

1st DRAFT

The Life I Lead

A novel by Paul G. Kostro

Written as part of the 2007 NaNoWriMo Project
[For more information go to www.NaNoWriMo.org]

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Dedicated to my parents, who gave me life;
and then tirelessly tried to teach me how to live it right.

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Thursday

Good morning; thank you for choosing Vector Communications; what is the number you are calling about? — 908-113-8163. — And what is the name on this account? — Paul Kos. — Do you have an invoice with you, Mr. Kos? — No I don't. — What was the exact amount of your last payment? — I think it was about \$120, but I do not remember the exact amount. — Well, I am sorry Mr. Kos, but unless you can confirm your identity, I cannot speak with you about this account.

But, I am calling you from my home number; and my internet connection has been suspended.

I am sorry, but you first have to confirm your identity in one of the prescribed ways. How do you pay your phone bill? — I use my bank's online payment system; and because my access to the internet has been suspended, I cannot get any of the information that you are requesting.

I am sorry, but there is nothing I can do. Can you call your bank and find out the exact amount of your last phone payment? — No, I can't! It is 8:10 in the morning, and I have no one to call. — And where is your phone bill? — I have it in my office; but I am home right now. — Well, I'm sorry, but, until you have the necessary information, I cannot discuss this account with you.

I hung up the phone. This is so frustrating! I have been waiting for this day, November 1, the day I was to start writing my first novel, and what happens — I wake up with a major headache. I get up; take some medicine, and decide to log onto my computer, only to find out that my internet connection has been suspended for non-payment.

But I know that I paid my bills — yes, there has been a lingering problem for the last couple of months; ever since we converted from DSL to FiOS; but each time I call the phone company to straighten out this mess, the automated customer support system asks me if my complaint relates to a FiOS billing issue, and once I acknowledge that this is my problem, I am told that the appropriate credits will be issued within the next several weeks; and then the computer-generated voice says "Good bye" and disconnects the line.

Frustrated, I turn my attention to my photography. After I edit several photos that I took recently during one of our numerous weekend trips, and save them on my hard drive for eventual uploading to Flickr, my wife, Chris, gets up and comes over to see what I am doing — later I find out that she was surprised that I was working on my photos, as she had expected me to be working on the novel that I have been gearing up for all week long.

By now ... it was time for breakfast, a shower, and off to the office.

My law office is in Lincoln, about twenty minutes from home. On the way, I stop at the post office to empty out my mailbox (actually, I have two – one in Lincoln, close to the office; and the second in Weston, close to home, where I receive my bills and other non-client related papers). Once at the office, I turn on my computer and double check what is on schedule for today. As I remembered, I am scheduled to meet with a client in the morning and I have a municipal court appearance in the evening.

The phone rings — it is Mrs. Stara, a person I met in court some time ago when she was the court-appointed interpreter for one of my non-English speaking clients. After some preliminary pleasantries, she asks me to represent a Polish woman who is married to a brute. As an inducement, she assures me that collecting a decent legal fee will not be a problem, as Stan (the brute) is a wealthy contractor.

Having a soft spot for such cases, I agree to meet with Mary (the victim, Stan's wife). I note down Mary's phone number, and ask Mrs. Stara to let Mary know that I will call her later today; or better yet, Mary can call me at her convenience.

Arthur shows up five minutes before his scheduled appointment. His wife Kate is with him. Arthur and Kate own a small business. They want to lease some additional retail space, and have asked to meet with me to talk about their new proposed lease. Arthur is not sure why he needs a lawyer, but his future landlord wanted to know the name of Arthur's lawyer for the landlord's lawyer to contact about the lease.

I had represented Arthur when he and his partner decided to split up their business. It was not a friendly breakup, but after a lot of haggling it finally got done. It was during those negotiations that Kate quit her job and joined Arthur's business.

We spend some time discussing the anticipated terms of the new lease – the monthly rent; the size and location of the property; the renewal options; work to be done by the

landlord prior to the start of operations at the new location; and other standard “stuff.” We sign a retainer agreement; and Arthur promises to send me the agreed upon monetary retainer in tomorrow’s mail.

Once Arthur and Kate leave, I find my last month’s Vector Communications’ bill and call them to try to reinstaie my access to the internet at home. As usually happens, it is difficult to locate the proper person to resolve the problem. However, after several transfers, each one involving the fresh recitation of my telephone number, account number, name, and complete explanation of the reason for my call, I finally am connected to the apparent proper person. She listens, puts me on hold while she reviews my account, and returns with the good and bad news.

Mr. Kos; I reviewed your account. The disputed charges were improper. I have given you a credit, which will show up on your next month’s statement. — Will my internet service be reinstated? — That will take anywhere from twelve to twenty four hours. Is there anything else I can do for you? — No, thank you. — I noticed that you are not subscribing to our television service; should I sign you up now? — Absolutely NOT! I do not want to give Vector Communications any additional power over my life; where you can capriciously just disconnect me, especially when you have no just cause to do so. — Thank you for choosing Vector Communications. Have a very nice day.

Feeling relieved that my four month struggle to straighten out my Vector Communications bill appears to finally be coming to an end, I check my emails. There are twenty three pieces of junk mail – thank God for junk mail filters. I check on what cases were decided yesterday in the Appellate Division and the Supreme Court. Two of them are labeled “Family Law,” so I copy them onto my roster of cases to check more closely and possibly write a blog article about. I read through the various emails generated by several members of the Attorneys Email List. None of those inspire me to respond. I then get to a long fax that was sent by an Abraham Berkowitz, Esq.

I review the fax – it is a proposed Lease between Ajax Corporation and Trendy Cloths Inc. (Trendy Cloths Inc. is Arthur and Kate’s company.) Several mistakes are immediately evident — my client’s address; the duration of the lease term; the square footage of the premises leased. But worst of all – it is forty three paragraphs long, single

spaced on legal size paper, spread across twenty seven pages. I send it to my network printer, when the telephone rings.

Good morning. This is Paul Kos. May I help you. — Do you speak Polish? — [In Polish:] Yes. — Can I speak with the lawyer? — I am a lawyer. How can I help you? — My name is Rozwadowska, Mary. A friend asked me to call you because my husband beat me, and I do not know what to do. — Who is your friend? — I don't know her name, but she was interpreting for me in court last night. — Can you come into my office for us to meet? My office is in Lincoln. — I live in South Bend and I don't have a car. — Can someone drive you to my office? — I don't know; everyone works all day. Can I come to your office late at night? — How late is late? — My son gets home at nine. Is that too late? — Yes; but tell me what happened; why do you need my services?

I came home from work late two days ago. My husband was not home, so I went to his girlfriend's house, where I knew he would be. She then jumped me. She knocked me over and she pounded my head on the concrete. He came out and he kicked me in the ribs. The police came and arrested him and gave him a Restraining Order. Later she bailed him out and he spent the night at her place.

What is your address? — 123 Side Street, South Bend. — And your telephone number? — 973-311-9832. Can you come to my house? — Generally I do not; but this time I will. It will probably be after five p.m. — Oh, thank you!

This domestic violence stuff always bothers me; however, I have to be careful — sometimes, the obvious is not so obvious once you hear the other side of the story. I guess I will know more tonight. Oh my God – tonight – I can't do it tonight; I have a court appearance tonight. I promptly call Mrs. Rozwadowska back and explain that our meeting will have to be postponed — we agree on 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

I then decide to review the Trendy Cloths Inc. Lease; but first, let me make sure that I am ready for tonight's court appearance. I find the file: Juan Carlos. Arrested October 17, 2005, for possession of a controlled dangerous substance.

He was stopped by the police for having a defective tail light. He did not have his registration; and his inspection sticker had expired. But worst of all, he was wearing a shirt exalting the virtues of marihuana. Since he was nineteen years old, you may understand the

shirt; but all together, he was asking for a close examination by the police. Within seconds the contraband was found.

Fortunately he was not driving under the influence, and he was polite to the policeman. In his mug shot he looks like a killer; but his record was clean.

He admitted to all his transgressions; and the police did everything by the book. Someone in the courthouse gave him my number, and based on that, we met. I successfully shepherded him through the Pretrial Intervention Program (PTI), which provides an alternative to criminal prosecution. Now, a year later, he completed the Program, and the County Prosecutor agreed to the dismissal of the more serious charges, and remanded the file back to Municipal Court for the disposition of the traffic offenses.

In preparation for tonight's hearing, I had advised Juan to bring with him to court proof that his car had been registered, inspected, and all deficiencies had been fixed. I put the file in my briefcase, together with my Municipal Court Police Manual, which I take with me each time I go to Municipal Court.

I was ready to go to lunch when the phone rang again – it was Raphael Sokowski; my adversary in the Abramkowicz divorce. Hi Ralph, what can I do for you? — Where do we stand on that proposed settlement agreement I faxed to you yesterday?, he demanded.

Ralph, like me, is of Polish heritage. Like me, he is a general practitioner, servicing the Polish community in Lincoln; thus, we have been adversaries in several cases. Unlike me, he also handles some immigration matters. When I first started my practice in Lincoln, we spoke several times about becoming partners; however, at first I resisted the notion because I did not know the man very well; and once I knew him better, I resisted the notion on principle.

Ralph is one of those attorneys who talks big, but does little, and the extent of his familiarity with the law is not readily apparent to me. I did not know this about him at first, so I used to refer to him whatever immigration matters that came my way. But, over time, when I asked him questions about the law, the answers I received were usually less than complete or fully thought out.

Currently, Ralph was representing Agnes Abramkowicz, who was seeking a divorce from my client, Waldemar Abramkowicz. About ten days ago, Waldemar (“Waldek”) called

me and told me that his wife had asked him to call me to represent him in a divorce. He wanted to know if he and his wife could come and meet with me. I told him that I would gladly meet with him; however, as to his wife, I inquired if she was represented by an attorney. I then learned that her attorney was Raphael Sokowski, Esq.

I told Waldek: I normally would not meet with a couple when I would be representing one of them in a divorce; but in this case, where his wife is represented by an attorney, I am not allowed to meet with her without her attorney's presence. Waldek then informed me that he does not drive; and his wife would have to bring him to my office. "She can bring you; but I will not meet with her." We scheduled an appointment; and as previously announced, they came together.

He was a handsome elderly gentlemen. She was significantly younger, and very beautiful. She waited in the waiting room while I met with Waldek. He promptly told me that they had agreed to a friendly divorce and they had no children. My inquiries revealed that she had purchased a house during the marriage, and the Deed was only in her name. He told me about some of the repairs and improvements that he did to the house, but admitted that he had not contributed financially toward the purchase of the house. He was less clear as to the mortgage payments, but he was certain that the house was hers, and he was not making any claim as to the house. Further inquiries revealed that his wife had recently purchased a new automobile, and that the bank loan documents were signed by both of them — nevertheless, he assured me that his wife told him that he would not be responsible for the car payments.

When I asked him as to what his address was, he was unsure; he excused himself, and went to speak with his wife. Upon his return, he told me his address, but had to go back to her when I also asked for the zip code. He again emphasized how this was a friendly divorce, and I should just process the settlement agreement that his wife's attorney was preparing – just make sure that after the divorce he would have no further obligations from the marriage. Somehow, things just did not feel right.

The document that Mr. Sokowski prepared were straightforward: divorce on the basis of extreme cruelty, no alimony, and the wife would keep the house and car. The extreme

cruelty accusation surprised me — I thought this was to be a friendly divorce; but the accusations included drunkenness, infidelity, gambling, and other unpleasantries.

I called Waldek and told him about the contents of the proposed settlement agreement that I received from his wife's attorney. He expressed disbelief, and told me again that his wife promised him that this would be a friendly divorce. He denied the accusations that supported the alleged extreme cruelty. When I asked him about the debts related to the house and his wife's car, he told me that he is not responsible for any debts.

Now, in reply to Mr. Sokowski's telephone inquiry, I told him that I am sure that we can work things out, but that my client denies the accusations supporting the alleged extreme cruelty. I continued: in situations where the couple profess friendliness toward each other, and extreme cruelty is the only legally recognizable grounds for divorce, I try to present bland support for the cruelty; something that would satisfy the requirements of the law, but would not inflame the passions of the litigants. Also, relating to the mortgage on the house; since my client signed the mortgage loan papers; to protect my client, the settlement agreement should include an obligation for a post-divorce refinancing; and also, the wife should agree in the settlement agreement to hold my client harmless from any claims asserted as a result of any marital debt outstanding.

The telephone conversation ended promptly, with Mr. Sokowski's announcement that he would check with his client.

I set my telephone answering system on; and I left the office to get lunch. My office is on street level on one of the main streets in Lincoln. It is not the street where other professionals have their offices, but it is in a retail district that benefits from significant visibility. I have been at this location since October 1997. Next to the office, on one side is an eyeglass store, and on the other there is a clothing store. Street parking can be challenging sometimes, but at the worst of times, I find a spot within half a city block from the office. Across the street is a small grocery store, where they make simple sandwiches to order.

When I walk in, the woman behind the counter just asks me: sandwich? To my affirmative reply, she slips two pieces of bread into the toaster. Sometimes we talk, but that is often difficult. Her English is broken, and my Spanish is even more so. She already

knows that I was born in Argentina, and that I speak some Spanish, but she also knows that my Spanish is not conversational. Nevertheless, I enjoy practicing my Spanish, and to the extent that I can, I try to use it as often as possible.

I was born in Argentina approximately fifty eight years ago. My parents were recent emigres from post-war Europe. Before the war, my father was from Warszawa Poland and my mother was from Leszno Poland. They met after the war, and then married in Belgium. Because Poland became a Communist county, they chose not to return there. They sought to emigrate out of war-torn Europe, and from the choices they had, they chose Argentina.

I was my parents' first child; later they had four others: Tom, Alexandra, Anna and Elizabeth. Nine years into my life, my parents received a postcard from the United States government — Ten years earlier, when they were seeking to emigrate out of Europe, they were placed on a waiting list to come to America; now, their names finally rose to the top of the list, and in 1958 they were asked if they still wanted to come.

As a child I knew that we had an uncle in America. I also knew it to be a place of wonderful things — for example, the marbles from America were see-through, and they had colorful windmill designs inside them; the local marbles were much more coarse, but they were interesting in their own right. Marbles was one of my favorite forms of entertainment; but I digress.

My father came to America first; to find a job, and set up a home for us. When he first arrive in New York, he lived with my uncle Bolek and his family on the Upper West Side. He found a job at a large engineering firm in New York; he was a civil engineer. Eventually, he rented an apartment in Forest Hills, a neighborhood in Queens, a borough of New York City.

I remember excerpts of our trip to America as if they happened yesterday.

In Argentina, we lived in Ramos Mejia, not too far from downtown Buenos Aires. I remember my mother packing, putting her medical books and pots and pans in boxes, which were shipped to meet us in New York. I next remember being on an airplane. In those days, the door to the Captain's cabin was open — my brother, sisters and I visited the pilot and co-pilot several times during that flight, from Buenos Aires to Santiago, Chile, to Panama, to Florida.

I remember when we were called to come to the pilot's cabin; one of my sisters was sitting on the pilot's lap, and I was standing behind the pilot's seat, looking over his shoulder. The pilot pointed to the horizon in front of us, and told us those were the Andes Mountains. It was so exciting to be the first ones on the airplane to see the Andes – we ran back to tell our mother. Five little children, ages two through ten, running all over the airplane — I now feel so sorry for all the other passengers.

All I remember about Santiago was that we had to stay close to our mother; as we walked on a grass field (presumably off the runway), and these giant war planes were parked to the side. I remember those large propellers; I remember the red fiery designs painted on the front of the airplanes – we were told that they were “fighters.”

I next remember being in Panama at three in the morning — I did not remember ever being up at three in the morning before that (now, having had my own three children, I suppose my Mother may be willing to enlighten me on that issue). Just like Santiago, this was a refueling stop. Panama was a big airport; concrete everywhere, and buildings and airplanes all around us. Unlike today, when airplanes pull up to a gate, and passengers walk from the airplane into a terminal; then, staircases would be wheeled over to the airplane, and all the passengers would descend onto the tarmac and walk to the terminal.

We landed in Miami sometime in the morning, on June 2, 1959. All five of us kids were wearing our winter coats — when it is summer in the United States, it is winter in Argentina. All I remember is that everyone else was wearing shorts, and loud colorful shirts. This was my first image of America.

The two pieces of bread pop up, warm and toasty. She shakes a dispenser, and squeezes a modern-art design of mayonnaise on the two pieces of toast. A slice of American Cheese is placed on top of each piece of bread, and then two slices of ham, covered with green lettuce and red tomato. Salt and pepper on top, and the two slices are united into one sandwich. A knife slices the edible delight into two halves; and then the whole is packaged in wax paper and a small bag.

I pay two twenty five for my lunch; say “muchas gracias,” and head back to my office across the street; where I retrieve a Diet Coke from my small refrigerator. While eating my lunch, I check for new emails. I note that a controversy has broken out on my

Attorneys Email List — Dave asked: “I represent H; after a divorce, W went shopping and used H’s credit card to purchase a new wardrobe for herself. Despite my several demand for reimbursement, W has not reimbursed my client, and her attorney is ignoring the situation. What else can I do?” To which Margaret replied: “Send W’s attorney a letter, pointing out that what W did was a crime, as she was not authorized to use the credit card; and if immediate reimbursement is not received, you intend to report the matter to the police.”

This simple piece of advice created an uproar: “An attorney may not threaten criminal action to gain an advantage in a civil case.” But a minority supports Margaret’s advice; arguing that it is proper to give a final warning and an opportunity to set things right if in fact a crime has been committed. The arguments are tossed back and forth – twenty three emails on this subject alone. Margaret’s advice may have been good or bad; but we are all alerted to the fact that before we threaten to involve the police, we should be very careful, as the practice may be effective but unethical — our law license may be on the line; is it worth it? To most, the obvious answer is No! Thus, go to the police or not; but do not threaten to do so — it is the threat that is unethical, because it is an exercise of excessive power geared to extort an economic advantage.

After my lunch, I call my Mother. She is eighty seven, living with one of my sisters. She tells me about her daily activities and what is happening in the family. I tell her that I intend to write a novel about her life. She is surprised that I would want to write a novel; and that the novel would be about her. I explain that although I do not like to write, I always wanted to write a novel. Last week I learned about an international effort to spend the month of November writing a novel of at least fifty thousand words in length. I tell her that this may be the perfect opportunity to do what I always wanted to do; and document for my children, her grandchildren, a portion of our family history.

My Mother has been in the United States for almost fifty years. She took English classes numerous times. On many occasions, she spent hours with a dictionary, trying to read a magazine or a newspaper. But, although she is communicative for her life essentials, she is embarrassed and claims not to speak English. Her grandchildren, however, do not speak Polish. As a consequence, for the lack of effective communication between them, the

two generations know of each other, but do not talk to each other. Both, I believe, are that much the poorer.

My novel, if I ever write it, may be an effective means of transmitting to my children the lessons of their grandparents' rich and meaningful lives. Over the years I have heard the stories many times, and yet, they are fuzzy and imprecise. So I take this opportunity to ask my Mom to tell me again how it was that she found herself in a Prisoner of War Camp during World War II.

So, Mom, what was the name of the camp where you were a prisoner? — “That was Oberlangen; it is in Germany, someplace close to Holland” she replied. — Tell me again how you got there. — Well, before the war I was a nursing student; and after the war broke out on September 1, 1939, I joined the “AK” (Polish Home [Underground] Army) in 1943. When the Warsaw Uprising started, I was taking care of my twin brother who had been shot in the neck just a day earlier. We were in the hospital where I had been working as an operating room nurse, and where I was assigned to take care of patients, changing their bandages and caring for their wounds.

I interrupt: “Mom, I need much more detail.” I could hear her brace herself, and she continued: Toward the end of July, 1944, rumors were everywhere about the impending uprising against the German occupying forces. In Warszawa, I was located in the Old Town, where I was preparing for the Uprising by making bandages and gathering syringes to take care of the injured that we were anticipating very soon.

On the last day of July, my brother Wiesiek and I were in the courtyard of our building when a passing German soldier sprayed the area with machine gun fire. No one was hit directly, but one of the bullets ricocheted and hit Wiesiek in the neck, grazing his carotid artery. The artery ballooned tremendously, but it did not burst. I managed to get him to a hospital, where I stayed to take care of him.

The next morning, the Warsaw Uprising began early in the morning. We had expected the advancing Russian Army to come to our aid after a few days. However, the Russian Army reached the Wisła River, and stopped there. We fought for sixty three days, but the Russians just sat there and watched us from across the river.

In the hospital, in addition to caring for Wiesiek, I began caring for other patients as well. Initially I was utilized as a general nurse, traveling from home to home, where our injured soldiers were being laid out. I was responsible for changing their bandages and tending to their wounds.

When the German air force started to systematically bomb the city, block after block, we moved the injured to the basement of the hospital, where they were laid out on mattresses on the floor. But then, the operating room that had been on the ground floor was bombed also, so we had to move what remained of it to the basement as well.

Toward the end of August, our operating room nurse was shot in the knee while she was crossing the street under the cover of a barricade; she was bringing sterilized operating tools, which had to be sterilized at a different hospital because we did not have adequate facilities for that. When she became incapacitated, I was assigned as the nurse in the operating room. My job was to hand the appropriate instruments to the doctor during operations.

When we lost the fight and the Uprising was crushed at the end of September 1944, the Germans transported us, the entire hospital, patients and staff, to a Prisoner of War camp. Then, in early December, 1944, the Germans decided that many of the patients were well enough to take care of themselves, so they separated us. I, together with many of the other women, were transported to Oberlangen, where I remained until we were liberated by the Polish First Armoured Division in April 1945.

Tell me about your "AK" experience. — It was very secret. I remember telling a fellow student of my desire to join; she told me that she will arrange it. I was then notified to attend a meeting at a secret location, where I did not know anyone. There was more than one meeting that I attended; there I learned how to load and take care of a gun, and how to engage in urban warfare.

Were you ever involved in any operations? — Once; it still makes me sick to think about it; although, I think that they were just testing me, to see how I would react. I was notified that I and another women would be assigned to be the supporting medical staff to an assassination mission involving a German official. I did not know my counterpart, nor where it would happen. All I was told was that I needed to report to a safe-house, with a

stretcher, from where I would be detailed to the proper location. I obtained a stretcher from the hospital and brought it with me by taxi to my assigned location. From there, I was told to go to a specific gate and wait; and, if needed, to be ready to support my fellow soldiers should anyone be injured. I was so scared. I was not able to sleep that entire night, waiting for the event. However, around noon, while I was waiting for the assassination to be carried out, I was relieved of my post and I was told that the assassination was canceled.

My phone started ringing then; so I interrupted my Mother — it was Mrs. Jagoda (one of my former clients). Three years ago she bought a condominium; now she wants to sell it. I agreed to meet with her tomorrow afternoon. When I got back to my Mother's call, I realized that it was getting late; and that she was very upset from talking about her war memories; so we said our goodbyes and hung up.

I get back to the review of the proposed Lease for Arthur's and Kate's Trendy Cloths Inc. I was almost finished writing my letter to my clients with my recommended changes, when an elderly woman walked in. She asked: are you a lawyer? After my affirmative reply, she started telling me about a car accident — I interrupted her, and asked her to fill out my Potential New Client Intake Form.

She came to me by way of a recommendation from Mrs. Walderowicz, one of my other clients that I was representing after she was rear-ended at a stop light. The woman sitting before me was pleasant looking, average height and weight. She was blond, and her name was Teresa Kolakowska.

According to Mrs. Kolakowska, she and her daughter were in Middlevillage, cleaning houses. They had finished cleaning one house, and were on the way to their next appointment. They were driving West on Middlevillage Road, crossing Route 9, when suddenly they were hit on the driver's side of their car. It was a very loud crash; everything went spinning. She heard her daughter Kasia scream.

She next remembers being on a stretcher, being put into an ambulance. They were taken to South Middlevillage Regional Trauma Center. She was released from the hospital after three days. Her daughter had to stay in the hospital an additional two days.

Who was driving? — I was, and my daughter was sitting in the front seat next to me. — What happened to the other vehicle involved in this accident? — I do not know. — Please

describe the last several seconds before the accident. — We were talking about what needs to be done in the house that we were driving to clean. Kasia was changing the radio station. As I approached Route 9, the light was green. A car in front of me crossed Route 9; and, I was almost in the middle of the intersection, when a car crossing Route 9, coming in the opposite direction, made a sudden turn and hit me. I still remember the face of the other driver as she was coming toward me at high speed. I tried to turn, but it was too late; I remember the loud crash, and how everything went spinning; but then I do not remember anything else until I was on the stretcher.

Having determined that this accident happened about nine months ago, I agreed to represent Mrs. Kolakowska. I explained the terms of my retainer agreement, and received a \$250 initial retainer; and a copy of the Police Accident Report. We agreed to meet again in a few days.

After she left, I finished my letter to Arthur and Kate about their Lese, and sent it off to them by email. I then called Kate to let her know that the email has been sent, and we scheduled a meeting for tomorrow to review the matter face to face.

As I return from the bathroom, I find waiting for me a large man, who tells me that he needs a lawyer. I invite him into my office and ask how can I help him.

Robert Jura hands me two traffic tickets: careless driving, and driving while intoxicated. I look at the tickets; and ask: how can I help you? — the astonishing answer: Can you fix this? My quick response: I can represent you; but I cannot fix this. Is this your first DWI ticket? — Yes; but I was not drunk.

I explain to Mr. Jura the consequences of a DWI conviction – the mandatory loss of driving privileges, the potential for jail, the fines and penalties, the insurance surcharges, the escalated punishment if he is convicted again for DWI in the future. The man insists that he was not drunk; he is only a social drinker, on weekends only. On this particular evening, he and his wife were celebrating his birthday at a friend's house. They had several drinks — when I press him on this, he admits that he does not remember how many, but he is sure that it was only a few shots of vodka, and after that he switched to beer, because he knew that he would be driving home.

On the way home, he swerved, and hit a tree. He got out of his car to see what happened; and his wife followed him, and started to yell at him. When he saw that the police were coming, he told her to keep quiet, which she did. The car was towed; he was arrested for drunk driving, despite his protests that he was not drunk; and his wife walked home (they were only a couple of blocks from home).

At the police station they had him do various things, like point at his nose with his eyes closed, and try to walk a straight line — but he was dazed from the accident, so he could not do it. They asked him to blow into a machine, which he did — successfully.

After he left, I faxed to the Municipal Court my Notice Of Appearance, Plea Of Not Guilty, And Request For An Interpreter. I also wrote to the Municipal Prosecutor, requesting “discovery” — i.e., a copy of all the documents related to this case.

Before I head off to the Westernnton Municipal Court and meet there with Juan Carlos, I check what is on schedule for this weekend and next week — plenty of work to do, but nothing earth shattering (but I know that a week later will be my long awaited medical malpractice trial with Linda Mastriani). I close up my office, get in the car, and turn on my CD player.

The trip to Westernnton is about half an hour. I use this time to listen to a book-on-tape. In preparation for my soon to be written novel, I am listening to “Bridge Of Sighs,” by Richard Russo, a book that was reviewed favorably on National Public Radio, and was also read and praised by Chris.

I am a very slow reader — how I got through graduate school and law school I do not know. As a child I enjoyed Jules Verne and other light science fiction books. I used to go to the public library and bring home many books — but I do not remember actually reading them. There were some; Guadalcanal Diary; Heidi; and others. But, I never developed the love of reading that others, like my wife, have. In high school I remember reading books (in addition to what was required), like the James Bond series. To this day, I love books; I love owning books, but wind up not reading them.

Books-on-tape is a perfect solution for me. I very much enjoy listening to books being read out loud, even in short increments, while I drive from home to the office and back. So how did I get on this novel-writing kick?!

Well, I was checking out various social networking websites; a chore I do almost daily. One of those sites is Yelp — which generally focuses on restaurant and food related reviews and activities. There, I found an invitation to go to Starbucks in New York City for a write-a-thon on November 1, at 1 a.m., as a kickoff event for the 2007 NaNoWriMo (**N**ational **N**ovel **W**riting **M**onth) Project. Although I decided not to go to the event, I was intrigued by the concept of actually writing a novel. The next day I went to the local bookstore, and purchased five books on how to write a novel. The most valuable piece of advice I got was from the sales clerk ringing up my order: Oh! Are you going to write a novel? I took many courses on this, and the only thing I learned is: remember to describe; write what you see, not what you conclude.

When I arrived to the Westerton Municipal Court parking lot, I got the last available parking spot. I often marvel at the irony of municipal courts not having adequate parking facilities for the amount of defendants regularly processed in their courts. Often, people wind up parking improperly (illegally). So, they got busted for a traffic offense; they come to court to take care of it; and before they can take care of it, they are forced to commit a new parking offense. Life is strange, sometimes.

The municipal court is in the city hall chamber. The violations bureau window is off to the side – little colorful stickers indicate that they accept credit cards now. Off to the other side is a small office with a long line of people leading from its door — I guess that this is where the municipal prosecutor officiates, and those in line are “regulars” who already know how the system works. On the wall, next to the door into the courtroom, is a computer paper listing, detailing the cases scheduled for adjudication this evening. Several people are trying to read the list; confirming that they are on it, as they expect; or perhaps hoping that they are not on it.

I enter the courtroom and look for my client. At first I do not see him, so I say in a loud voice: is Juan Carlos in the courtroom? People turn to look at me; the general level of the noise seems to become muffled; but no one responds to my inquiry. I check the hallway, and I do not see my client anywhere. It is only five to six; he still has five minutes before the court is scheduled to be in session. I take this time to look over the file one more time.

At few minutes later, I go over to the Violation Bureau window, and report in. I inform the clerk that I am an attorney and that I represent Juan Carlos, who is expected to arrive momentarily. The clerk places Mr. Carlos' file on the pile that is to be given to the municipal prosecutor.

Then I continue to wait for my client, who was supposed to meet me at the courthouse at 5:45. I decide to call him — he answers his cell phone; apparently he is in the parking lot, looking for a spot. Now I feel better — I have a client. A few minutes later he comes in and I motion to him to join me down the hall for us to talk.

I go over with my client what we talked about previously on the phone. He is comfortable with the expected procedure, and agrees to wait for me in the courtroom while I go to the prosecutor's office.

Every prosecutor has their own way of doing things. Here, the prosecutor is sitting at a long table, several police officers are off to one side, and several attorneys are sitting at the table. I walk in, and find an empty seat, as close to the prosecutor as possible. She looks up, and says: you look familiar counselor; have we met before? — Hi. My name is Paul Kos, and I represent Juan Carlos. We may have met before; my office is in Lincoln.

Hold on, let me find your client's file. Ah, yes. Oh, this is an old one. Where has he been all this time? — He has been going through the PTI process; he has completed that successfully; and now we need to take care of his vehicle violations. — Let me see his Registration. — Here it is, the current one and the one from last year; and here is a Certificate that he passed inspection. I was hoping that you would dismiss all the charges. — I am not going to agree to an outright dismissal; but, I will agree to reduce the Unregistered Vehicle charge to a Failure To Produce Documents, with no fine. All he will have to pay is the court costs. — Thank you very much. I will wait with my client to be called in the courtroom.

I join Juan in the courtroom. It looks like there are about fifty people waiting, sitting in the public benches. They are of all types, young and old, male and female, white and black. Several are in suits, some are dressed in casual office clothes, and the majority in street casual. The suits appear to be all lawyers. Although I am wearing a tie and jacket, I

am not wearing a suit. I have found that people are generally more comfortable when dealing with someone who dresses nicely, but is not too stuffy.

Whoever was having their case disposed off is done, and the clerk calls the next case — it is not our turn yet. The judge is an elderly fellow, sitting up high with a little sign in front of him that says: Hon. John M. Smithers. The person whose case was called goes up to a microphone with his attorney. Please enter your appearance for the record. — Yes Your Honor, my name is Charles Sorensen. I represent the defendant, Paul Whats. — I have here a note from the prosecutor. I understand that you reached an agreement; the charge is amended to 4:97.2, Driving In An Unsafe Manner; is that correct? — Yes Your Honor. — OK. \$150 fine; \$250 surcharge; and \$35 court costs. Go pay it at the Violations Bureau window. — Thank you Your Honor.

The attorney and his client start leaving; and the court clerk calls the next case: Amanda Watkins. Someone in the back of the courtroom opens the door, and yells out into the hallway: “Amanda, get over here.” The judge does not look pleased, but he does not say anything.

Slowly, a young woman, not in the most formal of attire, makes her way to the front of the courtroom. As she progresses, the man that just called her in moves from the back of the courtroom to one of the front benches, together with his male companion of equal age and unfavorable appearance. As the woman gives her name into the microphone — my name is Amanda Watkins — her two companions in the front benches of the courtroom engage in some commentary between the two of them.

Now the judge looks really annoyed. He says to the Ms. Watkins: Hold on a minute; and he directs his gaze at the two men who are talking to each other. “What is going on here” says the judge in a loud voice. Suddenly, the courtroom turns very quiet and feels very cold. The judge begins to turn his attention to Ms. Watkins, but he obviously changes his mind; and again focuses his attention of the two men. “If I hear anything more from either one of the two of you, you will regret it.” He then tells Ms. Watkins to sit down, and he will call her case later. “Next case” the judge orders. The clerk quickly calls out: “Juan Carlos.”

I stand up; my mind rushing – I am ready for anything; I am hoping for nothing. I approach the microphone placed on the floor in the area in between the first public bench

and the judge's bench. My client follows and stands by my side. As quickly as his demeanor changed before, the judge's composure returns to his prior pleasant self. He looks at me and says: enter you appearance for the record.

In what seems to be only seconds, my client's plea to the amended charge is accepted, and he is directed to go to the Violations Bureau window and pay the \$35 assessed court costs. Once we are outside the courtroom, my client looks at me, and asks: Is that all? I assure him that once he pays the \$35 the troubles that started more than a year ago will be over; and I warn him to avoid all further problems, and to stay away from drugs. He pays is \$35 in cash, and than thanks me profusely. That makes me happy; it is always nice when a client is satisfied.

Normally, after work, I go to the supermarket and buy ingredients for dinner. But, when I have to go to court or to a meeting in the evening, Chris is in charge of this task. Sometimes we go out to dinner, but rarely – this is reserved for date-night Fridays. Sometimes we order out – Chinese food; Thai; Sushi; or something else – but usually we buy what strikes our fancy at the supermarket and we prepare dinner when both of us get home.

On my way home I called to let Chris know that I was finished with court, and I would be home soon. When I got there, dinner was ready. We caught up on each other's lives; discussed the latest adventures, tragedies and successes of our children, and went to bed, exhausted. As often happens, one of us falls asleep with the television still blaring, and the other one of us is in charge of securing both sets of eyeglasses and turning off the television.

Friday

In the morning our access to the internet was still suspended. I tried to call Vector Communications, but their customer relations department does not start operations until 8 a.m. We had breakfast in front of the television, watching the morning news, taking-in our numerous medications, and reading the newspaper. Chris asked if I had decided what my novel would be about — I still had not; but I told her that I was considering writing a biography of my sperm. She looked at me, and reminded me that our children may want to read my novel, and I should not embarrass them too much.

Then my blood boiled. Not because my free-speech rights were being curtailed or my creative juices were being dried out; but because I read in the newspaper (in a story about an F.B.I. agent whose criminal trial was derailed because the government's key witness was completely compromised) that our federal government has had an alliance with criminals — apparently the Federal Bureau of Investigation had a multi-year relationship with known murderers whereby they helped and protected each other.

Lately, each day brings a new revelation about the depravity that our leaders have fallen into in the name of “national security.” I am aware that the events of September 11, 2001 have scared us all — they have damaged me also. But, it seems to me that the terrorists have won because our government is terrorized and our leaders loose sight of our American ideals and the foundation of our Constitution. Recently, people are more and more afraid; but now they are not afraid of what some external radical force may do to us, but of what we may do to ourselves.

That morning I decide to drive to downtown Weston, to collect whatever may have accumulated in my mailbox there. It is a cool and sunny morning. All the trees are turning colors — some are still green, many are red, and others are yellow, with many shades in between. I drive slowly, taking in the beauty of our town. Children are walking to school; crossing guards are facilitating their safe passage across many intersections. Lawns are green. Some houses still have their Halloween decorations. Squirrels and chipmunks are running all over the place.

I am fortunate to be able to park in front of the Post Office in one of the ten-minute spaces. When they are not available, as often they are not, I park in one of the metered spots — the cost is ten cents for twelve minutes. To fund these needs I have two compartments in my car — one, full of quarters; and the second, full of dimes. Between these two compartments I can handle almost any parking situation.

I continue my journey to my office, now with a new set of bills to be paid. It seems like it is a constant struggle to balance the outflow of cash to the inflow of fees. As I drive and enjoy the park-like setting, I listen to my book. How beautifully the author expresses his ideas — when will I start my novel?; I am already two days behind schedule, and I still do not know what to write about. In preparation, I study my collection of books that are supposed to teach me to write; but, it seems that you have to start writing to learn how to write.

At the office, after checking my mail and emails, and having determined that there are no emergencies that need my immediate attention, I call my mother, to follow up on our conversation of yesterday.

Mom is happy to hear from me. Nothing new happened in her life since yesterday; and there is no news from the family — we go on the assumption that no news is good news. I tell Mom that I want to get more details about her life for my book — she does not seem to mind. I tell her that I did some research on the internet about Oberlangen, and I was wondering what did she do once she was liberated? Mom's answer was not short:

After we were released from Oberlangen, we had nowhere to go, but our mood improved tremendously — we were happy to be free; we enjoyed better food; and we were hoping for the quick end to the war. When the opportunity presented itself, I volunteered to work at the Red Cross Headquarters, somewhere in Bavaria. At first I was assigned to the distribution of clothes detail; but after a few days, I learned that they needed people to help with the distribution of medications. I quickly transferred to that detail, where I worked with another fellow medical student, Ryszard Niklewicz.

One day, I was called to report to Colonel Misiak, the Director of the Red Cross Headquarters. It turned out that he was also from my hometown, Leszno. His parents, like my parents, had a store on the Town Square.

Some time later, my friend, Ryszard Niklewicz, told me that the Polish Army in exile had opened Polish Student Centers in Edinburgh, England and in Brussels, Belgium, for the purpose of allowing student to continue their studies. I decided to go to Brussels to continue my medical studies — apparently, scholarships would be available for qualified students.

I promptly approached Colonel Misiak and obtained his permission to go to Brussels. He gave me a piece of paper on which he wrote his official authorization. To join a convoy that was going to Brussels I had to take a train to some town in Germany, and try to meet up with the convoy that was supposed to go through that town at 6 a.m. That night, as I was sleeping, something bit me in the leg, in the area of my knee — I just swept it away (whatever it was), went back to sleep, and did not think about it again.

I arrived at my destination in time, and waited there for three hours — however, the convoy never came. I had no money, and I did not speak German or English — I did not know what to do. But then, I met two soldiers who were also going to Brussels. They told me that a military train with English soldiers would stop at the train station at nine that night, going to Brussels and Paris. However, I had to get there before eight, because the station would close at that time.

When I arrived at approximately 7:30 p.m., the station was brimming with military personnel. There, I blended into the crowd, and was fortunate to meet two older, experienced soldiers, who told me to hide behind a wood pile until the train arrived. The military police, with rifles, were patrolling the station, so I had to be careful not to attract their attention. While I hid, one of my new friends went to explore the station; when he returned, he told me that there was a group of five or six women all the way up front; and I had to somehow join them if I wanted to get on the train.

I waited for the military policeman to start his patrol in the direction that I wanted to go, and once he started, I followed him, off to his side, staying behind him so he would not see me. This way I was able to get to the group of English women. I stayed close to them, but did not make direct contact with them. Once the train arrived, they climbed on board, and I followed them in. They started to set up their bedding for the overnight trip, and I promptly did the same and quickly pretended to go to sleep.

At approximately midnight, the train stopped and everyone got off. I got off also, as I did not know what would happen next. It turned out that this was a dinner stop. There were long tables with benches, where we were given wonderful sandwiches. I was so scared that I would be found out, but no one asked me for any identification papers. In my very broken English I became friendly with my female companions, and I told them that I had a brother in Edinburg. It turned out that one of them was from Edinburg, and she actually knew my brother Bolek. After that, they took good care of me.

I arrived in Brussels in September 1945, in time to enroll in school.

My next adventure was getting off the train and getting out of the train station. I was dressed in a Polish soldier's uniform (the pants, converted by a tailor into a skirt). On my shoulders I had Red Cross insignias. The only identification I had was the handwritten authorization from Colonel Misiak, authorizing me to represent the Red Cross in Brussels.

I was very afraid that I would be caught as an impostor, riding military trains without proper authority. As I was approaching the gate out of the train station, I stayed in the middle of the crowd being formed by a narrow passage, and I had my handwritten identification in my hand. Fortunately a commotion started because someone else did not have proper papers with him. During that commotion, I was waived on to pass – I was finally free!!!

I wandered around, finding a beautiful park. Surrounding the park there were these beautiful building and hotels — I could not believe my eyes. For the past several years all I saw was total destruction, and here I was, in the most beautiful place on earth. I felt I was in a fantasy world.

Soon, though, reality set in. I had almost no money and I had difficulties with French and English. Fortunately, I had my stash with me — after we were liberated, we were paid by the Red Cross in cigarettes and very little money. I had the good stuff: Chesterfield and Camel cigarettes. They were very valuable. I decided to sell them, but I could not do it in public, as it was illegal to do so. But first, I needed to try to arrange for some lodging. I remembered that I had been told that there was a possibility for free lodging if I was in an official capacity.

I found the office that handled such matters, and reported in with my handwritten authorization from Colonel Misiak. I told them that I was in Brussels on official business for the Red Cross and I needed a place to stay. I was asked: For how long? I replied that I was not sure, but probably a week. I was told that it was too long; they only had housing available for two or three days. So, I told them, give it to me for three days, and I will try to take care of things quickly.

The official overseeing this enterprise agreed to give me housing for three days — it was the best hotel next to the park. I felt like an angel in heaven. I had a giant bed; a lamp and a wash basin in my room. I finally took a bath; I don't remember when I last took a bath, but this one was so wonderful! I then went down to the restaurant for lunch. As part of my accommodation, I received free breakfast and free lunch.

In the hotel, I was approached by someone wanting to buy cigarettes — after this transaction, I felt rich. I then found out where the Polish Student Center was located — I took a street car there. There I met these two students who were hanging around — Stach Jachner and Jurek Kos. What struck me about Jurek was that he was thin as a needle, but had these giant eyes. Apparently they were already waiting several weeks for the scholarships that were anticipated for the continuation of their studies.

Whatever bit me on the train, by my knee, several days earlier, gave me a nasty infection. I had a fever, so I went to see a doctor at the Red Cross. He sent me to the military hospital. I went by public transportation; but once I got there, I could not walk any more and they came for me with a stretcher. Afraid that I may not qualify for the services, I pretended not to understand whenever they asked me any questions as to what military unit I was assigned to.

Finally, the giant boil that developed on my foot broke, and this horrible black and red pus flowed out. They kept me in the hospital for the entire week. Fortunately, while in the hospital I received a daily ration of cigarettes and chocolate — the source of my wealth for the coming days once I was released from the hospital. Because I lost my glasses, I also took this opportunity to get new glasses while I was in the hospital — wire frame glasses that made me look like a grandmother.

Once I was released, I hitchhiked back in a military jeep to the Red Cross facility in town. Once again I was homeless, with nowhere to sleep. I decided to go back to the same place where I obtained housing when I first arrived in Brussels, and I told them about my hospitalization, and my consequential inability to complete my Red Cross business. Fortunately, they gave me a second three day pass at the hotel.

Now, having a place to sleep, I went to the Polish Student Center, where I met Jurek Kos again. Apparently he had been very worried about me — what happened that I disappeared for more than a week? I told him about my hospital stay, and I assured him that now I was fine. He kept asking me: What next? I had no idea, what next. I told him that I had to find a place to stay, as I only had housing for the next two days. He offered to help me look for a place, and I agreed that he should.

The next day I saw Jurek again, and he told me that he spoke with his landlady, and she agreed to provide me with housing at her place. It was a small one room apartment on the fifth floor. However, the stairs only went to the fourth floor; and I had to use a ladder to get to my room on the fifth floor. The room had a bed, a wash basin, and a small skylight. When I agreed to rent the apartment, the landlady painted the place for me, and sprinkled the floor with various colors of paint so it looked like polka dots. In that small room, I felt like I was Marie Curie-Sklodowska, studying in Paris.

While we waited for our studies to start, my friend Jurek and I went to the free movies and to the free museums. Because I had not yet received my papers allowing me to reside in Belgium, I was not receiving any ration cards, so it was difficult to buy things — but, I was able to buy yogurt, for which you did not need ration cards; and I would buy bread on the black market from the women who came from the surrounding areas and would sell the loaves from under their dresses. We also ate a lot of tomatoes, which were readily available. I had absolutely nothing, but I was free, and I needed nothing — I was so happy!

Then I had to take an exam to qualify for the scholarship. I had to prove that I was fluent in French — that was easy, as all I had to do was to translate a short paragraph. I also had to take a medical exam, but I passed that also — they asked me a few questions about anatomy, which I still remembered the answers to. And thus, I was finally admitted to medical school in Belgium.

“Mom, I have to interrupt; because I have to get some work done. But, I want to get back to this soon.” Shortly after that interruption, I forced my mind back to law.

My schedule reminds me that I am to meet with Mrs. Rozwadowska — I call her, and let her know that I am running late, but I will be there. I close up my office; set up my telephone answering system; and leave a sign at the front door, advising that I will return at 1 p.m. The drive to South Bend is uneventful; and once there, I find her house without any difficulty.

I park my car in front of her house, on a quiet tree-lined street of single-family homes. The front yard is clean, but does not appear to be manicured. After a short walkway, I climb a set of about five wooden steps onto an open front porch. As soon as I ring the doorbell, a short, slender, middle-age woman with black hair opens the door. Bruises on her face are immediately obvious. I introduce myself, and she lets me in to a small living room. As I am asked to do, I sit down on a brown couch, in front of a television. Off to the side is a arched passage into a dining room and a stairway upstairs. Next to that is a small kitchen.

She sits on a winged chair next to the television; I open my notebook; hand her my business card; and start by asking her to tell me what happened. She repeats what she told me over the telephone yesterday, but I want to know some more details — she elaborates, and tells me more of her story.

In 1975 she was living with her husband and four children in Poland. Because of very bad economic conditions there, they decided that her husband, Stan, should try to come to America and earn some money. Everything worked out as planned, and he returned to Poland about twelve months later.

After the Christmas holidays in 1977, Stan announced that he would come to America once again — because the family needed the money, preparations for the trip were made. They drove him to the airport, agreed to keep in frequent contact; and then she returned home with the kids to take care of his ailing mother. At first, letters and telephone calls were frequent; but then, they were less so.

Some months later she learned that Stan had meet someone and was living with her. This news was later followed up by a rumor that Stan had a child in America. In the interim,

his mother passed away. Packages with clothes and other goods (and occasionally some money) would arrive from time to time. She never questioned Stan about this woman, or the child he was reputed to have fathered, as he was her sole means of support; and there was nothing she could do about it anyway. They still kept in infrequent telephone contact.

Over the next couple of years, the children came to America to live with their father. By now, the horrible rumors were confirmed; but what could she do — and, anyway, he promised her that he would bring her to America also (this never happened).

He bought this house (the one where I was sitting in); his youngest son and his new daughter lived with him and his girlfriend Heidi. The older children moved out, married and started lives of their own. Then, at the insistence of her eldest daughter, she entered a visa lottery to emigrate to America — and believe it or not, she won.

I arrived in America on Good Friday; my daughter and her husband picked me up at the airport, and brought me to their house. Once there, my daughter called her father and told him that I was in America. The family was to get together for Easter Dinner at my husband's house; now that I was here, I was invited to come also.

That Easter Dinner was very awkward — I met his girlfriend and their child. We did not discuss family relationships during that dinner, and I did not stay very long. However, the next day, Stan came to visit me at my daughter's house. He started crying, and told me that he still loved me very much. The next two weeks were a whirlwind of sightseeing, talking and hotel rooms. Finally, he asked me to come and live with him.

I agreed to live with him, but I demanded that his girlfriend and her child move out. This became a topic of discussion and negotiation over the next several days. Finally, it was agreed that I would move in and sleep with him, and his girlfriend and her child would live in a separate room until the school year finished; then they would move out to their own place.

That time was very difficult. Heidi and I would compete for counter space in the kitchen. When one of us would vacuum, the other would re-vacuum, asserting that it was done wrong the first time. Once or twice we almost took a knife to each other; but June came without incident, and Heidi and her daughter did move out. But, then, Stan started to visit her, ostensibly to be with his daughter. Sometimes he would not return home; and at

other times he would come back drunk. His drinking became much worse — he could not decide between the two of us, so he had us both. But this led to constant fights between us. He became violent and abusive.

During one of those fights, he threw me down the stairs. I lost consciousness, and he got scared. He called my sons and they tied me to a chair, and took me to the hospital in their pick-up truck. I did not speak English; Stan told the doctors that I tripped and fell down the stairs. I had a broke rib, and I was in the hospital for almost a week.

At home he apologized profusely, and promised not to drink any more. But that did not last very long. Soon he started seeing her again, and the fights continued. Her house is just a few blocks from here, so it was easy for him to go to her.

To help with the family finances, Stan found me a job with a cleaning service. I did not drive a car, so a van would pick me up every day. I was part of a crew of other women in similar circumstances. We would be driven to houses, and in groups of two or three we would be assigned to clean them. Our boss would then return for us, and drive us back to our houses. I generally worked about twelve hours a day, and I was paid one hundred fifty dollars a week, which I had to turn over to my husband.

Several days ago, I returned home from work. No one was here. I knew that he was with her again. I decided to go get him there. I walked over. The lights were on in the house, and I stood on the street in front of her house. I started calling him: Stan, come home. I called several times, and finally the front door opened. He came to the door and told me to go back home, he would come later. Heidi then came to the door, and yelled out: get the f* out of here, you bitch.

Her language did not surprise or bother me. I yelled back: you leave my husband alone. I then turned my attention to him, and asked him to come home and I will fix him a good supper.

She suddenly started running toward me; she flew down her front stairs, she ran down the walkway, threw her gate, across the sidewalk, and pounced into me with her full force. She is big, she is a fat pig, and she is taller than me. Although I braced for the impact, it still knocked me over. I fell on the street; she landed on top of me. I tried to fight back but she overpowered me. I did bite her in the hand when she tried to grab my face.

I am not sure how it happened, but then Stan was next to me. He was wearing his work shoes, and he kicked me in the ribs. The blow took my breath away. I remember hearing sirens and saw flashing lights. Suddenly the tremendous weight that was squashing me was off of me. I was crying. So was she, and her hand was bleeding, as was my lip. Her daughter was in the doorway, crying: Mommy, Mommy.

The police had separated us, but I could not tell them what happened. Because he was drunk, and he started arguing with one of the police officers, they arrested Stan. The ambulance came, but I just wanted to go home. The police gave me a piece of paper — my children later told me that I had to go to court.

When I went to court, Stan was there. A elderly woman introduced herself to me; she said that she was my interpreter. When the judge asked me what happened, I told him the whole story. Heidi was there also, with her daughter. The judge told me that Stan could not come home any more; and he told Heidi and me to stay away from each other. The interpreter later told me that she will get me a lawyer, and that evening she called me with your name and telephone number.

I do not know what to do. I do not speak English. If he kicks me out of the house I have nowhere to go. I cannot go to my children — they have their own lives and their own problems. I have no other family here. Maybe I will just go back to Poland, but I have no money, and there are no jobs there.

I ask her about Stan, What does he do? He is a carpenter. He has his own business. He works out of his car. He goes to job sites when he gets a call; when someone needs something done; and he goes and builds or fixes things for people.

How much does he earn? I ask her. — I do not know. He never tells me anything about his finances. I know that he owns this house, and he owns the car. He tells me that I have to earn money to pay for the food. He takes all my money, but sometimes he gives me some; and when I have to go to the store, he gives me money, but then I have to give him the store receipt and all the money that I did not spend.

I explain to her the Domestic Violence process and the Divorce process. I ask to see the papers that she received from the police — one of those pieces of paper is a Summons to come to court in the matter of the Temporary Restraining Order that was issued to Stan.

I explain to her what will happen next, and at her request I agree to come to court with her. I ask her to have her daughter take pictures of her body, of all the bruises; and I tell her to go see a doctor. She agrees, and we part until we meet again in court in a few days.

By now, I am exhausted and starving. It seems that I leave as fast as I can. I get in my car and drive in front of me, not knowing exactly where the road would lead me to. My mental compass reassures me that in front of me, somewhere, I will come upon Route 73, which will then allow me to get back to the office. Along the way, I have to make choices, especially when faced with T-intersections; but eventually I do reach Route 73. During this ride, however, I do not listen to my book; I am too upset, and cannot concentrate. I listen to my old stand-by, National Public Radio.

Along the way, I stop at one of the diners that are so numerous on the roads. This one is nicer than some. As expected, it is mostly chrome. In front, there is what looks like a glass tower, with a giant clock and neon sign on top. I check the time against the time on my car's dashboard — one of the clocks is off by about five minutes; since I recently checked my car's clock against the time given on the radio, I conclude that the diner's clock is the unreliable one.

I started to climb up the steps, when a group of three men passed me on their way out of the diner. Above the front door, over the shining chrome, in block red letters, framed by a black four inch pipe, was the name of this establishment: Victoria's. In the foyer, there was a gumball vending machine; next to it was a plastic motorcycle where small children can ride out their fantasies, while their parents feed their quarters. Above waist level, the walls are mirrored, thus the place is very bright. Some of the mirror space is taken up by posters to local events: a musical at the local high school; yoga classes at the Y.M.C.A.; advertisement for "The New Charlatans" who will perform on Saturday night at a local bar.

Inside it is crowded. A cash register is to the left, behind a small counter. The hostess greets me, and asks: One? After my affirmative answer, I am led to small table. Along the way, I grab a newspaper from the rack. I am left with a menu, and the assurance that Bambi will be with me right away. Although I am pretty sure of what I will order, I look at the menu anyway. It is an oversized catalogue of breakfast, lunch and dinner

choices, any of which you can have at any time; reality has no bearing on your time frame of mind.

The daily specials are listed on a photocopied single page insert. After careful consideration of these specials, I decide to order the usual, a cheeseburger-deluxe, no onions, and a Diet-Coke. The place is buzzing with short Mexican men, cleaning off tables, delivering water, and setting up new place settings after tables had been cleaned off. Several waitresses add to the commotion – one of which is Bambi.

Bambi is tall, blond with blue eye shadow. She is dressed like her counterparts, wearing flat shoes, black tights, and a red mini-skirt. Her top is a white shirt, and an American flag bandana, that is discretely placed around her neck and over her chest. It is a nice chest – well proportioned, and very tempting. The kind that you look at and wonder Because her legs are slender and long, the combination of the tights and the mini-skirt just adds to the visual excitement.

Her voice is very pleasant. She is not too young, but she is not too old. In so many ways, she is perfect. What will you have, honey? she asks. Despite the fantasies swirling in my head, I manage to give her my mundane order for my mid-day (although now late) nourishment. Having calmed down from the testosterone induced excitement, I turn my attention to the newspaper I brought with me.

The news is depressing — the stock market is crashing; our past heroes are being indicted; starlets go in and out of rehab or prison; our government is waging wars no one wants; and torture is discussed as a viable option to solve some of our political and social inadequacies. Fortunately lunch comes quickly, and my mind can focus on something more pleasant – food.

When I get back to my office, there is a car parked in front of it, with someone obviously waiting for me. She tells me: The sign said you would be back at 1 p.m. – you are late. As I unlock the front door, I apologize, and explain that I was not expecting anyone at this time. She tells me that its OK; and follows me into my office. Although she is elderly, she appears to be very elegant. She is average height, gray hair, with blond tones. She is dressed casual, in slacks and a shirt, over which she has a jacket.

I introduce myself, and ask how can I be of help. She replies: I got your name from the Polish newspaper. We need your help. — I explain that before I can determine if I can help, I need to know much more about her problem — she said “We need help.” — Who is “we?” — My husband and I need your help; we do not know what to do. — Where is your husband? — He is home; he is very depressed, and he does not know that I am here. — And why do you think that I can help? — I decided to sell my kidney; otherwise, I am afraid that I will have to go to jail. — Why is that? I ask with interest.

Some time ago we purchased a condo in Florida. Now the real estate market has crashed, and we are able to rent it for only half of our monthly mortgage payment. Pretty soon we will be out of money. — So why don't you sell it? — We thought of that, but we can't. You see, that is the problem. We purchased the condo in my daughter's name; but she does not know it. — What do you mean? — When we were buying it, my husband and I did not have good credit. But, our daughter had very good credit. So, we were going to buy it in our daughter's name. We talked to her about it, but then her husband was against it, so she told us she would not purchase the condo. But it was too late, we already sent all the papers to the mortgage company.

Still confused, I asked: Well, if you sent the papers to the mortgage company, and they were in your daughter's name, she knew about this transaction, because she signed the papers. — That is the problem; she did not sign them — I forged her signature. ... That is why I will have to go to jail now. — You forged her signature?! So, your daughter does not know that she owns this condo in Florida? — That's right. All the mortgage statements come to our address, and she lives in Massachusetts. We never told her that we purchased the condo in her name. Our son, he knows a bit about it, but he does not know the whole story.

What does your daughter do in Massachusetts? — She has a Ph.D. ... she works as a chemist. — And her husband? — Oh, he does secret stuff for the F.B.I. I am not sure what he does, but I am sure that our daughter knows more. — What about your son? — He works in Connecticut, but he lives in Lincoln. — That is quite a commute; what does he do in Connecticut? — He works in finance. He is destroying his marriage. I am going to have to have a heart to heart talk with him; but he never has time for me.

And what about your husband; what does he do? — He is very depressed, and he is not doing much now. We started investing in real estate several years ago. We took this one day course in Florida about how to get rich without any capital. You know; we buy a house that is in foreclosure, and then quickly sell it for more money. This worked for us for a while, and we purchased and sold several houses, but now, we can't keep up with the payments any more.

And my husband has prostate cancer. He is getting treatment, and things look good for him. But he can't have sex any more; and sex is very important to him. I tell him that it is alright; that he can still piss normally; that he does not have to wear a bag. Admittedly we both enjoyed sex very much, but it is not the end of the world. But to him, it is, no matter what I say to him.

Is he receiving counseling? Does he go to a psychologist or a psychiatrist? — No. He is very stubborn, and he won't go. — How about marriage counseling. This is an issue that involves both of you ... — So far he does not want to agree to anything. Maybe I will just schedule an appointment and make him come with me.

As to selling your kidney, I believe that it is not legal to do so, but, at any rate, I have no experience with such things, so I cannot help you with that. As to your financial troubles, I think that you have to tell your daughter. Since your son works in finance, maybe a family conference may be a way to find a solution. I wish that I could help you, but at this point I do not know how. You may have to consider bankruptcy; but I do not handle those types of cases any more.

It has been good to talk with you. I will consider discussing this with my family. If we need you, I will call you; but thank you for listening to my story — I feel much better now.

Just as she was leaving, two young men walked into my office. — Are you a lawyer? — Yes. How can I help you? — One of the two says: I want to sue my employer for discrimination and workers' compensation. — Why do you want to sue your employer? Give me some of the background. — I worked in the kitchen area, and I spilled some acid in my eyes. And now I feel dizzy, and they fired me just like that. So I want to sue them.

Who is your employer, and why did they fire you? — I have been working at the Old People's Nursing Home in Newtown. They did not train me properly, and they did not give me any safety goggles, and when I was swirling some acid, it spilled and fell in my eye. — Did they send you to the hospital? — I first had to wait for the Incident Report, and about an hour later they told me to go to the hospital. But I went home to rest; and later that day I went to St. Patrick's Hospital. — And what did they do for you? — Not much. They did not care. So they sent me home. — And what happened next? — The next day was my day off, but I went to the Nursing Home to see what my schedule was. But my manager saw me; and did not like that I was in my street clothes; and he fired me, even though it was my day off.

Let me ask you something, I said. Do you have the right to quit your job? — Yes, of course; everyone does. — Well, it is the same for an employer; they can fire an employee at any time for any reason, and for no reason at all. There are just certain protected classes, like race, sexual orientation and others, but from what you tell me, you were fired because they did not like the clothes you were wearing. — I was dressed just like I am right now. That is discrimination. They can't do that.

I took inventory of his clothes; and I was not impressed. Baggy jeans, with holes bigger than any previously seen. Checkered underwear adding spice to the jeans. Untied sneakers that looked too large (I wonder how anyone can walk in them; but then, I am too old for modern street fashion). He had a dirty tee shirt with some design on it which I could not make out, partially covered by an oversized green high school or college sport jacket, with large white lettering sewn on.

So how are your eyes now, I ask? — They get blurry and I get dizzy, you know. I told my boss that I was going to sue them, and then they fired me. — If your sight is blurry and you get dizzy, did you go back to the hospital? — Yes, but they said there was nothing wrong. — They looked at me, but they did not find anything wrong, so they let me go.

I am sorry. I recommend that you speak with another attorney; but, from what you tell me, it seems that the kind of help you need is not what I specialize in. It seems that they were not very nice to you; but I think that you should use this opportunity to find a better job for yourself. They shook my hand, and we said our goodbyes. One after another, I spent

significant time with people who came off the street; and no new clients; I better start working on the clients I do have.

But first, I call Vector Communications about my internet access again. The run-around starts again; I am transferred to various departments, some of which deny jurisdiction, others who claim that they did not receive an order for reinstatement, others who claim that they did what they were supposed to do. The hopelessness when faced with a faceless giant who has such control over your life and how you lead it is overwhelming. But persistence finally pays off; I am connected to someone who claims that she will help. She asks many questions; she reviews the account; she puts me on hold (like many before her); but then she returns. She tells me that an “emergency hookup” has been scheduled – it will take a few hours, but less than the twelve to twenty four hours that a normal hookup takes. I cannot confirm this; I can only hope that all will be working when I get home tonight.

Sitting on my desk I notice is the file from yesterday’s municipal court appearance — I check the file, make sure that all the documents had been scanned and stored on my computer. After shredding the paper file, and disbursing my fee from my Attorney Trust Account to my Attorney Business Account, I move on to prepare for my meeting with Ms. Jagoda by finding her old file and looking it over.

Magdalena Jagoda is a very pleasant and very cultured looking woman. When she arrives at her appointed time, she looks very much like I remember her. She tells me that her business has expanded nationwide, and she now spends most of her time in Chicago. Consequently, she decided to sell her condo in Edwardtown.

As I do not remember ever knowing what she does for a living and since I am curious, I ask: What kind of business do you have. Her reply is surprising: I heal people. — Are you a doctor? — Oh, no. I have a gift. I cure people with my will. — I am intrigued. Please tell me more. — I touch people, and with my touch I allow them to heal. But it is not always just a touch; sometimes I am able to heal people over the telephone. — Have you actually healed anybody? — Oh yes! Many people. The youngest was just a small child. The doctors said that he would not survive. But I was able to see him, and I touched him.

And several months later the doctors were amazed. The tumor in his brain was gone. He is a normal, happy child now, thanks to my healing powers.

People are amazing. How differently we all see each other, and ourselves. Some hope and believe, and are willing to part with great sums of money toward that end. Others have tremendous self confidence, and are eager to share themselves for the benefit of others. We meet each other every day. We travel together on public transportation; we sit next to each other in meetings and in restaurants. We speak with each other when we must interact and when we choose to as well. We are strangers or lovers; spouses, siblings, parents and children – but no matter what we are, we are all unique; and sometimes seem strange to others.

I congratulate her on her wonderful gift; and thank her for sharing it with others. I hope that I will never need her intercession, I tell her, but if I ever do, I am grateful that I know of her.

We turn to her business at hand, the sale of her condo. Her realtor will be in touch with me. She wants to get things done as soon as possible, as she needs to go to Chicago for a while. She will be lecturing there about her experiences, and she has several appointments to keep, now that word is getting out about her powers and abilities. Soon thereafter she leaves for Europe to lecture there.

Am I the crazy one? I wonder. My life experience does not accommodate what I was just told, however, I do believe in miracles, and I do believe that firmly held beliefs can overcome great obstacles. But still, in this case, I am not convinced.

Just then, Kaz Napojny walks into my office. I like him very much – his face reminds me of my childhood friend Tom Oranski. Kaz is a Realtor, servicing principally the Polish community. There was a time when he would refer to me several clients per week; but lately, since the real estate market has cooled down, I have seen much less of him. However, here he is – smiling, and bringing me a new client to service. We catch up with each other; the usual pleasantries are exchanged. He emphasizes that it is very important to be “out of attorney review” as quickly as possible. I assure him that I will call the clients right away, and will give this file my immediate attention.

This unexpected visit from Kaz brings to my mind my friend Tom Oranski. He is a chemist, now working in California. Tom and I had been friends since approximately 1962, when I joined ZHP, and we met at summer camp. ZHP are the initials of the Polish Scouting Organization's name in Polish: Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego.

When my family came to America, we did not know anyone, except my uncle Bolek, with whom we became very close. To help us learn English, he would give us the coins in his pockets, if we could name them – we quickly learned: quarter, dime, nickel and penny. I do not remember what I did that first summer in America, but I assume that I spent it exploring the neighborhood and watching television.

In Argentina, we did not have a television set; although one of our neighbors did, and so, I was familiar with the concept. The very first show that I saw on our brand new black and white television set was Circus Boy, followed by Sky King. Our access to the television was restricted by our parents; but we managed not to be too deprived.

A bicycle became a key ingredient in my life, although I do not remember how I got my first one. However I got it, I used it all the time. Slowly I expanded the reach of my travels, such that soon I was very familiar with many of the new wonders available to me in America.

In Argentina my main forms of entertainment were games such as Tag and Marbles; construction of fortifications, tunnels and tree houses, and the corresponding battles with bows and arrows, and slingshots and rocks were things of the past. Here, my tastes were much more sophisticated. We learned communal games such as Gaga, Stoopball, Catch (and later Baseball), and we also played Tag.

When September came around, my knowledge of English was still very limited. I went to Our Lady of the Angelus school, fifth grade. As I became more socialized with American culture, I became aware of the Boy Scouts. Around 1960 I expressed to my parents my desire to join the Boy Scouts. A family friend recommended to my parents that I join a troop of Polish Boy Scouts that met in Manhattan, on St. Mark's Place, between Second and Third Avenues.

I attended my first meeting that September. The following summer I attended my first summer camp. Here, I met the scouts from South Brooklyn, including Tom Oranski and

his two brothers. Over the years our lives ran parallel tracks, including living in the same town on two separate occasions. We had traveled together several times, and we remained lifelong friends.

As soon as Kaz left my office, I call my new clients. I speak with Jan Mlodowski, and schedule an appointment for tomorrow morning. My calendar reminds me that I am to meet with Arthur Sowitz of Trendy Clothes Inc. to discuss their proposed new lease. I quickly have my lunch, and while I am waiting for Arthur, I write a short synopsis for my blog of a recently decided “Family Law” case relating to Child Support.

What I do is I read recently decided cases in the area of Family Law – i.e., divorce, domestic violence, alimony, equitable distribution, child support, child custody, grandparent visitation rights, palimony, pre and post nuptial agreements, and other related topics – and I summarize the reasoning of the court in deciding that particular case, giving citations to previously decided cases that support the reasoning. I post this synopsis, together with a link to the original decision, on my blog. I view this as a public service project; but I personally benefit also because when I am confronted with an issue when I am representing my clients, I have easy access to the relevant case-law in this area.

As usual, Arthur is late, but no matter, as this gives me the time that I needed to complete my blog entry. When he comes, Arthur and I quickly focus on the terms of the Lease, and my recommendations. He raises some concerns of his own, which I either incorporate into my planned discussion with the landlord’s attorney; or explain to Arthur why his concern is not well founded.

With Arthur still in my office I call the landlord’s attorney, Mr. Berkowitz. After a very short discussion, we agree to have a four-way meeting early next week to discuss the proposed Lease. He will call his client and schedule the meeting at a mutually convenient time after Arthur and I give him our time constraints. The meeting will take place at the landlord’s office, right next to the place that Arthur hopes to rent.

Every Friday I try to remember to review my calendar for next week — I see that toward the end of next week, on Thursday, I am scheduled to meet with Maria Antanowicz. I first met her when her uncle was dying at the hospital of lung cancer, and she found my name in the Polish Yellow Pages, and called me to tell me that he wanted me to prepare his

Will. That catch was that I had to come to the hospital right away because he did not have much time, and because of his very strong pain medications he is not always very lucid.

Her uncle, Andrzej Warta, was in his late fifties. He had no wife and no children — he was a lifelong bachelor, who spent his free time fishing. Maria Antanowidz was his sister's daughter.

I remember that when I got to the hospital, he was in a private room. I was able to speak with him alone, and he did confirm that I already know about him, and his desire to prepare a Will. He did not have a previous Will, and he did not want the State to get his money. I explained that it is unusual for the State to get people's money, even when they do not have a Will. The law provides for a presumptive distribution to family members, assuming that there are any. Only when there are no family members that qualify for such distribution that the estate escheats to the State.

Nonetheless, he told me, he wants to make a Will. We talk about what comprises his estate — what does he own, and what does he owe. The net estate comes out to approximately \$125,000, mostly in bank accounts that are in his name alone.

He wants half of his estate to go to his niece, Maria, and the balance to go to her two sons, Marek and Stefan. After I gathered all the relevant information, I went back to my office, prepared the Will, and drove back to the hospital.

Generally, hospital personnel are not allowed by their employer to be witnesses, because the hospitals do not want to be involved in any potential future litigation, but in this case I am able to convince two nurses that their presence is necessary because I am not a doctor, and I need to know that he is lucid and understands what is going on when he signs the Will. My appeal to their professional pride worked, and I got my two witnesses to the Will signing. He died later that night.

After his death, I was retained by the Executor, Maria, to supervise the cleaning out of his apartment. That was very weird. Looking through someone's things — their clothes, their mess, their letters, their documents, their photographs, small amounts of money in strange places (coffee can in the refrigerator and under the mattress).

Recently, Maria called me and told me that she had been involved in an automobile accident. At first she thought that she was fine, but then her head began to hurt, and she

could not turn her neck. She told me that she was stopped at a stop sign, when a car behind her skidded and bumped into her. There was very little (if any) damage to her car, but she wants me to sue the “bastard.”

When she called, I explain that under the current state of the law, it is not easy to win such lawsuits, and if she purchased the wrong kind, the cheaper form of insurance, she may be precluded from suing for soft tissue injuries unless she can prove that she suffered one of a few type or prescribed injuries (e.g., her death, which obviously did not happen; or a compound bone fracture, which also did not happen in this case). She cut me off, and assured me that she has full coverage — apparently, the last time she renewed her insurance policy, she agreed to pay a higher premium and purchased the “no threshold” policy. Just like her friend Justyna (whom I represented in a previous car accident), she told me that she is ready to litigate.

Justyna. Justyna Wiesna. I remember her. She was a piece of work.

When I met her, I was still practicing out of the house. She had seen my advertisement in the Polish Newspaper and called for an appointment. Since I did not have an office yet, I invited her to my house. She came with two guys, each bigger than the other. The way they were dressed — leather boots, leather jackets and leather pants — made them look like a motorcycle gang (actually, I was worried).

They each had a car accident related story, yet each was different — it looked suspicious, yet their three stories made sense. Years later I learned that the two guys were accused of staging accidents and then they would submit fake accident reports, which included fake witnesses and all. Justyna was not implicated in those fake accidents.

According to her story, she was traveling late at night through a dangerous neighborhood, when suddenly she was sideswiped by another car. She lost consciousness for a brief amount of time, but regained it before the police arrived. There was an eyewitness who saw the whole accident and gave a full report to the police (however, when I tried to independently corroborate the report, the witness was nowhere to be found).

I expected my adversary to take an aggressive stand as to this accident — in fact he did. Before her deposition, I explained to her that it was very important that she tell me the

absolute truth, and that at the deposition she tell nothing but the truth. She told me that everything that she told me was absolutely true, and agreed to testify truthfully.

During her deposition, my adversary was relentless in his pursuit of the facts. He wanted to know where she was going? — Home. — Why were you in that neighborhood? — Because I was running out of gas, so I got off the highway, and I was looking for an open gas station. — Where were you coming from? — I drove my lover to the train station. — Who is your lover? — Mike. — Mike who? — I do not know his last name. — You have a lover, and you don't know his last name? — That's right. We just enjoyed each other's company, and we did not care about such things. — Where does this Mike live? — I don't know. — You have a lover, and you don't know his name; and you don't know where he lives?! — Yes. I know he is married, and he did not want me to know where his wife lives.

This went on for quite a bit; finally my adversary gave up. Eventually, the insurance company settled the claim, apparently not wanting to risk my client's performance before a jury.

I am usually in the office until much later, as many of my clients need to speak with me in the evening after the get home from work. But, Fridays are "Date Night," so I usually leave the office around 5 p.m. Chris and I try to see the "hot" movie of the week on Friday evening. Often we go to New York, either to the Angelica or to the Sunrise movie houses on Houston Street.

The Angelica is a block off of Broadway; if we are early, we often look at what is new at Crate and Barrel (just around the corner). Because it is difficult getting tickets for a Friday evening, we usually buy our tickets online (at a slight premium). This is dangerous, however, because I never know what traffic will be like on the way to New York — if it takes us too long to get there, we will miss the movie. Parking is also an adventure, but usually we are able to find street parking near the movie theater.

Depending on the status of our wealth on a particular evening, sometimes we go out to dinner. I enjoy going out more than Chris does, and I enjoy going to New York much more than Chris does. Thus, these choices can lead to discussions and negotiations that by now qualify us to settle the Mideast Conflict. When we do go to New York, we have to face the traffic that is inevitable, both getting into the city, and on the way home. I think that if

not for the traffic, trips to New York would be much more enjoyable — that raises the question: should we move to New York? However, we are not yet ready to face this issue at this time.

Saturday

As usual, I get up at six. I check my Flickr site, to see what others have said about my pictures, and to see what my Contacts have posted since yesterday. It gives me such pleasure when I receive a compliment relating to one of my pictures. I call them pictures, not photos, because I work hard at altering the photographs that I take, to focus the viewer on what I believe to be important. This process often involves cropping, layering, erasing unnecessary elements, and sometimes changing colors. The image is then processed to make it look like a painting; watercolor or dry brush. The exception is when the photo is intended to reflect reality, usually an art piece produced by someone else; e.g., a piece of sculpture.

I have three levels of pictures: public pictures that can be seen by anyone who cares to look at them; family pictures, that can be viewed only by those who I have been designated as members of my “Family;” and private ones, that cannot be seen by anyone else – these are usually experimental pieces, or restricted because of content or by Chris’ proclamation.

Often, I spend an hour on this form of art; however, I have been known to spend ten hours, with bathroom breaks as absolutely needed. Fortunately, I have not resorted to diapers — when that happens, I think that my obsession may be viewed unfavorably.

Now I want to write this novel I have been talking about for the last week or so. I am already three days late, and I have not written a single word yet. I have not even decided with any sense of definitiveness as to what I am going to write about. However, since I told my Mom that I was going to write about our family history, I suppose that I should. Actually, that is what I am going to write about – I will call it: A Family History. And today I will start. But first, I have to go to the office to meet with a client (I don’t remember which one, but I do remember that I have to be there by 10 a.m.).

On the way to the office I stop at Dunkin’ Doughnuts for two Boston Cream doughnuts and a small coffee, milk, no sugar. One of my life’s pleasures is a stop at Dunkin’ Doughnuts; a second is a stop at Panera, where I order an Apple and a Cheese Pastry, with a small coffee (with Half and Half, and no sugar). These pleasures, together with a constant

appetite, cause me to sport a less than skinny figure. Non-skinny people are prevalent in both my parents' families; and yet, all of them, just as I did, were very slender in their youths. I suppose I have a defective genetic switch that breaks sometime at mid-life — I hope that they find a fix for it some day, soon.

I have tried diet and exercise — individually and together. They do work, especially when done together, but something always interferes, and the weight always comes back, heavier than before. When I do exercise, I like to walk on a walker, in front of the television. I usually build-up to a setting someplace between 2.5 and 3.0, and I manage to do it for sixty minutes in the morning — another alternative to my photo pictures, and my novel-writing, if I actually go in that direction.

Soon after I finish my two doughnuts, my new real estate clients arrive. Jan Mlodowski is a mid-30s person, blondish hair, strong build, tall. His wife, who came with him, is Janina Mlodowska. She is also young-looking, red hair, slender build, and also tall. They brought their seven year old son with them — I wish that they spared me that privilege; but he is here, so I need to deal with it.

When they fill-out my intake form, I confirm that Janina's surname is Mlodowska, not Mlodowski. Surnames are a constant source of confusion. In Poland, where the male is a -ski, the female is a -ska. However, when they come to America, some of the females change their legal names from -ska to -ski, in conformity with American custom that both spouses share the same surname. But, even when they change their surname for "legal" purposes, in conversation, when speaking in Polish, it is only natural to refer to her as a -ska (a -ski being very strange sounding in Polish when referring to a female).

This is going to be their first real estate purchase; so they are a bit concerned. They are concerned, but determined. Real estate gives you a home; a permanency; and an investment in the future. When you fix it up, it is your pride and joy. When you pay your monthly mortgage, it is an investment, not an expense; and whatever you pay for real estate taxes and interest, it is tax deductible.

Many of my clients start off with one house (usually a two-family fixitupper); and then progress to a second house, where they ultimately reside, and use the two-family as a source of wealth accumulation and income.

We go over the Contract, confirm the purchase price, the anticipated date for the Closing, the amount of the mortgage loan, and the amount of the deposit that has already been paid, and the balance due within the next couple of days. It is not unusual for this amount to be a surprise to my clients, as the Realtor often “forgets” to highlight this term, and almost all of my clients never read the Contract.

I explain to them how the process works — they need to contact their anticipated lender and work with their representative to process their mortgage loan. They need to schedule the inspections of the property. I explain that the Seller may do a municipally-mandated Certificate Of Occupancy inspection, but they should schedule an structural inspection to confirm the soundness and adequacy of the roof, plumbing, electrical system, heating system, foundation, and other vital home-systems. Sometimes, when my client is a contractor, they choose to forego this inspection; nevertheless, I always advise them that an independent professional may see something they may overlook in the excitement of buying their house.

I also tell them about a lead paint inspection; radon gas inspection; and underground oil tank inspection; explaining the benefits of each, and the potential hazards if the inspections are not made. Most of my clients choose not to do any of these.

I also explain the “Attorney Review” process. Each Realtor prepared contract has a provision that both Buyers and Sellers have the right to consult with an attorney after signing the contract, and that attorney may “disapprove” the contract within three days after both Buyers and Sellers receive a copy of the signed contract. Often there is confusion as to when exactly the Attorney Review period starts, as it is not clear when (or if) the signed contract was delivered to both Buyers and Sellers.

I explain that often the two attorneys, the one representing the Sellers and the other representing the Buyers, agree to extend the Attorney Review period until they either reach agreement on the terms of the contract, or alternatively, either side decides not to go forward with the contract. Often, also, one of the attorneys sends a “Disapproval” letter, indicating that the disapproval will be withdrawn if the other side agrees to certain changes in the contract.

Sometimes, deals fall apart during the Attorney Review period — when that happens, the Realtors are furious at the attorneys for denying them a livelihood. But often, after negotiations, conferences with clients, and intercession by the Realtors, contract terms are finally agreed to. When that happens, the balance of the deposit, as stated in the contract, needs to be paid. If things slow down during the Attorney Review process, Realtors start calling, alarming everyone that there is another buyer on the horizon, and if we are not out of Attorney Review immediately, the house will be lost to the new buyers — sometimes this influences the current buyers to agree to terms that they were reluctant to agree to just a few hours earlier.

If and when we are out of Attorney Review, inspections are often ordered by the Buyers. Then new issues arise — almost every inspection will reveal at least some deficiency; sometimes these deficiencies are serious (like a crack in the foundation; or an antiquated electrical system), but usually the deficiencies are those that are obvious to anyone closely looking at the house. Some buyers take this opportunity to demand a credit or the actual remediation of these “newly-discovered” deficiencies. A period of negotiations, consultations and angst follows, but often the differences are resolved with the intercession of the Realtors.

My meeting with my new clients is not an easy one. Their son runs around my office suite, touching many of my things. I worry that he will knock something over, or hurt himself; a concern that is obviously not shared by his parents. My clients have many questions, and consequently the meeting lasts more than the hour that I allotted for it. But finally, they sign the Retainer Agreement, and go on, hopefully confident that I will do a good job for them — they tell me that they heard good things about me from their neighbors whom I had represented some time back. This reminds me that word-of-mouth is just about the most important form of advertising; and how important it is to do a good job for each of my clients — you just never know where that relationship will lead to, sometimes a few years later. After that meeting, I hurry back home.

Chris is already outside, raking the lawn. Trees are beautiful, but they have leaves, and these leaves fall to the ground every fall, year after year. There are thousands of them, millions of them, more than can be counted. The lawn is covered, especially in an oval

emanating from the trunk of each tree. In the front of the house we have one tree on our property, but there is another tree on my neighbor's property, just a foot from my property line — falling leaves do not honor property lines, they just fall, and the wind sweeps them around, seemingly to all the places that are still green.

Although I find this annual chore to be difficult, what can I do — I must help her. She enjoys the outdoors; she enjoys the colors, the freshness, the softness. I admit that the leaves are very colorful indeed; but I would be very happy if somebody else raked the leaves.

When our children were young, it was always a family project to sweep the property, front and back. But now they are gone, and only Chris and I are left to do the job. Somehow, the job does get done — I am glad that it is over (for this weekend; there will be much more to do next weekend and the one that follows also); Chris is very satisfied — her radiance bring joy to my heart; when she is happy, I am happy.

After lunch, we decide to drive to New York. She demands to know precisely where are we going, I am much more of a free spirit and do not want to be restricted by plans and schedules. I tell her that I read on Yelp about these ball-fields in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, where the locals have set up kiosks from which they sell South American ethnic food.

Chris is less excited about this adventure, but agrees to go with me; after all, I did help with the lawn. The drive is not too bad this time, and we soon find ourselves in Brooklyn (via Manhattan). I am not sure where to go, but before I go to the ball-fields (wherever they may be), I drive to another Yelp-suggested location: the Brooklyn Superhero Supply Company on Fifth Avenue and 5th Street.

This deviation is not agreeable to Chris, but she suffers in loud silence. When we park, from across the street she announces “it is closed; lets get out of here.” She grew up in Brooklyn, and I sense a desire not to go back there – but, I admit, as we see more and more new and interesting places in Brooklyn, her attitude is slowly becoming less resistant. Actually, I remember how, before we moved to New Jersey, she absolutely refused to live in New Jersey; and now, I cannot get her to move back to New York – the compromise is: frequent (but less often than I would like) trips to the City.

After World War II, Chris' parents met, married and settled in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. When Chris and I married in 1972, we rented a small apartment just two blocks from her parents' house. After our first son was born in early 1974, but before our second son was born in late 1975, we decided that we needed larger accommodations for our growing family. My parents were not land owners; her parents were. We decided that we would rent if we had to, but we would try to buy if we could.

We looked in Forest Hills and Greenpoint; we looked on Long Island, and in Westchester, and Connecticut. I finally convinced her to look in New Jersey, and here we saw some opportunities in Montclair and other communities we never heard of before. But everything was too expensive for us. One Sunday afternoon we drove to New Jersey again, but could not find anything we liked. We were ready to drive back home, but stopped for some ice cream at a Howard Johnson's restaurant. After our snack, we decided to drive down a road that led to a town named Weston, a place we were not familiar with. After a short drive, we went up and over a bridge crossing some railroad tracks, and then, into a beautiful community.

We stopped at the first Realtor's Office we saw. Phillis was ready to close her office, but agreed to show us one or two houses, just to get a feel for our tastes. Our first stop was just three blocks from her office — it was beautiful. Over the next several weeks we must have seen about thirty houses in Weston, but we always were drawn the most to that first one we saw. We finally made an offer, which was accepted. Then we needed to finance this purchase — a task that appeared to be impossible, but we tried nonetheless.

We had some money saved up, but definitely not enough. We had to borrow from family, and that was not enough. So then we had to borrow from friends. Because both Chris and I had close ties to the Polish community through Polish Scouting, we had very close friends in the full spectrum of ages. It was those older friends that allowed us to be able to gather enough funds to finance the down payment. For that I will always be very grateful to them – thank you.

A down payment was not enough, we also needed a mortgage loan. Would a bank lend us this incredible amount of money that we needed to buy the house? Our mortgage payments would eat up almost half my earnings. I went to the local bank, explained that I

was studying for my M.B.A. at nights, and had a prestigious job at a major investment banking firm on Wall Street, in charge of their computer department. I explained that although my current income would be devoured by the mortgage payments, my future income would allow us to meet all our obligations. The bank officer listened to my presentation intently, and told me that they would get back to me after the mortgage committee met later that week. I now recognize and appreciate the courage of that bank officer, who stood up for us in front of his committee, and lobbied on our behalf for a loan that was out of the norm. That bank officer not only improved our lives, but also the lives of our children – to him I owe a great debt of gratitude.

On my insistence, we walked up to the Superhero Supply store, and it was opened. It is a tiny place, but it has great things: they sell capes, grappling hooks, antimatter, portable cellular phone booths, and more. It is a place of fun, and imagination; a place where you can spend money for the things that really matter, but are so difficult to find anyplace else. We do not stay very long, mainly because in just a few minutes you can see the whole place.

Back in our car, we drive south-west, to find the ball-fields. Getting lost is one of my favorite activities — I drive to places unknown, and take in the sights. Sometimes it is random directions, at other it is in a predetermined pattern (such as: take every second right turn). I also enjoy looking at a map, to see where I have been, or where I can go to, and to see how it relates to what I already know. Knowing the major geographic boundaries gives me assurance of not really getting lost. I know that the State is divided north-south by the Garden State Parkway, by the New Jersey Turnpike, and by Route 1. On the far east, I cannot go further than the Atlantic Ocean or the Hudson River; on the far west, I cannot go further than the Delaware River. East-west, the State is divided by Route 22, Route 78, Route 80, and others. I also know of local boundaries such as other highways, or railroad tracks, or rivers, streams and canals. On a sunny day, I just keep track of the shadows to know what general direction I am heading in, and knowing my boundaries, I can guesstimate where I am and where I expect to end up.

From having looked on a map, I know that the ball-fields are west of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, and south of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, relatively close to the harbor. With this information we quickly find the our destination; but we are disappointed

– the food stands are nowhere to be found. A conversation with an officer in a passing police cruiser confirms the obvious – the food stand are no longer here; last week was their last weekend for this year.

Since we are here already, we take this opportunity to explore the waterfront. We find a small park that in next to a pier that goes out into the New York Harbor, just across from the Statue of Liberty. It is a beautiful sight, and I take several pictures with my Canon Rebel digital camera. I am glad that I brought my camera on this trip — hopefully some of the pictures will yield good art.

When we resume our trip, we find a long pier on which stands a very long warehouse. A small sign states that an Art Show is in progress. We decide to explore, so we park the car, grab the camera, and go off down the length of the pier. The warehouse is very old looking (later I learn that it dates back to the Civil War era). The steel gates to the portals that are evenly spaced every thirty feet are painted black. The wind off the water is strong and cold, but we are determined to see what is in front of us.

Half way down, we see what appears to be abandoned trolleys — another source of photographs. We finally reach the Art Show — we pay the requested donation fee, and see what people are doing now, what is called “art,” and what it is being sold for. We compare what we see against what is stored on my computer back at home. I think that some of my pictures are better, but theirs are on display, and being sold to willing buyers. Whether mine are better is a meaningless inquisition — to test the premise I need to print my work and risk the public exhibition of it, subjecting it to commentary, ridicule and possibly praise. I mean to do this soon, but I have not done it as of yet.

When we tire of the Art Show, we head back to our car, and decide to drive north, with our intended destination one of the bridges that cross from Brooklyn to Manhattan. Along the way I spot a small store that sells Australian food. Now that is unusual, so I stop. Poor Chris, she must endure another unknown – but she does come with me. The place is small. They sell various meat and vegetable pies, either hot, to eat on the premises; or frozen, to take out. With Chris’ approval I order one of each kind, to be taken back home. Over the next several days, we find out how good tasting they are.

Once we finally get home, I decide to sit in front of my computer, and let my novel flow out — at least that is the theory. Nothing happens. So I check out what my fellow Flickrites have posted on their sites. So many of them produce such wonderful work. But I am determined to write, so I give it another try.

Since I had been thinking of writing a family historic novel, I debate where I should start. Should I start in the year 1410, when family oral history tells us that our family stems from a Spanish knight who traveled from Spain to Prussia to fight on behalf of the Knights of the Teutonic Order against the Polish King; but once he was there, he switched sides, and the Polish forces having been victorious in the Battle of Grunwald, he was rewarded with lands in Poland, some of which are still called with various derivations of our surname: Kostry; Kostry Noski; Kostry Stare; Kostry Litwa; Kostry Smiejki; Kostry Podsedkowieta.

Since I have been talking to my Mom about her life story, maybe I should concentrate on her history first. I know that last year I made notes during my conversation with her on this topic. I have no idea where to find these notes, but Chris is my savior, once again — she finds them as soon as she knows that I want to refer to them.

These notes tell me that when Poland was invaded on September 1, 1939, my Mom, Irka, was a nineteen year old nursing student at a three year nursing school run by the Red Cross in Poznan. Her lifelong dream had been to be a missionary in Africa.

Although her family had retail stores in Leszno and in Poznan, in 1939 she resided in a student dormitory close to Stary Rynek in Poznan. The store in Poznan, was a women's clothing and fur store; while the building in Leszno had tenants on the second floor, and a store on the street level where they sold clothing and cloth. Just a day before the beginning of the war, Mom's father bought a house in Lublin, where, in anticipation of the war, all the cloth was sent; however, it never arrived – apparently it was stolen at the train station.

Earlier, Mom's Father had a mens' clothing store in Gostyn; but once he married and my grandparents had children, the family moved from Gostyn to Leszno. Mom's mother (my Grandmother Walentyna) was the person who ran the stores, dealt with clients and salesman; my Grandfather Antoni, on the other hand, was the family bureaucrat — he dealt with accounting and finances; he also was constantly remodeling the store – everyone joked that he should have been an architect.

Grandfather Antoni came from a very poor background — his father died when Antoni was seven; and after that, his Mother maintained the family by selling fruits and food at town fairs.

Grandmother Walentyna, on the other hand, was better off economically; but, she wanted to get married and get out of the house as soon as possible because she did not get along with her step-mother. Walentyna's father, Alojzy Wojciechowski, was the church organ-player in Smigiel, where he also taught piano and violin, and had a small shop selling religious items. His wife, Skornicka, died young, of kidney failure. At the time of her mother's death, Walentyna was sixteen — she had three brothers; and two sisters (Mietek, Wlodek, Czeslaw, Edmund (he later moved to Czestochowa), Zosia and Stefcia (who later became a nun).

To help take care of the kids, Alojzy married one of Skornicka's sisters – with whom he had four more children: Stach (who became a director at a school for the deaf); Jadzia and Marylka (who sang very beautifully); and Leon.

Anyway — a few days after the start of the war, the entire nursing school volunteered for action, and then was evacuated by train to Warszawa. Irka left her family, which also escaped from Poznan to eastern Poland.

During her train trip, Irka was on guard duty from 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. After her watch ended, there was an air raid, and her train was bombed by the German air force. During the air raid, most people escaped into the surrounding fields. Irka and several other nurses, believing that the bombs were likely to hit the area surrounding the train, decided to stay put. However, after the air raid, they saw that the train car in front of theirs and the one behind theirs had been completely bombed out. Irka and two others gathered their luggage and documents, and decided to hitchhike to Warszawa. Most of this hitchhiking was done at night to avoid air raids.

Along the way, Irka tripped on some cobblestones and hurt her knee. Nonetheless, she eventually made it to Ożarów, close to Warszawa. From there, Irka saw the sky illuminated by the burning building-fires in Warszawa.

Irka was determined to get to Warszawa. She was leading; her two companions were following. At times they heard heavy gunfire. After midnight, around 2 a.m., flares were

shot up into the sky. They had to hide in a ditch by the road. By dawn (5 a.m.) She was very tired, her knee hurt very much, and she lost her companions.

All alone, she heard German sounds. She was found by a German soldier with a rifle. She did not have the strength to stand up. He took her into camp (she was very surprised that the Germans were so close to Warszawa already). He then ordered her to go into the field, but fearing that he would shoot her, she refused. Then, another tall blond soldier calmed him down. Her skirt then rode up and they saw that she was injured. The Germans found a translator, and in response to their inquisition, she told them that she was a nurse, on the way to Warszawa.

The soldiers took her to where the machine guns were. It was so loud when they were firing, but she was so tired that she fell asleep. When she woke up, at noon, there was much activity around her. A German officer interrogated her again, and again he told her to go down the road, but again she refused. Later, some Polish woman came to Mom and told her to pretend to be severely injured.

Later, Irka was taken to an abandoned farmhouse with many injured Polish soldiers. This was the first time she saw so many injured soldiers. There, she received some water, which revived her. Shortly after that, Irka started treating the injured. It was a very small farmhouse, and there was too many injured to fit inside; some had to be outside. It rained all night, and by morning many of the injured had died. While at this farm house, all they had to eat was water from a well, and dried out bread. After two or three days, a German army truck took Irka and the other injured to Pruszków, where a mental institution was converted into an emergency care hospital.

Because the well water caused Irka to suffer digestive problems, and because she was exhausted from the treatment of the injured, she was assigned to what was considered lighter duty at the mental ward of the hospital. There, she was assisted by an obsessive-compulsive chemist. In the hospital, there were three categories of patients. She remembers one patient: she was an actor with long hair, always playing her role. Another was a lawyer – he would stand on tables and give very passionate speeches. Yet another was a ten year old, pretending to be Shirley Temple. The worst patients were bound; they were making accusations that they had been raped.

After Warsaw fell, the German forces consolidated their control.

Within a few weeks, when trains started running again; Irka and two men (an engineer and a student), decided to return to Poznan. The trip was difficult because the bridge across the Warta River had been destroyed.

When she finally arrive in Poznan, she went to her parents' place on Stary Rynek. The store was open; all the employees were happy to see her because she was the first family member to return, and this was the last day to register the building and store with the German authorities as private property. Within a few days, the family reunited. When the Germans attacked, the family had separated in order to maximize the likelihood that at least someone would survive. Irka's mother and sister, Jola, had traveled to Lublin. Irka's father and twin brother, Wiesiek, had traveled in a different direction. (Irka's brother Bolek was at sea in the Merchant Marines; and her brother Mietek was a priest in a monastery.)

At the beginning of October 1939, Irka visited her uncle, Antoni Skornicki, who was a priest and under house arrest in Leszno — he later died in Dachau.

However, soon thereafter, the Germans began their program of resettlement. About a week and a half before Christmas, in 1939, the German soldiers came to evict everyone from Stary Rynek. At that time, Irka's mother was at her sister's house in Poznan. Wiesiek hid in the attic, and was not found by the German soldiers that searched the house (he later notified his Mom that the house had been taken; for her not to return there). Irka, Jola and their Dad were taken out, and together with others, were marched to some barracks where they slept on straw for a few days. Then, they were marched to the train station and loaded onto a train. Also evicted from the house was Irka's uncle (her mother's brother) who had been living with them — because he appeared to be Jewish, he was separated from them. The house was locked up, and sealed, awaiting its new tenants – Folks-Deutsch (people who descended from Germans and had a German surname) from northern Poland.

Irka and others were packed on the train like sardines. No one knew where they were being taken – rumors were that they were being taken to Siberia in Russia. After several days, they were ordered off the train in Jaroslaw. As they were marched through the streets, Irka heard her name called from the side of the road — to her surprise, she had been recognized by an old high school friend who had moved to Jaroslaw some years earlier.

At her old friend's invitation, Irka, Jola and their Dad, and also two couples they befriended during their ordeal on the train, separated from their German captors and went to live at Irka's friend's house, where they slept in one small room on the floor.

One or two days before Christmas, Irka and Jola learned of a Red Cross facility in Jaroslaw where they could get some help. Despite the bitter cold and heavy snow, they decided to go and register there that night. The following day, a young man came to their house and brought them bread, butter and Babki made for them by the locals. This was such a nice gift from heaven. The next day, they went to Church and sang Christmas Carols in gratitude.

Before their eviction from Poznan, but in anticipation of such an event, the family had agreed that those who survived would reunite in Czestochowa, where Irka's uncle, her mother's brother, had a clothing store. In accordance with this plan, Irka, Jola and their father traveled at night from Jaroslaw to Czestochowa. The first part of the trip was by train; but in the vicinity of Sandomierz, the bridge had been destroyed, so they had to continue by sleigh. It was a crystal clear night, with beautiful stars and a full moon. They had furs, but their faces were exposed to the cold wind – they suffered severe frostbite. When they reached an operating train line, they resumed their journey by train.

As had been agreed, they met Irka's mother in Czestochowa. From there they traveled to Warszawa, where Irka's Mom had rented a small place in a factory building. Wiesiek got the best place – he slept in a closet, and the back wall from the closet was close to a stove, so he was warm. Irka and Jola slept in one small bed – it was so tight that when one of them wanted to shift, they had to coordinate, and both had to shift or turn over together.

Across the street from where Irka and her family lived there was a place that distributed food ration cards. These ration cards entitled the holder to purchase meat, once a week; bread, once a day; etc. The person supervising this operation fell in love with Irka; consequently, he was always super-eager to help as much as possible. He gave them his brother's ration card, because his brother was out of town. Whenever he had anything extra, he gave it to them. However, he was one of those super-sweet kind of individuals, always speaking in the sweetest of voices, kissing hands constantly — all of which turn Irka off.

Irka's mother, on the other hand, was very impressed with Irka's new friend, and encouraged the friendship. But Irka had no interest — once, when they were alone, this fellow wanted to kiss Irka, but she realized what was about to happen, and escaped; they wound up chasing each other around the table, until he finally gave up. He complained to Irka's mother about the lack of affection he was receiving — she tried to explain that Irka always wanted to be a nun; that he should be patient; that maybe she will come around some day — this did not happen.

The owners of the factory were Jews. When they were deported by the Nazis into the Ghetto, Irka and her family had to move. They moved into a place on Senatorska Street, that had been the offices of doctor that specialized in sexually transmitted diseases (Gonorrhea, Syphilis, etc.). Then they had to move again, to a fifth floor walk-up; where there was no heat, and it was very cold. Their only source of heat was whatever newspapers they could collect and burn, and the burning of any leftover food scraps — absolutely everything was used, nothing was thrown out. Everyone slept in their clothes and any furs that they had. In the mornings, the ice would be chipped off the walls and the floor; and clothes that had been washed would have to be thawed out so they could dry — this was usually a multi-day process. Living with them was another family, and a Folks-Deutsch woman who was married to a Jew — the Nazis had taken her husband and her son to the Ghetto.

Then they moved again, this time to Long (Długa) Street, where they lived in a small apartment in the attic. Here, Irka's mom organized a sewing business. She took orders for quantities of finished clothing goods, purchased materials, and hired seamstresses who worked out of their houses making the required clothes. Irka was made in charge of making sure that the seamstresses resided where they claimed to do so, and kept in touch with them to keep production going at a steady rate — this way, Irka got to travel throughout Warszawa, and got to know the city very well.

Toward the end of 1941, Irka had another “adventure.” Irka was dispatched across the Wisla River to the Praga neighborhood, to meet with a seamstress. That day, a German officer had been assassinated; and there was much tension in the community. The curfew was unexpectedly changed from 8 p.m. to 6 p.m. As Irka was walking back home,

approaching the bridge that crossed the Wisla river, she noticed that the streets suddenly became quiet and there were no Polish people outside. The only ones walking around were groups of German soldiers, either on assignments or on leave.

Irka felt the need to get back home so she kept her blond haired head high and walked assuredly. Soldiers stared at her, but no one stopped her — they must have figured that she was German, because no Pole would be so brash as to walk in their midst past curfew. As Irka was approaching the bridge, she saw a horse drawn carriage taxi pull up to her. The driver asked her where she was going; when she explained that she needed to get across the bridge to get home, he told her to get in. Irka thanked him, but declined because she had no money to pay the fare. He replied that he was going that way anyway, and since it was past curfew, he would not charge her anything. Irka thanked him, and got in. For safety's sake, she turned her watch back fifteen minutes, so if they did get stopped, she could show that according to her watch she still had time.

The bridge was guarded by a sentry at the beginning, a sentry in the middle of the bridge, and a sentry at the end — to get through, they had to pass through three check points. They crossed the first guard post without incident. The driver was very worried about the middle guard post, but Irka concealed herself low in the carriage, and they passed without incident. The third post appeared to be unguarded, so they anticipated easy passage — suddenly, as they entered to Royal Square, the command was heard: Halt! Halt!! The carriage driver pulled over to the side of the road, and Irka got out. The German guard was yelling at her; she did not understand most of his antics; but in her broken German, Irka tried to explain that according to her watch, she still had time. When she showed her watch to the guard, she noticed that the watch had stopped at 5:50. She continued to apologize profusely; he kept on yelling. Then suddenly, he told her to get out of there. She promptly got back into the carriage, and left.

Back home, the whole neighborhood knew that she was missing. When she arrived, she knocked at the front gate to be let into the building. In reply to the inquiry “Who is it?” she announced herself — the setters in many windows of the surrounding buildings opened, and she was welcomed back warmly; but her Mom yelled at her, for being so foolish and violating curfew. She should have stayed at the seamstresses house. This was so dangerous!

People who were caught violating curfew would routinely be sent off to work camps, or worse.

The next year was spent working, hoping for better times, and playing bridge. Irka then tried to join the Nursing School in Warszawa. Unknown to Irka, the Director of the School was of the opinion that nurses must be dedicated to their profession, could not color their hair or wear any makeup, and had to look plain as to not tempt their patients. At this time, Irka had long blond curly hair. She went for meeting with the School Director, wearing a beret, with a lock of her hair hanging off to the side of her face, and darkened eyebrows. The Director was scandalized; and told Irka that in her opinion she certainly did not qualify to be a nurse; however, she would consult with her counterpart in Poznan about Irka's character.

Irka got a very good reference — how dedicated she was, and how well she studied. Based on this reference, the Director decided that what she heard was “heaven” and what she saw was “hell.” In her opinion, anyone who could change so drastically in such a short amount of time is completely untrustworthy, and should never be allowed into the nursing profession. Irka was devastated.

In time, Irka's mother's doctor recommended that Irka forget about nursing, and become a doctor instead. Irka resisted – she felt that she was not smart enough. But then, since she was declared not suited for nursing, she decided to pursue her medical career in medical school. Medical Schools were prohibited by the occupying German forces — officially, the school was called Dr. Jan Zaorski's Private Vocational School for Auxiliary Medical Personnel [Prywatna Zawodowa Szkola dla Pomocniczego Personelu Medycznego] (the name, not denoting its university character, was supposed to mislead the Germans). It was staffed by all the professors from the pre-war medical university. Irka attended from 1942 until 1944, when her medical studies were interrupted again, this time by the Warsaw Uprising.

That is the end of these notes — to be able to write a historic account, I will need much more information from my mother; maybe I will call her later.

I am stuck ... I don't know what to write. I check out Flickr again — this time I look at the most recent contributions from my “Contacts.” All of them are so talented; and in so

many different ways. Some take abstract photos; other paint on canvass and then take photos of their work. Several of them manipulate their photos into (what I call) photo-paintings, like I try to do. Some are into photo-journalism; and others are into nude expressionism. They all share with me a love for photography, and its use in the expression of art.

Done with Flickr, I check out Yelp — this is crowded with young people, all of them sharing their willingness to talk about places to eat, and also about places to go and things to do (however, most of this is about eating and drinking). I wish that I could convince people my age to join Yelp, so that we could use this as a forum for finding common interests. But, I tried to invite some of my Contacts from Flickr to join, those that reside in the New York metropolitan area, but none of them responded to my invitation.

I also check out my Facebook page — this is much less exciting than Flickr or Yelp, but you never know what tomorrow brings, so I stay with it. In the past I looked at MySpace (and I even have a page on that service), but I don't like it at all — it is full of commercials, an loud colors and graphics, mostly geared toward modern music. I also have a page on LinkedIn — this is “serious” service, geared toward professionals who want to network.

It does not feel like I am ready for my novel; maybe if I take a break I might be able to return to it later. I go to help Chris change the handles on the cabinets in the kitchen; she appreciates the help; I enjoy being with her.

She is really an angel in my life. We met we are not sure when, but it must have been around 1965, probably at a Polish Scouting camp. Then, I was involved with the Polish Boy Scouts, and she was involved with Polish Girl Scouts. She was a friend of one of my sisters. I know that over the years we double-dated, she with her boyfriend, I with my girlfriend. I know that we traveled together to Scouting sponsored events, usually in groups of Boy and Girl Scouts; always with adult chaperones. She was from Brooklyn, I was from Queens -- but we were both into hiking, scouting, and most importantly, Polish.

“Polish” was important to me. I dated many “American” girls, but they did not understand the world that I came from. Chris and I shared so many common experiences, even though they were not experienced at the same time or in the same place. At some point

in time we must have started talking on the phone, and then dating. This dating was not exclusive, but apparently in other people's eyes, we were "the couple."

Her grandmother, Apolonia, liked me — that was a great help. When Chris was not home, and her boyfriend called, he would be told that she was not home, her whereabouts were unknown, and nobody knew when she would return; when I would call, I was assured that she will be back soon, that she will call me as soon as she gets in, and I would be invited to come and visit soon.

Chris' grandmother was a wonderful person! She was one of eleven children, born in Kilania, Poland. Because the farm work could not support them, when Apolonia was sixteen years old, she left home with one of her sisters, and went to France to look for domestic work. In France she met her future husband, Michael. Michael had been a traveling salesman, who traded in cattle, cream making machines, and fruits. After World War I, he went to France to collect and sell scrap metal. Michael and Apolonia married in 1925, in Denain, St. Martin, France. They eventually returned to Poland and settled in Wrzesnia. Michael died of tuberculosis in 1935.

When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Apolonia's daughter, Irena, was twelve years old, and her son, Jan, was ten.

During the war, goods were rationed. To purchase food and clothing, the buyer had to present a rations card which limited the amount that could be purchased. In 1943, Apolonia used a found rations card to purchase some cloth; however, the police were waiting to see who would try to use the missing card, and arrested her. As a consequence, she was sent to jail for a year.

During that time, the Germans took all their possessions. Without their mother, Apolonia's two children lived at a friend's house in a cold attic.

When Apolonia was finally released from jail, she returned to her children in Wrzesnia. Because they did not have any place to live, they were allowed to sleep in a toolshed in the yard of a relative. But then in 1944 they were expelled by the Germans. They were amongst 1,300 people that were put on a train, and were taken to Germany.

In Germany, an elderly farmer took an interest in Apolonia's son because he needed a strong young man to help him operate the farm. Apolonia and her two children were taken to work on the farm, for no pay, just the food that they would receive.

Their duties started at 4 a.m., at which time they had to prepare food for and feed the animals – the pigs and cows. Then, after breakfast they would go into the fields and do seasonal work – cut hay, gather potatoes and beets, rain or shine. This was very hard work, and very cold in the winter. They did not have any clothing available and their skin was constantly exposed to the elements.

Initially they ate their meals with the farmer's family; but when the local police became aware of this, this practice was forbidden. By now they had learned to speak German fairly well; however, they were required to wear a "P" badge on their clothes at all times so that everyone would know that they were not German, but Polish slaves. This went on until they were liberated by the American Army in 1945.

Once liberated, they were sent to a Displaced Persons' Camp in Ingolstadt, near Munich, Germany. Because they had nothing in Poland; and because the Communists took over the country, they sought to emigrate out of Europe. Apolonia's son was accepted by Canada, to work in the nickel mines near Sudbury.

At the DP Camp, Apolonia had a job making pajamas out of parachutes — these parachutes were covered in a chemical, which infected and deformed her hand when she accidentally pricked herself with a needle. Because of this hand deformity, no country wanted to accept her. However, when her daughter agreed in writing to be financially responsible for Apolonia, a relief organization made arrangements for them to travel to America. Apolonia was to be a cook for a church in Washington, D.C. and her daughter was to be a chambermaid.

When they arrived in New York, in November 1950, they were met by a priest from the parish in Washington — however, when he saw that Apolonia's hand had been deformed, the priest decided not to accept them into his employ; thus they were relieved from their contract (and from the obligation to pay for their passage to America).

In New York, Apolonia and her daughter got temporary housing at a friend's house in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Within a few days after arriving in New York, Apolonia's

daughter got a job at Leviton Manufacturing, inserting small screws into electric outlets. After some time, she switch jobs to an assembly line in the Chicklets factory. Then, she decided to further her education, and after putting in a full day of work at the factory, she went to a school of fashion design in the garment district in New York.

That Thanksgiving, in 1950, Apolonia's daughter was invited to a dinner party, where she met a tall, thin, very handsome man, Henryk. Henryk arrived in the United States about a year earlier.

Henryk was born in Tuchola, Poland. His family were merchants, with a large store on the Main Square. Although they considered themselves Polish, because they distantly descended from Germans and had a German surname, they were considered by the Germans as Folks-Deutsch, and were treated differently than the other Poles. When he became of age, Henryk was drafted into the German army, and was sent to fight on the Russian Front. There he suffered a leg wound, and was sent back to a hospital in Germany. When he was able to, he defected from the German army, and escaped to France where he joined the Polish Army in Exile.

After the war, Henryk traveled to England, and from there, he emigrated to the United States. At first, he worked in the shipping department of a religious store. Later, he got a job at Bohack Supermarkets, where he eventually became a Store Manager. Later in life, his health began to fail, and he died in 1979.

I think that Chris' Mom liked me also — no matter how outlandish my proposal would be, it would be explained to her Father in the most favorable of terms. Once we were at a ball — in Polish society we always had a ball to attend — there I became involved with bombshell of a woman. She was slender, blond, beautiful, tall, and, I have been told, had way too much blue eyeshadow. This alarmed some of the older Girl Scouts that also attended the ball, and a plan was hatched for all of us to go to the beach after the ball (somehow, the woman of my interest was excluded from the planning). When the ball ended, the blond gave me her number, but went off with her family. I was communally put in charge of picking up Chris at her house.

My friends and I drove to her house, but we had to wait — Chris was by her front door saying goodbye to her boyfriend. We hid, and quietly cheered him on to finally kiss

her good bye, so that he would leave and I could spring into action. The man finally got around to it, and then left. Once he was safely out of view, I approached her house (at 1 a.m.) and rang the doorbell. Her father answered, in his night-robe — I could hear in the background Chris explaining to her Mother that it was decided at the ball that we would all go for a ride to the beach, and would be back not too much later. Her Mom was not convinced, and I could tell that her father was definitely against this; but once I showed up, her Mom softened her stance, and then even convinced her husband to allow the trip. After all, this was “a Scouting event.”

I was in my suit; she wore a long gown. The beach was deserted, with clumps of unmelted snow here and there. It was cold, but we were young — eventually, the sun rose. On the way home, we stopped for breakfast — we were by far the best dressed of everyone in the diner. I have been told that later Chris managed to sneak upstairs to her bedroom, and her parents never found out that we did not come back shortly after we promised to do so.

Over time, we had gone on several hikes. It was during one of these hikes that I became very interested in her. We were climbing Mount Washington in New Hampshire. We were with a group of Polish Scouts, and my girlfriend of the time. That evening, the five of us shared one tent — Chris happened to be next to me. The night turned quite cold — at one point, when I was not fully asleep, Chris woke up, and made sure that I was well covered with a blanket over my sleeping bag. That kindness made me realize that I would be a fool if I did not consider her for a wife — I guess that I must have been auditioning candidates, even though not very consciously or methodically.

Some time later, my girlfriend and I broke up; and Chris broke up with her boyfriend — what an opportunity; we started dating, more and more, eventually exclusively; Christmas Day, 1971 we got engaged.

I had discussed marriage with Chris before, but this was just talk, and the response was always negative. After the summer of 1971, my intentions became more crystalized. I approached a friend (hereafter referred to as “Friend”) who was a jewelry designer in the Diamond District of New York, and I asked her to make me an engagement ring. I did not have much money, so a retail purchase would be quite an obstacle. To learn her ring-size we developed a plan.

On the way back from one of our dates, I suggested that we visit Friend. It was an unusual suggestion, but I was convincing — Friend was twice our age, but we both knew her and worked with her in Polish Scouting — we needed to discuss some Scouting business, and since we were in the neighborhood, we should stop-in to see if she was home.

Friend was home; we sat in her dining room, discussing Scouting business. On the table was a collection of ring measuring devices. I inquired as to what that was; Friend explained that when they make a ring, they use this device to measure the finger. Fooling around, I measured my finger, and then, for fun, we measured Chris' finger. Concluding our Scouting business, after having some tea and cookies, we left. Friend spent the next several weeks making the ring during her spare time, but often after work. Before Christmas I went to Friend's house, got the ring, and was wished good luck.

We celebrated Christmas Eve — I spent it with my family, and Chris spent it with her family. We had a date, however, to attend Christmas Day Mass together. Throughout the Mass, I had this BOX in my pocket — it was sticking out SO MUCH. I was convinced that EVERYONE could see it. After Mass ended, I gathered all my courage, and offered the box to Chris. When she opened (I suppose, expecting a Christmas gift), I formally asked her to marry me — to my everlasting gratitude, she said YES.

I think that both families were quite surprised; her much younger brothers offered me their condolences, but everyone was happy. Once the decision to marry was made, the wedding had to be planned. June 3, 1972 was the date; since then, much of my good fortune is thanks to my angel.

She may be my angel — but she is also my devil; but, now is not the time to discuss this — after all, she may read this, and then there will be hell to pay.

Now my angel calls me to dinner; and after dinner we go to the movies.

Sunday

As usual, I wake up early. OK; today I must start writing my novel. I turn on my computer, and while checking out Flickr, I am reminded that it is Veterans' Day. I am not a veteran, but I was in the Army.

When I graduated high school in June 1967, the Vietnam War was in full swing. The draft was on everyone's mind. My draft number was not low, so it was not certain that I would be drafted, but it was not high, so I could be drafted. I decided to avoid the issue by joining R.O.T.C. in college. That way, if I had to go to war, I would go as an officer, not as a regular soldier; and while in college, I would earn some money (the Army paid you for being in the R.O.T.C. program).

When I enrolled in College, I made sure that one of my electives was Freshman ROTC. I had to pass a physical exam, but that was not a problem. Once admitted, we had to purchase uniforms, but we did receive a clothing allowance. I learned how to spit-shine my shoes and boots; and I learned how to polish my brass (the metal insignias on my uniform). In my school there was a Military Society that I could join, but before I could join, I had to undergo a pledge period. After that, the Society's "Brothers" would vote as to our individual worthiness to join. Some of my fellow Freshman chose to go Greek and pledged with the various campus fraternities whose names were a collection of two or three Greek letters; most were not into the fraternity system, especially that our school was a commuter school — *there were no dormitories*; classes were held in a 15-story building in Manhattan, and everyone commuted to school. About ten of us decided to pledge for this Military Society.

As part of the pledge process, we had to attend special classes. We had to memorize many rhymes and facts; we were constantly doing pushups, as punishment or as a reward, or just to keep in practice. Our pledge class was supervised by the forty or so Brothers. As a privilege, however, we were allowed to come into the Society's Room, on the third floor, in the building adjoining the school building. The Room was small; between classes, when up to thirty young men tried to squeeze into it, it was impossible to move. Next to the Room

was the room for the women's Boosters Club. As neighbors, and as ideological comrades, we shared our spaces, and found much comfort in their female companionship (at that time, there were no women in the ROTC program). Eventually, the first semester of college came to an end, and all of us pledges (those that did not quit during the term of the semester) were admitted as new Brothers.

During the Sophomore year, we were told that the Army was making some slots available for qualified ROTC students to attend Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Three of us volunteered for this, and were accepted. We drove to Georgia together; and were assigned to a single room at the Guest Officers' Quarters. The program was three weeks long — we ran, for miles and miles; we did push ups, we did pull ups, hundreds of them, thousands of them. We learned how to fall gracefully — how to keep our feet bent at the knees; how to extend out toes; how to keep our ankles and our knees squeezed against each other, so that our two legs became one shock absorber.

We jumped from the 34-Foot Jump Towers hundreds of times; and from the 250-Foot Tower several times. The 34-Foot Jump Tower was designed to simulate the fuselage of an airplane, and the height was chosen to maximize fear, close enough so that you can appreciate the jump, and not too far away from the ground for the jumper to disassociate from reality. The first jump was a true test of my faith that the equipment would in fact keep me safe. I had to jump, with a back pack on my back, and a reserve pack on my belly. The back pack was attached to two runners which were attached to springs which were attached to a wire guide above us.

As we jumped, the looseness of the runners on each side of our head would give way to the stretching of the springs, and our bodies would bob up and down as we slid down the guide wire to a receiving mound some fifty yards away. We did this over and over, with our trainers yelling at us to keep our knees bent, to point our toes, to keep our legs tight against each other, to keep our head down for a count of five seconds — one Mississippi; two Mississippi; three Mississippi; four Mississippi, and five Mississippi. Then we were supposed to look up, and make sure that our imaginary parachute had opened.

During the third week, we would graduate, after completing five actual jumps.

After our morning run, and other grueling exercises, we went for breakfast. Then we showered, cleaned our room, and ran out for formation. We ran in formation to the training area, and practiced our landing once again. This was not the time to break anything, as soon we would jump for real. The excitement was visible in everyone's faces. At the appointed time, buses rode up to us, and we boarded. The trip to the airport was quick. We were assigned our real parachutes, and our spares also. The staff made sure that we had them on properly, and we were instructed, again, on the procedures we would follow.

The planes were waiting for us. We boarded and sat in two rows, facing each other, along both walls inside the airplane. There was no airline niceties – no pretty airline stewardesses, no mixed drinks, no pretzels or peanuts. It was dark green gray, and very loud. The parachute on our back made it difficult to sit comfortably, but comfort was not anyone's concern. Surviving the day was!

We taxied to the end of the runway, and promptly took off. I sat toward one of the ends of the row, and thus I could see out the open door. I saw the quickly passing grass and hangers further behind. I saw the ground leave us as we lifted off. The vibration and noise was so strong and loud, I could feel all the fillings in my teeth rattling. We climbed to approximately twelve hundred feet (the height of the Empire State Building), and we slowly progressed to the Drop Zone.

I was so scared; tears were spilling out of my eyes, I almost could not see anything, there were so many tears. Soon, the order to stand up was given. As one, we all obeyed. We turned ninety degrees, and were now facing the front of the airplane. On the command, we took the hook that we had been holding in our hand and attached it to the wire running the length of the airplane above our heads. Each one of us was checked by the one behind him to make sure that there were no kinks between the hook and the parachute on the back of the person in front of us.

Then the stop light by the side door turned from red to green. The first person stepped up to the door, and grabbed both sides with his hands. As the jumpmaster told him to jump, he closed his eyes, lowered his head, pressed his chin against his chest, and jumped out of this perfectly good airplane. The line moved very quickly, and then it was my turn.

By then, we were moving at almost a running speed, so there was not much time for reflection.

One Mississippi; two Mississippi; three Mississippi; four Mississippi, five Mississippi — it was quiet now. Unlike in the airplane, it was peaceful and light. Way below me was a field. I looked up, and I was so happy — I was looking at a perfectly opened parachute. All around me I could see the many others who had jumped with me this glorious day. Off to the side, above me, I could see the airplanes banking away from us.

The trip down was approximately sixty seconds. If this had been war, these would have been sixty seconds of terror. During this time of descent, you are just hanging there, available to be shot by anyone who may wish you ill. That is why military parachutes are designed for a quick descent. It is a delicate balance, to minimize injuries upon landing, while minimizing casualties from enemy gunfire. But I was not in a war; I was having a blast!

The amazing thing is that I never felt like I was falling; it was the ground that was coming up at me. I could see that I would make contact with the ground soon, so I held on to the risers with my hands; I made sure that my elbows were touching each other, pressed against my chest. I extended my legs as much as I could, bent my knees and squeezed my legs against each other, while stretching my feet so that they would win the race to the ground.

Impact was violent. I quickly got up, disconnected my parachute and ran around it to decompress it before the wind took it away. The whole procedure was executed quickly and we gathered at our designated spot, all proud of our accomplishments. That first day, we jumped only once — the next day, we jumped in the morning and again in the afternoon. The afternoon jump was different in that I saw someone fall from the sky.

What I saw, I did not expect. He jumped, along with many others, but his parachute malfunctioned. As instructed, he made use of the spare parachute on his belly — but his position, relative to the wind, was such that he spare parachute climbed up and got stuck on whatever was there of the main parachute. The two parachutes became entangled, and somehow deflated — the fellow fell the last hundred feet or so with nothing. We were told that he broke his leg, but was alright otherwise.

The next day, June 17, 1970, we were scheduled to make our final two jumps. The morning went as the previous two mornings. Once again I was next to last in my row on the airplane. I jumped eagerly, and counted to five Mississippi as I was supposed to do. But, when I looked up, things were very different. Up above me there was a giant bra — my parachute looked like two little cups with a big tangled mess in between them. This was a “Mae West,” and I had been trained for this. I immediately started pulling on my risers, trying to force them to untangle.

This time I was passing my friends – in youthful foolishness, I waived goodbye. I could hear the loudspeakers on the ground, instructing all others to get out of my way, so that I would not crash into them and collapse their parachutes with my weight from above. The trip was happening much faster than ever before.

I pulled on my reserve, and it started to inflate, but as I saw just yesterday, it started to climb up my parachute and it looked like it was going to deprive me of whatever I did have to soften my landing. In that split second, I decided not to risk it, and I started pulling at my reserve to bring it back down, away from my main. The ground was coming up so very fast — it felt like I was about to be swatted by a giant pan.

I knew that the landing was perfect, although it was very hard. As I laid there in the field, I could see a medevac helicopter hovering above me. I checked my fingers in my hands and my toes – I was able to move them all – I was OK. By this time, an ambulance pulled up to me; and then I lost my ability to breathe.

The medics worked very fast. They cut off the parachute from my body. They calmed me down, and I regained my ability to breathe. I was quickly strapped to the helicopter; and within minutes we landed at the hospital.

I remember a group of medical personnel meeting the helicopter, just like you see on television, and pushing the gurney through the doors. I remember being wheeled into the X-ray room, ahead of the many people waiting their turn. I remember someone telling the doctors that the operating room was ready on stand by. But, thank God, the operating room was not necessary. The X-rays showed that I only suffered a compression fracture of T-6 and 7 in my spine; without any nerve damage.

My hospital roommate was a soldier who suffered an injury to his foot – a tank drove over it. I next remember my parents and my girlfriend coming to visit, and also a senior military officer visiting and pinning my parachute wings to my pillow – apparently, I passed, even though I did not take my fifth jump. My Military Society Brothers visited, and then went back home without me.

My hospital stay was predicted to be a lengthy one — but I was macho and my doctor agreed that I could be discharged when I could do ten pushups. I left the hospital on June 23rd.

I healed over the summer and was ready for duty when school started again in September. After graduation, I was sent back to Fort Benning, this time to Infantry Officers' School. This was great fun! However, if it had been for real, I remember two occasions when I would definitely have died.

The first was when I was quietly climbing a hill that had limited vegetation. My fellow soldiers were to the left and to the right of me, about ten or so yards in either direction. Suddenly, I heard a very loud noise, and a tremendous tank appeared in front of me, rolling over the crest of the hill, toward me, with machine guns blasting away. This was a shocking surprise, and not survivable.

The second time, our helicopters just landed in a simulated rice paddy, and our mission was to take the village in front of us. We had not met any significant resistance from the village, and were able to advance into it quickly. Although I checked as I was trained to do, upon entering one of the huts, my boot tripped off some explosive device that meant instant death to me and anyone with me.

These two instances made me realize that no matter how much fun it was to play soldier, and no matter how much training you received, in real life, death can come at any moment.

Almost six months into our training, just as we were about to graduate, and we were all speculating as to our next assignment (probably Vietnam); we were called into formation. We were told that the Pentagon has decided that there were too many Second Lieutenants in the Army, and therefore those of us in the Reserves (as opposed to the Regular Army guys) were being asked to leave the Base by tomorrow (one day short of the six months'

active service required to be a Veteran). By doing so, we would not be qualified for Veteran's benefits, but we would also not be sent to Vietnam. The next day, I was on my way home, free of the Vietnam War.

Within a few months I was assigned to a Reserve Unit in the Bronx whose mission was tactical psychological operations. With the help of friendly Navy doctors, I was able to convince the Army that I should be allowed to retire from the military, without any further responsibilities.

Over the years, I developed a tremendous gratitude to those who, unlike me, had to serve in Vietnam. I remember how unpleasant it was to be seen in public in an uniform — how some would spit on you, and others would call you a killer or a murderer. Those that were drafted and then forced to go to Vietnam must have been particularly hurt by the treatment they received upon their return. I think that since then, we as a society have learned that our soldiers need to be honored, even when we are engaged in an unpopular war — wars are started by our government leaders, and not by our military leaders. On Veterans' Day we say Thank You, and pray for those that could not return to their homes and loved ones.

Maybe I will write my novel about my Grandfather who was an officer in the army; or perhaps about my Father, who was a prisoner at Dachau Concentration Camp. But I know so little and my Father has been dead for so many years. Maybe I should write a mystery novel, or perhaps something else — no matter what, I continue to be at a loss as to what to write.

Unable to write anything meaningful, I decide to go into the office, to catch up on some of my work. I have a trial starting soon, and although I believe that everything is ready for it, I will take this opportunity to make sure.

Dr. Larson is the defendant; my clients Linda and Charles Mastriani are the plaintiffs. During the trial, my witnesses will include Linda and Charles, Charles' mother, and Linda's current treating pain doctor and her psychiatrist. I will also be calling as expert witnesses an economist, two medical doctors and an employability expert. My adversary is a very well respected medical malpractice defense attorney, who went to medical school before he became an attorney. His witnesses will include the defendant, and a collection of expert

witnesses mirroring my list of expert witnesses. The medical records in this case take up several boxes.

It all started several years ago, when Linda was a laborer on the railroad. She hurt her thumb, and was sent by her employer to see Dr. Larson, who specialized in hand injuries. Dr. Larson treated the injury, but then Linda developed pain in her other hand from overuse (while the original injury was healing). During a followup examination, Dr. Larson diagnosed Linda's new problem as carpal tunnel syndrome, and recommended surgery.

After a several month delay, the insurance carrier finally authorized the surgery. The day after the surgery, Linda's hand was very painful, but Linda was reassured by Dr. Larson that everything would be alright. The following week, Linda complained again about her hand, and told Dr. Larson that sometimes it felt very cold. Dr. Larson examined the hand, but determined that there was nothing wrong with it.

During the next post-surgical appointment, Linda complained again — she came into Dr. Larson's office, holding her hurt right hand, which just hung from the left hand fingers that were holding it up. Dr. Larson examined it once more, and did not find anything wrong with the right hand.

The next appointment was very brief — Dr. Larson told Linda that there was nothing further that he could do for her.

Over time, the hand started to change color, and Linda could feel pins and needles going up her arm. Linda asked her employer's workman's compensation insurance adjuster to send her back to see a doctor — this time they sent her to Dr. Smithers. Dr. Smithers confirmed the appearance of an unusual color in the hand, however, he wrote in his report that Linda should be sent back to Dr. Larson, since he did the original surgery on her hand.

Dr. Larson was angry – he already stated that Linda reached the maximum medical improvement, and there was nothing more he could do for her. Linda then went to an attorney seeking his help. The pain continued, and became constant. Court hearings were scheduled, but that took months. Eventually, she stopped working, because the pain was too great. Then she was referred to a pain-specialist.

Injections were administered in Linda's neck and spine. The pain would subside, but then it would return. To alleviate the pain, nerves were cut; and then it was decided that the

carpal tunnel operation needed to be redone. Eventually, Linda was referred to another neurologist, pain-specialist. He took Linda under his care, inserting nerve stimulators in Linda's neck, with wires running down her back to a control device in her buttocks. When the stimulator was misaligned during physical therapy, further surgery was required to reposition the contraption in Linda's body.

Linda was told by her doctor that she suffered from RSD — Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy. This was a malfunction of the nervous system, caused by pain induced over activation of a nerve path, which in turn induces permanent pain. Linda's neurologist told her that this was caused by Dr. Larson, who must have injured one of Linda's nerves when he performed the carpal tunnel surgery.

By the time that she approached me to represent her, her claim was almost exhausted by the passage of the statute of limitations. To induce people to assert their claims promptly, and to give comfort to those who may be accused of having behaved in a tortious way, the law requires that a claim must be asserted within two years of the incident. In Linda's case, the law was more lenient — because she could not have known that she had been injured, she could assert her claim within two years from when she could have known that she had a claim; i.e., within two years from when she was first told that the pain she was suffering was from the surgery performed by Dr. Larson several years ago. But, even with this extended time frame, the two years had almost passed.

Before agreeing to represent Linda, I met with Dr. Sanjamani, the neurologist who told Linda that Dr. Larson was responsible for her injury. I told Dr. Sanjamani that I would not represent Linda unless it was clear that Dr. Larson was responsible — he assured me that I had a solid case. The next two years were spent gathering medical records, sending Linda to appropriate experts, taking the depositions of the anticipated trial witnesses, and gathering whatever evidence may prove to be useful in proving Lisa's claim.

The trial is scheduled for next week. I am confident that we have done all that we could do to properly present her case. I had spend many hours with Lisa and her husband, preparing for their testimony. I also consulted with the experts that we retained, to confirm the testimony that they were expected to give. Now, all I need is good luck.

So much for work — now the real work: the damn NOVEL.

It was stormy and loud; it was lightening all around me. I was naked, fat and bloated. I was not cold, nor hot; I was not really scared, but I was not hopeful or eager. I was standing in a line, long behind me, and I was next to go up to the podium. The gate opens, and I understand that I am to go forward.

So, what have you got to say for yourself? — I'm sorry, but no one can tell me where I am, or what is happening; who are you, and why are you asking? — Your future depends on these next few moments, and you need to explain your past, so your present can be understood. — And who are you? — I am your preliminary judge; if you don't like my decision, you will be given an opportunity to appeal (but I would not count on a reversal). — And why do I need to answer your questions? — Because if you don't, you will be forced, and it will not be pleasant. What is your name; and where do you come from?

My name is Paul, Paul Kos. At different times I was called Pablo and Paveu. I have been told that when I was young, I would introduce myself as Pepeuek Mr. Kos. — And why was that? — At home, my parents spoke to me in Polish, and called me Paveuek, a diminutive form of Paveu (Paul in Polish). Apparently I was not able to pronounce Paveuek, and I enunciated it as Pepeuek; and whenever I would hear anyone speaking with my father, they would refer to him as Mr. Kos, so, from my perspective, my name was Pepeuek Mr. Kos.

And were you a good child? — I am not aware of any complaints; it was after my babyhood that my checkered past began. — We know, we know; but first, please verify your background information. Tell me about your siblings. — I have one brother, Tom; and three sisters, Alexandra, Anna and Elizabeth. We were all born in Argentina, where we lived with our parents in a rented house in Ramos Mejia, a suburb of Buenos Aires. — Tell me about the house you lived in. — It was a one story brick building, with a flat roof and no basement. In front of the house there was a dirt street. We had a concrete sidewalk; a waist-high brick fence with a wooden gate. As you walked in through the gate, along the left there was a tall cement wall against which my Mom had a climbing rose bush. To the right, there was a very small yard (covering a concrete cesspool). Then we had some bushes, behind which we had a tiled patio up to the middle of the front of the house, and the other half was my sisters' room.

The path from the front gate went on along the side our house and our neighbor's house. In our house, behind the front patio was our living room, which was also my parent's room. The center of the house was a short hallway that connected my sisters' room, the living room, the kitchen/dining room, the bathroom, and my and my brother's room. Behind the house we had a back patio, followed by a large yard, that was divided in two by a tall hedge. The front half of the back yard was against the rear of our house, and it had four trees. A giant yellow magnolia tree, under which no grass would grow because of the shade. The other trees were a tall evergreen, a tall willow tree, and a lemon tree.

From the kitchen you would exit onto the rear tile patio, where there was a wash basin and a crank wringer. There was also a pump with a well; and off to the side, along the neighbors' property, just next to the willow tree, we had a tall lean-to where four cylinders of natural gas were stored and connected to the house.

Behind the front rear yard there were the tall hedges, several feet thick, and many feet in height. On the right side of the hedge, by the lemon tree, there was an entranceway to the back rear yard — the rear back yard was left wild, for us kids to play in. Along the rear metal fence, we had a row of evergreen trees. To the right there were more trees and a tall brick wall (the side of a small paint brush factory that my neighbors had in their back yard). In the left rear corner, the neighbors behind us had a tall metal shed, which we climbed sometimes to reach the plums that grew there. To the left of our rear neighbor there was a cane field — a wonderful place for us to dig tunnels from our yard to there, so we could escape from home.

To the left of our rear back yard was another neighbor's property, they had a GIANT fig tree, and we were constantly at war with those kids. Completing the circle, on the side of our front back yard was our neighbor who had a chicken coop, and whose daughter, Nena, was our baby sitter from time to time.

In the rear back yard we fought many a battle, and built forts with moats. The forts would be built from branches, cane stalks and leaves. We took pride in the strength of the construction, that would not allow a rock shot from a slingshot to penetrate.

Our slingshots were home made. We would buy strands of rubber, and attach them to "Y" tree branches that we would cut from our many neighborhood trees. The two rubber

strands would then be connected with a small piece of leather, large enough to hold a small stone, and have two small holes on either end to which the rubber strands would be tied. We practiced a lot, and once or twice I was able to shoot down a bird in flight (one of the things I am very sorry for now).

Our choice of weapons was not limited to slingshots — we made bows and many arrows. We also made lances. Our Mom was so cool — she taught us how to make gunpowder (we did not make much use of this knowledge, as the ingredients were expensive, and had to be purchased at the drug store).

The shed where the gas canisters were stored was the site of one of the two times in my life that I remember feeling hate. This is the place where one of my baby birds was murdered by my cat. The bird had fallen from the willow tree in the morning, as was common in the Spring, and I found it and put it in a basket for safekeeping. Suddenly the cat jumped in, grabbed the bird in its teeth and ran off into the gas shed, hiding deep inside where I could not reach it, and ate my bird. I desperately tried to save the bird, and I really hated my cat during those moments of helplessness.

My second encounter with hatred was when my pet frog was eaten by little red ants. Frogs were common, and often we would collect them as pets. On this particular day, we found a frog, and made a home for it in the back rear yard, including a nice mud ditch for it to play in. That evening, when it was dark already, I took a candle from home, and walked to the rear back yard to see how my frog was doing. To my horror, it was half a frog, and half a clean skeleton, completely covered by thousands of little red ants, munching away on my friend — I remember hating those ants so much.

So far things don't look very good for you; and we have a notation about other incidents — what else are you prepared to confess? — Nothing; unless I have to. — What is this about you shooting your neighbor in the chest?! — Oh, that was nothing! We were at war. They (the kids next door) were getting ready to storm our fort. We were returning fire with slingshots. Suddenly, the oldest of our attackers climbed the fence separating our properties. His rear leg was hanging behind him on his side of the fence; his other leg was bent at the knee, with the foot on top of the fence. One arm was holding the top of the fence, while the other was raised in the air, holding a slingshot, and he was about to swing his rear

foot over the fence and jump into our yard. We were all defending our yard valiantly, but at this moment of truth, I stood up, took aim with my slingshot, and fired away. My rock flew straight and fast, and struck him in his chest, just below his neck. At that moment he felt the pain, and grabbed his chest, and fell back into his yard. We had defeated the attack! And as it turns out, we were not attacked ever again.

And what is the story of your bedroom window?! — That was NOT my fault. Tom was inside drawing, and I was outside. I made some gestures at him, that eventually upset him. But it was him that lost his cool and it was him that threw something at me. I was an innocent passerby who was almost seriously injured by the flying glass. Then my Mom flew out of the kitchen, yelling at ME?! Why me?; I did not throw anything. Then I heard those awful words, that so often were thrown at me – You are older; you must set an example; you should know better; you provoked him! How unfair, he broke the window and I got punished – then, I had to stand in the corner forever!

With your attitude, I can just see that things will not go well for you today. — I'm sorry. It is not fair; why do I always have to be the good one?! But, I am sorry; I am sorry that I got him mad; I am sorry that HE broke the window; I am sorry that MY life is a mess now because of HIM. I am sorry!

Your life is a mess because of HIM?! What are you blaming your brother for? — He was always right. He never did anything wrong. I tried to forge new ground for him, and he did not appreciate it. — What do you mean?

When I was a teenager, I constantly struggled with my parents for children's rights. Whatever rights or privileges I was able to establish as a child became the standard of living enjoyed by my siblings. I knew that I was fighting for all of us; I knew that they would not have it as hard as I did; nonetheless, I fought for us; so that we all could have a better life. And then, one day, he looked at me in disgust and told me: "You are just a crazy teenager." But, I got my revenge – in just a few years later, I was the conservative ROTC guy; and he was the long-haired hippie of the family. Amazing. He did not appreciate all that I had done for him, and then, only thanks to all the effort that I put into introducing my parents into the modern world was he able to be himself.

And I always had to stick by him and defend him. When he got into a fight with a neighborhood bully, even when I was scared, I had to step in and save him. I remember once we were shooting off firecrackers in the back of the High School. Suddenly, some crazy teacher came running at us. I told Tom to run, and I ran as fast as I could. I made it to the fence, and started to climb; but Tom did not follow me. He stayed behind. By then the teacher had reached him, so I had to go back. I made it back in time to defend him from the verbal abuse being heaved upon him. I had to apologize and promise we would never do that again. He was upset, and what about me. I could have gotten away; but I stayed behind for HIM.

And were you a good brother to your sisters? — Maybe I could have been better, I respond sheepishly. But, now, I am very sorry for all the times that I wronged them.

And were you a good son to you parents? — Well, it depends. Because of what I put them through, they are now assured to go straight to heaven. I think that I deserve some credit for that. — Are you a wise guy?! — No; no; it is just that I was the oldest, and nobody showed me the way. I had to figure everything out for myself. My parents had all these rules and expectations. Do this; do not do that. Only with time, and lots of trial and effort, were we able to reach a happy (or at least not an unhappy) medium.

And what is this in the records about you punching Johnny Johnson in the face? — Well, that was self defense. Other kids were picking on me because I was not an athlete, and I was not very strong. One day I decided that I had to free myself from this grammar school predicament. Johnny was telling people how he could beat me up. When I heard this, in the fifth grade, I walked up to him during recess in the yard of the school. I told him that he should leave me alone. Everyone turned and looked at us. Johnny said in a loud daring voice: “Oh yea! What are you gonna do about it?” — I pulled my arm back, bent at the elbow, clenched my fist as hard as I could, and let my arm swing forward. It hit him straight in the nose. He took a step backward, tripped and fell. Blood flowed down his face. A bunch of guys stepped in between us. The nuns came running. I think that we both may have been punished. But, no one bothered me again after that.

And what about you having been a gang member? — I had to do that; I needed protection. — Protection! What kind of protection did you need?! — It was 1962; and we

were young men; young men, becoming men. I made friends with many new people that came from Cuba; by then, I had forgotten my Spanish; but then, I quickly learned to communicate with them in Spanish, with a Cuban accent. We kept together in grammar school, we went to dances together, and we played together. All this togetherness was noticed by the kids in the local public junior high school. West Side Story was the rage; and we practiced all the dance steps and songs.

And then someone heard that there would be a rumble. So we got ready. But, it had to be official. We had to be an official gang – so, we became the “Atoms.” The girls wrote a song for us. We had meetings to discuss when and where the rumble would take place. We had knives, and someone even managed to get a gun. We all got a chance to hold the gun. But then the girls told on us. They told some of the parents. The gun was confiscated. The rumble was canceled. Now, I thank God; how close we came to a tragedy. How little we understood the danger we were dealing with. Now, when I represent people who have done bad things, I try not to judge them, because, but for the grace of God, there go I.

And is it true that you were reckless with your life? — Reckless? What do you mean? — It is written here that you tempted faith and wondered where you should not have? — What do you mean? I remember several uncomfortable situations, but I do not remember ever tempting faith. — For example, tell us about your crossing of a the frozen lake. — Oh, that. That was not tempting faith. I got stuck after reaching a point of no return. It was winter, and I went to a local park with a giant lake. The lake was frozen, so I started to walk on it. It was frozen solid. At one point, when I was almost half way across, I heard the ice crack under me. I did not know what to do, and there was nobody around. I decided that if I try to go back, I will be walking on the cracked and weakened ice, so I did the only thing I could do – I continued forward, slowly and carefully. With every step I kept hearing the cracking ice all around me. But then, I finally made it across. — We would call that tempting faith. — But I did not intend to tempt faith; when I started, it was frozen solid. Only when I reached deep water did the ice begin to crack, and it was too late to do anything about it then.

Suddenly faces come out of the mist. Some I know personally, others I do not. There is my Father; and it looks like my two Grandfathers and my two Grandmothers. My

Father speaks first – “Forgiveness is possible; just ask for it.” Ask for forgiveness? I was always taught to do good; and not to do bad. But yes, asking for forgiveness was always part of the deal. Actually, it was the most difficult thing to do, because you had to acknowledge that you did wrong; acknowledge it to yourself, but also acknowledge it to the person that you hurt, and may still be angry at.

Then the old man standing next to my Father speaks — I always wanted to meet you; but first you must repent. — Repent? Repent for what? — You must repent for all the things that you have done wrong. You must repent for all the times that you have hurt us. You must repent for all the times that you have shamed us. — But I never intended to hurt anyone. I certainly did not intend to hurt you, or to shame you, or the rest of the family. — Nonetheless, you must know that when you do wrong, you hurt as all; and we are all ashamed of your actions. You must know that wrongdoing is a very public act; it hurts not only one person, it hurts us all.

At that point the two women approach me. One of them caresses my face with her hand, while the other takes hold of my arm. “We know that you were human; we were human at one time also; but now, all eternity is before you, and you must set the past right.”— How do I do that? — You start as you have already done, you confess your sins. You must ask for forgiveness, and you must commit yourself to do what is right. — But I am sorry for my sins; all the ones that I remember, all the ones that I told you about, but also for all the ones that I don’t remember. — We know that you are sorry; but you must be certain of your sorrow. — I am; I am. — And are you ready to do good? — Of course I am; I have been trying to do so for many years now. — Good. And your efforts have not gone unnoticed. We have been watching you with amazement; how you progressed from a child to a young person; to a husband; to a father; across your several careers; in your travels; and in your endeavors.

We have also been watching how your children are honoring our family; although, in that regard, at least half of the credit goes to their mother. But, we congratulate you on your very wise choice when you picked out the person to be their mother. She is truly a lady, who has come to understand the meaning of family and tradition.

Paul really got into writing his novel, and lost track of time. It was the evening when the phone rang – “What happened to you? Did you get lost?” Oh, hi sweetheart. I am sorry, I was just finishing up for today. I will be home right away.

Monday

Today's morning was taken up by doctors. At 8:30 a.m. I had an appointment with Dr. Earhouse. First, they will draw blood, and then he will check on my status. In anticipation of his question, I print out a listing of the medicines that I currently take regularly (actually, I will print out two copies, since I also have an 11 a.m. appointment with Dr. Kurly to check up on my prostate).

Dr. Earhouse's nurse is one of those super-happy sounding individuals. I recently learned that she is 62 years old — that was a surprise; she looks good for her age. Her problem is an innate ability not to find my veins when she wants to draw blood — she eventually does find some vein, but it is not unusual for this to be the second or third stabbing (once, she had to stab me six times before she claimed success).

One of my deficiencies is a low tolerance for pain; especially needle stabbing pain. I already know to ask for a “butterfly” — a baby needle; however, even then, I do not look at the procedure, and I wince when the needle penetrates my skin. This process is repeated every three to six months (it appears that this is dependent on the doctor's mood, as there is no consistency in the frequency). The purpose of these blood tests is to make sure that the medications that I am taking are not damaging my liver.

My regimen of daily medications consists of a small “baby” pink Aspirin, to promote general good health, and avoid a stroke or a heart attack by thinning out the blood. The second pill, a big horse tablet, is Avapro, which I take to decrease my high blood pressure. The third tablet is oval and white, Lipitor; its purpose is to reduce the amount of cholesterol in my blood stream. The fourth is a capsule, Flomax, which I take to control my benign prostatic hyperplasia. The fifth is a tiny round yellow pill, Aciphex, which I take to control my acid reflux. And the last is Toprol, which is also for my high blood pressure.

As usual, the super-happy nurse is lancing away at my body, first on the right arm, then on the left arm, before she finds her next victim in my left forearm. This becomes a two person operation, as the flow of blood is so small, that a second person is needed to keep the needle stabilized while blood vials are changed. Today, the damage does not appear to be

great; but I know from past experience that by tomorrow I will have giant black and blue marks on both my arms.

My meeting with Dr. Earhouse is uninteresting — my weight continues to climb, ever so slowly, but consistently. I am told to loose some weight, and in response to my inquiry, I am told that there is nothing that can be prescribed to help me loose weight. If I am still alive, I will see him again in six months. Because Dr. Earhouse only takes patients by prearranged appointments (which need to be made several days in advance), I am unlikely to see Dr. Earhouse before the end of the six month wait — if sickness or other medical need arises before than, it will have to be handled by one of the very efficient Medical Care Centers in the neighborhood, that take patients without appointments.

Before it is time for my appointment with Dr. Kurly, I have some time to kill. I go to a coffee shop to make some notes about the novel I finally started to write. I think about what I had written already, and am amazed how the story just flowed out of me. The characters started to speak for themselves, and their actions were purely their own. I was just recording what was happening in my mind. When I am done with my coffee, I decide to take a ride to Dr. Kurly's office – I will be early, but that will hopefully allow me to get to my office sooner.

His office is a converted beautiful house on a tree lined street, with a big sun porch surrounding the front and sides of the house. Inside, the waiting room is large, often crowded with men, but to my consistent surprise, with women also (but to a lesser extent). As with almost all doctors now, I am required to make payment for my anticipated services before I actually receive them; fortunately, this is limited to the insurance co-pay amount.

After some time, a nurse calls my name. I am ushered into a small bathroom with a toilet. Inside the toilet is a painted "X", and above the toilet is a sign that instructs: Aim at the "X" and empty your bladder. As I practice my aim, a device records the rate and quantity of the flow — I do not know what, but I understand that this record provides vital information to the urologist.

When this process is completed, I am asked to wait in another room, where there is a large machine with a television screen attached. I now know that this is an ultrasound

device. It will be used to check on the efficiency of the bladder — did it successfully expel all the urine out of my body.

A nurse comes in — urologists also depend on blood tests, but as I learned a long time ago, each doctor want to draw their own blood. I am always curious about the economics of this practice; but whatever it is, all the doctors get upset if I ask one of them to draw blood and do the tests that the other doctor needs. This nurse is much better (or luckier) than the one I had earlier this morning, and she gets her quota of blood quickly. She is Polish, and she tells me about how she sends her son to Poland every year to keep up with his Polish; and I tell her about my recent trip to Poland. She is surprised that this was the only time that I actually saw Poland, as my conversation in Polish is smooth. She then goes on to another patient, and I am left alone to wait.

When the doctor comes in, he is very friendly. He is always ready — almost eager — to prescribe one of the wonder drugs now so often advertised on television for “ED” — I guess that an urologist is the main conduit for the distribution of these medications.

After the chit chat comes the unpleasantness. “OK, drop your pants, and your underwear also; face away from me, and lean on the table. You are going to feel something cold, and then you will feel like you want to pass gas — do not worry, you will not. I will just be checking for the size and smoothness of your prostate.” The first time this was done, it was quite shocking; now it is just an unpleasant event that is needed to possibly save my life. Once the procedure is completed, the doctor hands me a box of Kleenex tissues, instructs me to open the door once I am dressed, and leaves the examining room. “Man; with the amount of lubricating jelly he used, I hope that one box of Kleenex is enough” I think to myself — but this is just my private hysterics. After a short amount of time, I open the door. Shortly after that the doctor returns, looks happy, and tells me that everything is OK — he will see me again in twelve months.

On the way to the office I stop for lunch at a Saladworks restaurant. I am glad that everything is OK. My blood results will be available in a few days, so something may still require further intervention; but for now, it appears that I am alright.

After picking up my mail at the Post Office, booting up my computer, and checking my emails, I disconnect my telephone answering machine. Soon after that Mr. Zawadzki

calls. Mr. Zawadzki has been my client for many years now. When I first met him, he just lost two fingers in an accident at work. One of the managers had removed a guard from an industrial cutter, but the absence of the guard did not alleviate Mr. Zawadzki's responsibility for keeping production running. On this particular day, someone on the factory floor was driving his fork lift vehicle too fast, skidded in a turn, and slightly bumped into Mr. Zawadzki's behind. This slight but sudden force pushed Mr. Zawadzki forward, and his arm deeper into the well of the cutting machine. The fingers were mangled beyond repair, even though he was taken to the hospital immediately.

I represented him in the processing of his Workers' Compensation claim. Unfortunately, the compensation for the loss of two fingers is less than adequate; although, from the point of view of the insurance company, it is very fair.

Some years later, I represented him when he went into business with his son selling mattresses at flea markets. I set up the corporation for him and the shareholder agreement between Mr. Zawadzki and his son. Later, he needed my services again when he could not meet his financial obligations, and needed to file for Bankruptcy Protection.

Eventually he straightened out his life and decided to re-marry – I represented him in the negotiation and drafting of a Pre-Marital Agreement. A year or so later, he was able to buy a house with the help of his wife. However, when they wanted to refinance their mortgage some years later, they were not able to because a judgment showed up on a credit report.

When I researched the judgment, I found out that someone driving Mr. Zawadzki's car was involved in a car accident fifteen years ago, and left the scene of the accident. Mr. Zawadzki confirmed that he owned the car, but denied that he was involved in an accident; however, although the car had been registered in his name, he did not use the car — the car was used by his son, and several friends from Poland who were here temporarily, working various construction jobs.

Apparently, the injured person in that accident sued Mr. Zawadzki; but Mr. Zawadzki did not received any notice of the lawsuit because he was then living in New York; and the "friends" who were living in his old apartment in New Jersey never notified him of the lawsuit. Since Mr. Zawadzki was unaware of the lawsuit against him, the plaintiff won by

default, and was awarded the damages that he requested – approximately \$15,000. That award became a judgment against Mr. Zawadzki, and a lien against any real estate he may own or later acquire in New Jersey.

Over time, the “friends” returned to Poland; and Mr. Zawadzki moved back to New Jersey. Only when he tried to refinance his mortgage so many years later did this lien surface; and put a sudden stop to his financial well-being. After I contacted the attorney listed on the credit report in connection with the judgment, and received from him a copy of the Complaint, and the Default Judgment, I went to the courthouse to view the entire file. Attached to an affidavit, I found a copy of the Police Report related to the accident. My review of the Police Report provided another surprise — two tickets were issued on the date of the accident; one for careless driving and the second for leaving the scene of an accident. Now, I had two tasks to take care of for Mr. Zawadzki – to clear his financial record, and to clear his motor vehicle record.

I filed my Notice Of Appearance with the municipal court where the tickets were issued. When the court could not find any outstanding tickets against Mr. Zawadzki, I requested written confirmation that there were no charges pending — the Court Clerk would not do so unless I first sent her a copy of the Police Report, which I promptly did. I then turned my attention to his financial record.

I prepared a Motion to vacate the Default Judgment — the basis for this petition was that even if he was responsible for the accident, the Judgment had been wiped out by the intervening Bankruptcy. To prepare the motion, I had to do some legal research to confirm that a debt that was not listed on the Bankruptcy Petition would be wiped out if the omission was unintentional.

The biggest obstacle to the process was obtaining a copy of the Discharge Order from the Bankruptcy Court. Mr. Zawadzki lost his copy and the Court in Newark did not keep such old records — I had to contact a national central document depository in Nevada, and obtain a copy from them. Getting this done took some time, but once the certified copy of the Discharge Order was received I was able to file my Motion.

The Judge who considered my Motion did not agree to an outright discharge of the Judgment against Mr. Zawadzki; however, the Judge did vacate the Default Judgment and

listed the case for a trial on the merits. This required me to enter into negotiations with the insurance company that had insured Mr. Zawadzki's automobile at the time of the accident. But – that insurance company had gone out of business; and was take over by another State-run entity. Locating the appropriate individuals was a challenge; but once accomplished, lead to the appointment of an attorney to be my adversary in this pending matter.

Now, based on the Bankruptcy Petition and the Discharge Order, I was able to negotiate the settlement of the matter within the limits of the insurance coverage that was available so many years ago. With this settlement in hand, I was able to remove from the State records the lien against Mr. & Mrs. Zawadzki's house; and they were able to refinance their mortgage (several months after they first sought to do so).

After I finished clearing Mr. Zawadzki's financial record I returned to his Motor Vehicle record. When I called the Municipal Court to inquire about the status of the two tickets, I was told that they were still outstanding. I reminded the Court that I had filed my Notice of Appearance and Mr. Zawadzki's plea of Not Guilty to the accusations against him. Then, after I consulted with Mr. Zawadzki on this matter, we decided not to do anything further for the next three years. The additional passage of time would give us a new grounds for a dismissal — the lack of timely prosecution.

Amazingly, nothing happened for over three years, after which time I contacted the Municipal Court again, and once again requested the dismissal of the tickets. This time, the Municipal Court Judge scheduled the matter for a hearing.

On the appointed day, Mr. Zawadzki and I went to the Municipal Court. As usual, we reported out presence to the Court Clerk, and then I went to meet with the Municipal Prosecutor. Usually it is the Prosecutor who is in a good position; i.e., the accused is usually clearly guilty of the violation charged, and in the interest of speeding things along the Prosecutor offers a plea that will lead to a quick admission of guilt to an amended lesser charge. This time, however, I was in the stronger position — the passage of time, even if the complaining police officer was still available, made it unlikely that the State could prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt; plus, we had an affirmative defense — my client was not involved in the accident; he did not even reside in New Jersey at that time.

month and how many can be exhibited at any one time. I started with a free account, but I quickly upgraded to a paid account. I currently have approximately 10,000 pictures posted – some are “private,” some are “family” and some are “public” pictures. Private pictures can only be viewed by me. Family pictures can be viewed by anyone who I have designated to be a member of my “Family.” And public pictures can be viewed by anyone who has a Flickr account.

I have very few Private pictures – they are only those that I like, but I have been informed by Chris that they should not be shown to anyone else; e.g., when I caught Chris doing a beauty treatment on her face – a white paste all over, and thin slices of cucumber over her eyes (what a wonderful picture; but its admiration is not universal). Family pictures feature either family members or private places; e.g., the inside of our dwellings, etc.

When I first started using Flickr more than a year ago, I thought that it was a wonderful medium for the family to keep in touch and be involved in each other’s lives. Unfortunately, however, not everyone shared my enthusiasm. Some individuals fear the Internet or anything connected with it, and thus do not want to post anything that they fear others may see. Some members of the family have limited or no computer knowledge, and therefore are unable to take advantage of the opportunities made available by this device. Others just do not want to bother posting pictures for others to see. But, several members have succumbed to my nagging, and have opened Flickr accounts, at least to keep abreast of what I may be publishing.

On Flickr, I can designate other individuals as my Contacts, and I can join Groups. Contacts are individuals whose body of work interests me, and by designating them as Contacts I have easy access to their Public pictures. Some of these individuals are quite prolific, posting daily, pictures in a variety of styles and moods.

On Flickr, people can post comments about your pictures (and you can comment about their pictures). Some of my Contacts have never commented about my pictures, even though I had commented about theirs — maybe they believe that if you have nothing good to say, you should say nothing. Others are quite generous with their comments — these individuals I have grown to consider my friends, even though I have never met them, and

The Prosecutor reviewed the file, and agreed to a dismissal, subject to the police officer's concurrence. Municipal Prosecutors often check with the Police Officer who issued the tickets before agreeing to a plea bargain or a dismissal — this is to make sure that there are no unapparent issues involved in the case. About an hour later, when I went to check on the status of this matter with the Prosecutor, I was told that it will be a dismissal as the Police Office had retired from the force during the intervening years, and therefore the State could not prove its case (i.e., there was not witness available to testify on behalf of the prosecution).

I then waited with Mr. Zawadzki a short period of time in the courtroom before the case was called – once it was called, the process was very quick. The judge looked at the file, confirmed that the charges were dismissed, and we were out of there.

So much for ancient history – now back to the present.

Mr. Zawadzki was calling me, very upset. He wanted reassurance that he had done the right thing. Apparently, he now drives a truck for short hauls. His boss called him early this morning and asked him to drive over to his boss' house and pick up a body – a human body – and drive it to the warehouse, where it will be transferred to a long-haul truck and then be transported to Florida for burial. Mr. Zawadzki thought that this may not be legal, and refused to do so. However, he called me to inquire if he did the right thing, and to put me on standby – if he gets fired for refusing to transport the body, he wants to sue his boss.

I assure Mr. Zawadzki that I will help him in any way that I can. I also reassure him as to his decision not to transport the body – I tell him that if he were to transport the body he may be participating in an illegal act, and he may be destroying evidence, and may get involved in something much more sinister than it appears on the surface. After our conversation, Mr. Zawadzki sounds reassured and we leave it that he will call me if he gets fired.

After the call I reflect on the amazing unpredictability of my job. I just never know who will call me next and what kind of unbelievable problem they will have.

Before going back to work, I check out the status of my Flickr account. Flickr is a website where people subscribe for either free or paid accounts. The difference between free and paid accounts is the limitations of how many pictures the account holder can post per

in most cases do not even know what they look like (unfortunately, many people do not post their portrait).

I often wonder what these friends are like – I am generally certain of their gender, but I wonder: Are they young or old? Are they white or black? Are they nice or not? I have a group of Contacts that are women who consistently generate many comments to their latest postings – I am envious of the attention that they attract, and I consider it unfair competition for affection when they post provocative pictures of themselves; what am I supposed to do – if I posted a naked picture of myself I can imagine all kinds of people breaking out into convulsions and displays of expulsions that would put the famous scene in *The Exorcist* to shame.

Once, I even sent invitations to a few of these Contacts (those that appeared to reside close to me; who may be of a compatible age; and whose comments and pictures give me pleasure) to also join Yelp and become my “Friends” there — alas, no one responded to my invitation.

Because of the number of pictures I have posted on Flickr, I needed to organize them in some logical way. I decided to create Albums – generally one per year (i.e., the 2007 Album; the 2006 Album; etc.). Within each Album, I have Sets – these are generally a collection of pictures from a particular event (e.g., picture taken on Christmas Eve; or pictures taken during a particular trip to New York City; etc.).

As I look at some of my pictures, I come across a picture of my Father’s grave. I visually stop there and pay my respects. In Loving Memory; George Kos; 1923 – 1984. I still remember quite vividly the time of his death.

I was the Director of Finance for a major telecommunications company. I was sent to Los Angeles, California, to negotiate the sale of one of the company’s buildings (because the company was experiencing cash flow needs, senior management engaged in an aggressive program of selling company-owned buildings throughout the United States, and then leasing them back for long term fixed lease prices). While I was in Los Angeles, I was notified that my Father had suffered a heart attack. However, when I called my Mom and his office, I was reassured that it was a minor heart attack and that he would be fine. I was

told that he expected to be back home in a day or two, and that I should continue with my business – if anything changes, I would be told.

That day I kept debating what I should do – my business obligations required me to stay a day longer, and the cost of changing plans was substantial. In between meetings I had some time, so I took a bus tour to Malibu — I distinctly remember sitting in the bus, wondering about my Father, not paying attention to the sights. In a way, I felt his spirit was with me on that bus. When I returned to my hotel room, the message light on my telephone was lit. There was a messages from Chris – my Father had died just a few hours ago. I later learned that he suffered a second massive heart attack in the hospital; and the subsequent autopsy report revealed that there was blood in the pericardium; i.e., as I understand it, his heart burst.

I called my Mother, and spoke with her a bit; I assured her that I will try to get back as soon as possible. I then called the people that I was scheduled to meet with — I decided not to share my sorrow; but I did ask them to book me the next available flight home right after our meeting. I packed my bags, and went to the meeting with all my stuff. I managed to get through the meeting; although, I cannot remember anything about it. From the meeting, I went to the airport and took the red-eye back to New York. From there I went straight to the City and met my Mom to help her with some banking business.

I had experienced death in the family several years earlier, in 1979, when Chris's Father and Grandmother died several months apart; but this was even closer, this was my own Father. Because my parents' families are in Poland, I was spared the grief of the death of other family members; but now the grief was here.

The Funeral Mass was held at our Parish Church; and my Mom decided on a cemetery in Queens, a few subway stops from her house.

My Father was born in Warszawa, Poland. He had one sister, Teresa. His parents were Zygmunt and Janina. Zygmunt was fifteen years older than Janina and had been her high school teacher. Later, Zygmunt became a military officer in the army of the Russian Empire, participating in the Russo-Japanese War and World War I. After his military career, Zygmunt became a court official responsible for the distribution of bankruptcy and other types of estates.

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, my father was sixteen and his sister was thirteen. Their wartime-duties included keeping watch on the roof of their three story building, and after each German bombing-run check for unexploded bombs and anti-aircraft shells, and to help extinguish fires. Later, when he finished high school, my Father enrolled in a two year technical school to study ship building; he did this because under German occupation, Poles were not allowed to attend university. He completed his studies there in 1942.

In 1943, my Father was caught on the German/Swiss border, trying to cross into Switzerland, from where he intended to hook up with the Polish Army. For this crime, he was sent to jail, and then to the Dachau Concentration Camp for political prisoners, near Munich, Germany.

During his captivity, my Father was responsible for emptying latrines with a bucket — this is a job he volunteered for because he believed that it minimized his availability for other tasks, many of which featured the return of fewer prisoners than the number that set out to get the task accomplished. During his ordeal, my Father also did not discriminate in his assistance to sick fellow-inmates; this eventually saved his life. When my Father fell victim to the typhoid fever, the Russian prisoners took care of him, keeping him alive until they were liberated by the American Army in April 1945.

After he was liberated, and regained his health, my Father traveled to Belgium, where he enrolled in an Engineering School in Liege. When his scholarship expired, he applied to a prestigious private school, the Gramme Institute in Liege, where he was granted a scholarship and finished his studies in 1947 as a Civil Engineer.

As a student in Belgium, while waiting to register for school, he was sitting on a bench with his friend, people watching. He spotted a young woman passing by, turned to his friend, and announced: I am going to marry her. This brash hope was dashed after he introduced himself, and later learned that this beauty intended to go to medical school, and then become a nun.

With time, however, he was successful in his persuasion, and they married in Brussels, Belgium, in May 1946. When he was finished with his studies, my Father got a job in Brussels as an engineer, where he worked for approximately a year.

Seeking to find a permanent home, my parents applied to emigrate to the United States of America; South Africa; and Argentina. For entry to the United States they had to wait for their turn in the quota system; to go to South Africa they needed to demonstrate substantial bank assets; however, to go to Argentina, they did not need to prove anything, were immediately welcomed, and their cargo ship passage was free. In November 1948, after a three week sea voyage from Le Havre, France (stopping in the Canary Islands; Brazil and Uruguay), they arrived in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Initially, my parents were in a hotel for displaced persons. Having received a letter of recommendation from his former employer in Belgium, my Father was quick to gain employment in Buenos Aires. After a month, my parents moved out of the hotel for displaced persons and moved into a guest house run by a Polish couple in Devoto, a suburb of Buenos Aires.

After they became my parents on January 9, 1949, they rented a house together with another couple in Haedo, a neighboring suburb; however, this became too expensive for that other couple, so they moved out; after which the three of us moved to a rented house in Ramos Mejia, another suburb.

After working in Buenos Aires as a Civil Engineer for six years, my Father started his own construction firm in 1954. I remember when he took me to one of his construction sites, a skyscraper, and I was taken up many floors into the sky, and he tried to explain to me how a swimming pool was going to be built on the roof. I could not fathom the concept of a swimming pool on a roof — a swimming pool had to be on or in the ground; wouldn't all the water spill out of it on the roof? These may not be logical questions now; but they were very perplexing then.

When I was about six years old, I remember being in the back yard with my Father. Apparently Argentina was in the middle of a revolution. When many airplanes flew slowly over our house, my Father explained to me that they were bombers, flying to bomb downtown Buenos Aires. Some minutes (or hours) later, the airplanes were flying in the opposite direction — my Father explained to me that now they were returning to their bases, much lighter because they had dropped their bombs, and therefore could also fly faster.

I also remember my Father taking me to downtown Buenos Aires, showing me the damage that had been done by the bombs and the gunfire to the downtown buildings. I remember putting my hand in the holes that dotted a granite building. I do not believe that I was scared, and I do not remember my feelings at that time; however, those images are very vivid in my mind.

Similarly, during some other revolution or political upheaval, I remember being with my Mother in Buenos Aires, crossing a street. In the middle of the intersection there was a machine gun nest, surrounded by sandbags. As we were preparing to cross the street, I remember my Mother telling me (perhaps one or more of my siblings were with me) that if the machine gun start firing, we are to hit the ground and pretend to be dead; but, to make sure that nothing bad happens, we must cross the street very quickly — now I am curious as to accuracy of this memory, and when did it occur?

My memories are not limited to war. I remember the great flood, when I had to swim home from school. In Argentina, I attended a public grammar school in grades one through four. The school was about half an hour walk from my house. On this particular day (which I have no idea when that was), a torrential rain fell while I was on my way home from school. Because there were no sewers on the paved street that I was walking on, downhill, the water quickly rose above my knees. I remember leaning forward into a swimming breast stroke position and “swimming” (probably, walking on my knees) downhill toward the intersection where I would have to turn to go to my house. That is all I remember — I must have been some sight for my Mother, especially that the last two blocks before reaching my house were not paved.

As a child, I spent a lot of time making and flying kites, and swatting and collecting butterflies. To make a kite I needed a large double sheet of newspaper, string, glue, bamboo cane and a long strip of rag. The bamboo cane needed to be as long as the long side of the newspaper sheet. I would step on the dried out bamboo cane to splinter it into several strips – I needed two strips, from which I would make a cross (the short strip would be equal to the width of the newspaper sheet). I would make the glue from mixing baking flower with water.

When I had all the parts together, I would lay the newspaper flat on the ground. On top of the newspaper, I would lay the bamboo cross, which had a string running tightly from the end of each extremity of the cross to the next closest extremity. I would fold the triangle ends of the newspaper over the string, and glue it down. The kite would then be turned over, and I would tie the long strip of cloth to the bottom of the bamboo cross. Then I would tie a loose string from the end of the right side of the cross to the left side of the cross, allowing the string to stretch out about two feet above the kite; then I would tie another string, from the top of the kite to the middle of the string that is running from the right side to the left side. To this point of intersection of the strings, I would tie another shorter string, which would be tied (after passing through a hole in the newspaper) to the intersection of the bamboo cross. Finally, the point of intersection of the strings in front of the kite would be tied to a spool of string, hundreds of feet long. Now the kite was ready.

I would go to the end of the street with one of my siblings or a playmate. Check for the wind conditions, with the intention of running into the wind. My “assistant” would hold the kite up, perpendicular to the ground, as high as possible. I would extend the string from my spool about twenty five feet, go as much forward as was necessary to take all the slack out of the string between me and the kite. Then, I would simultaneously yell out to my “assistant” to let go of the kite, and I would run as fast as I could forward into the wind.

If the kite had been constructed properly, it would quickly rise up to the sky. Once the wind caught the kite, I would slowly release more string from my spool, allowing the kite to continue climbing up, higher and higher, until it became visually very small. Although it never happened, I worried that a bird would crash into my kite. A much more real obstacle was other kites, and electric wires running along the street. We could play this way for hours.

Butterflies, hundreds of butterflies, thousands of butterflies — in all colors and various sizes. When it was butterfly season, they would fly down the street in giant swarms. When we spotted them, we would run to the nearest tree and break off a branch; then we would run into the swarm of butterflies, swinging our branches through the air. With each swing we would hit many butterflies, which would fall to the ground, unable to fly. We would collect them, and mount them in shoe boxes.

When it was too hot to run around, I enjoyed playing marbles. I had a big box of marbles that I would carry with me to the site of the competition. Competitions would be held on the street, on areas of dry mud. A proper field would be about five yards in radius, extending from an indentation that we would make with the heel of our shoe. I no longer remember the rules of these games, but I know that there were several of them. All of them involved the shooting of a marble with your fingers, aiming it at your opponent's marbles, and somehow involving the whole in the center of the playing field. As I remember it now, I was pretty good at these games.

When we felt artistic, my siblings and I would organize theater plays for our friends. Our friends would sit on the brick fence in front of our house, as our audience. My brother, sisters and I would perform on the window sill to my sisters' room. These theatric events always drew a large crowd (about five to ten spectators).

The sport to play in Argentina was football (American soccer). I was very proud of my skills – by the time that we left Argentina, when I was ten year old, I was a successful challenger to sixteen year old players. I suppose that if we had stayed in Argentina, I would have become a world famous soccer player.

When we had nothing better to do, we would shoot arrows at each other — until I remember pulling back on my bow, and releasing my arrow. It flew straight, but not where I had intended. It hit my sister Anna in the eye, and I saw her eye flow out of her head. I was terrified. I was so sorry, and I did not know what to do. She was crying and we all ran to our Mother. I kept apologizing, and she kept on crying. Later, to my great relief, I learned that it was not her eye that flowed from her head, but it was her tears that mixed with the blood from the wound that I caused in her face, close to her eye. I don't believe that I shot any of my sisters after that.

While reminiscing about my childhood in Argentina, I need to go into several additional incidents – the horse, the cow, my broken collar bone, the wind storm before Christmas and my collection of train tickets.

The horse. I was returning from school, crossing from the paved street into the dirt road around the corner from our house, in front of the pharmacy. I saw this horse drawn wagon standing before the drugstore. The owner of the wagon was standing in front of the

horse, pulling him and beating him with a whip. Suddenly the horse buckled and fell to the ground. His master continued to beat him, and then gave up, as the horse just lay there. The man went away, and returned later with another horse. He untied the rigging off the horse; attached a new horse to the wagon, and drove away. Left behind was this white horse, laying on the road, dead, in front of the drug store.

We spent the rest of the day, and the next day, jumping all over the horse, and sliding down it belly. But then we were forbidden from this activity, and a few days later the horse became bloated and started to stink. We would walk around the dead animal taking a wide path around, trying to avoid the stink — I do not know how the drug store owner coped with this mess in front of her store. Eventually, some officials arrived, and dragged the horse onto a cart, and took it away.

The cow. Dead animals were not limited to horses — there was an abandoned forest about half an hour down the dirt road. We used to go there sometimes (I know not for what, now). One day we became aware of a terrible smell — investigation revealed a dead cow in the brush. I believe that after that, our Mom would not take us there any more.

Although there were no ranches in our neighborhood, from time to time Gauchos would guide a herd of cattle down the street. Whenever that happened, we had to stay inside our house. Apparently the cows would get disoriented (or disobedient) sometimes, and would run wild down the street. Once a cow stopped by our front sidewalk and started eating our front shrubs — my Mom went out with a broom and banished the beast.

We also had to come into the house when packs of wild dogs would come into the neighborhood — I do not know how our parents knew of this danger, as we did not have a telephone or television. But somehow the word would spread from neighbor to neighbor, and we would be called into the house until the dogs left.

When we were stuck at home, I would listen to the radio. I would lay down on the floor, face up, with my eyes closed. On the radio we listened to various shows, such a Fury (the horse); Tom Mix (the cowboy); and other adventure series that I no longer remember. I enjoyed this activity very much, as it allowed my imagination to wander around an unreal universe.

My broke collar bone. That was very painful.

My Mom was washing the floor tiles on the front patio. We, the kids, would take turns running down the tiles, and sliding on the wet floor toward the wall. During one of those runs, I slipped prematurely, fell back and felt a very sharp pain in my upper chest. Several blocks from our house there was an automobile garage owned by a Polish man. My Mother made arrangements for the man to drive her and me to the hospital (I now wonder what she did with the rest of the kids – I guess they were dispatched to the neighbors). In the hospital, I remember that they put wet bandages around my chest and my shoulder, which quickly became very hard.

That evening I continued to be in a lot of pain; and I was very angry. To this day I do not know why, but I remember that I took my anger out on my Father. In the evening, when he returned home from work, my Mom told him about my accident. I was pretending to be asleep, although I was not. He came over to me and tried to comfort me; but for some reason I ignored him — to this day, I very much regret that.

The wind storm. Christmas in Argentina occurs during the height of summer. This particular year, my parents decorated the big evergreen in our back yard as our Christmas Tree. But that Christmas Eve a wind storm blew through the neighborhood, and all the Christmas decorations were stripped from the tree and lay smashed all over our back yard and patio. My Mom collected all the broken ornamental balls, broke them down into smaller pieces and using three pieces of a small mirror, made a kaleidoscope out of a paper tube. This was absolute magic — all those colors and all those shapes! Now, I wonder how she did this?

The train tickets. The main mode of transportation was trains. The nearest train station was about forty five minutes walking distance from home, but we could take a bus to it also. To get on the train we had to purchase tickets — these were colorful strips of cardboard, about half an inch wide and one and a half inches long. Every station had its own color, so there was a vast variety of tickets. When a train would pull into the station, we would go running after the conductor, and convince him to give us the used tickets in his pockets. We also collected the abandoned used tickets on the sidewalk and the train station. I remember that at one time I had quite a collection of these tickets.

I see my office front door opening — its Mr. Lewicki. I close down my Flickr site, and welcome him into my office. About a year or so ago, I represented him in the purchase of a house. After some initial pleasantries, he tells me that he is in trouble. I ask him to sit down and I listen attentively. He takes out various pieces of paper, and starts:

My car broke down; it was a piece of junk. So I went to a used car lot, and traded it in for this newer piece of junk. They gave me a \$300 credit for my old car, and I paid an additional \$3,600 in cash for the new car. They gave me the Title to the car, and told me to go to the Motor Vehicles Department to register the car.

At the Motor Vehicles Office they looked at the Title, and told me that the previous owner had to come with me. I then noticed that the Title was not from the used car dealer but from two individuals who I did not know. So, I went back to the car dealer, and they told me not to worry about it, and gave me a paper Dealer's Plate to stick in my rear window. The car dealer took back the Title that was rejected by the Motor Vehicles Department, and told me to go back to Motor Vehicles with the Dealer's Plates to register my new car. Once again my attempt failed — the only thing that they would accept is the original Title signed by the owners, with their certification of authenticity.

When I returned to the dealer, he told me that he would take care of it. I kept calling him, and he did not take my calls. Now, the Dealer's Plate has expired, and I don't have a car, and I don't have money. Can you write the dealer a nasty letter and scare him into fixing this mess.

In reply to my question, Mr. Lewicki tells me that the car is parked in his driveway. I give him more bad news. If the police notice that the car's Dealer's Plate has expired he may get a ticket for having an unregistered vehicle, and if the car is uninsured, he may lose his driving privileges. Under no circumstance is he to drive the car — if it needs to be moved, get a tow truck to move it. I agree to represent him, but he needs to provide a \$1,500 retainer — this is a serious problem for him, but as soon as he receives his Christmas bonus, he will return.

I explain to Mr. Lewicki that in my opinion writing letters is a waste of time — the best way to get action is to file a lawsuit, seeking damages, potentially treble damages, and attorney's fees. He does not want to go to court. He just wants his problem to be solved.

I feel so sorry for him, but I do not do magic. I protect people's rights in a court of law. In a case such as this, the faster he files suit, the faster he will reach his desired resolution. But, I am aware that he has no money; but I have no money either — and it costs money to file a lawsuit; there are court filing fees; service of process fees; and other costs. I will gladly help, but the battle must be properly funded. I hope that he returns soon; or that somehow the dealer is able to fix the problem (although I do not believe that this will happen, since Mr. Lewicki already tried to reach out to the previous owners of his car, and could not locate them).

When Mr. Lewicki leaves my office, I notice that I received a fax from Tom Smart. Tom is an attorney, representing the seller of a house that my clients, Jan Wladyga and his wife Krystyna Chora, want to purchase. Jan Wladyga is a builder. In this horrible real estate market, he was able to negotiate the price of the house down from \$425,000 to \$375,000. In the Realtor prepared Contract, it states that the Seller will make arrangements with the Gas Company to install a gas meter and provide a gas line to the house (currently, the house is heated with electric heat).

His letter-fax starts off with those dreaded words: I disapprove the Contract. I forward this Disapproval Letter to my clients, and ask them to call me to schedule an appointment so that we can discuss it in detail. This reminds me that I need to attend to the Mlodowski real estate deal, the couple that I met through Kaz Napojny. I review their Contract, and write a review letter addressed to the attorney for the seller. In my letter, I clarify some issues that were not dealt to my satisfaction in the Contract; I add terms that will focus the risks of the deal; and I delete terms that are clearly disadvantageous to my clients.

To focus the risks of the deal, I include terms such as: The Sellers warrant that there is no underground oil tanks on the property. Often, these requested warranties are objected to by the attorney for the sellers, but I include these terms so as to focus my clients on the issues that can be so very important (and costly) some time in the future.

The term that I always delete from a Realtor prepared contract is where the Realtor inserted language providing for the payment of a commission even if the deal falls apart. All attorneys believe that commissions are earned only if there is a closing.

After discussing my proposed letter with my clients, I finalize it, adding any concerns that they may have. I always end the letter with a request to extend the Attorney Review Period until such time that we have a mutually agreeable contract, or until such time that it is decided that the parties cannot agree on the terms, and therefore are ready to walk away from the transaction.

A salesman walks into my office, with a deal of a lifetime. He works for a local distribution company, and they are offering a special deal to all the merchants on the street — men's cologne; how many would I like? — Thank you, but I do not use cologne. — Well, Christmas is coming soon; how many can I sell you as gifts? — Thank you, but I do not want any at this time. — That's OK, boss. By the way, we are also selling these great toys (as he takes out some stuffed animal from his bag) ... — Thank you, but I am NOT interested in buying ANYTHING at this time. — OK; have a very nice day.

As he leaves, I wonder if any of these salesman ever make any money. In the course of a week, I must receive about ten such visits; offering me new and improved telephone service; carpets; toys; and just about anything else imaginable.

Thursday, three weeks later

We were required to be in court for 6 p.m. My client, Robert Jura, and I are ready — and he continues to deny that he is guilty of driving under the influence of alcohol. However, as part of the “discovery” materials, I received from the prosecutor a copy of a video tape that clearly depicts my client in an unfavorable light: he cannot stand straight; he is unable to walk in a straight line; he pokes his eye when he aims for his nose; ... this just looks hopeless.

The courtroom is crowded. My client sits with his wife on one of the audience benches. I choose to sit with the other attorneys much closer to the judge. The judge does not come out to the bench until it is forty five minutes past the hour — reminds me of the army: hurry up and wait. There are children crying; people are impatient; many are exchanging pointers about the law with their fellow citizens; and the police officers congregate in the first two rows, some of them in their undercover dress, looking worse than anyone else in the courtroom.

The judge spends his first few moments with us reading the relevant rules and opportunities: if you do not have an attorney, and you want one, you can apply for a public defender. If you do not like the decision of the court, you can appeal. You must keep quiet because the proceedings are being recorded.

The first order of business is the processing of the prisoners. When the word goes out that the judge is ready for them, the side door to the courtroom opens; two big police officers are readily available as a group of men is let into the courtroom, all chained together by their hands and feet. Following the men, several women are also brought in, in similar chains. They all stand before the judge, and each is addressed by the judge individually. The accusations against them are verbalized, and bail is set. Once this process is finished, they all shuffle out, after which, some will take advantage of the jail facilities, while others will await the love of their family and friends, demonstrated in the payment of their bail.

Next are the guilty pleas — one by one they step up to the microphone, announce their guilt, and are assessed the fines and costs related to their offences. Many of these

people are represented by counsel, and the pleas reflect plea bargains negotiated in the interest of minimizing the financial damage to the culprit, and clearing the court calendar as fast as possible so that justice can be administered swiftly.

Then the judge is ready to hear the motions for an adjournment – all kinds of excuses as to why justice should not be administered this evening: I am still looking for an attorney; my most important witness could not come today; I am sick and need time to recover; we are negotiating a civil settlement, after which all criminal charges will be withdrawn; my dog ate my papers; etc.

Finally, the judge is ready to proceed to trial: two are scheduled for tonight; the other trial will be heard first; and when that finishes, it will be our turn.

It is almost 10:30 in the evening, and a discussion evolves as to whether we should proceed or should we adjourn to another day. In favor of adjournment is the fact that everyone is tired, and the court staff and officers want to go home; on the other side of the argument is the fact that an interpreter has been waiting to assist my client in this matter, and the fact that we have been waiting for this moment since 6 p.m.

The judge decides to proceed. Ashton Harris, the prosecutor, call the State's first witness – Officer Sanchez.

After some preliminary questions concerning how long he has been a policeman, and his training, attention turns to the night in question. "Please describe what you observed." — I was dispatched to a scene of an accident. When I arrived, a car was propped against a tree, with the front slightly elevated, and dented around the tree. Sitting on the stoop was the defendant, and pacing back and forth was his wife. The defendant was bleeding from his forehead, so I called for an ambulance; however, he refused any treatment other than the cleaning of his forehead, and the application of a band aid. I asked him for his driver's license, registration and proof of insurance. He took out his wallet, and gave me his license and registration; his wife retrieved the insurance card from the glove compartment. Neither of them spoke any English, but I saw that his eyes were blood shot, and I smelled alcohol on his breath.

After the tow truck arrived, I arrested the defendant on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol; then, the defendant's wife said she would walk home. His car was

towed away, and I transported the defendant to the station house. Once there, I asked him to walk a straight line that is marked on the floor – he took one step forward, and then swayed to the right, almost falling to the ground. He was not able to walk straight, even though I gave him another chance. By then, Sargent Martinez was ready with the Breathalyzer Machine.

I read to the defendant his Miranda Rights (the right to remain silent, etc.), and I informed him that if he refuses or fails to blow properly into the Breathalyzer Machine, he will be charged with the refusal. The defendant blew into the machine as he was asked, and then again when the test was repeated.

And what was the readings from the Machine? — Objection; this officer has not demonstrated his qualifications to interpret such readings. — Judge: Officer, who operated the Machine? — Sargent Martinez did; I guarded the defendant. — Judge: Mr. Prosecutor, you will have to call Sargent Martinez to testify about the readings.

One of the officers in the courtroom dashes out; and the prosecutor explains that he went to see if Sargent Martinez is on duty tonight. The judge calls for a brief recess.

After about ten minutes we are ready to proceed. The prosecutor does not have any additional questions for Officer Sanchez; but I do: “Please describe my client’s appearance at the scene of the accident.” — As I said before, he was dazed; he smelled of alcohol; his eyes were bloodshot; and he was bleeding from his forehead. — Did you notice a crack on the front windshield of the car? — No. — No further questions, Your Honor.

OK, you can step down. Next witness. — The State calls Sargent Martinez.

After he is sworn-in, Mr. Harris starts again with preliminary questions regarding the Sargent’s training, experience and duties. Mr. Harris then proceeds to ask whether Sargent Martinez is qualified to operate the Breathalyzer Machine. — Objection; his qualifications need to be evidenced by a certificate, not the officer’s opinion of himself. — Mr. Harris: Sargent, do you have your Operator’s Certificate with you. — Yes I do. And at this time he hands a piece of paper to the prosecutor. — Your Honor; may I see this piece of paper that the officer handed to the prosecutor. — Go ahead; show it to him Mr. Harris.

After a quick inspection of the paper, I continue: Your Honor, I object. This is a photocopy of something that looks like a certificate, but it is not the real thing. If the State

intends to rely on a Certificate, they must produce the real Certificate, not something they claim to be a good substitute. Judge: Where is the original Certificate? Sgt. Martinez: It is in the locker. May I go get it? — Judge: go ahead; but don't take too long; it is getting late.

During the next several minutes I observe much activity within the police officer ranks. Apparently the locker that contains the Certificate has been locked for the night, and the officer who has the key already went home. Telephone calls are placed; and eventually a disgruntled officer comes into the courtroom, clearly having dressed hurriedly for the occasion, and brings the Certificate. Some minutes later, the Judge returns to the bench.

OK, Mr. Kos, are we ready to proceed? — Your Honor, I was shown the Certificate, and I withdraw my objection. — OK, Mr. Harris, proceed.

After describing the procedures that were followed, Sgt. Martinez testifies that the Machine readings were 1.8 and 1.9 (clearly above the 1.0 reading that is legally conclusively presumptive of driving under the influence). During my cross-examination, I try to shake him on some of the technical details of the procedures followed and more importantly the fact that the two readings, taken just minutes apart, did not yield the same result. All my arguments are not resonating with the judge — everything looks very hopeless for my client. When we are done with Sgt. Martinez, the prosecutor announces that he is done with his case. The judge turns to me, and tells me to call my first witness.

I ask for a moment to consult with my client. I explain that I will not call him as a witness because I do not want to give him the opportunity to incriminate himself. Similarly, I will not call his wife as a witness, because, having heard the State's case, I do not believe that she can contribute anything meaningful to the defense. My client leaves it up to me. I turn to the judge and announce that I will not be calling any witnesses. The prosecutor looks at me like I am crazy. The judge looks astonished; but says: OK, closing arguments please.

Mr. Harris recounts all the testimony adduced during the trial; and concludes that my client is clearly guilty. When it is my turn, I simply state that there has been NO evidence presented that would prove beyond a reasonable doubt that my client was guilty of driving under the influence of alcohol. (I can see that the prosecutor is outraged at my silly

conclusory statement, in light of his well presented case and the 1.8 and 1.9 Breathalyzer Machine readings.)

Judge: Having heard all the evidence and having considered the arguments of counsel, I find that the Defendant is not guilty. [The silence in the courtroom is noticeable.] I have heard no evidence that proves that the defendant was driving the car. When Officer Sanchez arrived at the scene of the accident he found two individuals in the vicinity of the damaged car, the defendant and his wife. The defendant was injured and appeared drunk; his wife was unhurt and did not appear to be under the influence of any alcohol. I understand that Officer Sanchez deduced that the defendant was a drunk driver who drove his car into a tree; however, that is not proof. I did not receive any evidence from which I can conclude that the defendant was the driver. His wife could have been the driver; and for that matter, a third person, unseen by the Officer, could have been the driver.

Prosecutor: Your Honor; may I recall Officer Sanchez. Judge: No. Its now almost 1 a.m. and everyone wants to go to sleep. I am sorry, but the case is dismissed. Good night.

That evening (or morning) the translator's opinion of my abilities were greatly enhanced — it actuality, I (actually, my client) was just very lucky. Notwithstanding my luck, I went to sleep that night not feeling very good — the conflict of the adversarial system and social good; when I represent someone, I, as a human being, want to win; however, I realize that winning may be losing, as in this case, where a drunk gets to drive again.

No system of justice is perfect; and ours in particular. It is believed, however, that through the adversarial system, when two adversaries do battle in the arena of the courtroom, an approximation of justice is achieved when the fact finders (either a jury or a judge) decide what probably happened based on the evidence presented.

In a civil suit, the standard of proof is “by the prepondence of the evidence.” That means, just lightly more than perfectly even; i.e., the plaintiff (the person who is suing) must prove its case just so slightly more convincingly than the alternative view. In a criminal trial, the standard of proof is “beyond a reasonable doubt.” This means that the prosecutor must convince the fact finder of the guilt of the defendant beyond a reasonable doubt — not beyond any doubt; but beyond any reasonable doubt. A difficult burden of proof, but criminals are convicted every day.

Friday

So much has happened in the last few weeks; but my novel, although it has progressed, is certainly not finished. I still need to write an additional 10,000 words by midnight tonight in order to become a NaNoWriMo Winner — will I accomplish this? I hope that my novel does not offend or hurt anyone, and I hope that my family understands that I am truly sorry for all the times that I have wronged them. Many of those wrongs were unintentional; but nonetheless, they hurt, I now realize. My parents, in particular; how did they survive me — thank God, they knew so little about my many transgressions (this may alarm my Mom, as she thought that she already know of so many).

My wife, Chris, is certainly an angel. I think that others recognize that in her even more than I do, but that is because I get frustrated with not getting my own way, and others are amazed how she copes with it. My children — well; good luck. They are stuck with me, and hopefully they will be better human beings, learning from my few successes, and not repeating my many failures.

As for myself — I hope that I am able to be a good friend to myself. I hope that I continue to appreciate life, its beauty and its richness; and that I can share my life through my pictures and other artistic and professional expressions.

Oh my God! Chris just brought me a letter that I recently received (but already forgot) from my aunt in Poland, in which she give me some information about our family.

Regarding my paternal grandfather (her father) she writes: He was born in the settlement known as Sereje (in Lithuania), and was baptized in Olita (Alytus, Lithuania), after my great-grandparents moved their pharmacy from Sereje to Olita. His father (my great grandfather) had been a pharmacy student at the Main University in Warszawa. After his marriage in 1874; he moved to Lithuania. The family returned to Warszawa sometime prior to 1886 — that is when the first family grave is dated in Warszawa's Powazki Cemetery. My grandfather graduated from the Industrial/Technical School in Lodz, Poland. In 1900, he took part in the Chinese campaign as part of the Russian army; and in 1904-05 he participated in the Russo-Japanese War.

From 1906 to 1908 my grandfather was a “nature” teacher at the school for women in Lodz. One of his students was his future wife (my grandmother). From 1908 to 1912 my grandfather was a law student at the University in Saint Petersburg, where he worked in the International Bank from 1912 to 1914, ending his career as the Director of the Bank.

From 1914 to 1918, my grandfather was an artillery officer in the Russian army. During that time, he received all the commendations due to an officer for actions that were given by the high command. When he returned to Poland in 1922, he attempted to join the Polish army, but without success. He then married his former student. From 1922 to 1930, my grandfather was a bank inspector for the Bank of Commerce and Industry. Then, he moved to Kalisz, where he worked as a Court Officer until 1939.

In 1939 he was not drafted; however, during the siege of Warsaw, he participated as a civilian volunteer. He organized a unit of volunteer recruits in Sadyba — their job was to collect guns from the dead and redistribute them among the remaining defenders. He also supervised the construction of barricades on Hoza Street, and organized anti-aircraft surveillance. He was wounded by shrapnel from a tank, and lost hearing in one ear, while transmitting orders as a courier across Marszalkowska Street. Because of these wounds and the hearing loss, after the war, he was classified as a disabled veteran.

During the occupation of Poland by the Nazis, my grandparents took an active role in saving Jews. Among others, my grandfather brought two sisters and their mother from the Ghetto. The mother was with a Catholic family in Milanow – she died in 1942, and was buried there. One of the daughters now lives in Canada. Also, until the uprising, my grandparents hid in their apartment on Hoza Street two Jewish girls from Bilgoraja, who were cousins. One of them died after the liberation, the other moved with her husband to America. [For their efforts, my grandparents are listed on the website: Polish Righteous - Those Who Risked Their Lives, compiled and edited by Anna Poray (see: <http://www.savingjews.org/>).]

After the war (World War II), my grandfather became a certified Russian translator. He was to retire on April 1, 1951, but he died on March 31, 1951. [Because my brother Tom was born on April 5, 1951, it is family lore that Tom is my grandfather’s replacement here on earth.]

So much for the past; now back to the present.

On my way to the office I listen to the final installment of the “Bridge Of Sighs,” by Richard Russo — it is a wonderful book; and I look forward to listening to it again, soon.

In the mail I receive a check for a substantial amount of money from the Estate of Jan Towar – offered in satisfaction of my claim for unpaid attorney’s fees. I represented Mr. Towar several years ago; at that time he was 92 years old. Mr. Towar was a friend of Kaz Napojny, the friendly Realtor. I remember that Kaz called me one day and told me that a friend of his was declared incompetent by his daughter, but he is not incompetent, and the daughter did this because she is afraid that he will change his Will. Per my suggestion, Kaz came to my office that same day, together with Mr. Towar, and a stack of court papers.

Mr. Towar was Slovak — he understood me when I spoke to him in Polish; but I had difficulties understanding him when he spoke to me in Slovak. Fortunately, Kaz spoke Slovak, and thus could assist as a translator for me.

After reviewing the papers, I called the courthouse to check on the status of this matter. To my surprise, I was told that a hearing was held that morning, and that Mr. Towar had been declared incompetent, without any opposition. I told the Court Clerk that I have been retained by Mr. Towar, and that I will be in court with Mr. Towar as soon as I can draft the appropriate court papers. The Clerk later called, and told me that the Judge that heard the matter that morning is not available today, but that she will hear me tomorrow at 9 a.m.

I was glad for this delay, because it gave me the opportunity to carefully consider what needed to be done, and what papers needed to be prepared. The key document would have to be an Affidavit from Mr. Towar, setting forth how he was not given notice of that morning’s hearing; how he was mistreated by the attorney that had been appointed by the Court to represent him; and that he has retained me to represent him in this matter. He confirmed that he had over \$400,000 in three bank accounts; and he was the owner of his four family house where he lived with his tenants. His wife died fifteen years ago, and ever since then, his only daughter had been trying to get his money and his house.

After I prepared the papers, I met with Mr. Towar again, and confirmed that I understood his story correctly. He then signed the Affidavit; and I faxed a copy of all the papers to the attorney for the daughter (the one who initiated the incompetency proceeding),

and to the attorney that had been assigned by the Court to represent my client. I also sent by messenger the original set of papers for filing with the Court.

My legal research revealed that the duty of an attorney representing an alleged incompetent person is to advocate on behalf of such person the position that they maintain; i.e., if the person does not concede their incompetence, then it is the attorney's job to gather whatever evidence and arguments that would support that position, even if the opposing evidence is overwhelming.

In Mr. Towar's case, the attorney assigned to represent him only spoke with the psychiatrist that was opining as to the incompetence, and did not try to find any expert that may present an opposing view. This attorney also limited his interaction with my client by meeting with him in a nursing home, without any prior warning, without an interpreter, and without a common language. Apparently, Mr. Towar understood that his daughter wanted to take his belongings, and started screaming that he will not allow her to do so — the attorney then concluded that Mr. Towar was uncontrollably "out of it," and so told the Court at the hearing.

I arrived in court next morning at the appointed time. My adversary, and my client's former attorney were already there, and so was my client's daughter and her husband. Shortly after that, to everyone's (except mine) surprise, Mr. Towar came in and sat next to me. Just then, the Judge came in and sat at her bench.

The Judge informed everyone that she had entered an order declaring Mr. Towar incompetent because the petition was unopposed. However, once she learned that in fact there was opposition, she vacated the order, and was ready to proceed with today's hearing. However, my adversary requested an adjournment so that we could engage in appropriate "discovery." My client's former attorney was officially dismissed, and the matter was rescheduled for a date a month later. The one condition the Court did impose was that Mr. Towar was required to stay at the nursing home where he currently was living.

Fortunately, Mr. Towar had the financial resources to mount an offense. I scheduled appointments with three geriatric psychiatrists and a psychologist. I also retained a geriatric social worker to prepare a care plan; and I retained the services of an ambulance service to provide transportation on an as needed basis. All these tasks consumed much time — getting

references; talking to people; getting more references when experts proved not to be appropriate because of their reluctance to testify in court; etc.

I also went to the nursing home where Mr. Towar was residing, and met with his several care-givers — gathering information as it became available to me. Because Mr. Towar did not trust his former doctors, I made an appointment for a checkup by a geriatric internist. I also reached out to people in the community who knew Mr. Towar, and after speaking with them, gathered information, some of it counter to my client's interest and some of it supporting his desires.

I also subpoenaed his medical records — because of his several recent hospitalizations, the records were quite voluminous (approximately a thousand pages of medical records). Again, because time was of the essence, I needed to personally meet with the appropriate hospital personnel to make sure that I received the records promptly, and equally important, that I received all the relevant records.

The next week or so was spent reviewing and analyzing the medical records, preparing for the depositions that would be necessary. I also had to keep in touch with the experts that I had retained, to make sure that I understood their thinking and to encourage them to provide me with appropriate reports. One of the psychiatrists proved not to be helpful, as she concluded that my client was clearly not competent. Fortunately for my client, the other psychiatrist and the psychologist thought differently.

A week later, my adversary and I scheduled depositions. I deposed the daughter, her husband and their son. Through those deposition I learned many things about my client — how he served in the Soviet Army during the Cold War; how he arranged for his wife and daughter to escape from Czechoslovakia. How he emigrated to the United States during his elder years. How dysfunctional the family was, with the absence of any familial love. How he worked hard in the United States, despite his age, accumulating significant wealth by saving his pennies, and investing his money in real estate.

I also deposed Mr. Towar's former treating doctor. His position seemed reasonable — but contrary to my client's wishes. The doctor testified as to my clients attempts to escape from the hospital; of his incomprehension of what was happening around him; of his

inability to make rational decisions; of the physical limitations induced by a stroke; and the degeneration of dementia.

The doctors I retained, however, were equally convincing — they testified that admittedly Mr. Towar would get confused sometimes, but that confusion was caused by the lack of language skills, and the lack of a supporting environment. These doctors testified that if his medical needs were met properly, Mr. Towar was perfectly capable of making rational decisions for himself.

Eventually, Mr. Towar was allowed to move from the nursing home back to his house. Surprisingly, this move was not opposed by my adversary. Once he moved, a long term friend of Mr. Towar grew attentive to his wants and needs. I later learned that this “friend” also had a close connection to Mr. Towar’s daughter – but this information came too late.

The friend convinced Mr. Towar that she could take care of him better than anyone else – she would live with him; her son, the accountant, would take care of his finances; and for his satisfaction, she would provide him with interesting female companionship. One morning, my client came to my office, accompanied by his friend and her son. Mr. Towar told me that he no longer needed my services; and that his friend’s son retained a new attorney to represent his interests.

Suspecting undue influence, I filed an emergent motion with the Court for the appointment of a Temporary Conservator of my client’s estate. The matter was promptly scheduled by the court; and when we arrived, the Judge took the position that since I had argued that my client was in fact competent, then (notwithstanding new evidence to the contrary) as far as the court was concerned, Mr. Towar was competent to fire me and hire anyone else he wanted. I was out of the case; just like that.

During the months that followed, Mr. Towar called me once, claiming that he was being held prisoner; and that his friend turned out to be an enemy. I informed Mr. Towar that he should call the Police; as I had been relieved from his representation. Some weeks later, I heard, Mr. Towar passed away. Apparently, after I had been relieved as his counsel, Mr. Towar’s new attorney prepared a Will, transferring the house to Mr. Towar’s daughter,

and the bank funds to the “friend”. The friend’s son, the accountant, was named the Executor of this Will.

I submitted my detailed bill for services rendered to the Executor, who refused to pay it, claiming that it was exorbitant. Not wishing to litigate a collection action for attorney’s fees; and knowing that the Estate could not be finally settled until my bill was somehow settled, I let things sit – they sat for three years. Finally, I was approached about a potential settlement. At one point I was under the impression that we did settle; but when it came time to pay me, it turned out that there still was a difference of opinion as to the amount of the settlement; thus, no settlement.

Months later, a new settlement was finally negotiated — and today’s mail brought the fruits of those negotiations. Thank God – I really need the money to pay some outstanding credit card bills.

During the early morning, Jan Mlody stops in. He brings me a large bottle of honey. He tells me that he collected it himself, and that I should use it because it is vary good. I thank him, and I assure him that he need not do this; he already paid me for my services. He responds – that is OK; this is for you. Thank you.

Mr. Mlody is an elderly gentleman who was cited for having an illegal apartment in his house. Apparently, his neighbors complained to the town, and an inspector came and issued him a citation. When he first came to me a month ago, Mr. Mlody was outraged — what right does the town have to tell him how to use his own property?!

I explained to him that there are local and state rules and regulations as to what can be done on private property. When you want to make some major revision to your property, you need to obtain appropriate permits before you start the work, and the municipal inspector has to inspect the work completed. There are also fire codes, and regulations that mandate how certain work is to be done so that it is safe.

Also, when a neighborhood has been designated as a single family home zone, you cannot alter your house to allow two families to live there. He replies: But I did not do that. — Well, tell me what you did do. — A cousin is visiting from Poland, and I let him sleep in one room. — And what is your cousin’s name? — Jan. — Jan what? — Oh; I don’t know his last name. — But he is your cousin; why don’t you know his last name? — He is a

distant cousin. — And you let this distant cousin to sleep in your house? How much do you charge him? — I don't charge him anything. He just gives me some money to help with my expenses. — I see here in the Inspector's Report that you have locks on the bedroom doors? — Yes, but that is for privacy. I can lock my doors if I want to. — Well, from the point of view of the town, that may be fire hazard. In case of a fire, people may have a difficult time getting out; or the fireman may have a difficult time getting in.

After some communications with the town, I was able to convince my client to get rid of his distant "cousin" and to remove the door locks. The town inspector also wanted one of the bathrooms removed; but I convinced them to re-inspect after my client applies for the appropriate plumbing, electrical and construction permits.

The final result was satisfactory to both my client and the town, and the substantial penalties that were originally threatened were substantially reduced. I just hope that another "cousin" does not come to live with him soon.

Later in the morning, I have a Mediation scheduled. Both parties arrive with their attorneys and I welcome them into my conference room. The dispute involves the breakup of a pediatric medical practice.

Two doctors had an established practice, and they took on a third doctor to expand it. After a year, this third doctor decided that the practice was not growing to her satisfaction, and announced that she was leaving the practice. A dispute arose as to accounting issues, which were related to the distribution of funds between three doctors. The departing doctor filed suit, and the court referred the matter to mediation; I was assigned to be their mediator.

I have been mediating for a few years now. I took several formal courses in both civil mediation and matrimonial mediation. I also attended numerous seminars on mediation related issues, and I became a member of the New Jersey Society of Professional Mediators. I am registered with the court as a potential mediator — cases are assigned on a rotation basis; the first two hours (including one hour of administrative time) are free of charge, and after that, if the parties wish to continue with the mediation, they pay for my services at my hourly rate (split evenly between the parties).

After filling out some paperwork, and signing a Mediation and Confidentiality Agreement, we are ready to proceed. I explain to everyone in the room that each side will be given an opportunity to express the reasons for the dispute between them, and then we will start to work toward the resolution of the dispute. I tell them that I am a mediator, not a judge or an arbitrator. Thus I will work with them, without bias toward one or the other, but I will not be deciding the merits of their case. As a mediator, I cannot force anyone to do anything.

I also explain that it is not uncommon for me to meet with one or both sides separately, and that I will not be giving equal time. I assure them that whatever they choose to say to me will be held in confidence, and will be revealed to the other side only if I am specifically authorized to do so.

Dr. Samantha Goodlace is the plaintiff, so she gets to tell us first her reasons for bringing the suit. She feels that she was unappreciated; and she feels that she was lied to about the prospects for the growth of the business when she agreed to join the practice. She believes that she was underpaid for her services; and that she is still owed for three weeks of work.

Dr. Jerry Fortunato and Dr. Peter Druker are the defendants. They listen politely while Dr. Goodlace makes her presentation, but when it is their turn to speak, they present an equally impressive list of complaints — Dr. Goodlace was inattentive to her patients; she was often late in the morning, and missed numerous days of work. She mishandled her administrative duties, and she failed to bring in the business that she assured them she would do after joining the practice.

Surprisingly, neither side has much proof to support their accusations. They are basically mad at each other because their “partnership” failed, and now they are reacting to each other on the basis of emotions and not pragmatic realities. I work with them for about an hour, but not much progress is made toward a formal resolution of their dispute. We decide to adjourn today’s proceedings, so that both sides can reconsider their position, and seriously think about the costs of litigating this dispute, and the cost of trying to gather the evidence necessary to convince a jury of the righteousness of either side’s position. We will

meet again in a month, unless the parties call me to cancel the mediation process, or they agree to an earlier mediation session.

In the early afternoon I meet with a new divorce client. Joan Smithers has been married to her husband for the last twenty three years. They have two teenage children, and they own a home. There has been no domestic violence in their relationship; but they both feel that they have grown apart and no longer love each other. Before they get too old, they both want to be free to look for a new life, without the other.

They both work, but my client earns substantially more than her husband. They both have pension funds; here again, my client's plan is substantially wealthier than her husband's. They have decided to sell their house, and the children will reside with my client.

Because it appears that the two parties are able to communicate rationally about the split up of the "family" business, I am hopeful that a resolution will be quick and relatively inexpensive. However, I warn my client that if a significant dispute arises between them, the cost of litigating it may prove to be very costly. I explain to my client the benefits of mediation; however, she does not want to pursue this option, because she has tried marriage counseling and other modalities and was unable to reach any reasonable accommodation with her husband.

I explain to my client that under a recent law passed in New Jersey, you no longer need to aggravate the other side by listing any bad acts allegedly performed by them; you simply recite that the marriage has failed due to irreconcilable differences which arose more than six months ago. Because they have children, there will be issues relating to child custody, child visitation and child support. In that regard, I inform my client that in New Jersey, parents are responsible for their children's education beyond high school and beyond the age of eighteen.

Because there is a significant difference in their incomes, and because of the length of the marriage, I inform my client that she may be obligated to pay alimony to her husband. This is the most surprising thing to her — that a woman may have to pay alimony to a man. In response to her inquiry, I tell her that there is no formula for the calculation of alimony.

I also emphasize that contrary to popular belief, for purposes of equitable distribution, their assets and liabilities need not be split 50/50, they just need to be split “equitably.”

Before she leaves my office, I give my client a list of documents that I need to receive from her: their latest W-2 forms; the last three years’ income tax returns; their last three pay stubs; and a listing of all their insurance policies, including the amounts of coverage, name of the insurer, and policy number. I need this for their automobile insurance, their homeowners insurance, their life insurance, and any other insurance they may have.

All of the sudden, the simple divorce that my client was anticipating is no longer that simple.

My next appointment is at 3 p.m. A girl comes in, with her mother; the girl is holding a baby. They tell me that they were referred to me by a friend, but they do not know the friend’s name. The baby fusses a bit, but is generally quiet and content. The girl’s name is Angelina; the middle age woman is Dorothy; and the baby is Carlos; each of them has a different surname. How can I help you, I ask.

Dorothy speaks: We need your help. Carlos was left without a father; and we do not know what to do next. — What do you mean?

Maybe you read about it in the newspaper; where those four kids got killed at the La Bamba Dance Club on Main Street? Johnny Junto was one of the kids killed; he was Angelina’s boyfriend, and Carlos’ father.

I am so sorry. I did read about it in the newspaper. I understand that there was a fight, and people stampeded, and were trapped, and several people were trampled to death. Please tell me what happened, as far as you know – but first, let me have some background information about all of you; how old are you? Where are you in life?

Carlos was born ten days ago. My daughter, Angelina, is fifteen years old, and she is a Sophomore at Eltona High School. I work as a Corrections Officer at the County Jail.

I came home from work late, but I was in bed already when the phone rang. It was one of Angelina’s friends; she was crying and told me that Angelina had to come over right away; to go to La Bamba right away. Why? I asked. She told me that some people were dead; and she thought that Johnny was one of them.

I quickly went to Angelina's room and woke her up. Carlos was sleeping in his crib by her bed. I told Angelina that I will stay with Carlos, and told her to get dressed and go to La Bamba and find out what is going on.

Angelina picks up the story here, with tears in her eyes. She is very pretty, and looks older than fifteen. Although her mother has red hair and looks very Irish, Angelina has dark brown eyes and very dark brown long silky hair.

I got dressed, and I went to La Bamba. It is a dance club on Main Street, where we go to from time to time. It is about ten blocks from my house. It was around midnight, maybe a bit later.

When I got closer to the club, I could see fire engines and police cars all over the place. There were people milling about everywhere. About a block from the club I met my friend Beatrice. She grabbed my hand and quickly dragged me closer to La Bamba. A policeman stopped us and told us that we could not go any further, but when he was distracted, we managed to get closer. I saw Johnny laying on the sidewalk, in front of the club. Some medics were working on him — they were pushing on his chest, and the other was blowing in his mouth. But then they stopped; and put him in an ambulance and drove away with their sirens on.

Eltona General is the closest hospital. It is only two blocks away, so Beatrice and I ran over there as quickly as we could. When we got there, the place was mobbed. I told them that I was Johnny's wife, and they let me through. But then a doctor came, and told me that Johnny did not make it; his ribs were crushed and his neck was broken.

Tears were flowing freely; but she did not stop.

I found out that Johnny and his two friends, Manolo and Ermundo, died with him; and some other girl, that I don't know, was killed also. After talking to many of my friends, I got several stories. What happened was that they were all dancing upstairs, on the second floor. It is like a gym there, with a stage for the DJ. Surrounding the dance floor, there is a third floor balcony, overlooking the second floor.

Some people told me that there were shots fired; others told me that beer bottles were thrown on the dance floor from the balcony. I don't know what really happened. There

were several hundred kids dancing, and they started to panic. Many people started to run for the rear exit door, but it was locked. Some people jumped out the window.

Apparently, Johnny and his two friends were the closes to the stairs. These stairs are very narrow and very steep; it is difficult for two people to pass each other on them. Earlier that evening there was a fight on the dance floor. The bouncers kicked those people out; and locked the downstairs door so they could not get back in.

As the commotion started upstairs, people did not know what was happening. The DJ was telling everyone to calm down, but his loud voice just scared everyone even more. Johnny and his friends followed some people down the stairs. Someone tripped and then more people fell over them. The door downstairs was locked and they were trying to open it, but more people came rushing down, and everyone was falling; people started to pile one on top of the other; and once you fell you couldn't get up, because someone else would fall on top of you. People were screaming, and crying, everywhere.

Someone from the outside saw what was happening, and they smashed the glass door with a pipe. There was glass all over the sidewalk, and people ran over and started to pull out the bodies out of the doorway. The cops and the fireman came right away, and the ambulances too. It was a giant mess, with police cars all over the place, and fireman trying to widen the doorway. They finally got the back door open and put ladders up to the second and third floors.

I am so sorry; that is terrible. How are you doing?

I am a mess. But I am busy with Carlos. But Johnny's mother has gone off the deep end. She does not believe that he died. She keeps calling his name all the time. I went over her house, and she just sat at the table and cried all the time.

Tell me about you and Johnny. Did you guys live together?

Some of the time. He dropped out of school and was looking for a job. He wanted to be an airline mechanic. He was very good with his hands, and he used to fix cars on the street all the time. When I got pregnant, he decided that he was going to marry me, but I wanted to finish high school first. While I was pregnant, he was great. He would come over all the time, and he bought all these clothes for the baby. Then he fixed up his room at his

Mom's place for us to stay at; so the weekends I slept at his Mom's house and during the school week I slept at my Mom's apartment (it was closer to my school).

And how was he with the baby?

Oh, he was great. He came to the hospital right after Carlos was born. He was so proud of being a father. He would tell everyone "I have a son!" He played with him, he was so gentle, and I taught him how to hold him up. He was just great.

How come he was as La Bamba and you were not with him?

Carlos was born just a couple days ago; and I was so tired. He sleeps a lot, but I still was tired. So I decided not to go this time. Johnny went with his friends; they always went everywhere together.

Dorothy spoke up: Here, I brought these newspaper clippings for you. Some are in Spanish, but the pictures tell the story.

And how can I help you now? I ask.

We need you to represent us. Johnny did not have any life insurance, and we need to provide for Carlos now.

OK. So your primary concern is the well-being of Carlos?

Yes – we want you to do everything possible to help Carlos. I figure that you can sue someone.

Well, there is an issue as to who has what rights. Is there any doubt as to who is Carlos' father? Did Johnny admit to being Carlos' father? Is Johnny named on Carlos' Birth Certificate?

Oh yes, from the very beginning. He was very proud. He was looking forward to being a father. And he is listed on the Birth Certificate as the father.

Well, based on what you told me so far, I do not believe that you, Dorothy, have any claims in this matter. You, Angelina, may have some claims, but the biggest obstacle is that you were not married. I would have to do some legal research, but to assert claims on your behalf may be tough. The one who is in the strongest position is Carlos, as his son. Did Johnny have a Will? — Of course not; he was not planning to die yet.

If you want, I can represent your son, Carlos. But he is a baby, so a Guardian will have to be appointed to represent him. Normally, you, Angelina, as his mother, would be

his Guardian, but you are underage yourself. We could try, but it probably would be better if you named someone older as a Guardian for Carlos. — Well, could my Mom be the Guardian? We all live together. — “Sure, I will do it.” Dorothy responds.

I anticipate that Johnny’s parents may want to assert some claims also; so it will be a contest between what rights they have versus what rights Carlos has. I will check all of this out, but I believe that since Johnny was a father at the time of his death, and he did not have a Will, his son inherits after him.

First we need to sign a retainer agreement — I will do several things for you. First I will go to court to have Dorothy appointed as the Guardian for Carlos. Then I will have Dorothy appointed as the Administrator Ad Prosequendum ... Dorothy interrupts: what is that?

An Administrator Ad Prosequendum is the person who sues on behalf of the deceased person, to assert his claim for pain and suffering before his death.

Do you know when Johnny died? — Some people say he died on the stairs; others say he was still alive when they pulled him out of the staircase. Maybe he died at the hospital, I do not know. — That is OK; when I get his medical reports I will know from there more about all of this.

Once Dorothy is appointed Guardian and the Administrator Ad Prosequendum, I will file a lawsuit on your behalf — do you know who owns the La Bamba Dance Club?

No, but I know that the dances are organized by this guy, Jimmy Suarez. The dances are advertised at our school, and we go there all the time. Sometimes the cops come around to the Club, and start kicking people out because it is too crowded or because fights brake out.

So, the police have been there before? I ask. — Oh, yes; lots of times. — Do you know how many people are allowed at the Club? — There is a sign that says, I think, two hundred people; but nobody pays any attention to that. There is always more than that at the dances.

After thinking about it for a second or two, I say: Well, I will have to research this also, but if the City knew that this Club was a problem, then the City may be responsible also. The problem is that to sue a municipality, you have to give them notice of your

intention to sue. If my thinking is right on this, I will need to file a Notice Of Intent with the City before we can sue. Then we will have to wait some time before actually suing, to give the City time to investigate the matter. — What is there to investigate? The cops were right there. — I know, but this is a formality required by the law; and I prefer to do things right, so that I make sure that all your options are fully protected. — OK; do what you think is best.

I will do some of the basic research early next week, and then I will prepare the papers for Dorothy to be the Guardian for Carlos and the Administrator Ad Prosequendum. When I finish preparing the documents, we will need to meet again, because I will need your signatures. I will probably call you by the end of next week. Meantime, if you need anything, or if there are any new developments, please call me right away.

Also, because there may be competing interests here, I recommend that you do not discuss any of this with anyone; especially Johnny's Mom. I do not want any problems to arise before we are well on our way to protect your sons's and grandson's rights.

After my clients leave, I am drained. What do I do? Where do I start?

First I go online, and I read as many newspaper articles as I can about this tragedy. The New York Times has a long story about it, with names of witnesses, and lots of details. I print them all out for future reference.

I then call an attorney that I had met some time ago. He is much more experienced than I am, and we discuss the incident. He offers to help me, if I want it. I had not handled a death case before, so I am concerned about my abilities. Maybe the best thing for my clients is for me to bring in a more experienced attorney, but that will require my client's blessing; and the splitting of any legal fees that I earn. I table the matter, so I can think about it some more — I tell him that I will let him know.

But I do follow one of his suggestions — I call the Surrogate, and let them know that I represent the Estate of one of the decedents, and ask them what they need me to do to properly proceed in this matter. I will need an original certified copy of the Death Certificate and the Birth Certificate. I need to know Johnny's family tree — I am pretty sure that he had no siblings, and I know about his mother; I remember that at some point someone

said that his father lives in Florida and his parents are divorced — I will need to check this out.

I call Chris, and I tell her of our new client. She is busy at work; and she get nervous as to this case — it sounds like a lot of work; but I assure her that I am ready to handle it. I wish that she could work on it with me; but she can't and she does not want to. She is so smart and intelligent. I always thought that she would make a great attorney or investment banker; she knows how to talk with people, and her mind makes these great connections (sometimes, though ... ; sometimes I am amazed at how she just does not get what I am trying to convey to her — argh!). Anyway, she is happy in her life, and she says we could never work together — we always approach everything form opposite ends.

That is true. We always are opposites. When I turn right, she instinctively thinks that we should go left. When I say black, she says white. We often laugh at how opposite we are. Our poor kids — they must be so confused.

I am too exhausted to do any more work. I have to do something else. I check out what is happening on Flickr — several people have posted some great new pictures. Then I check out Yelp — I bookmark one or two newly reviewed restaurants to try out next time we are in the city.

I then decide to dedicate the rest of my day to trying to finish my novel. I lock the front door, so that no one can come in, and I turn on my telephone answering service to answer my calls.

I reread my last paragraph that I previously wrote, and go on from there:

The judge is angry; he has been quizzing me for what seems like an eternity, and my status remains indeterminate. Whenever the scales would begin to tip under the weight of my misdeeds, my heavenly family stood by me and helped me balance the scales. The line behind me has grown tremendously, and discontent can clearly be felt all around me.

A devil and an angel are arguing about all kinds of procedural points, each accusing the other of being unfair in this trial for my soul. All the witnesses that already testified are sitting off to one side, some curious as to what will happen next, while others much less interested in my future. All this time has taken a toll on me as well. I am exhausted.

Suddenly, a sound becomes audible, and it slowly gains in volume. It feels like it is coming toward us, but I am the only one who seems to notice. Then a wind pick up. But again, no one seems to mind — everyone is engaged in their business without regard to the wind and the noise.

The temperature seems to rise, but a cold sweat also can be felt. And then the ambient light becomes much more intense. Up to now I was relatively calm; but now, fear of the unknown is starting to take over. But, what am I afraid of? After all, I am still unsure as to where I am, or why I am here. As I contemplate these thoughts, I notice the everyone else is in a huddle some distance away from me. Every so often, someone's head pops up, and they turn toward me, stare, and return to the huddle, with a new sense of animation emanating from the group.

Finally, the group approaches me. What do they want from me?! — I am told: We have never had this situation before – such a great sinner, who has repented so much, but may not have atoned yet enough. You will have to go back; and time will tell us where you belong. — Go back? Go back where? — Back to your life. Back to your petty squabbles, and mundane plodding along the toils of daily life. But remember, what you do with your life will be up to you, but it will also be the measure of your eternal future once you are called back.

The footing below me gives way, and I feel that I am falling; but falling from where, and falling toward what?

The end.