

CANDID by Michael Scanlan

*T.J., a young student photographer, chronicles the break-up of his family after his mother walks out. The demise of the family and its devastating effect are captured in dramatic and photographic flashbacks. T.J. tries to make sense out of all this, but no one is willing to listen. Here, T.J. has a chance to talk with his friend Rico, but backs away from the confrontation. Instead, T.J. tells a story - which reflects his friendship with Rico, and confirms for himself that someone may be willing to listen to him.*

T.J.

(As his friend Rico exits.) See. I told you he thinks I'm a jerk. I should've told him about mom's leaving. Rico's very understanding. Really. One time when we were just little squirts, Rico dared me to jump off the high dive at the pool. So, I climb up the ladder -- my knees are knocking together, my lunch is rushing towards the nearest exit -- and step onto the board, which I swear is at least 6000 feet above the surface of the pool. I look down and I know that there is no way I'm gonna jump. Even at the age of nine I understand that humiliation is preferable to death. So I back down the ladder to the hoots and catcalls of the kids who assembled to see me commit suicide. As I get to the bottom, Rico walks over to me, shakes my hand and says, "That was great. Anyone can jump off a diving board, but you have to be real brave to climb down a ladder backwards." All the kids are very impressed with me, start patting me on the back, telling me how brave I am. I even start believing it myself. I even start bragging about it. Worse, I even start bragging to Rico about it. "Boy, I can't believe I actually had the nerve to climb down that ladder backwards," I say. Rico, totally disgusted with me says, "You jerk. Did you ever hear of anyone coming down a ladder forwards?" Well, I guess you

had to be there. I know I should've told Rico about mom, but I was afraid to talk about it. I was afraid talking about it would make it real. And reality was something that none of us was ready to deal with.