

Chapter One: Universals of Interpersonal Communication

An Interpersonal Transaction

MARGARET: mother, housewife, junior high school history teacher; 41 years old

FRED: father, gas station attendant; 46 years old

DIANE: daughter, receptionist in an art gallery; 22 years old

STEPHEN: son, college freshman; 18 years old

Margaret is in the kitchen finishing preparing dinner lamb chops, Fred's favorite, though she does not much care for them. Diane is going through some CDs. Stephen is reading one of his textbooks. Fred comes in from work and throws his jacket over the couch; it falls to the floor.

FRED: [Bored but angry, looking at Stephen] What did you do with the car last night? It stunk like hell. And you left all your damn school papers all over the back seat.

STEPHEN: [As if expecting the angry remarks] What did I do now?

FRED: You stunk up the car with your damn pot or whatever you kids smoke, and you left the car looking like hell. Can't you hear?

[Stephen says nothing; goes back to looking at his book but without really reading.]

MARGARET: Dinner's almost ready. Come on. Wash up and sit down.

[At dinner]

DIANE: Mom, I'm going to go to the shore for the weekend with some friends from work.

MARGARET: OK. When will you be leaving?

DIANE: Friday afternoon, right after work.

FRED: Like hell you re going. No more going to the shore with that group.

MARGARET: Fred, they re nice people. Why shouldn t she go?

FRED: Because I said so, OK? Finished. Closed.

DIANE: [Mumbling] I m 22 years old and he gives me problems. You make me feel like a kid, like some stupid little kid.

FRED: Get married and then you can tell your husband what to do.

DIANE: I wish I could.

STEPHEN: But nobody ll ask her.

MARGARET: Why should she get married? She s got a good life good job, nice friends, good home. Listen, I was talking with Elizabeth and Cara this morning, and they both feel they ve just wasted their lives. They raised a family and what have they got? They got nothing. [To Diane] And don t think sex is so great either; it isn t, believe me.

FRED: Well, they re idiots.

MARGARET: [Snidely] They re idiots? Yeah, I guess they are.

DIANE: Joanne s getting married.

MARGARET: Who s Joanne?

STEPHEN: That creature who lives with that guy Michael.

FRED: Watch your mouth, wiseass. Don t be disrespectful to your mother or I ll teach you how to act right.

MARGARET: Well, how do you like the dinner?

[Prolonged silence]

DIANE: Do you think I should be in the wedding party if Joanne asks me? I think she will; we always said we d be in each other s wedding.

MARGARET: Sure, why not. It ll be nice.

FRED: I m not going to no wedding, no matter who s in it.

STEPHEN: Me neither.

DIANE: I hope you ll both feel that way when I get married.

STEPHEN: By then I ll be too old to remember I got a sister.

MARGARET: How s school, Stephen?

STEPHEN: I hate it. It s so big. Nobody knows anyone. You sit in these big lecture halls and listen to some creep talk. I really feel lonely and isolated, like nobody knows I m alive.

FRED: Listen to that college-talk garbage. Get yourself a woman and you won t feel lonely, instead of hanging out with those pothead faggots.

[Diane looks to Margaret, giving a sigh as if to say, Here we go again.]

MARGARET: [To Diane, in whisper] I know.

DIANE: Mom? Do you think I m getting fat?

STEPHEN: Yes.

FRED: Just don t get fat in the stomach or you ll get thrown out of here.

MARGARET: No, I don t notice it.

DIANE: Well, I just thought I might be.

STEPHEN: [Pushing his plate away] I m finished; I m going out.

FRED: Sit down and finish your damn supper. You think I work all day for you to throw the food away? You wanna go smoke your dope?

STEPHEN: No. I just want to get away from you forever.

MARGARET: You mean we both work all day; it s just that I earn a lot more than you

do.

FRED: No, I mean I work and you baby-sit.

MARGARET: Teaching junior high school history isn't baby-sitting.

FRED: What the hell is it then? You don't teach them anything.

MARGARET: [To Diane] You see? You're better off single. I should've stayed single.

Instead ... Oh, well. I was young and stupid. It was my own fault for getting involved with a loser. Just don't you make the same mistake.

FRED: [To Stephen] Go ahead. Leave the table. Leave the house. Who cares what you do?