

# Stuck

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A Memoir of Grief

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Thesis Approval Page

In Partial fulfillment for a Bachelor of Science Degree in Integrated Studies, with emphases in English and Communication, we hereby accept this senior thesis written by Kira Buswell

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Hello, my name is Kira and my alter-ego is Worst-Case-Scenario-Girl. It's a superpower that I've been honing for years. When I was little I used it to keep myself out of trouble. It worked almost as well as seeing into the future. When I was four I got into Mom's green craft paint; I knew exactly how mad she would be, but I had my plan in place. If all went well, she would never know. I imagined the scenarios if she caught me: she would be pleasantly surprised at my artistic abilities; she would be mad and I would have to sit in the corner; or she would be really mad and I would get a spanking. I didn't however, anticipate the spill, nor stepping in it and leaving little green footprints on the concrete basement floor, nor Mom finding me sitting in the bathroom sink frantically scrubbing my green toes. I had already imagined the worst, and I was ready for my spanken – but pleasantly surprised when she sent me to the corner.

The imagined scenarios became worse as I grew. When my elementary crush betrayed me, I imagined a scenario where I would be stuck sitting next to him, and have to face him every day for the rest of my school career. When I became aware that people get stuck in small towns, I started looking for ways out.

After Dad died my scenarios began to end in imminent death – or worse. When my vehicle got stuck in the snow, I bypassed all the scenarios where I might have waited to be discovered, or gotten out and trudged through the snow for help; as soon as I realized I was stuck, I knew I was going to die. When I went spelunking and a member of our group got stuck, by default I was stuck, and I was sure we were all going to die. As a teenager I was always looking for scenarios that might get me out of Santaquin so I applied for jobs in the next town over. When I decided to go to college I imagined scenarios where I would fail miserably, and then I wouldn't be able to get a good job, which would result in a low paying dead end job, and I

would have to work myself to death doing manual labor in a sweat shop and sleep in a cardboard box under the Provo viaduct.

I imagine others assume I am not driven. Sure I pursue a few goals like most people do, with an eye on the prize and an end in sight; but my drive primarily comes from looking back not forward. Looking back on my childhood, it was the fear that I might also be a widow like my mom that drove me to go to college so I could have a backup plan, just in case my worst fears were realized. I am a very laid back person and I typically go with the flow, but there are a few things I will never be found doing: skydiving, deep sea diving, or race car driving. There are simply too many uncontrollable and obvious scenarios that lead to death. I promise I am an adventurous person; I just enjoy slow adventure. My dream car is not one that will go from zero to sixty in five seconds, or whatever the goal is lately, my dream car is something fun that I can putt around town in, something I can take for a slow drive through the canyon.

Being stuck and trying to not get stuck is a constant in my life. I saw it in my dad when he was stuck working a dangerous job, I saw it in my mom after she lost her husband and she was stuck as a widow with five kids.

I am one of those kids that had to touch the burner to learn that it was hot. Perhaps it is my stubborn nature, but I refuse to let others predict my scenarios. Often I have had to learn the hard way, but the times that I proved others (and even myself sometimes) wrong have made it worth it.

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Grief isn't just related to death, the following page illustrates this. I grieved when my daughter was born ten weeks premature (She is a thriving nine year old firecracker now). I was

over the moon happy when we bought our first home but I still experienced the grieving process during the transition. The image of my father's coworker's linked 'arm in arm' as they comforted each other the day they lost a friend speaks of grief. I grieve over my father's death certificate, and then grieve again when I read the cause of death as "Thermal injuries and inhalation of hot air." Pictures of moments with my father are bittersweet as I am forced to acknowledge I will never get another. I grieved over my first, and then second A-, the next ones were not as hard, but the overachiever in me still grieved each one. And I definitely grieve over an empty Haagen Dazs container. The thing about grieving, is you don't make it to acceptance and everything is okay. You make it to acceptance and there is still grief, again and again. Nothing has changed.

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# Grief

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance



DAILY SPIRITS	
AKF - AKF's Amazing Grace Song	1
PRG - PRG's Amazing Grace Song	2
WFL - WFL's Amazing Grace Song	3
DAILY FAITH	
AKF - AKF's Faithful Heart	1
PRG - PRG's Faithful Heart	2
WFL - WFL's Faithful Heart	3
DAILY PRAYERS	
AKF - AKF's Prayer for the Sick	1
PRG - PRG's Prayer for the Sick	2
WFL - WFL's Prayer for the Sick	3

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## Escape

I've always considered myself an escapist. Even from a very young age I was always looking for places I might escape to, or from. Anytime we left our small town Santaquin, we had to take the freeway or Highway 6. The entrances for both were at the east end of town. The grocery store was ten minutes north on the highway to Payson, and Kmart was up the freeway in Spanish Fork. Every day we passed the south freeway entrance with the sign that said "South Las Vegas." When I was in kindergarten I read the sign, as "South Lays Vegges," which I thought must be the shorthand way of saying, "Vegetables are grown in the south." *Good to know*, I thought. To the east were mountains, to the west were some small towns and more mountains, south had veggies, and north was where we did all our shopping.

The older I got, the more frequently I ran away from home, usually when my parents were being unreasonable. Most often I ended up at Grandma Vay's house six blocks east and one block north of our house. Generally it was because I was frustrated by a situation at home and needed some space, but often it was because I felt like there was nothing I could do to change it. Usually by the end of the day I was back home, but each time I ran away I inwardly swore that this was the last time and that I was never going back. When I was in the fourth grade, I ran away from school and really never went back.

Until that year, I had loved school. I loved it so much that when my second grade teacher Mrs. Curran took our class to watch an educational movie in the kiva, a small room with carpeted benches behind the library, all the other kids looked forward to the break from doing school work. But after a few minutes of watching leopards in the wild, I would ask my teacher if I could write lines with the kids who had been removed for being rowdy. Usually it was



something along the lines of, “I will sit quietly and pay attention.” There was something about having to sit still in the dark kiva with the other second grade classes that made me feel extra fidgety. I liked practicing my handwriting and I felt like pen on paper was a better learning experience than watching movies.

In third grade I frequently drew pictures of myself as a school teacher holding a book so big it covered my whole face. All that was showing were my pompom bangs copied from Mrs. Coleman. Fourth grade started out the same as all the other years. My teacher Mrs. Hancock was amazing! But one day she announced that she would be leaving because she was going to have a baby. Miss Applegate would be replacing her. I had never met Miss Applegate but I knew of her. She had been my brother’s second grade teacher. When Miss Applegate arrived and introduced herself the following week, I raised my hand and stood next to my desk to let her know that she had been my brother’s teacher in second grade and she was his favorite. She seemed perturbed at the interruption, which confused me. I thought she would be flattered.

The next day we arrived at school to find that Miss Applegate had rearranged all the desks from the neat rows Mrs. Hancock had made, into quads. I was delighted that she put my desk right next to Jared’s. I liked Jared, and I was sure he liked me back; but in the fourth grade, talking about liking each other was unacceptable. So instead I made sure to always be close to him, to tell him all the jokes I knew, and when necessary, annoy him. It was a game we played. He bragged about how he could write so small others would need a microscope to read it, and then I would critique it. I commented that all he’d done was make some dots, or that his handwriting that was a problem. Once I pretended to draw on the back of his shirt, sure it would get a rise out of him. He just shrugged and said his mom could bleach it. I rolled my eyes and

explained that bleach would ruin his shirt because it wasn't white, it was green and blue. He insisted that his mom had a special kind of bleach.

One day, we were divided into groups of four and assigned to create a piece of art from an abstract drawing that had been cut in half. Jared was in my group. We decided that Jared and Corbin would finish the drawing, and Lacy and I would color it in. The boys got to work creating a mirror image of the geometric shapes on the paper. As they drew, they talked about the elaborate story that went with the art. It was a skyscraper and at the center, a precious diamond. They were on a mission to steal the diamond. They talked excitedly about the secret passages they were drawing. The teacher announced that our time was almost up, but Lacy and I were still waiting for the boys to finish and hadn't started coloring yet. I looked at her and we agreed to start even though the boys weren't done yet. I pressed a blue crayon to the diamond and began coloring. Jared knocked the crayon out of my hand and yelled "Diamonds are not blue, they're yellow! You're ruining the whole thing!" I completely disagreed about the diamond color, but acknowledged that this had become his project and begrudgingly colored it with the yellow crayon.

The day before I ran away from school had been a normal day. We'd been so focused on schoolwork that I hadn't had time to talk to Jared. I got up to get a drink and when I returned, I let my pencil trace along the back of his neck. I turned to face him as I sat in my seat, and he did the same. He smiled and lifted his foot and kicked, hard. It landed right in the middle of my stomach. Time slowed down and I recognized that my feet had left the ground and for one second, I was flying. I landed with my breath knocked out of me, more from the foot to the gut than the landing a few feet on the other side of my overturned chair.

Clutching at my stomach, I picked up my chair and sat with my head down on my desk. I couldn't look at him or I would cry, and I was too proud to cry. I sat until I could breathe normally, but the pain in my stomach, chest, and backside would take longer to get over. I didn't look around the room because I didn't want to see the faces of any classmates who might have seen what happened. I realized I had finally gone too far with him. That maybe he didn't like the back and forth jibes as much as I did.

When it seemed like enough time had gone by, hoping it had been long enough that anyone who saw it had forgotten, I stood and walked to Miss Applegate's desk. I waited for a moment expecting her to acknowledge me, and when she didn't I said her name. She continued to write in her notebook with her head down. I repeated her name, "Miss Applegate, Jared kicked me in the stomach." When I said the last word I felt my voice quaver and I closed my eyes and took a breath to calm myself. She looked up and said, "Okay, go back to your seat." I paused, sure I had misheard her. I had expected her to ask if I was alright, to reprimand Jared, to send him to the principal. I turned and went back to my seat. I took the long way around and sat without looking at Jared. I sat miserably for the rest of the day, and when school was over, I walked home with my head bowed.

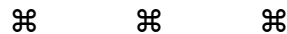
The next day, I had a plan. I arrived at school and acted like the day before had never happened. I talked to people, even Jared, though I made sure to only discuss school topics. I didn't want a repeat of yesterday; I didn't even want him to acknowledge what he'd done. Just before lunch, I went to ask Miss Applegate if we would be using any of our workbooks for the rest of the day. I came back to my quad and told my desk mates the great news, we wouldn't be using our workbooks for the rest of the day! Then I casually emptied the contents of my desk,

workbooks included, into the fluorescent yellow backpack I had borrowed from my older sister Holly.

This time, the walk home was better, I felt free. I would never have to see Jared again. I would never have to see Miss Applegate again. And I was sure the workbooks I'd stolen would provide me with plenty of schoolwork. I knew if I needed help, Mom could teach me, she was already homeschooling Daniel. I didn't make the connection until later that Miss Applegate had been Daniel's teacher when he was removed from public school to be homeschooled. Mom said it was because of his ADD and that the teachers couldn't handle him. He often ended up in detention for not focusing on his schoolwork.

My parents didn't try to pressure me into going back, though years later Mom admitted that she went to the school to try and resolve the issue. She said their response was,

“Well, if Kira wasn't so sensitive...”



## Lessons in Counting

In Santaquin Utah, everyone knew everyone else. I felt like everyone knew my story: I was the girl who dropped out of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and refused to go back; mine was the family (three years later), whose dad was killed at the explosives plant; I was the girl who ran away from home only a month later because I was a selfish teenager, struggling with feelings that I needed to take of my devastated mom and four other siblings.

Sure, at sixteen there were plenty of kids my age in town, but they were the kids who went to high school, who were part of the in-crowd, part of any crowd. They played sports, and hung out with each other at the mall. They were the kids who went to church with my family, who made sure I was still invited to youth activities as my family slowly became less active at church, but they didn't know how to talk to me, so they lingered in groups and talked about me instead. They were the kids who made sure I was invited when we put together fruit baskets to deliver to all the widows in the ward while we sang Christmas carols. When we got to my house I prayed Mom wouldn't see me lip-syncing the words in the back of the crowd.

I had to do something to escape the small town. I applied for a job at The Polar Queen in Payson, the next town over. I couldn't apply at the burger place in Santaquin, there were too many people there who knew me. A few days after I turned in my application a woman called and told me that Jerry, the manager, could interview me the next day. I had heard that people should dress up for job interviews, but this was a little hamburger shop, and I made a conscious

decision that I didn't want to seem pretentious. I made sure to dress in a nice casual set of clothes: a pair of blue jeans and my favorite navy blue t-shirt.

A mist of deliciously greasy air struck my face the moment I walked into The Polar Queen. For a second I hesitated, wondering how the vaporized grease would affect my acne, but I was too excited to linger on that just then. I wasn't going to let a little greasy air, or the ugly paper hats scare me off.

"Are you looking for someone?" a gruff voice asked as I searched for a face that looked like a "Jerry." Thankfully there weren't many people in the one room restaurant. It was mid-morning and just early enough that there wasn't a line yet. The customers who were there sat leisurely eating. Like Santaquin, people weren't usually in a hurry in Payson; life moves more slowly in small towns. I looked up to see a man who appeared to be in his late forties with graying shaggy hair and a matching beard. He wore a grease-covered apron, that by the looks of it, hadn't been washed, ever. He stood, looking at me expectantly. "Oh, I'm here to see Jerry," I said, hoping I had remembered the right name. "That's me, you must beeee..." Fearing that his "beeee" would go on forever, I cut him off. "Kira," I said. "Come 'round here, let's get this over with," he mumbled.

Positive I would get the job, I assessed my future co-workers: a boy just a little older than me flipping burgers, a girl with long stringy brown hair pushing a mop bucket on wheels, and a blonde girl working the drive-thru window. Both girls looked my age. They all looked at me as I made my way around the grayed Formica countertop, worn brown in spots from years of sliding orders. No one smiled as they stared. I couldn't tell if it was an instant dislike, or if I was seeing the robotic forms of burnt-out workers. Experience made me assume the former. "What grade you in?" Jerry asked bearishly.

I hadn't expected that question so soon; I had glossed over that part on the application. "Oh, I'm not. I mean, I'm homeschooled." I stuttered. I hoped he had heard everything that I had about homeschooled kids: We are nice, polite, and often smarter than public-schooled kids because we don't have to follow the same rules as public schools, enabling us to work at a faster pace. At least that is what Mom and Aunt Tammie told me when they researched homeschooling. Like most homeschooled kids, I was socially awkward; but I intended to charm Jerry with my charisma so he wouldn't notice.

Jerry made a noise somewhere between a grunt, a snort, and a scoff: "Can ya count?" For a second I thought I had misheard him. I groped for words as I felt the heat rush to my face. Squaring my shoulders and trying to force myself to look him in the eye, I mustered my stern and obvious voice. All that came out was a timid and hesitant "yes." I was still trying to raise my eyes to look him in the face when he said, "Show me."

I felt myself go from maddeningly red to a color that matched the grey countertop as the blood drained from my face. The one-room restaurant was suddenly too quiet. I took note of the three employees who refused to make eye contact with me, but were obviously unable to focus on anything else, and the half-dozen customers who had stopped eating and were now staring at me expectantly. As I was opening my mouth to start counting, I saw that he had walked away. I followed him to a cash register, and was instantly relieved but terrified all over again. I had never seen the button side of a cash register. I leaned over it to try and read all the tiny words on each of the buttons. There were so many buttons.

"Show me," he said again as he smashed his fat fingers into a cluster of buttons making the drawer jump to attention, almost hitting him as it erupted outward. I was sure he would notice my shaking hands; that he would see through me and know I really wasn't homeschooled,

that I was just a fourth grade dropout who really hadn't done much in the way of schooling in the last few years despite Mom's efforts.

Working to maintain my façade, I smiled; *Of course I know how to count, of course I can count money*, I thought at him furiously. The obstacle here would be figuring out the register. "Say I'm a customer, my order comes to \$7.32, I hand you a \$10, what is my change? Count it out to me," he said, as he folded his hairy arms over his bulbous torso. I wondered if the thick black hair on his arms would eventually match the gray of his beard.

"Ah, ok, um, I just need to, how do I put the numbers in?" I said as I hovered over the keys. They all seemed to be in code. I jumped as he bellowed, "No! We're not using the keys, just count the money." If there was any question before, there was no question that we now had the entire restaurant's attention. Quickly trying to do the math in my head, I spoke as I counted. "That will be 2...2 dollars, and sixt-" "No! That's not how we count change back." He made that scoffing sound again, "Start with the pennies." He was standing so close to me I could feel the bristles on his arm and the moisture of his sweat humidifying the air around me. I stood, staring at the till, trying to make sense of what he had said.

My vision blurred as I reached for the pennies, hoping that by touching them, something would click and I would know what to do with them. "Look, if you can't count change, this isn't going to work out, alright..." I was already making my way to the door before his sentence was done; the building seemed to be closing in on me, but also elongating. It took more steps to get around the counter now than when I arrived, the path to the door was now at the end of a long tunnel. I needed to get out of there before he saw the tears that were distorting my vision. Once outside, gulping breaths of cool air, I let the tears fall as I made my way to the pay phone on the side of the building. All I found were a few small holes where the wires and screws had held it to



the white painted cinder brick wall. It had been moved to the inside of the building where vandals were less likely to mess with it. I would have to go back inside to call Mom for a ride.

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Years later, when I finally made it back to school, my first semester at Utah Valley University, the panic of having to count was renewed as I began attending my first week of math. The teacher, a heavily accented Ethiopian named Tes, was writing on the board. The previous few class periods had been great. We spent time getting to know each class member by name, it was important to Tes that he knew everyone's names. We slowly moved into some of the introductory math. This day Tes started the class out with a few problems to remind us what we had done the previous day so he could tie it in to the next steps.

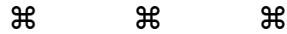
I must have blinked at the wrong time because when I looked up from my notes Tes was writing numbers that seemed completely random. I couldn't figure out what they had to do with the problem we were working on. Soon he was plugging those numbers into another problem; I leaned over to Terri and asked where he got those numbers from. She whispered something that I didn't understand. I asked her to repeat but she was trying to keep up with Tes. He was asking us to try the next problem on our own. I looked around the room and saw that everyone was following the same steps to solve their problem but it seemed like gibberish to me. I felt myself start to panic. Before I dared ask for help, we were moving on to a new concept and I was becoming more lost.

Comparing my notes with the board, I tried to trace the numbers back to when I first became confused. I found myself going all the way back to before the first day of class, and then all the way to the placement test. Some of the problems were easy, but most of them were hard or complete nonsense. I developed a system so I wouldn't feel so bad for not knowing the

answers. If there was a problem I couldn't figure out, I chose D on the multiple choice answer sheet. But now, I was again seeing problems that I couldn't figure out. The panic doubled when I wondered how many of my D guesses had been correct! What if it was all of them, or at least enough that I placed in too high of a class?! I used the cuffs of my brown sweater to wipe my eyes. It was ridiculous that I was nearly thirty and crying at college. I tried to hide it, but Tes kept glancing at me, I tried to communicate with my watery eyes that I was lost and that he would need to start the class over but he just kept going, occasionally looking back at me with a concerned look.

I tried holding my breath, hoping that would hold in the tears but that only made my nose also start to run, and then I cry-hiccapped. I covered my nose and mouth with my sleeved hands and I heard some murmuring behind me. I was glad I sat on the front row so that no one could see my face, but also horrified that the entire class could see me convulsing as I shook to control my breathing. Then I heard in a sympathetic whisper, "Oh, she's crying." When I went home that night and cried to my husband Caleb that I wasn't meant for college, that we would have to figure out how to pay back the loans I had used to pay for those first few weeks, he comforted me and instead of helping me figure how to pay my loans, he helped me come up with a new plan.

Caleb's plan was for me to go back to class, he encouraged me to ask questions, but knew I probably wouldn't; so instead he told me to write down everything the instructor did and everything he said, even if I didn't understand it; then every night that semester Caleb sat down and tutored me. When Tes handed me my final grade for the semester I asked him how he came from Ethiopia to be a math teacher at a university in Orem, Utah. He said, "Sometimes life is stranger than fiction, and YOU, are my hero." I had earned an A!



## Grief

When I was thirteen my Sunday school teacher told the class he was finally ready to move on. His seven years of grieving for his wife were over. I hadn't known that there was an amount of time people were supposed to grieve. I thought it was sad and a little silly that he should have to count down to the day when he could be done grieving. What if he missed his chance at new love because he was only six and a half years into the process?

In Victorian times, depending on one's relationship with the deceased, people in mourning were expected to wear black accordingly. Widows typically wore black for two years; although after one year they were allowed to reenter society. Those who suffered "less" than the widow wore black for their appropriate grieving time. Children grieving their parents: one year; an aunt or uncle: six months. Cousins were mourned for one month.

After the death of my father, I found grief to be more problematic. Even now, more than twenty years later, I am still grieving; not only grieving, but making a mess of the whole process. We are taught that grieving happens in stages that begin with denial and proceed systematically through anger, depression, and bargaining until we reach acceptance. The image that comes to mind for acceptance is a sigh of relief, relief that finally we can move on with our lives, relief that we have recovered. Acceptance is the stage that tells us we have healed. The amount of time spent in one stage or another is arbitrary. Depending on the person or the circumstances, one

might be in denial for days, and anger for moments before moving on to depression. However, the entire process seems culturally to be finite.

Sometimes I do settle into one stage, but then I find myself combining stages.

Occasionally I wonder if the stage I am in even has a name. Perhaps it is all of them combined, or a stage that only I have discovered so it doesn't have a name. I often live in one stage for years at a time while simultaneously cycling through the others. There are moments when I go through DenialAngerDepressionBargainingAcceptance instantaneously.

On August 23rd, 1994 my childhood ended. Mom was sitting at her sewing machine in the family room with blue shag carpet, sewing what would be satin and lace dresses for porcelain dolls and teddy bears for a lady who owned a boutique. The five of us children were raising hell. I was on my hands and knees playing with one of my siblings (either Tasheena or Chelsea, because at seven and three they were both smaller than me at twelve and so easy to pick on), play fighting just for the sake of being loud. I was always mindful of the carpet because the family room doubled as Mom's sewing room, and it only took one time of getting caught on a stray sewing pin to make a kid wary of those long blue strands and the pokey things it could be hiding. I heard a noise behind me and saw that it was Grandma and Grandpa Crook.

Grandpa was the mayor of the small town Santaquin, Utah where we lived. He and Grandma lived close enough to walk but we usually drove because it was it was on the other side of town. When we went for visits we were always welcomed with a class of goat milk, so fresh it was still in the old metal pail, cooling in the fridge. When we left it was often with a bag of apples we picked from Grandpa's orchard. Daniel (not quite two years younger) and I always tried, despite Grandpa's warnings, to get close to the goats. I finally believed they were dangerous when we were visiting one day and Grandpa announced they had one of them for

dinner last night, “She butted me, and I killed her.” He said matter-of-factly, while I stood with my mouth agape. “Once they turn mean, they’re no good,” he explained. I assumed he meant their meat. I imagined the crankier a goat, the tougher the meat.

It wasn’t uncommon for Grandma and Grandpa Crook to show up for a quick visit, but they never just walked in like this. “Have you heard from Arthur?!” Grandma asked, as she came down the stairs, Grandpa silent at her side. “No, why?” Mom asked looking at the phone as if it had failed at its duty. “It was on the news. Have you been watching the news?” Grandma insisted. “There was an accident at the plant.” Mom was dialing the phone before Grandma could say anything else. I was confused by what they were talking about. I looked to the TV for answers as Daniel began twisting the dial, searching the channels for whatever Grandma and Grandpa had seen. There seemed to be a lot of noise all at once.

“Why didn’t you call me?” I heard Mom yell as she slammed down the phone. At the same time she began working her way around the green table that held the big industrial sewing machine. Before I knew what was happening, the three of them were out the door.

After they left, and after cycling through all the TV channels a dozen or so times without any new information, I went over what I knew. With the house now silent and the five of us kids on edge after all the commotion, I eventually reasoned that there had been an accident where Dad worked, and Dad was somehow involved. A little while after Mom left, neighbors started showing up and cleaning. I couldn’t figure out what they were all doing there. Even Kristin, the neighbor next door who was so quiet and who I assumed didn’t like us because we were messy and her house was always spotless and smelled like carpet powder, was doing the dishes.

I momentarily wondered if the brandy was still in the cupboard. I hadn’t thought about it since I found out it existed three years earlier. Mom had just given birth to my youngest sister

Chelsea, and while she was in the hospital Aunt Tammie came and cleaned and organized the kitchen for her. Days later I overheard Mom and Dad talking about it, “Do you think she noticed the brandy, should I call and explain?” Mom wondered. Then Dad, “Why do you need to explain?” “I need to tell her that someone gave it to us, to make a cake with. We didn’t buy it.” I couldn’t remember having a special cake since then, so the brandy might still be in the cupboard, and if our neighbors who we went to church with found it, I am sure Mom would be embarrassed. While I was contemplating this and why so many people were over cleaning, the phone rang. I knew my older sister Holly would answer it upstairs, so I scurried up the stairs to see if I could listen to her side of the conversation.

Holly was lying on Mom’s side of the bed with her sleeping two-week-old baby Carilynn, and had the phone to her ear. It was the phone that had the broken ringer. I later found out that Dad had taken it apart and removed the ringer completely because Grandma Crook had a habit of calling in the middle of the night just to say hello and see how everyone was doing. Holly looked at me as I peeked around the door jam, and quietly mumbled into the phone. When she hung up she was crying. I was sure it was Mom, and that whatever had been said had to do with Dad. We made eye contact and she said, "Mom is on her way home. Go make sure things are cleaned up.”

Downstairs I saw that the cleaning was winding down; the people were beginning to leave. I moseyed about and pretended to clean, caught up imagining what that phone call could have been about. If Holly was crying and the neighbors were cleaning our house it was probably bad. Besides, Mom had been gone for hours. I thought of the worst thing that could have happened to Dad. The more I thought about it the more I was sure he had broken his legs, or maybe he was paralyzed.

As I waited for Mom I thought about how nice it was that neighbors came to clean the house, because if Dad was going to come home tonight, he would probably be in a wheel chair. It would be hard for a while since we lived in a four-level split and all the bedrooms were either upstairs or downstairs. Dad might have to sleep in the living room, but we would help him. It might actually be fun having a Dad in a wheelchair. He could give rides, or we could push him around. I imagined myself sitting on his lap in the wheelchair, I was sure he would be sad like the dad in *The Little Princess*, but we would be there to keep him company.

When Mom came home it was dark outside. She called us to the living room and we quickly gathered. None of us looked at each other, all eyes were on Mom. Perhaps that is why I can't picture where anyone was sitting except Mom. I can't see them in my memory, but I can feel them. I know Chelsea found a place next to Mom and probably sat proudly next to her as if she were the one conducting the meeting. Holly and Daniel were on the couch opposite from Mom, Tasheena on the green recliner next to Holly, and I stood behind the recliner, leaning my elbows on the soft green over-stuffed headrest. It's hard to pin down the details of this memory. Sometimes I remember the light was on, blindingly bright compared to the blackness outside. Were the blinds drawn, or did I see myself illuminated in the window? Sometimes I remember the light was off with just a glow coming from the kitchen. Mom sat for a moment looking at each of us. We waited in silence, all of us anxious to know what was going on and when Dad would be coming home.

Mom opened her mouth, closed it, then sighed and said, "Dad's dead." We all bowed our heads and I heard Daniel start crying. I didn't want to look at him, but I pictured him in my head anyway, arms and head folded over his knees, hiding his face as his body betrayed him and let out a squelch of a whimper.

I couldn't believe  
it. I had played out every  
scenario and none of them  
had Dad dying.  
It was a whirlwind  
few days. Aunt Wendy  
came and took Daniel,

Tasheena and me to spend the night at her house. Chelsea was too young to go with us, and Holly needed to stay home with her new baby and perhaps lend support to Mom. I'm not sure where Daniel and Tasheena slept at Aunt Wendy's house, but Daniel probably slept in Jordan's room and Tasheena in Angela's room. I shared a room with my cousin Jessica, who is close to my age. She woke me up in the middle of the night and beckoned me to follow her. I obeyed, only asking what we were doing when we arrived at the kitchen. She looked at me with a mixture of excitement and surprise, "Midnight snack," she grinned. I had heard of midnight snacks before, but never knew anyone who actually had them.

The next morning after breakfast Aunt Wendy took us shopping at the mall and helped each of us pick out a couple of outfits, including socks and underwear. As we were finishing up, Aunt Wendy noticed me looking at the earring display and encouraged me to pick some. I chose a card that had three dangly pairs. Aunt Wendy pointed at one of the pairs and said, "Those will go good with the dress you are wearing Saturday." "What's on Saturday?" I asked "Well," she paused, "The funeral." She seemed to want to add "of course" but hesitated I think, because of the look that must have been on my face. I was confused for a moment, *whose funeral?* I had been having so much fun, I had forgotten my dad was dead.

## Officials investigate cause of Trojan blast

By KEVIN NIENDORF  
The Daily Herald

Local and federal officials have spent the last 24 hours trying to determine what set off a chain of explosives Tuesday which killed a Santaquin man at Trojan Corporation.

Dead is Arthur E. Dix, 38, a veteran employee of the explosives plant located at the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon. Jerry Newitt, 41, Payson and Larry Bradshaw, 57, Mapleton, were just outside of the building and sustained minor injuries from the blasts. They were released from Mountain View Hospital Tuesday afternoon.

The force from one of the explosions reportedly knocked the survivors to the ground outside of



Arthur E. Dix

the 2,000 square-foot building. All three victims were part of a crew which was in the process of demolishing the building. The

decision was made 18 months ago to "decommission" the building but there may have been explosives stored inside since, said Farrell Badger, business systems manager at Trojan.

The two explosions, heard by residents from Payson to south Provo, occurred at 9:34 a.m.

"At this point we don't have any idea what happened," Badger said. "There was a fire and the building is destroyed."

Spanish Fork Police Chief Dee Rosenbaum said it took nearly an hour to contain the fire. Emergency personnel were then pulled from the area as a precaution.

"There is still a question of instability in the area and, with explosives like that, you don't want to take any chances so we pulled them off," he said.

The smoldering fire eventually reached an adjacent building and burned it to the ground Tuesday evening. Rosenbaum said officials are waiting for the remains of the buildings to burn off so inspection officials can begin their investigation. He expected that to begin this afternoon.

Rosenbaum said the city's firefighters attacked the fire in a search and rescue mode in order to find Dix.

"When they found him he was not badly burned but he was dead at the scene," he said.

Badger said he knew what kind of explosives had been stored there but he was reluctant to reveal it to the media, which had gathered at Trojan's main en-

(See TROJAN, Page A2)



### Arthur Ernest Dix

Arthur Ernest Dix, 38, devoted husband and father, of Santaquin, Utah died Tuesday, August 23, 1994 from injuries suffered in an explosion at Trojan Corporation.

Arthur was born January 25, 1956 at Wichita Falls, Texas to Arthur David Dix of Grant, Florida and Gretta Homer Cook of La Verkin, Utah. From the age of 8 Arthur was raised in the home of D. Lynn and Josephine Crook of Santaquin.



Arthur graduated from Payson High School in 1974 and earned a two year certificate from Utah Technical College at Provo in 1976.

On December 7, 1979 he married Karen Marie Erickson in the Manti Temple.

Following his graduation from college, Arthur worked as a mechanic at Tischer Ford in Santaquin. He was employed with Trojan Corporation for 15 years prior to his death. Arthur was an active member of the Santaquin 4th Ward and was serving as Cub Master. He was a lover of scouting and was active in district scout training as part of the Nebo District Round Table Staff. His hobbies included camping, fishing, snowmobiling and restoring old cars.

He always had a jovial personality and a unique ability to make people happy. He was a loving husband, father, new grandfather and a great friend. Arthur will be greatly missed.

Survivors include his wife, Karen Dix; and children: Holly, Kira, Daniel, Tasheena, Chelsea; and one granddaughter, Carilyn, of Santaquin. Other survivors include his father, mother, and foster parents; grandfather, Edmund Homer of Pleasant Grove; grandmother, Hilda Dix of Grant, Florida; sisters: Carolyn McKee of Duchesne; Janice Thayne and Karen Cook of La Verkin; and Nanette Dix and Gail Dix of Grant, Florida; brothers: David Dix of West Valley City; Richard Dix of La Verkin; Edmund Dix of Provo; James and Robert Cook of La Verkin; and foster brothers: Kenneth Crook of Salt Lake City and Bradley Crook of Santaquin.

Funeral services will be held Saturday, August 27th at the Santaquin 4th Ward Chapel, 345 W. 100 North at 11 a.m. Friends may visit with the family Friday evening from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Holladay Hills Funeral Home, 66 S. 300 East, Santaquin, and Saturday from 9:30 to 10:45 a.m. at the chapel. Burial will be at the Santaquin City Cemetery.

*How could I have forgotten?*

I felt ashamed and shocked. It was as if I was hearing it for the first time. I hadn't thought about it since Mom told us two days ago. We had simply gone to bed. I hadn't thought about all the things that have to happen after someone dies.

The funeral. How had I not expected that? I realized that I had accepted his death and readily moved on.

When we got back to Aunt Wendy's house, she showed us some dresses from her daughter's closets to wear for the funeral; I received a dress from Jessica's closet and Tasheena got one from Angela. My dress was navy blue with white polka-dots. It had a long body with a short pleated knee-length skirt. It reminded me of a school girl uniform. I liked the way the cool silky fabric swished against my legs.

~ ~ ~

It was dark and cold inside as we entered the church for Dad's funeral, a stark contrast with the warm bright church it

became on Sundays. Even though we were surrounded by family, and the church was so full they had to open both overflows and there still wasn't enough room, I suddenly felt so alone. I asked Mom if I could call my best friend Catherine and see if she could come. I wasn't sure if she would be allowed to sit by me on the front row, but I would feel better if I had a friend there. Mom said that I could call Catherine and I hurried to the end of the dark hall where the phone sat next to the bishop's office. I dialed the number and when Catherine answered, I told her the

funeral that was happening today. I asked if she could come and she said she would ask her mom. I listened as she pressed the receiver to her chest to muffle her voice.

The problem was, I knew this trick. I had been with her and watched her do it. A friend would call that she didn't want to play with. She would tell them, "Let me ask my mom." Then she would press the phone to her chest and grin at me and whisper, "I don't want to play with her." She would lift the receiver back to her ear and say, "Sorry, I can't play," and make up an excuse like, "My mom says I have to do my chores," or, "My mom needs me to babysit." I knew from experience that when she did want to play, she would drop the phone in a clatter as she ran to find her mom.

When Catherine came back on the line and said that her mom didn't want her to go, I was crushed. I had hoped she was only thinking about it. I knew I was asking a lot of her. I didn't blame her for not wanting to come, but after being rejected, I couldn't tell her how much I needed her. I went and found Mom and she asked if Catherine was coming. I repeated Catherine's lie and she looked disappointed, "Why would her mom not let her come?" I hoped she wouldn't call Catherine's mom. I think Mom understood Catherine's mom the way I understood Catherine. Even though she didn't know it was a lie, Mom didn't blame Catherine's mom for not wanting her to come.

Children shouldn't have to go to funerals.

I think often of the last conversation I had with Dad and wish I could redo it. It was late and everyone was going to bed. I was a night owl and thought night time was the best time to clean my room. This night I was cleaning my mirror with rubbing alcohol. It smelled horrible, but it worked just as well as windex. Three year old Chelsea came streaking into my room and ran right into the bottle of alcohol, dousing her naked body in the stuff. Instantly she was

screaming and I realized she'd gotten alcohol in tender places. I grabbed her and ran upstairs to wash her in the kitchen sink. Hearing the screaming Dad came and asked what happened. "She got alcohol all over her peepee!" I yelled. "How did she get alcohol there?" he asked, his voice raising to match mine.

In anger at myself, and trying to assign blame to anyone but me, I yelled back in that angry and condescending voice that teenagers take with their parents when they ask stupid questions, "I was cleaning my mirror." Dad didn't say anything else. Once he knew Chelsea was okay, he left the room. I've gone over that night so many times the moment has almost lost meaning. Why did I have to be so angry? Why did I yell at Dad when all he was doing was making sure his screaming child was okay? Why did he have to die the next day without another word between us?

I cried the night Mom told us about Dad and I remember thinking to myself, *Good, this is the appropriate reaction*. But I wasn't really sad. I didn't believe he was really gone. It's not that I thought Mom was lying or had been tricked; I just was so sure he was going to come home. I didn't cry for days after his death. At the viewing there was one moment when I looked at that navy blue casket, and it hit me that Dad was in there. I caught Mom looking at me and she opened her arms so I could cry into her rather than in front of that big room full of mingling people.

I must have inherited Mom's need for emotional privacy. She once explained her frustration that she can't hide her emotions. People always seem to know what she is feeling. We wept together silently until I could compose myself again, or until the next person came to offer their condolences, I can't remember.

It was days later before the real tears came. Grandma Vay was still sleeping at our house on a mattress in the living room. And I cried, hard. I was worried I would wake her. I knew I was crying louder than a twelve year old girl should, but I couldn't hold it in. I wailed. I screamed into my pillow until it was too wet to breathe through anymore. I thrashed and kicked, tears running down the sides of my face, into my ears, soaking my hair. I laid on my back yelling towards the sky, "I want my daddy, I want my dad." Moaning and bawling the way my little sister cried when she had a tantrum. I wondered if anyone else could hear me. I am sure everyone could, even Mom two floors up could probably hear me. No one came to shush or comfort me; they were all grieving themselves.

There were only one or two times that I wished I could trade something to have Dad back. As much as I wanted him to show up and say it was all a trick, I never really thought of giving something in exchange. The couple of times I did, it was only briefly. And only in moments of extreme teenage anger. As the surviving parent, Mom got most of our symptomatic anger. It was unfair really. And there was a lot of it from five children, three of us teenagers. I remember thinking once, when Mom wouldn't let me do something, that I wished she had gone instead of Dad. I instantly regretted it. Mom was the one we needed most. If Disney has taught me anything, it's that we all need a mother. Without her, we might have turned out like Peter Pan's tribe of lost boys.

In life, Dad was the one who seemed to keep things level. When we didn't want to go to church, it was Dad who would drag us out of bed and make us get dressed. When someone was misbehaving, Dad was the one to get them going right. One Saturday Mom assigned each of us a row in the garden to weed. She told us what she expected then left us to do the work. Dad kept on us, making sure we weren't wasting time. But every time Dad walked away one of us would

throw a handful of mud and a mud fight would ensue. Dad would come back and yell at us to quit goofing off but Mom never did, she let us realize that if we were going to waste our whole day on a ten minute job, that was up to us; it was a good lesson to learn. Not so with Dad. I remember one time hearing him yell at my brother, "Git your mitts moving!" Then Mom, exasperated, "He probably doesn't know what mitts are." Dad believed once you start a job, you work quickly to get it done so there will be time for other things, like more work but sometimes fun. We learned this same lesson from Mom too. Perhaps that's why we goofed off so much with her in charge. We knew that Mom would let us waste our day on one job, but if we were quick about it she might also find something else for us to do.

As hard as Mom took his death, I think Dad would have taken her death harder. When it came to us asking permission, he always deferred to Mom. I imagined what life would be like had Dad been the one living and I just didn't think he would have made it. I knew he knew how to cook because he and Mom regularly made dinner together. They seemed to like experimenting. One of their favorites was Egg Foo Yung, some kind of egg based pancakes with bean sprouts in them. I thought they were just okay. Another favorite was experimenting making different raisin cookie recipes in a search for the very best raisin cookie. Dad loved raisin cookies. The winning cookie was some kind of raisin-cookie pie. I thought they were absolutely disgusting. A steaming pile of sweaty raisins stewed in their own juices and sealed in a cookie pocket? No thank you!

It's easy for a twelve year old girl to eavesdrop and pick up pieces of conversations, especially those not intended for younger ears. Part of having very young ears means that not all the information gets in; bits and pieces that seemingly don't matter are left behind. To me, it mattered that while Dad died in an explosion, he hadn't been blown up. That is his body was

recovered whole. The day before the funeral Mom had the idea that she wanted to send Dad on in his favorite pair of jeans but the mortician said it was too late, knowing this would be a closed casket funeral he'd already sealed the casket. And besides, Dad's body couldn't be dressed anyway, it was too messy.

It mattered that even though he was whole, he was not able to be buried in the white temple clothes that were supposed to get him into heaven. They would be laid over his body instead. At least he was still somewhat modest. At the viewing, I kept finding myself looking at the casket, wondering if he was really in there. I imagined Dad as a paper doll, his clothes flat, with little white tabs folded over his shoulders.

It mattered that my parents had just emptied a bank account that had seven hundred dollars in it. It was spent on something deemed necessary at the time, likely food storage or school supplies. Only a week later he would die and we learned that the account had an insurance policy that would have doubled the balance should the owner die in a work related incident (an odd stipulation to my twelve year old mind). Now our family was minus fourteen hundred dollars and a dad.

I have less information about who was at fault. There are no complete conversations to recall. I remember bits about a possible lawsuit. Bits about OSHA's report deeming that no one was at fault. That meant that a lawsuit wouldn't happen. I wondered how they got to decide that; shouldn't a judge or jury make that decision? One of the eavesdropping's told me that the previous crew was supposed to spray the building down. While wet explosives can still explode, it's less likely to happen. When Dad died the walls were dry.

Does it matter now who was to blame? A worker? The company? Who decides? To me, it has never mattered. The grief that I have felt, feel, cycle through: anger, denial, depression,

acceptance, bargaining, sometimes over months, sometimes all within an instant – that’s not something I would want someone else going through as they accept responsibility for a man’s loss of life.

After I cried as much as I could cry, I began making up stories for Dad. I decided that he couldn’t have really died. He had to have faked his death so that we could quit living paycheck to paycheck and live on the insurance money. I just knew he was out there watching us. After months of watching for him, I decided he was better at hiding than I gave him credit for. I knew if he could, he would have snuck home to let us know he was okay. If he could he would take us with him to his secret hideout and we could all live the way people in the movies do with secret identities, or at least we would know so we could sneak in a visit once in a while. There must be people watching our house, otherwise he would have come for us. I imagined him lonely all by himself for weeks, then months, then years.

Before he died Dad was spending more time with my three-year-old sister Chelsea. She wasn’t talking yet and saw no need to start. With four older siblings, all she had to do was point and her wish was granted. She was beginning to make up noises that represented things she wanted. An exaggerated gulp noise meant she wanted milk. A sharp intake of breath, swishing air between her teeth, meant she wanted water. She knew how to communicate, so Mom and Dad were only mildly concerned. In the weeks leading up to Dad’s accident, I saw him often sitting with Chelsea at his new computer helping her play a preschool learning game. He was also teaching her to sing the Beach Boys song “Barbara Ann.” I was a little jealous that they had their special time together, but I knew Chelsea needed it if she was ever going to start talking.

Prior to the funeral, Mom received special permission from the bishop to play a medley of Dad’s favorite songs at the end of his funeral. The excited squeals that came from our front

row as Chelsea realized her song was playing is something I will never forget. “Baba Ann! Baba Ann!” she yelled, looking around to make sure everyone was hearing her song.

After the funeral, I thought about all the time Dad had been spending with Chelsea. Maybe it was all just concern for Chelsea’s speech delay combined with the new computer. But when I learned that the job that killed Dad was actually assigned to someone else twice before, (one employee took an extended vacation, and the other quit) I questioned their time together even more. Did he know his time was limited? Dad had to have known the risk with this job. I felt like his job outweighed his family. Why would he choose to do something so life threatening when he had a family that needed him?

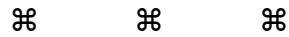
Only now, as an adult do I understand that for Dad, family outweighed everything. It is obvious Dad knew what he was doing, and he still worked at a high risk explosives plant. I am sure he knew of the two other employees assigned to the job, but Dad had a family to support.

I never asked it aloud, but I often ruminated on whether Dad’s death could have been prevented, or if he could have chosen to not go to work that day. I reasoned, if he quit, we could have made it, we would have found a way. But I also have to acknowledge that it’s easier said than done. Dad worked full time at Trojan, and on the side sold magnetic water conditioners, and co-owned a concrete curbing business with Uncle Stephen. Mom had her small jobs that she did for money as well. When the apples and cherries were on, she worked for the Fruit Grower’s company sorting and boxing the fruit, and did small sewing projects on the side. I always knew money was tight, but I never thought we were poor. My parents’ generosity overshadowed all the other lessons I learned as a child.

Three decades after Kubler-Ross wrote her book about the stages of grief (1969), she wrote a statement that more succinctly explains what I am trying to understand with my messy



grieving process. “The stages have evolved since their introduction, and they have been very misunderstood...they were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grief is as individual as our lives. The five stages...are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling But they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief. Not everyone goes through all of them or goes in a prescribed order.”<sup>1</sup>



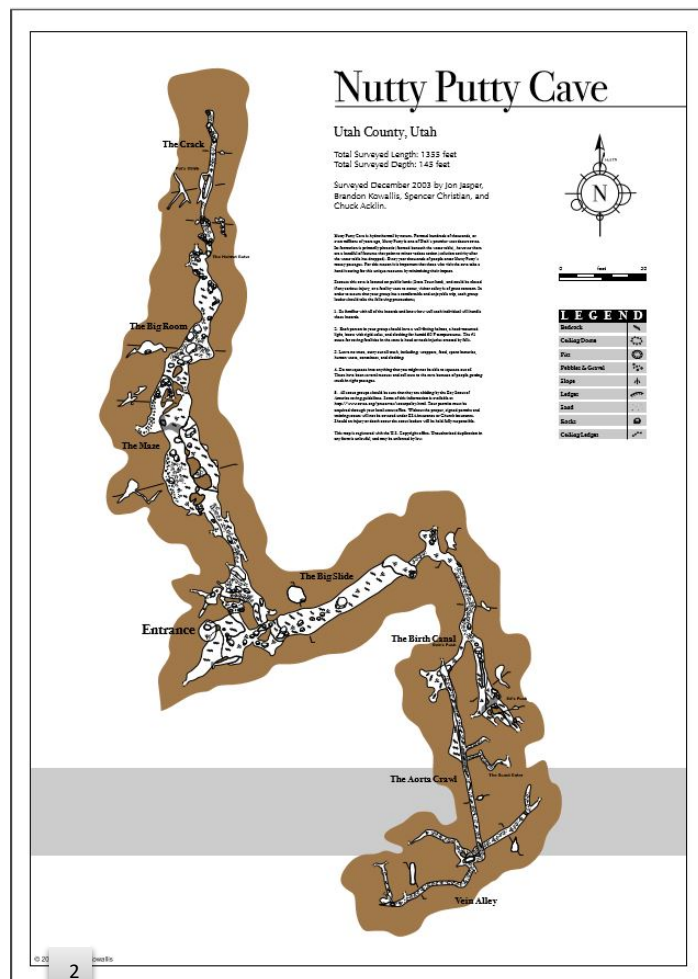
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<sup>1</sup> Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth, and David Kessler *On Grief and Grieving: finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. Scribner, 2005. P.7.

## Tempting Fate

Like most people, I discovered my phobia only after I was confronted with it. I was fourteen and had been invited to go spelunking with my cousins in the Nutty Putty caves located in the southern end of Utah Valley. I considered myself an adventurous person, but when it came my turn to slither through the narrow opening, the idea that thousands of tons of rock were between me and open air made me question what I was really doing here. As my body occasionally made contact with the top of the tunnel, I marveled at how incredibly solid and hard the rock was. We had come from crisp winter air into this cave that was cool to the touch but alive in the warm stagnant air.

Past the entrance tunnel, the cave opened up, and I imagined we were in a caveman's living room, complete with scattered stone furniture. Someone had brought a lantern that lit up the main area and I could see that the smooth rocky walls and dirt floor were all the same peanut butter color. Having never been in a cave before, I wondered what was next. I took a seat on a boulder and watched as the others



<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nuttyputtycave.com/maps.html>

explored the crevices and crannies. I assumed everyone would settle down and we would all 'hang.' I was the youngest of the group and thrilled to have been included. However, as the time went on I began to wonder if there was more to the cave than I thought. Someone was talking about finding the "Birth Canal," and "The Big Room." I thought we had already found both of those areas right here at the entrance.

While the others explored, I was content watching. James, a friend of one of my cousins, was shining a light down a small opening in the floor, then began lowering himself feet first but found his shoes problematic. They kept getting stuck on the various protuberances. I became alarmed when he continued to work his way lower. I wanted to reason with him that if his shoes didn't fit, his body wouldn't either. I watched as he came to rest, stuck vertically up to his armpits, and unable to wedge himself any lower. He was disappointed that he still couldn't feel the bottom of his hole; and I realized I was hyperventilating.

I had heard of hyperventilating, but had never experienced it. With the breath of the cave exhaling on my neck, its humid saliva sticking to my skin, I noticed my cousin Thane glance at me and I told myself I was acting ridiculous and to quit drawing attention. I briefly wondered if I could control my breathing, but instead turned my focus toward James as he realized that he was stuck. With only his arms free, he couldn't get the leverage to pull himself out.

Thane came to his rescue, but they both quickly found the ceiling problematic. James' hole was beneath one of the few places that had a significant dip in the ceiling and Thane realized he couldn't help him either. Simultaneously a thought came over me that I might be claustrophobic. I analyzed my symptoms. I was in an enclosed area, someone was stuck and surely going to die, and by default we were all going to die, and I was hyperventilating. That must be it.

I remember thinking very clearly that my self-diagnosis made sense. I thought back to a time when I was around three or four. My family was camping at a family reunion, my siblings and I all slept in two sleeping bags that had been zipped together to make one colossal sleeping bag. I woke up during the night to a blackness so dark I couldn't see even the shadows. I moved my hands around trying to figure out where I was. It was hot; my skin felt wet and I could feel redness on my cheeks. Crawling on my hands and knees it seemed like everywhere I went there was no way out. The air was steamy and I found my face wet from a combination of sweat, tears, and snot. I don't remember when I started screaming, I only remember Dad's giant hand reaching for me. I grasped for it and he pulled me out of the sleeping bag and simply told me to go back to sleep. I had thought my rescuer would have commented on the epic trial I had just experienced, but instead, I felt like I had been reprimanded.

That was it, I thought as I watched Thane trying to free James, I am claustrophobic. But only a little because there have been times when I quite enjoyed being in small confined spaces, in fact, I usually won hide and seek because I always chose the most obscure small spaces that no one ever thought to look. Eventually James was able to use his toes to slowly climb as Thane helped lift him. For years I was confused by my claustrophobia, it was obvious that I had a very real fear of becoming trapped, but many of the places that claustrophobes fear, I am indifferent to; for example, I actually enjoy elevators.

You should know that many people prior to our visit and after became stuck enough to need a rescue team. In 2009, years after our excursion, the Nutty Putty caves were sealed after a man became trapped and died.

I eventually realized there is a phobia similar to claustrophobia called cleithrophobia, the fear of becoming trapped. There doesn't need to be a tight enclosed space for a person to become

trapped, as I learned when I became trapped in the snow. I was driving an old eighties full-sized GMC van. As the three-quarter-ton beast came to a stop in the snow I knew I was going to die. I was a young mother with a two month-old baby that I knew would also die. I tried going forward and in reverse but nothing would move. The chances that I could muscle the van out of the snow by myself were so laughable I didn't even try. Just as I felt the tears about to spill over, I looked over at Mom's house that I had just left and considered asking for help. But I knew how heavy that van was. It was impossible. I sat with my hands folded in my lap and contemplated my unfortunate demise, blinking back tears. Suddenly there was a knock on my window, Mom had noticed my situation and came to see if she could help. With her coaxing me on how much pressure to put on the gas pedal, she and my teenage brother Daniel pushing, I was free within a few moments.

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As a child, my brother and I lived in our sandbox. One of the things we liked to do was dig as deep a hole as we could. It was only about a foot before we reached clay soil, but we kept going, all the way to our armpit. The hole would only be six inches around, but it was big enough to suit our needs. We stuck our leg in the hole and wiggled it until the sand and dirt collapsed around it. I'm not sure what thrill my brother got from this, but for me it felt like I was cheating death, trapping a major limb of my body, and then freeing myself. It was exhilarating. I'd tempted fate and survived.

Knowing that I have an irrational fear doesn't diminish the fear when I realize I am stuck. A few years ago, my family was visiting Sandy Beach on Utah Lake. The road in was very rutted and we found ourselves nearly high centering a few times. We were in an all-wheel drive minivan; however, that particular feature happened to be on the fritz. After a day of playing in

the water and building sand castles we were all exhausted and it was time to leave. Thinking we might have more luck taking a different way out, my husband Caleb drove along the beach toward where it intersected with the main road. All was fine until we met the warm dry sand. Noticing my white knuckles on the dash and door handle, Caleb began explaining, "Driving on sand is similar to driving on snow. The trick is to not slow down, once you slow down you're screwed- Uh-oh." Almost as if on cue, he slowed. Ahead of us was an outcropping of trees we would need to drive around. The trees weren't the reason for his concern. It was the car that had parked next to the trees; it appeared to be blocking our path.

On further inspection we saw that there was in fact room to go around the car, but it was too late. There we were, stopped in the middle of someone else's camp spot in an all-wheel drive vehicle whose all-wheel drive wasn't currently functioning. We were stuck. Caleb turned off the ignition and turned it back on, hoping the all-wheel drive would kick in. When that didn't work, we got out and began pushing. We pushed and the tires spun and the van sank deeper in the sand.

I could smell burning rubber and something else that was hot. As I looked at the wheels trying to bounce out of the holes they had dug, I saw that they were leaving black streaks in the sand as if it were solid. Desperate I opened the side door to make the kids come help and felt my limbs go cold. The sand was level with the door.

The people whose campsite we were ruining were watching as the kids and I fruitlessly pushed. I gave them a desperate but incredulous look. I couldn't believe they would sit and casually watch a family fighting for their lives. The man and woman sighed and began helping. On the brink of tears I thought about how unfortunate it was that I would die in an ugly, too-small swim suit. I was embarrassed that all these people had to watch me straining in such an unflattering getup. I regretted that these would be my last moments and I would be remembered

as that one lady in the bad bathing suit who died with her family after becoming stuck on the beach.

I looked over at the woman from the campsite who had relented to help. She was pushing with just one manicured hand, not even putting her body into it. She reminded me of Grandpa from *Chitty Chitty, Bang Bang*. In the movie, Dick VanDyke brought home a broken-down old car and asked for help getting it into the shop. Grandpa begrudgingly helped, but only used one finger. This woman was dooming us all! I was consumed with the intense wish to grab her and shake sense into her. All that held me back was the knowledge that I was fighting for my life and if I was shaking her, there would be one less person pushing. Eventually with the help of other beach goers, we made it out.

The whole time we were pushing and I was panicking, I knew I was being ridiculous. I even contemplated what would happen if we just walked away from our sinking van. I told myself that just because the van was a goner didn't mean we were; that people didn't die like this. I even considered the legal ramifications of littering an entire vehicle on the beach; but none of that mattered. As far as I was concerned our lives were tied to that van. I even reasoned how often has someone thought that same thought of the ridiculousness of their death, right before they died?

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I've always known the circumstances of my father's death, but I had never made the connection to my fear until recently. On August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1994, a three man team was tasked with prepping a brick building for demolition. Dad's job was to secure a chain around a large mixing drum, then he would signal the second man standing in the doorway who would then signal the third worker on a tractor to go ahead and pull the drum out. In the process of removing one of the

drums, it sparked on the concrete floor, igniting the explosive residue that coated the room. In the explosion, the building collapsed, pinning Dad and another worker in the doorway. A man on the tractor ran to help; he pulled the worker from the doorway and was returning for Dad when the building exploded a second time. When the building collapsed, Dad's legs were broken and he was pinned. The second explosion killed him. The death certificate listed "Inhalation of hot air" as the cause of death. I don't think the circumstances of Dad's death are the root of my claustrophobia, but they definitely exacerbated it.

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## Self-Fulfilled

When I was in elementary school, one of my friends brought some little dolls for show and tell. She showed them to me in secret at the beginning of class. Her dad had just visited another country and brought them home as a souvenir. There were six of them, three boys and three girls just over an inch tall. All were made of colored thread. She explained they were protection dolls, kind of like voodoo dolls, but opposite: “You can line them up at night and they will protect you, or someone you are thinking of, from evil spirits.” Even though she explained they were to be used for good, they gave me the creeps. I didn’t want to think about some invisible force out there trying to do harm to people and all that was stopping it was these tiny dolls. I reasoned that if the dolls could be used for good, they could also be used for evil.

As a teenager I came to the conclusion that I didn’t believe in voodoo, or curses, or that evil forces were out there with the ability to harm me. Any time I came across a movie or a story where someone was cursed, I scrutinized the details. Most often the person cursed knew about it and participated in the fulfillment of it. I reasoned that voodoo and curses are slippery-slope fallacies. Perhaps it’s because I am the most stubborn person I know, but I don’t believe anyone can control another person by merely stating a few words. Throw in some chicken or goat blood, and maybe...? No, I don’t think it’s possible even then.

For years I thought people who believed in self-fulfilling prophecies were silly. I thought I could see right through them, that they were also a slippery-slope fallacy of a prophecy. Just because I worry about something, or someone says something will happen, doesn’t mean it will

actually happen. In fact, knowing a prophecy is a possibility should make it less likely to happen, especially to a stubborn person like myself, right?

Although I can't remember a time when my parents said the phrase, "You'll have children like yourself one day," I'd heard it enough to know it was a threat used often. My first reaction when I heard it was, nuh-uh. But the more I thought about it the more I felt it would be a good thing, especially when I was a teenager and life was no fair. I thought that if I did have children like me, it would be ideal because I would know how to handle them, I would be a great parent. The problem is, I did get children who are exactly like me because all of them are stubborn (though the jury is out on who is more stubborn), and they all seem to be on a mission to make life difficult.

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Shortly after Dad's funeral, as the visits from friends and family were slowing down, I was eavesdropping and heard Mom say to one visitor, "Of all my kids, Kira would be the only one to go to college." I wasn't in the room at the time and I could never have asked about it because I knew, unless I was being spoken to, it was none of my business. I found out later she was referring to a trust fund that had been set up to (replace what my father might have provided?) provide funding to higher education for the five of us.

I wondered why she would say that. College was never something that was talked about at home, I don't even remember hearing about college in school. I knew college meant more school after high school, but I didn't understand why someone would want that. Dad had earned an Auto Mechanics certificate from Utah Technical Trade School, and Mom completed a semester at BYU, but without knowing what I wanted to be when I grew up, I saw no need for college.

The problem is, more than two decades later, I am finishing my last semester of college. Like the prophecy that I would have children like myself one day, it came true. It took me longer than the average person because I had my three kids first, then went to college. Is it because I am so stubborn that I was unconsciously resisting Mom's prophecy, only later to also unconsciously fulfill it? If not a self-fulfilling prophecy, how else did I end up here?

I am a pattern seeker, not the kind of patterns from elementary school where you have to figure out the next color or number. No, those give me a headache. I mean the kind of patterns some would call hypochondria. I think of hypochondriacs as people who hear something and automatically assume they have it. My friend's grandmother calls the doctor every time there is a commercial for a new medication that says, "Ask your doctor if you have... because this might be the medication for you." In reality, I look for evidence. I watch for patterns (i.e. symptoms) and see how they apply to my life (i.e. self-diagnosis). But the patterns I am talking about aren't medical.

A few years ago I started seeing patterns that were keeping me awake at night, glaring at me in the dark, forcing my eyes open so I could watch the scenarios play themselves over and over. It started when I realized I was twenty-nine, only three years younger than Mom was when she became a widow. I wasn't ready. I watched Mom grieve and then pick herself up. I knew I wouldn't be able to pick myself up.

I found myself lying in bed comparing myself to her when she was my age. Though I can't remember ever really worrying that I would become my mother because I have always been in awe of her, especially for the strong woman she became after Dad was gone. But I couldn't help worrying about the patterns that were playing out.

We both had the same level of education, she with a high school diploma, and I with my GED. When her children were young she took on various jobs to supplement what Dad earned. Santaquin's pride was cherries. The city's yearly community celebration was called Cherry Days, although because there were also a lot of apple orchards, they later changed it to Orchard Days. In the summer Mom would go work in the cherries. She would come home and talk about how it hurt her eyes to watch the swirling bins of cherries as she looked for leaves or branches.

In the fall it was apples. She once described how apples were 'picked.' A big tractor machine with giant arms clutched the trunk of a tree, attached to the arms was canvas so when the arms shook the tree, all the apples would fall onto the canvas and then go into a bin. Sometimes she counted and boxed the washed apples that would go to grocery stores, sometimes she watched the conveyer for debris. She said that was a hard job because when the tree shaker shook the apples out of the tree, it shook everything out of the tree, and sometimes nests and birds would be mixed in with the apples.

Mom also was an excellent seamstress. She made most of our school clothes, and she sewed boutique doll dresses on the side. Up to this point, the most work experience I could claim was the paper route I had when I was twelve. As stubborn as I am, I knew I didn't have the inner resources she did to survive the loss of a husband and then have to raise five children alone with no one to tag team with when it got hard. I can think of countless times when I have been frustrated with my three children and I was thankful that I could take a break as soon as my husband came home from work.

I even tried comparing Caleb to Dad. The fact that Caleb works in an office building and not an explosives plant was only mildly comforting. Both his grandfathers died from heart attacks, so as far as I was concerned, he could go at any moment. With all this worry, and

contemplating life without my husband, it would seem I was anticipating his death; but it was more of a realization that death can come for anyone at any time. As one friend said, “Anyone can be hit by a bus.” Recognizing these patterns, I could see myself becoming stuck in the same situation as Mom. My kids would turn out like me (again), and we would all be caught floundering in a cyclical life. “One of the great myths of our society is that when women are left with small children, they are not alone. The truth is that a mother left with babies is far more alone than she would be without them; every bit of energy, attention, protectiveness, and care she might use to meet her own needs must first be directed toward the needs of her children. That’s why the bible always laments the fate of ‘those who are with child and those who give suck’ in the middle of war and disaster. The authors of the Good Book knew perfectly well that a woman alone can run, fight, or hide, but a woman with babies is toast.”<sup>3</sup>

Aware of my fear of being a widow, Caleb would occasionally joke that I am set to inherit his life insurance policy, and I can always remarry. But I reasoned with myself, insurance policies run out, I even imagined loophole scenarios where I might end up with nothing. Kidding aside, Caleb encouraged me to go to college. He told me the only way I was going to be able to sleep at night is if I had a good solid back-up plan. He reasoned that a degree would provide independence and enable me to provide my own stability.

I still wonder about Mom’s college prediction. The circumstances of Dad’s death had everything to do with my decision to go to college. It definitely wasn’t the trust fund because by the time I decided to go, I was too old to be eligible to use it. I want to say my choice to go was driven by my own internal dialogue. But I do have to admit, I am the only one of my siblings to attend college. It could simply mean Mom had a good ability to read personalities and she knew

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<sup>3</sup> Beck, Martha. *Expecting Adam*. 1999.

something I didn't. Did I unknowingly participate in a self-fulfilling prophecy? For that matter, did one of my siblings hear the same prediction and also participate in their own self-fulfilling prophecy?

Growing up I spent a lot of time at Aunt Tammie's house. She had twelve children and when asked, she always said, "What's one more?" Over time I learned that their family had a firm belief that saying, or even thinking bad thoughts was just as bad as voodoo. On one occasion we were traveling from one end of Utah Valley to another; the red car we were in was small but the storm outside was not. Wind and rain rocked the car. Someone ventured to say, "I hope we don't get into an accident," and everyone in the car gasped. The speaker apologized and said, "Cancel that." Saying this phrase was not a guarantee that the curse was cancelled, it only lessened the chance that it might happen. It wasn't enough for Aunt Tammie, she pulled the car over and we said a prayer that we might make it to our destination safely.

It was never fully explained to me why we had to say 'Cancel that,' I only assumed based on our Mormon culture that they worried that Satan might take our words and make them come true. I often thought of this idea and wondered if that were the reason bad thoughts and predictions came true. But then why didn't wishes come true? Said aloud or not, I certainly never had any of my birthday wishes, or any other wishes come true. No blue fairy ever came to visit me, flying ponies didn't magically appear, and no matter how much I sang and snapped my fingers, my toys never cleaned themselves up. Perhaps it was Satan after all. He would be the kind of person to make only the bad thoughts come true; not considering that most of my good thoughts had to do with mythical impossibilities.

Satan notwithstanding, I believe it is all in where we place power, even having witnessed and participated in some of my own self-fulfilling prophecies. As a child I put everything I had

into wishing, some outside force only had to make it so. A lesson most learn somewhere around adulthood is that giving power to something or someone else means we are powerless to do for ourselves. Without a husband, Mom learned, “If it is to be, it’s up to me.” It became her mantra. She learned to make home repairs; she learned to lay tile and wood flooring so well people continue to ask her to do their floors. She repairs plumbing problems, builds sheds, does masonry – the list goes on. She even bought her own welder. And she did all of this without the internet!

For years I lay awake stressing about my inability to do anything to change my life. I felt trapped and I had put myself there. I was completely dependent on Caleb for more than is fair to be depended upon. Whether it was Mom’s prediction, or Caleb’s encouragement, I found it in myself to change my life.

I didn’t learn until I was an adult that I had become a statistic, if I had known, I think I would have done my best not to. As I was dropping the kids off at school the radio announcer began reading a study: “Children from fatherless homes are more likely to be poor, become involved in drug and alcohol abuse, drop out of school, and suffer from health and emotional problems. Boys are more likely to become involved in crime, and girls are more likely to become pregnant as teens.”<sup>4</sup> As I listened I realized the study was describing my family. Some of us had some of the characteristics, and some of us had all of them. I saw my own participation as a school dropout, in the emotional problems, and the teen pregnancy.

I know there are fatherless children out there who don’t participate in the statistics of the fatherless child, but for those who do, I don’t think these statistics have anything to do with the surviving parent or their efforts. In the case of my mother, I believe she put up with more than any parent should. We really were brats.

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<sup>4</sup> “The Consequences of Fatherlessness.” National Center for Fathering. N.d. Web. 08 Oct. 2016.

I often wonder about the people who attended Dad's funeral. Obviously they were all there for him, but how many were also mourning the five fatherless children sitting on the front row? I haven't been to a funeral since that has had to open both overflows in the chapel. Until Dad died, I believed he could have been the president of the United States. He seemed to know everyone, no matter how far away from home we were. How many of the people at his funeral knew that fatherless children are often doomed the way we were? Did any of them know about saying "Cancel that" and would it have helped? With potentially hundreds of people consciously or unconsciously thinking about the statistical probability that I would end up pregnant within four years, would it have mattered if one of them had said "cancel that?"

I remember shortly before his death, Dad and I were having a fight. I don't remember what the fight was about but I do remember when he looked at me and yelled, "Do you want to turn out like Holly?!" I'd always looked up to Holly so I didn't know what he was talking about. I searched my mind for reasons I might not want to be like her and at the same time, out of pure stubbornness, denied that I was anything like her. I admired her straight brown hair, not that I minded my red hair, but it couldn't decide whether it wanted to be curly, wavy or frizzy; and I didn't love when people assumed all red heads like being called "Red." I wished I could read a chapter book as fast as Holly, I just couldn't think of why he would be worried about me turning out like her.

Then I remembered she had been sneaking out at night to meet up with her boyfriend; and at fifteen she was pregnant. I hadn't considered I had any choice but to follow in her footsteps, not that I was purposely doing everything she did, or that I planned on getting pregnant; but I did look up to her. In the sixth grade she dyed her hair purple and she laughed when everyone called her "The purple people eater," even though I knew it probably hurt her



feelings. She became a vegetarian and it made her cool and different, and got her out of eating a lot of yucky things. It's why I became a vegetarian when I was thirteen.

I don't believe a single person at the funeral actually wished anything but the best for us, and I do think some were worried about the consequences of losing our dad. Still, whether they meant it or not, people treated us like victims, and who could blame them. We were.

As stubborn as I was, Dad's accusation that I was going down the same path as Holly, didn't stop it from happening. Perhaps he should have said "cancel that."

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## Caught on a Barbed Wire Fence

*Define, on the two-dimensional surface of the earth, lines across which motion is to be prevented, and you have one of the key themes of history. With a closed line (i.e., a curve enclosing a figure), and the prevention of motion from outside the line to its inside, you derive the idea of property. With the same line, and the prevention of motion from inside to outside, you derive the idea of prison. With an open line (i.e, a curve that does not enclose a figure), and the prevention of motion in either direction, you derive the idea of a border. Properties, prisons, borders: it is through the prevention of motion that space enters history.<sup>5</sup>*

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Driving from my home in Saratoga Springs to the mouth of Spanish Fork canyon feels like a pilgrimage. I've driven past the land where Trojan Explosives once stood plenty of times, and every time I do, I look for any recognizable symbols of the old plant. Unlike those times when I happen to be headed somewhere that takes me through the canyon and past Trojan, this time I am driving there with a purpose. It's actually the first time I have ever driven there. My mind is working, looking for internal and external clues that will help me get to the spot I am searching for. It feels different knowing that I am headed there with a purpose. Sacred.

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<sup>5</sup> Netz, Reviel. (2009). *Barbed wire an ecology of modernity*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press. (p. xi)

Built sometime in the 1930's, Trojan Explosives was so "isolated, it wasn't even necessary to have the property fenced." Later as a result of houses being built closer and closer, it became necessary for "the entire perimeter [to be] enclosed with two sets of fences, and there's a security system with gates and guards."<sup>6</sup> In 2005 it was announced that the plant would close for good. Although fraught with a history of injuries and a few deaths from accidental detonations, the incident that killed my father is the only one I think about.

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When I was about ten years old, my best friends were a pair of sisters, Catherine and Caryn. Both had long dark brown hair and looked alike. Catherine was slightly older than I, and Caryn was slightly younger. Catherine and I spent the most time together, with her dark hair and my red, I would like to say she was the Diana to my Anne of Green Gables, but she was more of a Marilla character. Everything was very matter-of-fact with her. Most of our time spent together was wandering around small town Santaquin, Utah; walking and talking, walking and talking. I often wanted to go explore things we saw but Catherine always kept me on the road as if we were on some kind of mission.

One day I brought along my six-year-old sister Tasheena on our walk. Neither Tasheena nor I wore shoes. I hated shoes, they were too confining for a simple walk through town. Catherine, always rushing to get on with whatever she was doing, rushed us out the door before I could track down shoes for Tasheena; but Tasheena was of a similar mind as me, she preferred going without shoes. At the top of the dead-end street I lived on, I talked Catherine into taking a

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<sup>6</sup> Haddock, S. (2003, January 5). Explosive Utah. *Deseret News*. Retrieved December 2, 2017, from <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/957705/Explosive-Utah.html>

shortcut through the field next to Utah Power and Light, a single level white building surrounded by a massive fence. She insisted it wasn't a shortcut, and either way we had to make it to the diagonal end of the block. I begged, I told her it would be fun and she begrudgingly agreed. We ducked through the barbed wire fence and walked along the ten foot tall chain-link fence of the power company. Just a few steps in we began encountering goat heads; evil little stickers shaped like their namesake. Tasheena and I gingerly tiptoed through them, stopping every few seconds to pull one out of our feet. Catherine, frustrated by our increasingly slower pace quickened hers, crunching through the thorns with a purposeful gait. I kept calling to her for wait for us, but she yelled back that we should have worn shoes.

I was too stubborn to admit she was right, and insisted silently that if I could make it out of this patch it would be worth it. I looked to Catherine near the end of the field and back the way we had come, we were only a little more than a third of the way through. Tasheena started crying, My feet hurt so badly, I was ready to cry with her. Every time a sticker would make its way into my skin it felt like it was accompanied by poison. I knew I couldn't go further with the goat heads now a carpet ahead, and I refused to go back. There was nowhere to stand anymore. We were surrounded and our feet were full of stickers.

I looked at the chain link fence of the power company. It gleamed bright silver, I would have scaled it to get to the hot pavement on the other side but it had barbed wire at the top like a prison. I reached out hesitantly to touch the fence. There were rumors, but I had never decided if it was an electric fence or not. It made sense that it would be because they obviously didn't want people in there with the barbed wire at the top. It was the most imposing fence in Santaquin, but I needed somewhere to go to get away from the stickers. I winced as I touched it, waiting for the zap but it didn't happen. I grabbed it more forcefully and smiled, it would be our savior. I helped

Tasheena climb a few feet up the fence and brushed as many stickers as I could off her feet. I imagined clamoring along it sideways to meet Catherine at the other side. But once we were both on the fence, I realized it was harder than I thought to hold on, I knew we wouldn't be going anywhere.

I called for Catherine to come help us. She stomped back angrily. By the time she arrived, a lecturing finger pointed at us, I had moved behind Tasheena to help support her. My arms and fingers were so tired I thought I was going to collapse. I envisioned my weight against the chain-link forcing my fingers to separate from my hands. I helped Tasheena climb onto Catherine's back, thankful that she changed her mind about lecturing us, and watched as she stomped back the way she came. I called for her to hurry and she yelled back, "I am!" But she didn't quicken her pace. I worried the whole time that the people in the power company would see us and come out dressed in black military uniforms. I imagined them coming at me in jeeps with their big guns drawn like in the movies. I hoped that if they could see me that they would realize I was just a ten-year-old girl trying to escape the stickers. I hollered to Catherine to hurry again and got the same response as last time. I worried it wouldn't matter to the power company who I was.

While I waited I began to wonder if the fence really was electric. I imagined they had a big red switch in the building that they were about to throw. I wondered if I would be electrocuted and cook to the fence in a dramatic electrified seizure, or if I would be zapped and thrown off on a blaze of sparks. I imagined myself backpedaling through the air, higher than the fence only to land hard on the field of goat heads. I wondered what would hurt worse, the zap, the hard landing, or my entire back side covered in goat heads. Luckily, before they had a chance to throw the switch, Catherine arrived and carried me in silence through the field to safety.

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Arriving at the gate where the entrance to Trojan used to be, I stop next to a tangle of barbed wire, and try to take it all in. The clouds seem almost ghostlike, ethereal, as they linger



around the mountain. Later they take on a mottled look that matches the landscape. This place feels haunted; I can tell it has stories to tell. Everywhere I look there is a story waiting, begging to be told. There is a history that I, and I'm sure a lot of other people, don't know. I can feel the past aching to be known.

If I didn't know at least some of the history of this mountainside, I might not realize anything ever happened here. I have an idea of where some of the buildings used to be, but now the area is mostly vacant. I remember attending a company party where the families of employees were given a tour of some of the buildings. Although I don't know where the building was or what it looked like, I hold onto the mental map I created when I was twelve; I feel like I know where my father died. It's been over twenty years, and now I arrive with the hope that I might be able to walk around and look for evidence. Maybe time will have left the spot alone. At the very least I hope I can walk the grounds and see if I can sense the spot where Dad died. But I'm met with the same fence that was there when Trojan lived.

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The first time I remember going to pick up Dad from work I was young, maybe around six years old. It was dark and raining hard. Mom drove up to the mechanical gate in our gold sedan. They looked like prison gates, tall chain link with barbed wire at the top. I had no idea dad

worked at a place that needed that kind of gate. Mom had to get out and go to a phone that was next to the gate. I worried for her because the rain was hitting the car with big fat drops and the wind was blowing so hard it made the raindrops hit the windshield with hard cracking sounds. Mom looked like she was going to get blown over while she waited for someone at the other end of the phone to open the gate. When she got back in she was soaked. The gate opened and we drove through. But then Mom stopped just inside the gate. I asked what she was doing, and she said she had to wait for the gate to close. She explained that she would be responsible for whoever followed her through the gate. I didn't think anyone was behind us, but regardless, mom was doing the responsible thing. I realized then, those gates were not just for show, they meant business, but I wasn't sure what intimidated me more, the gate or the person at the other end of the phone. If there was someone waiting behind us, I imagined they would be angry that the gate was open but that they would have to get out in the rain just like mom did and ask to come in.

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Older now than my mom was that night in the rain, the sun is up and the sky is clear; the phone to call the guard now missing. As with the Utah Power fence, I still haven't decided if the fence is electric or not. If it ever was, I'm sure it isn't anymore. I can see places where there are wires coming out of the ground for a keypad or a light that is long gone. I hesitantly reach for the fence, but still don't dare touch it. I become more and more frustrated, pacing like a restless animal in a cage, but I am anxious to get inside rather than out. Eventually I work up the nerve to tap the fence, with the thought that if there is electricity even a tap will have me in the clutches of electrocution. I touch it as if I am testing out a hot burner, one quick pat, then a few more successive taps to make sure. I grasp the metal fence with both hands and press my face against it so I can look with one eye through the squares for an unimpeded view.

I can't help but think of the time I scaled the fence at the power plant, and the relief I felt that the fence wasn't electric. Holding the fence like this reminds me of an image from a newspaper clipping I'd saved of the stories produced after Dad's death. The image is both haunting and comforting. A man on one side of the fence, obviously shaken by the events of the day, and a woman on the other. With her hunched shoulders, it seems that she is more upset than



Herald Photo/Matthew R. Smith  
A Trojan Corporation employee, right, and an unidentified acquaintance console one another Tuesday after a chain of explosions destroyed a building at the Spanish Fork facility. Santaquin resident Arthur E. Dix, 36, was killed in the blast.

him, maybe thankful to arrive and see that it wasn't her loved one that was killed. I remember wishing the man and woman could have reached through the fence to comfort each other, but I was glad for what comfort they were able to give. Now as I clutch the fence and even lean on it, pressing my body into the diamond pattern, I wish there was someone on the

other side for me.

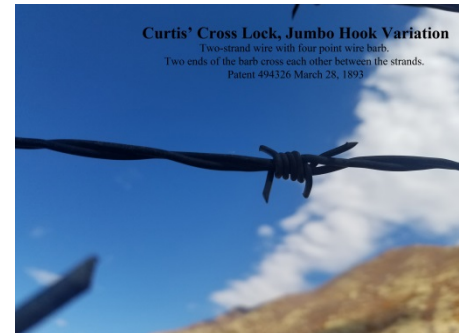
I spot a parked camper a few strides away from the fence and I stand motionless, holding my breath as I look for signs of life; someone who might be willing to let me inside, or at least talk to me about the property. After I conclude that no one there, I walk dejected back to my car so I can sit and take note of the things that are left from the old Trojan.

Aside from the fence, there are a few scattered buildings. Skeletal compared to what the working factory once was. One building sits just inside the gate, red brick with a red metal roof, another a few hundred yards away, red siding with the same red roof. I remember from visits when Dad was alive that most of the buildings were the same color of red. Up a hill there is a tan



painted cinderblock building, and higher up on another hill is a small grey building peeking out between the mountain foliage.

When I feel like I have seen all there is to see (which isn't much since most of the buildings have been removed) I am ready to go; or so I thought. I can't make my hand turn the key. I stay, looking for more, looking for anything. I came to learn something, to see something, and I feel like I need more. I find myself looking not through the fence, but at it. And I realize the fence might have more to say than the land it is guarding. I begin scrutinizing the fence, judging it. I want to see what it is made of. The prickers at the top of the fence remind me of the painful goat heads of my childhood. I inspect the barbs along the top and find three different kinds of barb. I realize this fence is not all original.



Once I recognize the barbed wire along the top is from three different makers, I am able to look at the fence differently. I see the fence posts with their sagging support rails. Each post a slender body with arms straight out, after years of standing, the shoulders have started to sag. Is it a lack of purpose? After all, the ground it is guarding no longer needs its security.

<sup>7</sup> Clifton, R. (1978). *Barbs, Prongs, Points, Prickers, & Stickers*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press

I realize the fence looks tired. I'm reminded of Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood*. He returns from the military, his parents long dead, and finds the fence around his house "had partly fallen" and someone had taken almost everything from the house; a symbolic representation of his coming struggle to



find meaning. Later in the story he meets a girl who climbs under a barbed wire fence, "Once under it she sat down and began to take off her shoes and stockings. 'How I like to walk in a field is barefooted,' she said with gusto."<sup>8</sup> I should have walked with her rather than Catherine, we might have been kindred spirits.

I feel bad for being angry with the fence and I look at it now with compassionate eyes. I know if it had a voice it would tell me all its stories. It would tell me about that day in 1994.

Perhaps I thought that by going to Trojan I would be able to access Dad. I think of the times when I took his presence for granted, like when I was a young child and asked him what the orange balls were on the powerlines. Or when I showed him the smoking cup I'd pulled from the dishwasher and he took the time to explain ad nauseam the concept of steam. I always knew to choose my questions carefully because Dad always had time to make sure I not only understood the answer, but could then explain it to someone else.

Now as an adult, I've been able to recognize Dad as human, rather than the superman I assumed he was when I was little. It makes his absence and my inability to access him that much harder. My inability to access the old Trojan property brings to the forefront my inability to

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<sup>8</sup> OConnor, F. (1985). *Wise blood*. London: Faber and Faber

access Dad. I wish I could ask him his opinion, tell him an accomplishment, let him meet his grandchildren. But instead I am stuck with the memory of a twelve year old girl and some assumptions of what I think he would say.

Even though I understand the fence a little better, I am still looking for a weak spot, for a place I can slip through. I wish for the carefree days with Catherine when I would have shimmed over or under without a thought of the consequences. I think at it, *You would let me through if you could, wouldn't you?* I take its silence as affirmation, and I no longer blame the fence. I wish the phone were still here so I could call the gatekeeper and get access like Mom did.

As I leave, I see a yellow sign that reminds me of a story dad told me about an Indian scout who never returned from an expedition. Only instead of “Watch for Falling Rock” this sign says, “Fallen Rock.” It seems like a declaration that here he lies, and we no longer need to watch for him, but acknowledge his existence and his effect on the world. I consider taking a sunflower to press, but the irony of killing a flower to remember the place where Dad died is too much.

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*Quite simply, being in a place is something you do with your body – nothing else – and therefore, to prevent your motion from one place to another, your body must be affected. The history of the prevention of motion is therefore a history of force upon bodies: a history of violence and pain.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Netz, Reviel. (2009). *Barbed wire an ecology of modernity*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press. (p. xi-xiii)

After sharing some of my feelings and fears of becoming stuck with one of my favorite professors, she explained something I had been feeling but couldn't eloquently put into words, "Phobias are metaphors for our lives."<sup>10</sup> I am not sure what this means for my arachnophobia, but it works for cleithrophobia. Some say facing your fears is a way to overcome them. Cleithrophobia is something I am willing to face, but I am also fine living with it. It is what drives me to make my life better, to always improve.

Knowing that I am progressing, even if it means crying in a class full of my peers, brings me contentment. It lets me know I am living. It's a battle fought and won.

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<sup>10</sup> Laura Hamblin