

NELLY

A MEMOIR

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1999

For my sister,
Nelly Louise Kuipers
1916 - 1994

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I know, Nelly, that you could not bring yourself to tell me. I would have been so shocked. How could you have told me about such a thing?

But, it wasn't enough to tell the doctors and Mary. I had to know too, so that I would not be left with all of the unanswered questions.

This psychiatrist who abused you, what did he really do to you? How did he do it? Did he simply pounce on you like an animal? Or did he work up to it gradually, after hours and hours of talk therapy? Did he plead and sweat and kiss you before he slipped his hand under your skirt? Did he undress you before he kissed your maiden breasts? Were you willing?

Oh, I cannot bear to think of it.

Did you really believe that he loved you?

And how did you finally get well?

Or, were you ever really well?

You died, and I am left sorrowing. Now we will never talk and cry as sisters should. I am shamed, angry, violated. All of my dead family, and all of us still living have been betrayed.

THE FUNERAL

We had a party at my sister Nelly's place on the night of her funeral. We came back to her little blue chicken-coop house still dressed in our black funeral clothes. We threw our coats over the foyer railing and took possession of the home she had loved, sinking our stressed bodies into the couch and chairs she had chosen with such good taste.

"I've always loved this house," Tim said as he stood in the kitchen opening cupboards, fondling familiar objects. Tim, my son, now a grown man with a job, a wife, and four children was unashamed of his tears. He continued reminiscing as he poked through the house. "I lived here, you know," he explained. "She let me stay with her for a month when I directed the play at Calvin. She was always so accepting. She didn't even care about my long hair."

The house was small--that's why we called it a chicken-coop. It was just perfect for a single school teacher. A rather modern split-level with vaulted ceilings and large floor-to-ceiling windows, Nelly had designed it with the help of an architect friend. It stood out among the colonial houses of the neighborhood as different. I had always thought it made a bold statement about the character of its owner. My husband Jerry and I had enjoyed our visits over the years so much that, eventually, we adopted its plan for the design of our own retirement home.

Now we looked at each other, hoping to organize this occasion. "Well, what shall we do?" my brother George asked us. "I think we should spend some time talking about Nelly, don't you?"

Brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews had come from great distances to be at the funeral. We agreed we should spend this time talking together. Nelly would have wanted it. "Let's have an old fashioned coffee kletz," she would have said.

Nephew Carl, a chef by trade, took over. "I'm going to order pizza," he said with authority as he began to count heads.

Sitting all around on the floor we took up every bit of available space, even on the staircase overlooking the living area. We drew back the drapes and turned on the yard lights to take in the scene: her icy lawn, her neglected bird feeders, and her wind-whipped garden.

Everyone jumped to help. "I wonder where she kept her liquor?" my sister Harriet asked. "We could use a drink."

"I think I saw some wine in the cupboard," I observed.

When my son-in-law Tom arrived he was carrying a brown shopping bag. He set it on the dishwasher and began to take orders. "Who wants a Manhattan?" he asked, opening the whiskey and vermouth as he passed out the pop, chips, and dip. Tom, my daughter Mary's husband, is a Presbyterian minister: an Old Testament scholar who has no scruples about moderate drinking.

As we munched and drank we began to talk, revisiting some of the details of the funeral, commenting with appreciation about the eulogy. I looked around, observing two of my daughters in deep conversation. Mary was crying and Emily's face was solemn as they whispered together.

After the pizza arrived, Mary and Emily gestured to me to follow them into the bedroom. No one seemed to notice our retreat.

"What's going on?" I asked. It was cold in the bedroom. I shivered as I urged them to get on with whatever they had to tell me.

"Don't grieve excessively," I said, trying to give motherly advice. "We're just going to have to accept her death eventually. Nelly had a good life and, in a way, her heart attack was a blessing. At least it saved her from the dreaded nursing home. I'm so thankful that she was found the next morning--and that she did not suffer at all."

Nelly had been found lying face down on the tile in front of the foyer closet with one arm still in her coat. The coroner's report stated that she had died instantly from arrhythmia, a heart condition she was known to have. She was wearing her deep pink bunny suit, an adult-sized sleeper with feet that she used to lounge in on evenings around the house. She had slipped her coat and boots over the outfit for her final cold walk. She greeted her neighbors at the mailbox, she ascended her front steps, entered the house, closed and locked her door, and then, as she began to take off her coat, her heart stopped beating. She cut her lip on the tile when she fell. But, the family was assured, she never knew what hit her. Thankfully, she was found the next day because her Bible study group missed her and checked to see why she failed to attend their meeting.

Mary sat on the bed. She was not listening to my exhortations. She wore her most professional-looking black suit, the one with the gold military trim. Her short dark hair was cut pixie style, giving her a modern, sophisticated air. Her slender body tensed as she took my hand, pulling me down next to her on the bed among the guest's coats. She looked squarely into my face. Emily stood by, crying softly.

"Mother, there is something I have to tell you," Mary said. "Aunt Nelly told me something three weeks ago when I visited her during Christmas vacation. I have to tell you now because I can't keep it from you anymore!" She broke off, weeping, covering her face with her hands. We sat together on the bed oblivious of the relatives in the living room. Mary began to talk. Tears stained the even features of her face. Her voice shook as she continued, bravely trying to regain her composure as she talked. "She told me because she knew I could handle it," said Mary.

Mary, who has a PhD in psychology from Columbia University, is a professional counselor with an empathetic nature. I had often wondered skeptically if that combination could be successful. Now my heart sank as I felt the weight of her personal involvement.

"When I visited Aunt Nelly on Christmas Day," Mary said, "we sat by her kitchen table and she began to tell me all about the shock treatments she had when she was a patient

at Pine Rest (a Christian psychiatric hospital), and how much she feared and hated them. She cried as she talked about the staff nurses who cornered her in her room and strapped her down when she made futile efforts to avoid the ordeal. Dr. Beukema, who was young and fairly new on the hospital's staff, rescued her from all that when he took her by the hand and told her he would see her every week--just to talk."

"But, I know all about that already," I interrupted.

"That was just the beginning of what she wanted to tell," Mary insisted. "She was leading me up to the real bomb shell. She said, 'Mary, I'm going to tell you something now, something I've kept a secret all of my life. Everybody always thought that I was an old maid who knew nothing about sex. Well, I know a lot about sex, because for eight years Dr. Beukema had sex with me in his office at Pine Rest every time I came in for therapy.'"

Mary sobbed, "The kids were running all over the house playing hide-and-seek while she was telling me this, and the two of us just sat there crying at the kitchen table. It was the craziest thing."

Emily interjected, "He did that to her! Can you believe it?"

"No," I said dumbly.

"Now I've told--I've betrayed her trust--how unprofessional of me!" Mary cried, spilling out more details, letting the tears fall unchecked.

"You mean Dr. Beukema had sex with her at Pine Rest, in his office?" I asked, incredulous. "I just can't believe it."

"She said it went on for eight years, until she had the hysterectomy."

"Nelly, I just can't believe you did that," I said, as if Nelly was in the room with us. "How could you have let him do that to you?"

When relatives knocked on the door to see why we hadn't eaten, we went back to the group trying to be normal. I choked down a piece of pizza while I tried unsuccessfully to carry on a conversation with one of the guests. Soon I moved back to Mary. We stood

together in a corner, out of touch with the others. Finally George walked over to say, "Do you realize that you've been standing here talking to each other for over a half hour?"

"Sorry," I answered weakly.

During the rest of the evening, while we cleaned up, family members shared stories of their experiences with Nelly. We read scripture and prayed together. We agreed to try to keep in touch. Slowly we began to leave, with each family making its own arrangements for travel home.

Jerry and I and all of our five married children were staying in the same Holiday Inn. We put on our coats and drifted off together, agreeing to meet for breakfast in the morning. Once safely in our hotel room, I told Jerry about Nelly. In the end his counsel was practical, perfectly sane. "Come on, Honey. We've had an exhausting day. You'll just have to try to get some sleep. There's nothing you can do about it now." Bone-tired, we fell into bed. There had been so many arrangements and there was still so much to do.

I awoke very early. I lay in bed in the dark and unfamiliar room dimly aware of a mix of alien smells: stale smoke and chlorine treated sheets. Thoughts of Nelly tormented me with strange visions of her corpse under a bed of red roses. Sickened by Mary's revelation, I knew that further sleep was impossible. As memories came flooding back, I began to ruminate about the hysterectomy.

We were living in Cleveland, the kids were small. Nelly was visiting over Easter vacation. We two were standing together at the kitchen sink as she helped me load the dishwasher.

"Dr. Beukema thinks I may have a tumor in my uterus," she confided, obviously worried. "He says I should go to another doctor to check it out."

"How did Dr. Beukema find the tumor?" I immediately asked. "I thought you were putting on some weight, Nell," I went on, looking at her rounded stomach. "But, how come your psychiatrist gave you a physical? I've never heard of that. It doesn't sound

right to me.” I felt unusually annoyed to think of him examining her in his office at Pine Rest . I continued my admonitions as I vigorously scrubbed a pan.

Nelly argued. “Well, he is an MD. Psychiatrists have to go through years and years of training--they have to be medical doctors too. Anyway, he puts on his white coat when he examines me.”

I noted that, like me, Nelly always knew how to hold her own in an argument. It was a family characteristic. But I was not impressed with her logic. “I still don’t think a psychiatrist should give you a pelvic exam,” I insisted.

The following summer, when she had the hysterectomy, I drove to Grand Rapids to be with her. Nelly had asked me to come because she just couldn’t face the surgery alone. “That’s what sisters are for,” she told me, “to support each other.” I found Nelly in bed at Butterworth Hospital being prepared for the operation. A nurse met me in the hall. “Are you Nelly’s sister?” she asked with an air of relief. “Your sister is in some kind of a panic. She wants you to call her psychiatrist,” she reported.

I walked into the room and kissed her. “Hi, Nell,” I said cheerfully. But Nelly was too preoccupied to even ask about my trip. I sat down by her bed, immediately trying to reassure her. “Many women have hysterectomies,” I said knowingly. “There’s really nothing to worry about. Dr. Vander Ploeg is a good doctor.”

I could tell that Nelly was already under some kind of preliminary sedation. She licked her lips and said her mouth felt dry. As I helped her take a sip of water I was beginning to feel apprehensive. I watched her sink back into the pillows. She wrung her hands with a familiar gesture which filled me with dread. Then she warned me in a whisper, “I think I’m going to go into a panic.”

I looked at Nelly with compassion. It was obvious to me that she was distraught. Her dark eyes, slightly dulled by the drugs, registered fear. Her brown hair was tousled and her generous lips were pale and tightly drawn over her prominent front teeth. She looked very small and vulnerable lying in that hospital bed.

I had often assumed the mother role with Nelly, although I am ten years her junior, the youngest in our family of six. Now I leaned over to soothe the excessive fears I did not understand. "What shall I do?" I asked, feeling helpless against what I assumed was another onslaught of the depression that had plagued her life.

She caught my hand and brought herself into an upright position. She fumbled for her purse on the night stand, opened it, and found a paper with a telephone number. "Here, take this and call my doctor," she instructed me. "Please, Emma, do this for me," she pleaded. "I'm so afraid."

I did not ask who "my doctor" was; I knew she referred to Dr. Beukema. I protested as vigorously as I dared.

"He won't even know who I am," I said. "I haven't seen him in years. And, what does he have to do with this anyway? Dr. Vander Ploeg is the surgeon." Then I added as an afterthought, "Do you still see him that much?"

"I see him every week," she said without hesitation. "Don't worry, he'll know who you are. You just tell him you're Nelly Kuipers' sister and that she doesn't think she can go through with this hysterectomy. Tell him I think I'm having a panic attack!"

I walked into the hall to find a telephone. Unused to pay phones, I nervously fumbled for the change. I sighed to myself as I grudgingly dialed the number to ask for Dr. Beukema. When he answered I followed Nelly's instructions.

"I don't know if you remember me, I'm Nelly Kuipers' sister," I explained shyly. "She seems to think she's having a panic attack. She doesn't think she can go through with the surgery."

I was impressed by the promptness of his response. "What is she telling you?" he wanted to know. After a long pause, his voice was stern when he finally gave orders. "You tell Nelly she will be just fine," he said evenly. "I will order some medication for her." He hung up with no further instructions. I thought him cold and distant. How could Nelly imagine him to be warm and supportive?

After the operation, when she awoke, Nelly's only concern was what she might have said to me under the influence of the drugs.

"What do you think he gave you, Nell," I teased. "Truth serum?"

As I lay in bed in the Holiday Inn thinking about that telephone call, I could almost hear his frigid voice. Pondering the long buried memories, I had my own moment of panic. At that moment, in my troubled ruminations nothing was beyond belief. A thought intruded. What if the operation really was an abortion? Could that be true? Mary had said Nelly was always afraid of pregnancy. I sat on the edge of the bed with my head in my hands. I got up and paced the floor. I took a shower. Finally, as morning dawned I went to the lobby for a cup of coffee trying to erase all the doubts and suspicions that occupied my mind.

At breakfast I told the family that I had decided that I would return to Grand Rapids as soon as possible, perhaps the following week. "I have a lot of work to do," I said. "I'll begin going through Nelly's things. As a personal representative of her estate I have papers to sign with her lawyer; I have to see her CPA about paying her taxes; I have to go to the bank." I listed all of the duties I could think of without registering my real agenda. Underneath the bravado I was already scheming. How would I approach her doctors for verification? What is the procedure for requesting her medical records?

After we said our goodbyes, agreeing to call each other often, Mary whispered caution, "Move slowly, Mother. We need time to think." I took a deep breath and tried to square my sagging shoulders.

On the drive back to Wisconsin with Jerry we plotted our next moves. "You'll have to wait for some decent weather," he said. "Then you can take the Mercedes and stay at Nelly's house as long as you like." Jer and I are partners in everything. He would have cleared his calendar as bank president to come with me. But I knew that Nelly's allegations

were something that I would do battle with alone. After only a few days at home, I arranged to take some time off from my part-time consulting job at the bank.

When I returned to Grand Rapids I found that staying at Nelly's house was not as easy as Jerry had imagined. I settled myself, as usual, into the guest room across the hall from her bedroom, but I felt strange being all by myself in her house. Looking through the refrigerator for something to eat, I found some of her famous chicken soup in the freezer and warmed a bowl for dinner. I spent the evening unwinding in front of the TV and went to bed trying to ignore thoughts about Nelly's solitary life in this house. How many evenings had she sat alone on this couch and then, like me, wandered up to her lonely bed?

During the night, acting like a frightened child, I scurried over the space that had been the scene of her death. I was afraid to cross over the tiled foyer of the dark house to get to the bathroom. All of the primitive fears from my childhood surfaced: fears of the dark, of death, of a corpse lying by the closet. "This is so silly," I scolded myself out loud as I glided by the spot where she had died in the dimly lit hallway. Safely back in bed I huddled shivering, dozed fitfully, and waited miserably for the morning.

Thoughts of Nelly imprisoned me during the first weeks after her death. At first I occupied myself with the necessary work of settling her estate. I paid her taxes, I did the banking, and I signed papers for her attorney. Then I began to look through her house.

I spent two days in seclusion, sometimes forgetting to eat, while I combed through closets, drawers, filing cabinets, desks, and finally, her basement storage shelves looking for some clue, some scrap of paper to give me proof that Nelly's allegations were true. But I found nothing. One box in the basement contained a folder with psychiatrist jokes. The same box had a souvenir brochure of Pine Rest. Dr. Beukema's picture was prominently displayed. Published in 1948, Beukema had written an article entitled, "Tell me...Doctor." A small scrap of paper stuffed inside read, "Nellie, Dr. Beukema would like to see you at 4:00."

But these were ordinary memorabilia, something anyone would have kept.

My back was aching from my efforts when I finally sat down to think. If he was her psychiatrist for forty years, why was there no reference to him anywhere? I found lots of letters from friends and stacks of cards and notes from former students. Why this vacuum? Idly I picked up an old phone book. I noticed tucked in among the pages two sheets of white paper. One had a penciled map. It was obviously well used, with coffee stains in one corner. The other had meticulous directions written in an unfamiliar hand. My heart jumped a little when I saw the name *Beukema* printed on the bottom of the page.

Take Fulton St. to M21--this goes to Lowell. In Lowell
go left at the traffic light. Follow Hudson St. about 3 miles
going north . . . it becomes Lincoln Lake Rd. Turn right at the
sign to Fallasburg Park.

The careful hand-printed directions led to the county park, and finally to his private drive. At the bottom Nelly had written in her familiar script, "35 minutes."

Eager to get out of the house, I took the directions, setting out to follow them, wondering as I drove along if Beukema still owned the home. Nelly had told me that his wife died of cancer, and I remembered her saying that he had Alzheimer's disease and was in a nursing home.

It was a lovely sunny February afternoon. As I approached Lowell I was dismayed to find that a new traffic light was in place, across from McDonald's. Straining to follow the directions precisely, at last I found Hudson Street farther on. I realized as I went along that the directions were completely out of date. "How old are these things?" I asked myself. After finding the house, which I could hardly see from the road, I was disgusted for having gone on what now seemed to be a wild goose chase. I wondered why I had come. I turned the car, instead, in the direction of Pine Rest.

No map was needed to find the hospital. How many times had we gone there in all those years of Nelly's depression? Thoughts of my mother and of our Sunday afternoon visits filled me with nostalgia. As I came to the familiar corner on Division Avenue, I

looked for the grove of pines where I had romped as a child while mother sold her crocheted pillowcases at the church bazaar, an annual fund-raiser for Pine Rest. The grove was still there, and I rounded the corner in ardent anticipation. Would the hospital building be as unchanged as the grove?

“Where is it?” I asked, aghast, as I drove up. The large stone building I remembered was gone! Where were the imposing front pillars, the tall glass doors, and the wide stairs leading to them? Pine Rest, the pride and joy of the church fathers who had conceived it in the early part of the century, had disappeared. Dumbfounded, I saw that nothing of the building I remembered remained, only grass and a few shrubs. I sat in the driveway for a long while. Feelings of loss--that time had cheated me of something valuable--washed over me.

At last I drove around the back, through what looked like a service road. “There’s Dr. Mulder’s house,” I said to myself as I recognized the familiar red brick house of the chief administrator. Finally, I came upon the complex of administration, counseling, and hospital buildings that now embody Pine Rest. I realized that everything had changed drastically since I had last been there. The legacy of the founding ministers was still alive, but in a new and modern architecture. Mary had told me that a few months before her death Nelly found the courage to tell her heart doctor; then, heeding his advice, she had returned to Pine Rest for treatment. Gazing at the buildings, I wondered how Nelly felt when she came back to these formidable structures to tell her secret. I decided that she must have been terrified and desperate to have done it.

Determined to continue probing, I had the idea that maybe I could talk to someone right then about Nelly. I wandered into a building marked as a counseling center, trying to remember the name of her therapist as I advanced toward the front office. Vaguely recalling a name, hesitantly I asked a secretary if I could find a counselor named Louise Sommers in this building. She nodded and asked me to have a seat. Within minutes Nelly’s therapist invited me into her office.

Louise was young and personable and probably unqualified, I judged, to handle Nelly's case. She let me know, without the slightest hesitation, that she knew all about the abuse and that she believed it. "Oh yes, I believed her," she said. "Nelly was really trying to get on with her life, and I thought she was handling things quite well," she told me. "Of course, what the doctor did was completely unethical: a terrible thing. But, it's too late to prosecute," she added emphatically.

I was stunned by her candor. For me the allegation was new and raw, a wound that had not begun to heal; for her it seemed like past history, an unfortunate case history that was too late to fix. As I got up to leave she volunteered one more piece of information. "The doctors believed her too," she said.

Emboldened by my success, I walked over to what looked like the administration building to try my luck at getting even more information. I asked for the records department. I introduced myself as a personal representative of Nelly's estate and asked for Nelly's medical records. There was some hesitancy before someone gave me a form to fill out. After more delays in the back room, a supervisor came out to tell me that these records were so old it would take several days to find them. Before I left, arrangements to mail them to me at my home address in Wisconsin had been made.

Back at home, two weeks later, I listened in disbelief when I received a phone call from the secretary assigned to find Nelly's records. "You know, Mrs. Talen," she confided, "I just don't understand it. We can't find any records on Nelly from Dr. Beukema. I even called someone else in to help me look because I thought maybe I wasn't doing it right. But she agreed with me that there just aren't any records. We've mailed you a packet of what we have . . . but there's nothing at all from Dr. Beukema."

THE PARSONAGE

Thoughts of Nelly brought up childhood recollections which I had never, in my adult life, taken the time to consider: visions of the bum's chair on the front porch of the parsonage on Summer Street in Passaic, New Jersey.

It was a mission style chair, designed by Gustave Stickley, upholstered in black horsehair that would never wear out. We called it the bum's chair because the hobos sat there to eat my mother's food when they came to our kitchen door begging. Our house was close to the railroad tracks, next door to the red brick, Dutch, four-square Christian Reformed Church. The message was out among the tramps that my mom's homemade bread was stuffed with thick slabs of cheese and meat. She carefully arranged each sandwich on a plate with bread and butter pickles. She served it with a cup of coffee, a canned peach, and a cookie for dessert.

Sometimes I stood in the corner of the porch watching, nervously twisting my blond hair. As I gazed, I ventured close enough to see the grime that had collected under the bum's long uneven fingernails. I followed every sound, and every movement of their trembling hands: lifting bread to their hungry lips, coffee dribbling down their dirty beards, the snorting that accompanied their loose-toothed chewing. Afterward, I would catch the smell: the sweet mixture of booze and sweat that clung to the chair long after they had shuffled off. The slightest gesture or hint of conversation, ". . . come here little girl, let me see your pretty dress . . .," sent me scampering back to the safety of the living room.

"Why do we have to feed them?" my older brothers and sisters complained. "The chair smells and we can't even sit in it."

"We are the minister's family," my father exhorted. "We have to set an example."

Later, when he began to require work, splitting wood or raking the lawn in exchange for food, the traffic to our door slowed. Even in the desperation of 1932's depression in New Jersey, some men refused to work.

On Saturday mornings I had the special treat of walking with my father to the cigar store to buy a newspaper, cigars, and a candy cigar for me. We passed by old John Gunlag standing by his fish wagon, opening clams with one deft stroke of the knife. "How are you this morning?" my father called as we approached.

"Just fine, Reverend," he replied, his bright Dutch-blue eyes beaming with pleasure in his brown, weather-wrinkled face. John was one of my father's converts. Mother said, "He was just an old drunken sailor when Daddy began to talk to him about his eternal salvation."

Skipping along, I tried to match my small steps to my father's footsteps, insisting that my steps fit his exactly. "No, Emma, your legs are shorter," he told me decisively. I felt offended. But, after I was grown and wondering why the memory stuck I forgave him, rationalizing that he was only trying to instill some realism into my world.

Saturday evenings, after our weekly baths, we gathered around the piano. Father held me while he sang at the top of his lungs. Mother played the piano and the rest of us stumbled along, trying to read his latest penciled translation of a Dutch psalm or the hymn text he was trying out. He cheered us on with gusto. "What do you think, Mother?" he asked good naturedly, expecting only praise. Sometimes George brought out his violin, squeaking along slightly out of tune, while Nelly took her turn at the piano. Black eyes luminous, large, white-toothed smile set in her generous mouth, teenage Nelly either giggled or collapsed in tears if she stumbled on the notes. I curled up on the couch while my mother scolded, murmuring to herself, "I just don't understand that girl!"

Father preached three sermons every Sunday: two in English in the morning and evening, and one in Dutch in the afternoon. None could be repeated because some parishioners attended all three services. He preached to a difficult congregation whose

rigidity frustrated his poetic nature almost beyond bearing. The consistory, the men elected to be the ruling body of the church, paraded into the service together exactly three minutes before the minister. They stood firmly in their places, heads bowed in prayer, in spots designated by time: round areas of threadbare carpet, worn thin by a previous generation of praying men. At the proper moment, my father appeared in the pulpit dressed in the black, long-tailed preacher's coat he wore with black striped pants and black shoes topped with gray spats. His prematurely gray hair was carefully combed, but we knew that, during the excitement of preaching, stray locks would break loose to fall over his earnest blue eyes.

Our family, carefully costumed--boys in white shirts, ties, and jackets, and girls in dresses, hats, and gloves--sat in a pew near the front. We were always the objects of intense congregational scrutiny. Although she was a strict disciplinarian, my mother passed pink peppermints to us just before the long prayer to help us maintain our decorum. Because I was the youngest, I was allowed to amuse myself playing with the little tails and feet that dangled from her red fox stole.

After Sunday School it was not customary for us to shed our church clothes. They were worn all day, even though, by the end of the day, our patent leather shoes pinched and our homemade cotton underwear was often grass-stained.

We were welcomed home from church after the long morning by delicious smells of roast beef, onions, and potatoes. We sat down to Sunday dinner around a table grandly set with our best china. It was a weekly ritual, with no spills allowed. We were warned to respect the white linen table cloth. "Think of the hours of ironing for your mother," my father would say. Occasionally we had guests: a visiting minister or some other church dignitary. Then the children were quiet. We knew that if we tried to contribute to the conversation we would be questioned about the sermon.

During our Sunday afternoon I lay in bed listening to the boys of the neighborhood swear and argue over their baseball game. Much to my parents' dismay, they played every Sunday afternoon in the empty lot next to our house. My father admonished them about

their foul language. "You must not take the Lord's name in vain," he remonstrated, adding with finality, "Sunday is the Lord's day and you should not be playing ball. It is a day of rest!" His efforts seemed useless until one summer afternoon when their ball smashed through our leaded glass window. Then I watched my mother sweep up the glass beneath the window while a burly, sweaty player walked into the house--came right through the front door to retrieve his ball! "This is my property now," said my father as he resolutely stood his ground and kept the ball for a trophy. After that, I was allowed to hide in the bushes, where I waited with heart pounding to grab any balls that came our way. I was a five-year-old warrior for the Lord.

There were six children in our family. My oldest brother, John, was studying at Calvin College, a small liberal arts college run by our church's denomination in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Nelly and George were in high school at Eastern Academy in nearby Paterson. Florence, Harriet, and I attended Pine Street Christian grade school within walking distance of the parsonage. I was the youngest child in my class. At home, from his position of superiority, my brother George teased me mercilessly, and my older sisters called me glue. "Run--here comes glue," Nelly and Harriet cried as I approached to join their play. I turned to Florence, who never played with dolls. She kept pigeons with the neighbor boy. They talked endlessly about the "blue he" or the "blue she." Since I was a little afraid of pigeons, I would have rather played with Nelly and Harriet and their dolls.

My brief childhood in New Jersey was a prelude. Afterward, I grew up with different memories. My father--the central figure, the one who inspired us with his warm, poetic nature, who supported my mother even when she was demanding, nervous, and irritable, who calmed Nelly's outrageous adolescent fears, who stood as a go-between, who made us laugh and sing, who taught us to dream--was taken from us.

Little by little, when I was six, I came to understand that my father was dying. His seemingly robust health masked a fatal heart condition which rapidly sapped his strength. Upstairs, in his bedroom across the hall from mine, they drained the fluid from him and

rigged a grown-up potty chair. They gave him digitalis and sometimes opium to make him have wonderful dreams and to ease the pain. When he was well enough to talk, I crawled under the blankets and listened, transfixed, while he told me Bible stories.

The night he died, Nelly and George had gone to a high school party. A great moaning cry jarred me awake. It must have been my mother. I sat up in bed, feeling for Florence who slept beside me in the big brass double bed. I was alone. "Where can she be?" I thought, feeling a little sick and scared. I lay still, listening. Finally, hearing nothing, I covered my head with a pillow and went back to sleep.

In the morning, when I crept down the back kitchen stairs, the rest of the family had already assembled. My mother was sitting at the table. Her hair was neatly combed, she wore an apron, and the table was set. I shivered as she took me on her lap. "Don't go to the bathroom upstairs," she warned. "Your father has gone to be with the Lord. The undertaker is in there getting him ready so we can see him."

As we ate our breakfast of oatmeal and toast I told them, "I heard somebody crying and yelling last night."

My mother, trying to be brave, denied her outcry. "You were only dreaming," she assured me matter-of-factly. "Eat your breakfast, children," she said.

After our solemn meal we tramped silently up the front stairs, past the stained-glass window, to father's study at the end of the hall. Mother opened the door. We advanced cautiously toward the daybed where he lay. His eyes were closed and his hands had been carefully positioned over his heart. I hid my face in Mother's skirt until she picked me up and held me close. "Don't be afraid," she said. "See--he is so peaceful--just like he's sleeping." I clung to her trembling body and tried to look.

Mother took only John, Nelly, and George to Grand Rapids for the burial in a cemetery plot she purchased near her family home. Three weeks later, back in New Jersey, we celebrated our last Christmas in the parsonage sitting miserably together in the living room where the coffin had stood. Only I received a present, a pair of slippers from

some kind neighbor. Nelly cried all the time and my mother said, "What will I do with that girl? She's no help at all!"

In February the moving van came and we set off for Grand Rapids where mother had arranged to rent a house. We piled into our green Buick, stepping over the suitcases which George had carefully tied to the running boards. We cuddled under car robes in the back seat because the heater only worked in the front. John drove. I had to sit on someone's lap because it was a six passenger car and we were seven. I felt car sick until, at noon, we stopped in Utica for a bowl of chicken soup. Mother agreed that we could afford the expense of buying lunch. "Just this once," she said, "because this is where your father always stopped." The first night we stayed at the halfway point, my aunt Gertie's house in Rochester, NY.

The next day, somewhere in Canada, a box containing all of our Sunday shoes fell off the roof of the car. No one noticed until we arrived at our house in Grand Rapids. Then my mother was furious. "Didn't any of you hear it fall?" she scolded nobody in particular, desperate to blame someone for this terrible misfortune. But we could only stand there, stupid and miserable, unconcerned about our loss. From the driveway, under the street light, we peered fearfully at our new home. We walked into the cold, unwelcoming house. My mother and John went to the basement to turn on the water and to start a fire in the furnace. I ran around the empty rooms, up and down the stairs, trying to imagine which bedroom would be Florence's and mine.

Within weeks we had settled into our bedrooms and learned which place was ours at the kitchen table. I focused my attention on my new school where the kids in my first grade class teased me. "Where'd you get that New Joisey accent?" they sneered as I sat quiet and unhappy, trying not to be noticed, careful not to offend.

It was spring before I ventured out of my shell. I wandered down the block to the corner store, holding a dime for a loaf of bread. The grocer became my surrogate father. I told him about my sister, Nelly, who couldn't sleep and who cried all the time. "My

mother invited Agnes, her friend from New Jersey, to stay with us this summer," I confided. "She thinks that maybe Agnes can help Nelly get over crying about my father. And, of course," I sighed, feeling the weight of my news, "my mother still cries all the time too . . . in the basement while she's washing." The grocer seemed fascinated by my family's plight.

Mother's summer experiment with Agnes was a failure. At first we all made excuses for Nelly while we entertained Agnes. "Take Agnes along with you to the store," mother whispered as she shoved us out the door. We scolded Nelly when we thought Agnes would not hear. "How can you be so mean to her?" we asked peevishly. "She's your friend, not ours!" Nelly only wrung her hands as she sat on the backyard swing. She seemed pathetic, defenseless, torn between listlessly buffing her nails and wiping her brimming eyes. She said she hadn't slept for weeks.

Agnes went back to New Jersey as soon as it could be arranged and mother took Nelly to see a doctor at Pine Rest, a Christian psychiatric hospital in the area. It was an act of desperation. Doctors were a luxury we could not afford. And besides, everyone knew that a person had to be crazy to go to Pine Rest!

Sixty years later, standing at my kitchen desk perusing the mail, I opened the packet from Pine Rest that contained the doctor's summary of that visit. I was jolted back into the reality of 1934 when I read Nelly's sparse medical records. Dr. Mulder had written:

The patient was in to see me in 1934. This was shortly after her father's death. She then suffered from an acute anxiety which was greatly aggravated by the father's death.

THE DOCTORS

"The first thing I have to do is tell my brothers and sisters," I told Jerry as we sat over our breakfast coffee in Menomonie, Wisconsin. I was very nervous about informing them. Sex was a subject we never discussed, and the idea of bringing such an undesirable picture of our unmarried school teacher sister to their attention was daunting. I procrastinated.

Harriet and Florence took a trip to Michigan from their homes near Washington DC to help clean out Nelly's house. We kept in touch by telephone, talking about the furniture and about listing the house with a Realtor. But I said nothing about the abuse.

Finally, I decided to tell George. After John's death in 1983, and now Nelly's death eleven years later, he was the oldest of the four remaining siblings. I called Mary to tell her of my decision to tell my family.

"You're going to tell them?" she said doubtfully. "They're all so religious--so Christian Reformed."

"They've seen a lot of life," I answered.

As adults, only Harriet, my married sister, and Florence, a scholarly career woman, had lived close to each other. The rest of us kept in touch through occasional letters, and we met, as families do, at weddings and funerals. We camped together with George's family of six children one summer on a trip to Yellowstone Park, a trip that was a high point in the minds of all the cousins. But generally we led separate lives. Since our mother's death in 1954 the siblings had grown apart, but after John died suddenly of a heart attack, we resolved to see each other more often. We kept our promise, arranging in the last few years to have a brothers and sisters reunion at least once a year, usually at my cottage on Lake Michigan.

When I made the phone call to tell George, I tried to ease him into the subject gradually. We talked about the furniture items his grandchild wanted and the progress we

were making with the estate. I confided that Nelly had left a remarkable estate for a Christian school teacher. "She managed to save a lot of money," I said. "She was always very frugal, and, of course, she never traveled."

Then I blurted out, "I have to tell you something that will shock you. Are you sitting down? When Mary visited Nelly last Christmas, she revealed a secret that she had kept all of her life. She told Mary that Dr. Beukema had a sexual relationship with her for eight years while she was his patient at Pine Rest."

George is a very calm individual who thinks before he speaks. A physicist who worked for one company in one city during his entire career, he is a problem solver by nature. He approached the allegation with a scientist's caution, quietly questioning me about the details. "What exactly did Mary say?" he asked carefully.

I related all the details I knew. "I've been living in sort of a haze of shock," I continued. "I think about it all the time. Pine Rest couldn't find her records, so I even called Dr. Beukema's son, Jim, to ask if he might possibly have found something when he cleaned out his father's house. He said he knew his father would never have left anything like that lying around the house. He told me to ask Pine Rest for the records." Thinking about the phone conversation, I laughed. "I didn't tell him that I had already been to Pine Rest," I said.

George listened in silence as I explained that I thought I should write to the staff psychiatrist who had treated Nelly recently at Pine Rest, and that I planned to return to Michigan soon. I said I would also try to make an appointment to see Nelly's heart doctor. Before we hung up we had agreed that he would tell Harriet and Florence when he had a chance to see them. He thought it was not something he could talk about on the phone. I composed the letter to Dr. Hardee, Nelly's recent psychiatrist at Pine Rest:

I am writing to you about my sister, Nelly Kuipers,
who was under your treatment at the time of her death on
January 25, 1994. I imagine that by this time you have

closed her case. However, for the family, her case lives on because of the new perspectives we have gained since we learned of the abuse she suffered while she was a patient at Pine Rest, and later, as an outpatient.

We are burdened by our knowledge. We feel an obligation to somehow instruct the board of directors, or someone in authority at Pine Rest, that our sister's tragedy happened in their hospital, under the very noses of all of us: unsuspecting nurses, doctors, family members, and friends.

As Nelly's personal representative I have requested her medical records. I have been told that there are no progress notes by Dr. Beukema, even though Dr. Baker's discharge note of July 16, 1957 states:

For the last five years she has been seen in psychotherapy with Dr. Beukema and during this time made a very gradual but definite response in that she improved considerably.

It is incomprehensible to the family that this doctor left no records. And we wonder if all of Dr. Beukema's records are missing.

I am writing to you because I am not sure which forum should hear our complaints. How can we get the matter before the proper authorities without compromising confidentiality? At this time the family is not contemplating litigation or exposure of the doctor.

Dr. Hardee did not answer my letter. As I waited for a response, I worried about the reference I had made to litigation. I knew it would be seen as a veiled threat. Relief came when I received a phone call from the hospital.

“Dr. Sider, the hospital’s administrative director would like to visit with you anytime that is convenient for you,” cooed the smooth-voiced man who identified himself as the resource director. We agreed to meet on a day in May when I would be in the vicinity at my cottage.

I unlocked the gate and drove into the road leading to our cottage with the feelings of anticipation that I always have when coming back to Lake Michigan for the first time in the spring. Our place is isolated from the highway by a dirt and gravel road that winds through the woods for over a mile. Tall trees tower on either side of the trail: hemlock, birch, maple, and oak, some eighty feet tall. I arrived in the early evening, cautiously avoiding the potholes along the way. A deer jumped out, crossing my path. Weary after my long trip from Wisconsin, I was refreshed and thrilled by the sight.

Mary was with me when I first walked this road ten years earlier, looking for property to buy in the vicinity of Grand Rapids where I grew up. We said that it felt like we were in a cathedral. The same sense of wonder came over me as I crossed the ravine and approached the cottage that Jerry and I had built, perched high on a dune overlooking the lake. I stopped to admire the trillium still in bloom in the protected part of the woods under our bridge. Some had turned pink in their old age. I was alone because most cottagers come on weekends. I loved the isolation, the feeling of being there all by myself, of having time to think and read. Later, I walked along the beach, digging my bare feet into the sand, savoring the clean fresh air. I slept that night lulled by the sound of breaking waves.

The next morning my mood changed when I arrived in Grand Rapids with appointments to keep, far removed from the spell of lake and dunes. I drove straight to

Butterworth Hospital, the scene of the hysterectomy. In less than forty-five minutes I was sitting in the coffee shop with a table full of documents spread out before me. Getting them had been easy--only a form to fill out and a signature. In five minutes I had them in my hands. I flipped through the most recent account: about Nelly's emergency room visit only last August for "left arm numbness and left facial droop." I read a thick file about her two weeks in the hospital after her heart attack in 1984, and a case history of her fall on the ice that resulted in a broken wrist in 1989. The oldest material, documenting the hysterectomy in 1961, was of the most interest to me. I scoured it for some indication of wrongdoing, for any reference to a fetus buried among the fibroid tumors. But nothing appeared that would give even the slightest support to my suspicions. The most impressive thing about the records was their thoroughness: the sheer weight of the paper, the number of pages, and the quality and quantity of the supporting text.

I took a short walk across the street to find the office of the heart specialist in whom Nelly had first confided. I was chastened by my review of the Butterworth records. Perhaps Dr. Beukema was innocent and Nelly had been fantasizing all of these years. I began to consider that possibility as I waited for the doctor. I told myself to be objective and hard-headed when I questioned him.

"First let me offer my condolences," said Dr. Rasikas. "Nelly was a lovely lady and I will miss her very much."

I asked questions about Nelly's heart condition, her tension, and her recent depression before I got to the object of my visit. "I am aware of Nelly's allegations of sexual abuse," I said. "She told my daughter before she died."

"You will find nothing in my records about that," he answered quickly. "She asked me not to write anything down and I complied with her wishes."

"Did you believe her?"

"Of course. There was no reason to doubt her word."

"So. . . you don't think she made it up? You think it really happened?"

“Yes, I do. I advised her to go back to Pine Rest to tell a psychiatrist. And, I believe she did that.”

Dr. Rasikas seemed sympathetic, even sorry for me as I said good-bye, thanking him for his time. After a hasty lunch in a hotel, I retreated to the cottage to prepare for the next day’s meeting at Pine Rest.

I made myself comfortable in a lounge chair on the deck overlooking Lake Michigan to study the few medical records I had received from Pine Rest. I read the details with great care. There were only four pages to record Nelly’s eleven years of treatment at the hospital. The first page contained statistical data: name, birthdate, occupation, the diagnosis: No.16 (whatever that meant). Group: manic depressive psychoses. I understood that. Reading along I confirmed my belief that Nelly had been there for eleven years, having been admitted in 1946 and discharged in 1957.

A narrative about Nelly began on page two. Its three paragraphs were written by Dr. Mulder. Page three contained only one paragraph: the discharge note, dated 7-16-57. It was signed by a Dr. Baker, a name I did not recall.

Sadness overwhelmed me as I read page four, entitled *Special Procedures*. The date column listed a period of time between 1946 and 1951. The procedure was *electric shock*.. And the result of the fifteen treatments was noted as *good convulsions*.

Later, on the phone, I told Jerry, “I feel betrayed. It is a scandal to have only four brief paragraphs to summarize Nelly’s eleven years of suffering.” Then my anger boiled over as I cried, “Who was in charge of the doctors? I thought Pine Rest was accredited.”

The following noon I took the time to dress carefully for the two o’clock appointment at Pine Rest. I wore my bright pink silk pantsuit, with a white silk blouse and my best pearl earrings. I donned nylons and light taupe shoes with high heels. I applied eye-liner, blush, and lipstick that matched the pink of my suit. My hair had been cropped short for the summer, tipped blond to hide its natural drab-blond color which was increasingly, I noticed, streaked with gray. I was determined to come to the meeting with

as much clout as I could muster. "I don't want them to think that I'm someone who can be easily intimidated," I told my reflection in the mirror.

On the drive into town I thought about what I would say to the doctor. I talked to myself out loud in the car, rehearsing different scenarios. I wanted most to hear the doctor say that he would help me find out what happened to Nelly; that he would work to restore her files; that someone at the hospital would confer importance on the years she had spent with them. I wanted support, backing, advice; I wanted whatever he could give me to relieve the dread that I felt every time I remembered Nelly. "Please, God. Help me find out what happened to her," I prayed as I drove along.

When I arrived in the lobby, a good looking, well dressed young man carrying a briefcase approached me. "Are you Mrs. Talen?" he asked. He offered the information that he was an attorney and that he would be joining our meeting.

"Why are they having an attorney?" I asked, annoyed by his presence, and, in spite of my resolve--intimidated.

We chatted as we stood together in the lobby. "Are you the Talen from the bank in Wisconsin?" he inquired.

"Yes, that's right," I replied, searching for some connection.

"I think I did some legal work on your bank holding company," he said, bringing up the memory for me. Then he added, "Now my firm represents Pine Rest."

I cut him off quickly. "Well, I'm not comfortable having you here, and I'm not sure I'll stay!" I fairly hissed at him under my breath as a secretary ushered us into a conference room. All of my preconceived ideas about gaining support from the hospital and the doctors had been dashed by his unwelcome appearance. I assumed now that we would be adversaries. I hated the idea that he knew about the bank.

Dr. Sider, the hospital's administrator, presided. He briskly introduced himself and Mr. Van Zoeren, the resource director, as we took our seats around the long oval table.

My new attorney acquaintance was uncomfortable. He immediately told them that I was unhappy with his presence. "But," he explained, "I am simply here in an advisory capacity." In an effort at appeasement, he promised that he would not take notes. With a nod of my head I gave grudging consent.

Shaken from the very start, I was thankful for my written agenda. I plunged in, nervously clearing my throat as I began to speak. "I represent the family," I said, as I carefully named each one of my siblings. Still searching for more authority, I meticulously added the "Doctor" title to George and Florence's credentials. I told them about my father, my widowed mother, and about Nelly's long battle with depression.

Dr. Sider seemed restive, eager to get to the point. I sensed that he had no particular interest in learning about my family. He said, "Well, while I'm very sorry for your family, this was all so long ago."

"Some of this happened last year," I said, "when Nelly came to tell you her secret."

I turned back to my written agenda, listing three major complaints I had devised from the information I received in the medical records, "1) Dr. Beukema left no record of his five years of psychotherapy with Nelly between 1952 and 1957, or of his more than twenty years of treatment of her as an outpatient at the hospital following her discharge in 1957. 2) The other doctor's recent response was inadequate. There is no record that the doctors attempted to find the root cause of what they called a "personality disorder" when Nelly came to tell them her story. I told them that Mary, a professional in the field, was very upset about the diagnosis because, in her opinion, Nelly did not fit the criteria for that diagnosis. 3) The doctors initiated no search of her records and did not attempt to treat the abuse, although the records show they believed that she had been abused by her psychiatrist."

Having found my voice, I abandoned my notes and pronounced, "I think they should have looked up her records, and, when they found nothing, alarm bells should have been ringing all over the hospital about this case."

Dr. Sider sat up straight in his chair. Waving his arms in my direction, he interrupted, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. Am I missing something? What is she talking about?"

The attorney threw a copy of the few pages of her medical record on the table. He slid the thin packet down toward Sider. "She thinks the doctors should have looked up her records and should have reported this to you," he answered. Then, muttering under his breath he added, "She may have a legitimate complaint."

"Tell me, Dr. Sider. When did you first learn about this case?" I asked.

"Well, there was this letter. I suppose it was from you."

"That's just my point. It took my initiative to bring this matter to your attention. If our family had not decided to write, nothing would have been done. Nelly died, and the case was conveniently closed." I realized now that some latent anger from deep within me had been triggered. My tone was increasingly bitter as I asked if the board of directors had been informed and, "Who is the hospital's accrediting agent?"

Dr. Sider immediately became more conciliatory. "Well, perhaps that should be done. On second thought," he said, springing up from his chair as if the idea had just hit him, ". . . in fact, I believe I will recommend that the board be informed of a complaint. With no names, of course," he said hastily. I agreed, adding that the family might also have other remedies in mind.

The meeting lasted more than an hour. Dr. Sider made other attempts to squelch me with assertions that often the doctor is the innocent victim, and that it really was too late to conduct an investigation, repeating his theme that it all happened so long ago.

"He's getting my goat," I thought as I watched him try to put me off. When I got up to leave, they all rose to shake my hand. But I felt they had no further need of me.

Back at home I composed a letter to George describing the meeting in detail:

I don't like their assertion that keeping no records was standard procedure in the '50s. Also, I am troubled

because there was no acknowledgment of Pine Rest's obligation to prevent this in the future.

I think we should meet again, and bring our own legal counsel. In any case, I wouldn't want to go back there alone.

MOTHER

My mother's first name was Romktje, a common Dutch name, handed down from several previous generations of female Romktje's or male Romke's. At school in Grand Rapids, with English-speaking American classmates, her name was an embarrassment. Finally an aunt took pity, instructing the family, "Now dat ve are in America she'll haf to haf a diff'rent name. I tink it would be better to use von of de names of de queen of Hollant herself. Ve'll call her Emma from now on."

Emma was a talented young woman. Because she was the oldest girl in a large family of brothers and sisters she was expected to do much of the family's household work while her parents made a living in their corner grocery store. Along with most girls of her generation, she quit school after completing the eighth grade. She found a job sewing at the Martins, a rich manufacturing family in Grand Rapids. Blossoming under Mrs. Martin's tutelage, she mastered most of the fine points of managing a wealthy household. She learned how to set the table properly with linen, china and silver, and how to entertain guests. Then, arriving home, she slaved in her own kitchen and laundry until she dropped in exhaustion each evening, only to repeat the pattern the next day, beginning at dawn. Later she told me that she thought her health was broken when she was very young. "They shouldn't have let me do it," she exclaimed.

Emma had ambitions for herself. By the time she was nineteen she had saved enough money to buy a piano. She bought it with the money she made selling her exquisite sewing to an ever-expanding list of customers, mostly Mrs. Martin's friends. The piano was her pride and joy. Because there was no money for lessons, she taught herself to play. She was known among her friends for her lovely soprano voice, her piano, and for the dresses and hats which she skillfully designed and sewed for herself and others. Pictured in our family album as a young lady, she stood on the lawn in a long white dress surrounded by look-alike girl-friends, all with smiling faces. Their hair was

piled up Gibson-girl style on their heads. Lithe, radiant, corseted figures, they formed a chorus line of virgin-white propriety.

Dux was my father William's nickname at Calvin College and Seminary where he was studying for the ministry. In class pictures he was the debonair figure clowning with his friends or puffing insolently on a long cigar. Although not as good looking as some of Emma's other suitors, he was the most flamboyant--Emma found him interesting. He was known as the class poet. His letters to her were resplendent with rhymes and sonnets to her beauty. In comparison, all other suitors seemed dull, of no particular interest. Their engagement lasted six years because Dux was judged by his teachers to be too immature to graduate from the seminary. His poem, dedicated to Emma, entitled "Dreamy Eyes," and set to music by a friend, had unexpectedly found fame at a local bar. The drinking clientele joyfully sang his sentimental lyrics:

When nothing in this world will cheer nor give my heart
delight. When sorrows seem to gather round like shadows
of the night. There's only one thing, darling dear, that gives
me hope anew. They are those pretty dreamy eyes, those
dreamy eyes of you!

For such worldly sentiments, Dux spent an extra year in the seminary and Emma stayed at home caring for her youngest brother Martin, recently born to her mother who was nearly fifty years old.

After their marriage, during her years with William, Emma was proud of her position as the respected "frou" of a "dominee". In our Dutch Frisian society both the minister and his wife were regarded as something akin to royalty. My father always refused to hold his babies in public because the social structure of our Calvinist community did not allow such mundane behavior for spiritual leaders. William and Emma had lived in four parsonages and spent twenty years raising their six children before my father became ill in New Jersey. I grew up confident that theirs was a happy marriage. Emma was

always fiercely supportive of William's tendency to jump into denominational controversy and preach his conscience, and William good-naturedly went along with Emma's perfectionism about the house and the children. He loved people, so while he lived their home was an entertainment hub for his parishioners and friends.

After his death Emma rarely had guests. "It's so much work," she complained.

Following our move back to her hometown, Grand Rapids, my mother's standard comment to anyone who came to our door begging, soliciting, or selling was, "I am a widow with six children. I cannot help you!" We were struggling to survive financially as well as emotionally. To my mother the loss of our Sunday shoes had been a great calamity. How could we maintain our public posture as the minister's family without Sunday shoes?

Within a year after our move my mother was so worried about paying the bills that she decided to take steps to improve our position. First, she looked for another house to rent: a bigger house where we could keep boarders. Another step, more onerous, was an appeal to our local church for help in paying our Christian school tuition. It was an indignity she faced stoically, but with distress as she realized that she had been reduced to begging for money. One day, unable to resolve her dilemma, she put on her best dress, carefully combed her hair and powdered her face, and then walked off, purse swinging from her arm, resigned to her fate.

The presiding minister had known both William and Emma during their courtship days. But the Emma who stood before him now, tense and trembling, was not the Emma he had known. She sat erect trying to hide her dishwasher-hardened hands. Her eyes had a faded ice-blue quality, her mouth was tight with strain, her fine, blond hair was pulled back in a bun. "What can I do for you, Emma," he said kindly. "How are you and the children getting along?"

From her position, sitting straight arrow on the edge of her chair, my mother described her situation. "I simply cannot pay the tuition for all the children to attend

Christian schools," she said. "With John still in college, it's impossible to make ends meet on my minister's pension and the small insurance policy Dux bought before he died."

The minister was sympathetic. "No, it wouldn't be right for them to go to the public school," he said. The thought of one of their minister's widows entrusting her children to public education was unthinkable to both of them. He knew he would have to do something.

After the ordeal, as soon as she returned home, my mother went to her bedroom to take off her corset and her good velvet dress. She put on a cotton house dress and her old slippers. It had been a cold five block walk home from the church and she was chilled to the bone. I watched her sit by the kitchen table thinking it over. She made herself a cup of tea and ate a cookie. I ate a cookie too with her, for comfort.

Some weeks later we learned that our problem was solved, at least temporarily. The elders of the church had quietly arranged to pay our tuition.

After school had recessed for the summer, we moved to the house at 925 Franklin Street. My mother's brothers from Detroit came to help us. Uncle Herman, an enormously fat and jolly man, had a truck because he was in the house construction business. Mother told us that in the worst days of the depression he bought bags of potatoes to feed all of the Detroit relatives, including Uncle John's sixteen children. He always seemed to have money and he was very generous to Emma, his favorite sister.

The house, which was destined to be my growing up home, was big and square with oak floors, four large upstairs bedrooms, and a porch that stretched all the way across the front. It's location was ideal, allowing us to walk to school in all directions: six blocks south to grade school, eight blocks west to high school, and six blocks east to Calvin College. We were only a short walk from my Grampa and Gramma's store, and about as far from our church. The neighborhood was populated by the Dutch Calvinist immigrants who had established the schools and churches we attended.

Mother said that Nelly was allowed to choose which bedroom would be hers and Harriet's, because she was the oldest girl in the family. Nelly had started her freshman year at Calvin College. Many of her old girlfriends from Eastern Academy in New Jersey were in her class. She took the big bedroom: the one with the clothes chute, the door opening to the attic steps, and another door opening onto a sun deck over the garage. Florence and I were across the hall in a smaller room fronting on Franklin street. George took the other front bedroom which he would soon share with a boarder because John was going to attend graduate school in Ann Arbor. John had a scholarship. He told me he was going to be a chemist. I worshipped my oldest brother, coming and going as he did in my life, reading me bedtime stories and buying me books to start my own library, but never staying long enough to be a part of our daily squabbles.

The house had an attic that was big enough to hold all of my mother's clothes lines hung with our voluminous washing in the winter. To me the outstanding feature of the house was the clothes chute which started in Nelly and Harriet's bedroom. We delighted in sending our laundry tumbling to the basement through its cavernous belly. The chute was so big that when George said, "I dare you to go down it," I started in with a bed sheet.

I was about to descend when my mother came screaming to pull me back unharmed. "Emma, if you ever try that again I'll give you a sound spanking," she warned, shaking me and pinching my arm for good measure.

George smirked at me from the hallway. "He never gets the blame for anything," I sulked. But, deep down, I was pleased to have George's attention.

My mother's standards of cleanliness were a combination of her own perfectionism and the rigid rules imposed by our Dutch society. "In the old country," she told me "Dutch housewives even scrub their outside steps with Fels Naptha soap and water." Fels Naptha soap was also a favorite remedy for washing out children's mouths. I was threatened many times, ". . . if you say that word again I'll wash out your mouth with soap and

water." But it never happened. The prospect of having Fels Naptha soap--brownish yellow, hard, and smelling heavily of disinfectant in my mouth--was warning enough.

Our life took on a new rhythm in the house on Franklin street, a rhythm dictated by our school life and by my mother's housework schedule.

Mondays were devoted to the washing. Mother got up early. She went directly to the basement to poke up the dying coal embers in the furnace and to light the gas burner under the large, oval copper clothes boiler. She filled the boiler, carrying and dumping pail after pail of water from the faucet in the laundry tub. After she had sliced a whole bar of Fels Naptha soap into the water I was allowed to stir it around with a long wooden stick. I watched it melt with interest, fascinated by the whole process--from sorting the clothes to hanging them on the line.

Everything was washed in the same water. Sheets and other white clothing were boiled first, then put into the washing machine and finally rinsed in the laundry tubs. After the whites, the colored loads were washed and rinsed, ending with anything black, brown, or navy blue. It was hard work. The heavy, dripping clothes were lifted from the boiler with the wooden stirring stick. Each part of the process required more lifting, until, in the final step, the clothes were laboriously fed through a hand-operated wringer into a big wicker basket. We were usually seated around the kitchen table eating our breakfast when the first call came from the basement, "It's time to carry up the basket!"

I was too young to be expected to help. Nelly, George, Florence, and Harriet took turns, but not without the inevitable argument about whose turn it was. "Nelly always gets out of it because she has anemia or something," I complained. I felt sorry for Florence who never grumbled about all of her extra turns. In the summer the basket only went up one flight because then it was brought through the kitchen side door to be hung in the back yard. But in the winter the task required a back-breaking struggle up three flights of stairs. "Let's rest," I heard them gasp as they stood panting between flights on their way to the attic.

All day Tuesday was devoted to ironing. If the washing dried in a good wind on Monday, it was brought in by late afternoon to be folded, sprinkled, and starched for ironing the next morning. While we were in school mother worked her way through the rolls of sheets, pillowcases, shirts, blouses, and dresses. After school the girls took over. Very early I learned to do the hankies. In the end, my sisters and I learned to iron all of our own clothes and our brothers' shirts and pants as well. It wasn't fair, so we complained loudly, "Why can't George learn to iron?"

"He has other work," my mother maintained, staunchly defending his male prerogative. The girls bore the brunt of the housework but we also helped George with the "man's work." In winter we shoveled coal and piled wood. In summer we mowed the lawn and trimmed the hated spirea bushes which grew untamed in front of the porch. We even changed the flat tires on the blue Chevy my mother bought to replace the old Buick.

Each week we completed our six days of labor with a mixture of pride and resignation, aware that no amount of protest would change the routine of our assigned duties: upstairs cleaning on Thursday, downstairs cleaning on Friday, and kitchen work such as soup making and baking on Saturday. Mother reserved Wednesday for shopping, sewing, and morning coffee with Grandma Batts and the Aunties, a mid-week respite. All week the routine advanced relentlessly forward, only winding down to the approaching Sabbath after we had finished our Saturday lunch of soup and crackers. Then the house was clean and filled with the good smells of baking. Mother's pies and cakes stood ready to be eaten. It was a favorite time, especially in the summer, when we met on the front porch to swing and talk or read a book.

Mother said, "If I didn't have all that work I don't think I would have survived." She considered her slavery a blessing given to her by God, a loving nudge from the Lord to help her get over her grief.

Each morning she awoke very early and as she lay in bed waiting for the dawn, she schemed and connived her way through the day. The milkman would demand payment

because it was Friday, but she would argue because she knew his tally would not match hers. She had jotted her precise figures down on a small card which she kept on top of the icebox next to the side door. There she would confront him as he started up the steps with his metal basket containing our six bottles of milk. She knew she would win the argument because his records were not as accurate as hers. After he had run off, having given her the exact amount of change she demanded from the purse on his belt, we put the milk in the icebox. Later, when we used a bottle, we removed the paper cap with great care so we would not disturb the cream on top. That delectable, thick liquid was carefully poured off, reserved for whipping cream, or for use on bread and strawberries when berries were in season.

Mother's meals were a triumph of frugality and good nutrition. She fed us a breakfast of cereal, toast and jam, boiled eggs, fruit juice (or her home-canned tomato juice), and sometimes even fried bacon and eggs which would last us all morning. At noon we hurried six blocks home for lunch where she had prepared soup, sandwiches, fruit, and milk. After school a snack was waiting: cookies or left-over cake and pie. Dinner was her greatest challenge. The roast we had on Sunday provided enough meat to make another meal or two, but only if it was combined with great heaps of fried potatoes. When John Feikens, our new boarder, wanted to impress Mother with his prayer after the meal, he pompously thanked God for the "bounteous repast" we had just enjoyed. Visions of small scraps of meat hidden among the potatoes inspired irreverent giggles as we sat at the table with bowed heads, our stomachs bulging uncomfortably with potatoes.

I was assigned the task of walking the two blocks to Pastoor's meat market every Thursday to buy our meat for dinner. Mother pressed the exact change for the purchase into my hand with instructions not to lose it. Each week I was sent to buy the same thing: 1/2 lb. of veal and 1/2 lb. of pork steak, ground together. Mother combined the meat with plenty of white soda crackers, an egg, an onion, and enough milk to moisten the mixture. She skillfully formed the shapeless blob into a meat loaf with her bare hands, and then

lovingly created a design on top with a fork. At dinner, under the scrutiny of our hungry eyes, she carefully cut the pieces: larger slices for George and John, a small piece for Nelly who didn't like it anyway, and usually only a half portion for herself and me.

We were never allowed to leave even the smallest morsel of food on our plate because wasting food was a sin. Our personal likes and dislikes were beside the point. Food was something for which to be thankful. "Think of all the starving people in India," was the admonition Mother commonly used to urge us to clean our plates. Even a penny spent on a frivolity such as candy had to be justified--because every cent counted. My best friend, Mary Jo, who went with me on most of my trips to the store, was along on the day when the butcher would not give me my package of meat for the lack of a penny.

We stood together watching Mr. Pastoor behind the meat counter, his white apron stained with blood, performing his usual routine of grinding the meat, weighing it, and wrapping it up in white paper. He liked to kid us about our boyfriends, and we considered him a friend, even though he was an adult. Mary Jo looked at me in disbelief when his face became stern as he counted, and then, rejected the thirty-three cents I shoved forward. "It was always enough before," I said backing away as I grabbed Mary Jo's hand. We ran out the door together, loudly protesting the injustice all the way home. Then I argued in vain with Mother to give me a few more pennies when we returned--just in case they were needed. But she refused, allowing only the one additional cent the butcher said we owed.

After the argument we trudged back to the meat market, furious at both my mother and Mr. Pastoor, who looked surprised and grinned sheepishly when we stepped forward with the penny. As I placed it triumphantly before him on the counter he said in his usual joking way, "Girls, didn't you know I was only kidding? I didn't really mean it. Keep the penny and buy yourselves some candy."

I solemnly picked up the package of meat and the penny and backed away, easing toward the door. Didn't Mr. Pastoor know that he had stabbed me right in the heart? Didn't he know that he had humiliated me in front of Mary Jo? That now she knew how

much a penny meant in our family? We bought a tootsie roll at the drug store and I tried to be very nonchalant as we each took half. But, inwardly, I vowed to never forgive him. We skipped along home hurrying to eat the sinful, chewy treat before we got there.

In spite of Mother's valiant efforts to feed us well, we were all very thin--especially Nelly. She only picked at her food while we urged her to eat more. Although she had recovered from her excessive crying about my father, Nelly's health was a constant, nagging worry, so that, eventually, Mother used some of her carefully hoarded funds for a visit to another doctor. This doctor said that Nelly needed iron because she had anemia. He gave her some pills, and recommended feeding the whole family liver at least once a week. Liver soon became one of our most dreaded meals. We protested every time it was served. One night, at dinner, Harriet refused to eat her portion.

Harriet, who we all agreed was the prettiest of the girls, had what Mother called "a mind of her own." Her determination was surprising, cloaked as it was in her Judy Garland face with large, innocent-looking blue eyes, a cute pug nose, and a full-lipped smile. There was a legend in the family about her stubborn refusal, when she was four, to say her prayers which had led to a stand-off, missed meals, and an early bedtime. "It lasted until the next morning when Daddy held her over an open register to scare her into praying so she wouldn't go down to hell," whispered Nelly, who knew all about it. Harriet later claimed that the incident, with its enduring memories of the bottomless pit through which she might have plunged into the fiery furnace below, scarred her for life.

Now, Harriet had resolutely set her mind once again, this time against liver. She sat by the table long after the meal was over while the piece of liver on her plate grew cold and even more disgusting. At last, with great effort, she took one bite. She began to gag as she tried to chew and swallow the grizzly wad. The dishes were cleared and washed. Mother gave strict orders that she should not leave her chair until the liver was gone. Family members, trying to ignore the dispute, went off to other rooms of the house while Harriet remained at her place. Hours went by and darkness settled slowly over the kitchen.

At last, when Harriet put her comely head down on the table and fell asleep, Mother sent her up to bed.

Afterward, liver as a palliative was abandoned and Mother filled us up, instead, with macaroni and tomatoes, or rice and tomatoes: bland, comforting meals. Even Nelly loved those dinners, eagerly anticipating them when she walked into the house and smelled the aroma of our home-canned tomatoes baking in simple combination with pasta or rice.

Mother's frugality was not confined to food alone. She also managed to sew all of our clothes. She reshaped my father's coats and suits into outfits for John and George. She made dresses for all of the girls out of seemingly unusable scraps of material. Most of the time we were ungrateful, complaining that we did not like the style or color. The outfit that I hated most was the snowpants she fashioned for me from my father's black preacher's coat. "The material is too good to throw away," she told me with a steely look that closed the argument. The pants, made from the coat's wool gabardine material, were hard, inflexible, and uncomfortable. I was often cold when I wore them because they absorbed water and grew heavy in snow, like a wet shroud around my legs. Wearing them, I was weighed down by memories of my dead father and by the responsibility of having to accept these snowpants as mine, without protest.

Mother demanded excellence from everyone, including herself. Never one to pamper anyone, all of her talents and concerns were focused on her house and children. Of the children, Nelly required and received the most attention. She wondered if the doctor was right about Nelly's anemia. She fretted because she did not understand Nelly's failure to accept the proper responsibilities of the oldest daughter in the family--duties that she had performed without complaint in her own girlhood. Why, when William died had Nelly, at seventeen, just started to menstruate? Why, two years later, was she still having difficulty? Why was she always complaining of cramps? And why were her periods so irregular? Why was she such a giddy, argumentative, and uncooperative daughter? Sometimes she thought that Nelly's physical problems were only the product of the girl's too lively

imagination. She realized that the aggravation she felt which led to their constant bickering was bad for them both, but she could not fix the problem. She had lost the perspective William's warm presence had given her. The balance in the family had shifted to the single, intense focus of her own lonely insight which often proved inadequate when dealing with Nelly.

Although we children knew that Nelly severely tested Mother's patience, we were too young and unthinking to realize the state of Mother's health. "What's wrong with your eye?" we commented callously when she appeared at the breakfast table in the morning with a hideously bloodshot eye. "Look how your cup is shaking," we said in wonder when she could not calm the tremor in her hand. And some mornings, when she could not get up at all, we went off to school, leaving her alone in bed. On the way to school I reported to Mary Jo, "Mother is having another one of her spells."

One evening, after George had driven her home from the dentist where that day she had all of her lower teeth pulled, Mother sat at the kitchen table in her bathrobe, weak and forlorn, spitting blood into a basin while at the same time she tried to instruct us about serving dinner. Suddenly, she began to cry. "Oh, mother, help me," she moaned. She slumped over, her head rolled backward, and her arms fell limply to her sides. Florence and Harriet sprang to each side of her chair to keep her from falling. Nelly stood transfixed. "Maybe she's having a heart attack," we gasped.

I jumped up in panic. I ran out of the house to find my tricycle, a conveyance which, in spite of its large front wheel, I had long since outgrown. I began to pedal blindly across busy Franklin Street, down Kalamazoo Avenue, towards my Aunt Louise's house. "My mother is dying," I cried out loud, sobbing as I strained to pump faster. "I have to get help. Oh, I wish we had a telephone!"

After Aunt Louise heard my hysterical message, she quickly sent her husband to help, but when he got there George had already brought Mother back to the dentist who grumbled as he reached into her mouth and tied the vein to stop the bleeding. "Why didn't

you tell me that a woman was bleeding to death?" he scolded George while Mother screamed in pain.

Mary Jo told me that the neighbors were talking about us. "My mother says," she whispered "that they are all sorry for you, because they think you will soon be a family of orphans. The minister says he doesn't think your mother is going to live very long. And then, what will you do?"

Early that summer Uncle Martin, my mother's youngest brother who was a doctor completing his residency at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, came over to take Mother's blood pressure. He brought his big, portable blood pressure machine into the living room. We watched, fascinated, as he told her to relax. Then we saw his look of dismay when the pressure meter shot up almost to the top. "This is no good, Emma," he said, taking the situation over. "I'm going to have to get you to the clinic".

"How can I possibly do that?" Mother cried.

But Uncle Martin was firm. "Don't worry," he said. "We'll manage it somehow."

So Mother was sent off to Mayo's, and we children were left alone to fend for ourselves. We tried to get along. We wrote down a schedule for cooking and cleaning. Grandma did our washing. Nelly was supposed to be the boss, but it didn't work out that way. Instead, we floated through the days, each one of us girls coping with her own schedule, alone and unattended. George was in a college world of his own working off his tuition at Calvin with a landscaping job. No one seemed to notice that I slept over at Mary Jo's house often. Since her mother was frequently out visiting friends, we listened to the Lone Ranger radio program, an entertainment which would have been strictly forbidden if my mother had been home.

Three weeks later, when Mother came home, she was pale and thin. Grandma said, "She will have to be flat down in bed for another three months." Family members whispered together about her high blood pressure, her sympathetic nervous system which was "shot," and the diagnosis that she had, at best, only ten more years to live.

FAMILY SECRETS

Mary Jo became my best friend the day our fourth grade teacher leaned over my desk and whispered to me so the others wouldn't hear. "See the girl sitting at the end of the row? She lives near you. I hope you will walk home with her. Be nice to her--you know how hard it is to be new."

Mary Jo was a strawberry blond, with thick eyelashes that matched her light reddish hair, green eyes, freckles, and a nose that ended in a little round ball. She was the brightest student in our class: the one who could play Mendelssohn's Italian Concerto on the piano by the time we were in the seventh grade. Without a hope of formal lessons, I could not play a note, even though I often sat at my mother's piano trying to figure out how the notes matched up with the keys. I watched and listened while Mary Jo practiced. She tried to help by teaching me to play the first few measures of Beethoven's *Fur Elise*. But I was a careless and impatient pupil. At last, in exasperation, she taught me something easier and less classical, something that sounded like an Indian war dance which I pounded out with gusto every time I found a piano within range.

We two were inseparable friends. When it was time to start out for school, we signaled to each other with a shrieking cry, "Kee-o-wheet," which started and ended high in our sinuses. Our shrill call was usually yelled from a stance one of us took on a street corner halfway between our houses. The strange outcry continued to be our special signal until we were in college. All of our friends knew the scream, but no one else used it. Later, Mother asked, "Are you still doing that? Haven't you outgrown that cat-call yet?" She shook her head in disapproval because we were too old for such indignities.

When Mary Jo and I had a disagreement our entire class at school was involved. Our fights split them into a two-party camp of such vicious debate that even the teachers knew about our quarrels. As class leaders we each came to school early to recruit our supporters with arguments to bolster one side or the other of our debate. Mary Jo's father

had died in 1934 from the lingering effects of mustard gas in WW I. So we often argued about our fathers. Whose heroism was superior--a warrior for his country or for the Lord? I had religion on my side, but Mary Jo had a way of putting my father down that infuriated me. She could make me cry.

But she could not make me laugh. No one could make me laugh. Our group of friends had a game we sometimes played to make each other giggle. I was the one who could remain sober, no matter what! I stood with my face like a stone while they tickled me under my arms. They never knew why I could not be made to laugh or understood the reason why I refused to give in. How could they know that inside I simply focused my mind on my mantra? *My father died and my mother is dying.* Nobody could disturb the mythical power of that sentence. It was a secret I kept even from Mary Jo. In the calm center of my child's mind, under the laughter, there was a space, a deadly serious space saved for my family's sorrow.

However, as Mother's health improved, our family life gradually settled into a more comfortable routine. John Feikens, our boarder, who I never imagined was destined to become a federal judge in Michigan, became my good friend. He took his turn with the dishes and flattered me with the male attention I craved as we played jacks together on the kitchen floor. That summer, after he went back home to New Jersey to work on the family farm, he corresponded with Nelly who had taken a job doing housework and minding the baby for a lawyer's family.

Dear girl--you are crazy--working for \$3 a week.

Why don't you go on a spree, shriek and roll on the floor,
tear your hair, laugh till you're hysterical; then go out for a
swim and a long hike to no-where and see if you don't feel
more like it.

The truth was, Nelly loved her work. She savored the relationships she had found in another household. Her job inspired feelings of being needed and in control, feelings

she never had at home under Mother's dominance. At our dinner table she monopolized the conversation every evening with a vivid accounting of her day. Although we had never seen the baby or the lawyer and his wife, we knew them well.

The house on Franklin Street was the center of life for me and all of my siblings, except for John who soon left for graduate school. From that house we walked to school in all directions wearing the clothes Mother had managed to make for us. Mary Jo and I walked to Oakdale Christian Grade School, Harriet and Florence to Grand Rapids Christian High School, and George and Nelly to Calvin College. Harriet and Florence were quiet in class and shy about making friends. George and Nelly already had friends who came to Calvin from New Jersey. However, Nelly claimed that the burden of working for her tuition money in the government's NYA program limited her social life.

The summer of John's engagement to Letty Rus, his college sweetheart, Mother decided that we could afford a real vacation. She rented a cottage on the sand dunes of Lake Michigan for two weeks in August. Although he could not stay, John helped us drive out to the place. He let me ride with him and Letty, even though it meant I had to brave the full brunt of the wind in my face in the rumble seat of his roadster. The whole family arrived together, with George, exuberant in his jaunty new white slacks and cocky sailor hat, driving the family Chevy. We moved in with our homemade root beer and all the cookies, pies, and cakes that Mother had prepared in advance. Then we raced each other to the beach, vying to be the first into the icy water. After we had surveyed the bedrooms, the tiny living room with its wood stove, the kitchen with an outside pump, and an out-house in the back, we ate our favorite dinner of macaroni and tomatoes. In the evening when it was cold we made a fire in the wood stove, huddling around to tell ghost stories. I was ten years old, and I thought it was the most fun I had ever had in my life.

When Letty's parents came to the cottage for a visit, Mother served cake and root beer at a picnic table on the side lawn overlooking the lake. As bottle after bottle of her dark, homemade root beer exploded when it was opened to the air, Nelly danced around

the table in hysteria. "Help!" screamed Mother. George came running. He instructed us to hold out our glasses as he calmly poured out what was left of the oozing, bubbling foam. John ran to get his camera to film the drama and Mother was embarrassed about her ruined party.

That summer at the cottage Nelly's mood switched again from uncontrolled gaiety to unexplained despair. She sat on the beach brooding while the rest of us helped George build a kayak using a pattern he had found in a magazine. It was to be constructed out of waterproofed canvas which was stretched over a wooden frame. We were all involved in the boat building project. We argued loudly about whether it would ever float. The rest of the time we played croquet, swam, or danced the Virginia Reel on the beach under Letty's patient guidance. But Nelly had to be urged to join the family. Instead, she took long solitary walks on the beach. She wrapped herself in a towel, complaining that she could not sleep. The day before our two weeks stay was over, she barely smiled when George, launching the Kayak, tipped over, and in a flash of yellow canvas disappeared into a wave. "I can't wait to leave," she said. "I have to get back to my own bed."

Mother was thoroughly displeased. "What is the matter with you?" she demanded while Nelly sat in a corner quietly weeping into her towel. "How can you be so selfish and spoil our good time? You think only of yourself."

Harriet and I tried to talk to Nelly. "What is wrong?" we whispered. "Don't you feel well?"

"I'm so afraid," she whispered back.

"Afraid of what?" we asked.

"Afraid that I'll be afraid and spoil everybody's good time," she answered, letting out her tension with a little nervous giggle. We giggled too in response.

With our summer holiday over, we all went back to school and work. When I talked to Mary Jo about our cottage vacation I never mentioned Nelly. I only talked about

the fun we had, about how silly John and Letty were--always hugging and holding hands, and about how much I admired George and his kayak.

I soon had many friends, some of them boys. Mary Jo and I loudly claimed that they were a nuisance, especially when they teased us, stole our collection money, and chased us home from catechism. Mary Jo was well known at school for her piano playing, and I was noticed for my soprano voice after I sang a solo at a pageant about Mozart's life. I played on the girl's basketball team, but one year Mary Jo and I were picked to be cheerleaders for the team. When I screamed too much at the games, the school's music teacher protested. "Don't risk ruining your beautiful voice," she warned.

I was in seventh grade when Nelly came to our school to do her practice teaching. "Your sister is going to be our teacher. Don't you hate it?" my classmates said. I was both proud and chagrined. How strange to have someone so familiar in front of my class, her slender figure a study in self control, poised for discipline. I had just begun sneaking her lipstick from the dresser in her bedroom before I left for school in the morning. Did I still dare to do it? I decided to be brazen.

I entered the classroom red-lipped. I kept my head turned slightly toward my friends, away from Nelly. The class droned on. She was teaching fractions, and she knew that mathematics was not my strong subject. When she asked me a question I pled ignorance, speaking into my hands cupped in front of my face to hide my crimson lips. I giggled foolishly while Nelly frowned her disapproval.

"I'm telling on you," Nelly whispered ominously in my direction as she gathered up her papers and walked past me down the aisle on her way out of the classroom.

She kept her threat to tell on me, but Mother was forgiving. "Just don't do it again," she said indulgently. "You are still too young for lipstick."

Nelly got an A in practice teaching. She was an inspiring and imaginative teacher: a strict disciplinarian who demanded attention and got it. Outside of our home no one would

have believed the capriciousness of her moods which often threatened our family's equilibrium.

"Nelly just doesn't like boys," I told Mary Jo as we sat on the front porch swing. "When boyfriends come over to ask her for dates she stays upstairs in her room. I make up excuses for her." What I didn't mention was the enjoyment I found flirting with Nelly's cast-offs. I had newly discovered how to banter with boys twice my age. I happily joined the family game of finding a match for Nelly.

One day, snooping in her bedroom, I found a note from Nelly to herself.

My fears written up:

- of getting married
- of vomiting in public
- of sleeping at another person's house
- of thinking and worrying alone in my room
- of having dates with some guys
- of parties in general

Why have fears--no use . . . what to do about it?

My accomplishments in stilling my fears:

- praying at the table
- singing for Mr. Swets
- sleeping with Agnes (not much of an accomplishment)

I must start with little things, then have greater challenges.

I've kept my fingernails from being bitten. I've done what I planned to do--no slacking!

During her college years, Nelly successfully covered her inner turmoil with a lively facade. The strict teacher I had observed at school was not the Nelly I knew at home.

Around the dinner table we shrieked with laughter as Nelly described the antics of her colleagues or students. At Christmas time, when Letty came to visit, Nelly joyfully urged us to play lively games of charades. In one memorable gathering we set up a stage, hung a sheet between the living and dining rooms, and with John acting as photographer, made pictures of ourselves, black and white silhouettes in all kinds of ridiculous poses--figures smoking long-handled forbidden cigarettes, or ballet dancers with legs and arms inexpertly extended. Nelly was both the innovator and the leading lady in our theater: the true author of our family fun.

But we family members knew the other side of Nelly's personality. As summer approached, inexplicably, the blackness and despair that none of us could fathom engulfed her life, and all of her capacity for frivolity seemed to vanish.

After her graduation from Calvin, Nelly found her first job teaching fifth grade and coaching the girl's basketball team at my school. Right from the start she was popular with her students, and before long a fellow teacher, Ann Westveer, became her best friend. I thought her life had taken a very exciting turn.

Nelly continued to live at home because she thought having a place of her own would be far too expensive. She paid Mother a small sum for room and board. I watched with interest as she devised a system to keep track of her money. After she had cashed her pay check at the bank, she bought a package of white envelopes which she carefully put into a shoe box. She stuffed the envelopes with her newly acquired cash, at the same time categorizing and labeling each envelope for a specific use: *Benevolence, Books, Church, Budget, Clothes, Entertainment, Food, Medicine, Room and Board, Taxes, and Misc.* One day, during the first fall of her teaching career, Nelly came home from shopping carrying a lovely wool checked suit which she had paid for herself out of her clothing envelope. Harriet and I watched as she tried it on for us, showing off her slender figure to advantage. "That's really cute, Nell," we said enviously.

With money coming in from both John and Nelly, our life was slowly easing out of poverty. I watched in excitement as two men moved the ice box out, replacing it with a brand new Norge refrigerator installed by the gas company. Soon after, Nelly insisted that we had to have a telephone. But, more important to me was the classical record club we joined when Nelly convinced Mother to buy a record player. Even as a teenager I preferred Schubert and Haydn symphonies to the top ten swing tunes on the *Hit Parade*.

I was thirteen, ready to begin high school, the summer that John and Letty were married. Mother made me a special pink chiffon dress, and I sang a solo at the reception. We were worried about Nelly because it was June and her depression was noticeable. Would she make it through the festivities without revealing her problem? As we gathered on the lawn for a garden reception the family kept a close watch over Nelly. Harriet and I followed her as she talked with relatives who did not even seem to notice her thinness. When at last John and Letty drove off to begin their life in Rochester, NY where John had a job with Eastman Kodak we sighed with relief. We felt confident that we could cover for her during the rest of the summer.

In August, just before school started, Mother took me shopping for patterns and material to sew to supplement my last-year's school wardrobe. She understood that the year I started high school was of particular importance to me. Together we perused magazines for ideas. Finally we decided that she would make me a multi-colored striped seersucker suit, and a pink and blue plaid wool pleated shirt. We bought a blue sweater to wear with my new skirt. While she sewed I hung around the house hitting a tennis ball against the garage door, ready to be called in for fittings whenever necessary. Mother was still a fine seamstress, but her hands shook as she tried to thread the needle. Sweat poured down her face catching on her glasses which she never bothered to wipe. "Here, let me do that," I cried, grabbing the elusive thread, exasperated by her nervousness. But after the skirt was finished, when I tried it on and pranced around the living room to show it off, she took great pride in my satisfaction with the finished product.

Mary Jo and I talked incessantly about what high school would be like, and about our boyfriends. One day I played tennis in the park with a boy named Lambert. It was my first date. On the way home he bought me a Coca-Cola at the drug store. With boys hovering around our front porch, horns honking as they drove up to invite me to swim with the gang at the gravel pit, I found I could almost ignore Nelly's summer depression.

I was the first one in our family to have the social life of a typical teenager, so they were somewhat aghast when I began to date a parade of different boyfriends. My grades were not up to the high scholastic standards set by all of my siblings who had preceded me. Teachers, expecting me to produce only top grades, were surprised. My high school advisor wrote in my yearbook, "Dear Mom: What a daughter you possess--carefree and troublesome . . ."

"I guess I'm just the black sheep of the family," I said flippantly. Guilt was not something that I took very seriously, although Calvinism as the only possible world and life view had been the foundation of my education. At home our food often got cold while Mother conducted long Bible readings and prayer at the table before meals. This was reinforced by more prayers and readings at school and at our church's weekly catechism classes. Sundays were devoted exclusively to Sunday School and to two church services, with mandatory rest in between. These routines fostered stoical attitudes. We were a serious-minded family, intent on making an earnest effort to do good in an evil world.

My teenage frivolity shocked Mother. My desire to break out and to enjoy the freedom of dissent was viewed with chagrin. I had the audacity to question the catechism and to sneak off to movies with Mary Jo, which was strictly forbidden. "What can be so sinful about *Bambi*?" I asked myself. I found myself humming the theme song of the movie around the house hoping no one would recognize the tune and expose my deceit.

When it was time to appear before the consistory to formally join the church, I told my girl-friends that I did not plan to lie to the elders about going to movies. (The church had identified dancing, card playing, and movies as sins.) But somehow, for my mother's

sake perhaps, the church fathers tolerated and ignored my refusal to promise never to attend a movie.

My sexual education was self-directed and haphazard. My girl-friends and I searched the dictionary for clues. Words like “sexual” and “intercourse” led to the further mysteries with words like “coitus” and “copulation.” Finally, our search led us to illustrations in the library’s medical books. We whispered to each other, but we never dared to ask an adult.

Mary Jo and I ran off to neighboring churches for Sunday evening services, hoping to see Warren or Marvin, or whoever it was we were currently in love with. We felt very adventurous and wicked. After my sophomore year at Christian High I began to go out on real dates in cars. Smooching in the car was the generally accepted protocol of dating, but I remained completely naive about my body and the bodies of my boyfriends. I kissed and hugged the boys I liked, but our time together was strictly limited by the early curfews my mother imposed. Among my friends, pregnancy before marriage was considered an unthinkable tragedy, to be avoided at all costs. Although I enjoyed flirting and being provocative, further intimacy was outside of the limits of my adolescent world.

By the time I was old enough for a driving permit, the girls in the family were busy teaching me how to drive. They instructed me at Restlawn Cemetery where my father was buried. I was told to drive around the road while Mother and my sisters occupied themselves feeding the swans and watering the basket of flowers on Father’s grave. The dirt cemetery road was quiet and free of traffic. The Chevy jerked forward in leaping starts and stops as I circled the graves trying to master the action of the clutch. With George gone and Florence and Harriet about to move on, I simply had to learn to drive.

Driving backwards was a completely different skill which we all acquired at home when we backed the car out of the garage. Since the driveway immediately took a sharp left turn, the maneuver was difficult even for an experienced driver. Sometimes the car was balanced precariously on the edge of the four foot embankment between us and the

neighbor's house. "Don't let it go into the bushes. Put on the emergency brake!" we screamed to each other as we tried to negotiate the tricky turn.

Although I look back on my growing-up days with nostalgia and sentimental fondness, I realize that Nelly's recurring depression dampened the carefree mood of my high school years. Her melancholic condition set a pattern that I had come to expect. As summer loomed, Nelly's depression descended on our house like a cloud. At dawn, when the crying began, I smothered the sound of her moans in my blankets, dreading another day of weeping. Mother took her to a doctor who advised that she should find something to look forward to in the summer. "Why not start a garden in the spring?" he suggested.

When Nelly's best friend, Ann, began to date a widower and then announced that she would marry him the following summer, Nelly was crushed about losing her best friend. She became even more fearful of the coming vacation. "What will I ever do without Ann?" she cried. Her insomnia began very early that spring. In desperation, she began to create her garden. She dug up half of the back yard, recruiting George to help her spade the plot when he came home weekends from Ann Arbor.

Nelly's garden became a wonder of flowers and vegetables, some that I had never seen growing before. Tiny green peppers and brussel sprouts hung down from their miniature stems, and tomatoes grew in profusion from vines which she had carefully tied to stakes. Mother, who had always filled our basement fruit cellar with rows of home canned fruits and vegetables, could hardly keep up with the produce. For a season the effort was therapeutic. Sometimes I heard Nelly humming to herself as she worked, lovingly tending her garden.

When school reconvened Nelly went back to teaching, Florence was a senior at Calvin, Harriet started nurse's training at Blodgett hospital, and I began my junior year in high school. On Thanksgiving Day George came home from graduate school. After dinner he tried his best to keep me from flunking algebra. As we sat by the dining room table, he patiently explained the problems over and over while I feigned concentration on

the incomprehensible subject. At last he gave up and we all stood around the piano to sing from a book of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. At least I could excel at singing! That evening, after Nelly and George had talked it over, the family agreed that I should have voice lessons. "She really has a remarkable voice," said Nelly. "And I'm going to pay for her to have lessons." She went upstairs and fixed another envelope labeled: *Emma's Voice Lessons*.

Music and boyfriends were the focus of my final years in high school. Every Saturday morning at my voice lesson I learned operatic arias far beyond the scope of my fifteen year old voice, while my inexperienced teacher pushed for more range and quality.

With her good looks Harriet attracted many boys, but she was quiet by nature and tight-lipped about her boyfriends with me, her "kid sister." When she went to live at the hospital's training school Mother lost track of her social life. Florence had girl friends who were intrigued by her extraordinary intellect, but she was not part of any social clique. I often noticed her walk home from class alone, not included in the groups of friends I watched sauntering along Franklin Street. Florence seemed unconcerned, content with a few good friends.

George completed his master's degree at the University of Michigan in 1941. Although he occasionally had a date, he said he was a confirmed bachelor--at least until he was established in his job at Eastman Kodak in Rochester, NY where he went to live.

The summer after Florence's graduation from Calvin in 1942, Mother, Nelly, Florence, and I set out to find Florence a place to live near the Champaign/Urbana campus of the University of Illinois. Florence had a scholarship to pursue a master's degree in German in the fall. With the country embroiled in WW II, the study of German was thought to be a necessary and even patriotic pursuit.

Florence drove our car, with Mother beside her in the front seat directing her every move. "Grab the wheel tightly," she admonished. "If we get in a wreck, just don't let go of that steering wheel."

Nelly and I sat together in the back seat along with the picnic basket bulging with our lunch and our suitcases packed for an overnight stay. As we drove through the countryside Nelly began to weep. "I just can't do this," she cried softly. "I'm so afraid."

"Of course you can. There is nothing to be afraid of," said Mother decisively, determined to disregard Nelly's despair and to keep to her own planned schedule.

As we drove along I told jokes and sang to divert Nelly's attention. "Just don't think about it," I said. "This is going to be fun. I can't wait to see the campus." Florence concentrated on her driving. But the sobbing grew louder. Nelly rocked back and forth on the seat beside me, her sobs accompanied by hand wringing and an occasional muffled groan.

After about an hour of listening to her whimperings, I could bear it no longer. "I think we should turn around and go back home," I said. "I don't think Nelly can make it."

"What is the matter with you? What are you afraid of?" Mother and Florence asked again, trying to understand. But Nelly would not be consoled. When we stopped by the side of the road to eat our lunch and to discuss what to do next she became wild with fear, thrashing around in the back seat, refusing all offers of food or comfort.

We turned around and drove back home. Nelly went to bed, shutting herself in her room. The next day Florence took the train to Urbana alone. Mother and I avoided any further mention of the incident. I did not even tell Mary Jo because I felt ashamed and afraid. How could such a thing be explained?

As soon as school started Nelly's depression magically lifted, and during the school year she became engrossed in her teaching. But in the spring I found myself once again anticipating the ordeal of her emerging depression. In May, about the time of my seventeenth birthday, I watched with anxiety as Nelly stopped eating and sleeping, gradually descending into the blackness which seemed to be caused by her coming vacation.

My first summer job was at Camp Roger, a Christian youth camp on a small lake near Grand Rapids. Shortly before high school graduation our school superintendent offered the work to a group of us; five of my girlfriends were invited to be trained as camp counselors along with me. It was the first time I had ventured away from home. On the morning that I left for camp I was awakened by the fearful sounds of whimpering coming from Nelly's bedroom across the hall. As usual, I put my pillow over my head to stop the sound.

At Camp Roger I quickly matched the names to the faces of the girls in my cabin. I was challenged both in teaching them and by my own need to learn. I was required to swim across the lake, to learn and teach archery, and to lead group singing around our evening campfires. My muscles hardened as I climbed the fifty steps from the lake to my cabin several times each day. I loved the work and it was good for me. It had the added benefit of allowing respite from Nelly's progressively worsening illness. But, even at camp, I could not get away from the pain of thinking about what was happening at home. Every night, sitting around the campfire, I worried about Mother who was coping with Nelly alone.

LEAVING HOME

A group of students followed me home as I walked down Franklin Street on my first day of class registration at Calvin College. I watched in wonder as one of them ran into our back yard in pursuit of a bird. I peeked from the house to see him stalk the cardinal that had landed in our pear tree. "There's a tall skinny guy in our backyard looking at a bird," I told Mother. Signing up for classes that morning, I had noticed his black curly hair so different from the other Dutch-blond students. In French class the next day I learned from my friends that his name was Jerry Talen, that he was from Rochester, Minnesota, and that his father was "a rich banker."

During our freshman year Jerry and I were just friends, dating others. But, in the spring, one week before he enlisted in the US Navy, he took me to a symphony concert. On that date I discovered that, although he played center on Calvin's basketball team, he also loved music, birds, and nature. I was charmed by his versatility. His rare combination of interests was unlike any that I had known before. Having discovered each other, we were together every night until he left for the Navy. When he kissed me good-bye, promising to write, I knew that he was the one for me.

After Jerry left for Great Lakes Training Center, I talked with Mother about the coming summer. I wanted to attend the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY where both John and George lived. I had written for the brochures which described their summer program in vocal studies. "If only we could afford it," I sighed. When Uncle Herman from Detroit came for a visit, I was still talking about it longingly.

The next day Uncle Herman stopped over again for tea. "I want to send Emma to Eastman's," he told my mother. He explained that my cousin Helene, his daughter who was about my age, wanted to go there too to study organ. "I'll pay for them both," he

said. I could hardly believe my good fortune. I would live in the dorm with Helene and spend the summer singing!

My summer in Rochester opened my eyes to the joys and hazards of being totally on my own. At Eastman's I had my first taste of dormitory life, and my first shower. On Franklin Street, when we were ready for our weekly bath, it was our custom to carry two kettles of boiling water up the stairs. We poured them into the tub, quickly adding enough cold water from the tap to make the temperature right. We bathed in the tub, sitting shivering in about three inches of water. The procedure was over in five minutes. Who could linger over that? In contrast, at the dormitory with streams of steamy hot water pouring over me, I sang in the shower till my floor supervisor yelled, "Pipe down in there, you're waking everybody up."

In an audition on my very first day, I was selected to study with Arthur Kraft, the head of the voice department. But a student standing in line with me suggested that I study with Miss Call instead. So I foolishly declined to study with the master teacher--a fundamental mistake. My lyrical voice was not well suited to opera, the forte of Miss Call. As classes in theory and piano piled up, I became painfully aware of the inadequacy of my music education which left me far behind the others in my class. At the same time I loved music so much that just being there, to walk down the halls and hear instruments tuning, was reward enough. I disregarded my feelings of defeat.

Toward the end of the summer I witnessed the final days of WW II from John and Letty's house where I waited for Mother to visit us and to accompany me back home on the train. I sat on the screened porch daydreaming and listening to Brahms Second Piano Concerto, played over and over on their new phonograph. George and his wife Lorraine lived in Rochester too. George, the confirmed bachelor, had married a girl who was her class valedictorian when she graduated from high school. She was about my age, but mature and ready for marriage. For Lorraine love came first, college later. On the August day when the Japanese surrendered we all piled into the car--John and Letty with their two

children, George and Lorraine, and I--to join the parade of those who drove downtown with horns honking in wild celebration of the event.

Later, after Mother arrived, we sat around the kitchen table planning what to do about Nelly. As only the kid sister, I was not expected to offer advice. They reviewed the situation, presenting every argument they could think of. The family had tried everything: sometimes laughing it off and sometimes, in desperation, shutting the door on her cries. Nothing made a difference. "What are you afraid of?" was our constant query. Her unchanging reply was gasped through her tears, "I don't know. But I'm so afraid that I'll be afraid."

Mother assured us that Nelly's school was not aware of her depression. Even Mary Jo, who often came for dinner, did not know about our summer trauma. "But how much longer can we keep it from them?" I asked. "She looks like a concentration camp victim." From pictures that had recently been in the newspapers I thought she resembled a victim of war atrocities. At ninety-five pounds her weight was dangerously low. Her teeth and eyes looked huge framed in her sunken face. In her worst moments she repeatedly licked her lips, wrung her hands, and picked at her pajamas with nails bitten to the bone. Her dark hair hung in uncombed strings, accentuating the gauntness of her features.

"She's resisting going back to teaching," said Mother. "But the doctor told me not to allow that to happen. Whatever you do, don't let her stop teaching, he told me." We could think of no solutions. Finally we agreed that, at all costs, she must keep her job.

Back home, before returning to Calvin, I drove Nelly to school to begin her semester of teaching because she had refused to take any initiative to get there by herself. "Please, Emma, don't make me do this," she pleaded from the back seat of the car.

My heart began to pound and a lump constricted my throat as we drove toward her school. She was like a child begging for mercy and I was the cruel step-mother with a duty to perform for my family. Why did I have to do this? I was terrified by the responsibility

that had been thrust upon me. I stopped the car in front of the school and tried to push Nelly out. But she only cowered and moved farther back into the corner. I walked around the car, opened the back door and pulled her out. "You have to get out," I said firmly. Then I quickly slammed the car door and drove off, leaving her standing on the curb clutching her books to her breast. On the way home my tears spilled over. I groaned out loud under the weight of my burden.

In the weeks that followed Nelly somehow managed to begin teaching, although her recovery now seemed more tenuous than ever before.

That fall our attention was diverted to another family crisis: Mother discovered that Harriet had secretly married her boyfriend, Quentin, while visiting him in Washington, DC where he was recovering from war wounds. Marriage was prohibited for nurses in training, so Harriet had passed hers off as an engagement. Arriving home from her visit to see him she extended her left hand so we could admire the diamond she had received. "Look, I've got a ring," she told us joyfully as Mother caught her breath in surprise.

Mother thought that Harriet must have been dazzled by that diamond ring. "I didn't know she even liked him that much," she said. Later, when Quentin visited, after watching them together Mother's suspicions about their relationship were aroused. Late one night after Nelly and I had gone to bed she confronted them in the living room.

I was awakened by angry voices. I crept stealthily down the stairs. Halfway down I paused to listen. Mother was arguing with Quentin. "Why did you have to make such a hasty marriage?" she cried. She must have remembered her own years of delays and waiting for her marriage to begin. Finally, I heard her tell Harriet and Quentin to leave the house. I quickly retreated back to my bedroom. Mother walked out of the front door, slamming the screen door behind her.

After they were gone and the house was quiet I went to Nelly's room. "Harriet has eloped," I whispered to her in the dark. "They're all gone. Mother ran out of the house and I don't know where she is!" When we heard her return I slipped quietly back into

bed. I never told Mother that I had been outside wandering the streets in the dark looking for her.

The next day Mother went to the minister's house to ask for advice. She walked the five blocks to the parsonage, trying to gain some insight as she made her way along the tree-lined streets. She thought the deceit was a scandalous affair. To make matters worse, they were second cousins! What would people think? Her minister friend listened in sympathy while she told him how difficult it was to face her problems without her husband. As usual he offered sensible, calming counsel and sent her back home.

In the summer, back at Camp Roger, I was preoccupied with thinking about Jerry's return. He had written that he couldn't wait to see me and that, if necessary, he would even come to Camp Roger to find me. I hardly gave Nelly's depression a thought because she had gone on a trip to Denver with my mother and her two sisters, our spinster aunts, who Mother called "the girls." We were hopeful that the trip would be a diversion which would pull Nelly safely through the summer months.

I had only been at camp for a few days when, on a Sunday afternoon, I was summoned to the director's office. "We'll have to find a substitute for you, Emma," he said. "There is an emergency at your house and you will have to go back home."

As we drove away from camp I felt far removed from the polite conversation of my unknown volunteer chauffeur. Behind my cheerful facade I feared the scene that awaited me. I wondered what could have happened on the way to Denver, and I thought that we should have known better than to take Nelly on a trip. Unpleasant memories of our attempted journey to Champaign/Urbana haunted me.

I thanked the man who drove me home and walked into the house setting my suitcase down in the kitchen. I tiptoed into the living room where Mother sat on the sofa in the gloom, crocheting. "Nelly is in bed," she said. "We're going to have to bring her to Pine Rest. She went crazy on the way to Denver."

Mother described the scene in the motel. "I hid the knives in the kitchenette because I was afraid she would try to kill herself during the night," she said. "The girls were so shocked. It ruined their good time. We had to turn around and come home!"

Together we went upstairs. We got Nelly out of bed and dressed her. She was listless, like a rag doll with floppy arms and legs. We dragged her down the stairs and I backed the car out of the garage, carefully negotiating the hazardous turn. Mother put her into the back seat and we started down the road.

"Where are we going?" she whimpered.

"We're taking you to Pine Rest to see Dr. Mulder," Mother said. "I called him on the phone and he's expecting you."

"But I don't want to go there!" Nelly screamed.

"Nelly, you need help," I yelled into the back seat without turning my head.

The atmosphere in the car was thick with tension. The car began to shimmy violently--it was something our old Chevy had recently started to do. "This dumb car," I exclaimed jerking the wheel to make it stop. I was close to tears, hating what we were doing. "You won't have to stay there, Nell," I said reassuringly. "Just let the doctor see you and then we'll know what is best for you."

The drive brought us up to the front of the hospital where Dr. Mulder was standing on the steps waiting for us. He was a middle-aged man, soft-spoken and fatherly. He took Nelly by the hand and brought her through the front door, across the entry, and into his office. He closed the door indicating that we should wait in the lobby.

A nurse in a white uniform appeared. She had a large ring of keys hanging from her belt. Emerging from his office with Nelly in hand Dr. Mulder said, "Nelly is going to stay with us for a few days, aren't you Nelly?" He led her to a door and they waited as the nurse searched for the right key to unlock the hospital wing. As she was shepherded inside Nelly turned to look at me. Her eyes were wide with terror and full of reproach. I turned

away feeling like Judas, having just betrayed my sister. The nurse locked the door between us.

Although we had been instructed not to visit for at least three days, the next day we found an excuse to bring her pajamas and other clothes to wear. We were confident that her hospital stay would be short. Dr. Mulder had said that she would be able to continue teaching in the fall.

Mother and I were nervous as we walked up the long staircase leading to the hospital. I was still haunted by Nelly's final resentful look and I knew that Mother's blood pressure was soaring. When we checked in at the reception desk carrying the suitcase of clothes for Nelly, a nurse came to unlock the door and to escort us to her room. We followed her down a long quiet corridor. Nelly looked very small, there in the middle of a big white hospital bed, wearing an unfamiliar stripped hospital gown. Seeing us, she roused herself from her drugged stupor. She cried to go home. "Can't you do something to get me out of here?" she moaned.

I looked around fearfully. I was afraid of the whole place. I did not blame Nelly a bit for wanting to go home. The heavy doors, the keys rattling ominously on nurse's belts, the hushed voices, feet pattering down the halls, medicinal smells, and worst of all, the thought of the crazies who lay in other rooms filled me with fear. Squelching my flight impulse, I talked cheerfully about the garden and I promised to continue weeding it for her. Mother bravely described the corduroy dress she was making for Nelly's fall school wardrobe. We said we would bake cookies to fatten her up, that hardly anyone knew she was there, and that soon we would be back to take her home.

I was very secretive about Nelly, even with Mary Jo. Mother had cautioned me that we couldn't allow the school to find out. If anyone asked I planned to say that she had a "nervous breakdown" but that she was getting better, and that she would be coming home soon. But, truthfully, our visit did not help to raise my expectations about an early release.

Three weeks later we tried taking Nelly home--just for one night to see how it would go. In the morning she told us she hadn't slept a wink and that I should drive her back. "I have to do this very slowly," she said. "Dr. Mulder says it's going to take time, and I think he's right."

In August Mother informed the president of Oakdale's school board that Nelly would need a year's leave of absence. They agreed to find a substitute.

We continued our visits, almost daily, until one day in October when the hospital called to say that we should wait a few days before coming again. They said she was going to have an electric shock treatment. She might not know us if we came too soon.

The next time we saw her, Nelly could not remember her birth date. But she was more cheerful. She sat on the edge of her bed and told us that she would soon have a roommate. She walked with us part way down the hall and said we didn't have to come again until Sunday. As we drove away Mother was hopeful. "I'm going to talk to Dr. Mulder about taking her home next week," she said. "We don't want her to stay too long. She might get institutionalized."

I said, "Isn't it strange. I mean--what the shock treatments did to her memory?"

Jerry came back to Calvin, and life for me settled into the rhythms of classes, dates, and friends but with one additional duty: our regularly scheduled visits to see Nelly. Jerry came along often, just like one of the family.

Mother was relieved to learn that Nelly's insurance would cover most of the cost of the doctor bills. One clause in the policy specified coverage for psychiatric care. It was a benefit that Nelly had not realized when she paid the premiums. In the years that followed, as Nelly's time at Pine Rest dragged on to become years instead of days and months, brothers and sisters contributed whatever they could afford to pay. Later, when the payments were too burdensome, her church began to make regular contributions for her care from their benevolence fund.

Nelly had more shock treatments, the only treatment the doctors seemed to have. "She is not deteriorating," Dr. Mulder said hopefully. "We've tested her judgment and her mental acuity remains good. However, she is very tense and sometimes, when her depression is severe, we try to break the cycle with electric shock."

When she wasn't having treatments, we brought things for Nelly to do. She learned to knit, and Mother wondered if she would like to have some oil paints. She made friends with her roommates and with an elderly Dutch lady down the hall. "Mrs. Kett has beautiful long hair. Her braid is so long she can sit on it," said Nelly. Sometimes we picnicked in the park while Nelly entertained us with interesting details of her life at the hospital. Occasionally Nelly managed to stay home with us for a weekend, but she was always eager to return to Pine Rest. Mother's worst fear, that she would get used to the place and want to stay, seemed to be coming true.

My love affair with Jerry continued to blossom and Mother told Nelly, "This time it's serious." When Jerry gave me an engagement ring, Dr. Radius, a professor at Calvin, took him aside after class. His message was delicately phrased. He began by telling Jerry that the Kuipers family was very talented. He said he had known my father well and that he thought he was an unusually creative man. But, wanting to give a little fatherly advice, he felt inclined to say that he perceived a certain instability in the family which should be very carefully considered. He admitted that he was not sure if these tendencies are inherited, but it was something a fellow certainly should think about when choosing a wife. He alluded to my sister's admission to Pine Rest. He said she was a charming girl, one of his best students a few years ago. But now, after hearing about her trouble, he was concerned about Jerry's engagement to me.

Jerry thanked him and broke away. He went directly to my house. He could not wait to tell me that it made no difference to him if my whole family was crazy and that, anyway, he liked Nelly and would be glad to have her for a sister. We laughed together and joked about all the demented kids we would probably have. But inside I was angry

and hurt that a professor would attempt to derail my happiness. I knew that he dared to interfere because his views reflected the thinking of a whole generation. There was plenty of support for his point of view at Calvin and in the community. That attitude had fostered our family's secrecy and our feelings of shame about Nelly's depression. I was determined that I would no longer try to hide Nelly's mental problem--I would tell anyone who wanted to hear. Much later, when I read about the genetic origins of depression, I realized that Dr. Radium's analysis was probably correct, if unsympathetic.

Jerry and I were married on a cold winter day in December 1948, after Nelly had been in Pine Rest for a year and a half. Because of the interruption of the war, I had graduated from Calvin the previous June, a year ahead of Jerry, and I found a job teaching fifth grade at Seymour Christian School, a rather new school in the southeast suburbs of Grand Rapids. During my teaching year it was Nelly's idea for us to marry in the middle of Christmas vacation. "Why don't you just get married?" she said. I knew that Mother had been complaining to her about how much she worried that I might get pregnant before we made it to the altar. A person would have to be blind not to notice our intense physical attraction. Although I never told her, I was always grateful to Nelly for her understanding and support.

On our wedding day we took Nelly out of Pine Rest for the day. She borrowed one of my formal gowns to wear. The dress, made of black net designed with a big saucy fake red rose pinned jauntily at the waist, was my mother's creation for one of my solo recitals. Later, looking at my wedding pictures, I thought it was a sorry choice, emphasizing as it did Nelly's gauntness and the dark circles under her eyes. In the picture she stood awkwardly, trying to smile. After the ceremony, held in Calvin's Seminary Chapel, we had a chicken dinner at the Country House, the scene of John and Letty's wedding. It was almost ten years later, but the family was still haunted by worry over Nelly. I was beginning to believe that she would never be well.

After our honeymoon trip on the train to New Orleans, Jerry and I moved into the house on Franklin Street. Our private quarters consisted of two of the upstairs bedrooms. The big one, Harriet and Nelly's old room with the clothes chute, we converted into a combination living room and study. We rigged up a hot plate in one corner for a kitchen stove and a counter to make coffee for breakfast and to pack our noon lunches. The other room, our bedroom, had been George's simply furnished room. Before long we were eating all of our evening meals with Mother, discussing and planning our move to Minnesota in June and Mother's move to live in with her two unmarried sisters, Harriet and Anne Batts. Mother was very nervous, putting on a brave front, characteristically determined to remain optimistic. But I knew she dreaded the change. When Jerry found her sitting in the basement crying she said, "You don't know how hard it is for me to lose Emma." I was torn by feelings of guilt about leaving.

The doctors at Pine Rest had started an aggressive series of shock treatments for Nelly: four in a row on four consecutive days in May. But Nelly's condition seemed worse than ever. Sometimes when we visited she was completely listless. Other times she whispered bits of information. "They had to tie me down," she said, or, "The nurses had to give me a shot because I fought so hard." It was distressing news and the doctors did not offer any explanation.

Jerry and I moved in June, piling our belongings and furniture into a truck borrowed from a dealer in Elgin, Minnesota, the town that would soon be our home. Mother insisted that we should have her upright, mahogany piano, the one she had saved up for before she got married. She had stopped playing it right after William died, and now, at her sisters' place, she would have no room for furniture. Even her most cherished dining room table and chairs and many of the other pieces we had lived with all those years on Franklin Street had to be left behind. Years later I wondered whatever happened to the couch, the library table, the kitchen table and chairs, the lamps, the wooden candle sticks which she had begged me to take from the pile for the Salvation Army? I'll never know.

But I have enduring memories of Mother sweating as she swept the last speck of dust from the empty bedroom floor. We argued because she insisted on leaving a spotlessly clean house. I thought she might collapse--that her weak heart would finally give out and her high blood pressure would inevitably burst a blood vessel somewhere in her trembling body.

We took our leave with stoic resolve. Jerry piled into the front cab of the truck as he said a hasty goodbye. I planted a kiss squarely on Mother's lips. Then we drove off without looking back. An hour later we stopped at a truck stop to fill up with gas and to buy a hamburger. I sat at the table feeling homesick and nauseous. "I forgot to thank her for the piano," I said despondently.

"Why don't you call her?" Jerry suggested. He helped to make the call from a pay-phone on the wall while I worried because a long distance call was such a big extravagance. After talking to Mother I knew the call had been a waste of money. It hadn't cured the ache I felt. As we drove on I could not swallow the lump in my throat or dislodge the heaviness of my heart. The happiness I should have enjoyed as I began my new life with Jerry was spoiled by guilty thoughts about leaving Nelly in the lurch, and abandoning Mother to cope all alone--without even a house to call her own.

THE RECOVERY

I kept in close contact with Mother and Nelly. We wrote letters, and I sent presents. Mother continued to hope that Nelly would be released, although she knew from Mrs. Kett that she was having a bad time with shock treatments. In the fall, when I found that I was pregnant, I went back to Grand Rapids to visit them and to share my news about the baby. Nelly seemed to be improving. She was excited to tell me that she had a new doctor, one who really understood her problems. Over and over in her conversation she referred to his kindness and skill. She told me eagerly, "He took my hand and said that I don't have to have any more shock treatments. He said we would just talk instead."

On that visit, I realized that Mother was unhappy living with her sisters and that she was beginning to consider the possibility of leaving Grand Rapids. However, she was in a dilemma about where to go because she valued her independence; she had often told us that she would never consider living with her married children. "I can't think of anything more to do for Nelly," she told me. "I hate to ask the girls to drive me to Pine Rest all the time. John wants me to come to Rochester to live near him, and Dr. Mulder said that it won't make any difference in Nelly's condition if I leave here. He thinks I should go."

Every week, usually on Sunday afternoon, Mother wrote a letter to each family member. She wrote in a neat, even hand on both sides of a sheet of typing paper. These letters, which I kept in a shoe box in the attic, created a record for me of her last years. Reading them later, I was reminded again of her talents and of her interest in many things, including the lives of her children and grandchildren. They contained detailed descriptions of her life: the church services she attended, what she cooked for dinner, and what she planned to sew. She gave advice which she never expected us to obey. She maintained her distance by insisting, "Of course, it's your decision." After the birth of our children she always mentioned them by name and asked if they were teething or walking yet. She

usually ended her letter by commenting on some aspect of Jerry's work and she often asked me to give her greetings to the Talens.

Her letters also provided an account of Nelly's ups and downs. Mother was very sorry for her, and she was always hoping for a cure. When she finally sold Nelly's car it was a sad admission of defeat, another milestone she unwillingly hurtled. She wrote that she noticed, when she traveled to visit her children, that Nelly was fine while she was away. "Am I humoring Nelly too much?" she asked.

She came to visit us at our home in Elgin, Minnesota on a cold day in February. She wanted to see our house, and she said, "to experience a real Minnesota winter." During the visit Jerry and I took her to a Christian Reformed church in Minneapolis. We wanted to make it a special day, so we stopped at a restaurant for lunch, and to top it all off, we purchased tickets to a symphony concert in Northrop Hall for that afternoon.

After lunch we parked the car a good distance from the auditorium and started up a long hill, walking fast against a bitter cold wind. "We're a little late," I said, spurring Mother on.

"Wait," she gasped. "I have a pain in my chest."

We froze in our tracks. "Shall I call for help?" Jerry asked. We edged slowly forward, looking for a place for her to sit down.

"I think I'll be O.K.," she said, catching her breath as she began to recover. "The pain is not so bad now."

Once inside the auditorium, we sank into our warm comfortable seats with a sigh of gratitude that Mother had not collapsed completely on the way to the concert. The lights dimmed, and the Minnesota Orchestra began to play Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique* as Mother fell into a deep sleep. After a very quiet moment in the music, there was a sudden loud clash of cymbals. Mother screamed and jumped from her seat. As she relaxed back into her seat, a titter went through the audience. We were not so much embarrassed as sick with worry about her heart.

A month later, back in Grand Rapids, she wrote to tell me that she had the same pain again. She called Dr. Haeck who thought it was angina, but after giving her a cardiogram, he decided it was a heart attack and that there had been damage to her greatly enlarged heart. They gave her new medication to try to take her blood pressure down.

After the heart attack, Mother made the final decision to leave her sisters' house. She wrote that she wanted to move by the next fall, and that she preferred to have an apartment with Florence in Washington. Florence did not comment.

In the summer, when Mother came by train to be with us for the birth of our first child, Kathy, she sat on the front porch of our little bungalow working furiously on a braided rug she was making for our front entry hall. As usual, she poured all of her anxiety about the future into her work project. She was a study in nervous energy, sweat pouring down her face, repeatedly pricking her fingers as she tried to shove a large needle through the tightly woven braids. "I've always prided myself on my braided rugs," she said, still concentrating on her sewing. "It will be years before this one comes apart."

I knew that what really occupied her thoughts was her decision to leave Grand Rapids. So I dreamed out loud: "I wish Florence would ask you to live with her in Washington. Are you still willing to move there if she asks?" Florence, who lived alone in an apartment, seemed to be the only sibling who was able to make an offer of independent living to Mother. But, so far, Mother had not been willing to ask, and Florence had remained silent on the matter.

I could tell by the tremor in her hands and her relentless gum chewing that her mind was churning and her health was more at risk than ever. "Maybe you should move near me," I offered, knowing all the while that she would not accept an invitation to live in Minnesota.

Mother and I walked to the post office every day to check our mailbox. When at last a letter arrived from Florence, Mother carried it to the porch and then sat for a long time

with its pages flapping open in her lap. "She asked me to come to Washington to live with her," she told me with a sigh of relief.

I was ecstatic. A burden had been lifted by Florence's generosity. Now Mother had something to look forward to--a place to go. She loved to travel and, in spite of her tenuous health, I knew her spirit of adventure would see her through the move. The fact that Nelly would be left at Pine Rest in Grand Rapids with no family members to watch over her did not seem to be important. In her own mind Mother had already given Nelly's care over to Dr. Beukema and the hospital. My life was focused around our new baby.

In her letters to me Nelly was beginning to talk about the future. She looked forward to someday starting a part-time job--after they finished building the Children's Retreat, a hospital for children at Pine Rest. "My doctor says it would be a good first step," she said happily. When she was told about Mother's decision to move to Washington, the news seemed almost irrelevant. All of Nelly's letters and conversation converged around one theme: "My doctor says . . ."

Mother moved to Washington in the fall. I concluded from her correspondence that she enjoyed living with Florence--close to Harriet who took her shopping and did her washing for her. Harriet's kindness to Mother mended any remaining strain in their relationship. They had many mutual interests. Harriet had become a talented seamstress who shared Mother's passion for making beautiful clothes, and Mother took an active interest in her grandchildren: Harriet and Quentin's son and two daughters.

During Mother's first summer in the stifling hot third floor apartment, she longed to escape the oppressive heat of Washington. She traveled by train to Rochester to see John and George, and then to Michigan where we met in August for two weeks at a cottage we had rented on Lake Michigan. I came with one-year-old Kathy, driving from Menomonie, Wisconsin where Jerry and I had recently moved. Jerry had started to work in a bank his father purchased in the small college town of Wisconsin, just across the Mississippi River, an hour's drive from our previous home in Elgin, Minnesota.

We were excited about taking Nelly out of Pine Rest for two weeks. Nelly's recent letters had sounded so hopeful. Perhaps Mother even dared to dream that it was time to end her long stay in the hospital. We settled in, surveyed the cottage we had rented, declared it clean and livable, chose our bedrooms, and spent the evening walking on the beach. In the morning, watching Nelly's forlorn face, I saw that her internal struggle was not over. "How are you doing, Nell?" I asked as we sat together in our bathing suits on the beach watching Kathy play.

"I didn't sleep last night," she whispered. "I don't think I'm going to make it."

"Well, you just let me know when you need to go," I told her. "I'll take you back whenever you say."

Three days later, with Nelly in tears, Mother vented her rage on me. "Why did you tell her it was OK to go back?" she cried out in anguish. "I thought she could finally get out of there!"

Nelly sat in a corner and sniffled, "I just have to see my doctor."

I drove Nelly back to Pine Rest as I had promised. Mother, Florence, and I stayed on at the beach. The weather closed in and the atmosphere inside the cottage reflected our conflict over Nelly's departure. Mother was critical and I spanked Kathy when she resisted her afternoon nap. At the end of the second week when Jerry arrived, as we packed to go home, the tension was palpable. "I'm sorry that it didn't work out with Nelly," I apologized to Mother. "But I just didn't think she was ready to leave Pine Rest and go home. And where is her home right now anyway?"

After Mother's second year in Washington, Florence found a cooler place for them in a first floor apartment in Arlington, VA, closer to her work. John helped with the move. He cautioned, "Mother isn't what she used to be. She left all the silverware in the old apartment by mistake." In spite of constant warning from her doctor to "take it easy" Mother busied herself with trying to build a social life in her new community. She learned

to ride the bus, even though the doctor had warned that it was dangerous for her to venture out alone.

Meanwhile, because I was discontented with life in Wisconsin, Jerry decided to leave the family banking business and to try to strike out on his own in Michigan. He accepted a job in computer sales with NCR Corporation in Grand Rapids where he knew I would be happier. Mother seemed pleased that we were moving back to Grand Rapids, but she did not suggest coming there herself. "How nice that will be for Nelly," she wrote.

I took Nelly from Pine Rest to help with two-year-old Kathy and our son, eight-month-old Timmy, even before the moving van was unloaded. She seemed to be delighted to watch the children. After Jerry started his new job and I worked to establish our home in a rented duplex apartment, Nelly became our favorite baby sitter. We soon began the routine of "getting Auntie Nelly" several times every week. Driving out to Pine Rest, I looked forward to her company. She was not just my sister, but my best friend.

It didn't take long for Jerry to realize that he was fascinated by the potential of his new work. He became involved in NCR's development of computers even before the company recognized the importance of this newly emerging technology. When his father tried to entice him back to the bank he answered, "Not yet, Dad. I'm too interested in what I'm doing right now."

Because of Jerry's success we were soon able to buy a little gray three bedroom bungalow in suburban Grand Rapids. We painted it red and decorated the living room with discarded shutters gleaned from the windows of the bank in Wisconsin. "I'm pregnant again," I told Nelly as I happily prepared our new home for our third child.

In the summer, we rented another cottage on Lake Michigan. Mother and Florence came to see our baby, Mary. This time we planned only a short weekend visit for Nelly. Since we never missed church even while on a holiday, on Sunday we dressed in our "good" clothes and went to a service in nearby Grand Haven. During the long prayer, as my attention wandered, I had a premonition about Mother. In my mind's eye I clearly saw

an ambulance pull up to the church and I watched two men loading a stretcher into the vehicle, carrying my mother's inert form. In the crush of the crowd after the service I anxiously looked for Mother, but she had gone on ahead. Jerry and I were standing on the lawn talking to strangers when I saw the ambulance of my imagination move slowly forward. It came to a stop at the front steps of the church. "It's my mother," I gasped.

Mother had lost her footing and taken a nasty fall down the church's steep front stairs. After she spent a week in the hospital recovering from broken ribs and other more minor injuries we brought her to our house. She stayed with us for the rest of the summer. As it turned out, it was her last summer. That fall I drove her back to Washington, and it was there that Mother died on Thanksgiving Day in 1954.

Our family celebrated Thanksgiving that day at our home in Grand Rapids with Nelly and Jerry's brother Jim, a Calvin student. In Washington Mother prepared dinner for Florence, Harriet and Quentin, and their family. She carefully set the table and lovingly laid out the pumpkin pies on the kitchen counter in preparation for dinner. Then she went off to church with Florence. Her heart attack happened as she sat listening to the choir. From her vantage point in the choir loft, Florence watched Mother slump over in her seat. A doctor in the congregation called for an ambulance. As they put her on the stretcher she was her practical self, complaining that her sweating might ruin the collar of the new coat she had just made. But, she must have known that she would die because on the way to the hospital, in the ambulance, she told Harriet, "It's not so hard to die."

We had just finished our Thanksgiving dinner when Quentin called with the news that Mother had passed away. As I sat crying Jerry bundled the children into the car. "I'm taking them to my uncle's farm for the rest of the afternoon," he said. "You and Nelly need some time to be alone and talk about this."

After they left, Nelly began to clear the table. As I washed the dishes I remarked that it was comforting to have my hands in a pan of hot soapy water. "Mundane work is good for us," I said stoically. Together we began to make the traditional pot of turkey

soup. I noticed how calm and detached Nelly was. I talked about what a good mother we had, and how hard she had worked all of her life. But Nelly remained quietly aloof; I sensed that she did not share my views completely.

Later, at the funeral home, when I walked in to view Mother's body for the first time, I burst into tears. Nelly walked over to me and said, "I wish I could cry like you do. I haven't cried yet." After the funeral the brothers and sisters agreed to try to continue Mother's letter writing. We established a round robin letter to circulate among us.

After Mother's death I concentrated on our busy family, on church life and singing lessons; Nelly began to teach part time at Pine Rest's new Children's Retreat and to play the organ at the chapel. During the next three years Jerry and I had two more babies. We now had a family of five children, all below the age of seven. I lived in a whirlwind of housework and diapers, while Jerry's career surged forward on the new wave of computer technology. Nelly was part of the glue that held us all together. She knew us well and we thought we knew her completely. She was our constant friend and helper, always available to come when we needed her.

Sometimes, when the children were napping, Nelly and I talked about her depression and the progress she was making toward recovery. "What do you and Dr. Beukema talk about all the time?" I asked. "Is he helping?"

"Yes, my doctor thinks I'm getting better," she assured me. "He thinks I stopped growing emotionally after Daddy died, when I was a teenager. Now he wants me to begin to think like an adult. He wants me to imagine myself as a grown woman--even sexually. I'm supposed to imagine what married couples do together, and to put myself into that picture. He's trying to make me grow up emotionally."

I was reticent about discussing sex with Nelly. I didn't know how to begin, so I simply nodded my sympathy and said little. Once I asked, "Did you fall in love with your doctor during your therapy?" She said that she supposed she did, but now she was on the road to more independence. She seemed unsure when I suggested that it had occurred to

me that it must be a real balancing act for her doctor--to keep his distance so she could get over her dependency and her love for him. I told her that I considered breaking away from him would probably be her final step toward wellness.

Nelly often complained, "Dr. Beukema doesn't even know my family. I really wish you and Jerry would get to know him." Although we had no particular desire to establish closer ties, reluctantly we agreed that she could set up an appointment for us to have a talk with Dr. Beukema.

We were ushered into his office on the appointed day still wondering what we would say to him. However, since Jerry is very much at ease in any social situation, I knew that I could rely on him to begin the conversation. Dr. Beukema, dressed in a white doctor's coat, sat stiffly behind his desk. He did not come forward to greet us warmly as we had expected. Instead, he waited in silence from his position behind the desk.

"Well, Nelly thought we should come to see you so we would get to know you," I finally blurted out nervously without even waiting for Jerry. The doctor seemed tense and on his guard. It was as if he wondered what we were going to say. Perhaps he was expecting the worst--that Nelly had told us about their intimacy.

Although we were uncomfortable about the visit, the doctor did nothing to ease our tension. It soon became apparent to him that we had nothing in particular to tell him, so after a brief exchange about Nelly's progress, he dismissed us as hastily as he could. Afterward, when we talked about the visit, we told each other that Nelly's expectation that we would establish a friendly social relationship was unrealistic. "He certainly wasn't easy to get to know," I said. "I'm sure she is disappointed."

We were pleased on the day that Nelly said, "My doctor thinks I'm ready to begin to live outside of the hospital. I've been offered a part-time teaching job for next fall at Cutlerville Christian School." The school was just down the street, very near Pine Rest. "My doctor thinks I am ready for this," she concluded.

When a retired Dutch couple living next door to the school offered Nelly room and board in their home, we went shopping to buy furniture for her new bedroom. We talked excitedly about her life. We bought a blond, modern single bed and mattress, with a dresser and desk to match. We picked out sheets, blankets, and towels. On the day her furniture was to be delivered, Jerry and I drove to Cutlerville to help move Nelly's things from Pine Rest into her new, small, first floor bedroom. It was a tense moment. We knew that she was scared and excessively dependent on her doctor, but we encouraged her to try her wings. "You are so good with kids, Nell," I said over and over. "You are a wonderful teacher. I'm sure you can do it!"

Three years after Mother's death, in 1957, Nelly was officially released from Pine Rest. She had begun to teach part-time, but she remained under Dr. Beukema's close supervision. Several times a week she trudged on foot between her new home and the hospital to see him. Her teaching went well, and by Christmas she successfully directed a pageant that she had written for the children.

After her second year of part-time teaching Nelly bought a Volkswagen, a car she had always admired. She began to be fully independent for the first time in twelve years. She told me that she wanted to look for a full-time job, and to have an apartment of her own. "But I still have to see my doctor twice a week," she said. "I could never make it without him."

That summer Nelly's little car came zooming into our driveway several times a week. "Here comes Auntie Nelly," the kids cried joyfully when she arrived. She always carried books or little presents. Often we sat around the kitchen table making cars out of cut up carrots stuck together with toothpicks (Nelly's idea).

With his job going so well, Jerry thought we could afford to build a bigger house. So we began to look for a lot, a plan, and a builder. We created our dream house two blocks away, in our same neighborhood, so the children could walk to school. In the fall we moved into the new five bedroom house--with its double fireplace, three bathrooms,

and a utility room on the first floor. That fall Nelly began teaching full-time at Millbrook, the school our children attended. She also found an upstairs apartment within easy walking distance of Neland Avenue Church. We helped each other move.

As it turned out, only six months later Jerry received a promotion to be Financial Manager in Cleveland, Ohio. When I broke the news to Nelly, she said, "I'm going to have a hard time with this."

Although Nelly was disconsolate because we were moving to Cleveland, she was resolved to somehow adjust to the change. "My doctor says I'll just have to find another family to adopt," she sighed. In an effort to obey his instructions, she began to cultivate a friendship with Andy VanderSloot, a young man who taught at her school. She told me that she spent long evenings with him talking and arguing late into the night about everything under the sun. While Andy drank beer, Nelly had an occasional glass of wine and served him homemade pizza. In later years, Andy VanderSloot, along with his wife and three boys, became the surrogate family that she so desperately needed.

As our move approached, Nelly began to feel more and more empty and forlorn. One evening, as the two of us sat talking in her apartment, she began to reflect about her life. "It just isn't fair," she complained. "He goes home and has a nice time with his wife and I am left all alone in my apartment." She stared down at her hands, clutching them together in her lap. Then, as she looked up to meet my uncomprehending gaze, we sat in embarrassed silence until we changed the subject.

At the time I thought she must have been talking about Andy, although I wasn't even sure if he was married. I was shocked. I wondered just what had happened between them. Because he was so much younger than she was, it seemed impossible that they had a physical relationship. But I didn't dare ask, and since she seemed to realize that she had said more than she intended, we dropped the subject. On the way home, driving in the dark, I pondered the meaning of our strange dialogue. It was a conversation we never mentioned again.

After Nelly's death, when I tried to sort things out by conjuring up old memories, I gained a new insight into that peculiar exchange. I recalled it as if it were yesterday--how we sat together in the gloom of her apartment that evening treading on forbidden ground. I realized that her remark referred to her relationship with Dr. Beukema, and that it was a slip of the tongue which she never made again.

Following our move to Cleveland, a new relationship with Nelly was established. We remained closely connected through letters and visits. For the next twenty-five years, as our family pursued Jerry's career from one midwestern city to another, we moved from Cleveland to Chicago, to Erie, PA, to Buffalo, NY, to Dayton, OH, and finally, back to Menomonie, WI to work at the bank. Through all of this Nelly visited us wherever we went, especially during Christmas holidays. We could not conceive of a Christmas tree without Auntie Nelly's gifts to enliven our celebration.

During our eight years in Cleveland we marveled at Nelly's renewal of spirit. She made up for all the lost years with a remarkable list of accomplishments. She bought a lot, hired an architect, and built her dream house. She finished a master's degree at Michigan State University in East Lansing, MI, commuting there one summer to finish the residency requirements. She purchased land on a small lake and made frequent visits to mow the grass and to plant lilac bushes and other fruit trees. She had plans for a summer cottage, but they were set aside so many times that finally she was content to use the place as a private park--a place to take friends (including Dr. Beukema and his wife) for picnics. She planted a garden, devising a compost pile whose soil produced vegetables which were the envy of all of her friends and relatives.

Nelly's house became the anchor location in Grand Rapids for all of the Kuipers' family visits. She had a warmth about her that welcomed us in any circumstance. There was a guest room we frequently used. We let her cook for us, until she admitted that entertaining relatives and teaching full time was "just too much." In the early seventies, when our teenage children were caught up in the rebellions of the time, Nelly was the

person in whom I confided. "Have I been a rotten mother?" I asked in anguish. Nelly gave me the reassurance I needed. She knew how to ask the right questions to allay my fears and how to give me the courage to accept what I could no longer change.

There were other times when I sensed a vulnerability in her that created an atmosphere in which I assumed the role of the mature, elder sister while she was content to be submissive, even when I was the guest in her home. She remained my closest sibling because her gentle, accepting nature allowed me to share confidences and to unburden myself in her presence. However, as the years passed, there were times when I felt that I was a surrogate mother. Jerry pointed out that often Nelly walked a few paces behind me in an almost childlike attitude of obedience.

Often, when I came for a visit, Nelly and I would drive to the cemetery to put flowers on our parents' graves. We would walk around the lovely grounds and place our vase of lilacs, or whatever we had from Nelly's garden, between Mother and Father's places. Sometimes, as we stood looking down at the plots, we talked about our own lives. On one occasion Nelly sighed deeply and said, "Compared to them my life is a failure."

"How can you say that, Nell" I responded, incredulous. "You have more than compensated for the years in Pine Rest with your life as a successful teacher. You are much loved by your students and friends. How can you say that your life is a failure? I'm truly sorry if you feel that way."

She wandered over to the car and sank down into the front seat. "You just don't know . . . you just don't know," she repeated stubbornly to herself. "I've been a failure."

When we drove off I shook my head, admonishing her all the way home to stop thinking such depressed thoughts.

Although, as she aged, Nelly was increasingly afraid to travel, one fall she agreed to come to see Jerry and me in Menomonie. After the visit we drove her back home through northern Michigan stopping enroute to enjoy the fall colors. I remember it as a lovely trip. We stayed in a bed and breakfast inn by the side of a lake. We spent an

afternoon talking and walking along a wooded lane and then drank tea and ate cookies in the charming lobby of the inn. Later, at a restaurant for dinner, we ordered wine, and Nelly said she would try the local beer. This was unusual, because she had stopped drinking completely. As the meal progressed Nelly began to tell us about her experiences at Pine Rest. She described being tied down resisting shock treatments. We listened to tales we had never heard before. She forgot to eat, although Jerry and I had long since finished our food. It was as if the flood gates had opened and she was ready to tell all of her well-kept secrets. "Let's continue this back at the room," Jerry said after everything had been cleared away from our table and we were the only patrons left in the restaurant.

Back at the inn, we invited Nelly into our beautifully decorated suite and Nelly asked us to see her room. We stood at her door, uncertain how to begin again. Nelly hesitated, and then she said, "Well, I'm tired. I think I need to go to bed." She had come to the brink of self disclosure, but then suddenly backed away with fear in her eyes. There was nothing we could do to recapture the momentum of our conversation over dinner. An opportunity for both of us had been lost forever, and I felt empty and depressed as we retreated to our room. That night I went to sleep longing to know what she was thinking about as she lay there, alone in her fancy pink and white bedroom.

In early June, the last year of her life, Jerry and I took one more trip with Nelly, driving her home from Menomonie along the northern shore of Lake Superior. I could tell then that she was in some kind of distress. We drove in silence for hours, every attempt at normal conversation somehow drowning in its own banality. Later I realized that on that trip she was preoccupied with her decision to go to Pine Rest with her story. After her death I found her calendar, specifying dates and the times of her appointments, which told me the sequence of events. Then I understood why she was disoriented: why she followed me around so closely that I had to open car doors and direct her into her seat as if she were my child.

THE MEETING

The Kuipers' family visit to Pine Rest to discuss Nelly's allegations of sexual abuse was arranged by my cousin, Jake Eppinga, and scheduled to be held at 11:00 a.m. on September 16, 1994. Jake, my Uncle Herman's son-in-law, had married Helene's older sister, Ann. I knew him since I was a kid in grade school. Since then he had become a much respected minister in the Christian Reformed Church. He was well known throughout the denomination as the beloved author of whimsical, satirical prose about Christian living published in The Banner, the denomination's official weekly journal. How fortunate I felt when I saw his name on the list of board members of Pine Rest. It was the breakthrough that I had sought. Somehow I had to get past the bureaucracy. All summer I had dealt with Dr. Sider, who limited his actions to sending manuals and bylaws. He seemed to have nothing to offer other than his non-specific promise to report the situation to the board of directors.

I walked on the beach, reviewing in my mind the likely scenario in Pine Rest's board room. I imagined them sitting around the table haggling over budget matters and personnel issues as board members do. An item on the agenda about an alleged abuse under "New Business"--a single phrase in the sea of words--would hardly catch anyone's attention. *No names, we had agreed.* I decided that I had made a mistake to leave the report anonymous.

Over the years, in her more than three decades of teaching, Nelly had influenced many people. For some, she was an all-time favorite teacher. They told me so later, as adults, when I met them in the grocery store or at church. They said she had opened their minds to Shakespeare with dramatic illustrations unprecedented in seventh-grade classes. She was an inspiring teacher, known for her strict discipline and her highly imaginative style. Her students loved her. They wrote notes to tell her how wonderful she was. I knew that some of her former students now sat on Pine Rest's board of directors. They

would be shocked to hear her allegation. I reasoned that Nelly's credibility was far too high for her word to be doubted by those who knew her.

Mr. Van Zoeren's letter, in response to my request for a patient's rights investigation, had troubled me. He asserted that, since the abuse occurred more than one year before the date on which it first became known, the hospital had no obligation to report to authorities and an investigation was not indicated. That seemed to close the matter. I was stunned by the coldness of the message.

Mary and I sat together on the beach discussing how to proceed. Neither one of us was willing to just drop the issue. Mary had been Nelly's special niece. When I decided to ask Jake for help, she insisted on going with me to see him.

I set up an appointment and we drove to his house in Grand Rapids. Jake, now retired, ushered us into the living room and we settled into our chairs. He said Ann was sorry she would not see me--she was off somewhere shopping. Mary took over. "It's hard for me to talk about this," she said. "But I have to tell you that before she died Nelly told me that Dr. Beukema had a sexual relationship with her when she was his patient at Pine Rest many years ago." She began to cry as she talked. "Nelly was a very special aunt to me," she explained.

I looked on with motherly pride. Then I filled in more details, adding a description of my recent contacts at Pine Rest. "I noticed that you are on the board of the hospital, Jake," I said. "George says that this is clearly a matter for the board, and that I should not have gone to the hospital administration in the first place."

"Perhaps we could have a meeting with the whole family this fall," Jake suggested as he agreed to help in any way possible. Greatly relieved, we left his house with promises to stay in touch. I said that I would arrange a family reunion at my cottage in September so we would all be in Michigan. I also said that I would write him a follow-up letter and provide additional background material.

When Dr. Sider called to suggest another meeting, Jake's influence was immediately apparent. This time he expressed hope that he would have "a better understanding of our family's concerns."

The next meeting at Pine Rest was in sharp contrast to my first visit. Jake presided from the head of the table. He began with a prayer. Afterward, he listed all of my family's accomplishments from my father down. "This isn't just any family," he said, trying to impress Sider and Van Zoeren with our family's history in the church community. He reminded them that one of the denomination's favorite hymns, *By the Sea of Crystal*, had been written by my father.

At first I felt flattered. Then I became restive. This is wrong, I thought. What difference does it make whose family it is? As the meeting progressed, Jake went on to stress his belief that Pine Rest as a Christian institution had a higher calling than other hospitals. Now he was getting to the point. "What is our mission?" he asked. After some discussion we agreed that the hospital's mission could only be fulfilled by initiating responses above and beyond those typically directed toward fulfillment of legal obligations by other similar institutions.

"We are all Christians," I said. "I can assure you that my family is not looking for money or revenge. But, we are looking for help to find out what happened to our sister, to document the findings, and then to take any necessary preventive actions so it won't happen again."

My arguments seemed to be accepted and we agreed to arrange a time for further discussion with the whole family. Later that week I was gratified when I received Dr. Sider's written assurance that he was following up on a number of the requests I had made.

The evening before the scheduled September meeting, my brothers and sisters, along with their spouses, arrived in Michigan. I had prepared the traditional meal of macaroni and tomatoes. But I added meatballs to satisfy Jerry and the other in-laws who

could not imagine why the Kuipers liked the plain concoction. George and Lorraine came from Rochester, NY, a long trip. Florence, Harriet, and Quentin drove together from Washington, an even longer journey which they insisted on making all in one day. I considered their attitude toward travel typical of Dutch Reformed Calvinists. Who else would subject themselves to such punishment?

Letty, John's widow, did not make the trip from Boston. We had celebrated her eightieth birthday at a reunion the summer before Nelly died. To spare her unnecessary grief, last spring on the phone the rest of us had agreed not to tell her about Nelly.

Jerry served drinks on the deck. Watching him play the perfect host, I still thought he was handsome. I was always pleased and proud to be with him. He was my best friend: a man comfortable with himself who had a knack for making others feel at ease. His black wavy hair had turned almost white, but his figure was lean, and his manner gentle and courteous. As always, it was apparent that family members liked and respected him. "What's new at the bank?" they asked.

George remarked about the smallness of our group. "Neither John or Nelly are with us," he reminded us. "Their deaths were so sudden," we said. "And Mother's too." When we thought about it, our family's history of heart disease was not encouraging to the rest of us. We were dropping like flies.

We compared health-related statistics. Harriet was still a pretty woman, attractively dressed, with thick silver-gray hair which she wore in a page-boy style. She talked about her struggle to control her high blood pressure. Except for Lorraine, we were all taking blood pressure pills. Quentin, with his angina, had to be careful about walking up hills. He looked trim and fit, but his war wounds were permanent, so his hands shook when he accepted the martini Jerry handed him.

Florence's slender figure had never changed. She had given herself a home permanent for the occasion and cut her light brown hair very short. She was dressed in her standard blue knit pants, a favorite for years. In spite of the fact that she had a

condominium in Georgetown and a mountain vacation house in Virginia, her social preferences over the years had kept domestic concerns secondary in her life. She had little interest in clothes or food. All of her life she focused, instead, on intellectual pursuits.

The center of Florence's attention was her career as a linguist in government service. Because most of her work was top secret, I never really knew what my sister did. I understood only vaguely that she had a good job working for the National Security Agency in Washington, DC. When Jerry and I went to Florence's retirement ceremony where she received a Civilian Meritorious Award, we were astonished to discover that she was a code cracker in WW II, the author of nineteen publications, and that she had done outstanding service for her country. We were proud and amazed to learn the full extent of her work.

George, in his late seventies, became the patriarch of the family when John died in 1983. Now retired after a long career with Eastman Kodak, he kept himself in shape physically, and continued to work on a research paper which he planned to present at a meeting of the American Physical Society. He and Lorraine, a vigorous pair, impressed us all when they built their own cottage on Lake Ontario and then took up sailing as a hobby. They had parented six children and lately they enjoyed their large progeny by traveling around the country to visit or baby-sit their grandchildren. Lorraine, a kindergarten teacher for the past twenty years, was slender and careful about what she ate, a strong woman whom I admired greatly.

Later that night, as we sat gazing into the fire, we reminisced and planned what to say at Pine Rest the next morning. "Looks like you're the one to be the spokesman," they told me. I insisted that, because George probably had the most clout in the denomination, he should do the talking. I knew he was influential in his own church in Rochester, and I reminded them that Jerry and I had left the denomination to become Presbyterians long ago.

"Besides, he's a man, so he should represent us," Florence said sarcastically. Florence was entangled in a bitter dispute with her church in Washington about women's

rights. She wanted to change the church's long-held rule against women holding office; her fight for justice had left her obsessed with the problem. Florence was hard to ignore when she put her mind to a cause. Even I, who believed in her cause, was apprehensive about some of her tactics.

"Well, OK I'm in favor of women's rights too," I admitted. "I'll begin the discussion, and the rest of you can add whatever you want."

The next morning we filled up two cars for the drive into town. Jake was waiting for us in the lobby at Pine Rest. We solemnly shook hands. "Haven't seen you since the funeral," I heard them murmur. "Hello there, Harriet, Florence, George. It's been a long time."

Someone else had pre-empted our scheduled use of the board room so they ushered us into a small conference room next to the lavatory. It was a tight squeeze. We filed in, taking our places around an oval table. The Rev. Robert Nykamp, hospital chaplain, joined us and took a seat at the table with the family. He quickly put us all on a first name basis when he introduced himself as Bob. Jake, Roger Sider, and Keith Van Zoeren sat behind us on chairs shoved up against the wall. "Are we all in?" asked Bob congenially as Roger closed the door.

I had exceedingly high expectations about this meeting. I had been told in psychological jargon that it would "begin the process of healing for the family" and that, hopefully, we would be able to "come to closure" on the matter. I believed that it was a sincere gesture by the hospital administrators to give time and attention to our problem. But Jerry had cautioned me to be more realistic. He said, "Of course, they're trying to appease you to avoid a lawsuit. They don't want the hospital's insurance rate to go up."

During the two-hour meeting, each family member was given a chance to speak. George and I talked the most. I asked them why this was viewed as the family's problem. Why were we the ones asked to formulate goals and objectives? George took up the theme. "This is the hospital's problem," he said. "What are you going to do about it? I

think a top priority should be to make sure that some physical changes like the use of mirrors or windows in office doors are planned, so it won't happen again."

It seemed obvious to me that everyone in the room, even Roger, assumed that Nelly's allegation was true. Harriet was bitter and saw Nelly as a victim, but Florence was concerned that others would blame Nelly. I wondered why the doctors who said they believed Nelly did not treat her for the abuse. "They just reviewed her medications and told her to get on with her life," I said. "She was a very religious woman. She had finally found the courage to come to them with her life secret. They believed her, and then they chose to ignore the abuse and only focus on her medications. I just don't understand it." The thought of her suffering made me squirm in my seat. Roger Sider admitted that Nelly had resisted the doctor's decision to limit himself to a review her medications.

"She wanted a psychiatrist, but they referred her instead to a family therapist with a master's degree," I said.

"Perhaps she should have been referred to me," Bob offered.

"Yes, she could have used support from the chaplain," I agreed.

Bob looked at us sympathetically. Then he offered a bit of new information. "A long time ago," he said, "there was another allegation from a lady in Kalamazoo against Dr. Beukema for the same thing."

My heart missed a beat. From his seat behind us Roger quickly leaned forward to try to explain away the damage of this surprising revelation. Had he known that Bob would reveal what he remembered? I doubted it.

"Well," Roger said defensively, "Bob has been here a long time. He remembers that a minister from Kalamazoo came to Pine Rest with the story that some lady in his congregation said Dr. Beukema did the same thing to her. But nobody believed the woman, including the minister, so nothing ever came of it."

I pressed for more information. "How long ago? Could that minister still be found? Was the lady still living?" But Bob had given us all that he knew. He said it was a

long time ago and he doubted that it could ever be traced. I leaned back in my chair, disappointed. To me it was another tragic example of their reprehensible failure to keep records.

“That poor woman,” I thought. “Nobody believed her, and they didn’t even write it down.” My heart pounded wildly when I had another, even more dreadful, thought. “Poor disillusioned Nelly. All of her life she really believed that he loved only her!”

The meeting droned on beyond the lunch hour. We heard toilets flushing over and over in the next room as employees took their lunch breaks. Over the noise of the flushing, our smiles broke the tension. Roger suggested lunch, but we declined. We were tired; we thought we had said all that we came to say.

In the end we asked for two things: that somehow Nelly’s allegation would be recorded in the hospital’s permanent records, and that serious research would be done to investigate the prevention of this type of abuse in the future.

After Roger and Keith had made their formal apologies to the family on behalf of the hospital, Jake closed the meeting with prayer.

THE BOTTOM LINE

As her old age approached, Nelly's health deteriorated. When I visited her at school the year before her retirement I observed first hand her unusual annoyance with her students. As we walked across the playground after class she said, "I'm ready to retire. These kids are getting to be too much for me."

During the years after Pine Rest, Nelly had seen only Dr. Beukema for both her mental and physical care. The only exception was the hysterectomy which he had arranged for her with Dr. Vander Ploeg. Now, with her high blood pressure and other health problems emerging, I talked to her about the need to find another doctor. "Why don't you get a heart doctor?" I argued. "I think you need a physician who is really up on the latest medicine and treatment for hypertension." But, ignoring my suggestions, she continued to visit Dr. Beukema at his home, even after his retirement from Pine Rest. He prescribed drugs for everything, from heart palpitations to digestive disturbances. Looking at Nelly's medications Mary, who was now a psychologist, told me, "I don't think she should be taking some of these drugs. They're very heavy duty--for psychotics--and I don't think Dr. Beukema is really up-to-date on the latest treatment."

At my urging, reluctantly, Nelly found another physician, Dr. Rasikas, who she thought was nice. "But he does not know me the way a doctor should. He's very impersonal," she complained. Nelly had a great need to have a personal relationship with anyone involved in her life.

One morning, after a night of nagging chest pains, Nelly drove herself to Dr. Rasikas' office. There she collapsed in the waiting room, suffering a heart attack. She probably would not have recovered without the immediate resuscitation she received from the doctors on the scene. She was taken to the hospital and shocked back to life over and over again, until at last her condition stabilized. When I rushed from Wisconsin to see her the following day she was in intensive care, but out of immediate danger.

Although she recovered with little heart damage, the heart attack was a moment of truth for Nelly. She was never quite the same afterward. She was often tense and troubled with insomnia. After the trauma Nelly's need to tell her secret must have weighed heavily on her soul. I recall a long discussion with her one afternoon. She skillfully led the conversation into an analysis of confession, posing the hypothetical question: is it necessary to confess a sin in order to be forgiven? I hadn't thought about it much, but I could tell that she had probed deeply for the answer. After her death, when I found a sheet of white lined paper by her bedside with all of the words to the old hymn, "Just as I am, without one plea . . ." written out in her neat handwriting, I choked back my tears. Sitting there on her bed reading her private paper I was painfully aware of the extent of her suffering. She must have been drowning in feelings of unworthiness. I remembered her comment to me in the cemetery. Thinking it over, I found some comfort in the knowledge that in the final year of her life she gained new insights into her dilemma. In the end she was able to tell her secret. Casting herself on Jesus for forgiveness, she finally made up her mind to tell Dr. Rasikas about Dr. Beukema's sexual relationship with her.

Nelly told me that she visited Dr. Beukema regularly at his home after he retired from Pine Rest. When his wife was diagnosed with terminal cancer, Nelly brought food and stayed to talk. Sometimes, when she went there, she worried about appearances. "Does it look like I use his wife's illness to create an excuse for frequent visits?" she asked. I assured her that it didn't. After all, they were such life-long friends.

About that time we were all developing an awareness of a new phenomenon. The media constantly referred to it as sexual abuse. Nelly learned all of the buzz words watching Oprah Winfrey's afternoon TV talk show, and reading the Grand Rapids Press and Time magazine. She must have been increasingly aware of the parallels, brought up in their discussions and articles, with her own experience. Things that had never been talked about before were now the subject of everyday conversation.

One day, after the death of Dr. Beukema's wife, Nelly told me, almost off-handedly, that Dr. Beukema had asked her to marry him. I was flabbergasted. I watched her casually setting the table as she talked. "Are you going to do it?" I asked breathlessly.

"No," she said emphatically. "He just wants someone to take care of him in his old age, and I'm not going to do that."

At the time I was astonished by her new attitude of independence. I did not realize then that she had gained some understanding of the wrong that had been done to her. Encouraged by a steady flow of media attention to the subject of women's rights and sexual abuse, she must have found the will to dare to begin to hope for some measure of sympathy.

A short time later she talked about the doctor again. This time it was about his strange new behavior. "Sometimes I come and he hasn't shaved for days. He looks a mess!" she said. "His daughter is worried about him."

At last, when the truth was known--that Dr. Beukema suffered from Alzheimer's disease--she began to be afraid to go there. However, to put some closure to the relationship, she arranged with his daughter to have him come to her house for dinner one last time.

She described the event to me in great detail. He was clean-shaven and dressed in a suit, white shirt, and tie when his daughter delivered him to her doorstep. She had cooked his favorite beef roast meal with mashed potatoes and gravy. He ate her cooking with delight, asking for seconds, especially on the potatoes. "He even managed to use the bathroom by himself," she said. "And then he stayed for hours. But sometimes it was hard to keep up the conversation."

What did they talk about? Nelly did not tell me. She only confided that at the end of the day she felt a sense of satisfaction and completion. I believe that she ended her long relationship with Dr. Beukema on that day when he came to her house for dinner, when she experienced his mental deterioration first-hand. It must have been difficult for her to

realize that she was now in control, not Dr. Beukema. From now on she would have to be the one in charge of her life--without him. Although she made a valiant effort, perhaps it was more than she could do after a lifetime of dependency. Perhaps something died within her that day. After that, she saw him only in the Alzheimer's wing of the nursing home where his family had placed him.

Nelly's zest for life seemed diminished when I saw her at the Kuipers' family reunion at our cottage that fall. I did not know why. I told Mary, "Aunt Nelly has a head tremor, and she has developed a strange new walk. I think her health is really failing."

"I think it's her medication," said Mary. "And yes, I've noticed too that she is walking with a nursing-home shuffle."

Mary was the only family member who saw Nelly at Christmas time, a month before her death. She called to say, "Oh, Mother, Aunt Nelly has suffered a lot. Maybe some day I'll tell you about my meeting with her, but not now--not over the phone."

A few days before she died Nelly called me for the last time. I was busy cooking dinner. I sat at our kitchen table trying to deal with the distress of her call. "I don't know what to do," she said. "I feel so bad!"

"Are you depressed?" I asked. She told me that she'd been seeing someone at Pine Rest, but not a psychiatrist.

"Shall I come there, Nell?" I suggested.

"No," she said softly. "I'll probably be over it by the time you get here. I feel better just talking to you. I'll call again soon."

It was her final good-bye.

As the years passed after Nelly's death I worked intermittently to tell her story. I felt that it was important to make an effort to create a written account of Nelly's life and of our family's history. I wanted to explain the worthwhile values of the Dutch Christian Reformed culture in which I grew up as well as the stresses imposed on the family by our Calvinistic heritage. Could I spell out who we were and why our family took the sexual

abuse allegation so seriously? For myself, I felt compelled to explore my feelings of outrage over Dr. Beukema's failure to leave a record of Nelly's many years under his care. And, I had to ask myself why the hospital's response was so offensive to me.

There were long periods in which I simply dropped my effort, resolving instead to let the years go by. "Perhaps time will help me to gain some perspective and to lay the matter to rest," I told Jerry. But, in my heart, knowing that I was not gaining insight into my years with Nelly, I felt increasing dismay. Where was the trust that at some time in all of our years together should have prompted her to tell me her secret? I was stricken with feelings of disappointment and sorrow about all of our forfeited moments together. I knew that for her it must have been a matter of survival: the need to continue to live out her life in the world that Dr. Beukema had created for her. But for me, burdened with her secret, it became a matter of solving a mystery, of understanding the puzzle of her life. As I wrote the memoir I tried to overcome my feelings of chagrin about the sister whom, I concluded, I had barely known.

My quest for understanding led me to invite Marcia Zwier, a psychologist and long-time friend, to have lunch with me at Rafferty's restaurant in Muskegon near the cottage. Marcia was now near retirement. I remembered that she had worked at Pine Rest when Nelly was a patient and that they had become friends.

We ordered lunch. "Marcia," I began, "I have something to tell you about my sister, Nell."

After I had finished, Marcia sat very still for a long time. She took a sip of water. Then she said very quietly, "Oh, shit! Excuse me, Emma, but you will have to give me a few minutes to get over this."

I watched with fascination as her unchecked emotions blew up before my eyes. Leaning over the table, she spit out her words in a loud whisper. "I knew he was a bastard!" she said.

“He was so pious all the time. That’s the worst kind--when they act out. He would never cooperate with the rest of the staff. The message we got was loud and clear: no tampering with his patients, no messing around in group therapy sessions with his property.”

“Did you know that he has Alzheimer’s now?” she continued. “He’s a bitch of a patient. I know, because my friend takes care of him. Just wait ‘till I tell her.”

I left our luncheon convinced that I had won a crusader for Nelly’s cause. However, in fact, I never saw Marcia again. She died unexpectedly from a debilitating disease which made her incapable of fighting for anything but her own life. I faced the reality of another unfruitful inquiry.

I continued to look for resolution by pursuing my cause with Pine Rest. Soon after our family meeting in 1994 I received a long letter from Dr. Sider in which he outlined the many ways in which the board of directors of Pine Rest wished to respond to our concerns. His tone was very sympathetic. He reported that he had briefed the executive committee in detail about Nelly, and that a summary had been presented to the full board. He apologized for the legalistic posture initially taken by the hospital and outlined how they planned an on-going review of hospital policies and practices to assure that the Christian ideals upon which Pine Rest was founded are exemplified in day-to-day operations.

What was missing was a concrete response to requests made by our family. The letter said nothing about mentioning Nelly by name or about creating a record of her complaint. After contacting family members for advice, I responded:

If you remember, at our meeting in September I expressed our family’s interest in having documentation of Nelly’s allegations placed in the hospital’s records. We have always assumed that the minutes of the director’s meeting in which the case was reported would provide that record . . . We feel that it is necessary for the family to see the details.

Therefore, the family has asked me to request a copy of that portion of the minutes in which your report is recorded.

Dr. Sider answered immediately with two short letters. These excerpts are from his final letters to me:

. . . I understand that two items remain of concern to you: the question of a written report and its contents to the board and the question of physical modifications to therapy offices that might prevent further instances of abuse of patients . . . Thank you again for your family's continued interest . . . I write to let you know . . . that you will be hearing directly from Rev. Eppinga.

The next communication came from Jake, from his home, written on his personal stationary. The letter began on a personal note, complimenting the family for its Christian spirit. The real message followed:

The matter of mirrors for patient protection has been given consideration . . . for now it is deemed wiser to maintain present arrangements. We thank the family for its suggestions regarding this item because it has given us occasion to weigh the pros and cons.

With respect to documentation it was considered inadvisable by some members of the executive committee, in consultation with Dr. Sider . . . Thus the matter was reported to both the executive committee and the full board without any identification of the parties involved. In my opinion it was a good decision . . .

Nelly was highly regarded by friends, fellow-teachers, and had her praises sung by generations of her

students. Her startling disclosure did not alter my high regard for her. It did explain what I considered a too prolonged treatment program by one--as it has turned out--who was an unscrupulous physician. I hold him completely responsible--not Nelly--and I pray for him.

It is not easy for me to be involved in this matter . . . with all my sympathies on Nelly's side . . . but, I must say I am satisfied with Pine Rest . . . With this in mind I am content to close the gates behind us on this unhappy situation, and I would urge all in the family to do the same.

My worst fear--that they would choose to do nothing--was the message clearly communicated in Jake's discreet letter. "They haven't given us one thing," I yelled over the phone to George. "They just don't have the courage to do what's right!" A week later I wrote my reply:

Dear Jake,

February 20, 1995

We appreciate your sympathy for Nelly . . . and we fully understand your desire to "close the gate" on this unhappy situation.

On the matter of mirrors or other physical barriers, we are not convinced of the thoroughness of Pine Rest's appraisal. We are left wondering just how extensive the investigation was. How many hours were devoted to the project? How much research was done? By whom? Without such information we remain concerned that the matter may have been too easily dismissed.

On the documentation issue, we do insist that Dr. Beukema should be named in the hospital's records as the doctor against whom Nelly's allegations were made. For Nelly's sake, and for the sake of any other victim of his abuse, we do not feel that we can protect him The recording of Nelly's allegations against Dr. Beukema is for us a critical issue.

These comments reflect our family's continuing concerns. We are sorry that no resolution with Pine Rest has been achieved.

With warm personal regards,

Emma Talen

MARY'S NOTES*

I called Aunt Nelly up several days before Christmas to set a date for us to visit. We decided on the day after Christmas, December 26, 1993, at 11:30 a.m. The kids (Aaron, 8, and Emily, 7) and I would eat lunch and have time to play and visit with her. I asked if we could take along my nephew, Dan, 10.

It was a snowy day when we visited her. I parked in front of the house, trying to get close enough to the curb not to get stuck in a snow bank. The kids struggled to get out of the car and laughed when they sank into a huge drift. But, I noticed that her walkway was neatly shoveled. We knocked on the door. It always surprised me that she locked her door when she knew we were coming. She greeted us with her usual giggles and high pitched voice. I hugged her, noticing that she felt smaller to me. The kids were eager to see her. She was a favorite for them. As we walked into her house we could see the whole living area. The table was prepared, the chairs and sofa in exactly the same place, the curtains opened so you could see her magical backyard. She had transformed a postage stamp backyard into a land of Narnia. Her creation invited all kinds of birds and little animals. No matter what season it was, the backyard seemed set apart from the turmoil of the rest of the world.

The kids immediately took over the house, picking up all of the familiar objects and looking at new and old pictures. Aaron loved seeing his rainbow picture hanging prominently on the refrigerator door. Aunt Nelly wanted us all to sit at the table to eat. She was precise about eating time. We had a typical Aunt Nelly meal: homemade vegetable soup, bread, citrus fruit salad, vegetable salad, crackers and cheese, and the kids' favorite drink, Ovaltine. Nelly chatted with the kids about school and friends and their likes and

*Mary gave me her notes when I requested them soon after Nelly's death.

dislikes. After they grew restless and had finished with enough healthy food, we dismissed them. It was our ritual to have coffee and to talk in more depth about things. Because she loved having a good discussion, I always looked forward to being with her at her kitchen table. She started telling me about her doctor and counselor at Pine Rest. I was duly impressed that my seventy-seven year old aunt had started back into therapy. Meanwhile, the kids were running around, exploring her house, hanging on the railing, and getting spooked in the basement.

Then time stood still. But I wasn't aware of it all at once. Gradually just Nelly and I were suspended in time. She said, "Mary, I have something that I want to tell you. I didn't want anyone in the family to know. But you are a professional and you can handle this. Last summer I went to my heart doctor and told him what had happened to me at Pine Rest. I don't know why I told him, but I couldn't live with the secret any longer. I knew it was affecting me and my heart, and I was afraid." She paused and took a deep breath. "I wanted to get rid of this secret. You see, a long time ago, my doctor, Dr. Beukema, had sex with me when I was his patient. After I told Dr. Rasikas, he thought it was important for me to get treatment. He referred me to a psychiatrist at Pine Rest."

I froze. "Oh, Aunt Nelly, what happened to you? Tell me what he did to you."

"When I first was at Pine Rest I was so depressed. They didn't know what to do with me except to give me shock treatments. I hated them. The first time I didn't know what they were going to do to me. The nurses and the doctors just told me that this would help me get out of my depression. After the treatment I felt like they had killed me - it was so frightening. My body was scrambled inside and I couldn't get myself back. It didn't help me or the depressions at all. I was just more docile, numb. The next time they wanted to do that I resisted. I saw them coming for me. I remember running and getting trapped in a corner. The nurses in their white uniforms surrounded me while I kicked and screamed and they struggled to hold me down. I had no way to escape. I don't remember how long this went on. I felt that my life was over. I couldn't bear these treatments. But,

when Dr. Beukema came, I saw my way out. He was different. He was talking with his patients and helping them with their illnesses. I had to see him. I was so lucky to get him to take me as his patient!"

"He was a wonderful doctor. I worked very hard with him and I was getting better. I was working through the transference and emotionally dealing with the feelings I had that my father had abandoned me when he died, and I was learning to understand my mother who was cold and critical with me. As I was getting better and starting to get back into the world, something happened. He told me that he loved me. I loved him too. He had been my life savior. We had sex. It's funny that everyone thinks I am an old spinster lady."

We laughed together. How strange, I thought, remembering that Aunt Nelly always had liked to giggle about sexual jokes.

"He wanted to marry me after his wife died, but I refused because I didn't want to end up taking care of a feeble old man. He did love me, but he could not leave his wife and children. He said that he would have married me if he could. He told me that God allowed men to have more than one wife in the Old Testament because men were created with a stronger sex drive."

I gasped. "Oh, Aunt Nelly, how could he rationalize his behavior like that? How could he betray you like that?" I was crying and to my surprise, she was crying too. She had never cried in front of me before. She never cried.

"Aunt Nelly, psychiatrists are trained to recognize and cope with countertransference feelings and not to act on them. How could he do this to you? How long did he do this to you?"

"I was always afraid of getting pregnant, but I didn't. He said that everything would be OK. Then I had a hysterectomy. After that I stopped it. For some reason I had enough strength to say no. I don't know why. He still depended on me and needed me. I saw him, you know, even after he retired. He was closer to me than to his wife. We

shared so much. But I couldn't have him. And I couldn't have a family. I realize now how he took away my chance to have a normal life. Right when I was coming out into my life, he took it back--without me even realizing what it would do to me. He abused me. He shouldn't have gone that far."

"He hurt you. He hurt you. I can't believe he hurt you like that," I sobbed.

"I was so afraid to go away from home all these years--because I thought that I would lose control of myself and tell what had happened. I had to keep close to home so that I wouldn't slip. I couldn't bear to have anyone know."

"I wish you had told me or Mom or a friend. We would have supported you. I'm sure of it."

"I couldn't tell anyone. I felt that I was responsible. I thought that other people would think I seduced him. They would blame me. I felt so guilty because I did want to have him. I don't know what to think. I am so confused and I don't know what to do."

"Oh, Aunt Nelly. You have been alone with this secret for so long. I'm so sorry he did this to you. No one should be treated this way, especially by someone who says they love you. What can I do? I love you so much."

"You have been my special niece, Mary. Please don't tell anyone. I can't trust they would understand. I know that you understand because you are a psychologist and you work with patients who have these problems."

We hugged and wiped our tears. We returned to reality - time came back. The kids' background voices were restored from muffled white noise into the immediacy of "it's time to go home." I drove home in a daze.

When I called her in January she tried to tell me not to worry about her. We talked about abuse. She told me again that she had a special relationship with him, but now that she was angry with him for taking it too far. I encouraged her to talk to a therapist. I tried to be just a good niece. I didn't want the role of psychologist. I wanted to be an outraged vocal advocate for her. I wanted to send her an article about abuse. She didn't seem

interested. I tried to reassure her, but she didn't seem reassuring. That was the last time I spoke with her.

Now I have her secret.

The bottom line, Nelly, is that there will probably never be an answer. I do not believe that I will know what really happened to you.

I tried a couple of other tactics, but they were all dead ends. I even went to the minister and the elders of Neland Avenue Church. They did all they could. But no amount of pressure in the world could move Pine Rest to create the record you deserve. The right thing was not done.

I still ask: why were no records kept of your eleven years in Pine Rest? For the rest of my life I will be looking for your records. Our cousin, Cal Nagel, told me that he requested and received a book-sized volume of progress notes about his mother, Rose, who was at Pine Rest when you were there. So, where are the doctors' and nurses' notes about you?

Even Dr. Baker, the one who wrote your discharge note in 1957, the last remaining doctor who knew you at Pine Rest, refused to talk to me. He seemed to think that I was some kind of an obsessed crank when I called to ask if I could meet with him to talk about you. "What good would it do?" he said.

And so, I give you all that I have to give: this recollection of our lives together, this story--without an ending . . .

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- 1933 Father dies.
- 1934 Mother takes Nelly to Dr. Mulder at Pine Rest for anxiety about Father's death.
- 1938 Nelly graduates from Calvin College and begins teaching at Oakdale Christian School.
- 1942 Mother takes Nelly to Dr. Stewart, a psychiatrist in private practice in Grand Rapids. She sees him ten times and is advised to start a garden and not to stop teaching.
- 1946 Nelly is admitted to the hospital at Pine Rest and receives four shock treatments.
- 1948 Three shock treatments.
- 1949 Seven shock treatments. Jerry and I move to Minnesota.
- 1951 One more shock treatment. Dr. Beukema takes an interest in Nelly's case.
- 1952 Nelly begins intensive psychotherapy with Dr. Beukema, Mother moves to Washington DC, and Jerry and I move back to Grand Rapids.
- 1953 Nelly improves. The sexual abuse begins.
- 1954 Mother dies.
- 1955 Nelly begins to work at Pine Rest's Children's Retreat.
- 1956 Nelly begins to teach part-time at Cutlerville Christian School near Pine Rest.
- 1957 Nelly is discharged from Pine Rest and continues teaching part-time. She rooms in a private home and remains an outpatient of Dr. Beukema. The sex continues.
- 1958 Nelly rents and furnishes an apartment and accepts a full-time teaching job at Millbrook Christian School. We move to Cleveland.
- 1961 Dr. Beukema discovers Nelly has a fibroid tumor. Nelly has a hysterectomy. After the surgery Nelly stops the sex but continues to see him regularly.
- 1964 Nelly receives MA degree in counseling from MSU.
- 1965 Nelly builds a new house.
- 1976 Dr. Beukema retires, but Nelly continues to see him at his home.
- 1980 Nelly retires. Dr. Beukema still prescribes medication for her.
- 1984 Nelly has a heart attack.
- 1993 Nelly reveals her secret to Dr. Rasikas, Pine Rest, and Mary Talen.
- 1994 Nelly dies.