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## The Thinker

Who am I?

I have asked myself that question many times. I still don't know the answer. At twenty-five, I'm not sure I'll ever know, so it would probably be best if I told you who I used to be. Perhaps, that will give you some idea of who I am.

I was born the older twin boy of identical twins. My mother was a young mother, nineteen when we were born. My father was in his late twenties and on his third marriage. He wouldn't be in the picture long.

My life started as a struggle. My brother and I were born three months premature and spent several weeks in incubators before being allowed to leave the hospital. Life has continued to be a struggle up to the present. My brother and I are both serving life sentences in state prison for murder.

However, life has not all been bad. My brother and I have always been close, and we did everything together as kids. I understand him on a level that someone who is not a twin would not be able to understand. I've always had someone to love, and I've always been loved. I am truly blessed with our relationship.

Were we bad kids? I don't believe we were. We just went wrong at the right time! Products of our environment? Possibly?

I've gone from beginning to end. Now, let me fill in the middle.

### Early Years

My mother and father had separated and divorced when my brother and I were about one and a half. It was documented that we were sexually, physically, and psychologically abused when we spent weekends with our father on shared custody visits. At two and a half, we were supposedly sexually abused [anal sodomy], but I don't remember that.

I also don't remember the physical abuse, but it was the physical abuse that brought attention to the sexual abuse. On one visit, my brother and I were both supposed

to have “fallen” off our tricycles and broken our front teeth. Not just our two front teeth but rather all our front teeth. For the next six years, the front of our mouths were filled with silver caps until our adult teeth grew in and the old ones fell out.

One thing I do remember from the first couple years (actually, my earliest memory) is that I had soiled my underwear. I remember I was terrified of what my father would do to me. My brother and I hid the soiled underwear in a small hole in the bathroom wall. It was about a foot off the floor and behind the door. I don't know how my father found them, probably the smell, but when he did, he made my brother and me stand with our backs to the wall. He turned the underwear inside out and held the feces up to our faces. He said, “Do you see this? If either one of you do this again, you'll eat it! Do you understand me?”

Finally, my mother managed to get sole custody of my brother and me, and we didn't see our father again for another six years.

My mother got pregnant again and had my sister about two months before our third birthday.

My sister never knew her dad. He left before she was ever born. She had a lot of problems dealing with this later on when she got older. My mother was never married to my sister's father; he was just a boyfriend. I don't remember him at all, so he probably was not around long.

My mother would marry again and again and again. At last count, she has married eleven times. My mother has a lot of psychological and emotional issues. These problems would manifest themselves over the years, but at the time I knew nothing about these kinds of problems. I didn't know why my mother would spend hours in her room crying, or how she could be happy and playful one minute, and then be angry and mean the next. As an adult, I understand her problems, and I see them for what they are. She still exhibits the same patterns of behavior and completely denies anything is wrong with her.

My mother is a bipolar borderline manic depressive. Most of the time she doesn't really fully grasp the long-term consequences of her actions. She functions off her immediate feelings and how she feels at the moment. Sometimes she reminds me of an adult teenager who can't think past the moment. There are times when she's able to

function perfectly, but most of her decisions are impulsive. Emotionally, she detaches from feelings that are uncomfortable or she'll dwell on them until they overwhelm her.

My grandmother was always like a second mother, almost a replacement for a father. Over the years, we lived with my grandmother many times; her house will always be home to me. My mom would get married and we'd move; she'd split up and we'd move back. Sometimes, even when she had a new husband, we'd find ourselves living with Grandma.

Some of the greatest memories I have are in her house. When my mother wasn't there or when she was alone in her room, Grandma was always there to entertain and look after us. Later, when I reached adolescence, she was the one who caught the brunt of our rebellion.

Shortly after my sister was born, my mother met my first stepfather. They got married when I was four. We moved to a small town about an hour and a half from my home town. I remember living in two different houses with them. The first house was small, a one-story house with a small backyard. The neighbors had kids of their own. I don't remember them much, but I know they had a couple of daughters and maybe one or two boys who were all a little older than we were. They had an older daughter who I had a huge crush on. I believe it was my first crush.

I remember my mother and my stepfather arguing, but not a lot at first. We had a small basement where we would ride our tricycles. After a while, I was afraid to be down there, probably because they chose to fight in that area. To a child of four, when your parents fight every time they go down into the basement, you start to think the basement is the cause of their fights.

My mother broke her foot on the back porch steps. It wasn't long after her foot was broken that the fighting really started again. They stopped trying to hide it after awhile, and the fighting became more frequent. By the time winter came, they weren't speaking much. She left not long after that, and we moved back to my grandmother's house. They got a divorce and that was the end of stepdad number one.

My grandmother was married, her fifth, to a guy who was really good with us. He was like a pseudo-father! We idolized him! I remember he had his favorite chair in the

living room. It was box-shaped, big and square, with large arm rests. That is where we always sat, one on each side.

I have a lot of really good memories of my step-grandfather. Everything was like a big adventure with him. He was our first real role model! He introduced my brother and me to the forest that was about a quarter mile from my grandmother's house. Later that forest became like a sanctuary, our own personal never-never land with one adventure after the next.

We had turned five the previous fall, so come September we started kindergarten. Our school only had half-day classes for kindergarten, so we got home around 11:30 in the morning. He was always waiting for us with macaroni and cheese with hot dogs cut up in it, grilled cheese sandwiches, or soup.

After we ate, he would have something planned for us to do, like walking in the woods. He always had a lesson for us, such as "This is good! This is bad! Don't touch this. You can find this here!" He would make us stuff to do. He cut small branches and used twine to make us bow and arrows. Nothing dangerous - the arrows would only travel about twenty feet. We still thought they were the coolest things ever. He made us slingshots, wooden toy guns, and many other things. I could fill a book on just the memories I have of him, and all this took place in a six-month stretch of time. Before our sixth birthday, he would be gone.

My mother didn't like my step-grandfather. She thought he was a freeloader, lazy and living off my grandmother. He didn't work, and my grandmother was the breadwinner of the two. To my mother this was reason enough to start arguments with him. She would find something to fault him on and then turn it into a big issue. As time passed, she found more and more to fight about. Finally, one day in early fall, she gave my grandmother an ultimatum. It was either her and the kids, or him. Grandma chose us, and he left.

The following year my mother met and married my second stepfather. He was a couple of years younger than her, and his family did not like my mother much. Soon, we were moving again - this time to his home town. We stayed about three days and moved back. My mother said she didn't like living there because the neighborhood scared her. Their marriage lasted a month or so longer and it was over.

Before long, my mother began seeing someone new and in no time they were married. Insert stepfather number three. He worked during the afternoon, so we didn't see him much. By winter, they had started fighting on a regular basis. I can't remember the source of the arguing but after awhile it was very uncomfortable for the two of them to be around each other. Thus, stepfather number three was history.

We moved into a small trailer on the west side of town and stayed there for a month or two. Finally, when money got tight, it was back to living with Grandma. The rest of the school year wound down, and I finished my first grade year. Summer came and we stayed with Grandma.

My mother, now single and in her mid-twenties, sowed a few wild oats. She spent a lot of time dating and going out to bars. Grandma babysat us quite a bit during this time frame. That summer we signed up for Little League Baseball. Not having a father to teach us the game, we weren't very good. I had to hit the ball off of the T-stand my first couple of games, which was quite an embarrassment. We got Grandma to help us practice in the field next to her house. She had a bad shoulder, so she had to pitch to us underhanded. My hitting improved enough that I didn't have to use the T any more. I still wasn't very good. I was jealous of all the kids with dads. I felt inferior to them.

My mother met another guy at the end of summer, and you guessed it, married him not long after. Stepfather number four didn't spend much time with us. I remember his parents were dairy farmers. We went to their farm once; we watched a movie while we were there. I've got a pretty clear memory of that day. It's funny the things we remember!

My mother had a job at this time. I don't remember where she worked, but she didn't get home until a couple of hours after we got home from school. The stepfather was there but mostly stayed in bed during this time of day. He had a night job somewhere.

My grandmother didn't like him, and it didn't take long for her dislike to intensify. He had a stash of porno magazines hidden in his bedroom kept between the box spring and mattress. While we were at school and mom was at work, he had time alone with his smut books. Kids snoop, and it didn't take us long to find them.

With mom working days and his working nights, they didn't see each other often. I don't remember them fighting much, but it didn't take long for it to end. We hadn't ever moved when mom married that time. Our stepfather had been staying at Grandma's house the whole time so my life wasn't really affected by his leaving. By now the stepfather leaving was just part of our growing up.

My mother let us get a dog not long after he was gone. I thought of the name "Sugar."

We had a dog before Sugar, but it got poisoned and we weren't very attached to it. We didn't really miss it when it was gone. Sugar was different. She was like a member of the family. My grandmother was allergic to dogs and cats, so Sugar stayed in a dog house under our backyard deck.

My brother and I had turned eight that fall and were in the second grade. We were still getting by on our grades, but by now our teachers had some concerns about us not completing homework assignments. This pattern of concern would continue.

The school year went by, and we were getting close to summer break. It was near the beginning of April 1987 that my mother got a phone call from an attorney one day. He said that my father had contacted him and was asking for visitations with my brother and me. My mother was for some reason concerned that if she said no, they would fight for full custody, so she agreed to every other weekend.

The following weekend we packed our backpacks with clothes and a couple of toys and readied ourselves for our visit with our father. He was now remarried to a nice woman named Janice or something close to that.

I had this image in my head that my visit was going to be a nightmare, some torturous event, but for the most part we had a lot of fun. We played and watched movies on TV and had pancakes for breakfast. It wasn't traumatic or anything. So two weeks later when he came to get us for a second visit, we were looking forward to going. Kids are quite forgiving and forget easily.

When the time came for our third visit, he called and said he wasn't going to get us, nor would he be back to get us for anymore visits. We never saw him again.

My mother doesn't know how to show her love for her mother. She is always relying on her for help, but she doesn't really seem grateful. She finds little things to harp

on and nitpick at. She still complains about the things Grandma does. They seem very insignificant to me, but to Mom they are great annoyances and unbearable problems.

We turned nine that fall and started the third grade, but before the fall came we moved to a little trailer in a little trailer park. My mom said that she couldn't bear to live at Grandma's any longer. My mom didn't have a job then, and we lived on public assistance. I remember Mom sold our bikes for extra money.

Right about that time my grades started to get bad. I couldn't concentrate. I was bored. I was always daydreaming and asking to go to the bathroom, anything but my class work. I stopped doing my homework. Even when I tried, I couldn't concentrate for long. I was lectured and told to do better, but I just continued to do more of the same. I was lucky to receive a passing grade that year.

My mom decided to bake my brother a cake because he had done well on a test or his report card. While the cake was cooling, the mice we lived with helped themselves. Mom decided that was enough of that, and we moved back to Grandma's.

That summer my mom started dating a neighbor guy. I started the fourth grade still living with Grandma, but it wasn't long before mom had brought the idea of marriage to the table. Enter stepdad number five. We moved in with him later that fall. This was probably the most normal family life I experienced during my childhood.

Later that year my stepdad filed a petition to adopt my brother, sister, and me. The following summer his petition was granted, and we took on his last name. My brother changed his first name as well because his name was also the name of our biological father.

We had a good life for three years. I have hundreds of good memories from this time in my life. We went on vacations; had big Christmases; had a swimming pool, pet dogs, ducks, geese, rabbits, and chickens; and we were twenty yards from a forest we loved. Life was great!

The summer when we were ten, my brother met a girl at the skating rink. Not having a girlfriend of my own, I got hooked up with her younger sister who was my age. I had my first kiss and many to follow with my girlfriend.

## Middle School Years

My fourth grade year was not much better than my third. I would struggle to pay attention and got bored easily. I didn't have enough credits to pass, so I had to go to summer school. My brother was having the same troubles as I was having, so he went to summer school right along side me. We turned eleven and started fifth grade. We were placed into remedial reading classes because our reading skills were behind. Our grades were not good, but we did pass.

There weren't many fights between my mom and new dad. I realized early that this was because when Mom would pick a fight, he would just ignore her. When problems between them increased and he became more distant, my mother insisted they go to counseling to fix their problems. My new dad had some serious issues from his childhood that made him emotionally distant. He kept everything inside, and it had been eating at him for years. He vented some of his issues at these sessions, and even expressed that at times he had a desire "end it all." He told my mother on their way back from one of these sessions when she was picking on him, that he "felt" like pulling the jeep out in front of a semi-truck and killing them both. They stopped going, probably because my mother didn't trust his driving any more.

That summer we also got our first real guns. My brother got a .22 rifle that had been our dad's. I also had a .22 bought for me. My gun had a plastic stock and barrel, made for a young shooter and easy to carry. We'd go squirrel hunting and target shooting. I got pretty good at shooting.

We started the sixth grade and turned twelve. I am not sure of the reasons why but that fall we moved back in with Grandma. I think my mom and stepfather had gotten spending-happy and got in debt. They fought a lot while they were at Grandma's. It was usually one-sided. My dad would just sit there silently ignoring her and letting it build up.

One cold February morning I heard screaming. My mother was screaming, "Help? Help!" I ran into their bed room. My stepdad was beating my mother. He had her by the hair and was throwing her around. I grabbed my trusty .22, which was not loaded, and pointed it at my stepdad. I told him to stop or I'd shoot him. He turned his attention to me. He grabbed my gun and yanked it from my hands. He knocked me to the floor with the stock and began to beat me with the butt of the gun.

My mother jumped on his back and got a hold of the gun. I managed to get up and leave the room. My sister was in the hall crying. My brother, who had seen me getting beat, took my cousin who had been spending the night and ran bare foot in shorts and no shirt a mile to the neighbor's house. My sister and I started to do the same, but before we reached the end of the driveway, my mother ran out of the house and called us back. She took us into a room, just off from the den, to have us put on our shoes while she went to get the truck keys.

My mother came back with the keys. We filed into the truck and went to get my brother and cousin. We drove to the hospital, and I got a few stitches and bandages here and there. My brother was all torn up because he thought he should have done more to help. My sister just kept crying.

The sheriff went out to get my stepdad, who had laid out some guns and ammo, for what I'm still not sure - either to kill us, himself, or to shoot it out with the cops. He never used them and went easily into the cop's car. That night and the next day, we stayed at a safehouse, which was probably unnecessary because my dad spent the next twenty days in jail.

I never really blamed him or hated him. I even missed him when everything was all over. We had two supervised visits and then I didn't see him anymore.

I went to school with bandages all over me, and I got to answer all the questions and explain what happened. I acted tough, but I wanted to cry. I don't know why, but I felt ashamed. I was glad when the bandages came off. I failed that year and summer school wasn't enough to make it to the seventh grade. My brother failed, too.

That summer my mom met another guy. He was about seventeen years older than her and had two grown sons. By the end of the summer, they were married, and we were moving into his house. Enter stepdad number six. A month or so later he had a mid-life crisis and told my mom he wanted to split up. So, we moved out, back to Grandma's.

About a week later, my mother got drunk and gave him a phone call to talk things out. He said it was over, and she lost it. I heard her scream and throw the phone across the room. I went to see if she was all right and she screamed at me to get out. So I did.

She screamed and cried for a while and put her dresser in front of the door so we couldn't get in. We couldn't see what was going on in the room. Then she broke the

picture frame that had his picture in it, held it to her neck and throat, and said she was going to kill herself.

One of us called our social worker, the one assigned after the beating. She came out to the house. She managed to get the bedroom door open more and to talk with mom. The social worker was able to calm her down some. The sheriff and deputies showed up, and when they found out she had made threats to kill herself, they decided to arrest her and take her to a mental health hospital for observation. They drove her five hours to the other side of the state to admit her to the state psychiatric hospital. They kept her for about five days, and then we drove down to get her. It was a long drive.

A few weeks later stepdad six came to see mom, and they seemed to work out all their issues and decided to get back together. We moved back in together and everything was good for a while. Toward the end of summer, my new stepdad got transferred to a really small town in order to run one of the auto parts store franchises. It was about two hours away from Grandma's house.

The town wasn't that bad. We made some great friends. I've got a lot of great memories from the six months we lived there. I felt free there. I could come and go as I pleased. We turned thirteen and started our second year of sixth grade. I got a new bike for my thirteenth birthday. I loved that bike. It was a BMX and was fast.

### My Delinquent Activities

We started smoking that year. We'd use the soda money our parents gave us and all chip in to buy a pack at this little burger and ice cream store. We'd lie and say they were for Mom, Dad, or Big Sis. We never got turned down. There was this big storm drain that ran under a street on the south part of town. We'd walk up into it, hang out, and smoke our cigarettes. No one was really inhaling yet but it didn't take long.

I vandalized my first building about then. It was a park's public bathroom. It started out as just playing around. We were kicking open the stall doors like we were cops kicking in doors. Then it just got out of hand. Before we were done, the sinks were kicked off the walls, the pipes were kicked loose, and the place flooded fast.

We never got caught for that, so we never really learned how wrong it was. This was the time in my life when I could have used an involved parent. I was pushing a lot of

boundaries but wasn't being caught for any of them. I just got into the habit of doing what I wanted and didn't have anyone telling me some of this was wrong.

By Halloween we went out egging houses. We stole gum from one friend's uncle's store. We would ride our bikes through the courthouse just for kicks. We'd make prank phone calls, throw stink bombs all over town, break pay phones, and throw snowballs at moving cars - some on city streets, others on the highway. We were so misbehaved that one of our friend's parents seriously considered not letting his son hang out with us anymore. I was never punished for this type of behavior, so I just continued to do it. I had no real restraints.

School at this small town wasn't as difficult as my old school, so I managed to stay above flunking. I still had the same attention problems. I would only do partial assignments and slop my way through spelling, word usage, punctuation, and other grammatical skills.

It didn't take long for the arguing to start at home. After a while, it became more open and more often. The day before Christmas Eve, we packed up while he was at work and moved back to Grandma's house. That was the end of stepdad number six.

My grades slipped when we went to school that spring, but at the end of the year I was passed anyway. I had failed the year before, and they didn't want to put my development at a disadvantage, so I was sent to the seventh grade that next fall.

Again, my behavior was unchecked, and I'd do things that I shouldn't have, like kick over mailboxes, throw rocks, ride my bike through the college fountain, and even climb up onto the roof of a business for kicks. To me, it was fun, not stupid! I know better now, but back then I simply did what I wanted.

By the fall, I had figured out how to empty candy out of the vending machines around town by using a coat hanger to "jimmy" the wires that held the candy in place. We stole sandwiches out of sandwich machines by opening the back panel and rotating the trays the food sat on. It was never a question of right or wrong. It was there! I wanted it! So I just took it!

We were living in a crappy apartment building. After we had worn out our welcome and were behind on the rent, we moved back to Grandma's house once again. However, before we moved back, my brother and I finally crossed a line and got busted.

There was a hotel up the highway from where we lived. A couple of buddies, my brother, and I went there to shoot pool. We were all smoking and setting our cigarettes down on the edge of the table to make our shots. A staff member of the hotel came up to us and, in a real snobby and condescending voice, informed us, “If any of you burn that table, you’ll be paying for it.”

We simply said, “Ok, we’ll be careful” and out of earshot said, “F— you.” One kid, not a close friend, quipped, “My dad’s a doctor. He could probably buy this shitty hotel.”

Every flick of ash was now pressed onto the felt top of the pool table and the cigarettes were put out on the floor. We decided it would no doubt prove our coolness to throw the plastic pool furniture into the pool. We decided to take a fire extinguisher and throw it out of a second floor window.

With that, we decided it was time to go. We were all pretty excited and thought that what we had just done was to take a stand. “They’ll think twice about f—ing with us after this,” we thought. But we had been recognized by a couple visiting the hotel and three of us were charged. The doctor’s kid got off with a warning and he pointed the finger at us.

We were waiting to see what would happen when my brother, a friend involved in the hotel caper, and I vandalized a hiking trail. We pulled down signs, tore up older wooden steps, and destroyed two foot bridges. This time there was no “stand taken” because we just broke the stuff. We were stupid!

Our big mouths got us caught. We bragged about it to a kid in the neighborhood, and he told his parents. They called the cops. So add another charge to the first one. That summer, I was put on probation for a year, as was my brother. We were ordered to do community service and to pay a fine. We did our community service at a local activities center and the Salvation Army. It wasn’t hard work, but it wasn’t fun there. When we worked at the Salvation Army, we stole things.

My mother started seeing a guy that summer. They were together all of a week, and they were married. Enter stepdad number seven. He was pretty cool, easygoing, funny, and more like a friend than a stepdad. He liked to drink, though, and liked to punch stuff when he was drunk. He never hit any of us. He was small; my brother and I

were fourteen and we were bigger than him. He sometimes let us get drunk with him. My brother was a loud, goofy drunk, doing stupid stuff like dunking his head in the toilet. Later on, we started smoking pot with him. He wasn't a very good role model and only fed our delinquent behavior. He would tell us stories about all the trouble he got into when he was a kid.

There wasn't much time that passed before the fighting started. Mom would say he had been drinking too much. We moved back to Grandma's house. Just before Christmas break, Mom left and divorced number seven. The previous school year we had failed again, and so when the fall came we started the seventh grade over. The school year was finally coming to an end. I had been passed, not on grades but on the best interest of my development.

My cousin was more like a sister to me than my own sister. My brother and I always looked at her as if she were a triplet. We did a lot of stuff together over the years. She was there when my dad beat my mother and me. We would all go out and get drunk, including my mother. My cousin, brother, and I would smoke weed together. My mother knew but didn't say much. She'd protest at times, but we would just do it anyway.

That summer would be my last summer of freedom, but before it ended I found myself in trouble again. A couple of days before school was out, there was a track and field competition between the homerooms. I thought it would be cool to take some tequila to this field day. You can't be cool unless people know about it. Well, when too many people know, someone is bound to tell. A teacher had heard of the contraband and came to investigate. When he took a sip, I told him that it was "Swiss-English tea," but he busted me.

I was sent to see my probation officer who was quite disappointed with me. Later that summer, I was given six months more probation, more community service, and forty-eight hours in detention. Every day that summer I went to my drug treatment center. They only dropped a urine test on me once, but I was clean so they believed I was doing good. However, I was smoking pot whenever I could get it and even gave some to two of the guys in the group home section of the treatment center.

I went to the forty-eight hour detention at the end of summer. It seemed longer. Basically, I sat in the cell most of the time. I came out to play volleyball, once to shower,

and once to watch a movie. Mostly, I was just bored. When I came home, the stereo and TV were gone. We had gotten behind on payments. Mom had lost her job a month or so earlier and money was tight. We got a TV from Grandma, so we'd have something to watch.

### Events Leading to the Murder

We started the eighth grade that fall and began hanging around a guy we had known most of our lives. We were cool with his younger brother, too. We would go over to his house and smoke pot. He introduced us to huffing gasoline to get high. It was very cheap and very effective. We used the gas can like a bong. We'd open the breather hole and suck air from the nozzle. The trip was fun. Sometimes, you hallucinate and see weird things. Later, I learned the "high" is your brain being slowly starved of oxygen. The gas coats your lungs and doesn't allow the effective transfer of oxygen or release of carbon dioxide.

As my eighth grade school year progressed, I spent more time smoking pot, getting drunk, and huffing gas. I got assigned to a G.E.D. class so I could just learn what I needed to get a diploma and drop out. A G.E.D. was my way out of day-long boredom. I wanted more freedom and started pushing my limits - staying out late, sneaking out, stuff like that. My mom would try to punish us, but we didn't see it as punishment.

One day my brother and I tried to do something responsible. We called a family meeting and tried to discuss our issues. But we were pretty much laughed at. I snapped and threw something across the room. At that point, I just said, "F— it!" I was filled with anger and tried to walk it off, but Mom picked me up about five blocks away and took me home. So instead I brooded in my room.

It was harder and harder to just deal. My life wasn't bad, but I felt it was. To me at the time I felt misunderstood, not given enough freedom, and powerless to change the things that were wrong.

One Friday in early fall my pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend had planned a "camping" trip. It really had little to do with camping. There were no tents or camping equipment. My pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend drove. His brother and girlfriend, another boy and girl we knew, and my brother and I were picked up in his car. I told my

mom we were going camping. I didn't ask! I just said it! She didn't say no. My brother grabbed a blanket, and I grabbed my pipe.

We drove down a dirt road to a concrete bridge. Some of them had been here before on other "camping trips." Later we drove into town and got pot, which we all chipped in for. On the ride back, we used my pipe to smoke our weed. After a few hours back at the camp, we all left when the high wore off. But not before three of ~~us~~ <sup>our</sup> pot-smoking and gasoline-huffing friend, my brother, and ~~I~~ <sup>had</sup> a conversation about running away.

I didn't really put much stock into what was said. We were high, so I figured it was just bullshit. I was wrong! The following Sunday my pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend called my brother and said, "This is it! We're gone! Get your shit! Let's go!"

We filled up our backpacks, tossed them out the back door, and left out the front. We walked the eight or nine blocks to his house where he was ready with his bag, too. He grabbed a baseball bat out of the backyard, and we left. The plan was to find an easy victim and car jack him, or find a car that was away from any prying eyes and break the ignition with a screwdriver.

We ended up walking by a car with the keys in the ignition, so we simply piled in and drove away. The drive was exciting and fun. We had some of our cassette tapes, and we played the radio as loud as it would go. We tried to peel out with the tires, but the car was a town car and had no real power. About two o'clock in the morning and a hundred miles from home, we came to the realization that we had no money and no way to get any, so we decided to go home. Our pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend said he had a gun we could use to hold people up for money.

At home, we caught hell from mom. She had called my probation officer. We told her we were at a college party with some college chick we met. She demanded to know where and who we said we were with. We wouldn't tell and she finally gave up.

The following day was normal until our pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend said the words to me that were the beginning of the end of life as we knew it and would take the life of an innocent person: "I've got my gun back. We're leaving."

We found my brother and headed out. Across from the school was a guy my brother and pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend knew, but who I had never met. He

gave us a ride to the pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend's house. He went into his house, got his rifle, and grabbed a small bag of clothes.

We asked the driver to give us a life to the car we had "stashed" at an abandoned concrete factory. We also asked if he would give us a ride until we found a new car if the car wasn't there, and he agreed.

We drove the same route we used two nights previously. We listened to the radio, talked nonsense, and just enjoyed the ride. The driver had taken his dad's SUV the night before and wouldn't let any of us drive. Our pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend was annoyed by this, but he let it go.

We talked about robbing gas stations or houses, or pulling cars over and jacking them. But every time we would find excuses, such as "it's too open," "that car is too noticeable," or "there is probably someone home." Stuff like that! I thought it was all talk, and we didn't really intend to do anything but keep driving. That would change!

I'm positive all the events leading up to the crime are real. The actual murder is a blur to me, and I'm not sure what really happened. You ask yourself: "Can a murderer be traumatized by the act of killing?" The answer is yes!

I was fifteen. The most violent thing I had ever done was getting into a school yard fight that lasted two punches, only one of which connected. I felt guilty for that!

Our trip had taken us several hours from home. My pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend was getting impatient and eager to be rid of our driver. He thought that getting a car to continue on our own was priority number one. He had our driver back up into a field drive (a small short access to a field or pasture), and we sat and waited for cars to pass.

Earlier when the trip started, my pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend had asked us, "Who's good shot?" Proud of my skill, I quickly spoke up. He said, "Here's the gun, man," and handed me the .22 rifle. I didn't argue or dispute his assignment.

Like any good hunter or gunman I checked over my weapon. I found three bullets and an automatic bolt that wouldn't completely close. The gun was broken. My pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend and my brother took turns using a flathead screwdriver to poke around inside the gun. Finally, it slid close. Carefully, I slid a bullet into the barrel with my fingers. Uncertain of the gun's capability to actually fire, I put it out the

window and above the roof. If it backfired, we wouldn't be hurt. The gun fired, but the action bolt was again stuck open. After using the screwdriver for an hour or so, my brother managed to get the bolt closed again. We knew the gun would fire but only once.

As we drove up to the field drive, we had been laughing and joking. While we were sitting in the field drive, our pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend changed seats with the driver. He was believed to be the better driver. The gun was passed to me in the passenger seat, and we waited. Several cars passed by. We decided that they were the wrong kind of car or had too many people inside. We selected a car and pulled out after it.

It took us a while to chase it down. We used a flashing light bar on the roof to pull over the car (the previous driver's father had been a mail deliverer and used this vehicle in delivering mail). When it stopped, I opened my car door and put the gun in the "V" of the door. My pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend got out and used a flashlight to shine in the woman's eyes. He told her he was a cop and to get out of the car.

At this point my adrenaline was very high. I was overwhelmed with a thousand different thoughts. I had tunnel vision. I remember my brother and the driver talking at me. I don't think I really ever heard them. It was just background noise. My pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend came back to the car and said, "She won't get out. Shoot the bitch."

This whole trip I had been telling myself it was all talk. I'd never have to do anything. At that moment, I wasn't torn. I didn't stop myself and say, "Hey, what are you doing?" It was just automatic. My friend said, "Shoot!" I turned and shot.

I walked up to the car, but the door was locked. I kicked out the driver's window. The last thing I clearly remember as my own memory is looking into her face. Her eyes were dazed, and she looked like she had been punched. I felt like I was frozen in that moment for an hour. At some point, I pulled out a pocket knife and stabbed her over thirty times. I was told later that my brother had come up to the car and tried to pull me away. I said to him, "She won't die. Please, God, why won't she die?"

My brother used the stock of the gun to push her away and to push me out of the window. He said, "Lady, just give us your purse." With the last of her strength, she

managed to toss her purse to my brother. I remember my brother screaming at me, “We’ve got to go!”

I looked down at my hands, and they were covered in blood. I couldn’t figure out how it got there. Then I saw the knife and freaked out. I wiped my hands over my shirts and threw the knife as far as I could. It was more of an attempt to get it out of my hand than to conceal the murder weapon. I took off my denim shirt and dropped it in the ditch.

I could only think, “Did I? Did I really?” I was asking myself a question but wasn’t sure of what I was asking. It was like I was talking to myself, and there were two of me inside my head. One of me was saying, “Did you really do that?” And the other knew what I had done.

I don’t remember getting back into the truck or talking to the others. I remember being pulled out of the truck and water poured over my hands to wash off the blood. The truck was over heating, and the person who was now driving instead of my pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend had pulled up to a farm house to get water for the radiator.

I woke up the next morning asleep in the back of the SUV. The seat was folded down. My brother and I had slept there. The driver and my pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend had slept in a motel room, purchased with the credit card number of the driver’s grandmother. He had called her to get the number. The driver came down, got my brother and me, and took us up to the room. We all showered and sat around watching TV.

My pot-smoking, gasoline-huffing friend had called his mother, and she had called the police in that town. She told them that we were runaways. They came to the motel and brought us to the station while we waited for our parents to come and get us.

I wouldn’t let myself think about the night before and kept acting like a goof, telling jokes and laughing at stuff that wasn’t really funny. It was a defense mechanism because I was terrified to think about the night before.

### Arrested, Convicted, and Sentenced

My mother made us turn ourselves in for jacking that town car the first time we ran away. The elderly couple who owned the car agreed to not press charges if we returned their keys and atlas, which we did. We also wrote apology letters.

I was overwhelmed with guilt and couldn't think of anything else all week. My probation officer was upset but seemed to understand, and he wanted to help us work out our problems. I believed then that my life would go back to normal and no one would ever know what I had done.

The Friday of that week I knew differently. The driver had confessed his participation to a friend, and it didn't take long for word to spread. That same day two cops came to our town, found our juvenile officer, and scheduled an interview for the next day with all four of us. We all showed up and professed our innocence, but under the weight of our guilt and the skill of the interrogators, we all admitted our guilt and signed confessions.

That was my last day of freedom. I was a month away from my sixteenth birthday. I was put in a detention center, but I was still telling myself it would all be okay. I could not have really done it! Surely this was a mistake and everything would work out. Later that day, a judge waived jurisdiction, and we were transported five hours from home to the county where the crime had taken place.

In January, I was waived to the adult court and transferred to an adult jail. This transition into incarceration wasn't completely unpleasant. My brother was still with me, so I wasn't alone. I still cried a lot then, but you can only cry so much before your tears dry up.

First there is denial, then bargaining. Not very religious, I turned to God. I begged for forgiveness and pleaded for freedom. Some of my guilt subsided, but not all of it. Freedom never came.

I've relived the events of my life a thousand times. I've relived my crime a million times. Why? What could I have done to stop it? What was wrong with me? How could I? Why? If only I had thought of the consequences.

We spent the next year and a half in county jail going through disposition, pre-trial motions, and preparation for our individual defenses. I never was a big reader in school, but having nothing but free time, I started reading novels and fell in love with reading. It was an escape from my reality, another world I could lose myself in. I am still quite a reader.

Eventually, our individual cases were separated, and we were all give separate trials. The driver turned states' evidence and got a deal. He still ended up with a hefty sentence. The rest of us went to trial, and we were found guilty one-by-one and sentenced. In the end, it took the jury in my case about two hours to come back with the verdict: Guilty on both counts of first-degree murder and first-degree robbery.

The three of us were given life sentences without the possibility of parole. I wasn't really scared because I knew I would lose, I was just going through the motions; emotionally, I detached as I often did when I was uncomfortable in a situation.

Two things stick in my mind about my trial that I probably will never forget. One is that although I tried not to look, I couldn't help but see the crime scene photos. I was horrified and never more ashamed of myself than at that moment. The second thing is that after the jury read its verdict and I was leaving the courtroom, the victim's father walked up to me very casually and said, "It's just too damn bad they don't have the death penalty." I remember thinking his eyes didn't even look human. He had so much hate, anger, and pain in his eyes. I never dreamed I could inspire such angst and misery.

### Incarceration

It has been eight years since I was sent to prison. Prison has changed me. I've been through and done things I never thought I would go through. The word "prison" may bring to mind different things for different people, but for most, it's the movie version of what prison is supposed to be like. The reality of prison is much more complicated, though no less dramatic.

At seventeen, prison was many things for me. There is the fear; we've all seen the movies where the young kid comes into prison and is quickly fed upon by the predators. He's raped, beaten, or killed, sometimes all of the above. I have a very active imagination, so I could foresee every possible bad outcome, played out in vivid detail inside my head. You tell yourself, "I'll be strong. I'd do whatever it takes to survive," but the fear is still there.

Everything is so uncertain. You have no idea what to expect. It's a feeling of flux, and for a time, your life simply doesn't belong to you. It's like you were a caterpillar

sealed away inside your cocoon. You're constantly changing. You have to learn to adapt to your new environment.

It's a proving ground. You're constantly being tested. "Will he, won't he? Is he, can he?"

The other inmates, as well as staff, feel you out to see if you're a snitch, a bitch, a gossip, or a "stand up" or "solid" guy. They want to know if you're strong and can take of yourself.

When we first pulled up to the prison, it was intimidating and looked like a castle. I had some problems early on about guys hitting on me. One guy really worked me, but I made a knife in my cell and stabbed him in the neck. I was really scared. He got the knife away from me, but I stuck my finger in his neck. Guards broke it up, but he nearly died. I got an attempted murder charge out of it, but everyone pretty well left me alone after that.

Do I deserve to be here? Probably! Regardless of my age, what I did was wrong. Regardless of my mental status at the time of the crime, what I did resulted in a spouse who lost his wife, four young kids growing up without a mother, and an innocent person losing her life. Do I feel guilty? Not as much as I used to. As the years pass and the more I go through, it's harder to feel sorry or guilty.

I don't like being in prison, but for the most part, I like the man I am today. There are, of course, things about myself I don't like, and they are directly related to my environment. Still, I see how members of my family and some of my closest friends turned out. They are strung out on drugs, and their lives are miserable. I know that could have been me. Had I not come to prison, my life could have ended up like that of most of the people I know: strung out and living a life of unhappiness and meaninglessness. I would rather be who I am than as the person I could have ended up. There is always the possibility that I could have avoided all of that and turned out okay. We'll never know though.

I still long for freedom but have accepted my fate. If I could change it, I would, but I don't dwell on freedom like some guys do. Life is full of surprises. Who knows? Fifteen years from now they might pass some law or vacate a number of sentences. I'll never give up hope or the dream of freedom, but I'm not going to obsess over it. I have my life, and I'll get as much out of it as I can. I'll leave you with one last insight. I heard

somewhere the question “What is the meaning of life?” I had that question stuck in my head for several years and finally I came up with an acceptable answer, “The meaning of life is what life means to you.”

### **CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS**

1. Why do you think this twin killed the woman in the stopped car? What explains the viciousness of this attack (that he stabbed her over thirty times)?
2. What explanations of delinquency best explain his previous delinquent acts as well as the murder?
3. What do you think of the way he is processing and making sense of his life? Does his response seem to be typical?
4. If you were a member of the jury, would you have voted to give him a sentence of life imprisonment with no possibility of parole? If not, what sentence would you have given him?