-black-diamond. We had rented boards earlier in the week when the surf was small and surfed a few fun days at Hookipa—me on a longboard, so when Tim and I drove to Honolua after Randy returned home early I did not have the correct board to attempt a big surf and no one to paddle out with for camaraderie as I probably would have at least challenged myself to venture out from shore in the relatively safe channel to at least have a look around. I erred on the side of safety and with my tail between my legs, completely dejected, we drove back to Lahaina Harbor to check the surf there. Lahaina is a south facing break and even a small wave on the right swell can be fun as we had gotten one day earlier in the week. But this large swell was north direction and was big enough to have a wrap of energy even come in here, but since it was the wrong direction, the waves were small and without any pep and I had to pass and lick my wounds meandering around Front street and settle for a shave ice and “I’d get ‘em next time.” Tim gave it a go, and when he came in he proudly exclaimed: “Rode 12 waves!” For him, it “added up!”

Brothers can be complete opposites as Tim and I surely are, partly due to my need of pursuit in success in anything different from him and fortunately my interest in art and culture fits the bill. One day my son Sean was reading Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* for a school assignment and had the book along for a dinner at Tim’s. Tim picked it up and forced himself to read a paragraph and pointed out to me that it was: “Just a bunch of fluff!” Just like all literature. Any fiction worth reading needs to have an established author’s name larger than the title so we know we will be getting the correct formula. The story begins with a somewhat familiar cast of characters—the plot thickens with suspense in the middle and is all solved/tidied up at the end. It

has to add up damn it! Allegory, innuendo and rumination beyond closing the back cover—ridiculous! Blazing Saddles is just weird! When he mentioned that recently after catching part of it on cable as an “adult” it tarnished one of my fondest memories of when we were getting along well, which was mostly the case later as young men. He had just gotten his driver’s license which was a major step towards freedom in those days (I was astonished when Sean took his time to get his permit, etc., in today’s electronically “connected”—the folks will drive me times) and we (two youths, brothers—sans any parental accompaniment!) took Marshall’s grey Thunderbird coupe—the last bastion of his bachelorhood having been divorced before marrying Mom and instantly gaining a family of sons that was perfect for him since he couldn’t have kids and did a great job—to see the film at the Bay theater in Seal Beach. To experience this first ever in-your-face, stereotype satire when there was nothing nearly as “inappropriate” on the big screen previously was awesome. Campfire farts, racial jokes with lead actor Cleavon Little being a brother, the immutable genius Gene Wilder; Harvey Korman and Madeline Kahn supporting—what’s not to like! Mel Brooks, you are OG, Young Frankenstein being the second best comedy ever made (Terri Garr—yes, I would certainly like to take a roll-in-zee-hay!). Family Guy (my favorite toon) take a bow—there’s only two camps—people love it or they don’t get it. Just seems to beg the question: intellectually who’s more advanced?

Thankfully there are millions like me who enjoy creativity—something comes from nothing! And while acknowledging that idea can also be applied in a business sense, there is relief in the notion that the richest woman in the world—JK Rowling—made up a story about kids and wizards and amassed her fortune by people across the globe loving what she created rather than some white collar trading wizard who climbed to the top manipulating numbers or breaking middle-class people’s backs



Bjelland Family, Long Beach, CA 'round about '62 or '63. Youngest E is not in the picture yet, Oldest is already over it! Dad looks irritated and Mom's puttin' on a brave face. I'm oblivious to the possible underlying discord floating about the picture, and the dark image matches the sentiment. Mom was pretty sturdy in a lot of the difficulties she must have faced with three little dudes and the big split. Thank goodness for Marshall joining the family not long after!

by gentrification in the name of the almighty dollar. Dick! Greed is good. Greed is God, and God is American! Jesus didn't intend for us to be poor! Market rate is market rate for those renting suckers. Winners are winners, losers-tough crap! We need both types in the world and there is of course rightfully argument for both, unless you were to ask Tim. Could he possibly conceptualize the thought that if everyone was "just like him" how could he ever make a single deal and climb above the rest of us peons? It's not my job to have friends! When Dad passed away Eric and I were completely exhausted having spent a weekend in Oregon with him to visit Mary & kin and spread Dad's ashes after he first had to be talked into going due to his difficult feeling towards Dad, and then enduring his conclusive "correct and only" way of seeing every idea and situation non-stop for three days. Crikey! In a dose tolerable, beware of anything further.

Eldest one time mentioned at one of the many generous family dinners at their place that he doesn't like to brag in front of me about his country club golf victories as if I could really give a crap if you can hit a ball around a lawn filled with holes better than the next upstanding citizen in any fine town like Costa Mesa. Being a youth Little-leaguer, slo-pitch enthusiast and World Series fan (I don't watch until then, and many a Fall I've had the good fortune to catch it on my annual trip to the North Shore where in Hawaii it's three hours later so games start in the early afternoon and you can have a couple beers and still make it through any extra innings. Fun to check in with Tim then too). I can appreciate a good swing and Tim's long drive is indeed a beauty. A line drive that floats higher as it slightly slows the further it goes on its trajectory before starting descent. Nice! Good on ya, but it ain't the Pro tour, get over it! No risk of life and limb as in surfing. Don't even think he didn't email everyone (replete with photo attachments) to let us know he finally reached the holy grail of a hole-in-one on the



above: Thomas and Timothy (with holstered pistol just for fun!—he doesn't really need to be sheriff every day!) Dad's been fishin' with his son(s)! right: Eldest hits 5 with Mom's faithful home-made cake. How about my sexy jumper? Shiny!

local course, and which stores to look for when we drove by on Harbor Blvd., so we could reference which hole the great event took place. Whoop-De-do! What a pisser! It was really fun the one time my brother-in-law Hiromi visited from Tokyo and we all participated in Tim's passion by playing the *Bjelland Open* as brothers though. I sorted out later why in particular I'm not an enthusiast as it's a bit too mental of an exercise for eighteen holes. My best hole was the ninth where I teed-up and birdied in an effort to get into the clubhouse for lunch with as little delay as possible. Didn't even think about it. Bing, bang, boom, lunch! Not that surfing at the highest level does not demand dedication and unwavering confidence, in fact you better be sure you want to catch a big wave or payment will be rendered, (it will be anyways—but best to mitigate if possible) but it's a

different kind of mental intensity, challenging yourself and nature rather than beating "an opponent." Surf competitions aside (I have never been in one), of course it feels good to catch the best wave of the day or surf a nice wave in front of your bros, you have to have ego—but the fun is not dependent on any final ranking. And the endorphin high from a successful (safe!) surf session is not to be missed.

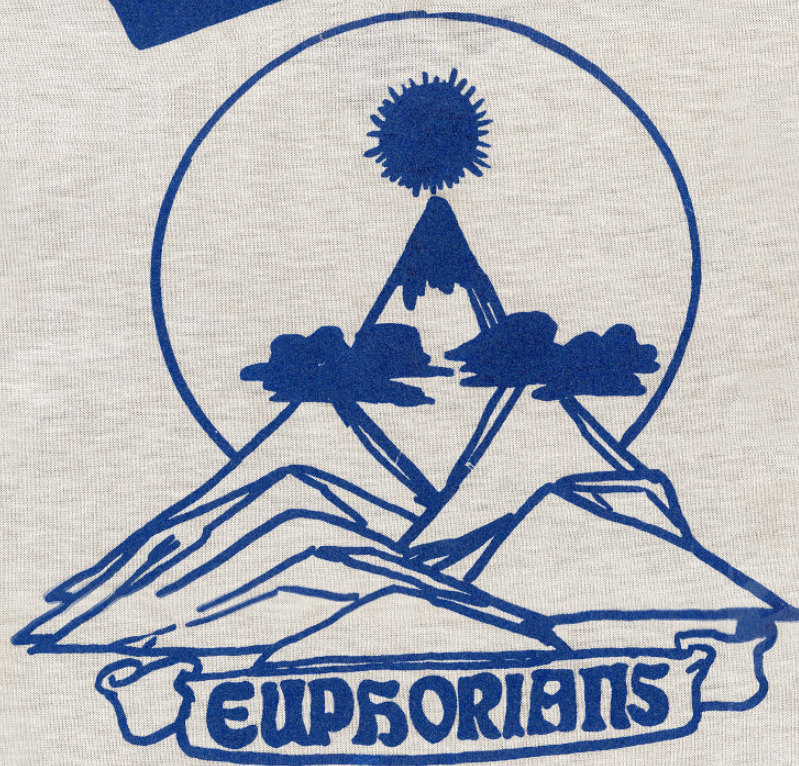
Our family dynamic established by "Oldest" is such that no mercy can be shown in any type of friendly competition in order to survive. Don't even think about letting a kid nephew enjoy a "game" of croquet in the backyard—knock him out on the first available shot! It's kinda fun still? It was a real bummer to hear nephew Marshall (named after our step-dad) say how when he had tried to communicate in addition to his high school football successes, his school-record baseball dinger to Tim, instead of congratulations or bonding—he belittled it.





Such are the tribulations of siblings, and the passing of time can heal if not at least hold a bandage on old wounds. One of the funnest things I enjoyed during college and beyond for around a decade was playing on a slow-pitch softball team with a bunch of bros from the hood. We were called the Euphorians (of course Tim was the guy on the team who didn't smoke weed as most everyone else did as customary for our generation and hence our name) for our general appreciation of a good buzz! Mom would flip if she knew one of the brothers from a Christ Lutheran Church family where we brothers were all confirmed grew it up North as our general supplier and a Euphy team member kindly distributed it. We drank tap beers and played shuffleboard in the local dive *The Annex* after games. We dressed up in costumes for the game during Halloween week and waxed opponents in comical fashion. One year after a few key bros had moved out of Long Beach, I was actually voted co-MVP the only year we won the league championship (\*we did have a ringer named Freddy for that season—Tim hadn't played for a few seasons by then—I can't recall why but possibly had some residual effect on me being able to competitively go to that higher place). I was in the zone for the entire season buoyed by the fact that I loved the guys who were gone from the team. I would walk to the plate and mentally dare the pitcher to put it anywhere near the strike-zone; and I would rip a line-drive through his skull or in fair territory. My one technique was to always wait a fraction of a second longer than when the impulse came to swing; and hence drive the ball faster than my normal swing would allow, even earning the nickname: "Hammerin' Hank." This one's for Thomson. Gush! This one's for Matt-the-Cat. Gush! This one's for Willy. Gush! I wasn't as dependable as an outfielder but had a good arm if I did have a play to throw to. A few seasons earlier during a game, a long fly sent me running back to retrieve it in right and I ran out of field and hit some sidewalk near the bathrooms, my

# Euphorians



RIP to the AWESOME Mr. JOESPH PLUMMER • "Grandma" ala Halloween FUN

Euphy Blue 'til the day I die! Front jersey logo and back print: Jake's Peak (4:20 p.m.)

cleats slipped on the smooth surface sending me flying on my back. Tim immediately sprinted from his pitcher position all the way out to see if it was as bad as it looked and see if I was OK. Fortunately I was fine. I know that he loves me in his way, difficult as he is. A'hole! (Allegedly!)

My last solo trip—during summer of my first year of Junior College at Long Beach City, I visited the Ranch for a three-month stay. I grew a goatee like Dad's, worked in the vineyards and winery, drove the John Deere (sans trucker hat) and participated in most of the endless chores of maintaining the Ranch. I had the luxury of youth to be overtly idealistic—ready to follow whatever path life could reveal—perhaps even a country life. I enjoyed lunchtime wine drunks with local vintner-hippy friends of Dad's who would visit, followed by the obligatory afternoon nap. He thought of himself (and was rightly so when occasion arose) as a high-brow intellectual—with the attendant self-centered ego to be above others; yet it didn't stop him from being good friends with every type of local yokel—which I love about him—but is sorely absent with bro Tim who inherited his elitist compassion deficient tendencies (He can't help it!). When they drove off in their VW bus, I envied their simple life of living off the land—country style insulated freedom—hard work and advanced home brewing. Dad was old-school, frowning on any kind of "drug" usage, all the while slowly pickling himself (and indulging in his own first rate cooking) into early/old age diabetes. He told me one day with great relish how he and the boys would sneak out back behind a haystack for a few snorts of whiskey back in their day. So I had to sneak a few puffs of the small amount of herb that I had brought up with me down at the swimming hole. Relaxation and clarity of thought, then I had to stay there for a couple hours until it wore off, lest be detected by Dad when he awoke from his afternoon lunch/wine slumber. This slow pace of life, where the afternoon mail delivery is a big event, later would calm me on restless nights; rumination of the serene but banal, hot, dry Oregon

General Bjelland

B.S. M.A.

An experienced authority, authoritative voice  
★ OPINIONS RENDERED ★

Old Cadillacs, table wine, wine grapes, scotch whiskey, gin, racing forms, wars, Colt 45s, manure, dictatorships, quelling uprisings, stuffing ballot boxes, jamming computers, burying dead horses, floods, snow, skiing, taming tigers, Administrative schools (any level), French Restaurants, U.S. Marines, gourmet foods, snails, beer, herbicides, pesticides, washing dishes, big cities, small towns, Champagne, busting dams, cat work, power boats, sommeliers, golf, tennis, basketball, SEX, wild life, Late Wabagon, Best Man, Regents, CLC Regents, TALB, CTA, PDK, NEA, OWEA, Greatest of the Grape, viticulture, enology, back aches, BOYS, T.V., speech making, dramatics, Wine Festivals, Norsk, Minnesota, Oregon, California Public Relations, Investments, OLD AGE, Seniors, Religion, Logging, Butchering, smoking, crabbing, clamming.

P.O. Box 747

Roseburg, OR, 97470

Fee \$125 per hr.

plus expenses

NEWPORT BEACH, CA

Dad's hand-written Opinions Rendered declaration. It did make it into his remembrance brochure. \$125 pr hr. plus expenses, a real pisser! Nice!

afternoons, a good sleep aid.

Eventually the summer wore on and the end of my stay finally approached. I had tried to hitch a ride back with cousin Meridee and her husband Paul passing through a few weeks earlier as the boredom was getting the better of me, but they were already packed tight with kid and dog and stuff in their truck. We drove the couple hours in Dad's blue vintage caddy from Roseburg to Medford, I boarded a flight home to Orange County (now John Wayne) airport. After touching down, I gathered my duffel bag from the then outdoor baggage claim expecting Mom to pick me up for the short trip home (in those magical cellphone-traffic-less freeway days) up to Long Beach, where my part-time job at Lakewood Nursery and fall semester awaited. Rounding the corner of the terminal building, to my surprise I was greeted not by Mom, but by next-door neighbor, Greg. Not only did he have a big smile, he had my board and wetsuit in the back of his carpet van! After a quick stop at the bank where Greg charmed the cute teller (back to the world of cute girls!-if there ever was a name befitting character Greg-gregarious was it.) We hit the 405 south to Trestles.

In the parking lot, Greg pulled his custom order Bruce Jones-yellow bottom and rails, clear-glassed deck diamond-tail singlefin with blue and red chevrons tapering parallel the rails from the nose to mid point, from the van and draped his springsuit over the rail. (We carried boards tail-first in those wide-nose pintail days.) I did likewise, a profound saying for us surf buddies struck true-nothing feels quite like putting your arm around a clean stick or a pretty girl. We headed down the blacktop trail carried along by the scent of sagebrush and eucalyptus, above us an overcast grey sky. Upon reaching the beach, head-high swells peeled right across the low tide Uppers cobblestones, a slight onshore breeze ruffling the ocean surface. We suited up, and gingerly crossed the barnacle-encrusted rocks, the cool water baptizing my feet; my nostrils filled with saline seaweed aquavescence, no longer a creature confined to

land. As soon as the water was deep enough, I flipped my board over deck-side up and gently pushed off into the inside section. A moderate crowd was out. I caught a few waves, each ride looser than the previous. Soon banks became carves. Climbing, dropping, roller-coaster roundhouse-cutback. I was one with the elements, I was Jonathon Livingston Seagull; I was Wayne Lynch backside, one with the universe; a Surfer-home. Greg caught a right as I paddled over the wave's shoulder, from behind his patented bank off-the-lip with arms folded framing his head-same as it ever was. It's fun to see someone surf months, years, even decades on and see the same style characteristics pop up. Towards the end of the session, a guy paddled for a wave, missed it. Turned to paddle back out, cursing himself or the other guy who had caught it deeper and rode past him. I looked at the twisted expression on his face, thought to myself "How could anyone possibly be bummed out surfing a good day of a good summer of a good year in the prime of his life?" We say in surfing that the surfer who has the most fun is best. That day confirmed conclusively who I am and would be for the rest of my life. No doubt I was the "best" surfer on earth that afternoon!

I made it back to The Ranch only twice after, a short trip with brother Eric; father, husband, grandpa, singer, Care Facility Administrator and country hot-roddin', gun-shootin' Kansan (a little like Dad!) and was a fond memory in one regard. Since Dad didn't raise or know us well, he assumed we wouldn't want to get too close to each other and had me bunked out in the delivery van with Eric up in the "apartment" above the winery. It was friggin' freezing in that metal tomb and I joined E upstairs and slept on the floor next to the bed. Next morn Dad was stoked to learn his sons were tight for the most part. Then a final visit with both brothers mentioned earlier; Tim-father, grandpa, husband, golfer, salesman, UCLA shortstop, to spread Dad's ashes there. But I've surfed Trestles many hundred times more..



*Does "Joy Emma"  
really get Dementia?*

[PREFACE]

Artwork by Tom B.

# Coroner's REPORT

[See You In Heaven "Chirp"]



Mom gave herself the email nom-de-plume and nickname “Joy Emma” when she got older. Not sure what persona she was expounding—perhaps something from a youthful memory or an adoption from women’s literature? She could talk herself into something and good luck cracking that nut once the hard shell grew over any idea. (Stubborn + Dementia = Fools Errand) for anyone even entertaining offering her an opposing viewpoint on any subject or memory anecdote. Let it be known that this brief account only introduces the upcoming essay of the fairly nutty “end-years” for entertainment and (for me!) an attempt for solace. She was great Mom and woman all the preceding years.

## CORONER’S REPORT

Having enjoyed a fruitful family life, comfortable retirement and golden years, Joyce E. Rothrock passed away February 9th, 2018 at eighty-seven. Mom passed away—that is to say—she willed herself to go, having spent her last year clutching her address book lest she forget who “she really was” at her final residence, an OC Memory Care and *Cuckoo’s Nest*. The coroner’s report has determined the cause of death to be stubbornness. While the battle went on with her three sons over how to help her deal with a progressing dementia—that she denied ever having to the bitter end!—the personalities and actions of all involved were exposed to the point of literary notation (or at least noteworthy consternation?).

Meanwhile, affectionately “Chirpy” carried on her “dating” with the villain of our tale, a certain pompous Dbag Mr. (DOC-TOR) Jackass Tyler. Whatever the reasons were that she never made him put a ring on it during their seventeen-year “Grand Romance”—they lived separately and got together during the day (how could they ever have a real problem? Go home and sleep it off. Sounds good on paper, but sadly Mom found out the hard way that the not-so-good doctor’s proclamation that she was: “The Love of My Life” did not include parting with any serious cash when the rubber hit the road)—presumably, all of the children on both sides are thankful in the end for the non-union, hopeful of inheritance (it’s human nature and hard fought in our predicament!), and peace to come.

Joyce was a great mom, a favorite aunt, and over time is entitled to be cut some slack for the challenges presented by Alzheimer’s. No thanks in part due to the semi-brainwashing that her diminishing mental facilities afforded the bad doctor’s arrogant barf to be spewed into in those latter days. She lived a happy retirement alone (never without dating!) in her town-house and with the exception of Tim R’s passing, didn’t have

anyone or anything say NO to her for nearly thirty years! Difficult! This being a preface, we are not going to delve into quirks such as her conscious-yet-feigned-ignorance of her uncontrollable farting, wildly comical views of her stratospheric eminence floating in the center of a social butterfly universe (such as exclaiming from the backseat while outrunning a twister at Brother E's in Kansas, "I can't die here!"—she would need to be abuzz at home in Long Beach) or any other peculiarities such as we all have and are indisposed to deal with ourselves. As different as three brothers can be, we all are confident she rests in "Heaven" and hopefully alongside our dearly departed stepfather Marshall who left far too early having suffered mesothelioma from the Linotype machine repair business he loved, and having raised us, I dare say, to be respectable young men each in his own fashion.

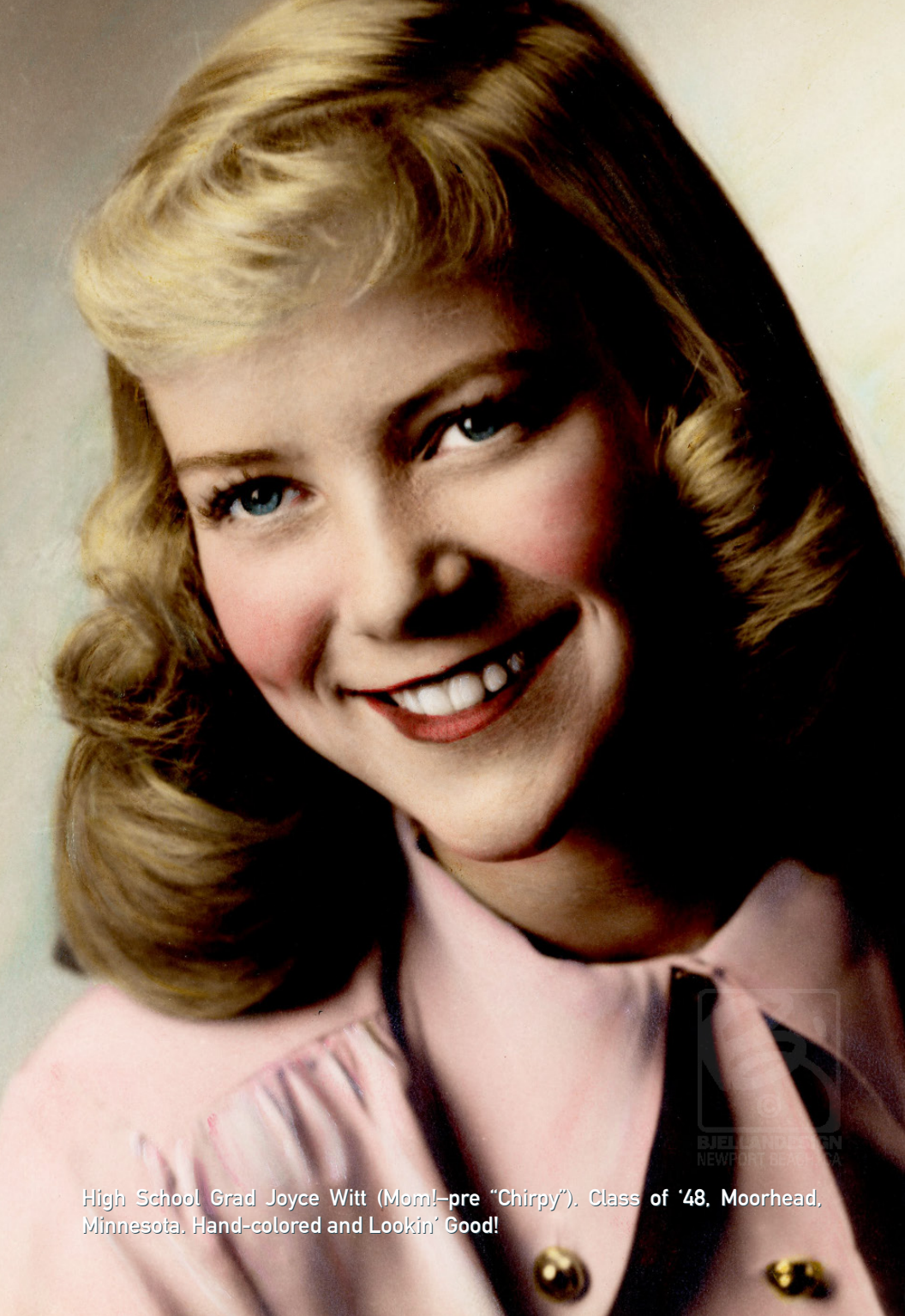
However, there is still ongoing debate as to her current "dating" status up there in the clouds. Does she get to see departed retired policeman Tim Ryan—whom she dated and we all loved for a while after Marshall's passing—maybe once a month up there? And what happens when Sir Doochie finally gives up the ghost after nearing the century mark? Surely his sins are pardonable in the scriptural scheme of things. Accusations of resembling a weasel when presented with the option of manning-up, hardly a flagrant desecration enough to send him down, Down, DOWN to the depths of "Hell." Undoubtedly, he will probably confuse the receptionist at the pearly gates when he pretentiously challenges roll call as "Doctor" instead of mister, even though he had been a retired for thirty years and still pushed his "wink-wink" assumed superiority over ordinary folks (get over yourself—Jerk!), and asks if: "My Joyce" is waiting. Surely, she won't be having any interaction with our "Dear Ole Dad" who was one funny dude despite his idiosyncrasies and the opposite of example in our exposure to divorce at a young age (Thank God for Marshall!). Do they just see each oth-

er and wave once in a while—just how does that work? And are they in their departed form or as an image of their best days?

The worlds' greatest mystery! I guess in the end we will all find out—each in his or her own time. It sure would be easier if religion meant inclusive acknowledgment of each person in accordance with their *own* spirituality and focused as a way to live ones life among others while here(!) rather than the threat of what might happen after if prescribed "congregation" views are not adhered to. Selfishly, your guy here might entertain a separate reso from those well intentioned, yet misplaced-result-proven Kool-Aid Drunks to a point beyond annoyance—on a cloud with invite only—if such a thing is negotiable? I mean really, if it is forever—for Eternity! I felt some part of Marshall's spirit come *into* my being when he passed—how can I explain that? Or when our father Paul passed away in Oregon after self-pickled diabetic illness complications, I felt an "energy change" (while gardening in the back yard) in California and realized what had transpired that afternoon—hours before I got the call.

See you in Heaven Mother (Chirpy!).

Love, Tom



# dementia MOM

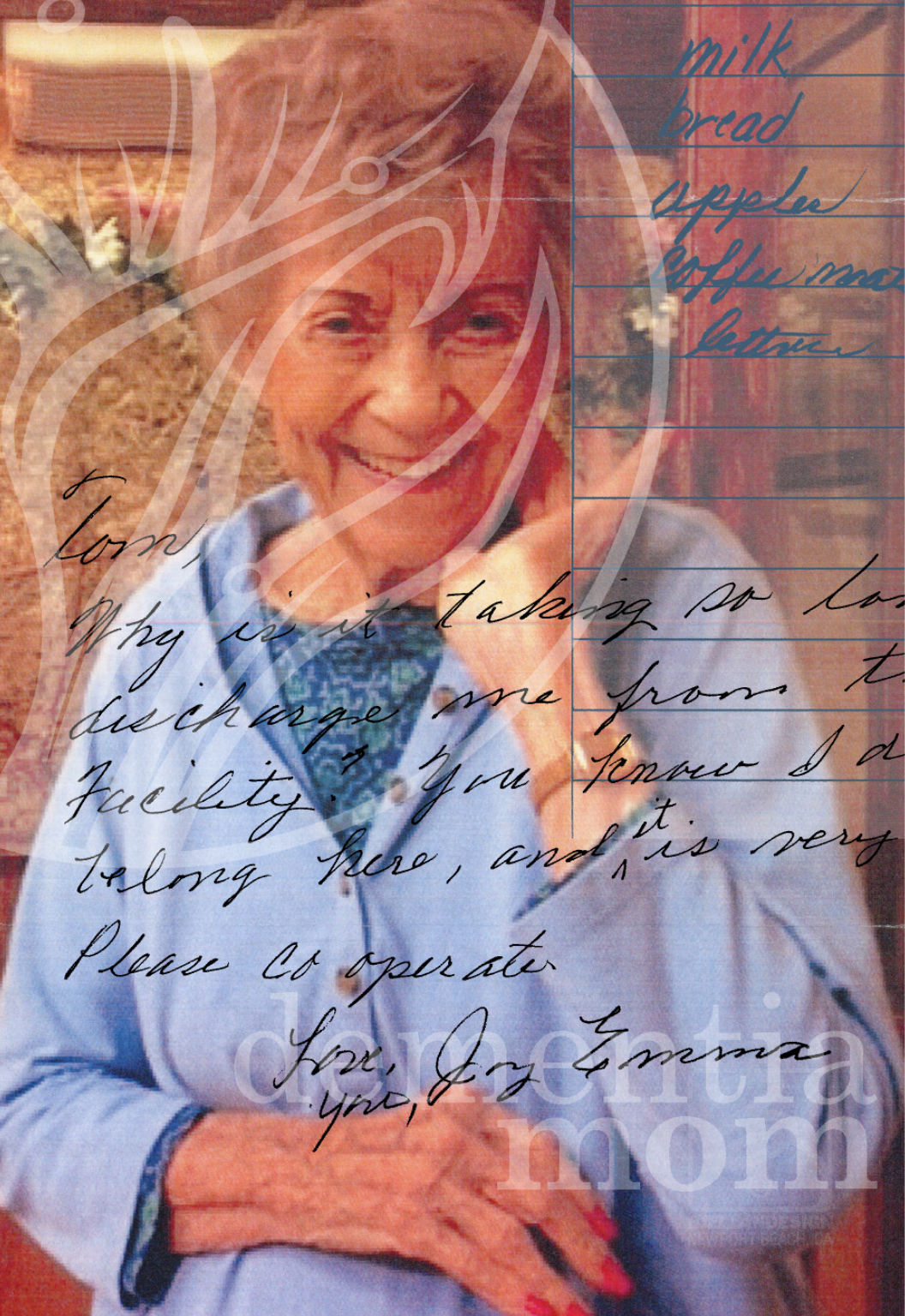
[Dating, Accusations, and So Forth]

[PART 2]

The Trouble Begins in Earnest



High School Grad Joyce Witt (Mom!-pre "Chirpy"). Class of '48, Moorhead, Minnesota. Hand-colored and Lookin' Good!



milk  
bread  
apples  
coffee maker  
lettuce

Tom,  
Why is it taking so long to  
discharge me from this  
Facility? You know I don't  
belong here, and it is very  
Please cooperate

Love, Joy Emma  
you,  
Dementia  
mom

## DEMENTIA MOM

When Mom told me that I did a terrible job as a father because son Sean didn't say thank you vehemently enough when she gave him the odd Franklin here or there, I wish I had known it was the Dementia talking. As it turns out there would have been very little I could have done about it though. She hadn't said: "A lacking father," "An inconsiderate man," "A selfish individual," she said straight-up *terrible*. To my face! Here's another doozy that she kicked me in the nuts with: "You should never have married a Japanese woman!" Ouch! She skipped right over the fact that among the other blessings such as her having another fine grandson, I had fortuitously brought two classy ladies from completely disparate backgrounds—her and Yoshiko's awesome mom Fumiko from Tokyo—who otherwise neither would ever have imagined developing a genuine friendship with one another being from different cultures and half a world apart, in my search for love and family. It felt so unfair to hear from her. And it is! It's a dagger through the heart every time I see a similar mixed couple: American/Caucasian or other than Asian dad; Asian mom with a couple kids in tow (they actually had sex again after the first one came along? ha) and for all appearances looking contented, I can't help cursing a little to myself and wonder why it worked for them, and why in the friggin' hell not for me! Luck? Taking things for granted all around? I'll never really know. Good for them though—God bless. I'm lucky Sean even likes me (he does!) after enduring the fun you'll hear about in a later chapter *LE DIVORCE*.

"Joy Emma" strikes a pose after a visit from the hairstylist in her "Bird Coop" manifestation, she mentioned on the caption "Too much make-up!!" but still sent the photo, eighty-seven and look-out-boys—she's still "got it!" "Egads!" exclaimed E, although I was the fellow reading the guilt laden notes in her ever-same cursive script. The shopping note was pre-cuckoo's nest—once in the store with all those choices—she might forget what she was there for? Funny granny.





Thalia Street, 4th of July 2011. Artwork by Tom B.

The first inkling I had that something was awry with Mom was just after said Divorce. Having sold the house of seventeen years in a sort of fifty/fifty split and barely surviving that whole ordeal; I had moved down to Laguna as the easiest choice being out of time and energy from the goings-on to rent a studio at the home of my good friend Greg Daly's older brother Brett, both of whom grew up there. Mom had always attended the art and crafts *Sawdust Festival* in Laguna Canyon as part of her teacher-summer-vacation-fun and social event schedule. Since I was in town, we planned to meet for lunch at Zinc Café on Ocean Avenue, which is a nearby main street in the small beachside town that had transformed over the decades from sleepy artist sanctuary and hippy colony to the multi-million-dollar tourist and rich folks haven it has become. Rightfully so; it is California at its finest, the hills meet the sea. Brett, who

became a friend and having been there his whole life wisely “got in early,” (you are either original stock or freakin’ rich—there is very little middleclass remaining) has an awesome view from Temple Hills Drive, and many a day I would round a corner thereabouts and be stunned by how beautiful the scenery was—*World Class!* The walks I had there down the hill on Thalia Street, up the beach then rounding Heisler Park and back up again did wonders for gaining a modicum of peace for my soul after enduring the big split.

Mom had finished her Sawdust Festival rounds and it's time for lunch. Jackass was in a physical rehab facility by now, having fallen down some stairs himself and was unavailable as her “companion” (lucky for me!) so she was solo. Apparently, she couldn't quite figure out her bearings on driving the short distance from the show to park near the restaurant which was unfamiliar territory. Of course, she didn't have onscreen NAV

Summer late-morning-overcast, Temple Hills view. Watercolor sketch.





This spread and previous top left. Watercolor and Gouache on iPhone rough WC paper print. Laguna Impressions by Tom B.

in her (piece-O'crap!) Cadillac Cetera, but she was sporting the aviator shades that she kept in the glove compartment specifically for driving though—which eliminated their cool factor for me forever—Granny wears 'em? Where the heck did she get those! When I finally saw her down at the end of the street she looked kinda lost and upon greeting had a slightly bewildered look on her face. Nevertheless, we had a nice lunch, I showed her the view from Temple Hills and she drove back on home to Long Beach. I didn't think much of it then (being five years or so out from the full reveal), but I did register it as being a little strange; almost as if the whole trip was done as something she did every summer by rote and she wasn't entirely present as to "why" this year. Especially single and all—no male chaperone or gal pals. In hindsight, it is State's Evidence #1 that I here present; that being out of her accustomed comfort zone, she couldn't exactly remember how to get to the restaurant or

where indeed she really was. Yes. And there it is, memory difficulty. Don't try mentioning it to her—EVER—though, she's not having it! And you've been scheming a plot to trip-her-up all along and will be accused there-of shortly!

So, it jibes with Mom being difficult to deal with for the five years or so since that day I noticed something to the beginnings of the Big Turmoil that I'll get into soon. When I say difficult to deal with during that span—it started with small things; like me feeling worse than before I called her every time after I hung up. She had developed "opinions" about things that she had never expressed before her entire life. She put so much pressure on any family get-together it nearly always was stressful instead of fun/casual, and woe to any situation if she wasn't the center of attention or couldn't socially control things to her preference.

Eventually as things transpired, I moved to her townhouse for mutual help, me to save some exorbitant SoCal rental cash while sorting things out, and I'm certain that when she finally asked me—she did know deep down that she needed assistance of some sort, but of course would never admit it and so began my first-hand exposure to the painful antics to come. There's some more fun coming up that I'll express before we get to the beginning of the Trouble in Earnest, which started when she did ultimately fall and had surgery on a broken hip. By the way, she had had glue-down carpet installed on every floor in the three-story townhouse; including garage, kitchen, porches, stairs—or course every room—in her quest to: "Not fall like so many friends have"—or maybe she'd just bounce-right-back-up! Who knows? She'll be dancing forever! For Eternity! If I can nod to my devilish side for a moment—It was funny as hell when the ambulance orderlies bounced her down the two stories from her bedroom to the front porch in a wheel chair all the while shrieking in her nightgown (it was painful I'm sure, I had just dozed-off downstairs and heard a loud bang that woke me up—

she did not cushion the fall) and trying to grab on to the stair rails to stop them; then when we got to the emergency room she attempted to reprimand the nurse for “trying to make light” of her faculties while being asked questions as they filled-in the admittance form. She had had a couple glasses of white wine up in her room as was her nightly constitution (she bought those small one-serving bottles for ease of transport up the stairs) while watching the small TV up there before she fell; so you could say things were just a touch tipsy-overall. Hey, most all of us like a little drinky-poo to unwind! So-what!

Mom’s half-German/half-Norwegian and hell-yes—we can be stubborn too! (At least we ain’t Irish for God’s sake! ha). She lived a happy retirement alone in her townhouse and since us boys flew the coop, with the exception of the good Tim Ryan’s passing, she’d had nearly thirty years where no one—including the universe itself—had said NO, called her out (excepting the one funny story bro E related about her throwing a fit and locking herself in her guest bedroom, sobbing all day when he did object to her methods on a visit to his family home in Kansas), or confronted her with anything she didn’t want to deal with. She had developed a sort of denial force-field to have things end or at least be viewed in her own way and subsequently became unable to admit to any fault large or small. Not anything! Difficult! Denied Alzheimer’s to the bitter end! When things eventually did involve the whole family, since her stubbornness allowed that she would not admit to any problems, memory or otherwise; there was no common starting point where us three sons could help her deal with its incursion to her situation, ultimately disrupting the perfect “dating” life with the villain of our tale, a certain pompous dork DOCTOR Jackass Tyler, who complaints of are forthcoming.

Joyce was always a good-looking dame and paid keen attention to fashion like when she subscribed to *VOGUE* (I liked those sexy model photos!) back in the house on Ostrom Street.



Mom and Marshall with big-collar, 70’s smiles. Lookin’ good! “Mink” had a James Garner-ish handsomeness and was an good athlete; football and diving being his two fortes. He and we three boys were a great fit for each other since he couldn’t have kids of his own. So unfair his mesothelioma sentence, his memorial service at Christ Lutheran was exceptional—folks loved him. My good friend Bret told me after, “I hope my service is that good!”

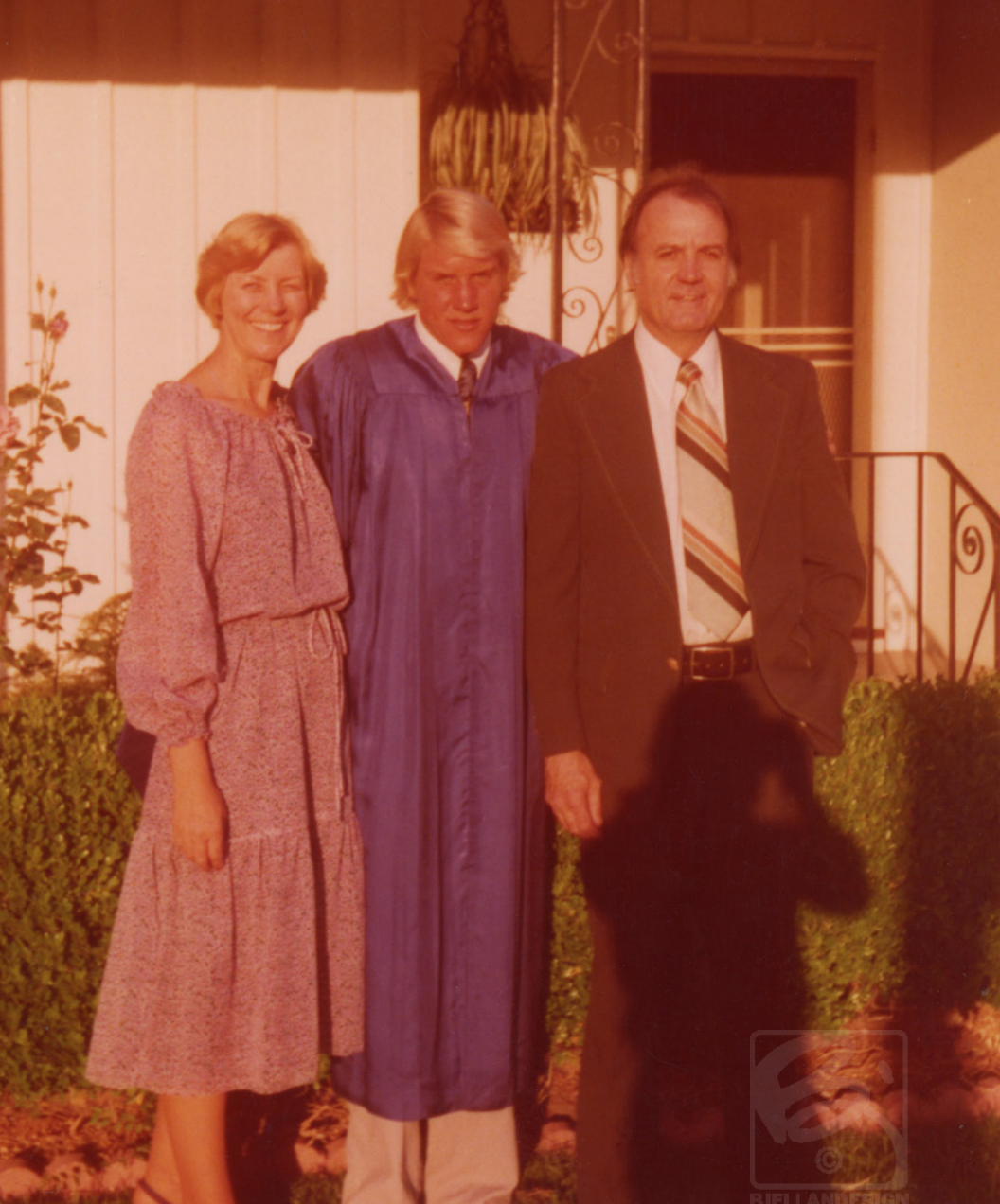
She loved and put a lot of effort into shopping, clothes shopping, entertaining, acquiring every knick-knack for every holiday under the sun for said entertaining (she had full service glassware, dishes, placemats, decorations, etc. for every single holiday squirreled away in every closet in the townhouse), mail ordering, and ultimately ascending to her eminent status of her very own Social Butterfly Universe; and working the power of female allure to her advantage that she realized she possessed in spades after Marshall passed and she began her “dating” career. First there was the father of one of my school grade classmates Teresa Ryan; Tim Ryan as just mentioned, who all us boys liked—but who also sadly passed away too soon after

we had bonded with him. One time at dinner I mentioned some difficulty collecting from a wayward graphic design client and Tim being a retired Cop offered to stop by the guy's office and, "Have a talk with the fellow." I declined, but he ingratiated himself to me forever. It was a bummer later on in her difficulties to hear Mom say that she would never have married Tim due to his financial "status" (one would guess most likely a comfortable local government or force pension, probable great benefits and presumably paid-off ever-equity-increasing house not enough?) and I can't attribute that attitude to anytime before she was heavily exposed to the pretentious barf that spewed from the not-so-good doctor Jackass.

As tough as it must have been for her with first Marshall and then Tim R passing, as I said Mom was a good-looking woman and attracted suitors easily; so it didn't take long for Jackass to enter the picture. He was a successful dentist that had worked hard in a long career and owned a very nice canal adjacent house (except for the creepy-overdone-outdated and differently decorated "themes" in every room) in Naples that had a nice patio with even a dingy/small boat dock—that still being original construction would now be a tear-down for the millions of dollars in land value it sits on. Location, location, location! Meanwhile his adult kids enjoyed his golden years (as he was still sharp) and awaited for time to take it's course, and if I might presume, hopefully not become entangled in differing viewpoints on sibling expectations with eventual passing and division of family assets and so forth. I'm not sure if they would be glad or mad to share the notion that Mom kept the old geezer around longer with his twice daily phone calls to look forward to; and keeping their "Grand Love Affair" burning bright! Kidding! I dare say it seemed none of his kids were extra partial to Mom in part due to her meddling in their affairs, such as getting in Jack's ear that he should be

upset if so-and-so got the cuff-links—or whatever –when they distributed and sold some of his stuff so they could rent out the house while he waddled around in Assisted Living at ninety-seven and couldn't give a crap about that stuff; he's busy not being able to dress himself or wipe his own arse! (nine grand a month includes everything!) Assuming Mom, underneath the quirks that altered her views to looking for faults other than hers, did like them, and I believe it so, I kept waiting for her to say something nice about them in private; but what little was offered, was over-shadowed by the notions burned in her mind (the Dementia put negative ideas first—it seemed as if she was constantly on the lookout to blame something/someone for her not being able to accept that something wasn't right, and it certainly couldn't be her) that couldn't be challenged once entertained, that they had malicious intentions such as their eagerness at getting rid of his stuff while he is: "Still Alive!" and their first and foremost concern was really getting their shares splitting-up the booty to come. (All kids, including yours truly, got grouped in this wacky notion for her, thanks Dementia! And as we all know, everyone thinks about it—but not as any driving force.) I liked both of Jack's sons and their families that we met and they *are* good folks (pardon the superfluous spelling of Jackass for our purposes of dramatization, humor, and for me—solace), and of course Jack had many good qualities for them to turn out so well, let it be stated that the opinions rendered here merely concern the effect he had on Mom that WERE BAD for US.

One example of the annoying affect Mom had on me due in part to their pairing and in combination with her mental difficulties, was her buying into the elitist crap Jackass spewed like when she mentioned him to someone else on the phone, she would *correct herself* if she called him Mr. Tyler with DOCTOR Tyler. She was the beau of such a successful pillar of establishment that it was not to be misunderstood! She got



Joyce, Tom & step-Dad Marshall on my Millikan High School graduation day, circa '78. Eric's shadow can be seen lower right snapping the photo. Afternoon California sun is shining on a hopeful future! Me—a SoCal Surf dog already inform. Love this snapshot!



it from his example such as when he called the rehab daily to check on her in his lame effort to be cheeky; he would say it's DOCTOR Tyler and confuse the staff into thinking it was one of her physicians and not the self-centered jerk who had already been retired for thirty years, but still assumed they would be so impressed (he even told me with a "wink-wink" one time that's what he did as if I would concur with his cleverness, and I held my tongue instead of telling him to get the F over himself!) they would immediately stand-at-attention. After-all, we all know that Doctors are far superior to regular folks, don't we? In any life situation they are *just plain better!* Jerk! In my opinion Jackass reinforced the stereotype of the rich Ahole, for example when the bill came at a family dinner out and he could easily ingratiate himself to us with a generous gesture of picking-up the check; he added up his and Joyce's orders, and laid down a twenty. He had to pay for Mom's since she always invited him along, but come-on! Despite our eldest bro Tim's annoyances, at least he will pick up a check, God bless him (maybe he knows deep-down he owes us for putting up with his shenanigans) And that goes for everyone. Damn it. Whoever has the most money pays. Please! Unless it's friends, mostly. He did give us sons/couples gift baskets at Christmas like the kind you get from a client, which was nice, but pretty much summed up his enthusiasm for getting to know anyone individually, the least personal gift available (Whiskey would have been good!). I felt good at first the one time I invited Mom—then of course Jack needed to be invited as well—to dinner to see Sean who was working for a stint as a waiter at upscale Japanese/Korean-style barbecue Manpuku and I treated them. Sure, it feels good to anyone to be treated, we're all human after-all. But then later, I thought about the trying fiscal situation I had managed to get myself into and had been enduring since the big divorce/recession combo knocked me around; that they both were fully aware of, and got kinda pissed at him for not

acknowledging my woes (self-inflicted or otherwise! And by the way, it obviously wasn't me saying; I'm doing so well I want to spread it around, more like this might not be doable later, and is worth the effort to enjoy an opportunity while I/we still can) and letting me chip that much more away from the steadily dwindling house equity savings. It's no sweat off your balls. You had a nice meal and company, be generous if you got it—Dork!

All during Mom's memory decline and stay at Cuckoo's Nest, Jackass was the opposite of helpful for us sons trying to deal with all the various issues; causing consternation and for me in particular, very unwelcome extra work. As opposite in character as Tim and I are—and Eric is in somewhere in the middle—we were all appalled by his weaseling-out on his chance of manning-up to bring Mom to be near him in Assisted Living as they had a memory care unit just across the parking lot from his physical care unit, and we could share the costs with the CalPERS Long Term Care Insurance that Mom had sagaciously acquired over twenty years (In the end, the payments that the insurance company doled-out after their deduction period was met and Mom's passing were less by many thousands than what she had contributed—It just goes to show: *You can't beat the house!*). When things went south we unanimously lost any respect we had left for him. It would have been a difficult call either way however; did we really want him that close to her? He would call me and tell me how much: "I really love that woman" and ADVISE ME on how I should be taking steps for her care, all the while refusing to chip in financially (zero-zilch-nada!) for "The love of his life," and providing ample argument that their relationship was never really real. "I'll never abandon you" unless that means ever forking over any serious green! "People think I have more money than I do!" he squeaked when Eric had had enough and pressed him over the phone. Bullshit dude!

Meanwhile during the "Grand Romance" (of twenty-two years!) which preceded the trouble; they both lived separately, would get together in the daytime and go back home to sleep alone most nights, and repeat several times per week or more. How could they ever have a real problem? Go home and start over the next day or day after—don't ever need to deal with anything longer than twenty-four hours. Sounds great on paper and would work until things got real; but Mom found out the hard way when the rubber-hit-the-road that she didn't have a *partner* to take care of her, and she had to deal with us boys making decisions a spouse could have. Whatever reasons she thought she could go on "dating" forever and never made him put-a-ring-on-it, were her choice and then her tough luck, but I dare say *all our good fortune* in the end. They did finally "break things off" when Mom was in her last throes of denial and difficulties in her facility however. "That Doctor—she didn't use his name—started out so good; turned out to be so selfish." She's moving on boys, single and ready to mingle—LOOK OUT!

Along the way, to get into more specifics, Mom really managed to wear on me as she adopted Jackass's arrogant outlook on most everything. There is only one correct opinion on every subject, just ask me, and I'll tell you what it is! They only watched FOXNEWS—which is a lot of money for cable if you never turn the channel—then would talk it over on the phone afterwards. Trump! Did you see how he: "Stuck-it to 'Em?"—although she preferred Pence (who may very well be a nice person in private, and having ascended to the lofty heights of V.P.; was a little off with his timing to find the job description of this particular administration to be *butt sniffer*—The Donald, please let me put my nose further up your arse next time you fart; was that two Big Macs, a Filet-of-Fish and large fries this time? Heavenly!) solely on *looks*. Not to get into politics too much—everyone needs a break—but I found it peculiar that even before Jackass, that Mom would favor a candidate by what she

thought of his wife. Interesting how we all relate to different things to make choices. But I'm not having it the time she said that Melania: "Reminded her of Jackie O," and this little doozy: "Michelle Obama couldn't even dance well! Come on! It's inherent she can just by looking at her. And back to Melania, who *is* a babe and probably smart-speaks four languages? The question I'd like to ask her is: Just what goes through her mind to mollify the cringe response of the image of "Orange Comb-over" (that's a joke friends-if we still can?) taking off his shirt and getting ready to roll on top of her? Surely it's not: Let's leave the lights on-I gotta get me some of that! Yikes. Well, of course we all know about power and money being attractive-but damn-at a certain point having secured them, things have to be reconsidered from a different angle. Look, I'm all for every American having the right to freedom of preference to a certain point, and consider myself Independent; but the platform being put forth on the emphasis of divisionism that never before was so severe is difficult to comprehend; and about as much as I care to notate in-politico, and as mentioned, each-to-his-own, but let's converse and maybe entertain some common ground.

And so, with Mom's weakening mental faculties, she seemingly became brainwashed to some degree by Jackass-drunk the Kool-Aid and all. To me she changed from the mildly-annoying-but-love-able "Chirpy" we affectionately called her all our lives to a kind of stuck-up beeaatch! I'd be remiss not to mention she did have her remissions into tenderness and her old, natural, mostly lovely self. She chipped-in some when I bought a MacBook Pro (and cried when I saw her at her place to say bye just before going) for the trip I took to Australia to investigate if the graphic design/art economy might be better there for me to be able to continue my profession. And paid for mine and Sean's tickets to finally visit Eric & family in Kansas for nephew Josh's high school graduation. She felt bad I had never gone to visit my brother (due to budget restrictions and

my selfish mantra of: "Not getting on an airplane/incurred credit card charges as a self-employed individual, unless there are waves or a girl at the other end.") When I tried to convey to this new Dementia Mom that times had changed in every way (for many unfortunates not on government salaries/pensions or employed in "essential" economic functions and *especially* in most creative fields) in the California economy since the "Great Recession," she rebuked my complaints: "Since she grew up in the Great Depression," and "Came out OK having suffered her own divorce with three young boys" (rescued in part by Marshall which she would never admit now-she did it all on her own!) and that if I would just: "Pound the Pavement" the nearly entire industry that went away (competitive growth of too many graphic designers in the workplace along with computer graphics ubiquity, in contrast with the shrinking of available work, and particularly for me the industry wide surf and resort brands decline for one aspect of my overall work repertoire: that of having an advantage of being able to do hand-drawn artwork and finish it digitally in screenprint work-my eggs-in-one-basket-bread-and-butter nearing the gutter) would somehow magically *reappear*. For as long as she could, up until she had a carpal tunnel difficulty and she realized/admitted she might actually *need* help, she brushed-off any of the normal: "Family help in time of need notions" with her *new* (beau of a DOCTOR whoopee!) righteous meritocracy disdain for anyone stupid enough to finish second. For a full six or seven years as I attempted to keep my business going or figure out what the heck else to start over with at Fifty!/? her uncharacteristic sympathy deficiency was pretty brutal. I nearly *always* felt worse hanging up from a call with her than before calling.

One more gripe I'll get off my chest if it's not already too much before espousing her many and good qualities was the virtual absence of any offer of maternal help taking care of Sean



Mom's (six of seven) grandkids (Sean-not pictured would have been staying in Tokyo, Japan at Grandma's house for a good part of summer; he even joined the neighborhood school that was in session weekdays while there—being bi-lingual and all.) LtoR: Eric's boys, Marshall, Josh and Rieder. LtoR: Tim's girls, Tracy, Christine and Kim. Way-to-go Joyce!

(or any grandkids for that matter!) when he was a little dude; as my then-wife Yokko had no family in America for assistance if we ever needed it. We both worked, she drove up to LAX for employ at the Japan Airlines counter, straight passed Mom's townhouse to drop son Sean at a babysitter near the airport on so many occasions. What the heck was she so busy with retired for nearly thirty years! Mom was great at arranging tea parties for her granddaughters, play or dinner outings with Sean and eldest grandson from brother Eric's Marshall, had energy to spare for any social event and the family event entertaining she loved to do (that was always stressful somehow!), but I can't recall *ever* an offer to "babysit." Looking back, perhaps it relates

to the work she had to endure when we were little, and with difficulties up to her split with Dad.

When Dad passed, we/I got all his 8mm film reels and Kodak slides, he had put in a pretty darn good effort documenting our early days (at least Tim's and mine—he was up in Oregon for Eric's budding years) as I hope you'll enjoy some of the images accompanying this text. We had one of the reels converted to video—Tim paid for it, thanks—and it revealed something I hadn't expected; Mom very seldom looked happy or content in her shots. Three youngsters amidst a fair amount of discord must have been taxing. Perhaps when she

Sean and his other Grandma, Fumiko—who became a friend of Joyce's over the years—would stay at the house for a couple months or so each year; and I dare say it was a special opportunity for a traditional Japanese woman to be able to expand her family experience to a global scale and spend time in California. Although Mom never visited Japan, she also broadened her horizons by having a woman she would never have imagined her friend; being of very different culture—but similar family values.





was done raising her three sons; she was done raising kids—period! The one thing I thank her for daily was her German determinedness. When Dad split for up north, some friend had advised her that she could homestead/squat the house on Ostrom Street we grew up in (do they still have protection laws like this today?) and was able to hang on to it until Marshall came along, and together they paid it off over time. Later she swapped it for her Townhouse and we three sons eventually benefited with a nice inheritance. Thanks Mom!

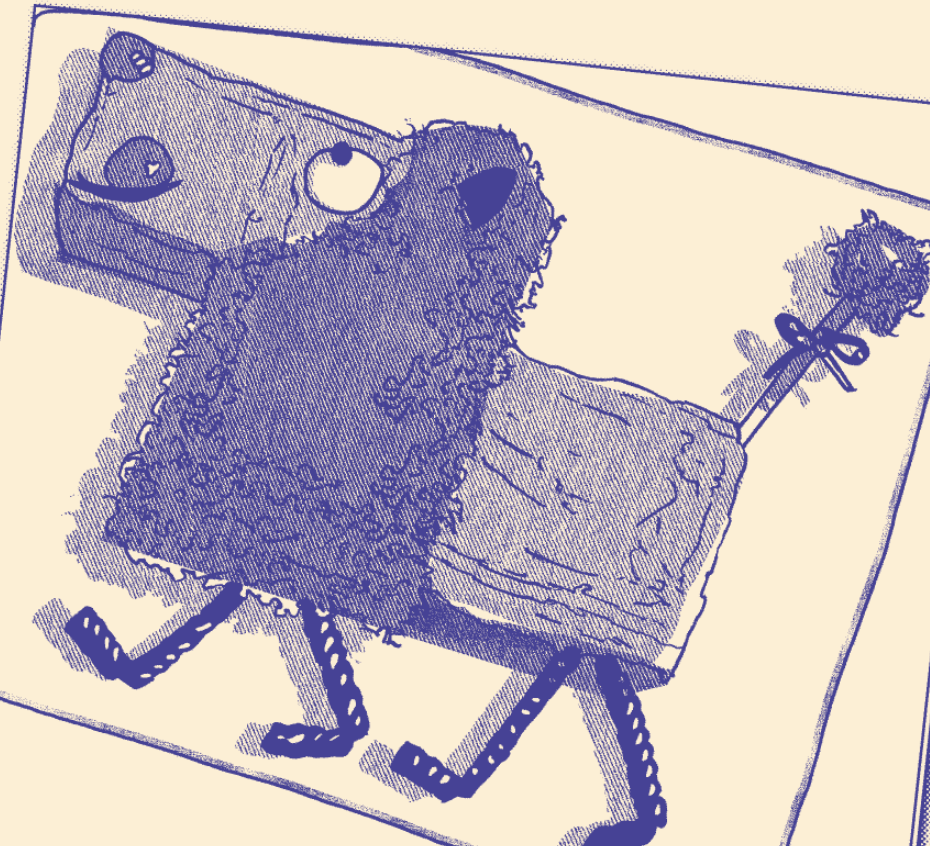
Speaking of the townhouse, I had no idea what I was getting into when she kindly (finally!) offered for me to move there. We were at Hof's Hut for breakfast near her place (best Eggsbenny ever!) and when the subject came up it was weird how she asked me. From further exposure to her over that time, I learned the extent to which she was still able to tap into her feminine side with men to wield her advantage. I don't think she fully realized her usage with the dementia tinge at times, but when she asked me the specific question of me moving there she said and intoned it in her: I'm-still-hot-granny-sexy voice as if I was going to say no and she needed to hear the right answer. Weird! (I've heard this similar peculiarity from another friend with a female Alzheimer's relative). And the one time a guy about my age who lived at the townhouses struck up a friendship with her, and occasionally helped or drove her somewhere; she confided to me that she had to finally break it off after he started asking her more personal things, "What are some things you like?" and so forth. She apparently had been using it on him—perhaps again without realizing—and the dude was going to make his play. Gross!

So I'm camped out in the living room with my Mac, big-old-skool-wooden drafting table that I was gifted from my part-time job during the college days at Lakewood Nursery when the landscape architect retired, and "work" to do, as the second/guest bedroom on the top floor next to hers was

way too close for comfort. My futon bed is next to the couch, I would scoot the couch close-up to but not touching the wall for the extra couple inches of space, and when I was out she would move it back away the few inches from the wall as if a pack of monkeys were going to come in, jump up-and-down and scuff the back fabric of the couch! Same with the storage closets there, I had moved some of her knickknackery to one area so I could have some semblance of space to put a few of my essentials, damn if she didn't put some trinkets right back where she had had them—where they were *supposed* to be—and not my stuff because I was only there temporarily; she *didn't* have any memory problems, and she was going to live forever! When this happened again a few months in, I opened the cabinet and started shaking with rage it was so insane. Also, if I nodded-off while watching TV on the couch before going to sleep on the futon, the next morn she accused me of sleeping on the couch all night as if I was trying to wear it out and damage her stuff? Damn! She loved my marinated-overnight and mesquite-grilled teriyaki chicken: "It looks like right out of the pages of *Home and Garden*," and then one day during grilling she saw me spill a little sauce on the patio, and damn if she didn't buy a thick plastic door mat the next day to put down under the Weber next time; we can't have patio—as mentioned, the single floor surface without carpeting in the entire townhouse—wreckage! Never mind it was easily hosed off and you would never notice—she could take the fun out of *anything*. As I had worked at the Nursery for seven years starting as boxboy, then delivery and then on to becoming a salesman, am knowledgeable and a very proficient gardener (especially with the artist esthetic added in), but when I proffered to help her upgrade the mostly plastic faux "foliage" she had there with some live plants in the patio; and suggested they had the opposite relaxation effect of an actual living/breathing garden, she blew a fuse! It's *her* place, they "look" real enough, are you

trying to rid me of my stuff and then me? Of course it was all hers, and the lower maintenance issue was a consideration, but I *am* here—I need a few square feet of space too! I only recount these small details as a way of relating the extent that *every single little thing* was a tussle, and the frustrating point of all these silly details was that she completely skipped over the fact that she needed help after I was already there—such an intrusion!

In the living room, with no-where to hide, I could not help overhearing phone calls from the dining room adjacent the kitchen where she spent a good part of most days in her lazyboy perusing mail order catalogs, newspaper and such—relaxing—she would talk super loud if she didn't have her hearing aids in, and never move to another room even after my asking her politely. If she hadn't eventually fallen I may have offed-myself if I ever heard that: *Here-comes-sexy-at-eighty-six* "Heeelllllooooo" when she saw Jackass's caller ID on the line. Kidding but—Yikes! Every day was a different "date" as they never woke up together like a normal couple and had the: It's you again familiarity doldrums *or* comfort—for some of those lucky folks that really love each other. Any protest I put forth was met with: "It was her house after all; and if I didn't like it I could go back to that seventeen-hundred-a-month studio apartment I came from." If there was ever an opposing viewpoint I dare expressed, I would get a taste of the fits she would throw (like that time at Eric's place mentioned) whenever she'd had her glass of wine in the evening and the so-called Sundowner effect wormed-in and the restraint she could manage during the day melted away. "Get *out* of the house, you're causing this, that, and the other thing, throwing her arms in the air and gesticulating wildly—"How could she ever deserve such treatment from her own son? She must be such a terrible person!" (*terrible* again) Then, the next morning completely remorseful almost to tears that she really wanted



BAKER'S COCONUT

# ANIMAL CUT-UP CAKES

Mom's Animal Cut-Up Coconut Cakes from the '59 General Foods guide always looked like the samples in the book. She was very adept at recreating recipes and absolutely loved hosting any get-together—especially family holidays—Christmas Eve her favorite.

me there. She never could in reality deal with the change/ incursion of privacy to her thirty-year domesticity routine and it's understandable, personal space is important. You never knew what to expect in the morning. Happy Mom or an accusation that you snuck upstairs during the wee-hours and meddled with her computer in order to hurt her. Gnarly.

Here's an interesting event that occurred that I never saw coming when Mom's older sister Lois (I have to say it for old time's sake—for Dad: "*Lowass*"—it's just a funny sounding family joke nickname—but don't mean nothin') came to visit with her *new* ten-year-younger-former-neighbor-now boyfriend. Aunt Lois and Uncle Irv—who had since passed, lived up North in Union City and I have a fond memory of Irv's San Francisco sightseeing tour he took us on one time back in the day. Could one expect that two sisters in their mid-eighties be *still* competitive and jealous about their beaux—Say What? Lois's new dude was ten years younger than she was! They didn't visit the townhouse being three-story and all, Lois was wheelchair bound by then, so Mom met her without the new fellow for lunch out. After Lois returned, Mom got goosed-up about keeping her status in regard to feminine wiles and set her sights on a new vine to swing to; possibly trading in ten-year-older Jack for ten-year-younger Wade here in the townhomes. That's a twenty-year upgrade for the old broad! She and Wade's recently passed wife Ramona became great friends and she was very heart broken for a while; especially amplified as at that stage in life that there is such a greater proportion of loss with friends and loved ones passing seemingly in succession. After Lois's success, Mom baked a quiche and I threw in some teriyaki chicken and brown rice in a care package to take to Wade and she was all excited about arranging for him to visit Jack as they knew each other from when both couples got together around the townhouses. Wade is a good-looking dude and Mom was pretty excited about the

new attention that might be coming her way with the way she was acting, but was again seemingly unaware she was being so obvious to me who tried my best to avoid the entire situation. On the appointed day, I bailed and spent an extra couple hours wandering around 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Belmont Shores after a solo dinner of fish tacos, hoping I wouldn't run into Wade if he came over as she had planned them driving together. I guess it turned out Wade drove separately (I didn't want to hear details—was she devilishly attempting cuckolding of the geezer with her new catch?) and somehow in the discourse Mom learned that Wade was still profoundly grieving over Ramona, and wasn't in a romantic way. I would deduce he must not have even known all this was going on; and maybe she didn't either at the forefront of her motivation? But somehow or other Mom got the gist of the situation and gave it up. It even morphed into a sweet statement she chirped later when she told me: "She really wishes for Wade to find someone." If it couldn't be her, at least she was gracious in defeat (feminine wiles be cursed for once!) and did care for him deeply. And in summary, here's the "funny" thing about this whole episode; of the three persons "involved," Wade didn't know anything about it, Mom at forefront didn't notice her possible motivations, I'm the only one who "knows" what's going down—what the deuce?

As Mom's memory difficulties stealthily worsened with time and since her stubbornness prevented her admission that she could ever have any such problem; she started to be accusatory to others in an attempt to sort out what was wrong and find the blame elsewhere. Anywhere *except* with her. This was really difficult. Grandson visiting overnight, he'd get the computer meddling charge next morning—Wacky! At least it contributes to the State's Evidence put forth here that corroborates some of my claims. Claims that two of her good friends whom shall not be named for our purposes disputed and caused us plenty of consternation when they saw her in



Left to Right: California-sun-blond bros growing-up; L to R: Eric, Tim, Tom and near-bro, the future “evil” Stevie horse-around on Ostrom street, circa mid 70’s(?). I’m saying eldest looks good with a little longer hair, this is about as “cool” as he ever got-ha! Mom in her final years had difficulty accepting that any issues, memory or otherwise, could possibly (ever!) be wrong with her. So when her dear friend, Steve’s mom Jewel wasn’t doing well, and Mom may not have been able to navigate driving to see her, needed a scapegoat for prevaricated excuses of why she couldn’t visit her, and Steve was the readily-available target.

# [evil] STEVIE!

[Senility/SCAPEGOAT—There Can’t be Anything Wrong with Me!]

the day and she could turn on the ole’ Joyce charm for a short visit or chat. She had the troubling vexation of being able to snap-right-back to things given a social butterfly opportunity or brief visit from a health care worker, and then fade during the evening and at other times. She was far and away the most together “resident” of the facility that she had inadvertently gotten herself checked into when she tried to “Catch the bus home” wandering around in the courtyard at her initial rehab after hip surgery (which by the way absolutely reeked of urine, you would walk in the doors and get an immediate powerful blast right in the face. They could bottle it as “*Eau Parfume de Urine*” as Tim and I joked about) in the middle of the night and became classified as High Risk. They put her on *72 Hour Watch* and it’s incomprehensible that nurses sat in a chair and watched her 24 hours a day for three days in a row. Does that really happen? And I hate to even say the dude’s name again, and I don’t know what they talked about; but whatever it was from DOCTOR Jackass triggered the “bus home” behavior as he had made his single in-person visit to her the day in question.

My godparents are Stevie Strong’s (who you heard about in chapter 1 briefly) folks, so we spent a fair amount of time growing up together; I would count him as my brother from a different mother back in the day. Steve’s dad Marley was an awesome dude and a great friend of our stepdad Marshall’s (Mink) going back to their Fargo, North Dakota football days, and he had sadly passed with Alzheimer’s complications a few years back, also with a few attending humorous escapades I heard about. When Jewel, Steve’s Mom and Mom’s great and oldest friend from way back at Moorhead High got unwell, for whatever the real reason was; it seemed Mom did not feel like interrupting her “busy” social schedule—or may possibly have felt uncomfortable seeing her friend in such decline as she herself certainly would never face such a thing—and so needed to have a scapegoat for her guilt of not really wanting

to visit, and Stevie became the readily available target. She blamed him for telling her she couldn't visit Jewel for such-and-such a reason, or he told her the wrong information about this-or-that, while all along I had to hear about how "Evil Stevie" is diabolically and determinedly trying to keep Mom from seeing her dear friend. Friggin' crazy! When I tried to get her to acknowledge there was no reason to put Stevie in the middle—she knew where Jewel was and could visit anytime she wanted—she wasn't having it. Perhaps in hindsight Anaheim may also have been on the precipice of her driving skills navigationally with her increasing memory challenges. A little too far from home in Long Beach. I couldn't convey to her that if she was calling him evil, in effect so was I, (as she indeed told me on a number of occasions!) as we generally shared the same upbringing and moral compass having been raised by two awesome Dads. She had an ability/affliction of being able to seemingly let thoughts she did not want to entertain sort of ricochet off some hidden inner-wall beneath the skull; you could see her eyes start to register the charge of any conflicting viewpoint, and then glaze over ever so slightly as she moved sideways on to the next thought in complete denial, but then would file it away solely as an attempt at somehow attacking her. Accusations left-and-right, everyday! The ultimate for Stevie's "evil doings" came when Jewel finally passed it was nearing the holidays, and Steve had apparently had the audacity to schedule the service too near Christmas and even on the date she already: "Had event reservations" for. "His inconsiderate care for his Mother was appalling! He just doesn't care if people have holiday plans and won't be available for her service!" I was pretty scorched by this time. (And just about barfed when I came across her digital camera later and saw the pictures of her and Jackass all decked out in holiday finery for his facility dinner that was apparently "the Big Event.") She had recently spent an inordinate amount of energy dragging out the

million angels, candles, and holiday decorations as I mentioned that crammed each and every storage space at the townhouse—and was once again bummed. She was already pissed and had been for years that: "Those darn kids had decided without any vote or consideration for her feelings to stop attending the annual Christmas Eve Dinner she loved hosting," and it had all ended not due to everyone becoming busy besides some living far away—they were just selfish—she never let that go! Bummed that nothing special was going on like in the old days. I was thinking of all the things Stevie was dealing with besides normal daily strife, which I'm pretty sure included a coffin burial that he couldn't just keep around on ice while waiting for Mom's holiday calendar to clear out. So she called him and told him we both wouldn't be attending the service. Then she twisted around what I had told her when I had taken her to Marley's service previously; when I said I would have been glad to be a pall-bearer being his godson and all, but was actually fine with stopping for lunch at Kaplan's instead of going to the burial after the Mount Calvary service. I overheard her telling Steve I was upset with him for not appointing me in the first place. She just twisted everything around to suit her guilt! On an everyday basis it was some form of mild torture to try to deal with getting through the day unscathed. The tough part of the Alzheimer's-stubborn combo was that once the thought came to her, it was indisputable history and woe to anyone confronting her otherwise!

Certainly, some of the stuff Mum could come up with was funny it was so whacked (especially with distance), like when she chirped-out an odd statement about their good friends John and Peggy Maxwell—she also a Minnesotan friend turned Californian, who lived pretty close to us in Long Beach, in a bit nicer two-story neighborhood. One afternoon, out-of-the-blue, Dementia Mum accused *me* of accusing *her* that I had said she had: "Had an affair with John." What the deuce? How the heck

would I ever come near to ever thinking such a weird thought? Wacky. But does make one wonder—how such a statement did come to her to be unearthed now and from when?

Dementia is a sneaky thief. I'm on-board with bro E's suggestion that if he ever gets the big D; for his sons to set him off in a Viking canoe and loose the flaming arrows lest they suffer what we all went through. Stubbornness is a tough affliction, the stronger the malaise—the stronger the denial. I have mine, to a much lesser degree, but at least will acknowledge it—not that it's easy to do much about it even upon admission. When finally, in Cuckoo's Nest it was apparent by Mom's turn for the worst—she had retreated into herself and must have ultimately realized that she was not going to be able beat her situation; I believe as a last act of empowerment she decided to take herself out, or more succinctly—let herself go. Any anger or blame was replaced with complete indifference, she withdrew from the fight. Later on, Eric related to me a very comforting (and funny!) statement that Mom had told him over the phone since we all had endured such tussles during her difficulties: "Tom sure plays a nice Banjo." Perhaps she was alluding to the Holiday Lunch event I had inadvertently dropped in for that a soloist accompanying himself on guitar was entertaining in the background for at her facility. He was covering some moldy oldies that the mostly geezer crowd might possibly recognize but was getting crickets. Then he played a very nice rendition of Eric Clapton's *Wonderful Tonight*, and after I broke into a vigorous clap that had my immediate table of nesters and their attendant family members and part of the room aroused from their complacency and joining in. (The performer was stoked and rewarded us with a medley of seventies classics—my favorite era—that he had up his sleeve. Some of the girl attendants even danced their way between tables!) Mom turned to me, and emerging from the gauzy cloud of remission she had by then withdrawn to, looked

me in the eye and smiled: "My Son." While I might go so far as to say I have a good ear and decent voice if I wasn't so reticent, and could possibly even harmonize something with Bro E who is the most musical of the bunch; but the one time I tried to learn the beginner guitar that my Japanese friend had gifted me on his trips to California collecting classic Martins and such, I couldn't put two chords together. Tenderness evocation, so—what if she was a little mixed-up about it later!

There's no way to end this recollection that includes expulsion of grief without stating that Mom was a great woman, great mother at heart, and this account merely expounds some of the kooky events in the hope of commiserating the now more commonly shared circumstance of aging kids/boomers in the challenging position of navigating the twists-and-turns of parents or family troubled with Alzheimer's Presenile Dementia. Koo-koo-karoo!

I love you Mom. I see your butterfly-flutter not goodbye to me—but see you in heaven. Thanks. I'll even remorsefully admit that in my darkest thoughts of battle—I'd sometimes wished you gone earlier. *Love*, Thomas Even