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Jim Breech, Jonathan Adams, and I were baby boomers, along with eighty percent of the population that lived in Maplewood when it first exploded onto the map—the big snake America has never been able to digest us as we've moved from its head to its tail. We were Maplewood's pride and joy and its unrivaled center of attention. We were children who were older than the neighborhoods that formed us. We were the first generation of Americans who were products of the American Dream, not participants in it. We didn't have to earn its fruits, we were bestowed upon us.

Our attitudes and demeanor reflected our circumstances and environment. Respect for the lessons of history, appreciation for the blessings that geography afforded us, family traditions and family ties—they all faded away as we floated through the public school

system. Our drift produced a lifelong inability to put our lives into perspective. We faced no real challenges while growing up; we had no hardships to overcome, except artificial tests created by the games we played, our school's grading system, and our deep need to be a cherished member of a group. Our privileged, plain-vanilla lives afforded us no context for evaluating what we experienced. We grew into adults with tendencies to overreact to life's small problems, who failed to appreciate the significance of its large ones. We were so sure that our lives were different from anything our parents and grandparents had ever known that their stories had no relevance for us. We had no patience or inclination to sit and listen to them.

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