

ONE

Kestrel Avenue

CHERYL STRAYED

BY THE TIME I WAS EIGHTEEN I'd worked a lot of jobs. I'd been a babysitter, a berry picker, an office temp, an assembly line worker, an ESL teacher, a soda jerk at a Dairy Queen, and twice—over the course of two summers, at two separate jobs—I'd been something I couldn't define, except to say that I did whatever I was told to do and usually got filthy doing it. I painted a bench and the exterior of an entire yellow building. Scraped gum and grime off hundreds of desks and chairs. Cut an eight-by-eight-foot passage a quarter mile deep through the Minnesota woods with a pair of hand-held clippers and a scythe. And one day repeatedly went out onto a lake in a boat to catch as many bullheads as I could with a net before dumping them into a gasping black heap on the lake's shore to let them die.

I'd worked since before I was even allowed, by the state of Minnesota, *to* work, fudging my birthday so I could be a wage earner the summer before I turned fifteen. I worked because work was money and money was freedom and it was my only way out from a childhood of material want into an adolescence of have. It was the pair of brand-name jeans and tennis shoes my mom and stepfather could never afford. It was the sweet tubes of lip-gloss and compacts of blush and eye shadow that shut with a tidy click that I would carry around in my purse. It was the 1971 Opel I bought the day I turned sixteen in 1984

and the gas and insurance that let me drive it wherever I wanted to go. It was my escape hatch from the life I had into the one I wanted to have, and I worked in every gap of time I could in order to build it.

So, of course, I secured a job that summer when I was eighteen, as my freshman year of college came to a close. But this job wasn't like any I'd had before. It wasn't a job I'd taken with the sole purpose of earning money. It was the job I'd been waiting for all of my short life: one that would allow me to write stories and get paid for it. I was going to be a newspaper reporter for the *Aitkin Independent Age*, my home county weekly in north-central Minnesota. It wasn't an internship. It wasn't an *educational opportunity*, like the so-called jobs many of my peers had for the summer, which took them to places like Greece and Costa Rica, the Bronx and DC. It was a real, actual job. I was replacing a thirty-five-year-old man named Bob, who'd had the position for a number of years and was ready to move on. I knew this because I'd run into Bob, by chance, home from college one weekend in late winter. Once I returned back to school in St. Paul, I'd written a letter to a man named Andy, who was the managing editor of the *Age* at the time, practically begging him to hire me for the summer, which, I reasoned, would give him time to find a permanent replacement for Bob.

I'd taken two journalism classes at college, I told Andy in my letter. I'd written a couple of articles for the college newspaper. I'd been writing on my own since I could write, reading avidly since I could read. Plus, I was the perfect person for the job. The woods and bogs and roads and towns and townships of Aitkin County were my homeland and the readers of the *Aitkin Independent Age* were my people. *I belong to them*, I proclaimed passionately to Andy in my letter, *and they belong to me*.

A month later, he wrote me back and offered me the job: forty hours a week, minimum wage, no benefits. I was to report for work on Thursday, May 28, and at nine o'clock in the morning on that day, I did.

"You must be Cheryl," Andy said somberly to me when I walked into the office of the *Age*.

"Yes," I trilled, putting my hand out to shake his, as if I did that all the time, though in truth I'd practiced this at home that very morning with my mother. Andy seemed unnerved by this gesture and he only took my hand lightly for a moment before letting it go. He was in his mid-forties and not much taller than me. He wore big square glasses and a short-sleeved shirt that buttoned up the front. His forehead was

shiny and damp looking and it extended all the way to the top of his head, where a few gray-brown hairs grew in coarse straggles that he smoothed back repeatedly with his hand.

He quickly introduced me to the two women who sat at desks near the front door—one was the receptionist, he explained, the other handled advertising sales. Every time he spoke, he blushed, and then he stopped speaking and waved at me to follow him. Silently, we wended our way past filing cabinets and tables stacked with papers and books and down a dark hallway, into a windowless room at the back of the building.

“This’ll be your office,” Andy said, blushing anew. There was a large table surrounded by folding chairs in the center and a gray metal desk against the wall. On it, there was a telephone and a radio scanner cradled in a charger.

“You know what that is?” Andy asked, when he saw me looking at it.

“Yeah,” I said. Lots of people in Aitkin County had scanners on their kitchen counters. They liked to keep tabs of the local police and volunteer fire departments, though seldom did the scanner spark to life with anything but the most mundane and indecipherable matters.

“Half listen to it when you’re at your desk,” Andy said. “Sometimes there’s a car accident or a wildfire worth covering.”

His face by now was as pink as a Popsicle. Looking at him, I couldn’t help but blush, too.

“I’ll send Ginny back when she gets in,” he said.

And with that, he left the room.

In his letter to me, Andy had explained that it would be with a woman named Ginny that I’d write the paper each week. She was my direct boss, the one who would give me assignments. He mentioned that I could come up with ideas for human interest stories on my own, in addition to covering a circuit of regular beats, and so as I waited for Ginny that morning, I figured now would be as good a time as any to make a list of possible stories.

I opened my purse and took out the pen and little notebook I’d brought with me and sat down at my new desk and pondered the things I could write about. There was a couple who collected birdhouses, so many that nearly every exterior inch of their house was covered with them. There was a man who made sculptures out of items he found at the dump and a woman who had worked as a nurse in Spain. There

were Ojibwes who went out onto the lakes and rivers each fall and harvested wild rice in the traditional way. There were elderly Finnish immigrants with dramatic and historically relevant stories to tell. I wrote them all on my list, though doing so filled me with gloom.

I hadn't lied in my letter to Andy when I'd said that Aitkin County was my homeland, that its people belonged to me and I to them. But another thing had also been true, an opposite, second thing that ran right alongside the first: I wanted out. My entire intention when I went to college was to belong to people and places that were *not* Aitkin County. I wanted to find other, more worldly stories to tell. I wanted to know and be known by people I'd only read about in books and newspapers—people more educated and worldly, more cosmopolitan and bold—not about people who collected birdhouses and owned birch bark canoes or remembered when the road between Aitkin and McGregor wasn't even paved.

But this is what I had. For now, it was my material. I'd have to make do.

I gazed at the scanner on my desk. It hummed with a too-quiet static so I picked it up and adjusted the volume. The moment after I did so, a female voice came bleating out of it, saying in a clear and urgent tone that the McGregor State Bank had been robbed and that shots had been fired. I stared at the scanner for a moment, stunned and sure that I'd imagined the woman's voice, that I'd somehow brought it forth by fiddling with the volume.

And then that moment ended and I looped my purse over my shoulder and shoved my pen and notebook into it and left the room with the scanner still in my hand.

"*Andy?*" I called uncertainly as I strode back down the dark hallway and into the room with the shelves and two women, until at last I found him and told him what I'd heard. He looked at me with the same doubt that I'd had initially, suspicious that perhaps in my very greenness I'd concocted this story. I'd only been on the job for twenty minutes, after all.

"It," I pointed to the scanner, almost panting with excitement, "it said that—"

Just then the scanner came alive again, the same clear, urgent female voice repeating what I'd heard before, only this time she added that the bank robber had stolen a car and escaped.

"Go on," said Andy, forgetting to blush.

So I handed him the scanner and ran.

It's twenty-seven miles from Aitkin to McGregor. I'd made that trip countless times in my high school years, Aitkin being the only place within sixty miles of McGregor that has a movie theater. As I drove I thought about the people I knew who worked at the bank. Most of them were the mothers and fathers of kids I'd gone to school with and the idea of them being robbed at gunpoint was preposterous to me. I thought about the town's only cop, an amiable man named Greg, and I wondered if he knew what to do in response to a bank robbery, if he remembered whatever he'd presumably been taught in police school. I couldn't blame him if he didn't. Fewer than four-hundred people lived in McGregor. The town was so small there weren't even any traffic lights for people to run through. I'd encountered Greg many times throughout my teen years and each time he'd been doing the same thing: compelling me and my friends to take our fun elsewhere, trying to keep us from drinking or smoking or having sex in our cars within the city limits, shooing us from the parking lots of the Galaxy roller rink or the Dairy Queen or the wayside rest or the Buckhorn Bar to the darker, wilder country roads that surrounded the town like a web in all directions.

I supposed Greg was in the bank now, just as surprised as I was.

My hands shook as I pulled into town. I drove slowly past the bank. In the parking lot there was a cluster of official state and county cars and a smattering of regular cars, too—those that belonged to the customers and workers who'd been inside the bank when it was robbed, I presumed. A section of the lot was marked off with police tape; I could have parked in the part of the lot that wasn't, but I continued on. To park that near the bank seemed too bold, too intrusive, even in my new status as a news reporter, so I parked in my familiar spot behind the Dairy Queen, where I'd worked in high school, and got out and walked the quarter mile to the bank along the gravel shoulder of the road, with my little purse that held my notebook and pens bouncing against my hip.

The bank is the most beautiful building in town, a low and airy log structure. Through its wide windows, I could see law enforcement officers inside, along with the bank workers and customers, some of whom I knew, in an investigative lock down. Strangely, the townspeople themselves had not converged on the bank, so I stood alone waiting for something to happen, for my first story to unfold. I brought out

my little notebook and wrote down everything that had happened so far, sitting on the concrete outside the bank's front door. Soon, other reporters from bigger, further towns and cities joined me. Reporters from Brainerd and Duluth and one who arrived from the Twin Cities in a helicopter, which had no problem landing in the empty field across from the bank, even though we were on the very edge of what's considered downtown. Pleased to have company, I chatted with the other reporters, feeling awed to be among them, especially the tall blonde broadcaster I recognized from TV. I explained in breathless bursts that this was my hometown and that this was my very first day on the job as a reporter and they laughed in amazement and had me repeat those facts again, each time another reporter arrived.

After about an hour, a deputy sheriff, who also happened to be the father of my brother's longtime girlfriend, came out of the bank to address us. He said that at 9:27 that morning a white man of average height and build had appeared from seemingly out of nowhere, striding across the parking lot and into the bank. He was dressed like a cowboy, in a long duster coat and a wide-brimmed hat, with a bandana tied over his face. Once inside the bank, he raised a rifle from beneath his long coat and fired one shot into the ceiling, shattering a light fixture, and announced his intentions. No one was hurt, but the bank robber got away with an undisclosed amount of money, in a car he stole from a bank teller. When the deputy sheriff was done with his statement, the reporters all around me chattered their questions, but he declined to answer any. He only looked at me and asked, "What are *you* doing here?"

I told him and he invited me inside the bank, locking the other, protesting reporters outside. There were law enforcement officers milling around, using the bank's telephones, and occasionally talking into their walkie-talkies. The customers and bank workers were cordoned off in the few offices in the bank that had doors, waiting silently to be led into another room to be interviewed. The deputy sheriff told me that I couldn't talk to any of them until later, but he pointed to the place in the ceiling where the bank robber's bullet had gone and answered a few more questions. There'd been three tellers working that morning and after the bank robber had fired his rifle, he'd walked behind the counters to each of them in a row and demanded that they fill their cloth bags with all the money in their drawers. They did as they were told. With the bags of money in hand, he walked out the door and

then—before anyone had time to move, but not before one of the tellers had set off a silent alarm—he came back into the bank, having forgotten that he meant to steal a car.

He demanded one and a teller named Bonnie offered her keys, but he refused to simply take them and run. Instead, he insisted that she lead him to it, so she went with him out the door and across the parking lot, and when they got to her car, he made her start it up. It was a brown Chevy Citation, the deputy sheriff didn't need to tell me. I knew that car and I knew Bonnie and her son, who rode my school bus. Once she started the Citation, the bank robber nudged her away and drove off in it alone. The whole thing was over in about eight minutes. There was no pursuit, but it was known that the robber had driven down Main Street, and then south on Highway 65.

As I pitched around town in the following hours—chatting with the folks at the Downtown Café and the Dairy Queen, taking notes on the rumors and reactions—word trickled in about the route the bank robber had taken before disappearing. Bonnie's car had been spotted racing past on this road and then the another, each road slightly more remote than the last, and culminating on the one that ran right past my house.

I thought of my mother. She was home alone. My stepfather and younger brother were both at their jobs—my stepfather's, as a carpenter, my brother's, a summer gig he'd started a couple of days before, doing odd jobs for the city. I'd run into both of them as I roamed town as a reporter that morning, telling them, in a flurry, everything I knew about what had happened at the bank and where the robber had gone. None of us were particularly worried about my mother, perhaps because it seemed evident that the robber wanted nothing more than to get away. I was sure she was working peaceably in her garden, just as she'd told me she'd be doing before I left that morning. Still, I felt the pull to drive home, if not to make sure that my mother wasn't being held hostage by a bank robber, then at least to be the first to tell her the big news. Plus, by midafternoon, I was frankly exhausted by all that had transpired—I'd nearly filled up my entire tiny notebook with the quotes and observations I'd written down—and there was no hurry to write my story. It was Thursday and the next issue of the *Age* didn't come out until Wednesday, so, instead of returning to my new office in Aitkin, I drove home along the same route it was rumored that the bank robber had.

It wasn't until I turned into my driveway and ascended the little hill that led to my house and saw my mother in the garden, standing to smile and wave, that I allowed the lurching, almost daffy feeling that I'd been pushing aside all day to flood into me. It had nothing to do with my wonder and amazement at what had occurred on my first day on the job or with the tendril of relief I felt to see that my mother was safe. It was something else entirely. And it was only once I laid eyes on my mother that I could let the thought crest fully in my mind.

It was a thought I'd been having ever since the deputy sheriff stepped out of the bank and described the man who'd walked into it and fired a gun: that I knew him, the bank robber. I knew exactly who he was.

I grew up on a road to nowhere. County Road 27 it used to be called, or sometimes, by the old timers, Arthyde Road. A few years ago—long after that summer when I was eighteen and last lived in Aitkin County, after my mother died and my family disintegrated and my connection to my stepfather, who still lives in the house on that road, grew thin—a state initiative came along and all the roads got new names. County Road 27 became Kestrel Avenue. I was indignant at the news, over both Kestrel *and* Avenue. Kestrel sounded too cute, too citified to my ears, even though it's actually the name of a bird, and the gravel road to my house is anything but an *avenue*. It's what the old timers call a corduroy road, originally built by the Finnish immigrants who'd come to the area in the early 1900s. They'd lain logs perpendicular to the direction of the road and covered them with sand and gravel in order to keep the swamps and bogs that the road passes over at bay. In the humid heat of summer, my road lived up to its old-fashioned name, becoming ridged with narrow lines like a pair of corduroys and in springtime it was pitted with sometimes-impassable cauldrons of mud created by the melting snow and rain. Those who dared to try crossing often ended up mired for hours, waiting for someone to come along to pull their vehicles out.

Rarely did someone come along. Neighbors are strung out one and three and five miles apart along that road, the distance between them punctuated by old homesteads composed of abandoned buildings that are slowly shambling to the ground or empty cabins occupied only on occasion by city people who come to hunt for deer and birds and bears in season. It's a road that takes you from one quiet, but paved state highway through woods of pine and fir and birch and past tamarack

swamps and no-name ponds and over streams thick with cattails and twenty or thirty or forty miles later—depending on which turns you take on the few occasions that you have a choice—deposits you onto another quiet but paved state highway.

A perfect road, in other words, if you're a bank robber on the run.

It was on this road, *my road*—the road that was not yet, but would become Kestrel Avenue—that I met the man who I believed robbed the McGregor State Bank.

My mother believed it, too, and so did my stepfather and brother and we talked about it that evening of the day the bank was robbed when we gathered for dinner. The man we all had fingered for the job was named Steven Earl Neumann but we never called him that. To us, he was simply the cowboy. He'd entered our lives three years before and lived for a month in our hay barn, eating his meals with us. *It sounds just like him*, we marveled that night, going round and round the details the deputy sheriff had told me, wondering if he really had driven straight past our house when he made his escape. The more we talked the more convinced we became that we were right and then we reached the other side of that and laughed at ourselves—*of course it wasn't him!* It couldn't possibly have been him. The fact that I was a reporter in my first day on the job and the bank had been robbed was practically proof enough: What were the chances that in addition to all that happening, that I'd also actually lived with the guy who'd robbed the bank? It was too much to contemplate, and so instead of calling the authorities—even the authority who happened to be the father of my brother's longtime girlfriend—we turned the idea that Steven Earl Neumann had robbed the McGregor State Bank into an insular family joke.

It was a joke I shared with no one, not because I feared I was breaking the law, but because the last thing I wanted was for anyone in Aitkin County to know that my family had housed someone such as the cowboy, whether he was a bank robber or not.

I'd first met the cowboy three years before when I was riding in the car with my mother, driving the last mile home on our road at the end of May. We spotted a man on a horse coming toward us, so my mother slowed the car and stopped and waited for him to pass, not wanting to spook the horse. My mother was a horsewoman from way back—we had two horses of our own in the pasture behind our house—and as the man and horse approached I could sense her excitement. Hardly anyone rode horses around those parts and this man, it was clear, did

far more than that. He was dressed in full cowboy regalia with a hat and gloves and chaps and boots and his horse was loaded down with saddlebags and a bedroll and a small throng of old-style tin canteens.

“Hello,” my mother called to the cowboy through her open window when he was near enough, but he only looked politely at us and nodded and tipped his hat before riding on by.

We continued home, but my mother couldn’t stop talking about him all through dinner, so afterward she fixed a plate of food for him and stuffed some apples in her purse for the horse and talked my stepfather into driving up the road with her to find the cowboy’s camp—it was near dark when we’d seen him, so she reasoned he couldn’t have gone far. She was right. He and his horse named Molly were camped only a few miles north of our house. My mother and stepfather sat by the fire the cowboy had made and as he ate the food my mother gave him, he explained that he was less than a week into his journey, but that he planned to ride all the way to the Continental Divide. Before they said good-bye, my mother noticed that Molly had saddle sores and she insisted that the cowboy not go on until his horse healed. Molly could stay in the pasture with our horses, she offered, and he could sleep in our hay barn.

The next day when I returned home from school the cowboy was sitting at our kitchen table, freshly shaved and showered and wearing a toupee. “Afternoon,” he said quietly when my mother introduced us, his eyes darting nervously in my direction and then away. He looked entirely different to me than he had on the back of the horse the evening before, and he felt entirely different, too, almost childlike, in spite of that fact that he was forty-four and I was fifteen, his voice coming out in a whisper and a mumble, if it came out at all.

He stayed with us for more than a month and I studied his strange ways. He wore his hat by day and his toupee by night. His deep shyness was interrupted by occasional bursts of stories about horses he once knew. My mother fed him breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but he never dared to walk through our front door on his own, or even to knock. Instead he stood at the bottom of our stairs, gazing up at the porch and the door beyond, calling my mother’s name, “Bobbi, *Bobbi*, BOBBI,” he’d call, his voice growing louder each time, until she opened the door and waved him, exasperated, inside.

“Probably Vietnam or too many drugs in the Sixties,” my mother explained when I asked her why the cowboy was so strange. This had been her catchall explanation for much during my childhood—both

odd behavior on the part of adults and lyrics in rock songs I asked her to decipher—but it wasn't enough for me. Once, when he was away, I went into the hay barn and poked through his things. I found a blue spiral notebook and opened it up and read a letter on the inside cover from a woman who wrote that she loved him, that he always could come back and live with her if he chose, and until he did he could use this paper to write her letters. It didn't seem to me that he had. The notebook was still full, page after page, which I turned with trembling hands, hoping for more revelations about this woman the cowboy either loved or didn't love, but there was nothing other than a few mundane lists of cowboy things.

Only rarely did he leave the property, occasionally catching a ride to town with my mother or stepfather—and almost always for one purpose: to purchase twelve-packs of Mountain Dew, which he shared with me and my brother and sister, despite our mother's general opposition to soda pop with dinner. Mostly, he spent his days with my mother, following her around as she did her chores, when my brother and sister and I were off at school and my stepfather was at work, occasionally giving her a hand while she tidied the house or raked the stalls or cleaned out the chicken coop or planted the garden. A couple of times they went riding—she on her horse, Lady, he on our other horse, Roger—leaving Molly behind whinnying in outrage.

And then, after a few weeks, Molly healed, but he didn't mention it and he stayed and stayed until finally my mother and stepfather told him flatly that it was time to move on. He rode away in the pouring rain with a full food pack of things my mother had prepared for him. We didn't see him for the rest of the summer, but we got word that he hadn't made it to the Continental Divide after all, that instead he'd gone only so far as Jacobsen, fifty miles north, where he'd taken a job as a farmhand for the season. He came and visited once again the following year, standing at the bottom of our front stairs, calling "Bobbi," just as he had before, until my mother opened the door. He was living on a horse farm south of here, he told my mother, working as a ranch hand.

My job as a reporter for the Aitkin Independent Age began with a bang, but the rest of the summer was a steady glide. The scanner sat on my desk making its low electric hum as I wrote stories about the meetings of city councils and chambers of commerce, about people who collected birdhouses and spent time working as nurses in Spain. A couple of times I called the deputy sheriff and asked him if he had

any new information about the bank robber and each time he said no, but that I'd be the first person he'd call when he did.

It was August when the phone rang, my last month on the job, and it was early enough in the morning that the deputy sheriff called me at home, before I'd even left for work, my hair still dripping wet from the shower.

"We made an arrest," he said. "And we got our guy—there's no doubt that it's him. Let me spell his name for you—it's a unique spelling."

"Hold on," I stammered, scrambling for a pen and something to write on, and then I told him to go ahead and he spelled out Steven Earl Neumann's name for me twice so I was sure to have it right.

I wrote the story of his arrest like a journalist. I placed all the facts together and let them stand for themselves. I wrote that a man named Steven Earl Neumann was alleged to have walked into a bank on May 28, 1987, and robbed it at gunpoint, making off with sixteen thousand, six hundred and eleven dollars. I wrote that the Chevy Citation he was believed to have stolen was found at an abandoned homestead on County Road 27—the road some call Arthyde Road. I wrote that with the money he was alleged to have stolen he bought a 1976 Ford pickup truck and a horse and a horse trailer and cowboy boots and clothing and a saddle and tack and a contract at a stable near Mora to board the horse. I wrote that what led the police to him was a bartender in Mora, to whom he'd bragged about robbing the McGregor State Bank.

But I didn't tell the story. I didn't write the other half. This is it now. Here it is.



Interview with Cheryl Strayed

1. Did your newswriting experience inform the fiction and creative nonfiction writing that came later? If so, how?

All the writing I've ever done has informed the writing that came after it. You never stop learning as a writer. Experience is the best teacher. At the time that I was a newspaper reporter for the *Aitkin Independent Age* I was only eighteen. I'd just finished my first year of college. I was still learning how to write at a pretty basic level—how

to write clear and concise sentences, how to create energy on the page, how to tell a complicated story without losing the reader. I had to do that every day on the job as a reporter when I was eighteen, and I have to do that every day as a writer in a different way at forty-six.

2. You say that as an eighteen-year-old, you yearned to move beyond your hometown. You “wanted to find other, more worldly stories to tell.” Ironically, you ended up finding a fascinating story in your own backyard—literally. Has your attitude toward material for writing changed since then?

When I was growing up in rural Aitkin County I thought that real life was elsewhere, or at least real life worthy of literature. I thought I had to live in a city before I'd have any kind of experience worth writing about. It didn't take me long to realize I was wrong about that. One doesn't have to go looking for material. One has only to look deeply inward and perceptively outward. It's all there—the stuff of life, the drama, the beauty, the sorrow, the redemption—wherever you are.

3. Can you talk about your decision to title the essay “Kestrel Avenue”?

For me, “Kestrel Avenue” is about our ever-shifting perceptions, about different kinds of knowledge, about being an insider and an outsider, about knowing and also refusing to know. In particular, when writing about the different names of the road, I was interested in the idea of self-definition and the definitions others project onto us. No matter what the powers that be decide to call that road, I will always know it as home. When I learned the road I grew up on had a new name it felt like a loss to me, the way change often does. I resisted it, and I still do to some extent. I knew the real name of that road when it was my road. Just like I knew the real name of the bank robber from day one, though I never said a word because I wouldn't truly admit to my knowledge.

4. More than twenty years passed between the events of that summer and the writing of the essay. Why did you choose to write the story when you did?

I've been wanting to write about that experience for years. I just never found a way to do it until I wrote “Kestrel Avenue.” I'd previously tried to turn it into a short story—only barely fictionalizing

the real-life experience—but I could never get it to work. It was too full of coincidence and “I-know-this-is-hard-to-believe-but-it’s-true” scenarios to be credible as fiction, so I had to write an essay instead. I find it’s often that case that stories that play the best at dinner parties are the ones that are the hardest to capture on the page, no matter the form.

5. In the last paragraph, you differentiate between writing a story and telling “the” story. How does this distinction apply to the writing you do now? Are there ever times when you scratch a draft because you realize you’re not telling “the” story?

Here again, I was fascinated by different kinds of knowledge, different versions of truth. My job as a reporter was to write only the factual details of Steven Earl Neumann’s arrest and the charges against him. But what I did in reporting that story is I neglected to tell the real story at all—the actual truth—which was my connection to this man, the past we had, the fact that my family and I knew him and had suspected all the while that he was the bank robber. The fact that we were right. As a writer of creative nonfiction, I’m constantly grappling with what truth means. What role does omission play in truth-telling? Is subjectivity or objectivity more important when attempting to reveal the greatest truth? In my story for the *Aitkin Independent Age*, I reported factually on a story about which I failed to tell the truth at all, and yet I did my job. I did what the profession asked me to do. “Kestrel Avenue” is my answer to that. When I was writing it, I was in search of a deeper, more complicated truth.