

# "Brother"hood

By Skylar Marks

"For my dad, Gary, and my Uncle Peter."

## 1 (By Gary)

"There is no way I am going there. No, no, no, no! Absolutely not. I don't care what you say mom, you can't make me!"

"Yes I can. In the car now."

"Well, maybe you can make me go, but you can't make me do it with dignity!"

"Peter, now!"

"No!"

"Peter, your setting a bad example for your brother!"

"I don't want to! There is no way you are going to make me go to playgroup with a baby--even if he is my brother, technically!"

"Peter, it's only for an hour and it's just so I can shop a little for myself and I really need some new clothes! Please?"

"New clothes? You have enough clothes to fill Timbuktu!"

Mom glared at him.

"Mom, it's a Saturday! I demand a lawyer! Saturdays are for kids to relax-- Do what they want to do!"

"Get in the car Peter or no TV for a week and Gary can watch Howdy Doody for as long as he wants! Understand?"

"Mothers. They always get their way," Peter muttered as he got into the car.

Yup. This is how most it is Saturday mornings. I (as you are probably wondering) am Gary--Peter's four year old brother. Yes, I am small, but I am mighty! Getting back to the subject. Every Saturday while my dad goes bowling with his friends and sometimes with Peter, my eleven year old brother, mom likes to go shopping. And she likes to leave Peter and me with the lady who watches the little kids in the store. It's like a playgroup.

Peter hates it. I don't mind. They let you watch TV and play with some dumb toys. I don't see why mom can't bring us shopping with her. Probably because Peter always complains and hides in the clothes racks and jumps out to scare snobby ladies who then go shrieking through the mall. I just sit there being 'mommy's little angel' while she picks out things for herself.

This morning since Peter made such a fuss, mom decided to take us with her. Last time she left Peter when he was in this kind of crazy head space, he attacked the lady who watches us and we almost got sued. Same old same old. Mom rushed through the store with Peter and me in the cart, sucking on lollypops. "Yum!" I said and I reached for another lolly pop because I had finished my other one and I wanted to see what the cherry kind tasted like. But Peter thought I was going to eat the whole thing and so he grabbed it out of my hand and said "Mom! Gary's trying to have another one!" He's such a tattler! I was just going to *taste* it. So I started to cry.

"Div it bat, Petow!" I yelled.

"Mom! Gary's saying I have to give him back the lolly. Help!"

"Just a minute, I'm paying. Then we're going home and Marion has made a nice dinner. So be polite."

"Humph," said Peter folding his arms flat across his chest.

Ahh, Marion. She's the house cleaner, cook, maid and sometimes our babysitter. Mom has a bad back and can't even boil water without burning it, so we had to hire Marion. She came on my 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

About three times a week, Marion takes care of Peter and me while mom and dad go out to dinner. After all, dad works from 7:00 until 5:30, Monday through Friday. Oh the joy of Marion. (I'm being sarcastic.) Anyway, Peter and I get along well, let's say, a decent percentage of the time. For the rest of the time, we fight like well, brothers. I think he's cool. But sometimes I think he's a tattler and a meanie. Like when he won't let me watch Howdy Doody and he wants to watch a cowboy movie that scares me instead. Then I have to cry and whine and I get what I want. Overall, I've got it pretty easy. He thinks I am a dumb, wormy, drooly, four year old brother most of the time and I don't blame him. But sometimes, we love to play together and that's the best part about having a brother.

## 2 (By Peter)

It totally doesn't make sense. Gary gets to watch Howdy Doody every time and I never get to watch my cowboy movie. Stupid! I hate him sometimes. And mom doesn't understand anything about having a little brother. The last time I wouldn't let Gary watch Howdy Doody, mom threw a deck of cards at me. I just can't wait until dad gets home.

The door opened. "Honey! I'm home!" yells my dad from the door way. He has a coat on because February in Manhattan is deathly cold. Dad has a scarf, a coat, boots, and like three shirts on. When I run up to hug him, he says, "Hey Petey! How ya doin'!" and to Gary he says, "There's my little champ!" His coat is full of icicles and frost. Marion has a nice dinner ready and it smells good. Dad hangs his coat on the hook by the door and sits down to read the paper while Gary and I scramble onto his lap.

"Daddy!" squeals Gary very loudly and puts his arms tightly around him.

"Dinner smells good Marion!" calls my dad from the living room.

"Thanks Mr. Marks," she replies just as mom comes down the stairs.

"Hello, Al," she says sweetly. She bends down to hug him.

We all sit down to eat. I pick at my food. I scrunch up my face and say, "I'm not, and I repeat *not*, eating that broccoli, so don't try and make me!" I see nothing wrong with expressing my opinion but I think mom does.

"Peter, don't speak that way! You are to be polite in this family. Do you understand?"

"No I don't understand. I don't have to eat my broccoli! It's a free country, isn't it?" I expect mom took that as an insult because she sent me to my room and yelled. That means she's mad.

"Busted!" Gary whispers as I walk up the stairs. I swear I want to pound that kid sometimes! He makes me so mad. I get in my room, slam the door, and stomp around so they can hear me downstairs. I scream and growl and pout until dad tells me to cut it out. Mom comes up after dinner with a tray of food.

"Peter," she says calmly, "I know you're frustrated with Gary lately and he's a little annoying sometimes..."

"A *little* annoying? He's driving me *nuts*! I can't take it any more."

"Well, you won't have to tomorrow," she replies, "your friends invited you to play baseball in the park." I shoveled the food excitedly in my mouth. I couldn't wait for tomorrow.

### 3 (By Gary)

It is now another Saturday. But, luckily, mom is not going shopping. I think she bought enough clothes to pile from here to Timbuktu. You may be wondering why I tell the story in such a mature way but I don't speak well. The answer is simply that I'm a genius but I don't know how to control my tongue. Anyway, since mom wasn't going shopping, I thought I was going to play with Peter today. But he had other plans. "What are we gonna do today Petow?" I asked as he came down the stairs with a baseball mitt.

"Nothing, at least not with you."

"Why?"

"Because I am going to play some ball with friends."

"Can I come too? Pewees?" I begged.

"No!" he shouted so I started to cry. Mom came in.

"What did you do to Gary?" she demanded.

"Nothing! I told him I'm going to play with some friends at the park and he can't come!"

"Why can't he come?" asked mom.

"Because I want some space and I want to play with my friends *alone*."

"Then Marion can take him."

"WHAT?" shouted Peter.

"Yes. That's a swell idea. Gary loves the park." Now she's talking'.

"Mom!" Peter whined.

"We're going to da pawk!" I chimed dancing around the room. I loved the park. I loved the swings and the seesaw. I loved playing on the jungle gym. But I hated Marion. She teased me and I doubt she liked me either. Peter likes Marion and mom likes Marion and dad likes Marion but I hate her! She grouchy and mean and thinks I'm a dumb, stupid four year old. I may be a four year old, but I'm not dumb or stupid. I do want to clobber Marion sometimes but she would probably beat me up first.

We entered the park and Peter ran over to his friends. "Petow!" I called running after him.

"Leave me alone!" he shouted and shoved me away. I fell on the ground (a bit over dramatically) and started to cry. I cried louder and one of Peter's friends felt sympathy for me.

"Peter, your brother's so small and you're being kind of mean to him. I say, we let him play for a little while." All of the other boys nodded. Peter cringed. So, while Peter's friends and I ran out to the baseball field, Peter sat on a rock and didn't say anything.

We played for about a half an hour and I forgot all about Peter but then I saw him sitting there looking so sad and I thought about how I would feel. So I stopped the game by just running off the field and I went over to Peter.

"Petow!" I greeted him.

He didn't look up.

"You can pway wif your fwends and I will pway by my sewf now Petow. I will go pway on da swings."

I looked over ten minutes later just to make sure my plan worked well and it did! Peter was happily playing with his friends and I was stuck with..... Marion.

But, of course, I lived.

## 4 (By Peter)

"Not tuna casserole! NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! My life is over. OVER! Do you hear? What are you trying to do mom, kill me? You know no human can stand to eat this hazardous piece of whatever the heck this blobby, lumpy, grey stuff is! It's coming to kill me! AHHHHHHHHH! Help! Save me anyone! UGGGGG! I'm calling my LAWYER!"

"Peter please! We are trying to eat dinner! And have you ever even tried it?" mom complained.

I groaned and ate my tuna casserole. (Don't tell I had seconds.) After dinner it was time for bed and bath and stories and the whole shebang.

"Captain Divebomb sends a dive bomb shooting into the water! BLOOOOOOOSH! And another! BLOOOOOOOSH! And the Evil-man Vegetable is blown to pieces!"

"What are you doing? Splashing water all over the floor?" screams mom. "Your going to cause wood rot under the linoleum!" she shrieks. I roll my eyes. Then she goes into lecture mode. The one about wood rot under the linoleum. So I half listen and then go back to my water battle the one with Captain Divebomb vs. Evil-man Vegetable.

I got out of the tub with a smile on my face because once again, Evil-man Vegetable had been defeated by Captain Divebomb! Survivor of liberty! Creator of justice!

I changed into my pajamas. Tomorrow was Sunday, a family day. Usually we went on a picnic or something. So in the morning, we all packed up some lunch, took the picnic blanket and Marion, some sandwiches, a pie we bought at the market ('cause mom can't cook dirt) and we were on our way. We set everything down in a nice peaceful grassy area in the park and Gary and I went to play on the playground.

We had a nice time and I played catch with Gary to make up for yesterday. Then we ate lunch and went back home. Mom and dad went out that night and Marion babysat. We went to bed early because it was a school day tomorrow.

Soon it was going to be Gary's birthday. He was gonna turn five and I wanted to get him something good. I had never gotten Gary a good birthday present. I mean, one time I got him Wonder bread and he had that for a year but, mom bought Wonder bread all the time. I wanted to get him something rare, exciting and unusual. But I had one small

problem. WHAT THE HECK FIRE WAS IT GONNA BE?

## 5 (By Gary)

It is June 16 the first day of summer vacation! I love summer vacation. Especially because my birthday is August 29<sup>th</sup>. Peter and I were let out of school early. He came out singing: "I'm free! I'M FREEEEEEEEEEEEEE! AHHHH YESSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS! YAY! I KISS THE SWEET GROUND!" And making a huge drama as always. I think mom was a little embarrassed when Peter did that. We got in the car and Peter started yelling excitedly. Finally after ten minutes of yelling, mom told him to close his mouth and keep it that way.

"What, am I gonna cause wood rot under the linoleum from screaming?" Peter snickered.

Mom glared and Peter kept his mouth closed.

"I have some news," she said.

"I bet it's about something boring," said Peter.

"It's not. The news is that Gary's birthday is coming up very soon and this week your father and I are going to go birthday shopping."

"Can I come too?" Peter shouted.

"Peter, what's gotten you so excited?"

"No reason."

"Well, I'll talk to your father about your behavior. If he agrees, I'll consider it."

"Yesssss!" said Peter with a giant grin. I just knew he was up to something. Peter never wanted to go birthday shopping for me. Maybe he was gonna get me a gag gift or something. Like maybe a rubber cockroach. I hated those.

That night Peter didn't do his major dinner drama and he cleared the table without making a fuss. He took his bath and put on his pjays and brushed his teeth and went to bed. He must really want to go!

The next day mom informed Peter that he was allowed to come with them that night

for shopping and dinner. Peter was very excited. He even got dressed in nice pants and a white shirt. When they left Marion grunted, stood up and started on the dishes. She hummed very off key while she worked. I tried to stand it.

"Have you picked up your room, Gary?" she asked me.

"No." I said back.

"Well you'd better before your folks come home and if you do, we can play a little cards. K?"

"Ok!" I said hurrying to my room.

Cleaning my room didn't take long. I just shoved Peter's stuff in the closet and put my stuff away. There isn't much of my stuff. When I was finished, I got my cards out of the drawer, took them in my very small hands, and set them rather sloppily on the coffee table. Marion took them in her big, grubby hands and shuffled and dealt for Gin. I won! Then the next game I lost. We played Poker, Black Jack, Gin Rummy, and every other card game you could think of. Then it was eight thirty, time for bed. Marion red me two stories, tucked me in and I went to sleep.

The next morning Peter was back to his old self: sliding down the banister and screaming like Tarzan. We had pancakes because it was Friday morning. I liked Fridays. That meant that after school it was the beginning of a new weekend! Even if it was summer vacation.

## 6 (By Peter)

Mrs. Carlston gives too much homework. I don't like homework on weekends. It takes me hours because the whole time your waiting and thinking 'Darn the teacher! This is a waste of time. I should be playing outside.' But homework over summer VACATION! I WON'T LIVE! I'LL DIE AND THEN MRS. WHATEVER WILL FEEL REALLY BAD ABOUT IT! POOP! And it rots! Like the wood under the linoleum! I wish SHE would rot!

"Oh mom! Please don't make me suffer!" I said hanging onto her leg in the kitchen.

"Oh please Peter. 'I'm gonna die' isn't gonna get you anywhere. I'll help you if you want me to."

"It was nice knowing you mom! It's fractions!"

Mom rolled her eyes and sat down at the table. I was out of humor. Homework just drains me. You know what I mean?

"NOT TORTELLIIIIINIINIIIII! GAG! HACK! UGGGGGGG! TAKE IT AWAY! Mom your gonna kill me! Oh uhh, by the way, eh hem, what's tortellini?" I said as mom cooked it up on the stove.

"Peter, will you ever stop criticizing my lunch foods? It's quite rude." said mom obviously feeling offended.

"Wait mom, I thought you couldn't cook?" I told her. BEEP BEEP! I guessed she couldn't. (That was the fire alarm.) Dad came in from the den sill holding his paper and using it as a fan.

"What were you doing honey?" he asked sputtering from all of the smoke.

"I was just trying to cook some tortellini! Is that a crime?"

"Well, in your case mom, it's arson," I interrupted. Two glaring faces looked over at me. I decided to shut up then and there for the better of everyone.

Gary started crying: "Fie-ow! Fie-ow!" (That means 'fire'.)

"No Gary. There isn't a fire, mom just tried to cook!" I explained. Gary calmed down.

Marion came into the kitchen and fanned the fire alarm and stopped the beeping. Finally, all was quiet.

I can't stop thinking about Gary's birthday present. But mom and dad's is way better. I would've got it but they saw it first and I couldn't afford it. It's a beautiful red shining fire engine. It has gleaming red paint and a little bell you can ring that's a shiny silver. It's just Gary's size and it has little peddles so he can go real fast. I got him a little truck that's a dump truck and it comes with all these thing you can dump. I hope he likes it.

## 7 (By Gary)

"Yesssss! Pizza! PIZAAAAAA!"

"Ok Peter we get your excited to go out for pizza. Now please just GET IN THE CAR!" shouted mom. Peter hung his head and got in the car and sat down next to me.

"Hey Gary!" he cleared his throat. "Your birthdays coming up soon and..."

"Shush!" said mom as she got in the car. I think she was feeling bad about burning our lunch or else she wouldn't have taken us for pizza. When we finally got to the pizza parlor we sat down in a cozy little red booth. Peter went nuts.

"I'll have a large double cheese with extra cheese and tomatoes and basil!" he shouted at the waitress lady.

"No he won't!" mom said. He'll have a kiddie pizza with cheese and I thought you didn't like tomatoes, Peter," she said turning to him.

"I don't." he confessed. "Gary does."

"And another kiddie with tomatoes. Al what do you want."

"Wait!" yelled Peter, "I want pepperoni!"

"Ok," said mom.

"No wait! I changed my mind." said Peter.

Mom looked annoyed.

"I'll split a medium pizza with olives on one side and plain cheese on the other," said dad.

It was a very nice evening full of cheesy, oily pizza! We all enjoyed it immensely.

The next day when mom went to wash her hands, the spout broke so she said she had to call a plumber. "Oh Boy! A PLUMMER! Can I WATCH him? Please? please? Please?" said Peter.

"If he says it's alright." mom agreed. "But he's here to fix the sink. OK? He's not here to play with YOU!"

"Mom, I know *that*. I'm very mature."

"Mature huh?" said mom to herself.

The plumber guy came in with a tool box and another plumber guy accessories. He was very dirty. "Mom," said Peter, "*he* doesn't have to wash behind *his* ears. It's not fair!" The plumber looked insulted.

"Peter!" said mom, horrified.

Just the same, Peter followed the guy into the bathroom. Mature huh?

"We also have wood rot under the linoleum!" Peter hissed. Mom turned red. Peter watched the poor guy until lunch. Mom made lima beans. Actually, technically *Marion* made the lima beans. We've learned to accept when mom says "Lunch time!" And she like when we sit down and say "Nice lunch mom!" and today it happened to be Peter's least favorite: lima beans.

Mom came into where Peter and the plumber guy were. "It's lunch time, honey," she said to Peter.

"What's for lunch, mom?" he asked.

"Grilled cheese and lima beans."

"LIMA BEANS??!!" Peter said alarmed. "Not lima beans!"

"Here we go again," said mom to herself.

"Oh...." he paused to read the plumber's name tag, "...Timothy! Save meeee!" Peter wailed. Mom dragged him into the kitchen. "It was nice knowing ya, Timothy! Have you ever eaten my mom's lime beans? Yech!"

Now that we were in the kitchen-alone-mom could talk to us any way she wanted to. And by 'us' I mean Peter. "Peter, I'm appalled by your intolerable behavior! It's very humiliating when you talk that way in front of people. I get very embarrassed. I need you

to watch your mouth and to stop making fun of my cooking."

"Mom, technically it's not *your* cooking. It's *Marion's*."

Mom glared at him and Peter shrunk into his seat. Mom washed the dishes in silence. It's very rare mom washes the dishes in silence for two reasons. One is that she tends to blab when she's bored and two is that she makes so much noise with the plates crashing and the pans banging and such. She's not the greatest dish washer. I think that's why she became a mom not a waitress.

## 8 (By Peter)

"I'm singing in the raiiiinn! LAAAAAAAA LAAAAAA LAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA! BO BOP DE DOO DOP! Trust me it took me a long time to get so good at singing in the shower. Hey Gary, why are you covering your ears? Don't you *like* it? I thought you liked good quality music!"

"Who says youws is dood twawity!" Gary screeched. What does he know anyway? I went back to my lovely singing. Then mom told me to shut up so I decided to take on a different sport. I guess they don't know anything about fine music. I got out of the shower and helped Gary dry off and get his clothes on and I did the same. We had been swimming for the past three hours and we both looked like prunes.

"Mom," I said as I walked into the kitchen, "I heard you were constipated. You can eat us! Ha ha! Get it? We're prunes! Ha ha!"

"I'm splitting my sides," she said sarcastically.

"I know. I'm a joker huh?" I laughed.

"Sit down for lunch, boys," said mom and served us spaghetti and meatballs.

"Finally," I sighed, "a decent meal!"

Then mom served the spinach.

"I take that back!" I yelled at the top of my lungs. Then Gary started yelling too.

"I hate spinit!" he said mispronouncing it. "It's swimy!"

"But Popeye eats it and he's big and strong!" said mom.

"Who cares!" I said. "Besides I want more spaghetti! There was basically none on my plate!" I grabbed Gary's because he wasn't eating it and it was going to go to waste.

"Yeah! Popeye, Smopeye!" said Gary pounding his fist on the table and then realizing that I took his lunch, started to wail. "Petow took my sketti!" Mom gave up this war surprisingly early and let us have Wonder bread sandwiches for lunch.

"Ahh mom, that was a delicious meal. You should be very pleased with your self," I said. Dad says it's good to humor mom sometimes. And plus, I liked the sandwiches.

"Peter and Gary, we are going to the park for some fun tomorrow and Peter, all of your friends will be there. Sorry to say that none of the children Gary's age could make it so he'll be alone. I frowned at him as he played happily on the floor. He probably wouldn't notice when we got there.

We arrived at the park and I ran over to my friends. "Oh man!" said Tom, "You had to bring your little brother again?" he said as Gary waddled over to us. He couldn't talk to Gary that way.

"Yeah, what were you thinking? He can't play baseball! He doesn't even know how!" shouted Fred.

"Get the baby!" they all started chanting. Gary looked sad as ten angry faces looked down on him saying "Get the baby!" This was too much. I could feel the anger building up inside me and I saw Gary's lips start to quiver and his knees start to shake. I got angrier and angrier.

"LEAVE HIM ALONE!" I finally shouted and the sound dropped from ten to zero. All of the boys went white in the face and looked so ashamed. "Is this how you treat a four year old? How could you do this to someone! You should feel horrible!" They all hung their heads. Yeah! I was guilt tripping them! I had never done that to anyone before! Back to the subject. "I say..." I told them much more calmly, "...we let Gary play too and we can teach him!"

"No way!" said one of the boys, "I think neither of you weenies should play! Ha ha ha!"

"Yeah!" said another. Pretty soon we had a big gang of eleven-year old boys saying we couldn't play, so guess what we did? We didn't play! Luckily God has given us precious brains for common sense.

We sat back down next to mom and some other old lady people. "How was baseball?" asked mom, puzzled. "Back so soon?"

"Yeah they wouldn't let Gary play so I got angry at them and then they called us weenies and said neither of us could play so I'm gonna teach Gary how to play catch! He's almost five after all."

"Why Peggy!" said one of the ladies, "What sweet boys you have! I'd better go talk to Tom. He was probably the ring leader. He's grounded again."

"I'm Hungee!" squeaked Gary. I nodded too! Marion had made our favorite! Skippy Peanut butter on wonder bread with Wise potato chips smashed inside. The bread was so soft, it melted in your mouth. In fact I don't even think it was bread. But, I'd rather not find out what was truly in the-well... 'bread'. After lunch, I took Gary onto the baseball field. It was empty and the grass was still wet from the morning dew. Our sneakers slushed as we walked out. I taught Gary how to hit.

"...here Gary like this. Yeah you put your feet apart so they're balanced. That's it! Now put the bat over your shoulder but be careful not to hit your head. Yeah! Good job! Not I'm gonna throw the ball and your gonna hit it with the bat ok?"

"K Petow! I'm wedy!" Gary said.

"Now," I told him, "get mad at the ball!" Gary's face scrunched. His eyes narrowed.

"I'm mad Petow!" he shouted.

"Good! Now hit it!" I yelled as the ball came slowly to the bat. And SMACK! "It's a home run!" I shouted at the top of my lungs. Gary ran like a penguin all around the bases while I pretended to run as fast as I could. "Slide into home!" I yelled. Gary slid. "Two points!" I screamed.

"I won, Petow, I won!" he yelled happily.

That night at dinner, dad was really proud of me. "Peter, I heard you stood up for Gary today!"

"I'w tew da howle story, daddy. Aw da tids were bein mean to me so Petow towd dem to top. But day didn't wisten. Den day tawed us weenies and said to doe away. So Petow tawt me basebaw in da feiwd and I got a home wun and won da dame!"

"Wow." said dad.

"So Marion, this is such a lovely dinner. Thank you so much."

"Uhh, your welcome," Marion replied.

"Why Marion," said mom, "you don't think we've forgotten your birthday!"

"Uhh, actually, I didn't think you knew my birthday," said Marion with a smile.

"Happy birthday..." sang everyone and mom brought out a cake that was beautifully decorated.

"Did you COOK that?" I asked wide-eyed.

"Of course not!" mom told me. "I bought it at the market. I didn't want to ruin Marion's birthday." And it was a lovely evening full of food and laughing. Everyone had a great time. And I ate like 30 pieces of cake.

## 9 (By Gary)

"When the MOOOOOOOON hit your EYYYYEEES! Like a BIIG Pizza PIIIEEE! That's a MORAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAY!" screeched Peter as he washed himself. You have no idea how arrogant Peter is about singing in the shower. He thinks he's so good when really, he has no talent at all. And I think my eardrums are about to break.

"SUT UP!" I yelled at him frantically.

"Gary, don't you like my singing?"

"NOT A TANCE BUSTEW!"

"Well, I've never been so insulted in my life!" said Peter wrapping himself in a towel. I rolled my eyes.

"Boys!" said mom from the bottom of the stairs. "Breakfaaaaaast!"

"Made by you?" asked Peter, horrified.

"No, made by Marion!"

"Feew!" said Peter, obviously relived.

"Come on boys!" called mom.

"We're coming!" hissed Peter. "I'm helping Gary get dressed! Sheesh!"

We finally came down for breakfast and we ate happily. It was Aunt Jemima pancakes and Peter and I loved it. Peter made loud slurping noises while enjoying the Log Cabin maple syrup.

"SHUUUUUUUUUP! AHFFF that was a good meal!" he said, patting his stomach contently.

It was all good. The park was fun, the lunch was nice. (We like chicken noodle soup in a thermos.) And Peter's friends were there and so were mine. That was good because as good of a brother as he is, he needed some space. His friends forgot about the 'weenie' and 'baby brother' incident and they were good as friends as ever. I played with Sofie

and Bob. Mom talked with her friends too and said she had a wonderful time on the way home.

When we got home, dad was home too. "Dad!" said Peter, "Why are you home?" he asked changing his demeanor. Mom looked worried as he lay on the couch. Marion rushed in with some ice.

"Al! What happened?" shrieked mom.

"Oh Peggy!" he said smiling, "I was being careless and I fell and broke my ankle. But I'm fine."

"You broke your ankle??!!" mom howled, alarmed.

"It's not serious," assured my dad.

"Daddy!" I wailed. Peter looked worried too.

"Will you need surgery or something?" questioned mom.

"Well, that's the only thing," my dad said looking at the floor.

"What?!" screamed mom so loud that Marion dropped the ice pack and it slammed on the floor and made a very loud crashing sound. So, obviously, I started to cry.

"Is Daddy o-tay?" I cried.

"Of course!" said dad holding out his arms and welcoming me into a big bear hug.

"Al," said mom, "But we can't have you in bed for weeks! What are we going to do?"

"It won't take weeks!" dad told her.

"What the heck were you possibly doing to break your ankle?" asked my mom.

"Well I was at that business party at the bosses house, and as I was getting in the car to leave I realized I forgot to say goodbye. I didn't want to walk all the way back around his long driveway, so I decided to jump the hedge."

"The hedge?" mom hollered.

"Yeah. It was only about so high," said dad showing us about three feet.

"Al, you need to be careful! We can't have you breaking your ankle every month!"

"Peggy, you think I'm gonna ever jump a hedge again?" said dad laughing.

"Yes, and next time you'll probably break your wrist too," shouted our angry mother.

"Well, I'm going in for minor surgery and it won't be that bad. I'll only be outta work for a week or so. Ok? You guys will survive."

"I'm just glad you're alright." mom said bending down to hug him.

"So what's for dinner?" asked dad with a smile. Mom looked relived. We all sat down and dad propped his foot up on a chair. And he told us the whole story and everyone laughed.

"Mom," asked Peter, "are we gonna get to visit dad in the hospital?" Mom looked uncomfortable.

"Of course!" dad answered for her. "It's just like I'm totally normal. I'll just be away from home and you guys will be able to bring me ice cream in bed and you guys can have a taste you know what I mean?" he said nudging Peter.

"Yeah!" smiled Peter happily. "Mom, start buying some ice cream! YAH!"

"Please don't scream Peter."

"Rats."

"So," asked mom, "when are you scheduled for the operation?"

"Oh, it's in two days! I got really lucky that I could get in so soon."

"Daddy!" I squealed and gave him a great big hug.

## 10 (By Peter)

I was so nervous when my dad walked through the doors of the hospital and we watched him disappear. Gary started bawling out of control and mom was a bit teary as well. I would miss him but mom said we would see him two days from now. When we were driving out of the hospital gates, mom said we were going to the store.

"What are we getting?" I questioned.

"Lots and lots of ice cream!" mom smiled.

"All right!" I yelled maybe a little too loud. But poor Gary didn't stop crying.

"Aw Gar," I said to him, "You can't be sad now."

"Why?" he asked, his lip quivering.

"Because we're going to the store and we're gonna get ice cream for daddy when we see him!"

"Yay!" cried Gary, joyfully.

When we got to the market, we ran straight to the freezer section. "Look Gar! All of these flavors! How will we choose?"

"Wet's det vannewa!" said Gary pointing to a giant tub of vanilla ice cream. Yum!

"Mom!" I yelled, how much are we allowed to get?"

"Just get a couple containers, Peter. Don't go nuts."

"Ok Gary, this is what we're gonna do, we're gonna get vanilla, and strawberry (because that's dad's favorite) and some root beer for root beer floats!"

"O-tay Petow!" said Gary with a smile.

When we got to the hospital at precisely noon, dad was tucked under blankets with his leg hanging on a rope in a sling from a big pole-like thing above. Gary, of course, immediately burst into tears afraid that someone had done something absolutely

dreadful to dad. Dad sat up in bed and said "Hey champ! How ya doin'?"

"Dood, I dess," said Gary, hanging his head.

"Good you guess? Well, that's not good enough. Did you get me some ice cream?" He asked a little more quietly.

"Yeah we dot vanewa and trawbewy!"

"Strawberry and vanilla are my favorite!" exclaimed dad, "Did you pick them out yourself?"

"Yup! Wif Petow's hewp of tourse."

Everyone laughed. And of course dad soon got better and we were back to our old house life. Dad going to work and mom doing the washing and the cleaning and stuff. And let me tell you, we were glad, glad, glad.

## 11 (By Gary)

"If the square root of eighty-one is nine, then this equation times pi equals what? Use multiplication to find the answer then times by two, divide by sixteen and round to the nearest tenth. What?" I said out loud, drumming my pencil hard on the table. I hate third grade homework. This isn't third grade this is collage! UGG! Sometime being eight is no fun at all. Peter says being sixteen is fun because it's sweet sixteen. Maybe he'll help me with my homework. "Peter!" I yelled. I heard the loud noise of clomping feet on the stairs.

"Hey Gar!" he said happily. "Watsup?"

"I just can't figure out this stupid idiotic equation. I hate this! Just because Mr. Nane's strength is math, it doesn't mean he can torture us! UGGG!"

"Gary, calm down. I'm sure it's not *that* bad. Let me see it."

I pushed the paper over to him, grumbling. "If the square root of nine is three blah blah blah blah. Ok. So do you know what pi is?"

"3.14."

"Right. So what's 3.14 times 9?" he asked. I jolted something down on my paper.

"28.26."

"Right! So then you have to times by two. What's that?"

"56.52."

"Now divide by sixteen."

"3.5325."

"Good! Now, round to the nearest tenth."

"3.5?"

"Right! Now you're done."

"Gee, thanks Pete!" I said with a smile. You know, I have to say, when it comes to big brothers, Peter is the greatest. Sure he plays a few pranks on me but that's what big brothers do. And, he's always there for me so I hope I'm always there for him.

The next day was Saturday. But, I has a one page essay to write. So after I wrote it I went down stairs to the kitchen. It was a sunny day. Peter was eating a plum. I looked in the fridge. "There's no more plums!" I said disappointed. "Peter can I have...some." He plopped it in his mouth. "Peter!" I yelled, stomping my foot.

"Wait! I have something even better." He pulled out a little thing from the fridge. I had never seen one before. "What is it?" I asked.

"It's cherry flavor on the outside and vanilla on the inside."

"Mmmmmm!" I said.

"Now take a big bite!" he said handing it to me. So I did and it was really really spicy. "Peter!" I cried angrily, chasing him around the kitchen. Mom came in.

"What's going on here!" she shouted.

"Peter fed me something spicy!" I cried. Mom picked up the left over 'thing'.

"You fed him a radish? Peter how could you! Go to your room now!" Then she threw a deck of cards at the back of his head.

That night we had meat loaf for dinner and I forgave Peter for the little incident earlier so we didn't exactly bring it up to dad but I think mom did later that night. But there was never to much more talk about it so we moved on.

"And that's why Alexander Graham Bell was an important part in our history," rambled my boring history teacher Mrs. Plaidbutt. Or that's what we called her because she wore a plaid skirt one day.

I plopped down on the floor when I got home. "OHHHH!" I groaned.

"What now, Gary," questioned mom as she dried the dishes with Marion.

"I have history homework tonight from Mrs. Plaidbutt!"

"Mrs. Plaidbutt?" Peter snickered as he came into the kitchen. "Now *that's* a good nickname!" We both laughed until mom gave us the "look." The look that meant don't be disrespectful to your teachers or BUSTED!

One day, while doing my homework, I was thinking, all my life, I thought I had a disease called Zanzibar, and if I ate lamb chops, I would die. But I couldn't remember ever going to a doctor about it, and mom and dad didn't really seem to make a big deal about it. When they made lamb chops for dinner I always ate something else. They never said, "Now remember, don't eat the lamb chops, they'll kill you!" But I couldn't be sure. It seemed. . .so real.

I was going to find out once and for all if I had Zanzibar.

I went to my mom, absorbed as usual in some 700 page novel.

Mom?"

"Mmm?"

"If I ask you something do you promise not to laugh or scowl or make a big deal about it?"

"Fine," she said, never looking up from her reading.

"Do I have a disease called Zanzibar where if I eat lamb chops I'll die?"

I guess I expected some kind of "Gary where did you get that crazy idea?" Or "Yes you do."

Instead, she just kept reading. "No."

That was a relief! But just in case, I still wasn't going to eat lamb chops.

I finished my homework and then I watched the baseball game with my dad and Peter. "

Go Yankees!" I shouted, stuffing popcorn into my mouth. "Go Mickey!" Mickey Mantle was my hero. He was the best baseball player in the world when he wasn't injured, sitting in some hospital with a cast on his leg.

And since he was number seven, that's my favorite number too.

He hit the farthest home run in the history of baseball, so far. It hit the top of the roof at Yankee stadium (the old one). No one had ever done that before.

It would have gone all the way out, but it hit the façade at the top of the roof line instead. If it had gone over, it would have travelled over 700 feet! Instead, it bounced off the roof façade all the way back to short right field just behind the second baseman.

I had Mickey baseball cards, and I went to every Yankee game I could and if I couldn't go to it, I watched it on TV. Lots of times I'd run all the way home from school to watch the last seven innings of the day games. He was my hero.

"Pretty cool game tonight, huh Pete?" I said as we were getting in our pajamas. It was late. About ten thirty at night. But, we were loyal fans to the Yankees so we watched the whole night game.

"Yeah," Peter agreed, "Mickey was great! He hit three home runs and the Yankees creamed the other team!"

"Time for bed, boys." said mom and she turned out the lights.

## 12 (By Peter)

I wish I had someone to help me with my homework all of the time but I'm still glad I'm the oldest. You see, it's a tricky feeling. It's like I want what Gary gets but I don't want anything to change. I kinda miss the old days when we were younger. This stupid math problem's driving me NUTS! Gary came into our room.

"Hey Pete, how the math coming?"

"Don't ask. Did you finish your homework already?"

"Yup, Mr. Nane, the math teacher, was out on vacation so we have an easier math teacher for a week!"

"Lucky," I mumbled glumly.

That night at dinner, dad said that he was just remembering years ago, when he broke his ankle.

"Al," mom said looking like she wanted to change the subject.

"Peggy," dad whined, "you're no fun." Then he giggled and so did everyone else. We had ice cream for dessert just for a special thing. It was so good!

The next day was Saturday. It was really hot out because it was almost summer. May 16<sup>th</sup> I think it was. But usually, it wasn't hot in May. So Gary and I were sitting in our attic room. "You wanna play outside?" I asked.

"Are you nuts? It like 4000 degrees out there!"

"In the sprinkler?" I said while dangling my swimming trunks in the air.

"Yeah!" Gary said jumping off the bed and pulling on his swimsuit.

"Mom, we're going to play in the sprinklers!" I yelled as we dashed out the door. We jumped into the cool water and let out a long sigh of relief. We must of stayed out for two hours because when we went out, it was ten o'clock in the morning and then mom called us for lunch at twelve-thirty.

"Come on boys!" mom yelled from the porch.

"Can you bring it down?" I yelled in reply.

"I don't see why not. Ok! It's coming!" mom said walking back into the kitchen. Marion brought down our favorite Wonder bread sandwiches and ice-cold popsicles for dessert. Gary and I sat down sucking joyfully on our frozen treat, on the nice cool grass. Then we went in the sprinkler for more fun!

Dad came back from bowling at one-thirty. He peeked in on us and then disappeared inside. Gary and I shrugged and kept playing with each other. Five minutes later dad came out in his swimsuit and yelled "BANZAI!"

We all laughed.

Then, Marion and mom came out too!

Ya can't have a better Saturday.

## 13 (By Gary)

Yeah, Saturday was fun. But you know the great thing about Sundays? You can just do absolutely nothing. So I sat down at noon to watch TV. I was just about to go to my favorite channel to see if anything good was on, when Peter shook me.

"Wanna play cards?" he asked. "Maybe Gin?" Gin was my favorite so how could I refuse? There was nothing good on anyway.

"Ok, fine," I said hopping off the couch. We walked up to our room. Peter took the deck in his hands.

"Oh man," he said, "I forgot my glasses. Can you get them for me?"

"Sure," I said, "but where are they?"

"Try the desk in the living room. I think I left them there."

"Ok!" I called, my voice trailing down the stairs. They weren't there. "They aren't here, Peter!" I yelled.

"Try on the table out on the porch!" he called back quickly.

"They're not here either!" I screamed.

"Quiet!" hissed mom.

"Sorry!" I whispered.

"Oh wait," Peter said, "I found them! They were in my pocket!"

I came up the stairs.

"Sorry for the trouble," he said dealing the cards. I picked up my cards and my hands started to shake. I was one card away from Gin!

"You want that card?" Peter said pointing to the one face down on the floor.

"Nope." I told him.

"Great! Gin," said Peter smiling and putting his cards on the floor in a fan shape.

"What?" I said and I burst into tears and ran down the stairs to mom. Peter slowly followed trying to apologize. I ran and wrapped my arms around mom's waist and started to cry harder.

"Sorry Gar," said Peter entering the kitchen, "I didn't know you'd be so upset."

"You set me up!" I cried. "You told me to go look for your glasses so you could set me up but it was all a trick! You're so mean!" I yelled. I stopped crying and only sniffed. Mom would have thrown a deck of cards at Peter again but he had taken the very same cards to set me up so she just sent him to his room.

It was dinner and dad was home the whole day because it was a Sunday.

"Peter, you weren't so nice to Gary earlier or so I've heard." he said intaking a huge amount of broccoli. I stuck out my tongue at Peter. He glared at me and then softened his face.

"Sorry Gary," he mumbled under the peas.

"Gary do you forgive Peter?" asked dad.

"No!" I shouted.

"Gary!" said mom.

"Fine! I forgive you Peter." I groaned.

"Good. Now it's settled." smiled dad. Peter and I growled quietly.

"So Gary, watcha learning in school?"

"Stupid stuff." I retorted. "You don't want to know."

"Oh stop it. It can't be that bad."

"Well, Mr. Muskinara, our Spanish teacher, taught the whole class with his fly open today. But the whole class hates him so much, nobody told him. What a dork."

"You're kidding!" gulped Peter almost spitting out his drink, "That's so hilarious!"

"How ironic, that's the same teacher that called me on the phone the other day." said mom looking up from her plate.

At that point, I buried my head in my food because I heard about that call. I wasn't eavesdropping, but I was coming down the stairs and I heard mom pick up the phone.

"Mr. Muskinara?" she asked. I stopped dead in my tracks. "He's flunking your Spanish class?" she continued. He'd threatened me earlier to call my mom and I told him I didn't care not knowing he'd actually do it. "Well," mom said to him, "that's odd, he's not flunking any of his other classes, maybe it's your teaching!"

I ran into the kitchen with my arms raised in the air. "Yes!" I cried joyfully.

## 14 (By Peter)

It's hard being in college sometimes. I mean, I'm only eighteen. I'm no kid anymore. Gary's ten and that's young to have a brother in collage. I'm home visiting now. It's good old summer vacation.

"How's about some baseball?" I asked Gary tossing the ball in the air.

"But you always win," answered Gary crossly.

"Well, the only way you can beat me is if you play against me. And you've been doing that since you were four and I taught you in the field. Remember?"

"Fine." Gary hopped off of the bed.

We came out. It was the warm summer breeze that got me the most and I couldn't believe how warm it was. I was sweating like crazy and it was dripping down my face.

I threw the ball. "Strike ONE!" I yelled.

I knew he couldn't hit my pitches.

"UHHH!" said Gary in frustration.

WHOOOSH! "Strike TWO!"

Gary was mad at the ball and at me. His eyes narrowed. He hit the bat on the ground and pretended to wipe his feet like a real ball player. I wound up and gave him my super duper fastball . . .

SMACK!

The ball went flying over my head, way over my head, way over the street, and the neighbor's grass, and CRASH!. . . *into the neighbors picture window!*

A big crack appeared in the glass overlooking their front yard.

"Darn, Gar," I said. "You are in so much trouble when dad gets home!"

"You pitched it!" he hollered.

He ran inside and hid in our room, pretending to read.

Dad came home dun dun dun duuuuun! Marion told him what happened.

He went right up to Gary's room. I listened from outside the door.

"So," dad said. "Let me get this straight. You were standing near the garage and you hit the ball Pete pitched through the neighbor's window across the street?"

"Uh, yeah," Gary admitted.

There was a long pause. "Unbelievable," he said, and he just left the room. I saw he was trying to hold back a smile. He was shaking his head as he walked down the stairs.

I came in.

"You are so lucky you didn't get busted! Do you know how much trouble *I* would get into if I ever did something like that?"

"You were eavesdropping!" shouted Gary.

"It's my room too, ya know!"

"Yeah. You shouldn't have thrown your fast ball into my wheelhouse," Gary said casually.

UGGGGGGGGGGGGGGH!

## 15 (By Gary)

I met Janet. Kinda briefly, but she's really nice. I see why Peter likes her. They hang out all the time. I don't like girls. I'm never getting married, except for my sixteen year old next door neighbor Margie. She cute.

"Hi," said as I came into the kitchen.

"What are you so glum about?" asked Peter spitting a cherry pit into the sink.

"Nothing," I said ripping open the refrigerator doors seeing if Peter has saved some cherries for me. "I'm just hungry." he'd left two in the bag.

"Two. A lousy TWO? Come on! You always eat all of the cherries!" I howled.

"Dad went shopping and he's getting some more." Peter said leaning against the counter trying to act cool.

"So *you* can eat them? Ha! If I ever get a decent amount of cherries in this house I'll scream. I never get anything good because I have a vacuum for a brother! Mean while, I'm hungry and two cherries aren't gonna fill me up."

"Have a radish." Peter said under his breath.

"Very funny. Have an onion.

"I ate that this morning. I'm a vacuum, remember?"

"Will you make me a sandwich?"

"Sure! Poof! You're a sandwich!"

"Peter!!!!!!!"

At dinner Peter seemed really happy. He loved teasing me and getting away with it. So he was sitting there smiling, until mom served "something." "

What is that, mom?" asked Peter trying to be polite.

"It's hot dogs and beans! I decided to try something new! Cooking!"

"Joy," said Peter quietly to me.

"Mom, dad," Peter said happily, "can I go to dinner with Janet on Friday?"

"Why of course, Peter!" answered dad excitedly.

Mom nodded in approval as well. "But first try my cooking!"

He took a bite. "

There was silence. Everyone was staring at him.

Mom, he said, "This is a meal fit for a king."

He put his plate down near the floor. He made a dog call with a kissing sound, "Here King!"

We roared with laughter. Even mom thought it was funny.

## 16 (By Peter)

It's time to return to college but I'll write to Gary and I'm taking the train with Janet so I won't be alone. It's my second semester and Janet's as well. I'll sure miss my little buddy. "Bye Gar!" I called from the train window. "I'll miss you! Remember to write, ok?"

"Ok!" he called waving. For a second it sounded like 'o-tay' from when he was little so long ago. We had all the time in the world. All the time to play, run, laugh, be young. We never had to give a care about being older and an adult. We were innocent and naïve. The old days, sadly, come and go. Sure I was a little dramatic, but I grew out of it...kinda.

I felt so sad as we drove away in the train and I knew I was gonna see Gary soon, but in a way, I felt like I was truly leaving him. He was the one I was gonna miss the most. My best friend, my brother. I watched him wave goodbye until he was speck. Then I turned and faced the seat in front of me.

"Is something wrong, Peter?" Janet asked me.

"No, of course not!" I replied smiling.

## 17 (By Gary)

Boys don't cry. But I do. So, I guess I'm not a full boy or maybe I'm not a boy at all. Maybe I'm an alien or time-traveler who can't remember his original location. But that's silly. That's make believe. Life could be real but it might all be an illusion including time. I might always be a mystical being who got stuck inside a black hole of illusions like life and time. Maybe.

"I miss Peter," I said as we drove home.

"I know, honey," mom said. "We all do."

"I want him back."

"I know."

"Humph."

Dinner was very lonely without Peter. He'd been gone before but for some reason, I didn't miss him as much then. I went to school, and played baseball, and went to a Yankee game. Then Peter came for summer vacation. And now it was all over and Peter was so far away.

TV wasn't the same either. There was no one to argue with. No one to say, "Gimme the remote!" or "I don't want to watch that show!" And it was kinda lonely without the constant arguing. We were the closest we'd ever been and that was a fact.

## 18 (By Peter)

I have never been so nervous in my life. Wedding days stress you out. I was practically scared out of my pants. Gary came and so did mom and dad. I was excited and nervous. I wonder how Janet was feeling?

We walked down the aisle. "I now pronounce you husband and wife," said the rabbi. And I smashed the glass with my foot. We had cake and a long enjoyable party with food and family and friends. Gary was about thirteen. He was all dressed up and grouchy about it. Until I served him a giant slice of cake that is. He perked up right away.

He was my Best Man.

## 19 (By Gary)

Ahh, yes, I was now about sixteen and Peter's marriage was going very well. I, on the other hand, wanted to write my own songs like the Beatles, and to play guitar. The Beatles were the best and I would stand in front of the mirror and play air guitar for hours to their songs on the big record player. So if I liked Beatles songs, and the guitar, why shouldn't I write my own songs and play my own guitar? So I went to my friend Gerry Milsky. He taught me a few chords and gave me a chord book. I practiced for about two months before I wrote my first song.

I came down to where my mom was reading one of her 700 page novels with a cup of tea sitting on her night stand.

"Mom?" I asked.

"Mmmm?" she mumbled.

"I wrote a song."

"Really? Can I hear it?"

"Sure."

I played it, singing the words with as much emotion as I could. "Well," I said when I had finished, "what do you think?"

"Gary, do you want me to tell you as a mother or as a friend?"

"Both. I guess."

"Well, as a mother, I say it's great and you should keep writing more."

Then she lowered her voice a bit, "As a friend, it stinks."

"Why?" I asked horrified.

"Well Gary, you're just copying the songs from the radio. You need to write Gary music."

"Ok," I said a little less disappointed. So I went up to my room once again. About

twenty minutes later I came down with a new one all my own. It was called 'Shadows and Dreams'.

"That's more like it," she smiled.

## 20 (By Peter)

Now that Janet and I are gonna have children soon, we got a dog named Pax. Pax, means peace in Latin. First of all Pax is not a Roman dog. He's a giant sheepdog, more like a polar bear, and he is not I repeat NOT peaceful. Pax loves the outdoors. So whenever the door opens, CLUMP, CLUMP, CLUMP, SKID, SKID, DASH, DASH, DASH, Pax tries to get away, and have you ever tried to hold on to an escaping Polar Bear? Anyway, we try to grab him, but usually before we can blink, Pax is five blocks down the road. Moral: Lock the dog up before opening the door.

The other thing about Pax is he sheds. And I don't mean like for a month or two out of the year. He sheds all the time! He sheds long white dog hairs all over the place. He sheds so much he could fill up Pluto. Not the dog Pluto, the planet. But I love Pax. He's great. Then again, we need to give him some breath mints.

One year, we were having a party. It was lovely and snowy, and someone opens the door, and Pax runs out. "Darn! Darn, darn, darn, darn, darn!!!!!" I said.

"Dear," says Janet, "Don't curse in front of the children."

"Janet," I explain, "darn is not a curse word..."

Then all of the kids look up at me and start saying "Darn! Darn, darn, darn, darn, darn!!!!!" Great.

So Janet and I went looking for Pax. We drove all around the neighborhood, and all of a sudden, we came to a pond, half frozen may I add. I hear a splashing and I look and there's a fluffy white thing bobbing up and down. Janet screamed, "Save him Peter!" So I go down to the edge of the pond and Pax moves. He's alive! Wait, he's swimming. It's like a pool for him. Oh yeah, he's a polar bear. Remember?

"Pax," I said, "get out!"

"RUFF!" I swear he was smiling at me.

*"Out!"*

"RUFF, RUFF!"

"OUT!!! OUT, OUT, OUT!!!"

Finally he got out, soaked and shaking, with mud and ice hanging from his fur.

How are we gonna take him home?" I asked Janet.

"Put him in the car."

"What?"

"In the car." She pointed to the back.

"He's sucked up the whole pond in his fur. He's gonna soak the car, Janet."

"Oh come on, he's not *that* wet."

"Fine, fine, FINE! He'll come in the dang car."

He shook, vibrating like a bee's wing, and got Janet and I freezing and wet a moment later. It was ice water!

Janet and I got out of the car, shivering. We pulled Pax out of the back. "Go in." I pointed to the door. Pax started to walk towards the door but he saw the garage door was open behind him, and skidder, skidder, skidder, slipping and sliding in the ice, he went clapping and skittering down the road again.

## 21 (By Peter)

One day when I came home from work, Janet was in the living room looking at a magazine. "I found the new couch Peter!" she said excitedly. I looked at the picture and the price below it.

"\$20,000 dollars! I could buy two cars with that!"

"But Peter!"

"Heck no! Not! Negative! Nope! No way! OVER MY DEAD BODY!"

A week later I come home. Sitting in the living room, is the couch.

"What the heck is that?" I questioned.

"It's. . .*the couch.*"

"We are not keeping..." I sat down, "Oooh! This is comfy! Can I have the paper and a cup of coffee?"

Anyway, we kept the couch for like fifteen years.

## 22 (By Gary)

Now that I was into music, things interested me that never interested me before - for instance one day I found an old violin in a closet in the attic. Normally my eyes would have yawned, passed right by it. But suddenly it piqued my interest. Wow! It must have been up here for thirty years! It was REALLY out of tune, and it was very dusty, with old looking wood. But beautiful. I brought it down to my mom. She was reading, as usual.

"Mom?"

"Mmm?"

"Who's is this?" I asked holding up the violin.

"It was...mine."

"Could you actually play?"

She hung her head. "Tell him, Peggy," said my dad.

Mom got up and went into a little drawer in her bedroom. She pulled out an old photo album with a New York Times article pieced together under the plastic. The headline said: "Peggy Weksler, 10, wows Carnegie."

"What? This is YOU?"

"It was a long time ago."

"Mom, will you play something for me? Please?" I looked back at dad. His face was stretched into a slight, mysterious smile.

"No," she replied.

"Please? Mom, I want to play it! Just tune it. Just TUNE it for me, please???"

"No,"

"Please?"

"Fine." She took the small instrument from me. She twisted the gears up and down for a mere five seconds and then put a little rosin on the bow. Then she took it in her hands and played a wild melody at lightening speed perfectly. Why didn't she tell me she was a musician? I decided to call Peter. Maybe he knew.

"Hello?"

"Hi Peter, it's Gary!"

"Hey, little brother! How ya doin'! Is everything ok?"

"Yeah. I just wanted to ask you a question about mom and the violin."

"Oh lord," said Peter.

"What, you knew?"

"Yeah,"

"Why doesn't she play any more?"

"Because... her parents pushed her too hard. They moved from London to New York when she was four because mom got an offer to study at the Philharmonic in New York. She played a solo concert at Carnegie Hall when she was ten and graduated from Julliard when she was sixteen. But when she finished with Julliard, she was done. She quit. Since then she's never picked up the violin and played it for anyone. She'll probably never pick it up again. Grandma and grandpa have begged her since then, but she won't."

"Oh." I was deeply saddened by this story and I knew that she would probably never play it again. But she was brave. She had a lot of will power to quit something that big, and to disappoint her parents. I don't know if I'd have the guts to do something like that.

## 23 (By Peter)

This was the time of the Vietnam war draft. The draft that made all of the young boys and men who didn't have children go and fight. Unless, you were in college. Gary, thank heavens, was in college. I had kids and was off the hook. Gary had just started school. He was half way through his first semester. He called mom and dad one day. Mom screamed and called me up. "Peter," she said, "Gary's insane. He's dropping out of college to become a hippie and he's gonna travel with his guitar and move to Canada where it's safe so he won't get drafted. We'll never see him again!" She wept bitterly.

"What do you want me to do mom?"

"Go and talk to him. Tell me how crazy he is. Maybe we should commit him to an insane asylum? I don't know!" She was crying.

"Ok," I promised.

I met Gary at an old restaurant, Dave Shore's. It was so good to see his face. He was bright and smiling as usual. "So Gar," I began, "mom and dad think you're insane."

"I know, Peter, but I'm not gonna waste four years of my life in college. I don't like it. I want to travel. See the world. Play my music."

"Ok, I understand. But do you understand that there's a draft and you could be dragged away to Vietnam and be killed?"

"I'll go to Canada."

"Yes, but you might never see us again. You'd become a Canadian citizen and never be allowed to come back. We all love you Gary. We love you so much. And we want you safe."

"Peter, I want to be safe, but I also want to live my own life and be free. I can't stay in college just to hide away there."

We hugged each other goodbye. I went back to the hotel and told mom that Gary wasn't insane. Far from it.

Fortunately, Gary became a "conscientious objector" and didn't have to fight a war he didn't believe in.

Unfortunately, he was going far away. He told us that he would begin his new life but he would keep in touch. "Maybe," he said to mom, "you'll come and see me in Carnegie Hall one day."

She laughed and hugged him tight.

"Bye dad," Gary said reaching out to hug him.

Then he turned to me, "Bye, Pete." I knew we were both sad. We were apart and I knew I would see him again. But your brother can be your most valuable friend. The one that touches you and understands you. But Gary was off to his own new life and we watched him step into the world as his own, individual great self. He was definitely free like he wanted to be. And I was proud to be that free man's brother.

The End