The Cinder Path

By Town Travis

CHAPTER 1: Reflections in Fire

Yellville, Arkansas, July 2005

Betty Grove stood by the burning barrel in slippered feet, cloaked in a massive black winter coat that hung to her knees. The summer sun was hot on her back and shimmering tendrils of heat reached out from the fire, caressing her skin. There had been times when the eager flames had escaped their confinement in the rusted metal can and singed her eyebrows and crinkled the hair on her wiry forearms. She felt the heat. But now her circulation wasn't as good as it had been in her youth, and she wasn't bothered as much by the thick fabric of the coat and the glaring rays of the sun. The coat was for protection – but not from the elements, since snow was unlikely to fall in the Ozarks even during winter, let alone July. Instead, Betty believed the heavy coat would dissuade the swarms of Arkansas mosquitoes that rose from the dew-soaked ground and attacked her bare legs at the first light of dawn.

She lifted a charred broom handle, the bristles long gone – sacrificed to former fires, and plunged it into the barrel. Her wrinkled knuckles tensed as she forcefully stirred the fire. It was filled with crumpled bills and credit card offers, empty TV dinner boxes and the rest of the family's garbage collected during the past few hours. Betty couldn't bear to let trash accumulate, so she often found herself standing alone beside the old burning barrel. The flames leaped up higher as she prodded the ashy heap and exposed untouched piles of paper, previously protected by their burning comrades and still pristinely white despite their charred edges. Many of the pages were torn in small pieces, for Betty feared that some vital bit of personal information

would escape the flames and rise on the powerful updraft of heat to drift away into the hands of an identity thief.

She took a step back as the orange and blue of the fire shot up to the top of the decrepit barrel. Its top was rusted through in spots and the fire could get out and attack her long white hair that hung in unkempt disarray about her gaunt face. In the black coat, with the white smoke swirling around her, her appearance was suggestive of a traditional Halloween witch. A tongue green flame erupted as the fire touched an old ammonia-soaked *Mountaineer Echo* rescued from beside the cat box inside Betty's rundown A-frame house, only to meet its fate in her burning barrel.

Her faded brown eyes gazed thoughtfully at the conflagration of withering trash. Betty remembered tending another fire in the alley outside her home in Floresville, Texas, almost 50 years past. The memory made the corners of her mouth turn up in a wryly-whimsical smile. Still, her eyes held a hint of sadness. Time may take the edge off, but a sword is still a sword.

Floresville, Texas, June 1961

The phone rang, its shrill tones echoing through the dilapidated antebellum-style house. A few moments later, Betty Grove was awakened by a knock at the apartment door.

"Mrs. Grove! Mrs. Grove! Telephone!" a woman's voice called from outside.

Startled, Betty arose from the double bed where her two young daughters were stirring to wakefulness and hurried across the room to the door. Pausing for a moment, Betty ran her hand through her wavy chestnut hair. Her eyes were a deep shade of brown with short, straight lashes and her nose hinted at a touch of Native American ancestry, although as far as she knew her people were all Scotch-Irish or German. She had wide shoulders, large capable hands and a

generous mouth. Her frame was the type men used to admire for its childbearing potential. One of her daughters later described her as resembling the goddess Demeter.

Betty opened the door to see her landlady, Lola Canfield, a short, stooped old woman with dyed red hair and gentle blue eyes.

"You have a phone call, Mrs. Grove," Mrs. Canfield said. "It's long distance."

"Thank you," Betty responded. "It's probably Ed, calling from New York."

She stepped outside and followed Mrs. Canfield across the sharp angle of the front porch that separated her door from the main doors of the Canfield house. The soft light of the Texas moon lit the scene. The scent of jasmine and the chirping of crickets filled the sultry night air. Betty walked into the part of the house where the landlady lived. The phone rested on a small table beside the staircase that led to the upper storey. As Betty lifted the receiver to her ear, she noticed that Valerie, her thirteen-year-old daughter, had followed her into the dimly lit hallway, excited at the prospect of a phone call from her father. Since the family had no phone of their own, it was a special treat to receive calls, especially if they were long distance. Valerie was close to five feet tall, small for her age. Her light brown hair, similar to her mother's, contained red highlights that showed up in sunlight – a throwback to her paternal grandfather. Her eyes were the pale green of new spring leaves – her father's eyes – and she had a sweet, round face, a small bow of a mouth and an upturned nose. Her skin was fair. She watched intently as her mother answered the phone. She would have preferred to answer it herself.

"Hello," Betty said into the receiver. Instantly she could tell that Helen Grove, her mother-in-law, was upset. Time stood still while Betty listened and made responses. The crickets continued their untroubled concert.

After hanging up, she turned to see Valerie staring at her in surprise and fear.

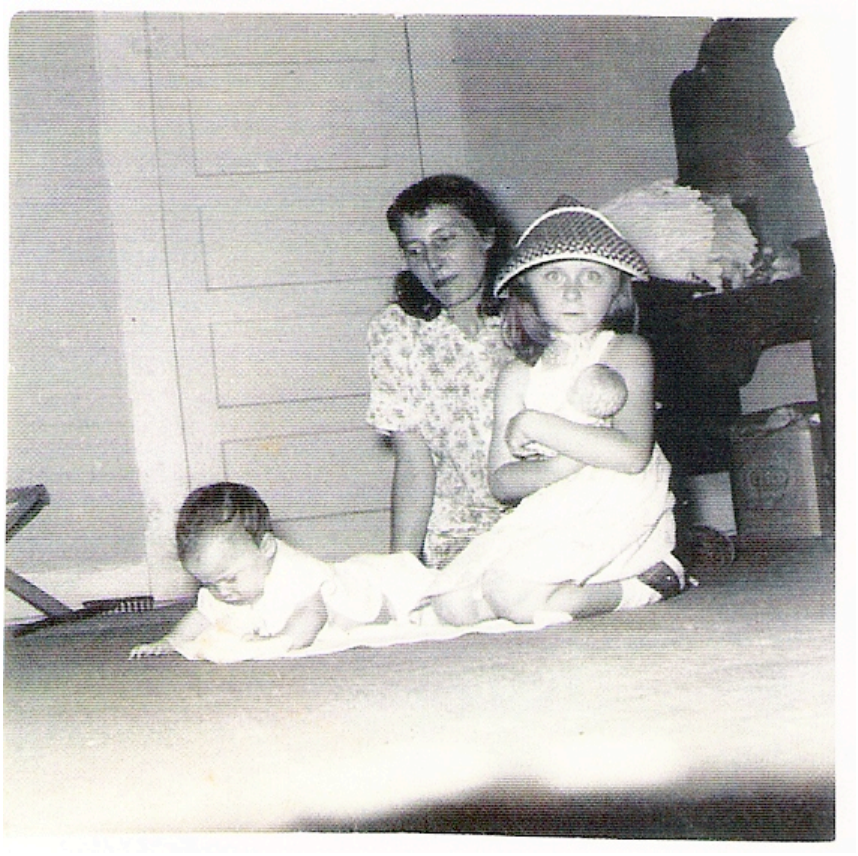
"Mama, was that Pop?" Valerie asked.

Betty felt the tears cascading down her face. "No, it was Grandma Grove," she said, brokenly. "She says he's dead."

Valerie began to cry and stumbled forward to fall into her mother's arms.

After exchanging a few faltering words with Mrs. Canfield, Betty found herself back in the apartment. It was dark, but she didn't care to turn on any lights. She sat on the edge of the bed, holding Valerie as they both cried. Only inches away, six-year-old Lenore watched her sister and mother, intrigued by their tears and by what her mother said had happened. This was one of the most interesting things to occur in Lenore's life so far. She gazed raptly at her family. Her eyes were green, darker than her sister's, with brown flecks. People often thought they were grey. She had dark brown hair, which was always tangled from her constant twirling of it. A small child, she looked younger than her age.

Lenore, who was named by her father after the lamented lady in Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven," had few memories of her father prior to her parents' divorce in 1957. In the three and a half years since then, his visits had left a tender impression, but now she couldn't quite grasp how his being dead was any different from his being in New York. Either way, he was gone.



Betty with her daughters, Lenore and Valerie, several years before Ed's death.

Before the dawn, Betty received a call from someone whose voice sounded just like Ed's. Relief and joy overwhelmed her.

"Oh, Ed, I knew it wasn't true!" Betty exclaimed delightedly.

But it was only Ed's brother, William Grove, calling to commiserate. He said, "I'm sorry, Betty. It's Bill."

Relief was short lived.

The next day Betty took Valerie and Lenore to their scheduled swimming lesson. She thought it was better for them to do normal things. While her children swam, Betty wept. Later she said, "I cried the whole time and nobody ever noticed," as if it was a source of pride that she had maintained appearances.

The girls' swimming coach would toss coins in the pool for the girls to dive and retrieve. Lenore was unaccustomed to men telling her what to do. The coach had a no-nonsense manner, and Lenore got upset with him once and walked away, muttering one of her favorite insults under her breath: "Cat mess." The coach heard her and called her back.

"What did you call me?" he asked, sternly.

"I didn't call you anything," she lied. "I was just talking to myself."

She never challenged the coach's authority again.

Valerie kept a diary and recorded her thoughts after the news of her father's death. She had already filled up the page for June 26 with a 13-year-old girl's perspective of the mundane happenings of the day, so she just underlined the date to signify its importance and wrote about it in the space for the next day.

June 27

Dear Diary,

Last night Grandma called and said that a hospital in New York called to tell her to identify a man they think is Pop. Oh DD [Dear Diary]*, it can't be true! Pop can't be dead and I won't believe it until they know for sure. It just can't happen, 'cause I love Pop too much. I hope crying helps, 'cause Mama and I did a lot of it.*

In the morning we took our lesson, which was O.K.

O, I hope it's not true! Pop was so sweet and I loved him so much. Now maybe I don't even have a father anymore.

The next day she wrote:

Whenever I think of poor Pop, I'm so sad. It's such a pity.

Ed's mother, Helen, took care of the funeral arrangements, but Betty paid for them. It cost $800 out of the $2,000 left by Ed's insurance policy. With the remaining money, Betty bought her first car, a green and white Ford that the family named "Chain Lightning." Betty told her children she couldn't afford the trip to Pennsylvania for Ed's funeral. However, she probably didn't want to go back to her birthplace for fear of meeting her father.

Ed was buried at the Spring Hill Cemetery in Shippensburg. Helen had a double stone placed on his grave, but instead of bearing his wife's name opposite to his, his mother's name appeared there. She wanted to be buried next to her son because she cared for him very deeply. Also, she and Betty had never gotten along; putting her own name on the stone distanced Ed from his ex-wife. Helen didn't like Betty very much and kind of blamed her for Ed's death. Betty's culinary skills and housekeeping were not up to Helen's exacting standards. In many ways, Helen thought Ed had wasted his life. He was always resentful of his mother's attempts to shape him into the model son. As a child she dressed him in little suits and made him and his brother go to church, hoping it would set the pattern for his life. However, after reaching adulthood, Ed showed little interest in religion. She frequently chided Ed for his drinking. Even so, Ed was very considerate to his mother.

His oddly prosaic farewell letter written to his ex-wife was found next to his typewriter after his death.

June 16, 1961

Dear Betty –

I have been feeling very badly these past several weeks. If anything happens to me, cash the enclosed check; it seemed a cheaper way of doing it than paying some shyster to make a will. There is

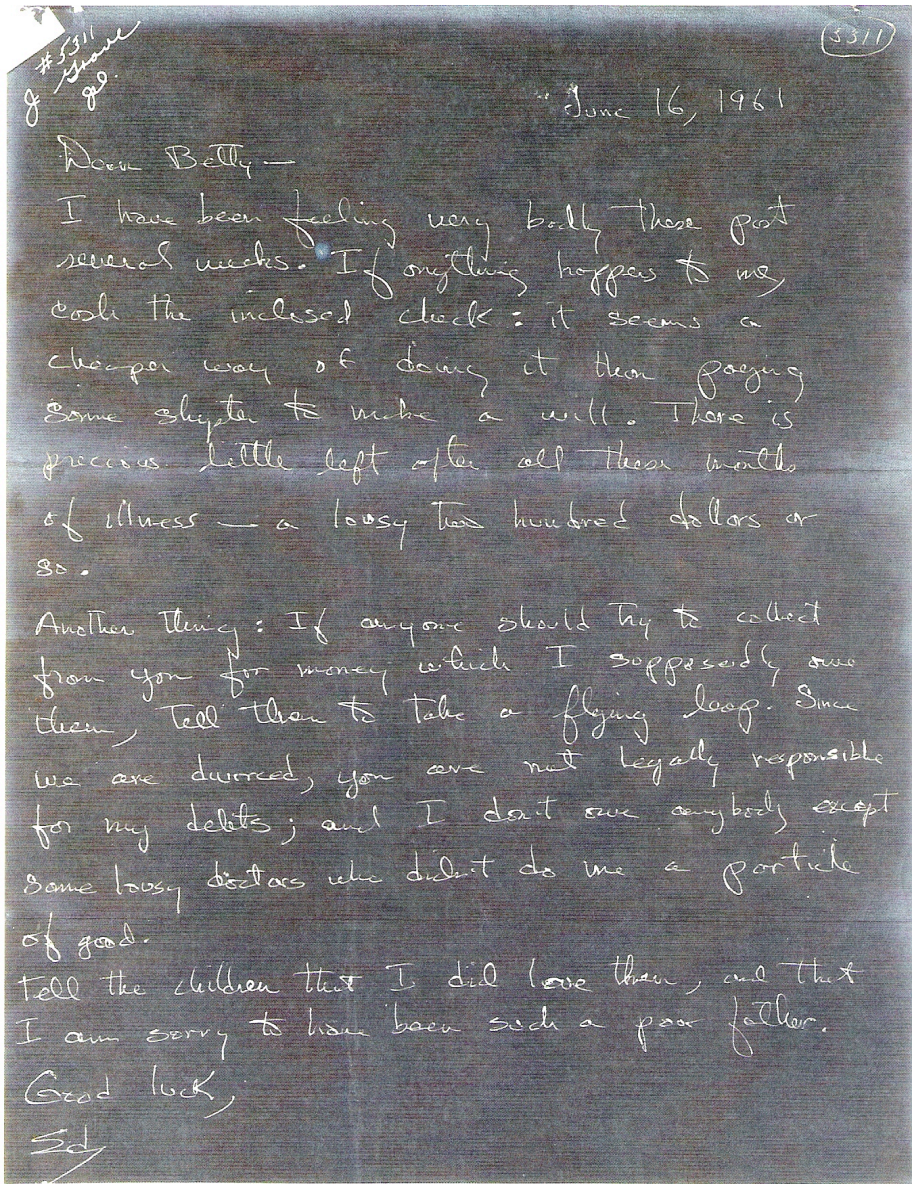
precious little left after all these months of illness – a lousy two hundred dollars or so.

Another thing: If anyone should try to collect from you for money which I supposedly owe them, tell them to take a flying leap. Since we are divorced, you are not legally responsible for my debts, and I don't owe anybody except some lousy doctors who didn't do me a particle of good.

Tell the children that I did love them, and that I am sorry to have been such a poor father.

Good luck,

Ed



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Good luck,

Ed

Ed's last letter to Betty. It was near him when his body was found.

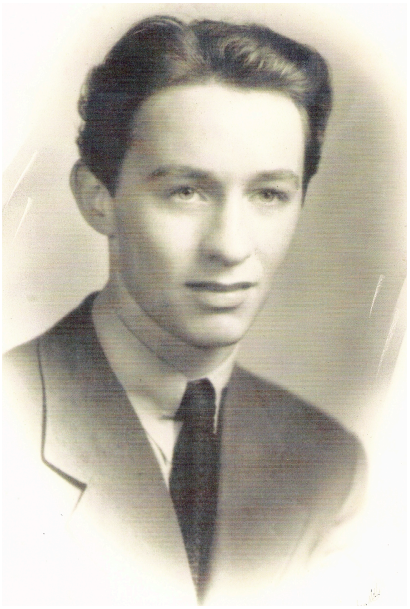
Betty received the letter and read it to her children. Intrigued by the last line, Lenore said innocently, "It sounds to me like he committed suicide."

"Oh, no. He wouldn't do such a thing. *Never*," Valerie said.

Betty was startled momentarily. Recovering, she said, "No, of course not! He was sick. He died of bleeding ulcers."

It would be more than 20 years before Betty could bear to tell her daughters the truth about their father's death.

In reality, James Edgar "Ed" Grove's death on June 26, 1961 was not of natural causes. Alone in his Gramercy Park apartment, he was sick and tired. He hated living in New York, and his job as editor at a vanity press brought him no satisfaction.



Ed at approximately the age he met Betty.

He had once told Betty and Valerie that there was a man in New York who looked exactly like him. Valerie thought maybe that other guy was the one who really died and he had been mistaken for her father. She talked about this, hopefully, with Betty. Valerie wasn't alone in thinking the account of his death might be incorrect.

Ed's mother wrote to Aunt Mary, her daughter-in-law (Bill's wife):

> *I know the NY police said Ed shot himself. I know he didn't, but have no way to prove it – Lately been going through old letters. He wrote me every week. This letter tells me he wants to come home a week and rest his eyes – Has to finish reviewing a book for a very good company,*

> *said he'd call when got to HBG* [Harrisburg]. *Had saved $300 + and closed bank acct. So I am sure someone standing in bank saw him get his money and followed him to apt. He would open door to pkg*. [package] *etc. He did have a pretty small revolver, so someone could use it and then put his fingerprints on it. Breaks my heart. Just when he has two good Publishing Houses. A lady here went to Bank to get SS check cashed and then went home – almost in front of her house, a man jumped out of alley, hit her over head and grabbed her bag and disappeared. So easy to do. It was so hard to lose Ed and now have Bill so sick.*

It was always hard for the family to comprehend Ed's death. Lenore, after attending Sacred Heart Catholic School for a year, thought her father might be able to see her from heaven. She asked her mother, "Does Pop know I'm in the second grade?"

"No," Betty replied. "He's dead."

Lenore was not convinced. When she was about 12 years old, she saw (or dreamed she saw) a man wearing a trench coat come into the room where she was sleeping and she thought it might be her father coming to visit. The man said nothing, and Lenore fell into a deeper sleep.

More than 20 years later, Betty drove Valerie (then named Samantha[1]) to visit her boyfriend. On the drive back, tired and stressed, Betty finally told Samantha that Ed had committed suicide. Betty said, "I just got tired of carrying it all by myself." Samantha wasn't surprised, but she was angry and said not to tell Lenore (then named Pamela[2]). Betty took the advice for the time being, but within a year she would tell her youngest daughter the truth.

[1, 2] Both Betty's daughters had their names legally changed in 1972. Throughout the book I will refer to them by the names they had at that time.

Both Betty's daughters followed in their father's literary footsteps; Pamela more so as she made it a career. They each wrote poems in response to learning the truth about their father's death.

Revelation 23
By Samantha

Somehow she knows she's always known it
since she was a child
but the lie confused her just enough
Revelation 23
You were right yes all along
you were right… and right is wrong
23 years ago
The man she loved most in all the world
sat at his typewriter all alone
and put a bullet through his brain
23 years later
She sits alone and shivers with his pain
What's that you say?
It really happened yesterday?
Revelation 23
It's a time warp, don't you see
She sees oh yes
she sees him sitting all alone
sees the gun and hears the phone
ringing in the hall so long ago
and 23 years later
she reaches for him screaming no
screaming screaming screaming no
If she screams loud enough
maybe she won't hear the shot
God don't let me hear it
God please deafen me
blind me, strike me dead
too late my God his head
and now he's falling bleeding dying
In the time warp, child crying
What's that you say?
Oh it happened yesterday
No… it's happening today
She is 13 going on 14
No, she's 36
She's as old as he was when…

and there it is again
Revelation 23
My father shot himself
and I am he
and he… is me

Betty told Pamela after Pamela read the letter from Ed's mother to her aunt, Mary Grove. In the letter, Helen said she didn't believe he had shot himself.

"If Pop was shot, Grandma never said anything to you," Pamela said, tentatively.

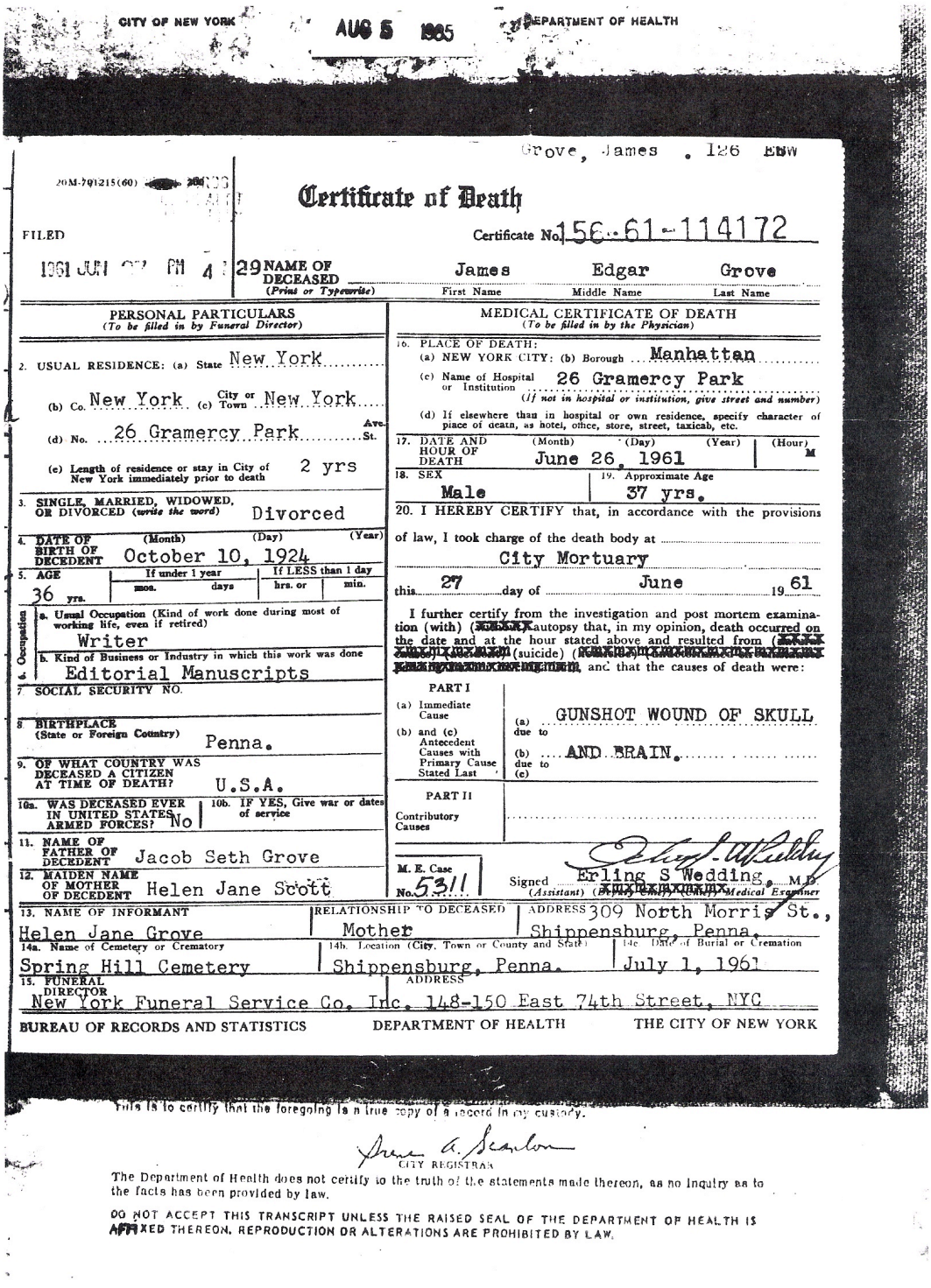
"Oh yeah, we just didn't tell you," Betty replied, casually.

Pop's Last Letter
By Pamela

When the letter call came,
I said, "It sounds to me like he committed suicide."
And Sister said, "Oh, no. He wouldn't do such a thing. *Never*."
She saw with her heart.
I saw with my eyes.
Why was I so wise, at six and almost seven?
Many times little ears hear things not worth hearing,
not worth understanding or remembering.
Now I stand here at the peak of 30
And look back and say, "Of course; what of it?"
I always knew, you see.
But… I remember love and hope in Gramercy.

26 Gramercy Park was the address in Manhattan where Ed took his life. Pamela hoped to convey a blend the words "grant mercy" in her poem. She still hoped that her father had found peace.

In August 1985, a copy of Ed's death certificate arrived. Pamela thought it was very strange to read about her father's death in the odd technical language that described the cause of death as "gunshot wound of skull and brain." She knew her father had a head, and consequently a skull and he certainly had a brain, but to know these features of her father had been impacted by the shattering effect of a gunshot was incomprehensible to her.



CITY OF NEW YORK — AUG 5 1965 — DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Grove, James . 126 EDW

20M-791215(60)

Certificate of Death

FILED 1961 JUN 27 PM 4 29

Certificate No. 156-61-114172

NAME OF DECEASED (Print or Typewrite): James (First Name) Edgar (Middle Name) Grove (Last Name)

PERSONAL PARTICULARS (To be filled in by Funeral Director)

2. USUAL RESIDENCE: (a) State New York (b) Co. New York (c) City or Town New York (d) No. 26 Gramercy Park Ave. St. (e) Length of residence or stay in City of New York immediately prior to death 2 yrs

3. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED, OR DIVORCED (write the word) Divorced

4. DATE OF BIRTH OF DECEDENT (Month) October (Day) 10 (Year) 1924

5. AGE 36 yrs. If under 1 year: mos. days. If LESS than 1 day: hrs. or min.

6. Occupation: a. Usual Occupation (Kind of work done during most of working life, even if retired) Writer

b. Kind of Business or Industry in which this work was done Editorial Manuscripts

7. SOCIAL SECURITY NO.

8. BIRTHPLACE (State or Foreign Country) Penna.

9. OF WHAT COUNTRY WAS DECEASED A CITIZEN AT TIME OF DEATH? U.S.A.

10a. WAS DECEASED EVER IN UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES? No 10b. IF YES, Give war or dates of service

11. NAME OF FATHER OF DECEDENT Jacob Seth Grove

12. MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER OF DECEDENT Helen Jane Scott

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH (To be filled in by the Physician)

16. PLACE OF DEATH: (a) NEW YORK CITY: (b) Borough Manhattan (c) Name of Hospital or Institution 26 Gramercy Park (if not in hospital or institution, give street and number) (d) If elsewhere than in hospital or own residence, specify character of place of death, as hotel, office, store, street, taxicab, etc.

17. DATE AND HOUR OF DEATH (Month) June (Day) 26, (Year) 1961 (Hour) M

18. SEX Male 19. Approximate Age 37 yrs.

20. I HEREBY CERTIFY that, in accordance with the provisions of law, I took charge of the death body at City Mortuary this 27 day of June 19 61

I further certify from the investigation and post mortem examination (with) (~~autopsy~~) that, in my opinion, death occurred on the date and at the hour stated above and resulted from (~~accident~~) (suicide) (~~homicide~~) (~~undetermined~~), and that the causes of death were:

PART I

(a) Immediate Cause: (a) GUNSHOT WOUND OF SKULL

(b) and (c) Antecedent Causes with Primary Cause Stated Last: (b) due to AND BRAIN. (c) due to

PART II

Contributory Causes

M. E. Case No. 5311

Signed Erling S Wedding, M.D. (Assistant) (~~Acting Chief~~) (~~Chief~~) Medical Examiner

13. NAME OF INFORMANT Helen Jane Grove | RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED Mother | ADDRESS 309 North Morris St., Shippensburg, Penna.

14a. Name of Cemetery or Crematory Spring Hill Cemetery | 14b. Location (City, Town or County and State) Shippensburg, Penna. | 14c. Date of Burial or Cremation July 1, 1961

15. FUNERAL DIRECTOR New York Funeral Service Co. Inc. ADDRESS 148-150 East 74th Street, NYC

BUREAU OF RECORDS AND STATISTICS — DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH — THE CITY OF NEW YORK

This is to certify that the foregoing is a true copy of a record in my custody.

CITY REGISTRAR

The Department of Health does not certify to the truth of the statements made thereon, as no inquiry as to the facts has been provided by law.

DO NOT ACCEPT THIS TRANSCRIPT UNLESS THE RAISED SEAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IS AFFIXED THEREON. REPRODUCTION OR ALTERATIONS ARE PROHIBITED BY LAW.

The certificate of Ed's death.

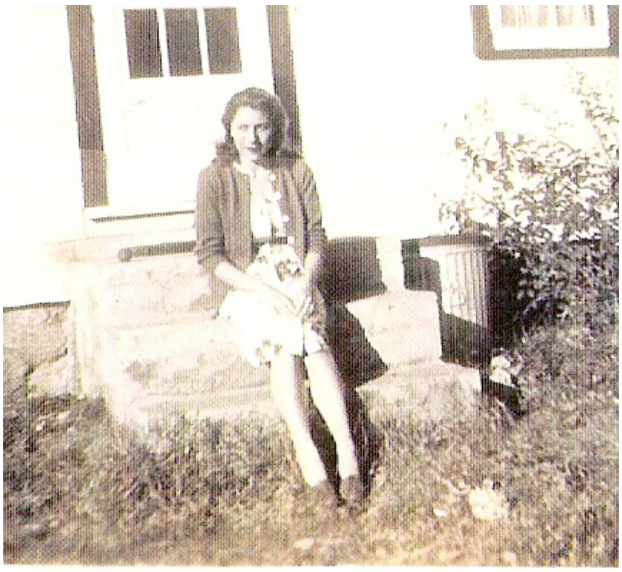
Prior to his death, Ed sent some unpublished manuscripts to his mother, who in turn passed them on to Betty in a cardboard box, with the suggestion that she might try to have them published. Instead, Betty took out her frustrations on Ed's lifework. She was sad that Ed had died, but she was also upset that he had taken his own life. To her, it seemed like a final great abandonment. First had come their marital problems and the divorce, and now this. She knew Ed was sick and depressed, but he had taken what so many people refer to as the "easy way out," leaving her to pick up the pieces and raise the children alone.

"I took care of him all his life and even buried him," Betty said.

Seeing the box of typewritten pages reminded her of all the times she had to listen to Ed read his stories. She was always expected to laugh at the right parts, but she and Ed had different ideas of humor and when she didn't laugh, he would be irritated and disappointed. Ed's dark short stories bewildered her. She wondered why anyone who wrote would not write pleasant things. Betty liked happy endings rather than morose ambiguity. Still she had always been polite and complimented her husband's writing, thinking all the while that he was wasting his time and talent when he could be writing cheerful stories that everyone would like.

Grimly, Betty started to read one of the stories the box contained. Ed wrote of how sad he had been in New York on St. Patrick's Day, and Betty couldn't read anymore. She didn't want to think of him alone and depressed in New York, nor did she want her daughters to read their father's stories of despondency and alienation. Betty was reminded of all her pent-up emotions. Everything came together in her mind and she carried the box of paper to the back alley behind the Canfield's house.

"I had a big bonfire," Betty recounted later. "I must say it gave me pleasure."




Betty and Ed – this was the closest they ever came to being photographed together.

Along with the manuscripts, Ed's mother sent Valerie Ed's typewriter, but Betty got rid of it as well. It was just another reminder of the secret burden she carried.

She had more reasons for resentment than the events of the summer of 1961.

[Interlude of chapters 2-10]

CHAPTER 11: The Valley of the Shadow

New York, New York, June 1961

In 1959, Ed moved to New York with his friend John McClain, after a quick stop in Pennsylvania to see Ed's family. McClain and he had briefly co-owned a small tavern in San Antonio called "The Village Inn." Ed wrote to Valerie of his experiences on the trip:

> *The night before we left* [Shippensburg] *some varlet broke into* [McClain's] *car and stole my typewriter, which had a lot of personal*

papers in the case. The police recovered the typewriter two days ago in a Harlem pawnshop, but I guess I have seen the last of the papers.

Upon his arrival in New York, Ed began work for another vanity press. Between editing other people's novels, he found time to work on his own short stories and novelettes and had several articles published in different magazines such as *Esquire* and *Argosy*. He wrote under the pen name J. Edgar Grove. McClain wasn't able to find work so easily and soon left. Ed was glad to see him go, since it granted him the solitude and quiet he needed to work.

Ed wore tattered sandals with socks, baggy pants and a threadbare trench coat, too long for his slight 5'5" frame. If he were in his own apartment, he would often type in just his underwear. He smoked incessantly, scattering ashes over his auburn beard. His sparse hair was receding from his high forehead. When he was employed at the Naylor Publishing Company, a vanity press in San Antonio, Ed kept his office blinds pulled and worked by the dim light of a desk lamp. Even so, he would frequently wear shades, possibly to hide the redness of his eyes, caused by excessive alcohol consumption, but more likely because of his sensitivity to light. Shades, too, are a barrier to keep the world at a distance. No matter where he was, Ed avoided the light. He liked curtains and blinds to be drawn and once wrote that the late hours he kept in New York, retiring at 8 a.m. and rising at 4 p.m., allowed him to "never have to look at the daylight, which I have never liked much anyhow."

Ed working as a DJ, a few years before his death.
His appearance here is much as it was when he was in New York.

Through his work for *Esquire*, Ed was able to get an agent to look at one of his novelettes. The agent took it to England, where apparently a London publishing house became interested. Ed wrote to his daughters: *If I can drag along for another couple of years on this earth, maybe I will yet leave something behind for you little girls when I am gone.* Ed's letters always took on a mature tone, even though, in this case, the recipients were quite young. It was as if he presupposed that anyone worthy of receiving a letter from Ed Grove must possess the intellectual capacity to comprehend its contents.

The promise of New York fell flat for Ed, as it does for so many. In the late 50s, when Ed arrived in the city, it was thought to be a writer's paradise – it was for writers what Hollywood was for aspiring actors. As true as that might be to some, Ed became incredibly depressed and tired of his job. He would work hunched over the black typewriter in his small Manhattan apartment, concentration etched on his face. His right hand was almost a blur above the keys as he struck them with just the index finger, a habit he picked up while in college. He expressed his feelings best in a letter he wrote the past year to his young friend Richard Hardin. They worked

together when Ed was an editor at Naylor. After leaving Texas, Ed kept in touch with Hardin, who was then in the military. In the letter, Ed had written:

> *Dear Dick,*
>
> *Since I have a hangover, and don't feel up to worrying about where the semicolon goes and what they call the water-front section of Istanbul, I'll do what would, at one time, have been considered a noble deed. You may be a bit young to recall the days of World War II (or maybe it was the War of 1812, I don't know) when we were harangued, by poster and air wave, to "write to a lonely boy in the service." Are you lonely, Dick? Well, no matter, I'll write to you anyway....*
>
> *In any case, this town is badly on my nerves, at the moment, and I am most all-fired sick of editing manuscripts and writing jacket blurbs. My existence has begun to seem extremely pointless: one book after another, write the blurb, take it in, pick up the check and another book, go and stare at yourself in the mirror of some bar while you fire up the boiler to a point at which you can go home and face the book.*
>
> *If I were to condense the sum total of my thinking during the past several weeks into one tiny, pithy capsule, it could be summed up in the conclusion: Any world where a man has to work all his goddamn life in order to feed, clothe, and shelter himself is not worth living in. Which is by way of saying that I have about decided that if life has nothing more to offer me than a Vantage book to edit, a crummy little room in which to edit it, and a barstool at night, I don't want it.*

Do not believe for a moment that the plans and ideas you have now will endure; it is not one's talent that one loses but one's enthusiasm. If you are going to write anything, do anything, this is the time. Osler was right when he said: "Take the sum of human achievement in action, in science, in art, in literature. . . . The effective, moving, vitalizing work of the world is done between the ages of twenty-five and forty." This is not because one does whatever he can do less well at forty; usually he does it much better, has improved his skills, knows more about it, has made tremendous advances in technical facility. It is because he no longer gives a damn whether it gets done or not. The young man does not believe that forty will ever come – I am sure that I didn't – what young man can imagine himself at forty? – but it is just around the corner, having a beer in some quiet tavern. I think, actually, that I lost interest in writing when it came home to me that I did not like my audience, that I was, in point of fact, writing for a bunch of clods and ignoramuses about whom I cared nothing, except to see them in hell. Having reached that point of my meditations, I repaired to a blind tiger and got drunk, and have been, off and on, with short intervals of enforced sobriety due to failing health, drunk ever since. I have never since had the thought of transmitting my thoughts to paper, because I don't, actually, give a shit in hell whether anyone reads it or not, or whether, having read it, they like it or dislike it.

Ed's sarcasm and wry humor never left him, despite his unhappiness in New York. In many letters, he wrote of feeling incredibly weary from his work at the vanity press and from the general oppressive nature of the city.

It was a far cry from the optimism expressed in a short poem he wrote in the early days of his marriage to Betty that she later kept in her Bible:

> To Betty -
>
> Who wed a drankard
> one who thought
> a frothing tankard
> his lot,
> who toed with ease a brassy rail,
> and frequently found need of bail.
>
> But now he's smarter,
> really is.
> He wouldn't barter
> what is his
> for gold – this chappy who is lucky –
> for all the bourbon in Kentucky.

Ed related a tale of his nighttime activities to Hardin. Ed said he got drunk and called his favorite call girl. The female operator told him the number had been temporarily disconnected.

"Hell," Ed said. "If she needed money to pay her phone bill, why didn't she tell me?"

"I do not know, sir," the operator said.

"Well," Ed said, "What are you doing tonight?"

That got him nowhere. Later in the evening, having spent fruitless hours trying to rustle up a substitute, Ed phoned Robert Finchley, an acquaintance in Far Rockaway who allegedly knew many prostitutes. After waking the man up, Ed got from him four numbers, three of which did not answer. At the fourth, Ed said, "Hello, I'm a friend of Bob Finchley's."

The girl answered, “I don’t like him giving my number to people. I don’t like people calling up here. I just don’t like it at all!” Then she hung up.

Ed called Finchley back to complain. Finchley said that particular call girl was “a real moody kid.”

“What’d you say to her?” Finchley asked.

“I said what you told me to say,” Ed said.

“Real moody kid,” Finchley said.

Growing desperate, Ed then tried the hotel desk.

“Look,” he said, “my numbers ain’t panning out tonight. You got a good number I can call? Blonde – perhaps a brunette?”

“I don’t know what you mean, Mr. Grove,” the desk clerk said.

“Aw, come on,” Ed said. “Don’t be a funky stud. There’s bound to be at least one whore in the hotel. You can tell me. Discreet, that’s me.”

“Have you been drinking?” the clerk inquired.

“Yes, I have,” Ed said. “And I would like a blonde – perhaps a brunette. Let’s call one, hey.”

“I can’t help you, man,” said the clerk.

After describing this bizarre and humorous situation, Ed remarked, “What a town.”

When not working or sleeping, Ed spent much of his time in bars. On one occasion, he found himself sitting at a bar with a lady holding a dog on either side of him. Ed attributed New York’s plentiful canine population to the loneliness of the city. As he sat at the bar, one dog was drooling on his sleeve and the other was trying to get at his beer. Ed asked the bartender, “What

is this – a barroom or a kennel? Man, I love dogs, but I can't see bringing a dog into a place like this."

"It's a drag, ain't it?" the bartender said.

On another occasion, Ed became vocal about his increasingly cynical views on humanity.

"If you pooled all the brains in this bar," he remarked in a loud voice to the bartender, "you would have insufficient material to make one high-grade moron."

Several people looked at him, with no discernible friendliness.

"That guy down at the end of the bar is kind of a brain," the bartender said.

Ed looked at the man indicated, a guy who, in Ed's opinion "looked something like an ape." "If his brains were constructed of silk," Ed said, "he would be hard put to scrape together sufficient material to make a hummingbird a pair of swimming trunks."

The bartender moved away, looking worried.

Ed suffered from alcoholism and other health problems. He visited a doctor several times in 1960 about a possible tumor, which may have been colon cancer. Although most of his letters seem to indicate that he was not diagnosed with cancer, it remained a possibility. In 1961, he underwent an operation on his leg for muscle spasms. As a child, Ed suffered from a severe case of pneumonia after sitting in an air conditioned theater and had to have one of his lungs drained. While he worked at Naylor he was in a near-fatal car accident, after which Betty cared for him during his recuperation at home. Ed was in a lot of pain and the children had to avoid jostling his bed. After the accident, Ed told Betty to pick up the papers that had escaped from his damaged car and were strewn alongside the road. Dutifully, she obliged, with her children's help.

As for their 10 years together, Betty and Ed remain something of an enigma. When she was older, Lenore asked Betty if she had enjoyed sex. Betty smiled and said, simply, “I loved your father.” To her, that was explanation enough.

In every relationship, there is one who loves more. In the case of Ed and Betty, she was the one to give most. Ed gave what he could and what he gave, at times, Betty found beautiful.

And, at other times, not so much.

He once asked Betty what kind of animal he reminded her of. He said she reminded him of a rabbit, in appearance. Betty couldn’t really think of an animal that was reminiscent of Ed, but since he wanted an answer she said “a muskrat.” Ed’s feelings were hurt because it was “a type of rat.” It’s silly things like that that can gradually tear a marriage apart.

Though he considered her neither a sexual athlete nor an intellectual, he still cared about Betty in a detached kind of way – detached because at that stage of his life it was all he could manage. Ironically, Betty herself was something of an intellectual snob. She had little patience with people who were poorly educated and she became upset with those who used improper grammar or spelled words incorrectly. Ed cared for his children too – eldritch Valerie with her wistful green eyes the reflection of his own, her love for her father as painfully apparent as his failure, and dreamy little Lenore, the shy prattling baby he had come to love against his will. He had complained to Betty, "Well, now you've done it. Now I like this one too." Ed loved his little girls, but felt he needed so much more than those uncomplicated little creatures could give him. Little did he know how complex the children really were and how deeply they would be affected by his decision to end his life.

In his final hours, Ed may have thought of his daughters and his ex-wife, remembering the times they had spent together as a family.

He could have remembered a time shortly after Lenore's birth when she became ill. She was fussy and crying, and Ed would carry her around at night to give Betty some much-needed rest. Ed turned on the kitchen light to reveal Texas cockroaches crawling on the floor and the walls. He would point them out to baby Lenore and she would grow interested in the scurrying creatures and stop crying. It would remain her best memory of her father. During one of Ed's last visits to the home in Texas, Lenore sat on her father's lap and proudly demonstrated how she had learned to count to 100. Ed endured the boredom of listening to his child display her latest accomplishment, but when she gleefully continued past 100, his patience gave out.

"That's enough," he said. He was tired and meant no offense, but Lenore's feelings were hurt and she felt very embarrassed. It would be her worst memory of her father.

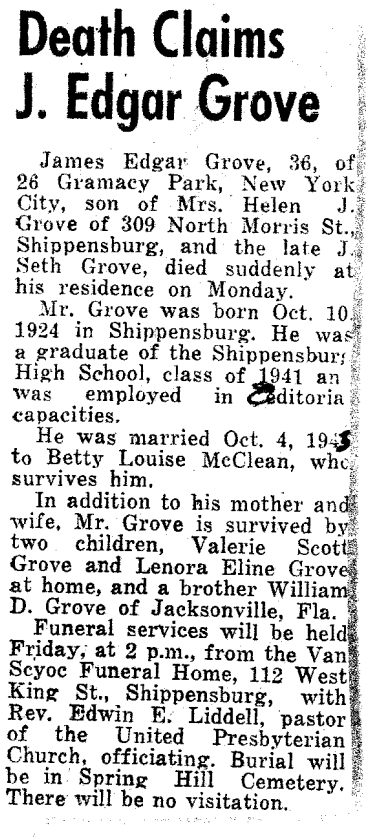
Ed may have remembered taking his older daughter, Valerie, to the elegant Majestic Theater in downtown San Antonio when she visited him at his apartment. Valerie loved the twinkling stars on the vaulted ceiling of the theater. They watched *The Horse Soldiers*, starring John Wayne. Ed wryly told his daughter that Wayne was "roaring drunk at the premier of *The Alamo*."

When Valerie was younger, Ed wrote a short verse to her: *Our goil* [girl] *is a gargoyle.* Later on Ed commented, "I think you may turn out to look like something after all. For a while I wasn't sure." They both laughed. Valerie was pleased, since at 12 years old she wasn't sure herself and he had given her hope. When Valerie was a baby, Ed tossed his crumpled manuscript pages into her playpen to amuse her. Although Valerie had no recollection of it, when Betty told her it made her smile. It was so much like Ed.

His last visit was on January 17, 1961. The family had a fish dinner at home, and Ed arrived unexpectedly after the meal was done. His children greeted him with delight. Betty was

more reserved, as it had been a year since Ed's last visit, although he kept in touch with the family. He gave Valerie and Lenore each $5 and gave Betty money to pay for the children's upcoming diphtheria shots. After returning to New York, Ed called Betty and offered to send her money for a television set. He said it wasn't right for children not to have one. Betty told him no. She could probably think of many more practical things her daughters needed. Ed told her writing was the most important thing in the world to him. That was the last time they ever spoke to each other. He missed his last planned visit to the home in Texas because of a hard rainstorm.

All reflections aside, on June 26, 1961, at 26 Gramercy Park in Manhattan, Ed Grove put a gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger. He was found sitting at his typewriter, with the final letter to Betty nearby inexplicably dated 10 days earlier.



Death Claims J. Edgar Grove

James Edgar Grove, 36, of 26 Gramacy Park, New York City, son of Mrs. Helen J. Grove of 309 North Morris St., Shippensburg, and the late J. Seth Grove, died suddenly at his residence on Monday.

Mr. Grove was born Oct. 10, 1924 in Shippensburg. He was a graduate of the Shippensburg High School, class of 1941 and was employed in editorial capacities.

He was married Oct. 4, 1953 to Betty Louise McClean, who survives him.

In addition to his mother and wife, Mr. Grove is survived by two children, Valerie Scott Grove and Lenora Eline Grove at home, and a brother William D. Grove of Jacksonville, Fla.

Funeral services will be held Friday, at 2 p.m., from the Van Scyoc Funeral Home, 112 West King St., Shippensburg, with Rev. Edwin E. Liddell, pastor of the United Presbyterian Church, officiating. Burial will be in Spring Hill Cemetery. There will be no visitation.

Ed's obituary.

In the back alley at Mrs. Canfield's house, Betty would burn trash as her daughters danced around and sang, "Up, up, up goes the genie of the smoke. You can hardly see him in the still night air, but he's there."

It was in that exact spot that Betty burned Ed's writing.

In years to come, when things weren't going well, Betty would say, sometimes whimsically, "Look at the mess you've left me in, Ed."

Ed would decline to comment.