

Summer 1973

For more than a year I had been residing at my grandfather's old house on Tamarack Street in Inglewood. I was studying advanced music composition at California State University at Northridge, while my job at a local warehouse paid the bills. I was also busily sliding into deep depression, the cause of which was unclear. What was easily observable was the fact it was getting worse on a daily basis and I was rapidly approaching the end of the road.

As the root of the depression was elusive, I ceased trying to pin it down and began casting about for a solution. One that recurred a little too frequently was suicide. I would find my thoughts drifting towards an old Colt.45 revolver I had owned for years and which seemed to hold within its chambers the answer to all my problems. A loud, bloody answer, but one that was quick, final, and irreversible. I was reacquainting myself with friend death, and I felt it worth considering that what the army had failed to do could be easily accomplished with the slightest movement of one forefinger.

That Monday evening was extremely dark – in more ways than one – when I entered my study to load the gun that rested quietly in my desk drawer, innocently waiting to ward off burglars and with no idea of the mission I had planned for it, getting rid of its owner.

Who would care if I put in my head an aperture nature had not intended? I had nothing to live for, no one to live for. I was going absolutely nowhere on a barren road that stretched ad infinitum into a bleak landscape decorated with nothing. My hand shook perceptibly as I loaded the gun one final time while trying to decide how long should be my countdown to the send off to wherever it was I would be going.

When I finished loading, something made me set the gun down on the desk and scrutinize the colts carved into the wooden grips on either side of the butt. The gun seemed to be infused with its own life force. It was a fine piece of workmanship, really quite beautiful.

I picked up the firearm, very much aware of the power it could wield when the exploding gunpowder shot forth a forty-five-caliber bullet at who knew how many feet per second. At that range, muzzle velocity would not be an issue.

As with most handguns, this one was heavier than it looked and certainly heavier than John Wayne or Clint Eastwood made them look. I began to spin the gun around and around, catching it to stop its motion, then whirling it around again, somewhat like the Johnny Ringo character in *Tombstone*, but without the moustache twirling bravado. It was a strange gesture, ghoulishly macabre, considering my frame of mind. Who was I trying to impress? Was this a last minute display of macho bravura, or was I secretly hoping the gun would slip out of my hand, hit the desk, and cover up my cowardice by doing my dirty work for me?

Finally, the dawdling came to an end. With an air of finality, I grasped the gun, wedged the end of the barrel against my forehead, and began to cock the hammer, when a voice speaking forth from the middle of my brain said, “Don’t do it!”

Half believing the voice to be real even though I was quite certain I was alone, I said, “What?”

Once again the voice spoke, “Don’t do it.”

Bewildered, I set the gun back down, leaned back in the chair, took a deep breath, than began that process of bargaining with the Almighty that goes all the way back to Abraham and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of which we have all been guilty at least a thousand times in our own lives.

The gist of the deal was that I would call one friend and if they answered, I would not kill myself. Just what God was supposed to get out of this deal remained rather fuzzy; one fewer soul to judge, I suppose. That might seem grandiose in retrospect, but at the moment my thoughts were less than entirely rational. Besides, I no longer gave the proverbial shit and I wanted to be bluntly honest about the whole thing with anyone or anything capable of reading my mind that was actually interested in doing so at that moment.

The only person in my life at that time whom I considered a friend was Dan, the minister of the local church. Of course, ministers as a rule are absent from their church all day and night Monday, as they are so busy Sunday, including Sunday evening if there is a guest speaker or special program. I had no illusions that I was not picking the least likely person to be available to answer the phone at that moment, but again I was laying all on the line, knowing that if Dan were to be there to answer the phone and save my life, it would have to be because God put him there. And if He had not, I would finish what I had started. I am indeed fortunate that God specializes in tough assignments.

Staring eternity in its cold, unreasoning face, I called Dan. After half a dozen rings, each of which seemed both inordinately long and ridiculously short, I took the receiver away from my ear and was about to hang up when someone answered.

“Dan?” I asked, of two minds as to what I wanted the reply to be.

But God had already decided. “Yes,” Dan said.

I identified myself and he said it was great to hear from me, asked what had I been up to, the usual pleasant banter, in one sense completely inappropriate for the occasion but in another just the sort of everyday banality that can be so calming when one is overwrought.

I candidly related the facts of the situation and he was insistent that I come to him at the church immediately. He had just been walking out the church door to drive some kids home from an evening activity, but he promised to leave the back door open for me. Her told me to make myself at home at the church and wait for his return, which would be as fast as possible.

With the pistol safely reposing, unfired, in its drawer, I drove over to the church. I went straight for the piano, and launched into an unplanned concert of favorite hymns. Playing the piano was soothing and reassuring and I couldn't have cared less that my only audience were the poor church mice. Or maybe Someone had placed angels around me.

Dan returned within the hour and we talked into the early hours of the next morning. I no longer recall the words he used but they must have been persuasive as I am here to write these words. Suicide was no longer an option; I would have to find other solutions to my problems, ones that actually demanded the maturity and courage that suicide does not require.

The upshot of that meeting with Dan was that I wound up joining the church and assumed direction of their youth choir. It was while I was settling into that next phase of life that I met Paula.

Paula was young, slender, with brown hair and a sweetness of looks and personality. She was very much in the same vein as my other relationships had been, both outwardly and psychologically. Between us there always seemed to be something we both knew needed to be verbalized but somehow always remained silent, remaining unspoken to this present day.

I was fond of Paula, not deeply in love, perhaps never in love to any degree. I've no doubt she sensed this lack of deep feeling on my part, but she never mentioned it, perhaps because she did not care either. I do feel our relationship never would have lasted if not for the birth of our daughter, Susan, or for the fact that I needed a normal-appearing cover for my bizarre interior life.

Against her mother's wishes and the advice of my few close friends, Paula and I were married. Susan was conceived a few months after the wedding and we both were rather nonplussed by this turn of events, as though marriage and children somehow went together for other people but was a shocking combination for the Dyals.

Paula seemed far too young to be a mother and I didn't exactly possess the Ward Cleaver skill set I thought necessary for effective fatherhood.

On the positive side, Susan was a real blessing, a true gift from God. Thanks to Susan, I have never had the slightest regrets over my marriage to Paula.

Following Susan's birth, my in-laws kindly permitted us you move into their home in El Segundo, California. Paula's parents were planning an extended trip and wanted someone to house sit until they decided to sell the property. The house was small, cozy, and came with a room in back that was pressed into service as my study.

We spent about a year and a half there and it was during that time I had my first major encounter with my unconscious since childhood (cf. February 25, 1975).