

# Another night, another

It was a night from a long time ago, from the 1960s, with empty coffee containers on a table and William Sloan Coffin talking about Martin Luther King and people singing to a guitar and coats thrown everywhere and children sitting on laps, and death.

This was on Friday night in a room on the sixth floor of St. Clare's Hospital. They had Al Lowenstein one floor below. The blood would not remain in the body and he was trying to live on his spirit. As this was so limitless in the life he led, there seemed no reason to assume it would not carry him through the hours of the night.

Peter Yarrow sang "Puff the Magic Dragon" and

**JIMMY  
BRESLIN**



Steve Smith Jr. held Tommy Lowenstein on his lap. And you thought of a night in another room and Robert Kennedy saying to Jeff Greenfield or Adam Walinsky,

## room...& death

"Did you find Al Lowenstein yet?" And the one on the phone saying, "We're trying. He's out on Long Island." And Robert Kennedy nodding and saying, "I can't wait. I'll try him when I get back here. It's important that I speak to him." And then Robert Kennedy walking out of the room and taking the elevator down to the hotel ballroom to be shot. And now here, on Friday night, the connection had carried across the years and it was Al Lowenstein's turn to be shot.

"Your father was shot five times," a doctor said to Frankie Lowenstein, who is 13.

"Five times?" the boy said.

"Five," the doctor said.

**THEN THE DOCTOR** said, "The one that was the  
(Continued on page 80)

(Continued from page 3)

worst came in from underneath. It went through the diaphragm and the lung and it clipped the edge of the heart. It clipped the muscle. It didn't go in."

"Does that mean there is no interior bleeding, in the chamber?" the boy asked.

The doctor tried to say no.

Steve Smith came into the room. Arcs the color of dark coffee were under his eyes. From too much practice, he went directly to the kids.

"What are you doing here?" he said to Tommy, the 10-year-old.

"Sitting here."

Somebody was telling a story about a dwarf. Smith said to Tommy, "Do you believe that?"

"I don't know," Tommy said.

"I think it's a lie," Smith said.

"I think so too," Tommy said.

"Don't be afraid, tell him he's a liar," Smith said.

**WILLIAM SLOAN COFFIN** sat on the floor. Somebody asked him how he had met Al Lowenstein and Coffin began talking about the day Lowenstein was married. "There was a reception on Beacon Hill before the ceremony and when I arrived, one of Jenny's aunts, one of these Brahmins, said to me, 'I don't know one of the people who are here.' So I said to her, 'Well, see that tall man over there? I'll bet you voted against him at

least 24 times. That's Norman Thomas.' And the aunt said, 'That Socialist!'"

"Did you know the fellow who shot him?" Coffin was asked.

"No, all I know is that he's one of these kids Al picked up when he was the dean at Stanford. There were 16 of them and you know how that loyalty string held with Al. If you were with him once, you were with him forever. He was in Mississippi with Al and then Al lost track of him, but whenever he'd see one of the bunch from Stanford, he'd say, 'Hey, have you seen Sweeney? Where is he, what is he doing?'"

"Jenny said that Sweeney was at their house in Brooklyn a year ago. He was very mixed up. Jenny said that Sweeney told her that evil was coming out into the world from his teeth. Al felt sorry for him. Al thought that Sweeney had all this trouble because of his time in Mississippi. He wanted to help him."

The talk was of all the places in all the years where Al Lowenstein had been. His politics were those of the parched. He was rumpled and gentle and annoying and one of the very few in the last 30 years who understood that always the true calling is to engage the most popular evil. Al Lowenstein went to Mississippi when he was an outside agitator: he was against the war in Vietnam at a time so early that the nation thought any such stand was treasonous.

Outside in the hallway, Secret Servicemen arrived. Edward Kennedy was flying from Chicago. Lowenstein's brother, Larry, and other members of the family kept going from the room to the hallway downstairs, to wait outside the operating room.

**AT A COUPLE OF** minutes after 11 p.m., the room on

the sixth floor was nearly empty. Tommy Lowenstein sat on a chair, and Steve Smith's son was talking to him and now there was a crowd at the door, a doctor and a nun and relatives, and the boy's mother came into the room and knelt in front of her son and told him that his father had died.

People grabbed for the coats and left the room as the family came in.

Outside in the hallway, Steve Smith was walking alone to the elevator when a man from the hospital staff, thinking he was one of the Lowenstein family, said, "You know in one of these matters, a shooting like this,

there is a procedure that is out of our hands. The body must go to the coroner."

"You're telling me that?" Smith said.

On Saturday morning, the suspect was at the Criminal Court Building. A clerk held up papers bound in yellow, docket No. 13616. The typing on the page said, "Depo- nent is informed by the defendant that the defendant, with intent to cause the death of Allard Lowenstein, caused the death of Allard Lowenstein by shooting him with a .380-caliber pistol. Detective Vito Verni, No. 537."

•  
**VERNI, SOMBER AND** handsome, brought his defen- dant, Dennis Sweeney, into the seamy room. Sweeney was lanky with a gaunt doomed Irish face and hair becoming gray. He wore a green rainjacket. He stared down and said nothing.

The assistant district attorney said that Sweeney had made admissions, and that he had said that Mr. Lowen- stein was one of six people that he had strong feelings against.

Sweeney was put back in a cell and Verni walked out of the room.

"Who were the other names he was angry at?" Verni was asked.

"He didn't give us names," Verni said.

"You know what I'm asking you."

"I know what you're asking me," Verni said. "And I'm telling you he didn't mention any names."

Al Lowenstein's candidate was at the New York Hilton yesterday morning. The night before had brought back the pain of the '60s, and now it brought back the glory: Teddy Kennedy, everything he always should have been, thundered at an audience, "We will not accept a society in which health is a function of wealth...we will not accept a society in which houses are boarded up while hundreds of thousands of families wait in rat-infested tenements...we will not accept a society in which whole sections of our cities become a blighted wasteland...we will not accept a society in which a handgun can be bought today and fired tomorrow to kill a man like Al Lowenstein."

And if Lowenstein himself had been alive, and able to move yesterday, everybody knows where he would have been. Not with Kennedy, but down at the Criminal Court Building trying to do something for Dennis Sweeney. Sometimes you get a guy who goes this way.