Life at the Last

Carol Miller

Contents

The Experience of Time

When I was small, time felt like forever. The only child in a hotel of adults, I was admonished to sit, be quiet, stop wiggling. Longing to run, jump, play, I felt imprisoned in a rebellious body. I remember wanting desperately to somersault down the length of the red carpet that ran past our door and around the corner in the hallway, a carpet that can still appear, nearly a century later, in my dreams. But Mother said that I could not because people had walked on it and it was dirty.

The doctor described my fidgeting as St. Vitus Dance, a neurological ailment popular at the time. Often, when the hands of the clock reached noon and we hadn't escaped our one-bedroom apartment for the thrill of the sidewalk, a busy store, the tiny nearby city park, I threw up my breakfast in protest. I was a clever child and my insatiable body and mind longed for novelty, news, and movement. By the time I was five, two sisters had arrived in close succession, and my mother sent me to a nearby Catholic school where the first half hour was spent in silent prayer to unfamiliar statues—I wasn't Catholic—an effort at immobility that smacked of the eternal.

Time, the experience of time, eluded my control and seemed unending. While waiting to grow up and become master of my fate, any repetitive task like brushing my teeth, waiting for Mother to come and get me after school, waiting for her to find a bit of time to read to me, trying to sit still through a two-hour concert in the company of my adored piano teacher, was too much. Time was never mine. It stretched slowly, endlessly, and flagged an alien farewell over a far horizon.

Anxious to become an adult, I married at nineteen, became a mother at twenty-one, and time became a tournament of challenges and choice. Beset with endless opportunity, I ruled that at no time should any time be wasted. Scribbled

declensions of French verbs or lists of things to do were invariably pinned on the cupboard above the ironing board or in the car. I loved multitasking and holding contests with myself, the carnival of balls in the air, the race to see how many I could keep going. During the decades of raising children, part-time work, going back to school myself as soon as my youngest was in first grade, and keeping up a home, only an occasional moment was ever exclusively mine—but I didn't care. Time was sometimes an advocate, sometimes an enemy, but always my constituent partner in the dance.

There were, of course, eventual endings, a BS in 1963, a divorce in 1967, an MA in 1968, when I was 42 years old. Halfway through a doctorate, I chose to leave the University of Washington, to follow my research with the Machvaia, the Roma tribe I had been studying, and to move south with them to their California home. Gypsies were not an easy study. To them, I was a foreigner, an Outsider, and the people had centuries of organized defense against Outsiders. To learn what I could, I listened, learned their language, asked questions whenever possible, recorded, and became an absorbent sponge. By trying to understand them and fathom the nature of their certainties, their fears, I became, over time, more and more like them.

My study took off when free-thinking Lola told my fortune, adopted me as her driver, and decided that I was the arrival of her good luck. All the Machvanki (Machvaia women) told fortunes. Trained from childhood to read the hearts and minds of others, they called it "a gift from The God, so we had something." Despite their obvious lack of certification, the women were skilled at giving practical advice. Nor was their extrasensory perception reserved for Outsiders. Feeling the mood of the moment, sensing what others in the tribe were thinking, took precedence. The people seemed wired to respond as a unit with a concerted sense of time. No matter how hard I tried or how many years we were together, I never knew when the next ritual step might happen.

Early on, I realized that my habit of making lists, multitasking, and hurrying after clock time would be unforgivably rude. Whenever I ran out of money and lived with the Roma, I took care to curb my reading; no newspapers or books. I tried, as best I could, to apprehend the wants and wishes of the other

household members. I learned to appreciate, to share the essence of the mood, the meaning, and the moment.

By the 1990s, however, the time of Machvaia Gypsies was over. The people complained they were "going American," and so it seemed to me. The younger generations did what they liked; they refused to obey their elders: they stopped attending the traditional rituals. Roma life was unhealthy, sometimes difficult, and, on occasion, dangerous. Many my age were dying, including some of my dearest friends. I began to make my way "back to America," as the Roma spoke of it—back to the American culture I had willingly left behind. Those years, in what was now my late middle age, of moving from place to place, of confusion and choosing what I wanted of Gypsy culture to keep, what not to keep, were rather like a second, more deliberately considered, adolescence.

After years of writing articles for academic journals, I began trying to write for a more general audience. As the Machvaia were no longer traditional, what I wrote was, of course, history. I found it indefensible that the Americans I met knew nothing about Roma. Those hours of the day that I worked on my writing, I lived again on Gypsy time, prolonging my fieldwork, in a sense, by several decades. I didn't want to compromise my hard-won material with an ineptly written story, and hoped that what I was writing would be published when I had mastered my craft.

When I was a child, to keep me from jumping on her bed, my mother had often sent me for lessons to other apartments. My teachers were artists: Carmelita Dorrity (dance), Jean Terry West (drama), Mable Henry Young (song), Laura B. Luke (piano). These women were the happiest people I knew. I could see that art was a magical and most fulfilling process. All my life I secretly wished to become, like them, an artist. Finally, after decades, when I was living again in Seattle, Gemma Media published both my books. The first, *Lola's Luck: My Life among the California Gypsies*, is a memoir in paperback with royal-purple end pages. The second, *Church of Cheese: Gypsy Ritual in the American Heyday*, a synopsis of the earlier Machvaia Roma culture, has proved more popular. One was published when I was 82, the other at age 84.

Ninety-three on my last birthday, I have come to terms with time. Multitasking is now out of the question; "One thing at a time" is my motto. As

my future grows shorter, events that I once considered boring have become endearingly piquant. Whenever sleepy, I take a nap. Lonely, I call or visit friends. While breathing fresh ocean air, savoring the aroma of good coffee, discovering a new and exciting book, I pause and give that experience my full attention. What a gift to know that there is nothing I must run to and that so much is already done. Time is finally mine, all mine, so mine that mornings I can get up whenever I please and at the perfect moment.

I have a fresh awareness of endings—death, for example. Like so many in my age group, many of my friends and family are dead, or dying. But the end of life doesn't seem nearly as depressing as it did when I was younger. Now I think of it as a welcome release when the physical has fizzled out. One does hope it won't be too painful, of course.

To me, old age signifies evaluation, a time for reflection and assessment, of wondering what all those years of striving and achievement were about. What were my victories and my failures? What did I set out to do, and did I manage to succeed? Am I leaving this earth in a somewhat better condition than when I arrived, as has always been my hope and intention? What matters still need to be addressed?

Having developed the writing habit, I am still writing. I write because I like to see what I am thinking in print, and then to ask myself if it is true—or if it matters. I write because writing whisks me into my critical, thoughtful center. There, I am challenged to consider the way that language can articulate ideas, feelings, and intuit meaning. I find that the startle and confusion of experience can be made somewhat sensible with words.

This isn't a memoir of my rather long life. These days, I don't find my memory particularly reliable. I can't imagine stuffing my accumulating and checkered years into the pages of a single book. Instead, I have chosen moments that seemed memorable, events that perplexed me, some that were amusing, more that were amazing, and a good many that were like speed bumps on the road of life.

My Early Life

When we are young and inexperienced, and making multiple personal choices for the very first time, we have a tendency to cause our own follies. I know I did in my teens. At fourteen, I was so crazy that once, when my Glee Club hour became especially tiresome, I stuck my finger into an open light socket on the stage to see if I would get a shock. Of course, I did.

Speed bumps like these can be our unwelcome teachers and involve quite difficult and painful learning. From our bigger problems we might even learn so much that, after a while, we feel like a different person, as I did after my divorce. They can shape us, hone us, perfect us . . . and they can save us. If I hadn't been so completely bored as a child, I might never have discovered reading, the joy I find in writing, and the great many authors whose ideas informed the person I became.

People who care about us may suggest, by advice or example, how we might deal with a current problem. As social beings, the more examples we have from teachers, mentors, friends, the more likely we are to profit.

As we grow older and more experienced, we learn that what seems quite disastrous at the moment may well evolve into something fabulous—or an entirely different set of problems. The trick is to be a good sport about setbacks and to follow the advice "Get cool, stay loose," sung by the Jets, the dancing street gang in the musical *West Side Story*. If you let the world orbit around the sun a few more times, the bump that gave you migraines may even magically vanish. To hope and believe in good outcomes is a more practical life plan than always expecting the worst. While mentally reviewing my past ninety-some years, I have realized that many of the difficulties, disasters, and what seemed the darkest of my days have transformed, over time, into gifts and blessings, or matters of total insignificance. When young, had I realized the variable nature of my problems, I might have taken more chances.

Gloves

My first memory is of annoyance as I was wrestled into stiff white gloves that immediately became sweaty and dirty. Made of kid leather, each time Mother washed them, they got tighter and more drab. We lived in a large transient-residential hotel in Spokane, Washington, and my mother apparently found gloves essential wearing. I must have been two or so years old and those gloves are the first aggravation that I remember.

Tots

As a cute kid and, for a time, the only child in a hotel of several hundred residents, I was aware of the eyes, smiles, hearts that followed me across the lobby. I could feel the solicitude and caring, the people's delight at my antics. I was a gift, a gift returned a thousandfold, building a certainty that has followed me through my days that I am loved and worthy of loving.

Giggles

I think my mother started it. One of my earliest memories is sitting in a chair—was it a highchair?—and giggling at my young and beautiful mother, her long hair back-combed into a giant black halo, acting the clown, making silly faces, snapping a dish towel, and dancing the Charleston. When I was small, Mother was a flapper.

Growing up, my sisters and I often got the giggles. I don't remember exactly when or why, but the giggling was fun. Grown, our mother joined us; we would laugh until our sides hurt and we were begging, "Stop!"

Now my sisters and I are elderly, and we giggle at the arthritis that bends our fingers, the wrinkles that mash our faces, the repeated times we forget our house keys. We are in conspiratorial agreement that old age can be hazardous, if not at times ridiculous.

Could laughter be the music that keeps our merry-go-round planet spinning around the sun?

Lina

When I was a child, Lina K. lived one floor down, and hers was the only apartment that I was permitted to visit by myself. Whenever I did, she tried her best to entertain me, telling me stories, sharing postcards from her wealthy sister who traveled Europe and Asia, encouraging me to play with her jeweled necklaces. Occasionally, she would waltz about the room, energetically flicking a feather duster, and even I, as a child of only five or six, was aware that this ineffectual dance was a charade of conventional dusting.

Lina's husband Arnold did all the cleaning, shopping, and cooking, and earned their income. My parents were appalled at the lack of tradition, the inequity of the couple's domestic roles, and they were cruelly judgmental. Nevertheless, on every holiday and whenever my mother wanted someone to talk with—and maybe cheer her up—she sent me downstairs to get Lina.

Lina had been raised as companion to one of P. T. Barnum's daughters. In a family of privilege, she learned to waltz, to converse, to be charming and fun. She taught me that money, doing, and accomplishing weren't everything in life and that, even during the Great Depression, there was room on this earth for those who could rainbow the air around them.

Reading

I must have been in second grade when I found a *Children's Playmate Magazine* at the corner newsstand, ran home to ask my mother for 15 cents, and, feeling quite adult, returned in triumph with my purchase. The back page had a paper doll with various Native American outfits that I treasured by never cutting her out.

We lived on the fifth floor of the hotel that my father managed, and the birth of my sisters, only a year apart, was keeping Mother too busy for our former shopping expeditions, or to take me to the park, or to read me stories; *Wynken, Blynken, and Nod* had been our favorite. Until I discovered the escape of reading to myself, I was perpetually bored and longing for stimulus. I remember watching the slow climb of the hands of the clock on the wall and a growing feeling of nausea as noon approached. Why noon? I don't remember.

I do remember vomiting. No wonder Mother put me in first grade when I was five.

Buck Rogers

After my sisters and I recovered from scarlet fever, the family moved from the hotel to a busy inner-city street a mile away. There I made friends who taught me to be the lookout while they stole chewing gum and yo-yos from the corner Mom-and-Pop store. I often walked home from school with a boy who shared my passion for Buck Rogers; we pretended we were rocketing above the Earth, like in the comics. I got tired of always being Dale, the girlfriend who didn't do much, and somehow this led to a wrestling match. The nuns had encouraged me to believe that if I wanted something badly enough, I would prevail. But Buck was stronger, and I remember being pinned to the sidewalk, the feeling of injustice, the loss of parity. I never played Buck Rogers after that.

Princess

When I was nine years old, my aunt Fran gave me a dog, the unattractive runt of one of her "pure-bred" collie litters. Our house was on one of the busiest streets in the city. The day that Princess got loose and was nearly run down by fast-moving cars, my screams from the curb really upset my mother. I remember her appalled reaction; like her very English mother Emma, she associated screaming and crying with an inexcusable lack of control. The next week, when I was away at Campfire Girls' camp, she gave my dog away.

Having often paged through my voice teacher's giant book of operas with exotic pictures, I knew that operatic librettos featured screaming and crying during crises. Mulling over my mother's horror, I decided my response had been appropriate. I already knew I didn't have an opera singer's voice, but why couldn't I have a life with a bit of drama? Mother and I were, I decided, in evident disagreement about such matters.

Sisters

I thought my sisters were fabulous. And I still do. I thought Joan and Nancy were perfect, each in her own special way. Summers, I would walk several miles across town to the magnificent Carnegie Library and borrow as many books as I could carry for the three of us to read, picture books initially for my little sisters. My idea of holidays had, I suspect, been inflated by the extravagant number of presents once received from my hotel admirers, and I saved my babysitting money to buy my sisters gifts, usually books, for their birthdays, Easter, Christmas. I tried to protect them from the anger of the sorcerer, our father. Although he seldom actually hit us, his anger terrorized his children.

Ghosts

When I was small, we lived downtown where the streets were full of ghosts. No one spoke to them; they didn't seem to converse much among themselves; they were men without words or work, men haunted by the Great Depression.

Just a block from our hotel, the men lined up each evening in front of Benewah's Creamery, where for a nickel they could drink all the buttermilk they could manage (buttermilk is a leftover from making butter). Mother and I could see them through the window from the street, and I would feel such a rush of pity. I hated buttermilk and thought life must seem terribly unfair to anyone forced to drink glass after glass.

By the time I had two sisters, Mother would take us to a nearby park for what she called "fresh air." On the blanket she had brought from home, our little family formed a tight and frustrated circle. We were not allowed to run and play. Nor were we allowed to approach or talk to any of the reclining ghosts that dotted the grass around us. This irritated me considerably. At the hotel I liked to talk with everyone, especially the people my parents didn't like, mostly because I didn't understand why my parents didn't like them.

When I was eight, we moved to a dilapidated inner-city house on a busy street and only occasionally saw a disreputable-looking man walking slowly down our alley. Mother would bring us inside and put a plate of food on the

back porch, warm food if it was nearly five, the time that our family ate dinner. Mother knew what it was to be hungry.

Always well fed, I didn't comprehend the ramifications of hunger. But I do remember worrying about the lack of social connection these men endured. Later, I interpreted these experiences as the shame connected with being impoverished and out of work, a terrible shame in America. Of course, there were very few opportunities for work and the ghosts were certainly not to blame for their suffering. Apparently, fear of not being able to work and thereby becoming ghosts made people, even those like my mother who were sympathetic to their plight, avoid social contact.

Mrs. Brown

Although I found geography interesting, largely because I planned, when I grew up, to travel the world, the classes at the inner-city school bored me to distraction. To escape the interminable, nothing-is-happening feeling, I would whisper and pass notes, misbehaviors that often sent me to the principal's office. One day, when she asked me to repeat what she had said and I did just that, Mrs. Brown put my crime into a new and critical perspective. "Carol," she said, "you may be smart enough to talk and listen, but the other children can't. Please be more considerate of them."

As she had treated me with respect, I felt respect for her and did my earnest best to stop whispering. I already knew I was smart—I had skipped a grade. But the idea that being smart obliged one to look after others was rich with possibilities never before considered. The excellent Mrs. Brown with the fading red hair gave my life a purpose.

Abraham Lincoln Parker

The summer I was twelve, we moved from the inner-city to a very white middle-class suburb, a move that felt like entry into another world. The park, only a few blocks away, featured a glorious blue, cement-bordered, seriously chlorinated swimming pool.

Relative to the earlier parts of my life, the years in the suburbs seemed uneventful, if not a little boring, and punctuated with only minor difficulties.

High school was the same; the work was a breeze, and I had no compulsion to get A's, except in typing. I would need to type because I planned to be a writer.

In my junior year, at a time we were supposed to be in study hall, two of my girlfriends and I got caught returning with candy bars purchased from the store across the street. Jean and Lorna cried and repeatedly promised to never disobey school rules again. But I didn't. The stern lecture by Abraham Lincoln Parker, our high school principal, was certainly a sizable speed bump for my friends. But Parker wasn't half as scary as my father and in fact I felt rather sorry for him. He seemed to be working hard at acting angry when he didn't feel that way.

Thirteen

Here is a picture of me at thirteen, a newspaper clipping of our family, my beautiful mother, her long black hair swept back into an elegant bun, my siblings, which now included the baby Anne and toddler John, handsome and radiantly healthy, and me looking glum in a girly-sweet floor-length puffed-sleeved peach dress, a dress that warred with my rebellious, critical-of-everything nature. Although I absolutely loathed being in this picture with this family, my freaky family, and pleaded mightily for release, I am so glad that my mis-fitted family insisted because I doubt I would otherwise recall this moment of my life, how I felt so long ago, how uncomfortable, alien, and out-to-lunch. I find the memory of myself at thirteen hilarious.

At thirteen, with Nancy, John, Mother, Ann, and Joan in Spokane

Fourteen

When I was a high school sophomore, more than anything material that I can ever remember wanting, I truly lusted for the pastel clogs with thick wooden soles that two fellow students wore, one pair pink, one pair pastel blue. Soon our biggest department store had the same clogs in white, and I bought a pair with my babysitting money. At fourteen, I was immediately two inches taller and could make, coming and going, quite a satisfying racket of clickety-clop.

Finds

When they couldn't pay their bills, people used to leave their things behind at the hotel my father managed. Then, after a period of years, he would clean out the suitcases, trunks, and cartons he had stored in the hotel's lower basement.

I remember one steamer trunk containing an enormous hand-painted Japanese silk scarf that my sisters and I often played with in the little dramas we staged, as well as a matched set of ten English mysteries that I read and reread so often, trying to comprehend the plot, that the effort compromised my American English spelling. Also packed away in the trunk was a pair of exceptionally fine size 4-and-a-half figure skates that I wore long after my feet had outgrown them and always without warm socks; there was, of course, no room for socks. Our discoveries were usually old and out of style, but of a fineness and romance—delicate hand-stitching, kid leather, fine embroidery, exotic fur (a monkey fur stole!)—that was unfamiliar. They spoke of another time and another world, a world of inherited money, finger bowls, servants, posh living, travel. Playing with these goodies seemed somewhat criminal, like stealing the odd pieces of a stranger's personal history, a forbidden adult history that my sisters and I tried to imagine but, of course, could never know. Adding to our childish delight, the previous owners might well be dead, which gave our acquisitions and their wearing a frisson of the macabre.

Fifteen

My favorite of the basement finds that my father brought home was the men's English racing bike. We called it Dad's bike, but I never saw him ride it. Big

wheels, thin tires, lightweight, way too big for me, but so wonderfully built that with very little effort, and although I was certainly no athlete, I could speed past the other bicycles on the flats and up steep hills.

Desk Clerk

I was fifteen and a high school junior when I began to work as the switchboard operator at the Ridpath Hotel. Did my father put me to work because we had just become involved in World War II and he had trouble finding help? Was it because he was anxious to instill a strong work ethic so I wouldn't become a bum, as he called his permanently unemployed brother? Or was apprenticing a teen-age child no more than what considerate fathers did in the forties?

Excused from school shortly after lunch, the work filled my days, making me feel incredibly capable and adult. An inadvertent mimic, I would find myself answering with the same dialect or accent as the speaker on the other end of the line, a tendency I managed to control after several misunderstandings and with considerable effort. Martha Maguire, the sociable main desk clerk and one reason the hotel ran so well, patiently showed me the ropes, and soon I, too, was a desk clerk, signing people into rooms, listening to their problems. Nights, when I ran out of things to do, I practiced the suggestive modeling slink of a tenant named Betty, back and forth behind the desk. I studied the many people I met, trying to find my own direction. I must admit, however, that anyone more than four years older than I was seemed unbelievably ancient.

Warning

As my father became my employer, my relationship with him changed. When I asked him a question, he treated me like an equal. After a hotel burglary, instead of the goofy white lad who always smelled of crème de menthe, the police took our black elevator operator, a fine young man who was in my high school homeroom, to the station for an overnight interrogation. When I asked my father how such a dreadful thing could happen, he said the Spokane Police were no good, even dangerous, and I should make every effort to avoid them.

Interim

Graduating from summer school at sixteen, I worked for five months at Standard Oil as a receptionist, a job that seemed endless, the tasks mindless, and I thought I would die. After work, a girlfriend and I began staying out late and going to bars; the challenge of getting into bars and ordering drinks before we were of legal age was much more fun than the actual drinking. Mother thought I was seeing one of the married men at work—untrue, but I let her think that. I doubt that my father had ever planned for, or expected, the expense of college for one of his daughters. But Mother was insistent, and he sent me.

College

At Washington State in Pullman, I spent six intense days and nights on a short story for my journalism class and loved the effort, the way words could be arranged on a page to such different and dazzling effects. The teacher gave me an A but apparently didn't believe I wrote it. When he asked me if my story was an abstract of someone else's work, I made no defense. Instead of recognizing his question as indirectly flattering, I was crushed, horrified, and silent. I had apparently never learned to stand up for myself, although, thinking back, perhaps that story was so much part of me that, in some way, I expected he ought to see it shining from my being.

Of course, since the days of MeToo, I now also see his reaction as insulting to the writing abilities of a seventeen-year-old girl.

University

The next semester, switching to the University of Idaho in Moscow, which had the advantage of being seven miles farther from Spokane and childhood, as well as in another state, I studied hard and got good grades. My father associated sorority life with social success and made a sorority part of the college bargain. I am glad he did. I liked being part of a group and feeling sponsored. Sometimes I sat up all night with Cissy, a sorority sister, debating Marxism, a popular topic at that time. I particularly enjoyed the way several of our Phi Delt fellows next door would drop by weekend afternoons and we would casually stroll downtown to

drink pitchers of beer and sing folk songs, revolutionary songs, smutty songs. Less pressure than dating, it seemed more convivial and fun. I'm afraid we proved quite a speed bump for the customers seated below the balcony where we sat, however, because our beer often ran off the table and spilled over the edge. Good Lord, we were young!

Marriage

Accustomed to income, I worked at the Ridpath Hotel during summers and vacations. In my junior year at the University of Idaho, pretending I had fast food experience, I got a part-time job at The Blue Bucket, the U bookstore/cafeteria. That was fun; I loved scooping ice cream and squirting chocolate into glasses of cola for a drink popular at that time. I met everyone at The Blue Bucket. World War II ended and, a few months later, I met the man who became my husband.

Like so many post-war females, including nearly all of the women in my sorority, I married. I met Roger in September, we quit school in October, and I married him in November. I married someone who looked right; appearance was everything to me at nineteen. He was tall, handsome, and wore a Brooks Brothers suit (broke, the suit was all he had to wear.) We danced, drank Moscow Mules, and rode around in his ramshackle Ford with the missing door. We were seldom without a third, his best friend, Devere, who was Jewish and full of jokes—Devere did most of the talking. Hollywood had shaped my expectations. Two attractive people looked, liked, fell into each other's arms, and lived happily together. All this quick togetherness happened without finding common interests or the nature of our personal values. I got the movie version of a marriage, and whatever attempts we made at communication were hampered from the start.

Corporations

Nowadays, corporations have a somewhat mixed reputation. But my husband worked all his life, and quite successfully, for American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T), which was then a near monopoly. With each new

promotion, AT&T moved us and our car around and across the country. It was easy; three or four moving men would arrive, pack everything into a giant van, and our family would drive or fly to the new location. While we were looking for a new address, AT&T generously underwrote the costs. We didn't always want to move. But corporate life left us no choice.

I am glad we had the opportunity to travel, to live comfortably, to send our children to private schools, to provide them lessons in the English saddle riding that was popular on the East Coast. During our years in New Jersey, we spent many a Sunday in the then-free Manhattan museums and all the money from the sale of our Seattle house on tickets to the New York City Ballet, Broadway and Off-Broadway plays, and concerts at Carnegie Hall, often preceded by the luxury of four-course dinners for $10 at La Cave Henri IV. When the musical *My Fair Lady* opened to considerable acclaim, tickets cost a fortune and usually involved months of waiting. I felt incredibly lucky when, early in the run, my husband called to say the office had just given him two in the orchestra section and to quickly grab the next train from New Jersey. Eventually, our corporate goddess Ma Bell, like Glinda the Good in *The Wizard of Oz*, even provided the wherewithal for three college tuitions and an amicable, money-eased divorce.

A Wonder Woman Wish

As a child, I felt like I had been born the wrong sex, the minor sex, the helpless sex. According to the media and the books I read—I was an inveterate reader—men were involved in all the exciting and meaningful jobs, they had all the fun, men ran the world. As I saw it, however, they weren't that successful; first, the Great Depression, then, when I was in my teens, World War II. The adult world struck me as needing considerable help, and I wanted to be part of the process. But when I grew up, I understood the recommended roles for me were those of little status: housewife or, possibly, secretary. The only way I figured I might sidestep convention and become a truly effective human being would be to cultivate close relationships with men of influence and power. As a female with ideas and ambition, my destiny was obviously that of sycophant and suck-up.

My father considered childcare unmanly. He was our boss, not our caretaker. He gave the orders: he expected obedience and perfection. But, unaware of our family dynamics or what that perfection might be, he was seldom effective. Crisis is a given in a family with five children and, during times of crisis, he relied on my mother.

Considering the importance of mothers, I have never understood how women became "the second sex." They not only bear the next generation; they are critical to the emotional stability and inherent joy of each generation. Human beings are born in a most unfinished state. A loving and nurturing beginning is the very basis of any life worth living. Largely because childcare has been regarded simply as females' involuntary nature and in no way extraordinary, women are accorded little glory for occupational success.

I adored my mother; she was the heartbeat and strength of our family. But I didn't like her circumstance as the servile second to our father's overbearing and often angry presence. As a hotel manager, he wasn't around often, but when he was, her backbone turned to mush. Born before women were permitted to

vote, she seemed, after they could, not to comprehend the significance of individual choice. Nearly her entire life she voted like our father because, as she explained, she didn't want to cancel him out.

Whenever he returned from a trip to Alaska, Cuba, or one of the World's Fairs with his flyer friend Claude, our father was, for a time, pleased with his job, his life, and his children. Taking our cue from his example, my sisters Joan and Nancy and I agreed never to become stay-at-home housewives but to travel the world instead. We read and reread Richard Halliburton's *The Royal Road to Romance* and planned a similar itinerary. We would visit Paris, the Taj Mahal, and the monasteries in Nepal, ride the Orient Express, swim the Hellespont, take a tramp steamer on passage to Bali. Despite later marrying and divorcing at least once, we did manage a fair number of these offbeat kinds of adventures. By the time we were in our seventies, my sisters and I were gratified to realize that at least one of us, most often Joan, had tried nearly half of childhood's royally romantic list.

At the age of twelve, desperate for mentors, the people that I admired the most were male—Longfellow, Poe, Milton; I liked the rhythm of their poetry and memorized passages. As a teen, I became enamored with Bernard De Voto's environmental writings; they greened my city child's view of the natural world. Voltaire, ah, Voltaire. I wanted so to be Voltaire, brave, compassionate, a free thinker, writer, revolutionary, and French—like my dear French grandfather. In Carrell's *Man, the Unknown*, I read that science was currently neglecting the human body and mind, and I signed up for a high school class in beginning physics. But as I entered the room and looked for a stool, the teacher pointed out that the other students were male and I might be uncomfortable. As he obviously didn't want me in his class and he was in charge, I left without protest. Not until eight years later, when Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was translated from French into English, did I realize that I could have, and probably should have, stayed and changed that teacher's mind about females and physics.

Until the advent of Simone de Beauvoir, the heroes in my books, and the people I admired the most, were usually men. Poor Eleanor Roosevelt. Many of her quite admirable exploits were broadcast on the radio, and I would read about them in the local Spokane newspaper. But the jokes made at her expense

confused me! What could be funny or absurd about charitable and kindly endeavors? I thought it was something I would finally understand when I grew up, and so I believe it was . . . when I realized that the men running the American media were likely men confused, if not threatened, by a strong and independent woman.

The movies of my youth, created, of course, primarily by men, suggested that sexual seduction was the ideal female role and working outside the home a futile deployment. Rosalind Russell managed both in one or two films, but in most stories a career made a woman less attractive. Lucky for me, I already knew this wasn't true. From age fifteen to nineteen, I worked after school, and during college vacations, as the desk clerk in the downtown Spokane hotel that my father managed. Weekends, hundreds of the sailors on leave from Farragut Naval Air Station got off a train a few blocks down the street—young, lonely, and certainly horny—and spotted me through the glass in the lobby. They whistled, waved, they came in. I usually went out with three at a time.

Just out of my teens and always looking for guidance, for what might be admirable, I collected the pictures and the biographies of powerful women. My favorites were Madame de Staël and Emilie du Chatelet. The latter was Voltaire's very dear friend, as well as his lover and a foremost scientist. Of course, unlike me, these women were nobility; they automatically had opportunities, prestige, funding, and weren't required to be suck-ups. And they were French, a plus in my book. I needed role models, and I found them.

By my late twenties, married with two children, I had moved to New Jersey and met a woman whom I rated heroic—dear Sylvia, a famous surgeon who loved what she did. We were introduced by my husband's younger brother, an eminent MacArthur scholar who had known her at Yale. That encounter inspired me to return to the university. I began with French and then, wherever we were (and we moved a lot), I took whatever local classes I could find. I liked that the classes were coeducational and unfailingly egalitarian. Feeling sponsored, I planned to become a person who might make a difference in a world that, with the advent of the McCarthy Hearings, still seemed in sore need of direction.

I took classes in New Jersey, Spokane, Portland, and Seattle, and, at age thirty-five, I graduated from the University of Washington with a BS degree in psychology. Then it was the 1960s. What a glorious period, the sixties! The UW's libraries had an infinite number of enticing books, a class was only thirty dollars, and the cost of living easily managed. I cherry-picked a variety of lectures and discovered anthropology, a field that combined my main interests and pleasures: science, writing, and face-to-face contact.

Having found my passion, I was stunned when Mick, the head of the department, suggested that, as a divorcee, I might be better assured of an income if, before attempting graduate school, I got a nursing degree. Had I been a man, I doubt he would have made that suggestion.

I had no interest whatsoever in nursing. I drove home, sobbed a bit, and then recalled that the only exceptional thing I had done, child to adult, was read. The knowledge that came with words and ideas was to my advantage. I determined to challenge Mick's decision. I signed up for the same classes as the graduate students, got A's, and earned a graduate degree.

The girls of today who are looking for ideals and direction, for female authors to read, scientists to admire, heroines to inspire, have a much better time of it than I did. They have living mentors like the jurist Ruth Bader Ginsberg, the one-of-a-kind Jane Goodall, the incomparable Gloria Steinem and Rosa Parks, and the cheeky Greenpeace women who risk their lives to save the seas and whales. These days, more and more women are found in jobs that were once exclusively male, and women are even heading nations.

Yet, in too much of the world, men are still the measure of all things and women too often hidden, faceless, voiceless. The #MeToo movement has recently worked to change attitudes toward women. But throughout most of the world, patriarchy is systemic. Much of this is owing to men's fear of losing the fiat of women as property, of losing dominance and control, a situation which began some six thousand years ago with government by states. Before that— during most of human history, our foraging, hunting, and evolving years—the sexes appear to have been more egalitarian.

Science has recently discovered different tendencies in brain circuitry between the sexes. Women, for example, are better at decision-making under pressure and, as a result, an asset to nearly any committee or group. I like to visualize a future in which patriarchy is dated history, men find joy in childcare (many outstanding women scientists and artists of the past several centuries were encouraged by their fathers), women get equal pay for equal work, and at least half of our world leaders identify as female. My heartfelt hope is for a future in which little girls the world over grow up believing in their own power and potential, and with a sense of limitless possibility.

Myrtle/Mimi

Mothers are what keeps life on earth going and thriving. Mothers hold the power of happiness, as they have since life on earth began. We had the best. Ours was Myrtle Neoma Latterell Davis. Had the U.S. census taker been more literate or more French, the surname Latterell would have been spelled La Tourelle.

Myrtle was born in a time when America was a nation of farmers and the government was doing its best to lure more people "out West," despite the fact that much of the prospective farming territory was often arid. Pioneers bought land for only a few dollars or claimed land parcels by cutting down the trees. A doctor had advised Myrtle's family to move from Minnesota to a milder climate because my grandmother Emma had an abscess on her lungs. They took the cross-country Northern Pacific train to Spokane, Washington, an infinitely easier mode of travel than the earlier Oregon Trail days of horse and wagon, or wagon and ox.

In those days, less than half of the population lived in cities, life expectancy was around 53 years, most homes were not electrically wired, and everyone either walked or got around by horse and buggy. Farmers mostly grew what they ate; they stored and canned any surplus for winter. On the farm, the child who became my mother slept on a hay-stuffed mattress and ordered clothes, when she or her mother Emma didn't sew them, from the Sears-Roebuck catalog.

I think of Myrtle's father as the backbone of our family, a strength magnified by his daughter's devotion. He was a sweet-natured, good-hearted man who never raised his voice in anger or faulted others.

My mother was very like her father, the man she called Pop, short for Papa. My entire family, and particularly my son, seems to have inherited my mother's affectionate regard for her father. In French Canada, my grandfather's family name had been Dubord–La Tourelle for six generations, but somehow the

move to Minnesota transformed it to Latterell. His first name was Guillaume in French, which is William in English, and I suspect he was his mother's favorite; she called him her "Sweet Willy." Although he had little interest in clothes or appearance, William Latterell was the finest gentleman I have ever known. A kind man, a gracious man, William treated everyone of any heritage, old or young, rich or poor, male or female, black or white, with unqualified consideration and respect.

I remember my grandfather William telling me that, like his father before him, he was a hunter, a storyteller, and a fiddler. In the days of subsistence farming, storytelling and music-making were critical to an evening's entertainment, as hunting was to daily sustenance. As a child, fascinated and appalled by the two black-bear rugs on the floor of his living room, I walked carefully around them.

The house Grandpa William built

By the time I was in my teens, however, the bears were gone and my grandfather was no longer a hunter. He had picked up other skills, carpentry for

one, as well as that of a stone and brick mason. In those days, trades were learned through practice and paying attention, the older man teaching the younger. Will's attractive steep-pitch home, now nearly a century old, was built with the round river stone that he found on the floor of the Spokane Valley. He assured us that everything he built would last forever. So far, it has.

The early twentieth century was a time of big families. William and his wife Emma had eight children, six of whom survived. Our mother Myrtle was the third child.

The first, Ethel, was a reader, and she was the reason my constant reading made my mother nervous. Mother worried that, like Ethel, I might become an old maid. In those days, unmarried women had a deplorable status and were obliged to help, without recourse or complaint, all the other family members.

My sisters, Joan and Nancy, and I all adored our mother. (Joan, Nancy, and I were a unit that Anne, born later, never became part of.) We thought she was the most perfect human being we would ever know. In those days, stylish women wore gloves, shoes, a handbag, and a hat, all matching. We never missed the drama of her preparations for city shopping. I remember several knockout outfits, and even one with a fine fur, all bought on sale at Haddads, the most exclusive and expensive store in the city. Mother was only able to afford one dress-up outfit at a time, and she would wear it for four or five years. After arranging the precious pieces on her bedspread, she bathed, sprayed the air with potpourri perfume, and dressed, as we watched spellbound from the other bed. She was our queen and we were her enchanted minions.

Most of the time, at home, she wore a housedress, a washable cotton housedress, so she could move easily. All her life, our mother loved to move.

We felt incredibly lucky to have a tomboy for a mother, a very physical, free-thinking woman. Other parents cautioned their girls to be good and well behaved; our mother promoted adventure. Growing up and even after we were grown, she would send us off with a bit of cheery advice: "You girls have a good time."

When my sisters and I were young, we would beg her to tell us again about the two Spanish dancers who, having lost their female performer, wanted to teach our mother her part so she could join their Pantages Theater vaudeville

act. At sixteen, Mother had been fast, fast at the one-step and fast at the two-step, and clearly fearless, a Dutch-bobbed flapper. In those days, of course, a young unmarried girl traveling with two men and no chaperone would have lost her good reputation. But her daughters, oblivious to such ramifications, always wished she had taken the Spanish dancers up on their offer. Performing onstage seemed so much more compelling to us than keeping house.

Leslie, Mimi, Nancy, Carol, and Joan

When my mother was in her forties, my first-born, Leslie Suzanne, couldn't pronounce Myrtle and shortened my mother's name to Mimi. As this sounded more French, the family followed Leslie's inadvertent suggestion.

When Myrtle/Mimi was 91, we persuaded her to tell us the story of her life, and particularly her life before we knew her. We wanted to know about her

childhood. She proved to be, like her father and grandfather before her, an adept storyteller. In September 1995 we tape recorded several days of conversation and transcribed it. An excerpt from the first half of her autobiography is here:

Myrtle of Wild Rose Prairie

I had a wonderful childhood. I did. It was so free. I learned a lot on my own; well, I felt like I was on my own. Of course, I wasn't. But I had that feeling. I felt like I could do anything.

I couldn't understand why Ethel wanted to stay inside and read books. When everything was waiting to be done.

I was lucky to get to do all those things I did. I wouldn't change any of it.

It was wonderful fun, just running on the prairie.

I had black hair, dark eyes, and red cheeks. I didn't look much like the first two. They were fair; I was dark. I liked to think I was adopted and somewhere I had rich parents. Sometimes I thought I might be part Indian. My middle name is Neoma and that could be an Indian name.

I don't know why I felt so different.

In our family, there was Ethel, she was oldest, Wallace, he was next, and me. The twins came after me; they died from whopping cough when they were infants. Mom didn't have any more children for awhile. Then Francis, Marge, and Ira. We were like two families. I left home early and didn't know the last three very well.

We spent a lot of summers on Wild Rose Prairie. We went there when Marge was a baby. Ethel and I just loved that place. We had about thirty-two acres for something like thirty-two dollars. A School Section; the government had set that land aside for a school. But they didn't build a school there. So Pop got it.

You could walk through the woods. Beautiful trees, green and full of pines, ferns, wildflowers. Two miles to the store. Right below us was a big swamp. There was water

everywhere. But we didn't have any water in the house. Pop put a piece of pipe down to the spring water and we had to lie on the ground on our stomachs to get a drink. Icy cold. Oh, that was good water!

Now water often tastes funny. Maybe what they have to do to purify our water makes it funny.

Lots of deer then. We'd see them all the time. We'd plant corn and as soon as it sprouted, the deer would eat it. At night, we'd hear the coyotes howl to each other. And the owls hooting. At night, I could see the sky and the stars out the attic window where I slept.

Lots of wildflowers and wild roses. That's what Ethel loved.

My father planned to live in Spokane and farm Wild Rose Prairie. But that didn't work out. He began by cutting down the trees so he could plant grain. It was a lot of hard work, burning out those stumps. Land was cheap out West . . . but you had to improve it. That meant cutting the trees.

It wasn't a very happy place for Mom. The stairs going up to the bedrooms were narrow and steep. It was cold, drafty, small, and inconvenient. No proper plumbing; then the toilet was an outhouse, a little house with a hole in the ground. Pretty often people would close up the hole and move the privy . . . that's what we called it.

My mother told me that one time Wally nearly fell through. He was hanging on the sides when she caught him.

I learned to crochet quite young. Mrs. Cooper taught me. She was Catholic and she had two little girls. When one of them, Marguerite, was naughty, Mrs. Cooper said she was acting like a Protestant. Marguerite fell to sleep on a railroad track, got hit, and limped after that. The girl lisped when she talked. We thought she lisped because of her accident.

During the summer, we went barefoot to save our shoes for school. One time, I was hanging around the house during summer vacation and complaining there was nothing to do. Pop told me to go outside and lay on the grass and see what kinds of things the clouds were making. So I went out, put my head on the grass, looked up in the sky, and had quite a time trying to figure it out. After that, I'd try that once in awhile. And sometimes I could see something.

My youth was so different from that of my younger brother and sisters. By then, my father had steady work. When they were teenagers, he could buy Fran and Marge clothes, there was more to eat. They didn't have to go out and work.

But after I left home, he hadn't as much time for his children. I have wondered if my father ever got as close to the next batch as he was to us, me, Wally, and Ethel. I think my little sisters might have missed great times.

Mom would be busy cooking a meal. My father would take us in the other room for stories. And he could tell them! He must have read Aesop's Fables, I realized later, because they tied right in. Funny stories like a donkey going up on the roof and looking down the chimney. My favorite was the one where three children are lost in the woods. They keep counting noses and coming up short. They'd say, "Me is me. One. Two. Where's the other one?" We thought that was so funny. He was a great storyteller. Like his father. Now, Ira, Fran, and Marge never got that.

I was held on his lap a lot. Once I fell when I was climbing up the cupboard—I was always climbing up the cupboard to see if Mom had hidden something good to eat. Pop picked me up and held me a long time. I played knocked out longer than I really was so he would keep holding me.

I guess you'd call me a survivor.

Ethel missed all that fun. She never played pranks or did anything naughty. The women would say, "What a sweet child that Ethel is. But Myrtle!" That was a time when older women seemed to think that little girls shouldn't run and play with little boys. I had more little boy companions than girls. Boys were the most fun. They climbed, ran, and so did I.

But Ethel was different. She was a lady from the start. She liked flowers and gardens and reading. I didn't want to be like Ethel. I wanted to be different. I wanted to do things my way. That's why, when I had my own children, I encouraged them to be the way they felt they had to be. Because that was so important to me.

When I asked Mom about Minnesota, she liked to remember her farewell dinner. Mom and Pop were getting ready to leave for Spokane (where Uncle Sam, Aunt Bird, and the grandparents lived) and Pop's sisters cooked a big dinner. In the midst of the

conversation, I stood up on my chair and ordered everyone to "Be quiet! Let me talk!" And everyone was very quiet. But I was only four and I had nothing to say. So I just sat down again.

When we first landed in Spokane from Minnesota, we rented a little shack close to my grandparents while our house was going up. I think it was our first Thanksgiving out West and the family had a housewarming party. There was Uncle Sam, he came West first, the grandparents next, and the Bordens—Aunt Bird's family. Bird had a lot of children. We thought it was great because there were children. We were glad to have so many cousins.

The children had to eat in the kitchen. But I don't remember what we had to eat. I really wasn't much interested in kinds of food. I just wanted to get full.

When I was tiny, to entertain me, Mom would fry potatoes on the stove. Brown them a little bit and turn them over with a spatula. Eat them as they cooked. My favorite food was potatoes—it still is—and we had a lot of them. For dinner, we had baked potatoes. Mom would slice the baked potatoes from the night before and fry them for lunch. We always had bread and butter. And sometimes onions and cabbage.

Breakfasts, Mom served mush. I didn't like that. So I'd fry a piece of bread on the back of the stove, browning it good, and have toast with butter instead. Milk was a treat. When I was young, we didn't have a cow. A quart of milk was a dime and that seemed like a fortune. To get milk, you just put an empty bottle on the porch with a dime inside and the milkman would deliver.

We seemed to be just starving for fruit. There must have been some for sale in the store. But Mom didn't buy much there. Sometimes, someone would have a fruit tree—Cummings did, a cherry. Oh, those were good.

I think I was named after Lestie Myrtle Jorgenson. Her mother had been a Latterell. I think Pop must have named me. Lestie Myrtle's grandfather taught Pop to do stonework. He always admired the man. I think he was grateful. Or maybe it was because Lestie was a young woman when Pop knew her and he liked her.

My mother wasn't a strong woman. From the time Mom was small, she was overworked. I remember how she ran from morning until night, cleaning, cooking, boiling the clothes

and stirring them with a stick. And then running out to hang them on the line. And, while she was there, she'd do a little work in her garden.

In those days, women wore corsets—all those strings that had to be laced up the back! Another thing, Mom always wore a hat. A sunbonnet or something. She didn't go outside with a hat. She said her skin burned too quickly. She was very wise about that.

But she was only eight when her mother died and she got a mean stepmother. The woman made her herd cattle all day. So I don't know if she wore a hat when she was little.

She probably shouldn't have had so many children and so much to do. She wasn't strong like Pop's sisters. Or his mother. Grandmother Marceline had nine children and two sets of twins, and then she raised some of her children's children.

When they opened this country out West, a lot of people came and claimed the land who didn't know anything about farming. Most of the time, they didn't know much about building, either. My father said Mom's father (Grandpa Day in Minnesota) was no farmer. He just ran from one corner of his land to another. He was educated at a seminary—that's like college today. When a young man, he had, for a time, been a minister when one was needed. Eventually, he became a surveyor. Grandpa Day didn't know anything about farming and he never learned.

My father was a handsome man, maybe the best looking in his family. But he didn't dress up much. And he didn't like tight clothes. When he bought a jacket, Mom said he stretched his arms ahead of him to make sure he had enough room.

When he wasn't working, doing carpentry or stonework, Pop carved and made things. In those days, people didn't waste. After they died, he used the wood from my grandparents' big dining table to make furniture. He could make something out of anything. His sisters were the same. Once they opened a hat store, and I don't think they knew a lot about hats. But they managed.

Pop built violins; he and Wally played them. They fiddled. Fiddle music never seems to end. Mom would say, "That isn't real music." While he was playing, he'd get a twinkle. I think he was remembering the dances before he was married.

Later, when Pop was working on the highway running out to Deep Creek, the principal of the high school told me that my father shouldn't be doing that. He said Pop had too

much knowledge to be doing hard labor. Pop would tell the crew just how much material was needed for each part, and nothing was ever left over or thrown away.

Pop got good wages at that job, and Mom blossomed out a bit.

Nobody locked a door in those days. One time, I was going to lock our front door and Pop said, "No. You can't do that. Someone might need a bed." I visualized a traveling person, tired and cold, walking in at night and sleeping on our floor. But I don't think it ever happened.

In those days, people had to think about other people and share. There was a very poor woman who would go to Mrs. Mengle—that was my mother's best friend—and Mrs. Mengle always loaded her basket with food. My, but times have changed.

What I do remember is Spokane; I spent most of my life there. When I was little, my grandfather Nelson and grandmother Marceline lived seven blocks from us. They spoke French to each other and it was always fun to go visit them. At that time, Nelson was a very popular name, maybe the most popular, like the name John is today. Grandfather was a storyteller; we loved his stories.

I can still see my grandfather playing solitaire, that's all he did all day long. His legs had given out, he said, from hunting "bahrs" and the "rheumatix" he got sleeping out on the cold ground. All day, grandfather played solitaire, spit into a cuspidor, and grandmother would run to wipe his mouth. He wore white paper cuffs over his sleeves to keep his shirt clean.

I have a picture in my mind of their house. The dining room was shut off during the day and opened for meals. After each meal, Marceline did the dishes, set up the table for the next, and shut the dining room door behind her. She had white tablecloths, which we didn't have. She was always perfectly dressed in a little ruffled apron. It didn't look like my mother's apron.

I am told that my grandmother insisted upon bringing her fine dining table and kitchen stove on the train from Minnesota. To me, her stove looked huge, with giant warming ovens. The stove always had soup bubbling at the back. She would throw in the leftovers and the scraps, and add seasonings; nothing was wasted.

My father William's mother was called Mary Marceline and came from northern France. The grandmother I knew was a particular woman. She wore a little dust cap

while she did her housework. She had three pie cherry trees and two Bings in the back. Of course, the cherries were made into wine. She canned some too.

After my grandparents died, Wally and I—I was eight—went all through the house and down into the cellar and found a keg of wine. We drank a lot of it. We thought it was real good. We could understand why she liked it.

Aunt Carrie stayed in one of Sam's houses for awhile. She was a devil. She told fortunes with cards and tea leaves and could think of more things to have fun! The family used to tell the most terrible things about Aunt Carrie. Once, when she was a child, she climbed up on the roof and peed in the chimney. I think my mother thought I might turn out like Carrie.

Grandfather and my grandmother probably had a lot of help from Sam. He got the land; Spokane was booming. Pop got his land from Sam. After awhile, Sam had a store and property all over. When he passed away, Aunt Amanda fell heir to that.

Sam never married. And he never said goodbye. We'd just look out the window and there Sam would suddenly be, walking away from the house. I asked my father about that and he said he thought it might be because, when Sam was young, he was in love with a girl who drowned. I think Sam said goodbye to the girl. And she died.

Well, suddenly, we'd see Sam walking away. That's the way he was.

Pop and Sam were close. Pop often went to visit Sam and his parents in the evening. Mom would be sitting at home. He'd be late for dinner, maybe. Because time never meant anything to Pop. If you wanted to do something, you did it.

One time, she ran short of money. Pop had gone up to harvest with the Indians someplace. He didn't come back, she didn't hear from him, and she ran out of money. She had to go to the grocery store and ask for credit. In the city, she hadn't much garden and everything cost money. Mom was very proud and asking for credit was hard for her to do.

It seemed like he was gone a long time. When he came back, he told us that we should never think we were better than an Indian; he'd been living with the Indians and he liked them. That didn't please my mother. She was English and she was always trying to make herself a little better.

Mom even tried a little day work, helping other women, to get money. That was humiliating, for a woman to work. Women were supposed to stay home and take care of children, when they had them.

None of his first three children ever asked my father for money. I know if he had had any, he would have given it. But when I was a child, the money was rare.

Marriage

I suspect I was a terrible wife. But I don't know how or why I failed.

I did learn to bake pies and to make a rather good crust; fruit pies were something Roger had apparently missed during the war. But when I learned Rog was also eating pie at lunch, I quit. No one needs two pieces.

According to the media and prevailing post–World War II culture, the ideal American wife was Betty Crocker domestic. Immediately after the war, women were expected to give up their jobs and resume a homemaking role full time. Having read about exceptional women in other places and times, my idea of excellence for woman was different. I was an early feminist, and although aware that I would probably never have a job more important than that of being my children's mother, I still wanted more. Unlike many of my peers, I didn't rhapsodize over bridal dresses in bridal magazines. The idea that a wedding might be the highlight of my life struck me as unlikely.

However, Roger was everything I could imagine in a man, tall, dark (eyes and hair), and handsome, and raised in the exotic eastern U.S.; to me, at the tender age of nineteen and an untraveled native of Spokane, Washington, Ohio was East. He was just back from four years at war when we met at the University of Idaho. We spent several delightful months partying, drinking, and dancing instead of studying. In the days before the peace-and-love-everybody 1960s, a young woman who slept with a young man on a regular basis married him. And that is what I did.

During the initial phase of our sixteen-year marriage we were incredibly busy, I at home with our two children, he in his beginning role as breadwinner. Like some of the other young fathers we knew, Roger joined the National Guard for the added income. During the Korean War, their Spokane unit was called to action and Roger became an Army lieutenant. He was stationed in Fairbanks, Alaska, for two years.

In 1951, after baby Colin's first birthday, we joined him. Little Leslie was the star of our plane ride north. While I struggled to hold her squirming baby brother on my lap, the stewardess encouraged Leslie to pass out sticks of chewing gum and napkins to the other passengers.

For the several weeks that our apartment was being finished, we lived in a wanigan, a temporary shelter. Colin got sick almost immediately. Colin in his stroller and Leslie in hand, I walked over to the Officer's Quarters to get medical help. I found Roger on the parade ground in a marching unit and, as he passed by, he didn't even glance my way. That's how I learned we were all in the Army.

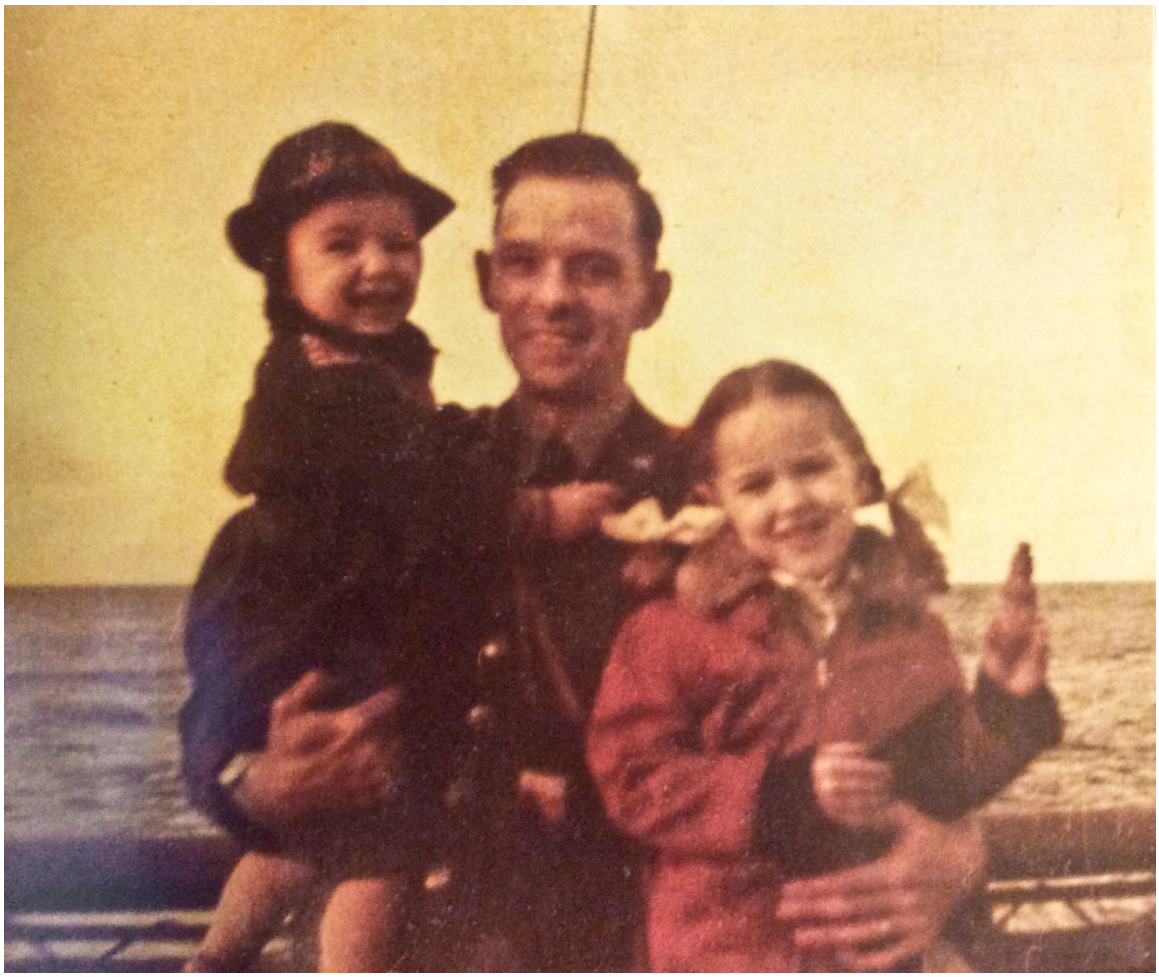
We arrived in summer and began to prepare for an endless winter of cold and dark. Advised to dress in layers, we borrowed clothes from the base—fur-trimmed parkas, padded vests, sizable felt boots lined in felt layers. In October, to keep the car engine from freezing and so he could get to the base the next morning, Roger piled blankets on the hood at night and kept an electric dipstick plugged into the oil. For a brief time, thinking that all children needed fresh air, I would dress mine in their snowsuits and lift them outside the laundry room door. But after the first icy breath, they screamed, red-faced, to come in. Our time in Alaska was mostly spent indoors.

Fresh moose meat, when someone shot a moose and knew how to dress it, was wonderful, as were the occasional sacks of hand-picked wild berries. But the food from the PX tasted like cardboard. Nearly all of it came by rail and ship from Seattle, and had been carelessly thawed at least once, we suspected, before reaching Fairbanks. Serving my precious children food with so few vitamins seemed abusive. I could hardly wait to get back to the States.

Each day, my lieutenant husband went stoically to work and never complained about the food or the hardships involved. To me, however, the war in Korea felt incredibly remote. I was young, apolitical, full of myself and my own problems, and had no sense of participating in anything critical. I don't even remember if we left before or after the war had ended.

But I did mark our departure date, several weeks before Christmas, on the kitchen calendar. Each morning at breakfast, while crossing out the current day, the children and I hip, hip, hoorayed.

When the red-letter day arrived, we were all shipped to the seaport of Valdez. Roger went with his unit, while Leslie, Colin, and I were sent by rail. As the sailors helped us on board they assured us, tongue in cheek, that we were now in better hands because we were under the protection of the glorious U.S. Navy. The crossing, however, was the roughest that the captain remembered, so rough that nearly all our fellow passengers were seasick and abed. Former Navy lieutenant Roger knew what to do when rocked by stormy seas. He kept us pacing the deck in view of the pitching waves and wouldn't let us sit or lie down until we were exhausted.



Colin, Roger, and Leslie on the trip back from Alaska

I was never sure what Roger thought or felt. But I know from being with him so many years that he did love to be admired and needed, as we all do.

Perhaps those moments of fighting nausea with his family were among the happiest of Roger's life. One of the Naval officers even came over to congratulate him on the way he kept his family in motion.

During meals, our little family of four and the naval officers were often the only ones in the dining room. Our journey was four or five days. I treasure a little snapshot that I took as our ship reached Seattle—Roger holding Leslie and Colin, the three of them grinning from ear to ear. Late afternoon and it was still light. After the dark days of Fairbanks, ah, the welcoming glory of light!

Our dinner at Ivar's Acres of Clams on the Seattle waterfront was not only delicious but entertaining. Little Colin cheered when, at the adjoining dock, a fireboat playfully hosed water high into the air. In happy anticipation of his return to AT&T, Roger bought a new shirt and tie. Seattle's premier shopping emporium, Frederick & Nelson, had been colorfully decorated for the coming holidays, and two adorable baby polar bears, fugitives like us from the Alaskan north, frolicked in their store window. Our Vance Hotel room seemed sumptuous; Leslie said the sheets smelled good as she buried her nose in a scented pillow. The highlight of our homecoming, however, was the discovery of the entertainment available, the comedies, the stories, on our first ever television set.

We couldn't believe our good luck when, two months later, Ma Bell transferred us from Spokane to the bright lights of Seattle.

During the early years of our marriage, I often found Roger smart and creative. I think he must always have seemed that way at work, too. He certainly was successful. Working for AT&T became his life, and we moved often, with nearly every promotion. In time, he became increasingly monosyllabic at home, but never less than charming and sociable at work. Eventually, he and I had few exchanges that might be considered a conversation. He was invariably agreeable, but he wouldn't talk. When I made a new dish for dinner and asked him what he thought of it, he would always say it was fine. He ate what I put in front of him, but I never discovered what he liked to eat.

When he was transferred for the fourth time, to work in Manhattan, we lived in a rental house in Chatham, New Jersey. Traveling to the city involved both the Lackawanna train, which served an assortment of drinks, and a lovely

aging ferry. Roger took that trip every weekday and, like the ad men in the series *Mad Men,* whom he certainly resembled in his suit, tie, and fedora, he began to drink. Three martini luncheons seemed a basic rule. Fridays, his job might require him to escort AT&T visitors to the Copacabana, and he wouldn't get home until dawn. Holidays were the same. Sometimes he went back to work over the weekend and came home plastered. He may have had affairs and one-nighters: how would I know? He didn't discuss his work or the women at work. He never invited me to visit his office in the city. But then, we seemed to be living in different worlds, and I never asked to meet him there.

Drinking relaxed him. But after a number of drinks, he liked to shock, create a scene, and break the rules. Our last year in New Jersey, we were at a Chatham party when he transformed into a slobbery and drunken embarrassment, kissing all the women and cracking bad jokes. Now that I am older, I understand that he was begging for help the only way he knew. But at the time I was thirty-one, judgmental, and decided I could not stay married to such a tasteless loser.

Before our years Back East, neither of us had the money, the time, or the energy to drink. Early in our marriage, I considered Roger a wonderful father; to soothe colicky baby Leslie, he walked the floor with her for hours. He helped out at Cub Scouts and taught young Colin to garden. He was generous with his money; when I asked him about a fine down and Dutch-cotton sofa in Macy's window, he readily agreed to the purchase. While she was saving for her trip around the world, my sister Joan lived with us in New Jersey for nearly a year. (I invited her to join us after she had a baby out of wedlock that she gave up for adoption.) Rog never suggested she leave, although he certainly didn't enjoy company of any live-in kind and complained that, after a brief two-day visit, his younger and very dear brother had overstayed his welcome.

Suddenly we were transferred to Spokane, Washington, a demotion, certainly, after New York. On the plane to our new assignment, where we would be stuck for a year and a half, and despite the luxurious (but long and jetless) air travel, with champagne and other treats, I cried all the way. I had loved being only a train and ferry ride away from Manhattan. I liked living in a town where other women also read and discussed *The New Yorker*. I'm sure Roger blamed

himself. He knew we were being transferred to the city that, as a child, I had always planned to escape. But he shouldn't have. It was my "fault," something I didn't realize until #MeToo recently encouraged me to remember and reconsider that miserable flight's trajectory. Rog and I had been at a party on Long Island when his boss led me into another room and tried to kiss me. I refused, and immediately forgot the incident, which seemed trivial. I certainly didn't mention it to Roger. A few weeks later, our family was heading west for Spokane.

Isn't it fascinating how one can live in a patriarchy and not be aware of the costs?

In Spokane, Rog's drinking eased off. Not until we moved to Seattle did it become a major problem. By then, while living in the house of our dreams with a million-dollar view of Lake Washington, our lives were rocketing in different directions. I was involved in classes at the University. Devoted to finding what made people tick, in part to solve the mystery of why my husband wouldn't talk to me, I earned a BS in psychology. Then, I discovered anthropology. My interests were academic, and his, perhaps, more corporate. I was a liberal Democrat. Maybe he voted Republican. But how would I know?

At times, I would lose my temper and beg him to talk, "Please!" There were times I even screamed. When I tried to discuss any of our family problems, he accused me of nagging and left the room. The children and I became aware that he didn't want to hear anything but good news, like when Colin's team won a game, or Leslie got an A on a test. But that didn't happen often. Our dinners together were mostly silent, without any sense of connection, and more and more infrequent.

Maybe it was me—being married to me and the disintegration of our marriage—that made him drink. Maybe it was to fill a hole in his heart. I regret that I couldn't have done more to help my husband face his demons, persuade him to get counseling, or to put into a more workable human framework what we now recognize as PTSD, the stress effects of war, or his mother's suicide when he was fourteen—he being the one who found her.. We did try marital counseling briefly in Seattle. But I suspect we should have gotten help years earlier. After our first meeting with the therapist, I went home and filled a long yellow legal tablet with my many reasons for divorce. For me, the puzzle of

marriage to Roger is an unsolvable mystery. Was the talking/not talking a game, a contest, a war? If so, the children and I lost.

After our next transfer, Roger worked in downtown Portland, the children went to Catlin Gabel School, and I took classes in physical anthropology at Portland State University, all a considerable drive from Lake Oswego, where we lived. By then, I had moved into an empty bedroom. We no longer entertained as a couple. After four or five drinks, Rog became mean, surly, and threatening. Leslie would go to her room and shut the door. Colin would patiently plead with his father to stop drinking.

I was never be able to discuss divorce with Roger. I knew I would have to divorce my peripatetic, constantly promoted husband before I could apply to graduate school and be in one place for any length of time. Anticipating a future of near impoverishment, I waited until my son had finished the bulk of corrective reading lessons for his dyslexia and my dancing daughter had tried out for the American School of Ballet. Finally, while I was waffling, thinking about divorce and doing nothing, Rog had a car accident on one of Portland's many bridges, went to the hospital overnight, and insisted I not come to see him. Instead, I went to bed and slept for two days. The third day, I got dressed and enlisted the help of a nearby female lawyer. When our divorce became final, Leslie was seventeen, Colin fourteen.

During the post-divorce period, our daughter Leslie met a man from Shanghai, a fine man. After a year of dating, she quit the University of Oregon and married him. Roger refused to come to the wedding. He couldn't accept that his son-in-law was Chinese, and thereafter evinced little interest in his mixed-race grandchildren.

Ever since he had learned to read, young Colin had been reading about war—his specialty was the Civil War—and he had a clear idea of war's costs. He judged the Vietnam War futile, if not insane, and spent his adolescence studying ways to avoid the draft. He and three other Roosevelt High School students, the incredible Tony, Don, and Bob, all sons of UW professors, were united in their resistance; a half century later, they are still Colin's dearest friends.

Our hippie son's lack of patriotism appalled Roger, who had served without complaint during the Korean War, and who had also been among the

first to enlist before World War II began. He felt, I would imagine, that Colin's anti-war stance critically negated his own sacrifice and service.

Todoro

Todoro was the love of my life. With him I became a Wonder Woman, magically besotted and prone to life on the edge.

We met in Seattle, after my divorce from Roger. I was a graduate student in cultural anthropology, attempting to study Roma and attending all the social gatherings I could of the local Machvaia, who had immigrated from Serbia several generations back. I saw him for the first time at a party. He arrived late and immediately went to the women's table to welcome Long Nose's visiting aunt. Todoro was the most beautiful Rom I had ever seen: intense eyes, long eyelashes, and shapely, powerful, hands placing a bottle of Scotch, as gift, on the table. Later, when I went out to get in my car, we met in person. I found him next to his car, trying to get it running, and offered to drive him home, which wasn't far. On the way, he wondered what I, an Outsider, was doing with Roma and agreed that his tribe did indeed need studying. Before getting out of my car, he politely asked if he might kiss me. Stunned, I said no, but the thought was there.

Unlike the other men of his tribe, Todoro invariably arrived at parties and rituals alone. I later learned that his wife, Rose, a serious drinker, had been forbidden access.

The now-and-then, off-and-on years with Todoro began in his car; we usually parked on the side facing Green Lake, and necked (as it was called in those days). We talked so easily. (The man I had divorced wouldn't talk.) We chatted, laughed, and even sang until two in the morning—Todoro liked to sing when he was happy. We longingly touched, and I learned the curve of his muscular chest beneath my cheek, how he felt, smelled, the taste of his breath, the provocative moustache tickle. After a month, when we finally stopped at a motel, I already knew him physically, emotionally, and well. My adoring heart had even learned to beat in time with his.

Todoro

To me Todoro seemed perfection; even his devotion to his growing family charmed me. We could only meet whenever time became available, on weekends, in the evening. But the agony of his absence was immediately remedied by the miracle of his presence.

I suspect that what made our relationship so tantalizing was the irregularity, the challenge, the frequent impossibility of even getting together. We spent our stolen days looking for cars to buy and sell, and our evenings in a tavern. He liked to pretend to be different people; when we were in the University District, he was often Professor Emacio, Professor of Foreign Languages. A marvelous mimic, he easily made me laugh. We laughed a lot, drank a lot, and celebrated the time we had together. Joy, he was my joy. I was his desperate need to escape crying babies, cold houses, bad food, and bad luck, as well as Rose's small but insistent jabs. Being wanted is a powerful allure. The intensity of his desire warmed my world to a constant shimmer.

"Marriage makes the man," he said. But marrying well wasn't his fate. The other Machvaia families in Seattle appeared reasonably prosperous. But his life was hard and short on comfort. When he and Rose argued, she liked to infuriate him further by screaming that Gypsies were born to be poor. I had thought I knew all the local Machvaia women, most of whom I truly liked. When I finally met Rose, however, she made the possibility of friendship unlikely.

As a child, Todoro had great expectations; he was the only son of the eldest son in an extended family—parents, grandparents, aunts, many uncles—all compacted as best they could into one small house. Unlike most Roma tribes, Machvaia designate women as the family breadwinners. For some time, Todoro's mother, Dinah, was the only daughter-in-law, and responsible for all the income, cleaning, cooking, and childcare. Owing to the abuse of overwork, when Todoro was twelve years old, his mother's health began to fail. To provide for his future, in keeping with the custom of marrying boys to older girls already skilled at telling fortunes, Dinah bought her son an eighteen-year-old bride. By then the family of four (Todoro, his bride, and his parents) had moved into Dinah's place of business, the storefront where she told fortunes.

The tragedy of Todoro's life was that during the subsequent crisis he was away at school, in sixth grade, and presumed too young to understand. He didn't discover what had happened until years afterward. Dinah came home one day to find her husband, Nikola, in bed with the new daughter-in-law. She went crazy, attacking Nikola, attacking the police, and destroying the storefront. Both Dinah and Nikola were arrested, the daughter-in-law returned to her parents, and Todoro was sent to live for a year with a Catholic foster family. Critically lonely, confused, and wondering what he had done to deserve such a bizarre punishment, Todoro spent most of his afternoons at the YMCA, building muscles. When his mother was released, he returned to her care. But she didn't live long, and at fourteen, he was back with his father's crowded family.

In those days, Machvaia rule was strict. The law forbidding inappropriate sex with a daughter-in-law was backed by the absolute authority of The Dead Ones (Ancestors). Nikola was judged defiled and impure, and he was consequently outcast; thenceforth, he was forbidden to associate with Roma. "Going American," as the people put it, was his only option. Meeting his son at a

bar, he invited Todoro to join him. Remembering the painful mystery year with the Catholic family, Todoro said no. Like the uncles close to him in age, he expected to marry and begin a family. But Machvaia luck is believed to travel along bloodlines, and none of his father's or mother's relatives would risk the shame-inducing and considerable financial investment of getting Todoro, now a black sheep, married. Nor was his father any help; Nikola eventually became a professional gambler, but at the time he hadn't discovered how he might earn an income in America.

Rose, in one of her less warlike moments, explained to me how Todoro, at age fourteen, managed to marry. Her parents saw him alone on the curb, playing with a toy truck, and they felt pity for him. As no one had asked for their daughter in marriage, they offered to adopt him as a son-in-law who had never paid a bride price. Apprenticed to Rose's family, he was required to emulate the daughter-in-law role, which, for a Machvano, was a lesson in continual humiliation. Eventually, after the birth of their second child, the couple severed all ties with Rose's family and set out on their own.

Without the help or advice of either extended family, without the usual upper-class connections, when others in their tribe were limiting the number of offspring to accommodate their new urban lifestyles, Todoro and Rose never learned about birth control. Constant pregnancies and childcare meant that Rose had no time for fortunes, and their main source of income was whatever Todoro could make buying and selling cars. Evicted as soon as their landlord discovered the growing number of their children, they were critically poor, often homeless, and usually dependent on government aid.

Initially, and very briefly, Todoro, in keeping with the ethics of the sixties, insisted that Rose and I be friends. We met at a local tavern and he bought us drinks. But peaceful coexistence didn't last long. Rose whipped out her scissors, cut his new jacket into jagged shreds, and the party was over.

The following month, he managed to rent a little house for his family not far from his favorite tavern, and he invited me to join them for a reconciliation dinner. "Rose wants you to come," he assured me. But finding that their six sons appeared to be as apprehensive as I felt, I kept my purse on my shoulder, my eye on the door. As we sat at the table waiting for Rose to serve us, the radio music

changed to a love song and Todoro began singing. He sang full voice, start to finish, and without interruption. *Unbelievable*, I thought, *What is he doing? Why am I in this crazy movie?* The next thing I knew, Rose was screaming bloody murder, and Todoro and I were running down the steps. As we drove away, the barbeque that had been heating on the porch sailed by the passenger side, my side, missing the front windshield by no more than a few inches.

Then began the year of crazy moves. As soon as she found me, Rose would have me evicted. She screamed—how she could scream! She beat on the door, tore up shrubs, scattered the garbage, threw whatever was handy at the windows, threatened to jump from the hotel's fifth floor, ate a pocketful of sleeping pills, spent the night in Emergency, and, one time, as Todoro followed her, protesting, she stripped off most of her clothes. Once she found me in the parking lot and punched me in the chest. "Die, *Djuhli*!" she screamed. (*Djuhli* is the Machvaia word for a non-Gypsy woman.)

My first in-and-out rental lasted the longest—several months. During this relatively uninterrupted period, I managed to finish writing my master's thesis, which was based on Roma rules, the secret washing and separating customs that Todoro, because we were intimate, had felt obliged to teach me. Then, in April, recognizing their father's familiar style of advertising cars for sale in the local paper, one of Todoro's sons called for our address, another son called to warn us, and we managed to hastily depart before Rose arrived. During that year, I moved six times. But on his visit to the fifth apartment, Todoro announced he had had enough of facing hell at home and the chaos of finding me a new place to live. He said we were through, forever.

What I remember next is leaning over the railing of University Bridge and realizing I couldn't jump; what a terrible memory that would be for my beloved children, both still in their teens, and Leslie just married. That's when a young man slammed on his truck brakes and ordered me to get in. I confess my memory of the following hours is overly fuzzy with pain. I do remember that an old-fashioned black leather satchel of the MD type rested on the seat of the truck between us. But Hal was no doctor. He was a commercial fisherman and a local dealer, perhaps the main one. He wanted me to understand that a suicide would crucially damage a sterling reputation and perhaps affect his business.

"But I'm not on drugs," I sniffled. Then, in light of these new options, I whined as winningly as I could that I would indeed like some. With the gallantry of the share-everything 1960s, a relieved Hal agreed to give me something to help, one of the pills from his bag, as soon as I dried my tears. But I could not stop crying. Nothing consoled me, not dinner, not breakfast, not sleeping with Hal—if I did; I don't remember. The next day, after he left for work, I walked slowly home along the weedy unused railroad tracks, still drugless, disconsolate, and sobbing. At my door, Todoro, covered with the scratches and wounds of ritual grieving, ran out to hold me like he would never let me go.

"We will never say goodbye," he promised. "Goodbye is our bad luck."

By the seventies, the families I knew best, including my lover's, were moving back to northern California. Over the years, I made five investigative trips to the Bay Area, one with Todoro, one with Lola, one with Katy, and two by myself. On my last such trip, in 1974, I rented an apartment in the Marina district of San Francisco and moved there. By that time my children were on their own, and I was committed to completing my fieldwork. In 1975, Lola died, and to keep her alive in the only way I knew, I began writing about her.

By then, several of Todoro's sons were approaching the age of marriage. According to Roma rule, intimate contact with an Outsider woman was forbidden. In order to attract brides from good families, Todoro tried to change his gossiped role from that of playboy to father. We became more circumspect, only meeting for abbreviated trysts in my apartment, which was up two flights of stairs, three doors, two sets of locks.

This arrangement lasted for years as I happily extended my research. Instead of a few Machvaia families, I now had several hundred. Sacramento was one ritual center, Los Angeles the other. I went to everything I could, the *slavi* (Saint Days), *pomani* (rituals for the Dead One), weddings, engagements, baptisms, holidays. How curious that as I became more popular with his people, Todoro's family lost status. Now it was I who brought him the tribal news. He was living and dealing with Kalderasha (another kind of Roma); I was on the phone daily with Machvaia and privy to the latest gossip. When one of his sons ran away with another Rom's wife, they were all—Todoro, Rose, daughters-in-

law, children—chased out of town by a vengeful Mexikaia (Mexican Roma) family. After that, he was on the move and the phone calls fell off. My rent in the Bay Area doubled. Broke, I briefly tried apartment managing. When I moved in with Machvanka Katy, in Oakland, we lost contact altogether.

Todoro never said goodbye. He had promised to never say goodbye, and he kept that promise.

Community

Ritual and belief were the focus of my study. In Seattle, most of the Roma were Kalderasha, not Machvaia, and my dear friend Lola assured me I had seen nothing until I had been a guest at a California Machvaia party. I began traveling there and found this to be true. Machvaia ceremonials were impressive. Even the *pomani* rituals honoring the Dead One promoted a sense of pensive exhilaration as all the innumerable millions of unknown Roma Dead were invited to eat with us at the table. When I complimented the people on the magic of their rituals, they explained the best was never quite good enough for any of the Saints, or for the Machvaia young people getting married, or for a people who considered themselves "the best of the best."

A Saint's Day was a matter of devotion. Even the poorest of the people would take out loans, sacrifice everything they had, spend their last dollars to honor the Saint. They believed the Saints were their help, their salvation, and that if the celebration was truly beautiful and they had really tried, the Saint would bless them with everything needed. The people spent days on their appearance, the men in tuxedos, the women in their best jewelry and gowns. They created another world with their matching intentions, their expert dancing (everyone practiced), danceable music, sometimes accompanied by a live band, disco lights, elegant dinners, endlessly available alcohol (alcohol is good luck), and everyone looking and doing and giving their best.

The tribal feeling is what I remember, the amazing sense of belonging – even for someone, like me, who really didn't belong. The unity of purpose involved the appropriate ways to move, to speak and think, all the rules already given. As I became familiar with the parameters of ceremonial life and the people's beliefs, I would feel safety safe as I entered a hall of fifty, hundred, even a thousand Machvaia, the men on one side of the room, the women on the other, safety safe in a way I would never feel again. In the 60s, 70s, 80s, I experienced

the warm and blissful blanket of feeling in a community of like human beings bent on the same sacred, auspicious, and communal ends, a feeling of connection, a divine feeling of immediate, powerful tribal connection. How I treasure that memory.

The experience of community seems exceedingly rare. But I felt it somewhat as a child, the only child in the Ridpath Hotel. Whenever I crossed the lobby with my mother, eyes of love and caring looked my way.

At age ten and eleven, at Camp Sweyolakan, I would occasionally feel a sense of warm connection when we were at the trestle tables, waiting to eat and singing song after song about nature and bonding.

I have also felt at one with forces of the universe while watching the stars come out at night in an area far from the lights of the city, or surrounded by a circle of giant Coastal Redwoods, or witnessing an outstanding Broadway drama. More than half a century later, I still feel in league, heart and soul, with Hector, his anguished mother Hecuba, and the other Trojan women as experienced in a 1955 Broadway production of Giraudoux's anti-war play, *Tiger at the Gates.*

But, for me, the longest period of non-Roma community feeling was from the mid-sixties through the early seventies.

Colin was first. He became a hippie first. I think my son started it by constantly playing Bob Dylan records. But maybe it was the Beatles, the wonderful Beatles, who opened the way. The magic of music and the sharing of music was a most important element of Peace and Love. 45s and LPs were invariably shared. Music was everywhere, in the cars, the houses, on the street, and in the air. I particularly enjoyed the recordings of Donovan and Cat Stevens.

Graduate school was the center of my universe. I spent my days in Savery Hall where wisps of forbidden marijuana smoke drifted down the corridors. One of my fellow anthropology students was planning to study the hippie generation. I heard he moved to Hawaii and began an organic farm instead. I visited some of the communes that were beginning nearby with the same intention. But most of

them ran into trouble of various kinds, as communes tend to do, and closed when they ran out of money.

My children and I lived in the University District, a block from the campus. For a time, both of my adored sisters also lived in the area. Joan was getting a graduate degree in Art. She moved to the hip, divey Pioneer Square area south of downtown when Abie Label offered free housing to artists in the low-ceilinged top floor of his hotel, once the servants' quarters. There she met Charlie, another budding artist, and began her own experiment in peace and love.

Sister Nancy also lived nearby. She had left the husband she was intending to divorce in England, arrived in Seattle with two children, and worked as a waitress, often at the Space Needle. Several evenings a week, we met at O'Banions, a local tavern, and there she met Pat, who was Irish, an entertainer, a poet, and a storyteller. Art, like music, was big in the sixties. Pat and Nancy were a popular couple, and we spent hours at their house, the first year as guests in their bedroom, where, like Yoko and John, they entertained. We would usually bring something to drink or to eat and share it. I often arrived with Todoro, of course. In our mid and late thirties, my sisters and I got involved with the younger men who became the loves of our lives.

At sixteen, Colin had a girlfriend too, a wonderful girl named Carol. I would come home from school and find a community of sorts, Carol, Colin, and Colin's three male friends, the sons of University professors who were determined, like him, not to fight in the Vietnam War. I certainly didn't want my son killed in such a war and resented the way his adolescence was twisted out of shape by the sinister threat of being drafted. We marched, we all marched. I marched against the war with Joan and Nancy; we were fiercely anti-war mothers with teenage sons. Colin marched on a variety of occasions, until, in the early seventies, the revolutionary march that he was on across the campus turned into a raid, and he got disgusted with some of his fellow marchers.

Colin did not consider war in any way glamorous. When my children were young, our little family had visited Gettysburg, and subsequently Colin had read everything he could about the Civil War. In truth, he became an expert

on that war. When we got involved in Vietnam, he did the same; he studied that country's previous century, the rise of Ho Chi Minh, the French defeat, our country's increasing commitment of troops. In high school, he and his friends Tony, Don, and Bob became involved in the anti-war movement. They set up an anti-war booth next to the ROTC booth. During his senior year, Colin proved so resistant to school rules that he was required to leave. As his friends Don and Carol were already students at Garfield High School, where the student body was largely black, Colin joined them.

Since my daughter had married a man from China, my grandchildren looked a lot like the Vietnamese children we were bombing. The Vietnam War was the first war to become visually available on a daily basis in America's living rooms. I always thought that the painful reality of being able to see who was being killed on our television screens was fundamental to the pervasive anti-war feeling.

Peace and Love were the tenets of the time. Class, color, sexual orientation no longer mattered. "To each according to need" and "Do your own thing" were our mantras, acknowledging the humanity of all was our purpose, and sharing was essential. In our one-bedroom apartment, Colin had the bedroom. Leslie spent the school year in Portland with her father; summers and holidays, she stayed with us in Seattle where she slept in a windowed closet. My bed was a cot behind the living room sectional. I would wake up in the morning, peek over the back of the sofa and see who was there—who had needed a place to sleep and who Colin had brought home.

Sharing, acknowledging one another's needs, the music and the dope bound the movement together. Not that I was much of a pot smoker. I found that when I smoked, I would head toward one destination in my little Beetle and then, when I was nearly there, switch directions. When stoned, I became an endless driver. Also, I tended to drive 15 miles an hour on the freeway. Other drivers would hang out of their cars and holler something like "Pothead! Get off the road or speed up." I decided that pot wasn't for me.

But it was for so many others at that time. So was hitchhiking, a way of meeting others while getting where you wanted to go. When I was driving, I

would often pick up hitchhikers north of the University Bridge. The law student hikers, usually male, would passionately assure me that as soon as they passed the bar, they would make certain that marijuana was legalized. Fifty years later, they are now in their sixties and seventies, and they do seem to be getting their wish.

One of the local newspapers was curious, and maybe concerned, about the drug use of the younger generation. A reporter approached Colin, who agreed to monitor a demonstration of Tony and several others taking LSD with Colin explaining the process. I didn't see the article about LSD because I didn't subscribe to the newspaper, and I don't know if it was ever published.

Our University District apartment became the after-school hangout for Colin and his friends—and the friends of friends. One way the lads could earn a bit of money was to hawk copies of *The Helix*, the local hippie newspaper. As sharing was the word of the day, buyers were expected to be generous.

In 1967, Todoro's wife Rose left with her children for the Summer of Love festivities in San Francisco—she hoped to tell fortunes—and, a few days later, Todoro and I followed. In the city, I looked up several of the Machvaia I had met in Seattle, nearly scared some Bimburia Roma I didn't know to death when I spoke to them in coherent Romany, slept in the car I had rented, ate day-old doughnuts, and, returning after a week, found I had forgotten to leave my son the money he needed for food.

I was apparently overly confident in the sharing. For that I will always be sorry, and particularly as my wonderful son has never, during our many years together and apart, disappointed me. He is smart, kind, creative and frequently amazing. He is the one who brought the essence of peace and love into our lives. The first day of high school, I asked him to help fashion our recently rented Wilsonian apartment into some kind of home by making friends we could be proud of. He came back with Tony, beautiful Tony, and I knew that our little family of two was on track. Tony was followed by more admirable young men, Don and Bob, and many glad years of community and family. I was free to spend my days at the University knowing all was well at home.

My parents deplored the Peace and Love connection. Whenever they visited from Spokane, they complained about Colin and Will's—Will was Nancy's oldest son—long hair and odd clothes; winters, for example, Colin sometimes wore a pale blue West Point greatcoat. (I thought my son looked stunning in the coat.) Before the divorce, we had had more money and Colin had gone to a private school in Portland where his lengthening hair posed a continual hazard. For more than a year I got calls of protest from the school. In Seattle, Colin was reprimanded and threatened more directly. Indeed, at one high school, his last, Colin never signed up for gym because the athletic director told him he would make him sorry for his hippie appearance. Over the years, Colin went from beachboy to surfer to beatnik to fringie (Seattle argot for the post-beats and pre-hippies) to full-fledged hippie, but I didn't mind. I considered the hair on his head his personal business.

After my sisters married Charlie and Pat, they became high school instructors and their households' financial support. Believing that making money was the man's job, my parents deplored this arrangement. A good portion of the people in our apartment building, many of them retirees, were also critical of the hippies on the street. Although the younger generation was confident that all of America would eventually come around to the Peace and Love way of thinking, I had a sense of reservation which I managed to ignore. The Roma I was studying had taught me to pay attention to the moment, to live in the moment, and at that moment, the music, the allure of community, the support of my children, my son most especially, my sisters, my fellow students and so many others, provided an aura of blissful hope and human warmth that I basked in, one that I will always miss and doubt I will ever experience to such a delightful degree again.

Colin

I can't say that period of my life was entirely perfect. It was interrupted by one year in which Rose, Todoro's wife, chased me from rental to rental. After six traumatic moves, I found an apartment management job south of the U District, changed the color of my car—always an identifying feature—had a cancer operation, and, while working on my doctorate, began teaching at the local community colleges. Before I started teaching, I made a list of the most outstanding professors I had known and their characteristics. Then I tried to copy them. I loved both teaching and my subject; I think that made me an excellent teacher. When my thesis was approved, two of the professors on my committee surprised me with a celebration. We enjoyed the congeniality. We clinked our glasses of wine. The party was on a little sail boat on Lake Union, a city lake just two short blocks from my fail-safe apartment.

For six years, Rose never found me. During that time of peace and love, I traveled south on several occasions, extending my fieldwork into California where the tribe Machvaia numbered in the thousands. In 1974, when I finally moved there, I arrived in a rented moving van and hailed a young man passing on the street. The good-hearted chap helped me get my belongings, which included a heavy plastic heating-and-vibrating chair, up two flights of stairs and into the apartment I had rented. Refusing to take any money, he cheerily advised me to "Live in peace."

The Peace and Love movement in the Bay Area was more organized than it had been in Seattle and tended to last. For some years—perhaps even today—the stores in the Haight Ashbury area sold tie-dye and Grateful Dead t-shirts to tourists. In the 70s, the local band Jefferson Airplane changed its name to the Jefferson Starship and occasionally played free afternoon concerts in the Financial District square. By then, for income, I was selling Pardee's etchings, and I would stop work to listen. Crowds gathered. Eyes tearily remembered. People hugged their neighbors. In those too brief moments, Peace, Love, and community lived again.

Why Roma?

I don't know how many times I have been asked why I studied Gypsies. Even one of the professors on my committee, during my orals, asked me why. Apparently, during the sixties, the word Gypsy conjured either a Halloween costume or a mezzo-soprano Carmen with flowered skirts and scarves, gold earrings, and clicky castanets.

I was in graduate school when Professor Ed Harper introduced me to a visiting former student. She was studying a Roma group in Pennsylvania and had offered to discuss her fieldwork with our Department of Anthropology. The way she described the Roma lineage inheritance was apparently nothing like my cohorts had either read about or experienced. Other than Harper, none of the professors, all male, believed what she said; the discussion ended in a hot debate. She struck me, however, as a careful person who spoke candidly from firsthand experience. (A few years later, further kinship studies validated her assertions.) That dramatic difference of opinion is, I believe, what created my initial interest in Gypsies.

As a child, my sister Joan loved stories about Gypsies. She thought Gypsies romantic and wanted to name a child Darklis, like a female character in one of the Gypsy tales she read.

Unlike my sister, I wasn't particularly interested in Gypsies as a child. But, as a returning graduate student with two children at home, a tween and a teenager, I couldn't imagine leaving them and going to New Guinea, where many of my professors had gone. Gypsies, however, were no more than fifteen minutes away from our apartment. Their palm reading storefronts lined Seattle's waterfront streets, curtained, obviously lived in, and some with the door ajar.

The kindly Professor Harper arranged for my introduction to a Roma family that was distantly related to the family he had studied as an undergraduate at Reed College in Portland. Despite the introduction, I was

resentfully tolerated, and certainly unwelcome. Nevertheless, for a time, I visited the storefront twice weekly. I would park my little VW at the curb and push the door open. The two teenage girls would usher me to the sofa, carefully serve me coffee, refuse to answer any of my questions, and disappear. The small children told me lies and teased me. They tried to scare me with ghost stories and popped balloons near where I was sitting. The television or recorded music often played so loudly that my head would throb for hours. The children's redheaded mother Katy, who, I later learned, achieved her hair color by soaking her hair in Clorox(!), was perpetually on the phone, sometimes while painting her long nails with polish—a tricky procedure. And she was obviously upset.

I had unwittingly arrived during a major family crisis. By Roma law, intimacy with an Outsider was forbidden, and Katy's husband, Tsetsi, had run away with a seventeen-year-old Outsider. He had run away before, but only briefly, and this escapade was lasting months. The Roma community, from Seattle through Tacoma, was calling to help, to give advice, and to discuss possible penalties. Katy was talking her head off, trying to make sure that everyone understood that Tsetsi's tendency to run away was not in any imaginable way her fault.

I, of course, didn't know this at the time, and no matter what Katy's family did to discourage my visits, I kept coming back for more. In truth, it struck me as an irresistible challenge. I think I was the perfect fieldworker for the task. My first years of life, I was the only child in the hotel where we lived, and where everyone seemed to adore me. Roma were raised to get rid of Outsiders. I was raised to be liked.

Then I met Katy's mother, the inimitable Lola. After taking a bus downtown to shop at the Pike Place Market, she had stopped by her daughter's storefront. When I said I wanted to study Gypsies, I suspect that she misunderstood—studying being a foreign notion to someone who couldn't read and who depended on intuition for insight. She was quick on the recovery, however. After adopting me as her driver and assuring me we were bound to be best friends, she insisted, without recompense, on telling my fortune. After that, she called me several times a day and insisted on meeting my family. I was still

an Outsider, of course. But my role as the fearsome enemy, at least for this particular family, was over.

Some years earlier, when I had lived near Manhattan, I remember pausing, stunned, on the stairs of the Museum of Modern Art, where Rousseau's fantasy, *The Sleeping Gypsy*, was hanging high and glorious in the stairwell. The sight took me unawares, and no other art experience has ever seemed as compelling and goose-bump thrilling. A black Gypsy sleeping on the ground next to a lion; what did it mean? Would the lion eat the Gypsy? Was the King of the Jungle standing guard?

A decade or so later, when I began studying the Roma in Seattle, the reason for my fieldwork choice would seem totally unrelated to that Rousseau moment. Nearly all Machvaia Roma are quite light-skinned and look nothing like the black Gypsy in the picture. But was my choice unrelated? I thought it was my growing desire, the scientific need, to know and understand the people that led me to the Machvaia Roma. But Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel Prize winner, writes that we are all highly suggestible, that our choices are intuitively colored by past associations, emotions, and reactions, and that our self-image as the conscious and autonomous author of our judgments and choices is only a tenuous part of our exchanges in real time. Perhaps the birth of my Gypsy choice had happened years before, at MOMA.

San Francisco

My first years of studying Roma were not a fieldworker's dream. Seattle was Kalderasha territory and never had more than six Machvaia families in residence. But thousands more Machvaia could be found in California, the tribe's home base and ceremonial center. As their student and *Djuhli* (female Outsider) friend, I made five investigative trips to the Bay Area, one with Todoro, one with Lola, one with Katy, and two by myself. While in Seattle I had worked part-time as a college instructor and found I loved teaching. When I was traveling, I tried, without success, to find similar work in California. By the seventies, the families I knew best were moving back to northern California. On my last pioneering trip to San Francisco, I rented an apartment in the Marina district and, in 1974, I moved there.

At first I was desolately lonely. I had left my now-grown children, my sisters, cousins, and too many friends behind. I really missed the aging Lola, who had been a significant part of my life for nearly a decade. Her daughter, Katy, now lived in Oakland. But Katy didn't drive a car or know her way around the city.

Sherrie

My first job was at the Marina Health Spa, advertising free spa visits by phone, and it was there that I met Sherrie. Among the dozen callers in a seated line, Sherrie was the one—Hungarian, vocal, a blonde Zsa Zsa Gabor in a pixie haircut—who couldn't be missed. Also new to the city, she and I explored it together, usually on foot.

Our first Christmas Eve in the city was balmy, windless, and an imaginative hoot. Sherrie and I walked the sidewalks for hours, looking through apartment windows while those inside tore open their presents, decorated trees, ate, laughed, drank. No one seemed to think of closing their drapes, and

sometimes carols spilled through the open casements. We gave the people names, made up stories, and enjoyed pretending that we were the welcome guests at many of the windowed celebrations.

The seventies were easy living; Sherrie and I each survived in comfort on only a few hundred dollars a month. Those were my years of part- and full-time jobs; I preferred part-time, which gave me more time for Machvaia. No matter how short we were on funds, however, we always managed tickets to whatever Broadway musical comedies became available. To get tickets to *The Chorus Line*, we stood in a line going around the block for an entire day and, when we finally reached the window, were dismayed to find that we had to buy the entire season. But the expense proved well worth the unexpected cost as we also got to see the wonderful *Pacific Overtures* and *The Wiz*.

In the meantime, I was meeting Machvaia, and going to all the parties and rituals I could. I was in the East Bay at the dying of Lola's oldest daughter when Lola herself died in Seattle. I was in Los Angeles and living with Boba when Duke, Lola's most promising male grandchild, died of an overdose. I was in Sacramento when none of the younger women showed up and I, like the other mature women, had to cook for days. I was there again, this time at a motel wedding, when crazy Donna started a fight and the police arrived with dogs. Katy and I, her new husband King driving, went all over California together, to all the rituals, parties, the celebrations. I became two people, one trying to think myself into another, down-the-rabbit-hole kind of Gypsy world, and the other with Sherrie.

Katy

Katy's home was always open door. Katy and I had been buddies for a number of years. (Katy was advised to quit smoking, but she couldn't, and she died some time ago.) Katy's was the first Roma storefront I ever visited. She was the one who introduced me to her mother, and it was initially our mutual affection for Lola that drew us together. I didn't realize it at the time, but one reason she was so glad to see me was that shortly after I had arrived in California, both her children, Judy and John—the youngest of seven—returned to Seattle to live with

their father and left Katy painfully alone. When she went to the Machvaia parties and celebrations, hardly anyone in California remembered her. For thirty-some years Katy had lived in another state, with another tribe, and she had become a stranger.

As I didn't look Gypsy, wherever we went, the people would ask who I was. Katy told them I had baptized her children (and I did later baptize two of King's grandchildren). Godparents are believed to have a critical and lifelong spiritual connection with their godchildren and are owed unending respect. In California, Katy became known as a person of interest, the redheaded Machvanka with the redhead Djuhli godmother, a designation vastly preferable to her previous once-married-to-a-Kalderash status.

It was, anyway, more fun to go to the parties and meetings together. We would spend days looking for the most attractive material and then days at the dressmakers, designing our dresses and being fitted. Then days on the road visiting friends and relatives, one stop after another, and, eventually, the main and often three-day event. Then we spent more days discussing who was there, how they had looked, what they said, and how that event compared with others of similar origin. And then days preparing for the next.

Sales

One of my San Francisco jobs was at Cory's Art Gallery. Because I wasn't much of a closer, I wasn't particularly successful at selling art. Someone more forceful and experienced had to step in at the last minute and order the customer to "Buy."

I quit or was fired—I don't remember which—after which Pardee, a local artist, invited me to freelance with his hand-pulled etchings. Mostly etchings of Victorian houses—San Francisco is known for its numerous aging Victorians—they were easy to sell. I was generous with credit. Nearly everyone I met seemed to love the city and to consider an etching to be the ideal souvenir. Some of the more popular pictures, apparently of bordellos, had the joke of several tiny naked ladies in a window. I only went to work when the weather was mild

because the wind that poured down Market Street could catch my giant leatherette carrying case and shove me along like a driven sail.

Sometimes men would joke: "You want me to come up and see your etchings? That's a switch."

While cold-call selling along Market Street and door-to-office-door in the Financial District, I learned a lot about luck, or *baXt*, as the Roma call it. Days I felt lucky, I sold. On the days that I didn't, I slept in and wrote up my field notes. Machvaia believe in inherited luck, tactile luck, momentary luck—Gypsy work, that's what it was. The experience of selling etchings fine-tuned my understanding of the Machvaia day-to-day life and my appreciation of the beautiful city I lived in. I learned to know the buildings and the streets, and I met hundreds of wonderful people.

Thanks, Pardee, for sharing your etchings.

My Parents' Visit

My father carries the heavy luggage as he has always done, ignoring the mist of rain in his face and the puddles staining his shoes. He leads the way, hurrying my mother by his urgency, projecting a sense of positive directions and insistent goals. They will spend twenty-one drowsy, dulling hours on the bus, but he will be the first in line, getting on, getting off.

He would have preferred to fly. But only a family emergency can get my mother on a plane. After a week of eating and overeating at the recommended San Francisco restaurants, they are leaving, traveling back to Washington State the way they came, by Greyhound Bus.

Turning away from the car, they deny my request to wait while I park and return to see them off. "That isn't necessary," my father says brusquely, rejecting the sentiment of a lingering goodbye. And I know, from knowing him all my life, the irritation, should I insist, at the slightest implication that he has solicited any personal attention when he hasn't, he never has.

My job is to smile, and wave, and pretend I must hurry off to another appointment.

I note that it is with increasing difficulty that my father stands tall, essaying the weight of two suitcases, a furled umbrella and briefcase, holding fast to a graying grace through the awkwardness of the bus station doors. He holds the doors impatiently for her, for my mother—once a sunburned black-haired tomboy who still moves with an athlete's coordination—at his side and a step behind, seconding him, supporting his will and wishes in the style of that era, maternal, serene, attentive. I wonder, does she never hope to be first? He invariably leads the way, our boss, paterfamilias, responsible for everything that might affect us, and to the world for the public standing of everyone in his family.

I can't even imagine what it is to be a man of his time and responsible for so much.

With my mother and father on their visit to San Francisco

While he visited with friends, my mother and I, who are close in mind and spirit, talked, looked in shop windows, and shared conspiring giggles. Married fifty-some years, she seems somewhat nervous now when Jack is not near, when he is

walking the city alone, or meeting his friends in places she doesn't know. Time has tempered my father's fierce command, the hunger for prizes and fame that once flared at his frightened children. But although he is more forgiving of failure, I know he will never approve of my current lifestyle, writing and living on a shoestring while doing fieldwork with a Roma tribe. When he says I am wasting my life on Gypsies, I am aware he is only stating a matter of principle, the Horatio Alger bid for monetary success that he has lived by. Still, hurt and dismay wells in my chest.

Harder and harder, each time, to watch them leave. Much to learn from them—and little time—about how to treat my own children, and, of course, about who I am.

We have contrary expectations. Mine are more or less hippie; theirs spell accumulation as logo and material increase as legend. Father collects bonds, bank accounts; he manages the estates of vanished male friends and advises their widows. Mother collects children—she had five—and genealogies, reading aloud our ancestor's names. The policies that pushed the country out West and the theme of hard work, the expansionist American Dream, propelled them up a class. I have always had two mothers. One speaks for father, and most likely herself, protesting the present sons-in-law and the previous. Poor providers, too young for my sisters, too artistic, too much hair, not enough—as is unspoken but obvious—like Father. While I helped her into her jacket, however, the other mother smiled and whispered, "Have fun," gifting me with the convivial advice that speaks to her own childhood, always outdoors and free, running and climbing all day through a wilderness of woods.

My own mortality is foretold in those straight and unrelenting backs, the heads that won't look back. If we were Gypsies, we could cry about goodbyes, now and in the future, holding and together for a time. Instead, I am left with their tears and mine to shed.

Then I drive to Oakland for the comfort of dinner with Katy. When I tell the Rom King, Katy's husband, about my parent's visit, he assures me I was rich . . . and lucky to be so rich. I have two parents living and in good health.

The Band

Some moments are rainbow-colored flags waving an insistent hello from the morass of memory.

In 1978, or maybe it was 1979, the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Marching Band sashayed through the city streets with a flotilla of drag queens in the lead, two dozen glorious and good-sized hip-swingers gallantly showing off their stuff and declaring by suggestive moves a spit-in-your-face challenge to the usual tepid role of drum majorette. So many gals with such heart-stopping audacity and cheeky angst that I was robbed of breath.

The band was excellent, but the queens were out of this world.

The next year, owing to the tragedy of AIDS, the band had shrunk by half and the gals were gone.

My dentist died. He had been the youngest member of a family dental group. Heartbroken, his father and grandfather retired, and I had no dentist.

Two of my doctors died. Ken stopped answering his phone, and I no longer heard about his crazy escapades in the San Francisco's baths. My hairdresser's lover died; Charles became depressed and I had to find someone else to dye my hair. AIDS had transformed gorgeous and wonderful young men into phantoms with blisters. The city became a war zone, with UC Medical Center leading the fight.

Those years in San Francisco were hell for so many. How curious that the music and the majorettes of the Gay Freedom Day Marching Band are even yet one of my most delightful memories.

Zoni

In 1975, Zoni arrived in San Francisco. She had left her husband and her older children in New York and was beginning a single life where her brother Theo and his family lived. Zoni was Lola's youngest daughter, and reputed to be the best at fortunes, the prettiest, the luckiest, the favorite, the one that everyone adored. We enjoyed the Roma parties, working together in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning up, and then going for walks—she was the only Machvanka I ever knew who liked to walk. I was studying Roma, she was trying to become American. As co-conspirators, we found an area of sisterhood and solace somewhere in between. Being similar in temperament, we planned, sometime in the future, to live together. In the seventies, discos were popular, and Zoni and I spent many joy-filled musical evenings in free form, dancing together, by ourselves, or with whomever. To me, Zoni was nothing short of fabulous. All of Lola's seven daughters were dear to me. But she was the only one to call me *Pei* (Sister).

Sherrie often babysat Zoni's two children while Zoni and I, and often Katy, went shopping, dancing, or to parties. Wherever we went, other Machvanki, hoping to find a mate for a single brother or a nephew, would ask if pretty Zoni was married. But Zoni had no intention of marrying a Machvano. When she wasn't with the Roma, she wore American clothes. Although most of the people avoided sending their children to school, she sent her sons to an excellent and expensive private one. Zoni wanted to quit telling fortunes, a pursuit so intrinsic to Machvaia values. Her plan was to buy a piano, take lessons, and become a singer—she had an astounding voice and, of course, an extensive wardrobe of formal-length party clothes. But before she could do that, before we could become housemates, before she could raise her sons to be American 100 percent, lucky Zoni became unlucky Zoni and died of a brain tumor.

I only shared a year and a half of Zoni's life. But I remember.

Zoni was in a coma for several long months. Over time, her people, including her family, including me, grew neglectful with our visits. Then I had a dream of glamorous Zoni dancing onstage in *The Wiz*—we had seen it together—a dream with the music of the song "Ease on Down the Road" so loud that it woke me up, humming. The lively technicolor dream sent me to the hospital the following day. And, as onstage in *The Wiz*, Zoni's company in the ER was a black man. But not a dancing and singing black man. He, like Zoni, was all trussed up, immobile, medicated, and unconscious.

Dreams and the Spell of Water

For the first time in my life, in my fifties, I became depressed. Was it the despair of losing Zoni? Was it the confusion of keeping two cultures separate in my head? Was it the strain of adoring a Rom with nine children and knowing that fatherhood, not romantic affairs, was his life mission?

Dolly would call me to parties, to come over for coffee, and, in the manner of the Machvaia who invariably follow their feelings, I was only comfortable at the rituals of grief. I was too despondent to look for work. When I signed up for the free psychological therapy available in San Francisco, after several half-hour sessions, my therapist pointed out something that I knew in principle, but had never truly considered. "You were not born a Machvanka, and you can never become one."

I don't remember the reason for one particular evening trip to visit Katy in Oakland. But, coming back over the Bay Bridge, the car developed a fierce mind of its own and began to swerve to the right, toward the railing. I fought the wheel with all the shouts, cries, prayers and promises I could. For reasons I couldn't assess, some part of my mind had been kidnapped by the allure of San Francisco Bay and was pulling me there with an unfamiliar force.

How to contend with this hostile and unknown part of my being? How to deal with the unwelcome promise of eternal peace? I sold my car, an aging Volvo, stopped bicycling along the Bay, and quit having my morning coffee on the Marina Green in the delightful company of the pelicans and shorebirds.

Then I remembered my dream of Zoni and a black man dancing in *The Wiz*. I remembered that the song "Ease on Down the Road" had provided a sense of connection with the dying Zoni, and even some consolation for her loss. Maybe dreams could help. I met with Patricia Garfield, the local expert in dreams, and she suggested the following all-night enterprise—setting the alarm to ring every two hours and, upon waking, taping or writing the remembered

dream. After a week, I was averaging four dreams a night, often watery dreams, which seemed promising. After a month or so, four dreams a night began to seem unwieldy. But my dreams proved highly suggestible and, as I lay down to sleep, I would tell my dream self that I only wanted to remember the more important dreams—and some magical part of myself obeyed.

As dreams, so often underwater dreams, became a significant part of my life, I still avoided the Bay. But I returned to Machvaia events, my Gypsy friends, and also attended a variety of dream-sharing classes. One was in Oakland. I took the underground Bart, which tunnels under the Bay. Once there, the leader would read us the nightly dreams that he was intending to turn into a book. I advertised in the *Bay Guardian* and held my own dream-sharing classes. Dreams became my passion. I lived frugally on Unemployment Benefits, and I collected dreams.

Then I had another technicolor dream that woke me up. A few blocks from where I lived, four-story ocean liners often dwarfed the Marina's two-story buildings, and in my dream I was watching a giant ocean liner sail by. But this boat was full of parties, Latin music, and people dancing. I wanted to be on the boat and on my way to somewhere wonderful. I knew Todoro was on that boat. But I was on the shore, alone.

The next night I told my dream self to put me aboard that holiday boat. But instead I got a gray and washed-out dream, a warning dream in which I was without an oar and stuck ashore in a beached rowboat.

So I wasn't entirely unprepared for bad news when Todoro showed up two months later. He came to tell me that he and his family had been chased out of town by another family. One of his sons had run off with the wife and children of a Mexikaia Kalderash Rom. Despite the pleas of his father, his son Larry had refused to give them up. Another son had been kidnapped, held as hostage, and beaten. Larry had disappeared. Todoro's family was on the run and hiding in a motel outside the city.

Although Todoro had come to say goodbye, I didn't cry. The sheer impact of his physical presence invariably made me feel magical, wonderful, a feeling that could last for days. What my head understood seemed unrelated to my heart; I could never experience the sadness of Todoro's departure within the

moment. This time, after he left, whenever he called, he carefully avoided telling me where he was. But as he called collect, I could see that he was moving south.

Almost simultaneously, Sherrie and I took to our beds. Eight blocks apart, we survived a bedridden month or so of depression. That October, having sold her belongings, Sherrie had gone to Montana to get married, only to find that her prospective husband had changed his mind. She still had her apartment, however, and each morning she would call to see if I wanted to get out of my nightclothes and go someplace—or I would call her. The calls stretched into long silences. It was a comfort to hear her breathing and to feel our empathetic connection. We were lost in two bottomless pits, but we were not alone.

Finally, we agreed that bed was not the ideal cure for depression. We got up, dressed, and packed a picnic lunch. Looking for an ideal place to eat it, we ventured onto an attractive but damaged No Trespassing pier in the Embarcadero. On our way down the pier, I fell partway through. After fainting on the examining table at one hospital, when the attending nurse found I had neither a job nor money, I was sent to the more charitable San Francisco General. There, Sherrie and I spent an entire afternoon of six or so hours waiting for a doctor to stitch me up. We waited through the arriving overdose emergencies, the coming and going of eccentric crazies, an ugly knife wound or two, and the curiosity of two middle-aged men who were engaged in a most bizarre competition. As the blood from their current gunshots dripped on the waiting room floor, they proudly removed both shirts and pants to show off scars and older injuries and to establish who had the most. By the time I saw a doctor, the sight of blood had lost all threat. Sherrie and I agreed that a trip to San Francisco General was quite an amazing and unexpected entertainment. I was, perhaps, a trifle high from blood loss, and so accustomed to disaster that I refused the delay of the anesthetic. The shape of the scar on my shin is a question mark.

Sherrie got a job; I went on a serious health kick. I quit smoking and, a week later, dreamed my lungs had become expansive, open panels of clean-moving air. In a lack-of-nicotine frenzy, I began running around the baseball diamond at the nearby park. I quit eating meat; I no longer ate any beef, turkey, or chicken. Eventually, and whenever not with Roma, I bought and ate organic.

Dying didn't fascinate me whatsoever. I wanted to keep writing about Machvaia. I wanted to learn to write well enough that people would learn about Lola.

Moving to another apartment nearby, I became the live-in apartment manager. The advantage of my new job was that I had more time to write, to practice writing, and to organize my field notes. But before the year was out, robberies in the area were on the increase and the owners decided they preferred a male manager. I moved again, this time to live with Katy and King in Oakland. I slept on their living room sofa, and each morning at breakfast, we remembered and shared our dreams.

Pacific Heights

In the early 1980s, I spent a long six-month winter with Katy and her family. A time of change, the people complained that they were "going American." The young, influenced by their American peers, had taken to running away and disobeying Roma rule. Brides were particularly disobedient. Once, without complaint, they told fortunes, did all the housework and childcare, and were the first to rise, the last to bed. Now, they refused to overwork. Instead, they went home to their parents when their married situation didn't please them. They even made their own choices when it came to whom they married. In terms of the tribal rules and the ancient beliefs of the Machvaia, it was the beginning of the end.

The Roma I loved were coming apart and so was I. So I put my two beloved Swedish modern chairs in Oakland storage and went, like any good Machvanka might, to look for the direction of my luck.

Still writing about the people I had studied, I spent a year in Seattle with my aging parents. Then, after some months in Hawai'i, I spent another year in Manhattan with my granddaughter, who was there on a scholarship with the New York City Ballet. Being with my good-sized and good-hearted family restored me. I knew I had to patch my mixed-up self together and moderate the intensity of my emotional ties to the Machvaia. In the process of transition, I tried to choose what of their culture I would keep. As the intimacy of their connections, one to the other, was something I had always admired and loved, I made that part of my being.

Returning to the Bay Area, I stayed with my non-Roma friends, Sherrie and Bev; at Sherrie's, I slept on the kitchen floor; at Bev's, I enjoyed my usual morning routine; exercise, meditate, eat an organic breakfast. In San Francisco, I looked for work that would accommodate my passion for writing – what I now

wrote was, of course, becoming history, but saving information of such kind is the way of the anthropologist. I was lucky enough to find the ideal job, one that included a small income while managing an apartment building in Pacific Heights. As Todoro and I had been out of touch for nearly a decade, that part of my life felt tragically unresolved. One of the Machvaia women told me in a roundabout way that he was loving in San Jose. Knowing so well where to look, I found him at a popular cantina.

He was drinking. In truth, every day after three in the afternoon he was a very drunk Rom. Alcohol had freed him from the trauma of his impoverished past, the difficult years with Rose—he and Rose were now separated—and most tender memories of me. His now adult children took care of him; one of them drove him home nightly from the tavern. I, on the other hand, was held in thrall to what had been. I would leave San Jose in disgust and then, after several weeks, what had been came back to memory and I would have to drive south from San Francisco to see him.

Pacific Heights is on a stable rock hill, below which is the Marina, a shoreline area built on sand. During the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, several houses in the Marina collapsed and people died. For three days I heard the wails of sirens, three days without electricity, lights, heat, warm food, television. I couldn't leave the building because I felt obliged to monitor the many candles that some of my youthful tenants with a flair for the dramatic had flaming across their vulnerable wood floors. When Todoro called me after the earthquake, I was in no mood for his hearty hello. Why was he never available when I needed him? The charade of pretending that we had never met or got together struck me as ridiculous, particularly as the Machvaia now assured me that they were "going American" and the old rules didn't hold. Exasperated, I hung up on him. He never called again.

Michele

Regarding real estate, it is said that "Location, location" is everything, and I must agree. My new management job in Pacific Heights was in a neighborhood of elegant mansions. The manager's apartment had once been part of the servant's

quarters, dark, and on an inner court. But the seven-story building was stunningly white, included in several Art Deco tours, and the windows away from the street were especially scenic. When I was on the roof and exercising on my trampoline, I could spy, at the apex of my jump, a good part of the Bay. I often caught the Pacific Street bus, which would slowly wander down the hill, compounding view after breathtaking view of the Bay, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Park. That short territorial bus trip—like going over the bridge—was superb and inspiring entertainment. Those traveling San Francisco moments taught me the power of place.

I was at home in Pacific Heights when Michele called. Michele was French, fearless, Parisian, and a decade older. She wore jeans, a Provencal cotton shirt, and hardly any makeup. She was in San Francisco because some of her photos of European Gypsies were on exhibit nearby. Having read and liked one of my academic articles, she had looked me up. Like me, she had several dear friends who were Roma. We bonded over Gypsy stories and our mutual affection for the Roma.

When, during lunch, she explained that she was living in a friend's noisy Castro apartment, I invited her to stay overnight with me. The next day, we went sightseeing, and that night we took the bus down the hill to the Fillmore West to see *The Gypsy Kings*. It was early in their U.S. run and the lads appeared shy, overwhelmed, abashed by their popularity, like any young and naive Gypsies might when a crowd of strangers roared with excitement. After the concert, Michele went on a week-long tour with *The Gypsy Kings*, taking pictures.

The band was glad to see her. While living in Camargue, Michele had known the older members of their family, including their father, the famous Jose Reyes of the amazing music and equally amazing voice. Michele and her husband, the artist Albert Brabo, would invite the Reyes to park their wagons in their yard and party. The Brabos provided the food and wine; the Reyes, the music. They would dance, sing, drink for a week or so. Then the Reyes would hit the road, Spain to France, France to Spain. In memory of those party years, Michele once had *une petite roulette* in the front corner of her Camarque yard.

Michele was a well-known photographer. I like her people pictures best, the way she captures her subjects at their most personal and revealing. My

library includes two books of photos by Michele, and another of Roma, *Le vent du destin*, which is my favorite, as well as her personal memoir, *Ma route en Zigs Zags*, all published in France.

Before Michele became a photographer, she was a Music Hall comedienne. She appeared in a film with Jacques Tati and danced with Gene Kelly—that dance, she confessed, was the highlight of her life. When quite young, having trained as a singer/musician, she was in a trio for a time. But as soon as she came onstage, the audience laughed. Michele was, in some inexplicable way, irrepressibly funny. Taking advantage of that talent, she improvised a solo comic routine, often with a saxophone. Always willing to experiment, to take chances, she was such fun—funny and fun. Just thinking about Michele is a delight.

I had always wanted to befriend someone truly French. Our half-French mother gave each of her daughters a French name; my middle name is Jacqueline. Some years ago, my sister Joan Yvonne arranged for us all to spend a month together in Paris. We stayed in a Marais apartment and I made side trips; the one with Joan was to Michele's *mas* (farmhouse) in Camarque.

Some years later I also flew to the south of France to visit Michele in La Gaude, her childhood home. I drove there from the Nice airport in thirty minutes. La Gaude is in an area of small towns surrounded by the usual tall defense walls, an apt reminder that this was once an area repeatedly overrun by the Huns, Greeks, Romans, Saracens, and pirates, Michele said that during World War II, first Italian, then German, and finally American soldiers came through, during which all her artist husband's valuable paintings disappeared.

When in La Gaude, I drove to Vence for groceries. We made a side trip to Renoir's last home, which featured a commodious modern bathroom and had once had a view, now overgrown, of the Mediterranean. One happy day the entire Brabo family and visiting friends, Genevieve, Tristan, and I, went to Old Nice for dinner. The day before I left, we went to a St. Paul museum for a Kandinsky retrospective. The Kandinsky exhibit was exceptional, extensive, glorious, and mostly on loan from Russia. We stayed for hours, reluctant to leave.

Michele's several-story La Gaude house is set in a landscape of olive trees. When I left, her farewell gift was a bottle of olive oil hand-pressed by an ancient machine from the fruit of the surrounding acres. At home in the States, I would call my dear friend Michele once or twice a month. Just the sound of her voice on the other end of the line made my day.

What I admired about Michele, besides her being funny and French, was her courage. Believing that life is short and everyone deserves adventures, I have always wanted to be brave; Michele was brave. She survived World War II in occupied Paris; she raised her daughter Agnes by herself. When her husband died, to help Michele take care of little Agnes, his good-hearted artist friends gave her their pictures so she might open a gallery and realize some income from their sales. As a comedienne accustomed to performing in cabarets, a tough business, she knew well how to deal with hecklers, and how to get things done. When I was leaving La Gaude, the car rental company in Nice wanted me to pay for a small dent that I hadn't made. I don't know what Michele said—it was fast, furious, and French. But the manager came out of his office to reprimand his employee, and to apologize.

I didn't always understand Michele's less than perfect English, but I felt a powerful and loving connection. I can hardly believe that I once had such a friend—she died a few years back—a delightfully funny friend who could always make me laugh.

Mill Valley

By 1990, my fieldwork was at an end. All the cultural matters that I had painstakingly written about were becoming history. When the people I was studying complained that they were "going American" and the loss of tribal tradition became apparent, I moved to a town without Gypsies.

For years I had been driving to Mill Valley to walk, to enjoy a day without fog, the hear the excellent music of the local quartet, or to drive over a little forested hill to Corte Madera, where a fantastic bookstore featured nearly all the authors I had recently read, liked, and wanted to meet.

Mill Valley is twenty minutes by bus or car to the north of San Francisco. The town is surrounded by Richardson Bay, marshlands, tiny canyons, the eastern slopes of Mount Tamalpais, and trees, magnificent trees. Those trees, the California coast redwoods, are the tallest trees on earth. Their species name, *Sequoia semper virens*, means "ever living." Like tall hotels, the fire-scarred, thick-skinned giants effectively vacuum the air so that it is oxygen fresh while accommodating cities of insects, mosses, animals, and birds on their many ascending layers. Redwoods grow in self-replenishing circles, reaching for stability with their roots and for the stars with their arching, branching mandalas.

On vacation from the tumult of my previous world of research with the Machvaia, I felt a mystical connection to the town, the redwood trees, the days, a joyful harmony with my living space, as if I had come home.

Mill Valley was a town of eight or nine thousand; since then, I hear, the number has doubled. The main thoroughfare is T-shaped, and I lived along one segment, Miller Avenue, which is lined with camellia trees, fragrant trees with giant white twelve-inch blossoms. After writing in the morning, I would walk to the Depot Bookstore and Café, once a train station; the train originally brought hikers and tourists from the city. The Depot is on a spacious town square where

children play and adults meet to talk, to smile—everyone smiled—and to exchange ideas. There I would order coffee, perhaps a sandwich, and enjoy some time with my new friends, Frank and Lenore, the town's unofficial greeters. Then I might head for a nearby trail; Mill Valley is a congenial nexus of innumerable trails, one of which takes the hiker over the mountain to the ocean and to a delicious lunch by the water, followed by the hourly bus that brings one back. Another that I truly enjoyed ran along the Bay where, in the early morning, multitudes of exotic shorebirds gather. Nearly anywhere in Mill Valley is only a few minutes from a trail and the inexhaustible glories of nature. At sunset, several deer often strolled past my apartment window on their way to Miller Creek, a lively freshwater resource that cut through my block. The weather in Mill Valley is as close to perfection as anywhere I have ever lived. I consider my ten years as a resident of that town a glorious gift.

Now, decades later, I often dream of Mill Valley, a Shangri-La that I need to find and recover . . . but can't. I know I am always looking for Mill Valley, searching for Mill Valley, even though nothing seems the same in my dream, or even vaguely familiar.

Such is the surreal and bizarre nature of dreams.

Going American: A Roma Tribe Is Undone

In 1966, a few months into my study of Gypsies, I met the inimitable Dolly at a pan-tribal storefront party. Dressed in bright satin, she lit up the room. Giant fans worked to clear the cigarette smoke. The tune "Feelings," sung by Engelbert Humperdink—a community favorite—played over and over at a deafening volume. Eyebrows raised and curious, she hollered, "Dolly, I'm Dolly," above the din. Pulling me away from the crowd into the buffer of a coat closet, she wanted me to know she was Machvaia born and bred, and that Machvaia, among the many American Roma tribes, are the best and most famous at fortunes. Then she added the clincher, squeezing my hand and dimpling, "*We women work too, you know. We have careers like you.*"

I was intrigued by the prospect of women who could support their children and extended families by reading the palms of strangers. I was delighted to learn that Machvaia men were expected to be the attractive and agreeable sex, not the women. Of the two Roma tribes in Seattle at that time, the Machvaia spoke better English, seemed less hostile, and I immediately liked them. Liking, as the Machvaia say, has a power.

My job, as a novice anthropologist, was to learn what I could about custom and tradition. But Dolly and her husband struck me as remarkably up to date. Although cars, like the horses before them, were considered a men-only activity, free-thinking Theo encouraged wife Dolly to drive; Dolly was the only female Gypsy driver in Seattle. Although camping and fishing trips were also deemed exclusive to the men, Theo often took his wife and children. Returning with a full icebox, he would invite other Machvaia over for an evening of fried halibut, fish stew, and music—playing guitars, playing records, singing.

One of the first rules I was told was that Machvaia women were the family breadwinners and that their men worked only by inclination, keeping the proceeds for their own good times. But Dolly's atypical family favored

investment and saving. Good fortune headed their way as Dolly gave psychic readings, and Theo and his father bought and sold cars. The family acquired several rental houses near Green Lake, two vacant lots, and sent their children to St. Benedict's Catholic school. These investments owed much to Theo's father, Bahto, who, although born in Serbia in the 1800s and illiterate, was keen to the economic possibilities in his country of adoption. Once notorious as the owner of a retail car sales business in Sacramento and perhaps the first Machvano in America to pay any kind of federal or state tax, he had also lost everything to an unscrupulous bookkeeper and so understood the value of education, insisting, as often as he could, that his children and grandchildren go to school.

Dolly next to her son (with flag)

I found Dolly smart, fearless, and great fun to be with. Whenever I missed a party, she would call the next day to share the latest gossip. While admitting that "it doesn't happen often, but it happens," she liked to call whenever she had interpreted a dream correctly or predicted something that, later, actually happened. Preventing potential suicides was her specialty. When a client's

husband left her for a younger woman and the client lost her will to live, Dolly told her to fill a bath with hot water, soak for half an hour, eat a favorite pastry, and see her in the morning. In the days that followed, she advised the woman to join the local country club, take up golf, meditate, and invest in a makeover. Within the year, the woman had remarried, this time to a rich and apparently generous man. She thanked Dolly with the gift of a three-bedroom house in an upscale Seattle neighborhood.

As relatives, mostly male, arrived from California, Theo often took them on hunting and fishing trips. They usually went to the Olympic Peninsula, Canada, or Alaska. Once, he, Fat Duiyo, and Long Nose flew to Mexico and returned with several marlin. Theo's fish, silvery snout pointing in the up and lucky direction, hung over the mantel of his elegant Seattle home.

In the mid-seventies, to avoid the threat of their growing children eloping with any of the local Roma who were not Machvaia, Dolly and Theo returned to California. Within the year, the five Machvaia families in Seattle followed. By then, Theo's parents, including his mother, my beloved mentor Lola, had died, and were now buried in the community's Sacramento plot. Following them, I could hardly wait to meet the other Machvaia lineages. In the succeeding years, I was dependent on Lola's children for access to the community, and like their mother, they fearlessly broke the no-Outsider rule. Feeling is the people's genius, and several of Lola's daughters promised me, "Mother loved you. So we will, too."

The women were making money, and it was the heyday of parties. One way to increase the benefit of good luck was to buy one another drinks. Ritual and belief were my focus, and I went to every party and public event I could. The people came together by car and plane for three-day weddings, three-day *slavi* (saint days), and week-long funerals, sometimes by the hundreds, even the thousands. Every life event and American holiday, even the Fourth of July as a picnic on a kinsman's grave, was celebrated—except Halloween. Parties kept them in vacation mode. Community spirit rocketed to an awesome high as we were either getting ready to celebrate or discussing the last party attended. Feeling fabulous and lucky, dancing, singing, laughing, the people celebrated the bliss of being together. I was told that the camaraderie, the warmth and joy of

those moments, the ecstatic coming-togethers were proof that Machvaia were the best, the luckiest, the most beautiful, moral, richest, and the highest class of any Roma tribe.

By rule, all Roma tribes were hostile to Outsiders. But not Dolly and Theo. I spent three decades as their friend and neighbor, first in Seattle, then in the northern California Bay area. The first months of my study, Theo made fun of me at parties—Dolly never did. But when I refused to go away and became his mother Lola's constant companion, he began treating me like family. Most of the Machvaia I met couldn't read or write, including Lola. She explained that although Bahto had insisted that all their children, including the girls, attend school, the child Theo had often skipped school and spent his lunch money on movies. But he got as far as grade seven, and I never knew a Rom who was smarter. Like a single-minded terrier, Theo would grab a topic he was trying to understand and worry it to death. Dolly often called to complain that her husband was driving everyone crazy with questions and beg me to talk to him, to listen. He knew my father was a lawyer and suspected that some critical bits of legal advice were hidden somewhere in my head. Full of ideas, he wanted me to help him start a Gypsy school. For a time, he discussed the possibility of a Gypsy restaurant. The latter didn't excite Dolly and me whatsoever. We knew Theo would be the welcoming committee at the door while she, her two teenage daughters, and I did all the work.

As I became Theo's empathetic sounding board, I gained insight into the men's culture and learned that Theo, like so many, longed to become an *ashundo Rom* (a "heard-about man"). Building powerful friendships was how men became successful and remembered. A "heard-about man" confirmed his family status and the karmic favor of his bloodline by being admired and respected by all other families and behaving like a king—or as the people like to think a king behaves.

In the people's earlier traveling days, becoming heard-about was a realistic possibility. Arriving in the States in the early 1900s, whenever two families discovered they were both from Machva, Serbia, they would stop, agree to party, happily unharness the horses, and start the fires. Displaying generosity was a must, and the host family scoured the countryside for food, liquor, and

wine. Days of drinking, dancing, guitar-playing, and eating followed, interrupted only by the time necessary for a nap. The people thrilled one another with spellbinding tales about monsters and ghosts; the Machvaia I met in the sixties were still deathly afraid of ghosts (particularly those of their dead Machvaia ancestors). Useful road stories were shared, as was critical information about the welfare of kinsmen. The women hoped to impress with their modesty, impeccable service, and dancing. The men dazzled with stories of heroic deeds and the exploits of Ancestors, all told in a casual, offhand manner. Style of presentation was important, as this conveyed status. Whenever the food ran out, the horses would be hitched to the wagons, and the party was over. That these events were experienced through an alcoholic haze by those eager to escape the rigors of traveling could, with the passage of time, transpose memory into myth. At a subsequent encounter on the road, and quite likely after days of drinking, the former host, particularly if he was never seen again, might well be described as exceptional, unforgettable, and heard-about.

In 1966, when I began my study, the people explained that a heard-about Rom was one admired and respected by all other families, a charismatic man who could hold a lucrative fortune-telling territory against all challengers and keep his entire extended family, without exception, obedient to the good behavior of Romania law. In the early 1980s, Theo seemed on his way to becoming heard-about. He "owned" a small town near the San Francisco airport where his family worked and lived. He was known to laugh at adversity. He and Dolly arrived early, left late, and promoted the bliss of good times.

But, by then, a way of life was dying. The exploding channels of communication, the informational and technologic boom had breached the people's traditional defenses against Outsider influence and, somewhat like a bloodless Arab Spring, let the Outside in.

The telephone, essential for the women's business appointments, began the revolution. A television in the living room proved the perfect babysitter. Raised on TV English, the young, in time, no longer spoke or understood Romanes. Children raised on sit-coms and movies extolling the advantages of individual decision-making—an American tenet—became less tractable and obedient. Brides no longer accepted the abusive role of a subservient *bori*

(daughter-in-law); when displeased with their married circumstances, they went home to their parents. Initially unaware that America also had rules and laws, an increasing number of young wanted to be "free" like Americans, and tried running away to America with a sibling, a friend, or a lover. Despite the shame involved and the penalty of social isolation, running away was popular for more than a decade. By the 1990s, however, the community had learned the hard lesson that only a few of the runaways, less than 5 percent, could make it on their own, financially or otherwise, as independent beings in the wilds of America.

By then, ritual events were no longer the communal moments that the people seemed to live for. Fortune tellers liked to blame the depressed American economy; as Dolly's daughter complained, "*I can't take three days off from work to party*." But this loss of ritual respect was more the effect of the younger generation, constantly online with the news of the day, seeking attention, eager to amaze other teenagers with their household secrets. Their more technical modes of communication, the email sharing of information and gossip, challenged former beliefs in Machvaia excellence and the superiority of the Roma way. Once, the people had been naïve about such matters. But now they knew that every family and lineage was no more moral, respectable, or divine than an ordinary family of Outsiders. They were aware that every family and lineage was cursed with a son who had run away to America, leaving Roma rule behind, a child who had married without the elders' permission, a gay man or woman, a husband with a mistress, a wife with a lover, a disobedient daughter-in-law, or someone guilty of time in jail (jail destroys the least possibility of respect). For centuries, factors of limited communication, the awkwardness of social distance, the difficulty and delay of traveling, and the lack of recorded history (Romanes was not a written language) had allowed the laudatory ideal to exist.

Older Machvaia deplored the heartbreak of "going American" and the loss of their moral code, which had been backed by the absolute power of the Ancestors and the example of high-class and presumably perfect families. But the days of the magic of shared beliefs and values were gone.

What the people described as "going American" was not an immediate transformation.

When his youngest child got cancer, Theo found the best treatment centers, and, in time, she recovered. In keeping with the rule of generosity to others, when the wife of a Machvano several towns away became ill, Theo spent an entire year doing the same for her—making medical appointments, talking to doctors at Stanford. But she died, and the ungrateful Machvano failed to continue his relationship with Theo. Reputation had always been a man's game. Building powerful friendships was how men became successful and remembered. Rumor has it that this cavalier slight broke Theo's heart.

When his eldest daughter reached eighteen, Theo arranged for her marriage to another reputable Machvaia family. Within the year, Sabrina was back, leaving a baby daughter with her husband's family. By tradition, any children of a marriage belonged to the father's family. But Theo insisted on visitation rights for his daughter. He asked me if I didn't agree that, in cases of divorce, girl children should go with their mother, boys with their father, an idea he tried to promote among the men. But for lack of elders untouched by scandal, the *krisa*, the legal council, was dying, and his proposal went nowhere.

Eventually, Theo and Dolly's children eloped with spouses of their own romantic choice, a Canadian Rom, a Kalderash, a Machvanka. The result of the two non-Machvaia marriages would once have been a significant loss of status. But in these more confused times, the shame system was in a shambles and status no longer a matter of grave concern.

In 1999, Dolly called for help, sobbing and furious. Theo had lost his mind and he was spending all their money:

> *—He hocked the Corvette for eight thousand to go gamble. I felt so bad. We had that car forty years—it was our security and peace of mind [their savings]. And what do you think he done? He took my money and gambled all of it at the track and card room. How you like that?*
> *—Then he started on my jewelry, to hock it, sell it. If I had all the money I made here, I think I would be sitting pretty. But with him? Forget it. Lost cause.*

Why did Theo spend so much money gambling? Rumor had it that he was even wanted by a scary non-Roma gambling syndicate to whom he owed money.

I would guess he became addicted to gambling in the vain hope of changing the direction of his luck. The triumph of good luck can be found in the winnings, and the process of winning suggests contact with one's personal fate, the glorious Goddess of Luck.

When Dolly had called that night, she had continued:

> *—Listen to what he done to me. Night, eight o'clock, and he took me across the bridge to see a car. And he's passing through red lights, and I told him, "Don't do that. You're going to kill us. No use rushing because the man's not going to sell the car this late at night." So he started with me and cussin' with me. Then he parked the car and said to get out. He left me there and I had no way home.*
>
> *So I found an all-night ice cream store, 31 Flavors. I told the guy to call me a taxi. Two mens came in the taxi—and I had almost ten thousand in my pocket (to buy the car). Two mens talking in their language and I don't know what the hell they are talking about. I thought they were planning to take me somewhere and kill me. OK? I started crying and crying in the car. Finally, I got home and he's watching television and he said, "How did you like that?"*
>
> *I called the police to lock him up. OK? Because I wanted him out of the house. I told the police, he's no good, he done this to me, he ruined my business, and spent my money. So the police talked to him and he went upstairs. For one month we didn't talk.*

As an elder and his mother's friend, I offered to discuss Theo's treatment of Dolly with him at their *Svet Yovano slava*—St. John the Baptist was Theo's lineage patron saint. But Dolly admitted that they no longer celebrated saints. We did meet the next month at a wedding in Sacramento. Theo avoided me, but enterprising little Dolly appeared much the same. It was a time of designer gowns, but even wearing the budget A-line dresses she had sewed on her portable Singer and lacking the sparkle and assurance of her many diamonds, she was still quick to crack a joke or tell a funny story, and often first to start the dancing. Although she complained again about Theo's gambling, she apparently still cared that he should appear rich and big in the public eye. In the pictures I took at that humid summer wedding, Theo is the only Machvano at the men's

table wearing fresh white linen in a sea of the usual dark tuxedos. Dolly had bragged that the suit was hand tailored.

Theo's best friend Long Nose died suddenly of a heart attack in his late fifties, a demise I credit, at least in part, to his day-to-night drinking. Alcohol is regarded as a good luck item, and the people complacently described his early death as "*pulling a Dean Martin*"—for Long Nose did physically resemble the singer. Soon after that, Theo and his only son had a terrible knock-down fight, over what I have no idea, and his son moved to another town. The loss of what he had worked for all his life—to be an effective boss, to be generous and treated generously—cost Theo his feeling of self-worth, which in tribal societies depends entirely upon the approval of others. Theo no longer called for my opinion; he no longer bothered with future plans. Respect involves obedience, and only his wife gave Theo a bit of respect. Dolly admitted that he had made her hate him. I expect this was because she still cared.

For a number of years, the local card rooms and good times in Reno and Las Vegas, drinking and gambling, were Theo's escape. They remain so today for a good share of the people who miss the community feeling of the past. Even though big get-togethers no longer pull the people together into a harmonic and ecstatic blend, anyone can drown their sorrows and pretend they are among friends for a few dollars at Nevada's gambling Meccas. Of course, everything has limits, but limits don't seem to be a popular concept to people who once lived, and would likely prefer to continue to live, in the heroic dimension.

Some months after Dolly's emergency phone call, I visited the couple at home. Dolly proudly showed me their newly remodeled kitchen and bathroom, a coup in terms of the sacred washing/separating purity practices inherited from their Hindu Indian ancestors. By then, the presumed purity of bottled water had replaced the charms of the Mr. Coffee machine, and a tall grandchild went to the refrigerator to get me a bottle. As the pair joined me in the living room, I noticed that Theo looked a bit drawn. Still the smiling, genial host, however, he offered to take us all to dinner:

—Dolly, call the hospital and tell them I can't make it today for my dialysis. I have a friend here I never get to see, and we will celebrate the good luck of being together at that new Chinese restaurant.

Concerned that he might miss his treatment, I said I had to run.

Alcohol is, of course, forbidden to those suffering from end-stage kidney disease. I expect that Theo knew what he was doing when, a year or so later, he went to Las Vegas again for the good times of drinking and gambling.

This chapter is dedicated to Dolly, whose telephone call inspired me to remember, and to Theo who, if this is published, will become some kind of American read-about and heard-about man.

My Father

My father was, of course, the first man in my life. I realize now that he terrified me. But as a child I was only aware of feeling angry. Maybe interpreting my terror as anger made me less vulnerable.

Now I suspect that my father's inability to control his exploding temper likely related to his fear of being unable to support his growing family. He adored his millionaire grandfather Stubbe, who made two fortunes in his lifetime, the first selling water to the miners in Virginia City and the second by successful investments in Eastern Washington wheat fields. As a boy, my father's happiest days were when Stubbe took him home for the weekend, bought him ice cream, and let him sleep with him in bed. Grandfather Stubbe may well have been the only one in his family to show my father any of the special affection that all children require.

Stubbe's daughter, Isabel Johanna, was an only child. Her mother died when she was young and, at seventeen, she married Murrow; he became a streetcar conductor. The couple had two sons; my father was the oldest. The last decades of Murrow and Isabel's life together, they communicated only via handwritten notes, often carried by their youngest son, who was still at home. As far as I know, no one ever told my father what happened to cause his parents to stop speaking to each other. Those were apparently the days when grudges were unending.

When Stubbe was in his eighties, my father was able to reciprocate a bit for Stubbe's early favors. He brought my great-grandfather Stubbe dinners that my mother cooked and insisted on giving him a free hotel apartment. I am now the only person in my family who remembers Stubbe—he died when I was small. I couldn't have been more than five or six when Stubbe took me for exciting after-dark, after-dinner walks along Trent Avenue to pick up cigars or

chewing tobacco (I don't know which, and maybe both). A happy man, Stubbe taught me to dance and sing "Ach, du lieber Augustin." We sang it together.

Although our father seldom hit us, our mother always went into shock, crying, whenever he erupted. Her own father, William, had been invariably appreciative and caring of all his children.

I inherited my father's temper. When he lost his, instead of running away, I went into attack mode, screaming. Once, as my admiring younger sisters tell me, I stomped all over his new felt hat.

As a young man, my father was gruffly intolerant of his children's childish behaviors. But he wasn't anti-social and always had a goodly number of male friends. My favorite, and my mother's favorite as well, was Claude Owen. He was at least a decade older than my father and, at a time when flying was quite a heroic and glamorous pursuit, he was one of the first US Air Corps pilots. I understand that Claude's first wife, a beautiful woman, became an addict, and died horribly. Claude, on the other hand, neither drank nor smoked. He was a sweet man, and when my parents were having a party, he would sneak into my bedroom with plates of whatever they were eating and tell me stories. The times that my father lost his temper, I remember Claude putting his arm around my shoulders and advising John, as he called him, to relax, calm down. How well I remember that arm! I wanted to grow up and marry Claude, but, when I was ten, he married a social worker named Myrtle. The reassurance of that arm is the reason that I decided I didn't want to get angry over nothing, like my father, but to become cool and comfortable like Claude instead. And I did.

My father was usually quite loyal to my mother. Indeed, I consider his smartest move in life was to marry her. She adored him. She said he had the bluest eyes and that she liked the way he looked, always so clean.

But there were several occasions that I know of—and undoubtedly more—when temptation overrode my father's good judgment and he succumbed to the allures of another woman. Mother always threatened to leave him. Once, I remember, we were living in an inner-city house, nine or so blocks away from the hotel. My father was on one side of the lawn, pacing, and my sisters and I

were on the other side. I explained to them, with confidence, that our mother and baby brother would be back. I knew her well enough to know she would never abandon any of her children.

Mother came back, of course, and her price to remain was a move from our old and drafty cold-in-winter, hot-in-summer house into one newly built, although small, in the distant suburbs. Our mother's sorrows, it seems, were often of a significant benefit for her family.

In the meantime, she developed an ulcer, owing, she said, to the glass of milk, or something else messy, that invariably tipped over whenever our father joined us for dinner. Most evenings, however, he called to say he was busy at the hotel and couldn't be home until later. Then, instead of the dining room, we ate in the kitchen, near the warmth of the fire. For dessert, Mother would fry sliced potatoes on the cast iron stove and I would salt them. Sometimes we would sing; that amused the baby. Dinner without our father was the best.

Five years later, when I was a teenager working at the hotel desk, I saw the next temptation. My father pointed her out. Didn't I think she was lovely? No. I thought she looked artificial and unreal with her matching yellow coat, hat, accessories, and pretentious manner. This time Mother was prepared. She had been looking at larger houses in the South End for several years, and the choice was down to two. She and I discussed them. I opted for the one with four bedrooms that was on a corner near the trees and tiny lake of beautiful Manito Park.

We moved there in the summer. But I well remember that on Christmas Eve our mother was still in recovery mode. After nine, when Joan, Nancy, John, and Mary Marceline (Anne) were all in bed, my mother, obviously depressed, sat on the sofa, crocheting. She didn't want to talk. At fifteen, I wasn't experienced enough to know how to console her. So I did the Christmas wrapping, the stockings, the tree, the decorations by myself.

Dad always thought ahead. He knew his management job at the hotel was increasingly at risk as his loyal employer, Mrs. Ankeny, became increasingly senile. Her descendants had an entirely different set of expectations and plans; indeed, years later, they would turn what was left of the original hotel into an

oversized motel. After studying law at Gonzaga, Dad took and passed the bar exam. A few years later, the five-story Ridpath Hotel burned down. By then I was married and had an infant to care for and lived more than a mile away. But I could watch it burn; the flames seemed to be eating up my magical once-upon-a-time childhood. The fire was visible from all over the city.

Despite his advanced degree, the hotel had been my father's life, if not his identity, and he began to drink; that's what people did in those days, good days and bad—drink. Mother got a job as a clerk selling jewelry at The Crescent department store; she was dynamite at sales, and several departments wanted her. After renting the Manito house to another family, my parents moved into a big apartment complex with their two youngest children and became the managers. A year or so later, one of my father's many friends tired of his drinking and encouraged Dad to get a job as the lawyer for a bank.

As a hotel manager, Dad had made the owners money. As a bank employee, he lost some of his imaginative, innovator self and became more conventional. Although, on occasion, his associates struck him as a bit naïve, he loved the financial security. No longer did my father party by himself. The bank get-togethers included my mother, who now had a meaningful role in her husband's social life. They moved back into their Manito home. When I visited, I would often catch my father humming the song "Lemon Tree" by Trini Lopez and suspect that Dad was remembering his time as a hotel manager and his lemon tree affairs. "Lemon tree, very pretty, and the lemon flower is sweet,/ But the fruit of the lemon is impossible to eat."

Father was never happier or better company than when he was traveling. His joyous passport picture says it all. He could spend the entire day walking by himself, block after block, around an unfamiliar city. He loved the changes of the twentieth century, the increase in mechanization, technology, the growing number of skyscrapers, and saw these changes as unqualified evidence of civic improvement.

He and my mother visited me in New Jersey, Seattle, Portland, and often when I lived in San Francisco; by then, several of Dad's boyhood friends lived in California, and they would join us. My parents flew to Hawai'i to see my sister

Nancy. Later, when Nan was living in Oxford, Dad visited her again, and then took her on a tour of London. For my sister Joan, he purchased a one-way, first class ticket on the *SS United States* to Europe; the remainder of Joan's trip around the world consisted of tedious months on tramp steamers. When my youngest sister, Anne, found working in Paris as an expat next to impossible, Dad happily financed her four-year stay there. When Mother put an end to this last largesse, before escorting Anne home he took her—Anne was always his favorite—on an extended European excursion. He was a delight when he was traveling, and we all treasure those memories. After he retired, he wanted to buy or rent a motor home and see North America. But that didn't interest my mother.

Instead, upon retiring, our father spent hours in his basement office, writing wills, addressing legal matters for friends, and putting money into investments for his children's future.

Then, in 1980, Mt. St. Helens blew up. The wind scattered the ash north and diagonally across Washington State. In Spokane, the ash was thick, unhealthy, more than a foot deep in the streets, and hard to get rid of. Many of the elderly left, including my parents, who moved to Seattle, where most of their children worked and lived.

The question that my sisters and I have often discussed is why our father was so insecure when he was young. Why terrify your children? He must have known that that was what he was doing. The easy answer is that his own father treated him that way, so that was the way he had learned.

I also doubt that his mother, our Grandmother Belle, showed him much affection. When I stayed at her house on occasional weekends, I could never get her to talk. All she ever said, that I remember, was to go down the block and play with the neighbor children. I felt like she couldn't see me. She wasn't into touching, either. She never kissed me good night or tucked me in. At my request, she would, however, play the little music box on the guest room dresser.

But this is all very secondhand, and, other than the fear of failing to provide for his many children, the reason for my father's youthful insecurity is still in question.

Grown Children

Here on my desk I have a recent shot of my children, both grown, wearing glasses, and looking mildly amused, a head of gray hair on my son, who is the younger, and my daughter with her short two-toned bob swept pink. Both beautiful people, fine human beings, marvelous parents. I like this picture because they appear satisfied, content, and able.

Colin and Leslie

I'm grateful to the powers that be that put me on Earth during the twentieth and twenty-first century. I can't say my life has been perfect, but I wouldn't have done well in a place or an an earlier time on this planet when a woman couldn't vote, work beside or challenge a man, speak her own mind, or get an education—or, as a wife or daughter required by law to unquestioning obedience. For many previous centuries in Europe, a woman like me, an uppity woman, was sent to a Christian convent for correction.

Because I believed it important, I tried to teach my children to think for themselves, question authority, and to find their own bliss à la Joseph Campbell. This has made them, young and old, always interesting company.

My daughter was born two days before I turned twenty-one, when I was hardly more than a child myself. When this unbelievably fragile being arrived at noon on Christmas day, I panicked. How would I keep her safe? Or alive? How to help her grow? The most important job that I would ever have came without written instructions. Bleeding desperation from every pore, I bought a textbook by the child psychologists Gesell and Ilg, *Infant and Child in the Culture of Today*, and then felt blessed with luck when Leslie hit the targets for crawling, teething, walking.

At the same time, by contributing to the world's population before correcting, or at least easing in some fashion, any of the world's problems, I felt like I had done things in reverse. I considered baby Leslie an uninformed but perfect being who deserved better than the mundane and ordinary. This kind of thinking left me with choices. Should I train her to accommodate and fit into our flawed society? Should I encourage her to defy convention and become a revolutionary?

Despite my reservations and because my first child didn't appear damaged by my own inexperience, I was more relaxed and confident with my second. But children make one vulnerable to so much, so many world events, frightening politics, uncontrollable crime rates, the changing seasons, neighborhoods, and schools. Whatever can or might affect one's children, now and in the future, had a sudden painful relevance.

Each advancing stage of my children's lives brought new and unfamiliar problems, and I tried to assume a confident demeanor. But, in truth, I was hounded by terror.

No more. Now Leslie and Colin are grown. They have met adversity, heartbreak, raised children of their own, made their own important choices, and survived. As peers and confidants, we share the same, or similar, memories. We exchange accumulated wisdoms.

Colin and his wife Denise

Like those before us, we are part of an eternal human chain that goes back through uncounted generations. They are my rocks, the kind I can lean on. They are my happiness, the kind I can count on. They are my gifts to the world and they mean the world to me.

Work, Jobs, Hopes

By tradition, to do well in America is to succeed at work, and for a great many people, it is primarily what they do at work that gives their life some measure of significance. The question we often direct to strangers—"What do you do?"—labels them in some fashion and suggests something about a person's social status. I know I felt suddenly more sophisticated than my high school friends—not that I was—when, at fifteen, I began working at the hotel my father managed. I spent nearly all the money I earned on clothes purchased at Rusans, a downtown Spokane store, most of which were in terrible taste. I remember one shiny white satin trench coat that I hoped might make me look like Lauren Bacall. Mistakes are one way a teenager learns.

In the past, the man of the house was the family's designated breadwinner, and earning income was associated with manhood. My father ardently believed Horatio Alger's "rags to riches" stories in which success was achieved through honesty, good character, and, of course, hard work. For him, this set of Spartan values proved effective; shortly after being hired as the hotel desk clerk, my ambitious father had been promoted to hotel manager.

Not everyone is so lucky or adaptable. Pamela, my masseuse, had a father whom she cherished. Several years ago, at sixty-four, he could no longer work. Even though there are now nearly as many women as men in the American workforce and most households require two incomes, her father, feeling of no further earthly use, became depressed and killed himself.

For those so dependent on identity through work, a future of fewer jobs, or no jobs, could be catastrophic. Many years ago, the author Kurt Vonnegut foresaw this as a possibility. In his first book, *Player Piano*, machines run by a technical elite do all the work, and most of the population face a meaningless and hopeless existence.

Are we, too, nearing a job shortage? At this writing, the five most valuable American companies, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Facebook, and Alphabet (Google), employ only a few workers relative to those formerly employed during the heyday of manufacturing. Robots and automation are unbeatable at any work that is predictable and repetitious. Since many of the old jobs were quite repetitious, jobs of this kind may soon no longer exist. My nephew Brandon manufactures boats and parts for boats. He has four to six employees and says that his computer-controlled machines have been critical, enabling him to take on jobs he could never have considered without them. They can produce parts more efficiently than by hand, at a higher throughput and higher level of accuracy.

In the more technological future, our value system with respect to work will certainly need adjusting. My father was very critical of his brother, who could never hold a job longer than a month and depended on handouts from their mother. I never knew my presumably incompetent uncle very well—he died young—but I have known several delightful people who were good at a great many things, but not at keeping jobs.

My experience with this kind of frivolity began as a child in the 1930s. As I have mentioned, Lina K. Litchfield lived one floor below my family in the Ridpath Hotel. Her husband did everything my parents considered work while she, raised as the companion to one of P. T. Barnum's daughters, liked to waltz, tell amusing stories, and make us laugh. I loved visiting Lina and got upset whenever my parents made fun of no-work Lina. But I knew, like everyone else, that they adored her.

The days may be gone of hucksters and showmen like Phineas Taylor Barnum, as well as women raised to waltz and entertain. But as automation results in fewer jobs, we will need to adjust our cultural myth that hard work invariably brings success and people who don't work, as well as those who work but who can't make ends meet, are lazy. Once, freedom to work a forty-hour week was the American recipe for success. But in the future, this, as well as our faith in unending consumption, is bound to lose credibility. Opportunity depends on job availability, and the opportunity to work may not always be there.

Some work is paid, some work is not; it is the former that is essential to a person's daily needs, housing, food, cell phones, and the many creature comforts: but it is the latter that may, as jobs become scarce, need more emphasis.

All my long life, I was never faced with a job shortage. From the 1940s through the 1980s, jobs were plentiful and easy to get. In those less cutthroat business days, I remember stopping by an attractive bookstore and thinking, as a book lover, I might like to work there. When I asked the manager for a job, he agreeably took down my phone number and said that although he hadn't thought he needed more help, he would, if he could, fit me into their store schedule.

A job can be a passion, something to tolerate, or, of course, to hate. Studs Terkel, the author of *Working*, written nearly fifty years ago in a much slower economy, found considerable ambiguity of attitude toward The Job. For even the lowliest laborers, work was a search, sometimes successful, sometimes not, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as a salary, for astonishment rather than torpor. To quote an editor whom Terkel interviewed, "I think most of us are looking for a calling, not a job. Most of us, like the assembly line worker, have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people."

What impressed Terkel the most was the compelling size of the dreams and hopes of everyone he interviewed. The time from birth to death is short. Perhaps because paid work consumes so many hours, people yearn to discover a bit of existential meaning in their day-to-day actions, and/or to believe that they are providing something of lasting benefit to future generations.

I come from a large family of five children, and our adorable capitalistic mother made us feel that there would never be anything we might want to do that we shouldn't try to do. During that period, the middle class was growing in an explosive fashion and career options were abundant. This began to change in the late 1980s as the cost of living escalated and, like a great many other Americans, I had some difficulty meeting my daily needs. As I was then in my sixties, I felt incredibly lucky when, like a happy-ever-after ending, my Social Security kicked in.

The world my youngest granddaughter will live in is bound to be quite different from mine. Shanley recently graduated from college with a major in history, a minor in economics. Like so many young people in their early twenties, she is in process of discovering what she might want to try in the future; for the moment, immigration policy and refugee resettlement intrigue her. She has considerable charm, abundant curiosity, but limited job experience. For income she is currently editing minor number errors for a prestigious accounting firm, a job that is destined, she gleefully admits, for automation. One thing that her seven-hour day in a cubicle working with figures has taught her is that she wants to work with people.

Shanley

I didn't find what I might love to do until my children were half-grown and I was thirty-seven. In those days, my reason for returning to the university was not primarily financial, as it is today for so many young people, but to become a well-rounded and somewhat intelligent person. School was incredibly cheap. After earning a BS in psychology, I continued to cherry-pick classes until I

enrolled in one taught by the eminent anthropologist Melford Spiro. I found graduate school exciting, rich with new ideas, new kinds of learning, and the feeling that we were all, students and professors, agreeable partners in the research dance. Decades later, I am still fascinated by the discoveries in human behavior and any ancient Homo sapiens fossil find. Besides becoming my chosen career, anthropology, the study of human beings, gave my life design and purpose.

My choice, however, wasn't entirely practical from the standpoint of income. Fieldwork, firsthand research into how a people think and live, is part of anthropology, and I couldn't get a research grant. Having become intrigued by the Machvaia Roma, I chose to sponsor my own fieldwork. Then, during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, to pay for school and my fieldwork study, I worked more than thirty jobs, among them cocktail waitress, camera "girl" (when I was in my forties!), librarian, door-to-door saleswoman, research advisor for a Hollywood movie and again for a BBC movie, AFDC social worker, and secretary. My longest employment was my three years as a part-time college instructor at six schools. I wouldn't say that the large number of jobs wasted my time or that any were more than a passing identity—I had already identified with the people I was studying. Each job taught me something about the world and about myself, what I might like, what I might be good at, etc. One thing I learned was that I enjoy meeting people and discovering how things work.

I cherish the experience of a variety of jobs; they were a rich opportunity for a writer. As automation cuts down on the number available, will the workers of the future have similar options? The authors of most of the articles and books I have recently read think not. But, for now, my gorgeous New York grandson manages to survive. Acting is Marcus's work identity and his passion. He is continually auditioning and has acted on stage, television, movies, in soaps, mysteries, commercials—work that is occasionally blessed by a windfall of money. He provides a regular income for his family of three, however, by doing part-time accounting for a lawyer and a challenging three-nights-a-week DJ job that keeps him up until four in the morning.

Elicia, my other granddaughter (now fifty), is the closest to a Renaissance woman of anyone I have ever known. I think Elicia can do anything. If I find

something difficult on my agenda, I call Elicia. From early childhood, she was fiercely determined to succeed as a ballerina. A scout for the New York City Ballet saw her potential and gave her a scholarship to the School of American Ballet. But, at sixteen, alone in Manhattan and living on a tiny budget, Elicia could only afford housing in shared apartments with quite unpleasant people. She hadn't even enough money for the necessary toe shoes and wore other student's throwaways. After a year or so, she quit school and worked. She worked at flower arranging, learned to do professional face makeup, got married, and then went back to dancing.

Elicia has been a professional ballerina with Eglevsky Ballet, Off Center Ballet, and American Repertory Ballet. She has done floral design for restaurants and ritual events, been the hair and makeup artist for celebrities, politicians, and actors on dozens of television shoots, and has modeled for beauty and fashion magazines, advertising campaigns, and acted in soap operas. She has worked at five-star hotels doing personal shopping and image makeover for the guests, been the interior designer for both residential and commercial properties in New York City, produced photo shoots, gallery shows, and done extensive marketing, as well as managed a photography studio and worked as the graphic designer of books, magazine ads, invitations, posters. Her latest publication as a writer is the 2018 book *One Woman*.

Articulate Elicia explains her work as follows. She says, "Beauty is the thread on which everything I do is strung. Beauty awakens the heart. It can be reflected in a living space, a makeover, discovered in a poem, or revealed in the expression of an art form. Through my professional and personal work, I try to spark an awareness of the miraculous within us and around us."

Elicia

As my children are both of advanced years, they don't have to work for income. Yet I wondered how satisfied they have been with their work, now and in the past. For years, my daughter Leslie, who, like her daughter Elicia, has a thing for beauty, was in clothing and jewelry sales; she still makes stunning jewelry. At sixteen, she intended to be a NYC ballerina; ballet is not so much a job as a total lifestyle. When that didn't work out, she taught ballet at Seattle's Madrona Park. Since then, ballet has been replaced by her devotion to daily exercise classes at the local gym and, lately, painting a landscape of silvery trees on an inside wall of her house.

My son Colin says his feeling about work is largely defined by the rate at which he is learning something new. During the early days when computers were giant machines, the university proved an ideal learning environment; in the space of seven years, he worked as a medical technician, research technician, statistician, and programmer. Computers became his area of expertise and, in the techie fashion of the day, he moved from one company to another. Upon retiring several years ago from Microsoft, he immediately began teaching high school STEM classes and, at the same time, earning the required instructor credits. He loves teaching and he is good at it. Techies are particularly accomplished at turning their interests and their hobbies into a successful business; indeed, that is how Microsoft started. But Colin isn't interested in becoming a tycoon; he is trying to help the young get the expertise that is needed in our economy, a digital economy currently part of every business and so many lives. His teaching job pays a salary, of course, but Colin isn't in it for the money. He wants to be of use and calls teaching his retirement hobby.

So much of the most valuable work that we do is unpaid. Several years ago Colin made me a beautiful and sturdy bed, an inlaid box, and a coffee table with picturesque knots. He is a natural at handcrafting and, when younger, would have liked to have earned his living working in his shop. But he found, as my daughter did with her jewelry, that creating was fun, whereas making more of the same was not. As her jewelry attracted customers, Leslie realized that, to have a successful business, she would need to send samples overseas to be manufactured in quantity. Colin would have had to do something similar. But it

is the feel and smell of wood that enchants him, and the process of designing enlists his passion. I enjoy his gifts. I am thrilled to wear Leslie's lovely jewelry. Nothing I might buy could ever be as precious as the things that my son and daughter make for me by hand.

When I called my son to tell him how I enjoyed the furniture he had made, how his work made me feel well loved, I embarrassed him. Downplaying his efforts, he pointed out that a century or so ago, most of the stuff we needed, like household furniture, was handmade. These days, however, the handmade is the exception, and even considered an art, and it is the scarcity that makes it dearly precious.

Colin's woodworking efforts, like those of my French grandfather's, were purposed by practicality and pleasure, rather than money. In the latter part of his life, after a day of paid work, the admirable William carved a variety of pieces from the dining table that his mother, my great-grandmother Marceline, brought by train from Minnesota. The table was made of the finest wood and large enough for all Marceline's thirteen children to sit around. He made each of his grandsons and great-grandsons a violin of that wood—violins had provided the music at the dances of his youth—and every grandchild, male and female, a round and intricately inlaid side table. I have lost mine. Too much frenetic Gypsy traveling.

My youngest granddaughter Shanley is just starting out in a job market with a quite uncertain future. I am hoping that she finds something to do that will pay her money and simultaneously enlist her passion. Two or more passions might be better; indeed, a whole list of them might provide the Yellow Brick Road to a productive and compelling future. In these challenging times, it would certainly be wise to have a backlog of interests that could be employed for income, for a hobby, something to learn, to read and get excited about, a calling to pursue with joy.

Art has always seemed to me the most magical of pursuits, and I believe we are all born with some ability in that direction. Nature is also an abiding pleasure. Parks and wild places with trees that have grown to a considerable height and for a considerable time have much to teach us about what truly matters. My friend David finds the study and sketching of clouds to be of a

similar benefit. Reading stories to children, playing music to elders with dementia, being of service to others, these are a few other options. Medical scientists have predicted that many if not most of today's youth will live at least a hundred years in reasonably good health, a span that, not too long ago, would have encompassed several lifetimes. What to do with all that time? Work. Some manner of work.

Todoro Returns

The love of my life, the shape of my heart, has called me unexpectedly. At the sound of his voice, my fear—or perhaps it was pain—keyed into thrill and excitement. We are talking, catching up, recalling old times, new times. One thing of interest I learn is that his girlfriend of twenty-some years has left him.

My love is a Rom, and Roma believe living alone is a sin requiring quick redemption. Knowing this, to stem the press of urgency, I point out I have been alone for decades. "You were always married," I say, "and the head of a growing family." I try to make it clear I am no longer interested in anything like sex and romance. I warn him about thinning hair, blepharitis, skin-tags, everything that comes to mind without referring to my health history notebook. I am almost ninety and no longer run, I say. He is almost eighty and he doesn't run either. He, too, has some difficulty walking; we could hang onto each other, he laughs. I mail him a recent selfie and several snapshots of my family. He thinks my daughter is me. I don't really mind that he never bothers to send me a current picture. I doubt anything could beat the hot studio shot of him at thirty, currently displayed on my bookcase shelf.

This is the man for whom, during the blissed-out days of Peace and Love, I neglected my children, my living standard, and any practical plan for the future. During the intervening years I have treasured the handwritten notes of "love" and "hope" he wrote the day he was waiting at my apartment, prepared to run away, and I, unaware, was at a seminar. This is the man—I call him Stevo in *Lola's Luck: My Life among the California Gypsies*—whom I followed to California, idolized, dreamt about, and never bothered to replace.

Younger, I wanted to be with him always and every moment. At the same time, I knew that, as a Rom, he was expected to raise his children and get them married to other Machvaia. Indeed, that was the only role he knew. Since then I have realized how fortunate I am that we were never married. I can't say that, at

the time, I recognized his exodus from San Francisco in several aging cars packed with his extensive family as my good fortune. But after several dreadful years of adjustment, my life took another direction, a very beneficial direction. I became a writer. I became a single person. I became the woman I was always meant to be. Now, having recovered my supportive ties to family and made new and quite wonderful friends, even a fascinating male friend, I was, until he called, content.

He calls from San Jose—I am back in Seattle—and the miles don't begin to describe the distance between us. Yes, he likes "NCIS," too, a show that airs on Tuesdays. Other than one television program, however, and our notorious past, we find we have little in common. Even our values are at war. I am an exercise, organic and vegetarian health freak; he seldom walks if he can drive and eats whatever dinner he can afford to buy at the Dollar Store. I live in the condo my sister Joan left me, read *The New York Times*, feel part of the world and the world's people, and never fail to vote. He thinks all politicians are shysters and brags that he never votes. Learning he has had the wit to quit drinking and smoking, immediately impressed, I ask him how he managed. He says he got too sick to smoke and that prostate cancer cut down on his drinking. I suspect these choices were also influenced by the health concerns of his American girlfriend.

My life is undeniably wonderful, and his is truly bad. Two of his daughters are married to criminals, his oldest son died last year of cancer, and cancer seems to be claiming one after another of his family. Remembering the smartest, kindest one, the son who always held the baby, I ask about my favorite. "A lost cause," Todoro says. "He won't have anything to do with the rest of us. Anyhow, he's always busy running his wife to the doctor." Why? "Cancer."

Sensing my growing dismay at his family situation, he tells me about a time he tried to escape the terrible cards tradition had dealt him. But when he applied at the local recruiting office, since he was only seventeen at the time and already married with two children, the Marines wouldn't let him enlist.

Encouraged to recall the more agreeable highlights of his life, he remembers the evenings he and his Roma buddies, dressed in their best suits and ties, would waltz into the local bar en masse—like a glamorous Sinatra Rat Pack—and the women would flirt with them. Because I am too old to make nice and pretend, I tell him straight out that the two of us have been incredibly lucky

we never ran away, were never together more than a few days at a time, and how I can't stand drinking. Since his people have begun "going American," as they put it, drink has killed too many of the Machvaia Roma. I assure him that his next significant other, a redhead who ran a bar, was a much better choice than I would have been, and particularly during his Rat Pack party days.

The man who calls is short of hope; he likely called me out of desperation. Although still doing his best to buy and sell used cars, he seldom has the money to buy one. I cashed in some of the gold jewelry I never wear and sent him the proceeds, but that doesn't seem to help. If he loses his subsidized apartment, he will have no choice but to move in with one of his children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren, most of whom have married lower-status Gypsies and some of whom have joined the saddest of the Roma poor, traveling constantly, living by chicanery and guile, a threat to others and themselves. When he talks about visiting me, I consider the explosive size of this four-generation family. Todoro One eventually had nine children; Todoro Two is shackled to a desperate and needy army. He wants to get away and promises not to tell any of his relatives about relocating to Seattle. But I know from hard experience that his family will always find him. With a start, I realize that their arrival could threaten the sanctity, safety, and stability of my own family.

Once the world seemed Technicolor and new, as if we had speed-dialed back to the beginning of time. Crazily in love, he and I were like giant greedy infants, perpetually desperate for the other's touch. Waking up each morning to another glorious day in which he also existed and drew breath, I became fearless, a mover of mountains, a force majeure. But now the person I was seems as dated as the Red Scare of the 1950s, and my affaire d'amour seems totally, seismically nuts.

What Is Luck?

I have always felt blessed, fortunate, and lucky, but why? Am I a perpetually optimistic person who likes to look, or chooses to look, on the bright side? Is it an attitude? A pretense?

Maybe it was because I read so much, when young, about the way life had been in earlier times. Dickens is fun to read in a comfortable chair. But who would want to be a character in one of Dickens's stories of 1800s London? And yet, in my early teens, like so many of that age, I was more or less lost in the macabre—and particularly in Poe's poems and tales. I liked and memorized parts of Milton's *On His Blindness*, as well as Longfellow's wistful *Evangeline*: "This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,/ Bearded with moss and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight, . . ."

By the time I was fifteen, we were engaged in World War II, and the news kept me well aware of how lucky I was to be living on a continent that was never strafed or bombed. Nor was I ever threatened during the many later wars that have occurred during my life span. . . the Korean War, Vietnam, Desert Shield, the Cuban missile crisis, Cold War, the Gulf War, Somalia, Afghanistan, to name just a few. (If we had had a female president, would we have been likely to go to war so often?)

Also, I am grateful that I have lived in a time of vaccines and amazing medical discoveries. Without the gift of amoxicillin, I would not be here.

Also, being white, an American citizen, and born into a financially comfortable family was considerable luck. I was reminded of this when I recently read about the neglect and deaths of so many poor Alabama black women from cervical cancer. (This certainly must change.) Back in midlife, I bled a bit one evening, and Todoro immediately drove me to the University Hospital, less than a mile away. A few days later, after my operation, the surgeon confided that all the cancer had been removed during the curettage preceding the operation and I

would need no further treatment. I did get hepatitis B from the transfusions accompanying the operation, and the subsequent illness affected my studies. But hardly anything is entirely perfect.

More than anyone or anything else, however, my fantastic mother, Mimi/Myrtle, made me feel like a person of good luck. My sisters and I cannot imagine how our mother could have been any better. She was our ideal. She encouraged us to believe that we were, each of us, exceptional and worthy, and that the adult world was full of unexplored and wondrous opportunity, like ripe fruit waiting to be picked. Although she died more than a decade ago, we still feel her infinite love and backing.

In my first book, *Lola's Luck*, I wrote that I had always been lucky. A reviewer of my book was irritated by that statement, and I suspect she found it smug. But what did I mean when I wrote that I was lucky?

My initial memory of good luck was when I was very young, age eight or nine. My luck arrived in a sampler box of Whitman's chocolates. How thrilling and adult it seemed to read each item's description—nougat, nut, caramel—on the inside of the cover and then, after a bit of consideration, to choose precisely the taste desired. The chocolates were a gift from my father, and the first time I remember him expressing the least approval of any of his children. He had borrowed a car to drive me to my piano recital, where I played, without making a mistake, a simple Mozart waltz. My dress had been resewn by my mother from my teacher's exquisite French lace wedding dress, and the adults at the recital assured me that it was lovely. On our way home, my father stopped at a drugstore and returned with a two-layer box of chocolates, placing it on my lap. "For me?" I asked, puzzled. In the Great Depression, our growing family didn't invest in nonessentials. My father frowned and nodded. As I had considerable difficulty believing that such largesse could be mine, I studied his expression. Now that I am older and wiser, I wish I had kissed and thanked him to show how pleased I was with the purchase. The poor man didn't know how to be affectionate.

To me, good luck is often a feeling, a storybook kind of enchantment rather like the happily-ever-after tales my mother read to me when I was young.

In the face of difficult times, my first inclination is to focus on the positive. Even after I moved to San Francisco, an unfamiliar city, far from family, friends, and job prospects, a reassuring sense of psychic connection with the many other human beings there as yet unmet and uncherished kept me from feeling entirely alone.

That connection to others may have begun when I was the only child in a hotel of several hundred and adored for reasons that I couldn't fathom. Whenever I walked through the lobby, oceans of love and admiration poured my way. This piled up the sense of affectionate obligation, and in return, whenever asked, I would cheerily sing and dance in the manner of Shirley Temple, the extremely popular Hollywood child actor of the time. That bounty of human warmth, I suspect, helped create in me a feeling of trust and a caring for others.

Is that nearly universal affection I experienced as a child the reason I have found so many people to love who were not part of my immediate family? For several decades, my friends were mostly Gypsies. Initially there was my beloved Lola, then there were others—heartthrob Todoro, my dear Anastasia, loyal Katy who shared her hard-won home whenever I lost mine, the ambitious couple Theo and Dolly, my Machvanka sister Zoni, and Little Sonia. I still have the Machvano artist Boyo's entire collection of framed and painted pictures in my condo storage area; instead of drinking and gambling like the other Roma men, he painted. He sent all his work to me when the family breadwinner, his glamorous wife Fatima, died and he had to move, with his two middle-aged sons, into a tiny one-bedroom apartment.

Just last week, I had a special feeling of good luck during a visit to the Hearthstone Retirement Home where my two younger sisters, who have dementia, now live. My brother and I were about to drive away when they came through the automatic front door, arm in arm and beaming, and heading for a walk. I realized that as their memories fade, they will have a sense of family, the comfort and company of each other, a stroke of unbelievable luck that nearly didn't happen.

Several months earlier, Nancy had been booked into another retirement home. She had chosen her third-floor studio with a view and we had given them

$20,000 as a beginning payment. Despite being assured that the Hearthstone was the better place to go for long-term care, Nancy was adamant about staying close to her son. The retirement home she had chosen was only two blocks from his little house.

Two days before the move, I got an emergency call from the Hearthstone. They had an unexpected opening next door to sister Anne. Nancy had called them that morning and said she would like to take it. Did she get confused and think she was calling the other retirement home? No point in asking. She won't remember.

I have been especially lucky when traveling. I got to see Paris and much of the south of France. I have also lived for some time in San Francisco, New Jersey, and New York. During my decade in Mill Valley, I spent many a happy Sunday morning at Spirit Rock, a meditative place a short walk from the ocean. I never managed to visit Bali, a place that has always intrigued me. But our little family of four did wind up at a motel on the Truro shore in Massachusetts during a thrilling storm. New to the East Coast and ignorant of the storm system warnings, on our drive to Cape Cod, we found it curious that all the other cars were going in the opposite direction. Without a car radio, we had no idea that a hurricane was headed our way. As it turned out, Boston got the main thrust while we played board games, ate cold sandwiches, piled on warm covers, shuddered at the thunder, and, curiously, had a glorious and unforgettable time.

When I was married, our little family of four often thriftily camped. Camping was my husband's idea, and one of his best. We spent days and sometimes longer in many wonderful national and state parks. Our favorite trip was to Canyon de Chelly and the Anasazi ruins in Arizona, where, at night, we pitched our little tent away from city lights and the sky, horizon to horizon, became a panorama of glittering stars. Crossing Navaho territory, we gave a lift to a Navaho man who didn't have anything to say and an adorable Hopi woman who never stopped talking. As she left us, she said that she was going to the hospital to see her husband who had fallen off the mesa the night before. We never saw her again. But I still feel our connection.

During the blissful days of Peace and Love, I was a student at the University of Washington, as were my sisters, and we all lived in the University District. I consider it fortunate that for me, my son, my sisters, and our neighborhood of hippies, it was a time of sharing food, housing, music, hearts. I was seeing Todoro. Joan married the artist Charlie, and Nancy, the Irish poet Patrick. The sixties were a time of significant affections.

But my good luck moments began long before midife. I have often felt lucky with my children, Leslie and Colin. When they were small, there were moments of spine-chilling elation. One of the first was when my five-year-old daughter Leslie was enlisted in a pioneering children's class in Creative Dramatics at UW. She turned, twisted, and then magically transformed, her perfect little arms stretching high above her head, into a rose. To me, her adoring mother, she became the breathtaking spirit of a rose.

The next such moment was when my son Colin was, perhaps, six. He and several of his schoolmates were taking riding lessons at Watchung Stables in New Jersey. During his first class, however, the big horse he was on knelt down and tried to roll on top of him. An agonized scream caught in my throat as Colin slipped under the fence and away. How fortunate I felt, and how thankfully relieved, to find that I had a quick-to-act, rapidly moving son!

Because when I lived in California I had no access to the Seattle newspapers, I didn't learn until years later about my adult son's good luck—which, of course, is my good luck. His quick-thinking, innovator side may have helped save him and his two friends from being killed in Denali Park. Chased out of their camp and exhausted from running, the three climbed to the top of a hill and, for more than an hour, waved whatever they could find lying about on the ground, making as much noise as they could while the grizzly bear that had chased them—later identified as a man-killer—kept circling around them. Was their luck the growing thought in the grizzly's head that easier prey lay in another direction?

Art can have a significant power, and sometime earlier, in the late fifties, I felt unbelievably lucky to be in one of the first audiences to see Balanchine's surreal,

unforgettable, and code-breaking dance *Agon* as performed by Arthur Mitchell and Diana Adams at Manhattan's City Center. Also, at so many beautiful New York City performances thereafter, I was lucky enough to be present at the moment when the dancer metamorphosed onto another level of being and the audience shared the dancer's transposed passion. These are out-of-this-world moments that truly evade description.

It was not by accident that when my daughter Leslie was 16, she went to Juilliard to apply at Balanchine's American School of Ballet. When Leslie's daughter, Elicia, was 15, she went to the same school on a scholarship. For our family, the New York City Ballet is the paramount company.

The head of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, attributes his financial success, his rise from the owner of a company that sold books to one that now sells practically everything that can be sold, to luck. I consider it our family's good luck, and particularly mine, that, out of a field of four applicants, my husband was chosen and sent from Seattle to AT&T's home office in New York. But was it luck? Or was it because Roger worked hard and well, and his boss liked him? Or was it because, when we were being interviewed for the post as a couple, having subscribed to *The New Yorker* for years, I was somewhat conversant about Manhattan life? Possibly all of these, plus many more. Perhaps the cosmopolitan New Yorker who made the decision liked the fact that my husband Roger had been raised in Ohio, rather than the wild and wooly West. Considering the unknown circumstances, personal bias, and environmental influences involved, whatever we do and whatever happens to us is likely to include a significant element of chance.

According to *The Free Dictionary*, luck is "that which fate brings along." Fate, as a noun, is "the development of events beyond a person's control, regarded as determined by a supernatural power." Apparently, in English, the concept of luck has an accidental, unplanned element and is intended to explain positive, negative, improbable, and mysterious events.

So many of the people I know seldom consider their decisions, or the decisions of others, as involving chance, luck, the unknown. They also discount

the influence of their emotions. They like to believe their choices are the result of sound reasoning and a practical mind, which are American's popular cultural values.

Although according to speakers of Romanes, the word *baXt* translates into English as "luck," their notion of *baXt* was not identical to luck in English. When I first began to study the tribe Machvaia, and before they "went American," their *baXt* was really more like *karma*. According to Brittanica.com, in Indian religion and philosophy, the Pali word *kamma* (Sanskrit *karma*) is "the universal causal law by which good or bad actions determine the future modes of an individual's existence." At that time, whatever happened to one of the Machvaia, good or bad, was usually attributed to inherited and unknowable *baXt*, as accumulated during the many past lives of their bloodline. This is not luck as "chance"—the English dictionary explanation. It is luck as earned over centuries by one's ancestors and inbred with mystery. To earn further blessings of good luck, Machvaia were faithful to their ritual observances.

Now that the Machvaia have "gone American," as they say, attention to ritual practice is less likely and luck has become a feeling associated with good and bad omens. I asked Machvano George of Sacramento how this more American practice worked, and he said that when their fortunetelling business fell off, he and his wife Sonya packed their suitcases and went to look for another area in which to live. But the engine in their car died at the Sacramento city limits. They took this as an omen and as their luck's directive to remain.

I can't say I am invariably lucky and, for that matter, who is? Although gambling is often associated with luck, I have never been lucky at gambling. In the 1970s and 1980s, during the Gypsy times of celebration, I spent days in Reno and Las Vegas, idly hanging out while the Machvaia gambled, mostly at the slot machines. To finance my fieldwork, I was living on a shoestring and I had no extra cash. Periodically, a Machvanka would fill my hand with coins, but I never won anything worth mentioning. In truth, gambling has never interested me. I never expect to be lucky at gambling, and I'm not. Perhaps that is because I was never raised, like the Machvaia, to believe in luck's spiritual connections.

I did have a period of depression when I was in my late fifties. But I knew it would end. Having read about depression, I was aware that a romantically

broken heart usually has a time limit. Certainly, making it into my nineties and feeling pretty good, eating well, breathing well, sleeping well, is considerable good luck. Also, as I approach my final years, I have realized that what I wanted most to *be* when I was young, which was fearless and adventurous; what I wanted most to *do*, namely, escape provincial Spokane and visit New York and Paris (although I was too late for Paris in the 1920s); and what I most wanted to *have*—a career, a passionate love affair, two children—all this has happened. I never wanted to be famous, and I am not. I did want to accomplish something meaningful, in terms of improving the life experience of others on our little planet or leaving behind something of lasting significance, which I did. I hoped to have an interesting time as an adult, full of pathos, drama, and comedy, like I read about in books. And I did.

A human life is involved with so many changing factors that it is often impossible to know what may be lucky. It seemed like the end of the world when Todoro was chased out of town. But since then, I have realized how very fortunate I was that Todoro was already married and therefore couldn't marry me. How fortunate, as well, that I married young and had my children young; an emergency operation removed my ovaries in my late twenties. How lucky, as well, that I couldn't get pregnant again when Todoro came along; caring for another growing child would have ended my fieldwork. Despite wanting Todoro desperately, I was never forced to choose between him and the others I loved who were not Roma. And that, although I can't say I knew it at the time, was my good luck.

I am often of two or more minds about matters of significance, a dilemma that seems intrinsic to the human condition. Any choice could be good luck, or bad luck, and often a choice will evolve into both. When describing the differences between humans and animals, Robert Sapolsky writes that one of the most remarkable human qualities is the ability to hold on to two contradictory ideas at once—and to find a way forward. But I wouldn't bet on that being a trait exclusive to humans. It may seem true for humanity at the moment. But the more we understand the nature of animals, the more ways we find they are like ourselves.

Seattle and Traveling

My daughter's husband died in 1999. As Leslie had been married more than thirty years and her grown children both lived in Manhattan, I thought she might be lonely. When I called, her immediate response was, "Come to Seattle. Stay with me." The rent in Mill Valley was increasing, I had been in California during the decades Leslie was raising her children, and this seemed the perfect opportunity to get to know my adult daughter.

Retired from Northwest Airlines and older than Leslie by more than a decade, her husband Frank had been unwell for some time. A well-liked man, a few years earlier, his sister, his aunts, and dozens of his former school buddies, now mature, had arrived from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Canada, and other parts of the States to celebrate Frank's sixty-fifth birthday. Their Shanghai school had specialized in English; the children of Chinese trading families or families that did business in English were the students. When Mao came into power, the world they knew was overturned. Families with money and education became suspect, and were consistently harassed. Frank's mother, an accomplished pianist, was assigned to live and work on a pig farm. Without any future in China, those who could left. As a young man Frank had moved to the States and, years later, he managed to bring his mother. By then, he had two sisters in the States who, like him, were married to Americans.

Frank left Leslie an inheritance of a small apartment on Oahu and four Seattle houses, two of which were rentals and in terrible shape, owing, most likely, to Frank's increasing disability. With his death, my beautiful balletic daughter, who had neither experience nor any particular interest in carpentry and plumbing, began the job of cleaning and fixing up the houses. Her daughter Elicia flew to Seattle to briefly help, and several months later I arrived. Our first years together were marked by arduous physical work with frequent trips to the dump in

Frank's red and aging truck. We made a game of what we called "flinging," throwing the garbage we were dumping as far out on the pile as we could manage. We hired the expert help of a very dear and tall Mexican man from Najarit named Hector. Somewhat physically impaired by neuropathy of my legs and feet, I had to leave the heavy chores to my daughter. I must say she was remarkably able and renovated like a champion. Once, when we were painting, she on the roof and me on the deck, the handyman Hector admiringly pointed out that Leslie was fearless and willing to tackle most anything. But cleaning, painting, and disposing of those houses must have stressed her considerably because, two years after Frank died, she developed a heart irregularity.

Leslie eventually sold most of her freshly repaired real estate, paid off what she owed, and put the remainder into investments. Then she got a part-time job more to her liking . . . at a jewelry store in Old Burien.

After the major house sales, I spent one day of the week shopping with Leslie—shopping was one of her passions—and hours tuned into QVC, the shopping channel. Leslie didn't charge me rent, and my only financial obligation was a portion of the electric bill. I spent most of the money I saved on fine jewelry. Gold was surprisingly cheap. Leslie and I had fun considering the cost, the worth, the appeal of each televised designer, and debating over purchases. After so many years of wearing inexpensive beads, shells, and ivory jewelry—yes, cheap ivory from China!—to the many Roma ritual occasions, I finally acquired what the Machvanki have always truly valued. For them, gold and diamonds were considered security, savings, an indication of social status, and the ideal gift; indeed, they may still be. I no longer went to Machvaia parties. But I did enjoy learning about the history, nature, and value of various stones, and acquiring a glamorous collection. Inspired, perhaps, by the many Machvaia occasions I had been outclassed and outshone, I overdid it and went crazy for jewelry. Acquisition is a self-indulgent trip—and especially for someone whose temperament tends to books and ideas, and who prefers, in the long run, to maintain as little property as possible. Years before, when I was with my Machvaia friends, I had to avoid admiring anything too much or the item would be given; for them, generosity is a basic rule, as well as a primary source of

happiness. I learned from them and, during this past decade, have found it great fun to give away most of what I had collected.

One Christmas, having never been to nearby Victoria, B.C., Leslie and I escaped Seattle and took the rapid Clipper ferry north. We spent several days in Victoria, drinking tea, eating a leisurely breakfast and dinner, shopping, sleeping in, and celebrating our birthdays—Leslie was born on Christmas Day; my birthday is December 27. On the way home we agreed that the time in Victoria had been more like a vacation from Christmas than like Christmas itself.

One August, while I was staying at Leslie's, my generous sister Joan traded her Seattle house for a roomy flat in an ancient thick-walled building with a court in the Marais section of Paris and invited all her sisters—Nancy, Anne, and me—to join her. What a wonderful month! Each morning, we sat around in our nightclothes discussing possible plans for the day, various travel books on our laps. Each evening, after dinner, we walked to the nearby Place des Vosge, the oldest square in Paris, to see what was happening, which was usually music.

Our first week in France, Joan and I visited my friend Michele's summer home, a two-bedroom farmhouse called Le Mas du Temps Perdu in the Camarque Delta region. One morning I opened my bedroom shutters to a field of wild white horses; Camarque horses freely roam the area. After a sociable breakfast, Joan and I would walk to the nearby Pont de Gau ornithological park. The area is swampy and dangerous, and we had to stick to the trail. The park attracted all kinds of birds. Our favorites were the giant flocks of exotic pink flamingoes.

When we returned to Paris, my sister Nancy admitted she would also like to see more of France. After booking a bed and breakfast in Saint-Remy-de-Provence, the artists' town where Michele and her husband had once spent winters, Nancy and I took one of France's excellent fast trains south. Near St. Remy, we spent an entire day exploring a Greek and Roman ruin called Glanum, the site of a BC to AD sacred spring and shrine. Our brochure said that the curved streets were Greek, the straight streets were Roman; following them was an imaginative hoot. While there, I took an endearing picture of Nancy, smiling

and with her arms outstretched, essaying the ancient role of Valetudo, the Goddess of Good Health.

As a young woman, our sister Anne had spent several years in France. She was fluent in French and a great help in Paris, particularly with menus and locations. When we were leaving and on our way to the De Gaulle Airport, Anne had a very French and intimate philosophical discussion with our cabbie. All of us, her sisters, considered that exchange the ideal ending for our sisterly trip.

I was suffering from allergies when my Gypsy friend Barbara Miller died; she died shortly after Leslie's husband Frank died. When I called to explain my absence, Anastasia said her mother Barbara, at 96 (a very rough estimate, as she was born in a camp when birth dates didn't matter), hadn't wanted to die: this was a woman who had been the Roma queen, the boss of San Francisco, and who was accustomed to having her way. For an entire week her six children, their children, and the great-grandchildren were all jammed into one hospital room, loath to go home and miss the Great Woman's departure. Although winter and cold, the window had to be open so Barbara could leave for The Other Side. With no place to get warm, to sleep, the family became exhausted, cranky, and even a little ill from lighting and relighting the necessary candles. A member of the family, Anastasia can't remember who, opened the window even wider and told Barbara that it was time to go.

Those five years with Leslie were a time of too many deaths. But then, such matters are to be expected when one has become quite elderly. People die, one after the other; and that's the way it goes.

Dear Katy died—and because I was taking care of my mother, who had broken her hip, I couldn't fly south. I had called Katy before she went into Intensive Care. But we really didn't talk; I was crying too hard. Katy was followed by her brother, Theo. Perhaps because of the disappointments and failures of his later life, Theo had arranged to be buried in Sacramento, but with Americans, rather than Machvaia.

In 2000, my adored sister Joan died, and several years later, Dolly, Theo's loyal wife; she is buried next to Theo. I don't remember why I didn't go to her

rituals. But I do remember that I flew from Seattle to Los Angeles for Fatima's one-year memorial feast and, getting to the hall from the airport, spent hundreds of dollars on cab fare. Although no longer studying the people, I wanted to be present at their *pomani* (feasts for the Dead One), which seem a much more satisfying way to say goodbye than anything I have experienced in American society. Once consisting of four succeeding rituals, three of which were magnificent, solemn, and costly, they had lost some punch, however, and it was obvious that the fear of ghosts and the Dead Ones had eased. The hundreds who had once been in attendance at such feasts had dwindled to no more than a few extended families. The eerie opening call to "the Sun, the Moon, and the Dead Ones everywhere, all Roma, to attend this table"—a call so evocative of the people's nomadic days—was no more. Machvaia have always been drawn to holidays and get-togethers. A century earlier, shortly after arriving in America, they had cheerily adopted all the American holidays except Halloween; the Fourth of July, somehow, eventually became the day for a picnic on the family grave. But in 1997, for the first time as American Roma, Machvaia celebrated Halloween. They dressed in fantastic and whimsical costumes, including costuming as ghosts—once a terrifying possibility. At one party I went to, George, Theo and Dolly's son, came as a funny ghost in dark glasses and a sheet, with three wobbly heads. I knew, of course, that was the end of law and ritual.

My marvelous Mill Valley friend nicknamed Babalay, a former dancer, died; we had lived in the same building for some years and she often helped me with my writing. When she came to Seattle for a visit, I pushed her wheelchair around the zoo and through the butterfly exhibit; the butterflies would land on her arm, in her hair, to her delight. The next year, she wrote that she was dying, adding the following; "Never fear. We will meet again someday, somewhere, in some form or another. Won't it be interesting to see how that works out?"

These past several decades, I have become more involved with my American family. My son had a daughter, Shanley; my brother's children had children; my cousin's daughter had a son, little Ellis; and my grandson Marcus and his wife Elaina had a daughter, Sofia. With actors as parents, Sofia Nozumi Ho (Elaina is half Japanese) is quite a dramatic child. We like to think she is also able as a fine

artist—like a typical grandmother and great-grandmother, Leslie and I have some of her work on our refrigerator doors.

Christmas with Elaina, Marcus, Leslie, Elicia, and Sofia

Also, my youthful French friend Jeanne had two children, Eythan and Maeva, to the delight of her grandmother Michele. My adorable and funny friend Michele died at the age of 97. The last time I called her (2013), she said it was time for goodbye, that she was dying, and for me to remember what had been.

Some years ago, my granddaughter Elicia divorced her husband Tim and now lives with another photographer, John Botte. The two have been gradually moving to Seattle and spending most of the year in an apartment at Leslie's. Leslie's house is large, and their unit was created by combining the sizable piano room where Frank liked to practice, the TV room, and an adjoining bathroom. John's many Leica cameras are mostly in rental storage. John is happy out West, away from the many reminders of 9/11. A former New York police detective, he was among the first responders. Nearly all his police friends, he says, are dead.

What happiness to have my beautiful and capable granddaughter near at hand! Elicia and I are long-term buds. At fifteen, she got a scholarship for the New York City Ballet School, and I, who was in Seattle that year, volunteered to accompany her.

Skipping back several decades, I will explain my relationship with Elicia. In Manhattan, before finding regular employment at Harper & Row, I struggled to support the two of us on part-time secretarial jobs. We spent nearly a year eating food bought cheaply at the Coop and living in shared apartments with difficult women. Dance made it all worthwhile for Elicia. But the fierce challenge of our impoverished experiences brought us together.

Manhattan in the eighties was nothing like Manhattan had been like in the fifties. We arrived to find the city experiencing a crime wave; even elegant upper Fifth Avenue was affected. We were advised to never start down any city street without checking first to see who and what we might encounter. Elicia got a tiny gold heart as a birthday gift in the mail and put it on. When she got to the subway, a policeman insisted that the heart be hidden safely in her pocket.

Life in the West hadn't prepared me for life in Manhattan. I was totally naïve about the nature of bribery. Having rented an apartment from an opera

singer for two months—the two best months, despite the cockroaches, that we had in Manhattan—we arrived with our belongings and I was dismayed by the elevator operator's refusal to take us up to the sixth floor. Indeed, I was so perplexed by his refusal that I sat on our suitcases and sobbed. But then a friend of Frank's appeared and saved the day. He gave the man a twenty-dollar bill.

Actually, several thousand dollars—money I didn't have—was the minimum bribe required to make any kind of bid on an available apartment. And, of course, without local contacts, I would have had no idea when a rent-controlled apartment became available. So Elicia and I shared.

We lived in the Bronx in a tiny apartment for several months with someone who kept promising to move. But when I opened the fridge and saw it was full of frozen food, I realized the woman, who was sleeping in the tiny living room, just liked our company. As she didn't talk, we never got acquainted. Later, we heard she had walked off the roof of a tall building.

Frank's older sister Angela had an apartment on Third Avenue near the variety store that she owned. When we arrived, Angela invited me to sleep in her daughter's single bed. Where Elicia slept, I can't remember. But Angela let us know that the sleeping arrangement was temporary.

We interviewed for as many shared apartments as we could. The most bizarre was the giant loft of a practicing psychologist where our prospective bedroom area was defined only by several hanging sheets. The woman said her lover and his child had recently moved out and she missed the child. She admitted that Elicia, at fifteen, was a bit mature. But we were desperate and gave it our best shot. All the time we were there being interviewed, at least an hour, the woman's cat and dog made out on the sofa next to Elicia, who managed to ignore them. The making out was like a nervous habit, and the pair never stopped. When the psychologist called that evening to say she had found a mother with a younger child, we were actually relieved.

After that we moved in with a nurse who lived in a Greenwich Village brownstone, where we slept on a double bed in the living room. To get to the bathroom, we had to go through the kitchen and the nurse's bedroom. This worked fairly well when the nurse was working, but not so well when she retired from nursing. We loved the area; we had two tall trees outside our

windows and could see the sky as well. But when Elicia became sixteen and I flew back to Seattle, the nurse moved Elicia to the flimsy and unheated porch, and Elicia couldn't stay. She didn't return to Seattle, however. At that time, Seattle was where Elicia said she had never felt at home and New York was where she had quickly made a multitude of friends.

One Thanksgiving, we were invited to a steakhouse by the father of one of those friends. Although we were vegetarians whose diet included fish, we were hungry, and our plan was to eat and eat. I ordered a well-done steak and ate tons of bread and butter that didn't digest for days. But the dinner was so unpleasant that we agreed our full stomachs weren't worth it. Our host was an overbearing braggart who was unkind to the servers and talked loudly, endlessly, about himself.

There were magic moments, however, at the NY City Ballet and at Elicia's school, Juilliard, where Alexandra Danilova was one of her instructors. Others at the Plaza Hotel, where I, an aging hotel child, would repair to the beautiful Plaza lobby whenever I became depressed. And another magic moment when we caught a cab across town and the driver, thinking we were tourists, started taking us the long and more expensive crosstown way. Instead of complaining, I began loudly recounting, so he could hear me, some of the setbacks we had experienced in New York, the problems of going to the bathroom in the middle of the night through the nurse's bedroom, the theft of my backpack and all our money two days earlier, the difficulty of eating macaroni and cheese, night after night, the hardship of using secondhand broken-down toe shoes to dance, and the challenge of getting, without cab fare, from the Professional Children's School to Juilliard in time for class.

When the driver dropped us off, he wished us well and refused to charge us. I knew his life was hard as well. I will always value that gift and remember the nobility of the giver.

Our father John died at 94. At his memorial, while we were copying pictures of Dad's many dead male friends to hang above the snapshots of his life—we always make a pictorial life story for family members—Joe Murphy, one of the men who had attended law school at Gonzaga with our father, surprised us. A

good-hearted man and much younger than John, he sat next to our mother on the sofa and made her laugh.

A few years later, our mother Myrtle died as well. Such is the way of the world, each generation succeeding the previous. After wrapping Mother's torso in ice, Nancy and I sat with her for several days, talking to her and reminding her of other times. I sang "Bye, Bye, Blackbird," a song that had been popular in the twenties, one of her favorites, and the song that I had sung as she was dying. Nancy whispered in her ear that she should always remember to follow the light. We assured our beloved mother that she was everything to us, that she would live in us as long as we lived, and that we were doing our best to give her a full-of-love and Mimi-like send-off. Tess, our mother's nurse and good friend, returned from her morning walk to say that she had just seen Myrtle and told her that her children were fine, that she could go now, after which Myrtle disappeared. Those days of being with the newly Dead One were what the Roma do, as well as those of Jewish inclination, and, apparently, some Buddhists; Nancy is Buddhist.

That same year, Joan died of a stroke, leaving us, again, bereft. All our lives, Joan, Nancy, and I had been a devoted support team, a Three Musketeers sisterhood in terms of spirit and fact. Now our threesome was split into two separate worlds, one of which was largely unavailable. But we didn't sit with Joan as we had with our mother. She had asked us not to.

Joan had been trained as an artist—as a high school teacher, art is what she liked to teach and liked to do. In her forties, she had a remarkable success at buying, fixing up, and selling houses. She left all her assets to her sisters. I was blessed with a two-bedroom condo. What a delight to have an office to write in with a view of trees and birds. What fun to be just a few blocks away from the University of Washington's Suzzallo Library. And how timely, because after my first book, *Lola's Luck*, was published, I began to work on the second, most of which was assembled from notes left over from the first. *The Church of Cheese* was more academic than *Lola's Luck*, so I spent days in the stacks of Suzzallo, hunting, reading, making notes, returning to that earlier time when I had been discovering the Roma, discovering anthropology, and discovering the joy of discovery. I find library research a lot like traveling.

The first book signing for *Lola's Luck* was in the perfect place for me: Mill Valley's Depot Bookstore and Café. The second was at Elliot Bay Books in Seattle. A homeless man came to the latter, and my cousin Margie him a book. I asked him where he might keep it and he assured us that although he had no clothes other than what he was wearing, he was a collector of books.

The book signing for *The Church of Cheese* was at Third Place Books in Seattle. My brother ran the machine that showed the slides, many of which were of my former Roma friends. Some of my Seattle relatives brought food, and the occasion was rather like a party.

My brother has a house in Palm Desert where he, his wife Arian, and two Siamese cats live for half the year. Several years ago, I rented an apartment in another part of town, just across the street from Clementine's, a restaurant that serves a tasty lobster sandwich. I spent several Decembers in Palm Desert. During one visit, my old San Francisco friend Sherrie joined me. Remembering when our hearts were young and gay, we were amused to realize that, somewhat like the musical comedies we had always loved, our Bay Area youth had been theatrical, on occasion poignant, and even somewhat silly.

To feel the warmth of the Palm Desert sun in mid-winter was a wonderful experience. But the park-like area I was in was green with grass and flowers—even poppies and pansies—and frequently misted, which seemed a waste of precious water in the desert. To get to the grocery store or almost anyplace else, I had to cross a fast and furious eight-lane highway. I quit going south when I began to worry, as I aged, that I might not make it across the intersection before the crosswalk light turned red.

Tilting at the Windmills of Age

What does it mean to be an old person in America? The media's answer to this question edges on the absurd: apparently, it means to look and act as young as you can for as long as you can. America is a young country, and young is promoted as the only way to be. Diet, exercise, wrinkle creams, vitamins are advised. Chemical peels, and puffed teeny-bopper lips as well. I see on television that Jane Fonda, once my esteemed exercise goddess, has managed, via expert surgery, to avoid looking anything like her age. Although nearly as old as I am, she could easily pass for thirty if some of us didn't remember her as Barbarella in the 1968 movie of the same name—and if her eyes didn't now tell a more experienced story.

Acting is, of course, a very competitive business, and Fonda undoubtedly knows the hiring whims of movie moguls. In the world of media, youth seems to be the *sine qua non* for female success. My grandson's significant other, a Manhattan actress, worked steadily and well until she hit forty. Today, still with the same able agent and looking more beautiful than ever, she can't find employment. I suspect all traces of childhood have disappeared and presume that advertisers—previously her main source of income—prefer the child-woman look. Except for a notable few, female actors, like ballerinas, routinely face short-lived careers.

Mature male actors seem less limited. My grandson, now fifty and still acting, is a case in point.

I have not found being old much of a challenge. But admitting that I am old certainly is. A few years back, as I was leaving the local YMCA, a father with a stroller in tow held the front door open for me. Allowing I was no longer agilely young, I cheerfully thanked him. "No, no," he said, appalled, "you're not old," trying to drum up some other reason for his courtesy and thereby denying my age, who I am, the weight and meaning of my years.

This is the face I grew into, the face that I earned, a face of character and feeling, the face of time—my time. It is not the face I had at eighteen. I didn't much care for my face at eighteen. We didn't seem well acquainted. No matter how I felt, I looked fine. I remember suffering from a splitting headache, but finding no visible change in the bathroom mirror, I realized no one would believe or empathize with my complaint. Sometimes I would cry in frustration, and my tears, when dry, would leave no trace. I had the classic poker face, emotionless, unresponsive, and unrevealing, and I suspect it cloaked an equally underdeveloped heart.

At age ninety-one

Now I have the face of felt experience. My face and feelings mesh; I look the way I feel. I am pleased with my wrinkles and wish others were as well. I would like to be accepted wearing this face without remorse, pity, or being metaphorically patted on the head. I particularly want to be acknowledged as a person of value and, at the same time, old. Not old by mistake, misadventure,

neglect, or criminal activity. Old in an acceptable fashion. Old as the way of the world.

Some things I do know about aging. After reaching sixty, the marionette body, our familiar transport of blood and brain, begins winding down. My recollection of names has grown a bit iffy, the multitasking that was such fun before can now generate serious mistakes, my softer body parts shift in the downward direction, the fineness of my senses, eyes, ears, taste, begin to dim. Yet, for reasons unknown, my heart, mind, and essence still feel rather young and ageless. What can account for this failure to match? What, if anything, does it mean?

Until I was sixty, I paid very little attention to my physical being and identified with my mind. Now that I am older and my future more limited, I am more aware of what my body can and cannot do. Familiarity has bred appreciation and even an affectionate regard for all my magically moving parts. Yet I was never an Olympic athlete or particularly adventurous physically and, until I have no choice in the matter, I don't want to be catalogued among the handicapped. I don't mind old; I am old. Not old and crotchety. Not old and super sexy, hyper-energetic, or competitive. Not old and irrelevant. Old, white-haired, a bit wrinkly and wise, and happily engrossed in the life I have lived and that I am still living.

I would guess the widespread urgency to look and act perpetually young was of less relevance to my grandparents, who were more concerned with "getting by." From day to night, from youth through her old age, my maternal grandmother Emma cooked, cleaned, milked, churned butter, weeded and canned the vegetables and fruit she had raised, washed the laundry (boiling it in a large copper boiler when I was small), dried, folded, ironed, and mended it, and then raced outside to feed the chickens. Conversation with her was on the run. Although I was told she loved music and reading, I never saw her at her piano or taking a break to open a magazine.

Emma never retired, but now we do. According to my friend David, a charming over seventy-year-old I met on a walk, the conventional perception is that the "productive" middle years are Life, followed by Age, the time of

retirement and a shift from the main stage to the sidelines. After our householder years we are often blessed with a wealth of leisure, much like our earlier ancestors, the pre-agricultural hunter/gatherers who seem to have seldom worked more than a few hours a day. Here in the United States, at the end of a life of skilled and/or unskilled employment, most of us who are lucky have an income from Social Security, a cushion of health insurance, time for friends and grandchildren, the leisure to meet over coffee, play golf or bridge, or do nothing—and choices, the luxury of choices. What do we make of these choices? What is optimal in terms of our choices? Outside the evolutionary loop, beyond working and reproducing, what is our mission? Surely it is not to obsess about the increasing ads for costly and ineffective revitalizing creams.

These questions will become more critical as robots and machines continue to replace human labor and as more of us, owing to sensational medical cures—if all turns out as predicted—live into our tenth decade. The number of people 80 years and older is expected to double by 2050, at which time the character of many nations, including our own, will be predominantly and characteristically mature. What has surprised me about this life stage, the last stage, is that it seems nothing like the way the news, movies, and television portray it. Nor could I find any books to read that told me what to expect—other than an increase in physical handicaps—of life and of living as I grow old.

Recently, while researching human happiness, a group of labor economists found that our perception of life tends to improve and look up with age, following the upward final swing of a U-curve. Measuring satisfaction with life as a whole (not mood moment to moment), the survey results indicate that happiness declines for the first decades of adulthood, bottoming out in the late forties to early fifties—a period popularly known as the midlife crisis—and then increases with age. The results, the scientists suggested, might be associated with more realistic expectations and goals, as well as growth in compassion and wisdom. As Jonathan Rauch wrote in the December 2014 issue of *The Atlantic*, "The peak of emotional life may not occur until well into the seventh decade." According to further studies, the happiness U-curve shows up around the world, and more often in wealthier countries, where people live longer and enjoy better health in old age. But it may also be partly owing to biology. When queried,

zookeepers, researchers, and animal caretakers rated the well-being of 500 captive chimps and orangutans in various countries as following the shape of the happiness U-curve, too.

Home a Lot

I no longer travel. For reasons unknown, I have a pain-free neuropathy of the nerves in my feet and lower legs that affects my balance. When walking any distance, I must use a walker. Just a few years back, I got into my aging Honda and I could no long feel the gas pedal or the brake. Reluctantly, I gave my low-mileage car to Leslie. I tend to develop an affection for reliable machinery, and over the twenty years I drove the Honda, I arrived without mishap wherever I was going. Mondays, Leslie takes me to the PCC market, and I am always glad to ride again in my very much missed Civic.

Without a car, I must depend on trips in other people's cars to see my sisters, to go for coffee, or lunch, to walk in the park—north Seattle is full of beautiful parks, most of which are next to a lake, the Lake Washington Ship Canal, or on Elliot Bay. I am lucky to have a large and agreeable family, a family of sweeties, all of them younger than I am and still driving. I also have friends, too many to count. I am unusually able in making friends. Friends provide the excitement of entry into other people's lives and the sustaining comfort of companionship in one's own. I regard friends as one of life's essentials. Communicating with others—a careful listening to others —is how we discover who we are as human beings, what values we hold, and where we are in the world.

In the end, it is the people you love who matter the most.

In mid-age, I knew a number of adult couples who had relegated the fun of traveling, the well-earned reward of traveling, to their golden years. After decades of eight-hour workdays, they planned to retire at sixty-five and fly to Europe, to Rio, or to a warm Hawai'ian beach. Such was never my intention. During my years of employment, I seldom had a full-time job, my income was

usually piddling, and my day-to-day escape was the Roma, the startle and amazement of the tribe Machvaia. They were vacation enough.

At this point of my life, I can't imagine that traveling would be fun. I have no desire to return to places that I loved, New York, Paris, Mill Valley. They, as well as the planes that would take me there, have become excessively crowded, the overnights expensive, and New York involves too much walking and too many subway stairs.

I no longer travel away from my pills, my lounger chair, my Austin Air air purifiers, and my writing. I am home a lot. But I don't mind. I have *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* for company. Friends call, friends who live in Seattle, California, New York, France. Anastasia calls, or I call her; we talk on the phone several times a week. Anastasia lives in Cotati, a town north of Mill Valley. Anastasia is my last link to the community of my heart, the Roma. She left them forty years ago, becoming, over time, quite American. But she still tends the grave of her sister Moxie in keeping with the past. On holidays she takes her sister something she once liked to eat, as well as a sizable, colorful bouquet, and spends some time at her gravestone, sharing her trials and troubles. Anastasia is no longer well enough to travel, nor am I. We will probably never meet again in person. But we are family.

My thanks to whatever it is, genes, luck, good karma, optimism, that has let me get so old—93. The other life stages, youth and middle age, had an undeniable charm. Old age is the best, however. How grateful I am that I have lived long enough to enjoy life at the last. I can no longer dance as I did and must use some kind of assistance when walking any distance. But my heart still tangos happily in my chest and my words can still draw amazing images upon a page. As the prospective days of my life become more limited, the beauty of the earth and all the people on it becomes a kind of glory that lights each fleeting moment. And Time, now spelled with a capital T, feels curiously, oddly, unending.

Yesterday, David and I were having coffee at Divas when a young and gorgeous teenager, perfectly poised and dressed, made us smile and keep looking her way. Beauty drew our attention. In large degree, beauty is a cultural construction. If it

was still the 1800s, when buxom curves were admired, we might not have regarded her in the same way.

But I suspect we would still find the girl endearing. Youth is a time of doing and becoming. As we age, appreciation of the young, with their bold-faced energy, has a new allure. We are fascinated by potential. We find the mystery surrounding future generations compelling. Not that we are envious. Our search for identity, for purpose, for belonging is over. We no longer have to worry about what might be. Old and full of years, we know who we are and what we can do. Our time, the history of our days on earth, is written.

And yet I do worry about the future. I worry about global warming, the heat, the fires, the floods, storms. Who knows if the coming generations can expect a future? The prospect of my grandchildren, Elicia, Marcus, Shanley, and my great-grandchild Sofia fighting for clean air or struggling to get clean water gives me nightmares.

Although I try, I cannot imagine how the many countries of our world, our diverse and often hostile world, might ever work together. To meet the environmental challenge, harmonious, non-competitive, even sacrificial effort will be required. We live on this lovely little planet without taking heed of our cost. There are, indeed, too many of us. We don't understand that we are part of the earth, we evolved on this earth, and that without the earth, we can't make it.

When I was younger, I marched in protest of the Vietnam and Iraq wars. Now I would like to march in protest of the growing climate crisis. Those younger might get annoyed, of course, at the stately pace of my walker.

The young take their health and boundless energy for granted. A busy day, even an arduous day, can pass without incident or cost. That's the way I used to be, mindless about good health, taking it for granted, tirelessly grabbing for the gold ring on the merry-go-round at each go-around. Now, a burst of physical exertion may be followed by a nap. Now I rate good health as a major blessing. A day of feeling physically able and in harmony with my many moving parts is cosmic.

When I was young, I had all these cool ideas about how things ought to be. Accomplishment was everything. Better, bigger, faster, funnier were some of

my yardsticks. Was it my family, my culture, or my beliefs that recommended the best, that I should expect the best, glorify the best? And what was the best? Was it really the best? In the long run, did it matter?

Now I accept the ordinary. No longer so prone to judgment, life, all of life—and that includes today—is reason enough for wonder. Now I find the ordinary extraordinary. I am at the age of cherishing, appreciating, and glorifying the fact of being alive.

This seems like the most wonderful time of my life. Isn't that amazing? The simple pleasures of sleeping, eating, talking to friends, reading, writing are now more rewarding than a trip to Istanbul or France; indeed, I have already been to France. "Wonderful," of course, is a superlative word, and what I value today wouldn't do when I was forty. Then, what seemed wonderful would have been different. Now that I don't have to earn a living, raise children, climb the corporate ladder, or worry about the future, I have time to reflect, to consider what my life has been, who and what I am, and what life itself might be about. I pay attention to the moment.

When I was young, I never anticipated what it might be like to be old. I knew people who were, of course. But I was intent on multitasking and packing as much as possible into the day. In my forties when I applied for a divorce, frantically eager to denote a major change, I dyed my mousy hair red, the color of adventure. At seventy, a bit more serene, I let a suggestive streak of white hair show. Some years later, when my hair became truly white, I stopped dying it. As I seemed to be accumulating allergies, I welcomed the natural look.

These days, I am seldom in a hurry. In fact, hurrying can lead to a disaster. Some years back, when I was visiting my daughter's gym and using the treadmill machine for the first time, I impulsively hit some button that made the machine race and throw me off. After that, I was at Leslie's for a month while a tendon in my shoulder mended.

For the first time in my life, I can wait in line or on the phone and find contentment. Sometimes I check my email. Sometimes I play solitaire on my iPad. Occasionally I find myself watching the crows arriving for the nuts that Kikka, the long-haired and lively medical student who lives in the condo above me, leaves on her deck for them. When I was younger, I felt that daydreaming,

looking out my window, having to wait any amount of time were somehow criminal. Then, I felt the constant pressure of time; each day qualified as too short. Now that I am truly short of time, Time no longer matters.

Winter

This was a sunny and wonderfully mild winter day. I was in good company, and before we went for coffee, David and I walked slowly through Witt's Winter Garden in the University Arboretum, where the witch hazel, sarococca, viburnum, daphne, and the hardy cyclamen were blooming. You should have been there. The air was brisk and delicious with fragrance.

At the Last

Not until Anne disappeared in Paris did we suspect dementia. We were aware that she had been losing her apartment keys on occasion. But Anne was the youngest sibling in our family, the only natural redhead, and the baby. She was on a tour of Paris with a group of mature adults when they realized that her bed hadn't been slept in the night before and notified us immediately. We spent part of that night talking about how, in her early twenties, Anne had lived in Paris. We kept reassuring each other that she might have been distracted by old friends or old places. We remembered she did know the language and she spoke it quite well. We hoped she had her credit card. Could she have forgotten she was on a tour?

The next day, the tour group ran a missing person picture of Anne on the local Paris television. By mid-afternoon, someone had responded. While warning him not let her out of his sight, the tour group assigned an employee to accompany Anne back to the States. When we met Anne at the airport, she had no notion of where she had been or what she had been doing, except the last night which, as she remembered, was spent in a Paris café. "The manager was so nice. I had no money and he let me sit at a table until morning."

My brother and I looked into retirement homes and settled on the one nearest Anne's apartment. During the several month delay before she could move into the retirement home, we found that Anne never had anything edible in her refrigerator. When she got hungry, she apparently walked some distance to a grocery store to eat. Also, she was buying five-year travel magazine subscriptions to places like Ireland, Scotland, the Netherlands, and France, and signing up for tours. That's when John took over her finances. Many decisions had to be made. My brother John and I hired a lawyer, and we became executors for her will.

I well remember standing on the middle of Anne's apartment and trying to decide which of her books, her DVDs, furniture, knickknacks, clothes she would want, what to mark for the movers, what to throw away. The violence of those decisions left me stunned. Nothing in my long and venturesome life had prepared me for those moments. I felt like I was invading Anne's privacy and damaging my dear and independent sister's carefully prized respect. What did she need? What could she do without? How could I know?

These past several years, I have often found myself making decisions for people who can no longer make them for themselves. We go from one crisis to another. We talk, those involved talk, those not so involved talk, usually by phone. None of us speaks from experience or knows what we should do. Thank the Lord for friends and family. It may take a village to raise a child. It certainly takes a village to care for the demented.

How sad to remember that my old San Francisco friend Sherrie was an only child. When her parents got sick and when they died, she had had to make all the final and difficult decisions by herself.

The day of the move, my brother John took Anne out to lunch and for an extended drive, during which we arranged for a quick transfer of her belongings. Then he dropped her off at her new Hearthstone apartment and joined the party of welcome.

When, two years later, we found that Nancy also had dementia, I, the eldest, was again automatically elected chief traffic controller. My family, my dearest friends, David most particularly, worried that I was taking on too much. But I didn't mind. I like the feeling of being essential. Most important, these are those whom I truly care for.

When I cleaned out Nancy's apartment, I felt it was the mountain of stuff she had collected that was doing Nancy in. Getting through her little 650-square-foot house was only possible by pushing aside all manner of litter. Several lifetimes of vitamins were stacked on the floor in giant cardboard boxes, stuffed with smaller boxes. Scattered about were recent and old sacks of purchases, as well as books, many overdue at the local library. The dozens of plastic files in the

living room were packed willy-nilly with bills accumulated over the past several decades, none marked paid. Nancy seemed to never throw anything away, but rather to move it from one location to another. Where to start? Each time I visited, I brought several empty sacks, filled them, and tried to get them to the garbage. But I have neuropathy of the legs and walking around her house on the widely spaced stepping-stones was dangerous, if not impossible.

Opening the tall chest in her bedroom I discovered nothing but socks, hundreds of pairs of rolled up anklets. I asked Nancy why she had so many and she said her feet were always cold. She bought socks because she never wanted to run out. But if I needed socks, she added, I should take some, which I did.

Other than her house, my sister seemed so Nancy. In truth, I have such a strong and enduring connection to my sister that her problems felt like mine.

Never a good driver, now she became a terrible driver, pausing so long at intersections that the other drivers got angry. I don't remember how we managed to get rid of her Honda, but I do remember telling her that it had gone to someone who needed it desperately. It never occurred to us to make an appointment for an eye examination. We didn't know that macular degeneration was the reason for her scary driving. Nothing had prepared us for these moments—nothing we had either read or experienced. We were equally blind.

When her financial manager Michael notified us that Nancy was making now and then payments on the $21,000 owed to Nordstrom Visa, we knew she had to move.

Nancy and I spent several months looking at retirement homes in north Seattle. We enjoyed going to the open houses together, meeting new people, and scarfing lunch or tasty snacks. We kept putting off the decision, however, in part because Nancy was the main caretaker for her disabled son who lived next door, and we worried that he might not be able to manage without her. The motivating factor for Nancy's eventual move was the condition of her bathroom, which became crammed with bottles, loose pills, clothes, and mold, and dangerously unhealthy.

For reasons already explained, our choice was the Hearthstone, where Anne was living. But Nan has always been athletically inclined, and we worried about her

taking off on foot to her son's house a mile away, to the bank, or to a store, and getting lost. Or falling. Nancy's eye doctor advised us she could no longer safely negotiate curbs. Limitations of such kinds involve short-term memory. But time and her depreciating eyesight have taught her caution. She now moves more tenuously and slowly, and with the aid of a cane. For now, the past slides gracefully into today. When I call and ask her what she has been doing, she often says she has walked around Green Lake, the little city lake across the street that she can no longer actually manage to circle.

Both my lovely and slender sisters gained weight at the Hearthstone. The food is delicious and meals are the social highlight of the day. Anne ate the desserts, grew the most, and refused to wear the more comfortable clothes that Ari, my niece, and I bought her. We consequently got her the same pants in bigger sizes, cut out the size tags, and sneaked them into her closet.

Within the first year that Nancy had joined her at the Hearthstone, Anne developed serious care-taking problems. She refused to let the nurses bathe her, insisted on a hat and multiple layers, winter and summer, and began sleeping in her clothes. My gentle little sister who adored travel, the luxury of Ralph Lauren shirts, and who had made her living teaching seriously disabled children flew into a violent rage, screaming and hitting, whenever anyone tried to clean her up. She had so many gross and smelly accidents that the Hearthstone insisted we move her to a facility more accustomed to handling difficult patients. I pleaded with her to shower, to let them clean her. But to no avail. In the end, we had no choice.

Anne's new place was full of classes, constant classes in music, singing, rhythmic movement, painting, stories, and get togethers. Anne was happy to participate; she had always loved to sing and dance. But her resistance to cleaning continued and, perhaps owing in part to the drugs she took to make her more compliant, she developed heart disease and died rather quickly. Ari and I were with her several hours before she died. We suggested more morphine to the Hospice nurse. We didn't want her to suffer.

Nancy is my last sister. Nancy with her short-term memory loss still seems to me like Nancy. I am delighted to lunch with her once a week and like to straighten

up her studio, which involves collecting all the little notes she writes to help herself remember. I often call her on the phone just to hear the music of her voice. At eight in the evening, I try to recommend a television program; she watches with her friend Judy. When Nancy complains she doesn't have enough to do, I make suggestions—a walk around the block, a magazine, a coloring book, playing the piano. I remind Nancy of our many life adventures, the books we enjoyed as children, how we planned to travel, and how we actually did. I mention our many friendships, our passions, the healing years of Peace and Love. We giggle, we laugh. We share our memories of our fantastic mother, so many happy memories, and Mimi/Myrtle lives again.

When Nancy no longer knows me, she will still be my beloved sister.

Valentine's Day at the ER

The phone rang before noon. Nancy had fallen at the Hearthstone and they were calling an ambulance. As the person with her power of attorney, I was asked if I wanted her to go to the University Hospital on Pacific or to Northwest Hospital, which is also a University of Washington hospital. I chose the one on Pacific, which is not far from where I live.

Tom took me. Tom is a Lyft driver who has become part of my working team. Nancy has dementia and poor eyesight, so for a bit more money, Tom picks her up in the lobby, takes her arm, walks her to the car, straps her in, and tries to make her comfortable. I didn't need this kind of special attention. But I needed Tom's reassuring support.

At the UW Hospital ER, I found Nancy on a bed in the hallway. She had a number of cuts and bruises on one arm and around her back ribs. The incoming nurse asked me how the accident happened, and all I could say was that Nancy had been found flat on her back in her Hearthstone apartment. Did she lose consciousness? Had she been sick or dizzy? I was two miles away when it happened. How could I know?

The waiting room was full of emergency cases, and Nancy had been wheeled through the double doors. As they kept swinging open, we were immobilized in a hallway of urgency, me sitting in my walker, which converts into a chair, my beautiful sister reclining on a narrow, wheeled bed. Doctors, patients, nurses, firemen, and various hospital personnel continually ran by us. For an hour and a half, the emergency nurse, whose name was something like Annagee, stayed with us. The nurse wore a navy and bright yellow outfit with printed bands of identification. She was young, in her early twenties. She told us about her family and how she had decided to become a nurse. I also tried to find topics of conversation. But we ran out of words and grew silent. I held Nancy's hand, and she said that made her back feel better. I told her that I loved her,

which, of course, she knows. I wished her a Happy Valentine's Day in the ER. This struck us as somewhat ridiculous, and we giggled.

A private room became available, and when the nurses were transferring Nancy from one bed to another, she screamed. Even touching her back was painful. Taking her bra off hurt. I removed her long spikey purple earrings. She found she was most comfortable sitting, so we asked for more pillows. The hospital's plan was to see if anything was broken. More screams as the X ray team arrived and positioned a flat hard metal machine against her back.

We talked. I pointed out that her eyesight is bad, so bad that it affects her balance. To prevent another fall, she would need, like me, to use a walker. But with her short-term memory loss, how can Nancy remember to use one? All her life she has been unusually able. When she was only a year old, our mother would put her on the carpet and she was out the open door in the next few seconds. Like our mother, who spent her childhood's summer days running and rambling on Wild Rose Prairie, Nancy has always loved to move.

My adorable gray-haired sister is now nearly ninety. But she still conceptualizes herself as an athlete. Knowing that she remembers past events better than more recent ones, I remind her of a sport she had enjoyed as a child. She smiles as she recalls Wilson Elementary School and the many blocks home for lunch, and how, if she ran both ways, she might get back in time to play baseball with the boys before afternoon classes. She smiles again when I tell her about the US women's soccer team, how they won the world's championship last year and how very much I admire their feminist captain, Megan Rapinoe. In your next life, I suggest, you could play soccer.

Nancy never forgets that I introduced her to books. I loved buying her books with my baby-sitting money and, later, with the money I earned working at the hotel. We try to recall the names of all the books I got her when she was small. I just managed to find again and buy *At the Back of the North Wind*, which had been one of her favorites. Nancy and I bonded over books. Books were our obsession. Nancy was the only one in my immediate family who, like me, loved to read.

As she often has during these past several years, Nancy asks me what became of our sister Joan. Growing up, Nancy, Joan, and I had identified with the legendary Three Musketeers who were bound by loyalty and friendship. We stood together against the fearsome Sorcerer, who was our young and often angry father (who later mellowed into a much beloved older man). I explain again that Joan died of a stroke more than a decade ago. I remind Nancy of the five days that Joan was in a coma, a time when her sisters, day to night, had stayed with her at the hospital. Then Nancy remembered again that Joan was gone. But Nancy has dementia and she never remembers that Joan died of a stroke.

Mostly we waited. When the x-ray showed no broken bones, the doctor ordered an MRI. Both results were the same. More waiting. At five, Nancy had another x-ray of her left arm, the one full of metal that she had damaged in another fall. At seven, the nurse was talking about Nancy going home and calling someone to wrap her arm in a more protected fashion. When I finally found the relevant doctor, he assured me again that Nancy had only scrapes and bruises, and no broken bones. The nurse said that I could leave, and they would send Nancy home in an ambulance.

By then, I was walking the hallways. (Sitting too much makes my legs ache.) I was tired of waiting hour after hour for the doctor's decisions and tired of being exposed, during the time of Covid, to an entire day of explosive coughing, wheezing, and masks. I had missed my nap, my coffee, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I had forgotten to bring something to read, or my I-Pad. I would never make it as a nurse or doctor. Actually, I am hoping to die in my sleep or somewhere suddenly. I don't want to end up in a hospital bed and succumbing slowly, moment after never-ending moment, to ennui.

Relieved, I called Tom.

The next morning, when I rang Nancy at the Hearthstone, no one answered. I then called the Assisted Living nurse and she said that Nancy was at Northwest University Hospital. Panicked, I asked, did she fall again? The nurse didn't know. Calling Northwest, I found that Nancy had been there overnight. Why, I

asked, had she been moved to Northwest? When I finally reached the doctor, she said that Nancy had been getting dressed to leave the hospital on Pacific and, when she stood up, she nearly fainted. As they were crowded and short of patient's beds, the staff had sent her to another hospital.

She was dizzy, I said, for good reason. She had spent the entire day in the ER without water or food. The fasting might not matter, but the water certainly did. I tried, once, to get her to drink water from a paper cup. But the x-ray people interrupted. Then, to her misfortune and my regret, I neglected to offer her more water.

But Northwest Hospital had other concerns. The doctor said that Nancy kept trying to leave her room. By midnight, she had become hysterical, and said she had to find her son. The nurses kept putting her back to bed and telling her that he wasn't in the hospital. They were wondering if she was crazy. Did she need to be transferred to a place with 24-hour care?

No, she isn't crazy, I said. No, I assured them, although she has dementia, she doesn't need supervisory care. Yes, she is right that her son is at a hospital (although we hadn't told her yet). No, she doesn't usually get up at night. I explained that Nancy's son has cerebral palsy and that Nancy, until she had gotten dementia, had been his main caretaker.

We have put off telling Nancy about her son's grand mal seizures. It is impossible to know when, how, or even if we will tell her. If he gets better, we will, of course, take her to see him.

We live with unanswered questions.

The Lens of Gender

I have always been a feminist. Maybe I was born a feminist. Despite being born into a patriarchal society, a society where cultural and social forms are male dominated, I have never felt inferior to men. My certainty of being just as worthwhile and smart as most of the men I meet has never wavered.

Not that I would want to be a man. Although, as compared with women, American men as a group are in power, they do not always find it of benefit. Gender is about power, and power is so closely woven into the fabric of our lives that it can be almost invisible to those who are the most empowered. The first man in my life, my father, thought that he had to control everything that happened in and to his family, an impossible task. He expected his children to be perfect, but he didn't know for sure what perfect might be. When he was a young man with growing children, he took these responsibilities so seriously that he was often in a quite angry and vulnerable state.

Sex is what we are biologically born with; gender is what we learn. Men and women are largely different because they are taught to be different. In America, the privilege of male gender remains invisible. But it is there.

By the time he was in his eighties, my poor father had Alzheimer's disease. My mother, who was about the same age, took care of him for years. She also took over his jobs, one of which she hated—paying the household bills. One morning when she was unhappily making out the checks, I told her that I had always found her the strong one in our family, the one who invariably met crises with equanimity. From her reaction, I could see that she was surprised, even shocked. That's a curse of patriarchy, one of them at least. Even powerful women don't know when they are able.

Growing up, I was always looking for heroines. The thirties and forties were the days of radio entertainment and President Roosevelt's mellow fireside chats. Our

growing family would eat dinner early so we could all sit in the living room, the children on the floor, and listen. I always wished that Roosevelt's wife Eleanor would join him. Eleanor was a mystery to me. The local paper often published the news about her wonderful and charitable activities. But then they undermined their value with weirdly suggestive jokes that I didn't understand.

I looked elsewhere. I found what I was looking for when I read about Madame Curie, Madame de Stael, Emilie du Chatelet, Simone de Beauvoir, all French, all either famous scientists or writers, and some of them both. They were women to admire and emulate, and that they were French added to their allure. Because of my admiring attachment to my 100% French grandfather, I have always had a thing for France.

These were women who, like me, wanted to achieve something of value and to make human life experience somewhat better. Born into a world run by men, beginning with the Great Depression, followed, shortly, by World War II and Auschwitz, the need for improvement seemed obvious. I sought heroic female examples as my mentors. Today, unlike then, young women and girls have a great number of women to choose from.

I graduated from high school at sixteen and got the usual senior picture, a smiling version of myself that I adore. But, shortly after my senior picture, a Spokane photography studio specializing in glamourous portraits opened a few blocks from where I worked. Intrigued by the possibility, I posed for my head shot as appealingly as I could. Continually pressed for dates by the sailors and the servicemen passing through, I already knew I was sexy enough, something that teenagers do seem to need to establish. I had also learned that men were ruled by their sexual desires and would do almost anything to get a female, glamorous or not, into bed. So why did I play the power game?

Today, as I look at both pictures, I find that I appear sullen and confused as a vamp. Indeed, the portrait doesn't, in fact, look much like anyone I know. In my senior picture, on the other hand, I am open-faced, familiar, and friendly. At sixteen, as I remember, I longed to emulate the women in Hollywood movies, most of which were created by male directors, writers, and producers who longed to be surrounded by compliant female vamps. I regard my vamp portrait

as concrete evidence that despite being an ardent feminist, I am not immune to the influence of the society in which I was raised. I am a gendered person living in a gendered society.

Before this century, as Margaret Mead put it, the nuclear family was not expected to live in a box. Mead found the lack of social support, other than immediate family, untenable. She would have thought me particularly lucky. Before I married, I only had a short box experience. Instead, I grew up in a hotel, a variegated arrangement of several hundred, among whom were traveling saleswomen—often more financially successful than their salesman husbands—spinster teachers who repeatedly traveled the world, colorful women artists, divorcees with children, and then, of course, there was Lina K. who made people smile and who was raised as companion to one of P. T. Barnum's daughters. As a child, I had ever-renewing examples of women who seemed seldom burdened by the trauma of housework and who had found some measure of happiness in non-domestic ways.

From there, our family moved to a house in the inner city and I learned what it meant to be poor. The time was the Great Depression. Diamond was a poor boy who lived in an apartment across the street with his mother and baby sister. My kind-hearted mother knew what it was to be hungry. She allowed me out in the evening to help my friend—Diamond was shy and I did the talking—sell the small paper bags of buttered popcorn that his mother popped. The people who came to the door did their best to be generous. They knew that the money they paid Diamond was his only chance for any kind of dinner.

When I was twelve, we moved to an all-white suburb where most of the women were stay-at-home housewives with children and everyone lived in boxes. As I seemed to have a number of friends whose mothers tended to migraines and depression, we tiptoed through their houses as quickly and quietly as we could. My mother was the picture of health, so much so that I, as well as her other children, felt somewhat embarrassed whenever we got colds. I puzzled over my friends' mother's frequent ailments and imagined they might be a form of escape.

At fifteen, I began working as desk clerk at the Ridpath Hotel, where my father was the manager. The hotel was only six blocks from Lewis and Clark High School. The week I graduated, the English teacher who liked my essays, dear Mr. Canup, assured me that, instead of my friend Lorna, I could have been valedictorian if I had studied. But the hotel, I suspect, seemed much more interesting to me than school.

When I became a mother, I tried to help my children avoid some of America's usual gendered limitations. I was so pleased that my four-year-old son didn't seem to worry about being manly and happily ran through his preschool, spending the same amount of time in the girls' section as in the boys'. As adults, I wanted both my children to be self-sufficient and independent. I didn't want them to have to get married or to need someone else, economically and otherwise, to survive. Of course, they might choose a more dependent lifestyle as adults. But that's another matter.

By the time they were in their teens, I thought it important that my daughter learn to support herself financially and that my son learn to cook and clean for himself. I was only somewhat successful. My daughter Leslie intended to be a dancer, a NY City Ballet dancer, at least until, at sixteen, she found she would have to stay in New York, where she knew no one, by herself. After she married, however, she became proficient at sales—she and her Chinese husband owned a cheeky clothing store for women, Ho in the Closet—and, for many years, she taught ballet.

When my son was fourteen, I refused to let him out of our apartment until he had cleaned his room and done his washing. A clever, well-liked lad, he was adept as getting his friends to do his chores for him. Once, he stayed in his room for three days, reading—he loved to read—until one of his friends arrived. I recently asked him why he had never complied. He said it was not, for him, a matter of gender equality. It was stubbornness, a growing teenager's refusal to concede to adult expectations. I do remember later, when he was in his twenties, that he called to inform me that he had just made a to-do list for the cleaning woman to follow when she came to clean his apartment. It was his initiation into the art of cleaning, and his voice betrayed a note of wonder.

Despite being an ardent feminist, I do like men. I don't know that I am particularly suited to marriage, however, or exclusivity. I could never comprehend how one man could satisfy all my needs, social and otherwise, for an entire lifetime. Or that I could possibly do the same for someone else. Some couples, among my family and friends, do approach the cultural ideal. My mother threatened divorce several times, but she never followed through. My dear friend David has been married twice, is still good friends with both his former families, and has several girlfriends at the moment.

I am so glad I didn't die in my eighties. If I had, I wouldn't have been around to see the funny pussycat hats on the women's marchers or the encouraging size of the Women's Movement crowds that gathered in so many major cities across the world. Women are finally standing together and insisting on what they want and need. I also would have missed the #MeToo movement which has brought a measure of justice to so many women and seems likely to eventually change the character of the workplace.

As the sociologist Kimmel writes in *The Gendered Society*, it's a no-win situation for women when they enter the workplace, the military, politics, or sports, arenas that have been established to reproduce and sustain masculinity and the domination of men over women (p. 16). But as the numbers of working women increases, as laws are adjusted to suit the needs of families with children, the gender gap will, of course, grow smaller. He finds a significant gender convergence taking place during this past half-century and a growing equality between the sexes. The single exception to this process is male violence (p. 290).

In America, masculinity is too often conflated with the capacity for violence (p. 277). When our family moved from New Jersey, we lived briefly in Spokane, and then Seattle. In Seattle, my son began coming home from school desperately unhappy. In New Jersey, fighting was forbidden; in Seattle, fighting between boys after school was expected. My eight-year-old son Colin confessed he didn't want to fight. I called the school to complain and was told that boys will be boys.

I knew my son would never be accepted into his group of fellow students unless he met their standards. But, fighting to gain fraternity seemed unreasonable to me as well. I was proud of my son, so proud that he had his own mind—he seems to have been born with this characteristic. That fall, I entered him in a private school for boys, now a school for both boys and girls, where scholarly achievement was the goal. At Lakeside, he flourished.

Sexual harassment is about power; it is a way for a man to make a woman feel vulnerable and to remind women that they are not equal to men. According to Kimmel, the United States has the highest rate of reported rape by men in the industrialized world, eighteen times higher than England. It also has the highest rates of male domestic violence and spousal murder (p. 278).

Most of my life, I have excused men's questionable behavior as just what men tend to do. My usual technique for dealing with awkward moments was to forget them. In truth I may have been harassed and not remember. I can imagine such a mode of forgetting because, until #MeToo made me reconsider, I didn't associate our family's sudden exodus from the East Coast with my refusal to kiss my husband's boss. I certainly was never raped. I spent most of my working life, several decades, in the company of Roma. Among Machvaia and despite being an Outsider, I never felt vulnerable. I was never sexually harassed; this I know for sure as I was taking exhaustive anthropological notes. Nor did I hear of anyone in the tribe being raped. Machvaia women are the money makers, the providers, and no less powerful than Machvaia men. According to Kimmel, it is unequal gender power that leads to rape.

Since #MeToo, I have often thought about Charlie Rose. His program was once my favorite. I never saw a better interview that his with Françoise Gilot, a fascinating artist who is one of the artist Picasso's former wives. All of his interviews were sensitive, intelligent, and entertaining. But with the advent of #MeToo and the complaints of several women, CBS canned him.

I cannot comprehend why a man like Charlie Rose, a man I have long respected, would answer the door in the nude. Although nudity is certainly not

in the same category as rape and may be more like a wink, a naughty power-trip wink, nudity, in a business situation, is not only inappropriate but invasive.

Men have taught us that an attractive woman, especially in the nude, turns them on. As an attractive man, did Charlie presume that undressing would affect a woman in a similar fashion? Was he lonely for contact and thought he might bypass foreplay? If so, despite his charm and interviewing brilliance, he really doesn't know much about women.

Men have been telling us and showing us for centuries what turns them on—via their advances, their ads, movies, decisions, laws, stories. One advantage of increased gender and power equality might be that men would finally find out what turns women on. This, of course, might be a happy benefit to both sexes.

What started me on the topic of gender was the early 2020 Democratic presidential debates. My favorite nominee was Elizabeth Warren, a woman of character and competency. Like most of my family and friends, I found her interesting, intelligent, and fun. But some of the women I talked to found her "bossy," and others found her "loud." When I asked them to be more specific, they cited the way she raised her hands and got agitated. I pointed out that Warren was standing next to Bernie Sanders and he was doing the same. But what struck them as appropriate for a man like Bernie they did not regard as appropriate for a woman. I didn't argue; what would be the point? As Warren said when she dropped out of the race, the time for an American woman president has not yet arrived.

But the power/gender situation is improving. Experiences formerly attributed to women—intimacy, emotional expressiveness, dependency, nurturing—are being more frequently adopted by men, not all of whom are younger men. Some of them are the main caretakers of their children. Some, whose wives are the more proficient wage earners, follow their mates and their work across the country. A good number of the couples I know live with their loves and, in the hope of avoiding the traditional husband/wife power roles, never officially marry. I have contented examples of these innovative situations in my immediate family.

David and his sister were raised by a working mother and a stay-at-home grandmother. David knows that women can be powerful. One of his charms is his emotional availability. He thinks the world would be a better place, better run, less hostile, more inviting, if at least half of the leaders, the presidents and bosses, were women.

The admirable *New York Times* is apparently on board with the possibility of a female president. This past February (2020), when the two were still in the running, the NY Times split their usual preferred Democratic presidential nominee vote and recommended both Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar. One of my son's best friends, and mine—since he reached sixty and we became aging peers—is Tony who lives in San Jose. When last he was in Seattle, he said he had just read my first book and liked it. Although I thought the book was about my life among Gypsies, it apparently labeled me as a feminist because, as he hugged me hello, he laughed and said that he hoped that being white and male was something I would never hold against him.

The *Times* has begun publishing more news about women in their Obituaries. I can't tell you what a thrill it is to open my paper in the morning and find an outstanding woman mentioned. Heroines—and I didn't even have to look them up. I never tire of discovering women in places they hardly ever used to be. Sometimes, the *NY Times* publishes the story of a woman from the past whose notable deeds have been neglected. I imagine there will never be a lack of once-forgotten women.

Life as a Musical Comedy

As a child, I skipped a grade. My fifth-grade class was well past student capacity, so I wasn't entirely surprised. The skipping, however, was anything but memorable. My new teacher, without speaking, took my hand and led me into the sixth-grade classroom, pointing toward an unoccupied desk. Hardly any of the other students seemed to notice. But I did. The class was algebra, and I realized I would need to pay attention and study to catch up.

It was a day much like any other day, and no one seemed at all impressed, including, at dinner, my parents. But that night I had a dream with considerable sound and color. To the syncopated rhythm of a loud brass band, I was singing, shouting, and marching gaily, over and over, from one room to another. Voices sang in harmony. Spirits soared as our hearts beat in three-quarter time.

Upon awakening, I realized my dream was the way I wished the day before had been. I wanted something to remember—music to swell, drums to roll, bells to ring. I was taking lessons in voice and was increasingly intrigued by the dramatic stories in my teacher's book of operas. After class, at my request, Mabel Henry Young would sing, with considerable feeling, some of the songs. That's when I decided that moments of significance in my life should be accompanied by music of significance. But how to manage that?

The operas in the book were old and dated. But Hollywood movies were current. I remember seeing the musical *Flying Down to Rio* several times; musicals with Latin music were my favorite. I began to hope that my life might be somewhat like a musical comedy, a spellbinding drama, a bit of fun and whimsy, poignant at times, but mostly alive to the spectacle and the glory of music and dance. For me, if books and ideas were, as they still are, the essential bread of life, music and dance would be the jam and butter.

At times it actually happened—quite often, in fact. I was at the University in the 1960s, a time when music was everywhere, music was everything, a time of Peace and Love—and, on occasion, of dance. I found that my lover Todoro liked to sing when he was happy; our first years together were filled with Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra songs. I took the Gypsy Lola to see the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Not understanding the concept of acting and performance, she stood up to talk loudly to the actors onstage. I took Todoro to see *Man of La Mancha*, after which he often sang "The Impossible Dream" as he showered. My first decade in California, I was attending as many Roma rituals and parties as I could, events rife with music and dance. I would often lose myself completely in the dancing and forget that I was the *Djuhli* (non-Roma female) Outsider.

During the late 1970s, discos were so much fun; Romni Zoni and I would dance—together, apart, with anyone—until exhausted. Sherrie was even more stage-struck than I was. We went without meals to buy tickets to *The Chorus Line*, *The Wiz*, *Pacific Overtures*. The years I spent in Mill Valley, I took lessons in belly dancing and the ancient form of Hawai'ian dancing that tells a story, the latter taught just a few feet away from the spellbinding waves of San Francisco Bay. A marvelous Mill Valley quartet often entertained us in a church so small that the people in the audience felt held inside the instruments and the tune.

During the golden age of musical comedy, my obsession took wings. In the 1950s, our family lived in Chatham, New Jersey, no more an hour from the theater district. Those years seemed our happiest as a couple. As often as we could, my husband and I went by train and ferry into Manhattan to see dramas, musical shows, and the concerts in Carnegie Hall. We spent all the money from the sale of our Seattle house on tickets to Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off Broadway, something I have never regretted.

The Pajama Game was so much fun. I longed desperately to join the "7 and a ½ cents" chorus, singing my heart out. After buying the LP record, I tried to demonstrate the "Steam Heat" dance to my children, an amazing number that was choreographed by the genius Bob Fosse. *The Pajama Game* was preceded by the drama *Teahouse of the August Moon*, which incorporated a blissfully graceful geisha dance; that was followed by *Threepenny Opera*, *My Fair Lady*, *Candide*, for

some. Before we left the East Coast, our entire family went to *The Music Man*. For weeks we were singing "Goodnight My Someone" and "Seventy-Six Trombones," songs that when sung as a duet comprise the most theatrically romantic moment I can remember onstage or in a movie. (*The Music Man* was later made into a movie.)

Both my children remember *Damn Yankees*, which also has a Fosse number, but they don't know whether they saw it on television, as a movie, or on Broadway. I do remember signing them up for a series of children's concerts created and led by Leonard Bernstein. At Christmastime, we never missed George Balanchine's annual production of *The Nutcracker*. Leslie was taking ballet; she and I went to NY City Ballet performances as often as we could.

The week, years later, when we were again in New York and Leslie, at sixteen, was trying to qualify for the American School of Ballet, she, Colin, and I saw *Oliver!*, *Any Tuesday*, and *Tiger at the Gates*. Colin was responsible for keeping track of our money. The three of us were trying to live according to the popular little paperback we carried, *New York on Ten Dollars a Day*. But not always. It was summer in Manhattan, and I remember the despair on Colin's face as our expensive hairdos, both Leslie's and mine, just created at the Plaza Hotel's salon, slid apart in the subway's damp heat.

I thought sharing the delights of music and dance was essential to my job as a parent. And perhaps it was. As a young man, my son acted in plays in Seattle and Portland; he also danced quite gracefully in Seattle's Koleda Balkan dance group. As a teenager, my daughter danced in a local popular ballet company, tried out for the NY City Ballet School, was accepted, but didn't stay – she didn't feel comfortable in NY by herself. She wound up teaching ballet for years at the dance studio in Seattle's Madrona Park.

I could blame the teachers I had for the significance of my notions about art—the women who taught me, when young, dance, piano, elocution (rather like drama), and singing. They believed in art, art above all else; art was what they lived for, dreamed of, and what they did. But my obsession probably started with my mother dancing the Charleston, and me as a toddler in a highchair, clapping. Those remain the most glorious and glamorous memories of my childhood. I

always wished my sisters could remember our mother dancing. But by the time they came along the Roaring Twenties were over, and the magic was gone.

Bon Voyage

Besides a decline in appearance, old age is popularly associated with the loss of physical ability. Those who are young tend to observe the elderly and feel pity. They judge old age as a sorry state, not realizing that the physical is only one element of being human—an important part, certainly, when one is having children and raising them, or climbing mountains, if such is one's inclination. Occasionally, a man or woman in their nineties competes ably in a 10k race and is acknowledged in the news. But athleticism, I am bound to say, is not the primary job, or even a very meaningful job, for those who are old.

Nevertheless, some of the elderly do find themselves in the constant state of sadness. Anastasia calls me several times a week, usually with a new complaint—a torn ligament, arthritic joint, damaged knee, back spasm, digestive problem. Just taking her little dog for a walk can be a challenge. Most of her time is spent calling doctor's offices, making appointments, and waiting to see the doctor. As she lives some distance from me, I can't assist her directly. Instead, I listen and wonder. Why and how did she end up with so many issues and such a defective physique?

I know others who are old and have little actually wrong, but who continually complain. Always measuring themselves against their younger selves, they find their physical powers waning. Unforgiving in their expectations. they judge the universe to be unfair. "Why me?," they ask, and talk of nothing but lost physical ability.

Most days, I feel good and I so glad to be alive. My nature seems to be a happy one. I don't want to miss a moment of enjoyment. The sun on the green leaves puts a spring in my step. I don't mind walking with a walker. I think walking in any fashion at all is a gift.

I find this stage of life a time for evaluation, appreciation, and caring. No longer required to earn a living, or to tend to growing children or my aging parents, I now have the time to consider what my life has been about; what, if anything, I have accomplished; and what is left to do. I am happily content to give each moment, each significant moment, my full and devoted attention.

I would say that, for the old whose time is running out, it is the moments we have left that count. Old age opens a floodtide of caring—caring for others and caring about the condition of everything imaginable in the world. I cried after reading in this morning's news that millions will die from starvation, possibly more than from the corona virus, and asked myself what I might do. For the old, nothing seems irrelevant, nothing is of little consequence, all is magically immediate. We who have seen and felt so much are bound to find infinity in a rainbow-laden raindrop.

Elders were not always so unappreciated or misunderstood as they are at the moment. Once, long ago, the old ones were esteemed and cherished. Once, when we were evolving and becoming *Homo sapiens*, elderly women and men were the ones who knew where the spring water was. We were the ones who remembered the migration routes of the animals, where the tasty tubers might be found in early summer, what area to avoid in which those strange, rather *Homo*-looking but positively terrifying creatures lived. We, the elders, knew the location of the best tool-making materials and where the clans who spoke a similar language might be found, people with whom we could trade for the things we lacked, as well as give and take young women and men in marriage. At a time when most adults died sometime in their thirties or early forties, the old were an informational treasure. Such was the situation of extended families and tribes for a long several million years. Then, some ten thousand years ago, our ancestors became truly sedentary, began to live in cities like those in early Sumer civilization, kings were invented, and the majority of people, young and old, lost status.

All human beings are given a ribbon of life, the gift of life, and the gift becomes the journey. My mother Mimi/Myrtle gave me this gift, and all my life she has always been just behind me, an encouraging voice whispering in my ear, sharing her warmth, her optimism, and wishing me "Bon voyage!"

Thus it is with those we have known and loved, some of whom seem never to die but to live through us, as well as through others, somehow forever, or as forever as anything can be.

For the young, the ribbon of life stretches far ahead, and how far it will go, no one can be certain. For me, the ribbon of life, like the book you are currently reading, is mostly written. For you, dear reader, however long your ribbon may be, I wish you a fabulous journey.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to my family and friends, all of whom are younger than I; they helped me remember the past. Thanks to a fellow anthropologist and writer, the dear Molly Hollenbach, who invariably welcomes and edits my efforts. Thanks as well to David Kaplan; our bi-weekly coffee, amusing arguments, and conversation fomented most of the included essay topics. Kudos to the gifted artist Tony Misch who so ably photoshopped the pictures. Kudos to his wife, the delightful Victoria Scott, my friend without peer who kindly edited and formatted my work, and put it into pdf form.

About the Author

Carol Miller's scholarly articles on the customs and ritual behavior of the Machvaia Roma of California are widely cited in Romani-American studies. She is also the author of *Lola's Luck: My Life among the California Gypsies* (2009) and *The Church of Cheese: Gypsy Ritual in the American Heyday* (2010). She lives in Seattle.