Betrayal

DAN WHITE
(1946—1985)

October 22, 1985

Dear Charlie,

Sorry for messing up one of your new school notebooks, blank except for a few pages of long division. It was the only paper I could find for this letter. I'm sure your mother will make up some good excuse for your notebook being "lost' and will get you a new one. You're only seven now. I trust her to keep this one for you. By the time she lets you read it you will have forgotten you ever lost it. And you'll be old enough to read this letter and know more about who your father was, a human being, not just the monster who murdered San Francisco's mayor and first openly gay supervisor.

I started today—my last day—by putting on a big cowboy hat and dark glasses and jeans with my good suit coat—so I'd look like just another tourist from Texas. Then I went out to Pier 39 for my first—and last—look since coming back to San Francisco. Not that any of the tourists would know me, but some of the concessionaires might, and I didn't want to find out which ones would pretend not to see me, and which ones would call, hey, Danny Boy. I'm not sure which would be worse.

It's been one of those hot October days we get after the summer fog goes away, and lots of tourists were there. Lots of seals too. I heard they started showing up a year or two ago, but this was the first time I saw them. Smelled them

What a stink. Finally I know what a metaphor is. Even though I didn't go past high school, I always did a lot of reading on my own, and I kept running into that word, metaphor, but I was never sure how to use it correctly, and I was ashamed to ask anyone. Now I think I can give a good example of a metaphor. Those stinking seals, feeding off the tourist garbage at Pier 39, are a living metaphor for what started happening to San Francisco around the time I was born almost forty years ago.

Back then, around 1950, when my folks moved up here from Long Beach, the seals had their own natural place, Seal Rock, right in the Pacific Ocean, near the Cliff House, out in choppy water. If you tried to row a boat out there, it would just get smashed against those tall rocks. Back then, nobody was crazy enough to try to row a boat, let alone surf or swim at Ocean Beach. Even wading in up to your knees is dangerous, with that undertow. Every kid knew that. I'm sure your mother told you.

The seals were the kings of Seal Rock, seagulls whirling around them for scraps, but keeping their distance. The seals hunted fish, or lay in the sun high up on their rock, When they weren't taking a nap, they barked. Day and night they barked like they were guarding the entry to the Bay. If you were anywhere near the beach you could hear them

barking. One or two might follow a ship into the Bay and hang around the docks on the embarcadero, but just for a day or two, then swim back out to their rock.

Years later, around the time you were born, Pier 39 was built. It never was a real pier where ships could come and go. It was just rows of souvenir shops and snack bars and beer bars thrown up between the real piers on the embarcadero. That was when the seals left their rock and swam a mile or two west, to Pier 39, where they didn't have to hunt. They could lay there all day, eat the tourist garbage, and stink. See? a metaphor for what the whole City did when it stopped being a working city and became a Tourist City, with piers where no ships docked anymore, a Fisherman's Wharf where no fishermen went out on boats and caught fish. With a Cannery that didn't can the fish that used to be caught, and a Ghirardelli Chocolate factory that didn't make chocolate anymore, just sold more tourist crap made in China. It was the same all over. Levi-Strauss stopped making jeans out in the Mission District, Zellerbach stopped making paper, breweries stopped making beer. The slaughter houses and tanneries at Hunters Point were long gone, shut down when the Navy took over, but when the war ended the shipyards shut down too. The only thing that grew was the Downtown, where buildings got higher and higher and fuller and fuller of people shuffling paper and money. My father used to say a man couldn't work with his hands anymore, nobody made anything real, anything useful. He would laugh and say, lucky they always need fire fighters, or you kids would go hungry.

My father, your namesake, used to say it was World War II that changed everything. Millions of men from all over the country came through SF, shipping out to fight in the Pacific. Once they had seen San Francisco, they weren't going back to Nebraska or Kentucky, not even back to New York—where there were paper-shufflers galore who would rather shuffle papers in the new downtown skyscrapers here. That's what brought in more gays, because so many of them were like Harvey—white, smart, educated paper-shufflers looking for a town besides New York that would, like even your grandfather used to say, "Live and let live."

There are a lot of other questions I'd like to ask my father about what the War did, but he died when I was only seventeen, died and left nine of us to shift for ourselves. You're going to think what I'm doing is a lot worse, leaving you when you're ten years younger than I was when I lost my father. Try not to think that. I'm doing you a favor I should have done six years ago, but I didn't have the guts, and then I didn't have the opportunity, and then I didn't even have the energy.

Two things give me the energy now. The most important thing was your mother telling me about what happened to you in school last week. That kid saying, "Your father's a killer. My dad says he got away with double murder." It was bound to happen unless she picked up and moved out of California. But she said, "I'm not running away from my City, my home, my parish, my family, my friends, my neighbors. If I went somewhere else with a new name and made a new life with new friends, sooner or later I'd have to tell them, and just go through it all over again." She's right and she's strong. She was strong for me, and now she has to be strong for you. Part of being strong for you was her telling me I have to stay away from here. The neighbors don't say anything, but every time they see me here they remember. Some things you can never get past. So, she told me, I'm taking the kids away for a few days. Enough time for you to get your stuff out of the house. From then on, they'll have regular visits with you, some place out of San Francisco, way out, where nobody would recognize you.

Providing—that was the second thing—I went to a psychiatrist her doctor recommended and my sisters would pay for. So I went, and after the second appointment he started me on some pills he said might make me feel better. They kicked in a few days ago, and they give me enough energy to do what I have to do. So if you want to blame anyone, blame the shrink. He won't care.

I know I'm doing the right thing, the only thing, and so does your mother, even if she'd never say it. When you're old enough to read this, you'll know it too.

I hope she tells you I made sure she wouldn't find me. She asked your Uncle Tom to come by after work and check the house every day while she's gone. I came here tonight, late, in the dark, to make sure no one saw me. Tom will come tomorrow, hear the car running in the garage, and he'll find me. Tom can handle it. And he won't really be surprised. Probably relieved, after he thinks about it from all sides.

I'm sitting on the passenger side, plenty of leg room, comfortable, starting this letter by flashlight so I'll have all the night and tomorrow morning to write it. I already set the hose in the exhaust, coming in through the window, but I won't turn on the motor till I finish this.

What the boy in your school told you is true. I emptied a gun twice, at close range, into two men. By now, I'm sure a lot of people have told you why, in one word—anti-gay. They are wrong. They just want a simple answer that they can love or hate, then forget. The answer is more complicated. Sometimes, even I don't know why I did it. Trying to explain it to you how and why I ruined your life, and your mother's, and your sister and brother and—I'm just wasting time making a list of all the people I hurt besides the men I killed. Just wasting time instead of filling in the things you don't know about who I am and what I did. It isn't easy. Trying to write things I never told anyone, not even your mother.

I'll start again from the beginning—1946.

Tom was already two and I was just born when your grandfather got his army discharge. He moved the family up to San Francisco where the fire department was giving hiring preference to veterans. He and my mother found a house they could afford in the Outer Misson—Viz Valley, where your grandmother still lives (or maybe she's dead by the time you read this, but you know her house). In those days Visitacion Valley was still like Hunters Point used to be before the Navy built the shipyards there, lots of open land where people still kept chickens and hunted rabbits. Our house was in one of the first rows of houses built at the foot of McLaren Park, which was a fancy name for a steep hill, scraggy brush up and down, wild.

The reason my folks could afford to buy that house was that during the war the government built temporary army housing running along Sunnydale Avenue, up into the "park" (just like what they built over the Hunters Point slopes for shipyard workers). My father must have thought, pretty soon the army and the war workers will leave, and the housing projects will come down, and families in houses like ours would grow up in beautiful open space by a park that was a natural green hill for kids to climb.

You know what happened, how all the "temporary" housing projects became a permanent place to park the blacks who didn't have war jobs anymore, but weren't about to go back to Mississippi. White people started moving out of Viz Valley, going south because they could commute to San Francisco on the new freeways, or if they were

police or firemen and had to live within the City limits, they moved west, out to the Avenues, the sand dunes near the ocean.

Your grandparents couldn't afford to move anywhere because, being a "good Catholic family," they had a baby every year or two. By the time my father died of cancer in 1963, there were nine of us, from Tom at 19 down to a baby not weaned yet. All of us in that two bedroom house, with an extra, unheated room my dad built in the basement, and one bathroom upstairs for us all. You could have fit the whole thing into Dianne Feinstein's living room in Pacific Heights. (Dianne invited your mother and me to tea a couple of times. She was only one on the Board who ever treated me like a human being.)

My father died a hero, written up in the paper with a picture of the time he saved a would-be suicide, holding this crazy jumper with one arm while he climbed down the ladder. That's the only picture I have of him in my mind because I hardly ever saw him. Firemen worked 24 hours on, 24 hours off. That meant they did a whole week's shift in 2-3 days, and could work at another job, mostly construction. Half the week my father slept, cooked, ate with firemen—like being in the army—and the other half, he pounded nails all day, too tired to do anything but eat and sleep when he got home.

A hero who put his whole life into supporting his big family? I guess so, but sometimes I wonder, did he prefer this life, getting enough sex and home-cooked food part-time at home, but not too much contact with so many kids? I never dared to ask him. He probably wouldn't have told me the truth if I had. But questions like this must have been rattling around in my head even when I didn't let myself think them. Maybe these questions are what made me want to live a life that was different from his. Charlie, you're the first person I ever told about these thoughts.

I went to Catholic schools. They were stricter and safer than the public schools in Viz Valley or anyplace else in SF, but the Brothers teaching at Riordan High made me mad. I always had a short fuse, especially when someone tried to make me feel small and cheap—inferior. At Riordan, a couple of the Brothers knew just how to set me off. Then it was slaps on the back of the head, humiliation, threats to throw me out when I wouldn't apologize, and, of course, threats that I'd go to Hell. After my father died, I did get kicked out. So what, I said, public school will save my mother a little money.

Woodrow Wilson High had just opened—probably to keep the blacks in Sunnydale from taking the streetcar west to the all-white Avenues. Wilson could even take in some of the Hunters Point blacks they used to send on the 22 bus to Mission High, where the blacks were starting to fight with the Mexicans more than with whites. From the day it opened, Wilson had gangs, always at war. Everyone said you had to join a gang for protection, but I wouldn't. I fought it out alone. Even when I was down and bloody, I kept on kicking, sort of out of my head, not caring if I killed or got killed, not thinking at all, not even remembering after the black gang backed off, and I sort of came to and saw them looking down at me and backing off, quiet and nervous. But that only happened once or twice. Mostly I acted happy. I was good at sports, better than most of them, always captain of the team, and always willing to teach someone how to sink more baskets or get more hits. I knew what set the blacks off was the same thing that got to me, even if I was white—being disrespected. I treated everybody the same, but I didn't take any shit. So I survived and got respect and even had some black friends. No. That's not true. I never had a real friend who knew my real feelings.

Before I get into how I ruined your mother's life, (she never said it, but it's true) I just want to say something about being Catholic, which I'm not, no matter what the newspapers said about me. Nothing will drive you out of the Catholic Church faster than being jammed into a house with too many other kids, like the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe, just because some priest told your mother birth control was a sin.

I don't know why my parents believed having too many children made them better Catholics. Lots of Catholics in San Francisco, especially the Italians, like Moscone's mother, long before the pill, managed to keep their families down to two or three kids.

Some Catholics even talked back to the priest. One time in the market—back in the fifties when I was your age—I heard two ladies talking. One lady told the other that at her last confession, the priest said he couldn't absolve her unless she promised to stop using contraception. "So told him, okay, fine, then can I bring you my babies to raise up?" (That's how I figured out what the word contraception meant.) And the other woman laughed, and said, "Next time go to Father Thomas for confession—we all do, because he never asks if we use birth control." The first lady said she was moving across town, and the second lady told her to ask some woman in her new parish, which priest to go to for confession. "There's always one who never asks."

That's the way it was even way back then. Most Catholics in San Francisco wanted a priest to baptize them, marry them, bury them—and some nuns to teach their kids better than the public schools did. Otherwise, the priests should mind their own business. I don't know why my parents couldn't be like those Catholics.

Anyway, I was seventeen when your grandfather died. That was 1963, the time when the hippies and flower children started coming to San Francisco. That's what the books say, but I don't know any more about hippies than you can read in books. No more than I knew about the "beat poets" and the jazz clubs that moved into North Beach even before that, after the Italians moved out. That was all over with by the time I was old enough to take the bus alone across town to see old City Lights Books and found it mashed between a string of strip joints—another neighborhood sold out to the tourists. The Beats, the jazz clubs, the flower children, the gays—never went as far out as Viz Valley. Except for one math teacher at Wilson, and I don't know if he really was gay, but the guys called him queer (not to his face). These kids called anyone queer for carrying a book or a tennis racket. Or just to insult a guy. As long as they didn't call me queer—and they didn't, I packed a pretty good punch—I wasn't interested.

I was only interested in my father suddenly going into the hospital and dying, leaving your grandmother with nine kids and only a partial widow's pension because he'd been a fireman less than twenty years.

But that wasn't why I stopped being a Catholic or believing in God.

It wasn't too many kids in the house, or one bad priest, or one nosey nun, or too many miracles to swallow. I was not much older than you are now when I just knew—you didn't have to be a genius to figure it out—that the things they told us were fairy tales to scare us. Then the priests could turn our fear into a soft living for them. I said this to a guy I met in the army, and he laughed. Sure, he said, everyone figures that out. God is for women and children, keeps them in line, that's it, and who cares? He said he didn't care, it just meant he could do whatever he liked. I noticed he drank a lot. Was it to help him not care?

I couldn't drink—I'd get sick before I ever got feeling good. So I cared a lot about losing God. And I couldn't do whatever I wanted just because no God was watching. For some reason—maybe just to try to make sense of things—I cared even more about doing what was right—me and everyone else should do what was right. But how do you know what's right when most people don't care, and the ones who do care—like your mother and father—believe some fairy tale God is going to send them to Hell if they don't have too many children and don't say enough Hail Mary's?

The shrink says I have a mental disease. But I don't think it's a disease. It's just knowing what everyone knows and doesn't want to know. It's not buying the fairy tales that cover the cold truth. It's feeling that cold truth through my whole body, exploding in my gut and sending icy air up and down all through me. Icy dark emptiness. It's just knowing where we are. In outer space. Cold dark space where the stars and the planets and the pieces that break off of them just spin around and around and around each other.

Most of the time I kept busy, especially with sports and working out, to keep warm. But sometimes I'd freeze in space, like a block of ice ready to explode.

In 10th grade English we read Shakespeare's "Macbeth." Probably you did too. In my class we each had to memorize a few lines and recite them in front of the class. I memorized Macbeth's speech after his wife kills herself, the one that goes

"Out, out, brief candle
Life is but a walking shadow—"

Then some more lines I don't remember. Then

"It is a tale told by an idiot
Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

The teacher gave me an A+ on my recitation, said I brought tears to her eyes, like a great actor. What she didn't know was that I wasn't acting.

When I was in prison, I had a lot of time to read up on this and think about it. I was kept separate, alone (because the prisoners might kill me because I had been a cop, and the guards might kill me because Moscone's father had been a prison guard.) I didn't mind isolation. It was the way I preferred to live when I was outside—a bunk in a small room with piles of books. The prison library had plenty of books on religion—mostly "inspirational" junk but a few real philosophers asking the same questions as far back as you can go—and the cart came around every day.

But none of the books answered the question that had always bugged me: after people stop believing in God, how do they live? To my way of thinking, they find different ways to not care, to distract themselves, like that guy in the army who drank a lot. Some others keep the churches in business, paying off a priest who'll keep on telling them there really is God, honest there is. Or, like when I was on the police force, I arrested men who were always fighting mad, always beating or raping—staying mad just to get warm? Or like those teaching Brothers at Riordan, who'd expected a better life in the Church than teaching kids like me, and then probably lost their faith, but had nowhere to go, so they kept the cold away by kicking us around, kicking at anyone weaker than them. I think maybe gamblers and con artists kept the cold away by working themselves up with fear of losing or fear of getting caught, heating up some excitement to keep their

minds off of —am I making this clear? People have to find some way to forget, to go on, day after day, once they know the truth.

At your age, it's easy—a new toy works—for a little while—stops the questions that already have started. It works for grownups too, always saving up to buy another car or a diamond ring or clothes, or take another trip—to help them forget what they already knew from your age.

If they're rich enough to have all these things already, they go for power, maybe in politics, like Dianne Feinstein or like George Moscone. George wasn't exactly rich, so he needed the power to be mixed up with fame—staying warm as long as everyone knows you when you walk down the street. George was always posing like a man who was looking at the world through a high window, but he was just looking in a mirror, admiring himself. Maybe that's not so different from Dianne or any other politician. They all have to check out how they look, whatever they're thinking or planning, always making sure they look good doing it. I never could learn what to say or do—how to make myself look good in that public mirror. But George! He never stopped admiring himself in that mirror.

My father always said he believe in God and the Church, but he was usually working on Sunday or too tired to go to mass with us, so maybe the truth was that he didn't believe all that strongly, and his way to not think about it was working night and day.

The best people, I think, distract themselves by making art—music or paintings or books. I wanted to be one of those. For a long time, I thought writing would do it for me. I'd be inspired, hot while I was writing. But the next day I'd read through what I wrote. That cooled me off fast.

Next to the artists are the ones who can forget by putting their mind into working for a cause, like civil rights or gay rights. (All the better if they can tie it to their church, their God, like King or Gandhi.) Harvey Milk was one of those—even if he was always looking at himself, clowning in that mirror—he was clowning with a purpose, to tell gay men not to be afraid, to just laugh at the people who hate them. I respected Harvey for that until politics poisoned him.

Then there are the really good people like your mother, who never looked in that public mirror. She just gave all her mind and soul to other people, being rock steady for the children she taught in school, and then for me, and then for you, (and for your little brother and baby sister that never should have been born, but that's my fault, not hers.)

Sometimes I wonder if my mother used her religion just as a way to keep herself distracted out of her mind with children. After my father died, she married a widower with seven or eight, so there were close to twenty people in and out of that house. (But that doesn't work for all women. When I was on the police force, there'd always be some who dumped their children, or even killed one to "save him from the devil." That's what being a cop was, mostly, seeing things you wish you could forget, not chasing or shooting criminals, like cops in the movies.)

Nothing I tried could break the chill, not for long. Over and over, I would throw myself into something, thinking, if I can just do this or get that, I'll be saved, I'll forget what I know about what's real, and I'll have a good life. But I never forgot for long. Cold reality was always there, waiting. The trouble was that, after I proved I could do some new thing, whatever it was, I got bored. It was even worse when I failed, the humiliation.

Worst of all was when liars like George betrayed me. Worse than a beating by some high school gang. I call George one of the snakes. Maybe that's their method for keeping warm—being snakes, stinging other people with venom that stunned them, and then laughing at them.

My first week in Soledad, I let the chaplain come to me because there was no one to talk to before a schedule of family visits could be set up. He talked to me about forgiveness, starting with the Our Father. He said "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" set conditions—if you want to be forgiven, you have to forgive. I just let him talk, so he picked up his Bible and read something about forgiving over and over again. If someone hurts you, then asks forgiveness, then hurts you again, then asks forgiveness, and then does it again—finally I interrupted. I asked him, what about the people who never ask you to forgive? The ones who betray you and humiliate you, and then just laugh at you, proud of how smart they are and how stupid you are? Was I supposed to forgive the people who weren't sorry? So then he quoted Jesus. "Forgive them for they know not what they do." I stood up and said, shit, they knew exactly what they were doing. (I think I scared him. He left fast.)

That was what I really hated, being shamed, made a fool of, a loser. Nothing else could work so fast to make that icy fever rise up in me. It made me want to smash everything. The best thing to do was just walk away. Go somewhere alone, until I could climb up out of that hot ice. Then find another distraction to warm me up a little.

When I was a kid, the best distraction was sports. It was good all the way up to high school, but then I was expected to use it to get a college scholarship. It meant a lot to the coaches. I think they were pushing it so they would look good—it had nothing to do with what was good for me. In the new San Francisco where a man couldn't work with his hands anymore, I had to go to college. Even if I hated the classroom. (Charlie, I didn't say I hated learning, just that I hated the school, the classroom, being told what to learn and when and how to learn it.)

The athletic scholarship route suited Moscone. College. Law school. Politics. (Maybe athletics was the best way to get you into politics.) By the time I was in high school, George was already on the Board of Supervisors.

The baseball coach at Wilson said I should go that route. I was a good athlete, and I was smart enough to get through college. Maybe not cool enough for politics, but I could become a teacher, a coach. I didn't want to follow in my father's footsteps, but I didn't want to be a teacher either, right back in a classroom. As for being a physical education coach, I was even getting bored on the field, tired of games. I wanted to be a writer. My favorite writer, Jack London, didn't spend much time in a classroom, and he became a great writer.

But I couldn't tell anyone that I wanted to be a writer. With my C+ in English? They'd laugh. No more than I could tell anyone about the icy hole God left inside me when he moved out. They'd say I was crazy. So no one ever knew me, no one had any idea what went on inside me. I kept on being the team captain, cheering everybody along, always joking, making people feel good. Whenever something started to make the chill spread inside me until I might explode, I would just walk away.

Sometimes I walked away from a good thing, like the baseball coach at Wilson High, when he started pushing me so hard to go for a college scholarship. He was pushing me a lot on the field too. We were at the tag end of baseball season, already

starting football practice, and, to tell the truth, I wasn't much interested in either one any more. We were playing Lowell, those rich kids from the other side of town, whose fathers could buy whatever university they wanted to go to, and then afterward give them a desk at their businesses. There were runners on first and second. When I came up at bat, the coach touched his right ear. Bunt. I automatically touched my visor to answer that I understood.

I understood, but I didn't like it. I know, it's all about team play and sometimes sacrificing—they even call it that, sacrificing—so that the players on base can advance and maybe the next batter could bring one or even both of them in. Maybe. The next batter wasn't very good, and I was. What if I hit a homer, right out of the park, and brought them in too? Three runs, bottom of the ninth, we would be winners. I'd be a hero. That wasn't a pipe dream. I'd done it before. I'd always hated bunting—for the good of the team, for good strategy, and so on. Whatever you want to call it, it seemed like cheating to me. I always needed to put everything I had into whatever I was doing. And win.

I'm not saying I was right and everyone else was wrong, Charlie, just trying to explain how my mind was working. By the end of the first pitch, ball one, knew I wasn't going to bunt. The second pitch came over the plate, and I swung with everything I had. The ball spun up high, the short stop got right under it, caught it, and I was out. Most of the kids in the stands were from Wilson, and they moaned. A few booed—the ones who knew the signal and knew I had ignored it. The guys in the dugout were just staring at me like I killed their dog. How could I walk back there and sit with them? Then the coach came up to me, and, with everyone watching, he chewed me out, not loud, but everyone could tell I had done something he didn't like. "You got my signal," he growled at me, and what he was really saying was, you got my signal, but you decided to make a big grandstand play and you fucked it up and lost the game.

That icy wind had already started swelling up inside me, so fast that I was afraid it was going to make me swing that bat at the coach, so I threw down the bat and walked away, off the field.

It was the last time I ever spoke to him or him to me. I could have gone to him and apologized the next week and maybe—but then President Kennedy was assassinated and that was all anyone could talk about until the end of the year.

By spring I was talking to an air force recruiter about enlisting in June, right after graduation. He said my athletic training would make me a good paratrooper. I could give my mother one less mouth to feed and my brothers one less body in the downstairs room. I could learn something about the rest of the world.

Another pipe dream. I never did any jumps. Not one. The last year of my three-year hitch I was sent to Vietnam, to clear out bodies of old ladies and babies who had been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Were the communists were out there behind every bush getting their sights on you? or were the old ladies the enemy? Back home more and more people were saying this war didn't make any sense. It sure didn't make any sense to me. The only thing I learned in Vietnam was how to avoid VD and hard drugs and the crazy guys who act like anything goes when you're in a foreign country.

When I got out in 1967 San Francisco had even more weird people and less opportunity than when I left. All these kids—I felt a million years older—from families with enough money to send them to college—dropping out and pouring into San

Francisco to wear weird clothes or no clothes and protest the war or whatever, and have lots of sex (because they all had the pill now) and lots of disease (because they lived like pigs and never used a rubber and all used the same needle to shoot up drugs). They filled up old flats from Mission Street up to the foot of Twin Peaks, and north of Market to Haight Street, where families were moving to the suburbs and couldn't sell their houses because of all this scum moving in to rent houses where other owners had moved out and couldn't get a buyer.

Except for the gays. They wanted to stay, to buy and fix up any old house in the Haight or the upper Mission.

But they didn't want to live in Viz Valley or Excelsior, nowhere in the Outer Mission, which was still, now and forever, Nowheresville. You couldn't pay them to live at Geneva Towers—nearly six hundred, brand new, empty apartments the builder thought he could rent to incoming paper shufflers. Way out there? No thanks. So the Towers got taken over by the City for more low income housing—with more gangs and more crime. Business as usual, whatever doesn't work or you want to get rid of, dump it in Viz Valley and forget it.

Long before you were born, most of the hippie kids had gone back to Iowa or Nebraska and let their parents put them through college so they could take over daddy's bank. The gays stayed and kept coming, buying old houses in the upper Mission near Castro Street. Harvey opened his camera shop—your mother used to buy film there when she was living near Castro Street. She said Harvey didn't know anything about cameras and was hardly ever there, but his partner was nice. She said the old Irish who were left in the neighborhood started to like the gays after they saw the way they fixed up those old wrecks.

But they didn't like the way the boarded-up shops on Castro Street were opening up again as bars with a back room for sex. Or the "baths," which were all sex, all men, from everywhere, day and night. For something called "baths" you'd think they wouldn't be so filthy and scummy. If I was really the gay hater they say I am, I could describe what Ray Sloane told me when I asked him what the "baths" were like inside. Never mind. Probably by the time you read this, those places will be long gone, because gay men have started getting sick and dying all over the place from some new disease they spread at the "baths." And yelling "civil rights!" at Dianne—now Mayor Dianne—and the health department, just for trying to shut them down like you'd shut down a typhoid source. Now here's a funny thing. Some of the men getting sick are priests who preached that God was killing gays for the sin of homosexuality. I know, I shouldn't laugh at dying men, even if they are hypocrites.

Anyway, for me, after Vietnam it was back to Viz Valley, find a job. The fire department had a waiting list of men who'd passed the test, so I had to fall back on the Police Force, where there were always openings. It was a terrible time to be a cop. The worst year and a half of my life. First they used me under cover, but I didn't want to pretend and lie to get somebody in trouble. So they put me to the usual—breaking up fights or picking up bodies. Or policing a war demonstration and having rich drugees spit on me and call me pig, screaming police brutality so they could get into the newspapers. I tried to tell one of them I'd been in Vietnam, and I agreed with her that the war didn't make any sense. She bit me.

If it wasn't these brats, it was a fellow officer trying to drag me along to some bar in the Castro or to some prostitute in the Fillmore. "Look, man, we'll have fun scaring some queers or busting our State Senator with a black hooker." Meaning George, who was on his way up in politics. Whenever he was in town for a fundraiser, he'd head for the Fillmore. Cops liked to let him squirm a little, then let him go, figuring he wouldn't forget who his friends were. (He sure surprised them.)

I saved my money, quit the force, and went to Alaska. Why? Jack London again. Maybe I thought I'd be inspired the way he was. I don't know what I thought Alaska would be like. Something like struggle with the elements, the way his Klondike stories are. Something like pure white snow and blue skies and green water—clean, not like the filth of police work in San Francisco. Except it wasn't all pure white and blue, not in the towns where people actually lived. Some looked like the Tenderloin dug into the snow, half deserted from people going south to work the winter. The ones who stayed through the winter stayed drunk, except for a lucky few taking care of their big oil leases.

So I went back home, back into the police force, picking up human beings out of the gutter and trying to keep them from being put in jail again. The other cops used to laugh and say I should have been a social worker. It was a miserable time, and even more dangerous. Not the everyday crooks we picked up, not the demonstrators who went limp and screamed "police brutality!" No, some who got bored with demonstrating had started setting bombs under patrol cars or even in neighborhood police stations. You could be sitting at a desk, checking a patrol schedule, and get killed. It happened.

What got me through that time was a woman I met. She liked me, and she wasn't after money, she had a good job, good tips, working in a bar. If I wanted to make love, she was ready. If I wanted to write, she'd curl up and watch TV while I pounded the typewriter, then threw away most of the pages. I'm grateful to her. You don't need to know anything about her, not even her name. I never saw her again after I met your mother. She was a good person, but not the kind of woman I could marry. She knew it. For about five years she kept me from going crazy with the work I had to do and the things I had to see, like one of the last times I picked up a burglary suspect.

He was a big black guy who was attacking everyone in sight at a bar. He mouthed off when we cuffed him. When we got him to the station, he still wouldn't shut up. He was drunk and probably on coke, or God knows what, the usual thing. The man who was my partner that night took out his baton and started beating him on the head. Half a dozen officers stood around, and no one said anything. So I did. I told him, the man is cuffed and can't do any harm. He went right on beating him, nobody saying anything, just turning away. So I grabbed the officer in a hold we'd all learned, but I was better at it because I worked out and kept myself fit. I took away his baton. Everything quieted down. They booked the black guy as if nothing had happened, and hustled him off to a cell.

The officer took back his baton and told me he'd never work with me again, and I said that was fine because I was going to write him up. Everyone got very quiet. He just laughed and then left. I asked for the form to do a report. The desk officer didn't want to give it to me. He knew what happened was wrong, everyone knew, but when I kept my hand out for the form, they all looked at me like I was crazy. Take it easy, Danny Boy, these things happen. I raised my voice. They shouldn't happen. It's wrong, it's wrong. It was like I was talking a foreign language, or like I was the raving drunk.

After I filled out the report, the officer on the desk didn't want to take it. Don't do something you'll regret, Danny, don't do something against a brother officer, against your own future. I knew that what I was doing was like throwing down the bat and walking away, and this was not just a game, this was serious. I wouldn't be a "brother" officer anymore. I didn't care. The more they talked, the more stubborn I got. I made sure the report went in, and then I quit the Force.

I had enough saved up to live on for a while, until finally my name moved up the list and the Fire Department took me. I want to tell you something good I did there too. Back in the early sixties, there was a story in the newspaper about how the fire trucks didn't want to answer an alarm at Hunters Point because the black people in the projects had started throwing rocks at the fire trucks. What kind of animals would throw rocks at the heroes who came to save them? A reporter finally went to Hunters Point to ask why, and found out what everyone already knew—not one black fireman in the department. A few on a police force to keep the prostitutes in the Fillmore and the Tenderloin from getting out of hand, a few in Hunter's Point to pick up the bodies. But the fire department was lily-white.

So the blacks had just found a way to get some attention. Get into the news. Enough attention so that by the time I got into the department, there were some blacks in my class. But I knew, everyone knew, that was as far as they would go, because there are all kinds of ways to make sure they would flunk out.

I was at the top of my class, chosen to be valedictorian. I set up small sessions to coach the black guys and make sure they got through the test. It was only right. I didn't care what the old firemen thought or said. I couldn't be part of a department of "heroes" doing wrong by their brother firemen.

Not much for a murderer to brag about, I know. Just one point in my favor. You should know at least one good thing about your father.

I met your mother in 1975. I knew right away that I'd never find another lady like her who'd marry me. She had a college education, she was a teacher, and she was beautiful. And my family would be happy I was finally getting married—to the daughter of a fire chief who had known my father. She had passed up a lot of men from the neighborhood, and she was a little older, almost thirty-four. I don't know what she saw in me. Maybe she thought it would soon be too late for her to have children, and she'd better settle for me. And—I don't know why, but she really loved me. She proved that. No other woman would go through what she has for me. Always remember how lucky you are to have a mother like her.

Mary Ann was (and still is) a good Catholic, but she knew which priest to pick for confession. We agreed on that from the start. A couple of children, no more. She laughed and promised, "After a couple, I'll be too old to have more, anyway."

She wanted our wedding in Carmel, and I wanted our honeymoon in Ireland. I'd been to Ireland once, but for almost no time at all before my money ran out. All I could remember was a ride on a tour bus through green hills that seemed like heaven, quiet and peaceful and clean. I used to dream about those green hills, and I bought books about beautiful, suffering Ireland, its brave rebellion against the English, and its fairies and spirits that the Church could never manage to kill.

The wedding went fine, but when we reached Ireland, the freeze hit me. We were in a hotel room, no place for me to hide until it passed. Your mother thought it was her—maybe—she asked, we were "sexually incompatible?" Or had she said the wrong thing?

I don't know what started the chill. Was it trying so hard to get this lovely educated woman? planning this trip? getting us a new Park Merced apartment, finally out of Viz Valley, out near the Ocean? Maybe when all that excitement, that effort was over, when I had what I went after, and I had time to think—had I still just become my father, all over again, except I wouldn't have as many kids?

By the time we were on the plane back home I had it under control, could act like a cheerful, relaxed man. Your mother was perfect. No questions. Just a smile, said she was glad I felt better, like I got over the flu.

And when we got back home for Christmas, things looked even better. There was a lot of excitement in the newspapers. George Moscone had just barely won a runoff election and become Mayor of San Francisco. He was the City's first liberal mayor and promised make a lot of good changes for ordinary folks.

The conservative he had defeated accused him of voting fraud, said the Reverend Jim Jones had gotten his People's Temple congregation to do things like vote six times for George, to put him barely over the top. But George just laughed that off.

It was true that those People's Temple folks gave a lot of money and work to liberal politicians like Willie Brown and Jerry Brown, and to the Glide Memorial Church food program, and churches like one in Berkeley that offered "sanctuary" for draftees who refused to fight in Vietnam. I thought that made Jim Jones look like a real Christian, even if he was doing weird things, like healing and falling down in fits—and saying he could read people's minds. The People's Temple was mostly poor blacks, who maybe expected that kind of thing, plus quite a few college-educated whites who accepted that stuff because they felt special being part of an integrated church. Frankly, I didn't pay much attention. Church, any kind of church, didn't interest me.

What George was doing did interest me. Within a few months he helped get rid of some old anti-gay laws. This made him popular with gays, but not so popular with the police, because he appointed a new police chief who, first thing off, announced that under him there'd be no cops harassing gays. That was brave. He was even talking about recruiting gays for the police force.

I kept quiet around the cops I knew because I didn't want to get into arguments about George only doing what was right. Sure, I felt different from those cops after being in Vietnam, where plenty of men had sex with men, some only temporarily to get them through their time on an isolated post, and some gay from start to finish. Aside from that, I didn't see much difference between them and the rest of us.

Perversion? When I was on the police force I saw people who did things, sometimes in their own families, that I would never describe to you. Compared to them, a gay like Harvey Milk was a saint. Being a Jew from New York was another plus. I can't tell you how much I admired these smart Jews pouring in from back East. I'd read a lot of books, but they'd always read ten times more and knew how to talk about them. And make little jokes out of a play on words. Quick and funny in such a smart way.

I even had to admire Harvey for kissing and hugging men in public, clowning—yes, looking in that public mirror—but with a purpose, to show bravery and make other gays brave. (If it doesn't take bravery anymore, doesn't get a man beaten half to death,

now that you're grown up, you can thank showoffs like Harvey for starting the change.) He ran for supervisor twice and lost, but he kept trying. He wasn't in and out like those hippie kids. He was here to stay. Your mother said some of the people on Castro said he was a lousy shopkeeper and rude when he wasn't posing for a news camera, but they had to admit he'd campaigned to keep an old grammar school open so families would want to stay in the neighborhood too. At least he wasn't sneering at straight people like the gays who called us "breeders."

Politics got even more interesting. Liberals like Harvey and George and Sue Bierman and Willie Brown talked about breaking up the power of the Downtown, the big businessmen who ran everything and were turning the City into a paper-shuffling Disneyland San Francisco for the tourist dollar, not for people who lived here.

The answer, said the liberals, was District Elections, dividing the City into nine districts, each with one supervisor on the Board, who had to live in the district they represented.

I don't remember who first said I should run for election in District 8: Outer Mission—Portola, Excelsior, Viz Valley. A lot of people in the neighborhood knew my family, knew me, missed me (one black lady said) now that I was living out in the Avenues. She said, you're good looking, you get along with anyone, you got the army and sports behind you, cops and firemen, decent working people who never got to go to college. All you have to do is move back into the neighborhood.

Maybe I couldn't be Jack London. But maybe I wasn't going to live my life in my father's footsteps, minus a few kids. Maybe I had finally found something I was meant to do, something better than I ever expected. Be part of a team, but better than sports. A team elected by the people for the people.

So your mother and I moved in with my mother until we could buy this house, west of Viz Valley, but still in District 8. That black lady, who was an organizer from Viz Valley, got me a campaign manager, Ray Sloan, a smart kid from Walnut Creek (and gay—which everyone forgets, now that they say I'm a gay-hater.) Fire Fighters worked precincts and your mother and I went around to the neighbors. I must have been the first candidate for office ever to walk the streets of the Sunnydale Project. I started taking a bunch of these black Sunnydale kids around with me, and we all liked watching supporters of the downtown people squirm a little, scared of my "entourage."

I was elected. I was so hot, I felt sure I could never freeze up again. So many things to learn and do, so many challenges, day after day. I even had some power already—a lot of votes on the Board split, 4 to 4. My name was at the end of the alphabet, so my name would be called last. Sometimes my vote was the deciding one. To be a liberal seemed simple to me. It meant to care for the people in the neighborhoods, and favor them over the rich developers. That's what I would do, and that meant I'd be voting with Milk and Moscone and Silver and Molinari—and sometimes with Dianne, who went back and forth.

It was as simple as that. I thought.

But that's not how politics really works, not how politicians trade off one thing for another with each other, regardless of what they say, regardless of what's right or wrong, what's liberal or conservative. Sometimes they vote for something they know is a bad idea because powerful business people in their district want it. (When Molinari said "they own me," he smiled, like it was funny.) Sometimes it gets worse. Sometimes they

could look you in the eye, say one thing, smile, and then stab you in the back, and then smile again.

The first stab in the back I took—from the whole Board—was a big one, money.

All of a sudden I couldn't work for the City in two jobs, supervisor and fireman. It was the law. Conflict of interest. Wait a minute! It wasn't like I was Director of Public Works making ten times my fireman's salary. Couldn't I just abstain when there was a vote on fire or police services? No. The other supervisors could keep their law offices and their contacts with businesses that were always doing deals with the city, like George's friend who made the voting machines the City bought. Or his friend Willie Brown's law firm that represented some North Beach strip joint owners who should have been cited or even closed down, but never were. All these things weren't conflict of interest? But I had to quit the fire department. In other words, if you had plenty of money, you could run the government, you could represent all the people—but if you didn't have money you couldn't afford to represent the people you represented, people without money, like you.

(I know I'm right. I know it didn't have to be that way—because the man who replaced me a year later was given some kind of extra job that wasn't official but got paid out of some City fund anyway—just to make sure he wouldn't have the same problem I had.)

Then we found out you were on the way, so your mother had to quit teaching.

How could we live on a supervisor's pay—$9000 a year?

Nobody had an answer, and nobody looked for one. Nobody cared—except the developer of Pier 39. Talk about irony—one of the big rich downtown "bad guys." He offered to reserve a concession for us, a snack stand we called "The Hot Potato," low cost food, high profit, but labor intensive. Your mother, a couple of your aunts, Ray, who was still my aide, all of us. We had to work long hours selling snack food to the tourists. No one else on the Board had to do anything like that.

And that's how the rumor started that I had sold out to Big Business. But I was too busy to care what anyone said, too worried about how to pay back all the money we had to borrow for my election and for the Pier 39 concession.

I tried to be a good supervisor. I tried to vote my conscience. I usually voted with Harvey, whether it was to repeal anti-gay laws or to defeat new ones—like banning gays from teaching. I liked Harvey, and I thought we had a lot in common—we had both been athletes, both been in the service, both wanted to help people, our people—his gays and my no-college-working-people who'd been ignored or disrespected for so long.

The more I got to like Harvey, the less I liked George. You'd think we'd have more in common, both straight, both born in SF, both easy-going Catholics—not smart, edgy New York Jews, who can get on your nerves sometimes. The police force all hated George since he hired that new police chief, but that didn't bother me. What shocked me was what a liar George was, always patting everyone on the back—blacks, gays, women—promising anything they asked for, even when he knew he couldn't get it.

And I didn't like him being so cozy with Jim Jones.

I never paid any attention to Jones until one of the women in Sunnydale Project came to me and asked what I was going to do about him. Her daughter had been in People's Temple and told her some really bad things went on there but nothing could be done about it. Jones "owned" George because Jones had made everybody go out and walk precincts to elect George. Payback was George making Jones Head of the Housing

Commission. The daughter had taken the story, all the details, to a reporter, who wrote an article, but the *Chronicle* wouldn't print it. George wouldn't open an investigation. He referred complaints to the D. A.'s office, where—guess who?—a member of the People's Temple had been assigned to handle them.

I told the woman I would look into it. But before I could do anything, *New West* took the article. That got things moving—fast. By the time they printed it, Jim Jones had put all his people on planes. They flew away, nearly a thousand of them, to some jungle in Guyana—South America. I didn't even know exactly where it was. Neither did anyone else. Rumors died down. Most people—except those whose daughters or cousins had been flown away—forgot about People's Temple.

My first few months on the Board I voted mostly with Harvey and George and the other "liberals," but sometimes I didn't. Sometimes I was the only one who voted against everyone else, like voting against that bike race down Columbus Ave. It really sounded dangerous, even if local businesses wanted it. (No one did get hurt, but that was pure luck.) Dianne took me aside once or twice and said it was good politics to just go along with something like that so I wouldn't antagonize people. She'd give me little lectures about the "give-and-take of politics." She meant well. Interesting, that the richest people I met by getting elected—like Dianne and the developer of Pier 39—and some not so rich, but conservative, like Quentin Kopp, were always polite. It was the liberals who looked down their noses at me.

I kept working at the Hot Potato, staying up late studying the thick files we had to get through before every meeting, hardly getting any sleep, and wondering when I'd settle in and find it easier, the way Dianne kept saying I would. Sometimes I would have trouble understanding some of the stuff we had to read, and, at the meeting, I would argue off the point. Silence. Everyone would look down at the table in front of them, all except Harvey and Carol, who'd smirk and whisper something to each other and then laugh. Then everyone would go on as if they hadn't heard me. Maybe Diane would add some little comment that threw me a hint, corrected what I got wrong, without saying I was mixed up. A lot of nights I went home thinking I never wanted to go back to be humiliated again.

Then all at once I had an issue that the people in my district were really upset about, something I could fight for the way Harvey fought for gay rights.

The City was getting ready to dump another problem on District 8. People were calling meetings to try to stop it from happening. Finally Viz Valley had a representative on the Board who lived there, who cared about the neighborhood, who could speak up for the Outer Mission. If anyone could stop the dumping for once, I was that man. They expected it. Demanded it.

Right next to McLaren Park and the Sunnydale projects, the Catholic Church owned twelve acres with a convent on it, where the sisters ran a "School for Wayward Girls," tough girls who had been tossed out of one school after another. This school was a lockup, one step short of the girls' reform school down south. As long as the nuns kept the girls inside, the neighbors didn't complain. But the nuns were running out of money and talking about selling the land. Some organization came with a new plan, plus a little money, plus a request for City money, to turn the property into a "Youth Campus" for both boys and girls who were headed for Napa State Hospital. The people pushing the "Youth Campus" were vague about what these kids had done or how they'd be housed—

except that most of them wouldn't locked up the way the nuns had run their school. Everybody knew that "de-institutionalization" was kicking all the patients out of Napa except the dangerous ones. So if these underage kids had been headed for Napa, they must be real trouble—probably make the nuns' locked-up "wayward girls" look like Little Miss Muffet. That was why the "Youth Campus" had to apply to the Board of Supervisors for a zoning exemption before they could get a permit and raise money to start another place in Viz Valley where the whole City could dump its problems

I went straight to the priest who was pushing the project, and I got tough with him. My district already had enough problems, I said, with Sunnydale and Geneva Towers, and no good shopping centers and a high crime rate. We shouldn't be handed another city-wide problem. I said he'd better stop preaching at the neighbors that they were sinning if they fought against taking the "Youth Campus" too. And tell those nuns who came to our community meetings to stop telling me I was going to hell—I didn't believe it, but I didn't like being threatened.

Now I had to work on the Board, where George was starting to describe "Youth Campus" as a "psychiatric facility" like it was a medical office where kids dropped in for counseling. The vote would come up in March.

I tried to do this one right, the way Dianne told me. Going into 1978, I went along with whatever George and the "liberals" wanted, as often as I could. I tried to be smart and strategic, and get trade-offs. Dianne and the "conservatives" would probably vote with me. But I had to win over at least one liberal vote, because George was preaching about not wanting to "send these children to Napa, so far away from their families" as if they were innocent little babies. I told him, okay, George, then tell the nuns to put the "Youth Campus" in St. Francis Wood, which was where George's family lived, in the old tradition of City mayors. He smiled, the way he always did, and slapped me on the back like I'd told him the best joke he ever heard.

Molinari still hated me for voting against his bike race, and Carol thought being a feminist meant she had to prove how stupid I was. So I started working on Harvey. I had always voted with him, sincerely, for good reasons. He had moved into a run-down, working-class neighborhood, and he and the other gays had turned it around. And he had tried to keep a mix of gays and straight families—stopped the city from closing the grammar school. I took him aside and put it to him, What if someone had tried to turn that school—or that church on Market near Castro that just closed—into a school for teenagers in trouble? An "open campus?" More convenient for punks to wander up Castro and beat up on gays? Harvey nodded and frowned. You got a point, he said. He started being more friendly, not smirking so much or giggling with Carol whenever I said anything. I kept on voting for anything he asked for.

By the time the vote came up in March, your mother was more than six months along, and I didn't want her standing all day working at the Hot Potato. I put in more hours at Pier 39, and when I wasn't there I was at meetings in District 8, talking to people who had swallowed the rumors about me and Big Business. I told them to be sure and come to the Board meeting where we would officially vote. I was that sure.

Just before we walked into the meeting, Harvey gave me a big grin and said, "Dan, you really earned your $9000 a year on this one." I took that to mean he was with me—wouldn't you?

But when Youth Campus came up for the vote, he voted "yes." My head jerked around toward him, I was so sure I had heard wrong. He could feel it, I guess, because he turned to look at me and gave me that smirk of him, a little nervous twitch on the edges. Then Carol whispered something to him and they both giggled.

My people in the audience, my constituents, who'd all come out for the meeting, because I told them it was a sure thing, just stared at me. Then they all got up walked out.

When we adjourned, Quentin Kopp looked sorry for me, shrugged, and jerked his head toward Harvey. "Well, Dan, he's a liberal." Now I understood what Copp meant by "a liberal." He meant a hypocrite. He meant a man who uses abstract words that sound good, like "help the poor, help the deprived delinquents" and so on. Nothing specific—like how? and where? That's understood—in your neighborhood, buddy, not mine. And the liberal gets away with it because that's the way most of the City feels, nice and liberal, help the "poor" but keep them out of my neighborhood, keep them in their place, in the City garbage can, Viz Valley. Oh, you say Viz Valley doesn't want any more garbage dumped on them?—well, shame on those ignorant bigots who never went to college.

I don't remember how I got home that night. It was like a building had fallen on me or a steamroller went over me. I was flat, lower than dirt, mashed down and stuck into my glacier. I didn't go to my office the next day or the day after that. I didn't care if I never went back.

If I knew then what I know now, I could have just laughed it off, called a meeting, told my constituents not to worry, because that "Youth Campus" or "psychiatric facility" or whatever pretty name they gave it, never even got off the ground. Big ideas, no planning, wasted words, wasted money. It never took in more than a few kids, then closed three years after it opened. I'm sure you never heard of it—because the people who supported it want everyone to forget the money—from the City and from donations—lost in that mess.

The only good thing that happened during that time was you, Charlie. I always thought I didn't care much about having children—after growing up with them all over me. But when I saw you in the hospital, all red and screaming, I just melted. Those five months, from June 12, when you were born, to the end of 1978, were a nightmare, except when I held you to feed you or bathe you or walk you around the block.

I didn't have the energy for much else. I felt frozen again and—at the same time—boiling over inside. Okay, I would start acting like a politician. Meaning payback. I thought payback meant that if Harvey wanted something, I voted against it. I had it wrong. Payback only works if you do it with a cool, clear head, and if it comes with power behind it, like being the deciding vote. That's not how it was when I ended up voting against the local gay rights ordinance Harvey put up. I had supported it all along in committee, but then I ended up casting the only NO vote on the Board. A meaningless NO, not a payback at all. A waste. Stupid. A NO vote, not because I was against gay rights, but because I was so mad at Harvey. Stupid stupid. I admit it to you, Charlie, so you'll remember it. Never let yourself get so mad that you turn stupid.

Something else I want you to remember. When your friends tell you I was a gay-hater, remember that I contributed money—and money was getting shorter every day—to Harvey's fight against "Briggs," the state initiative to keep gays from teaching. Even my

vote against closing the street for the Gay Pride parade wasn't just against Harvey or against gays. In 1978 the gay pride parade wasn't something a family would take their kids to, like the Fourth of July parade. (Maybe it's changed since so many gays started dying of AIDS.) All the other supervisors were afraid to vote against the permit. The liberals even had to ride in an open car in the parade, to make sure the gay voters saw them, while they smiled and waved and pretended not to notice what was in front of them and behind them. The floats with men in chains acting out sex were the least of it.

That vote only hurt me—again. That's not the way "Liberal San Francisco" handles something like that parade. They just look away, don't notice, never go to look at it, like the way they don't go to the strip joints that took over North Beach. To me, it was like looking the other way while a fellow police officer beat up some black drunk. You see "liberal" and "tolerant" can be just words to avoid responsibility, words to hide behind and do nothing. My trouble was, I still was a liberal, I just couldn't stand the other liberals on the Board.

By November, I was miserable except when I was with you, Charlie. Nobody talked to me, and I didn't want to talk to anyone anymore.

November 10, 1978, I went to the office, typed a letter of resignation, left it at George's office, and went back home.

When Ray found out, he had a fit. I'd played right into their hands, he said. Now George could appoint somebody who'd do whatever he said. I'd taken on a responsibility to a lot of people in the neighborhood, and "you can't just walk away from them." That really hit me. Ray was even taking the words out of my own head. Was I doing what I'd done so many times, boiling over, then walking away? I had to stop walking away when I got upset. I had to learn how to handle things like a man, for Christ's sake. No, for your sake.

So I went to George and told him I'd reconsidered. He said, sure, here. He handed back my letter and said he'd straighten out any legal stuff.

The next day came the Jonestown massacre. It must be in your school history books by now, how people were escaping from Guyana, coming back to SF, calling Jonestown a jungle concentration camp run by a lunatic, and how they still couldn't get George to look into it, so they got Leo Ryan, a congressman from South SF, who flew down to that jungle with some reporters. Jim Jones' men shot him dead, along with five others before their plane could get away. Then about 900 people stood in line—under Jim Jones' armed guards—and drank poisoned Kool-aid.

At first I thought George was just busy with that mess, because of how bad it made him look, playing along with this madman who ended up killing nearly 1000 people including a member of Congress. City Hall was going crazy, with all the families calling to find out who was alive or dead, and the reporters from all over the country rushing in to finally ask George some tough questions. Then it was Thanksgiving, and the City offices shut down.

But Ray started hearing rumors: Harvey was telling George he'd be crazy to give me my place back when he could appoint someone who'd always vote his way. And it wasn't just a friendly suggestion. According to Ray, Harvey backed it up with a threat—he could make sure that George would lose the gay vote. Along with the voters who held George responsible for the Jonestown Massacre, George could be in real trouble. See—

that's how the experts play politics. That's cool, smart payback—blackmail—works best when you don't have to use your weapon, just hold it over George's head—and smile.

Then came the weekend after Thanksgiving. You and your mother were in Omaha, at her friend's wedding. I got a phone call from a reporter. Did I want to comment on the Mayor's announcement that he planned to appoint another man to my seat on the Board? George hadn't even had the decency to tell me first.

What came next, you must have already read about in old newspapers and magazines, and maybe books. First, let me tell you about some books I read when I was in prison. Am I just putting off telling about the killing? I guess so. I need to take a breath before I go over what I did, but I'm not really going off the subject.

My third year in Soledad, I was into reading history, American history. My idea was that the founding fathers were not smirking liars like George and Harvey, playing back-stabbing politics. They were heroes building a new country. If I read about them I might learn something about how politics was supposed to work. Too late for me to do anything about it, but not too late for me to know how it should be done.

I was wrong to give them that much credit. The first half-dozen presidents were a rich man's club, passing the presidency from one to another, cutting each other's throat in the press. Andrew Jackson was the first president who wasn't one of them. But in some ways he was worse. "Indian Removal" was his specialty. Stealing Indian land for white people, then pushing thousands of Indians out to starve on reservations. And slavery was okay with him, too.

But when I read more about Andrew Jackson, I couldn't help having some sympathy for him.

The smartass-rich presidents made fun of him because he didn't go to Harvard. He was self-educated, like me. Ordinary people who didn't go to college liked him, the way my Viz Valley constituents liked me. He had been a good soldier too, who thought he was doing what was best for his country, wrong, but doing his duty, like me.

Another thing we had in common. He had a short temper, hot, hotter than mine. And he never walked away. In those days, a gentleman wasn't supposed to walk away. In fact, in his lifetime, Jackson fought about a hundred duels, killed some men, took some lead—and nobody ever told him he was mentally ill or a murderer. He was defending his honor. Nobody smirked at honor in those days. Honor meant something.

Charlie, I hope you are a reader. I tell you this so you'll know how reading leads you from one book to another, teaches you in a way that really fits where your mind is ready to go, gives you knowledge you might never take in if some teacher shoves it at you. I asked the librarian at Soledad, and he got me some books on dueling.

I thought duels were just something in the movies, Errol Flynn with swords and capes. The books I read told a different story. Here in America, and in Europe too, only about a hundred years ago, a man said something insulting to you or about you or your family, and you could challenge him to a duel. In fact, if you didn't challenge him, or he didn't accept the challenge, <u>that</u> was the disgrace. There were rules (made up in Ireland!) and as long as you followed the rules, you were honorable.

Most of the time nobody was killed, and the duelists might even end up friends. I wonder if that could have happened between Harvey and me. Not between me and George. He was one of the snakes. (Jackson called his enemies "vipers." Another thing

we had in common.) In Jackson's time and even later, if you killed a man in a duel, you might go on trial for murder, but, if you had followed the rules of dueling, the jury would find you not guilty.

Do kids still chant, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me"? I think the legal justice system is based on that. It covers hurting things like your body, your property. It doesn't cover humiliation, insult, ridicule, gossip, lies, disrespect, shame—all the things that hurt more than breaking your arm, and that don't heal the way your arm does. That kind of hurt is like poison soaking your heart and soul. You can sue in civil court for money—but it's not about money, is it? You can't buy back your honor.

So what can you do? forgive like the Christians, or pretend you don't care, like the Stoics, or pretend you don't even notice, like the Buddhists? Or kill yourself, like——yes, another book I read in prison gave a few pages on each religion. Most of them seemed to have trouble figuring out a way to deal with the crimes not covered by laws. Maybe dueling was one way, a quicker way, to clear out the poison that law or religion couldn't handle.

Okay, enough. I can't put off finishing this any longer. Time to turn on the motor. Done.

You and your mother got back late Sunday night and were still asleep Monday morning when I got up. I showered and got dressed in a suit, the way I did for Board meetings. I would go to City Hall, go straight to George's office, tell him what I thought of him, give him one more chance to reinstate me. I felt a little better, not quite so frozen. I was through with walking away.

Like I told the D. A. later, I put my old service revolver in one pocket and a handful of bullets in the other. It was hard then, and it's hard now, to say exactly what was going through my mind. I told the lawyers that taking the gun didn't mean I was planning to shoot George, didn't make it premeditated murder. That's not really a lie. Carrying a gun is giving yourself a little sense of power—even Dianne carried a gun after she got some nasty letters, but that didn't mean she could ever use it. What I think was in my mind was that I had the gun, but I would let George decide—by what he said and did—what I would do with it. So I was trying to shift the decision, to him. I'm not trying to excuse myself for murder, just trying to remember, to describe, what I think was on my mind. It wasn't clear then, and it isn't clear to me now.

I'm sure that after you grew up you read the newspapers, heard the tape of my confession, read the trial transcript. So I don't have to go through George's refusal to reinstate me and how I shot him five times, then reloaded and went down the hall to do the same thing to Harvey. There's only one thing I can tell you that I know wasn't in any of the papers. I can tell you the exact moment when I decided—without really deciding—to pull out the gun and shoot George. It wasn't right after he refused me, and said "It's not fair, but that's politics." I might have walked away then. In fact I started to.

But then he put his arm around my shoulder and took me into the little room behind his office, where he had soft chairs and a liquor cabinet. "Let's have a drink. Tell

me what's next for you, Dan. Back to the fire department?" He took out a bottle and two glasses. That was when he decided for me.

What ran through my mind wasn't in words. It was more like cold hot flashes of memory in stabs and kicks. I'll try to put them in words. He promised to give me back my place on the board. Then he went back on his word. Then he let me find that out from a reporter. Then he even told me to my face that what he was doing to me was wrong.

The next minute, he was pouring me a drink, asking me how would I get long—as if he was my best friend. And the worst of it was that he really believed he was such a nice guy that we would be friends. He was so nice, who could not like good old George?

The look on his face when he saw the gun was like—okay, this is a terrible thing for your father to tell you—it felt good, seeing that look on his face. For the first time he wasn't just looking at himself in the mirror. For the first time he was really looking at me.

After I put the last bullet in his head, I reloaded, put the gun in my pocket. What I told the D. A. was really true. I wasn't thinking anymore. It was like fighting off that gang in school, just kicking and punching, not seeing, not knowing, just going on, just finishing. Down the hall to Harvey's office. His aide let me in. I shut the door, pulled out the gun, and wiped the smirk off Harvey's face with five more bullets.

I don't remember how I got out of there, got to a pay phone, called your mother. We met at St. Mary's, sat together while your mother just held on to me for a while. Not praying. Just frozen. Then we went to North Station and I turned myself in. I felt numb, but it made me sick, the way the cops treated me, gently, sorrowfully, patting me on the shoulder, like what I had done made me a brother officer again.

When my trial started, my lawyer told me "shut up, don't move. You're deaf, dumb, and blind, catatonic. I can't get insanity, maybe diminished capacity." So I did what he told me. Except for when I was blubbering that confession into the tape recorder (I wish you never had to hear that, but I'm sure you had to listen to it sometime), I was an expert at hiding what I was feeling, keeping up a front. Hadn't I been doing that all my life? Maybe my 10th grade English teacher was right. I should have been an actor.

The question is—why did I do what the lawyer said? Why did I want to stay alive? Why hold on to a life that wasn't any good to anyone anymore, not to me, not to your mother, not to you, Charlie. Why didn't I shoot myself after I shot Harvey, and save you and your mother and the whole family all this time and trouble? I guess it's because like everyone else, I'm afraid of dying. I still am. At the last minute, it's hard to let go of life, any life. You don't really know that until you're right there, at the end.

The verdict came down—involuntary manslaughter, 7 years maximum, a slap on the wrist for putting a dozen bullets into two men. One minute I was relieved. The next minute I was disgusted, because I knew the verdict wasn't about me. It was about some made-up guy. It was about the gays who rioted because they thought I was anti-gay? About the cops who celebrated because they hated George? About a jury made up of old San Francisco that hated the "Gay Invasion?" They would have been a hanging jury if I'd been Harvey on trial, instead of One of Their Own. But I'm not not. They don't even know me. Nobody knows me.

That verdict and the way the City took it had nothing to do with me. It was all about everyone else—their hates—their thrills. I was a monster or a hero made up by committees of people who hated each other.

Five years of isolation in a cell with my books; an hour a day jogging around the yard; conjugal visits from your mother. Prison felt more like a shelter than a punishment. The real punishment was getting time off for good behavior. When I was released, Dianne (now Mayor Feinstein) begged me not to come back to SF, where someone might do me the favor of shooting me. (She never spoke to me again—it would have been political suicide for her.) But I had no life anywhere but here, close to you.

Until that kid at your school reminded me that there's only one way for me to be a good father to you. I have to get out now and be forgotten. Or if not forgotten, be remembered as the murderer who served justice better than the law and the courts did—by executing himself. Whenever you get to read this letter, you know there was nothing else I could do for you. Whatever else I did wrong, the last thing I do will be the right thing.

One more thought while I can still push this pen. People say the worst thing about me is that I never showed remorse. I never said I was sorry I killed George and Harvey. They're right. It's true. I wish I felt sorry that I killed them. I think it was wrong to kill them. But I don't feel it.

What I do feel is going to sound like an excuse, but it's not a lie. I wouldn't lie to you now, Charlie. What I feel is that playing politics like George and Harvey—like most politicians—is a kind of murder of what this country is supposed to stand for. People say, "Well, that's politics" or "They're just politicians," And then they shrug, as if they said, "the weather is cloudy today," like they're talking about something in nature that you can't do anything about. But democracy, voting—all that—was supposed to do something about things to make them right. And to be chosen to do that is the greatest privilege in the world. To play around, to cheat and make smart trade-offs with that privilege is a crime against the greatest thing this country stands for. And just because most politicians do it doesn't make it right. Everyone just is used to it.

I could never get used to it. That doesn't make me innocent. That doesn't justify murder. And I'm sorry that it just doesn't make me feel sorry for what I did.

I am sorry I was born too late to challenge George to a fair fight—a duel. If I had won, I probably wouldn't have bothered with Harvey. He would have been scared enough to wipe the smirk off his face for good. Or if George had been a straight shooter for the first time in his life and killed me, I could have died with honor. Either way, nothing would make a shadow like this over your life.

Most of all, I'm sorry you had a father like me. This is the only way to prove how much I really love you—to disappear, to help you and everyone else forget I ever lived. I wish you a good life in spite of me.

Your father

The 1978 assassinations in the city of my birth shocked and stunned the nation. The shameful verdict of the jury added weight to the myth of Harvey Milk as martyr of a hate crime, with virtual accomplices in "old, straight" San Francisco. Some myths deepen our understanding of human thought and behavior. Other myths, like that of Dan White as a homicidal homophobe, may create simple, pasteboard heroes and villains at the expense of truth. The 1978 media image of White overshadowed and obscured facts, which were quickly forgotten by almost everyone, including me.

Thirty years later, the SF Weekly *review of the 2008 film "Milk," touched on some events and issues ignored by the media in 1978, prompting me to read up on them in the few sources that offer a more complex view of the politics of the time. Adding those ignored facts does not excuse White's crime, but challenges simplistic views of his motives as homophobic, and adds more complex views of class and political orientation as played out in ignored (if not in your neighborhood) local issues like land use.*

I am not qualified to say what combination of psychological problems and social pressures led to White's loss of the inhibitions that keep most of us, most of the time, from acting on our murderous impulses. I only tried to clarify the events which played a role in these pressures. I described his inner feelings in terms of the universal dilemma of human consciousness.

After the 1978 assassinations, district elections in San Francisco were abandoned. They were reinstated a few years later.

In 1998 the 20-storey crime-ridden public housing disaster known as Geneva Towers was imploded and the City of San Francisco began a controversial, costly,, and slow process to replace the towers with lower density, low-income housing.

The Sunnydale Housing Project (767 family units in 91 buildings) remains an infamous no-man's-land of violence.

The Convent of the Good Shepherd remains on the land briefly designated as the "Youth Campus." It is now called "Grace Center," offering rehabilitative services for adult women with problems of substance abuse.

During the last days of 2009, the hundreds of seals (a smelly tourist attraction) suddenly and unaccountably left Pier 39.

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