

The March winds began to dry out the moisture left from the winter snows.

Dad and mom were very quiet as we drove to Grandpa's house twenty-minutes away. I don't know why he wanted me to go along. I guess Grandpa was getting old, so the time between visits got longer and longer, also I was a seminarian therefore my presence might offer some kind of comfort. But was the comfort for my father or my grandpa? As we went down the hill toward Charlotte Beach which was bigger and wider than Durand Eastman beach, I could see a streak of brown flowing into the blue water along the stretch of beach. Usually, the pier kept the brown water of the Genesee River away from the beach water, it would dissipate farther out into the lake, but not today. Today, the brown pollution, mostly from the industry along the river, just kept pouring in: it was Kodak, the Genesee Beer brewery, and the rail yard. The discharges into the river were hidden from view by the deep gorges upriver, but on the Studson Street bridge downriver, you could see the crap move into the lake.

Dad turned down Cleo Street and headed to Grandpa's house; he parked in front, and with a grunt turned the ignition off; he complained about his bursitis as he got out of the car. We walked in, said hello. Mom was sweet and kissed Grandpa on the cheek. Dad seemed distracted but cordial; I forced a smile. Grandpa's old living room smelled musty and smoky. My Grandmother had died the year before. She used to have her bed on the porch for more air, I guessed --- my grandpa smoked a pack Chesterfields a day. The walls and ceiling had a yellowish haze from the smoke or age, I couldn't tell which. Everything was old, the rug, the couch, furniture, lamp shades, and my grandfather. His face was cracked with time, anger, and I supposed some laughter mixed in with tear marks etched around his eyes.

My father made small talk. He finally, told Grandpa that he lost his job because WBBF did not want to take a chance that he would have a heart attack during his show, but that was it. Dad could never get to the real reason for that spontaneous visit --- money. But Grandpa was not exactly flush, nor did he want to worry about his grown son. He had enough problems, I thought.

Afterward dad seemed disgusted, he drove down to Charlotte to walk on the beach. Dad always liked to look for treasure in the sand there. Once he found a five-dollar bill but usually it was nickels, dimes, quarters, and most times nothing. I thought we might stop for a visit with my cousins but we didn't.

We walked down by the merry-go-round with dad impatiently spreading the sand away with his shoe as he looked to see a glimmer of a quarter or dime, but nothing but more sand. After a few minutes we sat on a bench, not much to see on the now deserted beach. The lake had turned gray with whitecaps, and the clouds erased what was left of the blue skies. Not beautiful or calming. Mom sat like a statue. It turned cold but there we sat.

Over on the right I saw a lone person standing motionless at the end of the pier, his jacket billowing. The strengthening wind made the Genesee turbulent, and splashed foaming water over the pier. I wondered what that man thought. Maybe he was dreaming of being the captain of the Mayflower navigating through an unknown sea on his way to America, maybe he had just come to the end of the pier to look for God in water and sky, maybe he would jump into the churning waters and be pulled deeper into the lake. I was afraid for him. I said a prayer.

On the way home dad pulled into the overlook on Durand Beach, tires crackling the cinders and stones covering this expanse of a parking lot, which became lovers' lane at night. We sat in silence for a moment. Mom and dad were in the front seat and I was in the back praying to Jesus for something or other, but always ending up pleading with him to get rid of my fear.

Suddenly, Dad grabbed the steering wheel hard with one hand, yanked the door open with the other, then got out of the car, slammed the door, and started walking down the railroad tracks which stretched along the ridge overlooking the beach. The sun turned red and sank a little hovering on the horizon casting a bloody light and my father glowed like a visitor from another planet. Mom rolled down the window and shouted out to him, "where are you going? Bud? Bud? Come back here."

"Go home!" He shouted back.

We drove home, my mother crying making every effort to be quiet about it but the inevitable gasping for air sounds spilled out. As we drove through Durand Eastman Park on the way home, I looked out the window at the bushes, wild flowers, and trees, now all the color of soot in the disappearing light.

"Will he come home?" I asked.

"He'll be home. Needs to walk. Needs to walk."

"Around midnight he came in the back door – the aluminum slap against the doorframe woke me up. I was afraid to breathe not knowing what he would do or where he would go. Then I heard his footsteps on the stairs. The clap-clap getting louder as he reached the top of the stairs. A ray of light came in and stabbed my eyes like a knife blinding me for a moment. I felt his weight as he sat on my bed and my left side moved down a little. My sight came back and I looked at his face, flushed from drink, I guess, or his heart having been exerted beyond its normal beats while walking along the railroad tracks. His blue eyes seemed black in the off light. They stole my soul for a moment. Time stopped.

His voice came out of the darkness.

"What's happening? I'll tell you. I was something when I was twenty. I had my own show --The Buddy Baker Show. Now! No job. Can't talk anymore. Top Forty! Move over for the kids with the

'duck-ass haircuts'. But be warned. Everybody has their Waterloo, their Bataan. It'll happen to you, too!"

"I'm sorry."

"What do you know about sorry?"

He put his sweaty hand over my face and pushed down – pushed and pushed down – and I couldn't breathe. I struggled to take his hand off but couldn't. I started to get dizzy and panicky and he let up his hand and I gulped in the night air, the black night, creased by that light from the door. He got off the bed. I smelled the bitter sweat from his hand. He walked out the door closing it gently as if not to disturb me, and went down the stairs. I sank into prayer but instead of a picture of Christ coming into my head I saw Sheila. I made the sign of the cross.