

White Noise

I opened my dresser drawer and stared into a pile of socks. I was confused and afraid. My mother had told us to pack quickly. We were leaving the suburban home I had lived in all my twelve years. My father stood beside me in a gray suit, tie loosened, collar open. His dark eyes were fixed on my dresser. He asked me if I needed help packing. The question infuriated me. How could he force us to leave our home, late at night, yet ask if we needed help packing? He would remain in the house, alone, while my sister, mother and I piled our clothes into a rusted gray station wagon and fled.

I felt my father staring at me, mute, feigning innocence. A tense silence roared in my ears. My parents weren't speaking. They had separated a year ago. We were all holding our breaths, anxiously awaiting the divorce.

I grabbed my schoolbooks from my desk and put them into my vinyl bookbag. A blue three-ring binder sat on the desk, open. I put the notebook into the bookbag, and put the bag in the carpeted hallway outside my bedroom. I could hear my mother on the kitchen phone talking in urgent hushed tones. My father left the room without a word. From the closet I took my only piece of luggage -- a blue and green plaid suitcase. The zipper whirred as I opened the case. A musty vinyl odor escaped. I removed an armful of school clothes from the closet and folded them, still on their hangers, into the suitcase.

The garage door shook the house. Outside my bedroom window, birch tree trunks glowed red from the tail lights of the station wagon as my mother backed out of the garage. She left the car in the driveway with the engine running. Crimson exhaust dissipated into the cool night air.

My sister Beth appeared at my bedroom door wearing a blue and white football jersey and shorts. She held a brown paper grocery bag in one arm. Crackled white sneakers peeked out of the bag. Her hazel green eyes met mine.

"Mom's in the car. You comin'?"

"Yeah. Where's Dad?"

"Downstairs."

His study was downstairs, just before the entrance to the garage. I felt a knot in my stomach.

"OK. Be right down."

I heard my sister's footsteps on the wood stairs as I zippered my suitcase and looked around. The bed was undisturbed, my desk clear. I flicked the wall switch, darkening the room. The light on the dresser cast a bluish hue. The decorative lamp was a souvenir my father brought back from New Orleans. It was a painted bronze cast of a drunken clown, whiskey bottle in hand, hanging onto a streetlamp. The lantern illuminated the clown's bulbous red nose. The clown was grinning broadly as I left the bedroom. He was laughing at me.

I descended the stairs, angry. I briefly thought of leaving without saying goodbye. But my father stood in the door to his study. He developed an eerie smile as he saw me. I kissed him and mumbled an incoherent goodbye. He said, "I don't know why your mother is doing this." I knew the answer, but I said nothing.

We pulled into the street. My mother looked through the windshield at the traffic ahead, her blonde hair pulled back in a tight chignon. A loose strand caressed her cheek as she spoke.

"We're gonna stay at Grandma's house for a few days."

The thought of seeing my grandmother, Ada, eased my mind. Beth asked, "What about school? I got a softball game tomorrow."

"I'll take both of you to school in the morning."

I was glad to leave our home. My father had terrified me for as long as I could remember. His sudden arrival at the house that night shook all of us. My parents had been legally separated for over a year seeking a no-fault divorce. By law, they had to be separated for at least eighteen months. If they spent a night together in the house, the eighteen-month period would start over.

"Why did Dad move back?" my sister asked.

"I don't know sweetheart."

"Why did we have to leave?"

"If we're getting a divorce, we can't live together."

"How we all gonna stay at Grandma's? Where we gonna sleep?"

"I don't know sweetheart. We'll figure it out. Don't worry."

My mother fell silent, her gaze unfocused. I could tell she was worrying. St. Elizabeth's Convent appeared outside the car windows. An elderly nun clad entirely in black stood at the pink marble entrance. Her gaze slowly followed our station wagon as we passed.

My grandmother lived in a small, one-bedroom apartment. It occupied the third floor of a house she owned in Newark. We visited her every Sunday. In Italian tradition, dinner lasted all day. The kitchen was the largest room, its centerpiece a long white table surrounded by an L-shaped banquette. The seating and chairs were white with black piping. The apartment was an eclectic mix of Art Deco and Chinese. Oriental figurine lamps flanked a long wingback sofa. Beveled-mirror walls reflected steel torchère lamps. The style expressed Ada's elán.

My mother asked, "Dean, you have homework to do for tomorrow?"

"Just social studies."

I always saved that for last. It required a lot of writing.

"When we get to Grandma's, you can finish it there. Beth, your homework done?"

"Haven't gottany." My sister never had any homework. I wondered what kind of teachers she had.

My mother tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. Her manicured hands rested on the steering wheel spokes. She concentrated on the road ahead of us.

We approached South Mountain preserve, part of the county parks system. The undulating road was surrounded by thick woods growing to the shoulder. Blackness filled the car windows.

My father's renewed presence worried me. For much of my life, he wasn't around. My mother often explained he was busy

at his office, working late. His public relations firm required much of his time. When home, he was usually in his walnut-paneled study, typing. Before going to bed, my sister and I would knock at his door, wait for permission to enter, then kiss him good-night. At times, he seemed surprised to see us. He was usually perched at his manual Underwood typewriter, fingers poised over the round black keys. In the morning, at breakfast, he would already be gone. Now he was home, and we were not.

As we approached South Mountain, the road began a steep, tortuous climb. The station wagon groaned deeply as it ascended the switchbacked road. My mother's knuckles whitened as she carefully guided us through the turns. The toe of her tiny Converse sneaker pressed down on the accelerator; her exposed calf flexed. Yet the car slowly lost speed as we approached the mountaintop. Except for the noise of the engine, the car was silent.

Once we reached the summit, the highway broadened and leveled. My mother leaned back in the vinyl bench seat. Beth leaned over the front seat and turned on the AM radio. Cousin Brucey was doing the top ten countdown.

At the peak of the mountain reserve stood a Schraft's ice cream parlor, commanding a view of the valley below. Small panes of glass outlined by white mullions spanned the front of the restaurant. Cars parked lazily at an angle. As a father with an ice cream cone in each hand approached a car, the heads of two kids in the back seat bobbed up and down.

I turned to my mother. "What's Dad gonna do in the house by himself?"

She turned down the radio. "Live there, I guess. His lawyer told him he might lose the house if he doesn't live there. Just like your father, only worried about his money."

"Where we gonna live?"

"I don't know, honey. With Grandma 'til we find somewhere."

Beth asked, "Grandma know we're comin'?"

My mother glanced at Beth in the rear view mirror. "She's making a potato pie."

Visiting Ada excited me. She was always so happy to see us. I asked my mother, "Can I watch 'Laugh-In' tonight?"

"Sure."

I was in love with Goldie Hawn. And I liked watching Ruth Buzzi beat the crap out of that old man.

We approached Seton Hall University. My father had attended its prep school. The bronze gates and landscaped entrance marked the final turn leading to my grandmother's. My mother's hand set the turn signal. We had passed this route many times. But this time, there seemed a finality to the turn.

Ada lived on a tranquil street. Narrow two- and three-family homes sat close to the sidewalk. Garages and small plots of grass occupied the backyards. Ada had lived there since marrying my grandfather, Tony. Her life changed dramatically when he died, forty-two years-old, of a heart attack. In mourning, Ada built a small three-room apartment on the third floor of their home. To supplement her income as a payroll clerk, she rented out the other two apartments.

My mother parked the station wagon in the macadam driveway, near the rear entrance. I got out and opened the tailgate. Mismatched pieces of luggage lay on the metal floor.

"Sweetheart, will you hold the door for me?"

The door led to a narrow rear stairway. As we climbed to the third floor, the linoleum and metal stair treads clacked under our feet. Stale cooking odors emanated from each apartment we passed.

On the third floor landing, Ada stood in the open doorway. She wore a blue vest and knee-length skirt. Light brown curls framed her face. Long ropes of faux pearls hung from her neck. Her usually radiant smile was replaced by a look of concern.

"Carmel, you OK? Come in, come in. Put your bags in the bedroom." Ada turned to me and Beth. "You kids hungry? I've got a potato pie in the oven. Put all that stuff down. Give your grandma a big kiss."

Petite, but shapely and buxom, Ada was only five-feet tall. We each stooped slightly to kiss her. I took our suitcases into my grandmother's bedroom. The bedspreads matched the upholstered headboards and the blue silk drapes. Antique perfume bottles sat on the dressing table. I felt I didn't belong. I had dragged my suitcases, and my shame, into an immaculate room.

Ada called from the kitchen, "Dean, come sit down. Your soup's gonna get cold."

My mother stood in front of the open refrigerator. "What do you kids want to drink?"

"Iced tea."

"Tang."

My mother removed the glass pitchers and set them on the table. She moved wearily, distracted. In an apron, Ada stood at her enormous white enamel stove ladling soup into china bowls.

Beth picked at a plate of provolone and pepperoni. I took a stalk of fresh fennel. I liked the licorice taste, the aroma recalling the after dinner cordials that Ada kept on a glass tea cart in the kitchen. Ada peered into the oven. With silver oven mitts, she carefully removed a Pyrex baking dish and set it on the stove to cool.

"The pie's done."

We sat. "Dean, will you say grace?"

I said a prayer my father had taught me and we started the soup course. We were eating dinner, late, far from home. Our clothes sat in suitcases. We had two beds for four people. Yet the conversation was just like any Sunday meal.

My mother asked me, "Dean, do you want grated cheese on your soup?"

"Sure." She passed me the bowl.

My father had succeeded, once again, in disrupting everyone's lives. We were so used to his insanity that we tolerated it with little outward sign of disturbance. But my skin still tingled with the fear I'd felt when my father showed up, suddenly, at the home he had left months ago.

Ada served me a corner piece of the pie. The crust of potatoes, coated with golden brown mozzarella, dotted with garlic and prosciutto, was my favorite part. The chewing served as a calmativie.

After dinner, I sat at the far end of the long table and did my homework. Ada washed the dishes while Carmel dried. My mother kept glancing at me while I studied. Ada, no matter what the chore, kept a sunny disposition. Beth lay on the living-room floor, with her head propped in her hands, watching 'Lost in Space.' I heard repeated warnings of "Danger, Will, danger!"

From my social studies book I read about the Civil War. The study questions dealt with the Mason-Dixon line. After completing an answer, I thought of my father, alone, in a big house. Did it bother him to pass by our empty bedrooms? I closed my books and joined Beth in the living-room.

"Whatya watchin'?"

"Nothin'."

" 'Laugh-In' is on."

Beth leaned forward from her prone position and changed the channel.

Joanne Whorley and Ruth Buzzi popped their heads out of the psychedelic wall.

"Hey Ruthie!"

"What, Joanne?"

"Did your parents have any normal children?" Ruth Buzzi frowned and slammed her door.

The wall behind the console TV was covered with panels of beveled mirror. I could see myself on the crimson sofa flanked by torchères. A hand-painted Chinese secretary decorated one wall. In elegant surroundings, I was miserable. I found myself displaced, confused and resentful.

My grandmother called from the kitchen. My mother was in the bedroom with the door shut. Ada, in a blue silk robe and slippers, opened a tin of Lorna Doone cookies.

"Come sit next to your grandma. Let's have a party. You

want a little anisette?" She flashed a conspiratorial grin.

"OK."

Ada went to the tea cart in the corner of the kitchen and returned with a glass decanter. Inside it, in a glass bathysphere, stood a porcelain ballerina. A music box was concealed in the base. Ada pressed a button underneath and set the anisette-filled decanter on the table, along with two apertif glasses.

"Today is your grandpa Tony's birthday. He would have been sixty-six. The good Lord took him from me twenty-four years ago. C'mon, let's have a drink for Tony."

As Ada lifted the decanter, the music box within played 'The Nutcracker Suite' and the tiny ballerina pirouetted. Ada poured two glasses of the silvery liquid. When she put the decanter down on the table, the ballerina and the music stopped. Ada raised her glass. "In boca al luppo." She downed the whole shot, scrunched her shoulders, and grinned like a little girl. Her zest for life was like the spin of a ballerina, graceful yet with inspired energy.

I brought my glass to my lips and sipped the sweet licorice liqueur. I liked the feel of it on my lips.

"Your grandpa Tony was such a good man. Worked hard. Designed industrial pumps for Worthington. He would come home and surprise me with flowers, sometimes French mints. One time a platinum diamond bracelet." As she turned the bracelet on her wrist, the intricate design sparkled. "He was such a sweet man." She paused. She turned toward me. "Your mother says you want to be a civil engineer. That's wonderful. You study hard, you can go to any college you want. I'll see to that. You make your grandma proud, I'll take care of your schooling. Don't worry about your father. If he wants to help you, fine. But if he doesn't, I'll take care of it."

"Thanks Grandma. I'd like to build skyscrapers, tall steel skyscrapers like in New York."

"Dean, you can build them as high as you want."

"Grandma, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, honey."

"Why did Dad move back home?"

"Sweetheart, I don't always understand your father. He's fighting with your mother. But they both love you. Sometimes when parents fight, they hurt the ones they love. They'll work it out. Give 'em a little time. For now, you can stay here with me. You like grandma's cooking, don't you?"

"Yep."

"Good. Have some more cookies." Ada helped herself to a butter cookie. "I'm gonna have a little more anisette." She smiled and poured herself another shot. The music played.

My mother emerged from the bedroom in a terry robe and yellow pajamas. "When 'Laugh-In' is over, you and Beth can sleep in the bedroom. In the morning, we have to leave by seven so you're not late for school."

"Where you and Grandma gonna sleep?"

"In the living-room. We'll manage."

"Carmel and I are gonna have a pajama party, right Carmel?"

My mother smiled, but there was a sadness behind it. Beth plopped down in a chair at the table and reached for some chocolate mints. "You missed 'Laugh-In'." She flipped her hair over her shoulder and ate a mint.

My mother stood by the table. "I made up the beds for you two. Why don't you get into your pajamas and get ready for bed."

I took my suitcase into the bathroom, got out my toothbrush and pajamas, and changed. Glancing at myself in the mirror, I turned away. I was in my plaid pajamas in a small apartment full of women, feeling useless. I could not reconcile my image in the mirror with my role as family guardian.

I returned to the kitchen. My mother was staring blankly at the table while Ada spoke in a soft voice. The conversation stopped when they saw me. I kissed them goodnight.

Ada said, "Goodnight, sweetheart. Sleep tight."

My mother told me, "I set the alarm in the bedroom for six. Let your sister shower first. We have to leave by seven. Good-

night, honey."

As I climbed into bed, my sister, laying in the next bed, said goodnight. On the dressing table between us sat the collection of perfume bottles. One of the glass bottle-stoppers, a hand-blown peacock, stared back at me, as if in surprise. I closed my eyes.

In the morning, we each showered quickly while Ada made eggs and Canadian bacon. After breakfast, we repeated the trip of the previous night. The climb to the summit of South Mountain challenged the station wagon. The tortuous descent challenged my mother's driving. The morning traffic made the commute tense. Even Cousin Brucey's countdown did little to ease the anxiety in the car.

My mother dropped me off first. I had just started junior high school, seventh grade. The short class periods and frequent change of classrooms served to occupy my mind. At lunchtime, I avoided the cafeteria. I didn't feel like talking. I studied in the library instead. The afternoon passed quickly. At the end of the day, my mother's gray station wagon sat outside. Beth was in the backseat; I got in the front.

"Hi honey. How was school?"

"Fine."

"Don't forget you've got visitation with your father tonight. He's gonna pick you up at Grandma's."

After my parents separated, I had begun to see my father twice a week. I dreaded it. It was only three hours, but they seemed eternal. He was volatile. I never knew what to expect.

When we reached the third floor landing of Ada's staircase, she stood with the door open.

"Come in, come in. I made a lasagna."

Stalks of fresh fennel and warm dinner rolls sat in a wire basket in the center of the kitchen table. Ada wore slacks, sneakers and an apron. Splashes of red, orange and white showed

through a glass pan on the stove top. Tomato sauce bubbled on the surface of the lasagna releasing a perfume of oregano and garlic. I said grace. I dipped a dinner roll into the tomato sauce pooled on my plate. The visit with my father faded from my mind.

I felt like a guest who had stayed at the party too long. The excitement of Sunday dinners no longer existed. Yet we couldn't leave. Beth seem unbothered. But my mother was distraught. She had become quiet, reticent. I did my homework, didn't complain, and pretended our dislocation was a minor inconvenience, soon to be resolved.

That night, it was my turn to visit with my father. We usually went to a local public place -- a restaurant, a park, sometimes a movie. But regardless of where we went, tension reigned. I never knew what mood he would be in, or whether I would anger him. Because my father provided fifty dollars a week in child support, he constantly criticized my mother's care. If we went to a restaurant, he would eat while I watched. He told me my mother was supposed to have fed us beforehand, that's what the money was for. So as not to listen to his attacks on my mother, I went hungry.

Occasionally we visited Friendly's Restaurant, a favorite haunt in Madison. Waitresses in red- and white-checked uniforms bustled about. Their hair was tucked neatly into small round caps. Customers sat at Formica banquettes and sipped sodas from tall glasses and flexible straws.

The waitress brought my father the Friendly's salad platter: Jello with pineapple, cottage cheese, lettuce and melba toast. He was always worried about his weight, and ours.

"Did your mother feed you tonight?"

"Yes."

"What did you eat?"

"Pork chops and baked potatoes."

"What did you eat for breakfast?"

"Scrambled eggs and toast."

"No orange juice? You need vitamin C."

"Yes, we had orange juice."

It was a lie. We hadn't eaten any of that. I made it all up to protect my mother. I preferred to go hungry than hear him carp about her alleged failures.

As I sat in my grandmother's kitchen waiting for my father, the doorbell rang. Normally, Ada pressed a buzzer admitting the visitor. That night, I closed my books, left the apartment, and went downstairs. As I passed the first-floor apartment, I heard voices and laughter.

My father sat in his silver Oldsmobile Ninety-Eight, double-parked. I opened the passenger door, slid in, and kissed him hello. At twelve years of age, I was loathe to do so, but he insisted. It wasn't a display of love; it was subservience.

He wore a white dress shirt and suit pants, tie loosened. His suit jacket hung from the roof clip behind his seat.

"How's your grandmother?"

"Fine."

He checked his side-view mirror and put the car in drive. "I have to pick up a few things I left at my apartment." He slowed at a stop sign, then proceeded. "I moved back into the Madison house so your mother and I could resolve things. But obviously she doesn't want to. You realize she's keeping us from being a family, don't you?"

He turned toward me, daring me to disagree. I remained silent. The white noise in my head started. I could see this was going to be another blame session.

"I'd like us all to live together, but your mother has other plans. She's not thinking of you kids." His voice increased in volume. "She's only worried about herself."

I didn't remember us ever living or even doing anything as a family. As we drove on in silence, I felt the heat of my father's anger. In an effort to avoid his vitriol, I looked out the passenger window. We passed a schoolyard where kids were playing basketball. A pile of bicycles lay on the grass near a worn

blacktop court.

My father's apartment wasn't far from my grandmother's.  
"Dean, wait here in the car. This won't take long."

He disappeared into an ugly three-story apartment house. The dozens of windows were cluttered with screens, air-conditioners and vinyl shades. I wondered why I was never allowed to see the apartment he shared with several men in various stages of marital problems -- separation, divorce, and alcoholism. I imagined the place to be raucous, filled with mismatched furniture and the floor strewn with clothes, both men's and women's.

As I sat in his car, I grew increasingly resentful. It was the second time in two days that my father had forced me to leave a comfortable home. I wanted the divorce to be over, and him banished from our lives. Every time I came in contact with him, drama and chaos ensued.

The entrance to the apartment opened. My father placed a large cardboard box on the ground to hold the door open. He waved to me to come help him. I was surprised to find I could exit the car. I thought I had been a prisoner.

After loading the trunk with boxes, we drove aimlessly through the surrounding neighborhood. The blame game continued.

"It's not healthy for you to be living in a house full of women. Where do you sleep?"

"Grandma's room."

"What about Beth?"

"There's twin beds."

"If you were at home, you'd be in your own room. A boy your age shouldn't be sharing a room with his sister."

I agreed with his logic. If I were home, it would solve a lot of problems. However, we differed on the idea of a home.

After years of psychological abuse at the hands of my father, my mother had realized the only way to heal our family and establish a safe, nurturing environment, was divorce. The dysfunction in our home had progressed into abuse. My father redirected his self-hatred at us. But it took many years for the ugly source

of his hatred to emerge.

Despite being a bright student, I had begun to exhibit behavior problems in grade school. I rebelled against authority and frequently disrupted the class. I was mad. Teachers noticed the change in me and called in the school psychologist. I began weekly sessions. A dark portrait of my home life came to light.

My father was an alcoholic, but the problem was far deeper. His behavior had become increasingly erratic. He would fly off into a rage over minor incidents. I was often the target.

If I didn't react quickly enough to his demands, he would cuff me in the back of the head. If Beth and I were being too noisy, he would come in and kick us, usually in the buttocks as we ran away.

His anger stemmed from many things. One of them was his sexual identity. I didn't know it at the time, but my father would get drunk at bars and bring men home under the pretense of camaraderie. My mother was not admitted to these stag parties, which took place late at night in my father's study.

I was reading a volume from The Hardy Boys series in my bedroom one night. My father came in with a stack of thick blue pamphlets. They were a Charles Atlas course in isometrics. He told me it was an exercise regimen he followed in college. Each pamphlet contained glossy black and white photos of Charles Atlas, wearing only a loin cloth.

My father wanted to show me how to perform the exercises, which used muscle against muscle. He said the course suggested doing the routine in front of a mirror, in the nude. We got undressed. I stood in front of my full-length mirror while my father stood behind me. He reached around me, showing me how to position my hands. My small taut muscles stood in contrast to his powerful biceps. He held me closely, pressing up against my buttocks. He told me I was to do the exercises every night, after dinner, in the nude. He sometimes visited me to give me what he called workout tips.

The school psychologist suspected abuse. He gave me a bat-

tery of tests. I was introduced to the Rorschach. He tested my IQ. Sometimes we just talked. He was the first man I had met who took an interest in understanding me. At first, his concern and empathy confused me, even scared me. I wasn't used to it.

After months of weekly sessions, he called my parents in for individual sessions. I recall my father calling him a "nosy pain-in-the-ass." He refused to meet with "that quack" again. Ultimately, the psychologist met with my mother to give her his conclusions. He didn't mince words. He told her that unless she left my father, and took my sister and me with her, his behavior would leave my sister and me emotionally scarred for many years. The marriage was imploding. My mother's choice was divorce or a family holocaust. She decided to leave her husband to save her children. At the time of the separation, I only knew we all feared my father.

"You realize your mother is destroying this family, don't you?"

I kept quiet. My father did not tolerate disagreement.

"Your mother is hell bent on divorcing me. She doesn't care about you or Beth." He spit the insults at the windshield. "She's selfish, and she's spoiled."

Outside the car windows, neatly tended Cape Cods and colonials slowly passed my peripheral vision. Manicured lawns alternated with macadamed driveways. I wondered what those homes were like inside.

"I'm trying to save this family, but your mother and grandmother are fighting me every step of the way. Your grandmother sheltered and spoiled your mother her whole life. And now she's letting your mother escape her responsibilities to this family."

By the time we returned to my grandmother's house, I was shaking. The noise in my head had reached a feverish pitch. My father dropped me at the sidewalk. As I kissed him goodbye, I got a nauseating whiff of his unctuous hair pomade. He drove off, heading for the home I had once occupied. I looked up at my grandmother's sturdy brick house. Ada stood at the third floor window. Even at that distance, I could see the worry in her face.

My mother, sister and I continued our commute to school for sixteen months. School vacations provided the few breaks in the routine. The three-room apartment managed to accomodate us. My grandmother bought a chair that ingeniously converted to a bed. My mother slept on that while Ada continued to sleep on the sofa. There weren't any kids my age living in that neighborhood, which was fine. I didn't feel like hanging out in those streets.

At the end of those sixteen months, a family court judge granted my parents a divorce. The judge ordered my father to move out of our home in Madison. We could live there until my sister's eighteenth birthday. I felt vindicated. At last, someone recognized that we were being punished by a heartless bastard.

When we returned to the Madison house with our suitcases in hand, we found my father had taken the furniture with him. As we walked around in the empty home, stunned, my mother said, "That's so typical of your father, only worried about his money."

Ada only chuckled. She told me, "You know, I bought that furniture when your mother and father got married. I'm glad he took it with him. Good riddance. Come on, kids. Let's get in the car. We're goin' shoppin'."

I often think of Ada as I lie on a steel cot in my prison cell. I imagine her support, and my mother's. Losing them -- Ada to Alzheimer's, my mother to cancer -- was very painful. Yet I am comforted whenever I remember their words, or their love.

My father is alive, but we don't speak. My mother had kept us communicating. "He's still your father. Call him for me." My mother's funeral was the last time he and I spoke. With my mother no longer alive to forgive him, the anger within me re-surfaced.

It wasn't until I went to prison that the memories of the sexual abuse surfaced. I had repressed them, along with the hurt.

I now write about my life and what brought me to prison. I've gained some clarity, but I'm still struggling with my emo-

tions. I don't blame my father for the path I've taken. My own actions brought me here. Drunk and high on drugs, I took a life. Not a day passes that I don't think about those final moments.

On the wall of my cell, next to a picture of Ada and my mother, are words written by Dante Alighieri, "In the middle of the journey of [my] life I found myself within a dark woods where the straight way was lost."

We all experience loss. It's ugly. It's painful. But I'm learning to deal with it and accept it. I take it one day at a time.

- April, 2009