

I – Escape

In hindsight, many dreams seem prophetic. In my sleep, just before Claude woke me, our back yard was exploding – our carefully planted garden disintegrating into shards of burnt leaves and incinerated flowers. So when Claude shook me out of *that* nightmare into another, my heart was already racing. It took me a few minutes to register the palm-sized square box with wires extending from its side which Claude held in one hand. The index finger of his other hand was placed in warning over his mouth. Almost inaudibly he whispered that he had just found this ugly object while trying to fix the car radio of our green Toyota. The object was a bug, a surveillance device for tracking movement.

Dazed but awake now, I looked over on the floor at the right side of my bed. Our two-week old son, Tony, was sleeping calmly in the handcrafted cradle we had found at a garage sale a month before. He had finally fallen into a deep sleep after a night of restless feedings. Now, as my mind began to assimilate our transformed situation, I longed to return to the questions about the best breastfeeding schedule that Claude and I had been arguing about in the middle of the night instead of dealing with the looming issue before us: WHAT WERE WE GOING TO DO NOW THAT THE FBI HAD FOUND US?

While, we didn't know *how* they had found us, a bug in our car could only mean one thing -the FBI had planted a tracking mechanism because they knew who we really were and were watching us to gather more information before arresting us. They weren't interested in the comings and goings of Lynne Foster the hospital clerk or Ed James the short order cook, the underground personas we had been carefully cultivating for some time. They wanted information on Diana Block, Claude Marks and the four other people we were working with in clandestinity, plus anyone else they could ensnare. Fear was rising inside of me, but another glance over at Tony helped click my mental discipline into place. I could not allow myself to dwell on the worst-case scenario. We had to figure out what to do.

We knew that our houses were likely to be bugged with other listening devices and watching contraptions, making it impossible to talk freely inside. Within an hour, Claude and I had contacted our four companions and gathered for a faux picnic in our local Van Nuys park. We wanted to act as normal as possible, to behave as if we had found nothing, to buy ourselves time so that even an observant FBI agent would not realize that we had discovered their bug. Instead, they would think we were merely continuing the strange daily routines we used to secure our clandestine lives. We constantly met in parks, in coffee shops, or in malls. We spoke in measured voices. We rarely used our home phones and when we did it was only to call the movie theater or library - never to communicate with each other. We watched for cars that were watching us - or at least we tried to. While we aspired to disciplined technique, in reality we were novices in clandestine methodology and were easily worn out by the constant pressure of our sometimes arbitrary rules. That June morning it seemed like all of our past shadowy efforts had been a poor dress rehearsal for this, the real thing.

It was June 11th, 1985 in Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley and at 10 am the heat was already building and the park with its brownish grass and skimpy sprinklers was filling with kids. The seven of us – myself, Claude, Donna, Jody, Karen, Rob and Tony - spread out our pretend, hastily compiled picnic on a blanket and took turns walking and jiggling Tony to keep him content while we all tried to stave off panic and concentrate on the decisions at hand.

As I looked around, I absurdly noted how each one of us was gravitating toward his or her typical comfort food. Claude had cornered the bag of tortilla chips, Jody was chomping the raw vegetables, Rob had cut off a huge hunk of gouda cheese, Donna was nibbling a chocolate bar, Karen hugged the box of triscuits, and I was gobbling cherries. These people had been my close friends and political comrades for over ten years, and we had already been in many tough political situations together. But most of those years we had worked together as public activists. We had never faced the type of cataclysmic decision that was now ominously staring us in the face. Still, the consistency of their food preferences reassured me. I knew them all well enough to trust their instincts beyond food.

Usually we debated issues and decisions at great length. We each had our own, different ways of coming at problems and it could take hours before we could hammer out a common approach to a challenge. This time there was little argument. We all agreed that the only possible solution was to leave as rapidly as possible with as much normalcy as we could muster. Over the past couple of years, other clandestine groups had been caught because they downplayed possible evidence of entrapment or didn't act decisively enough once they understood they were compromised. We could not make the same mistakes. Our only hope lay in getting away.