

## **Adventures in McCloudland**

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Chapter 30

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One of those weekends when Lee and I returned to the hotel we faced puzzling news of a different kind. We had just brought in our overnight bags when our neighbors from across the back, not the snow shoveling ones, but the ones on the corner came to talk to us. We gathered at the back porch. "No, I don't care to sit down," she started.

In all seriousness and concern they told us how teen-aged boys were coming to the hotel and partying in our absence. "They come to see Jeff," the wife asserted. "I don't want to alarm you," she continued, "but those boys are doing drugs there." "Musicians come by and they play loud music... and I've seen them doing drugs ...smoking stuff, outside. Jeff is selling it to them." "I hesitated to tell you, but as a parent myself, I'd want to know."

We sat on the porch steps trying to take in what she had said. First, I knew she was mistaken. No doubts at all. I know my son. But I didn't want her to think I was calling her a liar. I needed to let her know I appreciated her concern, would check it out and get back to them.

"Thanks, I know it must have been hard for you to do this. I appreciate your caring."  
"But, I must suggest there may be another interpretation of what you saw." "I'd just like you to consider that possibility."

Jeff. He didn't look like any McCloud youth. In fact, he wasn't even a youth. Jeff was nearly 30 years old and looked like 18. He still got carded when he bought beer.

But there was a whole list of things that made him different. His long blonde wavy hair gathered into a pony tail that reached below his shoulders we thought was lovely. He'd worn it that way for several years. (Truth be told, I think he did it as an act of assertion after his dad and I had asked the barber to give him a "schlitzhy" when he was a little

kid. I don't think he's ever forgiven us for that buzz cut.) But clearly no one else in McCloud looked like that.

He played the drums. And he was from the city; that place where drugs and sin abound. He also drove a red car with a security alarm. He didn't own a single plaid flannel shirt or chain saw. Clearly he was different.

Jeff made friends easily. The young boys who had helped clean up the property and haul furniture often came by to visit...as did other new friends. Jeff didn't judge them, ignored any gossip, and just enjoyed their company. Friends from Oakland, some of whom also played instruments and had long hair, also visited Jeff. The evidence must have added up. Surely, he was selling drugs.

Lee and I sat down with Jeff. We gently told him of the accusations trying not to make them sound like accusations. Well, he was hurt. His voice got quiet and steady as he tried to contain his anger and respond to the seriousness of this charge. "Mom, you know me. You know this is not true. Some guys came by. You couldn't even call it a party. Zippy, from Oakland, stopped by for a couple days. He plays the guitar. Some of the high school crew stopped over. We went up to the third floor where the drums are and played some music, and talked. Some of the guys went outside to smoke...cigarettes." "Mom, you don't believe this stuff she's saying, do you?"

I called our neighbors the next day and asked them over to the hotel. I made some coffee and waited. When they came in we asked them to have a seat, so we could "sort this out." They declined and stood in the hall next to the stairs. Lee and Jeff looked to me to begin. I told our neighbors that I believed that they had "our best intentions at heart, but there was," indeed "another explanation for what they had seen."

Lee and I quietly relayed that we knew Jeff had had some friends over...and had played music. But no drugs were ever involved.

They refused our offer of coffee... said that they knew we were mistaken...and left.

We decided to put the incident behind us. They had good intentions, but were just mistaken. After the hotel was finished and as they would sit on their porch swing in the evening, we'd stop by...chat a bit...share our plans. It was never mentioned again.

But they were not done. And there would be more hurtful surprises.