

Murder in Dead Horse Bay

A dramatic sunset over a body of water. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, some of which are illuminated from below by the setting sun, creating a fiery orange and red glow. The sun is a bright, glowing orb just above the horizon line. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a building or structure is visible against the water and sky.

A Short Story by
William H. Woodroffe

Dead Horse Bay landfill erosion: Along the southernmost shoreline of what is now known as Dead Horse Bay, there is an area of very old landfill that is suffering from extreme erosion. As the shoreline has eroded over the years, the buried garbage that the landfill is comprised of has become exposed, and a tremendous amount of toxins have possibly been allowed to run off into the bay. Visiting the site, the first thing one notices is that the entire shoreline is covered with broken glass and bottles, many of which are marked with a skull and crossbones signifying that they once contained poisonous materials. It is not uncommon to find areas where substances appear to be leeching from the sands below to the surface. This issue seriously needs to be addressed and action needs to be taken to halt the erosion that exposes more landfill to the bay each year.

Jamaica Bay Research and Management Information Network

All characters, except Willy Sutton, Arnold Schuster and John (Chappy)

Maziotta are fictional as well as this story at Barren Island.

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Prologue

At precisely 5 PM Tim Sullivan walked down six flights of stairs from his accounting office of a local radio station in New York City. He did this for the exercise and the extra minutes he saved waiting for the elevator, exactly as he had done for the past 15 years. He walked briskly to the subway entrance on the corner, down the stairs and through the turnstile. At exactly 5:12 he stood at the right spot where the third set of doors of the subway's fourth car would open so that the rush of people carrying him into the subway car could deposit him, if he was lucky, into an empty seat. But he was not usually lucky. Most times he would have to stand for the 45 minute ride. He emerged from the subway and walked the 8 blocks to his home, his wife of 20 years and his two sons. Being an accountant he knew these specifics. He unconsciously kept track of times and events as a routine. But in his conscious mind, for the 45 minutes while on the train he was thinking of other events. He considered himself an urban historian.

Little known facts and incidents populated his curious mind. He could look at a streetscape and easily talk about the area for an hour. He recognized patterns on manhole covers, the vintage of the street lights and knew all the historical events that took place near by. In New York City, almost every street corner has a history. After all, this is a city with 8 million stories.

This night he was thinking about Arnold Schuster. Schuster was, like Tim, an accountant. But instead of an amateur historian, he considered himself an amateur detective. Most accountants don't aspire to fame and fortune and maybe

that is why they develop these peripheral interests, Tim as an historian, Arnold as a detective. Schuster, as it turned out, did in fact become famous. He even landed on the 1950's television show *What's My Line* and claimed his fifteen minutes of fame. Unfortunately it was those fifteen minutes that did him in.

What made Arnold Schuster famous, and what his *Line* was, was that he put Willy Sutton away. It was the same Willy Sutton who responded to the question why he stole from banks, "because that is where the money is". Well, actually what he did was spot Sutton on the subway. The bank robber was evading the police at the time. One night on his way home from work Arnold recognized Sutton sitting across from him in the subway car. He did not get off at his own stop but followed Sutton when he got off the subway and followed him to his safe house. He then alerted the police to his whereabouts. Sutton was soon on his way to the Big House and fame followed Schuster. He delighted in the limelight and, shortly thereafter, was a participant on the TV game show. He was murdered a short time afterward.

His murder was never solved. Although the police suspected one John (Chappy) Mazziotta of committing the crime on behalf of a "friend of a friend", Mazziotta himself was never found. Rumors, legends, and curious minds have suggested that his body helped populate the landfills around Jamaica Bay, obviously without a headstone.

These historic facts were interesting enough, Tim thought, but he wondered if Schuster would have tried to track down Mazziotta? As a fellow accountant he thought he owed it to him to solve the mystery. And so, as the subway rolled into his stop, he thought about Mazziotta and the possibility of solving Schuster's murder.

The Boot

Tim was attracted by the color of the boot lying half buried amid the trash and broken bottles of Bottle Beach. The beach was named for the thousands of bottles, both broken and intact that lay exposed along the western edge of the Barren Island landfill and Dead Horse Bay. Winter storms have been washing away the sand covering the garbage almost since it was completed in the late 1950's. Now, as part of the Gateway National Recreation Area it was somewhat of a curiosity amongst the garbage explorers of Brooklyn. The possibility of finding horse bones adds to its allure but it was the exposed history that drew Tim to the area.

Dead Horse Bay actually doesn't exist anymore despite the current sand hole that bears its name. The original Bay and the land around it, Barren Island, has a history of horse rendering factories and was literally the underbelly of the city. At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, dead horses and other animal carcasses from the great metropolis of New York were brought by barge to the island. Off loaded and carted to the boiling vats in the factories, they were rendered into the early chemicals of the day. The small bay north of the island became known as Dead Horse Bay for obvious reasons but horses were never actually dumped there. They were too valuable as stock for the steaming vats of the factories.

After a number of years the smell and pollution was overwhelming and so it was determined to bury the past. And that is what the city did. Dead Horse Bay was completely filled with trash from the surrounding Brooklyn neighborhoods. It was capped off with sand dredged locally from Jamaica Bay.

The last remaining dredged hole that the city mined to cap the garbage was named Dead Horse Bay and which still bears that name. The filled land became part of Floyd Bennett Field and later Gateway National Recreation Area. Whatever evidence there was of the storied past subsided into obscurity, buried under tons of municipal trash.

The boot Tim saw didn't have the weathered brown patina of most of the other recently revealed artifacts from 60 years ago. An eclectic mix of old license plates, shoes, machinery parts, hub caps, electrical insulators, rolls of linoleum, and even old newspapers carpeted the beach front. All had a brown crust that seemed to be basted by time and weather from a hidden vat of liquid rust. The only things not crusted over were seen at low tide. Then the ground glittered with the glass of the thousands of bottle's that carpet the ground. It would take much more than 60 years to breakdown the clear, brown, blue, green glass. Until then they remain, long since emptied from a time long since past.

But the boot was different. It seemed fresher but not nearly so. What made it really distinguished was that somebody's ankle and lower calf were still sticking out of it. The skin was withered and dark. Almost like tree bark. The ends of the two bones were clearly evident and seemed to be splintered, not cut, as if the bottom half of the leg was just snapped in half and tossed away. There was something else though. As dark as the old skin was, there was a mark on its surface. At first Tim thought it was just a blemish or the result a bruise that had befallen the rest of the body. But no, it was clearly something else. It was a tattoo. It was a tattoo of an anchor. It was the tattoo that sent shivers down his body.

Tim wanted time to decide what to do. The right thing, of course, was to get the police down here so their forensic experts could identify the body, or

what remains of the body if the rest of it was still buried under the trash. Could it actually be Mazziotta, the suspect who might have murdered Arnold Schuster? It would be a fitting end to the mystery of who killed the accountant that fingered Willie Sutton - another accountant solves the crime! He was tempted to call the police right away but the tattoo bothered him. He decided to rebury the boot with the partial leg under some other trash at the site in order to give him time to think.

He looked out at the bay and surrounding area and wondered what the place looked like 60 years ago. But more importantly, what did this anchor tattoo mean as it bothered him but could not think of why. He walked slowly back to his car, about a ten minute walk, and as he walked the sandy path through the phragmites, beach plum bushes he thought about his father.

Dan Sullivan, Tim's father, worked for New York City's Sanitation Department for all of his adult life. In the early years, when Tim was really small, he remembered his father talking about the various garbage dumps around Jamaica Bay and how he had to go to different ones to dump the garbage from his truck. It all seemed so exotic for Tim. Most of the kids saw the garbage men picking up the garbage off the block and teased Tim about what his farther did. But they didn't know where the trucks were going after they left the block or what became of the stuff they just threw out. Tim knew, and felt that was the most interesting part of his father's job.

One of those spots was the filling in of Dead Horse Bay, the exact spot where Tim just found the boot. That is why he came here and to other locations he remembered that his father mentioned where garbage was dumped. But he also remembered something about an anchor tattoo story but could not remember exactly why it was told. Did Mazziotta have an anchor tattoo on his leg? Did

Tim's father know Mazziotta? He decided he needed to do a little more investigation into this before calling in the police to examine the boot and leg. A few more days will not kill anyone he thought. It will give him time to sort things out.

The Photo

Tim loved researching old New York stories and spent a good deal of time at the public library, the city's record office, and local newspaper offices. He visited people in nursing homes and old tenements, trying to piece together parts of stories to find out what really happened so many years ago. It was done, of course, in his "spare" time. His wife didn't really appreciate the time he spent on this but on the other hand she felt it was time others might be out on a golf course or sitting in front of the TV watching a ball game.

The internet gave Tim a vast amount of information at his finger tips so that in recent years there was more time spent in front of a computer than at a library desk. But Tim knew that he could be easily suckered into false information on the internet that could lead to some really bizarre conspiracy theories. He took what he could from the internet but always tried to check some real life sources as well.

He searched in vain for any link between Mazziotta and an anchor tattoo. He didn't think this failure was unusual as the police frequently kept some bits of

information about crimes secret. Then they can identify real information from the flood of accounts gathered from everyone who wishes to be part of the crime investigation. It is not that hard, for someone who is really interested, to put together a crime investigation based on public knowledge and then insert themselves in the narrative if for no other reason, then to occupy their time and elevate their own importance. Tim was not like this. He wished no part of the narrative other than the retelling it to others.

But this situation was different. The tattoo had to be investigated but he was reluctant to investigate why he remembered something about it as a kid. Maybe it had nothing to do with a person or a murder. It was so long ago, maybe it was just a passing reference to sailors that stuck in his head. He remembered that his father had stories of the garbage he dumped at the landfills. Stories of old refrigerators with food still inside, bathtubs filled with water and funny stuff like dolls heads, but not the dolls body, or bicycles that were broken in half. Tim and his friends would spend hours trying to figure out how a bike could be broken in half. They never did figure it out. Maybe it was a story about an anchor that stuck in the back of Tim's head, but he just couldn't remember. Since his father was at the Barren Island landfill maybe he could find some records his father might have kept.

In the attic of his house Tim kept a few boxes of stuff his father had when he died in 1980. Tim's mother died before Dan and so the last years of Dan's life were sort of disorganized. The boxes contained things like Dan's diploma from Madison HS, his Army rejection notice due to a medical condition in 1950, and various photos, of him as a teenager hanging around Brooklyn after World War II.

One photo caught his eye. It was taken in what appeared to be Sheepshead Bay. He could tell the location by the fishing boats and the old walkways down to the water. His father was standing with his arm around a girl that he knew wasn't his mother. His mother was tall and slim, especially at that time although she was not married to Dan until a few years later. The woman Dan had his arm around was shorter and heavier and was dressed like a worker on the fishing docks. On the back of the photo it read "Dottie's Boats, 1953".

Dan heard the name Dotty before and knew she was one of Dad's girlfriends before he married his mother. His mother never liked talking about Dottie, and his father seemed to drop the subject whenever her name came up. It seemed like a topic no one wanted to bring up. It was odd then, that this photo survived. Maybe it was just overlooked.

There were old baseball tickets to Ebbets Field, some old Christmas Cards between his father and mother, old store receipts for things long ago discarded, and some hand written notes that didn't make too much sense of why they were kept. One was an old yellowing receipt from the Great Fishing Fleet in Sheepshead Bay simply had a handwritten note on the back that said "Thanks, love DM". It was dated August 29, 1955. It meant nothing in itself but Tim could only wonder why his father kept it at all. And then he looked again on the front of the receipt. At first he didn't notice anything but on the bottom right hand corner there was a faint hand drawn mark. It was an anchor. The same style anchor as the one he saw on the leg in the Dead Horse Bay landfill a few days ago. He knew he had to find Dotty before he could turn the boot and leg over to the police.

Dotty Mallory

Tim knew that he would never discover anything about Dotty on the internet or papers. He didn't even have a last name. He decided to take a drive over to Emmons Ave and try to talk to some of the older locals to see if they knew of a Dotty.

Tim knew that there's not much left of the old Sheepshead Bay in Sheepshead Bay. A wave of condo building, an influx of Russian and East European immigrants, and the decline of fishing has wiped out most of the past. Lundy's, the famous seafood palace on the water stands only as a shell of its former self. The interior is carved up into trinket, delis, and other nondescript businesses where 60 years ago there was once a grand dining room said to be the largest dining room in NYC at the time. It was filled with Sunday diners eating lobster dinners, and fisherman eating raw clams at the indoor/outdoor clam bar. Most restaurants now are ethnic enclaves. Only two bait and tackle shops servicing fisherman remain in the area. Tim had a hard time finding anyone that even remembered the Sheepshead Bay of 60 years ago.

As he was walking down Emmons Avenue, he noticed an old house that seemed to be carved out of the surrounding area. It was actually surrounded on three sides by a parking lot for an old age home. It looked out of place and was clearly a relic of the past. On the front porch sat an old man who was staring across the street at the water in Sheepshead Bay.

Tim took a chance and walked up to the old man. He thought he might have been a resident of the old age home next door and didn't know what to expect from him. As he got closer he realized that the man probably couldn't see

so he called out and said, “Hi, hope I’m not disturbing you, but I wonder if I can have a word with you”.

The old man didn’t react but only said “I’ll make it back home ok, I know where I’m at.”

Tim asked, “Do you live at the home next door? I don’t want to disturb you if you rather I didn’t.”

Tim was very conscious of not upsetting older people if he was going to grill them with a lot of questions. But he found out that most older people like to talk about the past when asked but needed to be guided otherwise they will go off into stories, interesting as they are, that have little to do with what he is after.

His name was Joe Churchill and lived in Sheepshead Bay for most of his 90 years on the planet. He was a pipe fitter by trade and worked downtown but also along the waterfront. Never liked fishing but always liked the bay and the smell of fresh air. Tim made small talk until he came up to the reason he was down at the Bay. Did you know a woman named Dotty? She worked around the docks in the 1950’s. That put a smile on his face and Joe said the only Dotty he knew was Dotty with the Boats and her real name was Dorothy Mallory. She worked across the street on the waterfront with her brothers. They had a fleet of fishing boats.

Joe went on, “What were their names? The Big fleet? The Fast fleet? Oh, I remember, it was the Great Fleet.”

Tim remembered the receipt his father had from the Great Fishing Fleet of Sheepshead Bay. The old man could be trusted. He may be able to fill in Tom with some more details. But all Joe could tell him was that Dotty rented row boats at her family’s business and didn’t know a Dan Sullivan.

Tim asked if he knew where Dotty was now or what became of her. “She never married.” With a grin he said, “I think she liked running around with all the boys too much for settelin’ down with just one.”

Tim had the feeling that Joe may have been one of those boys but didn’t know how to ask him. Instead he asked him what happened to the owners of the Great Fleet. Are there any relatives in Sheepshead Bay?

“They all drifted off after a time. Others sailed in and took their berths. Other than Dotty that family was never very friendly anyway. I don’t think many missed them. Things were different then, there was a lot of fun around the boats and the water. Today is different, just a lot of cars and people running all over the place.”

Sadness overtook Joe as he seemed to see, despite his blindness, that whatever the world was like then it was gone for good.

“I think they had some family in Staten Island maybe Dotty is over there. Other than that I don’t know.”

Tim headed for Staten Island to track down Dotty with the Boats.

It was not difficult to track down Dotty Mallory in Staten Island. A few visits to some nursing homes, phone calls and a few bucks to some receptionists later, he found her at the Richmond Home, a small nursing home with less than 100 patients waiting for the next great stage of their life, the hereafter.

Dotty was bed ridden and slept most of the day in her on again off again awareness of the surroundings. She has been here for the last 10 years, the beneficiary of unknown relatives, probably one of her brothers. She didn’t expect nor receive many visitors and seemed content to watch some TV, have a few words with the attendants and face the unavoidable alone. As a previously very

active person, this looked like a depressing end to her life. But she seemed resigned to living the last few years in peace and tranquility.

Tim spoke to her in a quite voice, as her hearing was quite good.

“Miss Mallory, I’m Tim Sullivan, maybe you remember my father Dan Sullivan”.

Dotty looked puzzled as he stood there hoping she would instantly recognize the name. Of course, Dan and Dotty were friends many years ago and he didn’t know how good her memory was so it was no surprise when she said, “Who’s Dan Sullivan?”

“I have a picture of you and Dan, my father, taken in Sheepshead Bay back in the 1950’s”. He handed the photo to Dotty. “I was hoping to ask you some questions about...”

“I told them all I knew at the time, I don’t remember anything else. Why do you keep asking me about it?”

Tim was taken aback as he was not expecting this response. What was she talking about? And who kept asking about it?

“Miss Mallory, I really don’t know what you are referring to as we only just met and I was hoping to ask you about my father, Dan.”

She took a deep breath and seemed to force herself to remember.

“Dan was a great help to me. Not like Jimmy. Is he still driving his truck? Maybe he can make a few extra bucks here, I think I can get them to give him some garbage if it would help. Well, maybe not, I don’t have any money left.”

With that, another older resident stuck her head into the door and said, “Hi Dotty, got a visitor I see.”

“Well, yeah, but he’s no help to me.”

With that she seemed to drift off to sleep. Tim didn't know what to do or say as he didn't want to disturb her but also wanted to know what she was talking about. And who is or was Jimmy?

He followed the older resident down the hall to the lounge to see if she knew anything about Dotty. "Miss, I'm Tim Sullivan and my father was a friend of Dotty a long time ago. I was hoping to ask Dotty about my father but she seems, well confused. Do you know Dotty well?"

"As well as anyone here, I suppose. I have been here since she came in 10 years ago and she seems more, as you say confused, every year. Apparently she was some character when she was younger, according to her stories. We used to have long talks when she first came here but the last few years time is taking it's toll. By the way, my name is Margaret, call me Maggie. Maybe I can remember some of her stories."

This seemed like good news and Tim hoped Maggie could help but it was near dinner time so she was off to the dining room. He had to come back next week to talk to her more.

"Can I see you next week? If that is ok with you"

"I'll be here. Maybe Dotty will be too."

With that Tim left the nursing home and drove back to Queens thinking that whatever stories Maggie and Dotty could remember, they probably didn't involve John Mazziotta or a leg with a tattoo. Or maybe they did. Who knows what they will tell him.

At work during the week Tim couldn't stop thinking about Dotty and his father. He only heard that name mentioned a few times and then it was quickly dropped from the conversation. But now he actually met her and wondered if he really wanted to know what the story was. As far as he knew his father was a

faithful husband and an honest worker. No deep dark secrets or skeletons in the closet as far as he knew. And yet there was a nagging thought in the back of his head. Surly, a former love of his father's life, Dotty, would not be a welcomed conversation in the home, especially around his mother. But it must have been more than that. The photo was never in the family photo album but in a box in the attic. The cryptic "Thank you" note was saved. The anchor tattoo could be a coincidence. Tim hoped Dotty, Maggie or Joe Churchill could fill in some details.

Jimmy Reynolds

Early Saturday, before the rest of his family was awake, Tim reviewed the Brooklyn Eagle newspaper on line and searched for the Great Fleet. Maybe there was news about the boats in Sheepshead Bay that might be interesting. He found some ad's in the sport section advertising the party boats, *Great Bank*, *Great Sea* and *Great Wave*, sailing from Sheepshead Bay every day for fluke, flounder, bass and runs to the Canyon for tuna. They were operated by the Mallory family who also rented row boats to those who wanted to fish in Jamaica Bay. Not much else was mentioned but there was a short article, this time in the news section, about a fishing boat running into a bait barge in Jamaica Bay in the fog. Little damage was caused and the boat, the *Great Bank*, sailed off without the crew looking back. The article reported that a Jimmy Reynolds complained to the Coast Guard but since there was no damage, no action was taken. It did not

say who Jimmy Reynolds was but Tim wondered if he was the same “Jimmy” Dotty referred to.

Tim was going to Staten Island to meet with Dotty and Maggie on Sunday. Later today he would drive to Sheepshead Bay and talk to Joe and ask him about someone named Jimmy. After he had breakfast with his wife and a quick glance at the newspaper, he told his wife he was off to Sheepshead Bay.

“You sure are putting a lot of time into this project”, his wife Lin said. “All for a possible man hunt 60 years after the fact?”

Tim never mentioned to Lin that he found a boot with a part of the leg. He had to have some more details before he would say anything to anyone. He loved his wife but she did not share his enthusiasm for old forgotten stories. Just as well, he thought, I’d rather keep this to myself for the time being.

Tim again found Joe sitting on the porch of the old house on Emmons Ave.

“Jimmy? If you’re talking about Jimmy Reynolds, sure I remember him.”

Joe seemed to know Jimmy well as he was a friendly chap who always seemed to know all his customers by name. Joe started talking about Jimmy as if he was waiting for someone to ask about him all his life.

“Sitting on a barge waiting for boaters to come by to buy gas, bait or snacks may not have been everyone’s idea of a great job. But Jimmy loved it. Fresh air and the smell of bait, what more could you ask for?”

Jimmy inherited his bait and fuel barge that sat in the middle of Jamaica Bay from his uncle. Actually, I think it was off Plumb Beach. He was young, maybe 25 or 26 and he thought he had inherited a fortune. He could fish all day, BS with his customers, and not be bothered with a boss looking over his

shoulder. The best part was that there was no landlord or problems with neighbors. At least not out in the middle of Jamaica Bay. He had some life.”

“What happened to him? Is he still around?”

“No, he’s not around anymore. That’s where Dotty comes in. You see, he had a great time out on the water but ashore was another matter. I knew Jimmy when he came ashore at night. After work I came down here because I lived nearby and he lived over in Gravesend. I would see him down at Lundy’s and we would order platters of raw clams and mugs of Ballentine beer. I wasn’t into fishing so I only listened to his stories about his day on the barge. But both of us, being good Brooklynite’s, rooted for the Dodgers and called the other team the damn Yankees. You know ‘55 was the Dodger’s summer as they lead the league all season and eventually beat the Yanks in seven games for the world title. That was a great summer. That was also the last summer anyone saw Jimmy. I guess Jimmy never did see them win the series.”

“So what happened to him? Did he move away?”

Joe just sat there thinking. Tim wondered why he didn’t go on with his story. He seemed to hesitate and seemed reluctant to go on.

“Well, I don’t really know. There was a storm that came through in August. I was working in downtown Brooklyn at the time. The next day I heard that Jimmy wasn’t around. After a while, it seemed that nothing had changed but no one seemed to care what became of him”. There was sadness in his voice as if some past memories were better left undisturbed.

“You said Dotty had something to do with him.”

The sadness left his voice and he said, “She sure did!”

“Dorothy Mallory, know as Dotty, was like a barnacle on an otherwise smooth hull. She was part of the Mallory family in Sheepshead Bay that ran three

party fishing boats – the Great Bank, the Great Sea and the Great Wave. The family of six brothers and sisters grew up in Sheepshead Bay and took advantage of the old Coast Guard boats after the war to get into the party boat business. Dotty was short and stout and could easily handle any job her brothers did out on the water but didn't because her father and brothers thought it would be bad luck. So they let her run the fuel and bait shop ashore in Sheepshead Bay. She also ran the small boat rental shop and became known as Dotty with the Boats. Anyone not going out on a party fishing boat was directed to Dotty with the Boats.

Dotty was a few years older than Jimmy but they knew most of the crowd that hung out along Emmons Ave. Dotty, and her family were the only serious competition Jimmy had. Fisherman renting boats from Dotty didn't need Jimmy's barge service unless they ran out of bait. Jimmy's barge was more convenient out on the water and he was much more friendly to the fisherman. Dotty and her family, although respected, seemed to run roughshod over their customers. That may explain the names of their boats.

All was well, if not cordial until August of '55. The story was that the *Great Bank* ran into Jimmy's bait barge and almost sank it in questionable weather. The family claimed it was fog but Jimmy believed old man Mallory was 3 sheets to the wind when he ran directly into the barge at full speed. No one was hurt and the barge survived but for the rest of the month Dotty and Jimmy were at each others throats.

At night, after all the work was done, she would be down at Lundy's. After a dozen Ballentines, Dotty could match whatever Jimmy was downing. They would be going after each like you wouldn't believe. Lundy's had a great big dining room with the bar at one end. When the two got going you could hear them from one end of the hall to the other. Old man Lundy had to come down

and kick them both out! Jimmy retreated to Brennan and Carr's for a late night sandwich while Dotty crawled off to her room above the boat dock. It seemed that these two were always at opposite ends of a small boat, and could never agree on anything."

Tim thought all this was interesting but didn't shed any light on his father's relationship with Dotty. As far as he knew his father never really hung out in Sheepshead Bay and was never into fishing or boating. He wondered if Joe knew of any other names that either Jimmy or Dotty argued about or became involved with.

"Oh, I guess there were many people that got between them, mostly I guess customers. Old man Comer was one of them."

This startled Tim. The last name he was expecting to hear was Comer. His mother's maiden name was Comer.

"Did you know a Joyce Comer?" asked Tim.

"I knew of old man Comer's two daughters, Joyce and Susan. Never met them but knew Jimmy was really sweet on Joyce. He used to talk about her and her father and how they always bought bait from him at the barge. That was the problem because they rented the boat from Dotty but nothing else. I don't know if they ever went out with each other but he sure wanted to."

"And you never heard of Dan Sullivan?" asked Tim. Tim already asked him about his father but found it hard to believe that his name never rang a bell.

"No, not that I remember."

Tim's mother died before Dan died and so he could not ask her about Jimmy or to fill in any of the blanks. At least he had some information and could ask Dotty about some other names he had. He looked forward to his meeting with Dotty and Maggie on Sunday.

The Storm

Dotty was awake when Tim entered her room. The sun was shining through the Venetian blinds and Dotty seemed in deep in thought, staring out into the courtyard of the nursing home.

“Hi Dotty, glad to see you again. Remember me, Tim Sullivan? I was here last week asking about my father Dan Sullivan.”

Dotty turned slowly and just looked at Tim. It took her a few minutes and then slowly said, “You look like your father, is he ok?”

“Dad died a few years ago. I was hoping to talk to you about your time in Sheepshead Bay. Maybe you remember Jimmy Reynolds?”

Dotty sat up and her eyes lit up for a moment and said “Don’t know what happened. Don’t really care.” She then lay back on her bed and gave a sigh.

“Who was Jimmy?” asked Tim. Of course he knew the answer but needed to know if Dotty could verify what Joe had told him.

“Jimmy was a pain in my butt. But your father was a great friend.” She seemed very reluctant to talk about Jimmy. “We had some great times together down on the waterfront. He never liked going out on the water, which was fine by me. All the other boys wanted free bait and free boat rides but Dan and I liked the shore life! He did good by me too. He made a few extra bucks picking up some of my garbage with his truck. In those days the garbage men didn’t make a lot of money so when he came by he took some of my garbage to the dump.”

“Did you know Joyce Comer?”

“The Comer girl? Yeah, I remember her. A little snooty. She was sweet on Jimmy until he went away. Wait, didn’t she marry your father? God, that was

ages ago. Never did see what he saw in her. Anyway that was after the good times. Don't remember much after that."

"Good morning Tim". Maggie stuck her head into the room just as Dotty seemed to be drifting off.

"Hi Maggie, good to see you again. I was just talking to Dotty about her times in Sheepshead Bay. She looks to be dozing off. Mind if we talk in the lounge?"

Tim asked Maggie if she heard any stories concerning Jimmy Reynolds, Joyce Comer, or Dan Sullivan. She said that the names sounded familiar and recounted a story Dotty told a few years ago.

"It was a strange night. I remember it because we had a terrible thunderstorm and the lights were flickering, the wind was howling, and the rain and lightning. It was some storm! I was in Dottie's room and she was looking out at the terrible weather and told me about a storm like that and the day a guy named Jimmy left and how everyone tried to blame her. Seems Jimmy was a competitor to her business and they never really liked each other. But this day they had a big argument just before the storm came through Sheepshead Bay. She said they were arguing out on the street and many others heard them and that is what got her into trouble. But during the storm she said things worked out and she knew she would not have to deal with him any more. He was gone and would not come back. The next day, after the storm, the police came by asking her about Jimmy. Seemed he disappeared during the storm. Dotty swears that she saw him go out in a little boat just before the storm came but others said they never saw Jimmy leave Dottie's dock. That is all she ever said about that but I always felt there was more to it than that."

Tim took notes and thanked Maggie for the story and said that he was sure he would be back soon.

Tim thought it was time to visit his Uncle Jack and Aunt Susan. They lived out on Long Island and were both well into their 90's. He needed a little more information about how his father met his mother.

Tim knew Dan Sullivan was fresh out of James Madison High School when he was ready to join the Army and serve his country in World War II. A medical condition prevented him from doing so and so he took odd jobs around Brooklyn until he got a job in the Sanitation Department. It didn't pay much but there were good benefits and he fell in with the civil service workers well.

He also knew that Dan met Joyce Comer, his mother, one night at a Knights of Columbus dance and was immediately attracted to her. They went on dates, went to dinner at Tappan's in Sheepshead Bay but there seemed to be a gap between that time and the time they married.

According to Aunt Sue, at first Joyce never seemed completely comfortable being around Dan. He always seemed to have an eye out for other girls around him. One of the other girls turned out to be Dotty Mallory.

For a time Dotty became Dan's drinking pal. They were out at all hours of the night as his schedule with the Sanitation Dept. brought him home at odd hours. There was nothing serious between them but over time they did become a couple. Formalities like weddings and rings didn't seem needed despite the times they lived in. Joyce knew them and the other girls Dan hung around with but she was interested in someone else. A guy on a barge out in the middle of Jamaica Bay named Jimmy.

As Aunt Sue explained it, something happened to Jimmy and Dan seemed to change. He started to date Joyce again, and after a while they fell in love and got married.

No wonder his father never talked about Dotty. His mother was not going to discuss her either but how did Jimmy fit into the picture? Tim wondered about Jimmy Reynolds and what happened to him that night.

Police Report

The police reports of 1955 were stored in the basement of the old archive building in Manhattan. Tim knew the clerk and could, after some fancy talk, get to see what he needed. The report of Jimmy Reynolds was short and without many details. Possible foul play was mentioned as there were some accounts of arguments heard, interviews were made, but nothing was conclusive. The report ended by saying Mr. Reynolds apparently perished in a storm that went through Jamaica Bay on August 23, 1955. His body was never found. What caught his eye was the description of Mr. Reynolds. He was 5'-8", 190 lbs, dark hair, medium build with some distinguishing marks, including tattoos. On his left arm was a tattoo of a heart with the fishing pole in it. On his right arm was a tattoo of an eagle. On his lower left leg a tattoo of an anchor.

The sanitation records were a little more difficult to find. Each district had their own records and there was no orderly way to track them down after 60

years. But Tim was not discouraged and did manage to find the Brooklyn records of 1955 in the basement of the districts building in Canarsie. The records didn't mention particular drivers or crews but Tim knew his father was driving a garbage truck when the Sanitation Dept. starting filling in Dead Horse Bay. The years of horse rendering factories were over, squatters were driven out of Barren Island, Floyd Bennett Field was active and so the bay was filled with garbage. Tractors leveled the refuse, and sand was dredged from Jamaica Bay to cover it over.

There were no mention, of course, of extra private pick ups that some of the trucks made. Hearing Dottie's story about how Dan picked up her extra garbage, he could see how easily it could have been done. Trucks were dispatched to streets for pick up and then left unsupervised to drive to various dump sites. Stopping off along the way would not be hard. Before dumping his load Dan could stop off at a few local places and pick up some commercial garbage for good "friends" and pick up an extra 10 or 20 bucks. Not bad for a few extra minutes work. Dotty was one of his good "friends". Stopping on Emmons Ave., he could pick up some residential garbage and at the same time stop in at Dottie's and pickup the fish scraps and other garbage that they would have to pay a commercial hauler to pick up. He couldn't help to think about the "Thank You" note and the anchor tattoo.

The Phone Call

It was a Thursday afternoon when Maggie called. She said Tim should come over to the nursing home as soon as possible. Tim didn't expect the call so he wondered what was up. He left work a little early to go home and get his car to go to Staten Island. Along the way he couldn't stop speculating on what might have happened the night Jimmy disappeared.

He must have drowned during the storm and his body washed up on Barren Island. It was the most logical thing that could have happened. It was a simple accident that contains no mystery. The boot and leg was Jimmy's and so the case is solved. So what did Maggie want?

Maggie met Tim at the entrance and said Dotty was fading away but she wanted to tell Tim something. Tim walked into Dottie's room and saw her so frail that he had a hard time believing she was the same person he saw a week ago, never mind the rough and ready women working on a waterfront in Sheepshead Bay.

"Maggie said you wanted to tell me something. Was it about my father?"

In a low whispering voice Dotty said yes.

"Dan was a good friend, a very good friend. I just want you to know that. He helped me out but maybe he didn't feel I was thankful enough, but I was. I just didn't show it. I just want you to know that."

Tim didn't understand and wanted to know what his father did to help Dotty out. Sure he picked up trash, but what else? Dotty didn't seem to offer any other information.

Tim reached into his pocket and pulled out the old receipt with the “Thank You” on it. He handed it to Dotty and asked if she remembered writing it. Her eyes teared up and said yes. He was not willing to let it go at that point. Dotty would soon be gone and whatever happened that night would go with her. Did he really need to know more details? Or maybe he didn’t want to know the details. He asked her what happened the night Jimmy Reynolds disappeared.

“We had an argument, as we always did, just before a big storm came up. Who knows why, we were always arguing about something, but this was bigger and louder than ever. When the storm came up Jimmy got into his boat and headed out to his barge. I followed him in my boat and met him on his barge to continue the argument. Why, I don’t know. After shouting at each other in the wind and rain I jumped into my boat to head for shore. Lightning was everywhere and as soon as I got in my boat I looked back and barely saw Jimmy in his yellow slicker standing on his barge. A big lightening flash lit up the sky and when I looked back I didn’t see Jimmy. I don’t know what happened in the rain and wind but that was the last I saw of him. He must have fallen into the water. I just motored away and didn’t look back. I never saw him again, but I was so angry that night. By the time I got back to my dock Dan was there with his truck and picked up some of my garbage and saw how angry I was. I told him I pushed Jimmy off his barge, which I didn’t, and hoped he would drown. I was so angry. I think it made him mad just seeing how mad I was. He picked up the garbage and drove off. Later that night he came back to me and said Jimmy will not be bothering me anymore. How do you know, I asked? We both made a promise that we would never say anything to anyone about that night. And we didn’t.”

Dotty hesitated but then went on, “He said that when he went to dump his trash that night at Barren Island he saw Jimmy washed up by the dump site.

He didn't know if he was alive or dead but he wanted to protect me and so he dumped his truck load of garbage on him and left. Maybe he wasn't dead but I was glad that he was out of my hair. But for some reason after that night, we both changed. We didn't really go out with each other, too afraid of what we knew and thought it best just to forget about it. I think we both regretted that night but there was nothing we could do to change it. Jimmy drowned from falling off his barge. Dan didn't do anything wrong but we were too afraid to tell our story. Now that Dan is gone, and I'm on my way, maybe it will be all forgiven."

Dotty gave a sigh. Like a weight lifted from her shoulders she fell asleep. By the morning she had passed away.

Death bed confessions are not unusual and maybe it was good that Dotty was able to free her conscious. But now Tim was burdened with the thought of his father as a possible murderer or at least an accomplice to murder. He wondered if his father married Joyce Comer as some effort toward redemption. He hoped it was, as he never confessed to any of this, at least not that he was aware of.

Tim returned to Barren Island, to the spot he found the shoe and leg. It was still where he left it and thought of his father, so many years ago, looking out and making a fateful decision. He thought the past is past and what was buried by previous generations, for good or bad, should remain undisturbed. He reburied the shoe and leg deeper under the garbage of 60 years ago and walked away. He also buried the photo of Dotty and his father and the note under the same garbage. He was sure that those papers wouldn't last too long and would soon be dust. He could bury the past, he thought, but he inherited the guilt of his father. That would be much more difficult to bury.

The End