shared

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by Lori Spencer
and Wendy Spencer

On a very hot summer day all the neighborhood kids were out playing stick ball in the street in front of the Hornbecks' house, as we had done thousands of times before. This day was very different though. A big gold car turned the corner and started driving up the street. Tammy and I were on our bikes. Somehow the car hit me. Knocked me right to the ground. The only thing I remember is having to wear my arm in a sling for days after.

When I try to discuss this accident with my family they tell me I imagined the whole thing.

I think they are wrong.

It starts with my sister swearing to the family,
perhaps at the dinner table,
that she was hit by a car years ago.

She will say, "Remember when a long time ago I was hit by a car?"

None of us will remember.

My sister came to me one day and said, "Mom's in her room. I'm going to go down the basement stairs on my butt. You run and tell her I fell down the stairs."

When I heard my sister go down the stairs I ran and got Mom.

That was her plan.

The thing is, my sister really did fall down the stairs.

She didn't get hurt bad.

It was probably just payback for arranging something like that.

The next memory she tried to pawn off was of me trying to fool our mother.

My sister claims I said, "Pretend I'm falling down the stairs."

But instead of pretending to fall down the stairs I actually did fall down the stairs.

This is what she remembers.

I remember something vaguely foolish.

This is a true story.

People even remember this.

Thumper, he was my absolute favorite. Didn't he realize I was only four and in love with him?

We were at the parade. I don't know what street it was on, but we were somewhere in Walt Disney World. There was Thumper.

Thumper passed right in front of me and I pulled his tail to get his attention. He turned around and yelled at me.

I was scared when he yelled at me.

It's amazing really. You would think they'd have Thumpers who handled children better than that.

Maybe he was having a bad day. We all do.

My family went to Disney World when I was nine or ten. That would have made my sister four or five and—though I never would have admitted it—very adorable.

One of many memories I have of that trip is my sister pulling Thumper's tail. Thumper walked by us and my sister in her innocence and excitement grabbed his puffy white tail and started jumping up and down with it.

This really pissed Thumper off.

He turned around and yelled at my adorable four-year-old sister for playing with his tail.

It was the early seventies and I got some amazing hip hugger bellbottoms and halter-tops for the trip. My favorite outfit was a pair of white and pink, 3-inch-square checked pants and a pink top with capped sleeves and a lot of elastic around my then flat stomach. Personally, I feel that Thumper overreacted and should feel terribly bad. That's the only ugly spot I remember in an otherwise serene trip. I wore a white belt around my prepubescent hips.

Mom and Dad would go out and my brother and sister would turn the radio on static and tell me that the Martians were coming and that they got Mom and Dad. My brother and sister were very cruel to me. But that's all a part of who I am, so if they don't like it, it's their fault.

One night when it was storming out, I was in the kitchen washing the dishes because my sister made me. My sister and brother were babysitting me. They came into the kitchen screaming, "Get down, we're having a hurricane." So I got on the floor in tears, thinking the house would be destroyed and we would die.

Once they played the whole thing out they got up laughing and walked away, leaving me lying on the floor crying.

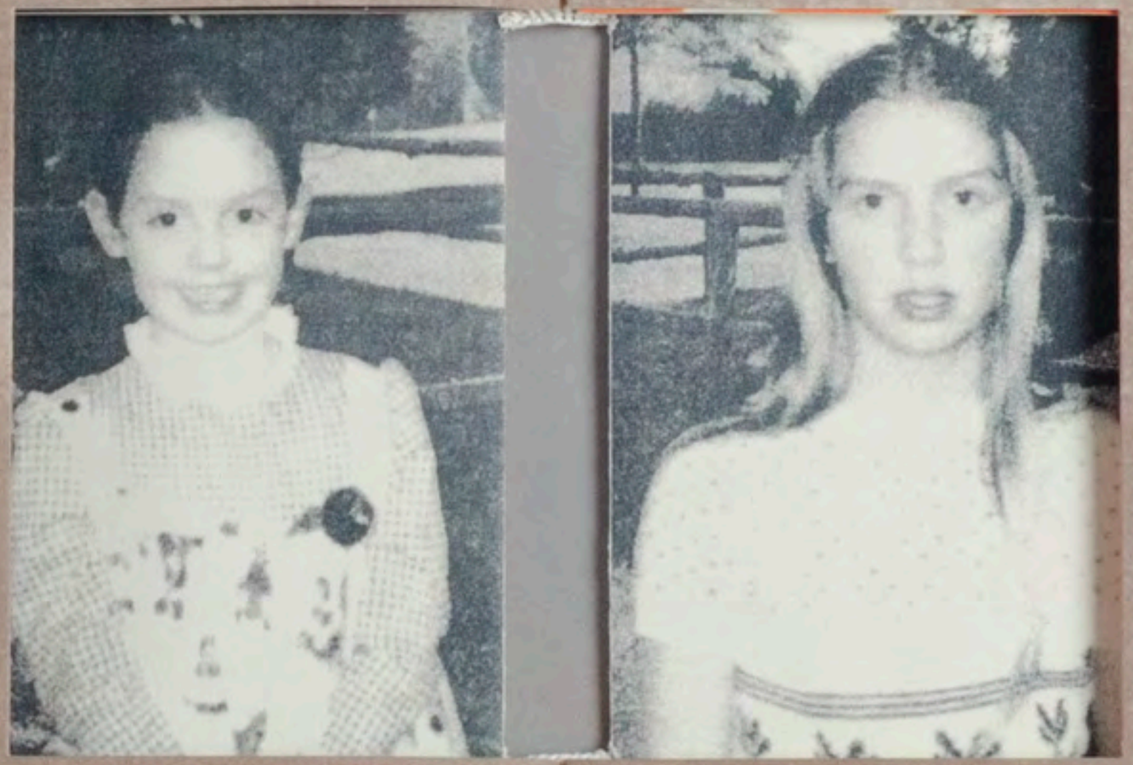
They had a great time with it.

Once when I was babysitting my brother and sister, we had one of those great thunderstorms. When the storm was right over us the thunder would shake the whole house. On one of the crashes I screamed that we were having an earthquake.

"Hit the floor!" I yelled.

My brother went along with my gag and we fell to the living room floor and covered our heads with our hands. I yelled for my sister to get down on the floor. My brother and I probably carried on about dying and the house crashing down. My sister lay on the floor, her hands over head, crying.

When I was a teenager I loved thunderstorms. I still do, but they seemed more magical then. The electricity would go off and that opened up all sorts of possibilities. Now during thunderstorms the electricity always stays on. My earthquake gag resulted in my sister's tears, which gave me a great feeling of satisfaction. I laughed hysterically. Her tears were proof of the believability of my performance. When I think of that night (which I do occasionally during storms) I feel guilty not only for scaring my sister but for finding such joy in her fear. Still—I can't help likening myself to Prospero and feeling proud of the comparison.



Looking back, I realize just how horny the four boys in that family were. I'm thinking there were several girls in the neighborhood who lost their virginity by those boys.

Some night. I can't remember much of the beginning. But the end will never be forgotten.

My sister was home from college. My brother had already gone to bed but his friend Pat was still there.

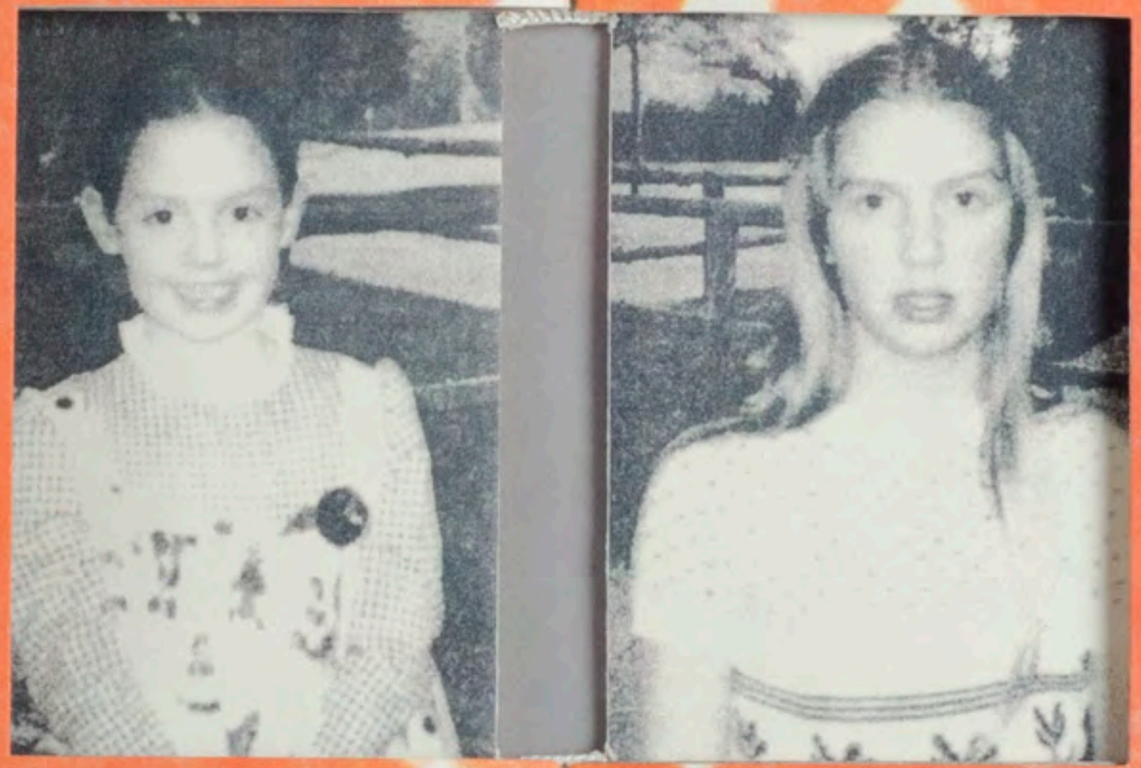
Pat and my sister soon disappeared downstairs, leaving me nothing to do but go to bed.

I was lying in bed when out of the heater vent came all this moaning and groaning from her bedroom in the basement. She was with Pat, my brother's best friend, and my brother was in his room! You can't tell me he wasn't hearing this also.

Late on a weekend night my sister and I were sitting in the living room watching T.V. My brother was out with friends. When he came home Patrick was with him. They were mumbling something slightly incoherently about my brother's girlfriend. It didn't take my brother long to grumble his way to bed. That left Pat, my sister, and myself. After watching a bit of T.V., Patrick suddenly got up and headed downstairs to my bedroom.

Things got very still. I waited for my sister to go to bed. She wasn't going to budge. Finally I got up and went downstairs. I hope she wasn't still in the living room when he left.

I didn't turn the lights on, or if they were on, I turned them off. I was a little scared but I was ready, and Patrick and I had spent many summer nights on the football field that my parents called their lawn doing warm up exercises for this occasion. Losing my virginity to one of the boys I played tackle with in my childhood seemed appropriate, a smooth transition from skirmish to match. Even though I hadn't seen Patrick for years I felt a slight pang of disappointment the day my brother went to his wedding.



I didn't do it. I think the bowl came from Grandma Spencer or maybe someone in her family. Wherever it came from, it sure meant a lot. I am drawn to amber bowls now. I see how beautiful they are and understand the disappointment Mom felt when hers was broken.

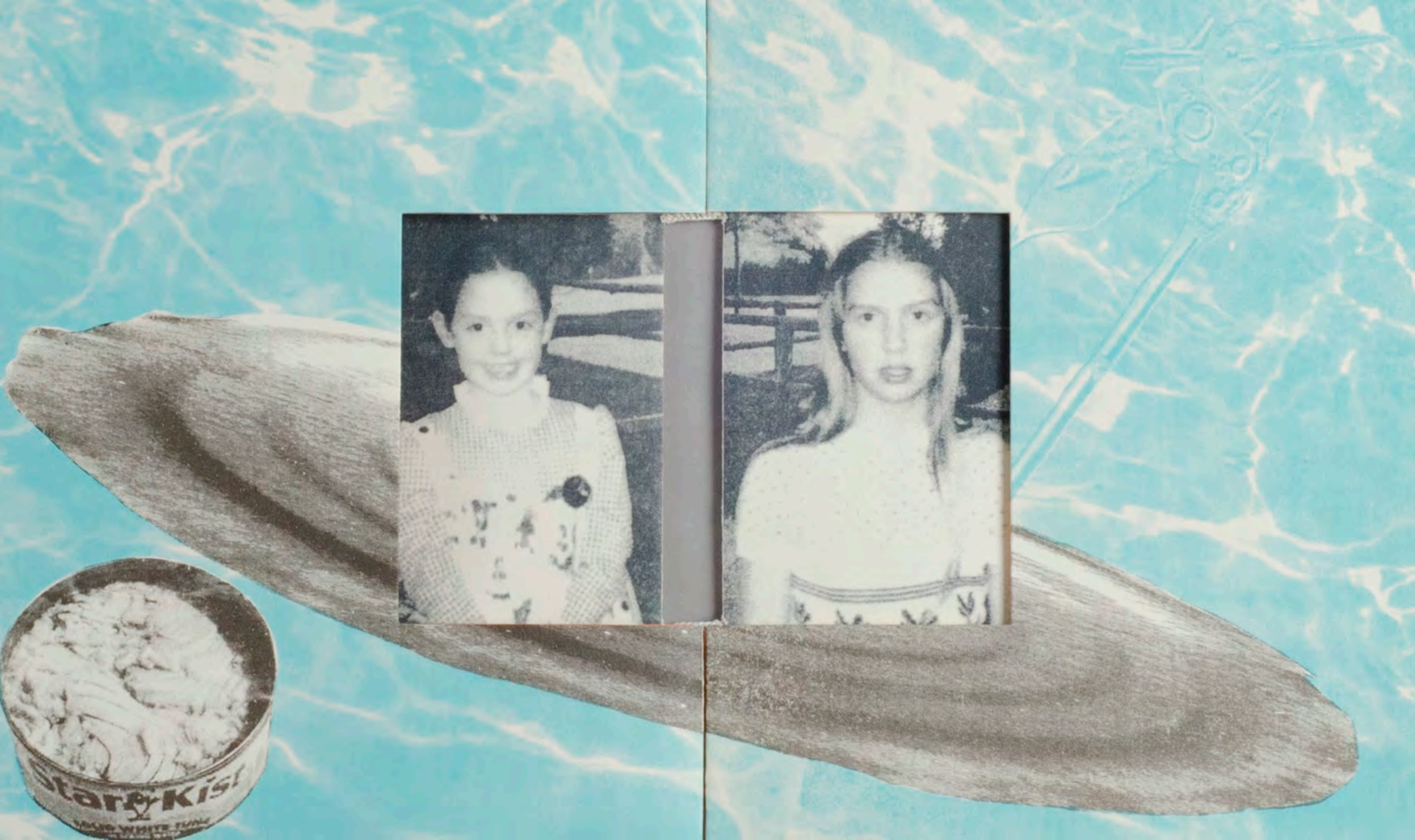
It was Easter Day. We were going to church. Maybe it was just a Sunday. I had put my Baby Wendy on the T.V. the night before because I was going to take her to church. In the morning the bowl was broken. Well, Mom saw that broken bowl and, boy, were we all going to be in trouble.

So I ran away, left a note saying it was my fault. Baby Wendy did it and I ran away. I only ran away to the car. I never ever ran far. To the car was the farthest I ever got.

After I told her Baby Wendy did it, she chilled a bit. Maybe she realized it wasn't so big a deal.

There was a glass amber bowl that sat on the T.V. I didn't consider it anything special until my mother one day found it cracked. Who broke the bowl? she wanted to know. We denied it. In atypical behavior she grounded us until someone fessed up. My sister, feeling the weight of my mother's pain, explained to her that maybe her doll did it. Maybe she accidentally put her doll down next to the bowl and the doll accidentally cracked the bowl and my sister was very sorry if this is what had happened. My sister's tearful confession brought my mother to her senses. She realized that none of us knew how the bowl cracked and her reaction was causing us a huge amount of misery.

The amber glass bowl came from my grandmother or maybe even great grandmother. It had fake fruit in it. The kind of fake fruit that is made up of colored plastic beads held in fruit shapes by pins stuck in styrofoam. I was sorry that my mother was upset, but hurt by the fact that she didn't believe us and a bit resentful of being punished. Maybe my mother even felt responsible for leaving the amber glass bowl out in a vulnerable place.


Starkist

The same day, my sister slammed the door in my face. She had a little bit of iced tea in her cup and she told me I could have it. I took the glass from her and was following her outside, as I took that as my invitation to hang out with them. Wrong as usual. My sister walked out the screen door and let it close behind her, right into me as I was taking a drink from the glass of iced tea. It was a heavy screen door that slammed into the glass. It left a ring around my upper lip and nose. I always loved hanging out with my sister and her friends but I was always unwelcome, by my sister anyway. It always seemed to me like the friends didn't have a problem with my being around.

We had people over that day. I know Katherine was there. I can't remember who else was there.

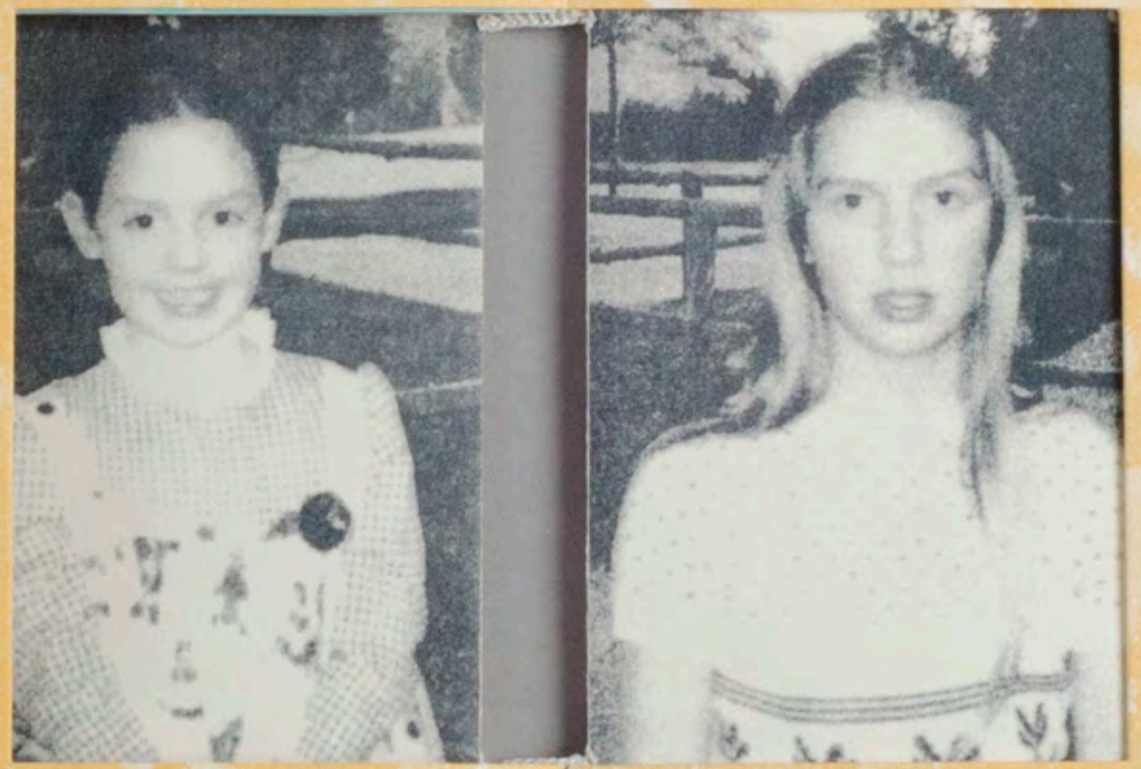
Katherine and my sister decided they wanted tuna fish sandwiches for lunch. My sister went inside to make the sandwiches, which gave me the opportunity to hang out with Katherine since my sister was not there to shoo me away.

My sister came out with blood all over the place. While opening the tuna she cut herself. It was clear she needed to go to the hospital for stitches. More importantly it was clear that Katherine would be babysitting me while Mom and my sister were gone.

It was the middle of summer, late in my girlhood. My best friend Katherine and I were spending the day swimming in my backyard pool. Midday I toweled off and went into the house to make tuna fish sandwiches for the two of us. After opening the can I went to remove the top when freshly cut tin sliced through my thumb. The cut was deep and the material that is normally part of my insides was bursting out of the new opening.

We went to the emergency room, where I got stitches. On the way to the hospital, as I held my thumb in my other hand, I could feel the pounding of my life continuing. With every beat of my heart my thumb responded.

Pain was not the dominant feeling. It was more the sense of amazement that a can of tuna fish could interrupt the etherealness of a lazy summer day by pointing out my physicality. This might be my first acknowledgment of my physical self. It is a memorable juxtaposition for me: the reality of looking down at guts hanging out of a thin deep slit in my thumb on a day that I might otherwise have been one with the water and sky. Another summer Katherine stepped on a rusty nail and we had to make the trip to the emergency room again. For the rest of my life I will confront the opening of a tin can with the concentration it deserves.



Our neighbors asked my family to watch their house for them while they were away on vacation. My sister knew the house well because she had babysat for their son several times. Years later when I confronted her about the peanut brittle, she confessed that the reason she and her friends went to the Bradleys' was to get high. She probably never intended to bring me back peanut brittle. Probably wasn't even any there.

One night Mom and Dad went out and left my sister and brother in charge. Later that evening some of their friends from the neighborhood came over, and the next thing I knew my sister was telling me they were going to the Bradleys' to check on the house. I wanted to go. I begged to go. But they wouldn't let me. As a consolation my sister told me the Bradleys had peanut brittle and she promised to bring some back. When they came back my sister's hands were empty.

No peanut brittle.

When I asked her, she said she forgot. She would not go back.

I remember I was house sitting for the neighbors down the street. I went down there to do whatever it is one has to do when one house sits, and I brought my friends. One of my friends brought his bong. I guess it was after I did all my house sitting duties that we went into the garage and got high.

When I went home. I went into the bathroom, peed and washed my hands. When I looked into the mirror I saw that my eyelashes were white.

I was mystified.

She asks me if I remember the time I was going to bring her back the peanut brittle. I don't. She tells me the story. I remember. But I don't remember the peanut brittle. My sister is pregnant with her first child when she tells me her peanut brittle story. It is a rough pregnancy. I send her some peanut brittle in the mail in hopes that it will make up for everything.

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