Freshman year of high school, I was on Spirit Line, a group of freshman girls who cheer at the girls’ games. One day right before Monique Yslis and I were going to cheer at a volleyball game, Monique was changing her socks while we talked to Ricky Christmas.

“I like the way you take off your socks.” Ricky said.

Monique’s sock-changing became a mock strip-tease. “We have to change into our cheer uniforms later,” she said.

“Can I watch you girls change?” Ricky asked

I wasn’t sure I had heard him correctly. “What?”

“Can we watch you change?” Ricky pointed toward Steve and his twin brother, Ken, messing around in the courtyard.

“You can hang out with us until we go change,” I told him.

“Where are you changing?”

“Mrs. Fraley’s classroom,” I responded.

Well, he misunderstood this to mean that I was allowing them to watch us change. Ricky went to get the Oldham twins.

Monique, the rest of the Spirit Line, and I went into Mrs. Fraley’s room. Ricky and the Oldhams followed us.

“What are you guys doing in here?” Joanne asked.

“Lisa said we could watch,” Ricky told her.

“I did not!”

Steve, Ken, and Ricky left.

As soon as they were gone, I removed my Bourgade uniform shirt and navy blue pants. I wanted to change quickly, incase they returned. Before the other girls took off any of their clothes, the boys peeked in through the window. I was the only one stripped to my underwear. Steve gasped, Ken told him to shush. Shana noticed them and yelled. Then the other girls started screaming. I turned around to see three boys staring at me in my bra and panties!

“Get out!” Joanne yelled.

I was horrified that Ricky and the Oldhams had seen me in my underwear. And I was worried that the other girls would be furious with me for telling Ricky where we were changing. I was relieved that I was the only one who had stripped down to underwear and that the other girls weren’t exposed to the boys because of my big mouth.

I figured that the boys were disappointed that of all the girls in there, I was the one who they got to see. I had small breasts and a wide butt. I wasn’t sexy, I was more like someone’s little sister. They wouldn’t be grossed out, but they’d wish I’d go put my clothes back on.

Steve turned around and pressed his face against the side of the lockers. I thought Steve was crying. Ken yelled at him to run to the bathroom. Steve turned around he kept his hand in front of his crotch.

When Mrs. Fraley got to the room, she asked Steve if this had happened before, if he understood what had happened. He was flustered: "No. Yes." But he said he knew what happened. Mrs. Fraley took him to the office. There was some discussion about calling his mom to bring him a clean pair of pants.

Then Mrs. Fraley came back to her classroom to talk to the cheerleaders. She asked if we were upset. Everyone else said they were still dressed when it happened. Then I admitted that I was in only my underwear. Shana said, "What do you look like in underwear?"

I thought it was a weird question. "Normal," I answered.

Mrs. Fraley asked me if I was upset. I was embarrassed that they had seen me in my underwear, but decided that if the girls weren't angry at me for telling Ricky Christmas we were going into Mrs. Fraley’s classroom to change, I was OK with it. They weren't upset. Mrs. Fraley asked if I understood what happened. I had heard something about going to the bathroom and clean pants and thought Steve had peed in his pants. Monica said, "It wasn't pee."

Mrs. Fraley said I needed a birds and bees talk, but decided that this was not a pleasant context in which to inform me of these things.

So, in my attempts to find out if anyone else remembered any details, or at least to confirm my memories, I called Joanne recently and asked her if she remembered the Oldhams peeking at us. She didn’t. How about remembering that Mrs. Fraley had to take Steve to the office to call his mom about clean pants? Uh, no, she didn’t remember that either.

“Umm, but thanks for reaching out to me…” Joanne said.

That was probably the weirdest phone call she had ever received.

I contacted Monique Yslis through Facebook, but she didn’t remember that incident either.

Then I found Mrs. Fraley. I sent her a message… “Do you remember when the Oldhams peeked into your classroom while the Spirit Line was changing… and you had to take Steve to call his mom to bring clean pants…”

Yes. Mrs. Fraley did remember that.

Ken Oldham fell into a construction pit during a walkathon in December of freshman year of high school. Liz Oakes, one of the other freshman girls, rushed around through the walkathon in the wrong direction, announcing the news to those who hadn’t gotten to the pit yet.

“Did you hear?” Liz approached my friends and me. “Some kid fell into a ditch and it’s too deep for him to climb out.”

“Is he OK?” I asked. “Did he break his leg?”

She wasn’t sure, but she thought he was fine.

“Where are his friends? Is someone there for him?” I asked.

“His twin brother is there. Someone went to call the school.”

When my friends and I encountered the pit, I asked Steve, the more careful twin, how he was feeling. He was worried, but was dealing with it without too much panic.

Joanne Deniston, Heidi Heiland, Jenny Blalock, Sandy Sindorf, and several more of the popular girls got into a group, whispered about Ken and laughed at him.

“I can’t believe they’re laughing about this,” I tried to comfort Steve. “That’s so mean of them. This is serious. He could have broken a leg. He could be in there over night before the construction guys come back to get him out.”

Maybe that last thought wasn’t too comforting. Luckily, the school had called the fire department to help get him out within the next hour. I thought, oh, the poor guy. For the next four years he’s going to be remembered as the kid who fell into a big hole.

How does someone fall into a construction pit? I didn’t know anything about Ken at the time, but now that I know more about him, even I laugh about it. If it had been Susan Vales at the bottom of a construction pit, it would have been a tragedy. But when Ken Oldham falls into a hole, it makes for great comedy.

The first two and a half years of high school – before I got my own car and gave my parents a few thousand dollars a year for car insurance while I saved the what little was left from my part time job for college – I often took the city bus home from school. Most of the time there were other kids at the bus stop with me. But occasionally I hung around with friends on campus and went to the bus stop too late to catch the bus with the other kids.

One afternoon of freshman year as I walked alone northbound alone on 31st Avenue, Steve, Ken, and Mike Duran walked south, back toward school.

“You like *her*!?!” a distraught Oldham yelled to Mike.

“Shh!!!” The other Oldham punched him. “Would you shut up?”

They stopped talking except for an occasional mutter, followed by, “Shh, shh.” All three watched me approach. I thought they were planning something, like to throw something at me, yell something at me, give me a wedgie, who knows.

Although I felt that whatever they were up to was all in good fun, I kept my eyes on them, in an attempt to prevent them from taking me by surprise. When I got within speaking distance, I asked, “What are you guys talking about?”

“Nothing,” they answered.

After they passed, I kept my ears open, turning around occasionally to make sure they didn’t sneak up from behind. One of them turned around several times to watch me also, walking backward as they walked away. I made it to the bus stop unscathed.

One Friday at the beginning of sophomore year, I stayed at school to paint posters with the pep club before a football game. Juliet Nevins, a senior, was the only other person there with me. When we went to the football bleachers to put up the posters, we found Steve, Ken, and Mike Duran hanging around the field. They volunteered to help us attach the posters to the bleachers.

After the posters were hung, Juliet and I went to change clothes in the restroom of the school’s main office. Juliet left campus to get something to eat, but I stayed behind, planning to get something at the snack bar during the game. I knew that if I went home, I wouldn’t be allowed to come back for the game. When I went outside, Steve was looking for me. “There’s a barbecue over by the baseball field. You should come over there with us.”

“Are you sure I’m allowed?”

“Yeah. My dad’s in charge of it and he said he wants you to come.”

Wow. Not only was I allowed to come to the barbecue, I was invited to come.

Steve’s dad wanted me to come over to him and chat for a moment while he manned the barbecue grill. “What classes do you have with my boys?” he asked.

“I don’t have any classes with them. I’m in all the accelerated classes.”

Mr. Oldham seemed a bit puzzled.

“Geometry, English Analysis, Accelerated Biology,” I explained.

“Do you do well in those classes?”

“I get straight A’s.” To me, it wasn’t bragging. It was stating what I had thought was a well-known fact.

It may have been difficult for Mr. Oldham to believe that his boys wanted to hang around with the smartest girl in the class. When he came to sit down by us and eat, he asked Steve and Ken, “Did you know that she gets straight A’s?” They didn’t.

I really enjoyed the barbecue. I felt like the Oldhams were glad to have me there – Steve, Ken, Kevin, and their dad. It was as though someone was concerned about me enough to make sure I had something for dinner. I enjoyed their company and hoped there would be more barbecues throughout the school year that they would invite me to.

The next Friday after school, Steve wandered around campus looking for the pep club, but they weren’t making any posters that day. He found me and asked about the poster painting. “They don’t do it every week,” I said.

I was feeling shy and overwhelmed about him looking for me. I turned around and went the other way. He tried to follow me, but I went into the girls restroom so I could be by myself for a moment. Then I realized I was being silly. “I’m not a freshman anymore,” I told myself.

When I was ready to come out of the restroom I went back to look for Steve, but couldn’t find him. I hoped he would try to find me after school the following Friday, but I didn’t see him around.

I was on the junior varsity cheer line with Lisa McCamic, Lisa Propati, Michelle Gagnon, Cristina Perez, and Rhonda O. during my sophomore year. Lisa McCamic never cared much for me, nor anyone else, for that matter. Lisa Propati got along with me fine. At least to my face. I also got along great with Michelle, Cristina, and Rhonda at first. But they became more interested in pleasing Lisa McCamic, an impossible task.

They followed Lisa McCamic’s lead in insulting me. My eye shadow was too green. My yellow and white striped shorts looked like McDonald’s straws. My shoes looked like something Mrs. Moore would wear (which would have been cool to everyone in physics class, but not to the cheerleaders).

Steve asked Lisa McCamic to the Christmas dance that year. I wanted to hold out hope that he’d ask me to the next dance. But Lisa McCamic was one of the popular girls. Pretty, flirty, sexy – the kind that all the football players wanted to date. I was sure that anyone who was interested in dating someone like Lisa McCamic wouldn’t have the slightest interest in going out with me – brainy, sincere, modest.

And I was sure Steve would also want to please Lisa McCamic, just like Michelle, Cristina, and Rhonda did. I expected him to start taking an interest in picking on me for whatever came to mind. I told myself not to hope, not to think about hanging around with the Oldhams anymore. I told myself to accept that there would be no more barbecues.

Before cheer practice, the Oldhams occasionally had water balloon and squirt gun wars with Lisa McCamic and Lisa Propati. I didn’t want to be a part of the water fights, so I stayed away from them until it was time to start cheer practice.

While we were having cheer practice in the courtyard one afternoon, Steve was at his locker near Fr. Tepsic’s classroom where I had sixth hour religion – near the overly-powerful drinking fountain that shot water at anyone within six feet. Lisa Propati told me to go talk to Steve. I thought it was going to be some kind of joke, like she wanted to get me to enter a squirt gun firing range. Lisa McCamic encouraged me to go over to his locker, promising that they’d wait until I got back before they practiced the next cheer.

I headed toward Steve, crossing through the grass instead of walking on the sidewalk, incase someone near the drinking fountain was waiting for me to approach. “Lisa and Lisa told me you wanted to talk to me.”

Steve squatted on the concrete, keeping his eyes glued to his locker. “I don’t think I said that.”

“You didn’t tell them that you had something to say to me?”

“No.”

So this was some type of joke. “You sure you don’t want me to talk to you?”

“Oh, yeah!” He looked up at me. “Now I know what you mean.”

Then, this wasn’t a joke? “What did you want to talk about?”

“Well, uh, nothing. Anything. I don’t know.”

Maybe he was in on the joke and I had caught him off guard, so he didn’t remember to play his part in the prank. “Should I try a do-over?” I asked. “Like I come up to your locker again and you play a joke on me?” He could release the spring-loaded snakes as I walked up a second time.

He laughed. “No. It’s not a joke.”

I went back to the cheerleaders, shrugging in bewilderment. I glanced at Steve over my shoulder as he waved his arms and made faces in frustration at Lisa Propati. The cheerleaders laughed at us and apologized for the confusion.

Several days later, Lisa Propati asked me if I had asked anyone to the morp. Morp was backward for prom, where the girls ask the guys out and everyone wears jeans instead of a fancy dress or tuxedo. She suggested that I ask Steve to go with me. I didn’t know why Lisa was suggesting people for me to ask. I thought this was another joke, or that they were trying to get Steve off their backs. I considered her suggestion, but thought I’d be better off asking someone I had classes with and knew better. Boy, was I wrong.

I took John Asher, but he avoided me, so I spent the entire dance with Tim Hodges.

Over the phone a few weeks later, Tim Hodges asked me to be his girlfriend. The next morning at school, the Oldhams went around the cafeteria telling everyone that I was going with Tim. How did they even find out?

Tim got mad at me about it. Why was this my fault? Apparently he took their broadcast as some sort of personal threat against him. So he broke up with me after school. We didn’t even go out for a whole day. Did he think I told the Oldhams to run around the cafeteria telling everybody?

On a rainy day a few weeks before the end of cheer season, I couldn’t find the other cheerleaders after school. I figured practice had been moved indoors, to the gym or cafeteria, because the grass was wet. To make sure Mrs. Moore knew I wasn’t ditching practice, I asked her if cheer practice was cancelled. It wasn’t. I asked if she had seen the other cheerleaders. She hadn’t.

I looked all over the school and finally found them practicing near the football field. But when they saw me, they ran the other way. I followed them. It didn’t make sense for me to practice the cheers without them.

They kept trying to hide from me, running away every time I found them. I should’ve ignored them and gone home, but I wasn’t the type to skip practice or quit just because someone else was being a pain in my ass. Finally they gave up, and we practiced together behind the school. Lisa McCamic kept yelling at me, saying that I wasn’t doing the cheers right. Even though I knew I was doing them better than Michelle Gagnon or Lisa Propati.

Rhonda got the bright idea to scoot closer to me and hit me in the head with her arms as we did the cheers. I scooted away. Cristina got on the other side of me and hit me from the other side. I backed up and stood behind them to do the cheers. Then Michelle crowded me on my left until I scooted into the wall on my right. Meanwhile, Lisa McCamic continued to shout at me.

I was so frustrated I didn’t know what to do about them. I moved to the back of the group again and started to cry, trying not to be audible. Lisa McCamic stood over me and shouted in my face. At this point, I could no longer continue with the cheer, or continue to keep my sobbing quiet. Lisa ended cheer practice and we all went home.

The next morning, Monica Ross approached me. “I overheard Lisa Propati telling Ken Oldham that you were crying at cheer practice yesterday.”

Great. Now the Oldhams were going to go around the whole cafeteria making fun of me and calling me a crybaby.

Monica described the conversation. “And Lisa Propati said to him, ‘I thought you liked Lisa.’”

“Which Lisa?” I asked.

“I thought she meant you.”

So one of the Oldhams did like me? And it was Ken? That didn’t sound right. “Are you sure she wasn’t talking to Steve, and she meant that Steve liked Lisa McCamic? Because he took her to the Christmas dance.”

“Oh.” Monica thought about it. “Maybe it was about Lisa McCamic. But I swear it was Ken.”

I wasn’t so sure. “What else did they say?” I asked.

“Ken also said, ‘Lisa can be a real bitch sometimes.’”

That one was definitely about Lisa McCamic. Awesome! He didn’t say that it was cool that she got all the cheerleaders to gang up on me. He didn’t join in on the insults against me. He called her a bitch!

I considered thanking Ken, or Steve, I wasn’t convinced Monica knew which one it was, for having the guts to call Lisa McCamic a bitch. Nobody else had the guts to say it out loud. But I didn’t want to talk to anyone, especially the Oldhams, about that awful incident.

One Friday I ran into Susan Vales after school. We were exhausted from staying up late for rehearsals for the spring musical and decided to go backstage in the cafeteria to take a twenty-minute nap. I was supposed to be at track practice in half an hour and needed a nap before going out to run.

When I woke up two hours later, Susan was gone. I went out to the field to find the track team. The whole campus was empty. I checked the locker room. Katie Burke was just leaving. She said the workout for that day was to run around the track for four miles.

Four miles! I had never run that far all at once before. Since Coach Arena had already left, I could’ve just skipped it, but didn’t want to miss a Friday practice; I knew I wouldn’t run over the weekend. With the whole track team having gone home, I went out to the dusty gravel track encircling the football field and commenced the sixteen-lap exercise by myself. It was peaceful running around the track with no one on campus.

Until the baseball team showed up.

They seemed engrossed in themselves as they headed for the baseball field, right next to the track. If I just kept running by myself, maybe they’d ignore me.

But before too long, an Oldham was splatted up against the chain link fence between the baseball and football fields, watching me run. I expected him to yell insults any minute. Hey guys, look at the geek by herself, running around and around on the track.

I had to get out of there. My eyes scanned for an opening in the fence on the other side of the track so I could sneak away without him seeing where I went. I didn’t see a way out except for the exit alongside the baseball field.

Mike Gross came over to see what Steve was staring at. Then Ken appeared. Too late to get out of this one. I braced for ridicule.

One of the Oldhams started applauding. What did that mean? C’mon, let’s get the taunts going? Then the other applauded. Soon the whole baseball team came over and applauded as I ran around the track. They weren’t there to make fun of me. They were cheering me on! There was no way I could quit before I finished my four miles now. I couldn’t let them down.

Mr. Cotter yelled at the team and told them to get back to baseball practice. After they were all back in their positions, one of the Oldhams snuck away and splatted himself up against the chain link again.

“STEVE!” Mr. Cotter yelled.

Startled, Steve scrambled away from the fence and ran back to his team.

It took me almost forty-five minutes to complete those four miles. (These days I can do four miles in less than thirty-five minutes.) As I headed for the locker room, Robert Bodnar, Bruce Grabber, and John Tallman peered over the back of the baseball bleachers, applauding me, and asked how far I ran.

This was the point of my high school existence when I finally realized that the whole school wasn’t out to ridicule everyone else to make themselves feel cool in front of their friends. We were all there to support each other. I stopped being afraid of what people might say to me if I was doing something out of the ordinary. I became optimistic about the next two years of high school.

To this day, as I run around a high school track with my running group, I think about the baseball team cheering me on, lead by the Oldhams.

During track practice freshman year, we lined up as a team to get water. The boys’ locker room was under reconstruction and the closest drinking fountain was in their locker room, so trips to get a drink of water had to be supervised. By the time track season came around sophomore year and construction was complete, the drinking fountain was in the same building as the boys’ locker room, but not in the locker room itself. We were allowed to go in to get water whenever we wanted.

Since I was one of the few who ran distance, I usually went to the drinking fountain alone. One time when I entered the building with the drinking fountain, the door to the boy’s shower room was open and I could see the Oldhams sitting in there as I walked past. Ken nodded toward me and motioned to Steve to walk out of the shower room. They were each wearing only a towel.

Steve walked out of the shower room a little ways. It wasn’t like he didn’t see me. It couldn’t have been an accident that he wandered around in a towel while I was there. I turned the other way and left the building.

But I was really thirsty and there were no other drinking fountains nearby. I peeked into the building again. There were no boys wandering around in towels, so I tiptoed back in to get a quick drink of water and leave before anyone saw me.

As I drank from the fountain, out of the corner of my eye I saw Steve wandering around outside of the shower room again, still wearing only a towel. He turned around and went back toward the shower room. I kept drinking from the fountain to give him enough time to get back in there before I had a clear view of him again.

When I no longer heard his footsteps against the bare concrete, I stopped drinking from the fountain and turned around.

Steve was standing right behind me!

As if he were waiting his turn to get a drink of water. I was so embarrassed. Was he trying to establish the building as boys-only turf? “I’m so sorry,” I whispered. “Am I not supposed to be in here right now?”

Steve smiled. “No, you’re OK.”

I went outside and asked Coach Arena if the girls weren’t supposed to go near the boys locker room to get water.

“Why do you ask?”

“The Oldhams are walking around in there without any clothes.”

I just wanted to avoid getting in trouble in the future for walking in on the guys while they were naked. Coach Arena told Mr. Cotter about the incident. Mr. Cotter yelled at Steve in front of the whole baseball team.

Oops. I got Steve in trouble.

Every year Bourgade held a ten hour dance to raise money for the school called the Superdance. About halfway through the Superdance sophomore year, Karen Bateman jabbed her fingernail into my eye while doing her impression of John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*. I sat in the gym lobby with a damp cloth over my eye while I waited for my dad to bring my contact lens case and glasses. When my dad showed up, one of the boys from my class came over and asked if I was OK.

My dad walked off with him for a few moments. Blinded by the cloth in front of my face, I couldn’t tell what they were up to. When my dad returned he asked, “Who was that boy who came over to ask how you were doing?”

“I don’t know,” I replied. “I couldn’t see.”

“Well, you’d better find out because he has your saline solution and glasses.”

After my dad left, Karen told me to go find Steve. “Steve Oldham. Hmmm.” She gave an approving nod.

Yeah. I smiled to myself. Steve Oldham.

With a hand over one eye in a dark corner of the gym lobby, I found one of the Oldhams. “Are you the one with my glasses?”

“No. My brother has them,” Ken eagerly responded. “Stay right here. I’ll get him for you.”

Steve came over with my stuff. I wanted to hang around with him, talk about whatever, but first I went in the restroom where there was more light and a mirror, so I could remove the contact lens from my injured eye. I figured I couldn’t invite him in there with me.

Of course, by the time I got out of the restroom, he had already returned to his friends. I went over to him and apologized for abandoning him while I took my contacts out in the restroom and thanked him for taking care of my things until I was ready to remove my contacts. He was very pleasant, said that he understood that I had to go into the girls restroom without him.

Yet he never asked me to dance. Instead, Rick Buelow came up to me and asked.

Since I was the smartest girl in the class, I always got invited to the award ceremony at the end of each school year to receive various certificates for academic achievement. It was always the same people who came every year. Except sophomore year.

My parents entered the cafeteria and took a seat in one of the rows of folding chairs. After greeting my friends, I sat with my parents and waited for the ceremony to begin. Then the Oldhams showed up. What were the Oldhams doing here? This was supposed to be one of those events for just the smart people. Without the obnoxious people to bother us.

Ken, handsome in his long sleeved white dress shirt, trolled the cafeteria looking for his friends. He must have noticed me watching him because he stopped when he got near me and asked, “Do you know where Deno Macsenti is sitting?”

“I haven’t seen him here.”

“Hm. I thought he was going to be here.”

Well *I* most certainly did *not* think that Deno, or any of the other unruly boys, were going to be there. This was a place for John Asher, Robert Bodnar, Rick Buelow, Billy Chavira, and all the other smart and (somewhat) well-behaved boys.

After finding none of his rowdy buddies, Ken gave up and sat with Steve and their parents on the opposite side of the cafeteria from me.

As the ceremony proceeded, I got called up out of the audience to walk across the stage eight times to receive awards for honor societies, achievement in class, and honor roll. Each time my name was called, Steve slouched deeper into his seat until his mom told him, “Sit up!” Ken received an award for non-honors English. Ah, Mr. Hass. That explains it.

After the ceremony I headed toward the stage. Mr. Oldham stopped me in the middle of the aisle and introduced himself. To my right, I could see Steve cringe in his seat, begging his dad not to talk to me. Ken stayed with Steve, trying to coax him into coming over to talk to me. I was glad they stayed in their seat because I was still a little afraid they’d say something mean if they came over.

Mr. Oldham congratulated me. “You got quite a few awards.”

I looked at him blankly. “Thanks.” Why would the Oldham’s dad be moved to congratulate me?

“I met you at the barbecue in the fall. You had told me that you were a straight A student.”

The awesome barbecue! That’s why Mr. Oldham wanted to say something to me. “Oh yeah!” My face lit up. “I really liked that barbecue.”

“What did you like about it?”

Everything. I felt very special. I felt happy and at peace. My presence wasn’t just tolerated, I was welcome there. “Everyone was really nice.”

“And because you enjoyed sitting with my boys?”

“Yeah.” I smiled. “I did.”

Steve and Ken hovered behind their dad, half hiding. “Come over here, boys.”

They weren’t being mean about the encounter, as I had feared. They were being even more shy about it than I was. They timidly approached and mumbled, “Hi.”

“Are there going to be any more barbecues like that one?” I asked.

“No. That was a fundraiser we did just that one time.” Mr. Oldham thought for a moment. “But, we could have a barbecue at our house instead. Would you like that?”

I was stunned. I had never been invited to a boy’s house before. “Sure.”

“You could invite a friend,” Mr. Oldham suggested. “So you aren’t the only girl there. I have four boys. No girls.”

“I have a sister.”

Mr. Oldham wanted me to introduce my sister to Ken, however, she wasn’t there. I didn’t know why he wanted Ken to meet Tracy, but wasn’t too concerned about it.

“She’ll be a freshman here next year.”

While my mom spoke to Mrs. Oldham, Mr. Oldham and my dad arranged to have a barbecue with our two families at the Oldham’s house. When my mom found out about their plans, she said no way.

The Oldhams suggested having just me come over, or just Tracy and me, or having my parents over without any of the kids first. My mom wasn’t going to allow any of that. The Oldham’s parents were confused as to why my mom would disallow a chaperoned get-together with our families. To most people, this would be a perfectly reasonable event.

But not with my parents. My mom didn’t allow any of my friends around and she didn’t want to go anywhere to meet any of my friends because she knew my dad would be drunk. And rude. And my mom didn’t like spending time with people if she didn’t have to.

On the way home from the award ceremony, my mom was upset at me for tricking the Oldhams into inviting me to their house. If I would’ve been quiet, like a good little girl, Mr. Oldham wouldn’t have brought up the barbecue and she could’ve avoided having to deal with their invitation. My dad was angry at my mom for turning them down. He couldn’t understand why I wasn’t more angry at mom. I said it was because those boys were naughty. My mom didn’t like boys, so I figured she’d accept that answer and stop micromanaging my behavior. However the real reason I wasn’t expressing anger was that one more turndown didn’t surprise me. I held no hopeful expectations that she’d make an exception for this invitation.

Rick Buelow was my hero at school dances because he often asked me to dance. I did not appreciate sitting on the side of the gym while the slow music played. Hardly anyone ever asked me to dance, but if Rick was there, I could usually count on him. It meant a whole lot to me that he took the effort to ask me to dance, not just once or twice, but many times. I never turned him down.

Dancing with Rick was like being with a best friend. I felt so comfortable with him. Standing close to him never felt weird. It always felt very peaceful.

One time while we danced with my hands resting on his shoulders, I let my arms rest against his chest. I could feel his heart pounding. I put my hand over his heart. “Your heart beat is strong. Does it always beat like this?”

I was fascinated by the ability to feel the heartbeat of another person, of my gentle friend. I wanted to experience the rhythm more deeply. “Is it OK if I listen to your heartbeat?”

I placed my ear against his chest while we danced. He held me close and stroked my hair. He hugged me and rested his cheek on my head. I felt like he cared about me a lot. Like a cousin, I thought.

With my head on his chest, I could hear Rick’s deep breaths. “You’re breathing really hard too.” A heavy heart beat and labored breathing didn’t seem like normal biological functions. “Are you feeling OK?”

“I’m fine!” Rick got defensive.

I felt sad for ruining the sweet moment we had just shared, dancing while listening to the beat of his heart.

“Isn’t your heart beating hard?” he asked.

I placed my hand on my chest to find out. I didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary. “Feels normal.” I put his hand on my heart so he could confirm.

It seemed only fair that if he gave me the opportunity to listen to his heart that I return the gesture. “Would you like to listen to my heartbeat?” I asked.

Rick laughed. “Uh, no. That’s OK.”

Oops. I supposed it wouldn’t be appropriate for him to rest his head against my breast with all our classmates around. “Yeah, I guess that would look weird.” But Rick was such a very nice boy. To me, having him listen to my heartbeat would be an innocent expression of affection. “Maybe later,” I suggested. “When no one’s looking.”

Rick looked at me like I was out of my mind.

After the dance ended, I returned to Monica on the bleachers.

“What were you guys doing?” she asked.

“Dancing. It was no big deal. We get along well. Like cousins.”

“People were staring at you,” Monica said.

Why would anyone have been staring? “Like who?”

“The Oldhams.”

I had seen the Oldhams out of the corner of my eye, standing still in the middle of the floor, but didn’t think much of it since, as far as I knew, they had no reason to pay any attention to me.

“I saw Kevin Phelan looking at me and Rick.” Kevin had been sitting in front of Monica, so she wouldn’t necessarily have been able to see if he had been staring.

“Yeah. And he saw the Oldhams staring at you.”

“How do you know?” I asked.

“Because then the Oldhams saw him staring at them and they gave him a dirty look and walked out.”

After a school dance one evening, Steve and Ken sat on the wall, facing each other, near the parking lot waiting for their ride. Renee Zandee and I approached. Ken nodded toward us as if to tell Steve, “Look who’s here.” I sat on the wall, behind Steve’s back, and Renee faced me. Renee and I talked while we waited for our parents to pick us up. I expected Steve and Ken to yell stuff to disturb our conversation, but they kept completely silent except for an occasional whisper.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a strange figure emerge from the parking lot. I looked up to see my dad staggering straight toward us.

I froze. Either I was going to get into trouble for sitting with my friends while he waited in the parking lot all this time, or for making him get out of the car to look for me. I didn’t know if I should bolt out of there or if he was going to make me come back and sit right where I was so he could scold me and get it over with.

My dad looked at the twins. “Have you seen my daughter, Lisa Schaefer?” he slurred.

I panicked. “Dad, it’s me. Lisa Schaefer,” I squeaked.

My response was so weird, I expected that line to be the joke around the cafeteria for the next several weeks. Like “Beetle Beetle,” “Hugh Hugh,” “Ya ya ya,” “Shawn Berry,” and all the other nonsense that the boys in my class yelled every day as they hung out at the loud table in the cafeteria. The table that I avoided. In the whole cafeteria that I avoided.

My dad didn’t say a word and stumbled back toward the car. I followed and got into the car in silence. As we drove past the wall where my friends still sat, the car veered too far to the left and hit a curb. The whole way home he swerved all over several lanes. I clenched every muscle, counting the turns remaining before reaching the house. My dad turned into our neighborhood and drove over a curb again, across the corner of someone’s lawn.

This wasn’t the first swervy ride home. And it wasn’t as though he never got into any accidents. This was a typical ride home from a dance. Yet there was no way I was going to tell my mom about it. She must have known. But she trusted my judgment more than she trusted her own, and if I wasn’t complaining, it must not have been a problem. I didn’t say anything because my complaints would’ve been a perfect excuse to disallow me from going to any more dances and to make me stay home where she could watch me. There was no way I was going to miss high school dances because of my parents’ irresponsibleness.

I dreaded going to school on Monday. I entered the campus, waiting for someone to come up to me and whine, “It’s me. Lisa Schaefer.” I expected people to tell me that the Oldhams were going all over the cafeteria telling everyone what happened after the dance. But no one said a word.

The first week of junior year, as I waited at the bus stop by myself, a blue Malibu with tinted windows drove up along the frontage road behind me.

“Do you want a ride?” the driver shouted.

I looked around, not sure who he was talking to. I wasn’t the kind of girl who was approached by boys I had never met and thought perhaps another girl had come up to the bus stop while I was doing my homework.

But I was the only one there, so he must have been talking to me. “No, the girl behind you,” the guy teased me as I looked behind me. I turned around to see a cute guy, a year or so older than I, waiting for an answer.

I had never seen him before. Strange. Cute guys never drove up to me out of the blue and asked if I wanted a ride. He wasn’t wearing a Bourgade uniform, so I thought he didn’t go to my school. Since I didn’t know him, I didn’t think it would be a good idea to get in the car with him.

Yet I was intrigued that this guy I had never seen before would be compelled to drive up behind me and offer a ride. I picked up my backpack and approached the car with caution, intending to ask where he went to school, where he lived, and to find out his motivation.

Then I saw Steve hiding behind him in the passenger seat. Ken, sitting in the back seat, leaned forward so I could see him through the open window. Awesome. A ride home with the Oldhams.

“Where do you guys live?” I asked.

“Past Bell Road,” the driver answered.

“Oh.” I was disappointed. “I live the other way.”

“That’s OK,” the driver responded. “I don’t mind going a little out of the way.”

I climbed in the back seat on the driver’s side. I’d have to be stupid to turn down a ride with three cute guys from my school.

The driver, a new senior at school, introduced himself as Dave Davis. He knew the Oldhams because he had gone to Bourgade his freshman year with their older brother Kevin.

“Do you want to sit back here?” Ken asked Steve.

Steve declined.

Dave made fun of Ken. “What, you don’t want to sit next to her?”

Ken got all flustered. “No, I… It’s not that! I’m just trying to be generous to my brother.”

Dave apologized for making it sound like nobody wanted to sit by me. “Actually, all three of us wanted to sit back there with you, but someone has to drive.”

Steve and Ken started to chuckle, then glanced at me to make sure I wasn’t offended. Ken glanced at Steve to see if Steve was offended, chuckled a little more. Soon we were all laughing at the idea of a driverless Malibu cruising down the road with the four of us crowded in the back seat.

Dave and Ken did most of the talking, occasionally asking me a few questions to keep me involved in the conversation. Steve sat with his back against the passenger door, watching me. He rested his arm on the dashboard and his chin in his hand, but turned around to face forward after we ogled each other a little too long.

When we got to my block, Steve recognized the neighborhood. “Hey. Deno Macsenti lives just down the street,” Steve said. “Let’s go see if he’s home.”

They dropped me off. Uh oh. Now the Oldhams knew where I lived.

Junior year was the only year I had a class with Steve. We had religion with Mr. Cotter after lunch. The desks were arranged in three groups, each with its back to one of three walls and facing the center of the classroom. My seat was in the front of the rows facing west. Steve sat near the door in the group of desks across the room, facing me, a little to my left. With Mr. Cotter on my right facing the door, I was within Steve’s line of sight of Mr. Cotter.

Sometimes I’d play eye games with Steve. My head would be forward while my eyes followed Mr. Cotter slightly to my right. Then without moving my head, I’d quickly shift my eyes to my left to focus on Steve. Once or twice I flustered him into blushing. Sometimes even Mr. Cotter would fluster Steve by asking him a question when it was obvious he wasn’t paying any attention to the lecture. I had never had the opportunity to observe Steve during class before. I wondered which girls Steve stared at during all of his other classes.

One day Steve didn’t show up for class even though he had been at school earlier that day. The rumor was that Steve and Ken had gotten into trouble for smoking pot behind the football bleachers during lunch and that they were in the office while the principal called their parents.

I was so angry at them. What had happened to such nice boys? How could they be the same boys who helped me hang posters, invited me to barbecues, took care of my saline solution, and offered me a ride home? When Steve got back to class, I tried to glare holes into him. I wanted him to know how angry I was about smoking. Especially drugs.

But I just couldn’t keep a straight face. I kept smiling at him every time he looked at me. I hid my lips behind my hands, but with my eyes still showing, I couldn’t hide my smile. I guess I really wasn’t that mad at him.

A bunch of the guys started calling me Catfish junior year. I didn’t know who started it or what it was supposed to imply. I was sure that whatever it meant, I wouldn’t like it.

Right before religion class one day, Billy Chavira pulled me aside in the stairwell just outside the cafeteria. “I know where the nickname Catfish came from, but you have to promise not to tell anyone that I said anything to you about it.”

I promised I wouldn’t mention his name. Not that loud-mouthed Billy deserved to be kept out of trouble.

“Steve Oldham. He calls you that because you don’t sit very ladylike during religion class.”

Just when I thought I had gotten over my fear that the Oldhams were out to make fun of me. I suppose I didn’t sit all dainty during class in my plaid skirt with shorts underneath. But how does anyone get the nickname Catfish out of that?

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Well, no,” Billy admitted. “But I think it was the Oldhams. And Pat and Steve were talking about the way you sit during class.” Pat Racinelli sat directly across from me in Mr. Cotter’s religion class. Billy sat on that side of the room in the back row.

“Sounds like something the Oldhams would make up. But I don’t think Steve would do that to me.” I didn’t explain why I didn’t think Steve would do that. I just didn’t think he disliked me enough to say rude things about me. “Maybe Ken would say that, but he’s not in our religion class.”

I considered asking Steve if he knew anything about the origin of the nickname Catfish, but thought that might be a conversation I’d regret. To this day, nobody has ever admitted who made up that nickname or what it meant. By senior year, I didn’t care anymore. I’ve even used it myself in recent years on reunion web sites and in correspondence with John Asher.

Anna Sampaio invited me to come to a park for a party she was throwing for her boyfriend, Bruce Grabber. Earlier that evening, Monica Ross and I had stopped by a twentieth birthday party for a guy whom I worked with at Montgomery Ward at Christown. On the way to the park, I had car trouble. Something was wrong with my battery or alternator. Monica was being a pain that night and we had gotten into an argument. We wandered into the party as it was ending.

Everyone was in their cliques. I had classes with most of them, but wasn’t really a part of their cliques. Monica didn’t want to join in with any of them. She wanted to leave. I wanted to slap her.

Ken Oldham came up to talk to us. He was very pleasant. We talked about the hotdogs and he handed us the mustard from the side of the picnic table where he was standing. We told him we had just come from another party and we had stopped at an auto parts store on the way because I was having car trouble. But I ended up not buying anything there since no one was around who could help me install a new battery.

Then Steve came up. He was quiet and we ran out of things to say.

Monica and I left the party soon afterward. On our way back to the car, we heard someone running up from behind us. “Wait!” We turned around to see Ken trying to catch up to us, with Steve slowly following behind.

Ken wanted to make sure I could get my car started. So he walked with us to the car and asked if he could follow us home. We said we didn’t think he needed to, but he said he would anyway. The car started fine. But I couldn’t sit there and idle while I waited for Ken to get to his car, or else my battery might shut off. Steve came up as I drove away slowly. I watched in my rear view mirror until I saw headlights turn on behind me before I sped up.

But they didn’t follow us. I was disappointed. I was looking forward to the possibility that they’d hang out with us after we got back to my house.

On our way home, Monica and I commented on how we were surprised that out of everyone at that party, it was the Oldhams who came over to talk to us, when no one else did. We were impressed that Ken offered to make sure the car started.

The next Monday at school we asked Ken if he had changed his mind about following us home. He said he and Steve tried to follow us, but couldn’t find us after I turned the corner. I should’ve waited longer to give them a chance to catch up to my car.

During senior year, Steve’s locker was near mine. At one point I noticed that Steve was always at his locker when I arrived at school. I liked seeing him there every morning, so I made sure I always gave him a hearty greeting as I approached, such as, “Good morning, Steve!” or “How was your weekend, Steve!” And he’d tell me he did something with Ken, like work on their car. Or if he didn’t see me, I’d sneak up behind him and play Guess Who by putting my hands over his eyes until he guessed who was behind him. One time he played Guess Who with me. I played with his fingers while I guessed. He made faces at my friends because I kept guessing girls. I didn’t think any of the guys would want to play Guess Who with me. My friends were giving me weird hints about nearby doors. Thinking they meant classroom doors rather than locker doors, one of my guesses was Mrs. Moore.

Sometimes I’d muss his hair without saying anything. That was my favorite greeting. I liked surprising him, but I mostly liked his incredibly soft and silky hair. Softer than anything that ever brushed against my fingertips before. I liked to watch him as he carefully combed it back into place.

Sometimes my friends and I would stick around our lockers and finish homework before school started. A few times Steve sat with us to do his homework. Ken would walk past and smile at us.

Steve often talked to Michelle Finnochiaro because she got to school before I did. She bragged that she had gotten to know Steve because they talked to each other before school almost every day. She told me that Steve didn’t like it when I messed up his hair. I asked him about it, but he said he didn’t mind.

I was under the impression that Michelle thought Steve liked her. I wasn’t sure she was wrong.

Steve invited Michelle to come to a desert kegger party, which my classmates called a Bourgade Kegger Association, or BKA. Michelle agreed and brought Monica Ross and myself.

As soon as we arrived, Steve came over to Michelle’s car. He offered to go get us wine coolers and came back with a bottle for each of us. The four of us chatted.

Michelle flirted with Steve. She wedged herself between Steve and Monica and me, pushing Monica and myself out of the conversation. Steve tried to include us back into the conversation, but Michelle kept nudging us out. Monica and I thought maybe we should go find someone else to talk to, however we were out of our element at a kegger party.

Steve walked away from us for a moment and came back with Ken. Ken tried to distract Michelle and Monica while Steve talked to me. But that didn’t quite work. I tried to stay in the conversation with Michelle and Monica. I didn’t want to push them away from Steve. Especially since I thought we were there so Michelle could hang out with him. Steve and Ken gave up and went back to talk with their other friends.

Michelle, Monica, and I didn’t stay very long. I could only finish half of my wine cooler before it started tasting nasty. On the way back to Michelle’s house, I sat in the back seat with my open bottle of wine cooler. We stopped at a park to find a trashcan to toss it in before we got home. It wasn’t like I could put it in the refrigerator and save it for later.

Steve didn’t talk to Michelle before school so much anymore after that party.

I went to another BKA with Tim Hodges, Billy Chavira, Nancy Colquhoun, and Michele Hiland. As we drove up in Nancy’s car, her headlights shined on Greg Thielen and Ken. They looked like deer. In our headlights. I thought it was from the shock that Billy or Tim would show up to a BKA. Especially Billy. I was very amused by their stunned reaction. Yeah, we came to your little BKA.

Billy went to find John Asher. Hm. If John knew Billy was going to be there, then Greg, John’s best friend, probably would’ve known Billy was coming. Why the deer-in-the-headlights look?

As I stood around with Nancy and Tim, Christy Lindell came over to me and asked if I had seen Steve Oldham. “Ken’s looking for him. Steve’s totally wasted and a girl that he really likes is here. Ken doesn’t want Steve to see her.”

I was disappointed. Since he had been talking to me every morning, I had hoped that he would ask me to one of the dances. But I wasn’t surprised that he liked someone else a lot more. I was just glad it wasn’t Michelle Finnochiaro.

I hadn’t seen Steve. “Who’s the girl? Maybe we could distract her until Ken finds him.”

Christy didn’t know, but volunteered to go over and ask Ken. I watched Christy and Ken talk in the glow of the bonfire. “Oh My God!!!” Christy shouted. “It was her idea!” Ooh. This will be good. I couldn’t wait to hear what she found out.

They talked a while longer, looked at me, talked some more, kept looking at me. What were they talking about? Christy headed back over to me.

“What did he say?” I asked.

“Oh, nothing.”

Nothing? How could Oh My God be nothing? Why had they kept looking at me?

I was confused. People were talking to each other about what was going on, but they wouldn’t tell me. It was like everyone had a secret to pass around, but I wasn’t cool enough for them to let me in on it. Ken and his friends dragged Steve toward a van. Christy turned me around, tried to hide me. But Steve saw me.

“I wanna make out with her,” he slurred. Everyone giggled.

“Who was he making out with?” I asked. So…was he making out with someone else when the girl he liked showed up? Is that why they were trying to hide him? He must be talking about one of the slutty girls.

“He wasn’t making out with anyone,” Christy said.

They tried shoving him into the van, but Ken gave up. “It’s too late. He already saw her.”

Someone came over and asked if I wanted to go in the van with Steve. Why would they think I might? “No way.” I did not want to see Steve like that.

“Believe me, you do *not* want her in there with him,” Tim told them. Tim knew me better than anyone else did at that point in my life, except for my sister.

A little while later, Christy came out of the van and said I was smart for not going in there with him. He had thrown up on her.

On the way home, I sat in the middle of the back seat between Billy on my right and Tim on my left. I didn’t bother with any wine coolers this time. Michele Hiland sat in the passenger seat. “Well, that was interesting information,” she said.

“What was?” I asked.

“Everything that happened.”

“I thought it was so funny how Ken looked shocked that we showed up to a BKA,” I said. “Especially with Billy Chavira.”

“That’s not what Ken was freaking out about.” Nancy said.

“Then what were they so shocked about?” I asked.

“You don’t know?” Michele Hiland asked.

“No. What’s going on?” I asked.

“What do you think of Steve?” Nancy asked.

“I think he’s an idiot,” I replied.

Billy, who had been uncharacteristically quiet on the way home, let out a roar of laughter.

“Yeah, tonight he was an idiot,” Nancy agreed. “But other than tonight. Like if he asked you to prom. Would you go with him?”

“Yeah,” I admitted. “I like that he always talks to me at our lockers before school. It would be fun to go to prom with him.”

Nancy replied, “Then you’d better talk to Steve at school on Monday.”

Loud-mouthed Billy would surely tell me what this was all about. I leaned over and whispered to him, “Do you know what was going on?”

Billy admitted nothing.

The conversation for the rest of the ride back to Nancy’s house was all about something that happened between Michele and Greg earlier that evening. Why was everything interesting that happened in high school always about someone else? First the girl Steve liked a whole lot, then Michele and Greg. And why did everyone think they had to hide what was going on from me?

When I got to school on Monday, Steve was at his locker. I didn’t give him my usual How Was Your Weekend greeting this time. I didn’t say a word to him. Steve had been too drunk or high to remember what had happened. So instead, I headed straight for Ken in his usual place with his buddies at the loud table in the cafeteria.

“Nancy told me to ask you what was going on at the BKA.”

Ken leapt out of his seat. “Let’s go find my brother.”

Ken marched me out of the cafeteria. He was on a mission. I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to follow him or wait in the cafeteria. I hesitantly followed. Ken looked back to make sure I was still with him. “C’mon.”

We went out to Steve’s locker, but he wasn’t there. “Steve was here a moment ago,” I said. “Just like he is every morning.”

“Yeah. Every morning.” Ken seemed pleased that I noticed.

I didn’t know what good it would do to find Steve. He’d have no recollection of what happened at the BKA. We looked around a little more until Steve returned to his locker. “Tell her,” Ken commanded Steve.

Now Steve was the deer in the headlights. They may be twins, but he could at least give the boy some context. I started to say, “About the BKA…”

Ken shook his head at me. “No, he knows.” He turned to Steve. “Come on.”

“No!” Steve turned to leave, but Ken grabbed him by the arm and yanked him back.

“Tell her!” Ken shouted.

“I can’t.” Steve panicked. “I can’t!” Steve struggled, trying to escape.

I felt uncomfortable spectating their argument, watching Steve squirm. I knew Steve would be upset that he was being humiliated in front of me in particular. Steve liked talking to me in the mornings. And I thought that Ken didn’t know that.

Jennie Cantu and Ardelle Cadacio, both a year younger than I, asked me what was going on.

“Everyone was trying to hide Steve from some girl he liked at the BKA over the weekend. They’re supposed to tell me what was going on.”

“Maybe the girl was you,” Ardelle said.

“No, I think it was one of the juniors.”

“Why one of the juniors?”

“They weren’t expecting her to be there. So it had to be someone who never goes to the BKAs,” I explained.

“Do you ever go to the BKAs?” Jennie asked.

“No.”

“I think it was you,” Jennie said.

Couldn’t be me. That much high school drama was never about me.

After their argument, Steve said he’d talk to me about it after school. But he came up with some excuse not to talk to me for several days in a row. Then he outright avoided me, making sure he wasn’t at his locker when I got to school. I didn’t want him to avoid me, so I stopped bugging him.

The next week Ken asked me, “Has Steve had talked to you yet?”

“No. He’s avoiding me.”

“Have you figured it out?”

Was there some information I missed? A clue he was going to let me in on? “What do you mean?” I drew closer to Ken. “How am I supposed to figure it out?” But he had no clues to offer.

At one point, I overheard Ken ask Nancy why I hadn’t figured it out yet. “I don’t get it. It’s not like she’s an airhead.”

Nancy came up with an explanation that Ken agreed hit the nail on the head. “Airhead isn’t the issue,” Nancy speculated. “She’s just not vain enough.”

One weekend evening, Tim, Nancy, my ex-boyfriend Eric Hull, our friend Kristen Wagner, and I were driving around. Kristen came up with the brilliant plan to stick straws from a fast food restaurant in the lawn of Chris Schmaltz, my rival for valedictorian. Kristen didn’t go to Bourgade, but knew Chris from a church event. There was no real reason for putting straws in his lawn other than we happened to be driving near his neighborhood.

We stopped by the Carl’s Jr. where Chris worked, grabbed hundreds of straws, and drove to his house. We parked down the street and silently tip-toed down the street to Chris’s lawn while Tim manned the getaway car. Nancy patrolled as look-out while Kristen, Eric, and I jammed straws into the lawn. When we exhausted our supply of straws, we tip-toed back to the car and drove off.

A clean getaway. Nobody ever mentioned it at school.

A few weeks later, Kristen came to an in-town away basketball game that I attended with the rest of the pom line. She sat at the top of the bleachers with me while we watched the game.

Kristen went down toward the players on the bench. She sat next to Chris Schmaltz and chatted for awhile. Suddenly he and his girlfriend, Susie, jerked their heads around and glared directly at me. Kristen bolted in my direction.

“What happened?” I asked.

“We’ve got to get out of here.” I got up and flew across the bleachers with thundering footsteps. I took a flying leap off the fifth row, my pom skirt lifting to reveal my bloomers as I plummeted to the floor, landing on my behind. Knocked the wind out of me. Sandy Sindorf came over to find out what happened. Steve deserted the basketball team, in the middle of the game, and ran over to me.

“Steve! Get back here!” The basketball coach yelled.

Steve ignored him and asked if I was hurt. I told Steve and Sandy that I was fine. They helped me stand up and I ran out of the gym with Kristen.

“What did you say?” I asked Kristen.

“I told Chris that I knew who put straws in his lawn.”

Oh, and since she came straight toward me after telling him so, I couldn’t very well hide the fact that I was the one who helped. But Tim had been there too. And so had Nancy.

Yet the next day at school, the Oldhams were rounding up people to TP *my* house after the next BKA. Everyone at school talked the whole week about TPing my house. Since when were the Oldhams on Schmaltz’s side of the battle for valedictorian?

I was not happy about this. I could not let Schmaltz, the Oldhams, nor anyone else get the best of me on this one. Thanks to Susie and Mrs. Nervous Breakdown, our religion teacher, I was already losing the valedictorian battle. One of the Oldhams asked if I’d be upset if they TPed my house. “Yes. I very much would be.”

I had to stop them. I asked Tim, Nancy, Eric, and Kristen to guard my house with me that Saturday. They agreed. Tim and Eric suggested going to a play at Brophy while we waited for the BKA to end.

“OK,” I said. “But only if we leave in time to get back to my house before they come to TP.”

Of course, the play was only half over around the time I felt we needed to leave. None of my friends wanted to miss the rest of the play, so I left to call Sean Cox, one of my neighborhood friends who had worked with me at Baskin Robbins the previous year, to come pick me up and guard my house with me.

Sean was all for it. He brought his best friend Greg Smith and some squirt guns. Back at my house, Greg climbed the tree in my front yard, ready to pounce on the first person who threw a roll of toilet paper up there. I moved my car to a different street so passers-by would think I wasn’t there. I brought out a blanket for Greg to throw on intruders and another dark blanket to keep Sean and I from being spotted in the bushes with our lighter colored clothes and squirt guns. Sean and I crawled behind the bush and pulled the blanket over us. We were ready for Schmaltz, the Oldhams, and anyone else. We waited in silence.

“What are you two doing in there?” Greg called down to us.

“We’re just sitting here,” Sean shouted back. “What are you doing?”

“Are you two being snuggle bunnies?” Greg asked.

After about forty minutes, a car slowly passed by. It turned around and lingered in front of my house. Yvette Saldano was driving, with Robert Bodnar in the passenger seat.

“Here they are,” I whispered to Sean.

The car left. We waited for them to park and approach on foot. Twenty minutes went by. Nobody arrived. Not even another car. We let another twenty minutes go by. Nothing.

Finally we gave up. Nobody threw as much as a square at my tree. Burn on us.

On Monday, I asked Steve and Ken, “Why didn’t you guys TP my house?”

“You said you would be mad if we did.”

So I had. Wow. I didn’t know that asking them not to would have been good enough to keep them from attacking my house. I never told them that I had been waiting for them.

A few weeks before the prom, I came up to Monica and Michelle hanging around our lockers as I entered school. Steve was also hanging out at his locker as usual.

“Guess what, Ladies. I found myself a date for the prom,” I announced, matter-of-fact. Not like the teenagerish screaming and giggling of the moment Todd suggested going to prom the night before.

Steve stood at his locker, pretending to read something as I told Monica and Michelle about the exchange at church the previous evening. I had been complaining that I had never been asked to any of the Christmas dances, only two of the homecoming dances, and I hadn’t even been able to find my own date for the junior prom, although I had tried. And I didn’t expect the senior prom to be any different. Todd Parent, who graduated two years earlier, said he missed his senior prom and offered to take me. I was excited. I insisted that we go as just friends.

After I finished my story, Steve slammed his locker as hard as he possibly could. Everyone turned around. The locker bounced open and a book fell out. He threw the book back in and slammed the door even harder. This time books fell out of other people’s lockers.

“Well what was that about, Steve?” Michelle laughed.

Steve didn’t answer and stormed off.

“Did we say something to make him mad?” I asked.

“No,” Michelle replied. “It was about something else.”

At the end of the school year, all the seniors were invited to the Senior Banquet. Awards were passed out for whatever the class had voted on. I was called onto the stage to get my picture taken with Chris Schmaltz for the Most Likely to Succeed award. Ken got an award at this ceremony also. Class Clown. Steve was not only voted Worst Driver, he was also voted Most Detentions.

Steve’s older brother Brian came to our Senior Banquet. Brian had been good friends with Tim Hodges’s older brother, Jeff, when they attended Bourgade four years earlier. At the end of the banquet, Tim told me that Brian and Jeff decided to go tubing on the Salt River the next day and that Steve and Ken were going.

“Do you want to go with them?” Tim asked.

“Would it be OK with Ken and Steve?”

“It was their idea,” Tim said.

What? He must have misunderstood. There was no way Steve and Ken would have asked Tim and I to hang out with them. They’d want to shout nonsense all down the river, like they did with their friends at the loud table in the cafeteria. And Tim and I would ruin that by trying to have an actual conversation.

I had to find out for myself. But I couldn’t get beyond the long dinner tables to the corner of the room where the Oldhams were sitting because too many people were standing around in my way. And it wasn’t like this was the school cafeteria, so I didn’t want to climb over the tables.

Ken had his back to me, so I stared at Steve until he saw me. He looked away and continued his conversation with Ken. I waved to get his attention back. Darn it, he looked away again, like he always did whenever I looked at him. But this time I had something to ask him.

Steve nodded at Ken to look over at me. I sort of shrugged my shoulders, pointed at them, pointed at Tim and me, and mouthed, “You want *us* to go with *you*?”

Steve and Ken nodded like, Yeah, we want you to come. I smiled and nodded in agreement. They smiled and nodded in return. How cool was that. The Oldhams invited us to go tubing.

It was a blast. Several people came. I hung out with Christy Lindell for most of the day. I thought maybe that Steve and Ken invited her so I wouldn’t feel like I was surrounded by all guys.

Shortly before we floated to our final stop on the river, Christy left us to join some guys she met there that none of us knew. She told us she’d meet up with us by the car. I didn’t want to go with her to hang out with the guys. Christy would be flirty and get all the attention. I’d be an ugly boring geek that they wouldn’t want to talk to. So I stuck with the guys I came with.

Robert Bodnar was irritated that Christy took off. “That’s dangerous. She doesn’t know those guys.”

I felt pretty good about staying with my friends. I was the only girl left to get the attention of the nice guys that I knew. And they seemed glad that I stuck with them. Luckily Christy was already waiting for us when we got done tubing.

As we stood around talking, I was no longer concerned about the danger of sunburn, so I took off my T-shirt. The right top half and left bottom half of my swimsuit was black, and the left top half and right bottom half was white. The cut was like a tank jog bra connected to a bikini bottom with wide curved straps that crossed in the front, making a really cool black and white figure 8 across my stomach. I felt a little self conscious about showing so much skin. No swimsuit is modest, but this one showed my belly button inside the lower loop of the 8.

Robert complimented me on my swimsuit. He was pretty good about not being embarrassing about it. Ken stared at my swimsuit, which was surprising because I didn’t think Ken even noticed me most of the time. Steve tried to hide behind Ken, squeezing Ken’s arm tighter and tighter until Ken finally stopped staring at me. I ended up feeling not so ugly and boring after all.

At graduation rehearsal, Mrs. Moore begged me to turn in a copy of my speech to the office. However, my plan had been to not make a speech. Instead I was going say that I was glad it was all over and now it’s time to move on. But I wrote something acceptable and turned in a speech anyway, just to get the teachers off my back. If I didn’t actually use the speech when I got up there, they couldn’t do anything about it.

The girls were told we'd get kicked out of church and wouldn't graduate if we didn't wear a proper dress under our robes. Nobody was going to see our dresses. And we were going to a swim party afterward. So I wore a swimsuit, with a T-shirt over it.

After all the graduates had gone to the front of the church to receive their diplomas, we sat quietly in the pews. Fr. Seetch headed straight for me. Crap, could he tell I wasn't wearing a dress? I froze. He took me by the hand and led me out of the pew, into the aisle. I prepared to be humiliated in front of my entire class and their families.

“Where's your speech?” He asked. My speech?

“My speech!” I shouted in church. I wasn’t getting kicked out of graduation. I was supposed to make a speech now! I tried not to laugh as Father Seetch walked me to the podium.

I was nervous about saying that I didn’t have anything to say. I stood at the podium, crumpled my speech into a ball and looked out at my fellow graduates. Which one was going to get beaned with my speech?

Well, none of them. I didn’t think I could throw paper far enough to reach any of them, especially with the podium in the way. And if I didn’t pull it off right, I’d end up looking just disrespectful. So I chickened out of throwing it. I uncrumpled the speech, laid it out on the podium, and read it. Boring.

Steve was talking to Ken as I headed back to my seat. I crumpled up my speech again and threw it at him. It hit Ken. I knew Steve would’ve appreciated it, but wasn’t as sure about how Ken would take it. I hoped he wasn’t angry.

He thought it was funny. He turned around and smiled at me. “Can I keep it?”

I shrugged. “Sure.” I didn’t need it anymore.

After the ceremony Monica asked, “Why did you crumple up your speech when you got to the podium?”

Just before I exited the church with the procession of graduates, I took off my robe to reveal my T-shirt and bare legs. The Oldhams turned around and did a double take, dropping their gaze below my T-shirt. “Are you wearing any pants?”

The school had arranged for a bus to take us to a resort for an all-night graduation party. Steve sat next to me on the way there. This time I was too shy to take my T-shirt off, even though Mia Siordian tried to talk me into it and there was no chance of sunburn at night.

For the first half of the ride, Steve and I knelt facing backwards in our seat and laughed with the loud guys yelling stuff in the back of the bus. Ken made most of the funny comments. Just like he did at the loud table in the cafeteria.

I felt something brush against my right shoulder. Steve was on my left, so I turned my head to look at Tina Blasius, who was behind me, but she was facing forward. Must have been my imagination. I turned around again to face the back of the bus.

Soon I felt it again. Something was definitely brushing my shoulder. I turned to my right again. Still, Tina faced forward. Maybe it was her seatmate, Michele Hiland. But they were engaged in conversation, not paying attention to me. I ignored them.

Someone touched my shoulder a third time. This time I asked Tina, “Are you tapping my shoulder?” No. It wasn’t her. Nor Michele.

Maybe it was Steve. When something touched my shoulder a fourth time, I whipped my head to my left to see Steve’s arm still behind me. Steve recoiled, jerking his hand away, and braced himself for a scolding.

Caught him! “It was you tapping me!” I burst into laughter. Relieved that I wasn’t angry, Steve giggled with me. Ken, in the back of the bus, laughed with us. He had seen the whole thing.

When Steve faced the back of the bus again, I tapped him on his left shoulder. We smiled at each other. He knew it was me, of course.

Steve looked at me and nervously ran his fingers down my back for a quick moment, then took his hand away. I rubbed his back for a second and smiled at him. Then we stopped our fun little game and sat down in our seats.

For the last half of the ride, Steve and I sat talking to each other. He helped me with my saline solution when my contacts started bothering my eyes and I had to take them out in the dark. David Pyle walked up and down the aisle, blinding people with the flash of his camera. I wanted him to get a picture of me sitting next to Steve, but he missed getting a picture of our seat.

The people sitting behind us looked over our seats a few times. We looked up at them, but they didn’t say anything. Then Ken came up to our seats. Steve asked what he wanted.

“Just checking on you guys.”

“He was asking us if you guys were making out,” the people in the seat behind us said.

Silly Ken. I laughed and laughed. Me and Steve making out. Why would anyone think that would happen. Steve got embarrassed and told Ken to leave us alone and go back to his own seat.

When we got to the party, in addition to swimming, there was tennis and an indoor dance floor. Nobody wanted to stay inside. I wanted to dance, but it was no fun dancing by myself. Monica and I played a few volleys of tennis with Rick Buelow and David Pyle. In the early hours of the morning, neighbors complained of the noise outside and they made us all come in.

After the graduation party, Monica and I boarded the bus for the journey back to Sts. Simon and Jude with David and Rick behind us. Monica and I were about to take a seat when David suggested, “How about if I sit by Monica?”

Monica was more than happy with that suggestion.

Rick asked me, “Is it OK if I sit by you?”

I thought that was great. How unusual, that one boy would want to sit by me on the trip there, and another on the way back. Why was I all of a sudden popular after we graduated?

Ken and Steve boarded after us. When they saw me sitting by Rick, Ken asked Rick if he would move so they could sit by me. Rick refused. Then Ken asked if I wanted to sit with them in a different seat. I declined. I already had my seat, Rick asked to sit by me first, and Steve had already sat by me on the way to the party. It wouldn’t have been very fair to Rick if I had moved.

Around four in the morning, the bus headed back toward the parking lot where our cars awaited. Everyone was tired and the bus was quiet. I started to fall asleep and fell on Rick.

“Sorry.” I rearranged myself so I leaned against the window.

“It’s OK. You can lean against me.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. The window isn’t very comfortable. You should lean against my shoulder.”

If you insist. As I leaned back into Rick’s chest, I squashed his arm. He adjusted himself such that his right arm draped over the seat.

I woke up when the bus pulled into the Sts. Simon and Jude parking lot. Rick had his arms around me, but quickly removed them when I shifted in my seat and he noticed I was waking. Groggy, I gradually opened my eyes to see Ken standing in the aisle of the bus, staring at me in horror. Steve stood next to him and turned away.

Still half asleep, I grabbed my bag of damp swimming clothes and shuffled off the bus. Monica whispered to me, “What were you and Rick doing back there? The Oldhams were watching you for half the bus ride. Steve looked like he was crying.”

Why would they have been watching me that long? Shock that Lisa Schaefer fell asleep on a boy? Never before had any of the guys at our high school put their arms around me, so seeing me like that might have looked weird. And the part about Steve crying I wasn’t sure I believed. Why would he have been crying. Sad that high school was over?

We arrived in the Sts. Simon and Jude parking lot just before sunrise. Monica, Rick, David, and I stood around talking. Rick invited us over to sleep. I was cranky and needed a shower. I had brought an extra T-shirt and pair of shorts incase I got them wet in the pool, but since I arrived to the graduation in a swimsuit, I had forgotten to bring a bra and underwear. I didn’t want to wake up all slimy at Rick’s house and hang out at his place without underwear. And I most certainly didn’t want to call my mom to say I was sleeping at Rick’s house, see ya when I get home. I said I’d call them later and we could hang out in the afternoon.

After everyone had left, the four of us were left alone in the empty parking lot.

Except for the Oldhams.

They stood by their car, smoking. Why were they standing there smoking? David turned his back toward them and whispered to Monica, Rick, and me. “Are they eavesdropping on us?”

“I don’t think so,” I said. “They’re just smoking by their car.”

“No. They’re eavesdropping on us.”

David went over to them. I hoped he wouldn’t offend them, I thought it was interesting that they were sticking close by. “Would you stop listening to us?”

“We’re waiting to talk to them,” Ken pointed toward Monica and I.

David let them know he didn’t think that was a good enough reason to stick around listening.

“Then we’ll just talk to Lisa for a minute.” They asked me to come over, so I did.

They made a little small talk with me as David stood nearby.

“You don’t need to hear this,” Ken told David.

“If you guys can listen to our conversation, I can listen to yours.”

The Oldhams asked me to get in the car. Steve took my hand and led me around to the passenger’s side and opened the door for me to get into the back seat. I was about to step in, but felt like I was being hijacked for the purpose of pissing David off. “Are we going to stay here, or are you going to drive me somewhere?” I asked.

“We’re driving somewhere.”

I didn’t want to go anywhere without underwear just to talk about nothing. I was tired. I didn’t know where we were going or how long they intended to keep me captive. If we sat in the parking lot, at least I could get out of their car whenever I wanted. But if they drove off, I wouldn’t have any control over when I could come back to my car and go home.

I let go of Steve’s hand and backed away. “I don’t want to go. Is this important?”

Steve lowered his eyes to the ground. “It’s really important.”

I looked at Ken for confirmation.

“It’s very very important. To him,” Ken told me.

“Then tell me right here,” I said to Steve.

“Please,” Steve whispered. He begged me to get in the car.

Why didn’t he just say it? If there was something he really had to tell me, he’d say it whether I got into the car or not.

“No,” I said.

The Oldhams got in their car without me. Ken circled the parking lot and drove right past me. Steve laid limp in the passenger seat, crying. “Look what you’ve done to him!” Ken shouted.

Ken drove like a maniac out of the parking lot. Steve shouted, “Bitch!” As David, Rick, Monica, and I turned to see what he was yelling about, Steve threw pieces of something out the window.

“What was that?” I asked.

“Paper?” David speculated.

Who was Steve calling a bitch? Why? And what were those pieces of paper?

David and Rick talked about how this was where they were four years ago when they left everyone for the last time after eighth grade graduation. Rick walked toward his truck with tears in his eyes.

“What’s everyone’s problem?” I asked David.

“We’re all sad that this is the last time we’ll be seeing everyone together,” he answered.

Right before I left to go home and sleep, I walked over to the pieces of paper on the ground find out what he had thrown out the window.

My speech. Torn into bits.

That afternoon, I tried calling both Rick and David several times, but no one answered. I tried calling the Oldhams, but the number in the Bourgade directory was disconnected. I tried calling Rick again over the next few days, but no one ever answered. And neither of them called me. David went out with Monica a few times during the summer, but I never heard from Rick.

I thought I’d see Rick at ASU in the fall, but in the four years he attended, I never saw him on campus once.

Steve never called later, nor stopped by my house to tell me what he had to say. I didn’t talk to him again for almost six years.

Greg Thielen had a barbecue in the back yard of his parents’ house for a four-year class reunion. When I arrived with Randy, my boyfriend at the time, Rick Buelow came straight over to greet me. Although we had both attended ASU for the past four years, I hadn’t seen him since high school graduation.

He told me he had just graduated with a business degree from ASU and was working at Pulice, a construction company. We were shocked that we had both been at ASU for the past four years and had never run into each other. Randy was working as an engineer at the Arizona Department of Transportation and got along very well with Rick throughout the afternoon. Randy and Rick had a lot of similarities: both were nice boys, smart, quiet, trustworthy. Rick gave me his business card and told me to keep in touch.

As I was about to leave, the Oldhams showed up. I was standing at the end of a hallway, waiting for Randy to come out of the restroom. I smiled at Steve and Ken. Steve smiled back and gave me a quick wave.

“She’s here with a boyfriend,” Greg whispered to them.

Steve stopped smiling. “Is it Rick Buelow?” he whispered to Greg.

“No,” Greg responded, intrigued. “But he talked to her for a long time this afternoon.”

Why were they talking about me? I approached them.

“Shh, she can hear us,” Steve said.

I backed away, not wanting to intrude on their conversation. I hoped they’d come over to talk to me when they were finished, but they left the house.

When Randy came out of the restroom, I went out to the party in the back yard to say hi to the Oldhams, but didn’t find them. So Randy and I left. I found them out by their car. I walked toward them, but they got into their car and drove off. We didn’t say one word to each other.

In March 1994, Randy and I had just gotten engaged and a seller accepted our bid to buy her house.

As I walked empty handed through the main aisle of Price Club toward the cash registers one weekend, I saw Steve heading toward the swinging doors of the backroom, wearing a red employee smock. I recognized which one he was, but wanted to be sure. “You’re Steve, right?” He was.

Good. I expected a conversation with Steve would go much smoother than a conversation with Ken. I used to talk to Steve a lot more than I talked to Ken. At our lockers in the morning.

I visually scanned the store for Randy because I wanted to introduce him to my old high school friend. I couldn’t see where Randy went. I didn’t want Steve to think I was looking around for a way to avoid him, so I stopped craning my neck and paid attention to Steve.

“I don’t have time to talk,” Steve explained. “Can I get your number and we can catch up later? I’m not trying to blow you off. My boss doesn’t let anyone stand around talking.”

Right. Steve Oldham is going to call me. Steve had never called me before. I found it very difficult to believe that he would want to bother calling me after six years. He’s blowing me off.

“Are you mad at me?” Steve asked with caution.

Odd that Steve would assume I was mad at him. I had never expressed anger toward him. “Why would I be mad at you?”

“For anything dumb I might have done in high school.”

Steve did a lot of dumb things in high school. But I didn’t see why he thought I might be particularly angry about any of them. “You probably did something to make me mad while we were in high school. But it’s been six years.” Our last encounter in the parking lot after the graduation party hadn’t crossed my mind during those six years. And because I didn’t understand what was going on, I wasn’t angry about it then either. Just confused.

I told him that I was in grad school at ASU and that I was working full time as an engineer. “I’m moving in three weeks, so you’ll have to call me before then. I don’t know my new number yet.” Steve agreed to call soon.

“Were you at the four year reunion?” I asked.

“Yeah. We got there just as you were leaving.”

Interesting that he remembered that not only was I there, but that I was leaving. Especially since he didn’t talk to me that night.

“Did you ever date Rick Buelow?” Steve asked.

Rick Buelow? That question seemed out of left field. Was he trying to remember who I had hung out with in high school?

“The only guy I ever dated from Bourgade was Tim Hodges.”

“What about during the summer? After graduation?”

“No. Where did you get that idea?” I asked.

“Uh, I heard it somewhere.”

Strange of someone from our class to go around telling people that I dated Rick Buelow. “Who would’ve been talking about that?”

“Uh, I don’t remember,” Steve mumbled. “Did you date David Pyle?”

“I went to morp with him as friends twice.”

“What about the summer after graduation?”

“No.” What’s this obsession with the summer after graduation? “Monica Ross went out on a few dates with him that summer.”

“Oh.” As if that explained what he was trying to figure out.

At the time, I thought these questions were just chit chat. I never linked this line of questioning with the incident after the graduation party until after the twenty year reunion.

Steve gave me his business card for the pest control business he and Ken were starting. I thought this pest control idea was ironic, since in high school he and Ken were pests that very much needed to be controlled. Steve asked me to write my number on his hand.

“Don’t you have a piece of paper around here?” I asked.

“Probably. But you can write it on my hand. I want you to write it on my hand.”

Well, OK. If he insists.

All he had to write with was a yellow pencil with green metal top. It took a while to write my number because number two lead doesn’t transfer well to skin like ink does. His hand shook. I held his hand steady as I wrote and rewrote my number in faint pencil lead.

“Are you sure you never dated Rick, even after high school?”

Why didn’t he believe me? “Steve, I’d know if I dated Rick.”

I finished writing my number and let go of his hand. I made Steve look at the number and asked if it was legible. He read it out loud.

“You might want to write it down on paper as soon as possible, before it rubs off and you aren’t able to read it.”

“Are you sure it’s OK if I call you?” he asked.

“Of course.” Would I have given him my phone number if I wanted him to not call me?

I handed the pencil back to him. Instead of taking the pencil, he took my whole hand in his and slowly let my hand slip out as he slid the pencil away from me and watched the expression on my face.

Hm. Cute. Steve was being flirty. Very unexpected.

It seemed more like something he would have done to Lisa McCamic or Christy Lindell. Not me. Didn’t he used to flirt a lot with them? I wondered, now that we’ve been out of high school for six years, if he was flirty with me, would he have done that to Susan Vales? Or Michele Hiland? Or Monica Ross? Was it just because I happened to be the one who was there?

He said something about going out somewhere next time a bunch of people from Bourgade got together. Sounded great. He seemed very sincere about his intention to call me, so I thought maybe he might actually call.

Finally Randy approached and parked the grocery cart next to me.

I had been hoping he’d come over before Steve walked off. How exciting! I get to introduce my new fiancé to an old high school friend that I hadn’t talked to for six years! I had never been asked out by any of the straight guys at our high school, so I thought it was great that the next time Steve went out with his popular high school buddies, he could tell them he ran into me and met my very handsome fiancé.

A big smile spread across my face. “Steve! I’d like you to meet my fiancé.”

Steve’s face went slack. He looked at the ring on my finger. He seemed strangely intimidated by Randy, quickly explaining himself by telling Randy that we had known each other in high school. Steve told me to give him a call if we needed any pest control service then ran through the swinging doors into the backroom.

He let out a loud wail and through the windows of the swinging doors, I saw him collapse onto the floor. A female coworker ran over, he got up, and she took him farther into the back room. The other customers who had seen me talking to him stared at me. What the hell was going on?

As Randy and I left Price Club, Steve was at a pay phone in the front of the store, very upset and sobbing uncontrollably. “She seems very happy,” he wailed. Then he saw me exit the store. “Oh no. She just walked by.”

He was talking about me. I must have gotten him into really big trouble for talking to him too long. Maybe he encountered me on the way to get something for a customer and the customer got irate for waiting around forever.

By the time Randy and I finished loading the groceries into the car, Steve was off the phone. Randy told me to leave him alone, but I felt responsible and had to find out if he was OK. I took the cart back toward the store entrance. Steve sat on a bench next to a woman with brown shoulder length hair, similar in style to mine but longer, wearing a red Price Club smock. As I approached, she glared daggers into me. Steve kept his head down, staring at the concrete. A cigarette dangled from his hand.

“Steve, are you OK?”

Without moving his gaze from the concrete, he mumbled that he was fine.

“Did I get you in trouble?”

He lifted his head and smirked at me in amusement. He and the brown-haired woman smiled with each other. “No. Not at all.”

“Well, good. As long as I didn’t get you fired or anything like that.”

He and his coworker laughed. “No, you didn’t get me fired.”

As I turned to leave, he said, “Thanks for cheering me up.”

So maybe this wasn’t about me. As I walked away, I heard the brown-haired woman say, “She’s really nice.” How did I go from getting daggers stared into me to being called very nice?

On the way home, I told Randy that Steve’s quietness was very unusual for him. I speculated that it was because there were two of us and only one of him. He was used to hanging out with his whole gang of guys at the loud table in the cafeteria.

A few months after moving into our new house, I ran across Steve’s business card. I thought about calling to give him my new number. But I figured that if he had any desire to talk to me, he would’ve gotten in touch with me before I moved. I threw out his card. I knew he’d never call.

At the twenty year high school reunion in September 2008, I stood around with my old friends Renee Zandee and Heather Hansen, scanning the party to see if there was anyone we hadn’t greeted yet. We ran across a familiar face across the room.

“That is not a spouse,” I said. “We know who that is. But I can’t think of who it is.”

We thought it over, no names came to mind. I considered that he might have been a graduate from another year. Brian Gross’s brother, Mike, was at the football game the previous evening, and I had seen several people from other classes at the game.

Another guy sidled up to him. I exclaimed, “And there’s another guy who looks just like him!”

Renee laughed and said, “Oh. The Oldhams.”

They looked so different. Gray, curlier hair, beards, and a bit of extra weight. I couldn’t tell which one was which, but made a beeline for the closest one. He looked at my nametag, gave me a hug. “Hey! How’s it going?” Then he turned to his brother and pushed him through the crowd away from me. I figured he didn’t remember who I was and didn’t care to talk to me. He’d rather make noise with his guy friends.

When dinner was served, they even yelled “Shawn Berry” and all those other things they used to always yell. Just like during lunch in the cafeteria. I told myself not to go over to that table.

Shortly before I was about to leave the reunion, I stood around the table that had a display of old pictures. The Oldham I hadn’t greeted yet was also looking through the pictures. I asked what he had been up to all these years. He didn’t seem to want to talk to me. He kept his back to me and mumbled while looking through the pictures. He mentioned the pest control business. I said, “Oh yeah. Steve already told me about that.”

Well, that was the end of that non-conversation. He became very tense, took a deep breath, shouted stuff to get his brother’s attention, and walked out of the reunion, past the smokers, all the way out to the parking lot.

Several weeks later, when the reunion pictures were posted on Facebook, I realized that the Oldham I was talking to at the end of the reunion was Steve. I thought he must have gotten upset that I confused him for Ken.

Although I didn’t have many of these high school memories on my mind at the time, and I didn’t know what the problem was, something in my subconscious mind told me that it was important to get back to Steve and tell him that I was sorry for upsetting him at the reunion. Because I didn’t talk to them much that evening, Steve and Ken were the only ones at the reunion for whom I didn’t ask for an email address.

As I’ve gotten older, I’ve gotten better about communicating what’s on my mind. Unlike in high school when I thought people weren’t supposed to say those kind of things. I realize now that I no longer have to sit back and take whatever happens as though I have no control over the outcome of a situation. If someone calls me a bitch and leaves, it’s OK to get back to him to ask why he called me that. If someone asks for my number and never calls, it’s OK for me to call and leave a message. And now with email and the internet, there’s no reason to feel as though old friends are lost pieces of the past.

So I searched for a phone number for Steve, found the number of his brother Brian, and left a message. Steve got back to me the next day. I told him about the pictures of the reunion on Facebook and apologized for confusing him with Ken. He said it was no big deal. We had a nice discussion. He told me he had lived in Boston for two years. He was buying a new house in a few months and wanted my email address so he could send me a message once he moved in and got the internet set up. It was nice to be able to talk to him, especially since we didn’t talk much at the reunion.

As we ended the conversation, I said that I had always liked him best out of the two of them. He seemed very flattered. Then we hung up.

Wait a minute. Why was it that I liked Steve better? I definitely remembered knowing that he was my favorite. But I didn’t immediately remember why I had felt that way. I remembered that when Billy told me Steve called me Catfish, I didn’t think Steve would do that to me. I remembered that when I ran into him at Price Club, I was glad it was Steve rather than Ken. Those memories confirmed what I felt, but not why I felt it.

So over the next few days I tried to remember things that had happened that caused me to like Steve better. At first, a few memories came to mind, but not many details. The ride home with Dave Davis. Helping to hang posters on the football bleachers. The baseball team cheering me on at the track. Playing eye games in Mr. Cotter’s religion class. Inviting me to go tubing.

Hm. These memories seemed a little like I thought he was in love with me. I laughed at the thought. Preposterous. He was a partier and goof off. I was the smartest girl in my class and had a good head on my shoulders.

But that thought made some sense. The more I thought about it, it made a lot of sense. It was the only thing that made sense. How could I have ever concluded anything else?

For the next two weeks, I was in denial about it. Wasn’t I the girl that everyone had a lot of respect for, but nobody ever wanted to date? He never asked me to a Christmas dance or prom. I’d look at the pictures of the twenty year reunion on Facebook, like the one of Christy Lindell and Steve out smoking together, and decided that it made more sense for him to have a crush on Christy. She was a partier and they had classes together. I read the Facebook discussion between Lisa McCamic and Cristina Perez, asking each other about the Oldhams. Didn’t Steve like Lisa McCamic? There were so many other girls in high school that would have made much more sense for Steve to have liked. I couldn’t have been much more than just another girl at high school to him.

Since most of the nice things Steve did for me were during sophomore year, maybe he liked me for a few months, then got over it. I tried to remember what happened in 1994 when I ran into Steve at Price Club. The main thing I remembered was that I introduced him to Randy.

Oh no. Steve wasn’t upset at the reunion about confusing him for Ken, which didn’t seem like something to be getting upset about anyway. He was upset because I mentioned the day I told him I was getting married.

I jolted awake at three o’clock the next morning. The entire scene with the pencil, my phone number, and crying into the pay phone played out in my head. I hadn’t even thought of that whole incident for over fourteen years. I was so upset over it that I could hardly eat the entire day. How could I have been so stupid to introduce Randy to Steve the way I did?

Over the next two months, the other memories of Steve came to my head, completely unprompted. One day as I peacefully worked on my computer, the thought of getting hurt at school emerged from my brain. Throughout the next hour, more details appeared: my dad was there. There was a boy, but I couldn’t see him. I got poked in the eye at a Superdance. Was it the Superdance? Yes. Dad came to school to bring my glasses. Which boy was it? Steve Oldham. Over the next few days I remembered Karen Bateman giving her approving nod, Ken running back into the dance to get his brother, and all the other details.

Another time I sat at my computer and the parties I went to with Monica Ross came to mind: we got in an argument. We walked into a park for a barbecue. Ken. Oh no, another Oldham story. Why did Ken pop into this memory? He came over and talked to us. I saw him running toward us… Again, more details came to me over the next several days.

The next day the BKA with Billy popped into my mind. I couldn’t remember anything except who I went with, but a very strong emotion took over and I had to stop what I was working on. It was a cross between fear, worry, and sadness. The same emotion you get when something tragic happens to someone you love and you don’t know if they’ll recover. I could picture that someone was being hidden from me. Could it have been Steve? Yes. I had to witness a struggle between Steve and Ken at school on Monday.

The way these memories of the Oldhams kept materializing for no reason freaked me out. I had to start writing them down. As I came up with more details for each episode, I realized I had some really fun stories. I didn’t know if I wanted the memories to stop so that my brain could be freed for other important ideas or if I should think it was really cool that I could pull all these great stories out of my head.

Then I tried thinking of memories about other people from high school to find out if I could drag out significant stories about more of my former classmates. Like Chris Schmaltz, my rival, and the straws in his lawn. But the Oldhams appeared in that memory too. I thought about Rick Buelow because he often asked me to dance, how Monica and I talked to him and David after the graduation party.

Someone else was there… the Oldhams. Again.

When I finally realized, over twenty years later, what Steve had gotten upset about as he left Sts. Simon and Jude parking lot, I felt like I got punched in the stomach. He really did have something he wanted to say. For years. And when he finally almost had the courage to tell me, he scared himself into thinking that I didn’t want to hear it.

After I wrote my story about Steve and Ken, I found their mom's contact information on the internet. I thought they should know that I had written a story about them. Since I didn’t have an email address for Steve, I sent the story to her. She wrote back saying that she had printed it out and gave it to them. I included my phone number, let them know I would be in town, and asked that they get back to me. I didn’t want to just dump a huge story on them and not talk about it.

When I didn't hear back from them, I was concerned that they might be furious with me for writing such a story, or that Steve was ashamed that I remembered so much. At the reunion, he seemed so upset that I remembered the encounter at Price Club.

While in Phoenix in January 2009, I remembered that at the four year reunion, Greg Thielen whispered to Steve and Ken that I had showed up with a boyfriend. So I gave him a piece of the story to jog his memory. Greg wrote back and said he only remembered Steve dating Michelle Blasius. All I remembered about that was it lasted for less than a week and had heard that it ended because he wanted her to smoke pot with him. "I could call Steve and flat out ask him for you." Greg offered.

Seemed too high-school. I felt that I really should talk to Steve myself. I asked Greg if he had Steve's number. He didn't, but sent me Ken's number.

I called Ken. "Were you guys upset that I sent you such a story?"

"No. I thought it was pretty funny."

"Did I misinterpret something?" I asked.

"I don't remember any of it. I remember graduating. But that's it."

He doesn't want to talk. Or admit. Understandable. It was really something that Steve needed to say to me. I shouldn't hear it from Ken first. Ken gave me Steve's number.

"He's at work now. Gets off at ten o'clock."

"Would it be OK to call him then? I'm guessing he'd rather be called at night rather than at like nine in the morning." One time I had a discussion with Cec, my college roommate, about how night people would rather get a call at eleven at night rather than nine in the morning.

"Sure. He wouldn't mind if you called after work."

As long as Ken was on the phone, I wanted to know a little more about their lives. It was so difficult to get in touch with the Oldhams, I didn't want to waste the opportunity for communication. "So where do you work?" I asked.

"Arribas Mexican grill."

"Where does Steve work?"

"Abuelos. That's also a Mexican restaurant."

Unsure what I was going to do with that information, I wrote down 'Arribas - Ken, Abuelos - Steve.' I thought about asking for a confirmation of the spelling, but I didn't want to raise any flags in his mind.

Ken asked what I was doing now. I was pleased that he thought of asking. I told him I lived in a suburb of Washington, DC, and that I was starting my own business.

"Starting a business is tough." He would know. He's no longer doing the pest control company.

I told Ken that a few day earlier, Kristen Wagner, from the story about straws in Chris Schmaltz's lawn, and I had put straws in the lawn of Schmaltz's current house, for old times sake. Ken laughed.

After I got off the phone, I looked up Abuelos. There were three locations in Arizona: Peoria, Phoenix, and Chandler. Based on Steve's area code, I figured he worked at the Peoria location. I clicked on the link for that address. It wasn't far from the Starbucks where I had met Monica Ross the previous week.

I had dinner at a friend's house that evening and called Steve as I left. It was already after eleven o'clock. I figured if he didn't want to talk that late, he'd have his cell phone turned off. But he answered. I heard voices in the background.

"Is this a totally inappropriate time to be calling you?" I asked.

"Kind of. Depends. Who is this?"

"Lisa Schaefer. Ken told me it would be better to call you at night after work than at nine in the morning."

Steve sounded a little panicked. "I was half asleep."

"With people talking around you?"

"That's the TV."

I would have guessed that he’d be at a bar with his guy friends on a Friday evening. "Is it OK to talk to you right now?"

"No, call me back tomorrow night at ten o'clock."

I felt that I should get out my most important topic while I had him on the phone, but my burning question, Why me? was something I needed to build up to, not blurt out. "I'm trying to think of a summary of something I want to talk about, but I'm not sure what I want to say."

"No," he sounded more panicked. "Just call me tomorrow."

I called him at ten the next evening, then tried again at ten-thirty and eleven, but as I expected, he didn't answer.

I called him a few times over the next few days, leaving messages that I hoped sounded non-threatening. I wanted to know how his life was going. At the ten year reunion, you feel like laughing at the screw-ups because they're still young. But by the time the twenty year reunion rolls around, you just hope that everyone is happy and healthy and you want to be a source of comfort and good memories to your old classmates.

After not hearing back, I got the bright idea to go visit him at work. Not while he's working, incase he'd get upset, but after he left the building. I wasn't sure if I really wanted to do that. I figured that if he wasn't answering his phone nor calling me back, he must have been traumatized by the amount of story I remembered and was seriously afraid of facing me.

But I deeply felt that I needed to reach out to him. To let him know that I didn't think he was a joke, that I never tried to make him feel rejected. That I cared about how he was doing. I wanted to know if he was happy. And I didn’t want to dump a seventeen-page story on him without ever discussing it.

On Monday I called Abuelos. I felt like a stalker. I thought Steve would have a fit if he knew I was going to show up at the restaurant. I asked if Steve Oldham was working that evening. They said he wouldn't be in until Wednesday. On Tuesday I called to ask if Steve would be working until ten.

"We're only open until nine."

That's not what their web site said. So I called back on Wednesday and asked how late they were open. They said nine o'clock again, so I figured that Steve would be getting off at eight-thirty or nine.

I told my mom and sister about my plan. "I do not expect this to go well. But I'm going to do it anyway." I imagined that he'd start yelling as soon as he saw me. But instead of shouting nonsense, like 'Shawn Berry' to Ken, this time he'd shout at me. Things like 'Bitch.' I imagined that he'd yell at me to go away and leave him alone. Then he'd escape into his car and drive past me like a maniac. My mom suggested taking someone with me.

"I think that would make it worse." If he would get upset, it would be from fear. I'm not a scary person, but he had been more afraid of me during high school than I was afraid of him. "He's going to be alone. If I bring someone, he'll feel like I'm ganging up on him."

I got to Abuelos at eight o'clock on Wednesday. I figured I had an hour to devise my plan of attack. The temperature was in the seventies, a little warm for a January evening in Phoenix. I wore a dark colored short-sleeved polo shirt, similar to the uniform shirts we wore in high school. I walked around the building a few times to check out the locations of the doors, hoping Steve didn't notice me through a window. A few cars were parked on the far side of the building. I figured that must be the employee parking. I got back into my rental car and parked it next to a white pickup truck.

I got out and stood against the building for several minutes, staring at the parked cars, trying to think of what I should do next. Standing there doing nothing, I noticed that my heart had been pounding. I felt like I should go to the bathroom. But I didn't want to miss him if he came out.

I mustered the courage to go inside and talk to the hostess. I was concerned that she’d be wary of someone hanging around, waiting for one of the employees without his knowledge. I'd have to act like I thought Steve would be glad to see me.

"I want to surprise a friend of mine who works here." I didn't say it would be a pleasant surprise. "Do employees usually leave out the front door or one of the side doors?"

"Front. Right through here." The hostess motioned toward the glass doors. She tried to be very helpful. Hopefully she wouldn't get into trouble for this.

"Would you be able to tell me what time he gets off work?"

"What's his name?"

"Steve Oldham."

"He's still here. Let me check." The young woman walked off for a moment then returned. "He's already cut for the evening, so he could be walking through any moment."

It was only eight-thirty. Good thing I wasn't still fooling around outside wondering what to do. "Do you know what he drives? I'll wait by his car."

"A white...hm. Acura."

"Is the employee parking over here?" I pointed to the side of the building where I had parked. She confirmed that it was. I thanked her and went outside.

A silver Acura was parked in front and a white Solara and an older white Nissan sat in the employee parking area. The Nissan had a hole in its front bumper and newspaper ads scattered all over the passenger seat and floor. Both cars had fast food soft drink cups in their cup holders. The Solara was much classier than the Nissan. Good condition, clean interior. In the back seat sat a dark green...fez?

I stood at the corner of the building so I could see both the front and side doors, along with the Acura, Solara, and Nissan. I thought the seconds would drag by, but I was content to wait in the warm night air.

Soon I saw a rotund figure in black exit the side door. "Steve!" I was no longer afraid that he would start shouting. I was just very glad I caught him before he left. "It's nice to see you," I said as I approached him.

"How are you?" Steve headed toward me. Good he wasn't angry.

When I got close to him, he said, "Oh, it's you." We hugged. My chin landed in his fleshy neck. He leaned away. Still, no anger. But he headed straight for the Solara, keys in hand. He wanted to get away from me. “What's up?” he asked.

"I'm flying back to Washington tomorrow morning." I wanted to let him know he wouldn’t need to worry about any more surprise visits during this trip. "My husband was here the first week of my trip and I've been visiting old college friends and a few people from high school for the past two weeks."

I didn't want to start in on grilling him about the story. I wanted to start with something that wouldn’t set him off right away. "Tell me what it was like living in Boston. What did you do there?"

"I was a server."

He'd probably had a different cultural experience than what I'd be looking for if I lived there. So I didn't ask about that. "Why did you move there?"

"A girl." That's what I had guessed. "But I got tired of living there," Steve said. Probably shouldn't ask how that went.

"What else is going on in your life?" I asked.

"Going to Hawaii in a few weeks."

Sounded like good news. "Who are you going with?"

"My girl. And Ken and he's taking a girl."

I smiled. How great for him! He has a girlfriend to take to Hawaii. "How long have you been seeing your girlfriend?"

"A year and a half. There may be marriage in the future for us."

I was so glad that he had someone he felt happy enough with to be considering marriage. "What's she like?"

Steve smiled. "She's a good little girl," Steve said with affection. How cute. I felt happy for him.

He kept inching toward the driver's door of his car. I didn't want him to get away without trying to talk about the memories I sent him. "What did you think of the story I wrote?"

"Long. You have a great memory."

Everybody tells me that. "My memory is better than anyone else's that I know. I even remember meeting my sister for the first time when I was two years and three months old. But this isn't the way I normally remember things. Usually things I remember from a long time ago come to mind every once in awhile and that’s why I still remember them. But with the memories of you and Ken, I hadn’t thought of those events for over twenty years. I'd be working on something unrelated and the image of you walking around the locker room in a towel would pop into my head."

Steve rolled his eyes, smiled, stepped back and grunted at the mention of the racy image.

"I don't know what would prompt these memories,” I said. “I wasn't looking at a towel. Nothing was going on related to a locker room. I haven’t thought about you in a towel since it happened. You guys just kept randomly popping into all my memories."

"Boo," Steve said.

I laughed. "Yeah. That's exactly what it was like." Boo indeed. Hilarious. And true. These memories had been haunting me for the past several months. “But eventually they stopped.” The last memory that came to me, of the four-year reunion, appeared while I was already in Phoenix. “I must have run out of memories.”

He hadn’t refuted my interpretation of the stories yet. But he didn’t confirm it either. I didn’t want my story to assume the preposterous notion that he had a crush on me for over three years if that was not the case at all. "Did I interpret something wrong?" I asked.

"No. You got it right."

Whoa. He came right out and admitted it. He must be feeling good about where he is in life if he doesn’t mind telling me that. "Because that was not the interpretation I had at the time any of it happened. I guess when they all happened as separate events, with a lot of time in between, I didn’t put them all together to come up with that conclusion.” He still hadn’t told me if he hated the story. “Were you upset that I wrote it?"

"No. It was good. You should publish it."

I smiled. Should I tell him about the other movie I’m producing? Or the documentary? No, not tonight. "I probably will."

Steve cocked his head, but I didn't elaborate.

So he liked the story. And he thought it was a good idea to share it. That meant a lot to me. I didn’t think I’d get that information during this encounter. I didn’t think it would be appropriate to ask yet, but he brought it up himself. Not only was he OK with the fact that I wrote the story, he was OK with the idea of making it public.

“Well, you look like you’re doing well.” I looked him over, my eyes fell on his round stomach. “You seem happy. Or at least in a good mood.” His attitude was a far cry from the yelling I had expected from him upon laying eyes on me. He agreed that he was doing fine.

Although I didn’t blame myself, and I didn’t know what I wished would have happened instead, I felt I should say something toward how sorry I felt for having a difficult time communicating with him when we were young. "I felt so awful for a whole day when I figured out what happened at Price Club." My eyes filled with tears, but I choked them back. "But eventually I got used to that memory."

"It's not a big deal," Steve said. "It was so long ago."

“I still feel really bad it happened that way.”

"You're married now, aren't you?" Steve asked.

"Yeah. Fourteen years." Happily. I hoped Steve understood that. Steve and I may have been an unlikely couple in high school, but we're completely dissimilar after the different paths our lives have taken us over the past twenty years. "I really like being married."

I told Steve about how first Randy was supposed to go away to grad school but changed his mind, then I was supposed to go away to grad school but changed my mind. I said I had worried that Randy would chicken out of moving after I finished grad school at ASU, but he kept his word with enthusiasm. I wasn’t sure that information communicated how well I'm doing in my marriage.

I hoped Steve grasped that marital status had nothing to do with why I wanted to talk to him or whether I cared about how he was doing. I could see that Steve might wonder why I would bother to share the story or apologize for the way things went. Wouldn't it be easier to pretend it never happened? This step toward communication will be important to me later, however Steve wasn’t ready for an info dump about my life.

At the twenty-year reunion, Steve definitely seemed like he didn’t want me to talk to him when I was standing next to him, looking at pictures. I still didn’t understand why he had been afraid to talk to me. “Were you trying to avoid me at the reunion?” I asked.

“No, not at all,” he replied.

I didn’t believe him. If he had liked me all throughout high school, and still had wanted to ask me out when we ran into each other six years later, wouldn’t he have at least wanted to talk to me at the reunion about what was going on in my life now? And Ken was even in on helping him avoid me. “What was that about when I came up to Ken and he turned and pushed you away from me?” I turned and made a pushing gesture, reenacting Ken’s behavior.

“That was just nothing. I don’t know what that was about.” Unlike the encounter at the Price Club, the reunion was probably still too recent for him to feel comfortable discussing it. I let it go.

I examined Steve’s face for traces of the boy I knew in high school. Hidden behind the extra flesh, graying hair, and beard, I saw the boy in his eyes, as he looked right into mine. Tears filled my eyes. I hid my lips behind my hands, but with my eyes still showing, I couldn’t hide my sadness. "I'm so sorry for anything I've ever done..." My voice reduced to a whisper, "to make you feel bad."

I didn't feel embarrassed about crying in front of him, but I hoped it wouldn't freak him out or make him cry and feel embarrassed, or make him want to leave. He didn't look upset. He looked concerned. Like the times I got hurt at school and he came running over to see if I was OK.

We hugged, a little longer than our hug when we first greeted each other for the evening upon his exiting the restaurant. This time I rested my head against his shoulder so my face wouldn’t brush up against his bare skin. I let go before too long. I didn't want make him feel uncomfortable. As I pulled away, he slid his hands down my arms and held my hands for a moment before letting go.

"Don't worry about it," Steve said. "It's OK. Like I'm not upset about being confused for Ken," Steve said, referring to the phone conversation we had a few months earlier where I apologized for upsetting him at the twenty year reunion.

I asked what his mom thought of the story I had sent through her. He said it was no big deal to her. She knew about what kind of trouble they had caused in high school. I had figured that since the school called his parents when they were caught smoking pot behind the bleachers, anything I had sent to her was no surprise.

Steve headed straight for his car door. "Well, I've gotta go. I'm supposed to meet my girl."

Although our encounter was very pleasant, none of the yelling I had expected, he seemed like he felt he needed to get away from me. I didn’t believe he needed to leave due to a time constraint. But I didn’t ask if he was trying to avoid me again, like at the reunion.

"You're moving to your new house in March, right?" I asked.

"Yeah, after I get settled and get my computer set up, I'll send you an email."

We hugged for a third time. "It was so nice to see you, Steve." We watched each other as I walked away.

December 29, 2015

My niece Mara has a passion for acting and just completed the first half of her freshman year at a charter high school for the arts. I thought it would be great if she were a part of the high school movie and realized that if that were to happen before she graduated, I needed to get going on the script and eventually the production.

At mom's house for the holidays, I called Tracy one morning. “I want to take you to lunch,” I said.

“Do you want to go for Mexican?”

“Yeah. I already have a place in mind.”

“Where?”

“Arribas out in Goodyear.”

“Why way the hell out there? There are a lot of better Mexican restaurants much closer than that.”

“I need to bring something to someone who works there.”

“Who would you know that works at Arribas?”

“I'll tell you about it on the way.”

“Are we going to meet a bunch of people I haven't seen for twenty years that I don't want to see?”

“No, it's not a surprise. This isn't about you.”

“Is Randy going?” Tracy asked.

“No, I think it would go better without him.”

“Can I bring someone?”

“Bring Mara if you want.”

The BMW Randy rented through one of those car sharing sites sat in mom's driveway as Tracy arrived.

“I'll drive,” I offered.

“No thanks,” Tracy barked.

Carrying two printouts of the High School Movie script, I got in the passenger side of Tracy's car and Mara moved to the back seat. On the way to Arribas, I reminded Tracy about the script I had written a few years earlier and told her I wanted Steve and Ken to have copies.

When we arrived, I asked to be seated in Steve's area.

As we walked toward the table, Steve waved at us. The odd thing is that he hardly even looked at us before he waved, as if he was expecting us. He certainly hadn't glanced at us long enough to have been able to recognize us. Perhaps one of the other servers had gone up to him to let him know we had specifically requested to sit in his area.

We sat down and he got right to business, asking what we wanted to drink, without even saying Hi or How have you been.

As we ordered our drinks I focused on his face to figure out whether there was any glimmer of recognition. “Do you remember who I am?” I asked.

“Yeah, from Bourgade. Lisa Schaefer.”

“We haven't seen each other for over seven years.”

“The last time was at Abuelos.”

I was pleased that he immediately remembered that episode.

“And you haven't seen her for twenty-seven years,” I said, referring to Tracy. “Do you recognize her?”

Surprisingly, he didn't. I thought he'd figure it out by context.

Steve left to put our order in and the three of us at the table talked about Mara's interest in drama.

“I know finding a job in drama isn't realistic,” she said.

“It's possible, just more difficult. I worked with a guy when I was in high school who was really into dance. You might remember him, Tracy. David Starry. He's a professional dancer now. Doesn't make a lot of money, but he found a way to make it work.”

“Starry?” Mara asked. “The principal at my school is named Mrs. Starry.”

“That would be a big coincidence if they were related,” Tracy said.

“Not for an art school,” I said. “His wife is a dancer too. Lisa Starry.”

“Oh my god,” Mara said.

“I can't believe you know Mara's principal,” Tracy said.

Steve brings meal. Montage of Tracy, Mara, and I eating, laughing, taking pictures of Steve and Ken walking around.

As we finished our lunch, Steve came over to ask how everything was. I asked him to bring Ken over so Mara could take a picture of the three of us.