

The Jumpers' Pool

by Jack Swenson

My wife was working in San Francisco at that time, and she took the train back and forth. I would drive her to the station in the morning, and late in the afternoon, I'd pick her up. Sometimes I'd visit a bar near the station and have a beer before her train arrived.

It was just a beer bar, and the only thing that was different about it was the Jumpers' Pool. The way that worked was you gave the bartender a buck, and he would write your name on a square on a calendar that was behind the bar. If somebody jumped off the bridge that day, you won the pot.

My wife and I were still getting along in those days. Life wasn't perfect, but it never is, is it? At least we weren't at each other's throats. That came later. We had a nice house in one of the suburbs, and for a time, our house was the place to be after hours for our circle of acquaintances. People would start to drift in on Friday afternoon. We would party until late in the evening.

Two of our regular guests were a black couple, our dentist and his wife. The dentist was a tall, handsome man. His wife was no beauty, but she was lively and intelligent. Outspoken, too.

I liked Hazel. I liked her husband, as well. I knew their daughter, too. Later the daughter married a lawyer who became a judge. I didn't like him at all. To him I was The Man. An Ofay. For one reason or another, we rubbed each other the wrong way.

Later on my wife and I got a divorce, and I moved into an apartment further down the peninsula. It was some years after that when I heard about Hazel's suicide. It was rumored that her husband, the dentist, was two-timing her, and that's the reason she killed herself. She jumped off the Golden Gate bridge. When I heard

that, I immediately recalled the jumper's pool and that sleazy little bar where you could bet on life and death.

It's odd, but when I heard of Hazel's death, the first question that popped into my mind was what was she thinking? Not *why* did she do it, but what were her thoughts as she fell to her death? I still can't quite wrap my mind around that.

Maybe she wasn't thinking about anything. I doubt she had time. I've heard that when you fall that far, when you hit the water, you're going ninety miles an hour.

