“Chim, Chimney”

By Elaina “Tracy” Dariah

“Tracy doesn’t understand” my sister Lani said. Daddy had just walked into the living room
where we lay sleeping on the floor, his red rimmed eyes mirroring a heart in so much pain. It
clutched the curtain of his larynx. As he asthmatically spoke the breathless words...your
...brother...Ronnie...has...been...killed.

Maybe Lani said that about me because the last time we found ourselves in so much great grief,
I was three years old and offered a tootsie pop. This time I was seven, and maybe just maybe it
was our way of life.

As we lay on the floor in Uncle Monroe’s warm house, the Thanksgiving feast still comforted
our sleep. At 6 am it was a mourning that did not end at noon. It was 1966, the country was at
war, but it was not Vietnam that took my beloved brother from us. It is the same war we are
fighting in 2020, a war with the weapons of gun violence and racism. Ronnie was shot in is left
temple because he had a white girlfriend.

It was a coward’s bullet. In the weeks that followed we learned his murderer did not even know
him. This heinous crime was not the result of heated words or a fist fight. He did not know that
Ronnie was the life of our family. He did not know this nineteen-year-old college student who
loved horseback riding and coached a (championship) little league football team, and was a
skillful college baseball player. He was also a law office administrative intern, but most of all a
devoted brother. Had the murderer known all of that, maybe he would have just shot at the car as Ronnie drove past...but no, he shot him point blank in his left temple, and rode off into an evil sunrise of hate and bigotry.

All the love and life pouring from Ronnie’s beautiful head on to his girlfriend Marcia’s houndstooth coat. While my sister Yvette and her fiancée Dick watch in horrifying slow motion from the back seat.

Where just a few moments ago they were young lovers riding down Rainier Avenue, in Seattle Washington until a continuous bump to the rear end of the car would change their lives forever.

It was 1966, no cell phones so Dick at 3 in the mourning, (yes, I know how to spell morning) had to find a pay phone. Something that in 2020 is (probably)in the Smithsonian. Ronnie did not have a chance. He was bleeding from his head. Three young adults in shock. Their car was a mile from the nearest payphone. I imagine it was probably thirty minutes to an hour response for an EMT vehicle and police. If only Ronnie had not stopped the car to find out WHY IS THIS GUY BUMPING INTO ME?!

HE never had a chance to get out to try to talk, this murderer did not pull over...he leaned over, pulled the trigger of hatred firing out ignorance that exploded our lives with pain and suffering...POW!!!!

Out of all five older brothers, Ronnie was the one that took time with me. My first movie theater experience along with my sisters Lani and Zinda was with Ronnie and Marcia. I was five years old. The movie was Mary Poppins. It is to this day my favorite movie, to this day I love
Dick Van Dyke. The song “Chim-Cheree” will forever be the soundtrack of my last memorable moment with my brother; that fall night we walked home from my second-grade open house, as he held my hand.

There are ten of us siblings, at the time of Ronnie’s death only four of us lived with my father in the Rainier Vista Projects. So, it was four of us that saw for the next six months the crime scene, Ronnie’s 1961, mint green with white top and black/white interior Ford Falcon, at the wreckage shop every time we walked to Dag’s burger joint, or Pay’n’Save drug store, or rode back to Uncle Monroe’s house. It was a daily occurrence for my brother Donald that first year walk to Franklin High school. Daddy probably rerouted and took the Mercer route to work every day.

Me, Zinda, and Lani were lucky. Our school was in the other direction.

I feel so grateful to have ridden on the back of Ronnie’s motorcycle, for all the times I go to watch him coach and for that memorable Indian summer night one month prior. Recently evicted from our family home, we had just moved into the public housing. Daddy worked swing-shift, 3 to 11 pm at the shipyard. I was two weeks into my second-grade class. Ronnie put on Daddy’s hat and said, “Let’s go to your open house.”

I felt so special walking that trail I usually walked with my new friends to school. He held my hand, my siblings always held my hand. My teacher knew Ronnie was my brother.

“I know you are her brother” she said “but this is such a sweet thing you are doing for your sister.” Ronnie replied and looked at me “my baby sister.”

Love prevailed.
My niece, middle name Ronai is a devoted caretaker of the young children in our family.

My nephew given Ronnie’s middle name (Scott), is a mischievous, globe trekking film maker.

Then there is the nephew who carries that love of baseball to another level- mentoring young athletes, coaching, and non-profit co-owner of local chapter of “Baseball Without Borders.”

Yes, there is a baseball star! Ronnie has a great-nephew, a student athlete who hits homeruns like Hank Aaron.

Not having Ronnie around as we grow older together is painful. We take comfort knowing his love enabled us to nurture the best of him into our children. HIS children in the loving cloud he left behind.

“Chim chiminey

Chim chiminey

Chim chim cher-ee!”

Remembering Ronnie, We’re in glad company.