

# The Last Lie

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NY  
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The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.  
New York, New York

NYQ Books™ is an imprint of The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.  
P. O. Box 2015  
Old Chelsea Station  
New York, NY 10113

[www.nyqbooks.org](http://www.nyqbooks.org)

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First Edition

Set in New Baskerville

Layout and Design by Raymond P. Hammond  
Cover photos by Tom Guiltinan

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009940956

ISBN: 978-1-935520-15-3

# *Contents*

LITERATURE	13
NOT ME	16
UNDERCOVER	18
READING AND WRITING	20
CATHOLIC SCHOOL	22
YEAR BOOK	24
1987	26
PHYSICS	27
WHEN I GROW UP	31
BOY SCOUTS	33
SWEET SIXTEEN	34
KISSING	36
VIGILS	38
ARRANGEMENTS	40
CROSSING	42
DISNEY WORLD	44
BATH TIME	48
A GOOD BAD DAY	51
4/17/06	53
MY OTHER LIFE	56
NOT THE WORST THING	58
LOVE AND BASEBALL	61
NUMBER 32	65
SOFTBALL	68
BLACK AND WHITE	70
YANKEE STADIUM MATINEE 2008	72
MID LIFE POETRY CRISIS	75
GOOD	78
ON OR OFF	80
HALLOWEEN ON THE F TRAIN	83
HAPPY	86

THOUGHTS AND THEORIES...	88
OPEN HOUSE	92
ANTHONY	94
THE WAY A WORLD CAN CHANGE	97
GETTING AWAY	100
WHEN MY WIFE ASKS ME FOR A DIVORCE...	102
EASTER 2002	105
ONE YEAR LATER	106
VISITS	107
GOODBYE	109
FAITH	112
THE LAST LIE	113
TRADING PLACES...	117
NIECE	121
LEFT BEHIND	123
THIRTEEN	126
TWENTY-EIGHT	130

## A GOOD BAD DAY

John walks slowly up the stairs  
to my office every day. Between  
four and four-thirty, after the bus  
brings him home from day program  
and after he uses the bathroom,  
he says, "Oh, hello Tony," as if  
he's surprised to find me  
sitting at my desk. He says  
he had a good day, stands  
by a chair and after six years  
of living at the residence,  
his home, he still hesitates,  
wonders if he needs permission  
to sit down. I don't give it,  
wait until he sits on his own.  
He tells me if he read or colored,  
exercised or sang today and I ask  
questions as if I was his mother.  
Maybe he went to a park, a store,  
the library. All along he wears  
this pleasant, half smiling,  
perfectly balanced, zen-like gaze  
across his Fred Flintstone face.  
And I don't know if I'm stressed  
or bored, mean or just a smart-ass  
acting like we are friends;  
but when he asks me about my day  
sometimes I tell him the truth.

Uselessly endless meetings, piles  
of paper work, asshole administrators.  
Not enough sleep. Girlfriend trouble.

## THE WAY A WORLD CAN CHANGE

Start with a letter from a woman  
who disappeared, broke  
your heart eight years ago.  
Her life's a stolen car,  
an escape from a cult,  
a sperm bank son, six  
years old, autistic.  
She's not sure why  
she's writing. Don't laugh  
it says, she's moving  
to Vermont, trying to find  
herself and she remembers  
the time spent with you  
as happy, stable.

Read it again. Write back,  
edit it like a new poem.  
You're working the same  
job, there are still no  
pictures on your walls,  
your first full length collection  
will be published in January.  
You like the name Joshua, ask  
if he has her clear blue eyes.  
Hope that when she finds herself  
it will be the woman you loved.  
Write. Call. Anytime.

Answer the phone. It's her,  
Mallory. Talk until Joshua  
screams too loud and wrestles

## GOODBYE

Today, I picked Joshua up from music group. He said my name soon as I stepped through the door, tried to run to me. The therapist stood in his way, forced him to stay until he made eye contact, said goodbye to her assistant, the other kids. She slowly walked him over to me, assured me how much better he was doing while he tugged on my arm repeating 'home' louder and louder. I thanked her while we headed out the door, tried to keep him from jumping into every puddle, steer him from bumping into people as we turned down subway stairs.

Joshua took a window seat, got on his knees and traced the outline of his face as we rode. I finger counted the six stops to Hamilton Parkway, promised that his mom would be waiting for him. When the train rose out of the ground, climbed up into the cloudless sky, he ran to the front door. I stood behind him, played with his hair as all of Red Hook spread beneath us.

## TWENTY-EIGHT

This woman who told me  
I was too old for her  
said she sometimes wonders  
what I was like at 28. Sure,  
I was 10-20 pounds thinner  
with darker, longer hair  
hanging down my back.  
But already, I had started  
working with retarded  
and autistic kids, sending  
my poems out, trying to learn  
if they had anything to say  
to anyone other than me.

I was always quiet, shy  
and I probably think  
too much, never learned  
how to let go and have fun.  
I can be self absorbed,  
thoughtless, too often sarcastic,  
irreverent and hard headed.  
And no I never liked parties  
or politics or money and most  
people. I didn't play guitar,  
drive a fast car, never dreamt  
of spending a year in Turkey,  
Timbuktu, Portugal, a weekend  
in the Hamptons or building  
a mansion on a hill, filling it  
with kids and lovable pets.