

Mark Crimmins

WHAT CHARLIE SAID

by [Mark Crimmins](#)

He told me that the first time he met me he thought I was an asshole, because I had replied to everything he said with one word: right. He said he realized that I wasn't an asshole later, when we were watching the Gerber machine make laser patterns at the factory and I quoted him something from Meister Eckhart. He told me he was on medication and pulled a little pipe from his pocket. He said he took a secret puff every hour of every day. He told me there were many great mountain ranges in this world but that for him it was all about the Uintas. He told me if I climbed the Timpooneke Trail solo and hiked all the way to the summit of Mount Timpanogos, I would find enlightenment. He almost cut off one of his fingers one day when he was operating a band knife and he couldn't stop laughing as he told me over his shoulder about how Jimi Hendrix had got out of the army by telling the military shrinks he couldn't sleep at night because of his obsession with the bums of other soldiers. He said Jimi always slept with his guitar on his chest. He told me he had registered at the university as an anthropology student using three different names for three different years to avoid paying tuition. In first year, he registered as Charles Dodd. In second year, over the phone, he spoke in Bee Gee falsetto and registered as Charlise Dopp. In third year, he registered as Chuck Dodge. He enjoyed playing with the names. It was like a Scrabble game to him. He cut his hair different every time he got a new student picture taken and wore makeup when he was Charlise. He still had his three student cards. They were among his prized possessions. He told me he got busted at the end of third year and dropped out because he couldn't find the fifteen thousand dollars in back tuition he was ordered to pay. He was so broke he had to live for a year behind Dave Neff's sofa up on Wasatch Boulevard. He told me the space behind the sofa was his apartment. He covered his rent by paying for the videos they watched. He told me his mother had taken off when he was six and his dad had been sick for a very long time. He told me he only had two feelings: that he was still a little kid and that he was older than the Rock of Ages. He said that every year he held an Antichristmas and performed pagan rituals. He told me that one day, when he was high on shrooms and reading Augustine on a balcony in the Avenues, he had an epiphany. Over the rooftops he saw auras around the trees. He felt a divine presence. Then he heard sobbing and realized there were tears streaming down his own face. He told me he had done peyote and sat on the edge of Bryce Canyon for ten hours. He told me he stared into the amphitheater until he had looked right outside of time. Then one day he called me in the middle of the night and said I needed to save water. We all needed to save water. It was the secret of life. He was calling me because nobody believed him. He called me a few days later and said he gave away his clothes, left his place on Redwood Road without even closing the door, walked down Sixth South to the Greyhound station, and got on a bus for Denver because that's where he needed to be. He told me he'd be staying in Denver for a while. He said he was in a hospital there. The doctors just wanted to keep an eye on him. He told me he'd be getting out soon. He just needed a little more time. He told me he missed his Uintas. He told me not to worry about him. He told me it was no big deal. He told me had to go now.

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Mark Crimmins teaches Contemporary American and British Fiction at the University of Toronto. His stories and flash fictions have appeared or are forthcoming in *Happy*, *Confrontation*, *theNewerYork*, *White Rabbit*, *Flash Frontier*, *Columbia online*, *Cha*, and *Eunoia Review*. He is currently working on two books of fiction: *Intersections: Experiments in Short Fiction* and *Characters Madmen Alone Can Read*, a collection of stories. You can find out more about him on his website: www.markcrimmins.com.