

## Chapter 1

### *Liars*

I was awakened by a commotion upstairs. My dad was talking loudly to my stepmother, Kathy, and I could tell he was upset. I looked at my clock radio; it was 6:10 a.m., and still dark outside. Then I heard my dad stomping down the stairs toward my room, yelling the whole time.

He shoved open the swinging bar room doors, which served as my bedroom door, and in one swift move, threw a bag full of garbage onto my bed.

The bag hit with such force, it bounced from the bed onto the wall and split down the side, releasing a heap of eggshells, coffee grounds, stinky beer cans, and T-bones from the steak we had for dinner two nights before. As I attempted to wipe the slime and grit from my face, neck, and chest, I recalled my dad's promise from a month ago.

"If you like the trash so much, maybe you should sleep with it!" he said. "The next time you 'forget' to take out the garbage when you're supposed to, you will sleep with it!"

It took me a few seconds to remember that I had, in fact, forgotten to take the trash out yesterday.

It was the last week of school, and I still had one more exam to take before I would finish my freshman year at Trenton High School in Trenton, a blue-collar town south of Detroit.

I got up, turned on the light, and spent the next 15 minutes cleaning the disgusting garbage out of my bed. As I worked, my dad started in with his usual insults. His degrading comments were commonplace by now, but they still cut to the bone and formed the core of who I was. After a while, you start to believe the negative comments targeting your character and personality.

"You are a lazy, undisciplined loser, and you will never amount to anything if you don't change your ways," he said.

I picked up the six or eight beer cans first. That was about my

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Dad's nightly intake on weekdays. On the weekends, it was more than that and usually included liquor as well. He was even meaner when he drank liquor. The trick was to try to figure out when Jekyll would turn into Hyde.

Next I picked up the steak bones, eggshells, and the soggy coffee grounds. There were also scrapings of old mashed potatoes, which had turned gray to match the rotting cobs of corn. I finished cleaning and went upstairs to take the trash to the dumpster at the end of the parking lot. We lived in an eight-unit condominium just off Fort Street on the south side of town.

I still had a mile-and-a-half walk to school and needed to get my sheets and blankets into the wash, plus prepare for the exam.

I returned to the condo and headed up to the bathroom to take a shower. As I did, I passed my father, who couldn't resist a few more parting words on his way out the door for work.

Once out of the shower and dressed for school, I went in to the kitchen, where Kathy was fixing my breakfast. She set a plate of food in front of me and sat down.

"I tried to stop your father from dumping the garbage in your bed," she said.

"It's not your fault, Kathy," I said. "He told me a few weeks ago that if I forgot to take out the trash, he'd dump it in my bed. I was studying for my history exam, and it slipped my mind."

Kathy often tried to intervene when it came to the way my dad disciplined my brother and me. His response was usually to cuss her out and tell her to stay out of it: "You are not their mother!"

I finished my breakfast, grabbed my lunch, and said goodbye to Kathy. As I did, she told me not to let the garbage incident ruin my day.

"I won't," I said. "I'll get over it."

As I walked to school, my thoughts drifted. Not about the exam I was about to take, but of my childhood and the events of my life.

I have always had an uncanny ability to remember specific dates and experiences, even from a very early age. I remember Christmas of 1962, when Santa brought me a fire truck. It was the best! It had a ladder that moved from side to side and expanded up and down, and it had flashers and a siren. I was not quite 2 years old.

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I remember having birthday parties at my grandmother's house in Flat Rock, Mich. My older brother, Jeff, and I always shared our parties because we were born 363 days apart. So for two days out of the year, we were the same age.

I recall the spring of 1963. My parents struggled, but did the best they could. One day, my dad's father, showed up, out of the blue. It was the first time I ever saw him—and the first time my father had seen him since he was 5 years old.

What I remember about my grandpa is he could tell great stories and had a lot of tricks, like taking a hankie out of his pocket and making a bunny out of it. It would come to life and run up and down his arm before sitting on his shoulder. I never figured out how he did that.

I also recall how he and my dad would go to the bar a lot and come home pretty fired up. And by fired up, I mean drunk.

(My grandfather was hired to paint a rooster on the side of the bar, probably to pay the tab. More than 20 years later, I drove past that bar on Telegraph and West, and the rooster was still there.)

We were living in Rockwood at the time, a town near Flat Rock, where my grandmother lived. Our house, which sat across the street from a Catholic church, had what seemed like a huge set of white stairs on the south side. They weren't enclosed, and there was no backing on the steps. I was terrified to go down them by myself. If I fell backward, I would go through the steps. If I fell forward, I would tumble to the bottom.

A boy who was about 5 years old lived next door. Jeff had gotten a tricycle for Christmas, and loved to ride it up and down the sidewalk in front of the house. He was only 3 years old, but very independent. One day, the neighbor boy came up and pushed Jeff off his bike.

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My dad saw this happen but did nothing. At dinner that night, he told Jeff, "The next time he does that, you take your bat and hit him with it!" (He was referring to the plastic bat that was part of a Whiffle ball set).

Sometime later, the boy again pushed Jeff off his bike. Jeff looked around and grabbed the nearest bat, which was not the plastic bat, but a genuine wooden one. He hit the kid across the arms. Needless to say, that was the end of the bike-pushing.

Shortly after, we moved again, this time to a place in Huron Township, north of Flat Rock. It was in this house that I would learn about domestic violence.

My mom was pregnant again. She gave birth to Jeff when she was just 15 years old, and I came a year later. This would be her third child, and she was only 17 years old. One day that spring, my dad and his father had been out drinking. My mom was in the kitchen when my dad arrived home in a foul mood. We could hear the arguing heat up. In an attempt to get away, my mom ran into the living room, where Jeff and I were. I didn't know why he was so angry, and why he kept calling her "woman."

"Don't talk back to me, woman!" he screamed, as he hit her.

She tried to avoid his slapping and pushing, but couldn't. He pushed her out the front door and she stumbled down the steps. Jeff and I pleaded with him to stop hurting our mom, but he ignored us. He was like a man possessed.

She was begging him to stop, "Don't hurt the baby! Stop!! Please Stop!!" As she regained her balance from the fall, he jumped from the porch and went after her again. He chased her to the swing-set, where she became tangled up and fell backward over a swing. Just as she fell, a police car pulled into our front yard.

The police had been to our house on several occasions already that spring. My parents' arguments would prompt the neighbors to call them, but never before had things gotten this out of hand. Both officers quickly jumped from the squad car. One ran to help my mother; the other restrained my father.

Jeff and I watched as the policeman gave my mom a hankie to wipe the blood from her face. We watched as my dad was placed under arrest. A little while later, we would drive to my grandparent's house. My mom didn't want to be alone. She was still just a girl, and needed her parents.

When my grandfather saw that my mom had been beaten, he was furious. It's probably a good thing that my dad was in the safe confines of a jail cell, because my grandpa was ready to tear his head off.

My dad got out of jail the next day, but we stayed at my grandparents for a few days. Then we all went back home. Dad seemed to settle down for a few months, and things were peaceful again.

My sister, Christina, was born on July 2, 1963. Jeff and I played outside most of the time, as my mom wouldn't let us stay in the house unless the weather was bad. By fall, my dad seemed to be drinking more and more. One day, Jeff and I were outside with him while he was painting the house. He would set his open beer down on the porch, and then go paint.

Jeff spotted the beer and said, "Come on, Dave!" We walked over to the beer. Jeff grabbed it, took a big drink, and handed the can to me. (Mind you, he wasn't even 4 years old yet, and I was still 2.) I knew what he was doing was wrong, so I said no. He looked at me, shrugged his shoulders, and proceeded to finish the beer himself.

We walked back over to the swing-set and sat down. A few minutes later, my dad walked over to get a drink. Realizing the can was empty, he went into the house for another. He took a few swallows, set it down and went back to painting. Jeff looked at me again and said, "Come on Dave."

Sure enough, Jeff grabbed the beer again—only this time it was too much for him to finish. We walked back over to the swing-set and watched as my dad returned for his beer. He picked up the nearly empty can and looked at it with a puzzled expression. Then he looked over at us. Just then, Jeff threw up.

My dad walked over to us and asked, "Did you drink my beer?" "No," Jeff answered. "No," I said.

"Get in the house now!" he roared.

Jeff fell out of the swing as he hastily tried to get out of it, and we both raced to the house. My dad made Jeff put his hands on the table and bend over. Then he took off his belt.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"I hate liars and will always know when you're lying," he hissed.

Then it was my turn. Guilt by association, I guess.

In the spring of 1964, we had to move again. This house was off West Road and Interstate 75. I think my dad either drank so much that he couldn't pay the rent or he lost his job, or both. Either way, we moved into a house that was not fit for anyone to live in—especially three young children.

The house was very small. It had two tiny bedrooms and a common area that acted as the living room, dining room, and kitchen. It had linoleum flooring and ugly paper on the walls. We had electricity and a refrigerator and a space heater to keep us warm. But there was no running water. There was an old-fashioned pump at the kitchen sink and another out in the yard. My mom would have to pump it several times to get the water flowing.

There was no bathroom, only an outhouse in the back yard, which I was terrified of falling into. I was only 3 years old, and the giant toilet seat was intimidating. There was no heat out there. We had a large pot that we would use as a toilet at night, so we didn't have to go outside. For baths, my mom would haul a washtub into the house and heat some water on the stove.

One morning as I woke up and walked into the kitchen, I saw a mouse on the floor in front of the refrigerator. I jumped up on the table and screamed. My mom came out to see what was wrong, and I screamed as yet another mouse ran across the floor. Three or four more followed. My dad came out with the broom and tried to sweep them out the door.

The owner of the place would put his old cars and other junk next to the house. It was a fenced-in, makeshift junkyard. The fence was missing in some places, and Jeff and I would go in and play in the old cars. There were also piles of lumber in there.

One day, my father came home from work and saw Jeff and I running around in the junkyard. He saw that we each had long sticks and were running back and forth, side to side very quickly. We would swat the sticks on the ground and then retreat back at the same time.

My dad yelled at us to quiet down, and then he asked, "What are you two up to?" Jeff replied, "We are hitting a snake."

My dad sat his lunch pail down and came over to see. As he approached, he heard a rattling sound. Suddenly, it occurred to him what it was and he moved swiftly. He picked up a board and rushed over to us, and with one hard thrust he killed the snake.

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"That was a rattle snake, and if it would have bit you, you would be dead!" he yelled. We were hauled inside, and off came his belt.

"Don't you ever play in the junk yard again!"

Ford Motor Co. was building a new plant across the street from our house. They had a contractor from Texas, and my dad was pretty sure that the rattlesnake had hitched a ride on one of the trailers.

After a few months, we moved yet again. This time to a four-bedroom, two-bathroom home in Trenton, on Fifth Street between St. Joseph and West Road. We had never lived in a house this big before, or in such a nice neighborhood. The house was white, with a large, covered porch, and I loved it.

Jeff started kindergarten in the fall and my mom, Chris, and I would walk him to school, as it was near our house. Things at home seemed more stable, but I missed Jeff when he was at school. There was a neighbor boy named Jack Hardaway, and he and I spent a lot of time together and became good friends.

My dad got a new car. It was a tan Thunderbird, and he would take us out for rides in it. I remember being so happy. We would go on a dirt road and dad would fishtail with the car and us kids would squeal with delight. Once he pulled over to the side of a road next to a cornfield. He got out of the car and started picking some of the corn. "Dad, isn't that stealing?" I asked. "They ain't gonna eat it all!" he said, which confused me.

That Christmas was the best we ever had. Jeff and I got bikes, new clothes and shoes, and a bunch of new toys. We wasted no time, and headed out the door with the bikes. It was Christmas of 1965, and there was plenty of snow on the ground that day, but it didn't stop us. We rode those bikes for hours.

Things were great. My father still drank a lot, and he and my mom would still get in fights, but not quite as often. My dad would play these head games with us at times. He would give Jeff or me the butt of his cigarette and tell us to go put it in the toilet. We would both go into the bathroom just off the living room and try to smoke it, coughing and choking as we tried.

Once back in the living room, my dad would look at us and ask, "Did you smoke that?"

"No. No!" we would answer.

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Off would come his belt and we were ordered to put our hands on the table.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"I hate liars! You can never trust a liar!"

It took Jeff and me awhile to figure out not to lie, but eventually we got it. The whole set-up was a test to teach us not to lie. My dad knew full well when he handed one of us the cigarette butt what we were going to do with it. It wasn't until later that we figured out that it was the coughing that gave us away.

In the spring, my dad bought a boat, a 1962 Chris Craft. We'd take it out on to the lake on weekends. It was fun, but scary, because we would bounce up and down on the back seat when my dad would go fast. Sometimes it felt like I was going to fly right out of the boat. Dad had a thing about veering from side to side, just like he did when he'd fishtail in the car.

Later that summer, he would take us fishing, sometimes in the boat, and sometime along the Huron River near Willow Metro Park. We would stop at the store to get worms and kielbasa to use as bait.

My dad was an excellent fisherman. My brother Jeff was pretty good as well. As for me, I did not have the patience for fishing.

Jeff loved to fish. He would relentlessly ask my dad to take us. Finally one day, dad walked us to the sewer grate at the end of the block and said, "Go at it, boys!" I said, "We meant at the lake." He explained that since the sewer leads to the lake, there must be fish in there. So we dropped our lines and sat, waiting and waiting. When we finally went home, I told my dad that the fish were not biting today. "Maybe next time," said Jeff.

Summer was coming to an end and I was eager to start school. I would be a kindergartner that year! I could hardly wait. My friend Jack and I were going to be in the same class, so I knew that I'd have at least one friend.

Jeff was in first grade now, so he went to school all day long. Jack and I spent a lot of time together in the fall, but once winter hit, we did not see each other as much.

On Christmas, Jeff and I each got a teddy bear with a chain around its neck, plus a few other small toys. It was nothing like the Christmas of 1965. That following spring, my dad sold the boat, which made Jeff and me very sad.

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A few months later, he and I were in the backyard playing. We had an alley in the back of our house, but we didn't have a garage like many of the other houses, so there was a lot of room to play. My dad was in the house taking a nap, and Chris was playing in her room. My mom had gone to get her hair done at the beauty salon.

It was a beautiful summer day, and it was getting late in the afternoon. Mom would be home soon to make dinner.

Suddenly, two police cars, one from the north, the other from the south, came racing into the alley and stopped about 40 feet apart. Two officers from each car jumped out and stood behind their doors with their weapons drawn.

Jeff and I turned quickly and raced into the house. As we did, we could see another police car coming to the front, parking between our house and the Hardaway's. Once we were inside, we yelled to our dad, "Dad, Dad!! The cops are here!"

He quickly jumped up from the couch and ran to the front window, then to the back door. By then another police car had parked at the end of the street. Dad paced back and forth frantically, lost it seemed. Then a black sedan pulled up and four men in suits got out. One raised a megaphone and ordered my dad to come out of the house with his hands behind his head and kneel on the porch.

He looked at us and told us to move back into the dining room and sit on the floor. We did what he said, but as soon as he went out the door, Jeff and I ran to the window.

I think the cops got spooked when they saw us moving inside because suddenly they were pointing their weapons at the house.

My father yelled, "Those are my kids! Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

The officers ran up the steps. Two came in the house. Two handcuffed my dad and brought him back inside. They sat him on the couch. My dad asked if he could smoke. Someone handed him a cigarette and he sat there holding it, unlit, with his hands cuffed together. He was waiting for a match.

Jeff, Chris, and I were just standing there, not knowing what to do or what was happening.

The men were FBI agents. They informed my dad that he was under arrest for the armed robbery of 11 banks in Indiana.

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### CHAPTER 2

#### *Ghetto Steaks*

My dad's hands shook in the cuffs as he tried several times to strike the match to light his cigarette. Several of the agents were also smoking, and the room quickly filled up with smoke. I remember the sun coming through the window, cutting through the smoke and shining right on my dad's face... which was full of shame. I could hear the anxiety in his voice as he spoke.

I remember that my heart was racing and my throat was dry.

My dad asked if they could wait until his wife returned before taking him away. The officers wanted nothing to do with caring for us kids, nor did they wish to wait for my mother to return. The FBI agent told one of the officers to take us to a neighbor's house.

Just then, my mom pulled up. It seemed like the car was still moving as she quickly opened the door and jumped out. One of the officers stationed outside tried to stop her, but she pushed past him, practically knocking him over.

I could see the panic on her face. She was frantic and tears were streaming down her face, as she ran to my father's side, saying over and over again, *No! No! No! Please no! Why? Why? Why?!*

My mom's actions caused Jeff, Chris and I to become hysterical. We all started crying. We tried to go to my dad, but the agents blocked our path and wouldn't let us near him.

*"Please let us through! Let us see our dad!"* we pleaded.

My heart was sinking, and the magnitude of what was happening was indescribable.

My mom saw the panic on our faces and turned her attention to us. Almost as if snapping out of a daze, she ran to us to hold and comfort us.

The agents helped my father to his feet and escorted him out the door. As he passed by us, he turned to Jeff and said, "You are the man of the house now. You have to take care of everything while I am gone."

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Jeff was 7 years old.

We asked my dad where he was going, and he told us that he was going to Indiana to visit our grandma. Although I wanted to believe him, I knew it wasn't true. It didn't take long for my mother's family to arrive from Flat Rock. Everyone kept asking me if I was OK. I told them that I was, but I just wanted to be left alone.



They decided that it would be best if we all went to stay in Flat Rock, which we did, for a while, returning home when school started. I remember looking forward to getting back to normal... whatever normal was now.

The first day of school was miserable. A bunch of older kids pushed Jeff and me and teased us and knocked things out of our hands. They threw things at us, and did everything they could to make us feel like we were less than human... like we didn't deserve to be there. It was like a public flogging or hanging or witch-burning.

Jeff and I didn't rob the banks—why were *we* being punished? The kids would taunt us by repeatedly yelling, “Bank-robber, bank-robber... your daddy's a *bank-robber!!* We did not expect this and didn't know what to do.

But we never once cried. My father always told us that crying is for girls. If we cried while or after he spanked us or used his belt on us, he would call us a little girl. “You must be a little girl, cuz only girls cry. Men don't cry!”

I still remember the fear I felt every morning as I left the house and walked to school. It was not a matter of *will* we be teased and persecuted, it was *who* will tease us and *when*. The pressure was very overwhelming.

As soon as we left the house, I could feel the adrenaline start pumping through my body. I was in a state of heightened awareness, like a field mouse, looking around in fear, anticipating an eagle or a hawk swooping in for the kill. I would look at each person we passed and wonder, “Is this guy alright? Or is he gonna start something?” “This guy is cool. He's safe.”

“Oooo, this one could be trouble...”

Jeff and I would try to ignore the mean kids by walking a different way to school—anything to avoid them. It wasn't all of the kids, just a group of about 20,

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all who were older than us. Our friends would try to tell them to shut up and leave us alone, only to be brought into the fold. They, too, became the subject of ridicule.

This went on for several weeks at the start of my first grade and Jeff's second grade year. Christina wasn't in school yet, so she was OK. Finally one day, as we were walking home, Jeff said, “Dave, if dad knew that we were letting these kids push us around and pick on us, he would be really mad. He would probably call us a couple of little girls for not standing up for ourselves to these kids.”

With that, we made a pact to take control of the situation and any others that came up in the future. “I have your back and you have mine” he said.

The next day, two older boys started pushing us and taking our stuff. They were third grade bullies. Jeff and I looked at each other and knew we had to do something. That's when it all seemed to come out. A month's worth of anger, frustration and pain reared its ugly head.

Jeff and I took them down and started hitting them with all our might. The next thing we knew, neighbors were coming out to break up the fight. We didn't come out unscathed, but we did get the better of them.

After that, Jeff and I became pretty good at fighting and ignoring pain. We got into fights almost every day for about a week. When the other kids saw that we weren't going to take their abuse anymore, the teasing eased up. We started hanging out with some other neighbor boys, Ernie and Larry. They each had older brothers in middle school and high school, and they had our backs.

Things were so bad in school that we started to skip every so often to hang out with some older kids. We would go down to the Huron River and break into the boats on the docks.

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The older kids were more interested in the alcohol on the boats, but Jeff and I went straight for the food. It didn't take long for the police to figure out what was going on, and my brother and I would be escorted home in a cop car. This happened enough that we were on a first-name basis with the police. Other times we would go to Elizabeth Park and hang out with the hippies that gathered there every day.

Shortly after my father was taken away, I started having extremely vivid nightmares—not every night, but often enough. The nightmares were of animals, or monsters that would come out of the closet, the bathroom or under the bed. It was as if they were three-dimensional. I would be wide awake, not wanting to say a word, as I did not want them to know where I was.

My heart would pound and my skin would crawl. I was terrified when they would lunge toward me and I would scream at the top of my lungs, *“Help!! They are coming to get me! Help!!”*

I would cry and scream until someone would turn on the lights. Of course by then, the beasts were gone. Because I was *sure* they had been there. And I knew one of these times, someone else was going to see what I was seeing.

Jeff and I spent a lot of time playing down at the railroad tracks with the older kids (fourth- and fifth-graders). We liked to put a penny on the tracks and wait for a train to come by. The penny would smooth out like crepe paper and double in size. We also liked to catch garter snakes and other animals, and smoke cigarettes.

One day, the train was passing by ever so slowly. The other kids jumped aboard. Not wanting to be cowards, Jeff and I did the same thing. (If you've never jumped on a train, you do it by grabbing the ladder on either side of each train car, pulling yourself up...and holding on for dear life!)

We went about 300 yards down the tracks and got off at N.A. Mans & Sons Lumber. The older kids picked up rocks and started launching them at the windows.

Being only 6 years old, I was petrified, but didn't want to back down. I couldn't let the other kids think I was weak.

Jeff and I tried hard to hit the windows like the older boys were

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doing, but we didn't have the arm strength. We heard the crashing and smashing of windows, but neither of us was successful at hitting any. Soon, all of the kids were scattering like rats. They

took off in all directions. That's when Jeff and I realized that the cops were heading toward us. We ran as fast as we could down the tracks.

We knew of a hole we could squeeze through under the fence up the way, and just needed to go a bit farther. Each time I looked back, the cops were gaining on us. The railroad ties were the perfect distance apart for the stride of a 6- or 7-year-old—but not for grown men. I could see the concentration on the cops' faces as they tried to time their steps with the distance of the railroad ties.

We jumped from the tracks and over the stones to the edge of the grass. The fence was in view. The hole was only about 5 feet away—just a little bit farther. I took one more look back and the cops were right on our heels.

“Hurry, Jeff!” I yelled. He scooted under the fence first, and I quickly followed. We took off running, knowing we were in the clear. The cops would have to go all the way around the fence, and by then we would be long gone.

A few weeks later, we did the same thing again. Only this time, there were two cops waiting for us on the other side of the fence. We tried to run past, but the officers caught up and grabbed us by the backs of our shirts. I was scared, sweaty and breathing hard. They took us to the car and asked us “What were you *thinking?*!”

They wanted to know the names of the other kids, but our dad had taught us to never be a snitch, so we didn't tell. We told them that we did not know the other kids. They took us home, all the while threatening to take us to jail. My mom was furious. I'm not sure there was even any leather left on the belt by the time she got done with us. We were grounded to the yard for two weeks.

My mom was the ripe old age of 22, raising a 7-, 6-, and 4-year-old all by herself. Back when we had money, we had chicken, meatloaf, steak, and other good dinners. But now she was struggling, and there was less and less food in the house. My mom had to get creative.

Jeff had a name for one of our meals: ghetto steaks. It was a piece of bologna fried in a pan, usually with pork-and-beans or green beans. Some days, we only had rice with sugar and butter on it or really watered down soup—one can for all four of us. We were always

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hungry. The food stamp program was in its infancy and hadn't spread throughout the county; in our area, if you didn't have money, you didn't eat.

One day, Jeff came up with a brilliant idea. He and I walked across the railroad tracks to the Big Boy restaurant on Fort Street. As we approached, Jeff told me to be quiet, smile, and agree with everything he says. He would do all of the talking.

We walked in and he asked to speak to the boss.

“All this trash in your parking lot looks bad,” Jeff told the manager. “What would you think if you drove up and saw all this trash in the parking lot? Wouldn't it make you wonder what the kitchen looked like? Wouldn't it make you wonder if the kitchen was clean?”

“Me and my brother would be willing to clean this parking lot for you if you would give us each a burger, fries and a Coke.”

The manager went out and looked around. Then he looked at Jeff and me. “Deal!” he said.

We cleaned the parking lot on a regular basis for food, and we soon did the same at the A&W restaurant on Jefferson Avenue.

In the mornings during the summer, Jeff and I would walk to school for a free breakfast—cereal, fruit, and milk. It was the first time I ever had Fruit Loops, which are my favorite to this day. The school also had activities. I became pretty good at board hockey. The game was played on a flat board with wood on the sides of it. On each end was a small slot that you would shoot the puck in to with a small stick. We also played kickball and basketball. We played almost every day, and Jeff became very good at basketball.

At night we would have babysitters. My mom had a job at a small diner on West Road by the high school. Sometimes, we would go there while she worked. If we were good, she would give us a treat. They had doughnuts on the counter, under the glass on a silver stand, so the incentive was definitely there. I loved the chocolate-covered doughnuts.

It was during this time, from the time my father was taken until the end of that summer, that several babysitters—both male and female—sexually abused me. It went on for what seemed like an eternity. In reality, it was probably once or twice a month for several months.

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One day, my mom found some *Playboy* magazines in the house and asked where they came from. “The babysitters,” I replied. “They bring them over and look at them.”

“Did they show them to you?” she asked.

“Yes” I answered.

That was the end of the babysitters—all of them. For me, it was the end of the abuse. From then on, one of my aunts or uncles watched us, and if they couldn’t, we were taken over to my grandmother’s house.

One night on the way home from Flat Rock, my mom was pulled over by the police for speeding. Jeff, Chris, and I were sleeping in the back of the car. Once we woke up and saw the flashing lights behind us, the experience of losing our father came rushing back. We all panicked and started screaming repeatedly, and at the top of our lungs: “*Don’t take our mom!!*”

The policeman had no idea what was going on, and why three children were reacting so strongly to a routine traffic stop, but he quickly let my mom go.

Early that summer we moved again, to Wyandotte, a community north of Trenton. My mother had gotten a job at a bar there and wanted to be closer to work. I’m pretty sure we had gotten evicted from our previous home. The new place was a big red house, again by the railroad tracks. We only stayed there for one or two months before moving into a garage behind a Polish lady’s house. She had made the garage into an apartment, but it was very small. In the rafters

was a tiny bedroom where us kids slept. The living room, bathroom, kitchen, and my mom's bedroom were on the main floor.

Things got real bad for us. My mom still worked late nights at the bar. There were nights she had to leave us home alone with Jeff in charge. It was terrifying. I was worried what would happen if the garage caught fire or we got hurt, etc. I also remember being so hungry. There were days when all there was to eat was a mayonnaise sandwich, or a ketchup sandwich. It is hard to split a mayonnaise sandwich 3 ways, and we always tried to let Christina have the biggest piece.

Jeff and I would steal fruit off the Polish lady's fruit trees, and she would yell at my mom for it. We also started going door to door asking for glass bottles. We would collect them and return them to the store for a nickel apiece. With the money, we would buy whatever food we could to hold the three of us over for the night.

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Jeff had been held back at school, so we were both in second grade now.

Once winter hit, things got even worse—no fruit on the trees. Somehow, we made it through. But I will never forget the pain of being hungry.