CONFIDENCES

MARSHALL DEASON

Editor's note: The following selection is an excerpt from Confidences, *a novel by Marshall Deason.*

PART I—THE CHOICE

1

"You're a lawyer, so everything I tell you is confidential, right?"

It wasn't the first time a client interview started this way. The man sitting across the desk from me was younger than most of my clients, in his early 20's. And taller. He stood at least four inches above my 6′1″. He was muscular, like a tight end. He had dark brown hair and tanned skin. His nose was crooked, and he had a scar above his left eye. He was wearing blue jeans, a much-washed baby blue golf shirt, high-topped white basketball shoes, and white socks. His client intake form showed his name as "Beau Dawson."

"That's right, with a couple of exceptions. If you tell me you're about to commit a crime or to harm somebody, I have to tell the authorities to try to prevent whatever you're planning. Other than that, what you tell me is more protected than things you tell a doctor or a priest. I can't be forced to disclose your confidences, unless you authorize it."

"But if I did something in the past, like a year or two ago, you wouldn't have to turn me in?" he asked.

"That's right. Why don't you tell me why you came to see me."

He smiled.

"I just won the Florida lottery. You know, the big one. The $186 million. I have the ticket with me."

"I understand why you'd want to keep that a secret."

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He shook his head, "No, that's not it. That's why I came to see you. The secret's something different."

"Why don't you tell me about it?"

He shook his head again, "First, can you help me with the lottery money? I've never had much money before. I don't know what I'm supposed to do or how I'm supposed to do it."

"I've done legal work for a couple of lottery winners. We have tax lawyers and estate planners in the firm. We can represent you."

"Good."

"If you don't mind my asking, how'd you happen to come to me?"

"Sami Al Amean, the man who owns the convenience store where I work, told me you were his lawyer and you were the smartest lawyer in Tampa. I also checked you out on the internet."

"I've represented Sami for several years. He's a smart man and a good client. Now, let's get to work on protecting your lottery money."

"Don't you want to know about the secret?"

"Does it have anything to do with your lottery winnings? Did you steal the winning ticket from someone else?"

"No. I bought the ticket. I buy five quick picks every Friday when I get paid. This week, one hit. The secret isn't about the lottery. It's something else."

I called my paralegal.

"Mary Beth, this is Beau Dawson. He's just won the lottery. The three of us are going to the scan the winning ticket and Mr. Dawson's driver's license. I want you to call the Florida Lottery Office in Tallahassee and tell them we have a client who won the jackpot. We'll be there tomorrow to present the ticket. Ask Vernon and Scott to join us in the big conference room. Call that detective we use and see if he can get a bodyguard to drive with us to Tallahassee tomorrow. We'll want to leave at 7:30 and return to Tampa in the afternoon."

Beau handed me the lottery ticket and a driver's license. The driver's license was from Wisconsin, not Florida. It showed a picture of a young man with a straight nose, no scar, and the same colored hair. It listed his height as 6′4″.

Beau saw me staring at the picture.

"I was in a car wreck since the picture was taken," he said.

"You also look taller than 6'4"," I said.

Beau shrugged, "I guess I've grown a couple of inches since I got the license."

We spent the next couple of hours discussing the tax and estate planning ramifications of winning the lottery. On our advice, Beau decided to take the lump sum payout, which would net him about $68 million after taxes. He told us his parents were dead and he had no brothers or sisters. We set up a trust to take the lottery proceeds.

We also coordinated our arrival with the lottery officials. We sent them a copy of Beau's winning ticket, and they confirmed the winning number. We arranged to open a bank account with a Tampa bank and got wiring instructions. We set a meeting for the next week with a financial planner.

After talking with the lottery people, I told Beau, "You'll get your 15 minutes of fame tomorrow. There'll be television cameras at the ceremony. Sometimes big lottery winners even get interviewed on the *Today Show*."

Beau's eyes went wide.

"Do they have to take my picture? Can't we keep it a secret who won?"

"Sure, if that's what you want. We can change the name of the trust from 'The Beau Dawson Inter Vivos Trust' to something like 'Tampa Asset Ownership Trust,' and I can accept the check on behalf of an undisclosed client."

"Let's do it that way. Maybe I should stay here. You can go to Tallahassee by yourself and bring the money back to me."

"I'd rather you go along, so there's no question in your mind about how we're handling things. You may have to make decisions. You can do that better in person. It's your money; you should keep an eye on it. If anyone asks who you are, say you're with my firm."

"O.K. As long as nobody knows I won the money or takes my picture."

2

The next morning, our entourage made the trek from Tampa to Tallahassee. I drove my car with Beau, Vernon and Scott, as part of a four car caravan—two cars from the office (carrying three lawyers, three paralegals and the paraphernalia needed to set up a remote law office operation), the bodyguard's car, and a state trooper escort arranged by the lottery office.

In Tallahassee, Beau hid, out of camera range. The lottery people wired

the proceeds into the Tampa bank account and did the paperwork confirming the payout.

By mid-afternoon, we were headed back to Tampa. I asked Vernon and Scott to find another ride so I could be alone with Beau.

When we were out of Tallahassee and heading east on I-10, I said, "Beau, what's all this about?"

"What do you mean?"

"You dodging the cameras and the differences on the driver's license. It's time to tell me."

"I'm not really who I said I was."

"I figured that out. Who are you, really?"

"My real name is Bogart Sweeney. People called me "Bo." Beau Dawson was my best friend. When he died, I took over his name. It was simpler that way."

"How did your friend die?"

"He was killed in a car accident—the same accident where I got my scar and broken nose."

"Were you driving?"

"No. My dad was driving. My parents were killed, too. Beau and I were in the back seat."

"When did the accident happen?"

"A year ago June 28. We were driving in Colorado, and a semi hit us."

"How did you take over Beau's identity?"

"Beau and I were about the same size, and he was wearing a Metropolitan U basketball shirt I'd given him. I was thrown out of the car in the accident, and Beau's wallet was found next to my body. I was unconscious for a week. When I woke up, I had a broken jaw, and my mouth was wired shut for another month. Nobody asked me my name. Everyone assumed I was Beau Dawson. They told me Bogart Sweeney and his parents were killed and had been buried in Greenville, Wisconsin. I decided it was easier to keep being Beau Dawson."

"Sounds like the plot of a Sandra Bullock movie."

"Who's Sandra Bullock?"

"Tell me about Metropolitan. Why would wearing a tee shirt from there make everyone think Beau was you?"

"I was on the basketball team there."

"That's big time ball. Sweet 16 the last two years. Were you scholarship or walk-on?"

"Scholarship. I'd just finished redshirting my freshman year. That was one of the reasons we were taking the trip. I wanted to quit. Beau and my parents were trying to talk me out of it."

"You wanted to quit? I thought everyone who played high school basketball dreamed about playing at a school like Metropolitan."

"Yeah, that's what I dreamed about in high school, but it wasn't a good dream. It was more of a nightmare after I got there."

"What happened? Why'd you want to quit?"

"A bunch of things. The coach was an asshole. I hated the big city. I was too far away from home. I didn't want to major in sociology. Basketball stopped being fun. It was just a job."

"Sociology? Why did you have to major in sociology?"

"Every basketball player at Metropolitan majors in sociology. The whole soc department comes to every practice. They're basketball nuts. They know the players by their first names. They get invited to team parties. They give the academic pitch to the parents of the recruits. They make it easy for players not to flunk out and for a big percentage to graduate."

"What did your parents think when you told them about this?"

"My parents said working through things you don't enjoy to achieve a goal is part of growing up. They said I'd made a commitment, and I should stick to it. Beau told me I was living his dream. He told me I had to stay at Metropolitan so he could experience college basketball through me."

"Did Beau play basketball too?"

"We played together in middle school and high school. They called us the "Bo-Bo Twins."

"Was the other Beau any good?"

"He was. Just not as good as he wanted to be. We won the Wisconsin state championship our senior year. I played a wing and Beau played the post even though he was shorter than me. He was a banger. Set a school record for rebounds our senior season. He was second team all-conference and honorable mention all-state."

"But you were better than Beau?"

"I was two inches taller. My vertical was five inches better. I could handle the ball and shoot the three. I went to the Nike camps after junior year.

I was first team all-state and came in second for Mr. Basketball in Wisconsin."

"So Beau didn't get any scholarship offers?"

"He got some. A couple of jucos. Some Division II schools and an NAIA school in Mississippi. None from anywhere he wanted to go. Not too many colleges want a 6′4″ center."

"So what did Beau do after he graduated from high school?"

"He took the year off. Got a job. Worked on his jump shot and his ball handling. He planned to walk on at a school he liked or join the Army. He liked living with my parents, and they were glad to have him there, with me away at Metropolitan."

"Why didn't Beau live with his own parents?"

"Beau didn't have any parents. He didn't know who they were. He was one of those babies dumped at a fire station by parents who didn't want him. He didn't get adopted, and he grew up at the Baptist Children's Home in Greenville. We became best friends in middle school, and by the time we were in high school, he spent more time at my house than he did at the Home."

"Your parents sound like pretty good people."

"Yeah. They were."

I paused, waiting for him to continue. He was silent for several minutes, staring at the road. Finally, he said, "They were both teachers. Mom taught English at the middle school. Dad taught biology and chemistry in high school."

He paused again.

"What about the rest of your family?"

"That was it. I didn't have brothers or sisters. Dad was an only child, too. Grandpa, my dad's father, died when I was ten and Grandma died after my freshman year of high school. She used to come to my games. She was a big fan."

"What about your mother's family?"

He frowned.

"Mom and Dad met and fell in love when they were in college. Dad was the son of a Methodist minister from Wisconsin. Mom came from a Jewish family in the D.C. area. When Mom told her family she was marrying a Gentile and converting to Christianity, they disowned her. They had a funeral for her like she was dead. None of her family, mother, father, broth-

ers, sisters, aunts, uncles, or cousins, would speak to her after that. She tried to reconcile after she got married and again after I was born, but they wouldn't have anything to do with her. After that, she gave up. She never said anything about it to me. I found out when I was in high school. I asked Dad. He told me, but made me promise I'd never say anything to my mother about it."

We rode in silence for a long time.

When we turned south on I-75 toward Tampa, I asked, "Now that you have more money than you can count, what do you want to do with it?"

"All this has happened so fast, I hadn't really thought about it."

He paused, thoughtfully, "What I'd really like is for things to be fun again. Like when I was one of the Bo-Bo Twins, playing basketball in high school." Another pause, "Is that possible?"

To be continued

3

Beau said he liked Italian food, so I took him to dinner at Lauro's on Henderson Boulevard. He ate a chicken dish with a white sauce with both soup and salad and sent the waiter back to the kitchen twice for more bread.

After dinner, as we were finishing off a bottle of red wine, I said, "There are a couple of things I don't understand. You said it was easier to keep letting people think you were Beau Dawson. Why was that?"

"I told you I had a broken jaw from the accident and my jaw was wired shut after I woke up?"

I nodded.

"During that month, insurance adjusters came to see me about the accident and personal injury lawyers kept trying to sign me up. Nurses would slip me cards from lawyers saying they knew this lawyer was great. After a couple of weeks, I was fed up with them bothering me. When the adjuster told me his company would give me $25,000 and pay all my medical bills from the accident if I'd sign a release, I signed "Beau Dawson" to the form just to get everyone to leave me alone. When my jaw healed and I could talk again, I couldn't tell anyone who I really was, because I didn't want to go to jail for forging Beau's name on the insurance forms."

I smiled and said, "You don't have to worry about going to jail for forging Beau's name. Your injury was worth much more than $25,000, whether you're Beau Dawson or Bogart Sweeney. The insurance adjuster took advantage of you. We can probably get a court to set the whole thing aside and get you back to being who you really are."

Beau looked at me for moment and thought about what I said.

"I'd rather stay Beau Dawson," he said.

"Why?"

"I'm not sure I can explain it," Beau said. "When they let me out of the hospital and I got my $25,000, I bought a used F-150 pick-up. It was the first car I'd ever owned that was just mine. I drove to Greenville to see the graves. New people were living in my house, and there was a kid about 10 years old shooting hoops in the driveway. Nobody recognized me. Of course, I'd grown a full beard, and my face looked like this. My parents wouldn't have recognized me. I felt relieved. A weight was lifted off of my shoulders. When I opened the door of the truck at the cemetery, a blast of cold Wisconsin air hit me. I decided that minute to move some place warm. Two days later I arrived in Tampa. As much as I enjoyed growing up in Greenville, I've never considered going back. Since I got here, I've never wanted to be Bogart Sweeney again. Do you understand?"

I told him, "I'm not sure I do. There are civil and criminal penalties for taking someone else's identity. Most of those penalties relate to using the identity to steal money, to commit fraud, or for other nefarious purposes. With the exception of your dealings with the insurance adjuster, you haven't done any of that. You have all the money you need, without having to steal any. I'll call a criminal lawyer about your situation and let you know what I find out."

"Does that mean I can keep being Beau Dawson or do I have to go back to Bogart Sweeney?"

"Who you want to be and what you want to do is a decision you have to make for yourself. I'm not going to tell you what to do. That's not my job. My job is to tell you the legal consequences. After you make your decision, I'll do my best to protect you. If you want to be Beau Dawson, we'll start from there and try to help you accomplish what you want to accomplish. By the way, why did your parents name you 'Bogart'? Is it a family name?"

Beau laughed.

"My parents met at a Humphrey Bogart film festival. Later, after they

were married, they were staying home on a Friday night, because they had no money to go out. They were watching Casablanca on television and drinking beer. They thought I was conceived sometime during the movie. They told me it would've felt wrong to name me anything else. I hated the name and asked them to change it all through elementary school."

After dinner, we drove to my office. As Beau was leaving, I said, "Think about what you want to do with your money. We can talk more about it in the morning."

4

Beau cancelled his appointment the next morning and rescheduled for the following Monday. When Beau finally saw me, he was smiling and excited.

"I've decided what I want to do," he said.

"O.K. What have you decided?" I asked.

"I want to go to a D-III school in a small town that's not close to any big city, play basketball, and get a degree."

"Are you going to enroll as Beau Dawson or Bogart Sweeney?" I asked.

"Beau Dawson."

"Registering at a college under somebody else's name can cause legal problems. You'll be giving a false social security number, which is a federal crime. If you're found out, you may lose your eligibility to play basketball, and you may hurt the school. I really think you ought to let us straighten things out for you so you can play under your real name."

"I wouldn't be able to do this if I go as Bogart Sweeney. There'd be NCAA problems with Metropolitan. The coach wouldn't release me, and I'd lose eligibility. If I go as Beau Dawson, nobody will care, and I'll have four years of eligibility."

"I think you're making a mistake," I said. "There's something called the Law of Unintended Consequences. All actions have consequences, and no matter how carefully you plan, you can't anticipate all of the consequences of a particular action. If you do this, there'll be lots of problems you haven't thought about. You don't know what'll happen. The more people who know about your background, the harder it'll be to anticipate the consequences."

"Does anybody know about Bogart Sweeney besides you and me?" Beau asked.

"No."

"Can we keep it that way?" Beau asked.

"I can, but I won't be the problem," I told him. "If you go to college, you'll be drinking with your buddies, and it might slip out. You'll have girlfriends who'll want to know all about you. You might bump into somebody who knew both Beau and Bogart who'll tell people about your deception."

Beau responded, "That's why I want to go to a small D-III school. I'll go somewhere far away from Wisconsin or Metropolitan. I checked out some schools online. Most of them show what states their students come from. I can pick a school with no students from Wisconsin and be safe. Anyway, if I get into any problems, you can straighten them out, can't you? Isn't that what I'm paying you for?"

"We can try to straighten them out, but we may not always get the results you want. I really hope you'll reconsider."

"I understand what you're saying, but my mind is made up," Beau said.

"I can't stop you, and I have to keep your secret. However ethically, I can't help you commit a crime or a fraud. I can continue to represent you, but I won't tell anyone your real name is Beau Dawson," I said. "In addition, no one in this firm will witness or notarize any documents for you using that name. If you want us to represent you in buying or selling anything, it'll have to be done in the name of your trust. If you can't live with that, you'll need to find another law firm to represent you."

Beau stared at me for more than a minute.

"Is that just you, or will every other lawyer I deal with tell me the same thing?" he asked.

"No ethical lawyer will represent you except under the conditions I outlined," I said.

Beau stared at me for another minute.

"I like you, and I trust you. I want you to represent me. I have to have someone who knows everything, and, as you said, the more people who know about Bogart, the more likely it is my real identity will become public. Will you come with me when I go to look at colleges?"

"If you think you need a lawyer with you, and you're willing to pay my hourly rate, I'll go with you."

Beau smiled.

"Can I afford you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Good. There's something else I wanted to ask you. Is it O.K. for me to start spending some of my money now? Can I quit my job without giving two weeks notice?"

"The money is yours," I told him. "From the moment the proceeds were wired to the bank, you could spend money. The credit card we got for you has a $200,000 limit. If you need more money than that let me know. As far as your job goes, I don't think Sami will mind if you quit today. I'll call him for you if you like. What do you want to buy?"

"I was thinking about a new car and a place to live. My studio apartment seems a lot more cramped than it did a week ago," Beau answered.

"You can buy the car with your credit card. Where do you want to live?"

"It'd be nice to have a place on the beach."

"If you're going away to college, a condo would be better than a single family house," I told him. "That way, when you leave, you won't have to worry about maintenance. I have a friend who specializes in high end beach-front property in Pinellas County. Give her a call and let her show you what's available."

I wrote the real estate agent's name and phone number on a piece of paper and handed it to Beau.

"What should I say at the car dealership when I go to buy a car?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You said I should buy things in the name of the trust. How do I do that?"

"Tell the car salesman to talk to me. You have my cell number. I'll tell them how the title should read."

5

Within the next month, Beau bought a new Cadillac Escalade and a two story penthouse on the 18th and 19th floors of a high rise on St. Pete Beach. Kira, the real estate agent, helped him buy furniture. He traded his Wisconsin driver's license for a Florida version, filed for homestead tax exemption on his condo, and registered to vote. Beau also set up a two week trip for us to visit 14 colleges in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

While Beau was busy with his acquisitions and his planning, I cleared my schedule for the trip, and had a detective agency do background checks on Bogart Sweeney and Beau Dawson. Most clients lie to their lawyers. I didn't think Beau was lying, but I decided to err on the side of caution.

CHATHAM SECURITY
428 North Lois Avenue
Suite 1418
Tampa, Florida 33609
813-875-xxxx

BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION

SUBJECT:	Bogart Sweeney
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER:	xxx-xx-xxxx
DATE OF BIRTH:	January 19, xxxx
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Greenville, Wisconsin
DATE OF DEATH:	June 28, xxxx
PLACE OF DEATH:	Cold Springs, Colorado
PLACE OF BURIAL:	Lot 46-C, Churchill Cemetary, Greenville, Wisconsin
CAUSE OF DEATH:	Automobile accident

Subject was killed in an automobile accident with his parents. Bodies were identified by a second cousin of the Subject's father from Michigan who was the closest relative.

Prior to his death the Subject was a student at Metropolitan University. He had completed his freshman year with a 3.2 grade point average. Applicant was on athletic scholarship for basketball at the time of his death and had completed a redshirt season. All of the coaches and players on the basketball team attended the funeral, and the team wore black bands on their uniforms for the following season in memory of subject.

Subject graduated from Greenville High School in the top 5% of his class. He was vice president of the senior class. As a basketball player, he set school records for scoring, assists, steals, and free throw percentage. He was first team all conference for three years; second team all state his junior year and first team all state his senior year. During his senior year, Subject was ranked 34th in the top 100 prospects by ESPN.

There is no record of the Subject being convicted or arrested of any crimes. There are no outstanding civil judgments against the Subject. Fingerprints of the subject were not available.

CHATHAM SECURITY
428 North Lois Avenue
Suite 1418
Tampa, Florida 33609
813-875-xxxx

BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION

SUBJECT:	Beau Dawson
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER:	xxx-xx-xxxx
DATE OF BIRTH:	March 31, xxxx
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Milwaukee, Wisconsin
CURRENT ADDRESS:	1418 Gulf Boulevard Unit 1800 St. Pete Beach, Florida
CREDIT RATING:	xxx

Subject has no known relatives. He was a resident of Greenville Baptist Youth Home until his 18th birthday.

Subject was a passenger in the automobile in which Bogart Sweeney and his parents were killed. Following the accident, Subject was hospitalized in Cold Spring Memorial Hospital for 7 days in Intensive care and another 35 days in the orthopedic ward with multiple fractures—left arm and leg, jaw. After release from the hospital Subject spent another 14 days in a residential rehabilitation facility. Thereafter the Subject was in an assisted living facility for 63 days receiving daily out-patient therapy. Thereafter Subject moved to Tampa. He was employed at the Quick Pak Convenience Store on the North-east corner of Dale Mabry Boulevard and Waters Avenue in Tampa until September 18 of this year.

Subject graduated from Greenville High School in the top 25% of his class. He was a three year starter on the varsity basketball team. He was second team all conference and honorable mention all state his senior year. He set a school record for rebounding and was voted most improved player his senior year.

There is no record of the Subject attending college.

There is no record of the Subject being convicted or arrested for any crime. There are no outstanding civil judgments against the Subject. Fingerprints of the subject were not available.

Since the background reports provided little new information and confirmed everything Beau had told me, I didn't tell him about the reports.

6

Beau picked me up at 7:00 on the morning of November 1 to begin our trip. Beau met me at my office, and he drove. Beau was happy and excited. We went east on I-4 and north on I-95 to Coastal Christian College. The campus was built on 200 acres on the Atlantic Coast which had been the estate of a railroad tycoon until his death in 1899. With a bequest from the tycoon, the college had been founded in 1901.

The campus was palm trees, landscaped knolls, and winding roads. We were half an hour early for Beau's appointment, so we drove through the campus and stopped at the gym, named "Steele Field House." Beau hopped out of the car and walked in the main door. On the floor of the basketball court, a middle aged woman in shorts and a tee shirt was conducting a women's phys. ed. volleyball course. When I caught up with Beau, he was looking at the basketball court.

After two or three minutes of evaluating, he said, "I wonder what kind of weight room they have."

He headed down the hall until he found it. He walked around the exercise machines and the free weights. Ten minutes later, we headed for the admissions office.

Admissions was on the ground floor of the administration building, a Spanish style, tan, stucco, three story mansion, with a barrel tile roof. The administration building had been the private residence of the college's first benefactor. Beau's appointment was with a Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes stood several inches short of six feet with a pot belly and thinning gray hair. He wore half moon glasses with black frames pushed down to the end of his thin nose. He also wore a tweed sports jacket with leather patches on the elbow, khaki pants, a shirt with beige and brown checks, and a green and blue plaid tie. My initial impression wasn't favorable, but I said nothing to Beau.

Instead of greeting Beau, Mr. Forbes came up to me with his hand extended saying, "You must be Mr. Dawson, the father. I'm Hank Forbes, welcome to Coastal Christian College."

"No," I said. "I'm just a family friend. Alden Collins."

Turning to Beau as I shook hands with Mr. Forbes, I added, "This is Beau Dawson, the man you need to talk to."

"Beau," Forbes said as he shook Beau's hand, "If you don't mind my asking, why didn't your parents come here with you? At Coastal Christian, we like to make college an enriching experience for the entire family."

"My parents are dead. I'm an orphan."

Forbes's face turned red.

"Oh," he said. "Well, why don't we go into my office and get to know each other better. Would you like to join us, Mr. Collins?"

"No thanks. I'll wait out here."

Ten minutes later, Beau came out of the office, followed by Forbes. Beau was frowning. Forbes forced a smile and waved.

"It was good meeting you, Beau. There'll be a campus tour leaving from the front steps of the administration building every hour on the hour until 4:00 this afternoon."

Beau turned back briefly to Forbes and said, "Thank you for your time, Mr. Forbes."

When we left the admissions office, I asked, "How'd it go?"

"I'll tell you when we get to the car."

"Don't you want to wait for the campus tour? There'll be one leaving in about five minutes."

"No."

We got into the car and headed off campus. As we were going through the college gate, Beau said, "If all small colleges are like this, I might be making a mistake. It doesn't even look like a college. With all those palm trees and the beach it looks like a cabana club. The basketball facilities suck. There's no way I'd go here."

"What happened in the interview?" I asked.

"He started out by saying he didn't think they'd ever had an orphan attend school here. Then he asked how I was going to pay for college when I didn't have any parents."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'I have money.' Then he goes, it costs more than $28,000 per year for room, board, and that's more than $100,000 for the four years. He also said that didn't include clothes or video games or summer school. What an asshole."

"Did you talk about anything other than the cost of school?"

"He asked me what I wanted to major in."

"What did you tell him?"

"Sociology."

"I thought having to major in sociology was something you didn't like about Metropolitan?"

"Yeah. But I couldn't think of anything to say, and if he asked me if I knew what sociology was, I'd be able to answer him."

"Did he ask?"

"No."

"Did you talk about basketball at all?"

"A little. He told me the basketball coach also taught religion. He said all varsity athletes were required to join the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and, every summer, the basketball team took a mission trip to a foreign country to spread the gospel."

"That doesn't appeal to you?"

"I don't have anything against religion. I just don't think it's right to make someone join some religious group just to play basketball."

"Did he ask you about your grades?"

"Yeah. I told him they were O.K. – A's and B's. He also talked to me about the SAT and the ACT. I told him I'd taken them in high school but I didn't remember my scores. He said if I took the tests more than two years ago, I'd have to take them again before I applied."

"You talk about anything else?"

"Yeah. He wanted to pray about my future. We bowed our heads and he droned on and on and all I could think about was getting out of there. When the prayer was over, I sort of raced for the door."

"So Coastal Christian College is off of your list?"

"Yeah," Beau answered. "I hope the rest of the schools we're going to visit are better."

"Before we get to the next school, I think we should do some mock interviews – I'll play the admissions officer – so you get a feel of what might be asked. Then we can talk about your answers; we can decide on the best way to answer the questions. If you want me to, I'll go into the interviews with you, but it's also fine if you want to do them alone."

"Could we do that? That'd be great. What should I say when someone asks me how I'm going to pay for college? Do I have to tell them about winning the lottery?"

"Do you want to tell them about winning the lottery?"

"No."

"Then don't tell them. Why don't you say something like: 'I've been thinking about going to college for three years. I made sure I had my finances in order before I started interviewing at schools.'?"

"That's good, but do you think it will satisfy them?" he asked.

"It should, in the initial interview. You're telling them you've thought about paying for college. If you apply, there'll be questions about financial aid – we can answer those questions when you actually apply – this is just the preliminary."

"O.K. What should I say when they ask me what I want to major in?"

"Well, what do you want to major in?" I asked.

"I don't know. I hadn't really thought about it,"

"It's O.K. not to know what you want to major in. Use your uncertainty to your advantage – say something like: 'I'm not sure what I want to major in. There're a lot of things I'm interested in. That's one of the reasons I want to go to a liberal arts college. I can get a sampling of several disciplines before I decide how I want to focus my life.' An answer like that will fit you right into a small college's philosophy of education."

"Good."

For three hours we did mock interviews. I asked questions I thought a college admissions officer might ask. We talked about answers and what to do if the officer asked a question we didn't anticipate. It was like preparing a witness for a deposition. Beau seemed to enjoy the back and forth. He was able to understand the reasons for the answers I suggested and remembered what we had covered; he didn't need multiple repetitions of questions to be confident in the answers he gave.

Over the next several days, we visited one or two colleges per day. In some of the interviews, I accompanied Beau. At other colleges Beau interviewed alone. After each interview, we dissected it, deciding what went well and what Beau could do better. At about half of the colleges, Beau got to talk to the basketball coach. None of the other colleges were as bad as Coastal Christian, but Beau eliminated most of them. The colleges Beau didn't eliminate were viable options, but Beau hadn't fallen in love with any of them. That is, until we reached Apex College.