

## Carl R. Brush

### Family Counseling--One-On-Ones

#### Callie

I just don't want them to argue all the time. They tell *us* not to. Caruso and me, of course. Could I have a glass of water, please?

#### Marilyn

I don't care so much about my career—

I *am* being honest. I said I would and I am. I still don't care so much—not about the career itself. But when Jerry used it to denigrate me—that's what I cared about. Am I making sense?

He said I had a better chance of being an astronaut than singing opera. Before that, I was happy raising two great kids and giving voice lessons.

No, I never minded his being gone so much. I liked my space. He did, too. I thought it was a good arrangement. Is that bad?

You see, after he said that astronaut thing—even though it might have been the liquor talking—he could have hit me and it would have hurt less—he said it in front of Callas and Caruso, too—That was the end for me. I'm sure you can understand. Anyone could.

I didn't *say* he hit me.

#### Jerome

Looking back, we were like a combo with no rhythm section. Nice solos, but nothing to hold it together. I don't know why I didn't see it—hear it—from the git.

Yeah, I drank—drink—a bit more than I should from time to time, but, hell, musicians, they're—you're surrounded by that stuff every day. I don't do weed or

coke, and you better believe I have plenty of chances—daily chances. Sex, too, and I never did that either.

You think I'm lying? Think whatever you want. But I'm telling you, when you're talking to her, watch out for how she twists things.

Me in A.A.? Sure, the day she starts to clean up her act. Which will be never because she thinks her . . . let's just say she thinks it's impossible for her to generate a bad smell. Look, I took—take—care of my responsibilities. Kids eat good, wear good clothes. And that damned private school. She never could have bought that with her la-la-la lessons.

Sure, I was against it. All that money and how much better can it be? We got good public schools here, but ooooh, no. Comes from her snooty opera crowd. See what I mean? Blue-collar. Tuxedo. Never make it together. Not in this life.

Did I say she's a bad mother? Just give *me* some credit is all I ask. All my money after expenses went—goes—to the household. Keeping a bunch of jazz musicians together ain't cheap and it ain't easy.

Oh, you been to the club? To the C-Note?

No, I don't own it, but managing the house band is a nice gig.

Well, sure I took—take—the kids there. I'm not ashamed of it. Why shouldn't kids should see their old man at work? Everyone there loves them. Not going to hurt them no matter what she says. Jimmy's teaching Caruso the drums, and Callie—ten years old and it's a miracle what she does on the keyboard. But there, again, she can't take it home. Her mother would have her on scales the rest of her life even though she's a natural at improvisation. Hears changes like pro.

### **Caruso**

I feel like I got to take care of Mom, you know? When dad's drunk or he's hungover, he's pretty mean to her.

No, he's never like that to Callie or me. Not to anyone, really. I mean, he might kick a chair or something, but . . .

No, I don't call it mean if he doesn't come over exactly when he promises or if he doesn't come home at night—of course that was before he moved out. The club takes lots of time, and he's always sorry. Mom doesn't really understand. It's not that he's trying to hurt us or anything.

Well one way is when I play piano for her to sing arias and pretend it's like La Scala or the Met and the audience is all cheering. Mom is happy then.

### **Callie**

Well, once was when Daddy told Mommy our house was like a refrigerator. She got so mad, but I don't know why.

## Marilyn

Some people have said that, but I don't believe I put an unfair burden on my children naming them after opera stars. I was just trying to give them aspirations, isn't that all right?

Not only music, no, just in anything to be the best at whatever made them happy.

Well, it was a compromise, really. Jerry and I could talk in those days. So Caruso's middle name is Miles, and Callas' is Billie. My mother was so disappointed we left her out of the naming, and for a boy's name, too, even though it wasn't really a boy's name, it sounded that way to her.

Well, doesn't it show that Jerry and I thought alike once? Even though he thought jazz and I thought classical, we both thought music, and we both wanted to bless our children with ideals to live up to. But now—I don't know why no one believes me—he cares primarily about his next drink, and it terrifies me every time I have to let the kids go with him. Because I know he drives when he shouldn't, and the degrading atmosphere at that club. Truly speaking, if you looked at this situation as theater right now, I'm embarrassed to say it would be like a soap opera. But if he does something to hurt them, believe me, it'll look more like a Verdi opera complete with murders.

I'm *not* joking.

## Callie

Caruso's older so he gets to do a lot of stuff I don't.

Four whole years. I won't even be out of middle school by the time he graduates from high school, so it's not really fair. I have to go to the bathroom.

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Carl Brush has been writing since he could write, which is quite a long time now. His work has appeared in *The Summerset Review*, *Flashfiction.net*, and *Right Hand Pointing*. He has participated in the Napa Valley Writers' Conference, the Squaw Valley Community of Writers, and the Sewanee Writers' Conference. Carl lives with his wife in Oakland, California, where he enjoys the blessings of nearby children and grandchildren.