

THE SONS OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Life has few laws, few absolutes, except for this: the sons of funeral directors almost always end up being funeral directors themselves. You almost never hear of a funeral director's son going into show business, or becoming an aerospace engineer. They're on a different path from you and me. Expose them to the arts, take them to cockfights, push them onstage with strippers, they won't change their minds. All they want is that degree in mortuary science so they can go home and take over the family business. Interestingly, the members of such families deny the reality of death among themselves. When you pass a funeral parlor with a sign out front that says "Cole and Sons," you can bet the father has died and that the sons are running the business.

NEAR A MISSILE BASE

I grew up near a missile base that wasn't very important to our nation's security. Other than a chain-link fence overgrown with honeysuckle vines, there was nothing to keep people from walking right in. Dogs slipped under all the time. My dog was always over there, sniffing around the jeeps. The military police would scoop him up and toss him back over like a little bale of hay. To them, he was more of a pain in the neck than a threat to security.

The only time things heated up was when they conducted one of their drills. Suddenly everyone started running around, parking the jeeps in different places while the underground rockets slowly rose up. They barely looked able to fly. Rusty green nose-cones. Incredibly long serial numbers on their sides. During these drills, which always seemed to take place in the late afternoon, all the dogs in the neighborhood would stand transfixed outside the fence, ignoring the far-off calls of their masters.