

ON BECOMING A TWIN:

**(WHEN TWINS FAIL TO TWINE, THEN DO TWINE, AND
THRIVE)**

BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

by Francis Baumli

PART I:

THE DISCOVERY

This narrative, of sufficient length it warrants being considered a small book, has a process (It indeed has been a process!) as mysterious as it has been abrupt; and yet, since its beginning, it has been thoroughly concrete though incremental, complicated yet refreshingly simple, and in some ways still mysterious even as it continues to take on further definition.

This story begins, in a way, with a name. My dad, despite his plenitude of faults—many of them so colossal as to be correctly termed heinous—in one small way might be characterized as one of the early men’s liberationists. He sired a big Catholic family. All those children! (As the nuns in parochial grade school would smugly say, “A big family is a happy family!”) Dad always took a strong interest in—even a stance on—what the name of each child would be. My mother always opposed him, they would argue and bicker, and in the end she would get her way. In other words, he always lost. I know this happened with every child that came after me because I heard the

squabbling. I presume it happened with the two children who came before me. Certainly it happened with me—or so I was told.

The first-born, a son, was named “Ronnie” (Ronald Walter). He died when he was 11 days old, probably of a fistula between his esophagus and trachea, although this is something I infer because our mother’s way of describing it was always, “He had something in his throat that wouldn’t go away.” That kind of fistula could be easily repaired today. But back then, in the mid-1940’s, surgery had not mastered this procedure. Such a fistula allowed food (milk) to get into the lungs, an infection resulted, and death followed. The importance of this fact to the tale I here tell involves something crucial for a father: his first-born, a son, died. His second-born was a girl. His third-born was predicted by the doctor to be a son. They did not have sonograms back in those days; the doctors judged by the apparent size of the fetus. So when my father learned that the third-born was to be a son, he wanted to name it himself and he wanted the name to be Leo Francis Baumli, II. (I.e., Leo Francis Baumli the second)—his own name being “Leo Francis Baumli.” But my mother would have nothing to do with this. For starters, she did not like the name “Leo.” (A very unkind thing, I daresay, to tell her husband whose name was “Leo.”) Second, she would not even think of having a son who was

“the second” of any name. Plus, she had her own names, and they were ... well, there were several.

My dad was not going to budge on this one. This was to be his first son, and he was going to name it. But my mother wouldn't budge either.

My Aunt Jean (Dorothy Jean Tindall) was, one might say, the alpha female of the family. Although she was the youngest of five (three of these siblings were sisters), she was always the one who took charge when there was a family crisis. She had her faults, but basically she was industrious, enjoyable, someone who could be depended on. My mother liked her the best of her siblings, and my father (who didn't have much use for most of my mother's siblings) liked and respected Aunt Jean. So my father and mother took the issue to Aunt Jean. She was to decide on a name that would be fair and acceptable to both my father and my mother.

I think she did a good job. My mother's name was Mary Evelyn. My dad's name, as already stated, was Leo Francis. Aunt Jean hit upon Marion Francis—the “Marion” for “Mary” and the “Francis” to repeat Dad's middle name. And, I would be called by my middle name. Both my parents accepted this, and so the name was selected. All this I learned, not from my parents, but years later when I was

eighteen and for two weeks lived with Aunt Jean and her husband—my Uncle Rawlings. There was much more to this story, but I did not learn it until years later. I shall get to that part presently.

Meanwhile, I was born, was named Marion Francis, and would go through life (as I am still going through life) encumbered by the chronic difficulty of people seeing my name on paper and calling me Marion. Teachers in college seldom could get it through their heads that I went by my middle name. If a cop pulls me over, I am called Marion. When I use my driver's license, which lists my name as "Marion Francis Baumli" for ID when cashing a check made out to "Francis Baumli," there often is a problem. But "Francis" it is and so it shall remain. In fact, over the years I even became fiercely protective of the name, resisting nicknames such as "Fran," "Fresno," "Hank," and always—again and again—having to fight a battle to not be called "Frank" which so many people think I should be called. (This battle has eased, certainly, since so many people now call me by my last name.)

If the name, or the naming, is the beginning of this saga, it follows that the tale took on direction because I have MS (multiple sclerosis—or "disseminated sclerosis" as it is called in the United Kingdom). I was diagnosed with MS in August of 1974 when I was

twenty-six years old, although upon being diagnosed, I realized I had had the disease, with occasional mild flare-ups, since about the age of twenty. It was pretty awful for a couple of years, then seemed to stabilize, and about two years later (my memory is somewhat uncertain here) I went on the Swank diet. (My regimen would later be the “Modified Swank-McDougall Diet.) It is a worthless diet, for most people with MS, because it is so strict one can scarcely stay on it. I did stay on it, however, “fell off the wagon” for a few months at one point, but then went back on it and have been on it ever since. I say (not quite facetiously) to people that I am able to stay on this diet because I am a slave to my will power. It is a life-saver, has sound neurological basis as to why it works, and for people who go on it within one year of diagnosis there is absolutely no progression of symptoms in twenty years. I waited about two years before going on the diet, and then was off it for a few months, so I fall into a second group which is defined as experiencing only a slight increase in symptoms. So for me certain symptoms have worsened, although only slightly, most symptoms virtually disappeared, and I lost my cane about twenty years ago after almost forgetting I even owned it. And I haven’t used my wheelchair in decades. I am vigorous, strong, can work hard all day, and the only visible symptom I have is the fact

that I lost vision in my left eye and it is patched. Other than this, my other symptoms are mild and (usually) unnoticeable to others.

But as pertains to my MS, I for many years had a nagging suspicion. I wondered if it had a psychogenic basis. Not psychosomatic, mind you, but psychogenic. This questioning took on a sense of urgency when I saw a movie. I see few movies, do not like most I see although there are a few I have seen and loved, but this time I saw a great, impactful, and curious movie. It was an Ingmar Bergman movie called Autumn Sonata, and in it there are two sisters, one afflicted with a mysterious neurological illness (which, in fact, seems to be MS). In the considerable drama of this movie, the afflicted sister is in a terrible state of distress as she hungers for the attentions of the cold and usually absent mother. One can not (or, at least, I could not) but wonder if the message is that this girl's illness is actually a psychogenic manifestation of this child-like need for her mother.

The movie is powerful, convincing in many aspects, and provocative in the question it raised about the possibility that the sister's illness came about as a desperate plea for her mother's emotional nurturing.

This question had a very strong effect upon me. I have written elsewhere (Believe me; I have no desire to go into that grisly story here again!) about the colossal amount of physical and emotional abuse I received from both parents as a child. Despite this abuse, I had always hungered for the love and affection I never received. I believe I felt this need more keenly with my father than with my mother, perhaps because my mother did, at times, give some degree of affection to her children when we were little. Perhaps I wanted it more from my father simply because I am a man. The idea occurred to me, after having seen Autumn Sonata once, that perhaps my own MS was a psychogenic reaction to that early (and long-lasting) deprivation and abuse, and perhaps this hypothesis deserved exploration. I saw the movie again, and I talked to people about this hypothesis. This was in the late '70s when what I term "air-headed thinking" was in vogue. Everyone, it seemed, was "into" some mode of thinking which had to do with the occult. It might be astrology, psychic readings, past-life readings, gemstone therapy, and so on. So discussing the possibility, with these people, that my MS might have resulted from the trauma of my parents' absence and abuse, elicited ready endorsement of this possibility, often much theorizing, and even suggestions that I go to see people who could perhaps help

me. I actually did this on three occasions because other people wanted me to, and I paid money for it. The astrologer saw no such evidence. Two psychics weren't sure. Some years before, a fellow at a party, who claimed to be a psychic, had been sure my MS was psychogenic, and in fact took my cane, rubbed it over his body, especially on his face, and declared that within a year I would not need the cane. He was right regarding my not needing the cane, but I suspect this was because I went on the Modified Swank-McDougall Diet during the interim.

I might have let the matter drop, and simply have concluded that it was a mere possibility I could do nothing about, were it not for the fact that I have a good memory and there was a very specific incident in my past which I focused on.

The incident happened when I was not yet three years old. It happened "down at the barn" (as we country people say), and somehow I was injured. I remember little of the incident except for three things. A large gate came off its hinges and fell on me, pinning me to the muddy ground. It was night, and I have a vivid memory of being carried by my father to the house. Third, I remember being at the hospital, and sitting on an exam table. I presume I was better—probably fine—by the next day. I did not recall the date exactly, of

course, although later when I examined my medical records I could have written it down but neglected to. I do know I was several months away from being three years old.

The memory of my father carrying me was powerful. Apparently I could not walk—that is what my mother later said, and that is what the doctor's brief note stated. So there you have it: a little boy, already abused by his father and mother, temporarily crippled and finding comfort in being carried by his father. And yes; it was comforting.

So I wondered: At that early age, I was temporarily crippled, and I received something I never otherwise got from my father—the comfort of being carried. (I am almost embarrassed to admit to this—but yes, it was truly a comfort. I liked it, and wanted more of it.) Could it be possible that my MS, in some way, was a deep, subconscious throw-back to this early experience? That the memory of an early episode: being crippled, and thereby receiving the attentions and ministrations of my father, resulted in my nervous system somehow succumbing to whatever causes MS, in the hopes that being crippled by the MS might again elicit the same kind of loving attention from my father?

It was, I admit, a far-fetched idea. But a psychogenic factor indeed is sometimes the primogenitor of a disease. So there was some degree of sense—or possibility—to what I was wondering about.

I stopped talking about the idea to other people, saw the movie Autumn Sonata again, and the idea persisted although I didn't know what to do about it. I was not going to go to a New Age therapist who might put me into some kind of artificial, and untrustworthy, regressive state to try and get at the truth. I was not going to endure years of psychoanalysis to pursue a remote hypothesis. But at last I did hit upon a concrete plan. When next I would be in Maryville, Missouri, where I was born at Saint Francis Hospital, I would ask to see my medical records and examine that episode—the time I could not walk—and see what the doctor then thought of it.

But the trip to Northwest Missouri was over 400 miles, I went rarely, and usually when I did it was to play music with groups I had played with previously.

But finally in summer of 1980, I went there with many commitments, but with my last day there reserved for examining my medical records. I thought the simple logistics of finding where the

medical records were, gaining access to them, i.e., permission, and then reading them would take most of the day.

Very recently Saint Francis Hospital had relocated. A new building had been erected south of town, the old building in the middle of town was still there, and I figured my medical records would be in the new building. So I was there at about 8:00 A.M. when they opened.

The receptionist was Mrs. Wiederholt—mother to my best friend in 7th and 8th grades at parochial grade school. This fellow, Ron, I would lose track of after leaving that grade school—moving on to a high school some miles away, and I would see him only once, about seven years later, when I was playing music at a night club and he, very drunk, came up to me and seemed to be sexually propositioning me. (I would later find out that he had become—or realized he was—gay.) But in the 7th and 8th grades, we were merely buddies, and a few times we spent the night at one another's houses. His mother I merely knew as Mrs. Wiederholt—a kind woman, who said little, but was always very appropriate and civil.

Perhaps because she remembered me, and I asked about Ron, she readily stated that I could examine my medical records. But they were still in the old building. She told me what room I would find them

in, but warned me that since the building was not being used, the electricity had been turned off and there would be no lights. (My Uncle Charles William, my father's elder brother, had something to do with that building. He was a shrewd and successful businessman, and when the old building for Saint Francis Hospital sold, he bought it for twenty thousand, and then sold it for one-hundred thousand the very next day.)

I drove the relatively short distance (maybe three miles) to the old building, climbed its many steps, and went in through the unlocked big front door. I carried a flashlight with me, but had no trouble finding the room, which was in the basement. As it turned out I needed no artificial light since there was a recessed window at the top of that basement room which let in a goodly stream of sunlight.

The medical records were in old filing cabinets, and were written in pencil, on oddly-sized cards. They were note cards, but not one of the three sizes we see today (3"/5", 4"/6", or 5"/8"). I would guess they were about 6"/7" and they were stiff, white, and very difficult to read. The handwriting was not the best, although not as bad as doctors are notorious for. The writing, done in pencil, was (I suspect) faint to begin with and it seemed to have faded with time. Still, I could read it, but there was very little to read. I soon found the

entry for that late-night visit to the hospital, and there were only a few terse words which went something like: “Can’t walk. Alert. Back injury? No soreness.”

Nothing else. My quest had yielded nothing fruitful, except for me to note that there was no record of a subsequent visit, which suggested that either I healed soon and completely, or if I did see the doctor again it was at his office and not at the hospital.

Having my medical records at hand, I decided to read them through from the beginning. (A small task, since there wasn’t much to read.) Here it became confusing, and I have often wished I had stolen those records, although if the thought crossed my mind at the time my conscience obviously won out, and in fact it would probably win out today.

I state that there wasn’t much to read, but in fact there were several pages which began at the time of birth (May 31, 1948) and the entries went on for several months. In fact, there were perhaps 15-20 pages. A good deal of writing, all this, considering how terse that entry was for a child who could not walk because of a back injury.

I found it all very confusing. The scribe—my (our) Doctor Bauman—wrote in the same terse, scarcely descriptive, style. So even though there was more to read, this was mainly because there

were so many entries. They went on, day after day, with an entry every day for about three months. And as I read I kept thinking that the cards had been mixed up, or the doctor had at times been writing on the wrong card, because the entries at times referred to a boy, but most times referred to a girl if they made mention of the infant's sex at all. And the health problems were numerous, mysterious, baffling. I read it all through about three times, and I was sure there had been major concern about early health problems I had experienced, but I could not understand why the references were so varying—most of them so brief as to make little sense, but when they did make sense, virtually all references were encased in language that would suggest I was feminine—a girl instead of a boy.

As I left the building, it would be wrong to suggest that I was acutely disappointed. Rather, it all just seemed like a venture gone awry. So much anticipation, and now I would leave for home sooner than I had intended to this day. What had I learned? I wasn't sure, but the conclusion I settled on was that this doctor didn't keep separate charts for separate patients. Rather, he sometimes made entries for every patient he saw on the same piece of paper, and somehow, in his own esoteric filing system, he was able to make sense of it and keep track of everybody. So, surely, what I had been reading was a

history of several infants—all of these histories conjoined into something that, to my layman's eye, seemed to be one history.

I felt I should go back to the new hospital and thank Mrs. Wiederholt, assure her that I had left everything intact, and I wanted to get information from her on how to contact her son, Ron, given how enjoyable our friendship had been those many years before.

When I went in to see her, I accomplished all this, and she asked me if I had trouble reading the records in the dark. I told her that actually there was plenty of light in the room coming in through the basement's casement window, and then I mentioned to her how confusing the medical records were, noting how they seemed to refer to me as a girl, and as having had severe health problems at birth which no one had ever told me about.

I will never forget the look on Mrs. Wiederholt's face as she looked at me. Her face was intent, kind, and pained. Her voice was both gentle and slightly incredulous when she said the fateful words, "You mean you still don't know?"

I'm not sure what I answered. I probably said, "Know what?"

Surely I asked many questions. And I am sure she spoke more freely than my parents would have wanted her to. She explained what she and the whole community already knew—in fact, had known

since the day I was born 32 years before. Namely, at my birth I had had a companion. I was a twin. I had come out first, and then an infant girl was born next, and she had had serious health problems. She had been in the hospital there at Maryville for several months. This explained the many notes made by the doctor. But then, at some point when it became obvious that she was not going to improve, and that her deficits were mental as well as physical, she had been transferred to an “infant care” ward at the mental institution in St. Joe (St. Joseph, where the Pony Express began) and my parents had kept all this a secret from the other children.

I know I asked more questions, but rather abruptly the burning desire came over me to go see my twin—my sister. Yes—my sister! Even if she was a drooling, retarded, misshapen gimp, I felt a duty to go see her. St. Joe was about 50 miles south, I would be going by there anyway on my way home, and I knew exactly where “State Mental Hospital Number 2” was. (I am not sure which was “Number 1” but I suspect it was the mental hospital in Columbia, Missouri.)

Mrs. Wiederholt gave me, then, a great kindness. She took it upon herself to let me call the hospital from her desk. Realize that this was 1980. It was in the days before cell phones, cheap long-distance service, and that call probably cost somebody about ten

dollars. But she let me make it, and I threaded my way quickly through people who answered the phones. (One forgets this too—that back in those days, real people answered the phones promptly, and you didn't have to wait interminably to get to talk to someone.) In short order, I was talking to a fellow who identified himself as the president of the institution. This seemed thoroughly odd. Why the president? And why was he so interested in me? He asked me so many questions it seemed as if I was undergoing a police interrogation and a job interview at one and the same time. And yes, of course, I could see her this very day—as soon as I could get there. He gave me directions as to where I should go once I arrived at this very large facility which had many buildings.

Mrs. Wiederholt had heard this entire conversation, so she understood my hurry, and I'm sure she forgave me if I was abrupt about leaving. But as I left we did have one crucial exchange. She said, "I have just one thing to ask you."

I knew what it was. "Don't tell my parents you told me."

"Don't tell anybody," she said firmly. "If you do, in a town like this, word will get back to them that I told you. They'll know by tomorrow."

I agreed to keep the matter a secret, and now, 32 years later, with both my parents dead these last 17 years, I am sure she is long dead also. Hence, I now feel released from my pledge of secrecy to her.

It felt like a long drive. I was in my big, black 1955 Cadillac hearse. Driving a car so visible meant I needed to keep it at the speed limit. But I was there within an hour, drove directly to the facility (which sprawled over many acres), and quickly found the office I had been directed to. There, I was soon talking to a pleasant-looking, self-assured man who was very well dressed, and even before our introduction I knew he was the same man I had been talking to on the phone. Why was I talking to the president of this huge institution? Very soon it became obvious. My sister was not really so very ill. She had improved, he said, remarkably over the last ten years. "So why hasn't she gone home?" I asked, and he grimaced, shook his head, and said something which, though vague, had the clear implication that my parents did not want her returned home. He, meanwhile, had another interest. Funds had been cut for mental health, and he had to release a significant percentage of the hospital's population. (I would later learn that he had a little less than one month to cut his inpatient number by twenty percent!) He began talking to me about my

becoming her “custodian.” I was both stunned and appalled. And also impressed by his resourcefulness. He had been on the phone with many people since I had left Maryville. He had talked to the sheriff of my county, the chairman of the philosophy department I had graduated from in 1976 with my Ph.D. in philosophy, and he had even talked to my former mother-in-law! He knew I was divorced, that I had custody of my almost five-year-old daughter, that I had MS but was “stable,” and that I had no record of any criminal activities—“Not even a traffic ticket,” he said, smiling. In short, I was a prime candidate to be a custodian, and my sister was a prime candidate for being released. By all outward appearances she was entirely healthy, arrangements would be made for her to have a medical doctor in Columbia, Missouri should problems come up, the State would pay for any medical expenses she might incur over the next year, and in short, he wanted to transfer her to my “care and keeping”—this was the phrase he used and I well remember it.

I asked the obvious question. “Why me? Instead of her parents? I mean, our parents?”

This was the only time I saw him lose his polished demeanor. He scowled, muttered something about how, “no amount of contact seems to elicit their attention, much less their interest,” but then he

collected himself and said briskly, “They no longer have custody of her, so we have no obligation to them whatsoever. Legally she is a ward of the State. We can arrange matters as we wish. We can give you custody—full custody—of her, but she will forever be, legally speaking, a ward of the State of Missouri. We, this institution, are her custodian at present. We can transfer custody, as long as it is in her best interests, of course. And,” he said this with a smile that almost seemed sociopathically exaggerated, “we do believe it is in her best interests that you become her legal custodian.” He kept wearing that smile. “Her twin brother, no less!” he said with enthusiasm.

I nodded, but with none of his enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, the first thing I needed to do was to meet her. He had anticipated this, and she was already on her way over. In fact, as we were speaking, in came an older woman, maybe fifty years old, and ... I tried not to stare. I felt no sense of surprise. Mainly I just felt numb. And burdened. Me take care of this young woman, who was mentally ill, but didn't look mentally ill?

The president was trying to be genteel. He said, “So, it's been right about thirty-two years since the two of you have been in each other's company. You meet again.”

She did not look at me. I don't think I took my eyes off of her. I did speak to her. I wondered if I should hug her but I didn't. I realized I was trembling all over.

My twin, however, was not looking at me nor speaking to me. Nothing boded well. "What is your name?" I remember asking.

The president spoke for her. "Mary Frances. And you are Marion Francis. A nice pairing of names for twins."

He was such a smooth talker. And also a smoother manipulator. A lawyer came in and began drawing up the transfer papers, even though I hadn't at all agreed to the suggested arrangement. The lawyer was asking me many mundane questions, I was answering, still wishing my twin sister would look at me, when an old—maybe mid-70's—woman burst into the room and in a loud, wailing voice was yelling, "SHE'S NOT GOING ANYWHERE!" Then to me, "YOU AREN'T TAKING HER!"

I hadn't a clue as to what this was about, but soon it all became clear. The old woman's name was Evelyn. This irony did not escape me, since our mother's name is Mary Evelyn, though most people called her Evelyn, except for little children who called her Evy (rhymes with levy). This old woman had for years worked as a volunteer at this institution, and had taken Mary Frances under her

wing, so to speak. She had educated her, mothered her, bonded with her. She was in a truly wild state of grief at the idea of her little girl being taken away. All this is understandable, and I truly felt great sorrow for her. But before I could make any real acquaintance, she was firmly removed by two young security guards in uniform, and her voice was soon gone.

I signed papers, my sister signed nothing, and both the president and the nurse who had brought Mary Frances to the office walked us to my car. The president looked it over, not suspiciously as I would have expected, but appreciatively. “Your sheriff told me what kind of car to look for,” he said. “I wouldn’t mind owning it myself. It would look nice sitting beside my white Cadillac.”

So Frances got in the car, the door was closed, and I got in on my side. I reached across her to lock the door, attached her seat-belt for her, and pulled out of the parking lot.

Getting out of Saint Joe, past Kansas City, and then moving east on Highway 70 toward Columbia involves some tricky driving, so there was not much opportunity for conversation. But once we were well on our way down Highway 70, I looked at my watch. It was exactly 2:30 in the afternoon.

Exactly four hours earlier, at 10:30 A.M., I had left Mrs. Wiederholt at her desk. In four hours I had discovered I was a twin—that I am a twin—and I had become the custodial guardian of this twin. She was carrying with her a purse, a small duffel, and that was all. But this realization—that a little more than four hours ago I hadn't even known anything about all this, and then, in the space of no more than four hours I had learned that I am a twin and now had custody of her—it was the most surreal moment of my life. There, behind the wheel of that car, for the space of one or two minutes I actually thought I was going mad.

But I kept driving the car (safely, I think) down the road. At times I asked her questions. She did not answer. Her mental illness, I presumed. Here I was, with a new responsibility—a challenging responsibility—a twin I hadn't known about, and (I had been informed by the nurse) she was on her period. How, I wondered, does a brother help his sister with the hygiene issues of that?

At one point, as we were driving, she pointed ahead. I saw an exit. “Are you wanting to stop and use the restroom?” I asked. “Maybe get something to eat?” She didn't answer. She merely patted the steering wheel and pointed again.

So I took the exit, pulled into a convenience store parking lot, and on her own she undid her seatbelt, unlocked the door, and got out. As she walked toward the store, this was the first time I really noticed the way she looked. She was average height, well proportioned, small breasted, with muscular legs, a nice womanly bottom, and she was smartly dressed in a white blouse, tan skirt, brown pumps.

I waited in the car, aware that Frances was in the restroom, obviously able to attend to the issues of her period all by herself. After about five minutes she came back out and got in the car. This time she locked the door herself, but had some trouble with the seatbelt, so I helped her. Then we were off again. I had looked her over carefully as she had walked toward the car, even though she had been careful to avoid eye contact. I had searched her face this time. It definitely was a Baumli face. And she definitely was a very beautiful girl—or, young woman.

I remember saying to her, “So they call you Frances.” The president had referred to her as “Mary Frances,” at first, but then he had addressed her as “Frances,” as had the others. I added, “That makes two of us with the same name. We won’t be able to tell each other apart.” I was trying for humor, but it was lost on her. I

remember this exchange so well because it was at this moment something dawned on me very clearly. I had heard her speak to Evelyn, the old woman. I had heard her speak briefly to both the nurse and the president. She spoke in a soft voice, but she had been clear and articulate in what she said. But now she was not speaking to me. I realized—I knew, I was absolutely sure of it—that the reason she was not speaking to me was because she was angry. At me.

Still, nothing was boding well.

Highway 70 is a boring highway. Perhaps I had a boring companion, but given my state of mind, nothing seemed boring. I do know, however, that it was a very, very long 200 miles we traveled after that stop. First we had to go to the residence of my former parents-in-law, who were keeping Dacia, my daughter, while I was gone. There, I parked out front, and left Frances in the car as I went in to fetch Dacia, not neglecting to take the car keys with me.

Proprieties were always minimal and simple with Dacia's grandmother (the grandfather, though retired, had taken a new job as a used-car salesman, so he was not there). Hence the amenities of politeness were speedily done with, although I did have to fabricate a (false) explanation as to why my ex-mother-in-law would receive a phone call from a stranger asking her to vouch for my character. I

asked her if she had felt she was able to do that. We had remained on relatively good terms since I had parted from her daughter, and she cheerfully answered, “Well, I was certainly able to vouch for your bad character!”

On the way to the car, I told Dacia we had a visitor and she could ride in the back. She loved this option. Almost five years old, and full of energy, she loved riding in the back because she could turn somersaults from one end of that long car to the other. This she began doing, as we drove the fifteen-or-so miles to my place, and Frances turned in the seat to watch her.

Once arrived, we went inside the house, and I heard Dacia asking many questions. And I heard Frances doing what she hadn't done with me. She was talking with Dacia.

“How do you know my dad?” Dacia asked at one point.

“We just met today,” Frances replied.

“Are you his girlfriend?”

“No.”

“Then what are you?”

That was when Frances first spoke to me. There she was, standing in the doorway between the kitchen and the living room, and she said, “What do I tell her?”

“Come outside, and we’ll both tell her,” I said. We went out to the front porch, sat down, and I did most of the telling. Frances listened carefully. She was learning much of this for the first time. I told Dacia everything I knew, just as if Dacia were a grown-up. I explained that only this morning had I discovered that I had a twin, and only a few hours ago had I met this twin.

“Why didn’t you know her before?”

“She was in the hospital. Apparently she had health problems, a long time ago, way back at the beginning.”

“Didn’t your parents tell you?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I have no idea.”

“Why don’t you ask them?”

“I will. When the time is right.”

We went back inside, and I started fixing supper. I was ravenous, and I knew Frances had to be hungry too. All she had had for lunch was a candy bar. I had stopped at a rest area along the highway and had bought her one from a vending machine. Given the restrictions of my diet, I had not had one.

Dacia and Frances began playing again. Now Dacia wanted to walk on Frances' feet. This was a game I often played with her. It involved me holding Dacia tight with her back to me, while she stood on my feet as I walked. (An exercise which became more and more difficult the older she got.) When Frances understood what the game was, she took her shoes off, helped Dacia take her shoes off, and they spent half an hour playing the game. I heard my sister laugh for the first time.

Supper was awkward, but the three of us were hungry, so it passed without incident. Frances, of her own accord, began washing up the dishes and Dacia insisted on helping her. I went out and sat on the front porch. After a few minutes Frances came out, without Dacia, and sat down beside me.

"She's nice," Frances said.

I smiled.

She looked at me, and she smiled too.

"She's your niece," I said, and touched her arm. She smiled again. "We'll make a grocery list, so I can buy food you like."

There then commenced our first lengthy conversation, and it certainly corroborated the fact that Frances had been institutionalized all her life. She was incredulous that she could have a choice about

what food she ate. Except for gifts, from Evelyn, she had always eaten only the food provided her. She had learned much about “life on the outside” from watching TV, but this was something she had not quite noticed or figured out. We had a considerable discussion about this matter.

Then there was a bath for Dacia, reading a story to Dacia which Frances enjoyed more than Dacia did, then the silly rituals I always went through with tucking Dacia in. Frances loved watching this.

Once Dacia was in bed, there immediately commenced our first argument. Frances always watched TV at night, and she wanted to know where the TV was. When I told her I didn’t have one, she was bewildered at first, then angry. “I’ve watched hundreds of TV shows, and people always have a TV.”

“Well, in the real world, as opposed to the world on TV, not everybody has a TV. In fact, many people don’t.” (I made this latter claim while feeling very aware that I was stretching the truth.)

“But I’m not used to not watching TV!”

“Well, get used to it. You’ve learned too much from TV, and it’s made you learn the wrong things. You need to leave the TV alone. Completely alone. At least for a few months. You need to start learning about the real world.”

“How can I learn about the real world when I’m so isolated out here in the country?” It was a sensible question, but it surprised me. How did she know living in the country is a kind of isolation? Could she have learned that from TV?

“Learn the real world of the country. There’s a great deal to learn here. Dacia will take you walking.”

“On a hike?”

“When you live in the country, you don’t call it a hike. You just go walking. Exploring.”

“But what about the rest of the world?”

“We’ll go into town too. Columbia, a lot. Small towns like Boonville and New Franklin. Maybe Kansas City. Saint Joe if you want.” (I was wary saying this.) “And Saint Louis. I think you’d love Saint Louis. It has the Arch. You’ve seen that on TV I’ll bet.” She nodded. “And it has a zoo. And a special botanical garden. A science center. Some wonderful spots just to go walking in. I think you’d love Saint Louis.”

This excited her. She liked the idea of going to Saint Louis, and indeed, over the next few months, we went there several times. We would go other places too, but not to Saint Joe. Not soon, anyway. I never suggested it, and she never asked.

Normally, at this late hour, I would do my writing. But not this night. I asked if she had a change of clothes, and she did. I showed her where the towels were. I discovered that she had never taken a bath in her life, only showers. So I had to draw the bath, and basically explain how it is done.

She took her bath, and came out wearing a simple nightie—as they are called. I bathed, and although usually I sleep in the nude, I elected to sleep wearing underwear and a t-shirt, and meanwhile would wear my bathrobe until getting into bed.

Here there was a problem. This was a very small house. It measured thirty by thirty-three on the outside. There was a large living room, a large kitchen, my large bedroom, Dacia's small bedroom, and the bathroom. Where would we sleep? It was a dreadfully hot summer already, I had a fan blowing into the living room, and one exhausting from my bedroom. If I slept in the living room I would have to turn that fan off, because I never could sleep with a fan blowing on me without catching a bad cold, even in the hot summer.

This was when Frances seemed to first assume an unusual domestic role. She pulled down from a closet shelf a light blanket, put it on the bed, laid it out flat, then rolled it up so it made a tube

stretching the entire length of the bed. She placed this down the middle, and lay down. I saw what she intended. We would sleep together, but with this barrier. I was glad she had lain down on the left side of the bed. I never could sleep with someone if I wasn't lying on the right side of the bed.

So I lay down, was awake a few minutes, feeling very awkward, then slept soundly. More soundly than I would have thought.

The next morning, I quickly dressed while Frances was in the bathroom. She came out wearing different, more simple, clothes. Dacia was all energy and excitement. I asked Frances if she would rather have eggs or cold cereal for breakfast. Again, she was very confused. Dacia decided we would have scrambled eggs with toast.

After breakfast, Dacia wanted to go read, so Frances and I sat outside. We said little. Things seemed calm. Were we now a happy little family?

Not at all. Toward Dacia, Frances not only was friendly, she was cheerful, patient, loving. Toward me, she was at times conversational, and occasionally almost loving—but in a quiet way. I could tell that she loved my touching her, which I did rarely, briefly, gingerly.

But other times she was nothing less than sheer fury. She would sulk, then talk sullenly, then begin a tirade of anger over

something as minimal as the color of the dishtowel I had beside the kitchen sink. Her anger during these times was frightening, and she had no qualms about raising her voice to the point that she was actually yelling and screaming. I felt helpless during these times, fought back with rational and beseeching words, and after each storm abated would give her a stern lecture on how screaming and yelling is not the way civil people deal with their difficulties. Then I would have to endure hearing her inevitable, “But that’s how people do it on TV!” My lecture then would grow even more stern.

She soon climbed the heights to a new level of fury. She had discovered my study, borrowed my books, and obviously loved reading. But if literature soon became one of her loves, she knew how to direct her fury in that direction too. She began destroying certain things I had written. Several short stories were destroyed, some notes for a novel, and one day she announced that I would need to write at least twenty pages a day because she was going to destroy ten pages a day. And so she did, for several days, this time focusing on an old novel I had written years before. This went on for several days, I was wishing I had never rescued her, and one evening after supper I went outside to the front porch, sat down, and burst into sobbing that surely would have rent the heart of the devil. The

sobbing began over her destroying another ten pages of my manuscripts, but it continued, and increased in force, because the entire weight of this new responsibility, and the ugliness of it, was bearing down upon me like a boulder. She came out on the porch, and I tried to stop crying, but could not. I sat there, helpless as a baby, my face in my hands. And so I sobbed this way for maybe another five minutes. Vaguely, I became aware that she was sitting beside me. Then she put her hand on my shoulder, and as I kept sobbing, I heard her say something. I couldn't tell what it was, but I looked up, with what I am sure was a ghastly face, and I asked her to repeat herself. She said, "I'm sorry." That was all, and it wasn't enough. I started sobbing again, just as hard, but a minute later when she said something I did hear her. She said, "I need you to help me find out why our parents abandoned me."

"You were sick," I said. "They thought you were retarded. Brain damaged."

"But as I got better they still stayed away. They abandoned me then too."

"You're right. We need to find out."

PART II:

FROM PARENT TO PEER

From that time on, things were different. Frances never again yelled or screamed at me. If she sulked, it was brief, and seemed nothing more than what anyone might do. She was cheerful not only with Dacia but also with me. We talked, sometimes for hours on end, about books and literature and writing. I introduced her to classical music, which did not much interest her, but at least she made an attempt to enjoy it. She walked for miles in the country, and would return invigorated. We bought her several changes of clothes. And I took her to a neurologist in Columbia whom I knew, her exam paid for by the State, and he concluded that she had nothing wrong with her at all. I told him about how she had been institutionalized, under the belief that she was brain-damaged, and he merely observed, “Well, sometimes, even in things like this, people do get better.”

Yes; over the years, she had gotten better physically. And over the last few days, our domestic relationship had improved considerably. After that incident on the front porch, when I was sobbing, I don't think either of us ever raised our voices to one

another or spoke sharply. There were moments of being grumpy, or withdrawn, or even sulking, but never anything of major proportions. And it deserves being here recorded that even during those difficult weeks, Frances was never anything but a doting aunt toward Dacia. Her many effluxes of anger toward me, which had been verbal and loud, had always been manifest when Dacia was away.

The summer was terribly hot. That little house had no air-conditioning, and even sleeping in my underwear became unbearable. Before long I was sleeping naked and Frances was too. The tube-like blanket separating us had been set aside, and so we slept chastely—like brother and sister, not like lovers. (“Like two little kids playing in the bathtub,” she would describe it years later.) The summer became even hotter. There were eleven days in a row when the temperature, in the nearby town of Boonville, registered at least 110 degrees. Outside, on the front porch, I had a thermometer attached to one of the support beams so it was shielded by the support beam from direct sunlight. It was clearly visible as one walked out the front door. One night I awoke at 3 A.M. precisely, soaked in sweat, and went outside to see what the temperature was. It registered exactly 100 degrees. As I got into bed Frances said, “What’s wrong?” I told her what I had just seen outside. She merely

replied, “Just go back to sleep. Then you won’t feel hot.” Already, it seemed, she was capable of some degree of wisdom.

A few days after domestic matters had smoothed out, and she had had her neurological exam which gave her a clean bill of health, I took upon myself the pleasant task of reading to her every night before we would go to sleep. There was a single lamp on the bedstead, and when I read to her, for some reason I preferred being on her left—the opposite of how we slept together. I read to her some poetry, The Little Prince, The Dog of Flanders, some short stories by Borges, but mostly she enjoyed my reading children’s books to her. Dr. Seuss books and that sort of thing. Silly books. I would read them enthusiastically, in the tone of voice one uses when reading to little children, and she loved this. I realized I was, at this late stage in her life, giving her something she had never received. A degree of friendly and fun parenting. This became a ritual, we both loved it, and at the end of each night I would put the books aside, go to the other side of the bed, and we would switch off the lamp and go to sleep.

Our intimacy was lovely. I had a sister, a twin, and also I was parenting her.

There was another aspect of our relationship, however, which was obviously more of an issue to others than it was to Frances or

me. It culminated in a night that was, not quite sexual, but nevertheless erotic. Just one night. That is all. And that one night did not constitute the sort of relating that other people had hinted at.

Actually there had been more than hinting. I had talked with people about our relationship, and while I told no one that we were sleeping in the same bed, I incurred some most unseemly teasing about my relationship with Frances. All this angered me to no small degree. One fellow I knew well, who was a friend of a friend, even leered, "Incest is best!" Another fellow, perhaps trying to be more genteel, asked, "Do you ever, at times, both of you being single, you know, uh, sort of, maybe, think about doing it?"

This questioning was crass. Even if an incestuous relationship had begun, between Frances and me, it was none of their business. Their questions I met with anger and sarcasm, and if I did not entirely halt this unseemly meddling, I did, I think, prevent any gossip from getting started.

We were brother and sister. We were twins. We were together in a small house with one bathroom. We were sleeping together. As time went by, our initial modesty had become attenuated by the sheer habit of being together. We caught glimpses of one another naked, at first. Soon we were brazenly, and unselfconsciously, naked in front of

one another. We slept naked. I watched her naked body, and was aware that hers was a gorgeous body, and the type of woman's body I am attracted to: broad and muscular shoulders, small but firm breasts, a slim waist, a plump but firm bottom, muscular legs. She had the body of a Venus. And she had absolutely gorgeous hair. It was long, thick, curly, and a luxuriant auburn color exactly like my daughter's hair. Truly it was luminescent in color and sheen. Moreover, it was exactly the same color as mine, although my own hair could not be as beautiful because it was much shorter than hers. We both were thirty-two years old, and I was still in my own physical prime. Sometimes I was aware that she was watching me—my body, my sex especially. But more important, we were not watching each other with sexual interest. We were just two siblings who happened to be together, and since being naked was more convenient, it became the habitual norm. There was nothing sexually charged about it at all. Until:

There was one night that was intensely erotic. And I believe my main reason for wishing to give a recounting of it is so I can disappoint those jeering, voyeuristic, auto-frottageous interlocutors of yore.

Allow me to encapsulate it this way: Something happened. But what happened is the fact that something almost happened yet it didn't quite happen. What did happen I will explain, trusting that my account reflects a clear memory, and also trusting that I do not infringe upon Frances' sense of privacy. (We have, several times, discussed the incident since. I think we are in agreement as to what transpired ... and did not transpire. Also, we are in clear agreement that what did not ensue was for the best.)

It began in the middle of a very hot night. I awoke tumescent. That was the beginning. Frances was on her back, I was on my side pressed against her, and—putting it bluntly—my penis was hard. I think she came awake at about the same time I did. (I can imagine the incest leers, at this point, becoming aroused.) We both were fully aware that this was new, unexpected, and in some ways uncontrollable—at least in its beginning. I was filled with a desire that was pure sex, and yet it was redolent with a plenum of emotional entanglements: The fun and intimacy of our reading, the simple fact that being naked and so hot made our being in bed so purely physical, the fact that we both were still in our sexual prime. Amidst this mixture of sexual feeling and intimate bonds, we both lay there, rigid with what can only be described as a combination of excited

arousal, anxious uncertainty, and a foreboding awareness that if we crossed this boundary then everything would become much more complicated and crazy.

For perhaps half an hour we lay thus, with minimal—even miniscule—explorings which mainly involved our moving closer to one another. By this time Frances was lying on her side, facing me. As I stated, the slow, cautious exploring was mutual. There were a few moments when I pressed against her hard, then relaxed. At one point she moved her hand, brushed it against my penis, but then rested her hand on her hip. I thought to myself that, if we went ahead and had sex, it would not really be incestuous. After all, she wasn't just my sister, she was my twin. So if we had sex, it would be more like masturbating. (How the sexually desirous mind can deceive itself!) At any point, during this half hour, had one of us made a definite move in the direction of sexual conjoining, I think we would have done it. Frances, years later, would admit that she was as aroused as I was. But even that night I could tell she was as aroused as I was, lying there in the dark, sweat pouring off both of us, the humid heat made more unbearable by the desire of our bodies. Thus sustaining this desire, and yet, not doing anything with it, caused it to run its course. It abated, not entirely, but we then began moving

apart. If for half an hour we had moved closer to one another, for about fifteen minutes we, less cautiously, slowly (as if exercising propriety) moved apart. And then, after lying quietly for a time, we slept soundly.

What if we had had sex? Would it have been morally wrong? At the time I wasn't sure. Would it have been disastrous for us emotionally? Maybe. Was it better that nothing happened? I am quite sure it is better, for one simple reason.

Later, I would allow myself the fantasy that a sexual relationship would have been splendid—allowing us an intimacy that could only happen when the already present possibilities for intimacy between twins are furthered by the opportunities for intimacy that occur in sexual relating. However, this fantasy would always be brought up short by a simple realization: Our relationship was not equal. In a sense, I was parenting her. I was teaching her about the “real world,” I was reading to her at night and thus trying to give her something she had failed to receive when she was a child, and in hundreds of other ways I was teaching her about the world and helping her grow up. Had we become sexual in our relationship at this point, it would not merely have been a relationship between brother and sister, or two twins, it would have been like a father

having sex with his daughter. This might, to her, have felt like a violation—even a kind of rape. But even if it didn't feel like this, it would have resulted in something disastrous, because Frances was growing up, and the day would soon come (as things transpired) when she would get a job and begin moving away from me in a manifold of ways—personally, economically, even where she lived. At this point, had we achieved the intimacy of sexual relating, her moves toward independence would probably have been laced with considerable rebelliousness. And likely I would have felt very hurt, even abandoned. I would have become both a lonesome twin and a bereft lover.

Did this night contaminate our relationship henceforth? Quite the contrary. The next day we both were uncomfortable with one another. At breakfast, we were unusually silent. It would probably be accurate to say that we both were more than a little embarrassed. Frances announced she was going for a walk. Feeling that I should say something about the night before, I put a hand on her arm, squeezed gently, and said, "Let's not worry about last night. Okay?" She nodded shyly and smiled. I added, "It didn't happen, and it won't." She smiled and nodded again, then departed. After an hour she came back, and at one point, in the early afternoon, I looked in

our bedroom and saw that Frances had put the rolled up blanket, forming a tube, running the entire length of the bed back in place. But later that evening, I saw that she had removed it. When we went to bed that night, I read to her as before, this time purposefully selecting a short story by Chekhov that was political in tone. And then we slept, soundly and peacefully. There never again was an iota of the erotic feelings of that tumescent and humid night. And what is surprising, I think we both responded to that fervent night with a stronger sense of both intimacy and trust. We had not crossed a boundary, even when we both were mightily tempted, and so we trusted that we never would. Trusting that we never would somehow even removed all trace of temptation.

But during this time, it wasn't just the two of us. There was another presence: I was amidst the process of breaking up with a woman who, for more than two years, had been "the love of my life." My soul was more than sore—it was shattered, and I carried the pain of that protracted parturition in me like a stone. The sundering of souls had happened, the sundering of bodies was in process, the separation (and relief) provided by space, I knew, was soon to happen. (Although, as events would unhappily prove, it would not happen as soon as it should have.) Also there was my busy and

energetic daughter. With custody of her, I was raising her by myself, with virtually no help from her biological mother who, in her drug-induced lassitude, scarcely ever wanted to even see her daughter—a source of great pain for Dacia. There were other presences too. Not the least was Evelyn, the old woman back in Saint Joe. Her sorrow, when we left, had been real. She phoned many times. She would speak to Frances briefly, then she would want to speak to me. It was awful. She was hurting, angry, indignant, and her sense of identity had been stripped away. So also had her sense of purpose in life. She had been working as a volunteer at Saint Joseph State Mental Hospital Number 2 for more than half of Frances' life, and during this entire time she had attached herself to Frances. In truth, Frances was not equally attached to her. She found Evelyn abrasive, bossy, and not very bright. But certainly Evelyn's loyalty was exemplary. She called perhaps a dozen times—not an inexpensive feat back in those days. I suspect each phone call lasted half an hour, virtually all of each call being directed toward me. She was angry to the point of being abusive, and so demanding as to be unreasonable. She wanted us to move to Saint Joe. She wanted me to give her custody of Frances. When I explained that I could not, she reasoned correctly that as Frances' custodian I could entrust Frances to her. I reasoned

obliquely, I stalled, I denied. After about seven weeks, two other people from her family called, first a son, then later the same day, a daughter. Exactly six weeks after Frances had been “taken,” Evelyn died of a heart attack. The two children made the accusation that taking Frances away from their mother had so traumatized her that this was what had killed her. In truth, I think it very possible that they were right. They both threatened to sue me. I was frightened, but also, I felt fairly sure of the situation. I explained to them that they would have to sue, not me, but the State of Missouri. I had custody of Frances, but she was—and forever would be—a “ward of the State.” I told them to see a lawyer and file their lawsuit accordingly against the State of Missouri.

This firm response, it seems, settled them down. I never heard from them again, and I noted (with what was almost consternation) that Frances did not at all grieve the old woman’s passing.

I also phoned all my many siblings to tell them the news, and I pressed upon them the fact that I did not want them to tell any of this to our parents. None of them believed me—or seemed to. I had a reputation for playing practical jokes on people—elaborate, crafty, dramatic ones. My siblings were inclined to believe that I was in the midst of another practical joke. One sister made the obvious

suggestion, “Well, if she looks like a Baumli, as you say she does, then bring her here and let us meet her.” I considered this, even planned to do this, but then Frances surprised me by letting it be known that she had no desire to meet any of them. In fact, she would not meet them under any circumstances. It seemed that her initial anger toward me, which somehow involved blaming me for the fact that she had been “incarcerated” all those years, was now being transferred to them.

So I prudently made no mention of Frances to my other siblings ever again, and what is curious, none of them—not one—ever brought the subject up later.

But I had my own agenda. I needed to confront our parents. “Your parents,” Frances would correct me. So I devised a scheme, which required considerable persuading on my part in order to get Frances to go along with it. I would go visit them, Frances would accompany me, and she would be introduced as my girlfriend. I would explain that I could only stay about an hour, that I had driven up there to fetch an expensive double bass I had bought, and I wanted to talk to them about this discovery that there had been a twin.

Frances was afraid of the plan. She feared they might recognize her, even though they apparently had not seen her since she was about four years old. She was afraid I might start crying, or become emotional in some other way, and let the truth out. Plus the idea of seeing them was reprehensible to her. And yet, I would discover that she is afflicted with the same degree of curiosity which often defines me. I suggested she sit in another room while I talked to them, and pretend to be reading. Also I pointed out that, given my dad's many work involvements, he probably wouldn't even be there.

But he was there, though not when we arrived. When we arrived my mother was baking cookies for a social event, and a fresh batch had just come out of the oven when we came through the door. I introduced Frances as "Karen, my girlfriend," and we were served freshly baked sour-cream cookies with milk. They smelled delicious, but I could not eat any because of my diet. Frances obviously loved them, and matters seemed simple and unusually amiable. But then my dad drove in the driveway, and he came inside. He had correctly assumed that I would be headed north toward Maryville, and he wanted me to deliver payment to a fellow he owed money to as I drove that way. It was a check to a radiator repair shop, and I took the check. Before he could hurry out of the house and get back to work, I

told him and my mother that I needed to talk to them, “privately.” They both looked at Frances, and I said she could merely stay in the dining room while we talked in the living room; it wasn’t so private that a stranger couldn’t hear what was said.

The exchange was short. I told them I had looked at my old medical records, and had discovered that there was a twin and that she was living in Saint Joe. I recounted nothing else. They were defensive, distant, and (to put it bluntly) refused to get involved. Dad, in his half-German, half-Irish, rural accent said they had been to see her when she was “three or four” and, “She don’t know ye.” I then said I had gone to see her, and she seemed normal, although not very conversational. “No; she ain’t normal. She acts like that ‘cause she don’t know ye.” My mother, predictably, was tearful and said very little. “We had to give up on her,” she said, crying, or pretending to cry. “The doctors said she would never be normal. We did what was best for her.” I wanted to ask them why they had never told me, or any of my siblings, but I was afraid that if I went into this terrain, my emotions would indeed come spilling forth. Several times my mother repeated, “We did what was best for her.”

With considerable alarm, it suddenly occurred to me that if I insisted that my twin was now normal, they might dwell on the matter

for some months and then go see her. I thought it best to merely say, “Well, I saw her. It’s true that she isn’t normal.”

I would later explain to Frances why I had said this, but she already understood. She had been having the same worry I had had, although it occurred to her sooner than it did to me.

So we left.

“Your mother was hospitable,” Frances said, “but I didn’t like her. Your dad is awful, like you said.”

“Our dad ... and mother,” I corrected her.

“Yours. They’re not my parents. I will never claim them, and from what I’ve just seen, I’m glad they abandoned me. At least they didn’t get to abuse me, like they abused you.”

“She don’t know ye.” “We did what was best for her.” “They’re not my parents.”

That was the sum of it. I hoped they would not mention to my siblings that I had confronted them about this matter. I am sure they didn’t since during the next seventeen years they were alive, they never mentioned the topic to me, and I never brought it up with them again.

I did, however, call Mrs. Wiederholt. I phoned her at Saint Francis Hospital, her place of work. She was not occupied when I

called, and so we had a nice chat. I told her exactly what had happened, and I am glad to report that she not only seemed glad that things had turned out so well, she also was warmed that I wanted to tell her about it. I even told her about confronting my parents with the news, although I did not tell her that Frances was there when I confronted them. Mrs. Wiederholt listened as I told her of my parents' resolve to remain uninvolved, and I well remember the grim (and judgemental) tone in her voice when she said, "Well, it doesn't surprise me."

So that was one more duty—a pleasant one—discharged. I had already written her son, my old friend Ron, although, as it turned out, he never wrote back.

Meanwhile, Frances and I were not finished with delving into our early past. On another of our trips, we went to see my old family doctor: Doctor Bauman. He was the one who had delivered us, and who had been our family doctor all through my childhood. In fact, the last time I saw him as a doctor was, if memory serves, when I was either a junior or senior in college. This means I saw him some time between 1968 and 1970. I suspect it was in 1969. But what happened, and when or where it happened, gets a little confused. I have talked to people who knew him, and now know that he wasn't just Doctor

Bauman, he signed his name H.C. Bauman. His first name was Henry. According to his obituary he died May 30, 1993, at age 81 in St. Joe, Missouri where he had been born. The obituary also states that he retired in 1972, but suggests that he practiced medicine in the nearby small town of Fairfax, Missouri on a part-time basis for either the last five years of the time he practiced in Maryville, or for five years after he retired from practice in Maryville.

This history does not quite “jive” with our experience. We saw him in late-summer or early-fall of 1980. Frances and I are not quite in agreement on certain circumstances around this. My memory was that we saw him at his old office in Maryville. But even though I usually have a “steel trap” of a memory, I know it can not always be trusted when matters are fraught with emotion. Frances remembers our driving to a place other than Maryville, and thinks it was probably St. Joe, although she isn’t sure. (For years she had a very difficult time identifying where she was going, or had been, on a road trip. This came, I am sure, from having been in a car so rarely during the first 32 years of her life.) However, we both do clearly remember that we met with him in a small exam room, and that Frances sat on the exam table, fully clothed, while he gave her a cursory neurological exam.

So did he really retire in 1972? Or retire in 1972 from his practice in Maryville, but then retire five years later from his part-time practice in Fairfax? Either of the two scenarios would suggest that we saw him at least three years after he had completely retired.

I am surprised that my recollection is so vague, but I do recall that we had trouble locating him, even though in my memory we saw him at his old office in Maryville, Missouri. I suspect the truth is that I tracked him down at his home in St. Joe, and that he had a single exam room in his house, which he likely had put in for use on rare occasions.

Regardless, I do remember how he looked: much the same, although now his hair was white. His personality seemed the same: He was mild in speech, gentle in manner, deft and peremptory with his hands. He gave Frances a cursory neurological exam, and said that he concurred with the neurologist who had examined her some time before: she seemed entirely normal.

Our meeting with him gave us a great deal of information, and also almost no information. The great deal of information involved what had happened at our births, and what had caused Frances' initial physical problems. But he had almost no memory of what had happened after the birth itself, except that she had difficulties and

had been kept at the hospital. He did not remember her being transferred to the mental hospital in St. Joe, nor did he remember at all the reactions of our parents. But his memory of the birth trauma seemed, for the most part, perfectly clear. His account, generally speaking, I do think was accurate, and I will relay it here as best I can; although I must, before I am finished, register the fact that I do have some reservations about whether or not truth graced the whole of his account.

One should keep in mind, first of all, that twins were not expected. Also, it bears emphasis that at the time, Maryville was not highly populated with doctors. There was no doctor in the hospital when we were born; rather, Doctor Bauman rushed to the delivery and was somewhat late. As to how late he was, the accounts vary.

My mother, predictably, has the most dramatic account. When she presented this account, she was of course describing my birth, not the birth of twins. She claimed that I was about to be born, and the nurse did not want me to be born until the doctor arrived, so the nurse crossed my mother's legs for ten minutes to keep me from being born. Physicians have told me that crossing her legs would not likely have kept me from being born given that she had had two babies previously. Still, it is a possible scenario. Regardless, it does

seem that the doctor was late, a nurse was in charge, and the birth itself was complicated from the moment it commenced.

Doctor Bauman's telling of the story became rather animated—considering the mild demeanor of his personality. I was the first-born, and I came into the world with—or so it seemed—my own umbilical cord wrapped around my neck, strangling me. So, understandably, he quickly cut it. I promptly emerged entirely, my umbilical cord still intact, which caused him a moment of distressed confusion. But then he realized that another baby was quickly slipping out into the world, and as my sister came out, it was obvious that my own umbilical cord was strangling her. So he cut that, realizing, with considerable consternation, that a few minutes earlier, when he thought he had cut my own umbilical cord because he believed it was strangling me, he had actually cut the umbilical cord of my unborn sister who not only had been strangling me with her own umbilical cord, she also was being strangled by my umbilical cord. Hence, because Doctor Bauman had unknowingly cut her umbilical cord, Frances had been without oxygen, supplied by the blood flow from the placenta, for—he wasn't sure how long, but he thought it was perhaps four or five minutes. (“You aren't exactly keeping an eye on your wristwatch during such situations,” he said, and I noted the old-fashioned term

“wristwatch” even though I was focused on his tale.) So thus we came into the world, two tiny babies, amidst much drama and trauma. My umbilical cord was strangling Frances, Frances’ umbilical cord was strangling me (such a battle we must have fought in the womb!), and when the umbilical cord strangling me was cut the doctor thought it was my own cord strangling me, so he unwittingly cut the cord of a baby minutes away from being born. I was already breathing oxygen; she, not yet emerged, could not breathe oxygen, and her supply of oxygen from the placenta had just been cut off. So Frances experienced a lack of oxygen—hypoxia—for several minutes before birth.

I have reviewed the medical literature on this matter, and discover that opinions differ somewhat, but generally doctors believe that an unborn baby can survive three to five minutes without oxygen. “It’s own circulatory system is already well oxygenated and this provides enough.” Such periods of oxygen deprivation actually are not uncommon as the baby slips down the birth canal, because as it is squeezed through the birth canal, especially during a difficult birth, the umbilical cord can be so compressed that the baby goes for several minutes without oxygen provided by the placenta. One must conjecture that Frances’ period without oxygen was just a few too

many seconds, maybe as much as a minute, beyond what otherwise would have been conducive to being born in good health. Thus, and thence for several years, her physical difficulties. But whence the miracle that would allow her body, all by itself, to neurologically repair itself?

But her body had indeed recovered, completely. Why had she not left the institution years earlier? Why had she not been returned to my parents? I am not sure, and could never get any answer from the president of the hospital, except a vague statement that Frances seemed to have not yet completely recovered, and when mention was made of her returning to her parents, she would, it seemed, regress. So no definitive diagnosis of her current state of mental health was ever deemed reliable. (I suspect, from what she has told me, that Frances was neurologically sound by the age of five or six. But also, it seems, she already was angry at her parents because even though she perhaps did not know all the circumstances, and was looking at the situation from a child's point of view, she did have a basic feeling of having been abandoned ... by somebody. And when the hospital personnel talked to her about going back to her parents, even though she did not know who her parents were, and perhaps did not even understand what parents are, she nevertheless had it figured out that

somebody had abandoned her, they were her parents, and she did not want to be returned to people who had abandoned her. (I happen to think this little girl made the right decision, and I even think this decision was wise.)

If she was completely recovered, physically, at a very young age, there would yet be much emotional recovery to do. Put in a different way, there would be much to be done in the way of growing up emotionally. I gave some of this to her in those first months she was with me. Those days were hellish for a few weeks, but the strife evaporated completely, and Frances very effectively took over the job of pushing along her own emotional recovery. She loved to walk, could travel on foot at a brisk pace for twenty miles and feel not a bit tired, and in fact she seemed to become even more vigorous, healthy, and effusive in personality as the years went by. She often used the word “vigorous” to describe her health, and indeed I often felt jealous of her health, aware of my own limits—minimal and subtle though they were.

We left Doctor Bauman on somewhat awkward terms. I offered to pay him, which seemed to both embarrass and confuse him. He declined payment, and even offered to take us out for a steak dinner. We had to decline his invitation, because we were pressed for time. I

wanted to give him something, however, so when he walked us to my car (a Volvo, this time), I realized that in the back seat was a boxed bottle of a fine, very expensive, single-malt Scotch which I had bought for an attorney I would be seeing the next day. I asked him if he imbibed, and he said, with a note of humor, “Only for my health. And only when the liquid has quality.”

I reached in the back seat, pulled out the bottle, and handed it to him. “Does the quality of this suit your criteria?”

He chuckled and said, “It often does. In fact, this is what I choose, when I am feeling especially indulgent.”

So I handed it to him and he asked, “How did you know I am partial to this particular whisky? Most people wouldn’t even know about it.”

“Because I remember you as a man of patrician stature,” I replied, and although there was humor in my words, he nevertheless seemed pleased by what I said. Thus we parted on amiable, and remunerative, terms.

I can not say, however, that I parted from him on terms that were not without suspicion. There was, shall we say, an aroma of inconsistency in his tale, and in what I had heard from others—especially from my Aunt Jean, plus the medical records I had read

(sparse though they were), what my mother had said in earlier years, and what Doctor Bauman himself had said. He had arrived late for the delivery. The nurse had crossed our mother's legs to keep "me" from being born. Yet it is likely that I (we) were soon born anyway. It is somewhere, here, in this tale that the aroma of something awry with the viridicality of matters seems to inhere. I am sure that Doctor Bauman arrived in the delivery room while the birth was already in process, but exactly what he did, and what the nurse had done before he arrived, was not presented quite clearly or with convincing consistency. In truth, I think the nurse was perhaps more aggressively involved (as the medical terminology puts it) than Doctor Bauman wanted to admit. For example, was it actually Doctor Bauman who snipped that first umbilical cord, or was it the nurse? Who cut the umbilical cord that supposedly was my own—strangling me, when actually it was my sister's, strangling me, which therefore, when cut, deprived her of oxygen for a crucial and critical time? Who was it who made the error?

But perhaps it doesn't really matter. The outcome likely would have been the same, regardless of which person was there at the beginning of the birth and cut that first umbilical cord. It was an understandable mistake. Either of them could have made it. The

consequences would have been no different. And the outcome, if problematical for a long while, in the end was good. My sister, Frances, despite those early difficulties, not only survived, she thrived—alone at first, then out in the real world (with me at first, then with many other people).

I wrote that on the day we saw Dr. Bauman we parted on amiable terms. This is true, and yet I rancored against myself because I soon wished that, when we saw him, I had asked him if he remembered that injury to my back, or if he himself had medical records which would refer to any office visits subsequent to that late-night visit to the hospital. But the topic did not even occur to me that day, and only later that night did I think about it. I can't for the life of me understand why I didn't think to bring the topic up during our visit, but after having presumed upon his time and good will once, it did not seem appropriate to pay him another visit—especially since I seriously doubted I would get any information.

From when I first knew Frances, and then for a long while, there remained the issue of our names. I have already recounted how my mother and father asked my Aunt Jean to mediate regarding my name, the “Marion” coming from my mother's first name, “Mary,” of “Mary Evelyn” and my second name coming from my dad's middle

name, “Francis,” of “Leo Francis.” But what happened regarding naming the girl?

The records at State Mental Hospital Number 2 had her down as Mary Frances, and this is what I called her for a long time. In fact, I still sometimes tend to think of her as this. But when she began trying to learn to drive (I state “trying” because she never did learn) we had to get a driver’s permit, and this required a birth certificate. There, on the birth certificate, it very clearly stated: “Marian Frances.” Having already been given considerable exposure to the seeming authority of the hospital authorities and their paperwork, I assumed that the birth certificate was in error. It seemed a natural error, i.e., one which could easily be made. I thought little of the matter; to me she was Mary Frances. But on her driver’s permit, the information had to reflect what was on her birth certificate, so there it stated Marian Frances. Still, we thought little of the matter, and so it went for a couple of years. But then, in early 1985, when Frances was packing for a journey to England, we decided to make a trip to Northwest Missouri where we were born. I wanted to see some friends there, and we both would see Aunt Jean. Frances, like everyone, was very fond of Aunt Jean; and Aunt Jean, in her busy, practical way, simply

accepted Frances fully for who she was, never making mention of the past except when pressed.

But something she had said during one of our previous visits had caused me to wonder anew if perhaps the birth certificate was right. I do not remember what she said; I do know that at the time it made little impression on me, and only later did it give me pause. I resolved that on this trip I would go to our parish and examine our baptismal certificates, which should be readily available since, our parents being Catholic, we both would have been baptized in the Catholic church there.

So I went to the parish priest, who was uncooperative and short-tempered, and said he could not possibly pursue this matter because he had other duties. I was cursorily dismissed, and once again had evidence for supporting my old decision to “fall away” from the Catholic Church. Sitting in my car, with Frances, we saw the priest drive away. With nothing else planned, we decided to go inside the church and have a look at it; maybe there would be some nice statuary, or stained glass. Once inside, we noted that the church had been modernized, there was little interesting in the way of statuary to see, but a man, perhaps in his ‘60s, was there straightening hymnals and tidying the church up. He approached us, as if we might be

unwelcome intruders, but when I introduced myself he immediately warmed to me because he knew all the Baumli family. He was the “custodian” of the church, and said since he had retired from his regular job, he had been “doing my part to please Saint Peter.” I told him about our quest, and he readily took us to the room where all the baptismal certificates were kept. Most were in file cabinets, some were in boxes; we found ours in a box. Examining them, I saw the names: “Marion Francis” and “Marian Frances.” No “Mary Frances” was there. Whatever information the state hospital had was wrong. The matter was settled, essentially, by a tallying of votes. Two votes—our birth certificates and our baptismal certificates listed her as Marian Frances. Only State Mental Hospital Number 2 listed her as Mary Frances. So “Marian Frances” she was, and we would get corroboration of this (if vaguely and reluctantly) within an hour from Aunt Jean.

Yes; after that visit to the church, we dropped by Aunt Jean’s place, and gave her the information we had just gathered. She was reticent about these matters when we tried to discuss them with her. This had always been the case. I think it was out of some kind of sisterly loyalty to my mother, and also because she did not want my mother to ever find out that she talked to us so openly about this

issue. So what we gleaned from her, that afternoon, was gained with difficulty, but I think we came away with a clear view of the situation. What the birth certificates, and baptismal certificates, stated was accurate. The “Mary Frances” had been given to the authorities by my mother when Frances was transferred to institutional care.

Although Aunt Jean did not—would not—come right out and say this, it seems that our mother, making a choice to not parent Frances, was trying to compensate by placing a stamp of ownership—her own first name—upon Frances. She, Mary Evelyn, if she was giving this child away forever, would give her own first name to this child. So to the institution, and in my mother’s own mind, “Marian Frances” became “Mary Frances.” My mother would not parent her, so she would be the one to name her (with her husband having no input, and perhaps no interest, at this point).

How did Frances react to the certainty of this news? She very much liked it. She had come to hate our parents, for what they had done to her, and she definitely did not want our mother’s first name although she felt fine with my father’s middle name since it did not seem to characterize him or reflect his personality. Moreover, she had never liked the two names, “Mary Frances,” together. At times she was called Mary Frances by teachers in the institution, and most

of those teachers were nuns. She thought “Mary Frances” sounded like a nun’s name, and perhaps the nuns did too, this being why they called her by both names. So she had not liked “Mary Frances” for this reason, and was glad to consider it now null and void. As for myself, I admit that although I preferred thinking of her as having a name exactly like mine (except for the spelling) I rather liked the sound of “Mary Frances.” To my ear it almost had a poetic lilt to it, and if I preferred her authentic name, I was a little sorry to now know that the wrong name had become defunct.

As Francis and Frances, the response from our friends was to immediately try and give us nicknames: Frank and Fran. Then, Hank and Fran. Next, Fran and Franny. Even Fresno and Fortissimo. The most persistent pairing was Frank and Fran, and all these nicknames we resisted fiercely. I write “fiercely” intentionally, because it soon became something of a small power struggle with several people, and all this was quite a lesson in how other people want to be controlling—they would rather put their stamp of ownership on you by being the ones to christen you with a nickname, than allow you to be comfortable with the name you were given and prefer. In fact I lost a long-time friend simply because he would not stop calling me “Fran” and I would not put up with this. It was not so much the

nickname, as his obvious attempt to be controlling toward me, which caused me to break with him.

But at last we settled into being Francis and Frances. There never did seem to be any mix-ups as to who was being addressed at social gatherings. Context, tone of voice, and simply listening to the entire statement always made it clear as to who was being spoken to.

There was one other small bit of information Aunt Jean gave us. Initially, when it had become clear to my parents that there were twins to deal with, some consternation about the names came up. This topic did not command a great deal of attention since, after all, Frances' health was the main concern. But the matter did get discussed, and it was decided that I would be called Francis, and my sister would be called Marian. However, given her health problems, she was kept at the hospital in Maryville for almost four months before she was transferred to the natal unit in the mental hospital at Saint Joe. That hospital in Maryville was named Saint Francis Hospital, it was run by Franciscan nuns (in their huge, voluminous white habits), and when a little baby girl is a resident for almost four months in a hospital named Saint Francis Hospital, and it is run by Franciscan nuns, that little girl, if named Marian Frances, is going to end up being called Frances. The preference of the nuns had become

habit, habit took on the persistence of convention, convention became dictate, and thus the authority of the nuns ruled (as it always did and does).

My tale about Frances, at this point, has abruptly caused an upsurge of sadness—of such dimension as to almost feel like grief. This surprises me, and yet I know exactly where it comes from. What I now have to relate is the process of Frances moving away from me—physically, and emotionally too. She was growing up, and my role as parent was diminishing. I had liked this role; I still remember it fondly, and thinking back now on how it atrophied and then disappeared makes me acutely sad. Also, Frances moved away—physically. I shall give a summary of this, aware that it involves mundane details which, lacking drama, may bore the reader.

We have, in our 33 years together, gained in intimacy, grown more fond of one another, and there is a joy and a security in our relationship which is quite unique. But at the same time, something was lost. As our relationship took on more complexity and dimension, the nature of the relationship, as it had been defined during those initial months, disappeared. During that time it had a simple, raw, almost primal intimacy which was not so emotional as it was physical, and perhaps not so physical as it was biological.

We were only now getting to know one another, and at times the simplicity of what we were in how we knew each other was so basic it almost seemed we were back in the womb together. I liked this, but it slowly and surely disappeared. At times I feel sad realizing how that innocence we felt together during the summer and autumn of 1980, tumultuous though it was, entirely evaporated. Yes; during those months, as Frances burgeoned and grew more emotionally independent, it would transpire that I would lose a dependent and difficult child. But also I would gain a sibling, a sister, a twin who was fast becoming a peer. We had never slept together as lovers, but we had slept together as loving and innocent companions. Though much of my working life—as a writer—was interrupted as I gave her the long hours of attention she now needed because she had been deprived of that attention when she was young, that time was nevertheless the most focused and dedicated emotional immersion I would ever experience. Never since, for so long a time, have I felt more needed, more indispensable even, and this gave me a sense of emotional security. How can one not feel emotionally secure when you feel that you are absolutely indispensable to another human being you love?

That had been close living quarters for us. I had a small study that was separate from the house, but the house itself was only 33 feet by 30 feet. In other words, less than a thousand square feet of living space for Frances, my daughter, and myself. If this made for cramped quarters, it also made for intimate living. I came to like the sense of being crowded, even preferred it. So when she abruptly moved away it came as both a surprise and an emotional shock.

PART III:
NORMALCY, DETAILS, HEALTHY MUNDANEITIES:
SHARING OUR MORTAL YEARS

A little less than six months after she had “come home,” Frances went for a walk one evening and did not return. As night came on, I became quite worried. We were now well into winter, and I was just about to go driving down the road, hoping to find her, when the phone rang. It was her. She was in Columbia, working at her first job!

She had intended to phone me earlier, but the manager had been giving her a lengthy training session, and she hadn’t been able to phone me until now. I knew that during her long walks, she had met most of our neighbors. I did not know that she had formed relationships with them, friendly enough that several times she had hitched a ride to Columbia and back. She had gone there, had applied for a job, and had obtained it. She now was night clerk at a big motel there on the outskirts of town.

I promptly, with a sleepy daughter, drove into Columbia. I walked through the door of that motel, and was just stunned to see her busy helping a family check in. She was thorough, competent, and friendly. Then she turned her attention to me. “I wanted to surprise you.”

“Well; you did.”

“You’re upset, aren’t you.”

“How were you planning on getting home in the morning?”

“I have a room here,” she said. “That’s part of my wages.”

Yes; I felt hurt. But I also felt impressed at how resourceful she had been. Not least, even though I felt abandoned by her, I also felt a true joy in realizing that this woman, who six months before was carrying a diagnosis of mental illness requiring institutional care, and then (from me), custodial care, had not only become completely healthy in the emotional realm, she now was moving toward independence—emotionally and economically.

So I drove back home. We talked by phone every day, and then, when she had two days off, she was more eager than me, I think, to come back for those two days.

It bears mention that, during this time, the president of State Mental Hospital Number 2 phoned me three times. He first phoned

one month after Frances had come to live with me. Then three months after. Then six months. Our most lengthy conversation happened during our third talk, and he expressed considerable surprise that Frances now held a full-time job. When he asked if she had learned to drive, I told him that she had not—that I took responsibility for her transportation to and from work. (I thought it advisable, at this early point—especially considering that she had just begun her first job—to not mention the fact that she was staying at the motel five nights a week.) I countered his surprise by reminding him that he could consult with the neurologist she had visited. It turned out that he had already seen the medical report.

The conversation ended with his brisk summary: “Well, I think we can safely say that she is out in the real world now, and can fend for herself.”

I replied that indeed she was fending for herself. I then was effusive in my thanks for the care he and his staff had given her all those years, and also for how he had so adroitly handled matters when it came to his attention that I could take responsibility for her.

We terminated the conversation with an appropriate combination of feigned amity and formal business-like demeanor. He

said he would not need to call again, although I could call him any time. I assured him that I would do so if ever the need should arise.

So at the end he was satisfied. I was wary but he didn't know it, and I would never hear from him again nor would there ever be need for us to contact him.

And so her job continued. Within two months she was an assistant manager, her title now being, "Night Manager." Then she was offered an opportunity for managing a new motel which had just been built in another city; it was in the same "chain." She took the job.

This was very hard for both of us, but still, we talked by phone every day. She talked much about her job, obviously was relishing her independence, and at some point told me she now had a lover. Still acting the role of parent, my first question was, "Are you using birth control?"

"No. She's a woman."

Still acting the role of parent, I replied, "Oh."

But I was glad for her, was supportive, but no, she did not want me to meet her. "We're not that committed," she said, "and I don't think we will be."

She was right. She would have several female lovers, over the next few months, and then she had both male and female lovers. And yes, with her male lovers, she did use birth control.

Frances began, tentatively at first, and then assiduously, to expand her vocational directions. Although she had become a very busy manager at the biggest and newest motel in this company, she made it a point to “keep in touch with the customers” by occasionally working the desk at night. The result was that she met very many people. Men were attracted to her and wanted to get to know her better. They often “came on” to her sexually, and they also offered her employment. Soon she had a position writing occasional pieces for an airline magazine, and before long was writing pieces for news publications—both newspapers and magazines. These pieces were not creative; they were exercises in journalism, and she laughingly dismissed them as, “irrelevant history in less than a week.” But if she had already gained confidence as an employee, this writing gave her confidence in her abilities to move on to other jobs. She gave up her motel work and took a job writing full-time for a newspaper in Minneapolis. This job allowed her time to travel, she had more vacation days, so she came to spend time with me. But during this new phase of our lives she slept in the living room because now I too

had a new lover and she was living with me. This woman I would later marry in January, 1985.

At this point, the recounting of this tale must become boring, at least for a short while, and this boring part is perhaps the happiest part. Why? Because here Frances entered upon the beginnings of her life journey, which meant dealing with practicalities, involvements with friends, moving about, the demands of work, and so on. In other words, she was leading an ordinary life, which does not make for vivid history, but means that she had truly achieved emotional health.

While the two events did not, I am sure, have an effect upon the other, about the time I married in January 1985 Frances was preparing to leave for a job she had accepted in London. Now she would be thousands of miles away, and this brought on a new sense of dread. Would we lose touch with one another? Would all our intimacy, achieved with effort and forged by strife, slip away because of physical distance? Even though my daughter demanded much from me, and my wife's work demanded much from her (even as my—now “our”—daughter demanded much from her), I gave as much time to Frances as I could. It was during the first two months of 1985 that we went looking for our baptismal certificates. We both still referred to my twin as “Mary Frances.” This would abruptly change.

She would set off for London with only a little baggage, but sure of her new name, and sure that she would succeed. I believe she felt not one bit of trepidation about her abilities with her new job.

I never quite understood the nature of this job, and perhaps she didn't either. She wrote news articles for a publishing conglomerate, and she got paid for each article based on how many publications used it, the pay varying with the size of each publication which used her piece. During this time, she became involved in the anti-nuclear movement, and worked with an organization that had vigorous chapters in several European countries. She would continue her anti-nuclear work until 1990, when she backed away from it, claiming that she could not handle working with "peaceniks"—especially the men—who she said always seemed more timid than peaceful. By the beginning of 1986, she had wearied of the deadlines a journalist is burdened by, and took an unusual job as head of security for a large company which was based on the Isle of Man. So she moved to that tiny island, and although she did some writing for them—their pamphlets and advertising—she increasingly took on more duties as head of security and soon that part of the job was all she did for the company. By "head of security" this does not mean anything so simple as keeping track of what went on inside the buildings, hiring

night guards, and such. Her job involved keeping patents licensed properly, enforcing them—going to international court to prosecute companies which infringed upon her company's patents, and getting secret information from one plant to another without it being stolen. It was funny, in a way, all this secret work she was doing. It caused the people she knew in the peace movement to suspect she was working for a company involved in the “military-industrial complex.” She later would reveal that the main thing her company made was razor blades (their main customer being Russia and members of the Soviet Union) plus they made a few other minor products. (I had never before realized that the metallurgical processes involved with making razor blades, in a way that will ensure their staying sharp, involves so much research, is patented, and is kept secret by a company.)

As busy as she was with this manufacturing company, she nevertheless took a part-time job in London working for a modeling agency. This stunned me. I very discreetly, though humorously, opined that I might have problems seeing my sister posing in catalogues modeling a bra. She assured me that she modeled only formal attire. She later would show me some of the pictures, and indeed she looked gorgeous and made the clothing seem most

comely. The photographers, sensibly, made considerable use of her strikingly beautiful hair.

Her main job, albeit very mundane, i.e., less glamorous than modeling, certainly paid well. She continued with her modeling work, and does it even now, all of her modeling still being for business attire—dresses and “suits” women wear to work.

Here I wish to address an issue which has come up with many friends over the last few years: Namely, why can't they find Frances doing a “Google” search on the computer? The answer is simple. In the United Kingdom, a person responsible for matters of high security in the private sector is essentially a government employee. They must have protection provided for them by the government, and one such mode of protection, if the government decrees it or if the person requests it, is to manage matters so that no mention of the person is made on the Internet. (Not a simple or easy process. Nor is it foolproof—exceptions do slip through.) Hence, such people usually can not be found by a Google search. Matters were arranged this way for Frances, and as she gained status in the U.K. with her successes in prosecuting companies which had infringed on the patents of her own company and the patents of other companies in the U.K., she was given the right to make arrangements for friends and business

associates who wanted to be inaccessible via Google. She asked me if I wanted this. Of course I didn't; as a writer, I needed all the public exposure I could get. But my close friend and business associate, Vanessa Vyvyanne du Pré, did take her up on this offer, and as a result, for some years, she was inaccessible by Google. However, as time went by, the logistics involved with this arrangement became more complex and much more expensive, and Frances lost the option of doing this favor for others. The result is that Vanessa Vyvyanne du Pré now appears on the Internet, although with significant gaps in her history (which will probably eventually get filled in). And I presume that Marian Frances Baumli, if she ever retires, will at that point become a more publicly accessible figure, and the general populace will regain their God-given right to know all about as much of her private life as possible. A problem presented itself to me as I mused one night: Namely, how can this treatise of mine appear on my website if Frances' name is expunged from the Internet? I phoned Frances about this, and she stated simply that she would arrange for an exception. All places on my website where her name appears will be left intact by the Google search engine and other such search engines. Also, all other websites which "mirror" (whatever this means) my website will retain her name. She can arrange for this. I

was surprised that she so readily assented to my need, and am amazed that she could, with such assurance, know that an exception could be made—electronically—and that it can be made to actually work. But I am an idiot with computers, and Frances is an expert on security matters.

As for the present, Frances, who took an apartment (or “flat,” as she calls it) in London long ago when she began her modeling work there, gave it up in 1994. Now when she does modeling work in London, she rents a room in a hotel. The year 1994 is significant for me because, for about two years previous, Frances had been talking about moving back to the States. But in 1994 she made a decision to definitely not come back. This was because she now had (and has) what she calls a “permanent lover” who lived (and lives) near her place there on the Isle of Man. I have, of course, met this fellow—and have done more than meet him; I have spent many hours in his company. He is about two years younger than her, mild in manner, bookish, friendly, and completely accepting of me when I visit Frances, i.e., he does not mind her giving me as much attention as she does. So I am glad she has found a “mate,” even though she has not married the fellow, this despite the fact that they have now been “together” for almost two decades.

All those fears I had about our losing our sense of intimacy were justified. Not because we lost it, but because likely those fears are largely responsible for the fact that we did not lose it. We talk on the phone about once a week, write about once a week, and we visit one another irregularly, perhaps twice a year. Usually Frances comes here since she loves to travel and I hate traveling. The intimacy remains, and if it has changed in certain ways, this seems more the result of the fact that we are growing older (now, both of us, age 65!), than because we now spend so much time apart. When we talk by phone, our relating can feel difficult occasionally because often there is a bad telephone connection, but if the connection is good then everything feels simple and natural. When we visit, things feel natural, friendly, simple, intimate, fulfilling. My love for her is so unique as to be virtually ineffable. The biological bond gives it an almost primal quality, the bond that came from our strife during those early weeks in the summer of 1980 infuses it with a sense of gratitude, the intimacy allows for an unqualified sense of trust, the intensity makes for constant enjoyment, and we even allow ourselves a bit of occasional bickering (in fact, it sometimes seems contrived, as though we are forcing it as if to remind ourselves that we not only are twins, we also are simply brother and sister).

This is not to suggest that everything is always easy between us. There is one difficulty, which is a curious one, and I am not evading personal responsibility when I state that it seems to come, not so much from within ourselves, but primarily because of what other people impose. The problem, stated in a word, is jealousy. Or two directions of jealousy, felt toward the other person, but for very different reasons. This only happens when we are with other people—whether it be both of us with these other people, or just one of us.

For Frances, the jealousy comes up when people compare the two of us in terms of intellectual or scholarly aptitude. I believe Frances is probably as intelligent as I am, but she is not an intellectual, and does not come across that way at all. I do. In fact, try as I might, I can not keep from coming across as an intellectual. Some people are envious of this, others find it irritating, many people comment on it. When they comment on this in front of Frances, or to her, they sometimes do it quite rudely, and even act surprised—sometimes even say they are surprised—that she does not seem to be the intellectual her brother is. This wounds her. I can see the immediate sting, and then it will put her in a bad mood, then an unambiguously jealous mood—toward me, and I can't blame her. People's caustic rudeness about this is just plain nasty.

But if people's rudeness toward Frances is caustic, their rudeness toward me is garish. It is almost always manifest by men, and it can make me irritated at first, then impatient and disgusted, and finally just plain jealous.

It would be accurate, I think (and I make this claim without boasting), that both Frances and I have personalities that are strongly sexual. I don't know if this means we are sexy; I am sure it does mean that the sexuality of our personalities is quite visible to others.

People may or may not be attracted by it, but it is hard to ignore. If a man knows only me, he often assumes that my sister must also have a highly charged sexual personality, and always—yes, always—he wants to meet her. That possibility, then, is where the conversation goes. He wants to talk about her. Often he wants to see pictures of her. If Frances and I are together, and there is a sexually needy man in company, she becomes his focus to the exclusion of myself. This angers and irritates me, then later I feel jealous toward Frances and get grumpy with her. This has been a problem almost from the beginning, and it persists even in the present. I do declare that, every time, it is caused by other people's rudeness, lack of sensitivity, or inappropriate conduct in conversation. We deal with our jealousy as best we can, but usually this involves just knowing that it will run its

course. For a few hours, sometimes for a day or two, one of us will feel jealous. Then it just goes away.

These difficulties with jealousy point to what may be a profound difference between the two of us. If people are attracted to me, it usually is because of my intellectual demeanor; if people are attracted to Frances, it usually is because of her cheerfulness and because (even at the age of 65) she is a gorgeous woman.

There are other aspects of our personalities, however, which, if now similar, at one time were quite different. I have always been an excellent public speaker. I don't know why. I think it probably comes from the simple fact that the more people I am standing in front of, the more powerful is my desire to be sincere and friendly. But Frances, probably because she was institutionalized for so many years, for a long while was shy with any group of people. If it was only two or three people, she was fine; but if it was a dozen people, she was painfully shy, and she absolutely could not speak to a group of people. But over the years, primarily I think because of her anti-nuclear activism, she has lost her shyness, and in fact has done a good deal of public speaking. I have heard her speak to large groups, and she has a rare ability to express herself strongly, even angrily, while also being thoroughly friendly. This makes her seem both

unique and attractive to her audience, and they almost always respond positively.

Frances, like me, is very reclusive, but when we do choose to be with people, we make sure to enjoy the situation. We both have many intimate relationships with friends, but since Frances has many friends here in the States, keeping in touch with them involves more effort on her part than it would for most people. She thinks of her friends as her family—perhaps because, except for me and my immediate family, she does not think of herself as having a biological family. In fact, often when she is planning a trip back to the States, she will speak of it as making a trip “to see my family,” and I always know that, by this, she means many, many people.

For these many visits, her health does her in good stead, and in this way she and I are decidedly different. Because of my MS, travel exhausts me. Frances, during the first years of her life, suffered not only mental deficits but also some degree (the extent is difficult to decipher even from the mental hospital’s records) of physical difficulties. Now she has no physical difficulties at all; in fact, her health can only be described as vigorous, robust, a whirlwind of physical energy. Because of all the work I did as a lad on the farm, and still do, I now have a considerable degree of arthritis. Frances

has none at all. Thus, in our physiological well-being, we were different at the beginning and now, for very different reasons, are quite different.

As long as I seem to be amidst an excursion which involves describing how she and I are either alike or different, it bears repeating, I suppose, that for a time she was homosexual. I never was, except for those vague, transient, and inactive inclinations that everybody probably has. That phase of her life she now finds rather funny. I have joked with her that she never seemed very dikey, and she agrees, stating that living with me made her more aware of her sexuality, and she at first only felt safe expressing this with women. This direction, I think, perhaps stemmed from the fact that, during her institutionalization (which lasted 32 years lest we forget), she was virtually isolated from men. This was to protect her—an attractive young girl, then an attractive young woman, and then a gorgeous young adult woman—from being taken advantage of sexually by the men who worked there, not all of whom, it would seem, possessed moral scruples beyond reproach. Of course, it could have occurred that she would have been taken advantage of sexually by a woman, but apparently the people there at the hospital did not consider this a real threat, and Frances is sure it never happened—even during her

very early years. But the fact remains that for years, except for brief exposure to health staff or administrative staff, Frances interacted with girls and women only. This may explain some of her initial difficulties, and anger, when living with me. I think it also explains her initial lesbian forays, which soon became bisexual, and then became solidly heterosexual.

So now we are alike in that we both are heterosexual. We are unlike in that I am married and she is not. I have two children and she has none. I live in the heart of the United States while she lives on the Isle of Man—an island off the western coast of England situated about halfway between England and Ireland.

A further difference between the two of us is the fact that, by temperament and avocation, I am very much a scholar while Frances is not. I already mentioned the fact that I come across as an intellectual, and she does not. This is more an observation about our public image. Referring to our scholarly differences is more a matter of how we apply ourselves privately. I spend hours at my desk involved with research, often in various languages; Frances sits in an armchair reading for pleasure. In my avocation as a writer, and considering her two years' work as a journalist, I am aware of the vast difference between our level of formal education. We both are

autodidacts. But I had an excellent formal education (although this excellence was quite intermittent), and the level of formal education Frances had at that institution was minimal at best. She has a high school degree, was generally taught by nuns of various orders, but what she learned was quite unsystematic and there are gaps in her education. For example, she never has been able to grasp, or remember, the rules of punctuation regarding quotation marks, parentheses, and that sort of thing. She didn't know, and still can't remember, that with parentheses, there are two different ways of putting a period at the end with the parenthesis. (If one puts an entire sentence in parentheses, then the period goes inside the second parenthetical mark—like this.) But if only the last part of the sentence is inside parentheses, then the period goes outside the second parenthetical mark (like this). Try as she will, Frances can not grasp the meaning of this, or remember it. Yet she did function well as a journalist for about two years. I must presume that she had lenient and helpful editors.

But Frances has been, and is, more than a journalist. Her letters can be little masterpieces of prose. And she has written a few poems and short stories which I find quite exemplary. In fact, she published a poem which she described as being a rough draft in the Jan.-Feb.

1987 issue of my Aviary. If indeed it was a rough draft, it far excelled most poems I have written which (too many times) I thought had achieved the stage of being a final draft. Also, for a number of years, she also wrote a sort of column for The Aviary. If this column was informal and unfocused, it nevertheless was well written—clear, engaging, informative, and always friendly. My siblings read what she wrote (some even demanding equal exposure, which I initially refused, although when I finally did relent not one of them actually took advantage of the opportunity). But even reading her column apparently did not change their minds about her existence. They never discussed the matter, but I must assume that they still did not believe she was anything more than a practical joke I was trying to foist off on them.

Some people, to whom she has shown her few forays into literature, have remarked that she and I have a similar writing style. I don't really think we do. In writing her poetry, she has adopted the form—the way of placing words on the page—that I use. I think this is simply because, during that first half year we knew one another, I was being her teacher in this realm too. But if, in some ways, it is true that Frances and I have a somewhat similar writing style, it definitely is the case that we each possess a different writing “voice.” A person

needs read only one line, from a poem by either of us, and that person immediately knows which of us wrote that line.

Thus commenting on our writing warrants, I think, a comment on our speaking. That girl has become intolerably English sounding in her speaking. And I most definitely do not like the English accent. The Scottish I like (as long as it is not from the islands), the Welsh is fine, the Irish is tolerable, but the English? No. However, on the Isle of Man, it seems that they practice speaking for about two hours every day with half a lime in their mouths. So when Frances and I talk by phone, or when she comes to visit, I initially have to tolerate an English accent so insufferable as to be cacophony to mine ears. Fortunately, when she comes to visit, she drops this accent within hours; and even in telephone conversations, when I tell her to quit speaking like a limey, she can adjust her speech accordingly within half a minute.

How well do we know one another? Quite well, I think, although at times we startle one another with what we do not know. For example, in the column she wrote for The Aviary, she more than once wrote about my hearing being bad. I kept intending to ask her what she meant by this, because, in fact, I have excellent hearing. Finally I did ask her, about four years ago, and she told me that she had

presumed my excellent hearing was what caused my insomnia. That I could hear too much when I sleep, and that this causes my insomnia, i.e., that my good hearing, in this sense, is bad for my sleep. What a convoluted judgement this was! I managed to straighten her out on this. My insomnia comes from posttraumatic stress disorder, i.e., PTSD. (Unlike me, Frances is resilient; she seems to have responded to her early years of emotional trauma by being an unusually good sleeper.)

I have failed to understand certain things about her too. I could not for the life of me understand why she kept vacillating, back in 1993 and 1994, about whether or not she would move back to the States. In my desire that she do so, I was overlooking how much she was attached to her “permanent boyfriend.” Also, and especially, I was not understanding how important it was, to her, to keep as much distance as possible between herself and the rest of her remote biological family. That was insensitive of me.

There are a manifold of other ways we are different. She is cheerful; I tend to be morose. She is healthy; I deal (well) with ill health. Her sleep is enviable; I am insomniacal. As for minutiae: Frances always dresses smartly. (I have never seen her in slacks or jeans; she always wears either a dress, or a skirt with blouse.) I

always dress sloppily, except when occasion demands otherwise. (One almost never sees me in a suit or wearing a waistjacket.) I wear glasses; she does not. I drink whisky, which she can not stand; she likes ale, which I detest. I drive. She does not. This latter difference perhaps deserves more comment. I tried to teach her to drive. Lord knows I tried. And she could master it all, whether it be a vehicle with an automatic transmission or a stick shift. But she could not master one important detail. She never could gain a sense for how fast she was going. If she was not paying careful attention to the speedometer, she might be going 60-mph in a 20-mph zone. On the highway, with a speed limit of 70-mph, she might, in the course of one minute, slow to 15-mph and not even be aware of it. This made for some dangerous situations, one of them quite perilous in fact, and I finally gave up, entertaining the vague notion that the day would come when a boyfriend (or girlfriend) would teach her to drive. But this never happened, and in the U.K., where public transportation is ubiquitous and cheap, she hasn't needed to learn how to drive. So she hasn't, and at this point, probably never will.

Despite the differences in our childhood histories, our education, and even in our temperaments, we get along very well. We are relaxed with one another. In truth, after those first tumultuous

weeks of living together back in the summer of 1980, we have never had a major quarrel except once, and that was my fault. In 1997, our parents both died. (“Your parents,” Frances always corrects me.) My many siblings gave me the responsibility of picking out a tombstone, and I chose one which, along with the particulars of my parents’ lives and deaths, would list by name, in the order of birth, all their children. Given my compulsive personality, I wanted “Marian Frances” to be listed there just below “Marion Francis.” But she would have nothing of it. Instead of respecting her immediate refusal, I pressed my case. After all, that gravestone is a permanent record. Somewhat permanent, anyway. It should reflect the truth. I wheedled, I pleaded, I even bullied. She remained unmoved and I became angry, then reproachful. This she had never experienced from me. It frightened her at first, and then she was crying. She said, “I’m not hanging up on you to be mean. I’m telling you I need to get off the phone now. Goodbye.”

I felt stunned. She not only had refused my request, she now was rejecting me emotionally. Not more than two minutes later I phoned her back, but there was no answer. Feeling a desperate anxiety, I waited another ten minutes or so, then called her again.

This time her boyfriend answered. He was on guard, but polite. He said Frances had gone for a walk several minutes ago.

Yes; this is her way of dealing with an upset. She probably had left the house less than a minute after she first hung up. But this made me no less anxious. However, I did know her habits. When she went walking, to relieve stress, it was almost always about exactly an hour that she would be gone.

When I called her back less than an hour later, she answered. I was immediately apologizing. Profusely apologizing. By this time I was in tears myself. I retracted all requests, declared that I did understand, and admitted that I had been selfish. These were not false declarations. They were true. I knew this, and I know she believed me. But her first words hit me like a bolt, “Now you understand why I’ve never trusted you to not tell your siblings who I am.”

“I’m afraid I do,” was all I could lamely say.

(I had suggested her meeting them in the same way she had met my parents. In fact, I had pressed for this several times, but she had always refused, telling me she was afraid I would “break down” emotionally and tell them who she was.)

So after we had “made up,” which this time—given my level of insecurity and the state of anxiety I had unjustly aroused in her—took a good while, we both calmed down and the matter was dropped. A few weeks later, when on the phone, she said, “I think all your insistence came from the fact that your parents left a bigger void in you than you realize.”

“Maybe you’re right. Maybe I was somehow trying, in a paltry and unfair way, to fill it.”

“Maybe. It doesn’t matter.”

That was the end of it, and I can honestly say this is the only quarrel we ever had, excepting our strife of those first few weeks together.

So the gravestone was erected, and the names of all the children are on it, excepting “Marian Frances.” (Does it bear mention that, since the list is entitled, “OUR CHILDREN,” it can be considered incomplete in that it lacks Frances’ name, but also one could note that there is another possible incompleteness since half-siblings are not listed?) My father was not without philandering tendencies. This I never much held against him, given how awful was his relationship with my awful mother, and given how awful was her relationship with her awful husband. But I possess considerable evidence that I have a

half-sibling, sex unknown, conceived in France close to the German border when my father was stationed there in WWII. I have a picture of the mother. It is a small picture, she stands at some distance from the lens, but from what one can see she was about as homely as they get. The other half-sibling, much younger, would have been conceived in Nashville, Tennessee when Leo was on one of his horse-buying trips.

The evidence for that first offspring was found in a small military Bible which had long been in storage. I inherited this little Bible after my parents' deaths. I did not even know the evidence was in that Bible until I had brought it home and had possessed it for several months. As for the evidence of the Nashville half-sibling: I had previously heard about the Nashville escapade, or escapades, from more than one source, but mid-1998 was the first time I encountered the possibility of there being a half-sibling in France.

Neither possibility have I ever cared to look in to. Frankly, if there are such persons, I do not wish to know them. What could possibly be the good in it for me? And what good would it do them, to find out that their biological father was an abusive monster, who well earned the enduring hatred of most of his acknowledged offspring? Besides, I am not absolutely sure that they even existed, and I also

know that if they did exist at one time, they might by now have succumbed to the demands of mortality. So why go mucking about for details, and truths, when one isn't even absolutely sure of the evidence?

What can gripe me to no end is the accusation (always it is this, even when politely stated) that Frances does not exist. She has met but a few of my current friends. When I talk about her, to them she seems an abstraction, and some kind of convenience—as though I am fabricating her existence for the sake of creating some kind of mini-drama.

At one time I would get out pictures, and this seemed to convince people. She does look like me, and she certainly has “the Baumli nose.” In black-and-white pictures, her hair often looks dark, even black, but in person it is clearly an auburn, and in the sun it flames. But I no longer even care to pull out pictures. If other people don't want to believe she exists, I don't really care. If they don't believe, then the least they can do is keep quiet about the matter. The only person who has had to grapple with the idea of her existence is myself. I grappled with it in the abstract (I shall say more about this shortly) for 32 years. But I grappled with it powerfully and concretely that summer day when, in the span of four hours, I learned about her

existence, became her legal custodian, then had her in my physical custody as we were driving down the road and I was realizing that my life had changed forever. And during that while, I was wondering: What am I to do about this mentally ill, or mentally challenged, woman's period? I can never, ever hope to communicate to anyone what a shock those hours inflicted. And were it not for the fact that she looked so much like me, I think that I myself, despite all the evidence I had just ingested—old medical records, the story told me by the president of State Mental Hospital Number 2, the efflux of emotion by the old woman named Evelyn—I myself might not have been able to believe that this woman was really my twin sister. But there she was beside me, at times inscrutable, at other times seeming to pout, and most of the time seeming just very interested in the scenery. (After all, this was the first time, since the age of about four months, that she had ever been beyond the boundaries of Saint Joseph, Missouri.)

And then we lived together almost six months. At first the strife was awful. That certainly made her real. My parenting her made her become even more real. Our sleeping together, in sweet sibling intimacy, made her real also. And her departure from my home, as she entered the work force, aroused a sense of parental loss so acute

I certainly could not then deny her reality. Real, too, was the way her personality grew, burgeoned, and became self-assured and independent. Independent of me, and economically independent. She was blossoming, and I was the parent looking on, with an admixture of pride and wistful loss. All this, I can assure anyone, was real. It was a reality which dispelled forever what, for me, had perhaps been the strongest inclination in my life to believe that something I was witnessing was not real. So ... to those who might, in the future, yet doubt, I say: Take your doubts elsewhere. I am the one who doubted, and then had opportunity, via evidence as varied as it was incontrovertible, for converting an old faith—intimations of reality—into convictions of reality.

(A funny conversation that occurred recently with a naive interlocutor:

“So, are you and your twin sister identical twins?”

“Yes we are. Now that she finally got that transsexual operation.”

The fellow at first believed me, until he noted my sardonic smile, and thereupon thought the matter through more carefully.)

Frances’ reality does not prevent my now and then discovering new aspects or characteristics of her reality. Only a few months ago

(or was it weeks? I am not sure) the realization dawned upon me that Frances is even more of a recluse than I am. Years ago I was, as a female friend of many years has described me, “a social butterfly.” I was at every party, I had many people over at a time, and those times were numerous. I traveled, I gave speeches, my face was known to many. But this all changed. There were too many fans, too many users, and eventually, too many stalkers. I withdrew from people, I avoided them, and now I keep to myself as much as I can. People know my name now, because of my writings, but not many know my face. But Frances, except for a few friends and her work associates, is even more a recluse than I am! I hide in my home, and in my home hide in my study. Frances hides on a small island far from her homeland because she does not want contact, ever, with any members of her biological family except for me. Yes; my twin sister Frances is even more of a recluse than I am. This realization, when it came upon me, truly stunned me. At the same time it gave me a kind of comfort. It indicates one more way we are alike. And it makes me feel less judgemental, toward myself, for having become so isolated from the rest of society.

Frances appeared in my Aviary several times, she has been with me many times when friends have visited, and yet it seems that

there have always been so many questions posed about her by people. More than once, as a way of putting a halt to those questions—which often felt invasive and rude, I had thought to write a brief history of myself and my twin. Why did I wait so long, only now doing it when we are 65 years old? Part of the reason is simply that, despite more than once intending to do it, I simply did not really care to undertake the task. I have lived my relationship with Frances so thoroughly, the thought of writing about it—all of it, simply felt redundant. Not boring, but not very interesting either. Also, I had told the essentials of our relationship to several people, or had tried to, and this had wearied me. Moreover, it had discouraged me, because I never felt that I succeeded in getting across what is essential about our relationship. I realized that I was telling the tale in “passing,” giving it mere “mention,” shyly “alluding” to it but not really telling the entire tale. My tendency toward terseness, with our story, hasn’t always been because of intentional reticence. Rather, I haven’t been sure how to tell it. A short version sounds so uncanny as to be unbelievable. The entire version is believable, and perhaps what makes it believable is the mere fact that, told in its entirety, the tale becomes boring. The story segues into the mundanities of Frances’ personal life and work life. I am not being unkind in suggesting that

this part of her life becomes boring. I think this part of just about everybody's life is boring to others. The everyday reality, choices, even minutiae which we go through are quite similar to what other people experience, and at the same time, they have little interest to others because there are so many details. Who really cares that Frances never learned to drive, and why? Who would want to know that she, like many Europeans, enjoys spending evenings with other adults who read aloud to one another? Who cares that I have, for years, encountered a plethora of expensive dental problems and Frances has never even had a cavity? These are the little things we talk about with our patient mates, not the things that warrant prose presented to the world. And who, besides Frances and me, really cares about the mysteries that remain?

For example, Frances and I are sometimes almost obsessed about why it is our parents did not go see her more often. According to the hospital records, the last time they saw her was right before she turned four years old. It is obvious as to why my father would have said, "She don't know ye," if he never saw her after the age of four. She was, it seems, already fast on her way toward recovery by then, but already emotionally self-cognizant enough to feel angry at these parents who did not act the role of parents. So it seems she

became dumb—literally—when they visited, and indeed seemed hopelessly mentally deficient when in their presence. Poor little angry, lonely girl!

But there also is the question: Why did our parents not tell us? Why was this so much a secret that even the community essentially forgot about it, except as a secret to be kept from the Baumli children? I asked Aunt Jean this question several times, and she always had essentially the same answer: “They were just sad and ashamed.” (Aunt Jean herself seemed sad and ashamed in thus commenting on what her sister and brother-in-law had failed to do toward one of their children.) But the collusion between parents, medical personnel, relatives, and the entire community had actually worked. Frances’ existence was essentially hidden from the world ever since she was four months old until she was 32 years old. Why?

I think I know, although it is difficult to explain. Realize, we were born in 1948. Back then, mental or emotional difficulties were not something people talked about. They were a source of great shame if they had a dimension sufficient to warrant medical intervention. People were not advised to go see a counselor if they were having trouble dealing with grief. Mental illness was utterly alien, entirely a stigma, actually a taboo. State Mental Hospital Number 2 in St. Joe

was the subject of jokes. People spoke of how weird the inmates were when you saw them standing in the yard. Supposedly one of those people thought he was Napoleon, and stood there with a military uniform on, posed like Napoleon. I doubt there was a shred of truth to this particular story, but it made for fun telling. In my tiny high school (fewer than 100 students in all four grades combined!), a girl's mother went to State Mental Hospital Number 2, and the result was that this girl was shunned and ostracized. People would not talk to her, or sit with her on the bus. They avoided her, and one often saw tears in her eyes—likely she not only was missing her mother, she also was experiencing the pain of being so utterly condemned. About two years later, when I was a sophomore in college at nearby Maryville, the barber I commonly went to told me, when giving me a haircut, that his wife had had emotional problems and had had to go to State Mental Hospital Number 2. He was a young man, likely no more than six or seven years older than me, and he obviously needed to talk about this. I'm sure I said something appropriate and kind since this was my nature, but I remember finding it extremely odd (and thinking it dangerous for his social reputation) that he would divulge to anyone, unless he absolutely had to tell them, the fact that his wife was in the “loony bin.”

Had Frances' disability happened 30 years later, in 1978, it might have warranted an occasional critical or even caustic comment, but it also would have warranted acceptance and true compassion. Not in 1948. Back then, my parents would have been stigmatized by that entire community had they themselves not taken the same view as the community—that mental illness is something to be locked away, hidden, and never talked about.

I now think back on that girl in high school, feel compassion for her, and wonder what happened to both her and her mother. I think of that barber, hope that his wife got better, and I am painfully aware that when I judged that he was being terribly imprudent to even talk about his wife's mental illness, my judgement was probably correct. I think of poor little Frances, essentially confined to what people formally called "the insane asylum" and jokingly called "the loony bin," and how she languished emotionally, improved physically, and somehow had the self-prepossession, a little help from the staff, and the native intelligence she was born with to rescue herself even while institutionalized. By this—by stating that she "rescued herself"—I mean that she gained and profited from what education was given to her, she managed to become a cheerful personality, and she managed to grow into a person characterized by curiosity, anger,

flexibility, rebelliousness, compassion, and social skills. In short, she rescued herself long before I, in 1980, rescued her.

I did rescue her, but also, I rescued myself from a loss. I had lost this companion, this sibling, this twin for all those years, but I finally got her back. I gained a close relationship, a relationship that initially was difficult and then became amazingly beautiful, and so it continues this way. We are twins, and we separately possess, and together share, the intimacy that goes along with this kind of relationship. We do not possess that psychical connection one reads about happening between identical twins. At least we have nothing of that magnitude. But there are other connections, or, one might say, intimations of such intimacies. For example, it happens that if I have a very intense dream of Frances visiting me, the very next day—invariably—she will phone and say she is coming to visit. About ninety-percent of the time, when we write each other, it turns out that we both wrote our letters not only on the same day but also at the very same time. (We have gotten in the habit of writing both the date, and the hour, of our letters to keep track of this fact.) And when we are sitting silently together, our thoughts run in the same direction. Frances is often the one who says, “What are you thinking about?”

and it turns out that I had been thinking the exact same thing she was.

What I have gained in intimacy, Frances also has gained, and I presume (rightly I am sure) that she values it as much as I do. We both gained a twin, but Frances gained something more: her freedom. In a letter, written five years ago, she wrote, "I will never be able to thank you enough for rescuing me from the medical maze that was imprisoning me." It is revealing that this is how she views her past. It also is revealing that she doesn't realize how much she has already thanked me. She has done so, plentifully and constantly, by being the unique companion she is.

But if we both gained companionship and intimacy, and Frances gained her freedom, I myself gained something very unique. My gain was self-vindication. Yes; a conviction I had held almost my entire life was at last vindicated when I found out I had a twin. I state this because my entire life, which I can remember clearly back to the age of three and in small glimpses back to about thirteen months, I had always felt the presence of someone beside me. As soon as I could think in words, it seemed to me, not that I should be a twin, or that I have a twin, but that I am a twin. I told this to several people, and no one, ever, took me seriously. People often rejected my claim

outright, and with some degree of ridicule. Others, who knew me better, claimed that I felt like I am a twin because I am a Gemini—astrologically speaking—since my birthday is on May 31. But I was never one to give any credence to astrology. However, I think that even if I had been a strong believer in astrology (or even if all of astrology were proved to be true!), I still would have been convinced that my feeling of being a twin extended far beyond what I might be experiencing simply because I am a Gemini. Other people, who gave my conviction no credibility but at least did talk to me about it, stated that the feeling came from a need to explain parts of myself that are elusive or even alien. But no; this was too complex. What I felt was very simple: “I am a twin.”

The result was that my discovery of Frances, although vertiginous at first, soon combative, and ever since exploratory and fulfilling, has for me solved a great mystery—a mystery that felt like a void, or that was trying to give voice to a void. I often said to myself silently, “I am a twin.” At times I felt almost foolish saying this to myself. Now I say it as a simple fact.

If in earlier years I felt foolish voicing this conviction to myself, I certainly felt foolish, and hesitant, about discussing it with other people. I not only grew tired of their skepticism, and worse, of their

attempts to explain my conviction away; but more, I simply felt foolish making such a singular claim on the basis of nothing but a feeling. I couldn't really blame people for their skepticism.

Surprisingly, I found myself almost as reticent in talking about her after I had discovered her, especially while we were living together, but also to some extent after she had moved away. I introduced her to people as my twin, a number of my friends met her, but unless there was opportunity for personal introductions, I did not like talking about her. Our history, my discovering her in summer of 1980, seems to require a complicated and long explanation. A short recounting of our history—too long unshared and now long shared—sounds almost unbelievable. Only a long version is really believable. There are many details which warrant, even require, explanation. And what makes this longer version more credible is simply the fact that, if it starts out dramatically, it segues into a tale about an ordinary life, filled with mundanities and practicalities and even parts that are boring—at least to others. The everyday realities, choices, even minutiae are not very different from what everybody experiences. Thus, the direction of our lives, as we get older, isn't so very different from what other people experience. And what is unbelievable about shared experience?

So I come to the end of this history. It is biography, since it is about Frances; it is autobiography, since it is about me. But because we are twins, the biography and autobiography meld and become, if not identical, then so proximal as to constitute what phenomenologists (who do not use the word carelessly) call an interface: a boundary which connects rather than separates.

I am a twin. I have a lovely sister who is my twin. Some things do succeed in being, and remaining, amazing. I now have known my sister, Marian Frances, as my twin for more than half my life. Her presence—our relationship—is a powerful, unique, and precious gift. I know true gratitude.

After all those years I finally succeeded in converting intimations of reality into convictions of reality. I had been believing, without any evidence, except for the evidence my body insisted on carrying within itself from our time together in the womb. This conviction which I held, on the basis of such remote experience, is the nearest I have ever come to possessing true faith.

Yes; it has been 32 years of vague awareness, followed by 33 years of bountiful relating. Sometimes, in the balance, life does succeed in giving us great blessings.

(Written: August 27 to September 11, 2013 at the age of 65.)

(Posted May 5, 2014.)

(This installment in my life story deserves being placed first because, even though it has been written during such a late era of my life, and in some ways describes part of that era, it also goes all the way back to the beginning—in fact, to certain details which apply to a period of time that lasted some weeks—perhaps even some months—before I was born.)