

A STATE OF KINDNESS

By

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[OBOOKO](#) Edition

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Chapter 1

My Autobiography

Eleanor, I told you a cleaned-up version of my life story when you visited. I wanted to impress you, my daughter, the daughter I never knew existed until you called me six weeks ago at 7:00 P.M. on January 25th. I answered the phone, sure that it was a telemarketer because they always call at supper time. But to my amazement, it was somebody looking for a Mary Reilly - a person who didn't exist anymore.

"Hello, is this Mary Reilly?"

"Yes, but my name now is Mary Reilly Webb. Who's this?"

"I know this is unbelievably shocking, but I'm looking for a Mary Reilly who had a baby on October 19, 1963. Hello... Hello... Are you still there?... Are you all right?... Can you talk?"

I don't know how I was able to talk eventually. It was as if I had been struck by lightning. My tongue was paralyzed. "Yes I can talk. I did have a baby on October 19, 1963, but the baby was taken away from me. I don't know if it was a boy or a girl. I haven't thought about the baby in years."

I could barely squeak out the words, "Are you my baby?"

"Yes, I think so. You've had an enormous shock and so have I. Do you want me to call back after you feel better?"

"No, no. Don't go away. Please. I can't risk losing you again. Who are you?"

"My name is Eleanor Kirk Hastings. I was born at Southern State School for the Feebleminded and immediately adopted by Bert and Hester Kirk."

"How did you find me? I'm sorry I keep crying, but this is an experience I never thought I'd have. I never imagined my baby might find me someday. This is beyond my wildest dreams. My God. My God. My God."

And then we talked, but we didn't really say much of any substance. I suppose it was the shock that tied my tongue. When you get to know me better, you'll learn that I'm very talkative so my reaction was totally unlike me. And during that first phone conversation, you weren't too talkative either. There were these uncomfortable silences. We had so much to say, but we didn't know where to begin. We were both overwhelmed at how easy it had been for you to find me, and how eager we were to start a relationship. When you said you'd like to meet me, I was overjoyed. I was on cloud 9.

And then we did meet here in Chicago on March 16, 2010. You and my granddaughter Wendy. Now that's a word I never thought I'd ever say – GRANDDAUGHTER. I love how that word tastes in my mouth. GRANDDAUGHTER. I was overwhelmed with doubts about how our meeting would go. I cleaned my house over and over so there wouldn't be a spot of dust or dirt anywhere. I changed clothes a few times so I'd look attractive, but motherly. I even made Charlie change his shirt. I thought it was too loud. I wanted him to look more formal, more dignified.

I wondered if you would reject me. You didn't. That hug you gave me when you walked in the door was total acceptance. I thought I'd melt in your arms. And the hug you gave me as you were leaving was even more loving. I wondered if you would hate me when you found out about my life. You didn't. And I'm hoping with time that you might even grow to love me. Then I wondered if you would be ashamed of me. Well, here the answer is probably yes if you knew my whole life story. I have a lot to be ashamed of. I tried to gloss over the bad parts of my life when we were together. I talked about my education and my job and my marriage. I avoided saying much about my first 21 years. You didn't ask why I was in an institution for the retarded. You didn't ask who fathered you. You tactfully stayed away from the details of my early life. You knew there would be a time when I would share the ugly parts, but not then. Not until we knew each other better. How can you tell someone that you want to love you that you were a child prostitute or that you were labeled mentally retarded and locked in an institution? But now I'm telling you about my whole life without holding back the bad parts. I'll have to resurrect memories I buried. That won't be easy. But it'll be a lot easier talking into a tape recorder than talking to you face-to-face.

There was so much I wanted to hear about you over those two short days you were here. You only wanted me to talk about myself, and I only wanted you and Wendy to talk about yourselves. Eleanor, when I saw your curly red hair and freckles, I knew you were my daughter. But your height threw me for a loop. You're at least six inches taller than me. My neck got sore from looking up to you. But I'm looking up to you in another way. I'm looking up to you with pride at all you've achieved – a law degree and election to the school board and then mayor. And now you might be running for governor of the great state of Ohio. And that's what led you to me. You knew there would be lots of snooping around in your past, and the only part of your past that you didn't know about was me. So you took on the daunting task of trying to find me, and miraculously you did. How wonderful of your mother to tell you the details of your birth. She could have kept them secret as she had for 46 years, but she knew it was the right time for you to find out. From an early age you knew you were adopted, but you were never curious about who your biological parents were, and of course, the Kirks didn't want to tell you unless you wanted to know. And how Wendy was able to use that information to track me down is mind-boggling. How she was able to find people who used to work at Southern who were still alive and remembered me, especially Cora Jensen, the wonderful lady who worked in the hospital ward when you were born. When I visited her six years ago, I gave her my phone number and address, and that's how you how you were able to find me. Anyhow, I'm pretty sure that your political opponents won't be able to use my life against you because my past was covered up. Dr. Warner and his son Walter made sure everything was buried. I don't think anyone else can find out about me unless they knew where and when you were born, and I don't think that's likely.

Eleanor, what a strong woman you are. You were able to get the good out of the life that the Kirks gave you, go on to college and law school, get married, and have two kids. You had it all until Phil died. Then a drunk driver snuffed out his life, and left you a widow with a 12 year old and a 10 year old. But you survived. I think your ability to survive is genetic because I'm certainly a survivor. When you learn about my life, you'll realize that I'm one of the great survivors of all time. There's a T.V. show called *The Survivor* about people surviving in jungles and deserts, but that's not really about survival. No, survival is how we overcome what life gives us - death, loss of love, loss of freedom, sickness, hatred. I could go on and on.

I know you want to know my whole life story, and we didn't have a chance for me to tell much when you were here. And I really didn't want to say a lot about my life in person because the facts are so ugly. I just couldn't tell you face-to-face all the lurid parts of my past. So I'm doing what you asked. I'm dictating my life story into a tape recorder. You wanted me to write it down, but that's too hard and it'll take too long. And my word processing skills aren't the best. I don't know how long this'll take, but it'll be faster than me trying to write out my autobiography. My autobiography. That sounds so impressive. Celebrities, politicians, and famous people write autobiographies. Not everyday people like Mary Reilly Webb. But maybe I do have something important to share with my life story. And my story has a happy ending which is the key to any good book.

Eleanor, talking for me is easy. So talking into this tape recorder isn't really hard. In fact, in a way I like it. I feel like I'm talking to you because I have a picture of you and the kids next to the recorder. You're gorgeous with your red hair, but the kids are gorgeous too with their brown hair. I look forward to coming home from work every night, making Charlie supper, and then talking to you. So, here goes....

I should start with my birth, but that's hard because I count my real birthday as the day I was released from Southern State School for the Feeble-minded – October 1, 1971. I don't count the day I came out of my mother's womb on February 2, 1950 as my birthday. I certainly never had a party to celebrate that day when I was growing up. I never had a cake or presents. Never. I would see T.V. programs with kids having birthday parties and I'd imagine that someday I'd have a party with kids wearing pointy hats and a chocolate cake with vanilla ice cream and presents wrapped in shiny paper and big bows. The kids would sing, "*Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday dear Mary. Happy birthday to you.*" Never happened in real life when I was a kid, only in my imagination.

But at age 28 I had my first birthday party given by my beloved husband. He invited friends over and bought a cake with a princess on it, just like a child's cake. He told me that I was his princess and everyone oohed and aahed. He lit the candles and everyone sang *Happy Birthday* on top of their lungs. That was some emotional experience for me. It took 28 years, but at last I had a birthday party. Charlie gave me a ceramic dog for my present. It was wrapped beautifully in silver paper with multicolored bows on top. He said it was too hard for us to have a

real pet because we're away so much, but he wanted me to have a symbolic pet. So every year for my birthday, he gives me a different dog. I have a collection of 32 different dogs. I pointed them out to you when I showed you around my house. What a thoughtful, caring man Charlie is. And maybe Charlie is so good about making me birthday parties is because he, too, didn't have parties growing up. So I make sure that he has a party on August 7th of every year.

There have been some years when Charlie hasn't been able to make me a party because of our busy schedules, but he always takes me out, maybe not on my exact birthday, but always within a day or two. We go to dinner, usually to the Olive Garden which is my favorite restaurant, and then to a movie. He tells the staff that it's my birthday so they serve me a piece of cake with a candle and all the waiters and waitresses sing *Happy Birthday*. I don't think most people care much about having their birthdays remembered, but to me it's so important because for 28 years no one remembered that I was born. It didn't matter to anyone that I was on the planet. And maybe that's the reason we celebrate birthdays – to acknowledge that the existence of the person makes a difference in the world.

The only way I know that February 2nd is my birthday is because I have a birth certificate that says my name is Mary Reilly, my mother's name was Eileen Reilly, and my father's name was Mr. Blank. There was no father. I was a product of immaculate conception. Not really. I'm just kidding. There was only one immaculate conception, and that was Jesus Christ. I was probably the product of my mother having sex with so many men that she couldn't tell who my father was. Even if she knew, she'd never tell anyone. I'm not sure if she was whoring when she conceived me, or if she was just having free sex with lots of men, or if she had one boyfriend. I never asked so I don't know what her life was like in 1949 when I was conceived. And even if I asked, she would never have told me. She never talked about her life. In fact, she rarely talked to me at all. As a kid I made up a romantic story about her being in love with a soldier who got her pregnant and then went off to war and died so he couldn't marry her. Of course, there was no war in 1949, but it sounds good. It makes my birth less of an ugly accident.

Let me tell you a little about Southern State School for the Feeble-minded. Feeble-minded – that word's not used today and a lot of people don't even know exactly what it means. Although some people do use the word "feeb" to describe a person who's dumb, just like they use the word "retard." They probably don't even know that feeb comes from feeble-minded. So

the word is still around. Anyhow that's the politically incorrect word for the politically correct term intellectually challenged. You might ask why I was called feeble-minded when most feeble-minded people can't talk or can't talk well, and I'm good at that. Feeble-minded people can't plot and plan, and I'm great at that too.

Well, of course, I'm not feeble-minded or mentally retarded or mentally disabled or intellectually challenged or an idiot or an imbecile or a moron, or any of the words that have been used over the years to describe the people I lived with during my teen years when I should have been going to school and to football games and to dances. Well, if I'm not feeble-minded, you wonder why I was placed at Southern. Well, that's easy. I was a wild animal of 13 who got pregnant. I'd have sex with anyone as long as he paid. I was a whore who screwed to stay alive and get enough money to support herself and her mother. I was a sex slave whose mother made her earn money so she could get booze. I was the breadwinner of the family, if you could call us a family. My mother was too sick to whore so she put me to work. Food, rent, and booze – those were our expenses. In order of importance though, it was booze first, and then food and rent. My mother lived for only one thing – the bottle. I was a desperate animal who scavenged for survival. I did what I was told because I had no choice. I couldn't rebel, or we'd starve or I'd be taken away to someplace unknown that might be worse than where I was living. Today, I can't imagine a worse place than where I was living, but as a child I had no idea that I was in the worst situation possible. I hated the sex. I despised it. It was the most disgusting thing in the world. But whoring was my job for a year and a half, from the age of 11 and a half to 13. And for the next eight years after that, I was a prisoner at Southern State School for the Feeble-minded. And for the next 39 years I was transformed into a human being, thanks to my beloved conspirators who helped me cover up my past. To two of the kindest men who ever walked this Earth: Dr. Warner, a true angel from God, and Charlie, another angel from God who wants only two things in life – to make me happy and do whatever he can to make the world a better place.

Let me explain the name Southern State SCHOOL for the Feeble-minded. Illinois had four "schools" – Eastern, Western, Northern, and my home for eight years – Southern. I don't know why they called it a school. There was certainly no schooling there. It was a warehouse for human beings where they were stored until they died. It should have been called Southern Storage. It was an institution for mostly people with mental retardation, and some who were

mentally ill, and a few like me, who were normal. We weren't crazy and we weren't retarded. We just went against what people thought of as normal and we had no one to take care of us, no family and no foster parents who would take us in. We were lepers who society wanted to hide away. When I was at Southern, I read about lepers in the Bible, but I didn't fully understand their significance. One day when I was living with Dr. Warner I came across the word leper in something I was reading so I asked him about it. After he told me, I said that we at Southern State School for the Feeble-minded were like deformed lepers with no noses or fingers or toes who had to be locked up so we didn't infect anyone with our disease, only our disease was mental retardation and that wasn't contagious. Dr. Warner said that institutions were like leper colonies, without lepers, only humans who were considered sub-human. Long ago, some institutions for the retarded were even called colonies, just like leper colonies. And then there were penal colonies for convicts. These colonies were different from the American colonies because no one went there willingly.

Anyhow, girls like me who were "sexually promiscuous" were institutionalized. I love that – sexually promiscuous - it's a fancy way of saying that we were wild, we were loose, we were out of control. Only I didn't want to be wild and loose. I had no choice. That was my job. I wanted to be a nice, innocent little girl, but I couldn't. More than anything I wanted to be a virgin. And the normal boys were placed at Southern because they were "anti-social." They broke the law and were violent, and in those days there weren't many jails for young boys. But all of us had one thing in common – we had no one to take care of us and society didn't know where to put us so they put us in a school that was really a cruel institution that dehumanized us. If we weren't animals before we got there, we became animals after we arrived. But in my case, I became a tamed animal. I learned that wild animals didn't survive long at Southern. They were put in solitary confinement with no human contact, or they were beaten until they were broken or became wilder or went crazy. I was smart enough to see that obedience was rewarded, and I was obedient. I never made trouble. I became the best worker at Southern. I took care of the severely retarded babies, the ones everyone called vegetables. I could never call a human being a vegetable no matter how retarded they were. They were created by God, and they deserved to be treated like human beings. They needed kindness more than anyone else because of how God created them. I think one of the reasons that God made them is to test us, to see if we have love in our hearts for all His creations. It's easy to love a pretty, cooing, smiling baby. It's not easy to

love a twisted, ugly, crying baby. But that baby is the test of our humanity. And by loving those babies, I learned that I was good and I learned to love myself. After 13 years of living, I fell in love with the person I became at Southern.

I worked seven days a week, eight hours a day. They didn't pay me. Well, they did – my pay was food, shelter, and freedom from brutality as long as I did my job and didn't make trouble. I hadn't had three meals a day before Southern, and although the food was what you would call institutional food, I thought it was great. There was fruit. I couldn't recall eating an apple or a banana in my house before Southern. I didn't care if the apple was over-ripe and mealy and the banana was black and mushy. I thought they were delicious. And they gave me a clean bed and clean clothes. I had lived in filth for so long, I felt dirt had actually penetrated my skin and coated the inside of my body. I loved white, starched things. They made me feel clean inside and outside. I still like clean clothes and a clean house. And Charlie's even more compulsive about neatness and cleanliness than I am. You saw my house and how everything is put away and everything shines, especially the kitchen. You could look under my bed and never find a dust bunny.

There was another group of normals at Southern besides those of us who were placed there because there was no place else for us. These were the babies who were born at Southern, but couldn't be adopted because they had some kind of obvious problem, like my friend Judy who had club feet. The normal ones like you were adopted as soon as you were born. And there were unwanted babies who were given to the institution by their families because they were different and couldn't be adopted. They weren't retarded. They often had physical disabilities. I knew this girl Paula who had a horrible cleft lip. She was an illegitimate baby born to a local farm girl. When the family saw her cleft lip, they wanted to get rid of her so they dropped her off at Southern and never saw her again. In a way Southern was like the SPCA, only for unwanted human beings, not unwanted pets.

I thought I would be at Southern for my whole life unless I could figure out a way to escape. Even if I could get out, I knew there was no one on the outside to help me. I had no place to escape to. I couldn't live on the streets. I knew from experience that didn't work. Then deinstitutionalization came along. Society thought it was wrong to lock people in institutions so society opened its doors to freedom. People like Bobby Kennedy who visited Willowbrook, a

famous or infamous institution in New York, led the crusade against institutions. When I was researching the topic of deinstitutionalization for one of my psych classes in college, I remember seeing newspaper pictures of Kennedy leading reporters through the wards of Willowbrook, and thinking that could have been Southern, or just about any other institution in the country. But for many who were deinstitutionalized, life afterwards wasn't always better. Sometimes it was even worse. It meant living on the streets or living in dirty, rat infested housing or being abused or even murdered by other people on the streets. But I was lucky, oh so lucky. For me, it meant freedom and a good life. I went from one extreme to the other. I started with hatred and cruelty and I ended with kindness and love. I could never have dreamed the good things that would happen to me, never. There was one very, very tragic thing that happened in my life after I got my freedom, but the rest of my life of freedom has been blessed. Even that tragic event had a good outcome – it led Charlie to me. Oh, I've been so blessed these last 39 years. Every day I thank God for being so good to me. I think God has a plan for me and part of that plan is for me to give back to society for the goodness He has shown me.

If we were talking face-to-face, you would probably ask me how I know words like deinstitutionalization and the technical terms for mental retardation. I learned to read during the few years I went to school. And at Southern, I read comic books and magazines and newspapers that the staff left around. And most importantly, I read every word in the Bible countless times. Reading the Bible saved my life. Most importantly, it molded my soul. Reading hard stuff, especially the Bible, proved that I wasn't retarded. It was evidence I could use to prove that I was normal. Only nobody cared if I could read, or if I was normal. When I was released, I read constantly. Thanks to Dr. Warner, I got an education. Who would think that a resident of Southern State School for the Feebleminded would someday get her bachelor's degree? I proved to the world that I was intelligent. That college diploma that's framed in a gorgeous gold frame is proof. It's one of my most precious possessions. You saw it hanging on my living room wall next to my wedding license and an enlargement of my social security card and my voting card and my driver's license. They're all proof that I am a normal human being who is a contributing member of society. That's my wall of competence.

After my release from Southern, I wanted to learn as much as possible about institutions. I went to the library and got books on the topic. I majored in psychology in college and learned

more. When I got a computer at work and then at home, I learned how to google, which expanded my knowledge of everything in the world. In my own way, I've become an expert on mental retardation and institutions because I've read so many books on the topic and because of where I lived for eight years, eight long years that seemed like a hundred years. And my professional life has been devoted to improving the lives of retarded people. Those eight years at Southern led to my life-long career as a caregiver and advocate for people with retardation.

I've had so many blessings these last 39 years, but certainly one of the greatest blessings has turned out to be you – my daughter – Eleanor Kirk Hastings. I never thought that my child would find me. I never really thought about you at all. Before I was committed to Southern my mother was dying and I was on the streets selling myself, totally unaware that I was even pregnant. After she died, I was sent to Southern where I spent the last four months of my pregnancy in the hospital ward. When I had you, they put me to sleep so I wouldn't see you. I didn't know if you were a girl or a boy, and they wouldn't tell me when I woke up. They told me to forget about you. I would never see you again. Who would think that 46 years later you would find me? And I'm glad you had DNA testing done so that there's no doubt that I'm your mother. I can sit back and take credit for something I had nothing to do with creating - you.

Eleanor, you are the creation of the wonderful parents who adopted you. You were so lucky to have people who loved you and gave you the best of everything. They adopted you even though they knew you came from Southern and could be retarded. Fortunately, they were special education professors at a university near Southern who believed that the environment was the major influence on a child's development, especially in the first few years of life. They were two of the top advocates of the nurture side in the nature-nurture issue. I read the articles they wrote about their views and even the article they wrote about their follow-up study of kids who had been adopted from Southern including you, but of course, not using your real names. You started out as an experiment for them, but became their loving child. How lucky you and Bert and Hester Kirk were to have each other. They must have been so proud to see you graduate from law school. It's sad that your dad died before you were elected mayor, but you know he was smiling down from Heaven when you were sworn into office. He's there with your husband and they both must have had a celebration for you. There was dancing in heaven on that election day.

When I think of the nature-nurture issue, the enriched environment explains how you became the great person you are today. But how does the importance of environment explain me? I had the worst environment possible the first 13 years of my life. I had a mother who didn't love me as much as she loved her booze. I don't remember her ever hugging or kissing me. She saved that for her clients. She never really wanted me and would probably have aborted me if she could have. During my preschool years, I was either left alone in a crib to watch T.V., or I was taken care of by uneducated, poor neighbors who might have been nice to me, but they didn't love me or even care about me. I shouldn't have been able to become an educated person as an adult when I dropped out of school after fourth grade. I shouldn't have been able to develop kindness towards my babies at Southern when I never experienced kindness from anyone until I met Judy and Dr. Warner. I shouldn't have been able to love Judy like a big sister and Sarah like a little sister and Dr. Warner like a father. And I certainly shouldn't have been able to have a loving marriage after the sexual abuse I experienced. And Eleanor, hopefully, I will learn to love you as a mother, even though I was never loved by a mother.

But when I think of heredity, I think you did get something from me. You have the drive that I have. My motivation to overcome the bad things in life has been my greatest strength and I think it's yours too. We're survivors, but more than that. We're thrivers. We thrive on adversity and overcome it to prove ourselves. When we were given the opportunity to achieve, we took advantage of it. And I think our drive to succeed has been passed on to your children. Imagine my grandson Paul, studying abroad in China and my granddaughter Wendy, a social worker. Without Wendy and her detective skills, you wouldn't have found me.

Well, let me get back to my story. To make it easy I'll start at the beginning and go chronologically. Amazing isn't it that a person with a tested IQ of 65 at age 13 can use a word like chronologically? I'm a visual thinker and when I talk, I think of the pictures that go with the words I'm saying. I have a movie running in my head. I hope you can do the same. The words you'll hear on this tape will bring to your mind pictures of violence and hatred and that will be good because you'll understand the terrible life I led. I don't want your pity for what I've been through. I want your understanding. But the words I say will also bring to your mind pictures of people speaking kindly to each other and of people touching each other with affection and

respect and that will also make you understand what happened in my life. So try to listen to this with pictures in your mind.

Chapter 2

My Mother Eileen

If I'm going to start at the beginning of my life, I have to start with my mother. She's the only family I had. I'll tell you what she told me about her life before I can actually remember anything. She never wanted to talk about her life. The little I know I had to pry out of her. And of course, she wasn't usually sober so she couldn't really tell me much anyhow. She was a bitter woman; she oozed anger at everyone and everything. Considering her life and her addiction, maybe that's understandable. But she was able to change when she had to. When she was with her clients, she was totally different - smiley and flirty. Looking at the man as if he was something special, when all he was was a paycheck. I saw her with people in the stores where she acted friendly and polite. And when she was with social workers, she was an upstanding woman trying her hardest to take care of her daughter. She was a great actress. And interestingly, that's the only thing she ever wanted to do – act in the movies. She couldn't do that so she created her own movies.

Supposedly, I was the only one who knew about Eileen Reilly's professional life. I don't think so. Ha! After she died, suddenly the cops and social workers realized what was going on. The cops must have known about her business, but they looked the other way. For all I know, they were her customers. We lived in a neighborhood where everyone knew everybody else's business. I'm sure our neighbors knew what was going on in our apartment. They saw the parade of men going up the back porch steps to our first floor apartment. There were lots of people in the neighborhood who were into drugs, alcohol, crime, and gambling so she wasn't that different. And I'm sure there were other whores in the neighborhood. We lived in an inner city poor

neighborhood with lots of different ethnic groups and lots of crime so who knows all that was going on. Everyone shared one thing though – we were all poor, very poor.

I know that alcoholism is an addiction, and supposedly it's genetic. But does that excuse what Eileen Reilly did to me? Being addicted to alcohol or anything doesn't mean that a person can't take responsibility for themselves. I think people have a choice to drink or not to drink. I believe people can overcome their genes, or there's no reason for education and treatment and religion. I don't know if Eileen could have stopped drinking, but I do know she didn't want to stop. Being drunk gave her a way out of reality. When she was in a drunken stupor, she could dream about a different life – a life as a rich, famous movie star adored by men.

It's funny; I don't really hate her now even though she gave me a horrible life. I don't feel any emotion toward her. No hate, no pity. She's like a character out of a book to me. But I must admit that I did hate her when I was young, especially when I was at Southern. I despised her; I detested her. I blamed her for everything, but when I went to live with the Dr Warner, he taught me that hating her only ended up hurting me. I had to cleanse my heart of hate or it would eat away at me. I've worked on my feelings toward her, and now I just don't have any. Blaming her doesn't change the past, and it only makes the present worse. Dr. Warner wasn't a psychologist, but he talked to me a lot about my feelings about my mother and he helped me see that I had to put the past in the past and not relive it, but learn from it, and get on with making my present and future as good as possible. He helped me overcome the nagging feelings of self pity I had. Why me? Why did I have to suffer? Why didn't anyone save me? Why? Why? Why? It happened. Make the best of it and get on with your life. It's been hard, but I think I've done it.

Over the years, I've had a lot of conversations with God about Eileen Reilly. When I look at her from a religious perspective, I can come to no other conclusion than she was evil. There's no excuse for making your child a whore, for selling your child to the highest bidder. Alcoholism, poverty, isolation. All these are not excuses. Other people have lived with these and haven't sold their children. Adversity brings out evil that is inside some people. Not many, because most people aren't inherently evil like Eileen was. For the first 13 years of my life, all I saw was evil – no goodness, no love, no kindness. It was a miracle that I found these later in my life. And I found them when I found God. That's when I saw that there was goodness around me and that I had goodness in me. I was not evil no matter what I was forced to do by Eileen.

Since I found God at Southern when I first read the Bible, I've struggled with the issue of forgiveness. I know God commands us to forgive as He forgives us, but can we forgive evil? I know I need to forgive out of obedience to God, but I just can't find forgiveness in my heart for my mother or for Jack Miller. They're the only two evil people I've known in my life. I know that forgiveness is one of the hardest things for humans. Jesus told Peter that seven times is not enough times to ask for forgiveness; it may take 77 times. I have asked God to help me forgive Eileen Reilly at least 770 times, but I still can't find it in my heart. So God and I will continue to have this conversation about forgiveness – probably for the rest of my life and maybe for eternity.

Let me tell you the little I know about Eileen Reilly's early life. When she was nine, she came to Chicago from Ireland with her parents. She told me the poverty in Ireland was much worse than any poverty in America. She remembered being hungry all the time. She had two younger brothers who both died, one because he was born prematurely. She remembered that he was born dead at home and she saw her father wrap him up and take him away. She didn't know where he was taken. They never had him christened in church so she didn't think they gave him a Christian burial. Her other brother was five when he was hit by a car while he was playing in the street. Eileen remembers seeing him lying dead in the street. For him, there was a church service and a Christian burial.

They moved to America because her father's brother, Uncle Dennis, had moved to Chicago and told them there were lots of jobs here and no one starved in America. He probably told them that the streets were paved with gold. He sent them money to buy tickets in steerage class, which meant being at the bottom of the boat and throwing up for the whole 10 days of the voyage. When they got into New York Harbor and saw the Statue of Liberty, all the hardships of the trip were forgotten. They were in the promised land, which turned out to hold the wrong promises for them. They stayed with some Irish people on the lower east side of New York City until Uncle Dennis sent money for the train to Chicago. He got her father a job cleaning streets, where he quickly learned there was no gold to be found on the streets of Chicago. The job didn't last long because he was sick a lot. It turned out that he had some kind of heart problem, and he died when Eileen was 13, the same age I was when Eileen died. History repeats itself. At about

that time Uncle Dennis married to a woman from Wisconsin and moved away. He'd been the benefactor of the family, but now my grandmother and mother were on their own.

Eileen's mother worked in the kitchen of a Greek restaurant, and they lived in a two room apartment above the restaurant. My mother told me that her years from 13 to 17 were the happiest of her life. She loved going to high school and did well in her classes. She probably was quite bright. She prided herself on how she could do math in her head. She'd pose a problem like 47×52 and come up with the right answer in a second. But most importantly, she loved having friends. She had one close friend named Peggy, and they were inseparable. Their favorite pastime was going to the movies. Every Saturday, they'd go to the Marlboro Theatre, one of the big old ornate movie houses. It was more than a movie house to Eileen. It was a dream palace where she'd look up at the crystal chandeliers hanging from a star-filled, blue night sky painted on the ceiling; she'd look sideways at scenes of ancient Rome painted on the walls, and she'd look down at the glittering marble floor. She was going to be a movie star and be the leading lady for Clark Gable, Cary Grant, and Humphrey Bogart. After seeing a movie, she'd go home and act out the part of the female star. She especially loved dancers like Betty Grable and Ginger Rogers. She would strip down to her underpants so everyone in her imaginary audience could see her shapely legs as she re-enacted dance scenes from the movie she'd just seen.

The only thing that my mother and I ever did together was go to the movies. That was like when I was six to about nine years old. She didn't work on Sundays so we spent the afternoons going to the movies. For most people in those days, Sunday morning meant church. Not for us. In fact, she never even walked in front of a church. When we came near one, we crossed the street. I used to think that being near a holy place made her feel guilty for what she did. Now I think she didn't want to go near a church because she was afraid she'd see a priest who might have been one of her clients. When we got home from the movies, she'd start drinking and talking about the movie until she got lost in her dreams of stardom. I mentioned her good memory for math. She also had a good memory for the dialogue from a movie we'd just seen. She'd enact scenes using the exact words the movie stars had used. Interesting that the booze didn't blur her memory for that. I would sit on the couch and she would act out the movie in front of me. To her, I was an audience of thousands.

Her friend Peggy and she talked about how after they graduated from high school, they would go to Hollywood. They had dreams of being discovered like Lana Turner. They planned to go to the same drug store where she was discovered. They were sure they would be spotted by a talent agent as they sat at the lunch counter sipping cokes. Then they would become famous, rich, and adored by men. All these dreams fell apart instantly when her mother died of pneumonia when Eileen was 17. With just three months before graduation, she had to quit school and get a job. She had no one to support her. At 17, she was all alone in the world. Peggy and her dreams of going to Hollywood both disappeared.

I have no photos of Eileen so I don't have a sharp picture of her in my mind. She used to tell me that I looked like her when she was young, before she destroyed herself. She told me she was pretty, and I'm sure she was. Of course, the time I remember her most is at the end of her life when she was a drunk who looked a hundred years old, a woman who was being eaten up by cancer. I can picture her sitting on the couch with a glass of booze in one hand and a cigarette in the other looking at T.V., not processing what she was seeing. She was in her own world. Sometimes the room was so thick with smoke that it was like looking at her through fog. She must have smoked two or three packs a day in this small, closed-up living room. She had this hacking cough, and at night she would cough up all this horrible stuff. As soon as she finished a coughing fit, she'd light up a cigarette. She was addicted to booze and cigarettes. She never had one without the other. She was always leaving lit cigarettes around. It's a miracle she didn't burn the apartment down. I've never had a glass of booze or a cigarette in my life. I don't know if it's because I want to prove to myself that I don't have the addiction genes or prove that it's possible to overcome the addiction genes. Well anyway, I've never been tempted by either.

I can see how Eileen might have been pretty once. She had cork screw curly bright red hair, like me and you. We all look like Little Orphan Annie. Of course, my hair hasn't been red for about 10 years. Now I have a curly white snow cap on my head. I've never thought of coloring it. That's just not me. My mother never lived long enough to have her hair turn white. At the end of her life, most of her hair had fallen out and you could see her white scalp with hair stuck in different patches, like a rag doll with plugs of hair sewn on. Her nose was very different from mine. Hers was turned up and cute, while mine is just a chunk on my face. She had same freckles and reddish complexion that I have. But the freckles disappeared after a while because

her skin turned to tan leather. I don't know what caused it; maybe the booze, maybe the cancer. I have bright blue eyes and she had coal black eyes. Both of us had this twinkle in our eyes which gave the false impression that we were happy and enjoying life. How do you get a twinkle in your eye? That must be genetic and have nothing to do with how you feel because neither of us was happy. I didn't get to see her eyes often because she rarely looked at me. It was so different from how she looked at her clients. She'd gaze into their eyes as if she was in love with them. She was some actress, and maybe that's why she had so many clients. She provided a fantasy of love as well as sex.

She was very short and again I'm like her in that way. She must have been about 5'1" or so. That's what I am. My early memories of her are with a curvy body and big boobs, but gradually she turned into a bag of bones with boobs that hung down like long pancakes. She became emaciated. She looked like pictures of people in concentration camps. She was 36 when she died, but she looked a hundred. In her last few years there was no way a man would pay to have sex with that body. That's why she made me into a prostitute – to get money to live on and maybe to live vicariously through me. But my work was in men's cars and hers was in our apartment. She wore sexy dresses for her work and I wore little girl dresses so men would think I was even younger than I actually was. Lots of men like to screw children, and although I started at 11, I looked younger. That was my attraction. She was grooming me to continue the family business. You know something strange? I think she liked being a whore. I don't know why I feel like that, but I think she believed in the fantasies she created. She believed she loved each man she slept with, and they loved her. She hated to stop whoring because then there were no more fantasies in her life – only the cruel reality of impending death.

When her mother died, Eileen dropped out of school and took her mother's job at the restaurant. She had no alternative. It was either work or starve on the streets. The owner of the restaurant was a Greek named George, or something like that. At first, he was nice to her. He took her into his apartment which was also above the store. His wife was dead and he had two sons. Eileen not only worked in the store, but she cleaned his apartment and cooked too. She did wifely duties, and maybe that included sleeping with him. I have no way of knowing. Anyhow, one of his sons was Alex who was 16. Eileen slept on the couch, at first alone, and pretty soon with Alex. Then she got pregnant. George wanted them to get married so the baby

would be legitimate even though he wasn't too happy about the fact that Eileen wasn't Greek. But before they could get married, Alex killed the baby. Not on purpose. He beat Eileen when she complained that he was going out with different women. One night he beat her so badly she miscarried. Without a grandchild in the picture, George threw her out. Of course, when I think about that situation, I realize that George may have been the father.

Eileen was alone in the world with no family or friends, out on the street at 17. A black woman who lived across the street took her in when she saw her sitting on the curb crying. I don't know the woman's name. Eileen just called her the nigger lady. I don't know her motivation for taking Eileen in. Maybe she had a big heart. There are people like that in the world, but not enough. She let Eileen live with her rent-free until she got a job working in a laundry where she washed clothes in scalding hot water. It was hard work, but it was a job. She didn't have a high school diploma so that was all she could get. She lived with the black woman for a while and probably learned how to drink from her. When she got home from work, they would drink. For Eileen, it was introducing her genes to booze. I don't know when she got into whoring. I wasn't aware of what she was doing until I was about 5 or 6.

I don't know what jobs she held after the laundry and before she became a full time prostitute. I do know she learned how to collect welfare because a social worker visited the apartment every so often. I remember my mother stayed sober long enough for her to act normal and even clean up the apartment to the extent that was possible. She told the social worker that she couldn't work at the laundry because she had a bad back so she couldn't lift the heavy wet laundry. It's funny how she played the system. She had enough self control not to drink for a few hours when she saw the social worker. She must have hidden the bottles of booze that were always around and she probably brushed her teeth for ten minutes to get rid of the smell of alcohol on her breath. Couldn't she have used that self control more? And the social workers? Couldn't they see how I was being neglected? Couldn't they see through Eileen's lies? Even with Eileen cleaning up, the apartment was still disgusting. I suppose all the apartments in our tenement were the same because we were all poor. And I suppose they ignored the neglect as long as I wasn't being abused, and I was never physically abused by my mother or any of the people who took care of me. Of course, part of my job as a hooker involved physical abuse. But that's another story. So to the social workers, that was enough. They must have known my

mother was a drunken whore, but they ignored it. What would they do with another kid going into the welfare system? There were more than enough.

My everyday life involved going to school, at least until my second year of fourth grade. She walked me to school up until second grade. She put on lots of makeup and a dress, not one of her sexy work dresses. It looked like she was dropping me off at school on her way to work. Well, I suppose she was dropping me off at school on her way back to the apartment for her job. Although my mother walked me to school, I walked home alone, even at age five. Can you imagine a five year old walking home alone today? We lived two blocks from the school and there was a crossing guard at the one street I had to cross, but I was still alone. When I got home, my mother started to drink which she did non-stop until I went to sleep. She saw men during the day when I was at school. She didn't see men at night because she'd be too drunk if she started drinking during the day. So the real reason she saw men during the day had nothing to do with me finding out, but with her being sober enough to perform her duties.

When I got home, I'd knock on the front door in case there was a man still there. She tried to finish up by 3:30, but sometimes she went into overtime. If she didn't answer, I'd sit on the steps and wait for her to open the door. Sometimes I waited for as long as a half hour. The men used the back door so I wouldn't see them leave. Most of the men were from the neighborhood and were regulars. She didn't like taking on strangers. I suppose she was worried about getting hurt or getting a disease. There were two Italians who lived in the building across the street who were customers. I'd see them coming around from the back door. I also knew that the man who ran the shoe repair store used her. There was a guy who I think was a neighborhood cop, but he wasn't wearing his uniform so I wasn't sure. And of course Doc was one of her best customers. Good old Doc Kruger. He was a chain smoker like her and weighed about 300 pounds. He had a foreign accent which I think was German. And he had this big thick moustache which always had crumbs on it and saliva dripping from the corners of his mouth. I think he was a good doctor considering what he did when my mother got cancer, and how he treated me whenever I got sick. Because he was her doctor and her client, he kept her clean and treated her when she got diseases so he would be protected too.

My mother had an unusual relationship with her clients. She didn't just have sex with them, she talked to them. I remember hearing her chatting and laughing with the men before and

after they had sex. Because the men were from the neighborhood, they probably discussed neighborhood news or the men talked about their lives. Maybe she was a therapist and a friend as well as a sex partner. It was very different from my relationship with the men I serviced. They rarely talked to me, and I never spoke to them.

When I'd go into the apartment after school, I'd get myself a glass of milk and a cracker and then go outside. There were neighborhood kids to hang out with. We didn't do much because we didn't have any bikes or toys. Sometimes we played kick-the-can or hopscotch or jump rope or hide-and-seek. But mostly, we just hung around. They weren't my friends; they were just kids to pass the time with. When all the kids went home for supper, I went into the house and by that time, she was usually asleep on the couch, dead drunk. I made myself a sandwich for supper, usually butter and cheese; the same thing I had for lunch. She didn't eat much. She only wanted her booze. After supper, I'd watch T.V. until I was almost asleep, and then I'd shut the T.V. and go to my room. I never said good-night or anything to her because she was usually conked out. I was really all alone. I didn't have any school friends or neighbors to talk to. I lived in one of the biggest cities in the world, and I was totally alone. I could have been on a deserted island.

We lived in a small dark apartment in a three-story tenement with 12 apartments. You walked into the living room which had a couch facing the T.V. There was a coffee table where there was always a glass filled with booze, a bottle of booze, a pack of cigarettes, and an ashtray overflowing with butts. My mother kept the shades down on all the windows in the house and there was a floor lamp which didn't give off much light so the room was gloomy and smoke-filled. If you went in one direction, you'd be in the little kitchen with a small table and two chairs. It had its own smell of stale, rotting food. And next to the kitchen was my tiny bedroom. It wasn't much bigger than a closet with my single bed and small dresser squeezed in. I had to keep my shades down and my window locked because my room faced the back porch and anybody could sneak into my room if the window wasn't locked. We didn't have anything to steal, but that didn't matter. I only changed my sheets once a month and rarely washed my clothes so my room had its own distinct smell of me. I could shut my eyes and go from room to room and recognize where I was by the smell. Next to my room was the back door and that was the way her clients came in. She kept it locked until five minutes before a man was scheduled to come.

My mother had the bedroom facing the street. It was decorated like I imagine a whorehouse would look. It had red velvet lamps with fringe hanging down and big, gilt-framed mirrors on the walls. There was a double bed with a red velvet spread and a dressing table with bottles of lotions and perfumes on it. I saw what she wore when the men came - a sexy low cut dress with no bra so her boobs were almost completely exposed. There was a slit up the side of the dress and you could tell she wasn't wearing any underwear. She wore that same dress for years. I'm not sure she ever washed it, but it didn't matter to her clients; they just wanted to get the dress off. She had this feathery stole around her shoulders which she'd fling around her neck in dramatic moves. She wore a black garter belt with black mesh stockings. She also had these silver high heels that she teetered around on. She didn't like me going into her room, but sometimes I'd sneak in and put on the lotions. The only thing I didn't like was the smell in there. Later, I learned it was the smell of sex.

There was only one tiny bathroom where my mother did a lot of her cleansing after each man. She douched to prevent disease, and I think she thought it would also keep her from getting pregnant. I know she made the men wear condoms because I would see them in the garbage in the kitchen. After every man, she would have them put the condom in a trash basket in her room and then after they left, she'd empty it into the kitchen garbage. I was familiar with the sight of condoms, but I didn't know what they were used for until I became her apprentice. The bathroom was her territory so I only used it when absolutely necessary. I washed up and brushed my teeth in the kitchen so I'd only have to use the bathroom to actually go to the bathroom. And when she got cancer and started bleeding from the lungs and later when she peed, the bathroom was disgusting. She couldn't clean it so I had to. I used towels to clean up all the blood and then went down to the dark, scary basement to wash them in the washing machine so I could reuse them. My experience cleaning up after her prepared me for my job later when I cleaned my babies at Southern.

Even though I hated that bathroom, I usually took a bath on Sundays. I remember wanting to get clean. I'd wash my body over and over and lay in the water until it was ice cold. I also washed my clothes in the kitchen sink and then hung them on the clothesline on the back porch. When I was in second grade, the owners of the building put a washing machine in the basement. Eileen wanted me to do the wash down there, but I was petrified of going into the dark

basement alone. I don't know what I was afraid of – being raped? That happened to me every day once I became a prostitute. Eventually, I used the washing machine almost every day to wash the towels so I could clean up after Eileen.

As I got older, I did the shopping. Eileen kept her money in a glass teapot in the back of one of the kitchen cupboards. She'd tell me how much to take out for what I needed to buy. At first, I did only the grocery shopping, but as she got sicker I also bought the booze and cigarettes. The guys in the liquor store knew who it was for and never asked questions. I didn't even have to tell them the brand of booze or cigarettes. Old Crow and Camels. Those were her choices of suicide. There was always a lot of money in that teapot. We never had to buy on credit. I remember once counting the money and there was \$418, which in those days was a lot. But there was nothing I could do with the money. I suppose I could have bought some decent clothes, but she would have known. Twice a year, a nice neighbor named Mrs. Milano took me shopping for clothes and shoes with money Eileen gave her. I don't know how she knew how much would be needed. Maybe she let Mrs. Milano keep the extra money she didn't spend on me so of course she always bought me what was cheapest. It didn't matter what I liked. Mrs. Milano was from Italy and didn't speak English well, but she knew money and how to bargain with the people in the stores.

From a young age, I was self sufficient. I had no choice. There was no one to do things for me, and after a while I was the person in charge. I can't remember my mother ever washing or dressing me. As Eileen got sicker, I started paying the bills. I'd bring the \$40 rent to the super who lived in the dreaded basement. And I'd go to the currency exchange to get money orders to pay the electric and phone bills. I ran our little household completely by myself by the time I was ten.

When I was 11, Eileen started coughing up blood. She didn't tell anybody about it for a while. Of course, I knew because I saw the hankies full of blood after her coughing fits. She was petrified her clients would find out and stop coming. She told Doc who sent her to a clinic at a hospital that was an hour bus ride away. We had to transfer twice. I went with her every time she had to go. She was getting too weak to travel by herself, and she wouldn't drink so she was very agitated. At the clinic, they gave her medicine, but it didn't work. Medicine doesn't cure lung cancer which is what she had. At first, they thought it might be TB and they could treat that.

But then they ruled that out and decided on cancer. How that cancer ate at her. But she never stopped boozing, and of course she never stopped smoking. She'd light up as soon as we left the clinic. The tips of her cigarettes would be coated with blood, but that didn't stop her.

I recall sitting for hours in the waiting room at that clinic. There were maybe a hundred people waiting. This was a clinic for poor people so we had to do whatever was necessary to see a doctor, even if it meant waiting for four or five hours. Some of the people there were in worse shape than my mother. I thought some of them might fall on the floor and die in front of me. I tried not to look at anyone. I just stared at my hands the whole time we were there. I never went in to see the doctor with her so I waited for another hour in the waiting room. This was a whole day event, but by that time I had dropped out of school so it didn't matter. For Eileen, it meant no work, but she didn't have many clients by then anyhow.

Although she had lung cancer, she beat the angel of death by committing suicide. She couldn't take the pain and deterioration. One day while I was out shopping, she left the house, although I don't know how she was able to because she was so weak. She dragged herself a block to 17th Street where there was a lot of traffic and she just walked in front of a moving bus. When I got home, she wasn't there. I was terrified. Where could she have gone? I went upstairs to Mrs. Milano. She didn't know where she was and said we should go to the police station to find out. I was petrified of going to the police station because I was afraid they would arrest me for prostitution. But when she didn't come home that night, I had no choice but to go to the station the next morning. That was the scariest night of my short life. I was all alone in the apartment and kept imagining there were ghosts and wild animals hiding in the corners and the closets. I stayed up all night thinking about what would happen to me, and whatever I thought might happen was worse than being a child prostitute. I imagined being tortured with lit cigarettes and being attacked by wild dogs.

The next morning Mrs. Milano took me to the police station. She held my hand tightly because she thought I would faint. Here I was this 13 year old prostitute, but I felt like a two year old baby without her mommy. Even though my mother was a cruel, heartless woman who forced me into prostitution, she was all I had and I didn't want her to be gone. The world without her was totally unimaginable, but one thing was certain – I would be all alone. I could hardly talk to the policeman at the front desk. All I could say was that my mother was missing. He told me

a woman with no ID had been hit by a bus the day before. He asked me to describe her. As soon as I said that she had red hair, he said that he thought it was her. Then a police car drove me and Mrs. Milano to the morgue so I could identify my mother. A 13 year old going to a morgue – is there anything scarier than that? A building with dead people, unburied dead people. My last image of my mother was her lying on a table in an icy cold room. Her face was all black and blue and bloody, but there was no doubt that this dead body belonged to Eileen Reilly. I didn't feel any grief because I was overwhelmed with fear. What would happen to me? When I think back to that terrible time, I realize that Eileen didn't care what happened to me. She didn't think of who would take care of me. Of course, that was no different from how she had treated me the previous 13 years. She only cared about herself and when the pain was too great, she ended her life. And she ended my life too. My life as a prostitute.

By this time the police knew who she was. They questioned me about having any family or neighbors who could take care of me. When I told them I had no one, they got a social worker involved. I wasn't allowed to go home. I wanted to go home to get my safety pins, but when I said I needed them, they looked at me like I was crazy. They didn't know they were my protection. I only had the one big safety pin in my coat, but they took that away and I never saw it again. I was left defenseless.

They took me to a children's home where I stayed until I was sent to Southern. Everything happened so fast. I was in a daze so I didn't process what was happening to me. Now I was an orphan, just like my mother had been, but younger. I was 13. When I was placed in the children's home, I was examined. The doctor looked at my swelling abdomen and did a vaginal examination and found that I was pregnant. The doctor asked who the father was and I told him how I had been hooking for the past year so I didn't know. I was in a state of shock at having lost my mother, learning that I was pregnant, and not knowing what was going to happen to me. I was five months pregnant and I didn't even know it. Naïve is the best word to describe me. Naïve doesn't seem to fit as an appropriate adjective for a prostitute – a naïve prostitute – but that was me.

That was when they decided I must be mentally retarded so they had me tested by a man who looked like one of my clients, but all men looked like my clients in those days. I can't recall what questions he asked me. I was in a fog. He found my IQ was 65. How did I know my IQ was

65? Remember I could read and I remember seeing him write the numbers 6 and 5 next to the letters I and Q. So I was the first to know the results of his testing, but certainly not the last. Based on the IQ test results, it was decided that Southern State School for the Feebleminded would be the best placement for me. You would have thought that someone might have questioned the accuracy of that IQ score considering all that had happened to me. But no, it was accepted as valid and used as the basis for my imprisonment at Southern. There was no voice of reason to be heard. No one advocated for me. No one knew me. They had no idea who the human being inside my skinny, dirty, pregnant body was. No one in the whole world cared what happened to Mary Reilly.

Well those are my memories of my mother. When I look back and try to find a time when she said kind words to me or touched me with affection, I can't find any. I have to admit to myself that she didn't love me. She didn't love anyone, especially herself. She was a woman who was dominated by her desire for booze. She didn't care about the men she serviced. It was just her job. She had no friends or family other than me. When neighbors or men, especially Doc, tried to reach out to her, she rejected them. She was alone in the world, and she didn't care. But she did have her obsession with movies and her impossible dream to become a movie star. Maybe when she screwed her clients, she saw herself in a love scene in a movie. Her fantasy as a movie star kept her going and when she could no longer dream of being a movie star, she killed herself. But she also killed Mary Reilly, the child prostitute. So something good came of her death. Just think of what my life would have been like had she not gotten sick and died. I probably would have lived my whole life as a prostitute. What a horrible, horrible thought.

Chapter 3

School

My first really clear memory of my past life is my first day of kindergarten. We'd walked from home to school in a heavy rain and even though we had an umbrella, we were soaked when

we got there. It was dark in the hallway as my mother and I walked to the office to find out which class I was in. The hallway was teeming with children and their parents. It was wonderful. There was noise and excitement all around me, and everyone seemed happy. It was contagious. I felt happy, an emotion that was quite foreign to me.

My kindergarten teacher was Miss Ryan, a kindly looking, gray-haired, old lady with a sweet smile. I don't really know if she was old, but to a five-year old, all teachers looked old, especially if they had gray hair. She was waiting at the entrance to the classroom and introduced herself. She stooped down to look me in the eye, said hello, and asked me my name. When I whispered Mary, she hugged me and said, "Welcome Mary." I felt joy. This was going to be a good place, a safe place. This was a place where people hugged you. I didn't even say goodbye to my mother as I eagerly walked into the classroom. It was filled with toys. I had very few toys at home so this was heaven. I especially loved the dolls and the corner with the toy kitchen. My favorite game was playing mother and pretending that the dolls were my children. I cooed at them and hugged them. I cooked them delicious meals. I did what my mother never did. Through my play, I was the mother I wanted Eileen to be.

At the start, I loved school. I would have been glad to go to school seven days a week, 24 hours a day. I was well behaved and eager to learn. The school was multi-racial. I recall black kids, Italian kids, Irish kids, Greek kids...all kinds of kids. By the second day, I knew everyone's names. I played with everyone. I had never really had any playmates since I just hung around with the kids from my neighborhood, but we didn't really play. I liked everyone and I wanted everyone to like me.

First grade was my favorite grade because I had Miss Dawson. I thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world. I would just stare at her face, admiring the shape of her nose and her big eyes and her pretty pink lips. She wore her blonde hair in a different style every week. At home, I tried, with no success, to create the same hairstyles with my unmanageable red curls. She, too, was kind and affectionate to me. But most importantly, she introduced me to reading. I can still remember that first day of school when she gave me a card with "M-a-r-y" written in perfect letters. That was me! Those four letters stood for me. I wrote my name over and over again. I loved printing, and I prided myself on having the best handwriting in the class. My letters were exactly like the models I copied from. I got 100 on all my spelling and math

tests. I absorbed reading. I remember just knowing all the words in the books and in my environment. Miss Dawson didn't actually have to teach me to read. As I walked to school, I read the names of the streets and the stores that we passed. When I walked down the hall at school, I could read the teachers' names on each of the doors. I could read the words "boys" and "girls" and "office". No combination of letters was a puzzle to me anymore. At home, I reviewed the words and math facts we studied in school. I shut the door to my room and played school endlessly. I was Miss Dawson and my favorite student was a girl named Mary. For a few years, actual school and fantasy school were my saving grace from a drab, loveless life.

I still played with all the kids in class, but I noticed some of them didn't want to play with me now. It could have been because I was dirty and smelly. I wore old clothes which weren't washed often and I took a bath once a week, at most. I think even in that school made up of poor kids, there was a sense that I was different. And I became more aware of what a normal family should be like. I saw mothers hug and kiss their kids and talk kindly to them when they dropped them off or picked them up. I don't recall one day after that first day of kindergarten when my mother went into my school. She walked me up to the front door of the building, but never ventured in. I suppose there were parent-teacher interviews, but I'm sure she never went to one. I think she was afraid to enter the school because the teachers might find out what she was and what she was doing to my life.

Second grade started like kindergarten and first grade. I continued to learn and do well. But Miss Stevens, my second grade teacher, was different from Miss Ryan and Miss Dawson. She was stricter and didn't smile much. I don't recall if she was like that with all the kids, or just me. I got the impression that she didn't like me as much as the other kids. I tried my hardest at everything so she would like me.

My first bad experience in school came that year when a girl, I think her name was Loretta, told me not to sit next to her because I was stinky. She held her nose as she said that I smelled like poop and garbage. Then she said that her mother told her not to play with me because my mother was a bad lady. The people in the neighborhood knew about my mother and they passed that information on to their kids. I was no longer just Mary, the second grader. Now I was Mary, the second grader and the daughter of a drunken whore.

The second bad experience that year was horrible, just horrible. My heart aches just thinking about it. It was the start of the end of my love of school. It happened when I was waiting in line to go to gym. A boy named Danny, who was standing behind me, put his hand under my skirt and touched my backside. I was paralyzed. I didn't know what to do. He whispered in my ear that he was going to put his dick in my hole and then in my mouth. I didn't know what he was talking about, but I knew it was bad. I had never heard the word dick before, but I guessed what it meant. The only time I'd ever seen a penis was when some of the boys I hung out with after school peed in the alley. I didn't say anything to the teacher or of course, to my mother. She wouldn't have done anything about it anyway. By me not doing anything, I gave Danny permission to do more. A few weeks later he and another boy, I can't remember his name, got me in the cloak room. You probably don't know what a cloak room is, but in old schools it was a room where the kids hung their coats. We didn't have cloaks, but the old fashioned word was still used. In winter, it was always stuffed with coats, hats, scarves, and galoshes since the weather outside was frigid and everyone walked to school. There were no school buses and mothers didn't have cars to drive their kids.

I was in the cloak room getting my coat to go out on the playground when Danny and this other boy pushed me against the coats, pulled up my skirt, and pulled down my underpants. It all happened so fast, I couldn't stop them. Then they stuck a pencil in my privates. I yelled with pain. When the teacher came running, she saw me with my underpants around my ankles and a pencil hanging from my privates. All the other kids came running to see what happened. They looked at me with disgust, and then some of them started giggling. Before I could say anything, Danny said that I had put a pencil up myself and then I told them that I wanted to put the pencil up their assholes. Miss Stevens believed them! She actually believed that I would do such a thing, especially in the cloakroom. Here I was this well-behaved, hard working student, and these boys were the troublemakers in the class, but she believed them. She looked at me with rage. How could I have done something so evil in her classroom? How could I have dirtied her cloakroom? I can still picture her face, or I imagine I can see her face. It was bright red with blotches all over. I thought she was going to beat me. I remember her screaming at me to pull up my underpants. She called me a bad girl, a witch, a devil, and then she dragged me by the arm down to the office. She was pulling so hard that I thought she was going to pop my arm out of

the socket. I sat on a bench in the outer office while she spoke to the principal. I was too stunned to cry. I was paralyzed. I just stared into space for I don't know how long.

After a while, one of the kids from my class brought my coat to the office. The school secretary took me outside where my mother was waiting for me. I don't know if the principal didn't want her to come into the school to get me, or if she didn't want to go into the school. She didn't ask what happened. She didn't talk to me. She didn't even look at me. She just walked home quickly, with me trailing behind. When we got home, I tried to tell her what happened, but she told me to shut up. I went to my room and stared at the ceiling, too stunned and pained to even cry. Then I looked at my arm. There were bruises from where Miss Stevens held me while she dragged me down the hall. For several days, those bruises were vivid reminders of my mortification.

I didn't go to school for the next two weeks. I assume I was expelled. I had nothing to do all day at home. I couldn't play school anymore because school was no longer a happy place. Now it was a place of shame and humiliation. This was my first experience as a helpless victim, but it certainly wasn't the last.

While I was home from school, I realized that I had to protect myself when I went back. But how could I do that? We had lots of sharp knives, but I couldn't take one of them to school. As I was thinking about this, I used a safety pin to close up my blouse where a button had fallen off. I looked at that safety pin and realized this would be my weapon. I stuck the point into my finger until it bled. I stared at the blood oozing from my finger and I knew I wasn't going to be a victim again. At the ripe old age of seven, I realized I had to defend myself. There was no one else in the world to do this for me. It was me against the world. I found the biggest safety pin in the house and I pinned it on the inside of the bottom of my skirt. I knew that if anyone tried to hurt me again or lie about me, I would hurt them first. I'd stick the pin in the person's eye as hard as I could. Safety pins became my weapon of choice. They don't seem dangerous unless you think of the terrible places you can stick them – eyes, nose, ears, neck. And even a relatively small one can do damage if you shove it hard enough. But the best ones are the big ones. I collected a stash of big safety pins and hid them in my dresser drawer. As I practiced sticking them in my pillow, I'd see Danny's face as I aimed at his eye. I used all the force in my skinny little arm to penetrate the pillow as I vented my feelings of revenge.

A few months later on a sunny spring day when the class was out on the playground, I was going down the slide. How I loved that slide. I could go down it for hours. When I got to the bottom, Danny was waiting for me. Danny, my tormentor. I tried to stay away from him whenever possible, but I was trapped. He caught me in the crotch and said he was going to stick a knife up my hole. That was it. I had to fight back. The next time I came down, I had my pin out. When he caught me, I stuck the pin hard in his cheek. Blood gushed out and he screamed his head off. When Miss Stevens came over, he told her what I had done. I tried to tell her why, but she wouldn't let me talk. Again, she dragged me off to the office, but this time I met Mr. Shields, the principal. Miss Stevens gave Danny's version of the story. When I tried to tell what really happened, Mr. Shields said "Shut up." He glared at me and ordered me to pull up my skirt. He took out a paddle and as I bent over, he spanked me. He counted out ten hard spanks. With each hit, I cried louder and louder. My face was soaked in tears and snot dripped from my nose. Every time he hit me, some pee leaked down my leg. When he was finished, he had this look of satisfaction on his face for having given out a just punishment.

He said, "I hated to do that, but it's for your own good so you'll learn to behave myself and not turn into a bad person." I knew who he was referring to when he said a bad person even though he never came out and said a bad person like your mother. He gave me some rags and told me to clean the pee on the floor, and then he said something I'll never forget. "You peed on my floor. I should make you lick it up with your tongue." How cruel, how disgusting. I still remember the look of pure hate on his face. Why did he hate me? I was an innocent seven year old child, but he didn't know that. He thought I was an evil child on the road to becoming like my mother. I wasn't evil, but I was on the road to becoming like my mother.

My mother neglected me, but she never spanked me. This was my first spanking and it was in school, the place I thought was safe, but it wasn't. Now it was a place of pain as well as humiliation. As Miss Stevens walked me back to class, I used my dress to wipe my face, but I still must have looked horrible. It was hard to walk because of the burning pain on my backside and the wetness from the pee on my underpants. When I walked into the classroom, I saw that the kids knew what happened from looking at my red, swollen, tear-stained face and the trails of pee going down my leg. I don't know how I made it through the rest of the day. That was the end of me having any playmates at school. I was now officially the bad kid in class - the kid who

did dirty things and violent things. I was to be feared, especially because I had a new, bigger safety pin to replace the one that Miss Stevens took away from me. It was hidden on the bottom of my skirt waiting to attack the next kid who came after me.

When I got home, I couldn't tell my mother what happened because she was too drunk to understand. I was filled with conflicting emotions – shame, anger that I was not believed, and hatred for Mr. Shields, Danny, and Miss Stevens. I could do nothing but fantasize how I would get back at them. Next time I would stick a pin in Danny's eye and I would stick a pin in Miss Stevens's boob, and I would stick a pin in Mr. Shields's dick. I would get back at these people the only way I could – with violence. I sat and simmered as my fantasies grew more and more violent. The pin was elevated to a sharp knife and then a sword.

After that, my school work declined. I stopped trying to do well and just sulked. It's funny but the one time I did well on a test, I was accused of cheating. We had a spelling test of words that were easy for me so I was able to spell them all correctly. They all had long vowels and silent e's at the ends. Words like lake and cake and take. I always liked words with that spelling pattern. Miss Stevens corrected the tests at her desk while we worked on our math. She called me up to her desk and asked how I was able to get the spelling of all the words right. I told her I just knew them. She asked if I had copied them from Earl, the boy who sat next to me. Earl? He was dumber than a post and couldn't spell his name, and yet she assumed that I copied from him. She put a zero on my paper and told me never to cheat again. Well, that was my incentive never to do anything right in school again, in fact never to do anything at all. It's interesting that once you're given a label, there's nothing you can do to get rid of it. I was branded just like a cow. My brand said dumb troublemaker. I could never erase it. It was permanently embedded on my forehead.

I didn't try to play with the other kids. It didn't matter. Nobody wanted to play with me, except the boys who just wanted to taunt me. They would look at my crotch and wiggle their fingers. I would glare at them and point to my cheek showing them what I would do to them with a safety pin. After all these years, I still ask myself how those seven and eight year old boys knew about sex. But more importantly, where did they learn such cruelty? They knew I was the perfect scapegoat and they took advantage of me knowing that no one would believe me. But no one ever tried to touch my privates again. They knew I still had a pin. It was my protection.

Unfortunately, it couldn't protect me from the men who touched my privates a few years later. Nothing could protect me from them.

In third and fourth grade I became truant. No one cared. I found it harder and harder to go to school and see kids smiling and having fun. I was a loner and I did minimal or no work. I'm sure that's when I got type cast as having low intelligence. The school people looked at me as a perfect example of a mentally retarded person who was culturally deprived and would not be good at reading or academic learning. I wonder if I hadn't stopped doing well in school but continued to work as hard as I did when I first started, if they would have called me mentally retarded. They would probably have found ways to accuse me of cheating again. Their minds were made up. Mary Reilly was a dumb, bad kid and nothing would change their minds about that. To make matters worse, they failed me. I had to repeat fourth grade because I didn't do the work so that was all the more reason to call me mentally retarded. There was not one person in that school who tried to understand me or the situation I was living in. This place that at first I thought would offer me safety and success now only offered me shame and failure. Where were Miss Ryan and Miss Dawson? Couldn't they tell the school what I had been like when I was in their classes?

I stopped going to school in my second year of fourth grade or what should have been fifth grade. No one did anything about it. The school people didn't care. They were glad to be rid of me. That was when my mother started training me for another job – prostitution. For this job I didn't need to be able to read, write, or do math. I just needed to spread my legs and put myself in a trance so I wouldn't be aware of what was being done to me.

Now all this time when I was in school, my mother was home collecting welfare and drinking and hooking. As long as I can remember, she had men up to the apartment while I was in school. When I was home from school because I didn't want to go or I was sick, she'd pay a neighbor to watch me. She needed the apartment free of a kid who would put a damper on her business. But by fourth grade, I was allowed to stay in the apartment as long as I stayed in my bedroom with the door shut. I would hear these disgusting noises coming from her bedroom. Once I thought there was no one in the apartment so I went out to get something to eat. The door to her room was open and I saw her doing things that I didn't know people did. When she saw me looking, she yelled at me to get back in my room. The man asked if I would like to party with

them. She hit him and said that I was only 10. He said that sounded good to him. That was when the idea was planted in my mother's mind. That was when she planned to pimp for me. I'm sorry Eleanor, but I'm having difficulty talking about this. I hadn't thought about that part of my life for a long time so it's really bothering me now. I'll come back to this in a while when I can control my emotions. Sorry. Maybe I shouldn't tell you what happened, but if I don't, the horrible events will be forgotten, and they shouldn't be. The world should know what some children have to go through to survive.

I have to find Charlie and have him hold me. I need him to comfort me and protect me from the ghosts of my past.

Chapter 4

Child for Sale

This will certainly be the hardest thing I have to do – describe my life as a prostitute or more accurately a sex slave. And I'm sure this will be the hardest thing for you to hear because you'll have to face the ugly reality of how you were created. I know how hard it is to accept that you had no real father, just an unknown sperm donor. That's how I was created, and that has tormented me my whole life, and it will probably torment you for the rest of your life. We can't undo the past. What is, is.

I was eleven and I'd dropped out of school. But it was also the time when my mother was showing signs of cancer. I hadn't started going to the clinic with her yet so I don't know what she knew then. But Doc was around a lot. He spent a lot of time in her room and I don't think it was doing the bad stuff. They were talking. Doc was the closest thing she had to a friend, as well as a customer of course. As she got sicker, he spent more and more time at our place. I didn't talk to him or her. I just stayed in my room or vegged out in front of the T.V. There was nothing going on in my head. I was empty – no interests, no hopes, a blank slate.

One night after she had spent a lot of time coughing her guts out, she told me that she needed to talk to me. This was the first and only time she sat me down at the kitchen table and faced me to have a conversation. Her face showed no emotion.

“Mary, I’m very sick. I won’t be able to work anymore so you’ll have to go to work.”

“That’s okay. I could get a job as a waitress or in factory or in a store.”

“No stupid. You have to do what I do. Fuck men.”

“I can’t do that. I never had sex.”

“That will be even better. I can get a fortune for your first time. A virgin is a precious commodity. You can only sell it once.”

“I won’t know what to do.”

“I’ll teach you. It’s not hard. You just lay back and let them do whatever they want to.”

“I won’t do this. I can’t do this. No, no, no! You can’t make me.”

I was screaming. I was frantic. I was out of control. How could she tell me that I had to become a whore? I was 11 years old. I only had tiny breast buds. I didn’t have pubic hair. I hadn’t gotten my period yet. I was a child physically and emotionally.

“Oh yes I can. You have no choice. Either have the police arrest you and take you away where they’ll do worse things to you than fuck you. They’ll take you to an orphanage or put you in a jail for kids where they’ll beat you bloody. They’ll stick lit cigarettes up your ass. They’ll shit on your face.”

“I don’t want dirty men touching me and doing bad things to me. I’ll kill myself.”

“Go ahead. Do you want me to help you? Go get a knife. I’ll be glad to help you stab yourself in the heart.”

I didn’t know if she would really kill me or not. I was in a wild state. There was no one to turn to and nowhere to go. I had to do what she was telling me. I was an innocent 11 year old child who was trapped, who had no choice. I actually believed that going to a kid’s jail or an

orphanage would be worse than living at home and being a prostitute. I think if I had said no, she would probably have beaten me or have someone else beat me. I have no doubt that she would have forced me to become a whore no matter how much I resisted.

“I don’t want you hooking in the house. I’ll arrange for you to do it in cars. We’ll start with men I know and then the word will get out that there’s a hot kid around and they’ll be waiting in line to screw you.”

“How will I know where to go?”

“They’ll come to the front of the building at a certain time and I’ll bring you out to make sure you get in the right car and I’ll take the money before they take you. I always have them pay on the front end. Otherwise, they might try to get away without paying. Then they’ll drive down the street to the alley where they’ll park and do their stuff. It’ll be dark so you won’t see much.”

“I’m just a kid. How can you make me do this?”

“You’re not going to be a kid anymore. It’s time to grow up.”

“I’m 11.”

She ignored me. She showed no emotion. I cried from the bottom of my soul. My heart ached so much I thought it would actually break into little pieces. How could my mother do this to me? How could any mother do this to her child?

“Oh shut up. Stop crying you idiot. You’ll learn to like it after a while. I got a great guy for your first fuck. He’s one of my best customers. His name is Harold. He’ll pay me 200 bucks to pluck your cherry. But after him, we’ll get 15 bucks from most men unless they want to do something special. Then it’ll be 20 or 25 bucks.”

The specials were fellatio or spanking or tying me up or taking nude pictures of me and other horrible things I can’t begin describe. But the worst was fellatio. Every time a man put himself in me, I vomited. I couldn’t help it. I automatically gagged and whatever I had for supper came up. My mother was furious when she heard, but word got out that I couldn’t do

fellatio so I suppose that was good in a way. My body was repelling this vile act. I couldn't say no and even if I did, no one would listen. But vomiting got listened to.

“Once you get more experienced, you'll be able to do more than one guy a night. I hope you can get up to three or four depending upon when it gets dark. We don't want anybody to see you getting into cars when it's light. Some idiot might report it to the police. I want you to watch what I do so you'll know what to do that first time. I've got a guy coming in a little while and I want you to hide in the closet. I'll do everything with him even if he doesn't pay so you can see all the things you'll have to do. After a while, you'll develop your own style and do things your own way.”

This was my course in prostitution 101 and my mother was the instructor. Can you imagine any mother teaching her daughter what to do when she had sex? The next time a man came, I hid in her closet and when I was sure he wouldn't see me peeking out, I looked. It was hard for me not to throw up or scream. I can still see her staring at me as the man pumped up and down. She was quite acrobatic for a woman who sat on the couch all day, drinking and smoking. This was her exercise. She seemed to be gloating. I think she was enjoying what the man was doing and she was enjoying showing off her skills. What an awful person she was – one of the worst who ever lived. As the man was leaving, I saw that he was the man who owned the candy store down the street. I could never go into that candy store again. I would walk three blocks to another candy store, one that didn't bring to mind the ugliest of ugly memories.

This vile act was what she wanted me to do. How was I going to do this? How was a grown man going to put his penis into my tiny body? Who would want to have sex with me? I wasn't sexy. I didn't have big breasts and a curvy figure. I found out later that lots of men wanted to have sex with a child. Perverts each and every one of them. They should have been arrested. But if the police had gotten involved, I would have been arrested, not the perverts. What a justice system!

After the man left, I came out of the closet. “Please, I beg you, don't make me do this. I can't. I won't. I'll die.”

She went into the living room, filled her glass to the top with booze, lit up a cigarette, and looked me in the eye and said, “You have no choice.”

I went to my room and cried. I thought of killing myself, but I wasn't serious. I didn't want to die. I wanted to live, but not like this. I knew that someday I would escape from this life, but not now. I had nowhere to go. I was trapped.

Interestingly, I don't recall a lot of what happened to me once I started hooking. I went into a trance so I wouldn't be aware of the awful things that were being done to me. I have no idea how many men I had over the year and a half I was a hooker. It could have been 50 or 100 or even 200. I tried to erase everything from my memory, but of course, that's impossible. Even today after all these years, I'll see a man who looks familiar and I'll think he might have been one of the men who bought me, but then I realize it's been too many years for it to be one of those animals.

When you contacted me, I thought I might be able to think of who might have been your father. I went back nine months from your birth to try to think of who might have been one of my clients, and of course, I can't think of anyone. I didn't know the men's names or anything about them. It would be impossible to find your father, and anyhow I don't think you would ever want to meet the man who would rape a child. It's hard enough to acknowledge what your father was – a child rapist. No, it's best that you think of your father as Mr. Blank, the way I think of my father.

That first night was the worst. My mother dressed me up in a new party dress she bought me. I'd never had a party dress before because I'd never been to a party. It was black taffeta with a big white bow in the back and it had a puffy skirt and short sleeves. I looked like I was going to a fancy birthday party. I wore no underwear underneath. You don't go to a party without underwear. She cut my hair so I looked more like Orphan Annie and she clipped a big black velvet bow in the middle of my curls. She piled loads of make-up on me. I'd never before worn lipstick or anything. I don't know why she put such heavy make-up on me when my dress made me look like a little girl. Maybe I was supposed to look like half child and half woman. But when I looked at myself in the mirror, I saw a terrified child who was dressed up for a Halloween night of horror. It wasn't me and maybe that was good. That helped separate the real me from the me who was going to lose her virginity in the ugliest way possible. I was preparing to be raped.

She walked me downstairs. She held my hand tightly so I wouldn't try to run away. Anyhow, where would I run to? There was a car at the curb and we walked up to it. It was dark out so I couldn't see the man clearly. He wasn't fat or skinny. He wasn't old or young. I could tell he had hair and he was wearing a tee shirt and jeans. My mother opened the car door and pushed me in. "Here she is Harold. Have fun." The man counted two \$100 bills into Eileen's hand. Then we drove off.

To say that I was trembling was an understatement. It was like I was having a seizure. The man drove me to the alley down the street from my house and parked in the middle, away from the street, and he shut the lights. We were in complete darkness because there were no lights in the alley. He opened the door and told me to get in the back seat. As I got out of the car, the thought flashed through my mind to run. But I had nowhere to run to. I got in. He told me to turn around so he could unzip my dress. He kept murmuring that I was his pretty baby. Then it happened. It was painful and bloody. I was a little girl and he was an adult so you can imagine what it felt like when he entered me. I felt like I was being ripped open by serrated knives. I was tempted to scream, but I knew better. He continued to do things to me to get his \$200 worth. When he was finished, I was almost unconscious. He put my dress back on carefully even tying the bow, and drove me to my front door where my mother was waiting. He thanked my mother for letting him be the first one and said it was worth every penny. Then he drove away and I painfully climbed the steps. In the apartment my mother inspected the dress to see if I could wear it again. There was no blood or dirt on it so it would be usable. Then she looked at me. I came second. She took me into the bathroom and washed me up. She wondered aloud if I needed some stitches since I was torn up, but she didn't follow through with Doc. Then she washed the make-up off my face. I put on my pajamas and looked in the mirror and saw an eleven-year old child who was damaged beyond repair. As I walked to my room, she said, "That wasn't so bad, was it?" I couldn't answer that this was the worst thing that could happen to a child. A mother selling her eleven-year-old daughter for \$200, and more worried about a dress than the child. I didn't answer her. I rarely spoke to her after that. I went to sleep as soon as I got into bed. I was hoping sleep would provide an escape from reality, but it didn't. For years, I had nightmares about that first night. But eventually that first night was gone. It was buried under the good things in my life.

My vaginal area was sore and swollen so my mother didn't make me go out the next night. I hoped she was having second thoughts and wouldn't make me do this horrible thing. But I was wrong, the following night she arranged for two men, one at 9:00 and one at 10:30. She made up for the lost second night by scheduling two men the next night.

Just before I turned 12, I got my period. At first I thought I was bleeding because of what one of the men had done to me. When I told my mother about it, she explained menstruation and pregnancy to me. Here I was having sex and I didn't even know the facts of life. I asked her if I should make the men wear condoms and she said no because I couldn't get pregnant because I was too young. Yeah – sure. Anyhow that was my life for over a year. As my mother got sicker, she stopped walking me downstairs and I handled the money. I don't think she trusted me to collect, but she had no choice. It was harder and harder for her to walk. She spent all her time on the couch watching T.V., drinking booze, and smoking. She rarely ate. During the day I shopped or took her to the clinic or watched T.V. I was a zombie, just existing, dreading nightfall and the start of my torture. I was in a haze that whole time. I just shut my brain down and acted like a robot.

Most of my clients were men my mother knew or they had heard of me through word of mouth. She would book two or three men a night starting at nightfall. Some of the men came once or twice a week, always at the same time. I suppose they fit me into their work schedules. I had some physical abuse, but not too much. Some guys liked spanking my bottom and then kissing it to make it better. But none of them spanked me as hard as Mr. Shields did back in second grade. I tried not to look closely at the men because I didn't want to recognize them in case I saw them in a store or on the street. I kept wearing that black dress until it was filthy and worn out. I never could get the smell of vomit out of it despite applying all kinds of soaps and lotions. Finally, my mother sent me out with Mrs. Milano to buy another dress that looked like a child's party dress since my perverted clients seemed to like the look. Pink was my favorite color so I got a pink dress with white lace ruffles around the bottom and the sleeves. I got a pink bow for my hair. I looked younger in this outfit than I did in the black dress so my mother put more make-up on me, even a dot for a beauty mark like Marilyn Monroe. What a costume!

I went into a trance as soon as the sex started. I entered la-la land, and when it ended I came back to reality. That was the only way I could cope. I was getting more and more like my

mother – bitter and silent. I only talked to people in the stores, and then it was only to ask how much things cost. I was completely isolated. There was no one who knew what was happening to me, or if they knew, they didn't do anything about it. Mrs. Milano must have known, but she didn't do anything. The other neighbors in the building saw me get into strange cars seven nights a week. They saw the cars go down and park in the alley and then drive out again a little while later. Obviously, Doc knew what my mother was doing to me. He even examined me when he came to check on my mother. I know he gave me antibiotics sometimes so I may have had some sexually transmitted diseases. I was glad Doc never wanted to be a client. I hated it when he touched me to examine me, but I don't think he had any sexual feelings for me. He treated me like a doctor. I don't think he was a pervert.

I still wonder how it was possible for nothing to be done to help me, for no one to rescue me. The schools just let me drop out. They never came to the house to find out why I wasn't going to school. They were glad to be rid of me. I was a forgotten kid. I was a throw-away kid.

There was a Catholic church down the street from our apartment and I wondered if they knew about me and if they did, why they didn't do anything to help. There was no greater sin possible than what my mother did to me. Even the priests who sexually abused kids weren't as bad because they weren't the child's parent, the person who is created to protect their child. I hate to say this, but there was a man who came to see me once a week, every Monday, and I'm pretty sure he was a priest. He wore these black clothes that were different from anything I'd ever seen on anyone. I can't think of who else might have worn a black collarless shirt and shiny black pants. And he had this different kind of smell which I later learned was the smell of incense. Years later the scandals with the priests made me even more certain that the guy in the shiny black pants was a priest who liked screwing children. I've become religious so it's hard for me to accept this, but I know it's a fact. Fortunately, it didn't lessen my love of God; it only increased my hatred for hypocrites who claim to love God while they sin.

Anyhow for over a year I worked while my mother took her time dying. I spent a lot of time nursing her when I wasn't working. I cooked and fed her although she refused to take much food. I cleaned her. I gave her medicines to cut down on the pain, but I think the booze was better at that. She didn't care that she was mixing painkillers and booze. The more the better. But even the combination of both didn't stop the pain that was eating away inside her. I often

think the real pain eating inside her was her evil. This was a woman who sold her child into prostitution without any qualms or feelings of guilt. She was a woman without an ounce of morality in her. Now the evil was eating at her more than the cancer. In a way I was glad she was in pain. I thought that she was being paid back for what she was doing to me. I know that she's burning in Hell for eternity, but I'm glad God punished her while she was alive. I'm glad she suffered unbearable pain. She deserved it. I'm sorry to say such awful things, but that's how I feel.

When the pain got to be too much, she committed suicide by bus. I told you how she somehow found the strength to walk the long block to a busy street where she walked in front of a moving bus. She took the easy way out. Did I mention that she was wearing the sexy dress that she wore when she worked? She got dressed up to die.

I told you before a little about how I felt that day. I really can't tell you how lost and destitute I felt. The only stability I had in my life was gone. My world collapsed. I was crazy with fear when I couldn't find her. Where was she? Had she run away? Had someone kidnapped her? Had the police taken her away? And then fears about myself took over. How could I continue hooking alone? If I didn't hook, who would take care of me? I had \$112 saved. Would that be enough for me to run away? Where would I go? You have to remember that my world was limited to the few blocks around my house, the stores where I shopped, and the hospital where I took my mother. I lived in a huge city, but it was like I lived in a little village. I was totally unaware of the world outside of the few places I knew. I'd never seen Lake Michigan or downtown Chicago or the museums or the airport or the neighborhoods where middle class or rich people lived.

The next day when Mrs. Milano took me to the police station, I was filled with fears for myself. Would they arrest me for prostitution and put me in jail? Would they torture me with lit cigarettes like my mother said they would? When they took me to see my mother's corpse, I was relieved. She was dead. Now I could stop worrying about what happened to her. I had no feelings of sadness for her. I was glad she was gone. But then when the police took me to a children's home and wouldn't let me go home to get my money and my safety pins, I was frantic. I became quite agitated and started yelling incoherently. I was hysterical. Someone gave me a shot and that was the last thing I remembered for a while.

I was in the children's home for a few weeks. That's where they tested me and found that I had a 65 IQ. I still can't believe that no one questioned testing a child who had been forced into prostitution and had just seen her mother's corpse. How could any respectable psychologist not look at what had happened to me and not try to find out who I was? Maybe they used the school records which showed that I was a bad kid who failed fourth grade as further support for me being mentally retarded. This IQ score just supported their biases. Didn't they see the damage that had been done to me by my cruel mother, my social isolation, my failure at school, and most importantly my lack of a childhood? I was never a child who had love, who played, who went to the zoo, or who had a birthday party.

I was given a complete physical examination, the first in my life. I was found to be undernourished and underweight. That was no surprise. I was found to have scabies from living in filth. That was no surprise. I was found to be pregnant. That was a surprise. After I got my period, I asked men to use condoms. A few did; most refused. Since I had just started menstruating, I was irregular so I never knew when I was fertile and even if I knew, I probably wouldn't have done anything about it. I was totally unaware of menstrual cycles and the specifics of reproduction. My mother gave me a two minute lecture on the facts of life, but she gave me an intensive course on how to have sex. When the doctor told me I was pregnant, I looked at my abdomen and saw the swelling. I hadn't noticed it and none of my clients saw it or mentioned it. Even if they saw my swelling belly, they might have thought I was like the kids who starve but still have distended bellies. I probably wouldn't have realized I was pregnant for another month or two had I not been examined. Sometimes I think my mother committed suicide at that time because she realized I was pregnant. She saw my swelling abdomen and realized it was the end of my work and it was the end of her having someone to support her. She might have realized that the police and authorities would soon be involved and she couldn't take that. So maybe it wasn't only the cancer that caused her to commit suicide, it was also my pregnancy.

The news that I was pregnant was shocking, disorienting, overwhelming. How was I going to take care of a baby? I didn't realize that the baby would be taken away from me never to be seen again. I thought I would be sent back to the apartment with a baby and I'd have to find a way to support it. I was totally irrational. And again I experienced the cruelty of people who should NOT have been cruel. After the doctor examined me and found I was pregnant, he said,

“Someone knocked you up, you little bitch. You whore.” I recall how he spoke the word whore – dripping with hatred. Like I willingly chose being a whore, like I willingly chose getting pregnant. And then he said, “I wish I could kill the bastard, but it’s too late for that. I couldn’t make up a reason to do it so we’ll have another fucking bastard that we’ll have to pay for. Another bastard on welfare. There won’t be any more bastards from you in the future. We’ll make sure that doesn’t happen.” Then he slapped me across the face – hard. The cruelest physical abuse I got wasn’t from my clients, but from authority figures – first from my school principal and now from a doctor. Why? Why? What feelings did I bring out in them when they looked at me? Why did they respond with violence?

Based on the 65 IQ, I was judged to be mildly mentally retarded and based on my wild behavior when I entered the children’s home, I was judged to be emotionally disturbed. Who wouldn’t be emotionally disturbed after living the life I lived? And of course, I was judged to be sexually promiscuous based on being pregnant. So those three things got me sent to Southern State School for the Feebleminded – being retarded, being emotionally disturbed, and being pregnant.

You know what bothered me most about this period of my life is that I was blamed. As if I had a choice, and I chose to be a prostitute. I was the victim, but no one saw it that way. I was raped by every man who had sex with me. Years later Dr. Warner helped me see the injustice of this. He was a great psychologist, not because of any professional training, but because of how he was able to cleanse me of guilt. He led me to understand that I was in a situation where I was paralyzed. There was nothing I could do. It wasn’t my fault that I was a prostitute. It was my mother’s, but more importantly, it was society’s fault for not doing anything for me. People knew, and refused to do anything. Society turned its back on me. When I think of America, I think of this great nation that cares for its citizens, even the least of them. That wasn’t the America I lived in back in 1963. And I’m not so sure if that’s the America of today.

All these years, I’ve felt guilty about not fighting against child prostitution. With my experience, I should be an activist fighting this plague. I should have made it a cause in my life, but that would have meant exposing my past, and I just can’t do that. It’s too demeaning; it’s too humiliating; it’s too painful. I can’t relive those memories. Most people think of child prostitution in foreign countries like Thailand and Ukraine, but it’s here in America too. It’s our

dirty little secret, much like it was when I was a child, but it's also different. There are pimps who specialize in young girls now. My pimp was my mother. I saw the term "survival sex" on line and I think it applied to me. I had to sell myself to survive. And now there's the internet and pornography which is totally out of control. I can't begin to conceptualize the sexual abuse of young children, especially babies, that's on the internet. Just thinking about it makes me crazy. I always wanted to see the men who bought me arrested and sent to jail. Today I would like to see harsher punishments. I would like to see the death penalty for child sexual abusers and pornographers. These are people who gave up their right to live when they committed the worst possible crime, maybe worse than murder. I've always considered myself a political liberal, except when it comes to child rapists and pornographers. I don't know your views on the death penalty and your experiences with this issue when you were a lawyer, but when you've lived through this, it's hard to show any mercy to these savages. I try to do a little something for the fight against child prostitution by donating to charities fighting against it, but that's not enough. I should be out there on the front lines fighting it, but I just can't do it emotionally. I can't relive those memories, even today after nearly 50 years.

My life as a prostitute made me hate sex and vow never to have sex with a man again. Years later I met my Charlie who showed me that sex is a beautiful act of love of commitment between two people who love each other. The sex I had as a prostitute was not really sex. It was rape. It was sexual abuse.

Chapter 5

Pregnant

I was transferred from the children's home in Chicago to Southern State School for the Feeble-minded in downstate Illinois. I didn't know where I was going. No one told me, and I never asked. I think my mind was totally shut down when I was in the children's home and when I first arrived at Southern. I was so overwhelmed with what had happened and not knowing where I was that I stopped thinking. I just existed. I ate. I slept. I went to the bathroom. I

operated on automatic. It was about a week before I found out the name of the place I was at. I thought I was in a hospital, but when I realized all the people were retarded, I asked an attendant what kind of place I was at. She said I was in an institution – Southern State School for the Feeble-minded. When I heard the word school, I thought I might have another chance at getting an education. I asked where the school was. She laughed, and said there was no school. My momentary dream of getting an education was quickly squashed. When I became aware of the people at Southern, I was certain I was in a “nuthouse.” I didn’t understand what an institution was. I just thought I was in a jail with crazy people. I didn’t differentiate retarded people from insane people. To me, they were all the same. And to me, being locked up meant you were in jail.

I traveled to Southern on a train with a matron who never spoke to me. I didn’t pay any attention to the people on the train. I cowered in my seat with my eyes shut tight. Once, the matron took me to the bathroom, and later she gave me a sandwich and milk. I had never been on a train before, but I was too numb to appreciate this new experience. I could have been on a spaceship for all I cared. I had never been out of Chicago before, but I didn’t look out the window. I was going from a crowded, squalid, inner city slum to an institution set in the middle of corn fields. There were more cows than people where I was going. I was as far away from Chicago as possible in both miles and environment. For me, it didn’t matter because there was no one to visit me, but for the residents who had family in Chicago, it made visits almost impossible, and that was the idea. Once placed in Southern, you were placed there forever. In those days, the belief was: out of sight, out of mind. No one wanted to see people who were different so they were stored far away from population centers. It’s like if you didn’t see such people, they didn’t exist. Sure – what wishful thinking!

I’m going to call the human beings who unwillingly lived at Southern - residents. It’s such a nice sounding word, but it’s better than calling them by one of the many labels that have been used for such people. It’s better than calling them inmates, like in a prison, even though that’s what they were because they were in prison. But their only crime was having been born retarded.

I was placed in the hospital ward awaiting the birth of my baby - you. I think they put me there instead of a regular ward because I was undernourished and they wanted to fatten me

up and also to monitor my pregnancy because I was so young. The hospital ward turned out to be a good placement because I was well fed. Not only did I not have enough food at home, I ate junk. I didn't eat meals; I just ate when I was hungry, usually a bag of chips and a candy bar. That's not a good diet for a baby or for a 12 year old girl. So from a nutritional point of view, my being in the hospital ward was good for me and you. And the hospital was clean, oh so wonderfully clean. I felt that at last I was being cleansed inside and out. And I also had rest which was good, and even some moderate exercise. Probably the best reason for me being there was I didn't have to have sex. I don't know how my continued hooking might have affected you, especially in the later stages of the pregnancy. I have a feeling that men would still want to have sex with me even though I was obviously pregnant. There are all kinds of perverts out there – even perverted perverts who like having sex with an emaciated, dirty pregnant child.

After a week or so, I became aware of my surroundings. I walked the halls of the hospital and found the day room. That was the room for recreation, but there wasn't much there, some puzzles with missing pieces, decks of cards with missing cards, broken crayons with partially scribbled coloring books, and comic books with missing pages. I read every comic book over and over until I had them memorized. Remember how important reading was to me because reading was something retarded people couldn't do. Every time I read something, I was affirming that I wasn't retarded. I know that some retarded people like to pass as normal by pretending to read stuff that they really can't read. Years later, I met a retarded woman who carried around a thick copy of *War and Peace* so people would think that she was reading it. I think some people thought I was doing that, but I didn't care. I knew that I could read.

And miraculously God put a Bible in that day room. It was old and battered. I don't know how it got there, or why it was there, but I do know there was divine intervention involved. It wasn't as if people at Southern could read it, so why was it there? Maybe it was there for visitors to the hospital to read while they were seeing a relative. But the whole time I was in the hospital, I never saw a visitor read anything. In fact, I didn't see any visitors. But that Bible was put there for me. It was waiting for me. I really believe that. God put it there to lead me to Him.

Slowly and laboriously, I read every chapter in the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi and every chapter in the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation. It took me several years to finish all the chapters, but I did it, and I have re-read them countless times since then. Of

course, I had lots of trouble reading and understanding a lot of the words and the formal, old-fashioned language, but I got the main idea from most of the sections, especially Psalms, which comforted me then and comfort me now. Even now when I read the Bible every night, I still labor over the interpretation of certain passages. I think God made it hard for us to understand some of the Bible so we would keep thinking about it. I've googled the meaning of some of the passages that I find hard to understand and I've learned I'm not the only one. Over the ages lots of people have pondered the meaning of parts of the Bible and have different interpretations of them. That's why we have so many different religions and sects. For example, the Bible teaches us to turn the other cheek or pacifism, but there's also the opposite in the Bible that tells us of an eye for an eye or vengeance. How do we reconcile these differences? Aren't these contradictions? What do we use to guide our behavior? In war, you need to be guided by an eye for an eye, but in everyday life, if you were guided by an eye for an eye, everyone would be blind.

Not only did reading the Bible stimulate my brain, but more importantly the words of the Bible stimulated my soul. In fact, my soul was born the first time I read that Bible, and with every reading it has been molded and remolded. The Bible was responsible for my birth as a moral human being with free will. When I was living with my mother, I had no opportunity to exercise free will; I was a slave who couldn't make any choices. What I was forced to do was immoral, but I couldn't do anything about it. At Southern, for the first time I was in a situation where I could make choices, and the Bible led me to make the right ones. And even though there are some parts of the Bible that are hard to understand, there are many more that are clear in their message, especially the Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." What more do you need to guide your actions?

I spent a lot of time thinking about God those four months in the hospital. I had never thought about God before I picked up that Bible. If anything, I thought there was no God because if there was, how could He let me live the life I was living with my mother. The word God was only mentioned when people swore. I heard, "God damn it," from everyone. I never heard, "God bless it." But as I spent more time reading the Bible, I came to believe that there was a God. I just didn't understand His plan for me.

I love all the Bible stories, but the ones about Jesus are my favorites. When I first read about Mary having baby Jesus, I thought of myself being pregnant like Mary and that comforted me. I learned to love Jesus. He was pure goodness. That was when I started thinking about whether I could ever be good or would I be evil forever because of what I did. I prayed to Jesus and promised that I would be good if He forgave me my sins. I became obsessed with God's forgiveness, and I eventually came to believe that there was salvation in my future. I became obsessed with forgiving my mother even though I thought she was evil. I kept thinking about how I could find a way of dealing with her, and not just hate her. How could I ask for forgiveness from God, when I couldn't find it in my heart to forgive my own mother no matter what she did to me? And forgiveness is what led Dr. Warner and Charlie to me. So you can see why I've been obsessed with trying to understand forgiveness. It's been a centerpiece of my life.

While I was in the hospital, I got to know a wonderful nurse named Cora Jensen. Of course she turned out to be a real life saver for both of us. She brought us together. She was my fairy godmother. She was the first person at Southern who was nice to me, who treated me like a human being. Other than my kindergarten teacher Miss Ryan and my first grade teacher Miss Dawson, no one had ever been nice to me. Unbelievable, isn't it? In 13 years, only three people were ever nice to me. Cora was this rolly-polly, redneck lady who wasn't really a nurse. I'm not sure she was even an LPN. I don't know if there were any RNs in the hospital. In this case, RN meant real nurses. She had three little kids and her husband was a farm worker so she had to work to help support her family. The only jobs available in the area were on farms or at Southern so the locals had all types of jobs there, even though they weren't qualified for them. Cora was very maternal and maybe that's what attracted me to her. She was a substitute mother figure to me. I asked her to help me read some of the words in the Bible that I couldn't figure out and to explain the meanings of other words. Her reading wasn't much better than mine, but we worked together and she helped me understand a lot. We talked about sin and forgiveness. She told me that if I accepted Jesus, I would be saved and I would go to heaven. I told her I desperately wanted to accept Jesus, but I didn't know what to do. She told me that I would have to go to church to get baptized. I asked her how I could get baptized and go to church when I was locked up in Southern. She said that she'd try to find out if arrangements could be made for me to go to church. I asked her about this three or four times, but she avoided answering me. I think the local preachers didn't think the residents of Southern were worthy of being baptized

and saved. Little did they know, they didn't have to be baptized. God took them to heaven because of their purity. They had no sins in their souls.

I was the only healthy patient in the hospital ward. Although there were many patients in the ward, I had no one to talk to because most of the people were too sick or they had no language or they were dying. So I was pretty lonely in the middle of a room with about 40 people. I was glad that there was a separate room for people with contagious diseases because I didn't want to catch anything and make you sick. Lots of Southern residents had serious health problems so every bed in the hospital was filled. As soon as someone got better or died and there was an empty bed, it was filled. Today some of the serious medical problems, especially for folks with Down Syndrome, can be avoided because surgery can be done for the congenital heart and stomach defects they often have. There was no such surgery then, and even if there was, it wouldn't be used on the retarded. People would look at that as a waste of good medical care. I saw a lot of patients die. I don't know how much medical help was given to these people. I think the minimum probably. Remember this was a storage facility where people were kept until they died, and society saw no reason to keep them alive longer than necessary.

I keep talking about society as if there's a Mr. Society, or Mrs. Society, who makes decisions for all of us. And there is. This Mr. Society is made up of millions and millions of people who share certain beliefs, like it's right to lock retarded people up, and it's right to deny retarded people life-saving medical care, and it's right to sterilize women involuntarily. Because Mr. Society is made up of so many people, it's hard for any one individual to make a difference, but not impossible. Beliefs can be changed starting with the actions of a brave few. Dr. Warner was driven by the need to change society single handedly by performing acts of kindness that made a difference in a few lives – his daughter's and mine. He believed that if enough people did this, Mr. Society could be changed, and he was right. Retarded people are no longer locked up in institutions. Retarded people are no longer denied life-saving medical care. Women are no longer sterilized against their will.

I remember the first time I comforted someone in the hospital. I had been there for a week or so and I was awakened in the middle of the night. I had always been a light sleeper so when I heard moaning, I was startled awake. At first I was scared. I thought it was a ghost. I cowered in my bed and shut my eyes so I wouldn't see the ghost flying around in the air.

Remember I was a 13 year old with 40 sick and dying people in a strange, scary place, and I also wasn't in the best mental health. There were only two night nurses on duty, and they were rarely around. They just sat at their work station and smoked so they were no protection against the ghosts. Then I clearly heard the word, "help," and I realized that the moaning wasn't from a ghost, but from a person. I opened my eyes and located the source. It was coming from a man in a bed down from mine. I lay there listening to him moaning and calling for help. No one came. Finally, I got out of bed and went to him. I just wanted to get him to stop moaning so I could go back to sleep. His eyes were shut. I said, "What can I do to help you? Can I get the nurse?"

He didn't respond. He just kept saying "help" and moaning. Then I touched his arm, put my mouth near his ear so he could hear me better, and asked again "What can I do to help you?" His eyes opened and he looked at me. I saw a change come over his face; it softened. I don't know how else to describe the change. It was as if he saw someone coming to his rescue. As I gently stroked his arm, I felt his muscles relax. I stayed with him until he quieted and fell asleep. I went back to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I was so confused about the emotions I was experiencing. For the first time, I had comforted someone who needed comforting. I felt good about what I had done and I felt good about myself. I fell asleep with a smile on my face.

On other nights when people needed comforting, I was there for them. Most of them were in pain or scared. They needed to know that they weren't alone. I held people's hands, stroked their brows, hummed to them, and whispered that things would be better in the morning. I told them that Jesus loved them. Most of them couldn't understand my words, but they understood my soft tone of voice and they felt the warmth of my touch. I would patiently wait for the transformation on their faces, when they realized someone was caring for them and someone was helping them get through the terrors of the night. It was gratifying to know that I could help other people. I was the one who needed help, but it never came. I found that there was a part of me that was good. This was the first time I realized that I had kindness in me. I was doing something for these people just to make them feel better, and not for any selfish reasons.

Before my time in the hospital ward, the only person I had seen dead was my mother, and that was brutal. Her face was black and blue and bloody, and she had this look of horror frozen onto her features. Maybe she saw the entrance to hell as she died. But in the hospital I saw people pass away from illnesses. There was no brutality in their deaths. There was a natural

transition from life here to life elsewhere. The first time I saw someone die was when I was with a person who had been moaning. I went to this woman's bed and saw a look on her face that I had never seen before. It was the look of life draining from a person's body. I felt that her soul was moving on. I held her hand and told her that Jesus loved her in a special way. I recited the 23rd psalm, or as much of it as I could remember. Then I saw a shaft of light going from this woman's body through the ceiling and then the roof and soaring to the sky until it reached heaven. I was in that shaft of light looking up at the face of God. At night in that hospital ward there was a spirituality that I've never experienced again. It was a place to commune with God. Since then, I've been to many churches, but I've never found the same holiness that I found in that hospital ward. God doesn't just dwell in churches. He dwells where He's needed most. And He was desperately needed in the hospital ward at Southern State School for the Feebleminded. That's where God commanded me to be good to others and that my kindness to others would atone for the sins I had been forced to commit. I've believed that all my life. That by being kind to others I am taking myself closer to heaven and eternal life with Jesus.

I came to view death as a part of being human. It was not something to be feared, but a transition stage from the material to the spiritual. The fact that I was pregnant made death even more meaningful to me. I was experiencing the two opposite ends of being human – birth and death. When I was sitting with a dying person, sometimes I would take the person's hand and place it on my stomach so they could greet you. I know that sounds dumb, but I felt that it was a way of showing God that I understood the progression from birth to death.

The staff found out what I was doing at night when I was alone with the patients in the ward. They were amazed at how I was able to calm people just by touching them. I had no special magic. All I had was the human touch, a caring touch, something these poor people had rarely if ever experienced. They needed to be comforted and I was comforting them. Maybe because they had so little comforting in their lives, they welcomed it, they treasured it, especially because they were sick or dying. Some of the staff thought that my comforting people saved lives. I got this reputation as a special person who did good deeds. I couldn't believe how the staff looked at me – with respect. Something I had never seen in someone else's eyes before. But they also looked at me with curiosity. How could a retarded child have such nurturing feelings? How could a retarded child believe in God?

Once when we were reading the Bible together, Cora asked me, “Mary, why do you help the sick and dying?”

“Because I believe that retarded people are special to God. He made them with purity in their hearts, and we should respect that.”

Then Cora found a passage in Matthew and read, “I tell you the truth. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” She looked into my eyes and said, “Mary, you’re doing God’s work.”

I can still remember the goose bumps I felt. Here was confirmation that I was a good person. That I was loved by God. Southern was a terrible prison, but it was a place where God and I found each other.

Then Cora asked me, “Why are you at Southern if you can read and think and act like a normal person.”

“I’m at Southern because I have a 65 IQ and I’m emotionally disturbed and I’m pregnant.”

Her face saddened, and she said, “The only thing you said that’s true is that you’re pregnant.”

From then on, everyone knew the truth. I wasn’t mentally retarded or crazy. I was a normal who lived in an institution for non-normals. And later I learned that I wasn’t the only one.

During my time in the hospital, I put on weight, not only from you, but from eating well. And I became aware of your movements. I probably felt some movement before I was in the hospital, but I didn’t know what it was. I probably thought it was gas or a cramp. I can still recall the first time you kicked me hard. I thought I was going into labor and it scared me because I knew it was too early. I was totally ignorant of what was involved in having a baby. I asked Cora if the movement I felt meant there was a problem. She laughed, and said that it was good when a baby moved. It showed that the baby was healthy. After that, I eagerly awaited your every movement. I got into the habit of caressing my belly as I told you how much I loved you. Maybe

you sensed my love for you. Maybe you sensed the good person I was becoming. Maybe whatever transformation that took place in me while I was pregnant with you also transformed you into the wonderful person you eventually became.

Another time when I was talking with Cora, I asked her the question that I had tried not to deal with. “What will happen to my baby after it’s born?”

She took my hand and told me the brutal truth. “The baby will be taken away for adoption and you’ll never see it. This is for the best because it wouldn’t be a good idea if the baby was raised at Southern and you can’t be released with a baby. You’re too young and you have no way of supporting yourself. ”

I cried bitterly. I had fallen in love with you even though I didn’t know anything about you. You were a life growing inside me. You were a part of me. I knew adoption was best, but it was painful, oh so overwhelmingly painful. At last, I loved another human being and that human being was going to be taken away from me.

Then I asked another question I probably shouldn’t have asked, especially in my state of mind then. “How long will I be at Southern?”

She tried to avoid the question. “It depends on a lot of things. I can’t really tell you.”

I kept pushing for specifics. “Like what?”

“I don’t know. You might be released when you turn 21 if they could find a situation where you would be taken care of. Or, you might live at Southern for the rest of your life.”

“Does that mean that someday I’ll die here and there’ll be no one to comfort me? They’ll be no Mary stroking me and humming to me in the middle of the night?”

She sobbed, and quickly walked away unable to continue our conversation. I was stunned to think that someday I might be one of the patients who would die in the hospital, but there would be no Mary Reilly to lead me to heaven. And I wasn’t sure I was going to heaven because of the life I had led. I wasn’t sure that God would forgive me for all my sins by the time I died. He didn’t have to forgive the retarded people at Southern who died because they were sinless. I am not one of these people who believe that humans are born with original sin. I do not

believe that we have the sins of Adam and Eve on our heads. Everyone is born sinless, but we are also born with the potential to commit sins and the sins that we commit willfully are what God looks at to decide if we go to heaven or hell. God gave us free will and judges us based on the decisions we make. Years later, Dr. Warner and I talked about this a lot especially in relation to evil and whether some people are born evil. Was my mother born evil? Was Jack Miller born evil? Were they condemned to hell when they were born? Or could they have fought the evil in them and gotten to heaven? If you're born with evil in your heart, can you overcome it? I have to believe that. I have to believe that everyone is capable of living an honorable, good life.

The next time we had a chat, I again did something I shouldn't have, I told Cora about my life as a prostitute. "Will this affect my baby in any way? Will the baby have a terrible disease or health problems because of my past?"

"If your past affected the baby, it would have come out already. We would have seen something by now."

Although that wasn't true, I chose to believe it. I couldn't spend the rest of my pregnancy plagued with guilt about my past and how it might harm you. After I told her about my past, she looked at me differently. Her look of respect was mixed with a look of disgust. I hated to tell her, but I had to know if my sins as a prostitute would be on your head. Over the years, I've read and re-read Exodus in the Old Testament where the concept of the sins of the father being carried on for three and four generations is written, but I can't accept that. If that was the case, all the Germans whose fathers were Nazis would have their sins on their heads, and I don't believe they do.

After I finished telling her about my life, she told me about Mary Magdalene and how she was a prostitute and Jesus cleansed her of her sins and she became His disciple. We got out the Bible and found sections about her in Luke and Mark. I've re-read these sections for many years sure that Jesus would cleanse me as He cleansed Mary Magdalene of seven demons. And then I realized I was fated to be named Mary because I was like Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary. I had never thought much about my name before, but now I treasured it. My name tied me to the two great women of the Bible.

I knew that by sharing my past with Cora, everyone at Southern would find out. And sure enough they did. The male attendants changed how they looked at me. Now they leered at me as if they wanted to screw me – this 13 year old very pregnant child. I really didn't think Cora would tell everyone, but there was no privacy at Southern. But I'm just talking about the staff and the other normals like me. The retarded people didn't understand and they accepted me for what I had to offer - kindness and comfort. Maybe that was another reason that God accepted them into heaven. They didn't judge others; they left that up to God.

Cora said something that caused me to think that probably the best thing to happen was me being at Southern to have you. She said that it was a good thing that I wasn't pregnant when I was at home. She was right. What if my mother hadn't gotten sick and I became a prostitute anyhow. I would have been hooking until I became too pregnant to work. What would I have done then? Where would I have had you? Would she have taken me to the hospital? What kind of health would you have had if I lived at home not eating an adequate diet and living in filth and possibly having a sexually-transmitted disease that you would have gotten? So Cora was probably right. My mother dying and my being taken care of at Southern probably made it possible for you to be healthy and for me to have a normal birth. You would have been taken away from me anyhow. There was no way I could go to a hospital and have you and take you home. Who knows what your future would have been like if I hadn't gone to Southern? I know you wouldn't have had a blessed life like you've had. When I think about Southern, I can't help but think about some of the good things that happened because I was there. And your healthy birth and being adopted by marvelous parents were certainly among the best.

Everything went well during the last four months of my pregnancy and then I went into labor. I recall that first labor pain. It hurt more than anything I had ever experienced – even my first sexual experience. I hadn't been prepared for what would happen to me. I was totally ignorant of labor and the birth process. I screamed wildly as I was taken to an operating room and a gas mask was placed over my face. That's the last memory I have – that gas mask being lowered to my face. I was asleep during the delivery, and when I woke up and asked if I had a boy or a girl, I was told I would never know and that you were taken away for adoption and that I should forget I ever had a baby. I sobbed uncontrollably. I wanted to say good-bye to you before you were taken from me. I wanted to see if you were a girl or a boy. I wanted to see if you had

red hair. I was sure I would never find out, but God looked down on me and 46 years later gave me the answers to all these questions. I don't know where God was the first 13 years of my life, but once He entered my life when I went to Southern, good things started to happen to me.

There was something that happened during the delivery that I didn't learn about until I had a physical exam years later. I had my tubes tied; I was sterilized. No one told me and no one asked my permission, although legally they didn't have to get my permission since I was a ward of the state who had been ruled incompetent when I was admitted to Southern. That hateful doctor who examined me at the children's home knew what was going to happen to me. He said, "We'll make sure you don't have any more bastards in the future." I had no idea what he was predicting. He knew. Oh, he knew. He knew that I was in for a much harsher punishment than a slap in the face. I was going to get the worst punishment a woman can have – being prevented from having a baby, being prevented from being part of the miracle of life.

When I did find out, I had Dr. Warner there to help me understand the significance of being sterilized. He wanted me to lodge a law suit against the state for involuntary sterilization. But I didn't want the world to know about my past, and I especially didn't want the world to know I'd been sterilized. I felt shame which I shouldn't have. I should have felt outrage at being violated, but that took a while to develop. I was always more concerned about hiding my past than doing anything that would make me stand out and let the world know I had been a child prostitute who was really an unwilling sex slave.

They kept me in the hospital for two weeks to recuperate. Again, they didn't prepare me for the aftermath of having a baby. I didn't understand why I was bleeding so heavily and why my breasts were leaking milk and why they became painful when the milk dried up. Cora knew the sorrow I was experiencing at having my baby taken away from me. She told me that she had three children, and she knew how much a woman grows to love her baby while she's pregnant. She said that a mother's love starts as soon as she first feels the baby move, and not when the baby is born. She returned some of the kindness to me that she had seen me give to the people in the hospital ward. She even kissed me on the forehead when I was transferred to the ward for the higher functioning young women. That was my first affectionate kiss from another human being. My skin tingled with warmth.

I had hoped that after I was moved to a ward, Cora would visit me, but she didn't. Maybe she didn't really see me as a friend, or maybe she couldn't get over the fact that I had been a prostitute, or maybe it was too difficult for her to see me lost in the wards of an institution, possibly for the rest of my life. She didn't want to know what happened to me. Would I become violent? Would I become a mute vegetable? But then in 2004, I came back into her life when I returned to Seymour and tracked her down. And then later she was the link that brought us together. When Wendy tried to find me, she talked to people who had worked at Southern and found that Cora Jensen knew me and was still alive and living in Seymour. Cora gave her all the information about me that I had shared with her six years earlier when I visited her. Cora Jensen turned out to be one of my guardian angels. I thank God for how she saved my life when I had you and for how she brought us together.

Chapter 6

Southern State School for the Feeble-minded

You can't possibly understand my life for the eight years I lived at Southern State School for the Feeble-minded without me describing what the institution was like. My memories of my life with my mother are somewhat blurry, maybe because I was so young or because they were so awful that I want to bury them, but my memories of Southern are clear. I don't know why I haven't tried to bury memories from there. Maybe that was the period of my life when I became aware of the world and I started to think. I became an adult at Southern. During my time at Southern, I began to care for other people. I looked inward for the first time and found that I was a good person, a person of value. At first when I got there, I felt like I was a bad person. How could you be anything but a bad person if you were a whore? But then I realized that I wasn't bad. What I did was bad, but I wasn't bad. I was able to separate the evil acts from myself as a person. My reading of the Bible helped me understand this. At first I thought about this by

myself, but when Judy and I became friends, we talked about this together. I went from being an unthinking child to a thinking adult even though I was just a teenager.

Southern was located in Seymour, Illinois, a small town about 200 miles south of Chicago. It was in a rural area surrounded by farms that grew millions of acres of corn. There wasn't much there – a farm supply store, a few restaurants, gas stations, one motel, a small supermarket, and churches. There were more churches than stores, and most were fundamentalist denominations. The people who lived in Seymour were hard-working, uneducated people. Because they were uneducated and insulated from people who were different from themselves, they were bigoted. To them, Jews had horns and black men were violent rapists who lusted after the beautiful white women of Seymour. Yeah – real beauties in Seymour. When there was the great migration of blacks from the South to the North, men with guns waited for trains heading up to Chicago so that blacks wouldn't get off at Seymour. But they saved most of their hatred for the residents of Southern who they considered freaks unworthy of being treated like humans. Since Southern was where most of the jobs in Seymour were, they tried not to show their hatred for the residents too much.

Southern was huge – it was on hundreds of acres just outside of town. There were lots of different buildings made of red brick with towers and spires. It looked like something out of the 1800's. I think that type of architecture is called Gothic. It was like what you'd see in Frankenstein movies. At its peak I think there were 4 or 5,000 residents plus hundreds or maybe even thousands of workers so it was like a small city. It was totally self-sufficient with a power plant, kitchens, a bakery, a laundry, and of course a hospital.

Southern was like a jail because the residents couldn't leave, but it was also different. There were no fences on the outside, and on the inside, the corridors weren't lined with cells, but instead were lined with retarded people sitting on benches or in wheelchairs. They would be looking down into their laps or they would be staring vacantly into space. Some would moan or make guttural noises, but most were silent. At first, I looked at these people, but after a while I didn't. I'm ashamed to admit that I ignored them. They became like wallpaper. But the memory of them came back to impact me years later when I worked in the community. Memories of those people haunted me and I became committed to never letting people I worked with vegetate like that.

Women and men were segregated, but not the babies and children. And even though the adults were kept separated, the higher level residents found ways of getting together, and there were always babies being born. There were babies produced by the residents with other residents, and also the residents with the people who worked there. Most of the sex was consensual, but there was also rape, maybe not a lot, but it was definitely there. Rape played a big part in my life, first when I was a prostitute and then when I was a resident at Southern.

Not only were the residents grouped by sex, they were grouped by age and level of disability. There were infant wards with very severely disabled babies. Some were hydrocephalic. That's water on the brain. They had these huge heads and looked like little monsters, but monsters with empty eyes because they were all severely retarded. The extra spinal fluid had washed away their brain tissue. Today we don't have kids like that because doctors do shunts to channel the extra fluid out of the brain and flush it out of the body. What a miracle of medicine! And there were children who were microcephalic. These kids had tiny pointed heads where it looked like it was impossible to have a brain, and unfortunately they didn't have much of one. Some of the attendants openly called these kids pinheads and the hydrocephalic kids fatheads. They didn't think it mattered that they used this insulting language because the kids didn't understand what they were saying, but it did matter because it showed the disdain they felt toward these people. There were severely twisted spastic children whose legs wrapped around each other in such a way that only a contortionist could imitate. Their arms were held high at shoulder level and their heads were tilted sideways. Most of these kids were severely retarded, but sometimes I'd look into someone's eyes and I'd see something in them. I think some of them were normal kids trapped in those bodies. Can you imagine that? There was no way to find out; there was no way to communicate with them back then. Today there are ways of communicating electronically, and even using eye blinks to send messages. Just think of Stephen Hawking, the brilliant scientist, and how severely physically handicapped he is. He communicates with his computer. He speaks with this spooky electronic voice, but the words he utters are priceless. Anyone who was as physically handicapped as Hawking who would have been at Southern would never have had a way to communicate, and his intelligence would have shriveled up and died. Again I'm thankful to live in an age where medicine and technology have helped so many people with disabilities have better lives. But THE most important thing in improving the lives of the handicapped has been the change in the attitude of society. There is

more respect for the disabled now, and recognition that they deserve to live full lives just like everyone else. Acceptance of the disabled is more important than all the medical and technological advances. Things aren't perfect yet, but we're light years ahead of where we were when I was at Southern. A lot of the progress is due to the activism of the disabled community itself. And of course the Special Olympics and the Para Olympics. Seeing people with disabilities perform like we ourselves could never do is inspirational.

Quite a few of the residents had grand mal seizures where they would fall down and shake violently. At first, I was frightened when this happened, but I got used to it, and helped people by making sure that they didn't hit their heads or hurt themselves. Again, thank God for the medical advances in anti-seizure medication. Not only did it help stop the seizures, it prevented people with constant seizures from having whatever intelligence they had reduced because of the damage the seizures did to their brains.

There were also infant wards for the less severely disabled. Most of these babies had Down Syndrome because in those days doctors told parents to institutionalize any baby who was born with a visible handicap. Those poor babies. They were just fed with propped bottles and left in their cribs with no stimulation except for a white ceiling to look up at. The brain grows fastest in the early years, and yet there was no food for these babies' brains. They were mentally starved to death. Kids with Down Syndrome were called mongoloids. In fact, they still are. We called them mongoloids because their slanted eyes made them look Asian. Today they're said to have Down Syndrome, named after Dr. Down who first identified the syndrome. And modern science found that Down Syndrome is caused by an extra chromosome. That's why they look alike.

And then there were the children's wards where many of the kids had Down Syndrome because the more severely disabled infants died out and because more kids were institutionalized as they got older. The kids with Down Syndrome had little or no speech, and whatever speech they had was almost impossible to understand. Most eventually learned to walk and some to even feed and dress themselves. There was no school for these kids so even if they could learn, there was no one to teach them. Today, there's intensive preschool education and good special education in the schools, and they all achieve at a much higher level than kids in institutions. They live successfully in the community and hold jobs. That was an impossible thought in the

days when I was at Southern. But the one thing many of these kids had was sweet personalities. Even in a cruel institutional setting, their sweetness came through. They smiled a lot and wanted to hug, but there wasn't anyone willing to hug back so eventually their needs for love and affection weren't met and they lessened, but they never completely died.

There were separate wards for young, middle-aged, and older residents. The young and middle-aged residents were separated into different wards for the milder and the more severely disabled. There weren't too many residents who survived into old age because they died from medical problems that were part of their disability or inadequate medical care. Those who did survive were often like the infants on the baby ward because they had dementia added to their disability. They were bed-ridden, and everyone just waited for them to die.

Many of the people in the young persons' wards were mildly retarded. Like me, they were institutionalized when they were adolescents because of social or legal problems. Today these people would be in public schools and integrated into regular education classes, but in those days they were placed in institutions because they were from poor or dysfunctional homes that couldn't handle them, or they had no homes. There were quite a few mildly retarded people at Southern who wouldn't even be considered retarded today because their diagnosis was based solely on having a low IQ score even though they had normal self help and social skills. These were people who could repair motors or lay bricks or plant trees, but couldn't read or write or do math. Their talents helped Southern run efficiently and cheaply since residents didn't have to be paid.

And then there were people like Jennifer who was a few beds down from me during my third year at Southern. Jennifer was at Southern because her family didn't want her, and they didn't want to pay for her to be in a private institution which they could well afford. Yes, it was possible to just dump kids at Southern. It was like the town dump, only for humans who were considered useless trash. Jennifer's family wanted her at Southern because it was free and open to all residents of Illinois. Jennifer was placed at Southern when she was 16. Before that, she'd been in a high school special education class for mildly disabled kids. Jennifer seethed with anger and aggression, probably as a result of being hated and rejected by her family. She scowled and yelled at people who tried to interact with her. No one, not even me, was able to get close to her. She had mild cerebral palsy and was marginally retarded. Maybe she wasn't even retarded

at all because she had great language, especially for swear words. I heard more swear words from her than I heard on the streets of Chicago. She would have been pretty, but she had severe acne. And she had a great figure which was apparent despite her mild cerebral palsy.

Jennifer was a throw-away kid. Her father despised her. He beat her, but when she told her special ed teacher and a counselor and even the principal, no one believed her. When she showed her teacher the bruises from his beatings, her teacher asked the father about them. He said they were from falls. Everyone believed the father, especially because he was a wealthy businessman. Such a man wouldn't beat his handicapped daughter. Oh, no. Not him. One day he drove Jennifer to school and when she was having trouble getting out of the backseat of a two-door car, he hit her with a wooden hanger. She was stuck and he kept hitting her and screaming for her to get out because he was late for work. He was in a rage and didn't stop hitting her until a teacher took the hanger away from him. At last social services got involved. They tried to work with the family, but the family didn't want to be worked with. They wanted her out. So Jennifer was encouraged to run away, maybe they even threw her out. Her parents didn't report her missing, but the police found her walking the streets in a town 100 miles from Chicago. She had hitched a ride from someone, and no one knew if anything happened on that ride. At last, her father got his wish. Jennifer was placed at Southern State and, of course, the family never saw her again. I didn't get to know Jennifer because after she was there for about two months, she ran away. I don't know how she got out, but she was smart enough to find a way. She was found walking on a highway and brought back. Although she was watched carefully after that, she still managed to escape again. This time when she was brought back, she was placed in a locked ward. I never heard about Jennifer again. My heart breaks when I think of her. Sometimes I think if I had known her better, I could have helped her. Just imagine - Jennifer locked away for the rest of her life. If that had happened to me, I would have lost my mind. Maybe that's what happened to her. Oh my heart breaks just thinking about Jennifer.

Violent residents were placed in locked wards. I never found out how many of those wards there were. I didn't want to know. We were afraid to have anything to do with these people because they were dangerous. I remember going to the building where the locked wards were. I don't know why I was there. I was with my friend Judy. I think she wanted to show me all of Southern. I looked in the window of a locked door at a large room where naked men were

running around. Some of them were throwing feces. They were screaming wildly. And some of them were banging their heads against the walls until blood came gushing out. I wanted to rush into the room and hold them to stop them from hurting themselves. These were the people that the public thought were retarded, but they weren't. I think today some of those people might be called autistic. In those days autism was just being recognized as a disability. There were some wealthy people who had autistic kids and wrote books about them, like Josh Greenfeld's "*A Child Called Noah*." People who had money kept their autistic kids at home and placed them in private schools, but people who didn't have money put their autistic kids in institutions and some ended up on the wards for the violent residents. Today we have all these kids with mild disabilities who are called autistic, but in my days at Southern and afterwards working with deinstitutionalized retarded people in the community, only people who didn't talk and didn't interact socially were labeled as autistic.

I think a number of the violent people at Southern were mentally ill as well as being retarded or maybe they were just mentally ill and got placed at Southern instead of an institution for the mentally ill. These were the days before medication so there was no way of controlling these people. The reason the men were naked was because they kept taking their clothes off or because they smeared themselves with their feces. The attendants hosed them down to clean them. It was like watching animals being cleaned at the zoo. I know they were hit by the attendants, but how else were they to control them? You couldn't reason with them. You couldn't try to restrain them gently. I'm not trying to defend the attendants or their use of violence, believe me I'm not. But I don't know what I would have done if I had to work with violent people like them. I couldn't control them by talking to them or touching them gently. Today many people like this are controlled by medication. Again, thanks to modern medicine for tranquilizers and anti-psychotic drugs. They sure have made people more manageable, even though some people turn into zombies. At least they're not hurting themselves or other people.

So this was my world for eight years. Sometimes I think of what my life would have been like if I hadn't been released. Or if I had been placed there 20 or 30 years earlier, I probably would have lived my whole life there. What would have become of me? I can't begin to imagine, but whatever, it would have been tragic. There would have been no happy ending to my life. In fact, I might have killed myself as the only means of escape. Who knows? Who knows?

Back to Southern. I was placed in a ward with mildly handicapped young women. My new home was a long room with 30 beds lined up on each side - 60 young females lying in narrow beds squashed together. There were huge windows which let in the sunlight and gave the room a cheery feel on sunny days. But there were no shades so they showed the total darkness that blanketed Southern as soon as night fell. At night, the outside was scary, especially if there was a storm and the wind was howling. Being in a ward with 60 women was somehow comforting, not that they could protect me from the dangers I imagined lurking outside.

I was outfitted in the Southern State School uniform. They gave me a new pair of brown lace-up oxfords with these stubby little heels. Why lace-ups when few of the women could tie laces? I don't know. Of course, there was no Velcro then. And two pairs of socks, two pairs of underpants, two bras that were too large for my breasts which had quickly shrunk when my milk dried up, and two dresses that would have fit a woman 20 pounds heavier and six inches taller than me. It's hard to describe those dresses because you would never find them in stores. Well maybe you'd see them in stores in Seymour where years later I actually did see some women wearing dresses similar to the Southern State uniform. They were made of stiff cotton when they were new, but quickly became thread-bare after repeated washings. They had buttons going down the front and they had designs on them. You could imagine a 90 year wearing a dress like that, not a 13 year old. Lower level women wore these gray sack-like dresses that were pulled over their heads. It would take too long for an attendant to button dresses if they had dresses like mine. Then I had an itchy sweater for cool weather. I wore that a lot because the rooms were cold, maybe because they were so big and had high ceilings and maybe because they didn't provide much heat. That sweater became ratty after a few years, but it was never replaced. Judy knitted me a beautiful sweater, but I saved that for special occasions and since there were very few special occasions, I rarely wore it. I still have that sweater in a trunk in my basement. I could never part with it because it was the first nice piece of clothing I ever had. I don't count my party dresses from my years of whoring as nice pieces of clothing. They were my costumes. I had a thin coat because I worked in another building so I had to walk outside. The coat didn't give me much protection, but it was real big and reached my toes and when I put the collar up, it covered my ears so it helped. I looked like a cartoon character with only my head and feet showing. When I was a hooker, I was disguised in a party dress, and now I was disguised as an old lady.

All the higher functioning women wore similar dresses so we had no individuality. Tall, short, fat, skinny – we all wore the same dresses, only the patterns and colors differed. We had no personal possessions to distinguish us – no jewelry or makeup. We were all the same. No individuals. Just retarded people. We were like the herds of animals you see from flyovers in the African wild. There are these herds of zebras that all look alike. Just like us – indistinguishable one from another. We had a comb and soap and shampoo and towels that we kept in our bedside table. We also had kotex pads for when we got our period. I had to help a lot of the girls on the ward when they got their periods. They had trouble cleaning themselves and putting on their kotex belt and hooking the kotex pad onto it. You probably don't know about that since today women use tampons, but years ago before tampons, having your period was a mess, especially if you didn't have the coordination to put the pads into the hooks. I remember getting my hands dirty with menstrual blood from the girls who couldn't manage themselves, but believe it or not, I didn't mind. Remember, I was used to cleaning up blood from nursing my mother.

A few of the girls had some personal items, mostly dolls. These were propped up on their pillows waiting to be tightly hugged at night. At first, I thought that the girls got the dolls from family members, but later I learned that they got them when they had a baby. These dolls were substitutes for babies that were taken away from them. Before I had you, the nurses used to give women dolls when they were discharged from the hospital. I've never decided how I felt about this. I would have liked to have had a doll to hug as a reminder of you, but then again, that might have been a constant, cruel reminder of my loss. The nurses stopped doing this because over the eight years I was at Southern, there were three girls who returned from the hospital after having babies and they didn't have any dolls. Like me, they only brought back the sorrow of having their babies stolen from them.

There was no need for money at Southern even if we could get some because there was nothing to buy. There was no canteen. And although many of us worked someplace in the institution, we were never paid. It was just expected that we would work, just like slaves. The normals and the mildly retarded residents staffed the institution. And working wasn't bad because it kept us from being bored. I would have hated to just sit staring into space like the lower level women who were thought to be too retarded to work. And if we had any money or

anything of value, it would have been stolen. Not by the residents, but by the attendants. They were like vultures always looking for something to take.

Let me tell you about the attendants. They were uneducated local hillbillies. The majority treated the residents as if they were animals. They weren't cruel, and in most cases didn't physically harm the residents; they just looked through them. They didn't see them as people, as individuals. They didn't talk to them unless they had to, and often this was a harshly spoken order to do something or not do something. There were a few attendants though who were dangerous and brutal. They mostly worked with the violent residents. Who else would want to work in conditions where they had feces thrown at them and where they were physically attacked? They're the reason I went back to carrying safety pins for protection. And there were a few attendants who were nice, like Cora Jensen. They were especially nice to normals. Maybe because they realized that we weren't too different from them. In fact, I was probably a better reader than most of the workers there.

We showered once a week so I washed thoroughly every morning. I felt cleaner than at home, but still not as clean as I wanted to be. Our hair was cut short monthly to avoid lice and to make it easier to wash. The girls had institutional haircuts with bangs across their foreheads. It looked like a barber put a bowl over their heads. Again, this made everyone look alike. Because of my curly red hair, I looked different. I couldn't have bangs because my hair wouldn't stay flat. I stood out because of my hair color and my different hair style. But there were times when even I looked like everyone else, and that was when they found lice and shaved everyone's head. How ugly we all looked!

Remarkably, we were fairly bug-free, except for the occasional outbreaks of lice. Maybe because the ward was kept clean. The floors were washed everyday and the sheets changed weekly. This was done by the higher level girls who were trained to clean, and they did a great job. There was a heavy, almost suffocating smell of disinfectant everywhere. There was constant concern about contagious diseases so everything was disinfected. Sometimes I thought the food was disinfected. I can understand the need to disinfect everything because when one person got a cold, almost all the rest of us got it. We slept inches from each other so it was easy for the germs to jump from bed to bed. When the flu hit, it hit hard. Many of the residents had poor immune systems related to their disabilities. There were always people dying of the flu. I hated when the

stomach flu went around because the toilets were always full and they were always clogging up and overflowing. Oh by the way, there were no stalls in the toilets. They were open so there was no privacy when we went to the bathroom or when we showered. The showers had these short walls that came up to our knees to prevent the water from getting out of the shower, not for privacy. That was one of the most dehumanizing parts of being at Southern - the total lack of privacy. It was like being an animal in a cage at the zoo. You could always be observed.

All the girls in my ward were ambulatory so we went to the cafeteria for our meals except for the girls who worked in the cafeteria, and there were lots who did. They prepared the food in the kitchens and washed dishes, pots, everything. I remember seeing Ethel, a girl from my ward, getting trained to dry trays. The trays came dripping wet out of this automatic washer, and Ethel was being trained to wipe them with one sweeping motion. The first day I saw her she wiped different sections of the tray taking a long time on each. A few days later I saw that she had mastered the art of tray wiping with one sweeping motion. Whoever said that the retarded can't learn never saw the look of satisfaction on Ethel's face as she worked quickly to keep up with the automatic tray washer.

Now let me describe the 58 residents of my ward who were retarded. Why 58? There was another normal, Judy. Because of the sameness in clothing and haircuts, it was hard to tell the difference between the girls, but I vowed to learn each of their names and a little about them. I don't know why I was interested in them. Maybe because no one else was. Maybe because I'm an outgoing person who likes mostly everybody. I never got to show my outgoingness when I lived in Chicago. Other than my clients and a few neighbors, there were few people in my life. Now there were loads of people in my life. It was hard to learn everyone's names at first, but eventually I did. To help me remember, I grouped the women by hair color, size, bed location, and personality. As I learned their names, I called them by their names when we sat together at the cafeteria table or when I was near them in the day room. And I taught them to greet me. I'd say, "Hi Helen." Then I'd point to me and say, "Say hi Mary." And with time, most of them did. I also taught them to smile when they greeted me, and later to smile and greet each other. I wanted the girls to become individuals to me and to each other. And for most of them, this worked. At the end of my eight years at Southern, many of the girls were the same ones who I started with so I knew them well. Not only did I know their names, I knew their likes, their

dislikes, and their fears. Over my eight years at Southern, there were three girls who died and nine who were transferred to a lower functioning or a locked ward. No one was released. Once you were placed at Southern, you were there forever until deinstitutionalization came along. New girls were added for the ones who were gone, and we accepted them like they were new members of our family.

Over the years, I learned to give the girls presents, especially if they were having a hard time for some reason. I drew a picture and gave it to a girl, like a Hallmark greeting card. On the picture, I'd write the girl's name and then I'd sign it "Love Mary." I especially remember Carol after she came back from the hospital empty handed after having a baby. No Hallmark greeting card could have helped her cope with what she was going through. She was totally devastated, and of course, I understood how she felt. I spent a lot of time hugging her. I think my words consoled me as much as they did her. I had forgotten about you, but when I saw Carol's face, I was filled with memories of how I felt after you were taken away from me.

After my first year there, I started teaching some of the higher functioning girls. I don't know what motivated me to do this. Maybe I wanted these girls to share my love of reading in their own limited way. I'd write their names on paper and teach them to read and write each letter. I wanted them to experience joy like I felt when I wrote my name in first grade. I think all the girls were eventually able to read and write their names. I taught some of them to read words like *dog* or *cat* for a picture I'd drawn. I was able to teach some of the girls to read simple sentences that I wrote, like "*I am a girl.*" And there were two girls who I taught to read quite well. I think they probably learned to read at the second grade level after a few years. I taught the girls some math too. One girl learned to count to 100 and three others got through most of the basic addition and subtraction facts. Just think of what these girls would have been capable of if they had a real teacher and if they lived in the outside world. The girls looked forward to when we had school. I loved playing the part of the teacher, acting how a teacher should act, and not the way some of my former teachers acted. I felt like I was playing school like I did when I was in first and second grade back in Chicago, but now I wasn't playing. I was teaching real students. I felt proud when a girl read a new word or got the answer to a math fact right for the first time. The look of accomplishment on their faces was like being paid a million dollars.

I also taught the girls to walk differently. Judy never noticed what I called the retarded walk of many of the girls in our ward. It was a slow walk where the girl bent over and looked down and shuffled her feet. I think a lot of the girls walked like this because they imitated others who walked like this. It was the expected way of walking. I made the girls stand straight and walk faster like they had a destination to go to, even if they didn't. Judy laughed at me for doing this. I was like a soldier training other soldiers to march in a parade, but after a while she saw the difference. She said that the girls looked less retarded, and she was right.

I also made the girls talk more. I think a lot of the girls were capable of fairly good communication skills, but because they didn't use them, they never developed them fully or they lost them. But I was able to get them back or teach them to talk more. Over time, I saw real improvement in my girls. We started to show affection. We hugged each other and held hands. The human contact transformed the girls. Some of them acted like robots before, but when they learned something new or touched another person, they were changed. They showed pride and satisfaction with themselves, emotions that they hadn't experienced before. I had Judy help me with the teaching, and we did all this during the two hours after supper while we were in the day room, except when there was a T.V. program we wanted to watch. Fortunately, no one wanted to watch wrestling which was on T.V. a lot of the time so we had lots of time for teaching.

You probably ask yourself why I did this. I ask myself that too. I was fighting Southern State the only way I knew how, and that was by making each and every girl a unique individual. I was treating them with respect which they were entitled to as human beings, as children of God. I was treating them in the way that I wanted to be treated. It was when I started living my life by the Golden Rule, something I've tried to do ever since.

Let me tell you about what it was like when I was transferred from the hospital to the ward after having you. I was disoriented from being pregnant, having a baby, and having my baby stolen from me. Although Judy was an angel who was trying to help me adjust to Southern, she was at work most of the time. I spent my days laying around, staring into space. After a few weeks, I was given a job, and that was a life saver. I now had a reason to get up every morning. Mr. Henderson, who was in charge of placing residents on different jobs in the institution, came to see me. He heard that I'd comforted sick and dying people when I was in the hospital ward so he decided to have me help in the infant ward with the severely handicapped babies. There

weren't many residents who wanted to work there or who could work there. A lot of people were afraid of the severely handicapped babies, but I wasn't. I don't know why people were afraid of them – they were totally helpless. They were grotesque to look at and maybe people secretly thought that, “Except for the grace of God, there go I.”

My job was to do the dirty work – change diapers and clean vomit and drool. This didn't bother me because I had cleaned up my mother's messes for over a year. After a while, they let me wash the babies and change their clothes. The very best thing they let me do was feed bottles to the babies. After I cleaned or fed someone, I always kissed them on the forehead. I didn't know if they would respond to my touch, but I knew that a kiss would get through, and it did because my babies seemed calmer after I was with them. I'm sure these babies had never been kissed before, but they responded because it is in our DNA to respond to affection. We need it as much as we need air and water and food. Even though the nurses and attendants on the baby ward complimented me on how I treated the babies, they didn't change how they treated them. They continued to treat them as inanimate objects. I'll never understand why they couldn't show a trace of affection or respect for those human beings.

I worked seven days a week in the baby ward, usually for eight hours, but I always had enough time for my meals which I ate in the cafeteria with Judy and some other girls from our ward. Our meal times were like lunch tables in a high school. We talked about what happened at work and we gossiped. “Did you see that Charlotte dyed her hair? What a color. It's like an orange... Did you hear that we're going to get muffins for breakfast on Sundays?... Did you hear about that cute new attendant on the older men's ward? He looks like Matt Dillon on *Gunsmoke*.”

I started to realize what the outside world was like when a T.V. was added to the day room. Everyone looked forward to the night *I Love Lucy* was on. For one half hour, our humorless lives were filled with hilarity. It was so therapeutic to laugh at crazy Lucy stuffing her face with candy or stomping on grapes to make wine. And then there was *The Donna Reed Show* where a beautiful mother had a perfect family which was something none of us had ever experienced. The attendants let us stay up late on Saturday nights to watch the best program of all - *The Hit Parade*. We had our own sock hop and clumsily danced with each other. I remember feeling ga-ga over Snooky Lanson, the guy who crooned the love songs, and someday

I wanted to have a white, sheer blouse like Dorothy Collins, the strangely prim singer of love songs. It's funny how I vividly remember those people who nobody else probably remembers or even heard of. Everyone criticizes T.V. these days, but to us, it created emotions we couldn't experience any other way. We experienced the joys of laughter and music.

But there was also a down side to T.V. It showed me the life I was missing on the outside and filled me with bitterness. My life was being wasted changing poopy diapers. I began to wonder if I would live the rest of my life at Southern. My daily conversations with God were becoming increasingly passionate pleas to get me out of Southern. I prayed to Him to stop punishing me and set me free and give me a normal life. And He did answer my prayers, but it took a while. God can't be hurried. He has his own timetable.

I've complained bitterly about living at Southern, but again I have to go back to some conversations I had with Dr. Warner after my release when he raised these questions, "What would my life have been like if I hadn't been sent to Southern? What would have happened if I had been sent to a school for delinquents? To survive, I would have become friends with the kids there and they would have become my role models and I would have become like them. I would have learned to live a life filled with violence, anti-social behavior, cruelty, and ugly sex. I might have grown up to be my mother – a professional whore – because that would have been the only thing I knew how to do. Sell sex. And most importantly, I wouldn't have been able to find God and I would never have found the good that I was capable of because the good couldn't come out in that environment. So maybe being sent to Southern was God's way of saving me.

Chapter 7

My Best Friend

Although Southern was a terrible, terrible place, it did give me one great thing in my life – a true friend. Judy was a gift from God, and still is. If you're lucky, you meet someone who

gives meaning and direction to your life. I met two people like that – Charlie and Judy. Judy and I have been friends since the first day we met in 1963. Before that, I'd never had a friend. I'd never had a person I loved. It was love at first sight for Judy and me, and I don't mean romantic love. I mean platonic love of two people who up to that time had no one in their lives to love them and to love back.

I clearly remember that first day I met Judy. I had just been taken from the hospital to the ward, and I was lying in bed totally devastated, thinking that I would probably spend the rest of my life lying in that bed doing nothing, just wasting away. I was thinking that this was worse than being back in Chicago. There I had a chance to escape someday, but here at Southern, there was no chance of escape. And I was doing something I rarely did, I was crying. Tears just kept gushing out of my eyes. So many bad things happened to me in the past and I didn't cry. I didn't cry when I saw my dead mother in the morgue. I didn't cry when that awful doctor examined me and told me I was pregnant. I felt that being in Southern was rock bottom. But then Judy bounced onto the side of my bed. She heard from the grapevine that I was a normal who just had a baby. As I stared at the ceiling through tear-filled eyes, she came into my view. I can still picture that smiling face and her non-matching eyes. She greeted me in a loud voice.

“Hello Mary. As one normal person to another, I'd like to officially welcome you to Southern State School for the Feeble-minded. I'm Judy Smith and I'm going to be your friend. So stop crying and begin living. TA-DA.”

Can you imagine a greeting like that? She must have chattered non-stop for ten minutes.

Suddenly I interrupted her and asked, “Where am I? What is this place? Is it a jail or a nuthouse? Why am I here?”

“You are at Southern State School for the Feeble-minded. It's not a school. It's an institution for people who are retarded. In a way it's a jail, but not for people who commit crimes. It's for people who are retarded. Do you know what retarded means?”

“Yes, and I'm NOT retarded.”

I conjured up memories of some of the retarded people who lived in my neighborhood. They walked the streets with their mouths open and their tongues hanging out and grunting.

There was one boy who was put out on a front step for the day to sit and masturbate. I thought of them as savages. I was nothing like those horrible people. I wasn't retarded. I wasn't crazy.

"I've got to get out of here. Someone made a terrible mistake. I don't belong here."

"You can't get out, and anyway you're a kid and you have no place to go. You're stuck here. There are a lot of bad things about being here, but there are also some good things and one of them is meeting me. I'm not retarded either. We're the two normals in this ward so we're going to stick together."

"Will I be here forever?"

"I hope not. I hope we'll both get out someday and maybe we can be roommates like we are now. Only right now we have 58 other roommates and I don't want to take them with me when I leave."

Mary, I'm going to teach you how to live at Southern. It's really not that bad. There are some nice people here, and you'll find that you can do just about anything if you learn the system. I'll show you where I work and then hopefully you'll get a job that'll be interesting and where you can learn something. I've learned so much in the sewing shop. I'm the best seamstress at Southern and that's saying a lot because there are some pretty good sewers here. I can embroider and knit anything."

She held up her hands and said, "These 10 fingers can work magic. I found my talent, and we'll find what you can do and make you talented too. Do you believe me?"

I said "no," and we both laughed. And then she hugged me. This was a human being who was hugging me. I couldn't believe it. I melted at the human contact. She told me she was so happy that there would be another normal she could talk to. I think from that first moment we met, we both knew we'd be life-long friends, and we are. Judy saved my life that day, and then she saved my life again 13 years later. I firmly believe that God sent Judy to me.

Judy is a miracle when you consider her life. She was 17, four years older than me, and had been born at Southern. Yes, born at Southern! She was born to a retarded mother and a normal man who worked there. That was not uncommon. There was a lot of sexual contact

between the people in the institution, especially in good weather when thick bushes provided privacy. There were even cases of people doing it in large refrigerators. You'd think the cold would slow them down, but it didn't. People, all kinds of people, can be very inventive when their sex drive is calling.

Anyhow Judy was born at Southern, but couldn't be adopted because she was born with two club feet even though she was normal in every other way. There was no medical treatment for her club feet then or if there was, it wasn't going to be given to someone born in an institution for the retarded. So there was no consideration of her being adopted. She's certainly not the only one who was born and raised in an institution. And almost all of the people who are born in an institution for the retarded are normal. All the ones I knew at Southern were normal. If kids were born at the institution and they looked normal, they were given up for adoption. Like you. But if they had some visible handicap like club feet or a cleft lip, they were kept in the institution.

She was named Judy Smith, Judy after Judy Garland because one of the delivery room nurses had just seen *The Wizard of Oz* and loved Judy Garland; and Smith because her father wasn't identified. Judy is sure that the workers at Southern knew who her father was, but he was protected because he was one of them. She didn't know who her mother was. No one would tell her. Whenever we were with older retarded women, I'd see her examining them to see if she resembled any of them, but she never found her mother.

Judy looked normal except for her strange way of walking because of her club feet. She was often mistaken for a worker at Southern, and not a resident. If she wanted to, she could have walked out the front door, and no one would have stopped her. Only she didn't have anywhere to go since she had lived her whole life at Southern.

Judy was rail thin, but muscular and strong. She had thin lips and a small hooked nose. She had clear white skin and straight light brown hair. She had one blue eye and one brown eye which made her unforgettable. When I looked at her, I played a game of looking at one eye for a few seconds and then switching to the other.

You would never guess who raised Judy – 10 higher level retarded women in the young women's ward. After she was born, her crib was placed in the middle of the ward and some of

the women in the ward were given time off of work to mother her. They fed her and cleaned her and played with her. And most importantly, they gave her affection. Like normal women, they had maternal instincts that were being satisfied by baby Judy. She spent much of her first two years being rocked in a rocker as a retarded woman hugged her and sang to her and talked to her. She had 10 mothers who miraculously provided her with the equivalent of one biological mother's nurturing. Some of these women were still around when I was there, and when they saw Judy, they hugged her and chatted like old friends. If it hadn't been for these women, Judy would never have developed into Judy.

When Judy was about six, there was an attendant in the children's ward who took a liking to her and taught her to read and do some math. Being of normal intelligence, Judy had no trouble getting to about third grade reading and math. But Judy had a special talent for sewing and other hand crafts. From the age of 12 until she was deinstitutionalized at 27, she worked in the sewing room as a seamstress making and repairing the clothes the residents wore. She was the best tailor at Southern. She loved creating things with her hands. She knitted and embroidered whenever she was given the opportunity.

When you consider both of our upbringings, it's more surprising that Judy rather than I developed normally. At least I had been in the outside world and I saw what was sorta normal. Judy never had that chance. She was so lucky to have been raised by the retarded women because they gave her affection which is the most important requirement for becoming human. But I can't explain how I became human because I never had affection in my first 13 years of life. Maybe God intervened when I found Him and through His love, I became human. That's the only explanation I can find.

We've talked a lot over the years about how we're both miracles. How was it possible for both of us to become good people? Maybe one of the reasons we've bonded so tightly is because we've overcome unbelievable adversities, and are good people in spite of our experiences. What was it in our genes that made it possible for us to become good people? And what made it possible for Judy to become normal intellectually? Where did she get her language skills and her thinking skills? As Judy says, "I'm a mystery." And the mystery is that she knows that word!

I got to know the meaning of friendship with Judy. We shared every idea that came into our heads. Never had I talked about feelings or past experiences or dreams for the future with anyone. The more we talked, the more I thought about my life, and most importantly I started to dream about a future, a life outside of Southern. She gave me hope and without hope, it's hard to live. You just exist like an animal.

Judy taught me about the city called Southern State School for the Feebleminded and its inhabitants. It really was like a city with its own laws and rules which were made by the powers-that-be. And she showed me the different neighborhoods and ethnic groups. The neighborhoods were the different wards and the ethnic groups were the different levels of residents. There were people who ran the institution, just like a mayor and police. Some of the attendants, especially those in charge acted like they were prison guards, and in a way they were. Some were cruel and they beat people. Just a few, but they did lasting damage.

I'll always remember seeing cruelty for the first time at Southern. There was this woman walking down the hall moaning and clutching her stomach. She was obviously sick. As she walked by this attendant, she vomited. It was this projectile type of vomiting so a little bit of the vomit got on his shoes. He went berserk. He screamed at her, and then grabbed some rags from a nearby cleaning cart and told her to clean his shoes and then wipe the floor. He didn't care that she was sick. As she started to clean his shoes, she doubled over as poop came running down her legs, and of course some of it got on his shoes. The attendant exploded. He screamed profanity at her and slapped her so hard that she fell backwards right into the vomit. He kicked her with the shoe with the vomit on it and then he held her head to the shoe and told her to lick it clean. He was out of control. Two other attendants stopped him. I think he would have beaten her to death if they hadn't pulled him off her. They got a resident to take her back to her ward and another one to clean the floor. After seeing this, I was reminded of a similar situation I experienced when I was in second grade. I recalled Mr. Shields making me wipe up my pee on the floor of his office after he had paddled me. Vicious cruelty was following me. First I experienced it, and now this poor woman experienced it. Of course nothing happened to that attendant. I saw him a few days later. I looked at his shoes. They were shiny. What happened to the sick woman? I don't know, but I do know that how she was degraded by that animal was worse than any physical sickness she had.

Believe it or not, I had practically no contact with the people who ran the institution until Dr. Warner came into my life. I had contact with the people who worked on our ward and with the people I worked with in the baby ward. I didn't want to have contact with anyone else because I didn't know what they would do to me. Interestingly, I didn't see a psychologist until after I left Southern. So there was no opportunity for me to be retested and prove that I didn't have a 65 IQ. But it didn't matter because I wasn't going anywhere no matter what my real IQ was. It didn't matter if my IQ was 165. I was stuck in Southern. I was lost in the masses of residents, and as long as I didn't make any trouble, I was invisible and that was fine with me.

Judy showed me all the buildings and wards. The secret of getting around Southern was to act like you knew where you were going, and then no one questioned you. She took me to the locked back wards and the area with solitary confinement cells. These were horrible, but she wanted me to see the very worst of Southern. She didn't want me to think that everyone at Southern lived as "nicely" as we did, and I say the word nicely with quotation marks. Living in a ward at Southern was horrible, but living in the back wards was pure hell.

There was a woman in my ward named Eunice who was sent to solitary confinement. I didn't know her well. She was in her own world and didn't communicate with anyone much. She scared us because she was always hurting herself and we were afraid she'd hurt us. She had always bitten herself, but her self-mutilation was getting worse. She would bite her arms until they bled. When an attendant tried to stop her, she'd bite the attendant. They put her in a straight jacket for the rest of the day and that calmed her. When this happened again, she was sent to solitary confinement for seven days. When she came back to the ward, she mumbled to herself all the time. She wouldn't talk to any of us. Her self-mutilation got worse when she found a knife. Fortunately it was dull so she couldn't hurt herself much, and when some of the women saw the knife, they took it away. After that she was transferred to one of the wards for the violent residents never to be seen again. She was exiled to the land of the forgotten.

The locked wards were like the old lunatic asylums. The madhouses. I'm sure you know the word bedlam. Well that word comes from the name of a horrible, horrible institution in London. There was total bedlam there and there was total bedlam in the locked wards of Southern. If I ever thought of misbehaving in any way, the memory of those locked wards kept me on-track.

Judy loved to show off her workplace – the sewing room. It was more than her workplace; it was her studio. She was so proud of it and the work she did there. This was where she did her required work, but this was also where she created beautiful things. She was an artist. There were other women who worked there, sewing and repairing the clothes for the thousands of residents at Southern. Although there was an attendant in charge, Judy really was in charge. She handed out the work to the other seamstresses and told them what to do and the schedule to follow. She examined what everyone did to make sure that everything was done right. Some of the other seamstresses were normals, some higher level residents, and some people from town. A resident of Southern State School for the Feebleminded was in charge of 10 seamstresses. Go figure.

The first time Judy took me to the sewing room, she showed me how the sewing machines worked. She took some material and in a minute or two she had a shirt. Her club foot pumped the treadle at high speed and her hands moved the material at different angles to miraculously produce an article of clothing. Then she proudly showed me some of the needlepoint she was working on for the staff. The quality of her workmanship was well-known throughout Southern so she embroidered all kinds of things that the staff wanted for their houses or for gifts. She embroidered pillowcases and table covers which would grace the homes of the staff, where they were probably the prettiest things in the house. She knitted sweaters for staff members who gave her the materials and patterns. When she sewed or knitted, her fingers flew. In fact, they moved so fast, they were a blur. She especially liked knitting sweaters for newborns. She had her pink wool for girls and blue wool for boys. This talent really helped when she was deinstitutionalized. She got a job as a seamstress in a factory, and eventually became a supervisor there. At Southern, she was in charge of 10 women and at Midwest Clothing she was in charge of a 100 women. She has also continued to do embroidering and needlepoint. I have some beautiful pieces she's made for me. And she's made things for everyone in her family, and she has a huge family. A woman who was born and raised in an institution for the retarded. Unbelievable how talent can come out even in that setting. I think she's evidence that God blesses some people and guides them to make a difference in the world. She is one of God's chosen.

We arranged to have our beds placed next to each other, and before we went to sleep each night we shared our dreams for the future. Someday we'd have an apartment together and go on dates and to parties. We'd both work and wear nice clothes to our jobs. We'd wear high heels, even Judy with her club feet. We'd get a pet – a dog for me and a cat for Judy. We created a future together. How important that was for our mental health. Even though we knew we might never get out of Southern, we knew we had to dream. When we talked about getting out of Southern, we knew that we had to use our skills as a way of getting discharged - her skill as a seamstress and mine as a nurse's helper. We knew we had to excel so that someday we could go to the powers-that-be and argue for our release. Little did we know that we would never have to argue for our release. Events out of our control freed us.

Not only did Judy help me dream about a future, she helped me understand my past. Of course, I told her everything about my first 13 years of life. I mentally beat myself up over the slut I was, but Judy kept telling me that it wasn't my fault and I could never blame myself for what I'd done. She blamed my mother. She hated my mother more than I did because she knew more than anyone how important mothers were and she despised Eileen for screwing up my life. She said that she admired me for my goodness. Like Cora Jensen, she saw goodness in me. She marveled at how I, too, had been able to overcome my childhood and develop into a good person. We were a mutual admiration society. We each respected the other for what we had made of ourselves. I don't know how we learned to do this, but I do know that by seeing the goodness in me Judy was able to make me an even better person. I think fondly of our long conversations about life. Two orphans in an institution talking about the meaning of life. That is what college girls do and for us, Southern State School for the Feeble-minded was our college.

I'd told Judy about my using safety pins for protection in the past. She told me that she might start doing the same thing. She said there were unsafe places and dangerous people at Southern, but if you stayed in well-traveled areas and avoided scary people, you could survive safely. But if not, you could be raped. She said that we were especially vulnerable because we were normals, and not bad looking. She even thought that I was pretty. No one ever called me pretty before. Maybe compared to the women at Southern, I was pretty. Really Judy was the pretty one. It was hard to see her beauty in her drab clothes and ugly haircut, but when she got out of Southern, she let her hair grow long and she wore makeup. Her thin, angular body made

anything she wore look stylish. Then her beauty became apparent to everyone, not just me, her biggest fan. I told her that I had swiped a few safety pins on my first visit to the sewing room. I had them pinned to the inside of my dress just in case I ever needed them. After that, she gave me several large pins. They proved life-saving later.

When we met, Judy was 17 and ready for sex. And I mean ready. Her hormones lit her up like a Christmas tree when she saw a guy she was attracted to. Judy flirted with every decent looking guy who might satisfy her needs. In fact, she flirted with any guy even if he was ugly. She flirted with the attendants and the normals and even the higher level residents. The year before I got to Southern, she had had a romantic relationship with a higher level resident, but it never got beyond kissing and petting for two reasons: it was hard to find a private place to have sex and the boy was afraid to have sex.

During her 18th year, Judy had several sexual encounters that finally resulted in her losing her virginity. First there was Tony. He was a normal boy from Chicago who had been placed at Southern because he'd knifed a man during a robbery. His mother was dead and his father was in jail. His grandmother had taken care of him in the past, but didn't want him anymore. So, like me, he ended up at Southern even though he didn't belong there. He prided himself on looking tough and glared at people when he looked at him. He sent the message that he would hurt them if they did something he didn't like. He was scary. Although Tony was only 15, he was experienced at sex and he was interested in Judy. He was dark and muscular and handsome. Judy was smitten.

Tony was given the job as a people mover because he was physically strong. He picked people up and put them in wheelchairs or on stretchers and took them where they had to go and then he picked them up and put them back in bed. Because he was a human delivery man, he got around to many wards at Southern. When he and Judy saw each other, they communicated that they were interested in each other. They talked briefly and arranged to meet in the sewing shop after everyone left. As soon as he entered the room, he attacked her. He pulled his penis out and tried to put it in Judy's mouth. She was not prepared for this so she bit down. He screamed with pain and hit her. She fumbled for the safety pin she had put on her dress, found it, opened it, and tried to stick it in his penis, but instead got his stomach. He screamed as he doubled over in shock. Somehow Judy escaped back to the ward. When we got to talk at dinner, she unloaded a

vivid description of what had happened. Her biggest fear was that Tony would retaliate and harm her in some way. She knew he was dangerous. But she didn't worry for long. He attacked a nurse in the hospital ward and was sent to solitary confinement and then transferred to a jail even though he was only 15. He probably got lost in the prison system for the rest of his life. Maybe he deserved it and maybe he was just a kid who needed sex and didn't know how to get it the right way. It's hard enough being a 15 year old with a sex drive living in the outside world. It's impossible to be a 15 year old with a sex drive living in an institution.

After that, Judy was careful in her selection of potential sex partners. Finally, she found Clarence. What a perfect name for him. He was a local yokel from a farm. He looked like a country bumpkin with straw-like blond hair and freckles and the biggest ears I'd ever seen. When I saw the Dumbo children's book years ago, I thought of Clarence. My Charlie has big ears, but they're nothing compared to Clarence's. He was 20 years old and had worked at Southern for four years. He worked on the loading dock and made deliveries all over the institution. Although he had gone to school up till the 8th grade, he was illiterate. Judy could read and write better than he could. He also talked with a strong country drawl so sometimes it was hard to understand what he was saying. She met him when he made a delivery to the sewing room. After they talked for a while, they arranged to meet in the sewing room after everyone left. As soon as Clarence entered the room, Judy took him to a huge pile of clothes awaiting repair. They laid down and in no time, had intercourse. Judy was elated. At last she had lost her virginity and to a worker who might provide the key to her getting out of Southern. Judy joyfully shared her first sexual experience with me. She vividly described each detail as if I didn't know anything about sex. When I asked her if he used a condom, she said no. I insisted she make him wear one or she would end up like her mother having a child who would be a third generation resident of Southern. Fortunately, Clarence did wear condoms and for the next three months, they had a twice-weekly relationship with each enjoying the sex. Clarence even brought Judy presents. He usually gave her candy and once he gave her a pretty barrette. After three months, Judy told me that she was going to ask Clarence to marry her and get her out of Southern. I warned her that it was too early and that she should continue their relationship for a while until Clarence was convinced that he couldn't live without her. But Judy couldn't wait. At the end of their next time together, Judy asked Clarence to marry her and get her out of Southern. His reaction crushed Judy. First, he laughed at her. He said that he'd never marry a retard, even

though he knew she wasn't retarded. He said that his family would never approve and anyhow there was no way he could get her out of Southern. When Judy and I were together that evening, she sobbed uncontrollably. This was not the strong Judy I knew. This was the Judy who had her first dream of freedom demolished. This was a broken Judy. She said that he only wanted her for sex. I didn't want to say that she only wanted him for sex too, but more than that she was using him to escape from Southern.

Over the rest of the time we were at Southern, Judy had off and on sexual relations with various guys, but they were just to satisfy her sexual needs. She never found a guy she liked. That would happen when she got out of Southern. She always tried to get me interested in finding a guy for sex, but I was totally uninterested in sex. I had found no joy in sex for the year and a half when I was a hooker. I had no intention of ever having sex again. My sex drive was dead, or as I was to learn later, just dormant.

Chapter 8

God and Death

To me, God and death are intertwined because I found God when I first experienced death in the hospital ward at Southern, and then I faced God every time one of my babies died when I worked in the ward for severely handicapped babies. Let me tell you a bit more about my work because that job is responsible for the person I've become. At first, I welcomed having a job, any job, because it filled my days and was something to look forward to. Without a job, I would have sat around with nothing to do, like many of the residents. I would have spent my days sitting in the day room or on the ward or in the corridors, just staring into space. The poor people without jobs had no stimulation so they stagnated or even regressed. If you don't use

whatever intelligence you have, it rots and you get dumber. So many people at Southern eventually became better and better candidates for institutionalization. Believe it or not, in a way Southern State School for the Feebleminded caused mental retardation.

The residents at Southern were put to work, not to stimulate them, but to save the state money since no one was paid. And remember we worked seven days a week, eight hours a day, 56 hours a week so we did more work than one paid 40 hour worker. When I first started in the baby ward, I just did the dirty work. I changed diapers, cleaned up vomit, washed the kids, turned them to relieve their bed sores, changed their clothes, changed their sheets, and disinfected everything in sight. I was a fast, thorough worker and never said no to any task that was given to me. I was a model worker. I smiled all the time and eagerly accepted anything I was told to do. After a while I was given more responsibility, like feeding the babies. They couldn't eat solid food so they had to get all their nutrition from bottles. The nurses wanted me to prop the bottles, but I refused. By that time, I felt comfortable enough in my job that I could stand up to the nurses. We finally worked out a schedule where I fed some of the babies one bottle a day. I couldn't get to all the babies in one day because it took so long to feed a baby just one bottle and because of my other responsibilities. So for about 20 minutes a day some of the babies had human contact. I rocked in a rocker as I fed them and sang or hummed or talked to them. I didn't really know any lullabies so I sang songs I heard on *The Hit Parade*. I sang *Mr. Sandman* and *A Slow Boat to China* and *Getting to Know You*. I avoided Elvis Presley songs, like *Hound Dog*, even though they were the hottest songs of the day. I didn't think the babies cared how high they were ranked on *The Hit Parade*. Most of the time, I just hummed these songs because I couldn't remember the words. Some babies made eye contact with me when I held them, and I know they responded to me. Even those who didn't make eye contact molded their bodies to mine so I know they were responding to me in their own way. There were a few kids who couldn't be held because their heads were too big or they were too twisted so I fed them in their cribs. But even with these kids, I sang to them and gently stroked their hands or their heads as I held their bottle. The nurses were always hurrying me to finish up because I was wasting time. I just ignored them. I think in their hearts they knew I was doing the right thing. Another job I was eventually given was putting salves and medicines on the kids' sores. Most of the kids had diaper rashes or bed sores or eczema that became open, oozing lesions. Sometimes when I touched them, they jumped with pain, and sometimes they cooed at the soothing of the salves.

At first I enjoyed my job because it was something to do. But quickly, it became more than a job. It became a source of gratification because I realized that in my own small way I was helping these babies. I was making their lives just a tiny bit better. I was adding one grain of sand to the beachhead of making the world of Southern State School for the Feeble-minded a better place. And my job became the reason I fell in love with myself because every time I did something for my babies, I did something for myself.

As I became more and more a part of the staff of the baby ward, I was given responsibility for helping the kids when they got sick, and that was a lot of the time. When they had high temperatures, I bathed them or sponged them to cool down their bodies. I learned how to tell if kids were sick by feeling their bodies or by looking at their stools or urine or by just looking at their faces to see if they were showing any changes. Even though they were severely handicapped, they did show changes in facial expressions. You had to look at them carefully to notice. I also learned to interpret their sounds. A lot of them moaned or made guttural sounds all the time. After a while, I learned to differentiate sounds for pain. I would tell the nurses of any changes I saw so they could be followed up by them or a doctor. Sometimes they ignored what I told them, and sometimes they followed through and looked at the kids. They didn't send sick kids to the hospital even if they were contagious. There was a special room next to the nursery where babies were put when they had something contagious, but even this attempt at isolation didn't stop sicknesses from traveling like wildfire from baby to baby. In those days no one wore gloves and no one washed their hands so hands meant to help turned out to be the means for transmitting diseases.

Occasionally, I criticized some of the attendants and even the nurses because they treated the babies roughly, especially when they changed their clothes. I told them that they were hurting them, but they said that they couldn't feel pain. How wrong they were! Every one of those babies felt pain. Although their senses of hearing and seeing were impaired, their sense of touch, their tactile sense, was not. They felt hot, cold, sharp, dull, and pain. But most of all, they keenly sensed the softness of a caressing touch.

Let me tell you about the nurses and the attendants who worked on the baby ward. None of them, not one of them showed any affection toward those babies. They treated them like non-humans. They never really looked at the babies or talked to them. They viewed me as an oddball

because of my treatment of the babies, but I think some of them might have felt a twinge of guilt that they weren't treating them better, but they didn't change. I've thought long and hard about how people who worked with such needy babies didn't respond with more feeling, but I've never come up with an answer. I know they worked at Southern because there were no other jobs available to them, but I don't understand how they couldn't respond to them as humans. I hid my anger when I heard workers talking about their feelings for animals. One nurse took in stray cats, and even slept with them. She risked getting fleas and who knows what else by putting her body close to a mangy, filthy stray cat. How disgusting! She would never think of sleeping with one of the babies who was clean and couldn't scratch her. Another woman took in the runts of pig litters as house pets. She named them and fed them from the table. She loved them as pets until they were full grown when she slaughtered and ate them. She ate her pets! How cannibalistic! One woman wanted to have her dog stuffed when he died so she would always have him with her. She complained about not having enough money to buy her kids new school clothes, but she had enough money to stuff her dog. Cuckoo! Cuckoo! These people showed more kindness to animals than humans. Don't get me wrong, I like animals and I think they should be treated humanely, but they're still animals. The word human is embedded in the word humane. H-U-M-A-N. H-U-M-A-N-E. So it seems to me that all humans, even ones with no measurable IQs, deserve to be treated humanely.

The hardest part of working in that ward was coping with the deaths of the babies. I found God when I faced death with the people in the hospital ward, and I again found God every time I faced death with my babies. But this was different. I knew these babies. I saw them every day. I fed them. I kissed them. Over time, a number of them died. In fact, I would say that more than half died within a year or two. It wasn't from neglect, or I don't think so. It was from their severe medical problems. I don't know if better medical treatment would have saved more lives. Either medical treatment wasn't available for their problems at that time, or if medical treatment was available, it wasn't made available to them. Remember, to most people these babies were vegetables.

Ruth was the first baby I lost. She had spina bifida, hydrocephalus, and constant seizures. When I came in one morning, Ruth's crib was empty. The nurse told me that she died during the night. I was overcome with grief. I couldn't stop sobbing. The nurse told me that I had to control

my feelings or I'd have to leave. I stopped crying and did my duties until lunch time. As I was leaving for the cafeteria, I asked the nurse where they took Ruth, and she responded that there was a cemetery someplace on the grounds. I never saw that cemetery then, but I did a few years ago. What an experience that was. I'll tell you about that later.

The first child who died in my arms was Freddie. He had pneumonia and wasn't responding to antibiotics. I watched as his temperature skyrocketed to 105. His breathing was labored and the nurse said that he would die soon. I took him out of his crib and rocked him in my arms until he died. I didn't tell anyone when he passed so I held my dead Freddie for a while. I said prayers over and over until the attendant took him away. I knew that my prayers helped ease Freddie's way to heaven. I had a vision of God with His arms open welcoming Freddie with a kiss. After God touches His lips to Freddie's forehead, he is no longer handicapped. His gnarled body straightens. His stone face becomes animated with a huge smile. His muteness turns to language. "Hello God." He takes God's hand and toddles off into the far reaches of Heaven to live happily ever after, for eternity. I know you'll think I'm some kind of fanatical mystic, but I really did feel God's presence when I witnessed a baby dying.

Whenever I held one of my dying babies, I silently recited prayers that I had memorized from the Bible. I didn't say them aloud because I thought that the attendants might make fun of me. Those prayers are still with me and always will be because they guide my life. I started off my silent funeral service with the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew:

Blessed are the poor in spirit;

For theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn (and that was me mourning my dying baby)

For they shall be comforted (and God did comfort me as I gently rocked a dying baby).

Blessed are the meek;

For they shall inherit the Earth.

Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness;

For they shall be filled (and that was me – my need for comfort was met by God).

Blessed are the merciful;

For they shall obtain.

Blessed are the pure of heart; (and these were my babies)

For they shall see God (I really believe that when they died, they went up to Heaven and saw God).

Blessed are the peacemakers;

For they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake;

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And then I said the 23rd Psalm which guided me then and still does. I followed that up with the beautiful verse from Ecclesiastes about how there is a season for everything. *A time to be born and a time to die.* This was the children's time to die, but it came too early. But maybe it wasn't too early because they were going to a world that was much better than the world they were living in.

I believe that good people, like these innocent babies, go to heaven, and I strongly believe that someday I, too, will go to heaven because I have devoted my life to doing what is good, what is right, what God commands me to do. As I die, God will kiss my forehead and then He will take my hand and lead me to heaven. I know that sounds childish, but that belief comforted me then and it comforts me now. I was a teenager, and yet I had to cope with death on a regular basis so I thought long and hard about the meaning of death and what happens to us after life. I couldn't accept death without God. For me, there is no explanation for what happens to us in life and what death means unless we invoke God as THE EXPLANATION. Death and God are not what most teenagers think about. I didn't think about typical things teenagers think about, like who is going to the prom with whom, what color should my new sweater be, which movie I should go see. No, I thought about death and the afterlife. I became an adult at a very

young age. First, I had to cope with being a sex slave, and then I had to cope with death. Not exactly your average kid's life.

My experiences with death at Southern never left me. They made me comfortable with it, and not fear it. To me, death is part of life. It's the continuation from a known existence to a new, unknown existence – a new adventure that we can't know about until we step over the threshold that divides life from death. Two years ago when Judy's husband Leo died, I helped the family cope with their grief. I also faced my own grief because I dearly loved Leo. He was the first person I loved to die. He saved Judy's life, and he also came to my rescue when I was desperate, when I was at the lowest point of my life. Leo's daughter, Monica, is an oncology nurse and was impressed with how much I helped the family at their time of sorrow. She suggested I become a hospice volunteer. I was totally taken aback since this was something I never considered. I put this out of my mind until about six months ago when I mentioned it to Charlie. He thought it was a great idea because of my experiences at Southern. So I signed up for hospice training. I'm almost finished with it, and am looking forward to starting my volunteer work, but I have to admit, I feel a lot of apprehension. I'm worried about doing the right thing until I remind myself that there is no one right thing. There are a number of right things.

It's strange how differently Judy and I reacted to God when we were at Southern. Judy was an atheist. She could not believe in a God who allowed a place like Southern to exist. She could not believe in a God who stood by and did nothing to stop injustices, like the attendant who made the sick woman lick the vomit off his shoes. She could not believe in a God who locked people up for no reason other than there was no one on the outside to take care of them. I don't know how she was able to develop her positive outlook on life and her kindness without God. Where did it come from? Are some people just born optimists, no matter what happens to them, no matter where they live? But I do know that if I had been an atheist at Southern, I would never have been like Judy. Instead of kindness in my heart, I would have had indifference in my heart. I might have become like the attendants and viewed the residents as non-humans. I wouldn't have cared about them or about anyone other than myself. I would have become selfish, only concerned about my survival. Or, instead of indifference in my heart, hate might have taken root. I might have become a cruel person who wanted to strike out and hurt the people around me even though they weren't responsible for where I was.

Over the years, I've thought a lot about God's existence in places that are hell on earth so I've read some books about people who survived concentration camps during the Holocaust. Being in a concentration camp was the ultimate hell on earth. Some people who survived kept their faith in God even after seeing the smoke of their loved ones rising from the chimneys of Auschwitz, and some rejected God because they felt He had rejected them by what He had allowed to happen. I've never been able to figure out how some people were able to find God, and others could not. What was it about them that made it possible for them to find God in hell on earth? What was it about me that made it possible for me to find God in my hell on earth?

After we left Southern, Judy changed her view of God. She fell in love with Leo who was a devout Catholic and a deep, deep believer in God. She knew he would never marry her unless she adopted the Catholic faith so she did. But along the way, she fell in love with God as well as Leo. She found God through his family, especially the love of his two children. She converted to Catholicism, married in the church, has always gone to mass on Sundays, and has been involved in all social and benevolent aspects of the church. She had her son baptized in the church. It's funny because now we argue because I'm not attached to a church, and she feels that I should be if I am to show my love of God so we're back to arguing, but in a very different way than we argued when we were at Southern. I feel that God is in church, but more importantly He's where he's needed. He was needed at Southern where He cared for His children's souls. He was needed in the concentration camps where he helped people die in peace. I know that sounds contradictory. How could God be in these awful places? But He is and that is our challenge – to believe in Him despite the cruelty and ugliness and evil in the world. I believe in God despite the Eileen Reillys and Jack Millers of this world.

I don't want you to think that I'm a religious fanatic because I talk about God all the time. I'm doing this so you'll understand how I was able to find peace after the horrors of my childhood. I don't share my religious beliefs with other people very often, and I think some people might be surprised to find the passion I have for God. I don't try to convert anybody to my viewpoints, and I resent when people try to convert me to their interpretation of God. To me, God is personal. He is my constant companion. I talk to Him all the time and He talks to me. We talk about the little, everyday things and the big things, but it always comes back to the bottom

line. God commands me to do what is right and to love my fellow man and I obey His commandments.

Chapter 9

Sarah

The person who made it possible for me to get out of Southern was Sarah Warner, daughter of Mark and Edith Warner. First, let me tell you about the Warners because I've been intertwined with that family since September 6, 1970 when I first met Dr. Warner. Sarah was born in 1952 to Dr. Mark Warner, a Professor of English History at Northwestern, and his wife Edith. Dr. Warner came from a middle class family; his father was a postman and his mother a telephone operator. Both completed high school. Dr. Warner stood out as gifted from a young age, reading at 3 and knowing all his addition and subtraction facts by 4. His photographic memory was astounding. After hearing or seeing something just once, he remembered it. He had a scholarship for his four years of undergraduate study at Harvard and then fellowships for his graduate studies also at Harvard. Not only was he brilliant, he was charming. He always had a trace of a smile on his face which made him look like he was thinking about something pleasant. He had a special talent for making people feel comfortable and making engaging conversation. He was at ease with all types of people in all types of social situations. He was gifted socially as well as intellectually. He had it all wrapped up in one good looking package.

Edith was quite different. She came from a wealthy Chicago family that made its money from the meatpacking industry. She lived the life of privilege and brought lots of money to the marriage. They were a strange match. First, they looked so different. Dr. Warner was a tall, handsome man with a thick head of black hair when he was young, and salt and pepper hair as he aged. He walked with a limp because of a skiing accident in Switzerland. What a romantic

reason for a limp. For most of us, the reason for a limp would be that we tripped over an untied shoelace, but not for Mark Warner. Edith Warner was tiny and bird-like. She was one of those women who wears a size zero dress. Someone once called them X-ray women because they were so thin, you could see their bones through their clothes. She wore her straight, platinum blond hair pulled back tightly in a bun. As she got older, her hair turned white, but it didn't look that different from the blond hair that she had all her life so she never seemed to change with age. She had a cute face with a turned up nose and full lips. I never saw her wear casual clothes. Most of the time she wore suits with pearls around her neck and diamond earrings, even if she was just home for the day.

Personality-wise, she was quite different from Dr. Warner because she was aloof, as if anyone poorer than her, and that would be almost everyone, wasn't as good as she was. In other words, she was a snob and she made no secret of it. She never worked because she didn't have to, and because women of her class didn't work. She filled her days with three pastimes - collecting nineteenth century English art, genealogy, and socializing with her lady friends. She went to lunch almost every day with some of her rich girlfriends. I don't know why she went to lunch because she rarely ate more than a spoonful of anything. But these lunches were for socializing, not eating.

Edith's greatest passion was her family tree. She had a huge framed diagram of the Wilson family tree going back to sixteenth century England hanging in the entryway of her house. It was the first thing that hit you when you walked in the house. She searched antique markets in England and the states to find paintings of her ancestors. Covering the walls of her home's hallways, living room, dining room, and library were paintings of English naval captains, members of Parliament, and clergymen going back to the 1600's. All were part of the Wilson family. Her ancestors came to America in the 1700's, and their paintings also graced the walls of the Warner home. First, they went to Boston where they went into banking, and then when Chicago became a wide open city of opportunity, they moved west to go into the meatpacking business, which in the old days was like high tech business today. These paintings of her ancestors plus the English art on the walls gave the impression of a house in England. Not that I've ever been to England, but it's what I imagine a house in England must look like.

Edith met Mark through her passion for her English ancestors. She had questions about a relative named Sir Henry Wilson who was aide to George II in 1753. She was told that a professor at Northwestern named Mark Warner knew about this particular person. Edith fell in love with Mark as soon as she entered his office, even before he answered her first question. She actively pursued him because he had everything she wanted in a husband; he was handsome, charming, intelligent, knowledgeable about English history, and most importantly had good genes that would lead to beautiful, brilliant babies to carry on the Wilson lineage.

Oh I forgot, Edith had another interest, if not passion, and that was money. She sat on the boards of her family's different businesses where she closely monitored the growth of her wealth thanks to her ancestors' business sense. Weekly, she conferred with her financial advisor to make sure that her money was earning more money. She gave Dr. Warner a weekly allowance just like I eventually received from him. Mine was \$50 a week and I think his was \$5,000 a week. He did not own any of their property although he did own his Cadillac and his sailboat. Edith kept Dr. Warner on a leash with money as the dangling reward for his good behavior as a husband.

Mark had grown up in a middle class family where he never lacked the basic necessities of life, but once he got to Harvard he realized he lacked certain types of material things that he wanted. Although he was among the brightest students at Harvard, he was never accepted by his fellow students who were members of America's wealthy elite. Marriage to Edith gave him acceptance by such people, and more importantly, it gave him material things that he very much wanted: a beautiful home staffed by servants, a summer house on the upper peninsula of Michigan, frequent trips to England and Europe, and indulgence in his favorite pastime of sailing his sleek 36 foot sailboat.

Mark and Edith seemed to have a loving marriage until Sarah's birth. In pre-Sarah days, they were a charmed couple, frequently seen at social events at the university or in the upper class social circles of Chicago. You'd see their names on the society pages of the Trib where they would be pictured attending charity balls and on the sports page where Mark's performance in sailing competition would be reported.

They'd married when Mark was 30 and Edith 32, and had a son a year later. They named him Walter, the name of many of Edith's ancestors. It was obvious from an early age that Walter

would follow in his father's footsteps intellectually. He, too, learned to read at age three and showed a photographic memory. But he lacked Mark's personality. Rather, Walter was serious and business-like, even as a young child.

They had no other children for 10 years and thought that Walter would be their only child. They consulted fertility specialists in the hope of conceiving again, but doctors could find no reason for their inability to produce another child. They had given up using birth control so they were surprised when at 43, Edith got pregnant. They were ecstatic, hoping for a girl to complete their perfect family. On June 18, 1952, they had their wished-for girl, but as it turned out, she was not the right kind of girl. At her birth, the doctor immediately saw the unmistakable signs of Down Syndrome - slanted eyes, extra eye fold, broad flat face, poor muscle tone, and weak reflexes. The doctor whisked the baby away so the Warners never saw their little girl with platinum blond hair. Just like my experience when I had you, they never saw their daughter. But the reason for them not seeing their daughter was quite different from the reason that I didn't see you. The doctor told them that their daughter had Down Syndrome, but he didn't use those words. He said she was a mongoloid. She would never be capable of any learning; she would never be able to do anything - talk, feed herself, read, give love, or receive love. He painted the grimmest possible picture of Sarah's future. He told them that they shouldn't take her home because they shouldn't bond with her, and then find that they had to give her up. It would be too hard on them emotionally. She had to be put away immediately. She had to be put out of sight, and then she would be out of mind. They had no way of knowing that what he said was wrong. He was a doctor so they trusted him. They were vulnerable having just experienced the death of their dream child. They had wished for a beautiful girl who would grow up like her mother, a delicate woman of culture who revered her present and past family. So they followed the doctor's advice. They never thought of questioning his recommendation. I don't want to paint the doctor as an evil man. This is what doctors believed back then, and this is what they did in such cases, especially with wealthy upper class people.

The Warners' perfect world collapsed. Edith was devastated by the news and retreated into a shell, not talking for months. She became catatonic. Dr. Warner made all the decisions from the moment of Sarah's birth. He followed the doctor's recommendation to give Sarah up and never see her. He told the world that their baby had died at birth of a congenital heart

condition. The doctor asked Dr. Warner for a name for the birth certificate. They had planned on calling her Sarah so Sarah she would be, but a dead Sarah to the world. Dr. Warner brought Edith home after three days in the hospital. He wanted her away from the maternity ward and the horrendous memories of what had just happened. He hired nurses to be with her 24 hours a day. He didn't allow any visitors, although many people wanted to come to offer their sympathy on the death of their daughter. Walter was told that his baby sister died at birth and that his mother was sick. Walter was allowed to see his mother 10 minutes a day. He watched her stare into space afraid that she, too, might die. Other than the nurses and the household help, there were no visitors to the Warner house for almost a year. Edith refused to see her lady friends who she had shared lunches with daily. The outside world thought that Edith was mourning for her lost child, and they were right, but she wasn't lost. She was deported to the land of the retarded, never to be seen again.

Let me tell you that institutionalizing handicapped newborns was not an unusual practice in the past, especially with wealthy people like the Warners. To have a retarded child, especially one with Down Syndrome was the worst stigma imaginable in their social circle. Just think of the Kennedys and how they hid their retarded daughter Rosemary for years. They even had her lobotomized. They were told that brain surgery would control her behavior. It sure did. It made her into a zombie. Having a mentally handicapped child was unacceptable to Edith. How could the Wilson blood line be perpetuated with a damaged child? Sarah would appear on the family tree with the dates of 1952 for her birth and 1952 for her death. A child like this couldn't be allowed to tarnish the perfect Wilson family tree.

I was recently reminded of how much our attitudes toward raising a handicapped child have changed. I was at a performance of the musical *Les Mis* when I was happily shocked to see a mother and her Down Syndrome daughter in the crowd waiting to be taken to their seats. What shocked me was that BOTH of them wore sumptuous mink coats and BOTH wore large diamond earrings that glistened brightly. I watched them as they walked to their seats in the fourth row of the orchestra section. The daughter walked with confidence, almost as if she knew people were watching her performance. Now that's total acceptance of a handicapped child.

The doctor took responsibility for Sarah from the day of her birth. He arranged for her to be sent to a foster home while plans were made to institutionalize her at Southern. He wanted her

at Southern so she would be far from Chicago and because Southern had a good reputation for keeping the identity of its residents confidential. Sarah wasn't the only child of the rich and famous to be deported to Southern. At three months of age, Sarah was placed in the baby ward at Southern where she lived without a visit from her family for 18 years. For all that time, she was an orphan.

During the 18 years since she had been sent away, Dr. Warner couldn't stop thinking of her. Time didn't kill his curiosity about where she was, what she was like, and even if she was alive. On the other hand, Edith was successful in blocking Sarah out of her mind, and never thought about her. To Edith, Sarah was indeed dead. Every year on Sarah's birthday, Dr. Warner brought up Sarah's name and asked Edith if they should find her. And every year Edith refused to allow him to do this. She wanted to keep Sarah dead.

Eventually Edith came out of her depression and re-entered her social world. She was back to daily lunching with her lady friends and collecting English art and managing her millions. Although they proclaimed their love for each other, their marriage had changed. Dr. Warner stopped talking about Sarah, but he didn't stop thinking about her so a slow-growing cancer grew between them. It ate at them when they saw a couple walking a baby in a stroller past their house. It ate at them when they saw a photo of a movie star or politician holding a baby. It ate at them when they heard someone say the name Sarah. Walter never thought about his dead sister. Why would he? He was sent East to prep school, and then to Harvard. He went to the University of Chicago Law School, and eventually joined one of the top law firms in the city. Edith was proud of how the Wilson family tree was being represented by Walter. She was eager for him to marry and populate the tree with perfect gifted children.

Now let me describe Sarah's life at Southern, and how I got to know her. Sarah was raised in the baby and children's wards. Although she was slow to learn, she did eventually learn to walk and perform self care tasks, like feeding herself and dressing and washing. She had some language, but much of it was unintelligible. What made Sarah different from the other residents at Southern was that she was pretty. People never think of retarded people, especially people with Down Syndrome, as being good looking, but some of them are. Sarah had platinum blond hair, light blue eyes, and perfect white skin. She had a pretty round face with pouty lips and a turned-up nose. In other words, she looked like her mother. If they were placed next to

each other, it would be apparent that they were mother and daughter. She certainly had the characteristics of Down Syndrome – especially the slanted eyes. She was tiny, even shorter than me. And although she was a bit pudgy, she seemed to have the baby fat that many children have. Sarah looked like an angel, especially when she smiled. And at first, Sarah was like many people with Down Syndrome because of her sweetness. She was always smiling; but maybe she got that from her dad. She smiled even when it wasn't appropriate. For example, if someone said something sad, she smiled. She didn't really understand a lot of what was going on around her, and her reflex was to smile. But that smiling stopped after the terrible things that happened to her. It took a long time for her smiles to return, but eventually they did.

Sarah lived in the ward for young women with moderate mental retardation, most with Down Syndrome. Almost all the residents were docile, but there were a few who were aggressive. When Sarah was 13, a woman in her ward started picking on her. Who knows why? Maybe because Sarah had this angelic, innocent look about her, she was a perfect victim. This woman kicked her and tripped her and dumped food on her head, and then laughed hysterically. Sarah responded passively which made this woman do even more to her. One day when no one was looking, the woman attacked Sarah and broke a finger and blackened an eye before the attendants stopped her. The staff thought they could stop the harassment by just separating the two, placing them as far apart as possible in the ward. But one night, the woman woke Sarah and started hitting her in the face with a shoe, breaking one of her front teeth. An attendant stopped her before she did any more damage. To solve the problem, the woman was transferred to another ward. Sarah changed dramatically after this attack and became silent and depressed. She kept her head down and didn't look at people. Who wouldn't change after something like that happened to them? She was afraid to go to sleep fearing another night-time attack. She even stopped eating. She shook with fear when anyone came near her. The staff decided that a move to another ward might help her. So they transferred her to a ward for residents with moderate retardation who were older and hopefully, less aggressive. Some of the women in this ward started to pick on Sarah. I think maybe they knew why Sarah had been transferred to their ward, and they just continued the harassment. They took her food away which didn't matter because Sarah had stopped eating anyway. They came up behind her and scared her, laughing when they saw her jump with fear and cry like a baby. They hid her shoes and socks so she walked around barefoot until an attendant noticed. They threw things at her, sometimes hurting her. The

problem was that it was not just one person harassing her; it was a group of four women. So the problem couldn't be solved by just separating Sarah. For some reason, Sarah had been marked as a victim. I often wonder how retarded people pick up on this, just like everybody else. Maybe it's the same thing with bullies in schools. They sense who they can victimize, and it was true of the retarded women in this case.

The staff knew that they had to move Sarah again. They were increasingly concerned about her safety because the harassment was getting worse. One of the attendants on the older women's ward had worked on the baby ward with me in the past and knew of my reputation as a caring person. She suggested that they move Sarah to my ward even though she was at a much lower cognitive level than all the residents on my ward. She felt that I could serve as her protector since I was normal and since I had shown kindness to my babies. A woman who I later learned was in charge of all attendants in the women's wards came to talk to me. I knew it was important because she took me to an office to talk alone. I don't recall her name. I'm not even sure she gave her name. She told me what had happened to Sarah in her previous placements, and because of my reputation as being helpful, she wanted me to look after Sarah. She didn't ask if I'd do this; she just assumed I would. And she was right. I would never say I wouldn't do this. Remember, I was a tame animal. I did what was expected and always with a smile.

Although I had no choice in the matter, privately I had some reservations about taking on Sarah. I liked helping others, but I also didn't like having the added responsibility. But it didn't matter how I felt, they were going to do this anyway. When Sarah was moved into my ward, I was given the day off so I could help her adjust to her new surroundings. They brought her into the ward in a wheelchair even though she could walk. They put her in the bed next to mine so I had Sarah on one side and Judy on the other. She looked like a frightened animal, shaking, eyes shut tight, and groaning. When they put her into bed, she laid in the fetal position.

Much like Judy had done with me several years earlier, I sat on the edge of her bed and talked to her in a quiet, soothing voice as I gently stroked her hair. When I first touched her, she jumped as if she was being attacked, but as I continued stroking her and talking to her about how she was going to get better, she calmed down. After a few hours, I got her out of bed and took her to the bathroom. She was filthy. No one had wiped her bottom in a long while. She also was very much in need of a bath. She cringed when I tried to clean her. Despite speaking in a soft,

comforting voice, she wouldn't let me clean her. A little later, an attendant brought us our lunch trays. I treated Sarah like a baby and fed her spoonfuls as I imitated how she should open her mouth wide. I gently held her head back as I fed her some milk. At the end of the meal, she looked at me. That was the first time she had raised her eyes. I knew I was on track to bringing her back to life. And I was right. I was given another two days off and during that time we started to bond. By the end of the second day, she let me take her into the shower and wash her. That was an accomplishment. When I went back to work, I would first take her to the cafeteria with me for breakfast. Then I'd bring her back to her bed where she'd spend the morning. She'd lie there and close her eyes and moan. Then back again for lunch and finally dinner. After a week, I took her to the day room after dinner. In the early days, she'd just sit and stare into space. Gradually, she watched everyone and seemed to become part of the group even though she rarely spoke.

My biggest breakthrough came after we'd been together for three or four weeks and she looked me in the eye and said ever so softly – "Mary." She said it as clear as a bell. I can't tell you the joy I felt. I knew that I was bringing Sarah back to the world. The attendants on the ward were very complimentary to me saying that I was a miracle worker. Judy wasn't too happy because it meant that we spent less time together with just the two of us. But she knew that my special talent was helping people, and that Sarah desperately needed help.

With time, Sarah came out of her shell. She held my hand all the time and hugged me a lot. I loved the affection. I arranged for her to come with me to the baby ward so she wouldn't just lie in bed all day. I planted her in a chair so she would be out of the way of the staff. She watched my every movement. When I hummed to the babies, she hummed along. When there was a problem and everyone including me looked worried, she became agitated. This lasted for about two months until the head nurse visited the ward. She asked what Sarah was doing there, and I told her. She said that she didn't want her there even though the staff insisted that Sarah wasn't causing problems. This was the head nurse and no one could argue with her. So it was back to the ward for Sarah where she spent most of the day sitting in a chair staring into space eagerly awaiting my return.

After a few weeks, Sarah's prettiness became apparent. I primped her like a doll. I tried to style her hair despite the institutional cut. In six months Sarah was a new Sarah. And she

became my puppy dog. She followed me everywhere and stood behind me as I talked to people. She was my shadow. She imprinted like I was the mother duck and she was the duckling. I didn't mind. In fact, I was beginning to like being important to another human being, and also because I was falling in love with Sarah. I was the first person Sarah loved. No one showed her any kindness before me. For 13 years she had been unloved, but her need for love hadn't dried up. I came into her life and filled that need. And maybe I needed to love her as much as she needed to be loved. She became my baby sister even though she was only two years younger than me. Judy was my older sister and Sarah was my younger sister. I had a family.

And then the unthinkable happened. I start to shake when I think of that horrible, horrible tragedy. For three years, we settled into a comfortable routine that was shattered June 17, 1968, one day before her 16th birthday although we didn't know it was her birthday then. Sarah was not usually away from me, but she had gotten a bad case of the stomach flu when there was another epidemic, and we had lots of them. She always caught whatever bug was going around. Her fever spiked to 104 and she became de-hydrated so she was transferred to the hospital. I visited her everyday to calm her. When she was away from me, she became agitated, but just seeing me soothed her. I tried to visit her at lunch time and also after dinner, but I couldn't always get away. It was the fourth day and she was starting to get better. I hadn't had a chance to visit her all day, and I knew she wouldn't sleep if I didn't see her so I got permission to say good-night to her at bedtime. When I got to her bed, she wasn't there. There was nobody around. All the staff was down at the other end of the ward. There was some kind of commotion going on. People were yelling and an alarm bell was ringing. I had a premonition that something was wrong so I went to the bathroom to see if she was there. She wasn't on any of the commodes. I heard this grunting and moaning coming from the shower area. I looked behind one of the short walls that kept the water from flowing out onto the floor, and I saw a sight that still haunts me. This huge man with his pants down was attacking my poor little Sarah. He was pumping up and down as he was beating at Sarah's face. This was a vision of evil attacking good. I thought fast and moved even faster. I felt adrenaline pumping through my body energizing me to attack this savage. I ripped the safety pin from the inside hem of my dress and jumped on his back as I stabbed him inside his ear over and over and over. He screamed, and as he pulled up, I fell off him. When he came at me, I stabbed him over and over in his eyeball. I had to stop this savage. I looked at his face and etched it into my memory. He had a bulbous

nose and pock-marks on his cheeks. He was bleeding from one ear and one eye. He pulled the pin from my hand and banged my head on the floor and then punched me in the face. By then, some of the staff heard my screams and came running. They pulled him off me and dragged him away. A male attendant picked Sarah up. She was like a rag doll. Her arms and legs hung lifelessly. I was sure she was dead. He carried her to her bed. The nurse called her name over and over, but she didn't respond. She checked and found she was breathing, but just barely. Her face was covered with blood from where he had hit her in the nose and mouth. Her lower body was covered with blood because, of course, she was a virgin and she was a small child who was invaded by a huge animal. I got in bed with her and hugged her tight as I told her she was safe now. I would protect her forever. I didn't say what I was feeling which was that I had failed her. I hadn't protected her from this savage. I didn't know that I would spend my life feeling guilt for not protecting her then or later. I was the only person in the world who loved her and I wasn't there for her when she most needed me. Of course, when I look back at the situation, I know that I couldn't have protected her and I shouldn't feel guilt, but sometimes I still do.

A nurse checked to see if I was seriously injured. I had a big bump on the back of my head where he had banged my head on the floor and a huge black and blue mark on my cheek, a black eye, and blood dripping from my mouth where my teeth had banged into my lips, but I was okay physically, certainly not emotionally. I got back in bed with Sarah and held her as I said, "I'm sorry," over and over again. In the morning, I washed her. She opened her eyes, but she was unseeing. She was still in a state of shock. Rape is hard enough to understand if you have normal intelligence, but it is totally incomprehensible to a retarded person. To her, she was being murdered. And maybe the rapist would have killed her if I hadn't stopped him. Maybe he would have beaten her to death.

I wanted Sarah to be examined by a doctor, but not then. I knew she wouldn't let a man touch her. Maybe a nurse could do an examination later. I spent the next four days with her in the hospital, and when she was well enough, she was sent back to the ward. If I had thought that she was my shadow before, she certainly was after the rape. I even let her sleep with me in our narrow cot. I knew she had to be with me all the time. A week later a nurse examined her and found that miraculously she hadn't been damaged. They thought that the rapist hadn't fully penetrated her because she was so small, but they weren't sure. She had vaginal tears, but they

had started to heal over by the time she was examined so she wasn't given any stitches. The concern now was pregnancy. I asked the nurse if she could get pregnant. The nurse didn't think so because there had never been a baby born to a person with Down Syndrome that she knew of. We monitored her closely until she got her period a week later. We all heaved a sigh of relief. What would happen to a baby born to a mother with Down Syndrome? Would it be normal? If so, would anyone want to adopt it? If it was born with Down Syndrome, it would be another generation for Southern. Thank God she wasn't pregnant.

I learned the rapist was Jack Miller, an attendant with a history of arrests, some for violent crimes, but of course, he was still hired at Southern. It was so hard to get people to work in the locked wards, but Jack Miller was glad to work with these people because he could get paid for being violent. I found out that he had seen Sarah and thought she looked like an angel. He was obsessed with her and talked about how he would give her true love. If he screwed her, she would become normal and they could marry and run away and live happily ever after. Now that's the craziest fairy tale I ever heard. I know that a kiss woke Sleeping Beauty and a kiss transformed a frog into a prince, but a screwing as a cure for mental retardation. That makes for one giant unbelievable fairy tale.

One night Miller and some other attendants took a resident from the violent ward to the hospital for treatment. This resident had killed another resident in a fight and had been injured himself. The person was in shackles so he couldn't get away, but he was out-of-control, screaming and squirming and trying to bite anyone who came near him. So obviously everyone was paying attention to him, and not Miller. Miller spotted Sarah lying in one of the beds. Here she was helpless and unguarded. It was an open invitation. No one noticed him carry Sarah to the bathroom where he raped her. I'm sure this wasn't the first time he had raped someone at Southern, but he hadn't been caught before. At last he was caught, but it was too late. He'd done his damage to Sarah. I didn't know then what happened to him afterwards. I asked around to find out if he was arrested or not. All I was told was that he no longer at Southern. But Jack Miller came back into our lives and did more damage, irreversible damage. He was the devil. I do believe that there are evil people in the world – people like Hitler and Stalin and Jack the Ripper. Jack Miller ranks up there with them.

There was never any mention of how I had hurt Jack Miller or any mention of my safety pins. I do know that I did some heavy duty damage to that animal's ear and eye. I had hoped that I made him deaf or blind, but I didn't. I did damage his vision, but unfortunately he was still able to see. When I saw him years later I saw the blood-filled eye where I had stabbed him. And that blood-filled eye eventually became the downfall of Jack Miller. Sometimes I think of my reaction to that man and I can't help thinking I was striking back at all the men who raped me when I was a child prostitute. I didn't fight back then. I couldn't. I had to cooperate to get paid. If I could have, I would have done the same thing to those men in those dark cars in that alley. I always say that I was raped by the men who had me when I was a prostitute, but I wasn't violently raped like Sarah was. What happened to her was a million times worse than what happened to me.

Anyhow that was my life with Sarah until September 6, 1970 when Dr. Warner visited Sarah at Southern State School for the Feebleminded.

Chapter 10

Dr. Warner

As I said before, Dr. Warner was haunted by the memory of Sarah since the day he abandoned her at the hospital. He and Edith had an unwritten rule that they wouldn't talk about her, but every year on her birthday, June 18, he broke the rule. On June 18th, 1970 Dr. Warner made a life-changing decision when he said:

“Edith, I can't stop thinking about Sarah, especially today on her birthday. She's 18 years old. She's a grown woman. Don't you wonder what her life is like and what she's like?”

“No. I put her out of my mind and I never think about her unless you bring her up. To me, she's dead. I don't want to talk about her. I want to keep her dead.”

Edith sat rigidly trying to block out Dr. Warner's words, looking down at her tightly clasped hands.

"I've decided to find Sarah."

"What will you do when you find her?"

"I'll visit her."

"Why? She won't understand who you are."

"We don't know that. Edith, I've been racked with guilt for these last 18 years. I abandoned my child. I have to make up for that or I can't continue to live with myself. I thought I could get over the guilt with time, but it's gotten worse. Especially because I learned about Down Syndrome. Edith, we shouldn't have institutionalized Sarah. We didn't know better so we took the advice of Dr. Knox, who we thought was an expert, but he wasn't. Recently, I've learned that there's hope for children with Down Syndrome. The future for these people doesn't have to be like Dr. Knox made it out to be. I've seen films of these kids who've had intensive education and stimulation and some of them are unbelievable. They talk and socialize with others and they work in sheltered workshops and some even in regular businesses, like McDonald's. I talked to Dr. Gottlieb at the med school. He's a specialist in infants. He told me that years ago doctors routinely told parents to institutionalize their handicapped kids, but now research has shown that these kids can be more productive than anyone ever imagined. Edith, say something."

"I don't want to see her. Ever. I don't think I can cope with that. I've spent years burying her, and now you want me to resurrect her."

"We have to. We won't be able to live with ourselves if we don't do something."

Edith collapsed in tears. Mark held her tightly, but she shoved him away.

"This is the biggest test of our lives. We have to find Sarah and be the parents we should have been 18 years ago."

“Mark, I haven’t felt one ounce of guilt since we got rid of Sarah. It was the right thing to do. It was the only way we could get on with living our lives the way we wanted to. It took me a year to get over her birth, and now you’re asking me to go through the same thing, but only worse. You’re asking me to be with a retarded person. I’ve never been with a retarded person in my life. Have you?”

“No, but now is the time.”

“Mark, what are we going to tell people?”

“The truth.”

“People will think we were cruel to abandon her.”

“We were.”

“No, we weren’t. We did what was right. We did what we needed to. What kind of a life would we have if we had kept her? We would have had this freak that we would have had to hide away.

Mark, if we get Sarah back, people will know that I was defective. I produced a damaged child. Not you. Of course, it wasn’t Mr. Perfect Mark’s fault. It was mine.”

“Edith, you weren’t defective. It wasn’t your fault that Sarah was born retarded.”

“How can you say that? It was my fault because I was too old.”

“Oh Edith, it wasn’t your fault. It wasn’t something you chose to do.”

“If I had known she was going to be retarded, I would have had an abortion. Even if I had to use a coat hanger. And I wouldn’t have let you stop me. I couldn’t knowingly bring something like that into the world. I would never choose to have a child like that.”

“I wouldn’t have stopped you. If we knew, it would have been best to abort the baby to prevent all this heart ache. But we didn’t know. Anyhow, we don’t get to choose our children. Fate chooses them for us.”

“Are you saying that Fate cursed me with a retarded child? What did I do to deserve such a curse?”

“Edith, it’s not a curse.”

“Then what is it?”

“Maybe it’s a gift.”

“Are you crazy? Being retarded is a gift? It’s the worst thing that can happen to a child and parents. Mark, I can’t stop you from what you’re planning to do, but I want you to know that if finding her causes problems in our lives, I’ll hold you responsible. You’ll be the one who ruined our lives. We’ve lived without her for 18 years without a problem. Why create one now?”

“Oh there’s been a problem for me every day for the last 18 years. I’ve had this guilt festering inside me. It’s eating away at me. It’s changed my view of myself. What kind of man deserts his child no matter what the child is like? I’ve thought of myself as a moral person, but I can’t continue to look at myself that way without doing something about the biggest mistake of my life.”

“Mark, I know you’re going to ruin our lives. Finding her will be a lot worse than deserting her. And if it turns out that way, I’ll leave you. I’m warning you. I can’t stop you from destroying your life, but I won’t let you destroy mine.”

He didn’t really believe Edith would leave him even if he found Sarah. He knew she needed him too much. She couldn’t live without him. They had always had a marriage of inequality. He made all the decisions, and Edith went along with them. The only thing Edith controlled in their marriage was the money, and she doled it out generously, never questioning what Mark wanted to buy, even encouraging him to splurge on things he hadn’t even thought of buying. But still, she sent a message that she could turn off the money tap if there was a reason to, and bringing Sarah into their lives could be a reason.

Edith worshiped Mark, especially because of his intelligence. She was dazzled by his mind. Edith had never gone to college and was not a bright person. She went to a finishing school for the daughters of the rich where etiquette was a more important subject than

academics. She read only a few things – sections of the Wall Street Journal that had to do with her financial interests, the society section of the newspaper, and writings about her ancestors. She had no idea what was happening in the world, and she didn't care. She marveled at Mark's ease with people. Although she had friends, they were like her - women who were only interested in material things and social status. Edith was not comfortable in social groups, especially if she didn't know the people in the group. Although they'd been married for many years, Edith continued to be in awe when Mark entered a group where he didn't know anyone and acted as if he had called a meeting of his best friends. He was magical with people. Everyone liked Mark. Everyone respected Mark. Everyone wondered why Mark married Edith, other than for her money. Maybe there was more. He was not known to fool around on the side. He was devoted to Edith. Maybe he even loved her before Sarah's birth, but not since.

With this battle over Sarah, Mark was seeing a new side of Edith, one that he didn't like. When she talked about Sarah, she became a different person; she was visibly consumed with hatred. When she spoke Sarah's name, her face shriveled and she looked like a skull. He certainly didn't love this Edith. He was beginning to wonder if he had ever really loved Edith for herself. He wasn't ashamed to admit to himself that he married Edith for her social status and wealth. He mingled with millionaires and even billionaires, only because he was married to one of them. He loved being with rich people almost as much as he loved being with his intellectual colleagues at the university. He basked in their life of affluence: going off to their summer home in northern Michigan, traveling to England whenever they felt like it, and going into a store and buying whatever he liked without looking at the price tag. Mark was a man who straddled two worlds. He thrived in the world of the mind where he enjoyed exploring ideas, and he thrived in the world of the affluent where he enjoyed the perks of his wife's wealth. But underlying his love of both of these worlds was a love of himself. He viewed himself as a special man, a unique man, one blessed with a great mind, a charming personality, and most importantly a conscience. He tried to govern his behavior and his choices in life by doing the right thing. He hadn't done the right thing when he abandoned Sarah. Now his conscience was thrusting him in a new direction - the search for his daughter, a search that might jeopardize his position in his academic and social worlds and his marriage. He knew the risks, but he couldn't turn back. He had to repair the damage done to his view of himself. Was his drive to find Sarah and "do the right thing" more

about his egotism, his desire to prove himself the perfect man? Or was he being driven by the need to find his flesh and blood and do right by her? Both

Dr. Warner knew that if he was to find Sarah, he had to start with the doctor. He had to find Dr. Knox which turned out to be easy since he was still practicing. Dr. Warner called him and told him who he was. Dr. Knox immediately remembered him. When he said that he wanted to find Sarah. Dr. Knox tried to persuade him from doing this. He said, “Let sleeping dogs lie.” That was it for Dr. Warner. “Let sleeping dogs lie.” He had let the sleeping dogs lie for 18 years, and now they were rearing up and they were hungry and they were angry and they were baring their teeth. After much insistence, Dr. Knox relented, and told Dr. Warner where Sarah was. - Southern State School for the Feebleminded. When he heard the word feebleminded, he shuddered. He pictured an institution like he’d seen in the movies – bars on the windows, people lying on cold floors of cells, wild, filthy, out-of-control people, and sadistic guards. Was that what he was going to find at Southern?

Dr. Warner knew that he couldn’t find Sarah without Walter’s legal help. He didn’t know what obstacles he would meet, and he needed to be armed with an expert lawyer, and there was no lawyer more expert than his son. But Walter didn’t know that he had a sister. He thought that Sarah had died 18 years earlier. He would be the first person who would learn of the Warners’ secret. Dr. Warner asked Walter to come to the house to discuss something very important. Walter was apprehensive about the meeting, fearing that one of his parents had a dreaded disease.

First Dr. Warner had to get Edith’s help or at least her approval to tell Walter. When he told her he had invited Walter to the house, she was furious. She didn’t want to be present, but she knew she had to be. She had to get Walter’s help in stopping Mark from taking this dangerous first step in finding Sarah. That was the only way she could stop him from this suicidal search for Sarah. They met in the library, a room rarely seen by Walter since he moved away from home. His father looked directly at him, but his mother cowered in the corner of a couch avoiding his eyes. Then he spoke the words officially starting his search for Sarah.

“Walter, we’ve called you here to tell you a family secret that we’ve kept hidden from you for 18 years. You probably can’t imagine your parents as having a deep, dark secret, but we

do. Your sister Sarah didn't die when she was born. She was born retarded, with Down Syndrome, and we followed the doctor's recommendation to institutionalize her and forget about her. We institutionalized her, but I never forgot about her. I've lived with the constant thought that I abandoned my daughter. On June 18th, her 18th birthday, I realized I couldn't deal with this any longer. I told your mother I wanted to find Sarah."

Walter was in a state of shock. He was 28 years old, and learning that he had a retarded sister who lived in an institution. His first reaction was to dissuade his father from doing this.

"Dad, don't do this. Forget about her." This was the second bit of advice for Dr. Warner to let sleeping dogs lie, although he didn't say those exact words.

"Mother, how do you feel about all this?"

Here was Edith's chance to get Walter to help her stop Mark. She spoke passionately. "I don't want him to do this. It took me a year to come back to life after Sarah's birth. Do you remember how I stayed in my room with the lights off for almost a year? I mourned for my lost dream child – a beautiful, bright charming daughter. I don't want to find the child I actually had – a retarded person, someone who might be dangerous. She might want to hurt us. Me especially because I gave birth to her. She might be a monster. I don't know what to expect. Will she be this big ugly mongoloid like you see in the movies? I'm petrified of what she'll be like. This whole thing might make me relapse. It might make me lock myself up again, but not for just a year, but forever. I want to keep her dead. I've buried her in my mind, and I don't want her back, but your father is insistent that we do this. I hope you can stop him. I can't. We have to stop him together. Talk sense to him. Make him realize what will happen if we find her. Our lives will fall apart. Our friends will leave us. We'll be disgraced."

"Dad, how could you do this to mother? This is going to destroy her."

"Oh, she's just being melodramatic. She's blowing this out of proportion. Anyway, I'll help with cope with this. Walter, I need to do this for myself if I am to have any self respect for the type of man I want to be."

"Is that more important than Mom's mental health?"

“She won’t want to live with me if I continue to be eaten away by the guilt I carry around for what I did.”

“Mark, I don’t care about you. I care about me and my place in the world. What will people think of me having such a child? It’ll be like I had Rosemary’s baby.”

“Don’t be a fool. A retarded child is not the devil’s child.”

“I don’t know about that.”

Walter listened to his father and mother argue back and forth, and then said, “What about Lauren? What am I going to tell her? Maybe she won’t want to marry me knowing that I have someone with retardation in my immediate family.”

“If Lauren loves you, she’ll marry you. Lauren is a well educated woman in law school and she’ll understand the research that shows that Down Syndrome is caused by a mother’s age. She’ll know why Sarah was born to your mother.

Walter, I need you to help me with this. I need your legal expertise to help me negotiate the hurdles that I’m sure I’ll face. Sarah was placed at Southern State School for the Feebleminded 18 years ago. It’s downstate in Seymour. I need you to contact the institution and find out if she’s still alive, and if so what her life is like and whether we could visit her. Will you help me?”

“You know I can’t say no to you, but I feel like we’re entering a field of land mines and one could explode and destroy us all.”

When Walter saw Lauren for dinner that evening, he told her about his meeting with his parents. Lauren was not bothered by the prospect of marrying a man with a sister with Down Syndrome. She had friends with handicapped siblings, and had never heard that they had any problems. And she realized that Down Syndrome is not inherited so it wouldn’t affect any children they might have. He was relieved at her rational, unemotional reaction. He wished he could feel the same way.

The following day Walter called Southern and after speaking to a number of people, he was finally put through to a Mr. Hutchison who was the assistant to the Superintendent of

Southern. Walter identified himself as the Warner family's lawyer as well as a member of the family and described his father's status at the university and his mother's family business so he would appreciate the prominence of the family. He knew this would make a difference in opening doors in his search for Sarah. Then he asked the all-important question "Is Sarah Warner a resident of Southern at the present time?" There was a hesitation which meant the answer was yes. Mr. Hutchison told Walter that he would have to seek legal advice before he responded. He told Walter that he would call him back within 48 hours.

Twenty four hours later Mr. Hutchison called Walter to say that yes, Sarah Warner was a resident of Southern State School for the Feebleminded. Walter, a man noted for his gift of speech, was momentarily at a loss for words. He hadn't realized it would be this easy. He said that the family wanted to know all about Sarah, and if advisable, they would like to arrange a visit. Mr. Hutchison told him that it would be best for Walter to speak to Dr. Phillips, the Superintendent of Southern. He transferred his call to him.

"Dr. Phillips, I'd like to tell you about how Sarah ended up at Southern 18 years ago. When Sarah was born, my parents were shocked to learn that she had Down Syndrome. Their doctor told them to institutionalize her immediately and they did. Since then my father has learned a lot about mental retardation and Down Syndrome. He feels overwhelming regret for what he did."

"What about your mother?"

"My mother is in a state of shock. She'll do whatever my father decides is best. My father wants to meet Sarah, but we're not sure of the best way to do this."

"I don't know much about Sarah and before I make any recommendations, I want to find out about her current situation."

But he did know all about Sarah Warner. Everyone on the administrative staff knew about Sarah's history of rape and abuse.

"I also want to involve Dr. Mather, our head psychologist, to minimize any psychological problems Sarah might experience as a result of meeting the family she knows nothing about."

Walter thought to himself that his family, especially his mother, might need the help of a psychologist too. Their conversation ended with Dr. Phillips's promise to call back soon.

Walter called his father to report the status of the search for Sarah. He mentioned his concern for his mother's mental health and recommended that she see a psychologist. Dr. Warner told him that since Sarah's birth, he had tried to have Edith get psychological help, but she resisted. She didn't want anyone to know about Sarah even though Dr. Warner insisted that a psychologist would and could never disclose such confidential information. After Walter's recent visit, Dr. Warner had again suggested to Edith that she see a psychologist to help her handle the issues that she would face with the re-entry of Sarah into their lives. She was adamant in her refusal to seek psychological help. She insisted that she wasn't the crazy one, but Mark was because he wanted to destroy their family.

Three days later Dr. Phillips called Walter. He briefly described Sarah's present intellectual level and her functional skills. He said that Sarah had a complicated history that he wanted to discuss with the family in person. Walter asked Dr. Phillips to come to Chicago for a face-to-face meeting with the family. To hasten the meeting, Walter told Dr. Phillips that the family would pay for Dr. Phillips and Dr. Mather to come to Chicago. He asked that he mail all reports about Sarah before the meeting so that he could prepare questions.

Dr. Phillips met with Dr. Mather to discuss if they should send all the reports. He was concerned about any possible legal ramifications of Sarah's physical abuse and rape. But he knew that hiding them could result in greater problems in the future if and when the family learned about them. He called his supervisor at the State Department of Mental Health in Springfield for advice. His supervisor told him that he would consult with the state's lawyers and get back to him which he did the next day. The speed with which everyone at the state level acted was definitely due to who the Warner family was. He told him to fully cooperate with the Warners and not antagonize them in any way. He didn't want any negative publicity about this matter. So Dr. Phillips sent Walter everything he had on Sarah: her history at Southern since her admission including her placements in different wards; a medical report; a psychological report; and incident reports which described, in detail, Sarah's physical abuse and rape. No one had anticipated that these reports would ever be seen by anyone outside of Southern so no information had been held back.

Along with the reports, Dr. Phillips sent a Polaroid photo of Sarah that had been taken a few days earlier. When Walter saw the pretty blond Down Syndrome 18 year old girl who looked like a 12 year old, he instantly saw Sarah's resemblance to his mother. They both had the same coloring and the same features, except for the eyes. He realized that Sarah was prettier than his mother. There was a look of pure innocence about Sarah. Walter murmured, "Hello my little sister. You are so pretty. Little do you know the explosion that you will be causing in our family."

Then he went through the reports starting with the medical report which described Sarah as having a history of chronic ear infections and because of lack of treatment or late treatment, the conclusion that she might have a hearing loss. It wasn't possible to test her hearing because she didn't understand the directions from the audiologist. Because of her limited speech, it was difficult to find out if she had an ear infection unless she rubbed her ears repeatedly, and even if she did this, the attendants didn't always notice. The report also cited her low resistance to colds and the flu. Every time there was an outbreak of something contagious, Sarah got it. She had been hospitalized four times with the flu. She was below average in height and average in weight. She had the classical symptoms of Down Syndrome: slanted eyes, extra epicanthal lid on the eyes, small ears, flattened nose, and single palmar crease.

The psychological report based on testing when she was 12 stated that her IQ on the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test was 40 placing her in the moderately retarded range. Her mental age was like that of a four year old. The report described her as also having the functional skills of a four year old: she could dress herself, wash herself, feed herself with a spoon and fork, and care for her toileting needs. She could not tie shoes or button or use a knife. Her receptive language skills were described as being like those of a four year old. She could follow two step oral directions involving actions such as touching her nose and standing up. Her expressive language skills were like those of a two year old. She primarily spoke in single words, but could produce two or three word sentences. The major problem with her expressive language was intelligibility. Her speech was unclear and her message could not be understood unless the listener knew her intent, or unless she used motions to supplement her verbal message. The report also described her as having a sweet, easy going personality up until the time of the abuse and rape. When Walter came to the words – abuse and rape - he had to stop and re-read them.

Everything he had read to that point had been as he expected, but these two words were chilling. His heart raced and he felt shaky. He went to the incident reports immediately. The first one described the first case of physical abuse from the resident on her ward, and her resulting injuries. He looked at the photo of her again and saw that one of her front teeth had been damaged; she only had part of one of her front teeth. This made her look like a child who had lost a front tooth. The second report described her transfer to another ward and the continued abuse there. How could they let the abuse happen? Couldn't they stop it immediately? Couldn't they punish the abusers? At least they tried to help Sarah by transferring her to yet another ward to be with this Mary Reilly. But why did they wait so long? Why didn't they do something after the first time it happened? Another report listed periodic updates describing the effectiveness of my care for her and the improvement in her behavior.

Then there was the last report – the rape. It described in detail all aspects of the rape. Walter again looked at the photo of Sarah and saw this innocent lamb being raped by a brute. He felt himself growing angrier. He found no reference to who the rapist was other than he was an attendant at Southern. He needed to find out who this person was and what happened to him. The report also described my role in stopping the rape, or at least stopping the rapist before he was finished. There was a lengthy report from Dr. Mather describing the change in Sarah's behavior after the rape – the regression, shutting out everything in her environment, and refusal to eat. Again periodic reports indicated she improved under the care of this Mary Reilly. Now I was part of the Warner family. These reports were their introduction to me.

Walter wondered how he was going to share the reports of abuse and rape with his father. The guilt his father felt about institutionalizing Sarah would increase a million times after he learned of the atrocities that Sarah had experienced. He would feel responsible for them because he had allowed Sarah to be placed at Southern. Would this make him change his mind about seeing Sarah? Maybe he would back down. Walter felt that would be best for everyone, especially his mother, but he knew they had gone too far. They couldn't turn back no matter what they found. Maybe they could keep the information on the abuse and rape from his mother. He was sure she wouldn't be able to handle it. She sheltered herself from anything unpleasant in life. Abuse and rape were more than just unpleasant. They were horrendous. They were not part of Edith Warner's world.

Walter was planning to meet with his father to share the reports and photo with him. But first he wanted to think more about his father – who was this man who wanted to destroy his family? He thought that he understood his father, a man he had always respected and loved. But now he realized he didn't understand him. He couldn't understand his compulsion to find Sarah no matter the consequences. And it wasn't because he wanted to help Sarah. It was because he wanted to live up to the image of himself as brilliant, charming, but most importantly moral. The last part made him unique. There were lots of brilliant, charming men in this world, but there weren't that many who tried to live by a code of ethics. He had never talked to his father about morality or ethics. As a lawyer, his views of morality were dictated by issues of legality. So his world view was much different than his father's. He tried to think of other areas where his father used morality to guide his behavior and the first area that came to mind was his teaching. He was more than a teacher to his students: he was a mentor, a friend, and a benefactor. Financially, he helped needy students in his classes. He had been there for a student whose father died in a plane crash. In fact, the student stayed at the Warner house for a while. He provided emotional and financial support for a student with cancer. His financial assistance to his students was always done discretely. He didn't want anyone to know about this. He used Edith's money to set up scholarship funds for needy, minority students. To satisfy Edith, he used her money to set up the Wilson Endowed Chair for the Study of English History. And there was his weekly volunteering to serve food to the homeless at an inner city black church's soup kitchen. He could have just given money to help with that, but he gave his time and personal commitment. Serving at a soup kitchen on Thursdays and sailing on Lake Michigan on Saturdays were certainly widely different facets of a man he might not really know after 28 years of being his son.

Walter wanted to be with his father as he went through the reports so he could help him cope with his reactions to these tragedies in Sarah's life. This was the first time he felt protective of his father. They had always had a relationship of equality. Neither had needed the other's protection before. They were strong men in control of their lives. First, he gave him the photo of Sarah. Dr. Warner gazed at it for a long time. Finally, he said, "She's pretty. I didn't know retarded people could be pretty. She looks a lot like Edith. I wonder how she'll respond when she sees this. I never imagined that she'd look like this. I expected her to be ugly, even monstrous. She looks so innocent. So sweet."

Then he read the reports. When he got to the report of the rape, he wept. Her short life had been filled with chaos and violence. If they had not institutionalized her, none of this would have happened. He caused his daughter to be brutalized. He'd always had this feeling that something was happening to Sarah that he needed to know about. He wasn't a mystical type of person, but at the same time he sensed that Sarah had been in trouble and needed him. And maybe that was why he felt driven to find her. Now he was going to save her. He was going to be the knight in shining armor, riding a white horse, charging into her life, scooping her up, and saving her from any future cruelty. He was going to rescue her from Southern.

They discussed whether they should share the reports with Edith, but they knew they had no choice. She needed to learn about this before she met Sarah. But they weren't sure she would even agree to meet Sarah. She was becoming increasingly resistant to having anything to do with her. When Walter or Dr. Warner mentioned her name, she said sternly, "I don't want to talk about her. She's dead to me."

At his next visit to the house, Walter brought the reports. He sat next to Edith as he went through each of the reports. When he got to the incident reports, Edith turned to stone. Violence and rape were not part of Edith's life. She'd never witnessed a violent act in her life nor had she known anyone who'd been raped. She didn't want to know about this. It was too ugly to be part of her life. She had used her wealth to create a world of beauty and comfort, a world with stone walls to keep out ugliness. Now it would be destroyed by Sarah. She couldn't claim the responsibility for causing this ugliness. Sarah caused it. She caused the abuse and rape. She had to be blamed. She couldn't accept blame for herself. When Walter finished going over the reports, she left the room without a word. Whenever they brought this up in conversation, she refused to talk about it.

Before meeting with Dr. Phillips and Dr. Mathers, Dr. Warner set out to learn about Southern State School for the Feebleminded, a place as foreign to him as Antarctica. At the university library he found a book with pictures of Southern. He studied the old, Gothic style buildings and the pictures of retarded people sitting on benches vacantly staring into space. Seeing the dinginess of Southern and the pathetic retarded people shown in the pictures depressed him and made him doubt if he should visit Sarah at Southern. He was seeing what he had tried to visualize in his mind, and the reality was worse than he had imagined. Was he ready

for the ugliness that he would find? Edith was right. They had such a charmed life. He had a great job which he loved; a successful, loving son who would soon marry and give him grandchildren; and an adoring wife, or an adoring wife before he started on this road to find Sarah. His relationship with Edith was deteriorating. There was a chip in their relationship that was widening every day he continued his search. Was it worth it? Yes, yes, yes, yes. It was worth it to him. He was becoming driven in his search. It was the only way he could atone for his sin. His desertion of Sarah at birth caused her to be abused and raped. He was the cause of the evil done to his child. Why hadn't he put her in a private home for retarded people? Why hadn't he consulted with experts to help him do the right thing? Why had he just listened to Dr. Knox without questioning anything? He was a man who investigates everything. Why didn't he investigate what Dr. Knox told him to do? He knew his emotional state at that time was a factor, but it still didn't explain what he blindly did. It was too late to ask questions; now was the time for action.

Dr. Phillips and Dr. Mathers met with Walter and Dr. Warner at Walter's 25th floor law office in a building on Michigan Avenue. Edith chose not to attend. She wasn't ready to take the first step. She was still hoping that Mark would back out, and she'd never have to see Sarah. They reviewed the medical and psychological reports, but they all knew that the real focus of the meeting was the incident reports. Dr. Phillips explained the circumstances behind the two cases of abuse and the rape. Walter was most interested in what had happened to the rapist. Being a lawyer, he wanted to make sure that the rapist had been punished appropriately. Dr. Phillips said that the matter was turned over to the police and to his knowledge Jack Miller, the rapist, had been sent to jail. He had not followed up. And interestingly, Walter also never followed up to find out what had happened to Jack Miller. Had he done so perhaps the tragedy of their lives would have been averted. Perhaps he could have found out when Jack Miller was released from jail and where he was after his release. No, he couldn't have prevented what happened. No one could have.

Then they talked about me and why I was able to help Sarah.

"How was this Mary Reilly able to help Sarah?" Walter asked.

“Well we knew that she was normal and had helped other people in the past. She helped the dying in the hospital and now she works with severely handicapped babies. We placed Sarah in Mary’s ward and had Mary work with her to bring her out of her catatonic state. She has this special talent for reaching out to people.”

Dr. Warner pounced. “What do you mean she’s normal? Isn’t she an inmate there?”

“Yes. When she was admitted at age 13 she was tested and found to have a 65 IQ, but we later found out that was a mistake and she was normal.”

“So why was she incarcerated? Why was she imprisoned in an institution where she didn’t belong?”

Dr. Mathers was visibly uncomfortable discussing this because he knew that I was wrongly imprisoned at Southern.

“We didn’t have anyone to release her to. She had no family.”

“What about placing her with a foster family?”

“I don’t know. I can’t answer your questions. Let’s talk about your visit. Mary has to be there when you meet Sarah because since the rape Sarah’s fearful of strangers, especially men.”

When Walter and Dr. Warner got home, they described their meeting to Edith.

“Edith, Walter and I are going to arrange to visit Sarah. I’d like you to come. Please consider it. I’ll do everything within my power to help you through this.”

“I won’t go the first time. If you go back, then MAYBE I’ll go with you, but don’t count on it. I think you might change your mind about all this once you’ve gone there and see what she’s like and what that institution is like. People like us don’t go to institutions. If we have problems, we go to private sanitariums. Right now there’s no way I could handle the trauma of seeing my dead daughter. She is dead to me and I want to keep her that way. Mark, you’re acting crazy about this whole thing. I don’t want anything to do with this. I feel like you’re pulling me down into quicksand and I refuse to let that happen.”

A visit to Southern for Walter and Dr. Warner was arranged for four weeks later. Edith went to a spa with friends on that weekend. Dr. Phillips and Dr. Mather agreed that it would be necessary for me to prepare Sarah for the visit, and also be present to give Sarah emotional support she would most certainly need. One day I was told not to go to work, but to go to a meeting at 10:00 in the Superintendent's office in the administration building. I was dumbfounded. Me going to the Superintendent's office? What did I do? I imagined all kinds of things: I was being arrested for injuring the rapist two years earlier; I was being arrested for prostitution when I lived at home; I was being transferred to a different institution; and implausibly, I was being released. I was a nervous wreck until the 10:00 o'clock meeting. I would have dressed up, but I didn't have anything to wear other than my two cotton dresses. But I did have the pretty sweater Judy knitted for me. Although it was a hot day, I decided to wear it. I was told where the Superintendent's office was, and at 9:30 was sent off by the curious attendants on my ward.

I knocked at the outer door of the Superintendent's suite of offices and waited for someone to answer. An attendant walking by told me to just go in; I didn't need to knock. I went in and nervously told a secretary who I was and who I was supposed to see. It was only 9:40 so she told me to sit on a bench and wait. At 10:00 a middle aged fat man with thick glasses came out of an office and introduced himself as Dr. Phillips. He escorted me into his office and introduced me to a Dr. Mather who was the Head Psychologist at Southern. Dr. Mather was young and cute. He was the first nice looking man I'd ever seen at Southern. They asked me to tell them all about myself. I started with my entry into Southern and your birth. They asked me to tell them about my life before Southern. My tongue froze. How could I tell these men that I had been a prostitute? Dr. Mather said that he knew I was forced into being a prostitute, but he wanted me to describe my life. And I did. For the first time ever I described the ugliness of my first 12 years to someone in authority. The only other time I spoke so freely about my first 12 years of life was to Judy. I was surprised at how easily I could call forth those horrible memories. I thought I had buried them, but they were close to the surface and came gushing out when I took myself back to those days in Chicago. I must have talked for about 20 minutes and for that whole time they were glued to my words. When I finished, Dr. Mather said that I was a remarkable girl to have survived such an awful experience and turn out to be such a nice person.

A psychologist called me a remarkable girl. A psychologist called me a nice person. I'd never had such glowing compliments in my life.

Then they asked me to describe the work I did at Southern. When I described how I loved my babies, Dr. Mather seemed to be overcome with emotion. He said that I had a reputation among some of the attendants as a healer. My work with the sick and the dying in the hospital and my work with my babies gave people the impression that I could heal. Can you imagine Mary Reilly as a healer? But maybe there was some truth to it. Maybe kindness and love did heal; not disease, but sickness from isolation and loneliness. And maybe I stood out at Southern because I was a rarity – a person who showed kindness to others in a place that was devoid of kindness, a place that only had cruelty and neglect.

Finally, they asked about my history with Sarah and our present relationship. I told them about the abuse she suffered before she was placed with me and her progress since then. Dr. Phillips asked me about the rape. I asked him if this was about me stabbing the rapist with a pin and injuring him and would I have to go to jail for that. He laughed, and said no. I described the terrible event and how I helped Sarah recover. I told him that the abuse and rape made her act more like a child and she was totally dependent on me, like a 2 year old with her mother. I said that she was better, but that her progress was still shaky. She trembled with fear when she saw men who looked like Jack Miller and stayed away from male attendants even if they didn't look like him.

When I was finished talking, Dr. Phillips told me why I was meeting with them.

“Sarah has family in Chicago who want to meet her. They placed her at Southern when she was born because that is the way people handled the birth of a retarded baby in those days. Now they feel guilty about what they did and they want to start a relationship with her. We've never had a situation like this before so we're not sure of the best course of action. The family is rich and influential and well-known in Chicago so we have to be careful that we do not break the law in any way. Sarah's brother is a prominent Chicago lawyer and will be watching us closely. We don't want any negative publicity about this either. We hope the newspapers and T.V. don't get a hold of this.”

I couldn't understand how they could break the law, but I didn't ask about that. And I certainly couldn't understand why newspapers and T.V. would be interested in any of this.

“We want you to help prepare Sarah for this meeting with her family. First, she'll meet with her father, and we would like you to be present so Sarah won't be alone with a strange man. Mary, what should we tell her? How should we present this? “

“She can't understand the concept of a father, especially HER father. She never experienced parents so she has no basis for understanding any of this. I think we should just say that a nice man wants to meet her and become her friend. Why isn't her mother coming? “

“She's having difficulty coming to terms with meeting her daughter.”

I didn't understand this, but I didn't feel comfortable asking him to explain. How could a mother not want to meet her lost daughter? At that moment I thought of you, something I hadn't done for a long time. I thought that I would want to meet you no matter what.

When I got back to the ward, Judy was eagerly waiting for me. She had come back from work early because she was worried about what the Superintendent wanted from me. We went to the day room to talk and be away from Sarah. Although Sarah wouldn't understand what we were saying, she would hear her name and understand that we were talking about her and I didn't want that. Somehow Sarah picked up negative aspects of a conversation. She sensed when something was wrong from how people spoke, even though she didn't understand the meanings of the words they were speaking. If I talked about something frightening or negative, Sarah grew agitated and moaned. She understood my body language and the tone of my voice, not something we think retarded people can do.

After I told Judy about the upcoming meeting, she offered some good advice about preparing Sarah to say hello, shake hands, look in her father's eyes, and smile a lot. Judy wondered who these people were and why they were so important. We had no way of finding out. In those days there were no computers with internet access that we could Google; and even if there were, they wouldn't be in an institution for the retarded; and if they were, the residents wouldn't be allowed to use them even if the residents were normal.

Suddenly it dawned on me that I was important, that the highest powers-that-be at Southern were asking me what to do, and involving me in important decisions. I couldn't believe that I was being recognized for who I was – Mary a smart, kind person. I was soaring.

On September 6, 1970, a Sunday at 2:00 o'clock, Sarah and I met with Dr. Warner in a conference room in the administration building. I dressed Sarah up as best I could and put Judy's barrette in her hair. Remember that was the barrette she got from Clarence. That morning, I shampooed her hair and it glistened. She had such lovely, silky blonde hair. I told her we were going to meet a nice man who was going to be her friend. Judy accompanied us to the administration building. It had been decided that I would talk to Dr. Warner in the conference room before he met Sarah so Judy waited in the hall with Sarah. Sitting in the conference room was Dr. Phillips, Dr. Mather, and this tall, handsome older man. He looked like someone who would play a minister or a doctor on T.V. After I was introduced, Dr. Warner thanked me for being Sarah's protector. His eyes kept welling up and he kept saying that he couldn't cry in front of Sarah because she wouldn't understand that these were tears of happiness, not sadness

Dr. Phillips and Dr. Mather left and I went out to get Sarah. I brought her in and introduced her to Dr. Warner. We had practiced saying Mr. Mark, and Sarah said, "Hello Mr. Mark. How are you?" We had practiced it so many times that it was actually understandable. Dr. Warner who was working hard to not cry replied, "I'm fine. How are you Sarah?" Sarah looked him in the eye, smiled brightly, and said, "Fine." She showed no fear at being with a strange man. Maybe because I was there with her or maybe because Dr. Warner sent the message that he wouldn't hurt her or maybe both.

I had told Dr. Mather to tell the family to bring things for Sarah since she couldn't chat. Dr. Warner took out a children's picture book with photos of different farm animals that was designed for two-year olds. He showed each picture to Sarah, said the animal's name, and then made the animal's sound. "This is a cow. A cow says moo. Moo. Can you say moo Sarah?....This is a pig. A pig says oink. Oink. Can you say oink Sarah?" How funny it was to see this distinguished, well-educated man making animal sounds. Sarah didn't do well with saying the animals' names, but she was better at saying moo and oink. When they finished going through the book three times, Sarah reached over and took Dr. Warner's hand and held it. He was overcome by this simple act of affection. He visibly struggled to hold back tears. Then from a

bag he took out cokes and cookies. Sarah was delighted – this was the best part of their meeting. She ate four cookies and would have eaten more if I had let her. Then Dr. Warner showed her a picture of Edith and said that this was “Miss Edith”. She was going to be her friend too and he hoped that she would visit next time. I said that we’d practice saying hello Miss Edith for the next visit. As Dr. Warner rose to leave, Sarah waved bye-bye like a little child. Dr. Warner waved bye-bye back.

As we left the room, we saw Walter waiting for Dr. Warner at the end of the hall. When Dr. Warner reached him, he collapsed into his arms. Then they went off to talk to Dr. Phillips and Dr. Mather. Their evaluation of the visit was quite positive. They felt that this was a good experience for Sarah. Dr. Warner felt that it was the beginning of him being able to heal. He would become the father he should have been for the past 18 years.

The next visit was going to be in four weeks, again at 2:00 on a Sunday. Edith still refused to meet Sarah. She was becoming more adamant in her refusal to ever meet Sarah. So at this visit, Walter was introduced. Walter read the baby animal book with her and then took out a coloring book and crayons. He showed Sarah how to color a dog brown. She picked up a pink crayon and scribbled over a picture of a cat. She used different colored crayons to scribble over the pictures on each of the pages. She smiled as she scribbled. She thought she was a great artist, and in her own way, she was. Then Sarah asked, “Cookies?” This was the best part of the visit and she couldn’t wait until she had her snack. She again devoured four cookies and gobbled down a coke.

Another visit was planned for four weeks later. Dr. Warner spent most of that time trying to convince Edith to join him. Finally, she relented and agreed to meet Sarah. She told him she was only doing this so that he would stop pestering her. Edith was nervous the whole drive down to Seymour. She fidgeted and refused to talk.

When I brought Sarah into the room to meet Edith, she was sitting alone at the end of the table, far from where we usually sat. So we joined her there. Sarah said, “Hello Miss Edith. How are you?” Edith looked at Sarah and said, “Fine, Sarah, fine.”

Sarah touched Edith’s white hair and then touched her own hair and said something that sounded like “Same.” When Sarah reached out to touch Edith’s hair, Edith pulled back as if she

were afraid that Sarah might hurt her. Edith couldn't stop staring at her. She was struck by the physical resemblance to herself. Although she had noticed the resemblance in the picture, she hadn't been prepared for seeing someone who looked so much like herself, but still looked retarded. They read the baby animal book and then Edith took out a new coloring book and Sarah eagerly scribbled on each page. The whole time Edith acted as if she wanted to be anywhere other than where she was.

When Dr. Warner brought out the snack, Sarah had her usual four cookies and drink. Dr. Warner and I also had cookies and a drink. Edith had nothing. She just wanted to get out of that room as quickly as possible. When it was time to go, Dr. Warner gently touched Sarah's shoulder and said bye-bye. Sarah smiled at him and said bye-bye. Edith left without saying good-bye. She felt that she had done her duty. She didn't ever want to see Sarah again. She hoped that this one visit would satisfy Mark, but it didn't. When he asked her to visit Sarah again, she said, "I hate her. It looks like the devil took my face and twisted it into hers. I can't stand looking at her. And I will never ever again set foot in that insane asylum. Did you see those horrible monsters? It's a place that no one normal should be allowed in. It's Hell on Earth. Those freaks should be kept hidden from the world forever." Mark was speechless at the extent of her hatred of Sarah and Southern. He knew he would have to scale huge walls to get Edith to agree to his ultimate plan of bringing Sarah home.

Dr. Warner didn't visit in December because he and Edith were in London for three weeks. He came in January and at the end of the visit Sarah hugged Mark. She just held him around the waist. On the next visit, I tried to leave the room while Sarah and Dr. Warner were coloring. I thought that maybe Sarah trusted Dr. Warner enough to be alone with him. As I put my hand on the doorknob, Sarah became agitated and started moaning. She had been aware of my movements as soon as I got out of my chair. I went to her and put my arms around her and she cried like a baby. She held me around the neck, not letting go of me for a long time. It was obvious that Sarah still needed me. Perhaps she would need me for a very long time. Perhaps forever. Up to that time Mark had only seen Sarah when she was smiling and cooperative. Now he saw that there was more to Sarah – there was a frightened child needing constant protection. I knew then that I would dedicate my life to protecting Sarah, but little did I know that I wouldn't be successful.

The visit on March 15 had life-changing news because that is when Dr. Warner presented his plans to bring Sarah home.

Chapter 11

Freedom

With each visit to Southern, Dr. Warner became more and more convinced that he had to rescue Sarah; he couldn't let her continue to live in this cold, dangerous institution. It wasn't too late to make up for the 18 years of neglect, abuse, and rape that he had caused her to suffer. There was nothing he could do to change the past, but he could change the future. It was at about this time that the trend for deinstitutionalization began, first with the mentally ill and then with the mentally retarded. At that time, it was revolutionary to think that institutions should be closed and the mentally ill and the mentally retarded should be integrated in the community. I don't think that anyone in 1970 would have thought that by 2010 most institutions would be closed. When Dr. Warner learned about deinstitutionalization, he was all the more convinced that he had to bring Sarah home. And he also knew that he couldn't bring her home without me. She needed me to help her adjust to the move from an institution she had known her whole life to a home with people she barely knew. Even though she would live in a beautiful setting with a caring father, it would still be hard for her to adjust.

Dr. Warner needed Edith's approval for his plan. She had only visited Southern once, and refused to return. To her, Southern was a hellhole and she didn't want to dirty herself by spending one more minute there. But it was okay for Sarah to live in the hellhole. Finally, Mark said to Edith:

“Edith, I think it's time we talk about moving Sarah to our house.”

“I know you’ve been thinking of doing that. Of course, I don’t want to do it. I think it would be better to place her in a small home with people like her. I asked Walter to check into the best homes for such people. There are some not far from here. That way you could monitor how well she was being taken care of and you could see her occasionally. Maybe you could even bring her to the house for Christmas. But I can’t stand the idea of having her live in my house. Remember it’s MY house.”

“I know that the small home might be a possibility. But it’s not really bringing Sarah home. It’s trading a big institution for a small one.”

“Well then we could even get her an apartment with someone to take care of her, like that Mary person.”

“Edith, we have a big house and there’s more than enough room for Sarah and Mary. We have the two rooms over the kitchen where they could live. It’s like a separate apartment up there. You wouldn’t even have to see them unless you wanted to. We could have Mary stay with her all day, take her places, and eat with her and do whatever’s necessary to keep her clean. You could still keep your life as it is. You could have your lady lunches every day and you could continue your art collecting. Sarah wouldn’t interfere with your life. But I just have this feeling if Sarah were here, you would change. You would start to feel that you were her mother.”

“Huh! I will never be the mother to that thing. Dream on.”

“Please Edith. Let me do this. I need to do this.”

“You’ll never stop pestering me about this so let’s try it for a short time to see if it works. But if it doesn’t, I want her out – anyplace but here.”

As usual, Edith gave in to Mark’s wishes. That was the way their marriage was. But there was another reason she agreed to Sarah’s move out of Southern, and that was that she didn’t like Mark being away from her for an entire day every three or four Sundays. He was away all day at work from Monday through Friday and he often sailed or did something with his men friends on Saturday so they only had Sundays together. Their Sunday routine started with her going to the eight o’clock mass alone because Mark never went to church. In fact, he hadn’t been in a church since their wedding. You couldn’t count his serving meals to the homeless in a church basement

as going to church. At 9:30 after she got back from mass, they'd spend the day at their country club. They'd have a champagne brunch together, and if the weather was good, they'd golf or play tennis, and if the weather was bad, they'd play cards. She loved the days of leisure when they were together at their elite country club with her kind of people. And they ended the day by going home and making love. She lived for these Sundays. She wished everyday were Sunday. So she didn't want him to be away any more Sundays so she agreed to have Sarah move into to HER home.

Edith agreed to Mark's plan as long as she didn't have to see Sarah. There was a back staircase in the kitchen that Sarah and I used to get to our bedrooms. These rooms were designed for live-in household help which the Warners didn't have. One bedroom was large and that was for Sarah, and the other, mine, was small, almost as small as my bedroom growing up in Chicago. There was a bathroom between the two bedrooms so we didn't have to use a downstairs bathroom. It was perfect. We lived in the house like ghosts, never seen by Edith.

After Dr. Warner got Edith to agree to taking us out of Southern, he talked to Dr. Phillips about what would be necessary to make this happen. This came about at the same time Dr. Phillips was making plans for the first movement of residents out of Southern as part of a deinstitutionalization plan that the state was implementing. He realized that Sarah and I were ideal candidates. He needed the first wave of deinstitutionalized residents to be successful so it would be easier for others to follow. Sarah and I were certainly not representative of the deinstitutionalized population. Sarah wasn't going into the community, but living with a family with endless resources, and I wasn't retarded. So our success had nothing to do with any future success of people who were retarded who were going into the community without family support and money. But that didn't matter. We would be successful, and that would provide evidence that deinstitutionalization worked.

At his next visit, Dr. Warner indicated that he wanted to talk to me privately after he met with Sarah. I immediately starting foreseeing bad things...he didn't want me to be involved in the visits with Sarah anymore or he was taking Sarah home without me or he was blaming me for her rape. All kinds of crazy things raced through my mind, all bad. We sat on a bench in the hall and Dr. Warner took my hands in his and said, "I'm going to take Sarah home. She'll be leaving Southern."

My heart sank. I was going to lose my baby sister. I would be alone at Southern, except for Judy. In the one second before he told me that I would be leaving Southern too, I was overcome with overwhelming sadness, but then it totally disappeared when he said, “And I’d like you to come live with us. I don’t think Sarah will be able to make it on the outside without you. We need you.” I was on a roller coaster going from the depths of extreme sadness to the heights of soaring happiness. I couldn’t believe that my dreams were coming true. This man was an angel from God. He was my savior. To myself, I thanked God over and over and over. And those magical words: “We need you.” Someone important needed me - Mary Reilly.

My mind was racing with endless questions, but I asked the most important one first. “When can we do this? Next week?”

He laughed. “I wish we could. It’ll probably take some months for all the paper work.” Little did he know it would take seven months, and it would have taken even longer if Walter hadn’t handled the legal aspects of our release.

Dr. Warner wanted me to prepare Sarah for the move. Although she’d be living in a much better place, she might not feel that way at first because it would be so different, so foreign, so alien. Dr. Warner asked about what he could do to make the move easier for Sarah. I told him to take lots of pictures: of the outside of the house, of every room in the house, especially her room, and of the household help. I also suggested that he get her a stuffed animal that she could bond with at Southern, and then take to her new home.

At that point I realized that since I’d met Sarah she’d become more than my little sister. She was my lost baby. She was you. I really loved her and I knew that it would be as hard for me to be separated from her as it would be for her to be separated from me. But we didn’t have to be separated. We could be free together and bond in a new way.

At his next visit Dr. Warner talked about my freedom.

“Mary, what can I do to help you make the transition to the outside world?”

“I don’t know what I’ll be doing.”

“You’ll be a companion for Sarah, not a maid, but a friend and a caregiver. You’ll help her meet the many challenges of living in the outside world. You’ll have a room to yourself next to Sarah, but at first I think it might be better if you shared her room. I have twin beds for both of you in Sarah’s room. I want to stress, Mary, that you are not going to be a servant.”

Of course, I didn’t know that Edith didn’t agree with him on this. Edith thought I was everyone’s servant and should be at everyone’s beck and call. I didn’t care if I was a servant. It didn’t matter because I was going to be free.

“With time, we’ll work out what you want to do. Have you given any thought to what you want to do with your life?”

“Yes, I want to go to school.”

“I didn’t expect that, but if that’s what you want, we’ll make that happen.”

“Dr. Warner, more than anything in the world I want to get my high school diploma. Then I want to go to college.”

He looked at me with shock, not expecting that school would be my main goal. “I’ll do whatever I can to help you get your college diploma.” At that moment in time, I had no doubt that someday I would be a college graduate.

To prepare for our move out of Southern, I made a list of clothes we would need since we couldn’t wear the rags we wore at Southern. I wanted us to walk out of Southern wearing clothes that wouldn’t make us stand out as being different. I wanted us to look normal. I never imagined that we would look more than normal; we would look stylish. At the next visit, Dr. Warner asked Dr. Phillips to get our measurements so that he could get us a new wardrobe. And of course who was the best at measuring us for clothes but Judy. So Sarah and I went to the sewing shop where Judy took every possible measurement, including our feet, so that we could be completely outfitted without trying anything on. Dr. Phillips was astounded that two of his residents would have complete new wardrobes. He never envisioned that for any of his residents, or even for his wife and three daughters.

Dr. Warner gave the list that I had put together to Edith, but she didn't want to be involved in any way with our leaving Southern so she gave the list to Mrs. Brown, their housekeeper. Mrs. Brown had a daughter, Michelle, who was in college and did all kinds of odd jobs for the Warners. She was given the job of buying our wardrobe. Dr. Warner gave her a credit card to charge everything. There was no mention of limiting the cost. Can you imagine that – a blank check to buy anything? Michelle bought us sweaters, blouses, skirts, underwear, pajamas, robes, sock, shoes, and slippers. After our release from Southern, Michelle took us shopping to further add to our wardrobe. We became the best dressed deinstitutionalized women in America. We could have been the cover girls on a magazine called *Freedom* featuring successful deinstitutionalized women. I can't tell you how different I felt wearing nice clothes. During my first 13 years I wore the cheapest, junkiest clothes imaginable, and then during my time at Southern I wore thread-bare old lady clothes. And now I was wearing fashionable clothes that made me feel I belonged in the outside world. I could walk down any street in Chicago and people would either not look at me because I looked like everybody else, or they would admire me for having such nice clothes. They say that clothes make the man, or in this case the woman, and they're right.

I thought it would be easy to leave, but it wasn't. I didn't want to leave Judy. She was my best friend and the person who had helped me survive at Southern. Without her, I would have died or become a zombie. She begged me to help her get out of Southern so I talked to Dr. Warner about her. He then talked to Dr. Phillips who said that the normals were at the top of the list to be deinstitutionalized, although this would cause a problem with their jobs. Who would head up the sewing shop when Judy left? Who would be a helper in the ward for severely disabled babies when I left? They needed us; we helped run the institution, but the high level retarded residents were the real ones who ran the institution. They worked in the cafeteria and the laundry, they cleaned the floors in every building, and they helped manage the residents with more severe disabilities. There's a saying about the inmates running the asylum. Well, that was certainly true in a literal way at Southern State School for the Feebleminded.

I had a hard time covering up my nervousness about the move. I didn't want Sarah to sense my anxiety because that would scare her. Although I told her that we would be moving to the pretty house in the pictures, she couldn't grasp what was about to happen. I couldn't grasp it.

I was going to live in a mansion and have my own room and nice clothes and go to school. This was beyond my wildest dreams. When I dreamed of being free, I dreamed of living in an apartment like the one I lived in growing up with my mother. When I dreamed of being free, I dreamed of going to school, but it was like my elementary school. The only experiences I had to base my dreams on were my experiences growing up in Chicago. I had no way of conceptualizing the life I would lead.

The day before the move I packed my few possessions as well as Sarah's in a small suitcase that Dr. Warner had given me. I didn't pack any clothes except for the sweater that Judy had knitted for me. I took my Bible, which by the way I still have. I've never gotten another one. This is the one that saved me. A new pretty one could not take the place of this raggedy, dirty Bible that has the words of God etched into it.

I looked at my collection of pins and knew that I wouldn't need them. I would never have to protect myself or Sarah from violence again. We would be safe, or so I thought. Judy and I spent my last evening at Southern together. I presented her with my collection of pins and told her that I hoped she wouldn't have to use them. We cried a lot; we hugged a lot; we talked about how we had saved each other when we were both at low points in our lives. I had good news for her. Dr. Warner told me that she was scheduled to be released within the next six months. I gave her the Warners' address and phone number and told her to write me with all the information on her release as soon as she got it. I told her that I would greet her as she had greeted me eight years earlier. Thirteen months later, Mrs. Brown told me that I had a phone call. It was Judy. All she said was, "I'm free." I'll tell you about Judy's life later. She has been one lucky lady and has had a loving marriage and two wonderful step-children. The only sad part of her life has been her son Carl.

I didn't sleep much the night before our release so when light came through the windows at 6:30 A.M. I got out of bed, washed, and dressed in my new clothes. I couldn't stop looking at my green sweater, green plaid skirt, white socks, and suede loafers. I felt like Cinderella wearing her new ball gown. I woke Sarah, helped her wash, and dressed her in her light blue sweater, dark blue pleated skirt, white socks, and leather loafers. We stood next to each other in the bathroom and looked at ourselves in the mirror. We didn't recognize these pretty, stylish girls. We giggled and hugged. I was giddy, an emotion I never before experienced.

We went to the cafeteria to have our last breakfast at Southern. Residents and workers came to wish us good luck. We were famous because everyone knew that we were the first to be released from Southern. We were the pioneers that would pave the way for others to leave. On that day, no one could possibly foresee that in 30 years Southern would be closed. It would become a haunted house, filled with ghosts of the poor souls who died there and the poor souls who led wasted, tragic lives there.

Judy was spending the morning with us so she could be with us until our very last minute at Southern. After breakfast we went to the day room to wait for the call that the Dr. Warner had arrived. I was talking to Judy and saw that she was staring at something behind me. I turned and saw Dr. Warner, Walter, and Dr. Phillips standing in the doorway. Dr. Warner had never visited the ward. I don't think it was allowed, but he insisted that he wanted to see where we'd lived. We took him to the ward and showed him our beds and the bathroom. Dr. Warner walked the length of the ward staring at the beds and the lives they contained. He asked me if this was the bathroom where Sarah had been raped. He was relieved to find out that it wasn't. Then he left so Sarah and I could use the bathroom before the long drive home. That was the last time I went to a bathroom where everyone could see me, where I was on public display.

We said goodbye to the attendants and then I hugged Judy tightly. It was hard to separate from her. We had been together every single day since I was transferred from the hospital to my ward. Every single day for eight years. We had shared every emotion imaginable, from the happiness of her having her first sexual experience to the devastation when she was rejected by Clarence. I wanted to take her with me. I loved her so much. We walked to the front door. I carried the small suitcase with all our belongings that were the only mementos of our lives at Southern. As we went out the front door, I felt like God was waiting for me. I felt like there was a shining light from heaven ushering me into the land of freedom. I felt like one of the Jews leaving Egypt for the promised land. This was my exodus. There was a long flight of steps leading to the road where Mr. Warner's car was parked. In the eight years I had lived at Southern, I had never gone out this door and I had never walked down these stairs. This was like my grand entrance into the real world.

We got in Dr. Warner's big white Cadillac. Walter and Dr. Warner sat in the front and Sarah and I in the back. When I had taken the train from Chicago to Southern eight years earlier,

I hadn't look out the window. But now on the ride back to Chicago, I looked at everything – the millions of cows, the trillions of acres of corn, the small towns, the many bumpy railroad crossings, and finally the suburbs of Chicago. The buildings looked taller than I remembered them. They had grown up like I had.

We drove to Evanston, the suburb just north of Chicago where Northwestern University is. We passed the stately university with its impressive buildings. Then we drove through streets with huge houses and manicured lawns. We pulled into a driveway next to a stately brick house that had three floors. Before we got out of the car, I showed Sarah pictures of the outside of the house and compared the pictures to the actual house. We got out and walked to the front door. As soon as we got there, the door was opened by Mrs. Brown who warmly greeted us. “Welcome.” She was a stout black woman with a huge smile which showed her perfect white teeth. She was decked out in a maid's uniform, a black dress with a white small lacey apron. But what was most endearing about her was her throaty laugh which was contagious. You just wanted to laugh when you heard her. From the first moment I met Mrs. Brown, I sensed that she was motherly and accepting, and she certainly proved to be so over the five years we lived together. She was always there to help us and comfort us. She turned out to be more of a mother to Sarah than Edith who was totally absent from her life. I asked where Mrs. Warner was, but no one answered my question. No one wanted to tell us that she didn't want us in her home, but only agreed because she had to if she wanted to keep her husband.

Dr. Warner took us on a tour of the parts of the house we would be allowed in. First, he took us to the downstairs guest bathroom since it had been a long ride from Seymour and we had only stopped one. It had silvery wallpaper and a marble sink with gold faucets. I didn't know such fancy bathrooms existed. Up to this point in my life, this was the fanciest room I'd ever been in, and it was a bathroom. That was the only time we were allowed to use that bathroom. For the next five years we could only use our bathroom upstairs. When we were finished, we went to the kitchen for a snack. We sat at a huge wooden table and were served lemonade and cookies by Mrs. Brown. I had never had lemonade before. I didn't really like it, but it didn't matter. It was something new and different. I knew I'd have lots of new and different experiences, and I eagerly awaited all of them with open arms.

Next Dr. Warner took us on a tour of the downstairs of the house. It was like a museum, especially with all these huge pictures on the walls. Some of the pictures were taller than I was. I showed Sarah the photos of the rooms that I had previously shown her so that she'd be familiar with her new home. Now we were in the place where these pictures were taken. We entered the living room with paintings of Edith's ancestors on the walls. There were three groupings of couches and chairs and there was a grand piano by the front windows. On each end of the room, there was a giant fireplace. They were so big, I could have walked right in them without bending over. This room could fit 100 people in it and no one would feel crowded. Next we went into the library where Dr. Warner did his work at home. The walls were covered with bookshelves containing thousands of books. It was almost as big as the public library I would eventually go to. I decided then and there to read as many of these books as I could. Of course, I never really read more than a few. We went into the dining room which had a table with 16 chairs and a shimmering crystal chandelier. Finally, we went back into the kitchen where I looked at the center island with pots and pans hanging over it. Imagine pots and pans hanging in the air.

We never went up the main staircase to see the second floor where the bedrooms were or the third floor where there was a huge game room and more bedrooms. This was Edith's house, and we were never welcomed to live any place other than the rooms over the garage. I was never tempted to go up to the second and third floors even when Edith was away for weeks at a time in Europe or at her summer house. Even though I knew I wouldn't be found out, I couldn't break the rule that had been set down. I knew my place both figuratively and literally.

Dr. Warner took us to Sarah's room and I matched the photo to the actual room as I pointed to her bed, her dresser, her armchair, and her bathroom. I told her to lie down in her bed and I laid down in the twin bed next to it and pretended to snore. She hugged her doll and snored too. What a happy moment! I think she knew she was home. This was the place she was meant to be.

Then we went to my room. I had a room when I was growing up, but it was like a filthy pig sty. This room was the total opposite – it glistened. There was a bed with a bright flowered bedspread, lace curtains on the windows, a narrow tall dresser for my clothes, and a small desk, a place where I knew I would spend a lot of time reading and writing. I went into the door leading to the bathroom that I would share with Sarah. This was a sparkling clean bathroom that I would

share with just one other person. How unbelievable! And there were separate doors going to Sarah's bedroom and to mine. I could have total privacy. A private, clean bathroom – one of my fondest dreams realized.

That night I lay in bed unable to sleep because I couldn't believe what was happening to me. I had never dreamed that houses like this existed so I never dreamed that I could live in one. When I finally fell asleep, I slept more soundly than any night in my life. I was now a free woman with no fears.

It took about a week for us to get used to the house. Mrs. Brown took me to the basement to show me how to use the washer and dryer so I could wash our clothes. This was not a dirty, dark basement like I had to use before when I lived with my mother. This was a bright, shiny basement that could have been someone's apartment it was so nicely furnished. She showed me which clothes had to be dry cleaned and told me to give them to her when they needed to be sent out. I didn't know that some clothes had to be dry cleaned. I thought everything could be washed. She introduced us to Hilda who was the maid who would be cleaning our rooms every few days. Hilda was what you call nondescript. I couldn't tell if she was 30 or 50. She was average height and weight, had drab brown hair, and wore no makeup. She was foreign. I think she might have been Swedish or Norwegian. She rarely spoke, but I'm not sure if that was because she didn't know English well or because she was a silent person. Although she cleaned our rooms and the bathroom, we were responsible for making our beds every morning. At first I made both mine and Sarah's, but after many weeks of teaching Sarah how to make her bed, she mastered it. It took her three times longer for her to make it and it was always lopsided, but she made her bed herself. That was the important thing.

Sarah and I had to use the back door in the kitchen to go in and out of the house. That way we wouldn't be seen by the neighbors or risk being seen by Edith. There was a huge fenced yard with a door in the back fence that took us out to an alley, and from there, it was just a few feet to the street. How I hated going into that alley. It reminded me of what I was forced to do in an alley years ago. Even though this was a clean, well-lit alley, it was still an alley. When Edith was away on one of her many trips, Mrs. Brown let us use the front door. She knew I hated that alley, and she also knew what it meant to have to go through the back door.

The yard had gardens, bird feeders, a fountain, and even a gazebo. In the spring and summer, we loved sitting in the gazebo admiring the flowers that sprang up almost every day. There were no flowers in my neighborhood in Chicago, and there were no flowers at Southern. So to me, flowers were an exotic rarity.

I bought a big rubber ball so Sarah and I could play catch. At first I had to stand just a few inches away from Sarah for her to get the ball, but gradually she was able to catch it from a few feet away. Sometimes I would see Edith spying on us from a second floor window. I couldn't see her face, but I saw the drapes move apart slightly. She probably heard us laughing and talking loudly. There wasn't usually much noise, if any, in the Warner house. What was she thinking when she saw her retarded daughter and her caregiver having fun? Was she happy for us? I don't think so. Was she angry that we were spoiling the beauty of her gardens with our presence? Probably. Was she angry that we were polluting the silence of her house? Probably.

It didn't take us long to settle into a routine. Dr. Warner ate early and left for the university at 7:30 so he wasn't at breakfast when we came down at about 8:00. Edith didn't eat breakfast so we never saw her. Maybe that was why she was so thin. Mrs. Brown made us breakfast. Whatever we wanted – cereal, pancakes, eggs. It was like being in a restaurant only I didn't have to pay. Dr. Warner left the morning Tribune on the table. That's how I got into the habit of reading the daily newspaper. Remember at Southern I read whatever I could find, but there wasn't much available. Now there was a paper awaiting me every morning. And that was the beginning of my interest in the news. Up until then, I didn't know what had happened in the world. I missed the space race, the civil rights movement, and the assassinations of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy. I had never heard of these people or John Glenn or Rosa Parks. I was totally ignorant of the world. It was like I hatched from an egg on my day of liberation and I had to catch up with what had happened in the world while I was inside the shell of my apartment in Chicago and Southern State.

After the first week at the Warners, Edith surprised us and joined us at breakfast, although she didn't eat anything. She talked to me and ignored Sarah, not even saying hello or good morning. She told me that Michelle would take us places when we had to go out. She always wanted to know where we were going and with whom. She told me that Michelle would take us shopping to get more clothes or anything that we needed. I asked if we could go out alone

once I learned the neighborhood. She thought for a minute and then said yes, but reminded me that I was to use only the back door and I was always to tell Mrs. Brown where we were going. She spoke at me, not to me, for about five minutes and then disappeared. I rarely saw her after that. When I had to communicate anything to her, I left a note for her on the front hall table. If she had something to say to me, she'd tell Mrs. Brown.

At first, we filled our days by exploring the neighborhood with Michelle. But as I learned the neighborhood, Michelle stopped coming because she was busy with school and didn't want to waste her time walking around with us even if she got paid for it. Michelle was relieved not to have to escort us on our outings, especially since I liked going out everyday even if it was raining or snowing. I don't think she particularly liked either Sarah or me. She never talked to us or even looked at us when we were together. I've wondered if she was afraid of us, afraid of who we were, a retarded person and a low class white person. I think the only person she liked was her mother. And she truly loved her. She was always hugging her and holding her hand. She was a different person when she was in her mother's presence. She acted distant and even fearful of Dr. Warner, and I never saw her with Edith, but I'm sure she acted the same way with her.

I realized after a while that we needed more clothes especially as the weather got colder. So I told Mrs. Brown who told Mrs. Warner who told Mrs. Brown to tell Michelle to take us shopping. What a communication system. Michelle took us to Marshall Field's, the fanciest department store chain in the Chicago area. We took a taxicab to Field's in the Old Orchard Shopping Center. I had never seen a shopping center before and was astounded at all the stores in one place. Can you imagine me in a taxicab? I felt like I was in Cinderella's carriage. As I walked into Field's I was hit by the smell in the cosmetics department. I loved it. I felt like I was being wrapped in something luxurious. I wanted to stand there and inhale the delicious smells forever. As I looked up at the ornate ceilings and looked down at the marble floor and sideways at the cases filled with goods, I felt like I was in a fairy land. What a gorgeous store! I think it's the most beautiful store I've ever been in and seeing it for the first time was magical. Another magical thing was that I didn't have to consider price. I just picked out what I liked and Michelle charged it. That was so different from when I shopped with Mrs. Milano. And it's so different from how I shop now. I'm always looking at prices, and I only buy what's on sale.

I loved being able to go out whenever I wanted to. That was another aspect of true freedom. In the neighborhood, I found a few stores that I liked, but the public library was my very favorite. Here was a place with thousands of books, and they were all free. On our first visit there with Michelle, I got my library card – another symbol of freedom. Whenever we went to the library, we'd start in the children's section and I'd get a few books that Sarah liked. Then we'd go to the fiction section where I was overwhelmed by the choices. I wanted to check out ten books at a time, but I learned to ration myself to two books a week. Once I started my GED training and school, I had to drop down to just one book a week because I found that I didn't have time for much recreational reading.

One morning after two weeks in the house, Dr. Warner joined us for breakfast. He told me that he was going to pay me a salary for being Sarah's companion. He was going to pay me \$50 a week, and I wouldn't have to pay for food or rent. He said that if I needed money for anything special to just let him know. I had no conception of money and the costs of things. To me, \$50 was like \$1,000. He had Michelle take me to the bank to open a savings account so I could save my salary. That was a much safer way of keeping my money than putting it in a teapot in the kitchen cupboard as I had done many years before. I felt that Michelle resented me getting paid so much for just "baby sitting," but of course we never discussed this.

Dr. Warner said that he wanted to meet with me once a week to discuss Sarah's progress. This was how our friendship began. Every Sunday morning at 8 A.M. when Edith went to mass, we met until she came home. As soon as we heard the front door close, Sarah and I hurried back to our rooms. We talked in the library, a room filled with books, a place where I felt comfortable. Mrs. Brown served coffee for me and Dr. Warner and milk for Sarah. She put out a plate of sweet rolls. Sarah usually had one of each kind – cheese, raspberry, and apricot. Dr. Warner was sure to keep the door open and have Sarah present whenever we met. I think he was concerned that Edith might think he was having a relationship with me. She certainly would have been suspicious if she'd known I was a child prostitute. Had she found out about this, I'm sure she would have thrown me out of her house.

First we talked about Sarah: what we did over the week, Sarah's behavior, and anything new thing Sarah learned. I tried to teach Sarah the letters of the alphabet, and every Sunday she showed off how she was able to read the letter we worked on that week. She was so proud as I

held up the letter S and she said in a loud voice ESSSSSS. She never did master all 26 letters, but I think she got about 10 or 15. S was her favorite letter because it was in her name which I tried to teach her to read – unsuccessfully. I taught her to point to pictures corresponding to names of different animals – dog, cat, snake, bug, and elephant. I tried to teach her colors, but she never was able to learn them. She confused the color name with the name of the object. For example, when I said red as I pointed to an apple, she'd say apple. Color was too abstract a concept for her. I think sadly of all she might have been able to learn if someone had taught her when she was ripe for learning, when she was a young child.

And then we talked about me: my progress in school and any problems I was facing. Gradually, Dr. Warner started asking me about my past and that is when he helped me to understand all that I had gone through, and how to cope with its affects on my present and my future. During the third year I was at the Warners, we started to talk about good and evil, God, doing the right thing even if it caused problems, the meaning of life, and every idea that popped into my mind. Then I talked about my dreams for going to school and getting a college education and getting a job where I could make a difference in the world. That's when Dr. Warner talked about not having dreams anymore. He wondered if he had achieved everything he wanted, and if so, why wasn't he happy. He talked about not being the man he wanted to be. It was not enough for him to be a good teacher or have an interesting life or be a good sailor or hopefully be a good father. He wanted more of himself, but he didn't know what. He did know he wanted to always do the right thing. And he was proud of himself for having taken Sarah and me out of Southern. But there was still something lacking, only he didn't know what it was. I found it astounding that here was a man with everything and he wasn't happy. I also found it sad that he no longer had dreams. Everyone needs dreams; even a 100 year old who's about to die. They need to dream of heaven.

Dr. Warner never talked about Edith, but she was always an invisible presence in the room. I sensed that he no longer loved her, but that he was trapped in a loveless marriage, and that was why he was unhappy. He couldn't leave her, or really he couldn't leave her money. Sometimes I got the impression that when Dr. Warner talked **about** himself, he was talking **to** himself. It was as if I wasn't there. He didn't expect me to say anything and when I did, he acted like he was surprised to find me in the room. I realized that he had no one to talk to about himself

– his dreams or loss of dreams. He couldn't talk to Edith or to Walter and he didn't seem to have any close friends that I knew of. I never felt that I understood Dr. Warner fully. He was so complex. He had so many facets. Obviously, I had never met anyone as smart or as charming or as handsome or as unfulfilled. After all these years, I still don't fully understand him.

Even though we were together only an hour, I missed those Sunday morning conversations when Dr. Warner went away, and that was frequently. For most of the summer, he and Edith were either at their summer home in Michigan or traveling in Europe. Sometimes they were gone for six or seven weeks. And of course, they never took Sarah. At first I thought that Dr. Warner might take her to their summer house, but he never mentioned it.

Now describing my feelings for Dr. Warner is hard because I don't know what they are, even after all these year. You probably noticed that I don't call him by his first name. I can't. I respect him too much. To me, Dr. Warner is god-like. Here was a man who had everything – wealth, success – and yet he had to atone for a mistake he'd made. No, to him it was more than a mistake. It was a sin. He believed in sin, even though he wasn't sure he believed in God. I never quite understood that. Can you have one without the other? His sin was abandoning his flesh and blood. It was his fault that she was violated in the worst possible way. He felt that he had to atone for his sin and do everything possible to give Sarah a good life, a safe life. And I was part of the way to give her such a life. I had been her protector and the only person to love her up until he found her. He needed me for Sarah. As I think back to his relationship with Sarah, I see that there was something missing. Maybe he, too, couldn't accept a person who was retarded. He valued learning more than anything in the world and it was hard for him to accept a person who was the opposite of a scholar, a person who had limited potential to learn. Dr. Warner was not a believer in God although he was a moral man. He couldn't put retardation into the bigger picture of God's plan like I did. But in the last analysis, I'm not sure he ever really loved Sarah. He didn't reject her like Edith, but there was no love in his heart for her. And maybe that was another reason for his unhappiness – he couldn't love his daughter especially because of the terrible things that happened to her because of him. He thought that he would atone for his sin by taking Sarah out of Southern, but that wasn't enough. He felt he continued to sin by not really loving his child.

And then there was the relationship between Dr. Warner and Edith. I never understood it. I didn't like Dr. Warner as much when I considered his relationship with Edith. He didn't make a secret of the fact that he used Edith for her money and social connections. He knew she needed him because of what he represented – brilliance, good looks, and charm. But I was to find out that there was more to their relationship. I didn't want to find out about their intimate lives, but I did inadvertently or maybe because they didn't care if I knew or maybe they wanted me to know. One night about six months after I went to live with the Warners, I heard noises coming from the kitchen. My room was directly above it so I could hear clearly in the quiet house. Mrs. Brown left at 8:00 PM after she cleaned up from dinner so she was gone. The noises scared me so I went to the top of the stairs and peeked down. I won't go into detail, but Dr. Warner and Edith were playing sex games. Dr. Warner was naked and laid out flat on the long kitchen table as Edith coated him with whipped cream and then licked and sucked it off. He was in ecstasy and making loud noises, noises that I was quite familiar with from my past. I looked at his erect penis with horror. Edith looked up at me and smiled as she took a long suck. I rushed back to my room not wanting to know what was going on. I could still hear them so I went into Sarah's room and buried my head under a pillow. I couldn't sleep that night. There were quite a few other nights like this, and when I heard the familiar noises, I immediately went to Sarah's room where it was harder to hear. Edith wanted me to know about her sexual hold on Dr. Warner. She was telling me that he was hers and hers alone. I'll never know if Dr. Warner knew that I saw them, but he must have realized that I heard them especially when they were in the kitchen. They didn't only use the kitchen, they used other rooms for their sexual adventures. Once I was in the library looking at Dr. Warner's books when I saw a pair of frilly black underpants on his desk. Obviously, he did more than read and write at his desk. I think maybe what they got out of their sexual relationship made up for the problems that resulted once Sarah and I came into the house.

I wondered why the Warners didn't have live-in help and I even asked Mrs. Brown about this once. She just gave me this strange smile and said they liked their privacy at night. I'm sure when she found the whipped cream in the kitchen and the panties in the library she figured out why they wanted their privacy.

Now Edith was a complicated story. She hadn't wanted Dr. Warner to take Sarah out of Southern so she adjusted the best way she knew how and that was by avoiding us. If she didn't

see us, we didn't exist. The few times we were together, she totally ignored Sarah, and treated me like a servant. I was an uneducated, poor, former prostitute so to me it was understandable that she would treat me like an inferior, a very lowly inferior. You have to understand that to people of Edith's social standing, people were either equals or subordinates. I was certainly a subordinate – I was as low as one could go.

It was hard to believe that we lived in the same house. Months would go by before we'd see her. It didn't bother Sarah because she didn't really know who Edith was. She didn't even know that Edith lived in the same house as we did. She did know that Dr. Warner was her father, or maybe just a nice man. She was affectionate whenever she saw him. She'd hug him around his waist and giggle. Now that I think of it, Dr. Warner responded to her affection like he would if a dog licked his face. He had this facial expression that said, isn't that cute, but that's enough, stop it. And in all the time I lived with Dr. Warner, he never touched me, not even a pat on the shoulder. Maybe because of my past, he thought that I'd misinterpret any physical contact.

So that was my life of freedom and although it wasn't complete freedom, it was the first big step toward a life of independence and happiness and fulfillment.

Chapter 12

Everyday Life for Five Years

During our first Sunday morning meetings, Dr. Warner talked with me about what I wanted to do with my life. We talked about me getting an education, and he assured me that he would pay for all costs and that I could live with them as long as I needed to. He wanted me to have two priorities; first Sarah, and then school. He said that I had to think about a time in the future when I would get a job and live on my own. That was scary. I was comforted by the thought of living with the Warners forever and not having a life of my own, but I knew that was

not what I really wanted. I was so lucky to have a safe haven while I planned the rest of my life. I didn't realize how important it was to have financial security until I went out on my own. I just took it for granted that I lived in a gorgeous house that was cleaned for me and that all my food and clothing and expenses were provided to me. I don't think anyone coming out of an institution ever had it as good as me financially. Although we talked about me eventually leaving, I wasn't sure it ever would be possible because I wasn't sure that Sarah would ever stop needing me. She wouldn't go to sleep unless I slept in the twin bed next to her, and only after she fell asleep could I go to my own room. She had a nice relationship with Dr. Warner, but it wasn't too different from her relationship with Mrs. Brown, warm, but not loving. They were just people who were good to her. She didn't love them. She knew that I was the only person in that house who loved her. And of course, Edith, was a non-entity, a person we rarely saw.

Dr. Warner said that I had to become normal in the eyes of the world or I would never be able to get a job or an education if people knew about my past. He said it wasn't something I should be ashamed of, but I had to recognize that telling the world about my past would damage my future. I felt that way even before I spoke to him. I was ashamed of being a prostitute and being called retarded and I felt I had to hide my past so people could look at me as Mary Reilly, the human being, and not Mary Reilly, the retarded hooker.

He said that first he wanted me and Sarah to have physical exams to make sure that we didn't have any medical problems. He planned to have me tested by a psychologist to get an accurate IQ and educational level. Once he had this information, he wanted Walter to go to court and void the ruling declaring me incompetent. This ruling was obtained automatically when I was admitted to Southern. Of course, I didn't know this and didn't even know what being ruled incompetent meant. How it meant that I was a sub-human who couldn't make decisions for myself, who couldn't vote, who couldn't live on my own, and who couldn't sign legal documents. He wanted me to be declared competent in the eyes of the law. Next, I needed to get a social security number. This was necessary for me to get a job. I had never heard of social security. I'm so glad he did that because in five years I'll be eligible for social security. I can retire then, but to tell you the truth, I don't ever plan to retire. I love what I do. It's not really work, it's a way of fulfilling a need I have to help people who need help, to be there for people when no one else is there for them. To be the person I needed when I was 13 years old. He even

wanted me to register to vote so that I would be a full-fledged citizen. I didn't understand the voting process since I never had a civics course and never knew anyone who voted. I didn't know who was president in 1971 when I was set free. I had never heard of Richard Nixon. Once I registered, I voted in every election, even local elections for aldermen and mayor.

The first time we talked about my education, I told Dr. Warner that I wanted to get a college degree even though most people would say that was impossible. But not Dr. Warner. He said that anything was possible. He said that he was going to be my benefactor. I didn't know what that word meant so he explained it. He told me that he was repaying me for giving him his daughter back. But he was doing more than that. I think he was doing a good deed, no more than a good deed. He was giving another person a life, and there is no greater act of kindness. He said that was part of his atonement. He was atoning for his not taking responsibility for Sarah, and he was atoning for society not taking responsibility for me. You might ask how one person can atone for society, and I would answer that any change must start with one person, and he wanted to be that one person.

First, a medical examination was set up for each of us. For Sarah, there was also genetic testing which confirmed that she had an extra chromosome 21 which was the cause of her Down Syndrome. It didn't really matter that we learned this, because we knew Sarah had Down Syndrome by just looking at her. The doctor who Dr. Warner sent us to was Dr. Rosenberg, the first lady doctor I'd ever seen. She was wonderful – competent, supportive, and warm. She found that Sarah had a heart defect, specifically a ventricular septal defect that was not found at birth, or if it was, it was ignored. There was no mention of it in the medical report from Southern. She said that it didn't seem to have affected her so far, but that this should be monitored regularly. Sarah did have a hearing loss as was suspected by the people at Southern, but Dr. Rosenberg did not recommend a hearing aid as she did not think this would help Sarah's communication. She found that Sarah had high blood pressure so she prescribed medication for this. She also found that Sarah was border-line diabetic and prescribed a medication for this as well as a sugar free diet. Having a sugar free diet for Sarah was hard. She loved desserts and candy. She thought for a person with Down Syndrome who had not had good medical care for her first 18 years, Sarah was in remarkably good health.

Dr. Rosenberg also found that I was in good health, which is surprising when you think of the lack of medical care I had all my life. I also had a female examination because of my previous history of prostitution which Dr. Rosenberg knew about, and because of my having a baby at such a young age. She was the one who told me that I'd been sterilized. She was aware that I didn't know this so she gently told me this heartbreaking news explaining what the procedure was and the result. She told me that this done after I delivered my baby, and unfortunately it was not an uncommon practice. I asked her if it was reversible, and she said no. I didn't think that I wanted to marry and have children, but this was a decision that was made for me. I thought of Sarah and felt that she was given to me because you were taken away from me and because I couldn't have any more children. That news changed my relationship to Sarah. She was no longer my younger sister; now she was a baby given to me by God. At first I wasn't bothered by the sterilization, but with time I have become angry about this. To take away my right to have a baby is one of the worst things a government can do. I asked Dr. Rosenberg if this was legal and she said that it isn't now, but in the past it was in many states and it was even upheld by the Supreme Court. The famous justice Oliver Wendell Holmes used the argument that *three generations of imbeciles* are enough meaning that retardation is inherited and must be stopped by sterilization. It's like what happened in Nazi Germany. They sterilized all the undesirables, which of course included the retarded. But then they went much farther and killed the retarded because they couldn't be considered part of the master race. When we were finished with the medical exam, Dr. Rosenberg took me in her arms and held me close as she said, "Mary, I know you'll have a good life. You'll overcome your past. You are a special woman." Here was a doctor telling me these good things and even hugging me. Where was a doctor like Dr. Rosenberg when I was growing up? How different my life would have been if I had people like her in my past life.

This sterilization issue makes me think of genetic testing and aborting retarded fetuses. Now through pre-natal testing a woman can find out if she's having a Down Syndrome child or a child with any type of genetic condition that leads to disability. Recently, there have been more and more abortions of fetuses with Down Syndrome. I think for some families, this is a good thing, but then I wonder about the purity of retarded children. I think of my babies back in the baby ward at Southern. They represented humanity untouched by sin. Now we won't have such babies. I suppose that's good for parents who can't cope with having a retarded child or pay for

their expensive medical and educational costs, but I wonder about God in all this. Does He want us to kill babies because they're not perfect? And what is perfection? Today there's talk of designer babies – fertilizing eggs with certain sperm so that the babies have traits like high intelligence or great athletic ability or good looks. That's dangerous. I hope we don't go there. Sorry, I got sidetracked on this issue, but it's something Charlie and I talk about. Years ago, I talked to Dr. Warner about it. We saw a future where there were no retarded babies. And yet with all our genetic testing, there are still a lot of handicapped babies being born. Probably because of all the premies who are being saved and because of us ignoring what we're doing to the environment and how this impacts on developing fetuses. I suppose there will always be handicapped babies. Maybe God wants to remind us how we should treat the least of us. And maybe God wants to remind us that we're not perfect, and never can be.

When I fell in love with Charlie, I was worried that he wouldn't want to marry me because I couldn't have kids. He convinced me that he loved me the way I was. We've made a good life together despite not having any biological children so God has been good to me again. He gave me a man who has accepted me as I am, with all my shortcomings. And I've been very close to Judy's kids. I feel like I'm more than their Aunt Mary.

When Dr. Rosenberg examined me, she found that I needed glasses. I'd noticed that what I was reading was getting blurrier, but I never thought it was because of my eyesight. I thought it was eye strain from reading so much. I was sent to an optometrist who examined my eyes and prescribed glasses. I picked small, black rimmed glasses which were in style then. I've always had a few pair of glasses that I try to coordinate with what I'm wearing. Sounds dumb, but I like that. I think glasses make me look like an intellectual. Someone once asked me if I considered getting contacts. I answered no because then I wouldn't look like a librarian, a career I might have considered in another life.

Our visit to the dentist, Dr. Gargulo, was hard for Sarah because she was petrified of him. She wouldn't open her mouth so he had to put her to sleep so her teeth could be examined and fixed. She had lots of cavities since she had never seen a dentist while she was at Southern. She had three teeth pulled because they were too rotten to fill. Dr. Gargulo did a great job of capping her broken front tooth. When she woke up from the anesthesia and saw her new tooth, she tried to pull it out. She couldn't understand how she had grown a tooth while she was asleep.

I had never seen a dentist in my life so my mouth was a cesspool of cavities. Dr. Gargulo taught me how to brush and floss and I've done so every day since that first visit. But it hasn't helped prevent the constant problems I've had with my teeth over the years. I dread my six month check-ups when the dentist tells me what teeth have to have root canal or be pulled. If I hadn't started going to the dentist when I did, I probably would have had to have all my teeth pulled. I'd really look great then.

Next I was scheduled for complete psychological testing by a psychologist, a woman named Dr. Vargas who was with the University Psychological Clinic. I was a nervous wreck before the testing. The IQ test results would be my official exit from mental retardation. I would no longer be Miss 65 IQ. I told her why I was so nervous and she put me at ease. By the time she started testing I was laughing. I found many of the test items easy, in fact very easy. And the more I realized that I knew the right answers to the questions, the more comfortable I felt. Then she gave me educational achievement tests to measure my reading and math skills. And finally she gave me personality tests. After all the testing, she told me she would report the results only to me since I was an adult, but that if I gave permission, she would also report the results to someone else. Just think if I hadn't been declared legally competent, she wouldn't have to report the results to me, but rather to a legal guardian. I asked that Dr. Warner be present when she gave me the results. On the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, my Verbal IQ was 95, my Performance IQ was 110, and my Full Scale IQ was 102, solidly in the average range. When I heard the magic number above 100, I cheered. I was no longer Miss 65 IQ. Now I was Miss 102 IQ. I wanted to paste the results on my forehead for the world to see. She found my reading to be at the 6th grade level and my math at the 4th grade level. She said that what she found most astounding was the personality test results. I seemed to have a strong sense of self awareness. I showed little anxiety and no signs of depression. She was more amazed at my mental health than the results of my IQ testing. She asked questions to find out how I was able to have such good mental health despite what I'd been through. I told her I thought it was because of my strong belief in God, my discovery that I was a good person, and my basic disposition as being a positive, happy person. I described my depression and mental paralysis when I was a prostitute. I told her that I think that genetically I'm programmed to be a happy person but only in the right surroundings. When I was in an environment where I was a sex slave, my basic disposition could not be expressed. If I was happy in that environment, I would be mentally ill. So like everything

else, both nature and nurture interact. Just think that if I continued to live in the environment where I was a sex slave, I would have been a very different human being. I would have been depressed, angry, hostile, and perhaps suicidal. At Southern, my natural disposition could be expressed for the first time. And of course, finding God and the love of Judy and Sarah transformed me into the person I should have been from the start of my life. I wonder if there was ever a time when it would have been too late for the real Mary Reilly to be expressed. Would living as a prostitute permanently kill the goodness in my heart? I think so.

Based on the results of the testing, Dr. Warner hired a tutor to help me study for the GED since I couldn't go to college without a high school diploma. I had so much to learn. I used to think of all I missed socially by not going to high school. But now I thought about all I missed academically. Joan, my tutor, was one of Dr. Warner's students at the university. We hit it off immediately. She had endless patience and a great sense of humor, both of which she needed for working with me. She tutored me three afternoons a week. My reading and math skills jumped ahead quickly, but I had so much to learn in Social Studies and Science. I was starting from scratch. I spent all my time studying. When I was with Sarah, she worked on her coloring books or her paper dolls while I learned about photosynthesis, the Constitution, and graph reading.

It took me two and half years of intensive tutoring and studying, but at last I got my GED. And then I enrolled in Rogers Park Community College. I can still remember that first semester. I was so excited to be in a school with other students. I hadn't been in a school since my terrible experiences in fourth grade. I took English, College Math, American History, and Psychology. I liked all the courses, but the psychology course was my favorite. I knew that would be my major when I got to a four-year college. By majoring in psychology, I was hoping to understand myself better as well as the people around me - like Cora Jensen, Judy Smith, Jack Miller, Dr. Warner, and Edith Warner. I loved going to class and listening to my teachers lecture. To me, every word they spoke was a gem of wisdom. I never cut a class. At first I was afraid of discussion classes fearing that if I spoke everyone would know about my past. Gradually, I realized that I knew as much or more than the other students in the class so I began speaking up. Some of my teachers complimented me on my hard work. After hearing their praise, I was ecstatic. I used every free moment to study and it showed. For my first semester I

got an A in Psychology, a B in English and a C in Math and History. Not good enough for me. I wanted all A's. And that happened in some of the future semesters.

I loved having classmates, just as I did in kindergarten and first grade. I talked to everyone, and most people were friendly. There were several girls I would have liked to have become friends with, but I knew it wasn't possible. How could I explain to them how I became Sarah's caregiver and how I came to live in such a fancy house? Two girls asked me to go to the movies with them, but after the third time that I said no, they stopped asking. One guy, a cute Indian guy, asked me out. We had been studying together for a History exam when he asked if I would go out for pizza with him. I was shocked, but pleasantly so. I didn't want to hurt his feelings so I lied and said that I already had a boyfriend. He continued to stare at me in class, sorta like a puppy dog. I think he really liked me. What a surprise that was. I didn't think any guy would ever be interested in me.

Let me tell you what the students at Rogers Park Community College were like. Many were older like me, and almost all worked one or more jobs, and many of the women had kids. They were all motivated to get ahead in life. They were committed to making sacrifices so that they could get an education. There was a cross section of all ethnic groups – Blacks, Hispanics, and Indians, both Asian Indians and American Indians. I was amazed to meet two women who were Indians from reservations in the Dakotas. Up to the time I met them, I thought all Indians had died in the wars with settlers. My knowledge of Indians was based on T.V. programs. This was the first time I was a minority – one of the few whites in a multi-ethnic school. I didn't feel uncomfortable. But maybe that wasn't really the first time I was a minority. Remember I was a minority at Southern - a normal person in a community of thousands of retarded people.

While I was away at school, Sarah stayed in her room coloring or watching T.V. I had suggested to Dr. Warner that he place Sarah in an adult day care program for persons with disabilities where she could get social stimulation and maybe even some pre-vocational training. He liked the idea, but when he told Edith about it, she vetoed it. I don't know why he checked with Edith. She had nothing to do with Sarah's life so why should she make such an important decision for her? He was also concerned that Sarah might not adjust because she couldn't be away from me. He may have been right because when I was away, Sarah put herself on hold, just waiting for me to return so she could resume living. When I had night classes, she stayed up

until I got back. As soon as I got into bed, she fell into a deep sleep. She was as dependent on me as ever, but she was more isolated than she had been at Southern. Now she had only me. I told Dr. Warner that we had to start training Sarah to be independent, but he wouldn't listen. I was concerned that Sarah would never be able to sever our bond and I wouldn't ever be able to strike out on my own. Not the way things were going. And I was ambivalent about this whole situation. I wanted her to become independent so I could go out on my own, but at the same time I wanted to continue living the easy life I had.

When I wasn't at school, Sarah and I spent time exploring the neighborhood. As soon as I walked out of that back gate door, I felt a sense of freedom that is indescribable. There was no freedom at Southern. It was a prison. I blocked out my experiences in my old neighborhood in Chicago when I went shopping. This was different. Now, when I walked down the street, I was a person with an identity. Before, I tried to be invisible. I didn't want anyone to know who I was, or who my mother was. Now I walked down the street hoping my confidence as a successful college student was evident.

Our first trips out alone without Michelle were to the park two blocks away. We swung on the swings and slid down the slide. We went to the duck pond and fed stale bread to the ducks who clustered around us. I loved hearing Sarah trying to imitate the quacking of the ducks. I recalled Dr. Warner's first visit to Southern when he read the book on baby animals to her, and he and Sarah made animal sounds. Now Sarah was hearing a real animal make sounds. How far she had come. She was gloriously happy. After I told Dr. Warner how much Sarah liked animals, he took us to Lincoln Park Zoo where we saw every kind of animal imaginable. Sarah was ecstatic. She tried to imitate every animal sound she heard, even the hissing of the snake. And I loved the zoo too – seeing animals I should have seen as a child, not as a 22 year old. I don't think people ever get too old for the zoo.

Because Sarah liked animals so much I suggested to Dr. Warner that he get her a pet. A cat would be good because it didn't require as much care as a dog. We went to the nearby pet shop where Sarah picked out a darling white kitten. Despite prompting from me to name it Fluffy, she insisted on naming it Kitty. That became the clearest word in Sarah's vocabulary – Kitty. I taught Sarah how to put out food and water for Kitty. I tried to teach her to change the litter box, but she never mastered it so that was my job. She loved Kitty and slept with her and

always held her in her lap whenever she sat down. I found it was easy to love a pet, especially when she responded with purrs as I rubbed her belly.

Gradually, we expanded our walks in the neighborhood. We walked three blocks to the shopping area where we bought bread at the bakery or fruit at the outdoor stand. Mrs. Brown would tell me what she needed and give me money for our shopping excursions. We also liked to shop at Woolworth's where I bought school supplies for myself and coloring books and paper dolls for Sarah. We'd have egg salad sandwiches for lunch at the lunch counter. How I miss lunch counters.

Let me mention money for a minute. While I was living with Dr. Warner, I didn't realize the importance of the money he provided me either directly or indirectly. He paid for everything - my room and board, my clothes, and my education. He even gave me a weekly salary of \$50 which he called my pay for being Sarah's companion. What an arrangement! I don't think any person released from Southern or any other institution had as much financial support as I had. My life would have been so different had I not lived with Dr. Warner. And I probably wouldn't have gone to college without his help. But of course what was more important to me than his financial support was his belief in me. That was invaluable.

After about six months, we walked to my dream destination – the lake. It was an exceptionally warm, sunny day for the first day of spring. Although I had lived in Chicago for my first 13 years, I had never seen Lake Michigan. To me, it was like the Atlantic Ocean – endless. All I could see on the horizon was water and a few ships. The sky and the water reflected off each other making each bluer. I loved walking down Sheridan Road and then going into the underpass under the street to get to the beach. First, there was the busy street with lots of people and cars, and then the dark underpass with the drumming sound of the cars overhead, and finally, the blindingly bright expanse of sand and blue water. Sarah was afraid of the dark underpass and the noise of the overhead traffic so I held her hand tight as we ran through it. As soon as we got to the beach, I took off my shoes and dipped my toes in the cold water at the shore. Sarah was afraid of the water so she stood back and nervously paced until I came out. I would have loved to have gone swimming, but I didn't know how to swim. I still don't know how even though Charlie tried to teach me. And even if I could swim, I couldn't go in the water and leave Sarah alone. I was afraid she would wander off because of her fear of the water.

Although Sarah and I openly lived in the Warners' house, I don't know if most people in the neighborhood knew who we were. When we saw neighbors or servants on the street, they'd say hello, but that was it. No conversation. No one seemed curious about the two people in the Warner house who didn't fit into the rich people category or the servant category. So who were we?

When the Warners had people over for drinks or dinner or a big party, Mrs. Brown made sure we stayed out of sight and made no noise. We had to whisper even though we were in our rooms and couldn't be heard. We couldn't even put on the T.V. in Sarah's room even though there was often a band playing loud music that would drown out any noise. When they had parties, I was tempted to find a way to peek and see what the women were wearing, but of course, I couldn't. We always had the leftovers from the parties. We had pate, caviar, canapés, and petit fours. The only thing that Sarah and I liked were the petit fours. I had to make sure that Sarah never had more than two petit fours. She would eat ten if I let her. I'm not sure what they told their friends about us or even if they told them about us at all. We were sorta like Rochester's crazy wife in Jane Eyre. We were hidden away in our attic. You wonder how I know about Jane Eyre. It's a book I had to read for an English course. I loved that book and have read it over several times.

Our relationship with Mrs. Brown was interesting. She'd worked for the Warners for ten years so she didn't know about Sarah's birth until they brought Sarah home from Southern. She was a marvelously efficient housekeeper who kept the house running smoothly. She supervised Hilda who came in to clean daily. The house was huge so she was always working in one room or another. We rarely saw Hilda, and she never talked to us other than to say hello. There were temporary cleaners who came in to do big cleaning, especially the many windows in the house. Mrs. Brown did most of the cooking, and she was great. She had two kids who helped out. Her son Jackson drove us places in a Honda, and sometimes he drove Edith in her Mercedes. Dr. Warner had a Cadillac so there were three cars. The Mercedes and Cadillac were replaced with new models every year, but the Honda was the same for the five years I lived there. Jackson also did some gardening although there was a gardening service that came regularly to mow and trim the bushes and weed. The lawn was always perfect. There never was a weed in sight and the flowers bloomed in the different season. Daffodils and tulips welcomed spring, roses in the

summer, and mums in autumn. Jackson shoveled the driveway and walkway whenever it snowed, which was often. He also repaired stuff. He was always friendly and smiling. He seemed to enjoy working at the Warners. Unlike Michelle, Mrs. Brown's daughter, who always had a scowl on her face, except when she was with her mother. To earn money for college, she did odd jobs, like taking us shopping and taking us to doctor or dentist appointments.

Mrs. Brown, I don't know if there was a Mr. Brown – he was never mentioned, was very sweet and easy going. She never seemed to tire even though she worked twelve hours a day, 8 AM to 8 PM six days a week. She had Sundays off. When Sarah fell and hurt her knee, she was there to hug her and lovingly put a band-aid on it. I even shared problems I had at school with her. She always had sound advice to offer me. I remember telling her about seeing some kids cheat on a test in a Geography class and not knowing if I should tell the teacher. I explained that the test was being scored on the curve and so if the cheaters did well, it made it harder for us non-cheaters. She advised me not to tell the teacher because the kids might find out and do something to retaliate. So I didn't, and I still got a B on the test. I think she was also discrete. She knew what was happening in the Warner house, but never talked about it. She was the one who cleaned up the whipped cream after the Warners' late-night escapades.

I think it must have been hard being a servant in that house because Mrs. Brown was treated as an inferior because of her position and because of her race. Edith openly spoke to her as if she was talking to a slave. If you could look down on somebody with your voice, then Edith looked down on Mrs. Brown whenever she spoke to her. Even Dr. Warner talked down to her. She accepted such treatment without any apparent hard feelings because she was well paid. She didn't mind working long hours because she was paid by the hour. She also appreciated the job because he had a limited education so there weren't too many jobs available to her. She told me that she only finished the sixth grade and that was why she was so glad that Michelle was going to college and training to become a teacher.

The Brown family was the first black family that I had any experience with. There were only a few black residents at Southern and no black workers. Only whites lived in the houses in the Warner neighborhood. All the families had black servants. I think Hilda was the only white servant in the whole neighborhood. There would be loads of black servants getting off the buses in the morning and then getting on the buses in the evening. It was unusual to see neighbors out

walking on the street so if you didn't know about the neighborhood, you might have thought that it was a black neighborhood from all the black people on the streets. There were a lot of times when other maids came to the house to talk with Mrs. Brown, especially when the Warners were away. They spent a lot of time gossiping about the people they worked for. I wonder what Mrs. Brown told them about Sarah and me. I wonder if she mentioned the late night whipped cream escapades. There were times when I heard Mrs. Brown laughing hysterically, but those were only times when she was with the other servants. I never really got to know Mrs. Brown. I never found out about her personal life other than she had two kids. I didn't even know where she lived. I knew her for five years, and yet I didn't really know her. I wonder if our relationship would have been different if she had been white.

Every summer the Warners went off to their house on Lake Michigan. At first, I thought they might take Sarah, but they never did. I don't think Sarah would have gone without me even if they wanted to take her. So we spent most of the summer in the house with Mrs. Brown and Hilda. The Warners also went to Europe during the summer and over Christmas break. They were away a lot and we had the run of the house, or at least the downstairs of the house. I would have loved to have gone upstairs to see the bedrooms, but I was afraid that somehow Edith would find out. Even though she was thousands of miles away, I still felt Edith's presence in the house.

So that was our life for five years, and it was a good life for us. I thrived on the goodness Dr. Warner showed me, the intellectual challenge of school, and the love of Sarah and Judy. Although I knew that life couldn't continue like this forever, it was the best possible transition from Southern to independent living that I could have had or that anyone could have had. God was looking down on me until that awful, awful day when my perfect world died a violent death.

Chapter 13

Judy's Life

For the 13 months that Judy was at Southern after my release, we kept in touch by writing letters. This was something totally new for Southern because most of the residents couldn't write and didn't receive mail. Someone would tell Judy that she had a letter and she would go to the administration building to pick it up. My letters were Judy's lifeline to freedom; they kept her hopes alive that someday she would be released. She was a nervous wreck for those 13 months of waiting, sure that something would arise that would prevent her from being freed. But only the usual bureaucratic stuff slowed the process. It was hard for normals to be included in the deinstitutionalization process because they shouldn't have been in an institution in the first place. So how could they be included in a movement to normalize their lives which should have been normal from the start? Dr. Phillips and Dr. Mather decided to continue the practice of pairing normals with mildly retarded people to make for an easier transition. The people being released first were those who would be employable in the community, mostly at unskilled jobs like food service workers, janitors, and some factory work. They wanted to have good results for the first wave of people who were deinstitutionalized to pave the way for other folks with harder problems.

Judy was paired with Lola. They had a close relationship from years of working together in the sewing shop and living in the same ward. Lola was mildly retarded, but only in verbal areas. She was what would be called culturally disadvantaged. She really shouldn't have been institutionalized, but at the age of 12 she was placed at Southern, probably because she was acting out sexually. Her mother left the area and no one knew where any of her other relatives were. Sadly, she was another throw-away kid. She was in her mid 30's and good looking until she opened her mouth showing her few rotten teeth. Like Judy, she was great at handicrafts.

They were going to be roommates in a newly established group home for women - the Lawndale House which was to house 12 women in an old remodeled building. It was laid out with the resident manager's office on one side of the front door and the night manager's apartment on the other so there could be monitoring of who came and went, not for the purpose of controlling the residents' lives, but for safety. There was a living room where residents socialized and a large kitchen where meals were cooked by the residents. The residents were responsible for cooking all meals and cleaning all public areas as well as their own rooms.

Lawndale was their home, and they were trained to treat it with respect. In the living room there was a T.V. and games and cards. There were 52 cards in the deck and all the puzzle pieces in the box. Life was starting new. This room was opened 24 hours a day, but after 10:00 PM anyone using it had to be quiet so as not to disturb the other women. Everyone was encouraged to get out of their rooms and socialize.

There was a counselor assigned to every six women. They taught them skills in doing laundry, cooking, cleaning, shopping, and self care. Although Judy wasn't retarded, she needed help in learning independent living skills because of her lack of experience living in the outside world. Judy had never ridden a bus, never shopped, never cooked, and never even walked down a street. A vocational counselor from the central office of Chicago Disability Services, the organization that owned Lawndale House, got jobs for the women and provided on-the-job training until they could manage on their own. Then the counselors monitored them in case any problems arose. Interestingly, most of the problems that did arise didn't involve the performance of the tasks required for the job, but interpersonal problems with other workers.

Judy and Lola were given jobs at Midwest Clothing, a factory where they could use their sewing skills. It really was like an old-time sweat shop with hundreds of women sewing the same things – blouses, pants, dresses. They worked eight hours a day five days a week, but now they were being paid for doing the same work that they did for free at Southern. Although they got minimum wage, they were in the system. They paid social security. It was a good entry level job for Judy. It gave her experience so she could move on. As it turned out, Judy never did move on; she was at that factory for her whole working life. Eventually, she became a supervisor in charge of about 50 girls and earned a decent salary. At Southern, she was in charge of 10 girls and paid nothing, and at Midwest she was in charge of five times as many workers and got paid.

When Judy wrote me the date she would be arriving in Chicago, I arranged to meet her at Lawndale House. I asked Mrs. Brown to watch Sarah that day because I wanted to be alone when I met Judy, just as I had been when we met in the ward at Southern almost 10 years before. I had a big bunch of flowers and two balloons that said Welcome. Judy was supposed to arrive at 1:00, but I was waiting at the front door at 12:00. By 2:00, she still hadn't arrived. I went to the manager's office fearing that Southern hadn't let Judy out or that the car bringing her to Chicago had crashed. The manager told me that she hadn't heard anything and to just wait. So I

went back to the front porch and sat on a rocking chair, furiously rocking back and forth. Then I spotted a car with the Illinois state logo on the side. Judy was free! She saw me as soon as she got out of the car and ran to me. We hugged and cried. Our dreams had come true. I handed her the bouquet of flowers and said “Welcome to the World.”

The manager welcomed Judy and Lola, and then showed them to their room. She gave each of them a keychain with a key to the front door and a key to their room. Judy lovingly stroked the keys, symbols that she was truly free. She could lock the world out; she was no longer locked in. She could have privacy. No one would look at her when she went to the bathroom or showered or slept or changed clothes. She could go to sleep and get up whenever she wanted. She could even stay up all night. She could go to the movies or bowling or take a walk or just sit on a park bench.

Judy’s room was spacious with two single beds, two dressers, two small tables, two chairs, and one closet. Judy kept touching the walls and the furniture as if she was proving to herself that these were real and not part of a dream. She went to the window and opened it. She stuck her head out and yelled hello to some people walking down the street. They waved at her and she waved back. She was deliriously happy. Then the manager took them on a tour of the house. To Judy, it was as beautiful as my house.

This was a Friday and Judy didn’t start work until Monday. She had orientation on Saturday and church on Sunday so I wanted to spend some time with her before she got busy. Of course, we had to include Lola in everything we did since Judy was supposed to be her mentor. I watched as they unpacked. They had been given new clothes, but of course nothing like what I had. They left their ugly institutional uniforms back at Southern. They had let their hair grow long. Judy was wearing hers in a pony tail which made her look younger. It bounced as she bounced around on her club feet. Lola curled her hair so she looked like a cherub. I wished that I had a camera so I could have taken a before and after picture of them – before showing them as anonymous institutionalized people and after showing them as distinctive individuals, in fact two attractive women.

Then we went to the manager’s office so that she could share plans for the weekend with them. On Saturday she would teach them how to take care of their room, do laundry, and explore

the neighborhood to find the stores they would need to shop in. She gave them their first allowance. This was money that was to be used to support themselves until they got their pay checks, and then if the pay checks weren't enough to live on, they would be given additional money. They didn't have to pay for food, rent, telephone, or transportation because these were being paid for by the state so their paychecks should cover any expenses they had. If they used their money unwisely, they were given instruction on budgeting. Remember, these were people who had no idea of the value of money. They had never had to buy anything for themselves before so learning budgeting was hard, very hard. Believe me, I know from experience.

On Saturday night, they would have a social with the other deinstitutionalized women who lived in their house and the deinstitutionalized men who lived at the Kildare House next door. Kildare House was like Lawndale House except it had 12 mildly retarded males. Now men would be within reach for those women who were interested, and most were

After two hours with the manager, I took Judy and Lola to eat at McDonald's. Judy had never eaten in a restaurant and Lola couldn't recall being in a restaurant before entering Southern. The women loved everything about McDonald's - the food, the servers, the chairs, the tables - everything. The Big Mac was the most delicious sandwich ever made and the fries were truly freedom fries.

One of the activities offered for Sunday morning was mass at a nearby Catholic church with an outreach program for people with disabilities. The program included social services and social activities, but most importantly, the church reached out to genuinely integrate retarded people into the congregation. Lola was excited about being involved in the church because some of her fondest memories before being institutionalized were going to church. Although the fundamentalist church that Lola went to in Seymour was as different as could be from this Catholic Church in Chicago. Judy was an atheist, but she liked the idea of going to church. It was another part of being normal. After the mass, they were warmly greeted by the priest who encouraged them to be involved in the church community. There was a little party hosted for them by the church members. Everyone was warm and welcoming. They had a receiving line where the members hugged all the newcomers. Judy couldn't believe that normal people could be so nice. She didn't know if it was because they were religious or because they were good people or both. Lola wanted Judy to come with her to church every Sunday morning. Judy said

that she would decide later. And she did go to that Catholic Church every Sunday until she met Leo, and then she went to his church. She has gone to church every Sunday since that first Sunday of freedom. Gradually Judy grew to believe in God. She realized that there had to be a God because only God could create a love like she and Leo had.

On their third weekend of freedom, Judy and Lola came to my house. I tried to prepare them for what they would see. I told them I lived in a big, rich, fancy house, but I don't think they could have imagined how big and how rich and how fancy it was. I asked Judy if she wanted me to go with them on the bus, but she insisted that she could do this alone. It would be the first time she and Lola traveled by themselves. They took the bus to work with their vocational counselor so they knew something about public transportation. I wrote down directions for where to catch the bus, what bus number to take, and how to walk the two blocks from the bus stop to the house.

We had arranged for Judy and Lola to be at the house by 10:00 AM. I'd gotten permission from Dr. Warner for them to enter through the front door. I hated the thought of making them go in the back door. It would be so demeaning, even though they wouldn't realize what the back entrance meant. I did. I got up early that morning and nervously waited for 10:00 to arrive. The doorbell rang at 9:30. They were early. Judy left at 9:00 thinking that it would take 40 or more minutes, but the bus came as soon as they got to the bus stop, and it only took them a few minutes to walk the two blocks after they got off. When they got to the Warner house, they were stunned. They thought the house was more than a mansion; they thought it was a castle. They fearfully rang the bell, thinking this might be the wrong house. I opened the door with a huge grin and a loud welcome. I had explained to Sarah who was coming to visit, but I wasn't sure she recalled Judy and Lola even though it had only been 13 months since she'd last seen them. Oh, but she did remember them. When I opened the door, she rushed at them calling their names and hugging them. She wouldn't let Judy go, and kept saying "I love you Judy." Then she saw Lola and hugged her as she said, "I love you Lola." It warmed my heart to see the affection that she felt for them, and they felt for her. Here were people to ease her out of her isolated life.

I took them to the kitchen where Mrs. Brown was waiting for us with lemonade and cookies. I don't remember what we talked about. All I remember was the loud laughter and

constant hugs. We took them to our rooms and showed them our clothes. In my room, I showed them my books. Judy said that she couldn't believe I could read such hard books. I told her about studying for the GED and how I was going to go to college.

Judy said to me, "If anybody can make their dreams come true, it's you Mary. You will go to college and you will graduate." It filled me with such joy to have someone other than Dr. Warner show such confidence in me.

At noon, we had lunch served by Mrs. Brown. They never thought they would be served by a maid someday. Of course, neither did I. They thought the chicken salad sandwiches and cole slaw and apple pie were the best they'd ever had, and they were.

Later I learned from Mrs. Brown that Edith didn't know that Judy and Lola were coming. Dr. Warner had planned the visit for a day he knew she would be out of the house. Afterwards, when she found out about the visit, she said that she never wanted to have THOSE KIND OF PEOPLE in her house again. She was furious that Mrs. Brown had let them eat with china and silverware. She said that she should have used paper plates and plastic ware so they didn't contaminate anything. I'm surprised she didn't make Mrs. Brown disinfect the kitchen after they left. I'm glad she didn't find out that they used the fancy downstairs bathroom. If she found out, she probably would have never used it again, or she might have ripped it out and replaced it with a new bathroom. I've wondered how she found out that Judy and Lola came to the house. Who told her? I can't believe that Dr. Warner would tell her. Maybe she had a secret camera taking pictures of everyone who came into the house.

I continued to see Judy every weekend, but at Lawndale House. I always took Sarah with me. She loved traveling on the bus, but most of all she loved being with the residents. I realized that she might be happier at Lawndale House than at the Warner house where she was isolated when I was away at school so much of the time. Lawndale House had people who understood her, and more importantly, accepted her. Mentally, I started making plans for how to prepare Sarah to live in a group home in the future. I realized that someday I wanted to be free to live completely on my own. I didn't want to be Sarah's caregiver forever. Somehow in the future, I would have to get Dr. Warner to agree to place Sarah in a group home. But not right now. Sarah wasn't ready, and neither was I.

Judy was happy working at her job and socializing with the people at Lawndale House, but she wanted a man. Not just a man; she wanted marriage and children. And she found what she was looking for on the 7:30 bus she took to work every morning. Leo Pulaski was a 35 year old widower with two children who came from a close-knit working class Polish family. He had a 10 year old son, Joseph, and a seven girl old daughter, Monica. His wife had breast cancer when she was pregnant with Monica. She refused treatment because she feared that it would affect her baby. Unfortunately, she died a year after Monica was born. Leo raised his children with the help of his mother who lived in the apartment next door. Leo was short and chubby. He had to wiggle to squeeze into the driver's seat of the bus. He was plain looking until he smiled which was often, and then everything about him changed. His face lit up like a neon sign. He radiated goodness and happiness. And he was funny. He made jokes and puns non-stop so laughter always surrounded Leo. I never met a person who didn't like him, especially the passengers on his bus. He was serious about his responsibility for getting his passengers to their destinations safely and for keeping them well-behaved and respectful of each other as well as entertaining them with jokes, stories, and even songs.

Since the bus went by Lawndale House and Kildare House, he was used to carrying retarded people. He was always helpful with them about having the right amount of money for the fare and letting them know when their stops came up or helping them up and down the steps. The first time he saw Judy, he flirted with her, and she flirted back. He asked if she needed help negotiating the bus steps, but she said that she was fine. Although she got on the bus with a group of retarded people, it was obvious to him that she wasn't retarded. He thought that she was a new counselor at Lawndale House. They joked back and forth every morning. One Friday about six weeks after they met, Leo was waiting for Judy when she got back from work.

“Hey Judy. Remember me? I'm Leo. I thought you might not recognize me without my my bus.”

“Leo, I'd recognize you anywhere. You're the handsomest bus driver in Chicago.”

“Judy, I came here to ask you out on a date. I hope you don't think I'm too pushy. I haven't been out on a date since I first met my wife Monica so I'm rusty. In fact I'm so nervous I

feel like I might faint. Now that would be a sight, wouldn't it? You'd have to get a fork lift to pick me up. How about Chinese?"

Judy wasn't sure what he meant, but she assumed that he wanted to take her to a Chinese restaurant. She tried to control her excitement. She wanted to scream yes and throw her arms around his neck and crush him, but she acted nonchalantly, like she always went out on dates to eat Chinese.

"Sure. Let me go in and clean up. I'll be out in ten minutes."

Judy was going on her first date so she would have loved to have spent hours primping. Instead, she washed up and changed in a record seven minutes. Leo drove her to a nearby Chinese restaurant. They were both extremely nervous and didn't talk much until they were seated and ready to order.

"I don't know what to order. I've never been to a Chinese restaurant before."

"How about we order two things and share? How about chicken chow mein and pork fried rice? How does that sound?"

"Great." She had no idea what either was, but she didn't care. When the waiter brought the food, he asked if Judy wanted chop sticks. She didn't know what they were, but she said yes. Leo tried to teach her how to use them, but she was only able to pick up a few grains of rice at a time so as you can imagine she didn't eat much.

Leo talked about his family. "My wife Monica loved chicken chow mein. That was her favorite, but my kids don't like Chinese so I haven't been to a Chinese place since Monica died." He then proceeded to describe his life with Monica, their love, and his crippling sorrow when she died. It had taken him a year to recover, but now he was moving on with his life.

"Judy, I never thought about marrying again, but when I saw you get on my bus, I fell in love with you. I don't know what it is about you, but I feel this connection to you. I hope I'm not scaring you away with talking like this. I'm not the type of man to have girlfriends and flings. I don't really know how to date. I'm serious about life."

"No Leo, you're not scaring me off. I felt the same way when I met you."

Leo talked about his kids and his mother until they finished eating. He never asked Judy about herself. He sensed that that was a taboo subject. Judy realized she couldn't end the evening without telling him about herself. She couldn't start a relationship with him, and then have him find out and reject her. That would kill her. So she did an unbelievably brave thing – she told him about her past then and there in that Chinese restaurant.

“Leo, before we go any farther with our relationship, I have to tell you about my past. I can't fall in love with you and then have you reject me when you find out about my past life.”

She took a deep breath, looked Leo in the eye, and said, “Well here goes. Leo, I was born and raised in an institution for people who are retarded. I'm not a counselor at Lawndale House. I'm a resident.” She proceeded to tell him about her birth to a retarded woman and a worker at Southern and how she was raised by retarded women. Then she told him about her talent for sewing. And finally she told him about me and how we loved each other. She told him almost everything about herself. Wisely, she didn't include her sexual experiences.

“Judy, I want you to forget your past life and feel like you were born when you met me. I want this new Judy to be Judy Pulaski, not Judy Smith. The name Smith shows that you have no identity. The name Pulaski shows that you are part of me and my family.”

After 20 minutes of non-stop talk by Judy, Leo said, “You are a miracle, but you will be my secret miracle. No one can know about your past or they wouldn't accept you. Judy, I accept you without question. Let's tell everyone that you were raised in an orphanage and you don't have any relatives. I think that will satisfy people who have questions about you. But honestly, I don't think people will care about your past. If they see that I love you, they'll accept you.” And he was right. Leo's acceptance of Judy meant automatic acceptance by his family and friends.

When Leo dropped Judy back at Lawndale House, he gave her a light peck on the cheek, but to Judy it was a romantic kiss like no other. She knew then and there that she wanted to marry Leo more than anything in the world. They made plans to go to a movie the next night. When Leo picked her up, he asked if she minded not going to the movies, but instead going to his apartment to meet his family. Within an hour of meeting them, Judy had bonded with the children and Leo's mother. When Leo took her back to Lawndale House, he kissed her again.

But this time it was a passionate, lingering kiss hinting at the intimacy that would follow once they were married.

Leo was a devout Catholic and went to mass every Sunday. Soon Judy went with Leo and his family. In no time, she became a mother to Joseph and Monica. They were children who wanted and needed a mother and Judy wanted and needed to be their mother. They were easy children – good at their school work, polite, and affectionate. What more could a stepmother ask for? And she was a loving, caring, supportive mother. What more could stepchildren ask for?

After four months of dating, Leo and Judy were married in St. Mark's Catholic Church. I was the maid of honor. Judy sewed a lovely ivory colored lace dress for herself, a blue silk dress for me, and a pink dress for Monica, who was the flower girl. Next to my wedding dress, that was the prettiest dress I've ever had. Judy had started the process of converting to Catholicism so the priest agreed to marry them. After the ceremony, there was a reception in the social hall with delicious, greasy Polish food and an accordion player. Judy's club feet didn't hinder her from dancing one polka after another. It was so hard to believe how easily and quickly Judy fit into Leo's world. Here was a woman without a family, without a history, without a religion, and yet she truly became Leo's life partner and Joseph and Monica's loving mother. Today her son Joseph is 40 and a detective with the Chicago Police Department and her daughter Monica is 37 and a nurse in a cancer ward. They both have two kids who Judy dotes on as only a grandmother can.

Judy and Leo had a biological son named Carl. Now that's a heartbreaking story. Their perfect marriage was marred by a very imperfect child. He had problems from birth. He fussed all the time, slept little, and wouldn't eat new foods. He didn't respond to affection. There were times when I baby sat with him and tried to hug and kiss him, but he'd push me away. He did the same thing with Judy and Leo. He didn't want to be loved. Whoever heard of a kid who didn't want affection? This was especially difficult for Judy who wanted more than anything to physically bond with her child. He refused her breast when she tried breast feeding. This was total rejection of her as a mother.

From the first day of kindergarten, Carl had academic and behavior problems. It was impossible for him to sit in a seat for more than a few minutes. Judy and Leo took him to a

specialist who prescribed Ritalin, but it created more problems. He couldn't sleep and he totally lost his appetite. They tried other medications that made him sleepy all the time or just didn't work. They were never able to find effective medication to treat his hyperactivity and distractability.

No one seemed able to help Carl, but it wasn't for lack of trying. Judy and Leo took him from one psychologist and therapist to another, and even put him in an expensive private school for problem children. He dropped out of school at 13 and ran away from home. He got into drugs and was arrested and placed in juvenile homes and rehab centers, but nothing worked. At 16, he ran away to California. They usually knew where he was because he'd call to ask them to send money which they always did. They tried every enticement to bring him home, but nothing worked. Because of Joseph's police connections, he tracked Carl in and out of jails in California. When he wasn't in jail, they didn't know anything about him. Judy and Leo continuously prayed for his rehabilitation, but God was deaf to their prayers.

Judy has talked with me about her feelings that she caused Carl's problems. Well not her exactly, but her parents and Southern. We had this conversation after Judy got a call from Joseph telling her that Carl had been arrested for armed robbery and faced 20 years in prison.

"Mary, you know why Carl is like this as well as I do. It's because of the genes that were passed on through me by my mother and father. They were poisoned. They caused Carl's problems. All the love Leo and I gave him and all the professional treatment we got for him couldn't counteract the effects of those tainted genes. They condemned Carl to a life of addiction and crime. They made him into the unloving, anti-social, hateful person he became. I loved Carl at first, but I can't love him anymore. I've tried so hard to love him, but I just can't. I know that's terrible of a mother to say. I can't love someone who hates everyone and everything around him. I can't love a person who poisons the world."

"Judy, you know I've thought about addiction a lot because of my mother. I blamed my mother for not overcoming her addiction. I don't think I can blame Carl. I really don't think he could be any different than what he turned out to be. He couldn't change. You did everything possible to help him and nothing worked. Medicine, therapy, education, and most of all love.

Nothing worked. You proved that some people are destined to be evil. If you couldn't change Carl, no one could."

"Mary, it wasn't the genes that did it. It was Southern. Southern has its claws in me. I thought that I'd escaped from there, but I hadn't. It followed me into my womb when Carl was conceived. Carl has been cursed by Southern. To me, Southern is more than a collection of buildings. It's an entity. It's the embodiment of evil. And that evil is what I passed on to Carl because I am a true product of Southern. That unknown father of mine wasn't a worker, it was Southern itself. When I look at my club feet, I see that I am the child of Southern. When I hobble around on these damn feet, I feel Southern in me. My name isn't Judy Smith or Judy Pulaski. It's Judy Southern. I'm not evil myself, but I'm a carrier of evil."

When my brain heard her words, I felt that she was reacting irrationally. It was crazy to say that Southern lives on. But when my heart heard her words, I agreed. Southern is something that can't be erased. Somehow it lives on and it is living on through Carl. It's a reminder that evil is in the world, and I don't know how to fight it.

"Not only did Carl ruin my life, he destroyed Leo's. Leo who gave him endless love and only got hatred in return. I was responsible for Carl, not Leo. He had two wonderful children with Monica and he had one damaged son with me."

Judy never talked to Leo about any of her feelings. She knew he could never understand what Southern was and how it lives on. I'm the only one she has talked to about this. I'm the only one who can understand how Southern can reach out and take control of your life even though you're not there anymore. Even though it's not there anymore. You can erase the memories of everyday life at Southern, but you can't erase what it did to Carl. Judy's right.

Two years ago Leo died from pancreatic cancer. Judy quit work to nurse him through eight months of pain and suffering. She was with him 24 hours a day. She loved him so completely. She often said that she wished she had died instead of him, and I believe her. If she could, she would have given her life to save him. Since his death, Judy hasn't been the same person. She doesn't laugh the way she used to and even when she's with her grandkids, there's still a sadness about her. I suppose I'll be like that if Charlie dies before me. The difference is that I won't have a family to take my mind off of Charlie the way Judy has a family to make her

forget Leo for a while. Who would have thought that Leo, the chubby bus driver, and Judy, the skinny club-footed former resident of an institution for the retarded, would have a deep abiding love that could be written about in the classics? Since Leo's death, Judy baby sits with her grandkids just as her mother-in-law did for her kids when she worked. That family involvement is good for her. It keeps her from being overwhelmed with grief at the loss of Leo and Carl. She goes to mass every morning to pray for her beloved Leo and her lost son Carl.

Judy's first 25 years were spent living in a prison because of the crime of having been born with two club feet. Her life of freedom has been one of extremes. She has reached the tops of the highest mountains with her love of Leo and she has reached the lowest depths of the oceans with her hatred of her son Carl and his personification of the evil of Southern State School for the Feebleminded.

Chapter 14

Tragedy

For the five years before Sarah died, we had so much fun living in the real world. We basically had a care-free existence. I told you about how we shopped and went to the park and the beach, and of course we were the best customers at the library. We spent a lot of time at Lawndale House. Sarah especially liked riding the bus there. To her, the bus was like an amusement park ride. We spent weekends there socializing with the residents and Judy. We continued visiting there even after Judy left because Sarah was happy to be with her peers. Living on the outside, Sarah came to realize that she was different from most people. She was never different at Southern so she never felt inferior. Now the real world was sending her loud and clear messages that she was not as good as everyone else, that she was damaged goods, and although Sarah was retarded, she wasn't that retarded that she didn't pick up on these messages.

Who sent these messages? Everyone. People in stores who inched away from her as if she had a contagious disease; people in the library who talked louder to her as if she were deaf, and that was in the library where you're supposed to talk softly; people on the street who stared at her and then quickly averted their eyes; Michelle, who looked past her whenever she talked to her, as if she would catch retardation by looking into her eyes; and all of the people who spoke to me instead of her, as if I were her interpreter who had to translate their words into retardese.

When Judy got married, Sarah was invited to the wedding. I arranged for Michelle to buy her a fancy dress. She glowed in her lilac taffeta dress. Leo was kind enough to dance a polka with her even though he was the groom. She kept pestering him to dance with her, but he had other ladies to dance with, especially Judy who wasn't hindered by her club feet. Leo asked Joseph to dance with Sarah, and he did so for most of the wedding. He was such a nice kid, and now he's a nice adult. She also found time to have three pieces of cake. I didn't stop her even though she wasn't supposed to eat sweets. I didn't want to put a damper on the fun she was having. She said that she liked weddings and wanted to have one of her own. When I asked who she wanted to marry, she said Joseph. How wonderful it would have been if she had lived to come to my wedding. But the irony is that I wouldn't have had a wedding if she had lived.

After Judy got married, we spent a lot of time with her family, who were totally accepting of Sarah. They treated both Sarah and me as if we were part of their family. When we went to big family events, Sarah played with the four and five year old kids. Some of them taught her to put together puzzles with eight pieces. No one would have thought that Sarah could have done that. Eight pieces – wow! When Judy had Carl, Sarah was overjoyed. Here was a real life doll to play with. She played with his toys more than he did, especially the soft stuffed animals that filled his crib. She tried to sneak them out, but we caught her and laughed at the inventive ways she found to hide them (like stuffing them under her dress and making her look pregnant).

Our weekends were filled with visits to Lawndale House or to Judy's or outings to the park, the beach, or stores. She was happy wherever we were as long as we were out of the house. Often she didn't want to go home on a Sunday because she knew she would be alone for the rest of the week while I was at school. When Sarah was at Southern, she was isolated from the normal world, but she still had other people to interact with. At the Warner house, she was isolated from the normal world and other people so she was lonely and sad whenever I was away

from her. On Monday mornings as soon as we finished breakfast and I got ready to leave for school, she'd start crying. Mrs. Brown hugged her tight and told her that I'd be back soon. Mrs. Brown usually had her calmed down by the time I was out of the door. Wonderful Mrs. Brown. She did so many things that weren't in her job description as a housekeeper.

I told Dr. Warner about how lonely Sarah was because she had no one to be with when I was away. I suggested that he put Sarah in a day program for retarded individuals where she could socialize with her peers, learn new skills, and even be trained to work in a sheltered workshop. He said he thought it was a good idea, but when I broached the subject again, he said that Edith didn't want her going to that kind of place. She didn't want her with THOSE KINDS OF PEOPLE. Sarah was one of THOSE KINDS OF PEOPLE. I argued that it was better than being home alone all day, but he said that Edith was adamant about not letting her go to a day center. I was tempted to say that she didn't have any relationship with Sarah so why should she have a say in her life. It should be Dr. Warner's decision alone, but I didn't. I couldn't interfere in their lives. But I keep coming back to why Dr. Warner let Edith make decisions for Sarah. He made the major decision to bring her home. Why couldn't he now make a decision to send her to a day program? Did he have to pick his battles with Edith so he won the big ones and let the smaller ones slide? Maybe he went along with Edith so that he wouldn't have to give in to her on the next big decision to send Sarah to live someplace else – anyplace but Edith's house. I was sure that eventually Edith would get her way. Somehow she would get rid of Sarah.

Since he wouldn't put her in a day program, he thought that another caregiver might be hired while I was gone. I told him that probably wouldn't work because it would take Sarah a long time to get used to a new person. I was right. He hired three different girls, but none of them worked out because Sarah refused to interact with them. She wouldn't even look at them. So Sarah remained alone during the day, just waiting for me to come home so she could begin living.

I decided it was time for us to branch out and see Chicago. Really, this was more for me than Sarah. One day we took the el for the first time. On our first outing, we rode just two stops and then took a train back to our home stop. The next time we took the el all the way downtown and rode around the loop, marveling at the huge skyscrapers. Both Sarah and I were giddy with excitement. I was excited about seeing downtown Chicago for the first time, and she was excited

about riding the train for a long time. The next Sunday when I met with Dr. Warner, I told him where we had gone, and he asked if I wanted to see all of Chicago. Of course I said yes, not knowing what he had in mind. So a few Saturdays later, he drove us downtown and we parked in a lot across from the Sears Tower. I looked up in awe at the 103 floors of windows. I thought I was going to fall over backwards trying to see the top floor. Sarah didn't understand where we were going, but I certainly did. I was trembling with anticipation at going to the very top of the tallest building in Chicago. Sarah was reluctant to go into the elevator so I had to pull her in. Remember an elevator is a small metal box with no windows so it is scary. As we rose higher in the elevator, our ears popped. They actually hurt! Sarah cried hysterically, not knowing what was happening. The feeling of being catapulted into space was unnerving to me, but at least I knew where we were going. Sarah didn't. She put her arms around my neck, almost choking me. When we got out at the top floor, Dr. Warner led us to the windows to see the magnificent views. Sarah was petrified. She refused to go near the windows. She must have thought that she would fall out. So Dr. Warner stayed with her as far from the windows as possible while I walked around to see Chicago from every angle. It was a crystal clear day and I could see all the way out on Lake Michigan and I could see north to where we lived and west and south. I especially delighted in seeing the airplanes flying in the distance heading to and from O'Hare. I felt like I could reach out and grab them, like in the King Kong movie where the ape is on top of the Empire State Building and grabs a plane flying by. I could have stayed there all afternoon, but I couldn't leave Dr. Warner with Sarah all that time. Twice I tried to slowly walk her to the windows, but she refused to budge. It was like trying to pull a mule. I'm not sure she would have understood that this was Chicago even if she had gone to the windows to look out.

When we got back into the car, I thanked Dr. Warner for this wonderful trip. I told him how this helped me understand the world and that I hoped to see more of America someday. Maybe I could even go to Washington, D.C. and see the White House. Thanks to my GED training, I now knew about my country's capital of Washington and the monuments there. I did get to go to Washington on my honeymoon. Not a place most people pick for a honeymoon, but it was where Charlie and I chose to go.

I hadn't been to the movies since I went with my mother many years earlier, but I was eager to go again. At first Sarah was afraid of them because of the darkness. But I figured out

that if we got to the theatre well before the movie started, it was light inside and then when the lights dimmed, I held Sarah's hand until she got involved in watching the movie. We loved *Charlotte's Web* and *Benji* and *Willie Wonka*. I'm not sure how much she understood, but she loved the color and the characters even if she didn't understand the plots. Most of all she loved eating pop corn. I'd buy a big tub, and she'd eat all of it. I was amazed that she didn't get sick from it. Sarah definitely had an iron clad stomach.

For the first year I lived with the Warners, Edith was occupied with Walter's wedding to Lauren. It was a big society event because Lauren's parents were also wealthy. I saw pictures in the paper announcing their engagement and then of the actual wedding. Everyone was beautiful and dressed in exquisite clothes. It was like a fairy tale wedding or a royal wedding. There were hundreds of people there, but not Walter's sister. She didn't belong. Anyhow most people didn't know about Sarah's existence so why have her there and have people wonder who this person was. Nothing should take the limelight away from the bride and groom. After the wedding, Edith eagerly awaited news of a grandchild. But after two years there was news of another sort. Walter and Lauren were getting divorced. Edith was devastated. She had put all her hopes for the future on Walter, and now he was leaving her with no hope for the perpetuation of the Wilson genes. To my knowledge, Walter never did remarry. I don't know why. As I said before, I rarely saw him during the five years before Sarah died, and I only saw him once afterwards. There was no one to carry on the Wilson and Warner genes, and I know that was the greatest disappointment in Edith's life. Her family tree was permanently cut down.

On June 5, 1976, I was to graduate from Rogers Park Community College. I was unbelievably proud of myself. No one would have thought I could do this, other than Judy and Dr. Warner. I was a college graduate, half way to my ultimate dream of a bachelor's degree. Graduation was on a Saturday afternoon. Dr. Warner, Sarah, Judy, Leo, Joseph, Monica, and Mrs. Brown were all coming to the ceremony, and afterwards Dr. Warner was taking us out to a nice restaurant. On the Friday before graduation, I decided that Sarah and I should celebrate early by going to our favorite ice cream store to get double dips of our favorite flavors. This would be a real treat because I usually limited us to single dips since they were so big and so messy. I was walking on air – I was deliriously happy. I wanted to shout to everyone that I was a college graduate. It had started out as a rainy, cool day, but as we left the ice cream store, the sun

came out and it grew warmer so I decided we should walk down to the beach. I felt the change in weather was an omen for a bright future for me. How wrong I was! If only the rain had stayed, the tragedy wouldn't have happened. Or, at least it wouldn't have happened on that day at that time, but it would have happened. It was inevitable. Jack Miller couldn't be stopped.

Because of the sun and sudden warm weather our ice cream cones were rapidly melting. What a mess. We were licking as fast as we could to stop the top scoop from falling off the cone. Usually Sarah ran through the underpass to get to the beach because she was afraid of the dark, but that day we were walking slowly, giggling and totally preoccupied with our ice cream. Suddenly there was a blood curdling scream behind us. "DIE BITCH." As I turned I saw a man with a knife held above his head and I watched in horror as he brought the knife down right into the middle of Sarah's back. He pulled the knife out and stabbed her in the neck. Then he looked at me. I knew that face. I never forgot it from 10 years earlier in the shower at Southern. It was Jack Miller, Sarah's rapist. He was consumed with rage. No, rage is too mild a word for the look on his face. What I noticed immediately was that one of his eyes was completely bloodshot from where I stabbed him with a pin 10 years ago. There was no white – it was all bright red. His mouth was open and there was foam coming out. He looked like a rabid dog. Instinctively, I ran, but he tackled me before I could go more than a few feet. He was on top of me and as he brought the knife down, I squirmed away so instead of the knife going into my back, it went into my left buttocks and down my upper thigh. I felt him pull the knife out, but before he could stab me again I heard someone scream STOP and saw a jogger run toward Jack Miller who turned the knife on him. Fortunately, the jogger jumped back so Miller missed him. Miller got up from the ground and ran through the underpass to the beach. The jogger ran onto the beach after him and screamed for someone to call the police. There was a policeman patrolling farther down the beach who heard the screaming and came running. The jogger pointed to where Miller had run off to. Miller was heading to another underpass farther down the beach. If he made it, he would disappear into the crowded streets. The policeman ran in the direction of the underpass. He didn't see Miller hiding behind some bushes. As the cop went by him, Miller jumped out from the bushes and stabbed him in the back. He then escaped into the underpass and the protection of the crowded streets.

I dragged myself over to Sarah. I saw these deep gashes in her back and neck. I could see inside her body. It was like looking at meat in a butcher shop. Blood soaked her blouse and matted her hair. I turned her over and looked at her dead face. “My Sarah. My baby. Don’t die. I love you so much. Don’t leave me.” Her face was covered with chocolate ice cream. She had fallen on her cone when she hit the ground. Her eyes were open and looking at me with emptiness. No, not emptiness. They were asking me a question. “Mary, why didn’t you save me?” I hugged her tightly and said, “I’m sorry my baby. Forgive me. I couldn’t stop him.” My hands were drenched in blood from her wounds. My face was coated with sticky chocolate ice cream from her face. I wailed loudly creating an echo that reverberated through the underpass.

People from the beach ran to help. They tried to pry Sarah out of my arms, but I wouldn’t let go. Finally, a policeman pulled her away and took someone’s beach towel to cover her face. Now there was no doubt my Sarah was dead – gone forever. Nice people tried to comfort me, but I was inconsolable. I knew what death was like in the hospital and the baby ward at Southern, but this was different. Back then, death was calm, quiet, bloodless, expected, and sometimes even welcomed. Here, death was blood soaked, loud, shocking, violent, and unexpected. Her death sucked me into a vortex of rotating grief that grew as it spun round and round, faster and faster.

Paramedics took me to Evanston Hospital in an ambulance. Somehow I was lucid enough to tell them my name, address, and phone number, and then I gave them Sarah’s name and her father’s name. The emergency room doctors found that I had suffered no damage to my spine or internal organs, but I needed 30 stitches to sew up my buttock and 6 inches down the back of my thigh. The wound was deepest at the top of my buttock where he put the knife in, but it loosened as he pulled down so it wasn’t that deep on the thigh. I still have pains on my left buttock when I sit a long time. I’m reminded of that horrendous day when I least expect it...when I’m sitting in church or when I’m sitting at a basketball game or when I’m at a movie. Suddenly I’m forced back to the worst experience of my life. I also got 10 stitches on my forehead where my head hit the pavement when I went down. There’s a faint scar visible there after all these years. Sometimes I lightly trace the remnants of the scar and smile as I see Sarah’s beautiful face behind my eyes. I suffered a concussion too so they wouldn’t let me sleep. The nurses and doctors who hovered around me made me feel safe from Jack Miller. I kept mumbling, “Don’t

let him get me. Don't let him kill me. He'll find me. He'll get me." Finally, they gave me drugs to make me sleep. I embraced the sleep so I wouldn't have to face the biggest tragedy in my life.

The next day the police questioned me. I told them what happened and who the killer was. I was horrified to learn that Jack Miller was still on the loose. I told them I was petrified that he would come after me again. They told me that there was a 24-hour guard posted outside my door for my protection. I don't think I would have been able to sleep if I hadn't known that. I would have hidden under the bed with a needle ready to stab Jack Miller in the other eye. The policeman who Miller stabbed was in critical condition, teetering between life and death. As you can imagine, to the Chicago Police Department trying to kill one of their own was the worst crime of all. There was an intense manhunt for him. Miller was the headline in every edition of the Chicago papers. His story was first up on the local news in the morning, at noon, at 6:00, and at 10:00. The jogger had given a description of Miller so there were drawings of him everywhere – T.V., newspapers, and flyers on walls in stores and public buildings. But the jogger had only seen him for a few seconds when he was in a state of panic so his description of him was vague – white, black hair, heavy set. That fit millions of men. The police were glad that I was able to give them a detailed description of Miller. A police artist work worked with me to create a more accurate drawing of Jack Miller. I especially emphasized Miller's blood filled eye. Now the drawings on the wanted posters looked like Jack Miller.

Dr. Warner came to see me. I have never seen such grief and sadness as I saw on that man's face. He asked me to tell him what happened. Then he asked questions which neither of us could answer. Why did Miller do this now? How did he track Sarah down? Why hadn't he thought of ways to protect her from this beast? Why hadn't I protected her like I had in the past? Why didn't he kill me instead of Sarah? Each question filled me with guilt and overwhelming sadness, but the last question devastated me. He would have preferred that Miller murder me rather than Sarah. He didn't feel like he had to protect me, but he did feel that he had to protect Sarah so that meant he was a failure – a failure at what he had committed his life to – protecting Sarah.

Of course, Edith didn't come to see me. Dr. Warner told me that she blamed me for Sarah's death. I shouldn't have taken her in the underpass. I should have thrown myself in front of Sarah to protect her from the attack. She wanted her gone and now she was gone for good. But

to the world she was a grieving mother, when in reality she was a mother who welcomed her child's death. At last, she would be free of Sarah as she thought she had been when she sent Sarah away 24 years earlier.

I didn't want to leave the hospital because I was afraid that Jack Miller would find me again. I needed the protection of all the nurses, doctors, and the armed guard outside my door. After three days, I was relieved to learn that Miller had been found. He had checked into a skid row hotel right after the killing and stayed in his room until he snuck out to buy booze. A clerk in the liquor store spotted him. Miller had his hat pulled over the top of his face and his coat collar pulled over the bottom of his face, but when he paid the clerk, he looked at him and there it was - his blood-filled eye. After Miller left, the clerk went into the street to follow Miller. He saw him enter the hotel and called the cops. When they came to arrest Miller, he barricaded himself in his room. The police used tear gas to force him out and when he came out, they shot him. They said that he attacked one of the cops with a knife, but no one believed that. The police killed a mad dog. They did the right thing. I wouldn't have been able to go on living if Miller hadn't been killed. Even if he had been sent back to jail, I would always think of him escaping and coming after me. I was safe now, but I would never be safe from the flashbacks of seeing Miller stab Sarah and seeing Sarah's wounds and seeing her lifeless face. They are etched in acid in my memory.

Judy and Leo came to see me as soon as they heard what happened. When Judy held me, I felt safe. I felt like I did when she hugged me the day I entered the ward at Southern. She comforted me then and she comforted me now in the hospital. Leo took me in his arms and said that we were family. I wish that there had been some way that Leo's strong arms could have protected Sarah and me a few days earlier. Judy told me that I could live with her as long as I wanted. I could live in her mother-in-law's apartment next door and share a bedroom with her 12 year old niece. I told her that first I had to go back to the Warners to get my most valuable possessions – the evidence of my competence – the court document declaring me legally competent, my social security card, my voting card, and my GED. I couldn't live without these. If I didn't have these, I wouldn't be the Mary Reilly I worked so hard to become. Without them, Jack Miller would have killed that Mary Reilly.

When Dr. Warner came to see me, I told him that I was moving in with Judy. He said that was for the best. He told me that he would arrange for me to get my things when he was sure that Edith was out of the house. It was obvious that his feelings about me had changed, but so had his feelings about himself. He thought he had atoned for what he did to Sarah and for what society did to me, but now the daughter he vowed to protect had been taken from him and I, his almost daughter, had also been taken from him. He felt that by saving Sarah from Southern, he had unknowingly arranged for her murder. If she had remained at Southern, Miller could have never gotten to her. She would still be alive. I wanted to say to him that five years of living in freedom was infinitely better than a lifetime of living locked up at Southern. I couldn't say anything to him. He couldn't be comforted. He didn't want to be comforted. He wanted to suffer. He needed to suffer.

After I was released from the hospital, Leo and Judy drove me to the Warner's house. Dr. Warner told me when to come because he had arranged for Edith not to bother me as long as I went in the back door and got my things out within an hour. When I entered the kitchen, Mrs. Brown hugged me tightly as she said, "You did the best you could to protect Sarah. Don't blame yourself." I told her I needed to pack my belongings as quickly as possible. I asked what I should take. She said to take everything because my things would be thrown out if I left them. First, I packed my important documents and then all my clothes and books. I took Sarah's doll, the one Dr. Warner gave her when she left Southern. I still have that doll. It's on a shelf in my bedroom along with photos of Sarah and me at Judy's wedding. I also took her favorite book on baby animals and the sounds they make. As I left the room, I petted Kitty who was being turned over to the SPCA where I knew she would be put to death. If pets went to heaven, maybe she joined Sarah. As Leo was loading the car in the alley, I stood at the back door and hugged Mrs. Brown again. I gave her Judy's phone number and address in case she wanted to contact me. I told her to keep in touch even though I knew she wouldn't.

Suddenly, I felt a presence behind me. I felt a cold chill as if a ghost had walked over my grave. I turned and there was Edith. She promised not to see me, and yet there she was in her gray suit, pearls, and diamond earrings. The look on her face was filled with venom. She said, "You killed my baby."

I should have just left, but I couldn't. I couldn't let her get away with this charade of being a loving mother. She might be able to fool the rest of the world, but she couldn't fool me. I did something I've never done before or since. I screamed at her. She is the only person I have ever in my life screamed at. I got as close to her as possible without actually touching her.

“You liar! You piece of scum! You heartless bitch! You hated Sarah. Now you're acting like a grieving, loving mother. I hope you burn in Hell for what you did to Sarah. You're the one responsible for her being at Southern and if you had your way, you would have had her live her whole life there. You're responsible for Sarah's death. If she hadn't been locked away at Southern by you, Jack Miller wouldn't have raped and murdered her. You are the real murderer. You're the one who held the knife and stabbed Sarah so deep in the back that you reached her heart. You're the one who carved her up like a piece of meat. You're a vicious, evil woman who deserves to be exposed to the world for what you really are. If I could, I would call every T.V. station and every newspaper to tell them what you're really like. A cruel, cruel woman who hated her daughter, her own flesh and blood, and wished her dead.”

I can still picture the look on her face – shock that someone like me could talk to her like that. Shock that someone could say that she murdered her beloved daughter. But there was also fear – fear that I would expose her to the world for what she was. She must have had a vision of her name and picture in every Chicago newspaper with the headline, “Mother murders daughter.”

I was tempted to slap her cruel, ugly face, but fortunately I restrained myself. I didn't have to. My words were stronger than any slap. Dr. Warner came into the kitchen as I was yelling at Edith. He pulled her away and they disappeared into the house that really was their jail. Leo and Judy hurried me out of the house into the alley where they finished stowing all my belongings into their car. I shook all the way to Judy's house. How could meek, poor, inferior Mary stand up to rich, powerful Edith? Well, I did, and I've never regretted it. Years later I learned the full impact my outburst had on Edith and Dr. Warner.

Obviously, I didn't go to Sarah's funeral even if Dr. Warner had allowed me to which he didn't. I learned that it was a small funeral with about 20 people, only relatives and close friends. No family member or friend spoke. How could anyone speak? No one knew Sarah

except her father and he wasn't going to share his feelings with these people. Edith's priest said a few general words about Sarah and gave some generic funeral prayers. It was as if no one wanted to be at the funeral and everyone wanted it over as soon as possible. Dr. Warner had Sarah cremated and kept her ashes in an urn on the mantel in the library.

I don't know what the Warners told people about Sarah when her existence could no longer be hidden. Here was this secret child who had lived in their house for five years, and now the whole world knew about her. What did people think of them having this secret? After people got over the shock of Sarah's death, didn't they want to find out about her life?

What made matters worse for the Warners was the coverage of the story in the newspapers and T.V. When Miller was on the loose and then killed, the Warners were spared media attention, but as interest in Jack Miller waned, they became the focus of the story. The tabloids had a ball milking this juicy story. People love to read about bad things happening to people who've had good lives, or what they perceive as good lives. Stories about them were on the front page and there were special segments on the news that were devoted to them. This went on for weeks and weeks. And that is how I found out about Jack Miller and how he was able to kill Sarah.

The media discovered that Sarah was raped by Jack Miller while she was at Southern. He was tried for rape and found guilty, but only given six years, probably because he raped a retarded woman. He might have gotten more if he raped a normal woman. When he got out of jail, he couldn't get a job because everyone in Seymour knew what he'd done. His wife divorced him and refused to let him see his kids. He found his way to Chicago, a place where no one knew about him. He drifted from job to job. He was obsessed with Sarah and me. He felt that we had ruined his life. All of his problems were caused by us. He learned from people he knew at Southern that Sarah had been released and who her family was. He thought that he had gotten a heavy sentence because of her family even though no one knew who her family was at the time she had been raped, and six years for rape was hardly a heavy sentence.

Although Jack Miller wasn't a smart man, he was devious which made it easy for him to find the Warner house. He started by looking Mark Warner up in the phone book, but there were too many Mark Warners in Chicago. Then he remembered that someone said that Mark Warner

was a professor at Northwestern. So he hung around coffee shops in Evanston and got friendly with some hippies who had dropped out of school. He told them that he had dropped out too and that he wanted to see the only professor who had been good to him – Mark Warner – and he needed help finding him. Jack Miller definitely did not look like a Northwestern University student, but to hippies strung out on drugs he might have looked like the president of Northwestern. Anyhow they helped him find Dr. Warner's home address in the Northwestern faculty directory. That was all he needed to stalk us, which he did for three months. Of course, we were totally unaware that he was following us. He watched our house at all hours of the day and night, but none of the neighbors reported him which is surprising considering he looked like a wild man and he was lurking around this fancy neighborhood. They only remembered seeing him in the neighborhood after the tragedy. Would things have turned out differently if a neighbor had reported him to the police and he had been arrested for loitering or something minor? Would that have stopped him? Probably not.

As he stalked us, his rage grew. He saw us living in this beautiful house and looking happy whenever we walked down the street. We never turned around to see who was behind us. We were totally ignorant of the evil that followed us. Oh, we were blissfully ignorant of what was about to happen to us.

Miller lived in shelters or flop houses or on the streets; he got food from soup kitchens; and he stole money to get booze. First, he wanted to find a way to rape both of us, but he couldn't figure out how to do that. He considered breaking into the house, but Mrs. Brown and Hilda were there all day and Dr. Warner and Edith were there all night. We were never alone in the house. When the Warners traveled, either Jackson or Michelle stayed in the house with us.

He knew raping us wouldn't be enough of a punishment; he would only be satisfied with our deaths. Interestingly, he talked openly to others in the flop houses and shelters about what he planned to do. Although he talked about murder, no one believed him. They thought he was a crazy man ranting and raving. But this crazy man also had a carefully thought-out plan for turning his ranting into reality. The first step of his plan was getting a weapon. He knew he couldn't get a gun, but he could get a knife – a sharp one. There was a butcher shop in the neighborhood where he was living. He looked in the window whenever he thought he wouldn't

be noticed. He spotted the carving knife that he wanted. One day when the shop was crowded, he snuck in and stole the knife. No one noticed him. It had been so easy.

The newspaper and T.V. reporters were able to trace his life up to the attack. They were able to find out everything about him and everything about Sarah and her family. But fortunately, they weren't interested in me. I was mentioned as Sarah's caregiver. I was just collateral damage. Thank God they didn't find out about my history at Southern. Only Sarah and her family were news. The papers portrayed the Warners as loving parents who had given Sarah the best of everything, including a full time nanny, me. When I read the articles about Edith, I wanted to announce to the world that they weren't true. She hated Sarah and was glad she was dead. But I had to be satisfied with my exposing the real Edith to her face.

I moved in with Mrs. Pulaski who was a kind woman whose sole mission in life was taking care of her grandchildren. Fortunately, she didn't speak English well so we didn't talk much which was fine with me. I don't think she knew what had happened to me and why I was living with her. I had a little money saved in the bank, about \$800, so I volunteered to pay rent for the room, but she wouldn't take it. I helped with the baby sitting and cooking and cleaning as a type of payment and also as a way of keeping busy. I loved taking care of Judy's year old son, Carl, but he was a challenge, always fussing and misbehaving. I got along with Linda, my 12 year old roommate. I tried only to sleep in the room so I wouldn't invade her privacy. But she was a shy 12 year old who wasn't into privacy yet.

Gradually the everyday activities of life dulled my memories of that horrendous day in June. And living there made it possible for Judy to take care of me emotionally. I felt like the poor girl who had just had a baby and found herself in an institution all alone until a bouncy girl sat on her bed and welcomed her. Judy gave me the kindness that I needed and laid the groundwork for me to start healing. At times, I felt like I had no future, but Judy was always there to paint a rosy picture for me. She constantly stressed how good I had been to Sarah and the happiness I'd given her. Dr. Warner couldn't compare to me in terms of what I had done for her. I was the one who gave Sarah happiness. It took many years for me to believe that. I was the only person who loved Sarah, and I was the only person Sarah loved.

My faith in God was shaken by Sarah's death. How could God take this angel who had never done a mean thing in her life? How could He allow her to be stabbed like an animal? I kept asking God why, why, why? And Judy was there to help me find answers. We read the Bible every night. Eventually I came to the realization that God couldn't be questioned. Sarah was safe now. She was in His arms. I think by trying to bring me closer to God, Judy brought herself closer to Him too. And our friendship was strengthened even more.

After three months, I knew I had to find a job, not only for financial reasons but for my sanity. I had to fill the days with something other than reliving Sarah's murder. Every time I had a quiet minute, Jack Miller's face flashed before me. I'd feel the cold metal stabbing into my buttock. I'd see Sarah's dead face before me. I'd hear Dr. Warner telling me that I had failed to protect Sarah. I caused her murder. I was going crazy.

I read the help wanted pages every day, but nothing seemed right for me. I did have a degree from a community college, but it didn't enable me to get a job that appealed to me. Nothing seemed right. I didn't want to work at McDonald's and I didn't have any talent like Judy. Judy learned that there was a part-time position available for a weekend counselor at the Lawndale Home. I certainly had the qualifications for that job. I had taken care of retarded people since the age of 13. Leo helped me fill out the job application. I needed two references. I called Dr. Warner's office to find out if he would give me a reference. He wouldn't talk to me so I left a message with his secretary. She called back to say that Dr. Warner would give me a recommendation and to just send her the form. Then I contacted Mr. Hutchison at Southern to ask if he would give me a recommendation since he was my supervisor at Southern. Both men gave me glowing recommendations and I got my first job. Now I was getting paid for work I had done for free for many years.

Gladys West, the manager of Lawndale House, trained me for the job. She knew about my past at Southern as well as my work with Sarah. She also knew me from my weekend visits with Sarah over the past five years. Although Gladys was older than me, about 40, she became a friend, and even more importantly, she became my mentor. She had a knack for putting people at ease and making them feel comfortable. Nothing bothered her, except her third husband who she constantly complained about.

I worked on weekends for three months, and then a position opened up as a night counselor and it came with a furnished one room apartment at Lawndale. Although it was only one room, it was large with a sofa bed and a table and chairs and a tiny kitchen along one wall. And I had my own bathroom. What more could I ask? I was going to live with retarded people again, not as one of them, but as a caregiver. How strange the turns my life has taken. Although I was a counselor at Lawndale, I wasn't that different from some of the women living there. I needed to learn functional life skills. Living in an institution and then living a pampered existence at the Warners had not prepared me to live on my own. So I learned to cook, shop, budget, and clean. It's funny that many of the women at Lawndale were better cooks than me and ended up teaching me a lot, especially the women who had worked in food service at Southern.

My job required me to be available from 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM to the 12 women of Lawndale House. That didn't mean I had to be up all night, but I had to be available if someone came to my room or if anybody hit the emergency button in the hallway. And there were always emergencies – people getting sick and having to be rushed to the hospital, people sleepwalking and trying to get out of the back door which was locked and had an alarm bell, people having nightmares, people who were afraid of the dark and the memories it held, and people trying to get into bed with other people who didn't want anyone in their bed. I made rounds four times – once at 10:00, then at midnight before I took a nap, and again at 3:00 and finally at 5:30 after my second nap. I always kept my door opened so I could hear if there were any problems. When someone was sick, I usually stayed up with them. I liked working nights because it reminded me of my time in the hospital at Southern when I was pregnant and I comforted sick and dying patients. And slowly I healed, just a little every day. Judy and my new friend Gladys were always there for me. But the one who really healed me was Charlie.

Chapter 15

Charlie

Of all the good things - like Judy, Sarah, Dr. Warner- of all these good things, the very best thing that has happened to me has been Charlie. I found true love. How many people can say that? I never ever imagined that I would have a relationship with a man, or that I would find romantic love. That was for the movies. The only people I knew who had a loving marriage were Judy and Leo. The Warners certainly didn't have a loving marriage, and after a few years the story-book romance of Walter and Lauren ended in divorce. And my friend Gladys has had three unhappy marriages, but she's looking for a fourth. What a masochist!

Let me tell you about Charles Herbert Webb. And I say with great pride that I am Mrs. Charles Herbert Webb. I don't want to keep my maiden name like many women. I want to share Charlie's identity.

He was born to Mabel and Marvin Web, simple people who lived in the rural community of Seymour, Illinois, home of Southern State School for the Feebleminded. Marvin worked in a lumber mill and Mabel was a cook in a diner. For as long as Charlie could remember, he was distant from his family. They were like people who shared a house, and that was it. As soon as he walked into his house, he was engulfed in a grayness, a depressing feeling that permeated every room of the house. As a child, Charlie had fantasies that he was adopted or had been stolen. His real parents must be people like him – outgoing, talkative, interesting. Not like these people he lived with who were silent, boring, and introverted. Although Charlie wasn't close to his family, he was close to many of the kids at school. Everybody, except his parents, liked Charlie, and Charlie liked everybody, except his parents. Guys admired him because he was a star athlete. Being tall, 6'3", and well coordinated, he was the star of the Seymour High School basketball team. Basketball ruled supreme in southern Illinois so Charlie was much admired by both boys and girls.

More than anything, Charlie wanted to get out of Seymour and live in a big city. The only way to do that was to get a college basketball scholarship. Although he applied to a number of schools in different places, he really wanted to go to a school in Chicago - the city of his dreams. The time when he was waiting to hear about what school, if any, would give him a

scholarship was stressful because if he couldn't get a scholarship, he couldn't go to college and he'd be forced to live the rest of his life in Seymour, a place he despised. If he went away to college, he would leave behind his girlfriend of two years, a girl he enjoyed sex with, but didn't want to marry. She knew he wanted to escape from Seymour and her so she was giving him a hard time. She wanted him to take her with him to college, which of course, he'd never do. He knew she wanted to get pregnant so he'd be forced to stay in Seymour, but he made sure he wore a condom every time they had sex. He wasn't going to get trapped by her. He was going to escape. No one was going to stop him. For extra protection, Charlie told all his friends that he used a condom so that his girlfriend couldn't claim that he fathered a baby she might have made with someone else.

The weeks of waiting to hear about a scholarship were a time of intense anxiety so Charlie took to hanging out with a bunch of undesirables at a local bar where everyone drank until they were blind drunk. That's where he met Jack Miller. Many of the attendants from Southern hung out there. They were an unsavory bunch, talking about sex they had and sex they wanted to have, who they hated, which was mostly everyone, and ending the evening with a brawl. However, Jack stood out. First, he was this big ugly, dirty, scary looking guy. He was obsessed with his blond angel at Southern. Of course, Charlie didn't know at the time that the blond angel was Sarah Warner, a teenager with Down Syndrome and an IQ of 40. Miller said that he fell in love with her at first sight. All he could talk about was that if he screwed her, she would be transformed into a normal woman and he would get her out of Southern and they would run away together. This was his version of *The Frog Prince*, only he was the princess and Sarah was the frog. Obviously, Miller wasn't too rational. Actually, he was crazy.

The night before Miller raped Sarah, Charlie had a huge argument with his girlfriend. She claimed to be pregnant, but he told her he knew she was lying. She told him that she would tell everyone in town that he was deserting her and her baby. He walked out on her and went to the bar where he proceeded to get very drunk. He sat next to Jack who went on and on about Sarah. Charlie stared at Jack and saw what he would look like if he stayed in Seymour for the rest of his life. To stop Jack's rambling, Charlie told him to find Sarah, take her to a hidden spot, and give her the best screwing of her life. He said that maybe he could come along and make a porn

movie of Jack screwing the retard until she turned into a normal person. Charlie wasn't really like this, but he wasn't sober and he was haunted by the vision of himself becoming Jack Miller.

After he left the bar, he forgot all about the incident. He was just talking crazy and never realized that Miller would do what he said. That is, until he heard about the rape a few days later. He felt guilty, but now that he was sober, he realized that he had nothing to do with the rape. He didn't cause it; it was just a coincidence. Miller hadn't really listened to him. And even if he had, he didn't rape her because of what Charlie said. Charlie forgot about the whole mess because two days later he got his acceptance letter and a scholarship offer from Loyola University in Chicago. His dream came true.

He went off to Loyola and never returned to Seymour. He put memories of everyone and everything from Seymour out of his mind. He didn't write to his parents and lost contact with them. He rarely even thought about them. At Loyola, he was one of the stars of the basketball team. He did well academically and found that he enjoyed the challenges of academic learning. Seymour High didn't stress academics; they were unimportant for the life most of the students led after graduation. To Charlie, everything about college life was wonderful. It was all he dreamed of and more, especially the adoring girls waiting for him after his games. He majored in education with plans to become a P.E. teacher. But before that, he wanted to play professional basketball so he could earn lots of money. More importantly, he wanted to continue playing basketball because that was the love of his life. He was happiest when he was bouncing the ball down the court readying his eyes to swoosh the ball through the flimsy net. Charlie was a good college basketball player, but not good enough for the pros. He didn't get any offers from professional teams so he had to be satisfied with real life. He got a job at a Chicago high school as a P.E. teacher and basketball coach. That turned out to be perfect for him because he was involved in basketball all the time. The school was multi-ethnic with only a few whites so having a white coach was unusual, but it didn't pose any problems. Everyone loved Charlie. He was outgoing and a great teacher and coach. Soon after Charlie began coaching, the team started winning and even got to the state finals several times.

Charlie had an active social life, but he never settled down with a steady girlfriend. He said he never found the right girl until I came along. He feels that God intended for us to fall in love and I think he's right. They say that opposites attract. On the outside, we are opposites.

Charlie's 6'3" and I'm 5'1". He was dark haired and I was a red head when we were young. Of course, now Charlie is almost bald and my hair is completely white. But on the inside Charlie and I are exactly the same. We have the same values and the same life goals. Our souls are totally intertwined.

Charlie had forgotten all about Jack Miller and his rape of a Southern resident eight years earlier until he saw the headline in the newspaper saying that Jack Miller murdered Sarah Warner and tried to murder Mary Reilly. Suddenly the past came crashing into the present. He recalled the night he told Miller to screw the hell out of the blond retard, and he had done it the next day. Now he had killed the blond retard. There was the picture of the blond retard on the front page of the Trib. She was pretty and innocent looking. And there were the words describing Sarah's rape eight years ago and the horrendous murder a few days earlier. He concentrated on Sarah's murder and only incidentally noticed that a Mary Reilly had been wounded.

For the next six months Charlie could think of little other than Miller and Sarah and his role in contributing to her rape and ultimately her murder. Over time, he felt greater and greater guilt for his role in Sarah's murder. People noticed a change in Charlie. He didn't seem as happy and easy-going as usual. When asked if there was anything wrong, he'd say no, but he knew what was wrong, only he didn't know what to do to make it right.

He cut out the newspaper articles about Sarah's murder and re-read them over and over. One day as he re-read an article describing how I'd been stabbed also, he was struck by the idea that he had to ask my forgiveness for what had happened to me because he felt that he was responsible for what Miller had done to Sarah as well as to me. He decided to track me down and ask for my forgiveness. He hoped that might help him atone for some of the guilt that haunted him. He tried to find a Mary Reilly in the phone book, but he quickly realized there were too many Mary Reillys in Chicago to call all of them, and then he realized that I might not live in Chicago. I might live in the suburbs, or I might have moved away. He thought he might track me down by finding Mark Warner, but he didn't have any better luck. He was not as creative in his search for us as Jack Miller was. As a last resort, he decided to ask for help from his roommate, Jimmy, who was a Chicago cop. They had been teammates on the Loyola basketball team and since graduation had roomed together. At first he didn't want to tell Jimmy why he needed the information, but he knew Jimmy wouldn't help him unless he told him. Once he did, Jimmy

tried to dissuade him from this futile search. He said that I couldn't erase the guilt that he felt, and that he had to deal with God for that. Finally after Charlie's persistent pestering, he relented and gave him the Warners' address and phone number. He said that I lived with the Warners, or that I had at the time of the murder.

Charlie decided to call the Warners' number to find out where I was and set up a face-to-face meeting with me. He didn't want to just show up on the Warners' doorstep and have the door slammed in his face. He envisioned all the scenarios for our meeting, and they all ended with me granting him forgiveness and him starting to heal. In his imagination I looked like the picture of Sarah he saw in the Trib. When he called the Warners' number, Mrs. Brown answered. Had Edith answered, she would have hung up and that might have meant Charlie and I would never have met. But God was watching over us and made sure that Mrs. Brown picked up the phone. I'd given her Judy's phone number and address in case I got any calls or mail or she had to contact me for any reason. Mrs. Brown asked Charlie why he wanted to contact me, and he assured her that he was an old friend who meant me no harm so she gave him Judy's number.

When Charlie called Judy's number, he got Mrs. Pulaski. With her limited English, she couldn't understand what he was saying so she told him to call back later when her son was home. Thank God Charlie didn't give up. When he called back, I answered. I happened to be babysitting with Carl while everyone in the family went to church. They usually took the baby, but he was sick and I volunteered to stay with him. Again, God was looking over Charlie and me that day. Do you see why I keep saying that we were fated to meet?

"Hello, my name is Charlie Webb and I'm looking for a Mary Reilly. I got this number from Mrs. Brown, the Warners' housekeeper."

I was frightened. Who could this be? Insane thoughts raced through my mind. Was this a reporter who found out I'd been at Southern? Was this a policeman who wanted to know more about the murder? I curtly asked, "What do you want?"

"First of all I want to tell you that I don't want to hurt you. I want your forgiveness."

My heart was racing. Who was this nutcase?

"Forgiveness. For what?"

“For my part in Sarah’s rape.”

I couldn’t talk. My mind was paralyzed. I thought of hanging up. There was this long silence. I heard Charlie sobbing.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“My name is Charlie Webb. I lived in Seymour when Sarah was at Southern. I was a high school kid who was at the bar the night before she was raped. I talked to Jack Miller the night before he raped Sarah.”

I was choking, but I managed to say, “I can’t talk to you now. Give me your phone number and I’ll call you back. Don’t call me at this number. I don’t live here.”

I didn’t want to give him my Lawndale number because I didn’t want him to know where I lived.

He gave me his number, and asked “When will you call me?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you promise to call me back?”

I hesitated, and then whimpered, “Yes.”

When the family got back from church, I told Judy about the call.

“Judy, I had a call from some guy named Charlie Webb who wanted to talk to me about Sarah’s rape. He said that he talked to Jack Miller the night before the rape. I couldn’t talk to him when he called. I couldn’t handle it. I told him I’d call him back. What should I do?”

“You need to know what this Charlie Webb has to say. The more you know about Sarah’s murder, the better.”

“What happens if he’s a maniac or a pervert or a murderer?”

“Well there’s only one way to find out and that’s to call him.”

I thought about the call constantly. Finally at 8:00 on the Tuesday night, I dialed his number. There was no answer. I thought this was a good omen. Maybe I wasn't meant to talk to him, but I decided to try one more time so at 9:00 I called, and Charlie answered on the first ring.

"Hello."

I couldn't talk.

"Is it you Mary?"

"Yes."

"Thank you so much for calling. Can we meet to talk? I can't say all that I have to say on the phone."

I hesitated. I was afraid to meet him and he knew it.

"We can meet in a public place that you pick and you can bring people for protection if that would make you feel better."

"Sarah was murdered on a public street. You would think that would be the safest place in the world – a street leading to a beach. When do you want to meet?"

"Saturday or Sunday would be good."

I wanted to have Leo come with me for protection, but I had to check with him about a good time. "I'll call you back tomorrow night to let you know."

"Can you call after 9:00? I have practice."

"What kind of practice?"

"Basketball. I'm the coach at Washington High School."

I hung up wondering whether Charlie Webb could be a murderer and a basketball coach.

Leo agreed to come with me as my bodyguard so I called Charlie back and we arranged to meet on Saturday at 3:00 at the McDonald's on Clark and Devon. As I thought about Charlie,

I was beginning to feel that I didn't have to be afraid of a basketball coach, but still I wasn't taking any chances.

When Leo and I got to McDonald's at 2:40, Charlie was there already. He'd been there since 2:00. He recognized me immediately. As he walked toward me, I knew it was him. I figured a basketball coach had to be tall, and Charlie was tall. Here was this tall, thin man with a buzz cut of dark hair and a long, narrow face. But what was most distinctive about Charlie were his big ears. They were like little satellite dishes and in a way they were because they picked up messages. Charlie has always been a great listener, and that's one of the reasons why people like him so much

As he approached me, he asked, "Mary Reilly?"

"Yes. Charlie Webb?"

"Yes."

I introduced Leo who said that he'd sit at a table where he could see, but not hear us. He got a coke and then opened the newspaper to keep himself occupied. He looked like a bodyguard for a Mafia mobster.

We sat at a table far from other people. Charlie said he was dry and needed something to drink. He asked me if he could get me anything and I told him that I'd have a coke. It was obvious he was nervous. He was fidgeting and had trouble talking because of his dry mouth. When he was at the counter ordering, I studied him. I saw a tall, thin cute guy and I knew then and there he would never hurt me. I was attracted to him. He was the first and only man I've ever been attracted to, but I put any idea of a relationship out of my mind. He was a college educated teacher. I was a former retarded whore with only an associate's degree.

We drank our cokes in silence for a few minutes. Charlie stared into my eyes and I felt woozy. What did he want from me? Why was I responding to him physically? I wanted to reach out and touch his hand. I had to will my hand to stay in my lap.

"I wanted to talk to you, but now I don't know where to start."

"Start at the beginning. Tell me about yourself and how you came to know Jack Miller."

And then he told me about growing up in Seymour and how he hated it there and desperately wanted to get away. When he told me about the night he was with Miller and encouraged him to rape Sarah, he was tense. His body stiffened.

“It’s my fault that he raped her. If I hadn’t egged him on, he wouldn’t have done it,”

He started to cry and soon he was sobbing uncontrollably. He cried so loudly that some of customers looked at him. He tried to regain his composure, but he couldn’t. He just let out all his emotions. Finally, he said, “Mary, I need your forgiveness. Please. Please.”

“Charlie, it’s not my place to forgive you. Only God can do that. But I really don’t think you caused Miller to rape Sarah. He was going to do it no matter what you said. You were drunk and nervous about school. You were just a kid running your mouth off.”

I continued giving him support and comfort. When he looked at me, he was like a little boy asking to be forgiven for having done something very bad, like breaking a priceless family heirloom.

I didn’t talk much that first time we met. Charlie just kept rambling on as if he was talking to himself. At 4:00 Leo came over and said we had to leave. Charlie immediately said, “Can we meet again? I have to see you again.”

“I’ll call you.”

I wanted to meet with him to help him find forgiveness from God, but I also wanted to get to know him. That date – January 17, 1977 – is embedded in my memory. It’s the date when God brought Charlie and me together.

We started seeing each other every weekend. We always met at a restaurant or a park or some public place. I didn’t feel that I needed Leo after our first meeting. I knew Charlie wouldn’t hurt me. I realized from the start that Charlie couldn’t hurt anyone. He is a gentle soul. He wanted to pick me up to drive me where we were going, but I insisted on taking public transportation. I didn’t want him to know that I worked at Lawndale. At first, he didn’t ask questions about me. He just talked about himself, and that was great with me. I was falling in love with Charlie, but I knew there was no future for us if he ever found out about my past so the

longer he talked about himself, the longer I could be with him. Once he found out about me, I was certain that would be the end of our relationship.

At first he wanted to know where I worked and I avoided telling him. He started calling me “mystery woman” and was sure I was a CIA agent or in the witness protection program. One Saturday we met at a pizza joint for lunch and talked for hours. As we were leaving, there was a violent thunderstorm. I told Charlie I’d wait inside until I saw the bus stop across the street, but he insisted on driving me home. He said that he was going to kidnap me and take me to his car. At the door, he turned to everyone in the restaurant and made noises like Tarzan calling to the apes in the jungle as he pounded his chest and said, “I’m Tarzan, king of the jungle, and I have my woman Jane here and I’m taking her with me to the jungle.” He picked me up and threw me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. Everyone in the restaurant laughed. I didn’t know whether to laugh or be embarrassed. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. Nothing like this had ever happened to anyone before. Of course, I had no idea who Tarzan and Jane were, but I didn’t say anything. I was learning to hide my ignorance of the world.

That’s how Charlie found out where I lived and about my job as night manager of a group home for retarded women. He asked why I was still working with the retarded after my experience with Sarah. I told him I didn’t know. I couldn’t tell him that working with retarded people made me feel that I was doing good in the world, that I was doing God’s work, and that it was my passion, my calling. He said that he knew I was a caring, loving person and that’s why I worked with the retarded. I couldn’t look at him. Here was another man like Dr. Warner who was seeing something good in me. Interesting because both Dr. Warner and Charlie were looking for forgiveness: Dr. Warner for giving up Sarah when she was born, and Charlie for his mistaken idea that he caused Sarah’s rape. And they both felt that I was the key to their gaining forgiveness. Maybe I was.

Gradually we began to do different kinds of things together. One night, we went to an outdoor concert at Grant Park. We laid on a blanket on the grass looking up at the stars. How could I help but fall in love with Charlie that night? We listened to classical music as we gazed up at the black sky with countless stars trillions of miles away. We talked about whether there was life on other planets, and whether we would want to travel to another planet. We dreamed about what a perfect life would be like in space. I said there would be no hatred and meanness

and everyone would be respected for who they were - God's children. Everyone would live by the rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Then Charlie took my hand. That was the first time he touched me.

Charlie loved the Cubs so he took me to a Cubs game. I had no idea of the rules of baseball so Charlie became my teacher, and I found that I really enjoyed the game. That was the beginning of my life-long passion for the Cubs. I love them even though they are the biggest losers in baseball history. Maybe that's why I love them. I've always rooted for the underdogs in life. And of course, I'm the ultimate underdog. I've made it so there's hope for the Cubs. I'm sure someday they'll win the World Series. You can tell from that statement that I am one of the greatest optimists of all time.

When Charlie's team played home games, I went to cheer them on. After a few games, I asked Charlie if I could bring my Lawndale ladies to the games. He, of course, said yes. First I took them to just watch so they would become familiar with the gym and the appropriate behaviors. Screaming was okay in this setting. Then I got them pompoms and led them in loud cheers. I looked around the gym and saw that my ladies were just like the normals – fanatic fans. By that time Charlie's students knew I was his girlfriend, and they also knew where I worked. They accepted my ladies without reservation. There was no hint of shame at having retarded fans. A fan is a fan.

Charlie and I acted like we were just good friends and avoided touching. I think we both knew that even a kiss would lead to the bedroom and I wasn't ready for that. I had sexual feelings for Charlie, but they were mingled with memories of the horrible sexual experiences I had as a child. I felt that I had to hide my feelings because I was afraid that I'd scare Charlie away. Then one hot, humid day we went to the beach. Charlie tried to teach me to swim, but I was afraid of water over my knees so I clung to him. I had my arms around his neck in a choke hold and he laughed that I was strangling him. I was sexually aroused by our closeness and my fear of drowning if I let go. He brought me to the edge of the water while he went off to swim. I played in the surf with the little kids. I even borrowed a pail from a three-year old so I could make my own mud pies.

We were leaving the beach, sitting in the car laughing at some people in old fashioned bathing suits we'd seen when Charlie reached over and took my hand and brought it to his lips and gently kissed it. Then he kissed me gently on the lips. I had never been kissed when I was a whore. I was 27, and this was my first romantic kiss. I was in love with the most wonderful man in the world, and we had no future together. Then he took me in his arms. My breasts pressed against his naked chest. Every cell in my body responded. I had sex in cars for a year and a half and had never been sexually aroused, but in that hot car wearing wet, sticky bathing suits, I was ready to make love, but I knew I couldn't.

"Mary, I'm in love with you and I think you feel the same way about me. Mary, you're the first woman I've ever loved and I'm not sure what to do or how to act. I don't want to scare you away. You seem so fragile. I don't want to break you. I searched for you to ask your forgiveness, but I found something completely unexpected. I found love."

I couldn't talk. I cried uncontrollably. He drove me to Lawndale House and said he'd see me the next day at 1:00 and that we could talk then when I was calmer. I ran into Lawndale House and bumped into Gladys as she was leaving. She saw the state I was in and insisted I tell her what was wrong. We went to my apartment and I told her everything. When I got the job at Lawndale, I told Gladys about my past at Southern, but not my first 13 years. Now I was describing those years of my life in lurid detail. No man could love a woman who had been a whore, who had sex with hundreds of men. She said that I had no choice but to tell him everything if I wanted our relationship to continue. She said that if he loved me he would understand that I hadn't chosen to be a whore. I was forced into it. I was a helpless child. She held me close and told me that she loved me like a daughter.

I didn't know what to do and where to go so I turned to Judy – my pillar of strength. The next day I planned to be at Judy's when Charlie came for me. I was running away from him. I couldn't face him. Gladys drove me to Judy's because I was in no state to take the bus.

Judy arranged for her mother-in-law to take care of Carl so we could talk without interruption, and we did so all night. Judy said I had to risk my future and tell Charlie everything. If he truly loved me, he would accept me. How could he accept my past when I couldn't? She pointed out how Leo had accepted her even though she had lived in an institution her whole life.

I said that it wasn't the same. I'd been a whore. She said that I really hadn't been a whore. I had been a sex slave who had no choice, no way out.

The next morning I went to church with the Pulaski family. I prayed to God for guidance. God told me I had two choices – tell Charlie the truth and risk losing him but also risk gaining happiness I never could have imagined, OR run away from him and never see him again but never, ever find happiness in life. He said that I had to choose and that He couldn't choose for me. He told me to examine my heart and I would find the answer.

Leo drove me back to Lawndale at 2:00. Charlie was sitting on a rocking chair on the porch. He was talking about basketball to Bart and Richard, two residents from Kildare House. Charlie told them he'd put a basketball hoop on the driveway and teach them to play basketball. The men were ecstatic. It was like they knew Charlie for years, and not for just a few hours.

I tried not to look him in the eye as I asked, "You look tired. Have you been here long?"

"Yes, since midnight. I couldn't sleep. I had to be near you even if I couldn't see you. I got a few hours sleep in the car, but I've been waiting on the porch since 9:00. I checked with the counselor and she told me you weren't here. I knew you had to come back sometime and I would just wait until you did."

"Did you eat anything?"

"No. I'm starved. I didn't want to leave to get anything. I didn't want to risk missing you."

"Come in. I'll make you a sandwich." I couldn't believe I had uttered those words. I was inviting him into my world. I had taken the first step over the threshold. I knew the choice I'd made and it was irreversible.

I led him to my small apartment off the living room. Several of the girls in the living room wanted to talk to us, but I told them we'd talk later. When I shut the door, the girls giggled, suspecting what was about to happen. This was the first time anyone other than Judy, Gladys, and the Lawndale women and staff had ever been in my apartment.

As I made Charlie a ham sandwich, he looked around my one-room apartment. He examined the wall containing my framed diploma from the community college, my enlarged social security card, and my enlarged voter's registration card. He didn't ask why anyone in her right mind would have these things hanging on their wall.

After he wolfed down two ham sandwiches, a can of mixed fruit, 5 chocolate chip cookies, and 2 glasses of milk, he sat back and said, "That was the most delicious meal I've ever had. You are a great chef – just like Julia Child."

"Who's Julia Child?" I silently reminded myself not to ask questions that showed my social ignorance.

"Mary, I will never ask about your past. All I want to do is be with you. When you're ready to tell me, you can tell me. I'll wait forever. Mary, I love you. I've never said that to any human being before. I can't give you up no matter what. I can't imagine a future without you. I think about you all the time. I feel like you're with me all the time."

I was paralyzed. Here was the man of my dreams, but I didn't know if he would actually love me if he knew the truth. It was easy for him to say these words without knowing that I worked as a whore.

I cried for a long time, maybe 20 minutes. He held my hand the whole time. And then I prayed to God, first silently and then aloud. "God, please answer my prayers. Tell me what to do. I need your guidance." And then God made the choice for me. I clearly heard Him say "Tell him." And I did.

"Charlie, I love you with all my heart and soul. You are the greatest human being in the world. And I want nothing more than to marry you and spend my whole life making you happy. I'm going to tell you my life story. When I'm finished, I don't want you to say anything. I want you to go home and think about everything I've said. Then I want you to call me later and say just one word - yes or no. If it's no, I'll understand because I don't think I could marry someone with my past."

And for two hours I told Charlie my whole life story starting with my life with Eileen, my time as a prostitute, my pregnancy, my sterilization, my life at Southern, my life with Dr.

Warner, and Sarah's murder. I didn't look at him while I spoke. I didn't want to know how he was feeling. When I was finished, he left without saying a word.

At 2:00 in the morning, my phone rang and there was just one word spoken. "Yes."

The next day after school, Charlie came to see me. When he came into my apartment, we didn't talk. I opened the sofa bed and we laid down. I was scared that I wouldn't be able to respond to him because of nightmares from the past, but I needn't have worried. I responded with a passion I didn't know I had. He was kind and gentle and asked me over and over again if everything was okay. I was really a virgin even though I'd had sex with hundreds of men. It was a beautiful first experience.

When we were finished, he turned me over and touched the scar on my bottom from the stabbing. He gently kissed it. There was more healing in that kiss than all the medicine in the world.

Then Charlie, totally nude, got out of bed and got down on his knee and asked me to marry him. I laughed and said, "Charlie, I want to marry you more than anything in the world, but do you really want to give up having children?"

"Mary, if we decide we want children, we can adopt. There are so many needy children in this world who would be honored to have us as their parents. But we may not want to have children. We may not want to share our love with anyone else but each other."

"Charlie, how can you accept my past? I can't."

"Mary, don't you realize that your past is what has made you into the strong, loving woman you are. You have survived the worst that life can give and you have come through it with kindness in your heart. So many people, maybe everyone, who was forced into being a child prostitute like you were would have a bitterness that would eat away at their souls. They would want only revenge on others, on society, for what happened to them. Not you. Instead of bitterness and hatred and anger, you found kindness in your heart. You had been in hell for those first 13 years of your life and when you saw the dying people at Southern, you looked inside your heart and found compassion and empathy because you knew that they had been in hell at

Southern. Mary, I want to learn from you. I want to be the person you are – strong, loving, caring. You are my hero.

Mary, when I'm with you I realize that I didn't cause Miller to rape and murder Sarah. I realize I was a stupid kid who was just talking. You've cleansed my heart. There's nothing I need to atone for."

That was the start of our wonderful relationship of 33 years. We've loved each other more every day. We decided not to adopt children, but to devote our lives to our careers and to each other. Sometimes I've missed having children, especially when I see mothers cuddling their babies or mothers playing with their children on a playground. But now I have a child – you – so I'll have experiences of being a parent, but a parent of an adult child, and maybe someday I'll have the joy of being a great-grandmother and then I can cuddle and play with my grandkids' kids. Don't tell Wendy what I said. She'll think I'm pressuring her into getting married and having a baby, or with today's way of doing this, just having a baby.

Before we could get married, we had to make lots of changes. First, I had to change jobs. I couldn't continue as the resident night manager and live with Charlie in my small apartment. Again, Gladys came to my rescue. She was being transferred to a new group home for more severely disabled women. This group would be harder to normalize because of the degree of their handicap. She asked if I wanted to serve as Assistant Director under her. I was thrilled to work with her on this challenge. I'd work 9 to 5 which was good for me since I wouldn't have to be away from Charlie in the evenings.

Charlie and I had rented an apartment in his building which was near Sheridan and Foster. The new group home called Dirkson House was quite far away. I would have to take two busses and it would take at least an hour of travel. Charlie decided that it was time I learned to drive so I could get a car and drive to work. Driving was not a dream of mine. The thought of steering a deadly vehicle through the crowded streets of Chicago was frightening. But Charlie helped me overcome my fear. He got me an old blue Chevy and we spent our free time with me practicing how to drive in a deserted school parking lot. After two months, Charlie thought I was ready for the test. I had no trouble with the written test, but the behind-the-wheel test was something else. My hands were so wet with sweat, I didn't think I could move the steering

wheel. On my first try I failed!! I forgot to put on my directionals. I didn't stop at a stop sign. I knew how to do these things, but my nervousness made me forget to even breathe. I was totally distraught and said that I'd never try again. Well Charlie doesn't know the meaning of the word no so two weeks later I was back behind the wheel and thank the Lord I passed. I added a copy of my driver's license to my wall of competence. Interestingly, I've learned to love driving. When we take long trips, I do more of the driving than Charlie.

The apartment we got was in the same building where Charlie and Jimmy lived for several years. We had four rooms. One of the bedrooms was where we slept and the other we converted to an office. Charlie had furniture from his old apartment so we didn't have much to buy when we first started out. We were so in love that we didn't notice the holes and filth on the furniture, but gradually we became aware of the fact that our place looked like a slum so we eventually replaced everything. The old furniture was so junky that when we put it out on the street for the garbage collectors, no one picked it up.

On December 22, 1977, we had a church wedding. Although I kept saying that I just wanted to get married in City Hall. I didn't really mean it. We had a perfect wedding, but I suppose all couples say that, but for us it really was perfect. We planned on having a small wedding in the church that Jimmy went to, but like most weddings ours ballooned to a fairly large affair. I'd gone to Judy's church and gotten to know her priest, Father Dominic. But he couldn't marry us because we weren't Catholic and we didn't plan on converting or having children. So we were married by Reverend Tom in a Methodist Church. Reverend Tom was an elderly man who was planning to retire, but he put it off so he could perform our marriage as his last act as a minister. Judy was my matron of honor and Jimmy was Charlie's best man. Judy made me a lovely wedding dress without a pattern by just copying a picture of a dress I found in *Bride's* magazine. It was an ankle length, white, soft, billowy chiffon dress with a boat neck. I still have it in a trunk in my basement. Every year on our anniversary, I take it out and recall how that day was the happiest of my life, even happier than getting out of Southern. I would try the dress on, but I've put 20 pounds on since my wedding. I can't believe I was so small.

I can vividly recall every word spoken at the ceremony. When Charlie kissed me, I felt that God was binding me to him for eternity. We held the reception in the church social hall. I invited my co-workers and all my ladies from Lawndale House and Charlie invited his co-

workers and his basketball team. And of course we had the whole Pulaski family which added up to more than 20 people. What a strange mix of people they were, but these were the people who gave meaning to our lives. I called Mrs. Brown to invite her to the wedding because she'd been so good to me and because I wanted her to know what had happened to the man she'd spoken to on the phone about a year earlier. Mrs. Brown came, but she brought someone I never expected to see again - Dr. Warner. She told him about me getting married, and he said that he deeply regretted that our relationship had died with the death of Sarah. He wanted to see me again, but he didn't want to call. He was afraid I might say that I didn't want to see him, but of course, I could never say that. I thought about him a lot and hoped someday we would meet again. I was so glad to have him share the happiest day of my life. And for the last 32 years I've been blissfully married. So Charlie and I have lived happily ever after just like a fairy tale.

Chapter 16

Thirty Two Years of a Normal Life

It's hard to describe my life since I married. So much has happened, and yet so little. My ultimate dream has come true. I've had a normal life – going to work, making dinner, doing laundry, going out to eat with friends, celebrating holidays with Judy and her family, and vacations. And best of all, birthday parties for Charlie and me. I don't mean to imply that the first 21 years of my life have been totally forgotten. They're there, lying just below the surface of consciousness, occasionally bubbling up. Once I read a newspaper article about sex trafficking of young girls which triggered a vision of the man in black, the priest, reaching out for me as I got into his car. It was so clear. It wasn't night time. It was day time so I saw him clearly. But there was a difference this time. Aloud, I screamed, "No," and I ran away. The priest didn't follow me. Or, after talking to a co-worker who had just returned from the funeral for her grandson who was stillborn, I had a bad dream about the babies I worked with at Southern all dying at the same

time. I couldn't do anything to stop what was happening. I frantically ran from crib to crib screaming, "Don't die." Sometimes I'll see a person with blood-shot eyes and I'll picture Jack Miller's face. I quickly blink my eyes to make him disappear. These reminders of my past show that my unconscious is still mulling over these experiences, and always will. They're like bones in a witch's cauldron that come to the surface when they're stirred up.

But the memory that is always with me is Sarah. I think of her every day, especially when I get up in the morning. I have a picture of the two of us from Judy's wedding in my bedroom. Every morning I go to the picture of Sarah and say, "Good morning Sarah," and I tell her what's on tap for the day. I think of her a lot at work. When I do something with the people I work with, like take them to a ball game, I think of how Sarah would have liked this. I have kept her memory alive and I have tried to keep the memory of her murder dead and for the most part, I've succeeded.

My work has enriched me psychologically and spiritually. It has always been more than a job. It has been a calling, a passion. There's always a new challenge that I have to meet, and as you probably can tell from all I've said on this tape, I love challenges. I love overcoming obstacles that people say can't be overcome. It has been a joy going to work, if it was at Lawndale House or Dirksen House or the Chicago Center for Disability Services. My first big challenge was helping Gladys set up Dirksen House for a new population, one that many thought couldn't make it in the outside world. We set out to prove them wrong. Higher level individuals had been deinstitutionalized, most successfully. Now it was the time for people with significant disabilities. It was their turn. There were so many different things we had to prepare for since many of the women were not ambulatory and most had significant medical problems. We had an LPN on duty 24/7 to handle medical emergencies, and there were lots. Gladys was committed to the notion that nothing could prevent Dirksen House from being successful despite endless unanticipated problems: we didn't expect our residents to die; we didn't expect the neighbors to protest the location of Dirksen House; we didn't expect parents to resist deinstitutionalization of their children; we didn't expect to have staff quit without notice; we didn't expect to have our funding cut by one tenth in our second year of existence. I could go on and on, but to Gladys, these weren't obstacles. They were just bumps in the road that could be overcome. She was David fighting Goliath, and I was her assistant handing her stones for her sling shot.

We had eight women who were living in the outside world, not just a small institution set in the community. We did not hide our ladies. They sat on the front porch and sunned and waved to people who passed by. Volunteers took them on outings to the park and to stores. They went on special buses in their wheelchairs to dances that were arranged by a local fraternity at a nearby university. The frat boys wheeled them around in their chairs as they danced to rock music and squealed with delight. They went to church and met God who greeted them with open arms. We did all we could to normalize their lives, and I think we succeeded. We saw these women smile, perhaps for the first time in their lives. How I treasured seeing those smiles light up their faces. They meant more to me than a paycheck.

After seven years at Dirksen, Gladys and I were both promoted. She became Director of Development, basically the fundraiser, and I became Director of Programming for all the group homes that the Center owned in Chicago. I still have that job; I've never wanted any other job. I'm the person who makes sure that the residents in our homes are given as many normalization experiences as possible. I'm the one who makes sure that no one just sits around all day doing nothing. I'm haunted by visions of the ladies at Southern who lined the halls, just watching their empty lives go by. That will never happen at our group homes. I love my job because every day I feel that I'm doing something to help my people, the same people I lived with for eight years at Southern. Maybe all the women in my ward at Southern became my sisters and I'm just continuing to do good things for my family. And maybe I'm doing this for Sarah – I'm helping people like her. My work is a tribute to my lost little sister.

Recently, my work has taken a totally new direction, one I never in a million years envisioned. I'm working on a team to design and put into action a program designed for maximal normalization in the areas of marriage and parenting. Talk about a challenge! When I started at Lawndale House, these areas were taboo subjects. We didn't think that marriage and parenting were appropriate for the retarded. We thought a bit of safe sex was okay, but that was as far as we would go. We acted responsibly and made sure that our sexually active women were on the pill. Meaningful romantic relationships for our residents were encouraged only up to a point - the point of boyfriend and girlfriend, sort of like high school dating. When an occasional retarded person did marry, and did so successfully, we thought it was something unusual, an anomaly. Remember I talked about Lola, the woman who was released with Judy. Lola went to

church every week and that's where she met a man who she fell in love with. He was older, about 50, and had never been married. He owned several shoe stores and was quite comfortable money-wise. He knew all about Lola's past, but he still wanted to marry her. The staff tried to persuade Lola and him not to marry. Fortunately, they weren't persuaded. They're still happily married after all these years, and most interestingly Lola has become quite a businesswoman. She helps run the stores. She replaced her few rotten teeth with a mouthful of gleaming white false teeth. She gets a chance to show them off because she smiles a lot, especially to the many customers she sells shoes to. She's a very happy woman.

The new program we're starting will have apartments for married retarded folks and their kids, if they choose to have any. Some people will live together because they'll lose disability payments or medical insurance if they marry. We will be providing comprehensive sex education, a family life program, and counseling appropriate to individual needs. We have many challenges ahead of us, challenges that those of us who have worked with the retarded for many years never thought we would face. In terms of marriage, what will we do if the parents of the individuals don't want their kids to marry? What if we feel that someone is making a serious mistake in marrying, can we prevent them from doing so? What about abuse and neglect? What about divorce? And of course, our greatest challenge involves parenthood. Some of our folks realize that they could not handle parenting and will choose not to have kids. Others believe they can, and they are right. But what about the people we don't think will be able to adequately parent, but still want to have children? What about individuals who have genetic forms of retardation? Should we get genetic testing when they're pregnant and then require them to have abortions if they're carrying a retarded child? What about individuals who neglect or abuse their kids? We're treading on some dangerous legal and moral issues here. And then there's the issue of homosexuality. What should we do about homosexual relationships? If normal people can engage in homosexual relationships, why can't retarded people? These are complicated issues for the normal population, but a thousand times more complicated for the retarded. Anyhow, this is the most exciting project I have ever worked on, and one that I know will make the lives of retarded people infinitely richer.

Some years ago Gladys came to me with a delicate request. She wanted me to help her fundraise by sharing my experiences at Southern. She wanted me to go public, to tell the world

about the past I had spent my life trying to hide. She knew how hard this would be for me, but she felt that it would help her raise money and it would help me heal. My first reaction was to say no loud and clear. I was sure that if people found out about my past, the sky would fall. I would lose my job and people would reject me. But after lots of conversations with Charlie, I decided to try it once, only once. I did tell Gladys that under no conditions would I ever tell anyone about my time as a prostitute, my pregnancy, or my sterilization.

Gladys invited me to a private dinner with six of the biggest donors to the Center. There were several executives from the Center who did most of the talking first. I really don't know what anyone said or what I even ate. I was so nervous. When dessert was served, it was my cue to give my pitch. We had rehearsed what I would say and how I would respond to questions, but everything we practiced was lost as soon as Gladys introduced me. I just floundered around for a minute or two and then I let the words in my brain clear a pathway to my mouth.

“As Gladys said, I was a resident of Southern School for the Feeble-minded for eight years from 1963 to 1970. Of course, I wasn't retarded. I had been placed there because I had gotten in trouble with the law and because I had no family and I was not considered a good candidate for foster home placement. I'm in the unique position to tell you what life was like in an institution for the retarded from the perspective of a normal person and why I am so committed to making sure that institutions are eradicated and that good community placements are available to everyone in need.”

As I described life at Southern, I became more and more comfortable. Words just flowed. After speaking for about 20 minutes, I said I was open to questions. The first wasn't a question; it was a comment from Hugh Wheeler, president of the largest bank in Chicago and the parent of a child with Down Syndrome.

“Mary, thank you for sharing your experience. I understand this is the first time that you've told people about this and I can't thank you enough for your bravery in coming forward and your dedication to persons with special needs. When you spoke, I pictured my precious daughter Lilly at Southern. That is something that should never happen to anyone ever again. Thank you Mary.”

As a result of my presentations, \$150,000 was raised. \$150,000 in one night!! What an unbelievable amount. Over the years, I've done a few more presentations like this with selected wealthy donors. Each one has been successful in raising significant amounts of money. In a way I've come out of the closet. Not all the way. Only far enough to raise money. But it has been worth it and the sky hasn't fallen on me yet.

With Charlie's encouragement, I returned to school part time to get my bachelor's degree. It took four years, but I did it. I have a B.S. in Psychology from Lake View University. I showed you that diploma on my wall when you were here. Although Charlie wanted us to go to the graduation ceremony, I couldn't. The horrible memories of the time when I graduated from community college kept popping up making it impossible for me to enjoy my achievement as much as I would have liked. I felt a sense of accomplishment, but not the joy I felt when I graduated from community college.

Charlie's professional life has also changed a lot. He was asked by the principal at his school to go to grad school to get certified in school administration. He was being groomed to become a principal. He was ambivalent about this because he didn't want to give up coaching, but he did like the idea of being a leader of his own school. So he got his master's degree in school administration and eventually became the assistant principal at two different high schools before becoming principal of Simon High School. There are about 3,000 kids in the school, and I think he knows everyone of them by name. He has a great relationship with all his teachers, and of course, he never misses a basketball game. He tries not to look over the basketball coach's shoulder and tell him what to do, but he's not always successful.

Our lives have revolved around our jobs and socializing with Judy and her family and Jimmy and his family. We're godparents to Judy's son and to one of Jimmy's daughters. Jimmy married a social worker named Carrie and they had three children in five years. Wow – were they busy and we were glad to help out with babysitting and anything else they needed. We lived in the same apartment building for a while so we were always on call if there was an emergency and Jimmy was off at work. Being a cop, he was away a lot and couldn't just drop everything and come home when he was needed. We've enjoyed other people's children and never really missed having our own. Anyhow Charlie has lots of children at school and the people I work with have always been my children.

I resumed a superficial relationship with Dr. Warner, except for one time when we met and talked like we did in the old days. After he and Edith divorced, we got together for dinner every few months – Charlie, me, Dr. Warner, and a lady friend of his. There was one woman he saw for about four years, but most of the time it was a different woman every time we went out. The women were all alike: tall, not short like Edith; dark, not light like Edith; well educated, not ignorant like Edith; and working in helping professions, not like Edith who was interested only in her family tree and money. One woman was a psychiatric social worker, another a legal aid attorney, another a critical care nurse, and another director of a planned parenthood office. The women were all attractive and interesting, and as different from Edith as possible. But Dr. Warner never got permanently involved with any of them.

Dr. Warner and Edith divorced a year after Sarah was murdered. After Sarah died, Edith put on this act pretending that she loved her retarded child who had been cruelly taken from her. She gave interviews to the newspapers with this story so the whole city of Chicago felt sorry for her. She conned millions of people. The outburst I had that last time I was at the Warner house had an impact on Dr. Warner. My words about Edith went straight to his heart. He knew I was right. He knew Edith hated Sarah. He knew that she was glad she was dead. He couldn't stand her hypocrisy and the ugliness of their marriage anymore so he divorced her. She kept the house in Chicago and the lake house in Michigan, but she gave Dr. Warner lots of money, enough to buy a condo on the 30th floor of a building overlooking Lake Michigan. Maybe it was hush money so he wouldn't tell the world about the real Edith Warner.

Edith died of stomach cancer in 1991. I think of Edith as being like my mother, the only difference was that Edith was fabulously wealthy. They both didn't really love anybody. I don't think Edith even loved Dr. Warner. He was her possession, like her paintings – something handsome and charming and smart to show off. And Edith hated her daughter, just like Eileen hated me. So in my life I've known two cruel, evil mothers, who on the surface are as different as can be, but once you dig down you find that they are birds of a feather – vultures.

About 10 years ago Dr Warner called and asked if I'd meet to have a chat, like old times. I was surprised because I rarely heard from him, and when I did it was to invite Charlie and me to dinner. We met at the library at Northwestern. It was a pleasant Saturday in September so we sat on a bench and watched the students loaded with books trudging up and down the stairs.

“Mary, you probably wonder why out of the blue I want to talk to you. Since Sarah’s death, I’ve talked to you a lot in my head and I thought that I probably won’t live much longer so I wanted to get some stuff off my chest. No – I’m not dying. I just said that because I’m getting old and death doesn’t seem that far away.

I’m still unsure about my belief in God, except when I think about Sarah. Then I think there is a God and he created Sarah to suffer, much like Christ. I think maybe we can only achieve joy and peace through suffering. So I think Sarah achieved joy and peace after the years of suffering at Southern. And she was created to give fulfillment to others, again like Christ. I always felt a calming, healing sense of peace when I was with Sarah that I never felt with anyone else. Sometimes when you were away at school, I’d get Sarah from her room and we’d sit in the garden for a while. Not talking, just being together. For me, that was the strangest experience. How could I be with someone and not talk or laugh or cry? It was enough to just watch the grass grow. I felt a sense of holiness about her. I felt that she was imbued with God’s spirit. Of course, she didn’t know any of this. She couldn’t understand it even if I tried to explain it to her.

After she died, God died for me too. Her death paralyzed me, especially the violence of it. I couldn’t understand how someone could actually plunge a knife into an innocent girl’s back. This girl who was my flesh and blood. This girl who I tried to love, maybe not always successfully, but who I cared for probably more than any other human being. How could he carve her up? How could he butcher her? In my mind’s eye, I saw him killing her. I saw the knife penetrate her skin and break open her back. I saw the blood gushing out. I saw it all in agonizing slow motion. Her life turned off in a split second. I couldn’t escape these visions. The brutality of it played over and over in my head when I was awake and came to me in my dreams when I slept.

What made this man do it? Was he crazy? Was he evil? What kind of God let his happen? What kind of God let a savage like Jack Miller take the life of an innocent lamb like Sarah? I couldn’t believe in this kind of God or any God. After Sarah’s death, I retired from teaching. I couldn’t concentrate on the needs of my students. Lecturing and grading papers seemed unimportant. My only focus was on the murder. I was driving myself crazy. I knew I had to stop obsessing about it so I tried going to church, something I’d never done before especially because Edith wanted me to. I didn’t get much out of it at first, but I continued going anyway. It was the

only place I could stop the replay of the murder in my head. One Sunday morning sitting in front of me was a woman with Down Syndrome. She wasn't pretty like Sarah. In fact, she was rather ugly, but so was her mother. She must have sensed me staring at her so she turned around and gave me this angelic smile, just like Sarah. I swear the church got brighter when she smiled. And suddenly the world was okay. I knew I would heal, and I have. I realize that I did the right thing by taking Sarah out of Southern and by having you as her companion. I realize that for the five years that she lived with me, she was happy as she would never have been anywhere else. Her murder is something I can't understand. Jack Miller was evil and he killed good, but we can't let him win by letting him destroy our lives. You learned that lesson through Charlie. I had to learn it, but without the help of another person.

So I've tried to get on with my life. Since I retired from teaching I devote all my time to different projects that benefit other people – working at a soup kitchen on Skid Row, volunteering on a cancer ward at a hospital, and being a big brother to black inner city kids who have become my best sailing buddies. One of them, Randy, is a born sailor even though he was actually born in the projects on the West Side and hadn't ever been to Lake Michigan until I took him out on the boat. I'm trying to give back for the blessings I did have – Sarah and you. I think of my life now and my life as Edith's showpiece and I can honestly say I'm much happier now than I was when I lived the country club life. The only thing I've kept from that life is sailing. When I'm on the water, I'm free. I'm at peace.”

“I wish you'd told me about your time alone with Sarah. You know I always felt that God gave me Sarah as a substitute for my lost baby. I, too, felt a sense of peace when I was with her. It wasn't her. It was God coming out through her.”

Then he talked about me. “Mary, I feel that you too have God in you. When he created you, he gave you a spine of steel. I can't think of anyone who could have survived what you did and come out a good person. I certainly couldn't have done it. I think a lot about what you did at Southern. Here you were this uneducated, abused, unloved child who was cast into a hellish environment. Where did you find it in your heart to nurture the sick and the dying when you never experienced love or kindness? Where did that come from? Where? Sometimes we all do intentional acts of kindness, and sometimes we do random acts of kindness, but you live in a state of kindness. Kindness is woven into your very being.”

“Dr. Warner, I don’t know who you’re talking about when you talk about me like that. I think it’s someone in your imagination. It’s who you want me to be, and not who I am. But you know what? It inspires me to live up to your expectations of me. And that is what I learned from you during our Sunday morning talks – to try to live in a state of kindness.”

Dr. Warner had brought this briefcase with him, which I thought was odd. Why did he need a briefcase for our chat? It was a bulky old-fashioned kind of briefcase. He opened it and took out an urn.

“Mary, these are Sarah’s ashes. I know this sounds strange, but I want you to have them. I thought of spreading them at the zoo or the duck pond where she was so happy, but I think they belong to you. In life, you loved her more than anyone else. In death, you still love her. And you were the only person Sarah ever loved. I know she just thought of me as a nice man. She couldn’t love me. We didn’t have a history with me like she had with you.”

I was astounded. I had never anticipated anything like this, but I realized it was right for me to have Sarah’s ashes. That urn was on the fireplace mantel in my home for a while. Sarah lived on in my heart and in my home until I found the perfect place for her ashes to spend eternity.

Dr. Warner and I never talked like that again. He died of a heart attack two years ago. He was 90. I wish I had a chance to say good bye to him, but there were no unspoken words left between us. I told him what he meant to me, and he told me what I meant to him. We talked about so many subjects, but the one subject we never reached any resolution on was evil. Jack Miller was born evil, and he destroyed purity and goodness when he killed Sarah. Why had God created Jack Miller, and why does God allow evil to exist? We never got anywhere with those questions. I suppose we’re like all the philosophers and religious thinkers who have asked these questions since the beginning of time. But it’s not only deep thinkers who ask these questions, it’s anybody who has been touched by evil. And that’s all of us.

To see how normal our life became, we did what every couple dreams of doing – about 15 years ago we bought a house. I can’t tell you how important this was to me. To have my own home - a place for just me and Charlie. It’s in Rogers Park, near Loyola which is the neighborhood that Charlie has always liked because that was where his first home was in

Chicago. When you visited us, you saw that we have a perfect house for our needs. It's got a small backyard and front yard so we can do a little gardening which I love. Since I sat in the Warners' garden watching different flowers grow season by season, I've wanted to have my own garden, and now I do. I sit in my back yard and see my very own daffodils, tulips, roses, and mums mark the passing of time.

When I saw my name on the deed of the house, I was so proud that I had attained this – a property owner. I made a photocopy of the deed and hung it with the other framed evidence of my being a competent adult. My wall of competence keeps growing. Speaking of my wall of competence, you probably wonder why I have it. Well, I don't have it for other people to see. I have it for me so that every day I can see how far I've come, to see how I have overcome unbelievable adversity, and to see how God has blessed me. It's not only my wall of competence, it's also my wall of pride.

Charlie and I have shared a rich life filled with gratifying work and friends and travel. Charlie and I took our first trip on our honeymoon when we went to Washington D.C. In four days we saw every monument. Most people didn't think we were on our honeymoon because we spent little time in our hotel room. We had plenty of time for love making, but not plenty of time to see the White House, the Capitol, Washington Monument, Lincoln Monument, Jefferson Monument, and the Smithsonian. I get tired just thinking of all we saw. And we've continued to travel to New York, California, the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Florida. We haven't gone out of the country yet. We're saving Europe for when life slows down, which I'm not sure will ever happen so we may never go abroad, but that's okay.

Our lives have also been filled with the inevitable sadness that comes with aging. Two years ago, Leo was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He had developed several health issues. First, he had diabetes so he was given medication and put on a diet. He lost a lot of weight, but he didn't look good. He looked wasted. Finally, they found the cancer. In the last three months of his life, I spent a lot of time with him. I felt like I did when I nurtured the dying in the Southern hospital ward. We didn't talk a lot; we just spent most of the time holding hands and my reading the Bible. Volunteers from Hospice came to help with medication and support. Monica who was an oncology nurse said that I gave Leo as much support as the Hospice workers. She suggested that I consider becoming a Hospice volunteer, and recently I took the training. I haven't had a

chance to start working with anyone yet, but I look forward to that. I think I'll feel like I did when I was a kid at Southern who helped people die in peace.

Leo died two year ago as did Dr. Warner. Their funerals were so different, but yet alike because they both honored fine men. There were about 40 people at Dr. Warner's funeral. All of us there owed him something. He had changed our lives; he made us better people. Some of his former Northwestern students spoke of how he inspired them to be the best that they could be. Several went on to successful academic careers, in fact one was president of a small college and another was an author of some of the most popular textbooks in English history. One became a state senator, and another a heart surgeon. The student who Dr. Warner helped when he got cancer was there. He spoke only one emotion-filled sentence, "Dr. Warner saved my life."

There were three black men who had been Dr. Warner's Little Brothers over the years. They thanked him for his financial generosity and for his guidance and affection. One had finished college and was an accountant, another worked for the Chicago Transit Authority, and the third was a manager of a drug store. They spoke of him more as a father than as a big brother. Because of him, they were able to avoid the crime and drugs that plagued their neighborhoods. And they all thanked him for giving them the special feeling of freedom that came with sailing.

And then there was the man who Dr. Warner met at the soup kitchen on Skid Row. He was an alcoholic who Dr. Warner worked with. He had been alcohol free for 12 years and was back working as a graphic artist, his job before his fall into homelessness and alcohol. He had married and named his son Mark after Dr. Warner. He hoped that Mark's spirit would live on through his son. He showed everyone pictures of little Mark who looked remarkably like the Mark he was named after.

Michelle and Jackson were there. Mrs. Brown had died about 10 years earlier. They thanked him for his generosity and his support of their education. I didn't know this, but he paid for their college tuition. Michelle was now a teacher and Jackson owned an auto body shop.

Although I hadn't planned to, I made some remarks. I felt compelled to publicly honor this man who had given me so much.

“Dr. Warner believed in me at a time when I didn’t believe in myself. I didn’t know who I was or who I could become. He told me that I could achieve whatever I set out to do and I did. I became a college graduate because of him. I became a better human being because of his belief that I could live a blessed life. He saw in me things that no one else saw and these things became reality.”

I would have liked to speak on behalf of Sarah, but I couldn’t. If I could though, I would have told everyone how Dr. Warner saved her from life in a cruel institution, how he made her happy by giving her her first book, by getting her a pet to love, by taking her to the zoo, and most importantly, by saving me so that I could love her. I would say that she, in turn, gave meaning to his life and by dying she led him to find the goodness in his heart so that he, too, could live in a state of kindness.

I should mention that Walter was at the funeral, but he didn’t offer any tribute to his father. He didn’t acknowledge me, not even with a nod. I don’t know why. Did he blame me in some way for what happened to his family? Walter has been a puzzle to me. The only thing I can see that he’s done with his life is run his successful law firm and manage the huge inheritance from Edith. He never re-married and had minimal contact with his father after Sarah’s death. So the Wilson/Warner family tree will come to an end with Walter’s death. All that will remain after he dies will be his millions of dollars. I hope he leaves his money to good causes like Dr. Warner did. Thanks to Edith’s money, Dr. Warner was able to leave his 11 million dollar estate to worthy charities like those that advocate for the disabled, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and the cancer center at the hospital where he volunteered.

After the service, I went up to Walter to offer my condolences on the loss of his father. He looked right through me and was silent, not even saying thank you. Maybe he blames me for what happened to Sarah, or maybe he feels guilty for what he failed to do to help Sarah and his parents. But that’s his cross to bear, but only if he has a heart and I’m not sure he does.

Shortly after going to Dr. Warner’s funeral, Charlie and I went to Leo’s funeral. That wasn’t really a funeral; it was a celebration of his life. There were so many people filling the church and the social hall that it was hard to move. All of these people were there because they loved Leo. I was shocked that Judy found the strength to give a eulogy for him. I thought she

would have been too grief-stricken, but she spoke calmly, even serenely. She spoke of the man who was the love of her life – who didn't have a mean bone in his body and only wanted to do God's work by loving his family, his friends, and his bus passengers. She said the first day when she met Leo on the Clark Street bus was the first day she started to live. When he smiled at her, she took her first intake of air. She ended by saying that God consecrated their marriage, and they would live happily ever after in Heaven. His son, Joseph, shared fond memories of a loving father who was always there for his children. He described the everyday things Leo did that showed his love of God and his dedication to doing God's will on Earth. He looked up at the roof of the church and told us to look up so we could see Leo's soul ascending to Heaven. I was reminded of the dying people at Southern who I helped into Heaven. Leo didn't need help getting into Heaven – God had his arms out eagerly awaiting him. He was especially looking forward to hearing some of Leo's corny jokes. His daughter Monica was too overcome with grief to speak. In fact, her wailing was so loud it almost drowned out the words of the speakers.

And then it was my turn to speak.

“I can't think of Leo without thinking of Judy. There were like one person to me. They both saved me when I was destitute, when I was lost. When I needed a home, they opened their door to me. When I was an orphan, they made me part of their family. Leo accepted my sister Sarah too. His heart was as big as his body. And that laugh. How could you be sad when you heard that life-affirming laugh? In fact, I think Leo's looking down at us now and laughing. Thank you Leo for giving meaning and direction to my life. I will remember you and honor you forever.”

And then Charlie spoke.

“Leo and I shared an insane passion for the Bulls and the Bears. I loved going to games with him because he cheered louder than anyone in the stands. He chastised people if they didn't cheer. At critical points in a game, he would yell encouragement to our side, and he would yell words I didn't know he knew to the other team. Leo's love of his teams was a reflection of his love of life. I can't think of anyone who enjoyed life more than Leo – he enjoyed his family, his friends, his job, his sports, and his God. Thank you Leo for showing us how to enjoy our lives too.”

Of course, Carl couldn't come to the funeral because he was in jail. No one mentioned him. He was and is the heartbreak of Judy's life, but she never stopped praying for him and hoping that someday he would find his way to God.

Anyhow the 39 years since I left Southern have more than made up for the unhappiness of the first 21 years of my life. And I have to give credit to God who found me when I was at my lowest point and led me to live a life of giving to others and doing His work. Charlie and I have gone to a whole lot of churches to see if we can find a congregation and a minister who would satisfy our religious needs. But we haven't found one that is right for us. To make sure we keep God in our lives, we pray together every night before we go to bed. We pray for peace in the world, we pray that our leaders will protect us, and mostly we pray that we will live in a state of kindness.

Chapter 17

Return to Southern

There's one very important thing I want to tell you about before I end my autobiography. It's my trip back to Southern. Six years ago I saw an article in the paper saying that Southern was closing after having been in operation for 110 years. I knew I had to go back there and officially say good bye. You would think that I'd never want to see Southern again after what I'd been through there. But I did want to see it through different eyes. Sometimes I think I've had four lives, not one. I wanted to see Southern through the eyes of these four Mary Reillys.

If I was to return to Southern, I needed Charlie to go with me. He really didn't want to go back to Seymour. He didn't want to face that part of his life. He'd buried his feelings about his family and Seymour, and he didn't want to revive them. I told him that it time to face them. He said he had to think about whether he was ready to face that part of his past. I told him that there wasn't much time – we were getting old. He didn't want to die with unfinished business.

On the following Sunday after church, Charlie and I went for a ride along the lake. Charlie liked to talk as he drove.

“I haven’t wanted to look back at my life in Seymour because it was filled with ugliness. Nothing nearly as bad as yours, but still ugly. I haven’t been able to face it and overcome it like you have. My parents didn’t abuse me or do bad things to me. They were just vegetables. Life for them was working and coming home to watch T.V. They didn’t talk to each other or to me. We were just people who lived in the same house. I don’t remember ever being kissed or even touched by either of them. Growing up, I was sure I was adopted. How could these sullen, silent people who didn’t have any friends have a kid like me – a kid who was talkative, friendly, and extroverted? The most popular kid in school. But when I looked at my father’s ears, I knew I wasn’t adopted. Do you know my parents never came to one of my basketball games? Everyone in town came to my games except my parents. Once I asked my father why he never came to my games, and he said, ‘Not interested.’ That’s all. Just ‘not interested.’ Your kid is the star of the basketball team and a star student and you’re not interested. I was in the National Honor Society which was the highest academic honor a kid could get in my school. There was an induction ceremony where all the parents came to show their pride in their kids. All the parents, except mine. I was the only kid without parents at that assembly. They called the name of each student who was being inducted, and then they called the names of the parents who stood up. When they called my parents’ name, no one stood. People in the audience looked around, but there were no Webbs to be seen. The school people were so nice to me afterwards. They knew how humiliated I was. They told me how proud everyone in the school was of my outstanding achievements, that I was one of the stars of Seymour High School. But their pity only made it worse. I really hated my parents more that night than ever before or ever again. Sometimes I think that one of the reasons I didn’t care about us not having kids is that I was afraid my parents’ genes might come out. Having a kid like them could have ruined our marriage.”

“Did you have any relatives?”

“Not that I knew of. They originally lived in Vernon and moved to Seymour just before I was born. I don’t know why they moved. You mentioned that your mother didn’t tell you much about her life. My parents told me nothing, and when I asked they just didn’t answer. It was like they were deaf so I stopped asking.

Mary, even though I lived in Seymour most of my life, can you believe I never saw Southern? It was like a haunted house that we kids wanted to avoid. We were afraid that there were ghosts there that would jump out and drag us inside where we would be tortured and killed. The worst future you could imagine was spending your life working there. If you thought that the residents were jailed there, we thought that anyone working there was jailed too. We knew that people like Jack Miller who were the lowest of the low worked there and we certainly didn't want to be grouped with the likes of them.

Mary, as usual, you're right. I need to go back to Seymour."

So one spring weekend we drove to Seymour so that Charlie could face his past and I could see Southern through the eyes of freedom. Charlie talked the whole way, conjuring up memories of life in Seymour. All of them had to do with school, sports, and friends. He talked about teachers who had been good to him. He thought he might want to see if Coach Arnold was still around. He'd been like a father figure to him, encouraging him, and always supporting him in basketball. Coach Arnold had come up to Chicago twice to watch Charlie play when he was at Loyola. But after that, they lost contact. He also had two close friends in high school – Andy and Jay. They were on the basketball team with him. They had such good times together. It was like a rural "Happy Days." Andy went to a small Christian college in Indiana, and Charlie lost track of him. Jay stayed in Seymour working at his father's farm supply store.

It had been 39 years since I had last driven the road between Chicago and Seymour. It had changed a lot. Now, there was a four lane highway where before there had been a narrow, bumpy two lane road. There were short order restaurants and gas stations along the way. Then there were just endless stretches of farmland. We got to Seymour and checked into a Super 8 motel, the fanciest and only motel in town. It was clean even though it looked like it had last been decorated in the 1950's, especially because of the green shag carpeting and the orange bedspread.

Then we went to the Seymour Diner where Charlie's mother had worked. We ordered chicken pot pie which was the house specialty and actually was pretty good. Hope, the owner of the diner came out to chat with us since she didn't get very many out-of-town customers. Charlie asked if she knew his mother, but she didn't since she had only owned the diner for the last 20

years and wasn't from Seymour. Hope did say that the recipe for the chicken pot pie was Mabel's. Charlie was astounded. She had never made chicken pot pie at home. In fact, he couldn't remember any food that she cooked at home. Meals were usually canned soups and beans and spam. Hope added that Mabel Webb was known as quite a good cook and that the beef stew, chicken noodle soup, and pecan pie were her original recipes. People came to the diner just to eat her specialties. Hope then said something that astounded Charlie. "I have the original copies of her recipes written in her handwriting. Would you like to see them?"

"Yes," Charlie responded eagerly.

Hope brought out a card box stuffed with recipes. She took out the ones that were Mabel's. Charlie stared at the cards in disbelief. He never knew she was a good cook and he couldn't recall seeing her handwriting before. She had written the recipes in perfect cursive style. In fact, each letter looked like the models Charlie copied from when he learned cursive in third grade. He had a silly thought that maybe he should have an expert analyze her handwriting so he could learn more about her.

"Would you like these cards? I put the recipes for everything on the computer so I don't really need them anymore."

"Yeah, I suppose so. Thanks." Charlie took the cards and handed them to me for safekeeping in my purse.

"Those are the only mementos of my life with my parents and they show a side of my mother I knew nothing about. What else didn't I know about them?"

As we ate, I looked around at the people in the diner. They looked very different than people in Chicago. They looked like the country folks they were. Everyone was white and bland looking. It's hard to describe, but they looked like hillbillies from the dust bowl era of the 30's. The men wore jeans or jean overalls and were rail thin. Under their baseball caps that had logos for John Deere and not sports teams, they had thin gray straight hair. And their lips were thin lines; no one in the whole diner had full lips. Their lips made them look like they were scowling. The women looked quite different. The older ones had gray hair and gray skin and wore clothes, not unlike what we wore at Southern. And most weren't fat – they were stout with no

indentation at their waists. There were two extremely heavy teenagers with their hair streaked with pink and green. In Chicago, they wouldn't have stood out, but here they looked like Martians. And they had squeezed themselves into too-small jeans and tight tee shirts straight from the racks of Walmart. I considered my Land's End pantsuit and my Dockers and Charlie's navy blue Izod shirt and khaki slacks. We looked like Martians here. I wondered what Charlie would have looked like had he stayed in Seymour. Would he be gray and bland too? Is that what he was running away from?

After dinner, we drove to where Charlie's house had been. It was gone. The land was level and there was no sign that a house had ever stood there. Charlie sat on a tree stump and said, "I should feel guilty for leaving my parents and never looking back. I don't. I just had to give that part of my life up and move on. Do you think I'm a bad person for deserting my parents?"

"You a bad person? Never. But what you did was bad. In a way you didn't really desert them, they deserted you by not giving you love or support. But you should have proven yourself better than they were. You should have been in contact with them after you left. No matter what they were like. Especially when you started making money. I'm sure it would have helped to send them some."

"I feel like I never had a family before you. In a way I've always felt like an orphan, just like you. Maybe that's why we've bonded so strongly."

When we got back to the motel, we looked in the thin phone book to see who was still in town. There was no George Arnold, but there was an Amanda Arnold so Charlie called and told her who he was. She said that her father died nine years ago. He'd talked about Charlie with great pride, feeling that he was responsible for Charlie's success. And that was, in part, true. He told Amanda that he had followed her father's example and gone into education and become a coach like him. Amanda was filled with pride that her father's legacy lived on. It was a good talk for both of them.

Next he looked up Andy Clay, but there were no Clays in the phone book. Later we learned that Andy never came back to Seymour after college. He married a girl he met in college and moved to the town she was from. Finally he looked up Jay Pressman. And there was his

name. Charlie was visibly nervous as he dialed his number. No one answered. In a way he was relieved. We found out that Jay had gone to Florida the month before. He had a second home there so he must be doing well. A farm supply business in a farming area couldn't help but do well.

Charlie said, "Well that's all."

"No, see if there's a Marvin Webb listed."

To Charlie's relief, there wasn't. "No Webb in the phone book."

Then it was my turn. When I planned the trip, I was determined to track down Cora Jensen as Wendy did five years later. There was an Elmer Jensen in the phone book who I was sure was Cora's husband, and I was right. I called her number and her daughter answered. She said Cora was out shopping and to call back in an hour because she knew that Cora would want to talk to me. During that hour, I told Charlie about my experiences with Cora even though I had told him about her many, many times before. I reminisced about how she comforted me after I had you and how we had these deep discussions about God. Cora was a special woman, not only because of the emotional support she gave me, but also because of her search for God and how to live a blessed life. Here was another person God sent to guide me to live in a state of kindness. An hour later I spoke to Cora Jensen for the first time in 47 years. She was overjoyed to hear from me. She said that she remembered me like it was yesterday. I told her I looked a lot different than I did 47 years ago. She asked me to visit so she could see for herself.

The next morning before we went to visit Cora, we stopped at a supermarket to get a bouquet of flowers and a box of chocolates. She was now widowed and lived with her daughter and three grandkids. Cora had changed a lot. She was about 100 pounds heavier than when I had last seen her. I had put on about 20 pounds, but I was still recognizable. She wasn't. Maybe she had the gray, bland look back when I knew her, I don't recall. But she certainly had it now. She had sparse gray hair permed into little curls, and she wore rimless glasses. But it was immediately apparent that she was the same warm, kind woman I remembered from my days at Southern.

“Cora, it is so good to see you. I can’t stop hugging you. I don’t think you can imagine how much you meant to me. You changed my life. Without you, I wouldn’t be the person I am today. You’re my fairy godmother.”

She glowed at the compliments and held my hand tightly.

“This is Charlie Webb, my husband. He’s from Seymour.”

“Oh I remember Charlie. Everyone knew Charlie. He was the best basketball player Seymour High ever had. The only time I ever went to Seymour basketball games was when Charlie was on the team. We all knew Charlie would go far in life. We weren’t surprised when he went off to college in Chicago. A Seymour boy making good.”

Charlie hugged her, and said, “I loved playing basketball here because of fans like you Cora. You gave me so much support.

I lost touch with my parents when I left. I never came back. Do you know what happened to them?”

“I remember your parents. I knew your mom from the diner. She was a great cook and the reason people went there was just to eat her food. Everyone loved her chicken pot pie. Whenever we had a special occasion like a birthday or anniversary, we’d go there and get her specialties. If you let the owner of the diner know in advance, she’d have Mabel bake a birthday or an anniversary cake. There was no bakery that could bake a cake like hers.”

Charlie looked at me sadly. I knew he never had a birthday cake baked by a bakery or by his mother. We shared that from our pasts – neither of us had birthday celebrations. But what made Charlie so very sad was that she helped others celebrate their birthdays, but not her own son.

“It must have been about seven years after you left when your mother died. She was walking home from work in a rainstorm. She didn’t have a car so she had to walk even though it was about three miles. Your father drove so he could have picked her up, but he didn’t. She was hit by a car. The car didn’t stop and she lay by the side of the road until morning when someone found her. The police took her to the hospital where she died the next day. They searched for the

hit and run driver, but never found him. I don't remember a funeral or even if she was buried anyplace. I know she's not in any of the church cemeteries. Everybody talked about the fact that your father didn't call the police to report her missing. That was strange. She certainly wasn't the type of woman to stay out all night. And we all blamed him for her death because he didn't pick her up when he could have. But nobody ever talked to him so we couldn't show how we felt about him."

"What about my father? How did he die?"

"He shot himself about six months after your mother died."

Charlie looked as if he had been shot. "That's hard to believe. We never had a gun in the house that I knew of. He didn't hunt or do anything outdoors. He just worked and watched T.V."

"We all wondered where he got that gun. Some people said he went to East St. Louis and bought it on the street. You can buy anything there, especially if it's illegal. He shot himself on a Saturday and when he didn't show up for work on Monday, the boss called and when there was no answer, he sent the police to check because he never missed a day of work in all the years he worked there. The police found him with a gunshot to his head. It was the talk of Seymour for a long time. Suicides don't happen here. We shoot other people, not ourselves. There was even talk that maybe it was a murder made to look like a suicide. That idea came from folks who watched too much T.V. Some people said he killed himself because he felt guilty for letting your mom walk home in the blinding storm. Some crazy people even said that he was the one who hit her with his car. And some people who didn't know anything about your parents said he killed himself because he couldn't live without his wife; he loved her so much. So we never did find out why he killed himself, and frankly no one cared."

"I know they moved here from Vernon where there was a state mental hospital. Do you think they might have been patients there? Or maybe just my father? Could he have been crazy and that's why he killed himself?"

"I don't know. I didn't even know they came from Vernon. They were the people in town that nobody knew, and that's the way they wanted it. When you were in high school, we talked

about what a shame it was that they didn't appreciate you. Any parent in this town would have been proud to have you as their son."

"Thanks for saying that.

Is he buried someplace around here?"

"Not that I know of. They disappeared after they died. They were invisible people when they lived here, and they were invisible after they died."

"What happened to their house? We went there and saw that it's gone now."

"Well, it was empty for years and became like a haunted house to the kids. One Halloween, some kids burned it down."

"So there's no trace that the Webbs ever lived here."

There were so many unanswered questions about the Webbs, but we did get some answers about Jack Miller.

Cora said, "Everyone in town knew the Millers were violent and crazy. We all stayed away from them. I didn't know why Jack was hired at Southern. He'd never been able to hold a job anyplace for long. Southern was always desperate for workers, especially men to work with the violent inmates. So I'm sure that's why he was hired and kept on even though I know he abused the inmates. Everybody who worked there knew. The bosses at Southern wanted to keep the rape quiet because of the bad publicity so there were no public announcements, just lots of town gossip. Miller went to prison for only six years, and then of course, you know he was released and murdered poor Sarah Warner. Everybody bought the Chicago papers so we could find out what happened. That's how I knew he tried to kill you too Mary. No one knew about your history except me and the bosses at Southern and we never talked about your. Especially when the newspaper people from Chicago came down to talk to people around here to get the whole story about Sarah and the Miller family. No one asked about you and no one mentioned you."

"I'm so thankful for that. My life would have been ruined if the papers got hold of my past. What a juicy story that would have made."

“You know the rest of the Miller family continued to rape and murder. Jack had two kids and when they grew up, they did the same thing. One kid raped prostitutes in Springfield and another shot a cop when he was robbing a Seven Eleven in Urbana. He was killed by the cops when they caught him. Just like his father. What a family. They had the seeds of evil in them.”

Suddenly, Cora kissed me on the forehead, my cheeks, and my lips. She said, “Charlie, do you know what people at Southern thought about Mary? They thought that she had God in her and was a faith healer. Everyone knew what this 13 year old did at the hospital when she was pregnant, and then what she did when she worked on the baby ward. How she touched people and then they felt better, and how she made people who never smiled before, smile, and how she made people who had no hope, have hope She even taught the girls on her ward to read, something nobody in the world ever thought possible. Not that she taught them to actually read books, but she taught them the abc’s and some simple words. She made these little miracles happen. It wasn’t like she created big miracles where she actually saved dying people or made retarded people normal. It was more like she made these little changes at Southern, all for the better. And what made these changes stand out is where they took place. She created little miracles in Hell.”

She looked at me and asked, “Did you know how people looked at you?”

“Not really.”

“These stories about you grew bigger after you saved Sarah from Jack Miller. They thought you saved Sarah’s life, and maybe you did. All the attendants, especially the women, believed this. And we were so happy that you were the first to be released. Everyone knew you didn’t belong at Southern. Maybe people in an institution need to have a saint in their midst so they can survive and you were that saint.”

My face turned red and I tingled all over as she showered me with her words. Charlie picked up my hand and kissed it.

Before we left, I told Cora we were planning to visit Southern the next day. I asked her if she knew where the cemetery was. The thought of the dead souls in that cemetery haunted me since I first learned of its existence. Cora told me that she had never seen it, but she heard that it

was down toward the river. I hugged her tightly as I told her over and over again how much I owed her. We both had a good cry. Even Charlie joined in. But I never did get to thank her for the best thing she ever did, and that was lead you to me, to bring us together.

As we were leaving, Cora said, “Mary you confirm my belief in the goodness of people. Anyone who can overcome what you lived through and lead a good life the way you have is a testament that God is good to us. And He has greatly blessed both of you by bringing you together. That’s a miracle – the star basketball player from Seymour High and a former inmate from Southern. Fantastic! Charlie, you’re the best that Seymour ever produced, and Mary, you survived Southern and became a good woman. I wish you both the best of luck. It has been an honor to know you.”

Charlie said, “Well, we need to get that kind of positive reinforcement more often. I feel like a returning hero after a war and you, my dear wife, are a saint. Did you know that? I did.” He laughed heartily as he embraced me.

“Charlie, I knew people at Southern looked at me positively, but I had no idea that they thought I was a saint. Maybe that’s why they gave me so much leeway to do what I wanted with the women in my ward and with my babies. When I think of it now, no one ever tried to stop me from doing things even if they were out of the ordinary and in a place like Southern, doing anything different was not something that was looked on positively.”

I called Cora a week after your visit to me in Chicago to thank her for helping you to find me, but she had died two weeks earlier. I’m sure she was up in Heaven smiling down on us when you and I hugged that first time. She made such an impact on me when I was at Southern, but even more when she led you to me. She was the first guardian angel God sent to me.

Then we drove to Southern. As we drove up, it was like a scene from a movie about haunted houses. I expected to see lightning bolts and bats and witches on broomsticks flying in the sky. What I did see were buildings with heavy chains on the doors even though it’s hard to think of anyone wanting to go into those terrifying looking buildings, but of course, the homeless and druggies would gladly make them home. All the windows were boarded up with heavy white planks of wood so you couldn’t see inside. The grounds were overgrown with weeds and nettles

that stung even through our pants. They snaked around our legs as if to pull us down. We walked from building to building as I tried to recall what each building had housed.

Charlie asked, “Do you have memories of any of these buildings?”

We stopped in front of a huge skeleton of a building that I recognized immediately. “Yes, this one is where my ward was. It was on the second floor. My ward was where the ten windows at the far end are. It’s so strange seeing it from the outside. I never even imagined how it looked from the outside. Even though I traveled from building to building, I never really saw any of the buildings head-on like this. It was like my whole existence was inside the walls of Southern. There is no outside when you’re in jail.

That building with the steps over there is where the administrative offices were. I knew how the outside of that building looked because when I walked down the stairs to Dr. Warner’s car to leave, I turned around to say goodbye. What a day!! Up until the time I met you, it was the best day of my life. Can you imagine thinking that you were going to live in these cruel surroundings for the rest of your life? Just think that if I hadn’t gotten out 39 years ago and I lived here until they closed it, I would have been 50 years old. I would have lived here 27 years, but it wouldn’t have been living. It would have been existing. I wouldn’t be the Mary you know. And maybe I would have died here and been buried in the cemetery we’re looking for.

Let’s find the river. I lived here for eight years and didn’t even know there was a river nearby. I always wondered where my babies were buried.”

We walked until we found a creek, not a river. As we followed along the water’s edge, I spotted a cross on top of a hill. We trudged over and saw a field filled with small white crosses, most of them flattened. We tried to read what was written on them, but the engraving had been erased with time. Then Charlie deciphered one. 1940-1945. That’s all it said. No name. At first we thought that the person who was buried there had been born in 1940 and died in 1945. Then we spotted another one that said 1935-1940, again with no name.

“Mary, these are common graves. All the people who died between 1940 and 1945 are buried together and all the people who died between 1935 and 1940 are buried in this grave. I wonder how many people are in one grave. I suppose it could be 10 or 20 or even more.”

Even in death, the people from Southern were not individuals. But at least they were buried, and there were some markers showing that they had lived. It could have been worse. They could have been cremated and their ashes thrown in the garbage.

“Charlie, let’s come back tomorrow with flowers and have a prayer service for all the people buried here. I know there was never a proper burial and I want to give them one now. I want them to know that someone remembers them. I want them to live on through me. I also want to scatter Sarah’s ashes over the graves. She belongs here.”

I kept Sarah’s ashes on my mantel since Dr. Warner gave them to me. But I knew that if I found the cemetery when I returned to Southern, I would spread Sarah’s ashes there.

That night Charlie and I wrote a service to officially bury the people of Southern. In the morning, we went back to the supermarket for flowers. We bought several bunches so we could place a flower on each grave we could find.

The weather was perfect – clear, cool, and crisp. We found our way back to the cemetery and cleared the undergrowth from the graves. As we cleaned off each grave, we put a flower on it. We didn’t have enough flowers for all the graves we found. We found nine graves all for the years 1918-1919. Those graves were probably with people who died from the flu epidemic then.

I found the grave marked 1960-1965, and said a special prayer for Ruth and Freddie, my first babies who died when I worked in the baby ward then. I could still picture Freddie as I held him in my arms and he passed from Earth to Heaven. I even recalled how his body cooled as his life ebbed away.

After we spread all the flowers, I started the service with the prayer *Lord God Creator of All.*

Lord God, creator of all,

You have made us creatures of the earth

But have also promised us a share of life eternal;

Receive our thanks and praise

*That, through the passion and death of Christ,
Your children whom we commend into your hands today,
Where there is neither sorrow nor pain
But life everlasting, Alleluia.*

AMEN

We took turns reading the prayers I'd brought. We read the last prayer together in loud strong voices as we looked up to Heaven. The words of St. Francis of Assisi were heard by the ears of God. These words guided us to use the deaths of the people in these graves as the basis for dedicating our lives to making the world a better place for the living.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand;

To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Charlie and I hugged. We were enriched by the souls that had gone from this cemetery to Heaven. This was a special place – a place where God dwelt.

Then I picked up the urn with Sarah's ashes and slowly scattered them as I walked among the graves, and said, "*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Dust though art and unto dust thou shalt return.* Rest in peace my beloved Sarah. You're home. I will always treasure your memory my little sister. May you find eternal peace."

We were reluctant to leave; we felt there were spirits in that cemetery. And we felt that we were close to God, maybe closer than we had ever been before. When it started to get dark, we left and said goodbye to the souls who I loved. We hadn't had lunch so we were hungry and decided to go back to the diner. Our souls had been fed, but we needed to feed our bodies. The chicken pot pie was even better the second time around. Although I've never been much of a cook, I learned to make Mabel's favorites and I cook them often. Charlie likes that as a reminder of the family he never knew.

That trip to Southern and to Seymour gave Charlie and me closure. I hate that word – it's so overused, but in this case it applies. That is the end of one period in our lives and now we're entering a new period – one as mother and step father of Eleanor Kirk Hastings, candidate for governor of Ohio. I can't wait to see you in December when we'll celebrate our first Christmas together as a family, and hopefully, we'll also celebrate your election to the governorship. Won't that be glorious! My daughter – the governor. I know you won't have a chance to listen to this tape with your busy, upcoming campaign schedule and then your busy schedule as governor for four and maybe even eight years. But many years from now after you've retired from public life, I know you'll hear this. I hope you will know that I love you as only a mother who is united with a lost child can. I hope you will love me for trying to live a blessed life and do what was good and to prove to myself and to the world that kindness is in everyone's heart, even a child prostitute who was once called retarded.

End.

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