



One Way
DeFord, Miriam Allen

Published: 1955

Categorie(s): Fiction, Science Fiction, Short Stories

Source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/32541>

About DeFord:

Miriam Allen deFord (August 21, 1888 – February 22, 1975) was an American writer. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she worked as a newspaper reporter for a time and, in the early 1900s, was also a campaigner and disseminator of birth control information to women. She spent perhaps the most energy in mystery fiction and science fiction. Hence she did several anthologies in the mystery world. She also had interest in historical crime or criminals. In 1968 she wrote *The Real Bonnie and Clyde*. She also wrote *The Overbury Affair*, which involves events during the reign of James I of Britain surrounding the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. For the latter work she received a 1961 Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America for Best Fact Crime book. She also worked for *Humanist* magazine. However, in 1949 *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* began with Anthony Boucher as editor. Anthony Boucher wrote science fiction and fantasy but also garnered attention in the mystery field as well. This gave his magazine some cross-over appeal to mystery writers like Ms. deFord. Hence much of her science fiction first appeared in Boucher's magazine. Her stories there dealt with themes like nuclear devastation, alienation, and sexual roles. Her two collections are *Elsewhere*, *Elsewhen*, *Elsehow* and *Xenogenesis*. She also edited an anthology of stories mixing science fiction with mystery called *Space, Time, and Crime*. DeFord was also a passionate Fortean, a follower of Charles Fort, and did fieldwork for him. DeFord is mentioned in Fort's book *Lo!* Shortly before her death in 1975, Fortean writer Loren Coleman visited Ms. deFord frequently and interviewed her about her earlier interactions with Fort and her trips to Chico, California, to investigate the case of a poltergeist rock-thrower on Fort's behalf. DeFord died February 22, 1975, at her longtime home, The Ambassador Hotel at 55 Mason Street in San Francisco. In 2008, The Library of America selected deFord's story of the Leopold and Loeb trial for inclusion in its two-century retrospective of American True Crime.

Also available on Feedbooks for DeFord:

- *The Eel* (1958)

Copyright: Please read the legal notice included in this e-book and/or check the copyright status in your country.

Note: This book is brought to you by Feedbooks

<http://www.feedbooks.com>

Strictly for personal use, do not use this file for commercial purposes.

Transcriber Note: This etext was produced from Galaxy Science Fiction March 1955. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.

We had the driver let us off in the central district and took a copter-taxi back to Homefield. There's no disgrace about it, of course; we just didn't feel like having all the neighbors see the big skycar with Lydna Project painted on its side, and then having them drop in casually to express what they would call interest and we would know to be curiosity.

There are people who boast that their sons and daughters have been picked for Lydna. What is there to boast about? It's pure chance, within limits.

And Hal is our only child and we love him.

Lucy didn't say a word all the way back from saying good-by to him. Lucy and I have been married now for 27 years and I guess I know her about as well as anybody on Earth does. People who don't know her so well think she's cold. But I knew what feelings she was crushing down inside her.

Besides, I wasn't feeling much like talking myself. I was remembering too many things:

Hal at about two, looking up at me—when I would come home dead-tired from a hard day of being chewed at by half a dozen bosses right up to the editor-in-chief whenever anything went the least bit out of kilter—with a smile that made all my tiredness disappear. Hal, when I'd pick him up at school, proudly displaying a Cybernetics Approval Slip (and ignoring the fact that half the other kids had one, too). Hal the day I took him to the Beard Removal Center, certain that he was a man, now that he was old enough for depilation. Hal that morning two weeks ago, setting out to get his Vocational Assignment Certificate... .

That's when I stopped remembering.

It had been five years after our marriage before they let us start a child: some question about Lucy's uncle and my grandmother. Most parents aren't as old as we are when they get the news and usually have other children left, so it isn't so bad.

When we got home, Lucy still was silent. She took off her scarf and cloak and put them away, and then she pushed the button for dinner without even asking me what I wanted. I noticed, though, that she was ordering all the things I like. We both had the day off, of course, to go and say good-by to Hal—Lucy is a technician at Hydroponics Center.

I felt awkward and clumsy. Her ways are so different from mine; I explode and then it's over—just a sore place where it hurts if I touch it. Lucy never explodes, but I knew the sore place would be there forever, and getting worse instead of better.

We ate dinner in silence, though neither of us felt hungry, and had the table cleared. Then it was nearly 19 o'clock and I had to speak.

"The takeoff will be at 19:10," I said. "Want me to tune in now? Last year, when Mutro was Solar President, he gave a good speech before the kids left."

"Don't turn it on at all!" she said sharply. Then, in a softer voice, she added: "Of course, Frank, turn it on whenever you like. I'll just go to my room and open the soundproofing."

There were still no tears in her eyes.

I thought of a thousand things to say: Don't you want to catch a glimpse of Hal in the crowd going up the ramp? Mightn't they let the kids wave a last farewell to their folks listening and watching in? Mightn't something in the President's speech make us feel a little better?

But I heard myself saying, "Never mind, Lucy. Don't go. I'll leave the thing off."

I didn't want to be alone. I wanted Lucy there with me.

So we sat out the whole time of the visicast, side by side on the window-couch, holding hands. I'll say this for the neighbors—they must all have known, for Hal was the first to be selected from Homefield in nearly 40 years, and the newscast must have announced it over and over, but not a single person on the whole 62 floors of the house butted in on us. Not even that snoopy student from Venus in 47-14, who's always dropping in on other tenants and taking notes on "the mores of Earth Aborigines." People can be very decent sometimes. We needn't have worried about coming home in the Lydna Project bus.

It was no good trying to keep my mind on anything else. Whether I wanted to or not, I had to relive the two last hours we'd ever have with Hal.

It couldn't mean to him what it meant to us. We were losing; he was both losing and gaining. We were losing our whole lives for 21 years past; he was, too, but he was entering a new life we would never know anything about. No word ever comes from Lydna; that's part of the project. Nobody even knows where it is for sure, though it's supposed to be one of the outer asteroids.

Both boys and girls are sent and there must be marriages and children—though probably the death-rate is pretty high, for every year they have to select 200 more from Earth to keep the population balanced. We would never know if our son married there, or whom, or when he died. We would never see our grandchildren, or even know if we had any.

Hal was a good son and I think we were fairly good parents and had made his childhood happy. But at 21, faced with a great, mysterious adventure and an unknown and exciting future, a boy can't be expected to be drowned in grief at saying good-bye to his humdrum old father and mother. It might have been tougher for him 200 years ago, when they hadn't learned to decondition children early from parental fixations. But no youngster today would possess that kind of unwholesome dependency. If he did, he would never have been selected for Lydna in the first place.

That's one comfort we have—it's a sort of proof we had reared a child far above the average.

It was just weakness in me to half wish that Hal hadn't been so healthy, so handsome, so intelligent, so fine in character.

They were a wonderful lot. We said our good-bys in an enormous room of the spaceport, with this year's 200 selectees there from all over Earth, each with the relatives and whoever else had permission to make the last visit. I suppose it's a matter of accommodations and transportation, for nobody's allowed more than three. So it was mostly parents, with a few brothers, sisters and sweethearts or friends. The selectees themselves choose the names. After all, they've had two weeks after they were notified to say good-bye to everyone else who matters to them.

Most of the time, all I could keep my mind on was Hal, trying to fix forever in my memory every last detail of him. We have dozens of sound stereos, of course, but this was the last time.

Still, it's my business at the News Office, and has been for 30 years, to observe people and form conclusions about them, so I couldn't help noticing with a professional eye some of the rest of the selectees. (This farewell visit is a private affair, and the press is barred, which is why I'd never been there before.)

There were two kinds of selectees that stood out, in my mind. One was those who had nobody at all to see them off. Completely alone, poor kids—orphans, doubtless, with no families and apparently not even friends near enough to matter. But, in a way, they would be the happiest; life on Earth couldn't have been very rewarding for them, and on Lydna they might find companionship. (If only companionship in misery, I thought—but I shied away from that. In our business, there are always leaks; we know—or guess—a few things about Lydna nobody else does, outside the authorities themselves. But we keep our mouths shut.)

The ones that tore my hearts were the boys and girls in love. They never take married people for Lydna, but a machine can't tell what a boy or

girl is feeling about another girl or boy, and it's a machine that does the selecting. There's no use putting up an argument, for, once made, the choice is inexorable and unchangeable. In my work as a newsgatherer, I've heard some terrible stories. There have been suicide pacts and murders.

You could tell the couples in love. Not that there were any scenes. If there had been any in the two weeks past, they were over. But anybody who has learned to read human reactions, as I have, could recognize the agony those youngsters were going through.

I felt a deep gratitude that Hal wasn't one of them. He'd had his share of adolescent affairs, of course, but I was sure he was still just playing around. He'd seen a lot of Bet Milen, a girl a class ahead of him in school and college, but I didn't think she meant more to him than any of the others. If she had, she'd have been along to say good-bye, but he'd asked for only the two of us. She was now a laboratory assistant in our hospital and could easily have gotten the time off.

It was growing late, almost midnight, and Lucy and I had to be at work tomorrow, no matter how we felt. I forced myself to talk, with Lucy's silent pain smothering me like a force-blanket. I made an effort and cleared my throat.

"Lucy, go to bed and turn on the hypno and try to get some sleep."

Lucy stood up obediently, but she shook her head. "You go, dear," she said, her voice firm. "I can't. I—"

The roof buzzer sounded. Somebody had landed in a copter and wanted us.

"Don't answer," I said quickly. "There's nobody we want to see—"

But she had already pushed the button to open the door.

It was Bet Milen, the girl Hal used to go around with.

I braced myself. This might be bad. She might have cared more for Hal than we had guessed.

But she didn't look grief-stricken. She looked excited, and determined, and a little bit frightened.

She scarcely glanced at me. She went right up to Lucy and took both Lucy's hands in hers.

"Well," she said in a clipped, tense voice, "we made it."

Then Lucy broke for the first time. The tears ran down her face and she didn't even wipe them away. "Are you *certain*?"

"Positive. And I got word to him. We'd agreed on a code. That's why he didn't want me there today—we couldn't trust ourselves not to betray it, either way."

I stood there staring at them, bewildered.

"What's this all about?" I demanded. "Have you two cooked up some crazy scheme to rescue Hal? I hope to heaven not! It would ruin all of us, including him!"

The wild daydreams I'd had myself flashed through my mind—the drug that would seem to kill him and wouldn't, the anonymous false accusation of subversion, the previous secret marriage. All impossible, all fatal.

Lucy disengaged her hands from the girl's and slipped her arm through mine.

"You tell him, Bet," she said gently. "You're the one who should."

I'd never noticed how pretty the girl was till then, when she stood there with her face flushed and her eyes straight on mine. A pang went through me; if only she and Hal could have—

"No, Mr. Sturt," she said, "we haven't rescued Hal. He's gone. But we've rescued part of him. I'm going to have his baby."

"Bet's going to live with us and be our daughter, Frank," Lucy explained. "Hal and she and I worked it out in these two weeks, after they came to me and told me how they felt about each other. We couldn't tell you till we were sure; I couldn't bear to have you hope and then be disappointed—it would be enough for me to have to suffer that."

"That is, I'll come if you want me here, Mr. Sturt," said Bet.

I had to sit down before I could speak. "Of course I want you. But what about your own family?"

"I haven't any. My mother's dead and my father's an engineer on Ganymede and gets home on leave about once in three years. I've been living in a youth hostel."

"But look here—" I turned to Lucy—"how on Earth can you know? Two weeks or less is no time—"

Lucy gave me a look I recognized, the patient one of the scientist for the layman.

"The Chow-Visalius test, dear. One day after the fertilized ovum starts dividing—"

"And I ran it myself every day for over a week. That's one of my jobs in the lab and it was easy to slip in another specimen. And it didn't, and it didn't and I went nearly out of my mind—"

"Every time Hal entered the apartment, I'd look at him and he'd shake his head," Lucy interrupted. "It meant everything to him. And it would just have broken my heart—"

"Mine, too," Bet said softly. "And his. And today was the last chance. I was scared to try it. This afternoon at 14:30, just before the farewell visits, was the deadline for viz messages to any of them. If I'd had to send mine without the word we'd agreed on that would tell him it was all right—But it was, at last! And now he knows, even if I never—even if we never—Excuse me, please, it's been a strain. I'm afraid I'm going to bawl."

We let her alone. Kids nowadays hate to be fussed over.

Us, we'd lost our son, and that was going to stay with us forever. But now we would have his child to love and—

An appalling thought struck me suddenly. I can't imagine why I hadn't realized it sooner. All this emotion, I suppose.

"Good God!" I cried. "An illegal child! We can't keep it!"

"Nobody's going to know," Lucy replied calmly. "Bet's going to live with us, and when it starts to show, she's going to take her allowed leave. We'll take ours, too, and we'll all go on a trip—to Mars, maybe, or Venus—one of the settled colonies where we can rent a house. Babies don't *have* to be born in hospitals, you know; our ancestors had them right at home. She's strong and healthy and I know what to do. Then we'll come back here and we'll have a baby with us that we adopted wherever we were. Nobody will ever know."

"Look," I said in a voice I tried to keep from rising. "There are four billion people on Earth and about 28 billion in the colonized Solar planets. Every one of those people is on record at Central Cybernetics. How do you suppose you're going to get away with the phony adoption of a non-existent child? The first time you have to take it to a baby clinic, they'll find it has no card."

"I thought of that," Lucy said, "and it can be done, because it must. Frank, for heaven's sake, use your wits! You're a newsgatherer. You know all sorts of people everywhere."

"I don't know any machines. And it's machines that handle the records."

"Machines under the supervision of humans."

"Sure," I said sarcastically. "I just go to my ex-newsgatherer pal who feeds the records to Io or Ceres and say, 'Look, old fellow, do me a favor, will you? My wife wants to adopt a baby from your colony, so just make

up the names of two people and give them a life-check, invent their ancestors back to the time Central Cybernetics was established, and then slip in cards for their marriage, and the birth of their child—I'll let you know later whether to make it a boy or a girl—and then their deaths; and then my wife and I can adopt that made-up baby.'

"What kind of blackmailing hold do you think I have on any record official," I asked angrily, "to make him do a thing like that and keep his mouth shut about it? I could be eliminated for treason for even making such a suggestion."

"Frank, *think!* Surely there must be *some* way!"

And then it struck me. "Wait! I just got an idea. When I said 'treason,' just now—It might barely be possible—"

"Oh, what?"

"It would have to be Mars, the North Polar Cap colony. The K-Alph Conspiracy messed things up there badly."

"I remember, Mr. Sturt!" Bet said excitedly. "They wrecked everything in the three months before the rebellion was crushed, didn't they?"

"Everything including their cybernetics equipment. Central doesn't want it known, but I have inside information that it's still not in going condition. That colony is full of children who have never been registered. And I doubt if it will be in 100 per cent shape for the best part of another year. Those hellions really did a job. Let's see—this is the end of Month Two. We'd have to get away around Month Eight at the latest and the baby would be born—when exactly, Bet?"

"Early in Month Twelve. We could all be back here again by the first of next year, or even by the end of Month Thirteen."

"Well, I have enough accumulated leave for that and I guess you have too, Lucy; neither of us has taken more than two or three weeks for years. But what about you, Bet? You've been working less than a year."

"I can borrow it. Our director is crazy about travel and she'll be all for it when I tell her I have a chance to go to Mars for a long visit. Besides, she knows about Hal and me—I mean the way we are about each other—and she'll understand that I'd want to get away for a while now."

Asher, my editor-in-chief, would feel the same way, I thought, and so would Lucy's boss.

"I knew you'd find a way," remarked my wife complacently.

I looked at the telechron.

"We've all got to be at work in seven hours," I said, "if we expect to get through before the end of the afternoon. What say we turn in?"

"You stay here with us, Bet," said Lucy. "You parked your copter in our port, didn't you? Frank, I think we need a drink."

I pushed the buttons. Nobody said anything, but somehow it was a toast to Hal. I know the liquor had to get past a lump in my throat and the women were both crying. It wasn't like my self-contained Lucy. I guess she thought so herself, for she braced herself. But her voice was still trembling when she turned to Bet.

"A year from now," she said, "we'll all be back here in this room and, this time, part of Hal will be here with us—his son, our little Hal."

"It might be our little Hallie." Bet smiled through her tears. "It will be ten weeks before I can run the Schuster test to find out."

"It won't make any difference. Hal will never know that, but he'll know, way out there on Lydna, that his baby has been born. He'll know, even though he can never see it—or us."

Lucy blinked, then went on bravely. "Every time he looks in a mirror there, he'll say to himself, 'Well, back on Earth, there's a little tyke with my blue eyes and my curly hair and my mouth and nose and chin, who's going to grow up to be tall and straight like me—or maybe like Bet, but also a lot like me.'

"And as he grows older, he can think back to the way he was as a child and a boy and a man, and know that his son, or his daughter, will be feeling and thinking and looking some day just about the way he himself is then, and it will be a link with Earth and with us—"

That was when I had to go to the window and look out for a long time to pull myself together before I could face them again.

Lydna is top-top secret, but as I've said before, we newsgatherers get inside information.

I have a pretty shrewd idea of what the mysterious Lydna Project is. It's to alter human beings so they can adapt to the colonization of outer space.

The medics do things to them to enable them and their descendants to resist every possible condition of temperature and radiation and gravity. They have to alter the genes—acquired characters would be of use only in a short-term project, and this is long-term. But you can't alter genes without affecting the individual.

We'd have Hal's normal child.

But when Hal got to Lydna, he and the rest of them would be shocked and sick for a while at sight of some of the inhabitants. And if he had any children on Lydna, we, back here, would scarcely recognize them as

human. Some of them might have extra limbs. Some might have eyes and ears in odd places. Some might have lungs outside their bodies, or brains without a skull.

By that time, Hal himself would have got over being sick—unless, some time, he got hold of a mirror and remembered the boy he used to be.

Loved this book ?
Similar users also downloaded

Gene L. Henderson

All In The Mind

When does life begin?... A well-known book says "forty". A well-known radio program says "eighty". Some folks say it's mental, others say it's physical. But take the strange case of Mel Carlson who gave a lot of thought to the matter.

William Clouser Boyd

Category Phoenix

Man, it would appear, can adapt to any form of society ... but not one in which the knowledge of extending life becomes a passport to death!

E. G. von Wald

Fair and Warmer

Tensor's melancholia threatened to disturb the entire citizenry, and that was most uncivil! So—if these peculiar aliens caused him this distress, by provoking his intellectual curiosity, the remedy was for him to investigate them to his complete satisfaction.... Thus, in this manner, did Tensor get well—and did he learn a bit too....

Michael Cathal

Rich Living

No other planet in the entire Galaxy was at all like Rejuvenal ... it was the only world worth one's whole fortune for a short visit!

Horace Leonard Gold

At the Post

How does a person come to be scratched from the human race? Psychiatry did not have the answer—perhaps Clocker's turf science did!

Robert Donald Locke

Deepfreeze

Life and the future belong to the strong—so Dollard laughed as he fled Earth and Mankind's death agony. But the last laugh was yet to come....

Charles V. de Vet

Big Stupe

Smart man, Bruckner—he knew how to handle natives ... but they knew even better how to deal with smart terrestrials!

Arthur G. Stangland

The Black Tide

Space in its far dark reaches can be fickle with a man; it can shatter his dreams, fill him with fear and hate. It can also cure a man—if he is strong enough.

G.L. Vandenburg

Moon Glow

That first trip to the moon has been the subject of many stories. Mr. Vandenburg has come up with as novel a twist as we've ever read. And it could happen.

William Douglas Morrison

The Model of a Judge

Should a former outlaw become a judge—even if he need only pass sentence on a layer cake?



www.feedbooks.com
Food for the mind