Becoming Wellstone

Healing from Tragedy and Carrying On My Father's Legacy

Paul David Wellstone Jr.

Afterword by Jim Ramstad

cosponsor of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act

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For my parents, Paul and Sheila,
and my sister Marcia
and for Mary McEvoy, Tom Lapic,
and Will McLaughlin

Ten years later, your
spirits all still burn bright.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Above all I want to thank my kids, Cari and Keith, for being the inspirations of my life. Without them, this book would never have happened. I hope they'll take pride in this book—and show it to their children and grandchildren. I want to thank my wife, Leah, for her support and love and above all for making me happy. I also want to thank my parents for bringing me up to believe that even when something is hard—*especially* when something is hard—it can be worth doing. I never thought I could write a book. Throughout the work on this project I heard their voices telling me to stick with it and I would surprise myself. I hope that my parents and my sister can be proud of what I've been able to share here of the Wellstone family story and I hope it continues to inspire people.

Nick Motu, the publisher at Hazelden, must have thought I was crazy when I contacted him earlier this year to say I wanted to do a book—and wanted to have it ready in October to mark the ten-year anniversary of the plane crash no one in Minnesota will ever forget. Thanks to Nick and his entire team for being flexible and creative partners in this project, especially Sid Farrar and Peter Schletty. Their input and advice shaped the manuscript in so many ways. If the book is good, credit goes to them. If it falls short, that's on me.

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Finally, I'm trying to keep this short so I'll just add a shout out to my brother, Mark, and his beautiful family, Jill, Bode, and Collette, to Steve and Sarah for a connection that was inexplicable yet made all three of us so clear about what we could do together with the Wellstone Center in the Redwoods, and to Gwen for all her support and for being a great mom. Ciara and Alex, glad to have you in my life. Rick Kahn, I know why my dad loved you.

~ PROLOGUE ~

THE CRASH

The call came late that morning. My parents had left the St. Paul airport at 9:37 a.m. on a quick hop of a flight to a funeral in Eveleth, Minnesota, but something had gone wrong. The Beechcraft King Air A100 eleven-seater carrying my parents, my sister, and three staffers could not be located on radar. I didn't know what to think. No one did. I had already slipped into a zombie-like state and didn't even know it yet. It was as if I watched someone else pay the check at Bakers Square and get into the car and drive off, then later walk into my father's Senate campaign headquarters in St. Paul and exchange blank, uncomprehending looks with the people there, most of them in tears. It was as if I watched someone else pick up my brother and drive him home, then listened to the radio with him when an announcement came on that

the Beechcraft King Air A100 had gone down. It was as if I watched someone else drop my brother off and then continue on alone, driving north from the Twin Cities and finally up from the Duluth area on little Highway 53 leading up toward the Iron Range town of Eveleth.

That was when I saw the smoke. It was a dark, dirty plume cutting up into the slate-gray background of heavy cloud cover. I knew right away what I was seeing. It was the plane. It had to be. Back when I was a competitive wrestler, I remember feeling my stomach flip-flopping and doing cartwheels, but nothing like this. If I let myself focus on the riot in my stomach or focus on any one thing at all, I knew I'd have no chance of getting through those hours. Instead, I concentrated on moving forward. I pulled off the highway and turned on a side road that brought me closer to the plume of smoke. By this time a light rain was falling and it was dark. I saw the flashing lights of a police barricade blocking my way forward and did not think twice before hitting the gas and driving around it so I could head farther up the road. No one knew who I was. I parked my car and got out. In the distance I could see a fire burning. It must have been after 5 p.m. by then. Law enforcement was all around, and finally an officer came up to me and told me to leave. I had to tell him who I was.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Well—" the officer started to say, but I was having none of it.

"What's going on here?" I shouted.

Even as I was shouting, I was still staring at the flaming plane wreckage, which no one was approaching.

"Why aren't you *doing* anything?" I complained. "Why can't you put out this fire?"

"It's too dangerous," the officer said. "The jet fuel is highly combustible. It poses a—"

"That's bullshit!" I said, cutting him off.

Law enforcement had mounted surveillance cameras within range of the crash site when they first arrived on the scene and then withdrawn to a safe distance. They took me to a trailer they had set up where they were monitoring the surveillance video. Suddenly what had only been blurry confusion at a distance took vivid form. I could see a tight close-up of the flaming plane. The impact of the crash had pushed everyone to the front compartment. I could see that. I could also see shadows that I knew were people, shadows that represented my father, my mother, and my sister.

"Nothing can be done, Mr. Wellstone," they kept telling me.

The words settled over me like dark ice. I was a Wellstone. I'd been raised a Wellstone. My father's father was a Russian Jew who fled just before the Bolshevik Revolution, which claimed the lives of his parents. My grandfather was a man of action, a doer, passionate about the need to fight for justice. He passed that passion and that belief in action on to my father, who grew up in Virginia as the smallest kid around but who was never, ever one to get lost in the crowd. As a wrestler, my dad was unstoppable and ended up undefeated, champion of the Atlantic Coast Conference for his weight division. As a professor at Carleton College in Minnesota, after earning his Ph.D. at age twenty-four, he threw himself

into campus activism, organizing protests and speaking out against campus ties to corporate interests. My brother, sister, and I were brought up to think and consider and learn, but above all, always to do. Now I was frozen in a trailer watching my life as I knew it end. All I kept hearing was the voice of officers telling me there was nothing to do, nothing to do, nothing to do.

I did my best to fight through the numbness and disbelief that overwhelmed me in that trailer near the plane. Back at the crash site later that week, I spotted a small flower that made me think of my father. I found a spot for it in the branches of a tree not far from where the plane had gone down and placed the small flower there, intending it as a kind of message for my father. He could not be gone. He was too strong a presence, too strong a man. It was simply unimaginable that, just like that—like *that*—he could suddenly no longer be there. I was sure he had been thrown from the plane and was still lying around somewhere nearby. I was convinced he would hop up and walk around and see the small flower I had left for him. That wasn't the last time I returned to the crash site. I went back again. Many times. But I could never find that flower again or any sign of it, let alone any trace of my father.

After that, I did a lot of nothing—days, weeks, months of nothing. I went home and stayed home. My neighbors were kind enough to take turns bringing me a hot dish every night. I might not have eaten for days on end otherwise. I was incapable of shopping. I was incapable of cooking. I was incapable of doing much of anything. I received a package

one day that was so big and strange that I had to open it up. It turned out that they had somehow sent me all the items from the crash by mistake. The shock and disbelief knifed through me again as I pulled out the charred remnants of a watch and a burnt, partially melted wedding ring. Then I came upon a burnt "Wellstone" campaign button that smelled so strongly of jet fuel, it made me sick to my stomach. Getting a whiff of that smell made me so dizzy, I toppled over and collapsed to the ground. To this day, I feel queasy whenever I smell jet fuel.

I opened almost no mail after that. It would pile up like snowdrifts. I will always carry a vivid recollection from this period of my startled, disconnected reaction when I saw a van show up one afternoon so someone in a jumpsuit with a name tag and a logo on the back could pop out and turn off my water. I hadn't paid my bill. I hadn't even opened my bill. Then someone else showed up with a foreclosure notice. I hadn't made my house payments either. I hadn't made any payments. I just didn't give a shit about anything. I lost twenty pounds. My eyes had a hollow, empty look. It was time to get out of there. I would never be free in Minnesota to find a way forward to my future. Too many memories. Too many associations. Too many bizarre, disturbing experiences, like the Halloween day when I heard a radio DJ announce, "This Halloween I'm going to go as a dead person. I'm going to put on a Paul Wellstone mask." Too many people making a fuss on those rare occasions when I ventured out and tried to pay with a credit card at a restaurant or supermarket and they saw the name "Paul D. Wellstone."

So I left Minnesota and moved to the Santa Cruz Mountains in northern California, where I could just be Dave. That was when my healing began. As I will explain in this book, I did not find a house in my adopted home state, a house found me. I was on Amigo Road in Soquel, low on the ridge of mountains that divides the Pacific Ocean from Silicon Valley. One thing led to another, and I felt myself pulled up to a house high on the ridge looking down, a house surrounded by redwoods and the healing energy they bring. I made this my home for many years to come and turned it into a place of spiritual power, a place of recovery and growth, a place where I could have the time I needed to heal and rejuvenate, and ultimately to take on new challenges—like the writing of this book and the journey it both represented and opened up for me and, I hope, many of you as well.

~ CHAPTER 1 ~

GROWING UP WELLSTONE

In one sense I was like most kids growing up: I got into a lot of arguments with my dad about haircuts.

"No!" he would say.

"Yes!" I would say.

"You don't need a haircut!" he would say.

"But Dad, I want one!" I would say.

For my entire childhood, my father had a wild, bushy head of hair—a full-on "Jewfro." He was so proud of his hair and would tend it constantly with a pick he kept in his back pocket, like J.J. on the 1970s TV show *Good Times* ("Dyn-o-mite!"). My old man loved long hair.

"It's okay to be different, David," he would tell me. "You don't need a haircut. Just because everyone else does something doesn't mean you have to. And anyway, you look better with your hair longer."

His message was: *Think for yourself. Don't just go around with the crowd. Never be afraid to take an unpopular stand. Always question authority.*

I hear stories about kids growing up in the 1960s whose parents had loose, free-form ideas about the values they instilled in their children. My parents were nothing like that. They were constantly asking themselves questions about what sort of moral education to provide for me, and later my sister, and then my kid brother. They thought about this stuff every single day. They talked about it with us all the time, especially to me as the oldest. From the time I was very young, my father always wanted to bring me along when he met with disadvantaged people so I could see for myself what was going on in the world.

My parents got married young and were both just twenty years old when I was born in March 1965. My father was a graduate student then at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, writing his Ph.D. dissertation called "Black Militants in the Ghetto: Why They Believe in Violence." The FBI sent in agents to seize the dissertation. He eventually got it back, but it took some work—and he was rattled. Even when I was very small, I always had a sense of people being mad at my father for some reason or of him setting them off, but never of him backing down in his beliefs.

Later he told me the story of following a trail of dead rabbits on the road, which people in North Carolina knew led to a meeting of the Ku Klux Klan, then showing up and confronting the KKK. That led to a tense standoff. He denounced the men in white bedsheets and one of them

told him, "Let me show you what we do with troublemakers like you," and then flipped up a cover on the back of a pick-up truck to reveal a pile of guns. That was the end of that standoff.

I guess being athletic ran in the family. My father had gone to UNC on a wrestling scholarship and went undefeated on his way to winning the Atlantic Coast Conference title for his weight class. I had a wrestling mat in my crib. I was always very active. I have hazy, half-formed early memories of being on the UNC campus with my dad when I was a toddler. Even as a little kid I could throw a Frisbee, and when my dad would take me to campus with him, that was a big hit with the other students. They would all crowd around to see me do it again, this little two-year-old flinging a Frisbee sidearm. That really impressed them!

We always had music playing in our tiny apartment in Carrboro, North Carolina. Simon and Garfunkel released the album *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* in 1966 and once the movie *The Graduate* came out in 1967, "Scarborough Fair" was a hit single and you heard it everywhere. I can remember sitting in a tiny little wooden rocking chair hearing that song over and over and trying to memorize the words. "Blowin' in the Wind" and other early Dylan songs were the soundtrack to my childhood. Are you kidding me? A little Jewish guy singing about injustice and ticking off anyone older than thirty? My dad's love of Dylan might have even had something to do with him later ending up as a college professor in Minnesota, where Dylan was born and grew up.

I had some issues when I got old enough for day care in Chapel Hill. Let's just say that Richard Nixon's election as president in 1968 didn't go over real well in our household. My parents did not need Woodward and Bernstein reporting in the *Washington Post* or the Watergate scandal in the early 1970s to know where they stood on Nixon. My parents were shocked that the American people could elect such a person. They talked about it all the time. So when Bobbi, my day care provider, started talking about President Nixon one day, I knew just what to say back to her: "Nixon is a fascist pig!"

This outburst caused a major brouhaha. My parents had a hard time explaining to me why the things we talked about at home together could not always be repeated to other people. North Carolina had of course voted for Nixon, as did the entire South, except for Texas and the states that went for segregationist George Wallace.

My parents did not readily use language like "fascist pig." They tried to be more tolerant of differing viewpoints, as my father made clear much later when he was in the U.S. Senate and formed friendships with even some very conservative Republicans. But 1968 was a traumatic year for my parents, as it was for the entire nation. When word came in early April that Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated on a balcony at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, my father was more upset than I had ever seen him. He was sobbing and crying and finally had to run outside. He was soothed somewhat by the eloquent words spoken shortly afterward by Senator Robert Kennedy, who implored African Americans not to let the tragic death fill them with bitterness.

"For those of you who are black and are tempted to be filled with hatred and mistrust of the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I would only say that I can also feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling. I had a member of my family killed, but he was killed by a white man," Bobby Kennedy said.

Two months later, Bobby was dead too. He was gunned down after midnight at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles by Sirhan Sirhan the night he won the California primary. My father found out the next morning and again he was inconsolable. Within a five-year span, Martin Luther King and Jack and Bobby Kennedy had all been murdered. As a kid, I only knew that my father was sobbing once again, but at some level I understood. My father was struggling not to turn bitter and hateful, and to use this tragedy to strengthen his resolve even more, always to fight for the underdog, the disadvantaged, the powerless.

What I will never forget about life in North Carolina was the heat. Never again have I lived anywhere with that kind of heat. I remember it being so hot that my mom and I would fry an egg on the sidewalk in front of our tiny apartment, sunny-side up. My dad would put me on his lap and let me drive the car up the driveway to the apartment, just to keep me distracted. I was never satisfied with just moving forward. I'd twist the wheel to try to turn the car off the driveway, and he'd just laugh and straighten the wheel back.

WE START A NEW LIFE IN MINNESOTA

One of my first memories of Minnesota was that no one could understand me. My Southern accent was too thick. My father was hired as a political science professor at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, starting in September 1969. He was only twenty-five years old and became the youngest professor they had ever hired. He was not about to do what most of the Carleton faculty did and live on the same street as a bunch of college professors. He wanted to be with the people. We found a house on the blue-collar side of town on a quiet street with a lot of families. As soon as I could, I ran outside to join a ball game. None of the other kids could figure out what I was trying to say.

"Foul ball!" I kept repeating.

"What?" they all said.

My father was an iconoclast, but when it came to our home life, we could not have been a more traditional family. June Cleaver had nothing on my mother. She was always there at home to look after us and drive me to everything. We were one of those families where you could pretty much guess what we were eating on a given night based on the day of the week. My mom had a rotation, so Tuesday night was spaghetti, burgers on Friday night, and so on. My mother was fiercely protective of our dinnertime, so if the phone rang while we were eating—as it often did—she was not always pleasant. Even though it was usually someone wanting my father's help, she would pick up the phone and give the caller a piece of her mind.

"We're having dinner now," she would say. "Don't you know it's six o'clock now, dinnertime? Call back in an hour."

I'd walk home for lunch every day during elementary school and my mother would be there to cook me lunch. It would be just the two of us. She was always my sounding board to talk about how I was feeling. She was my emotional frame of reference. We talked about things in a different way than I could with my father, who was always a man on a mission. My dad never liked to go to the movies or play games. His attitude was always, *Why would I want to go sit in a theater for two hours? Or sit down over a game board? Why would I want to waste that time? There's work to be done! Causes to be fought for! People to help!*

My mother taught me how to play Yahtzee and we would play that for hours. I loved it because the dice made a lot of noise and I could beat my mother sometimes. She also loved cards and we would play gin rummy, crazy eights, go fish. Movies were more of a special occasion, since we didn't have a lot of money for that kind of thing. I remember when *The World According to Garp* came out later and my mother and I saw it together. It felt a little odd to sit through some of those scenes with her, since that movie had some very adult themes, but Robin Williams played a wrestler, and by then I was a wrestler, too—like my dad—so it was a given that we would see it.

My mother and father came from very different backgrounds. His father was a Jewish writer who emigrated from Russia. Her parents were Southern Baptists from Appalachia. She grew up in Kentucky coal-mining country. My father

liked to say that when they met on the beach in Ocean City, Maryland, both of them only sixteen, it was as if he could hear the song "Two Different Worlds" playing in the air. But none of that mattered much in their marriage, and it didn't make a difference to us kids. I didn't feel Jewish and I didn't feel Christian. We never really participated in organized religions. It was a nonissue in our family.

The religious people my father admired were figures like Mother Teresa, people who rolled up their sleeves and devoted their lives to helping others. We would talk in the family sometimes about Catholicism, but only in the context of practical help for the poor. My father was impressed with the work Mother Teresa did with orphans and with the sick and elderly in Calcutta, India, starting in 1950. He had worked with a lot of nuns on various social issues since he was young. So I always saw a connection between religion and social justice, but it was a connection that was meant to encourage you, to inspire you, to get you busy making a difference in your own life. It did not matter what organization or faith you joined. What mattered was how you chose to live your life, the deeds you did or did not do. That was the spirituality I was brought up with.

I GET TO KEEP MY BLOCKS

My dad may not have been a tall man, standing five-foot-five, but he was strong as an oak and always carried me on his shoulders. I felt so safe and secure up there—most of the time. I remember sitting up on his shoulders for a Vietnam

War protest in Minnesota when I was very young, and suddenly there was chaos all around us. I was so small, my mother was furious with my old man for insisting on bringing me along. She was glaring at him, hand on hip, as we got ready to leave the house.

"You better not get arrested!" she said.

My mother's palpable fear made the event seem that much more exciting to me. She was against the war, too. That went without saying. Opposition to the war in Vietnam was in many ways centered in Minnesota, where our senator Gene McCarthy had decided to run for president in 1968 as an antiwar candidate. My mother was just worried about my father getting into trouble. She was very nervous about what might happen. She loved his passion, but worried sometimes about his judgment.

I had a great time at the protest. From up on my father's shoulders, I had a view of everything and I loved seeing so many people gathered together. There were speakers, but as a kid, I didn't pay much attention to them. What did make an impression on me was the chanting.

"Hell, no, we won't go!" I heard all around me.

And of course, "Make love, not war!"

But the one that stuck with me the most was "1-2-3-4, we-don't-want-your-fucking-war."

Then the rally broke up in a hurry. My father and I, like everyone else at the protest, had to beat a retreat, especially when the police dispersed the crowd with plumes of tear gas, turning it into a scene of chaos. Dad was fast and had no problem pulling me down from his shoulders and carrying

me as he ran full tilt to make sure he heeded my mother's warning and did his best not to get arrested. That might not have been the best way to get in good with his colleagues on the political science faculty either.

Soon after that Vietnam protest, my parents were surprised to see that I had written on my blocks. Then they saw what I had written and were even more surprised: A "1" and a "2" and a "3" and a "4"—that didn't faze them—and then a "we" and a "don't" and a "want" and an "a" and a "fucking" and a "war."

You should have seen the look on my mother's face when she saw those blocks!

"Paul!" she cried out.

My dad came over to look and could not hold back a chuckle. Soon my mother had to smile, too. Talk about a chip off the old block! They let me keep those blocks. They didn't even make me wash off what I had written.

"But don't write on your blocks anymore!" my mother scolded me, fighting back a laugh as she turned away.

IF LOVING SPORTS MAKES YOU ALL-AMERICAN, NO ONE COULD TOP US

Like any working-class neighborhood in the United States during the 1970s, our street in Minnesota was always buzzing with activity, usually centered on sports. It was great having a dad who was young and fit and scrappy. He was in his mid and late twenties those first years in Minnesota. After he came home from work, he would grab a football and the

two of us would toss that back and forth like two kids playing. He and I took on everyone in two-on-two football. At first they laughed at us. Here we were, my five-foot-five dad and me a little guy, taking on some big, beefy older neighborhood kids who were used to steamrolling anyone who came along. But my dad and I usually won. We had our set plays that we practiced ahead of time, and we were quicker and more disciplined than the neighbor kids.

We had a Catholic church down at the end of our idyllic street, which probably explains why we had so many large families on our block with lots of kids running around all the time. There was always a game going on. You could tell the season by the game that was under way: hockey in winter, either outside or at the rink two blocks away; and out front on our block, baseball in spring and summer, and football in fall and winter. We also made up our own games, like one called Green Hornet. This game was played just as it was getting dark. The object was to wait for a car to roll up the street, keeping a close eye on the headlights, and hold off as long as you could before making a dash and sprinting across the street just before the headlight would shine on you.

One of my favorites games was Wiffle ball, because you could wail on that thing and it would never go so far that you lost the ball. Wiffle ball was big on our street. We organized teams and kept accurate statistics, and of course we knew our exact batting averages at all times. We would have tournaments with all the kids on the block with special rules, like hitting the ball onto the roof was a home run. The best was on Sundays, when the street would be full of cars parked for

Sunday mass. We had a special rule that hitting a car was an automatic out, making it a lot more challenging on Sundays!

When dinner was ready at night, my mother would walk just outside the front door and scream, "David!" Wherever I was, within a block, I had better make sure I heard that and come running home right away.

My sister, Marcia, was four years younger than me, and I worked hard at being a good big brother to her. That is, I teased her as much as I could, but always looked out for her and tried to be there for her. If boys were after her, I'd be protective. That's what big brothers do, right? She was a good runner and ran both cross country and track. As I said, I tried to be a good brother, but I was also a kid messing around and doing the things kids do. One time I got tied up with my friends and got home late. I had missed Marcia's cross-country meet and that was a big, big deal to my parents. We always went together as a family to watch whenever one of us was competing. My parents were not at all happy with me for missing Marcia's meet. They sat me down for a good talking to about that and I learned my lesson. From then on, I was a regular watching my sister's races. She was one of the top runners on the varsity team when she was only in eighth grade and was also a natural at gymnastics from an early age. I remember going to Sibley Elementary School and being awed at the unbelievably long tumbling runs she did that made you dizzy just watching, as well as her other top event, the balance beam.

My little brother, Mark, was seven years younger than me, which meant that if anything ever happened when we were

playing, it was always on me. It would usually end up with him getting hurt and crying, and my father yelling at me, "If he's hurt, so help me!" Even so, we had a lot of fun. I grew up playing football and hockey with Mark in the driveway. We could play Wiffle ball for hours. We would go through the entire lineup of the Minnesota Twins, player by player, calling out the name in our best imitation of Bob Casey, the famous Twins PA announcer at Metropolitan Stadium, drawing it out the way he did, "Nowww baaaaating, Kennnn Lannn-dreaux," or "Nowwwwwww baaaaaating, Royyy Smallllll-ey." That would keep us entertained for the longest time. Whichever one of us was up to bat would hop around to swing left-handed or right-handed, depending on which Twins hitter's name we would call out.

My dad would also take me to see the Twins in the early 1970s when the Chicago White Sox were in town so we could see Richie Allen play. He batted .316 in 1973. (I love these stat guys who try to say batting average is overrated as a statistic. Let's see one of them hit .316 in the big leagues over an entire season.) We'd go sit in the outfield and root for Richie Allen to hit an inside-the-park home run.

That same year was a great one for our football team, the Minnesota Vikings, "the Purple People Eaters" led by quarterback Fran Tarkenton. They opened the season with a home win over the Oakland Raiders, even though George Blanda kicked three field goals, and from there they were on a roll: Nine straight wins to start the season. They finished the regular season 12–2 and earned a home playoff game against the Billy Kilmer–era Washington Redskins at Metropolitan

Stadium. That's the same stadium where my dad and I would see the Twins, and we figured we'd go out and pick up some tickets and see the game. I was incredibly fired up. Then we got there and discovered that the only available tickets were being scalped for way more than their face value.

"Son, we just can't pay that much money," my father had to tell me.

I was devastated. It was a huge lesson for me. By then we couldn't even watch the game on TV. I was so disappointed that I didn't even feel much better when the Vikings won 27–20. But eight days later, when they followed that up with a 17–10 road win over the Dallas Cowboys to earn a trip to the Super Bowl, I was thrilled. I had just read Roger Staubauch's new autobiography, *First Down, Lifetime to Go.* The Cowboys of those years had such an aura. It was amazing that our guys could even beat them. The Vikings held their annual spring training camp at Carleton College every year when I was a kid, which gave me added incentive to go along with my father to lift weights. We'd often see a group of football players in there.

I used to go regularly to the little gym at Carleton along with my dad and a group of professors, including Mike Casper, his best friend and a physics professor, and Dave Appleyard, a mathematics professor. They would run three to five miles regularly, and often I would tag along. Back then, my dad ran every day of the week and often lifted weights afterward.

It's hard to explain the importance that wrestling had in my house growing up. As I said earlier, I literally had a wrestling mat in my baby crib. For my father, wrestling

represented deliverance. He'd grown up in the Washington, D.C., area as a "tough" kid, as he put it, known to get into some scrapes. Not until wrestling did he find a sense of direction. Not until he found wrestling—or wrestling found him—did everything come together for him. He believed in the kind of energetic hard work that would wear out just about anyone else, but since he was always fit and strong, he could handle that pace every day of his life. He wanted me and my sister and brother to follow in his footsteps by being active and fit because he saw that as essential preparation for life. Later on, new staffers learned fast that if the senator was on the road, he had to have time in his schedule to get in a good workout first thing in the morning. If he didn't get his daily hour-long exercise, he would feel so thrown off physically, he'd start to think he was coming down with a cold.

I was more into running than wrestling when I was a kid. I was a fast little squirt and even went to the Junior Olympics one year, winning silver medals in the half-mile and mile. My dad was so proud, he couldn't stop smiling for a week. I did not start wrestling myself until later, when my father took a sabbatical from Carleton and the family relocated to Columbia, Maryland, for a year. The sabbatical was for my father, so he could do book research, but uprooting myself and moving to an entirely different corner of the country turned out to be a good thing for me, too. I could be a real smart-ass as a kid. I freely admit it. Hell, I can be a smart-ass even now, but at least I've learned a thing or two about not taking myself too seriously. I'm the first one to laugh at myself. As a fifth-grader in Maryland, however, maybe I was

scared or insecure, but I pushed it way too far. I would ask so many annoying questions in class, crack jokes, or just be a pain in the ass. I was forever pushing my teachers to the edge of their patience with my whole smart-ass routine, and the school administration had to come down hard on me. My parents were called in to that school every second or third week and, believe me, I heard about that from them. They were not at all happy with me for getting kicked out of class.

The year we lived in the Washington, D.C., area, twenty-five miles away from the Capitol, was an important chance for my father to renew old acquaintances and make new friends. He loved Minnesota and the work he was able to do there, but he was someone who had to always be learning, gaining new skills, developing new ideas. That's why he loved to meet other people who shared his passions. One of the few people who was as intensely committed to grassroots organizing as him was a man named George Wiley, whose National Welfare Rights Organization had eighty chapters and more than 125,000 members around the country.[1] George was also living in Washington at that time, and he and my father became good friends.

George went sailing out on Chesapeake Bay that August in a twenty-three-foot boat along with his two children, Daniel and Maya. The waters turned rough. George slipped and fell overboard and his children tried in vain to pull him back out of the water, but couldn't save him. My dad heard the news and was devastated. He came home that day and could not stop crying. George was a good friend, and it was such a

freak accident, so hard to understand. He deeply admired George's approach to political action, his commitment to hard work and careful organizing, and the way he reached out to both blacks and whites. For the remainder of his life, my father was always very uneasy any time he went out on the water.

One afternoon sticks out in my mind from that year in Maryland. I used to play tennis on a court near the apartment complex where we lived. The area was almost entirely African American, and that block with the tennis court was a tough neighborhood. A group of black kids surrounded the tennis court where I was playing that day and had their eyes on a guy much older than me who they wanted to beat up. I did what came naturally: I got the hell out of there! I took off running back to our apartment. When I got home, my dad wanted to know what was going on, so I had to tell him, and he marched right over to that playground so he could set things right. I didn't like this idea at all. I was sure it was going to get ugly. I followed along behind him, dreading what would happen. When we showed up, the same group of tough-looking guys were still there, menacing the older guy.

"What's going on?" my father demanded.

They all just stared at him. He was one man, five-foot-five, and they were a whole group of guys, big and strong and angry looking, who did not look at all ready to talk. Silence dragged out. I was getting more scared by the second. Then my father did something that truly surprised me. He turned around and left. He walked away. There was nothing he could do there and he knew it. I learned that day that even

my father knew that sometimes you just have to walk away.

Over the years, people have often asked me, "What made your father the way he was? Why was he always such a fighter? Why did he react so viscerally to injustice?" The truth is, I really can't pinpoint the reasons—and he himself could not have told you either. I don't think it had much to do with his upbringing or family history. That was just the way he was wired. It was an inner compulsion. When he saw a wrong, he could not let it go. He needed to try to make it right. Most people just turn away. My father never turned away. He always called it like it was and jumped into the fray.

~ CHAPTER 2 ~

MY DAD THE TROUBLEMAKER

It was embarrassing growing up with a dad like mine. That's the simple truth of the matter. When you're a kid, you don't always want to call attention to yourself. Sometimes you just want to fade into the background. That idea was incomprehensible to my old man. He did not fade. He did not function in the background. He did not believe in either, not for him, and not for his son. For him, one of the imperatives of life was to always be looking for ways to get involved and make a difference in other people's lives, even if that might put you in risky situations now and then. I just wanted to live my life. I was always wondering why my father had to go out and make a big stink all the time.

"Dad, this is embarrassing," I would tell him.

"You have to stand up for what you believe in, son," he would say. "Always. It's important."

My father's insistence on always fighting for what he believed in got him in trouble on occasion. I'll never forget the day he came home in January 1974 after finding out he had, in effect, been fired from Carleton College. Oh, he knew he was taking a lot of chances with his unapologetic defiance of the entire system. He did not believe that a political scientist should be concerned only with dry, academic research, especially at that time and place. He believed it was just as valid a pursuit to focus his energies on actual grassroots political organizing and getting his students out the door and active and involved. He'd already been barred from ever teaching again at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for upsetting traditional ideas of the role of a political scientist. Faculty members there had tried to get him fired for allegedly teaching a "black power" class. My father had always been a controversial presence on the Carleton College campus, culminating in a months-long review of his performance—and even though he was braced for bad news, still when the word came, it shocked him deeply.

My father was never one to spend much time hanging around the house. That was not his style. Suddenly, after the firing, he was always around. The house we were living in then, built in the late nineteenth century, had a basement lined with heavy limestone walls. That's where my bedroom was. Working with my friend Greg, I made a little office for my dad on the other side of the laundry room next to my bedroom. We put up a crude two-by-four wall glued to the floor, then finished the room with blond plywood. I was eight years old then. Up until this time, my father was hardly ever

in there. But now he would come home early and sit in his office for hours at a time and would sometimes pull out a cigar and light that up. You knew he was there, that's for sure, when the smell of those cigars wafted out. I'd walk in and try to talk to him.

"Whatcha doin', Dad?" I'd ask.

He'd be puffing on a cigar, staring at the wall. It would take him a minute to look over at me.

"Thinking," he'd answer finally.

He was extremely fearful, worried he would not be able to provide for us. Dad knew he was a good teacher—he'd just received a round of student evaluations that established him as a clear favorite of Carleton students—but that did not appease the timid administrators. Nor was it any guarantee of future job options. He knew that if he lost this job, he might have serious trouble finding another teaching position anywhere in the country. Carleton had put him on notice that he had only one year left to teach—and the news left him "shaken," as he put it in his book.

"Right away, I thought of Sheila and our three children," he writes in *The Conscience of a Liberal*. "Where would we go? What were we going to do? I felt tremendous fear and guilt. This experience gave me a real feeling for why many people put up with so much and are so passive. You do not want to lose your job. You have to put bread on the table and prioritize for your family. That is why most people, as someone once said, are more concerned with making a living than with making history."[2]

~ CHAPTER 3 ~

LOSING MY ADVISOR AND MY SUPPORT NETWORK

Walter Mondale was waiting on me. The former vice president and favorite son of Minnesota needed to hear from me, but I wasn't ready. My father was gone, and so were my mother and my sister. Everything was a blur. There were important decisions to be made and I was the one who needed to make them. No one expected me and my brother to play kingmaker. We were not the ones doing the heavy lifting on deciding who would run in my father's place for the Senate. This was not a Mel Carnahan–type situation. Melvin Carnahan was Missouri's governor who was running for the U.S. Senate when he died in a plane crash three weeks before the 2000 election. Missouri law would not allow his name to be removed from the ballot and he was posthumously elected. Upon Carnahan's death, the lieutenant governor became

governor and appointed Carnahan's wife to the Senate seat until a special election could be held in November 2002. State law in Minnesota was different. It called for my father's name to be stricken from the ballot and for another to be added as the candidate for the Democratic party. With the crash only eleven days before the election, this would be a tall order. I knew Mondale was an excellent choice, an honorable man my father admired and knew well, but I was having so much trouble getting a handle on all that had happened. I was going on autopilot. It all seemed mechanical. I could not seem to break out of that.

I needed my best advisor. I needed my father. My whole life, he was the one I had turned to when I needed a dose of good judgment and tough love. He was not only wickedly smart and generous with his understanding and insight, but incapable of sugarcoating anything or mincing words. Until now, I had always had that clear, passionate, commanding voice at the ready to give me a nudge when I needed one, or just to hear me out. It was just too much for me to process that he was gone. I couldn't believe it. I felt like it was all some kind of horrible trick being played, and if I could only figure it out, I could call him somehow, or see him, and he'd be there advising me again.

I would call my parents' house, knowing full well they were not going to answer, but wanting to hear my mother's voice on the answering machine. The shock over not having my father there hurt and saddened me, and made me want to turn to the emotional support and adviser I'd always looked to in an emergency: my mother. I'm not just talking

about the steady presence in my life all those years, when she would make me lunch and we would talk over my day, but the way she had of understanding just what I was saying—or not saying—and probing for answers, but always gently, so I never felt interrogated but came away understanding my own feelings and thoughts much better. Mom had a knack for knowing when you needed her. She always knew by intuition when something was going on and would show up at just the right time, even without a phone call.

My mother went through a kind of transformation following my father's political rise. She had resisted speaking in public as long as she could, but once she got out there she wowed people with her style. Even more so, it was the little things. She would go in and meet with children staying at a battered women's shelter, not just to say hello, but to look at their artwork with them and listen to them and make them feel special. She was always very good at adding a personal touch. But in her own way she was every bit as much a fighter as my father. As I said at the memorial on the University of Minnesota campus, "My mom was everything to us. My dad wasn't who he was without my mom."

Everything was so confusing. My father's political team was handling everything, but they still needed me, as my father's son, to give my blessing with the replacement campaign. They needed me there at the meeting with former Vice President Mondale to put into words what my father would have wanted. Fritz had not decided what he was going to do at this point. Before he saw us, he'd received phone calls from two senators, Pat Leahy and Ted Kennedy, urging him

to run. He'd also been called by Majority Leader Tom Daschle, promising him a position in the Senate leadership if he was elected. Jeff Blodgett, my father's campaign manager, had made it clear that the Wellstone campaign operation, headed up by Jeff himself, would be geared up behind Mondale at full blast.

The meeting was at the downtown Minneapolis offices of Dorsey and Whitney, Mondale's law firm, at ten that Saturday morning, the day after the crash and three days before the planned memorial service at the University of Minnesota. Jeff Blodgett and Rick Kahn were also attending the meeting. I don't even know if it's right to say I was nervous. It's hard to describe. It felt like I was just out of it, as if I were watching myself in the middle of some movie endlessly spooling forward, words coming out of my mouth, without ever having noticed that I planned to speak.

Mondale was in the lobby to greet us, wearing a comfortable-looking pair of khakis and a sweater. He walked up to me and gave me a big hug right away and was very emotional as he gave his condolences for my loss. We followed him back to the office, which I remember being very empty, and just to loosen up the somber mood a little, he started pulling plastic water bottles out of his little office refrigerator and tossing them to each of us. I caught mine and was relieved. In the state I was in I thought it might go right past me.

"Thank you for seeing us, Mr. Vice President," I said to start the meeting. "I'm sure both my parents would want you to be the one to carry on my father's work in the Senate."

I mentioned in particular how Mondale's emphasis on education and health care, especially mental health issues, lined up well with my father's interest in those issues and was something they had in common as senators.

Mondale laughed about the way my father had come to Washington, so full of vinegar that he ticked off half the city within the first month, but then soon learned from his mistakes and turned himself into a highly regarded legislator who was very able to work within the system. That was the kind of growth Mondale admired, he said. He respected the way my father built relationships with senators, both Democrats and Republicans.

"I don't know that I've ever seen anyone who could fire up a crowd the way your father could," he said during our meeting.

Mondale did turn serious at one point in a way I would not have expected, but immediately respected. He said he did have one difference of opinion with my father, and that concerned the pledge my father had made when he first ran for Senate that he would limit himself to two terms. Mondale felt that it had not been wise to retract that pledge and run for a third term in 2002. He added quickly that he did not want to talk in detail about politics, since it was a time for mourning, but he was very gracious in thanking us for coming.

Forty-five minutes after it started, the meeting was over and I could exhale. You do your best just to get through times like that. But at least the meeting achieved the desired result. Mondale had heard all he needed—though the world wouldn't know that just yet.

Eric Black reported the meeting in the next morning's *Minneapolis Star Tribune:*

> *U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone's eldest son, his campaign manager and an old friend implored Walter Mondale at an emotional meeting Saturday morning to take Wellstone's place on the November ballot, and Mondale is highly likely to make the run, according to one of those present at the meeting. The former vice president and U.S. senator did not commit himself, saying that he would not comment publicly on his plans until after Tuesday evening's memorial service for Wellstone, the person at the meeting said. . . .*
>
> *Speculation has run rampant in political circles, with most analysts agreeing that Mondale would be the party's strongest candidate, if he is willing to come out of political retirement at age 74. He has been bombarded with calls and e-mails from longtime friends and allies urging him to step forward.*
>
> *But Wellstone's son and closest political associates had not made their wishes known until the meeting Saturday at the office of Mondale's law firm.*[7]

Here is how Mondale later described the encounter in his own book, *The Good Fight: A Life in Liberal Politics.*

Jeff Blodgett arrived with David Wellstone, Paul's son, and Rick Kahn, a close friend of Paul's and his campaign treasurer. His eyes red with grief, David Wellstone made a personal request that I enter the race. He was crestfallen that his father's voice would be silenced, and he conveyed the family's view that I was the only candidate who had a chance to hold the seat. . . . I knew there was no time for equivocation, and by the time we finished, I had made up my mind. I had the elements I needed: a unified party behind me, a personal request from the Wellstone family, and the Wellstone campaign operation waiting to go. I said yes.[8]

THE MEMORIAL SERVICE

We knew there was never going to be a way to make everyone happy or satisfy everyone's expectations in memorializing my father and mother and sister and the five others who died in the crash. We decided to hold the memorial in Williams Arena at the U of M campus, where my father and I had enjoyed watching many a wrestling match together. The White House sent word that Vice President Cheney would like to attend, but we talked it over and agreed that the incredible security measures in place at that time, barely a year after the September 11 attacks, made it a bad idea for the vice president to attend. But many other Republicans

did, including Norm Coleman, who up until a week before was out on the campaign stump telling the people of Minnesota why they should vote for him for Senate and not my dad.

It was a beautiful, moving memorial. One of my favorite parts was the video montage of my father set to "Forever Young" by Bob Dylan, my father's inspiration in so many ways. "Politics is not about winning for the sake of winning," my father said in a video clip played at the service. "Politics is about the improvement of people's lives."

I was a nervous wreck, having to speak in front of so many people. I felt a great weight of responsibility to rise to the occasion and speak with calm and dignity and do right by my father, my mother, and my sister. I talked about sitting on his lap when I was a kid and how he would let me drive up the driveway. I talked about how my mother would whip up a smorgasbord of food in the kitchen to try and keep everyone happy. I talked about my sister and how the same iron will that ran in the family showed up in her in a way that led her to run marathons. I talked about the need to carry on, looking beyond the crash, beyond that numb, confused week of mourning, beyond the election coming up in one week. I talked of the need to heed the lessons of my father's example for as long as that memory remained alive and always to look for a way to help other people.

Only later did I come to understand how the power of a few isolated clips and slanted commentary gave people a completely inaccurate impression of the memorial. The problem with spin is there is no answering it. A false story was

presented to the country of my father's memorial as some kind of extreme display of partisan zeal as opposed to what it was—a memorial and a call to live my father's principles, which were, above all, to keep fighting for the disadvantaged. That's not a partisan message. That should be a priority for all. But once the spin got going, it influenced a lot of people. For example, the *New York Times* described the memorial in this way: "Some 20,000 people, including Bill Clinton, Al Gore and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, packed into two sports stadiums in Minneapolis for a somber memorial to Paul Wellstone." That article referred readers to page A23, where they found a highly opinionated headline: "Memorial for Wellstone Assumes Spirit of Rally." What happened to "somber"?

In the category of questionable taste, one commentator wrote an entire column in a national newspaper as if she were inside my father's head and knew what he would have thought about the memorial. I am not going to deny that when I first saw that, I was outraged. How about a little respect for the dead? But my anger has long since cooled. It was an election season, and there are always going to be people with no compunctions about using events like that in whatever way they see fit to try and push a particular viewpoint. That is politics. Getting angry does not help the situation. It only helps those who seek to manipulate others. I try not to engage in that. I want to engage in the politics of healing.

In fact, I hope one day to write another book on the subject of healing in politics. I'd like to talk about the lessons I've learned, and lessons we should all learn. The first is that hate in politics is radioactive. It's like toxic waste that

pollutes the environment, not just for an hour, not just for a day, but for years, even generations. I have no time to spew hate at anyone. I have no stomach for that. It doesn't help anyone. We all know this on some deep level, but nevertheless something is in the air that has people addled and grumpy and quick to lash out at others. Is the rapid pace of technological change to blame for the uglier mood of our politics? Or shifts in what we expect out of our economic futures and the insecurity that breeds? These and a hundred other trends all working in uneasy unison? It really doesn't matter. The point is: Change starts now, and change starts within. True, lasting change comes when we live our values day in and day out and put them into action.

I KEEP THINKING BACK ON MY FATHER'S LIMP

If I could just skip the months after the death of my parents and sister, that would be my first choice. I'd prefer to avoid reliving it all again, those first few months, really those first few years after the crash. My memories are too vivid, in that way that nothing is as vivid as a fresh jolt of pain, and too cloudy and confusing. During that period, my father was more present than ever in my life, every minute of every day, even as my vision of him went through a confusing series of shifts. In some ways, I felt I could see him more clearly and understand him better than I ever had when he was alive.

I found myself thinking often of my father's limp. Through most of his life, he would have been the last person you'd think would walk with any sort of limp. He was a

wrestler and a runner, an athlete, a very fit man with a burly chest and a bounce in his step. He was energy and physical ease personified. He felt comfortable in his skin and moved well. That was why it hit us all like a thunderbolt when he started having problems walking. Not many people know this, but in his late thirties he developed a form of multiple sclerosis, which was not diagnosed until January 2002, earlier in the year he died. He was lucky. It was a limited form of MS that would not have been life threatening, though it did give him problems. He quietly made a low-key public announcement of the diagnosis that final year, soon after it emerged, but up until then we never knew.

His leg would kind of kick out to the side when he walked. It looked odd, I freely admit that. We would be out in public and he would get some strange looks. I felt very protective of him. I remember going to a Vikings game with him, and him finding those little concrete steps very difficult, with no rail or handhold, nearly tripping with every step. People recognized my father wherever he went by then, of course.

"Hey look—he's almost tripping!" some guy called out loud so everyone could hear. "Senator Wellstone is drunk!"

I wanted to deck the guy who said that, but kept myself under control. We didn't know at the time about my dad's MS. He had this weird pain in his neck and kept going to doctors for years, but none of them ever diagnosed it as MS. It was a mystery. He crashed his bike one day on a casual ride. He wiped out, people saw him, and you knew they talked about that, too—a U.S. senator falling down on the

side of the road. I'm sure that started some rumors. I didn't know what to say to him after that. You just kind of shake your head and say, "What are you doing?"

Then came the diagnosis. MS is a highly heritable disease, so that means your chances of contracting the disease of the nervous system go way up. It can freak you out—with every leg twitch, the thought crosses your mind and you think, "Could this be it?"

We didn't have time to digest any of that when he was alive. Not until my father was gone did it really sink in what pain he must have quietly endured and how difficult it must have been for him, this energetic, athletic man, to accept a sense of physical limitation. It was, in a way, a glimpse of mortality. He could have been slowed down by it, but he never was. He refused to change anything he did. He was going to confront his own mortality, his own ultimate decline, and put as much determination and energy into that struggle as he had put into organizing for other people's struggles all those years.

SORTING THROUGH EVERYONE ELSE'S VIEWS OF MY FATHER

As I mentioned earlier, it was a bizarre situation for me in Minnesota during those first few months after the crash. So many people felt they had lost a friend when my father died, even people who had never met him but felt as if they had. I wanted to be as respectful and considerate as possible every time someone approached me to try and explain what my

~ CHAPTER 4 ~

WATCH OUT FOR THE EAGLES

The bald eagles pointed me forward, even though I didn't know it at first. You often do not understand as you muddle through a difficult situation just what to make of the clues you pick up to help you find the right direction, which ones hit you at the time, but then float away from your consciousness, and which end up linking together with other events to offer a clear theme. I knew enough in those walking-blind days and weeks after the crash to understand that it might be a long, long time before I felt like I had my life back again, if I would ever feel that way again. But at the same time, it's only human and natural to start looking for immediate answers. The eagles were there for me. They kept me company. At first they just seemed beautiful and spiritual and strong, distant but also very present. Eventually, I realized

they had a more specific message for me that I would only come to understand with time.

If I said that catching my first glimpse of a group of bald eagles in Minnesota made me think of the Romantic poet William Blake, you'd think I was trying to put one over on you, but later, when I started looking into eagles and what they have meant to people, I came across this quote from Blake that gets across some of what I felt about eagles the year after the crash . . . and still feel.

"When thou seest an eagle, thou seest a portion of genius. Lift up thy head," Blake wrote in a poem he called "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell."

The first day after the crash was, in some ways, the worst. We were not allowed back to the spot near the Minnesota Iron Range where the plane had gone down that day because the Federation Aviation Administration (FAA) and National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) were flooding the area with investigators to search for any small clues that could explain the crash. After all, my father had flown repeatedly in this same little plane during the campaign without an incident, and it was only a forty-minute flight. A lot of people suspected foul play, an idea that only picked up momentum when the FAA announced what was described as a "slight irregularity" with the radio beacon at the little airport in Eveleth where the plane was scheduled to land. Investigators were searching by hand through the debris in the woods a couple of miles away from the airport where the plane crashed. They found a gauge from the control panel and

took that away for analysis. I didn't have time for conspiracy theories then, and I don't have time for them now. It was an accident, what happened, a very unfortunate accident—not the result of a sinister plot cooked up by some nefarious political element.

On the second day after the crash, my brother and I were allowed to head up to the crash site along with the family members of the others who had died. They loaded us all on a bus at a staging area a few miles from the crash site, and as soon as I found a window seat in the middle of the bus and looked out I could see bald eagles following us. My brother, Mark, and I did not talk a lot on that drive, just sat together and looked out the windows watching the eagles. There was so much to say and so much not to say. We'd been a close-knit family of five two days earlier and now it was just me and my kid brother, seven years younger than me. We would have to be brothers to each other, but also father and son and son and father.

When we arrived at the site, we were faced with an eerie scene. Scraps of charred metal were littered here and there. The smell of jet fuel lingered. The area was swampy in places and wooded in others. I wandered around, and that is when I found the flower and left it for my father, sure he could not be gone. This all had to be some kind of big misunderstanding. He and my mother and my sister were going to appear any minute and life would go on. But the woods up there in the Iron Range were so quiet, so isolated, the chances of that happening did feel awfully remote. But still, I hoped. And still, I hated to leave. They called us back to the bus to take

us away, but I lingered. I didn't want to go. Finally, I climbed up the steps and took a seat, then stared out the window as the bus lurched into gear and pulled away.

As the bus drove away, I saw three bald eagles nesting in the trees near the crash site. My brother saw them, too. If you've never watched bald eagles flying over you, it's hard to convey how strong a presence they have. Some Native Americans believe that bald eagles can fly back and forth between our world and the spirit world, that they are sacred messengers. Others believe they are ancestral spirits. My brother and I saw those amazing birds up there and had a strong feeling of just why Native Americans see these birds as unique and special. There were three eagles, one each for my sister, my mother, and my father. Mark and I felt a strong connection to our parents and sister through those birds, and the feeling only grew stronger as the bus continued on and the trio of bald eagles kept following to keep an eye on us from up above.

I was starting to get a sense of why our Founding Fathers had taken such a shine to bald eagles. That's why we have a bald eagle on the Great Seal of the United States, as it's called, first designed back in 1782. We see it to this day on the presidential seal, which features a bald eagle in profile at the center of the image. The associations then were with strength and autonomy, the ability to go one's own way. As *Time* magazine wrote in a 1935 article about the birds, "The bald eagle is handsome, majestic, tremendously powerful. An individualist, it is rarely seen in the company of more than one of its kind. These attributes make U.S. citizens unversed

in Nature proud to acknowledge the bald eagle as their national bird and emblem."

But that was in 1935. A lot had changed with our national bird over the decades since then. By 1976, the Associated Press reported, "After 200 years of nationhood, the United States now may be forced to list its national symbol, the bald eagle, as an endangered species—a victim of shooting, pesticides and human intrusion."

By the time my father got to the Senate, the bald eagle was making a comeback—and I remember how excited he was in November 1991 when he was asked to release a bald eagle into the wild that had been rehabilitated. According to a report that year from the University of Minnesota Raptor Center, the birds, which can have wingspans of up to eight feet, only develop the famous white head and tail when they are four to five years of age. Before that, they are dark brown. The report explained: "Formerly distributed across North America, they are now limited to breeding in Alaska, Canada, the northern Great Lakes states, Florida, and the Pacific Northwest. In Minnesota, they commonly breed on northern lakes and along the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. Bald eagles move south for the winter to open water areas that attract large numbers of waterfowl or fish. In Minnesota, this includes the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers and sometimes lakes in the southern part of the state."

The Raptor Center had cared for and rehabilitated the two bald eagles that were ready to be released that Veterans Day. I still have a picture of my father, showing how excited he was to hold an eagle aloft and release it. I thought of that day

and that picture when I saw those eagles following the bus that was taking us away from the crash site. Three weeks after the crash, the Raptor Center contacted my brother and me to tell us they had another eagle to release. This time, I had the privilege of tossing the majestic bird from my arms and watching it soar away with three mighty flaps of its wings, just as my father had earlier.

THE EAGLES MAKE AN APPEARANCE AT THE MEMORIAL

I never really wrote a speech to read at the memorial for my parents, sister, and campaign aides held at the University of Minnesota in front of more than 20,000 people and broadcast on national television. Every day passed in such a blur, I never had time for that. I just jotted down some notes to guide myself as well as I could and then went up there and spoke from the heart. I knew I was going to close my remarks with a reference to those eagles, but it wasn't until I was actually speaking at the memorial that the exact words came to me.

I recalled a time not long before when my father had come back from a visit to the Red Lake Indian Reservation. "I was getting ready to speak," my father had explained to me. "And just as I got up there, the spiritual leader came up to me and said, 'The eagle passed by as you were up there. That's a very good sign.'"

I then told the story of going up to the crash site and seeing what looked like a huge, white ball on the road that flew up into a tree and perched there.

"As we went by, we looked and it was a huge bald eagle perched there looking out over us," I said at the gathering. "Make of it what you want, but I'll tell you what I think: I think that my father, my mother, my sister, and all the others, are there looking over us. Thank you for coming. Thank you for loving my father."

I knew my talk had resonated with a lot of people, especially the closing, but I was still amazed to realize just how deeply it had affected people. As an example of that, let me turn to the words of one of my father's good friends in the Senate, Tom Daschle, who represented South Dakota, a state that shares a lot more with Minnesota than just a border. Here was how Daschle described hearing the news of the crash as he drove with his wife to the Crow Creek Indian Reservation in South Dakota in his book *Like No Other Time: The 107th Congress and the Two Years That Changed America.*

At one point early on during that drive, my cell phone service connected and a call came through from my son, Nathan. . . . .

The connection was terrible. I could hardly make out his words. We were cut off a couple of times, but he kept calling back, and we were able to talk a little bit. He asked how I was doing. He'd heard the news and he wanted to make sure I was all right.

That's where it all broke through. I'd kept the grief inside up until then, but this was my son talking to me, my own flesh and blood, and now it just let itself out. I

broke down and cried—cried as I hadn't done in I don't know how long.

I've driven over a lot of long, lonely stretches of South Dakota, but that day was the longest, loneliest drive I think I've ever had. . . . At one point, I looked off into the distance and saw a bald eagle sitting on the leafless branch of a tree. The eagle is a powerful symbol in the Sioux culture, and it's not that common a sight anymore, not even in such remote parts of this historically Indian land.

I remember being struck enough by the sight of that eagle that I pointed it out to my security detail. . . . It would not be until four days later, at Paul's memorial service, when his son David closed his heart-wrenching remarks with the story of seeing an eagle drifting above his dad's crash site, that I was jolted by the powerful sense of meaning in this moment, of some kind of connection to Paul.[11]

MY BROTHER AND I TRY TO GET AWAY, BUT THE EAGLES FOLLOW US

Mark and I knew we needed to get away, just the two of us, and early that winter we got a chance. We decided to drive to Montana for a ski vacation. We wanted the time together, just the two of us, to talk or not talk, but most important to be together as a family. We also both wanted a break from the craziness and pressure of being a Wellstone in Minnesota in those months when so many people in the state were reeling

from the plane crash, still deep in shock and confusion and sadness. We wanted time to focus on our own shock and confusion and sadness. So my brother and I loaded up the car and left Minnesota, passing through South Dakota on our way to Montana, and there on the side of the road we saw two bald eagles looking at us. One of them might have been the same eagle that Tom Daschle had spotted in South Dakota only a couple of months earlier, I don't know.

Throughout that trip, I had the feeling that the bald eagles were keeping an eye on us. It was December, a time for family, and we had a place for five days so near the ski slopes we could ski right up to it after a day of kicking up powder. It was a treat for ourselves and it helped keep the bond between us strong. We kept talking on that ski trip about doing something for just the two of us to remind ourselves that even if life might push or pull us each in a different direction in the future, we were still forever connected, not just as brothers who had grown up playing football and hockey on our quiet street in Minnesota, but also as two men who had to live through this horrible, wrenching experience together.

Finally, we realized the eagle was the key. Mark and I got matching tattoos on our right shoulders. The image that we decided would convey all that needed to be said was a bald eagle, along with three feathers—one representing our father, one our mother, and one our sister—set inside a Native American medicine wheel with clouds in the background.

THE EAGLE STILL FOLLOWED ME

A few months after the crash, I received a letter one day out of the blue. I opened it up and a handful of photographs fell out. A woman who lived near the crash site had heard me speak at the memorial service about the bald eagles living near the crash site. She knew those eagles. She lived nearby and was very familiar with them. She had taken some pictures of those same eagles I had seen flying alongside the bus and sent them to me along with a short letter. It was a very generous act that I will never forget.

I have kept those pictures with me ever since. I often pull them out and feel bolstered both to remember my parents and sister but also to move on. I've been to the memorial site many times, and whenever I am back there I think maybe there's a way to meet that woman who sent the pictures and thank her for the remarkable gift she gave me, but I don't have her contact information. If you are out there now, kind stranger, reading these words or hearing me talk about this book, let me say: *Thank you so much. The pictures are beautiful and have sustained me for years. Please get in touch!*

Like a lot of kids who grew up on TV, I tend to think in references to my favorite programs. One I used to enjoy watching with my parents was *Northern Exposure,* that offbeat show set in Alaska, which once included this description of the eagle:

> *The Eagle wasn't always the Eagle. The Eagle, before he became the Eagle, was Yucatangee, the Talker.*

Yucatangee talked and talked. It talked so much it heard only itself. Not the river, not the wind, not even the Wolf. The Raven came and said "The Wolf is hungry. If you stop talking, you'll hear him. The wind too. And when you hear the wind, you'll fly." So he stopped talking. And became its nature, the Eagle. The Eagle soared, and its flight said all it needed to say.[12]

OK, anyone who has ever met me knows that I never stop talking for long. Like my father, I enjoy a friendly discussion. But it's true that the quiet, soaring grace of the eagles pointed me in a direction those first years after the crash, a direction of silence, a direction of pulling away from the need to say the right thing for other people, to hit the right note for other people, to say or do or be anything for other people. I had to spread my wings and soar and let the winds carry me where they would.

One morning in the spring after the crash, I was out on Medicine Lake, which was close to Golden Valley, Minnesota, where I lived at the time. I paddled around a bend and lost my breath when I caught sight of a huge eagle soaring across the water flying back to its nest. So, from that time on, I'd always return to that spot on the lake and check in on that eagle to see what it was up to. I kept that up right until the week I left Minnesota to live full time in California.

At it turned out, it didn't matter if I stayed in Minnesota or moved around the country—the way the eagles were always there for me. Later, I had a chance to visit Sedona,

Arizona, which is not only beautiful, but one of those places that has such a feeling of spiritual power, it's sometimes called a spiritual vortex. I was inside a small chapel on the hill in Sedona, and as I came out I looked up at the famous red rocks of Sedona. A guy in his seventies put his hand on my shoulder.

"You see it, don't you?" he asked me when I turned around to look at him.

"What?"

"The eagle."

And then I did see it. There in the stone, as if it had been carved, was an eagle. It was unbelievable, the most amazing eagle. I had gone to Sedona looking to explore the mysteries of spirituality, but that eagle was as spiritual a presence as any I could come upon. The eagle offers a reminder, as Blake put it, to "Lift up your head!" Be proud and strong like the eagle, and take the long view. I had lived through years in which it seemed that walking forward, taking even one step along the path of the rest of my life, was beyond me. Now I at least began to hope that, even if I couldn't yet take a step, I might spread my wings and be lifted again by fresh currents.

~ CHAPTER 5 ~

THE AMIGO ROAD HOUSE FINDS ME

The choice to move to California amounted to my admitting to myself that something wasn't working. I haven't gone into it in much detail so far, since it was more than enough to tell about my family and losing them, but I'd already been going through a tough time even before I lost my parents and sister. I'd gotten married young, had become a young father with two children, and my wife and I were right for each other in so many ways. We met in college and went into the Peace Corps in Africa together and worked on an agro-forestry program in the Solomon Islands, where we set up a small egg-laying project. We started with four chickens and built it up from there. The last I heard, the project is still going. Soon we were working a farm together in southern Minnesota. But by the time the plane went down, we had

been living apart for over two years and were headed for divorce.

I'll always remember how much it meant to me to have my parents behind me in this rough stretch, when I felt like I'd messed up my life and was wondering if I'd ever get another shot at building a life together with a woman and making it work. Congress was in session in March when my birthday rolled around and my mother went shopping for a birthday card. I pulled it out of the mailbox and was happy they had remembered, but what really grabbed my attention was the image on the card. I took a closer look. It was a picture from somewhere in the Hawaiian Islands that was so stunning and evocative, you wanted to slip into your swim trunks and hit the surf. I knew it was Hawaii because right there in the front was an outrigger canoe parked in a shallow puddle, surrounded by greenery, and in the near distance the emerald blue of an ancient fishpond, built by the original Hawaiians, a row of palms behind it marking the border with the ocean. It was a Hallmark card, but even the printed message meant a lot to me: "Wishing you time to relax, to unwind, to enjoy a quiet hour, and to dream some special dreams. Wishing you everything that will make you feel peaceful and happy and loved."

Hallmark cards were better back then, weren't they?

Below the printed "Happy Birthday," my mother had added "We love you" and signed it "Mom" with a + mark so my dad would know where to write "Dad." He used a light felt-tip pen to write that in, then over on the right, added "David, You have all our love and support. Dad."

The divorce had dragged on and my parents wanted to reach out and give me a little extra support. Later, when I lost my parents and sister in that crash, no one could offer me the same kind of support. The combination of the divorce and its aftermath and the deaths in my family added up to a double whammy. I felt knocked sideways. I knew just what had hit me, but knowing didn't help.

I thought at first I could tough my way through the pain and confusion, the way I would as a wrestler, starved down to weight, struggling against some guy, just the two of us on the mat, with no one there to help. I was trying to prove to myself that I could carry on, that I could stand up on my two feet without my best advisors and support network, and I could fight in the big arena where my father had worked for so long to make a difference. But I always had the feeling that something was off. It wasn't as if I was expecting to wake up one day feeling thrilled by life at all times, the shadows of loss and pain forever banished from view. I just had the hope that the oppressive feeling bearing down on me at all times might start to feel a little lighter. Instead, around the time I decided to move to California, it felt as if it was as heavy as ever.

PULLED UP THE HILL

I started taking trips to northern California, and I was really struck by the beauty of the central coast area, starting with Santa Cruz, two hours south of San Francisco on the northern end of Monterey Bay. The annual golf tournament at Pebble Beach, down the Monterey Peninsula, is less than an

hour away and it doesn't get more beautiful than the backdrop there, the placid waters of Stillwater Cove and the Monterey Pines. I would drive around the Santa Cruz area looking at houses and trying to imagine living in each of them. Would I like to live in a house right next to the raging, roaring Pacific Ocean in all its drama? The idea appealed to me a lot. Then again, a bank of fog settles in over that entire coastline much of the time and the damp cold can catch you by surprise.

I took to making regular drives up and down a winding street called Rodeo Gulch Road, popular with bicyclists winding back into the Santa Cruz Mountains. It sweeps along past redwoods, each twist in the road opening up on a stunning new view. I turned onto a street called Amigo Road one day and saw an older man pounding a "For Sale" sign into the ground there at the bottom of the hill. I zipped past him and up Amigo Road, all the way to the top, loving the view of the Pacific below and the sense of being swallowed up by the forest opening up all around. On the way back down, I was almost back to the main road when I noticed that the man pounding in the "For Sale" sign was gone, but he had left behind a box on the sign with flyers.

I picked one up and was blown away by the pictures of the house and its ideal setting. I felt an immediate connection: the redwoods and oaks, the stone columns at the entrance to the place, the sunset view out toward the ocean, the sky over the Pacific coming alive in a riot of pink and purple and salmon and red. The house itself looked charming and rustic. I liked the turret, which gave the place a sort of California mission style that I loved right away, but I also knew it would

take a lot of work to remodel and polish it up. I could tell that much just from the brochure. But I had to see for myself.

Driving all the way back up, now looking for the house at the end of the way when it dead-ends, I felt inexplicably drawn up Amigo Road. I felt almost a physical sensation of being pulled along by a magnetic force, even as I had the scary but exciting sense that I had no idea why I was having this feeling. I could not escape a deep certainty in my bones that I belonged at this house I had seen in the picture. I felt that powerful sense of doing just what you need to do at a certain time to make that veer or transition from the same old thing to something fresh and new and exciting and life-giving. I felt a sense of serenity and peace and good energy beckoning, but it was also confusing and amorphous, nothing I could quite identify or pin down. I won't claim I had any clear premonition that this house would become my solace and haven for many years to come—let alone that I would find myself, ten years after the crash, working my tail off to have the place ready to serve as a Wellstone Center in the Redwoods.

Up on top of Amigo Road I was struck by the stillness of the place and the crazy, exciting swirl of smells, the almost overpowering scent of jasmine and orange blossoms wafting over from the orchard, red salvia flowers erupting all over the place. The owner saw me pull into his driveway and park, and he urged me to take a look around the five-acre lot, so I headed out toward the front where a wobbly looking little house sat at the front of the property, perched on a rise in just the right place to give it a sweeping view of the

gorge cutting its way toward the sea, with stands of pine and oak and redwood rising up the far slope. I sat out front of that little house and stared out at the sea. I felt like a spell had been cast on me. Miles of tree line were all I could see between me and the milky blue Pacific below, and around me was a crazy rush of life, bushes and trees and wildflowers rustling back and forth in a light breeze, seagulls calling in the distance, jays protesting behind me at their ornery best, little twittering songbirds carrying on all around at double-time speed.

First, I heard the screeches. Five or six red-tailed hawks were soaring over the canyon, calling to each other. If you've never seen a hawk that size in flight, talons descended, let me tell you, it's one of those sights that freezes you, it's so startling and dramatic. These big birds moved with such grace and power, I was awestruck. Back in Minnesota I had the bald eagles, and here in California I was going to be kept company by hawks.

Then the first of the hummingbirds made a rush at me. I was on a seat out in front of the little house, and the tiny little bird came whirring up at me like it had been shot out of a cannon. It hit the brakes and pulled into a hover about three inches in front of my nose. It held there, flailing the air, and did its best to stare me down. I stared right back, not wanting to make a wrong move. It felt other-worldly. I really had the sense that I had been magically transported to some other place that was not good old planet Earth. The vibe that immediately seeped in was far too intense for any normal explanation to apply. I saw the buzzing visitation from the

hummingbird sentry as a sign—an amazing sign—that I was meant to be in that house.

"Let me give you a tour," the man said, after I'd taken a quick look at the main house. "The house is nice, but the land is special."

He showed me the organic fruit orchard and the giant eucalyptus just behind the house, and then we walked through a gate at the back of the house and were on a small, private trail walking into the forest. Soon we were surrounded by redwoods.

"These are all on the land," he said, grinning and waving his hand in the air to show me. "Your own private redwoods."

I put my hand up against one of those redwoods and felt a calming energy pulsing into my body. It was love at first sight. I knew at that moment I was guided to that place for a reason. There was no turning back. If I missed a sign like the one calling to me to that house, I was really stupid.

The man told me the story of why he'd moved to the Amigo Road house. He said his father had been killed in an accident on the side of the road and he needed a place of special beauty and healing power, a calm and inspiring place where he could find comfort in solitude. I nodded without explaining my own story.

Later that first day at the house, I took a long hike down the private trail leading back from the main house and connecting with a whole network of virtually unused trails running for miles and miles. My mouth was hanging open. All this right out your back door? I remember passing manzanitas with their beautiful red color and crossing a creek at

the bottom of the gorge, then exploring the far side and finding wonderful groves of redwoods sloping down toward the creek. What I remember even more about that hike was that I never saw another soul. What magic! Hiking the Santa Cruz redwoods so near the coast and seeing nothing but nature. Later that year walking that same loop, I spotted a bobcat, encountered a group of coyotes, and found a fresh kill that had to be from a mountain lion.

"Where you staying?" the owner of the house asked that first day in a friendly, offhand way.

He was asking if I needed a place to sleep for the night. I didn't, but in a way, his was the better question: This was where I was staying. Amigo Road was my future. We struck a deal in no time and I agreed to buy the place. Less than a month later I came back to take one more look and set everything in order. Then all I had to do was fly back to Minnesota and tell my children, Cari and Keith, that we were moving to California.

LIFE IN THE CALIFORNIA REDWOODS

One thing I found interesting about those first months of living at the Amigo Road house was that I never slept in. There on the edge of a redwood glade, the calm and quiet of the place folded in around you and you slept so well, so deeply and peacefully, the ticklish first light of the day poking in past the trees would pull you awake and you would lie there a minute listening to the first chirping birds of the morning and the call of the quail. Then you would want to bolt out of

bed, brew some coffee, and cruise around the grounds of the place, looking for fresh amazements, always coming across something new. Then you would get to making your plans for the morning, deciding which projects you were going to take on, which work needed to get done to make the place even more amazing than it already was.

Some mornings I would start my day by taking the dogs for a walk. They would be barking and hopping around even before I headed for the gate, because your dogs always know what you're thinking, sometimes before you do. I would take them down the trail out the back and down the slope and right into a temperate rainforest—the official name for the type of forest along the northern California coast.

The dogs loved that, and so did I. The trails were a big part of what had brought me there. I walked those trails before I got a full tour of the house. The Amigo grove of trees giving way to this endless landscape, to walk for miles among the redwoods and the scrub oaks and the manzanitas, encountering new wonders every time—one day a trio of huge banana slugs, another day California's version of a gecko sunning itself trailside, another a bobcat passing on the trail, the next a red-tailed hawk swooping past me, talons outstretched, to snag a small rabbit trying in vain to hop away. Then, at the end of the hike, I would be back at Amigo Road. I never get tired of the amazement of coming out of those Soquel redwoods, cool and serene, and back out into the full glory of the sun, looking out at the flat expanse of Monterey Bay beyond the tree line shimmering off in the distance. It gets me every time I hike that route.

I got to work planting. I started with some fruit trees and vegetables, more because I wanted the stuff to eat than any love of gardening I'd identified up to that point. I was stunned to realize how much I loved it out there. The smell of the freshly turned earth, the sight of fresh little sprouts of carrot or basil poking up through the soil line, the planting, the digging, the ritual of turning over the earth and putting things in and watching them grow—I found I loved everything to do with gardening.

There had been two river-rock pillars marking the front gate to the house, and a matching retaining wall lining the road. I loved the look of the polished boulders, some slate gray, others whitish, still others amber, forming a mosaic of color and texture. I wanted to lay new stones and see if I could make pillars and walls that looked even better than those near the front gate. At first I would drive down to a local supply store and handpick the stones one by one and build new pillars and walls. Before long, I would be bringing in truckloads and sorting through them to find just the right place for each stone. Then, we'd use the flat stones for the walkways, with golf ball–size river rocks in between, marking the borders, occasionally inlaying a mandala, or Hindu circle design.

The first priority was the flat-stone pathway through the orchard. At that time there were a few trees there, a plum, nectarine, orange, and an apple tree. Working with my partner, Carlos, I got that first path finished in two weeks and started working on some steps up toward the pool and hot tub using the same style of flat stones inlaid with small river

rock to bring out the different textures. The work was hard, grueling even, especially when the sun was beating down, but with every rock we put into the ground, making the place a little more beautiful, I felt a deep sense of satisfaction. I also felt a sense of being pulled forward toward some larger goal or purpose that I didn't even stop to ponder, since I was enjoying focusing on each stone, one at a time, each day of work, one day at a time.

On the north end of the house, looking down on the redwood groves on one side, was a rickety storage shack and below that a broad hillside covered with nothing but weeds and lots and lots of poison oak. I decided to take on that hillside. We dug out a big area for a retaining wall and laid concrete blocks, which we finished with the river rocks. Below the retaining wall, we built steps that went down to a plateau where we laid more flat stones for a floor and put in a stone bench next to a fire circle. Above that we built an outdoor pizza oven, finished in the same river-rock pattern, almost giving it the look of a small chapel. And as the crowning touch on that side of the house, I decided I needed a covered place to sit and eat in the shadows of the redwoods. I could have found a friend to draw up some architectural sketches or hired someone, but that's not my style. Instead, I took the hexagonal trampoline I had bought for the kids and dragged that down there, then simply built the wall around it. Voila! A neat and precise geometric design. Then we built up the walls and put the roof on, and now people who come visit tell me it's the perfect place for theater in the round or weeklong summits.

The beauty of nature can be so healing. Each day when I stirred awake at first light, it was as if the land around the house became my canvas. I had a vision each morning, and I would work all day to bring that vision to life, to finish a piece of the masterpiece. I finished the orchard, adding lime and lemon trees, tangerine and kumquat, two cherry trees, a white grapefruit, another apple, orange, and nectarine, maintaining the commitment to organic farming. The orchard was finished, and then came the organic gardens where I grew vegetables. I was always looking for fresh challenges, even after I had transformed the place into a magic little world where any visitor would be immediately struck by the special energy in the air, brought on by the physical beauty all around, yes, to be sure, but something more than that—something spiritual and healing that gave this special location the ability to bring about changes in how I lived and even who I was.

I had moved far away from Minnesota, but I brought my family with me. Cari and Keith loved their rooms upstairs in the house with a great view. Before I ever made the move, I had talked to my brother, Mark, and knew he was ready to join us in the Santa Cruz Mountains. He bought a house up the slope so we could walk back and forth between each other's houses, dropping in on each other or just knowing that the other was close at hand.

Family tragedy brings you together, but it's not always easy. Mark and I had both lost so much and both felt so much pressure to live up to the example our parents had set for us. Sometimes we crossed wires, but that's just part

of being brothers. Mark knows how much I love him, how important he will always be to me. We made a lifelong commitment that whether we were living next door to each other or half a continent away, we would always be there for each other, because we were all that was left of our immediate family, the last two, and we had to stick together.

Some days, Mark would stop by the house and we would head out onto the trails together for long walks through the redwoods and oaks and manzanitas, usually not saying much. But even if we didn't talk, we knew what the other was thinking and feeling, and it was a time of togetherness that I always cherished. That's the great thing about family. Words often didn't even matter. It was being together and sharing something that mattered above all.

Moving to California did involve some readjustments. As Minnesota boys, Mark and I grew up with the Minnesota Timberwolves as our NBA team. One day we decided to make the two-and-a-half-hour drive from Amigo Road to catch a game between the Timberwolves and the Sacramento Kings. We donned our Timberwolves jerseys, like any good fans, and showed up at the raucous, noisy arena and took our seats. We might have been fine if the Kings had won the game, but instead the T-wolves pulled it out and the hometown fans were in a foul mood streaming through the exits. Out in the parking lot, Mark and I attracted a lot of attention in our Minnesota jerseys. Soon we were taking some heavy verbal abuse. We realized we had better rein in our hooting and hollering over the victory and concentrate on finding our car and getting the heck out of there before a loud,

foul-mouthed knot of young Kings fans converged on us. It was like old times, like being kids back home in Minnesota, getting into it with fans after a Wolves game.

I WAKE UP FAR FROM HOME TO SEE THE WORLD IN A NEW LIGHT

Life at Amigo Road was a big step forward for me. I had good times with my brother and my son and my daughter. I had many walks with my dogs on trails that burst forth with a light show of possibilities. I took some workshops on looking within and found some answers that way, too. But through it all, some of my basic wiring was still giving me a lot of trouble. My default position was to want to be alone. In part, that's just who I am. I love people and I can talk you off your stool most days. But sometimes it's almost like something has clicked and flipped over inside me and I just want to sit alone in my bathtub or pull up a chair outside and watch the fog break down into little shrouded clumps, groping their way up the hill from tree to tree, looking as alive as the trees or the hawks above.

Sometimes I'd hear a lot of those clicks telling me I was spent. I'd need to be by myself a lot. The Amigo Road house was great for that, but in some ways, too great. It was easy for me to hide away up there and pull back from the world. That was no way to form new attachments or begin new projects. But for years, it was all I had in me to do. I needed to feel some real currents of excitement if I was going to take on anything really new.

I kept thinking about that birthday card my parents had sent me when I was going through the divorce. I had never been to Hawaii, but the image on that card made me want to go. I wanted to see lines of palm trees. I wanted to see a beached outrigger canoe. I wanted to feel as if I had entered the world that card evoked in me, a world of feeling peaceful and happy and loved, just as the card had said. So I went online, found a good fare, and flew over to the Big Island of Hawaii. I had arranged beforehand to buy an old 1994 Volkswagen pop-top camper for a couple grand. Not a bad price. I figured I could sleep in there and brought along one bag with a bathing suit, a couple changes of clothes, and not much else, but I did remember to bring along that Hallmark card with the Hawaii scene.

Flying into Kona Airport felt like landing on another planet. The plane comes in off the Pacific and drops right down on a vast black lava field that's often baking hot in the sun. I came blinking out of that plane and met the woman who was selling me the VW camper. She smiled at me and gave me a big hug. I felt enveloped, but it was kind of nice to have someone welcoming me. She looked into my eyes in a way that made me feel jumpy, and I tried to laugh it off with a joke, but she kept staring into my eyes, as if looking for something she couldn't quite find.

"You found the Big Island for a reason," she told me. "You have to figure it out. Don't give up until you know what it is."

I was happy to be driving away in the VW. It was an intense encounter, and I had no idea what to make of it. Let's just say I'm not the type to binge on Paulo Coelho books. I

believe in signs in our lives, very much so, but I'm a little uneasy sometimes having somebody else tell me which signs I should be focused on.

The camper was belching and backfiring as I drove north up the Queen Kaahumanu Highway. By this time it was dark, but I could still see the outlines of the lava fields around me and feel the force of the Pacific pounding away against lava shores down below on the left. I got to the other side of Kekaha Kai State Park, drove five or ten miles up the highway, and felt the camper start to lurch on me. I hadn't even checked the gas gauge! I assumed the woman had at least left me some gas. No such luck.

You can bet I gave the tire of that camper a good kick when I had to pull over and leave it there. What else could I do? I'm an early riser and like to conk out early, and I was still on California time. I had almost nodded off at the wheel. The last thing I wanted was some hours-long scavenger hunt to find a gas can and get the camper going. I needed to crash right away. So I took my bag with the change of clothes and that old Hallmark card from my parents and threw down a credit card to book a room in the first hotel I found walking away from the camper. The place was fancy, not my first choice, but I was in no mood to care. I was only in a mood to find a bed fast and go facedown, which was just what I did.

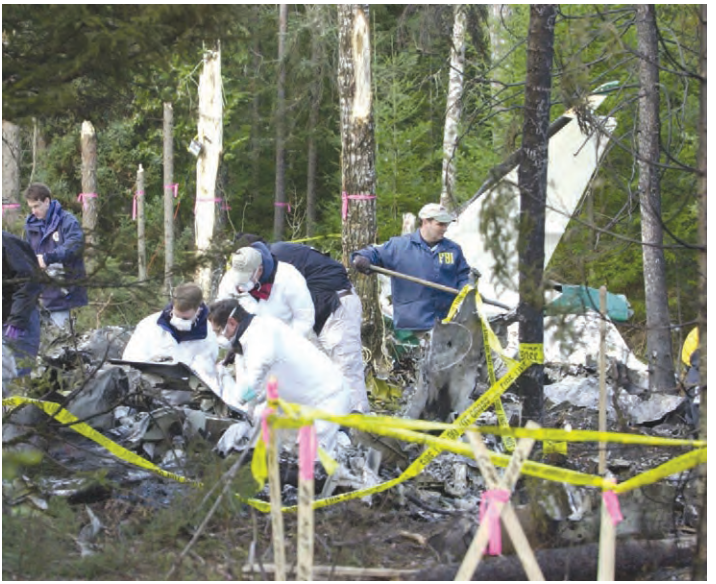
I woke up early and had to blink hard a few times to get my bearings. Where the heck had I ended up? I walked outside and that syrupy island air closed in around me like silk. I set off on a little walk to explore the grounds of the hotel and then just kept walking. Hawaii was every bit as

beautiful as I'd hoped. The palms rustled in a light morning breeze, but the air temperature was perfect. I kept walking and came around a cluster of trees and almost fell over.

It was too much to believe. I'd wanted to see a row of palms lined up. I'd wanted to see an ancient fishpond created by the old Hawaiians. Now, here it all was. I was staring at the exact vista featured on the card my parents had sent me. Every detail was the same. My mom and dad had never been here—except in spirit through that card—but here on my first visit to Hawaii I felt as if I had found them. They were with me, or at least some important part of them was, some gift of love and support and faith delivered through a tattered birthday card. That gift now filled me. I sank to my knees and could not help crying . . . good tears, happy tears. I felt like I was getting a hug from my parents right then and there.

Paul Wellstone, surrounded by his family, talks to supporters after winning the 1990 primary. *Photo by Brian Peterson/Star Tribune; September 11, 1990*

Daughter Marcia, wife Sheila, and Paul Wellstone make their getaway in 45° below zero windchill. *Photo by Mike Zerby/Star Tribune; December 21, 1990*



Sheared trees stand out in the background as investigators sift through the wreckage in Eveleth, Minnesota, Sunday, October 27, 2002, of the twin-engine plane that crashed killing Senator Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., his wife, daughter, and five others. *AP Photo/Jim Mone, Pool*

A newspaper, candle, and flowers sit among the many remembrances outside Senator Paul Wellstone's campaign headquarters in St. Paul, Minnesota, Monday, October 28, 2002. *AP Photo/ M. Spencer Green*

Memorial service for Senator Paul Wellstone: Cari Wellstone, David Wellstone's daughter, cries during the speeches. On her right is David Wellstone, on her left is Mark Wellstone. *Photo by Jerry Holt/Star Tribune; October 30, 2002*

Eric Reichwald, of Minneapolis, says the Kaddish (Jewish prayer for the dead) beside Paul Wellstone's campaign bus in the parking lot behind the campaign office. Reichwald was a volunteer for Wellstone's 1990 campaign. *Photo by Tom Sweeney/Star Tribune; November 10, 2002*

The Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008

The Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) was passed into law in 2008 to correct discriminatory health care practices against those with a mental illness and/or addiction. This groundbreaking, bipartisan law expands access to treatment by prohibiting most insurance plans from restricting coverage or imposing unequal limitations on treatment options if they provide mental health or addiction coverage. In other words, if they offer mental health and addiction benefits, they must be provided "on par" with medical benefits covered under the plan. Significantly, the law aims to curb both the financial and nonfinancial or "nonquantitative" ways that plans limit access to addiction and mental health care. The law applies to self-insured and large employer group plans, but not to individual or small group plans. Leaders like Senator Wellstone worked together with individuals with mental illness and/or addiction, their families, professionals in the field, and employers to pass this important law. The following is an excerpt:

In the case of a group health plan (or health insurance coverage offered in connection with such a plan) that provides both medical and surgical benefits and mental health or substance use disorder benefits, such plan or coverage shall ensure that—

> (i) the financial requirements applicable to such mental health or substance use disorder benefits are no more restrictive than the predominant financial requirements applied to substantially all medical and surgical benefits covered by the plan (or coverage), and there are no separate cost sharing requirements that are applicable only with respect to mental health or substance use disorder benefits; and
>
> (ii) the treatment limitations applicable to such mental health or substance use disorder benefits are no more restrictive than the predominant treatment limitations applied to substantially all medical and surgical benefits covered by the plan (or coverage) and there are no separate treatment limitations that are applicable only with respect to mental health or substance use disorder benefits.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul David Wellstone Jr., son of Senator Paul Wellstone, is the founding partner of Family Place Home Builders, a business dedicated to building affordable housing. He resides in St. Paul, Minnesota, with his wife Leah. A graduate of Hamline University, Dave is a founder, with his brother Mark, of Wellstone Action, and founder of a new nonprofit devoted to mental-health parity issues. He is a cofounder of the Wellstone Center in the Redwoods, www.wellstoneredwoods.org, located amid the spectacular beauty of the Santa Cruz Mountains in California, which seeks to promote an atmosphere of tranquility and calm and to bolster the talents and capabilities of people through workshops, seminars, and residencies. Dave will be leading workshops on this book at the Center.

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MEMOIR

Paul David Wellstone Jr. (known as Dave) fell into a state of shock when he received word on October 25, 2002, that the eleven-seater plane carrying his parents, Senator Paul and Sheila Wellstone, and his sister had crashed, tragically killing all on board.

Minnesota's Senator Wellstone was a respected political leader known for his bipartisan spirit and passion for championing causes that impacted the overlooked and underrepresented. As his son Dave reveals in this intimate memoir, he was also a loving advisor and an engaged father who taught his children to live with compassion and to "Think for yourself. Don't just go around with the crowd. Never be afraid to take an unpopular stand."

Through Dave's words, we experience the touch football games, family dinners, and political rallies of his childhood as well as his struggle to work through the tragedy of the plane crash. As Dave regained the strength to look ahead, he became a leader in his own right, lobbying for one of his father's signature issues: the enactment of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, bringing mental health and substance abuse treatment benefits to the masses.

Paul David Wellstone Jr. resides in St. Paul, Minnesota, with his wife Leah. A graduate of Hamline University, Dave is a cofounder of Wellstone Action and founder of a new nonprofit devoted to mental-health parity issues.

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