

OVER THE EDGE



When two teen-agers in Upper Bucks County leaped to their deaths from a quarry cliff, they left a suburban community in shock. "That kind of thing doesn't happen here," people thought. Then it happened again.

BY STEPHEN FRIED

East Rockhill Township, Upper Bucks County, Pennsylvania, November 18th, 1983.

THEY WON'T DO IT.

There's no path through the woods to their spot. It's pitch dark, and even with flashlights the only way to navigate is to reach out and touch the wide, black metal pipe that points the way to the cliff.

They don't have much with them: two sleeping bags, four packs of cigarettes, a tape recorder, a white cigar tube full of matches. And the evening's drugs, the 12 hits of LSD that remain of the 22 they bought after school that afternoon. The cliff they approach, 300 feet above the Rockhill Quarry outside of Quakertown, will be the perfect place to take the rest of the acid. The quarry is so immense and jagged and surreal that it's almost a hallucination in itself. And when they're setting up camp, no one will be wandering by to interrupt them.

Marc Landis, the gangly, long-haired pastor's son, and baby-faced Daniel Ferdock, who keeps his blond hair short because his father won't let him grow it like Marc's, finally emerge from the dark woods, amazed that five hits of acid *each* hasn't rendered them unable to feel their way through the forest. One hit is usually enough to bring a novice to his knees, and in all their LSD experience, swallowing three of the small paper squares. They are both dressed in jeans, faded denim jackets, sneakers. Marc wears a studded leather wristband. Dan had one, but he just gave it to his ex-girlfriend, in one last desperate attempt to convince her to come back to him.

They spread out their sleeping bags on the rocky ground, light up cigarettes and turn the tape machine back on. In the past they have used Dan's machine to play tapes of heavy metal music, tunes by Black Sabbath or Judas Priest or Iron Maiden. Or they would listen to one of the songs they wrote themselves, with Dan playing guitar and Marc on vocals. But tonight the tape is blank. They're here to fill it... with goodbyes.

They won't do it.

Before heading into the woods, before the acid had really kicked in--turning each light into a supernova, transforming sounds into screaming guitar solos--they had switched on the machine to leave last words for their parents. "Mom, Dad, you should try this stuff," Dan had softly giggled. "Remember when you said drugs weren't cool?" Then they began their goodbyes.

"Uh... Dad, I never really cared for you as a father too much," Dan had said. "We just never had a typical father-son relationship... you had so many damn *kids*."

"Dad?" Marc had called to his father, "Dad, fuck *you*. I fuckin' hate you, Dad."

"Marc didn't talk me into this, y'know," Dan has said sternly into the microphone, "I actually called *him*."

"Yeah, make that clear 'cause if not your parents will be thinkin' 'that Landis kid made him do acid and commit suicide. He wasn't thinkin' of it until he met him....'"

"Yeah, Dad, I've been doin' drugs pretty heavily for about two years. All right... uh, Moms. Mom, you've been a good mom... I hope this doesn't affect you too badly,

y'know, you'll pull through," Dan had said.

"My mom, anyway... you suck ass," said Marc. "Both my parents, fuck you..."
They won't do it.

Now it's time to say goodbye to friends, and to take one last shot at everyone else.

"Tom, you were cool," Dan says to one ex-friend, "what happened to you? We used to do shit, and then you turned into a total penis. And Ken... lots of mixed feelings... will you wake up, man, nobody *likes* you! You could've been all right, Lord knows you had plenty of opportunities, but you're a dick now."

Soon they are both laughing the hard forced laugh of kids impressed with the amount of drugs they've taken. They've now swallowed eight hits of acid each, more than twice the amount they've ever even *heard* of anyone taking. They run through the rest of their friends, and the first side of the tape is over. They flip it over and begin their serious goodbyes.

"I love Michelle so incredibly much," Marc says, talking about his girlfriend.

"Yeah," Dan says. "That's why I don't understand why you're doin' this....."

"I guess it would look pretty fucked up... but I don't understand you either... I'm here because I'm a fuckin' loser, I'm goin' nowhere. Marc is a nothing at the bottom of a pile of shit...."

"But you have it all...."

"I know what you mean, I have it all. You mean I have a girlfriend that loves me, that I love... but I just don't like life, man. I'm goin' nowhere and I just don't wanna bring her in with me...."

"I'm here for, like, the total love of a girl," Dan says softly. I'm kicking off after 16 years of my life, for a girl."

He gets up. "Where you goin'?" Marc asks.

"I'm goin' to take a piss, man."

"Don't leave me. You're all I got, man. You're all I got."

They won't really do it.

"Where are those handcuffs at?" Dan asks. He knows Marc always carries a pair of cuffs; they're usually threaded through his belt loop. "Let's clamp 'em on."

"Yeah, we're goin' for the big ride."

"What would've happened if Caitlin had never happened?"

"You'd be fine," Marc says. "But I'd still be dying." He closes the handcuff around his wrist with a loud click. "Forever!"

Dan is still fooling with his end of the cuffs. "Give me the key, Marc. I'd just like to make it real loose...."

Handcuffed together, they take the rest of the acid. There are now 11 hits of LSD barraging each other brains, making the clouding sky a movie screen of Day-Glo hallucinations. Soon, they begin hearing sirens--real sirens. thinking--perhaps beneath the brain waves tripping over each other, *hoping*--the sound is their friends coming to rescue them from themselves, they turn off the tape and listen. But the sirens pass.

"I love you, Caitlin," Dan repeats yet again, speaking to the girl who broke up with him three weeks ago.

"Yeah, and I love Michelle," Marc chants.

"The last three weeks have been like, eat, sleep, why Caitlin's probably happy now that she got rid of me...."

"Caitlin, if you had stayed with Dan you two woulda had a lotta years ahead."

"Oh, yeah."

"But, me and Michelle, I can't see nothin'...."

"You'd be *filthy rich!*"

"Yeah, man, but that's what's fuckin' *her* up."

"I think it would be kinda okay...."

At this point the acid is really beginning to make thinking difficult.

"Yeah, we're here at the quarry, the official quarry of the 1984 Winter Olympics," Dan jokes, slurring his words.

"Yeah, we're here at the quarry with mom, apple pie, Chevrolet, the whole *works*. Eleven *hits*, man, my hair is melting down my face, I'm getting totally fucked here!"

"My career with drugs is pretty well history...."

"Yeah, but so are we," Marc says. "We are decaying here...."

The two boys fall quiet for a time, until a car with a loud engine passes in the distance. They are beyond thinking it's the sound of somebody coming to save them.

"We didn't really get a chance to love 'em," Dan says. Both crying now, they roll on the ground in their sleeping bags, trying to stay warm in the chill November air.

They are running out of time. The second of their two tapes is almost half finished. Dan, to whom this all seems to be something of a performance, has an opinion to share with his listeners. "For any of you younger adults in the audience, I'd rough out your lives if I was you. This is definitely not something I'd recommend for young children, man...."

"Yeah, parental discretion is definitely advised," says Marc. "This is not rated G, don't bring the kids, the dogs. Some scenes in this portion of life may not be suitable for children...." He picks up the flashlight and shines it in Dan's face. "Your pupils are so *huge*, they take up your whole eye!"

They'll never do it.

They are very cold now, shivering, lying almost motionless on the hard ground, the drugs having drawn just about everything from them. "We're runnin' out of tape," Dan mumbles. "We'll just have to die by the end of this one."

"C'mon heart, stop... stop keeping my physical body alive," Marc pleads. "That's all I wanna know, that I'm not alive. Then we can do stuff. We can go over to Michelle's house and move shit around on her parents and they won't be able to see us. It'll be neat. Hey, once we're dead I guess I won't have to go to the dentist and get my cavities filled...."

But Dan isn't listening, he's sobbing hard now. "I've been a jerk. I don't wanna be a jerk anymore. I love Caitlin." For Marc, it's clear, this death will be a relief; for Dan, it's a kind of penance.

Then Marc staggers to his feet, pulling Dan up with him. They walk to the edge of the cliff and look over, shining the flashlight down, to see what awaits them. Stumbling back to their sleeping bags, they begin crying again. The thunder that has been faint in the distance grows louder. Soon it will rain.

They'll never do it.

"The way I figure it," Marc says, the words now just barely crawling from his mouth, "it'll be a bitch, right, but it'll be like jumpin' into cold water, and after you're in it gets warmer. And after we get down there we'll, uh, be in pain or somethin'...." His voice

trails off as a light rain begins, enough to stir them from their daze.

"So... like... you just... go back, and just run and it'll be like runnin' into them lights," Marc says, gesturing toward some illumination far in the distance, "so just run for them lights and pfffft, a few minutes later we'll, uh, be in pain."

"Let's do it!" Dan says, renewed by the rain, pulling himself and Marc up. They take another look over the edge. "Let's make sure we don't hit anything weird," Dan says. They walk back to the sleeping bags. "This is so weird, this is so weird, man," he says, shaking his head back and forth. "It's like it's all over, man," Marc says, "it's all over but we can't start."

They won't do it.

So they take a few steps back, and one of them says "Ready?" And with the cuffs jingling on their wrists they dash past the sleeping bags, past the flashlights, past the packs of cigarettes, past the still-running tape recorder, and finally past the edge. A small plane flies overhead; the rain continues to fall. After ten minutes the cassette player runs out of tape and shuts itself off with a resounding click.

HOURS LATER THE TWO BOYS WOULD BE FOUND, dead, by Marc's girlfriend, Michelle Qurashi; Dan's ex-girlfriend, Caitlin Brennan; and another close male friend. The story of the double suicide would shock the Quakertown area of central Bucks County, a flat of fertile stretch of outer suburbia with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. It would turn out that this largely pious community--mostly Lutherans, Mennonites and Catholics--had known little about the world their children were growing up in. Nor would the residents be eager to learn more. They would, in fact, do their best to minimize the problem and to put the deaths behind them.

And then, just as people were beginning to forget, a third teen suicide would jolt the community once more, giving even the most confident parents and community leaders pause, making them wonder what had gone wrong with the children--and what would go wrong next.

THE UNLIKELY COUPLE, March 1983

Michelle hadn't even been invited to the party. It was Steve's party, at Steve's house, and the only reason Michelle was there was to baby-sit. She was a sophomore at Quakertown Community High School and Steve was a junior. Steve barely knew her. While Steve and his friends partied in one room, Michelle stayed in another, looking after the infant daughter of one of the guests.

Michelle wouldn't have fit in at this party anyway. A shy, small, slightly asthmatic 15-year-old with doe eyes, dark skin, and a nose she hated because it was too big, Michelle wasn't at her best in groups. She had always tended to have one friend at a time, a girl she could spend every moment with. Besides, when she was with the other girls, they sometimes teased her--"rich bitch," they called her. It was true: her father was one of the wealthiest men in town, and her mother would drive her to school in their Porsche if she missed the bus.

Her best friends and her animals were the orbit of Michelle's world. She had dogs, cats, a horse and a guinea pig; she could make funny animal noises that sounded exactly like the pets in her menagerie. She also loved music, especially The Doors, a '60s group

that had broken up years ago after their leader, Jim Morrison, had died of a drug-induced heart attack. Talented, driven, but out of control, the manic poet/singer Jim Morrison was Michelle Quarashi's idea of perfection, even though he had been dead for more than a decade.

While Michelle was playing with the baby, a boy from the party wandered into the room. It was Marc Landis, whom she didn't know but certainly knew about. Marc, a junior, was notorious at Quakertown High. His father was the pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church in nearby Richlandtown, but he didn't look like a pastor's son--he looked like a low-rent Richlandtown druggie. He wore his hair long like a girl's, almost as if this were still the '60s. He wore rock concert T-shirts and ripped jeans and a silver-zipper earring, and a bandanna on his wrist. He was very thin and he didn't look particularly healthy. Marc was one of those kids who loved heavy metal music--loud suburban punk rock played by grown-up kids who never got past adolescent rebellion against parents and religion. He always talked about Black Sabbath and Judas Priest and Iron Maiden, and knew every one of their songs. Many of Marc's friends were older, out of school, going nowhere. He was known among the underclassmen as obnoxious and mean, always testing teachers and mocking people for no reason.

And now, Michelle thought, he was here to bother her. But as she watched Marc sit down and start playing with the baby, she saw a different person. When he began talking to Michelle, she suddenly realized that he was *nice*--bright and funny and sensitive. He was a good listener, and she found it easy to talk to him, easier than it had ever been to talk to a boy before.

Marc stayed away from the party until very late, and in a matter of hours he and Michelle had peeled away all the superficial layers of small talk. It turned out they had a lot in common. They both had problems with their parents, deep resentments even they didn't quite understand. They both had parents who were overachievers and who expected great things--perhaps *too* great--from their kids. Both were youngest children (although Marc did have an adopted younger brother); both loved music and both fantasized about being big rock stars.

Marc even talked to Michelle about his deepest troubles, the ones he rarely discussed with anyone: he was profoundly, completely, shatteringly dissatisfied with himself and his life. Nobody understood him, he felt; nobody accepted *his* ideas. He was a loser. Nothing made him really happy. Sometimes the only thing he looked forward to was getting wasted on Friday night. Sometimes he wondered what dying would be like.

Michelle couldn't understand this. She had nature, her friends, her horse, her music. She was convinced that if her parents would just get off her back, her own life would be perfect. How could a boy so obviously smart and nice feel so badly about his life and himself?

By the end of that evening, Michelle decided she really wanted to see Marc Landis again. She had never had a boyfriend before--maybe he would be her first. But she also knew something else. Somebody had to save Marc Landis from himself, convince him that there was more to life than drugs and beer. And she was going to be the one. She would rescue him just as she would any hurt animal that was crying out for help.

BEFORE LONG MICHELLE AND MARC WERE A COUPLE. And when Michelle's

best and only friend, Caitlin Brennan, started going out with a boy from Marc's crowd, they formed their own little clique.

Caitlin lived near the Qurashis and, like Michelle, had a horse. Her family had moved to Quakertown less than a year before, and almost immediately she and Michelle had become inseparable. Michelle slept over at Caitlin's house almost every weeknight--as much to get away from her parents as to see her friend; they both slept at Michelle's on weekends because the Qurashis made them. Caitlin was tall and thin, an Army brat with an athlete's body and pretty eyes and hair, but a chunky face that displeased her when she looked in the mirror. Her family had lived all over America and Germany as her father was constantly reassigned, and now was living on a farm.

Where Michelle relied on her single soul mate, Marc was usually surrounded by a group. He had his older friends: kids he had grown up with in church; kids he had met in art classes; kids in their late teens and early 20s whom he had met through his music. But there were always a few people around Marc Landis, younger boys who were more like *disciples* than friends. When Marc started dating Michelle, two of his most recent adherents were interested in Caitlin. One was Dan Ferdock, who eventually got her.

Dan was all contradiction. A tall, well-built 16-year-old, he got good grades, went to St. Isadore's Catholic Church every Sunday, practiced his guitar in the basement for hours. Around adults he was the all-American boy--especially around his parents, both of whom were teachers. But with people his own age, Dan Ferdock was different. "My son was either a Jekyll and Hyde or a pretty darn good actor," his mother would later tell a newspaper reporter. He was, in fact, a little bit of both. An insecure fifth and youngest child, Dan could be as obnoxious and egotistical as Marc--maybe even worse, because he seemed to *mean* it. All day long in school he played "air guitar," practically spitting in other people's faces as he buzzed out the solo to some Jimi Hendrix or Black Sabbath song. He drank and took drugs like so many of the other other kids, but his parents never knew. The Ferdocks understood that Dan hoped to be a professional musician.

Heavy metal was the music Dan loved. He liked the sound of it--loud and theatrical and simplistic. Even an inexperienced player could reproduce all but the most complicated guitar solos. But the music itself was only a small part of the heavy metal ethos. The real appeal was in the lyrics, the album jackets, the stage shows, crammed with male teen fantasies, suffused with scenes of gory apocalypse and vague religious allusions. This was the part of heavy metal that Marc loved--the nihilism in it somehow spoke to him. Marc--who had an impressive talent for drawing--would reproduce the violent images and naked bodies in his sketch books over and over.

Further fodder for fantasy were the lives of the performers--wild men who signed million dollar record deals, using their money to consume all the drugs and booze and women they could handle. This was the kind of professional musician Dan wanted to be. When they were alone and thinking about the future, Dan and Marc would talk about starting the next Black Sabbath.

Jim Tirelli was Marc's other new follower, and at first he seemed an unlikely one. Jim didn't really seem... *complex* enough to be friends with Marc, who sketched whenever he had a free moment and wrote poetry, too. Jim wasn't a heavy metal maniac *or* an artist. Broad and thick-necked, he was a jock: football and baseball. He didn't talk much, but he liked to drink and he liked to punch. In fact, when he and Marc had first met in seventh grade, Jim punched Marc in the mouth for something he had said. But there he

was, and even after Caitlin chose Dan over him, he continued to spend time with the two couples.

Before Marc and Michelle hit it off, nobody would have ever imagined these five together. Michelle and Caitlin were well-off kids from Quakertown who liked to ride horses; Marc and Jim were from working-class Richlandtown; Dan straddled both worlds, a little uncomfortable in each. In fact, Marc and Jim were just the kind of kids that Michelle's, Dan's and Caitlin's parents worried their children would fall in with. But that was the risk parents took when they sent their kids to Quakertown Community High School, where students from Quakertown, Richlandtown, East Rockhill and the local church schools--like the one Dan Ferdock had gone to--all came together. Farm kids, rich kids, low-rent and high-rent white trash, druggies, preppies, Bible belters, godless liberals, fifth-generation Americans, just-off-the-boat Asians whose parents worked in high tech, rednecks and New Age kids whose parents came out from the city to set up distinctly non-traditional places like the Clymer Health Clinic or the Alliance for Creative Development--all in a school district that 20 years ago was just an expanse of flat land with farms, machine shops and a few manufacturing firms. While the adults in this community could ignore those people with whom they hoped they had nothing in common, their kids mixed freely at the public schools, the mall arcades, and even in church.

AT FIRST, THE GROUP SEEMED TO BE GOOD FOR everybody. The girls, neither of them long on self-confidence, had their egos boosted. They guys, meanwhile, were a given a glimpse of a considerably more wholesome way of life than they had grown used to--playing Frisbee or touch football, pretending to do farm chores at the Brennans' enjoying the natural beauty they had forgotten was all around them. Not that the girls didn't drink; Caitlin especially could put away the beer. But both girls vehemently disapproved of drugs--they didn't want to *see* the boys if they were high. Marc, probably the worst abuser among them, respected his girlfriend's feelings: as long as Michelle was around, Marc would stay straight. Dan and Jim followed his lead.

By the time school was out for the summer, the five were spending most of their waking hours together. Nobody had a summer job, unless you counted Jim's early morning paper route, and Quakertown didn't offer its young people much in the way of entertainment. Out on Route 309, the fast-food highway that bisects the town, there were all-night diners, a tiny mall with a tinier game room, a few record shops and a movie theater. It was so boring that one of the main hangouts was the parking lot in front of a supermarket. There was Lake Nockamixon, about a half-hour away, but the group had been caught there once with a case of beer by the police. The lake was cursed.

The summer routine developed quickly. Michelle and Caitlin had summer school early in the morning. Caitlin had her father's car--he was away in Saudi Arabia on a long-term consulting deal--so she and Michelle would pick up Dan on their way back from summer school and drive the five miles from Quakertown to Richlandtown, where they would hang out either at Marc's or Jim's. At Marc's, they crowded into the first-floor den, with Mar slamming the door behind them; he didn't want his friends talking to his parents. In the den the boys would talk, listen to music, smoke cigarettes, play some air guitar, swap the latest heavy metal gossip and talk about getting tickets for the Judas Priest show in August and how great it was going to be. The girls watched and listened

and giggled, adding what they could to the conversation.

At Jim's there was more to do: the Tirellis had a pinball machine and Jim's stepfather had motorcycles. Their house also had cable television, so they could watch MTV, which was fun except MTV didn't show nearly enough heavy metal videos.

So they sat around at the Tirellis', in the dark den with the L-shaped sofa that you sank way down into, and Mrs. Tirelli made iced tea, and every day they chanted, "there's nothing to *do* here." But they filled the hours. It was a lazy time but a fun time, and except for an occasional fight between Caitlin and Dan--Dan, extremely possessive, was jealous of Caitlin's closeness to Michelle--it was great, just the five of them in their own little world. Even Marc seemed happy.

WHAT THEY DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT MARC

PASTOR D. CRAIG LANDIS AND HIS WIFE, ANNE, HAD come to Richlandtown 17 years ago, when Craig was called to the post at St. John's Lutheran Church. Pastor Landis was a blond, light-skinned 45-year-old, a local boy from nearby Boyertown, with a once-athletic body and a face that showed concern even when he smiled. Anne Landis, 43, was petite and dark-haired, a converted New York Jew. They had four children. Their oldest, a daughter, was retarded, but she had been raised at home. Their youngest, a son, had been brought from Korea during the late-'60s wave of mixed-race baby adoptions. There was another daughter in college. And then there was Marc.

Everyone knew that Marc Landis was an unusual kid, a kid with problems. He had certainly made enough public displays. From his physical appearance to his refusal to be confirmed after completing all of his catechismal training, almost everything Marc did seemed designed to let people know he was a little different. But most people never knew just *how* different. Only his family knew that. Marc Landis wasn't anywhere *near* being a normal 17-year-old with the normal problems of growing up. He was a deeply troubled young man, full of self-hate and rage, with a morbid obsession with death. He was a kid who refused to accept Christmas or birthday presents because he said he didn't *deserve* them. A talented kid who used his artistic gift to create gruesome images of bloody sword fights, rocket attacks, heavy metal stars and car crashes. A kid who was brutally impatient with himself--anything he couldn't do perfectly the first time, he didn't want to do at all. A kid who would go through periods of verbally abusing his retarded older sister or his adopted younger brother. Marc Landis would tell his mother to go fuck herself right to her face and not even flinch.

His preoccupation with death wasn't just a way of getting attention--it was deep-seated, and it even made some basis in fact. Until Pastor Landis, no male in the Landis family had *ever* lived past the age of 35. Everyone else had died of a hereditary heart condition, a condition the surviving Landis relatives talked about endlessly at family get-togethers, a condition Marc worried might one day kill him. His own father had made it this far by surviving open-heart triple bypass surgery and a heart attack six weeks *after* the operation. The heart attack was brought on, his doctors said, by Craig Landis' manic drive to get back to running his church; he was competing with himself, as he often did. It was a trait he had passed on to his son. But when Marc competed with himself, he always lost.

Despite his intensity, Pastor Landis wasn't a fire-and-brim-stoner. He was, in fact,

open-minded for a small-town preacher: a specialist in dealing with young people, he had spent years doing drug and emergency counseling. Schooled in Philadelphia, he knew the lessons of the big city in his congregation feared. His wife, a Brown University graduate in social work, had raised the children almost by herself because of her husband's seemingly endless schedule.

Yet both the Landises tried to be sensitive parents--giving their kids privacy, requiring only that they be active in *something*, attend church (though absolute *belief* wasn't required) and do simple chores. Still, the second oldest daughter, Heather, had always rebelled against her parents, calming down only after going away to college. Marc rebelled, too, but it was obvious from the sixth grade on that his insurrection was on a different level. Once, when Marc was 12, his father asked if he wanted to play catch in the yard, which abutted the church. Marc grudgingly agreed--his father hadn't been around to play catch with him when he was younger, and Marc resented his showing up now--and then proceeded to throw the first ball right through a church window. When Marc was older he would challenge the pastor's ideas in lengthy arguments. Their bitter fights about religion--both at home and in church classes--became the backdrop of their entire relationship. Quoting from sources like Black Sabbath lyrics, and Anton La Vey's *Satanic Bible*, Marc would loudly proclaim his atheism, insisting that there was no hope in life, no chance, no reason for faith. His father did his best merely to agree to disagree, but that wasn't enough for Marc. With anyone else--teachers and kids alike--Marc was always the first one to defend *anyone's* right to have *any* opinion. His father was the only exception to that rule, and their arguments usually ended up with Craig Landis screaming, and Marc crying.

As the years went by, things in the Landis household grew worse. With his father he argued--his mother he simply abused. He would sometimes actually tell her he wished she would die... so she's get off his back. Craig and Anne Landis kept wondering if there was any way to construe Marc's behavior as *normal*. They knew he was taking drugs and had been since seventh grade. His schoolwork had been steadily slipping--once in the gifted program in elementary school, he was now barely passing.

Craig and Anne Landis sat in bed at night trying to figure out what had gone wrong. Was Marc's problem too big for them? Did he need professional help fast? Or were they overreacting and making things worst? They tried giving him space. They tried sending him to a therapist, but after a year the therapist suggested that they were probably wasting their money, because Marc didn't seem to want help. They tried sending him to private school, but none of the schools wanted a kid who didn't want to go. They tried a series of "contracts": Marc would promise in writing to maintain a bare minimum of respect and schoolwork. Now, late in his junior year in high school, Marc's parents had decided to try clamping down on him, hoping that the strict discipline he never had as a child might help.

They told him he would be grounded whenever he broke any household rules. And so he was. He was restricted to the house so often that sometimes the only way Michelle could see him was at church, where he had to be every Sunday. The Landises also stepped up their dinnertime and late-night eye inspections, trying to catch Marc high on drugs they knew he was taking because of his cyclical behavior, as he came down off his weekend partying. To the other kids, Marc's parents appeared to be overreacting. But the Landises saw themselves as fighting a desperate battle with, and for, their son.

Despite their efforts, Marc was getting worse. Punishment meant nothing to him, probably because he punished himself more than his parents ever could. He couldn't stand living with his parents any more than they enjoyed having him around the house. His mother was now actually afraid of him; his father had tried every counseling trick he knew and had failed. Something had to give.

"YOU WANT ME TO HELP YOU PACK?"

LATE IN JUNE, THE IDYLIC SUMMER OF THE five friends was interrupted, as the Landis family--all four kids, some friends and some other relatives--took a trip to Florida. It was the first family vacation Marc had gone on in years and he brought Jim Tirelli along so he wouldn't have to talk to his parents too much. They all had a surprisingly good time, but it didn't last. When they returned and unpacked, Anne Landis discovered that Marc and Jim had almost 75 ashtrays stuffed in with their clothes. Everywhere they had been, the boys had stolen an ashtray. She found herself torn: what they had done wasn't any big deal, kids do these things, but she knew that her husband felt there was never any justification for stealing.

Pastor Landis demanded that Marc send back every ashtray with a note of apology. He also screamed at his son, grabbing Marc by the shoulders, shaking him violently, and declaring he was grounded for the *rest of the summer*. It was early in July--Marc would be trapped at home for close to two *months*. Marc, who not long before had told his older sister he was thinking about moving out, set a trap for his father after the tirade. Just as soon as he had destroyed so many gifts before, Marc smashed the Seiko watch his father had given him for Christmas, leaving the remains where the Pastor would find them the next day.

"Maybe you'd be better off not living in this house," his father shouted, tacitly admitting defeat after Marc could provide no better explanation for crushing the watch than that he had wanted to.

"Fine," Marc said, "I'm leaving."

"You want me to help you pack?" the pastor shot back.

"That won't be necessary," Marc said, grabbing his handcuffs off his dresser, hooking them through his belt loop, and heading for the door. Then he stopped.

"Before I leave..." he mumbled, popping a cassette into his tape deck and cueing up a song from an old Black Sabbath album. "I want you to push this button after I go," he said, pointing to the play button, "and you'll know how I feel." Then he stormed out and hopped on his bike. Two minutes later, before his parents could sort out what happened and play the tape, he was back. He walked up to his father with his hand out. "You owe me two bucks for mowing the lawn," he said. "You don't owe me for the garbage because I didn't do it." The pastor peeled off two bills; Marc grabbed them and left again, this time for good.

It seemed like just another of Marc's episodes--actually, a relatively mild one--until the Landises listened to the tape. The song was "Under the Sun," recorded by Black Sabbath in 1974, when Marc was only 8 years old; the lyrics were nearly impossible to piece together, even after several listenings. The banging guitar was deafening and the singer's screaming, whining voice sounded as if it were coming from father away than the rest of the music. "I don't want no preachers tellin' me about the God in the sky," said one

of the few lines they could make out, "and I don't want no one to tell me where I'm gonna go when I die." Marc had left them a message about rebelling against authority, an atonal poem about being true to your ideals.

What stuck in the Landises' minds was the verse that *sounded* like it ended, "I'm leaving it all behind." After listening to the song a few times, they became convinced that Marc was saying his final farewell. Their son was going to kill himself.

They called around to Marc's friends, but nobody knew where he was. Finally, they had to leave--Pastor Landis had a commitment to return to Hamburg, Pennsylvania, where he had led his first congregation, to preside at the funeral of an old friend. All through the drive and the ceremony itself, he couldn't stop worrying about Marc. Here I am fulfilling another church obligation, he thought, and I don't know where my son, the last of the Landis line, is dead or alive.

When Pastor Landis and his wife returned to Richlandtown, there was a phone call from Jim Tirelli's mother. Though Marc had made her promise not to call, she said, she thought the Landises should know that their son was with the Tirellis. Carol Tirelli and her husband had agreed to let Marc move in with them, Jim and their other son. The Landises were relieved--at least Marc was still alive. But he was gone.

SHELTER FROM THE STORM

MARC SEEMED HAPPIER living with the Tirellis than he had been in months, maybe years. The chores he couldn't be bothered with at his parents' home were suddenly very important to him--he did more than his share. And just as he had with friends at school, Marc was able to bring a voice of reason to the sometimes turbulent Tirelli household, acting as mediator in fights between Jim and his older brother, or between the two boys and their stepfather. Most surprising of all, he was able to accept from Mrs. Tirelli the sort of affection that he couldn't bear from his mother.

The Tirelli house had always been a haven for Jim's friends; Carol Tirelli worked very hard to make it that way. She virtually waited on the kids, making sure at the same time to stay out of their way. And even though her children had stricter curfews to adhere to than their friends did, the kids still thought of her as more reasonable, more relaxed, less judgmental than other parents.

One reason why the kids trusted Carol Tirelli was that she had been through so much herself. Her first husband had abused both her and the children, she said, finally leaving them a decade ago, never to be heard from again. Carol Tirelli had rebounded from that shock and had raised two young boys alone. (She had recently remarried.) In ten years she had slowly worked her way up through the state social services bureaucracy, rising from a job as a temporary secretary to that of a caseworker, saving enough money to buy a small house. To the five friends, Mrs. Tirelli was somebody who understood hardship. More important, she unconditionally loved kids and let them know it.

With Marc living at the Tirellis, each day seemed more perfect than the last for the little group of teen-agers. They played Frisbee, they went to Caitlin's house and loaded hay bales, they drank beer and played touch football. The only major source of friction seemed to be Dan. His frequent fights and breakups with Caitlin annoyed Michelle, who was very protective of her best friend. The other major topic the group usually argued about--the boys' dabblings with speed and acid--seemed to have become a

non-issue. As far as the girls knew, the weekend drug use that so bothered them had virtually stopped.

What they didn't know was that the guys had a whole separate life that began when the girls went home, a life that was played out on the bunkbeds in Jim's room or downstairs in the Tirelli's living room when everyone else was asleep. Marc and Jim--and Dan if he slept over--would take LSD and sit up babbling until 4:30 or 5 in the morning, making sure to stay awake until the acid wore off--if you fell asleep while tripping, you had horrible dreams. Marc slept on the top bunk, Jim on the bottom, and if it was late and nobody else was around, Marc would spill everything. After reminding Jim of his promise never to tell anyone about these discussions, Marc would talk about how unbearable life was, how his father's condition was going to kill him eventually so he might as well end it now. The only time he felt really good, Mar said, was when Michelle was around. Jim tended not to take Marc's ravings too seriously. He was sure Marc would someday look back on his death threats and laugh.

All through July and August, the Landises would periodically visit and try to convince their son to come home, or to at least take some money so he could contribute to the Tirelli household. Marc would also return home to pick up some of his things. He would appear at the front door of his parents' house and politely ask if he could come in. He let his parents know he wanted to be left alone, that he was happy without them.

As September approached, though, something changed. School was about to start again, and the specter of Marc's senior year brought back the despair that he believed was birthright. The problem hadn't been his parents after all, he realized. The love the Tirellis were trying to give wasn't really getting through, either. He saw their displays of warmth, but he didn't *feel* anything. Besides, he felt unworthy of their love, and of Michelle's as well. None of them could realize, he thought, just how badly he would eventually disappoint them. He was no good to nobody, he would say. He was a loser, going nowhere--and going back to school would *prove* it. He couldn't stand the idea of returning to the one place, besides his parents' home, where he was constantly reminded of how badly he had failed life. "I'm not gonna make it," he started telling Jim, then Michelle, and finally even Carol Tirelli. "I can't go back to school, I'm not gonna make it if I have to go back." Jim had heard Marc talk like this before, but never so relentlessly, so publicly. He realized that the joys of the summer hadn't cured Marc; they had only slowed his downward spiral. Now the depression and self-hate had returned, and with it, the same grim and inevitable logic: I'm going to die anyway, from this disease my father passed on to me; if life is going to be nothing but this pain, this deep disappointment in everything and everyone, maybe it would be better if I just got it over with now.

This kind of thinking didn't frighten Marc. He had long ago shed the instinctive fear most people have toward death. His father's religion had taught him that death itself was nothing to be afraid of, that the Lord Jesus could forgive all in the afterlife; his father's heart problems had taught him that death was relentless, that fearing death didn't help to ward it off. Besides, he had quoted his satanic and heavy metal sources so many times that he believed their frightening logic--that there's no difference between good and evil, life and death. He no longer seemed able to understand the finality of death. Death was just another thing to talk about. In fact, it was more than that: it made Marc special. When he talked casually about dying, people paid more attention to him. It was like all the rock stars who became more famous *after* they died.

Marc began telling friends he was going to kill himself. Perhaps he was reaching out, hoping someone would stop him. But just as likely he was laying groundwork so that when he did it, no one would think it was a mistake--Marc was too proud of being logical and rational to let anyone believe his death would be a miscalculation.

One day late in August, just before school began, Michelle, Jim and another friend followed Marc to the ledge of the Rockhill Quarry. He said he was going to jump. Michelle began crying hysterically, wheezing and sputtering asthma, but when Marc ran toward the edge she regained enough composure to grab him hard by the belt loop and restrain him. Michelle held on long enough for Jim and the other boy to drag him away from the cliff, slamming him into every tree they could find and telling him what an asshole he was. They weren't frightened, like Michelle--they were angry. They had heard *enough* of this death talk. They were sick of it. But Marc swore he would be back. "You'll see," he screamed. "You stopped me this time, but I'll win, I'll *win!*" Nobody but Michelle considered it a serious suicide attempt; it was just Marc trying to get some attention. Jim and Michelle told Caitlin and Dan, but they decided not to mention what had happened to anybody's parents.

AS SCHOOL PROGRESSED, WITH THE parties and the drugs and the rock concerts in Allentown and Philly, Michelle and Caitlin sensed that something was going wrong. Marc was doing absolutely nothing in school; he just sat in class and drew pictures. He drew all kinds of things: rocket ships, crashing cars, big muscular hulks battling it out with flaming torches, crazed rock guitarists in the contortions of obviously incredible solos. He was also beginning to draw himself more. His friends had long suspected the idealized rock stars he sometimes rendered--with long hair and perfect physiques--were Marc's concept of what Marc could be. But these new drawings looked exactly like the person Marc *was*: a skinny guy with long hair and a sad look. Marc drew himself in chains with fire burning all around, he drew himself with horns with BLACK SABBATH and 666 written next to his withering body. He drew himself in pain.

In person, he didn't look much better. Marc was never robust, but now he appeared positively sickly. The drugs, usually LSD or a combination of speed and beer--which counteracted each other so could take more of both--were slowly breaking down his body. He was becoming an image from a heavy metal album cover: sometimes his skin was so pasty white it seemed he had *already* done himself in.

Michelle was frantic. Almost everyday she appeared at the office of her only adult confidant, Mr. Lesko, the school guidance counselor the kids trusted most. Dave Lesko was a tall, bald athlete with a teenager of his own. A religious man who didn't let his beliefs blind him to the realities of growing up in the '80s, he told his students that he honestly *didn't understand* why taking drugs and drinking were more fun than making out and eating extra-cheese pizzas. But he insisted that he wouldn't judge them. He also believed the heavy metal music the kids listened to was a symptom, a sickness. Parents who didn't confront the messages in the music, he felt, were doomed to watch their kids grow up to be as alienated, addicted and destructive as their rock heroes were. Lesko was a straight shooter, and the students responded to him better than the parents did.

Lesko did his best to give Michelle support, but he was the first to admit that he didn't really know how to solve her problem--he didn't really even understand why she was in this predicament in the first place. How did a 16-year-old girl, somewhat spoiled

but certainly sensitive and bright and loving, get involved in a situation where her greatest joy was coming into Lesko's office and announcing that her boyfriend was still alive? Weird, he thought. But he listened and tried to get her to bring Marc in, keeping their conversations completely confidential.

Marc had also found a counselor: vice principal Mary Steckl, whom he befriended after she disciplined him for some disorder in class. Steckl thought if she could get Marc to open up, she could help him ease the pain. Instead, as he trusted her more and told her of his drug use and his suicidal desires, she was astounded by the depth of his suffering. Chemicals weren't a vice for Marc Landis, as they were for his friends Dan and Jim. Drugs and booze were Marc's *life*, his only happiness. Getting him off drugs wasn't the answer. If it weren't for the drugs, she thought, he would have killed himself months ago.

Vice principal Steckl told other school officials and Marc's parents about Marc's problem; when the talk turns to suicide, she felt, counselor confidentiality is justifiably pushed aside. To the Landises, the news was just the next frustrating chapter in their son's woeful life. They obviously couldn't help Marc--he wouldn't even *speak* to them. But they investigated whatever options they had life.

There was little they could do. They found that Pennsylvania law is unbending on the subject of institutionalizing minors. It was once so frightfully easy to commit a child that, to prevent abuse, the state has now made it frightfully difficult. Today, the Landises discovered, it's nearly impossible to have a minor child forced into inpatient psychiatric care, unless you can prove a recent suicide attempt--and even then the child will only be admitted for 30 days. And the Landises remained unaware of Marc's episode at the quarry's edge.

As Marc got worse, Dan and Jim seemed to follow their leader into his drug-fueled depression. They laughed off his almost daily promises to kill himself, and when Marc started taking acid before and even *during* school, they did, too.

WHAT BECOMES OF THE BROKEN-HEARTED?

BY HALLOWEEN, THE PRESSURE had become too much for Caitlin. She *liked* Dan, but he was on drugs all the time. They still spent time together in the group, but the fights they had no longer seemed worth the trouble. Michelle advised Caitlin to break up with Dan--she was sure her friend could do better. Dan used to be fun and a little obnoxious. Now he was just obnoxious--the drugs had made him moodier than he had ever been before.

A few days after the Halloween parade--when Michelle and Caitlin, just out of curiosity, tried acid and hated it--Caitlin told Dan she didn't want to go out with him anymore. He didn't take it well: first he refused to believe he meant it, then he turned desperate, begging her to resume the relationship.

"Caitlin, I can't live without you!" he would say, sounding eerily like Marc.

"You can't start *talking* like that," Caitlin said. "I'm not worth all this." But he persisted.

Caitlin began spending more time with Jim, who, she discovered, had always secretly liked her. But Dan wouldn't let up. He would appear at her house with candy and flowers; he sat at the Brennans' kitchen table staring at Caitlin while she and her mother tried to pretend it wasn't all extremely peculiar. Caitlin insisted she had no interest in

reconciliation, but Dan just kept repeating he couldn't live without her. And after awhile, he almost began to believe it.

With Dan's anguish the center of attention, Marc's condition appeared to the kids to be improving. He had managed to get a job at a nursing home, ostensibly to save enough money so he and Michelle could get married when school was over. He wasn't talking about suicide quite as much. To his friends, Marc seemed so much better that Caitlin began consulting *him* about *Dan's* suicide threats.

But the Landises and the school officials--who knew nothing about Dan's threats--were more convinced than ever that Marc was capable of killing himself at any time. When Craig and Anne Landis were called into school to meet with Marc and school officials on a disciplinary matter--the first time they had seen their son in weeks--he again talked about death.

"We want you to know that we love you and we're very unhappy to see you so upset and miserable," his mother said, trying again to reach him. "No matter what you do or say to us, we just want you to know that we care...."

"You don't have to care for *long!*" he screamed, storming from the room.

He even told vice principal Steckl that he had a plan--he knew how and where and maybe when. Steckl knew that this is a textbook symptom of an impending attempt, and on Wednesday, November 16th, Marc was sent to an outside adolescent psychiatrist, Dr. Sandra Bloom, who left the well-regarded Horsham Psychiatric Group to start a smaller practice in Quakertown.

Sandy Bloom took one look at Marc Landis and didn't just feel scared *for* him, she felt scared *of* him. Here, beneath the disheveled surface, was a charming, handsome, soft-featured boy, and he was so full of *hate*. There was no getting through to him. She felt he was definitely dangerous; at times he sounded to her like a Nazi. "The only thing retarded people are good for is to use their skins for lampshades," he told her, in his calm tone. He didn't expect her to agree with him. In high code of honor and logic, in the hysteria of his rebellion, he wanted only the right to feel whatever he chose. He respected people who didn't agree with him and could argue with him and could argue calmly, point-by-point--the way his father sometimes hadn't had the patience for. He was an ideologue. He just had all the wrong ideas.

Meanwhile, Dan Ferdock was telling anyone who would listen that he planned to kill himself. On Monday, November 14th, he had begun giving away his books, making a point of saying, "I won't be needing *these* anymore." He told his friends at lunch that they wouldn't be seeing him next week. He wrote the date of his birth and the day he expected to die on the wall of one of his classrooms below a quote from the heavy metal group Motley Crue; he wrote the same dates on his desk top in another classroom. Nobody took his threats very seriously, because they had heard it all before, from Marc. Dan's hysterics were old hat. Nobody listened to that stuff anymore.

That Wednesday, Caitlin tried the only thing she could think of: she went to see Dave Lesko, to ask him to talk to Dan. On Friday, Dan Ferdock came to Lesko's office. And, just as he had fooled his parents all those weeks, all those months and years, he fooled the counselor.

"I don't think Dan is suicidal," Lesko told Caitlin after seeing her ex-boyfriend. But the counselor had been deceived. Though he showed no outward signs, he *had* made plans to kill himself that night. Whether it was his depression over Caitlin, a drug-

induced disorientation brought on by the boys' at least daily LSD use, the hero-worship thrill that he was going to do it with *Marc Landis*, or a combination of all three, Dan Ferdock was convinced that today was a good day to die. Somehow, he broke through his drugged purple haze to perform for Lesko.

When school let out on Friday, every piece of the plan was known by *someone*. At least half a dozen school officials knew of Marc's stated intentions, including counselor Dave Lesko, who had heard about Dan's threats. More than a few students were aware that Marc and Dan had bought 22 hits of acid that day--Marc had boasted about it, claiming he and Dan Ferdock were going to "do them all up tonight." And everyone close to Marc knew of his promise to return to the quarry someday and jump.

Later, people would wonder how they could have missed what in retrospect seemed so obvious. Hadn't Marc and Dan told the girls to make plans without them that evening, that they were going out alone together to talk? All had been misdirected, manipulated. All wanted to believe that everything was going to be fine, that the talk Dan and Marc were planning to have would lessen the tension of the past weeks. Nobody figured out the plan, perhaps because nobody wanted to believe that it was possible for two young boys to kill themselves. *They won't do it.*

THE LAST TO SEE THEM ALIVE

WHEN CAITLIN GOT home from school on Friday, she was happier than she had been in weeks. It was finally over--Mr. Lesko had said that Dan wouldn't kill himself after all. She was finally free to make her own decision--if she ever got back with Dan, it would be because *she* wanted to, not because of emotional extortion. She was also pleased because both she and Michelle had done better on their report cards, which had been issued that afternoon.

That evening around 7, the girls went over to the Tirellis' to see the boys before they all went their separate ways. Caitlin was feeling relaxed about seeing Dan. But before she could say anything, he began his diatribe about not being able to live without her. He pulled a cassette tape from the chest pocket of his denim jacket and waved it in the air.

"When they find my body, you'll find this tape and I want you to have it, Caitlin, 'cause it's for you," he said. He took off his studded leather bracelet--the same kind that Marc wore--and strapped it around her wrist. "I want you to keep this always and forever and remember me," he told her. She was scared, confused, shocked. Lesko had said this wasn't going to *happen* anymore. Crying, she ran from the house.

Dan trotted out after her, looking ingenuously surprised, genuinely apologetic. "I'm really sorry, Caitlin," he said, "I didn't think you really *cared* about me that much. But now I know that you do. I'm sorry, really, I'm sorry I got you upset. I promise I won't kill myself, now or ever." And as they embraced and kissed passionately, she believed him. Because through all the drugs and all the fights, Dan had never, *ever* lied to her. But just to make sure, she asked Marc to talk to Dan about his death threats while they were out. Marc promised he would.

Marc kissed Michelle goodbye, saying little about their plans for the evening. Both boys had flashlights and the girls thought they might be going into the woods. Since it was Mrs. Tirelli's birthday, Marc and Dan had promised to be back by midnight to eat

birthday cake. Nobody noticed until later that Marc had left his birthday card for Mrs. Tirelli on the kitchen table.

Marc and Dan were picked up by Paul, a friend they were just getting to know at school. They said they wanted to go to Steve Shrack's house--where Marc and Michelle had first met at that party so many months before. When they neared the house, set far back from East Rockhill Road, they told Paul to stop. Shrack's house was there in the distance, they said, they could walk from here.

But when Paul drove away, instead of going to the house, the two boys headed down the road toward the end of the property, where Marc knew the Shracks had a small cabin. Marc and Dan pulled two sleeping bags from the cabin, took the first few hits of acid, and taped a short message for their families before the powerful drugs set in. They turned off the tape and started walking up the dirt road rear entrance to the Rockhill Quarry. After about half a mile, they saw the thick black pipe, the one that led to the quarry and the cliff, the cliff where Marc had been before. They turned on their flashlights and headed into the thick woods.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY DID IT!"

IT HAD TO BE THE QUARRY. When morning had come and still Marc and Dan hadn't returned, Jim had called Paul, who told him where he'd dropped the boys. Now Jim, Michelle and Caitlin were speeding toward the Rockhill Quarry. During the drive they tried to decide how to feel: should they get really scared, then be embarrassed when everything was okay? Should they act calm, only to discover that the unthinkable had happened? Or should they just pray?

It took time to find the campsite, but they didn't see Marc and Dan anywhere--either on the ledge or under it. "Okay guys!" Caitlin yelled, assuming they were hiding in the woods. "Come out, this isn't funny anymore." And then she heard Michelle scream. Michelle was gazing at the blue-clad bodies, 200 feet below them, lying on the rocks. Jim scrambled down to where Michelle was pointing. Neither of the boys was badly cut up, but there were white, so chalky white, and their blood shot eyes stared open. Each boy had one badly cut-up wrist; the handcuffs lay in pieces nearby. Jim felt for their pulses. There weren't any.

THE NEXT FEW HOURS WERE a blur of confusion. Somehow they got the two tapes and ran back to Steve Schrack's house and somehow the police were called. When they came, they forced the three teen-agers to look at the bodies *again*, for identification. Somehow their parents found out and came to the Shracks'. Caitlin was still hysterical, running into her mother's arms and screaming, "It's all my fault." Michelle was like a stone wall of rage. "Marc, you *bastard*," she shrieked, "why did you have to do this? We were so happy!" When she saw her mother, Michelle froze. "What are *you* doing here?" she asked. "You didn't even *like* him." When her mother tried to hug her, Michelle pushed away.

Somehow the Landises, who knew the boys were missing, were notified. They called the Ferdocks, who hadn't known anything was wrong. "I don't know how to tell you this," Mrs. Landis said to Mrs. Ferdock, "but the kids found Dan and Marc at the quarry a little while ago and they're pretty sure... that they're dead." Mrs. Ferdock

dropped the phone and ran off screaming. A few minutes later her husband picked up the receiver. "We can't talk right now," he said, and hung up.

Somehow, by the end of the day, everyone in town knew. Relatives had been called, 40 cops had invaded the site, the squads of news reporters were driving everyone crazy, and the families involved--who had rarely communicated among themselves but who had been linked by the closeness of their children--pulled further away from each other and from the world, trying to find the strength to face what had happened and what was to come.

MAKING SURE THE SURVIVORS SURVIVE

TWO TEEN-AGERS WERE dead, but no one would be afforded the luxury of mourning: there were other young people in danger. Teen suicides often came in clusters. Experts weren't sure why; perhaps the kids were being copycats, envious of the star treatment some of the victims received. A more likely theory, though, was that when one person buckled under adolescent pressure and killed himself, suicide ceased to be an abstract idea to other troubled kids--it became an *option*. In any case, adolescent suicide rates were rising with alarming regularity, up nearly 300 percent since the '50s. In 1960, suicide had ranked fifth in reported causes of death for people under 25; now it ranked second. And those were only the cases where suicide could be *proved*. The experts believed that a great number of teens reported killed in accidents, especially automobile accidents--the leading cause of adolescent death--hadn't really died accidentally at all.

In Quakertown, it suddenly seemed frighteningly likely that another teen would die. And Marc and Dan's friends were in the most danger of all. So the parents were watching each of their kids, *studying* their every action and reaction, thinking hasn't she be in the *bathroom* an awfully long time, or *why* is it taking him so long to get dressed, asking *how are you feeling*, is there *anything* I can do, do you want to *talk about it*? The three set of parents (except Caitlin's father, still in Saudi Arabia) were tip-toeing around their children, terrified that they would say the *wrong thing*, the thing that would drive their shaken teen-ager over the edge.

The parents' first big decision was to let the kids go back to school on Monday. The kids really wanted to go, and, like almost everyone else in Quakertown, the parents believed the best way to deal with this tragedy was to put it behind them as quickly as possible. They figured going back to school might do the kids some good. It didn't.

On Monday morning, when Michelle reached her locker, she saw that someone had scrawled, "You killed him" across the front of it. On Caitlin's locker was written: "Are you happy now that Dan's out of the way?" The rest of the day was just a mindless meander: none of the three really attended classes. They wandered the halls, looking at places where they had seen their friends the week before. Each survivor was having a different kind of reaction. Jim was quiet, as he always was--shocked, of course, but not noticeably changed. His biggest immediate problem was explaining to his mother about all the drugs he and Marc had taken right under her nose. Caitlin had scarcely stopped crying in three days. Dan's cooperation had been the catalyst that allowed Marc to finally kill himself, she kept thinking, and Dan had made it perfectly clear on the tape that he was dying *because of Caitlin*. She ached with grief and guilt.

But Michelle was the one everybody was most concerned about. She had become

a stone wall, and had caught everyone by surprise; nobody would have believed she could muster the strength of will to stand so alone in so awful a situation. After she saw Marc's body, her eyes became glassy, her manner unpredictable: she was unusually assertive one minute, dead quiet the next. This wasn't the Michelle they knew--that Michelle wasn't *capable* of this much independence. She refused to speak to her parents, and only wanted to talk to Caitlin or her sister Ruby, a 23-year-old who looked like a slightly more mature version of herself.

When her emotions finally tumbled out, they were more troubling than her silence. On Tuesday, she accompanied the Landises to Boyertown to see Marc's remains buried along with one of his more ghastly self-portraits one in which he pictured himself in chains burning in hell. Afterwards, Michelle and the Landises went out for dinner. At one point in the meal, Michelle just couldn't pretend any longer; she unceremoniously pushed her chair away from the table and ran to one of the restaurant's empty side rooms. Pastor Landis followed her out, asking what was wrong. "I want to be with *Marc*," she whimpered. She said the same thing after the memorial service for Marc that evening, where vice principal Mary Steckl's eulogy had included quotes from Black Sabbath and Emerson.

Instead of directing her anger toward Marc--who had left her, after all--or to the people who had sold the boys the LSD, Michelle seemed to be focusing her rage on her parents. Maqbool and Reinhild Qurashi lived in a magnificent Tudor estate on 40 acres with a stream and a pool, on the outskirts of Quakertown. They had built it two years before, with all their new money. They had come to America in the early '60s with nothing: a dark Pakistani man married to a pale, pretty refugee German nurse. They had risen from serving as butler and maid in a Chestnut Hill home to the leadership of a publicly traded company with more than \$32 million in annual sales. Mac Qurashi had made his money in cable TV--not the franchises, the actual cables. The Qurashis had a 28-year-old son, 23-year-old Ruby, who was married with a child of her own, and they had 16-year-old Michelle, who was the baby in many ways.

Michelle was the first Qurashi child to be brought up with money, with both its pleasures and its burdens. Frequently ill as a child, Michelle had been very independent on her mother. From an early age, she was always glued to someone: first her mother, then her sister Ruby, then her friend Caitlin. But she still often felt isolated. In the family, she was separated from her older sister and brother by a substantial age gap. In the community, she was different both ethnically and financially. Their money came to symbolize all that alienation for Michelle, and she said over and over how much she hated it. But she didn't want to give up the advantages of her position. She hated being rich, but she didn't mind being spoiled.

The problems that had come with the money and the change of lifestyle had always lurked under the surface in the Qurashi family. As a younger man, Mac had devoted more time to working than his children liked. Now that he was rich and had time to relax, his kids still seemed angry with him. Reinhild had always been very protective of all her children: they couldn't just slip into independence, they had to battle for it. And now that she could afford not to work, she could spend more time being overprotective.

But, more important, the Qurashis and their children had come from different worlds--they didn't have a lot in common. The parents were educated, well-traveled, street-smart veterans of poverty, and they knew how good they had it now. Their kids,

especially Michelle, had been brought up in sheltered American suburbia. Had they wanted to speak openly with each other, there may not have been much to talk about.

When, after the suicides, the Qurashis decided to take Michelle for some counseling, the family's troubles began to unfold. Hoping to assuage Michelle's grief--which they assumed was the cause of her irrationality and anger--they turned to Dr. Sandy Bloom, the same therapist who had seen Marc. When Sandy Bloom walked into her office that Wednesday--the day after Marc's funeral--she was confronted with a 16-year-old girl full of rage, bursting with an intense resentment toward her parents that couldn't possibly have surfaced overnight. Clearly, Marc's suicide wasn't Michelle's only problem.

Dr. Bloom and an associate who sat in on the session were shocked. They had expected to begin fairly routine family counseling, but what they saw set off flashing red lights. This girl was in bad shape, and this family was far from being close enough to provide the support she needed. The situation was clearly dangerous: Michelle had already spoken several times about *wanting to be with Marc*. Sandy Bloom made a quick call to the Northwestern Institute of Psychiatry in nearby Fort Washington, and reserved a bed in the adolescent ward. She told the assembled family that she believed Michelle was dangerous to herself, and suggested she would be safer in the hospital. But Michelle refused to go. She didn't *want* to, and besides, tomorrow was Thanksgiving and she didn't want to spend it in a loony bin. Her parents also balked: they would just feel better, they said, having Michelle at home. Dr. Bloom felt that the Qurashis were too strongly influenced by what Michelle--who was supposed to be the *patient*--wanted to do, but she was unable to change their minds.

She opted instead for what she believed was the second-best solution: making sure that someone was with Michelle 24 hours a day. Ruby--who had become Michelle's only confidante in the family--promised to be that person, even though she was having problems of her own at the time, most of them having to do with her shaky marriage. But she agreed to take time off from her classes at Penn State, where she and her husband lived, to stay with Michelle; the parents agreed to clear the house of all drugs, razors and knives.

AT QUAKERTOWN COMMUNITY HIGH School, three school days had passed since the suicides, but the only official recognition of the deaths had been an announcement over the P.A. system Monday morning confirming what had happened. School officials had spoken privately to the guidance staff, but basically no one knew what to do.

Fred Shipman, the director of pupil personnel services for the school district, had been chosen to coordinate the school's response to the deaths. Only the Friday before, as Marc and Dan were buying their LSD, Shipman was attending a conference on teen suicide, where experts warned how important it was for schools to have plans in case disaster affected their students: who would be the spokesman to the press? Who would brief the teachers? Who would set up counseling services so the "at risk" kids, identified by a set of guidelines given to their teachers, especially those in suburban and rural areas where major traumas are few, the Quakertown schools had made no such plans.

Over the next few days, Fred Shipman did his best to help the guidance staff prepare. But the administration was divided. Was the problem drugs or depression? Should they confront the issues openly, running the risk that more talk of suicide might

cause more suicide? Or should they ignore the whole episode and hope it would go away? Much of the larger community leaders and parents held meetings to talk about the drug problem--no one, including the police, had apparently been aware that kids still *used* LSD. There was talk about suicide prevention programs but no one was sure how they would work. The news reporters seemed to be doing their best to fuel the controversy--each day a new story appeared about the suicide tapes or the general topic of adolescent suicide.

Some parents began to crack down on their kids. They tightened security and asked more questions than usual about drugs and friends. They knew it was no longer safe to be naive, it was no longer practical to assume their kids would grow out of their problems. They knew that some kids had to have a secret life at their age, a life their parents didn't know about. But they wanted to make sure their children weren't hiding *too* much. They had read in the papers about what had happened to the Ferdocks.

Dan's parents, Michael and Rita Ferdock, had been taken completely by surprise. Michael Ferdock, a short, stocky, balding 49-year-old teacher of French and civics at the nearby Indian Crest Junior High School, was telling the newspapers, the TV stations, and anyone else who would listen that he *knew* his son had *not* committed suicide. "There are many unanswered questions in my mind, which I certainly am going to pursue," he told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. For Ferdock and his wife, Rita, a tall, sweet woman with teased blond hair, the unanswered questions went well beyond the official cause of death. If what Dan's friends were telling reporters was true, the Ferdocks really hadn't known their son very well. They never knew he took drugs, they never knew how difficult the breakup with Caitlin was for him. They hadn't even known that one of Dan's best friends, Marc Landis, had left home five months before: Dan's excuse for not being at home the night he died had been that he was sleeping over at Marc's.

Grieving and frustrated, the Ferdocks intimated that their son's death was Marc Landis' fault. Maybe Dan was trying to stop Marc and he was pulled over in the struggle, they told one reporter. Or Dan could have been physically or mentally coerced into jumping off that cliff, coerced by Marc Landis. When the Landises came to pay a condolence all, some of the Ferdocks' assembled friends more than hinted that the Landises were to blame, for not being strict enough with Marc. Michael Ferdock pressured the police to produce evidence--evidence that he *knew* existed--to prove that Danny hadn't willfully taken his own life. Despite what Dan had said on the hours of tapes the boys had left, the Ferdocks held staunchly to their belief that their son hadn't wanted to die.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO MICHELLE?

BY THE BEGINNING OF DECEMBER, Michelle seemed to be making progress in her therapy. There was even something she seemed enthusiastic about: on the 10th, she, Ruby and their older brother Ron were supposed to take a trip to California. Going to California had always been one of Michelle's dreams--she had expected to go to college with Caitlin, and live there with Marc when he became a rock star.

But then, something inside her snapped. On Monday, December 5th, Michelle had to take a test she felt she wasn't prepared for. It was in Mr. Walters' English class, one of Marc's favorites, and it was on Emerson, also one of Marc's favorites. Michelle turned in

a blank piece of paper at the end of the period, and was visibly shaken after the class. Ruby was back at college, finishing up some work so she could take the California trip, and Michelle, feeling completely alone, decided that week that she didn't want to go anywhere without Marc.

While she appeared to be preparing to go to California, she was really planning a journey to be reunited with Marc. On Wednesday, December 7th, she asked Caitlin to drive her to the drugstore to buy some things for the trip. Caitlin became suspicious when Michelle wouldn't tell her what was in the bag she returned with. Under pressure, Michelle admitted she had bought over-the-counter sleeping pills. But in the same breath, she warned Caitlin not to tell anyone: if she did, Michelle promised to stab herself to death. Caitlin felt trapped: if she didn't betray her friend, Michelle might take the pills... if she told the Qurashis, Michelle had promised to a more brutal, sure death. Caitlin was paralyzed with fear. So she did nothing at all. *She won't do it.*

That evening Michelle made a few phone calls, asked her mother to be sure to wake her at 6 a.m., and started taking the sleeping pills. She had her own little wing on the second floor of the house--her parents slept downstairs--so she knew no one would interrupt her. When she couldn't swallow any more pills she emptied the remaining capsules into a glass, mixed the blue powder with water and drank it.

As Reinhild Qurashi climbed the spiral staircase to her daughter's room early the next morning, she heard Michelle's alarm buzzing and her little puppy whimpering. She bolted up the rest of the steps and found Michelle unconscious. With her husband away on business, she would have to handle this situation alone. She tried to call an ambulance but the line was busy; she ran to a neighbor's house in her nightgown, but nobody answered the door. Finally she just heaved Michelle's limp body over her shoulders and carried her to the car and whisked her away to pump her stomach. She was comatose but alive and after a few hours she regained consciousness.

When Caitlin was told at school about Michelle's attempt, she felt betrayed, but guilty. *Again* somebody close to her had threatened suicide, *again* she hadn't acted, and *again* she had guessed wrong. And on top of the feeling that Michelle had somehow betrayed and abandoned her, Caitlin would have to lie. She would have to insist that she hadn't known that Michelle was buying sleeping pills. Only her mother was there to help her through the crisis. Her father was in constant phone contact, but Edward Brennan couldn't return from Saudi Arabia. It was in his contract--unless a family member died, he was stuck there. He was only allowed a certain number of days home each year, and he had already spent his allotment for 1983. Breaching the contract might mean forfeiting more than a year's pay.

MICHELLE WANTED OUT OF THE hospital, or the "mental institution," as she cynically called it. She had been transferred to the Northwestern Institute of Psychiatry--where her doctor had wanted her in the first place--after two days in the intensive care unit at Quakertown Hospital. At first she had been afraid. Some of the people at Northwestern were really *nuts*: they made her feel her problems were insignificant in comparison. She had also been repentant; she decided that there was a *reason* why the pills hadn't killed her, that she was obviously meant to live. But now she had had enough doctors checking in on her, enough of boring group therapy sessions, and *not* enough time with Caitlin or Ruby, who were only allowed to visit for very short periods. She was

growing impatient.

But there were times when she would let down her guard for a moment, and allow the staff psychiatrist to peer through the layers of her resentment. He saw the same thing that Dr. Bloom had suspected: Michelle's condition went far deeper than her relationship with Marc. In fact, her relationship with someone as self-destructive and rebellious as Marc could be interpreted as just another symptom of her already well-entrenched problems with her parents and her self-image. The doctor felt that she would had a completely unrealistic view of the world--she fantasized about going to California, maybe being a rock star, just as many kids did, but she rarely considered what she might do if that *didn't* work out. She didn't realize one had to *work* toward things. And she deeply, deeply resented her parents.

Maqbool and Reinhild Qurashi were confused. They believed their daughter was experiencing intense grief over Marc, but nobody was talking about his brutal suicide. The doctors only wanted to discuss their family problems--problems the Qurashis had never thought *existed*. The best doctors money could buy hadn't prevented their daughter from attempting suicide, they couldn't promise she wouldn't do it again, and they had the audacity to suggest that Michelle's problems were with her *parents*, not with this crazy pastor's son who had killed himself and nearly killed their daughter.

The Qurashis wanted to feel that they were in control of this situation--it wasn't easy to trust anyone else with the care of their troubled daughter. But they didn't know what to do. Sometimes they thought, "trust the experts"; other times what the experts told them seemed absurd. And in the Qurashis' confusion, their daughter began gaining more control of her own life. As Michelle stopped talking about suicide and began sternly asserting that she wanted to live, her doctor knew she wouldn't be in the hospital much longer. Michelle hadn't been *put* there--she had signed *herself* in for a 30-day period at her parents' insistence. And the 30 days would soon be up.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

SINCE DAN AND MARC'S DEATHS, five other kids at Quakertown High School had seriously discussed or had attempted suicide. Others were talking about it or leaving notes. Dozens of students had come into the guidance office for the first time, unloading problems whose existence school officials had never dreamed of. The kids were talking about being physically and sexually abused, they were talking about drug use and family breakups and friends who were in trouble with the law... even satanic cults. The counselors felt that a number of kids were identifying Marc and Dan--in their eyes, these boys were heroes who had been martyred for the cause of battling authority, rebelling against parental rules. Many of the suicide notes that students slipped under counselor Dave Lesko's door or left on his desk referred to Marc and Dan's deaths.

Other students were displaying their anxiety in less direct ways--ghoulish humor, for example. One girl swallowed a bottle of Tylenol pills, went to the hospital and was released after treatment. On returning to school, she opened her locker only to find a full of Tylenol inside, with a note reading, "Do it right next time!" She changed schools.

But even as the Quakertown guidance staff was uncovering the secret inner lives of some of their students, and a suicide expert was flown in from West Virginia to speak to the entire student body, the community as a whole seemed intent on putting the suicide

episode behind it. It seemed to Fred Shipman that maybe parents didn't *want* to know that Marc and Dan weren't the only deeply troubled kids in central Bucks County. Shipman had been reassigned by the school to work full time on creating a program to help the school cope with the questions raised by the double suicide--and to prepare the faculty, who had yet to be even consulted about the deaths, in the event another disaster took place. At the same time he was in close contact with the parents of the five kids involved. He tried to act as a conduit for information, since communication between the families wasn't good. Even weeks after the deaths, there were still many misconceptions about what had happened--some of the families, for example, hadn't heard the suicide tapes and knew little of what was on them.

On December 8th, Pastor Landis had a heart attack, his second: he required open-heart surgery, again. The Ferdocks were still deeply shaken: Michael Ferdock was calling the East Rockhill police almost daily with "new evidence" about his son's death. He began talking about the lawsuits against both the school and the Landises.

WITH CHRISTMAS APPROACHING and Michelle growing more restless in confinement, her psychiatrist decided to try a test. Michelle had been allowed to sign herself out for evenings and return by 11--sometimes she was angry about having to go back, sometimes she couldn't wait to get away from home--but now she had had enough, and wanted to go home permanently. Her doctor seemed to concur. He led her to believe that she would be discharged in time for Christmas. But at the last minute, he told her parents he just didn't think Michelle was ready. The doctor wanted to see if the Qurashis would side with the diagnosis, or bend to Michelle's strident demands. He was gratified to see that they sided with him. Michelle signed out for Christmas Day and returned to the hospital that evening. And three days later, the doctor said he thought she was ready to be released, that the worst appeared to be over and her problems could be handled on an outpatient basis, in therapy.

New Year's Eve was Michelle's coming out. Her sister Ruby and brother Ron threw a big party at the house while their parents were out of town. It was the first time Michelle had seemed really normal since Marc's death, the first time in more than a month that she appeared to be truly enjoying herself. There were lots of high school kids there, and some of Ruby's friends. It was similar crowd to the one at Steve Shrack's house almost a year earlier--at the party where Michelle met Marc. And it seemed like a new beginning. Michelle and Caitlin were looking at the guys, and saw a few that interested them. Michelle was laughing, flirting, meeting new people. At 11:40, she and Caitlin, sitting on the carpeted steps between the immaculately finished basement and the first floor, fell into a discussion about the suicide attempt. Caitlin said she wanted to hear the truth, not just the line that Michelle was giving to the doctors. Caitlin was trying to be realistic; Michelle had already tried it once. Would she ever try it again? No, Michelle promised, she would never try to do it again. They shook hands on it, a New Year's resolution.

During the next three weeks, Michelle's prognosis changed almost hourly. There were some indications that she was getting better. She was back in school, she was working out at the Y, she even finally got her driver's license. She was being somewhat more open in her therapy sessions: the switch she had made from Dr. Bloom to her associate, Ruth Anne Ryan, seemed to be paying off. Michelle was doing more of her own

talking, communicating less through her sister Ruby than she had. She was denying that she had any intention of killing herself, and was even beginning to show some anger toward Marc for betraying her, leaving her, and almost costing her life; during the first weeks she had frustrated therapists by insisting that Marc wasn't an issue. She even seemed sometimes to have that glint back in her eye, the glint that suggested that life still meant something to her. Her therapist was heartened by these changes, but she by no means believed that Michelle was cured. For one thing, Michelle's apparent improvement was coming uncomfortably quickly. For there to be recovery, there first has to be grief, and Michelle still hadn't grieved over Marc the way Caitlin had for Dan.

If Ruth Anne could have monitored her patient outside of the office, she would have had more cause for concern. There were signs... signs that Michelle's casual acquaintances recognized immediately but her loved ones tended to overlook in their attempt to be supportive. Both Michelle and Caitlin had sometimes worn pieces of their dead boyfriends' clothing to school, but now Michelle was beginning to pick up Marc's mannerisms as well. She would make that little spitting noise he always made; she was getting in to the same arguments he used to get into. She was wearing black a lot, and when somebody would ask why was wearing that color she'd say, "black isn't a color, it's a hue"--a minute description that *Marc* had always liked to make. She had decorated her room with Marc's clothes, Marc's posters, Marc's records; she had a bag full of Marc's poems and drawings.

She had also picked up Marc's defiant attitude, and she continued to act tough around her parents. They thought it meant that she was growing stronger, more independent. But it was just an act, and when only Caitlin was around, she would let the mask slip. A song that she associated with Marc would come on the radio and she would break down and cry. When Michelle and Caitlin were alone together, they would endlessly recount what had happened, trying to figure out why, or what they might have done.

Sometimes it seemed that they could go back to the way it was before Marc and Dan, that the closeness of their friendship was stronger than anything bothering either one of them. Other times they would just sit and cry together, or Michelle would space out and grow silent.

Ruth Anne did have another concern: Michelle began convincing her parents to let her cancel therapy sessions, once to go skiing. She hoped the family knew what a gamble it was--Michelle didn't appear to be getting *that* much better. Still, Michelle had improved enough for Ruth Anne to try the next crucial step in the therapy--helping Michelle to assert some *real* independence instead of these isolated bursts of defiance. Ruth Anne suggested to Michelle that she and Caitlin see each other less frequently. And when Ruby confided in Ruth Anne that she was thoroughly exhausted from constantly monitoring Michelle, and was considering returning to State College for a while, the therapist encouraged her to do so.

THE PHOTO IS GONE

BY MONDAY, JANUARY 24TH, most of the people really close to Michelle felt certain that she had turned the corner. She had gone on skiing trips three weekends in a row, Ruby's departure hadn't seemed too traumatic, and with her new driver's license she

was finally able to use the little Honda her parents had bought for her the summer before. But the improvement was illusory.

On Tuesday, Michelle got upset when Mr. Walters loaded her up with school assignments. She felt there was no way to complete everything he had demanded--as tears rolled down her face, she told Caitlin she couldn't believe she was actually crying about *homework*. That evening the Qurashis were going to a Rotary Club meeting to hear Fred Shipman speak about the school district's plans for dealing with teen suicide and other adolescent traumas. Michelle would have to come along, because there was nobody else to stay with her. But Michelle said no, hadn't Ruth Anne talked to her about her needing her independence? Didn't they trust her? Her parents allowed her to stay home.

While her parents were away, Michelle called her sister in State College. Michelle didn't sound like herself, Ruby thought, but she assumed it was just a mood that would pass. They were talking lazily about Michelle's weight lifting, when suddenly Michelle suddenly announced, "I gotta call Caitlin, bye." When the Qurashis got home, everything seemed fine. Michelle even suggested that she and her mother go out to breakfast the next morning. Reinhild Qurashi was thrilled. It all seemed too good to be true.

On Thursday, January 26th, Michelle drove everybody to school. She picked up Caitlin first and then Jim, who got into the car carrying a bag--a bag of Marc's things. Michelle had been pestering him to bring in one particular shirt of Marc's, but when he couldn't find the one she was describing, he just brought the whole bag. After school Caitlin and Michelle got into an argument over who would get to keep a Judas Priest tape that had belonged to Dan. Their harsh words were cut short when Caitlin had to leave for her therapy session. Michelle tried to make a quick apology, but Caitlin didn't want to hear it. She just walked away.

By the time Caitlin arrived at the doctor's office, she was feeling sorry and she called Michelle. Michelle wouldn't let her get a word in. "Listen, I have to talk to you, it's really important," Michelle said. "I'll come get you after your appointment. I'll be there at 5."

Caitlin's appointment was brief. The therapist felt she wouldn't be needing any more sessions; she had obviously done the bulk of her grieving. Caitlin was so excited she called Michelle to tell her the good news. But Michelle had already left, her mother said. She was going to get gas and then pick up Caitlin. So Caitlin sat outside the office and waited. At 5:15 she began to get worried, but she didn't want to call the Qurashis and upset them. She called a few friends to see if Michelle had stopped to show off her new driver's license. No one had seen her. At 5:30, Caitlin finally called the Qurashis. Caitlin asked Mrs. Qurashi to check to see if Marc's picture was still in Michelle's room. It wasn't. And the search began.

Mac Qurashi drove the route from the house to the doctor's office. Maybe Michelle had a flat tire. When she didn't turn up, he picked up Caitlin and they started checking all the spots the kids frequented: the lake, the mall, the shopping center, all the good drinking spots, even the quarry. No Michelle. The police were called and they too began to search.

The next morning Mac Qurashi rented a helicopter and scoured the entire area. He passed over the quarry again and flew over Boyertown, where Marc was buried. There was no sign of her. After an hour and a half he landed and arranged to have four more helicopters put into the air, systematically searching. They found nothing. The Qurashis

called the ski areas where the kids had been the past couple of weekends. She wasn't there either. There was nothing to do but wait.

Michelle hadn't been seen in more than 24 hours, and there were still no clues to her whereabouts. The only piece of news that surfaced on Friday was more ominous than reassuring. Caitlin remembered Michelle recently mentioning that her parents kept a gun in the house. There *was* a gun, Reinhild Qurashi recalled in horror. It was a .25-caliber Baretta pistol their son had given them to provide security for their expensive, isolated new home. The Qurashis had been so afraid of the weapon that they had hidden it away, never realizing that Michelle knew of its existence. When Mrs. Qurashi checked, she saw it was gone. And so were the bullets, which were kept hidden separately.

Late Friday evening, Caitlin and her mother went home. The Qurashis waited in their house, huddled with several relatives who had come to help with the vigil.

Finally, at 4 a.m. Saturday morning, the state police called. Michelle had been found. Her car was on a small street off Pumping Station Road, a long, two-lane highway that linked Quakertown with Richlandtown, the road the girls always took when driving from either of their houses to Marc's house and, later, Jim's house. The little side street her car was parked on was regularly used by teen-agers who wanted some privacy. Nobody had spotted it because Michelle had covered the roof with a huge piece of tin metal.

On the car seat next to her was the photo of Marc. In her hand was the pistol, with a single empty chamber. She had been dead since Thursday afternoon, shot once in the heart.

IT WAS OVER. THERE WAS NOTHING to do now but weep. Except that Caitlin would have to be told. The Qurashis called Mrs. Brennan and asked her to bring Caitlin over. Even though it was 5 in the morning, Caitlin and her mother rushed over immediately. As soon as they got in the door, Caitlin knew that it was over, that Michelle was gone, too. People reached out to hug her, comfort her the way they done after Dan's death. But she didn't want to be touched. She didn't have the same kind of hurt this time, she didn't even feel that much like crying. She didn't feel anything at all.

The numbness lasted for days, through the funeral, through the endless postmortems, through her father's return from Saudi Arabia. She didn't even seem to be moved when she helped Michelle's brother and sister make their final gesture of rage against Marc Landis and all that he stood for. The three of them went to Michelle's bedroom, which she had decorated as a kind of shrine to marc: his posters were on the walls, his clothes strewn over the furniture, his poems and drawings piled in the nightstand drawers. As they stripped the room of everything that had to do with Marc, Ruby and Ron were seething, calling the dead boy "a young Charles Manson" and tearing his things from the walls. Caitlin methodically did her share. The room looked much different when they were just done, like the bedroom of a girl just off to college, who had taken everything with her except for a poster of a baby seal, frilled at the bottom. In the nightstand drawers were photo albums--of pictures taken years ago--and composition books filled with Doors lyrics, the words that Jim Morrison wrote before drugs did him in, words to the songs Michelle loved before Marc and heavy metal became part of her life.

They carried Marc's things down the spiral staircase and out the heavy wooden

front door, throwing them in a pile on the grass next to the driveway. Ruby and Ron zealously doused the pile with lighter fluid as Caitlin looked on. And before Mrs. Qurashi realized what was happening--she had promised Mrs. Landis she would return Marc's possessions--her remaining children had made a bonfire of everything that was left of Marc Landis.

But even that symbolic burning didn't affect Caitlin; nothing really would for months. She would go back into therapy, begin taking a home-study program instead of attending school. She would see Jim when they worked out together at the Y, and she'd remember that fledgling relationship, the one that never survived the specter of Dan Ferdock. She would keep up on the news from the other families: Pastor Landis's surgery had gone well; Dan's father was still talking about "new evidence" that would show his son had been duped or lured by Marc Landis. She would remain close to the Qurashis, and continue to visit them, almost waiting for Michelle suddenly to return home. She would talk for hours with Ruby, who was now reeling under many of the same pressures her sister had succumbed to--plus the added grief of losing Michelle and its effect on her already unsteady marriage.

Still, nothing seemed to shake her emotional numbness. When she looked through the things of Dan's and Michelle's, they seemed like artifacts of a long-dead race. She kept one wooden box and one wicker basket. The inlaid wooden box was Dan's. It contained a couple of combs, the studded bracelet he gave her the night he died, a Jimi Hendrix pin, a few assorted buttons. The wicker basket had Michelle's things; a bandanna she used to wear, a feathered roach clip the two of them had won at a fair, a rawhide bracelet, a lot of rock group buttons, and an empty can of Buffet cat food--which Michelle always took great joy in feeding to Caitlin's cats. The bed Michelle used to sleep on was still in Caitlin's room; some of Michelle's stuffed animals sat on a sill just behind the bed. It didn't hurt Caitlin to see the things there. Nothing really hurt.

But there was one thing. Ever since the day Michelle's body was found, Caitlin had an image in her mind, an image she knew would explain *something* but whose meaning continued to elude her. She remembered sneaking away from all the adults, just a few minutes after they had told her about Michelle, and walking downstairs into the den, where a half-dozen floor-to-ceiling windows looked out into the Qurashis' stream and their pool. She saw the bare trees. And in the distance she saw the colors of the dawn. The sky was turning those amazing colors, red, purple, orange, blue, and the sun was just about to break the horizon and rise through the trees that hid the Qurashi property from the road.

She remembered looking at that beautiful sky with more hatred than she had ever felt in her life, thinking the sun had absolutely *no right* to rise on such a day. She wanted to reach out, to cry out, to stop a beautiful sight from ruining a day that *deserved* to be dark.

But she couldn't stop the sunrise. The birds were singing and the clear water from the melting snow was trickling over everything. She couldn't stop the sunrise.

The names of the Brendan's and Tirelli's have been changed. The Ferdock family declined to be interviewed—everything else is based on author interviews with living characters and reconstructions from the suicide tapes and journals.

Copyright Stephen M. Fried, 1984; originally appeared in Philadelphia Magazine 10/84