

The Silver Recorder

November 30, 2013, 8:00 p.m.

THE COPS DIDN'T BUZZ UP. THEY ARRIVED ON THE FOURTH floor, unannounced. Outside my dad's front door, the police assembled their witnesses and waited for the paramedics.

Inside, we were having fun making videos. I was pointing the camera at my younger sister Teresa.¹ She was clearing the table after our pizza dinner and I asked her, "So, how does it feel to be back home?"

"Awesome," she said. "We've got everything here." And she flashed a V for victory. Teresa is short—tiny, as she describes herself—she has a ready smile, a peaches and cream complexion, and straight shoulder-length brown hair. She had lived with Dad all her life, and before these troubling events began, she had no idea that her life was about to change.

I turned towards the kitchen where Dad was washing coffee mugs. He looked me in the eyes and said fondly, "My goodness, you guys are real pushers." All my life, Dad had praised my drive to get things done. On that day, he was ecstatic because we had helped him rescue Teresa. As I moved in closer, he asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'm shooting a video of you," I said.

“Of me?”

“Yeah, right now,” I said, holding up my iPad.

He smiled as he neatly hung the dish towel on the rack.

Teresa sat down at the small dining table beside my husband, Bill. He’s good-looking with short greying hair and is very fit, still running marathons in his fifties. Teresa was showing him her trophies. Bill said, “Hey Franke, get this on video: Teresa showing us her calendar and favourite things.”

Teresa and Bill were slowly flipping through Teresa’s calendar, chatting about events, when we heard the knock at the door. As Bill went to answer it, I kept the camera on Teresa. She was smiling happily, picking up her calendar and trophies and carrying them back to her room as Bill went to open the front door.

And there they were—two big cops, two paramedics with a stretcher, and others behind them. I caught a glimpse of my older sister, Deirdre, wearing a bulky maroon coat.

The first cop stepped in. He was bigger than Bill and looked beefy, especially with his bulletproof vest and the gun on his hip.

“Who are you?” he barked.

I heard Deirdre’s voice coming from the hallway, “That’s Bill.”

The cop immediately asked Bill to leave.

Bill backed away from the door, asking, “Can I see some documentation?”

The cop ignored him and took another step in. “Come on out,” he ordered. Then he spotted me—blonde hair, slim, in a long black cardigan with a red scarf—and I was holding my iPad. It was pointed right at him. He waved me towards the front door, saying, “Come on out.”

I was shocked and shook my head, no. I was not leaving. I was afraid the cops were here to take Teresa back.

Just then Teresa came out of her room, curious to see what was going on. She was born with Down syndrome and had lived with my dad all her life.

Bill turned back and, seeing her, he called, "Teresa!"

I dropped the iPad on the table and grabbed Teresa, pulling her away from the door.

Hearing strange voices, my dad came back to the dining room. He stood straight and tall beside me, wearing a collared T-shirt, a dark sweater and dark pants. Although surprised to see the police, he was quiet and composed. This was a skill developed from his years of being a lawyer.

The two cops strode in. The others followed, crowding into Dad's tiny kitchen. Deirdre and my other sister, Siobhan, marched in with their husbands, followed by two paramedics. They lined up behind the cops and stared at us grimly.

I was hoping that the Toronto police would listen to both sides of the story. But I was worried. We had been through a lot in the past few days. Everything I thought I knew was being thrown into question. My hand was in my pocket, holding my small audio recorder. I took it out and pressed *start*.

Then the first cop spoke, "We want to make sure that you're okay."

His words were probably meant to reassure, but they still sounded threatening.

Teresa answered, "We're okay. We're fine."

The cop started to speak, "There's an allegation that..."

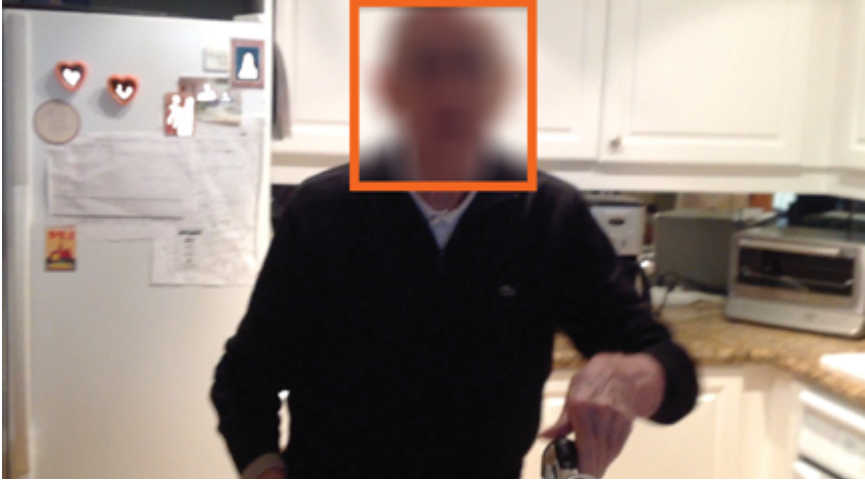
But my attention was riveted on Deirdre. She raised her arm, pointing at me.

"We're being recorded!" She stabbed her finger at me. "Franke! She's got a tape recorder."

I stepped forward. "Yes, I've got a recorder." And I held up my small, silver recorder for everyone to see. "Is that okay?"

THIS IS A STORY about the battle for my sister's freedom and, unexpectedly, my own. None of us lives in a vacuum. Each one of us plays a role in society and in history. Every generation is inextricably part of the tug-of-war for civil rights. One generation fights and surges forward, grasping the trophy of new ground gained and new resolutions. But then the next forgets what all the fuss was about and relaxes their grip. Then the hard-won gains slip away. The war is never won. The struggle for equality is never done. But sometimes by standing up for what's right, you can make a difference.

I wasn't looking for a fight with my family. I already had my hands full fighting the government's censorship of my climate change art. Ironically, that "learning experience" turned out to be essential training. But let's start this story at the beginning, at another stand-off in this very same hallway during a happier time nine months earlier.



Dad, washing the dishes: “My goodness, you guys are real pushers”

NOTE: I come from a family with seven children: Conrad, Deirdre, Lynne, Phoebe, Siobhan, me, and Teresa. Apart from Teresa, none of my siblings support the telling of this story. So, my dad’s face has been blurred in most cases, and the images of many family members have been redacted in white. I’m also using pseudonyms for most of my family.



Bill and Teresa with her calendar and trophies



The cops arrive. Note: The officers' faces have been redacted



Franke with her camera earlier that day at Aiker Place