

# Pool

*by* Gary Hardaway

“That pool will be the death of me.”

Which Dad said at least a couple of times a week. Ten times the week after he'd read the TXU bill.

“Goddamn pump, and that twitchy little Polaris. We should fill that pool with dirt and plant some trees and Asian jasmine.”

Which was his suggestion every month when TXU delivered their monthly reminder of how much we depend on electricity. He never used the pool and so never blamed the big power bill on air conditioning or lights. Nope, went straight for what mom, Trey and I used exclusively. It was the only petty and ungenerous thing he ever did that I saw.

“Try living in Texas without AC. I guess you kids could read by candlelight and Coleman lamps, though. Coleman doesn't make an oil fired computer yet. I guess you'll have to keep sucking down the kilowatts to check on all your Facebook friends.”

He just shrugged whenever I reminded him that all my classes at Quad C were either online courses or required homework done in Word or Excel. Quad C, though a good community college, was not my original plan. I'd been accepted at Rice and Duke but then the bubble burst. Dad lost his job managing commercial real estate development projects. No one was loaning money for anything and without interim financing, there weren't any development projects to manage.

After six months of unemployment and working every angle he knew, Dad finally settled for a job at half the pay preparing due diligence

reports on distressed and foreclosed commercial properties for potential cash buyers taking advantage of others' bad luck. Each day, he filled in the blanks of the templates used to prepare the reports based on walking through, taking notes, and snapping photos of the properties. He dropped the digital pictures where they belonged, proof read everything, then emailed the completed reports to clients with hardcopies FedExed over night. He was grateful for the job but we could tell he hated everything about it. The drop in income forced him to start using his retirement accounts to keep from losing the house. My mother told me that. He never said anything about it to Trey or me.

One night, when I was up late finishing a research paper and needed a Coke, I noticed Dad walking around the pool, looking at the sky, sipping a Shiner Bock. I went outside to ask if anything was wrong.

“ I'm just looking at the moon and stars, Katie. I like looking at the moon and stars. It clears my head.”

From the far side of the pool, looking back toward the house, the moon was like the Cheshire Cat's smile floating just above the roof. Mom had told me he was having trouble sleeping. I guess looking at the sky and having a beer was his alternative to Lunesta or Somnex.

When I used the pool, I liked to wear my flip-flops when I walked around to my favorite spot to dive. The same spot where I saw the smiling moon. My flip-flops were dirty white all over and matched the Cool-Deck that surrounded the pool.

One morning when I decided to have an early morning swim, I couldn't find my flip-flops anywhere. I was usually very good at keeping up with them. I figured they'd turn up somewhere and headed toward my favorite diving spot. I saw him floating face down through the French doors. I ran and tried to pull him out. He was so cold. All I could do was scream and scream.

The coroner's report surmised that my father tripped on pool shoes found at the far side of the pool, hit his head on the stonework edging the pool, lost consciousness, fell into the pool, and drowned. The time of death was estimated at 2:00 AM. Coroners' reports are very factual. They follow a strict format. Death certificates, too.

When my father was unemployed, he had to cancel the private life insurance policy he'd carried for years. He figured that once he started work again, he'd get another policy beyond the nominal one his employer provided. At his age, however, the premiums for a new policy were very high. He and mom decided to wait until things got better.

The house is on the market now. The small salary mom earns teaching high school math isn't enough and the death benefits from the nominal insurance couldn't retire the mortgage. We'll have to find a smaller house. It won't have any goddamned pool.

