

BEAUTY

God
Thank you

up and about on a windy cold day makes me feel like I
can get something done. yesterday miserable. today
errand-day but I'll wear the pad and pen on my hip
and stop anything I have to. Your pamphlet was
read many times by me and doesn't let me down. Mint
favorite. Tarragon, houseleek, and of course dill

it seems that if the Phenix Hall part of my application
goes through that Phenix Hall itself, the poets there,
may not respond to the readings possibilities and we
may have that money to work with, which would only be
matching what we can get from the door plus some in kind.
Tricia Gaines told me about a woman whose name and number
I couldn't get who divides her time between a poem workshop
at the penitentiary and a housewife group. sounds like you
must know her. apparently she has discovered this one
housewife, and these two prisoners that are dynamite and
she you probably know her but she could get in on the Phenix
Hall readings certainly since that was the idea.

likewise I need this pamphlet back cause I was only given
5 out of the hundred to work with. My reading at Nate Hawthorne
was terrible, and I'm going to do it again for nothing. s
the lighting was horrible, I couldn't see my audience.
I just can't respond to the stupid fake dark bar dark
coffeehouse readings. I can see dancing high on peyote
in the dark around a campfire but the dark candle and wine
lighting in the case of N Hawthorne was arbitrary I'll turn
the lights on next time and I'll get down off that staged

well I am certainly excited to have an ally in the state.
I have so often gone to people and made the good impression
and then receive interminably their funny post-cards. so
have have you say we would talk even monthly. iss new and
a gassy proposal. I meet less than that with these her

Franconia poets. I have utterly failed to sustain poet
relationships. so watch out I'll probably be making
miscalcualtions with you soon enough if I haven't already.
enough of this slathering. thanks for the beautiful and
useful poems

Wm

William Taler (AKA Reverend Billy)

concept for actual People Magazine

February 6, 1995

Dear Kay:

As I said on the phone, the text is in three files on the disk. As I understand it, one is small enough to print out. The other two are the large versions. But you can always call Diane with questions.

If you send her a check next week, that would be fine.

The pages might serve as the introductory chapter to the book. If it's to be a "meditation on the nature of family," what I'm considering is writing my mother and father's history kind of "as told to," filtered through my memories of the stories she told me, with details chosen for their relevance to my story. Next I'm considering a synopsis of my life as a kid, then my life as a grown-up (the two relationships, the kids, other people's kids, etc.). And, pivotal to the question, meeting Charter and family life from there. What do you think? *What?*

But, most importantly, what do you think of the first piece? Tone. Choice of details. You know. I NEED you!

Send along that resume.

Talk to you soon.

Love,

*Am on train
to Hartford
Sat 3:25pm*

I'll send you one of mine (a partial one)

that I considered printing on a flayed goat skin (or pig). I have the skins but scrapped the idea; the reason follows.

The reason I tell this is: I think the idea of a synopsis is so interesting. So ~~different~~ from an autobio, especially if done in parallel (like a chart) as you're suggesting. I would even consider a magazine format (TV Guide, Soap Opera Synopsis, etc.) + have thought of doing that. We'd be starting a new genre - everyone wants to read mags anyway we could

*pay for printing
distribution
costs. I want to
sell ads to printers*

This is a fine introduction.

There were harsh orange marks on the top of the cold woodstove where someone had set two damp clay flower pots. Cluster flies made little battering sounds in the corners of the window panes or lay dead among browning begonia petals on the sills. This was no longer my mother's house.

Standing under the great pine beams in the deserted living room, I could imagine chaff sifting down pale shafts of late January light and hear the soft thump of a tractor's tires on the floor of the barn that this building once was.

As much as the extent of her possessions had overwhelmed and dismayed me when we'd gathered to portion them out amongst the ten of us, their absence now pained me more. For the last time, I made myself see it all whole through her admiring eyes: the enormous sea green Oriental rug, Dad's leather top desk and the triangular leather armchair that fit the knee hole like a puzzle piece, the blue lacquered highboy, wing chairs upholstered in peach velvet, embroidered pillows, the green marble coffee table where she displayed her formal creations of lilies and tea roses or yellow and white roadside wildflowers amongst masses of French lilac in a Lowestoft bowl.

*beautiful
sound*

In my mind, I returned the cachepots to their places at either end of a sofa. I replaced inlaid wooden boxes and embossed silver boxes on delicate mahogany tables. I put back the framed wedding photos in bookcases decorated ^{with} by unread leather bound editions of Dickens and Thackeray and Theodore Roosevelt. I re-hung the oil painting of the woman with her back to us, sitting on a beach with a child in whom each of us had always recognized ourselves.

Bare... emptied... vanished... & leaving

her

All that remained of Mom's dining room were flowered chintz curtains and a rug that showed the footprints of a long table and ten Chippendale chairs. Shelves ^{that} ~~that~~ ^{bare} had held the dragon-lidded tureen and Steuben glass fruit bowl, the serving platters, the red and gold patterned bouillon cups and saucers on wooden stands... ^B bare except for a stack of ~~fancy~~ paper plates, three candles, ^a ~~and a~~ handleless pie server that one of us had taken out ^{from} of the French Provincial sideboard and left behind. The cupboard doors hung open, empty of ^{ied} ~~the dinner~~ plates and soup bowls and serving dishes that were ^{tenants} ~~meticulously~~ stored between circles of gray felt, arranged in stacks of Spode and Aynsley and Ashworth and Minton and Crown Derby and Balmoral and Worcester. Gone was ^{the} ~~the~~ etagère, ^{vanished} and with it her ^{the} ~~collections~~ of Royal Copenhagen figurines, miniature silver, yellowed ivory Japanese netsukes. ^{her collections.} Leaning against a bare wall, a portrait of her in ^{sp¹} ~~a~~ champagne-colored satin ~~gown~~ with a hint of décolletage. Dad never liked it. He was right, in a way. Costumed like that, her beauty appeared contrived, a fleeting (?) thing.

I walked ~~slowly~~ upstairs, past a wall of family photographs. We children were arranged, by an invisible Mr. Rocco, in tableaux--three of us, five, seven, then ten--with one or another dog in the foreground, Dad with a hand placed woodenly on a knee.

"Docta Harrree...over here!" Mr. Rocco would cry in despair as Dad twisted to whisper a joke to one of us behind him. "Bay-zil," this to my brother, accompanied by frantic pantomime, "The hair. The hair." Or "Smile, Margaret!" Or "Beeg sister, a leetle more forward. A leetle more, please!" The youngest squirmed. The older ones shifted between hilarity and sullenness. And, by framed turns, year after year, one or

two of us look dreadful: ^{into} trapped ~~at~~ an awkward age, ~~in~~ a bad mood, ~~on~~
the wrong day. But never Mom. ^{she.}

Elegant, serene, half-smiling at something just off camera, she is
beautiful ^{each time.} in every picture. Each hairdo ^{arrangement of hair (or something. 'coiffure' is too stuffy.)} looks right, each
^{set off} outfit--touched with a gold pin, ~~offset~~ by a rope of pearls--stunning,
each stopped gesture perfect. She loves her children. She loves her
life.

In newspaper clippings and browning photographs glued to the heavy
paper pages of old albums, in the color snapshots that fill years of
bulging ring binders, she is at the center, not by design but by some
quality that ~~seems to~~ light her differently than the rest of us.

I entered her ~~bed~~ bedroom, now just a room with green carpeting and a
lone Hepplewhite bow front bureau on which lay a heap of costume
jewelry no one wanted. We had taken away the furniture and all the
little objects that spoke of her. We had removed the bed where, on ~~a~~ ^{the}
steamy night in July, she died.

^{On} ~~I'd arrived~~ ^{old arrived} that afternoon to find her sitting between daughters
on the edge of her bed, dressed in a flowered cotton nightgown, bowed
head covered by a deep blue turban. They told me she had chosen to
stop speaking. ~~Even~~ ^B breathing was clearly an effort.

"It's me, pal." She raised her head at the sound of my voice. She
smiled. But the smile stayed on her lips too long, as if she had
forgotten ~~its meaning.~~

All evening we came and went, rearranging the pillows around her
restless body, moistening her mouth with damp cloths. Mary sang to her
quietly. Young Jesse tiptoed in to kiss her grandmother. Basil held
her hand. Perhaps he prayed. Maureen and I went downstairs to smoke.

'hairdo's &
'outfit' are
a bit
rude or
tense
in this
picture,
whereas
'stopped
gesture' is
perfect.

Nice!

Later, Mary showed me what the visiting nurse had taught her, how to fill the syringe, expel the air, how to pinch the flesh on ^{the} her leg and, holding the needle like a pencil, jab it in. How to deliver sleep. My hand trembled a bit. I expelled a stream of morphine with the air. I gave her a shot and I knew, at that moment, that she would tell me when to give the next.

At ten o'clock, exhausted, Mary and Basil took Jesse to bed. Maureen and I arranged ourselves on either side of Mom. Her breaths were coming so slowly, ~~we could count them~~. Her turban had slipped off. ~~and~~, with her bare head and wide, unseeing eyes, her open mouth, she looked like a tiny bird.

As we stroked her hands, I realized that her beauty had settled there. I held the hand with the wedding band caught between gold braided circlets; Maureen, the hand with the ruby and diamond studded ring Dad had given her for a birthday. Her nails had been lately painted in a blue-red hue. Her fingers were full, soft, still, relaxed, as if, surrounded by family, she were composing herself for another portrait. The dog shifted on the floor by her bed. Nice!

With no more words for each other, Maureen and I talked to her. We told her that she could go now, that her children, her perfect children, would be fine. We told her that Dad and her father and mother were waiting. She made me believe ^{the words} ~~what~~ I was saying. as later

Toward midnight, the moments between inhale and exhale lengthened. My own breathing matched hers until I exhaled and she did not. She simply stopped. Sobbing, I tried and tried to close her paling blue eyes. "Leave her." Maureen was crying and laughing. "She wants to see."

removed from
I took the rings off her fingers and gave one of the braided bands to Maureen. "These two are for us." And we slipped them on, married in our grief.

We dressed her in a silk robe with matching turban. When the doctor came to confirm what we knew, she was composed, beautiful.

Then the men from the mortuary arrived. It disturbed them that I would not leave her alone while they donned disposable gloves, zipped her brittle body into a plastic bag, covered that bag with a burgundy velvet sack and lifted the bundle onto a wheeled stretcher. As they rolled my dead mother from her bedroom, the funeral director turned--could it have been?--and winked at me.

Wonderful

"Oh look," said Charlotte in a small voice. My youngest sister and I were finishing the task of emptying the last of it, the bureau drawers, the clothes in the closets, left among empty hangers. She was holding up a pair of panty hose decorated with Christmas trees. The party dress that matched was gone.

While Charlotte packed up silk teddies and cotton underpants, I tossed half empty bottles of nail polish, sculpted lipsticks, jars of orange-scented Elizabeth Arden face cream, hair brushes with strands tangled in the bristles, old tooth brushes, face powders and puffs, vitamins into a box from the liquor store.

Although few of her treasures escaped our purse seine, almost nothing remains of the order of her life, a life I never wanted as my own, nor, as a practical matter, could I have had. My mother was the author of a fairytale ~~she~~ told over and over to her ten rapt children,

? What is that?

a story satisfyingly full of heroes and uniforms, balls, adventures and a cast of minor characters worthy of Chaucer: Irish servants, Jesuit clergy, handsome suitors, saints, shadowy sinners, personages famous in Catholic circles.

no! Not after all you're moving toward?

She was the lens through which I first saw family. She gave me the myths that informed her life, her best and most meticulously realized work.

maybe

As a young woman, ~~desperate to become my own imagined self~~, I put long distances and countless cardboard boxes between my mother and me. I broke or threw away so many things as worthless. I ~~even~~ hated her for fear I might become her, uncritical wife, ~~the~~ port in anyone's storm. It was my complicated father who served as my youthful model.

But it But ~~it~~ was he who yielded quietly to ^{the} a death he'd been announcing since I can remember, ~~and~~ ^{she} she who left us reluctantly. She loved her fairytale.

We became almost as close as sisters ^{over} her last decade. I had ~~become someone~~ ^{me} she could appreciate, even if she still ~~must have~~ wondered at the difficult daughter she'd raised so carefully.

As you've done, keep to feminine graceful endings here. 'Decade' is a word when at the end. This is more quiet accepting dignified + we know it is your speculation

~~Strangely, I think~~ ^{it} it was writing that connected us in the end.

She had a gift for it ~~herself~~ that found outlets in a lifetime of correspondence, from meticulously crafted notes explaining our absences ^{and} or untoward behaviors to beleaguered teachers, to the long and thoughtful meditations she composed to help us when we were in distress. I still see her propped up in bed, the breakfast tray she'd prepared for herself pushed to one side. She's wearing ^{cello} a lacy lace nightgown with a matching bed jacket. She's ^{braces} bracing a yellow legal pad on her drawn-up knees, writing with a pencil. Her head is bent in

the pads slightly in the direction of pornography or romance novel

in

2

concentration. Or she's fallen asleep.

More and more, ^{more & more} as her illness overtook her, I was there to set the pad on the bedside table next to ^{the mystery novel,} the booklets explicating the Stations of the Cross, the rosary, ^{and} ~~and the mystery novel.~~

She had begun to chronicle the story of her life in her precise Convent hand. ~~She would not object to my taking it up, adding my coda.~~

Wonderful lead-in

& you don't have to say it
to us (or to her).

Plus I love that the
final words here are
"Convent hand"

& refer ~~back~~ to her hand &
beautiful hands made earlier.

Caballeros/caballeros - A voice/a point of view

The noise is everywhere, like heat. Dozens of cocks crowing. The voices of fifty, sixty men shouting above the loud, scratchy amplified voice of the announcer. Only the two cocks in the middle of the ring are silent as they circle and jab, neck feathers fanned, blood beginning to stain their heads and shoulders.

Western
Eastern
end

Friday afternoon in Puntas, a tiny town in the hills above Rinco'n, Puerto Rico. People have come from all over the island for this gallera. Cars are pulled off the twisting road at angles under falls of purple vines and wild hibiscus. Thin hairless dogs thread the traffic. On a cement porch painted pink, a woman rocks and watches. There are cockfights almost every weekend, each as important as the other. And this small wooden building with its blue and white grandstands, its smoky cafeteria and the bar with bottles arranged beneath a mirror in bargello fashion accomodates the same birds and bettors as a ring in San Juan. And the same amounts of money change hands in a constant free-for-all of wagering all done with shouts and gestures around and above the battling roosters.

2
Cinder
block

many of

The men come early in the day with their birds. These roosters, which have been raised from chicks on diets of corn and bananas, vitamins and meat--personal recipes designed to make them the fittest and the gamest--are fasting today. Their owners carry them tucked under an arm, close to the chest, and stroke them and talk to them. The shiny birds seem calm, almost docile. Each bird is weighed and the matches are arranged, up to 35 fights in a day. Out of a glass jar the men draw chips for the order of the fights, hoping their birds will fight early while they are still fresh. Each rooster is then placed in a small plastic box; they are stacked in rows awaiting the moment.

Asia/Greece/Rome/Europe: 1700's big bus.

It's an old sport, cockfighting, still practiced legally in X countries and illegally in X more. It originated in the X century in X, etc.

(What I want here is some discussion of the sport and its origins, mention of cockfighting in art, etc., and some anecdotal first-hand info--perhaps from the NH Puerto Rican community--and anecdote.)

— No foreigners — local sporting — specialized

dirt floor

more dirty details

cages outside
wooden seats — peeling
Cafeteria

Country fair
"git & steel"

garden *hell is the* *folkman* *My state* *taxi driver / warehouse /* *the wires* *stand in* *returnees from U.S. retirement*

The shallow ring[^] is full of spectators. Some are young men dressed in jeans and fluorescent tee shirts. But most of the people here are older, sober in their pressed pants, short-sleeved cotton shirts and shined shoes. They converse intently, moving about, gesturing like brokers on the floor of a tropical stock exchange. There are two men in their midst with roosters under their arms. They put their birds into two blue cloth bags which are hung on a scale to demonstrate their equal weight. The crowd begins to take their seats. The owners approach ~~each other~~, thrusting the birds at each other. They make kissing noises and the roosters brighten, grow alert and wary. All around them the betting proceeds, each man shouting his wager at another until a deal is struck. Then more bets between new pairs. The entry fee is \$25, plus \$2 for the house. The winner earns \$50, if there is a winner. ^(#) The man in the checked shirt brings his bird forward. He holds it at arm's length. The official, who has a whistle around his neck, examines the bird--feet, thighs, head--then dips a square of cloth in water and rubs it along the bird's shaved legs, along its wings, around its shoulders. He takes the damp cloth and, when the man in the checked shirt opens the bird's mouth, squeezes a few drops down the rooster's gullet. If the feathers have been poisoned, the bird will die. It drinks to its own health. The process is repeated on the second bird. Then a cage is lowered from the ceiling, coming to rest on the dusty red rug of the ring. ? *form*

The din is augmented by the voice of the official over the antiquated PA system. He holds a large mechanical alarm clock aloft, announcing the minutes till the fight. The birds are put into the clear cage, separated by a plastic wall, facing each other. The official blows his whistle into the mike. The last spectators step over the low wall into ringside seats. The cage ascends. There is an instant of quiet before the roosters--one white, one black--fly at each other, attacking with beak and spurs.

There is an outer ring around the main ring, behind the stands, and a room walled off by slats in one section. In it there are two seats, like cobblers' benches or stationary seesaws. At one end of the wooden platform sits a man with matches in his mouth, surrounded by little pots of glue and thimbles of thin twine, a knife. At the

few opp. to make \$ - the possibilities of big time

The vitamin vendors

Latin male culture displaced / dying?

other end an old man holds his rooster, turns it on its side and proffers it. Skillfully, the man with the matches puts a spur--a natural one or a metal one depending upon the agreements between opponents--deep into the place on the rooster's leg where its own spur once grew. The spur is secured by hot glue and wrapped with twine. In this way the rooster will not risk a broken spur in a fight; this one is removable. The smell of the glue mingles with the smell of empanadillas frying in the cafeteria. Another man waits, holding a bird and a can of Medallia beer.

La Negra is down, pinned by the white bird's foot. It struggles. Lies quiet. Struggles again and frees itself. The white bird seems to be winning. The betting continues with men covering their early bets with new ones as the fight progresses. La Negra finds new energy. Its dark feathers are glistening with blood. It attacks with its spurs, exploding into the air like a xxxxx. The sound of wings is audible. In the wild these birds would fight for dominance. The contest would be as earnest, but almost never fatal. Roosters seldom die in a cockfight. One wins, and when it is clear to the other that it is beaten, it quits. The winner, after a few desultory pecks, retreats. The owners leap into the ring to retrieve their birds. The winner might hold his rooster aloft. His friends congratulate him. The friends of the loser commiserate. Tens and twenties change hands throughout the stands. The atmosphere is still charged, but always good-natured. This fight does not run its ^{allotted} twenty minute course. The black bird has won. Hundreds and hundreds of dollars have been wagered. The black bird has grown more valuable. Its progeny will fetch large prices, even as chicks. The black bird and its opponent will be petted, ice packs applied to their eyes. They will be fed and pampered. They will fight again.

The school bus comes and goes, leaving off a young girl who stops into the bar to buy a single cigarette. A policeman stops by and climbs to a seat next to three men he knows. In the next contest, unexpectedly, one cock refuses to continue. It flies to a perch at ringside where it is caught and brought back onto the rug. It flies again. And again a third time. The fight is called. But before the other cock can be named the winner, a fresh bird is brought in to

Hemel
Bowl

booze

longer

takers for
new bet

stakes
higher

survival

?

game

bird strategy - trip
head under wing - fighter in a clutch

boxers
sparring

feinting
motions

position

more than
600 mph

test whether there is fight left in the cock. It attacks the new intruder in a frenzy of feet and feathers. It passes. The coward cock has its flight feathers cut on the spot. It will not fight for a year, until it moults and grows new feathers. This way its owner cannot enter him in another town and, knowing its history, bet against it. ~~himself~~

A new match is beginning. The blue bags are hanging from the scale when a man in a brown suit steps into the ring. Much consulting. The cocks are returned to their owners. More consulting. The official leaves the building with the man in the brown suit and the owner of the establishment, a small stooped man of some age. Minutes pass. The spectators climb down from their seats and head for the bar. Roosters in cages and domestic roosters in neighboring yards crow in turn, making a kind of music behind the voices. The heat is tempered by a breeze off the distant ocean. The sky is huge and pale blue over the greens of palm trees and the lighter greens of cane fields. Now the principals are returning. The man in the brown suit take the microphone and begins to speak. There is complete quiet for the first time today. There have been irregularities. Certain rules have been broken, standards not met. Not enough officials to handle the cocks, ^{to} work in the ring. The establishment will be fined two hundred dollars. For the good of the sport. The protection of everyone. The crowd listens carefully, then breaks into applause and the match resumes.

It is Eddie Caro--Eddie Expensive--who explains all this in English: the supervision of the quality and composition of metal spurs, the ingredients in an ideal rooster diet, the prices of vitamins and a promising chick, the intricacies of betting, the techniques of training the young bird, the time it takes to bring a victorious cock back into fighting condition, the fate of the loser: over a beer and a cigarette at the bar between matches on a bright Friday afternoon in Puntas where the men come to wager and shout and pass a companionable few hours while iridescent roosters battle diligently and the school bus passes and the woman on the porch goes indoors to prepare the meal.

Pants & white shirt
in the style of
top the
state

~~the good of~~
~~the people~~

went aside -
lots of people
voluntary advice

The concession man - "PAY ATTENTION"

The starter: looks a bit like CD, but that's probably as much because of the role he assumes as anything. Bright white pants. Bright blue shirt, made brighter in the white light. Iridescent white-blond hair. He is standing in a box which hangs out over the track. At his back, a row of flags in flag stands. It takes me a while to interpret what the colors mean. Backwards: checkered for winner; white for last lap; yellow (this is the most powerful flag...waved it warns, stuck into the holder and left to wave in the wind, it suspends the race, forces each car to remain in position, circling and circling like sharks, until the problem is cleared up and) green begins. All the variations, the styles of display! Furled and ~~crossed~~ and displayed ^{parallel} pointing downward over the track, green and yellow mean the race will begin next lap (if the cars retain their proper positions). Furiously waved checkered and yellow mean that there's a winner but also some problem, some danger. Red and green furled and crossed and pointed down seem to mean that the race is halfway over. And then the starter also uses his arms, his hands, his fingers (three more laps: three fingers held high). He jumps in his box and spins to start the cars and watch them blur by him. He watches all of them at all times...he's wired to them. He has an assistant who wades into the passing herd to re-position a car ("Number 40 behind Number 00, then the field is correct."), to hand the checkered flag to the winner to wave out the window in a victory lap, to replace flags and hand him the next ones, to anticipate his needs. There's only noise, and all talking is mime.

The races: like pinball like kids' toys like TV will there be flames?

The crowd: friendly families a gentle rain of straws and styrofoam from the high tiers the smell of frying little kids running and nothing to harm them The cars are too noisy for the crowd to compete, so it (the crowd-animal) seems unusually quiet, docile, polite, well behaved

Notes on the exact wording on the cars. Interviews with drivers & fans.

Silver white winters
That melt into springs,

"Girls in white dresses with
with blue satin sashes,
Snow ~~that~~ does fall *flakes that*
on my nose and eye lashes."
"These are a few of my favorite things"
From the "Sound of Music"

Filled an undecorated childhood.
I was the ~~mere~~ girl of the twins,
My brother the important part,
I, somehow less than half.
I wore imaginary gowns.
They trailed after me in the
sweet country grass of Connecticut.
I was allowed no jewelry or ribbons.
"You are not worth it," my Father said.

I was a girl ~~child~~ in secret.

The gowns were always pink.
I had to pick up my skirts to walk.
My over-decorated mother walked in no beauty.
She was always sick.
She wore plastic jewelry from the dime store.
Geegaws, we called them in those days.

God was my secret.

No one ever spoke of HIM,
Too emotional for Protestants, I suppose.
We were Quakers.
I would serve the sick, free the slaves,
raise up the oppressed.
I read the Psalms and suffered.
It was my offering, ~~little though it was.~~

I took ballet.
"Perhaps," I thought, "there will be
"There will be beautiful dresses."
It was Protestant ballet,
we wore shorts.

I learned to cry like my Mother.
Maybe they didn't think I was a girl,
but I could cry like a woman.

In the autumn when the trees turned
I could feel every leaf fall.
I raked the side yard,
acres of gold
from the ~~new~~ vanishing elms,
but nobody noticed.
The land took me in.

A bit
sophisticated
in tone —
country west,
even.

I was a princess like Elizabeth
and Margaret pictured in
GOOD HOUSE KEEPING MAGAZINE.
They wore white rabbit fur dresses
with pale blue satin sashes.
I practiced my curtsy in the barn.

I longed for horses to ride,
my curly hair trailing in the wind.
They cut my hair.

I was told to be a lady.
Perhaps it was part of being a girl.
I would speak well and be reserved.
My school mates despised me.
"You use big words," they said.
~~I read books.~~ →
~~There was nothing~~ else to do.
"You are smart," they said.
In my books I could be a girl.

At Christmas I asked if
I could go to church without my bonnet
so my curls would not be crushed.
My Father's disapproval was as bitter
as the December wind,
but I went hatless.

In June I got a dress
sewn by my old maid aunt.
In those days it was fashionable
to hate unmarried women.
The dress was pink organdy.
It had a full skirt,
a lace-trimmed yoke,
and a wide pink satin ribbon
for a sash.

I was ten then.
I wore it to a wedding,
and the groom leaned down
from his great height
and kissed me on the cheek.
I burned with shame
and wondered why he did it.
I did not know ~~realize~~
that I was a little girl in pink.

and somebody liked me
for being that,
and my Aunt, --
who died of breast cancer
when I was in college --
never knew
that she made me into a girl ~~child~~
for a brief instant
the on s ummer day
when the band played
and people danced
and drank champagne in the sunlight.

it's so intimate, so friendly.

Draft of Lifshin piece

I read memoir & autobio for (a) info about another time or place (b) to experience the "informal" style of a writer (c) to feel connected (as a woman, usually),

* I write memoir to crystalize for myself those wandering, at-the-corner-of-the-eye experiences that, for one reason or the other, have traveled with me through my life. Too, it helps me makes sense of memory To make sense of to make sensual to make of yes, it's that sense of making * *←*

Diaries are, for me, little notes or records...memoirs are more fashioned.

life is an accretion like coral / living like trees
I live in a present past. Sometimes things trigger memories (a photo, a certain smell, a catch phrase or a family way of saying something), but, since my memories are interwoven with my current life, it's simply a question of what I want to put into words and why.

When I think about the past, which is often, I tend to focus on myself: main relation to people and places.

Memory does, I think, tend to romanticize the past, but that's not all bad. It's a way of creating...after all, does it matter so much what exactly happened or what we did/do with the story?

* PS Sometimes I write about the past in order to put certain things away, in a scented drawer, or wrapped in newspaper. *Some with fondness, some with relief*

Surprises? Not really...the surprises are for me in the prose, in how I've put it all together in the style I've arrived at. In this it's similar to writing poetry...the condensed account, the way in which it's said.

A gift? Perhaps not a gift but some kind of sharing with my mother, my sister Anne, my kids. Well, in some ways a memoir might be a gift if it recreates for someone else some part of our shared experience (I did that once for The Books of Bill & Bash)

Bro

MH is author of 2 books of poetry, editor
of anth. DEAR WINTER, co-ed. with KA, of
GIFT (V. of GA Press) ~~Magazine~~ essays on
contemp. poetry & a companion anth. of
poetry forthcoming from GA. She is a
partner with Chater Creek, an indus. ad
agency.

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of a collection of solstice poems ~~DEAR WINTER~~ --

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A GIFT OF VERBES, critical essays that challenge
the contemp. poetry canon & a forthcoming
anth., both from the Univ. of GA Press. She
is a partner with her husb. CW, in an
indus. ad agency. She lives in Athens.

your voice was strict
whether you were lecturing your grandchildren on the importance
of marrying within the Faith
or lecturing (graduating classes) on the importance of peace & prayer

we have lost the habit of prayer
the computer can tell our beads
the credit card can forgive us our trespasses
the notion of sin has been replaced by what's acceptable

the 686 Park Ave house:
a dumbwaiter
floors of crystal and china
a study overlooking the Avenue, filled with leather books
silver framed photos and portraits of family done in oil
the Russian Embassy was next door !

there's nothing about me that you would recognize or approve of
there's little about the world that you could condone
only the poverty and materialism would be familiar
the sabre rattling is so much louder it would deafen you
the mistakes grow more dangerous

Far from embracing the technologies that you pioneered, many of
us have fled from them, preferring the hand pump, the outhouse,
the rejected trappings of the land your grandfather left.

But I'm not deluded into thinking I've escaped the 20th century...
it's just down the dirt road,
at the end of the Spaulding Turnpike.
\$.15 gets me there (a \$.15 toll lets me pass into it)

I remember the opulence of the family world you paid for;
I even experienced a little of it: the debut at the Gotham Ball,
bicycles, then cars, huge houses, summers by the sea, winters
on ski lifts, private schools Noblesse Oblige I remember
through the filter of Vietnam, campus demonstrations, abortion,
birth control, women's rights, divorce, poverty... I remember
like a refugee might remember Czarist Russia... and I have no
wish to re-enter those halls...

Once I counted Anne Ford's shoes.

The barn we played in was filled with spider webs and the ghosts of
grooms

I've never been ~~the~~^{on} the ocean liners that served as limosines for
~~my~~ family to travel to Europe and the Far East.

I never folded my clothes into steamer trunks nor collected
multi-colored stickers.

I never had a summer job. I always had a tan.

I learned to waltz, foxtrot, rhumba, tango.

She also remarked, on looking out the window of a plane at a particularly barren and empty part of America, "Now how can people talk about overpopulation! Look at all that space going to waste!"

My father has retreated into stock answers. Worse, he asks fewer and fewer questions, preparing himself, as he's done since I was little, to die.

You were fearful (not the sinful, hopeless fear, but the healthy, holy kind)... your children have no fear. Your grandchildren are strangers to you, and they are afraid.

My father (for all we know, God may have decided that the 20th century is "closing time") is not afraid. Has nothing more at stake.

Electricity... we discovered it, too.

You were born before the refrigerator, the car, the plane, the radio, the TV. Before the bomb. You helped make some of these things. You believed in Progress. All of you did. At least you had a hand in it. And more, you thought about its implications.

Who thinks now? Genetic engineering. Robotics. Electronics.

Why are people still hungry?

Why has it taken me so long to love? What kind of love (duty) was I taught? Abstractions! Denials! Duty!

When the sirens sound, I have dreamed what I will do first: shoot the dog and cats.

This is only a test. If this were a real emergency, I would shoot the dog and cats. (the names of the 2 guns we have hanging)
Winchester 30/30 16 gauge shotgun.

Maybe when I get drunk and behave like a rebellious, outrageous spoiled child, maybe I'm blotting something out.

If this is personal, is it not also public? An attempt to make sense of what you, and men like and unlike you, have given to us? You asked us to solve it. You'd probably hate the ways I try.

There may be a God. Believing there is allowed you to sleep.

Grandpa, the corn is shriveled on its stalks. There's no rain.

Things are as simple as they were for your grandmother. And as complicated as

1816 - A killing frost every month of the year.

Tahitian volcano (100X more than Mt. St. Helens).

quite pp. 69-70.

Backriver road winds its way through what was once poor farmland. Now it is third or fourth growth forest, may be thirty year trees and there are many small and some large houses all neatly kept, a curious combination of working class small town and middle class suburbia. As you drive your car past the the thickets of trees and climb a gentle rise, for one lovely moment the road drops down to well kept open hay fields still bordered fine old farmhouses and imposing barns. Beyond the fields the Great Bay shimmers in the sunlight. A single telephone line loops its way from pole to pole along the left side of the road. This scene is how the land was when I was little. I pass it several times a week on my way to the grocery store, but I never tire of it. The land is always a kalaidoscope of changing seasons, changing weather.

Some times when I drive this road I think of you, because I have no camera, but I have a writer's words. You remind me of this amidst my chronic flurry of complaints in our phone conversations, and today, your birthday I remember that you above all human beings I have come to know, named me writer. On this singular gift you have given me, and keep returning to me no matter how many times I lose it, I meditate now when I come upon the remains of the old agricultural world I knew so long ago, and I give you quiet thanks in my heart.

That you could go on returning the gift to me almost ad infinitum is a credit to your own gifts as a writer, and to your very great

and generous heart. Happy, Happy Birthday

Love,
Charity

THE YEAR OF GLASNOST, THE DISMANTLING OF THE WALL,
THE DEMISE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY, THE RISE OF
THE UN, THE UNRAVELING OF APARTHEID, THE RE-EMERGENCE
OF WOMEN, THE ACCEPTANCE OF NICARAGUA, THE REVOLT OF
TAXPAYERS, THE OVERTHROW OF VARIOUS DICTATORS, ETC.

October, and no killing frost. Tarnished maple leaves wait for the signal to abandon their posts. Tomatoes linger in this unexpected warmth and zucchini push forth tentative members under a creeping canopy of dark green leaves. Zinnias continue. Carrots thrust inches deeper. Beets and pumpkins swell to mammoth proportions, shoulder each other for even more room in the tender ground. It's a rogue season: an omen, a portent, a gift, a warning, a story we will remember in years to come when we burn winter's wood too early, fidget in the stiff traces of a cold and lean Tuesday in February.

Summer before
WWII (Pen-Engineering)

What's being
bred?

IN

THE YEAR OF GLASNOST, THE DISMANTLING OF THE WALL,
THE DEMISE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY, THE RISE OF
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sexual

connection

brewing

blankets

morning?

Year of Snake
Change

[The first, tentative snow has softened
the sharp edges of the wintering parsnips.]

~~and I should be settling in~~

In the year's simple grammar, winter
is a colon: cold punctuation
balancing the glowing clauses of fall
and summer.

I should be settling in, content
to gather darkness like a shawl *your arms*
around my shoulders...

~~But I like the~~

But there's talk of a new winter,
an interminable eclipse,
a long, boring sentence
filled with repetition
filled with repetition...

In 1816 they called it
The Year with no Summer--killing
frost every month ~~of that year~~
for all the twelve months--
and in New Hampshire
snow on the corn
snow on the lilies
snow on the raspberries
snow on the harrow
on the backs of grazing cows
in the nests of phoebes...
and on and on and on
in a punishing monotone.

As I stood in line at the Town Hall on a soggy Tuesday in Barrington, New Hampshire, waiting my turn to cast a ballot for 1 Selectman, 1 Cemetery Commissioner, 1 Trustee of Trust Funds, 1 Superintendent of the Checklist, 2 Library Trustees and a Town Moderator, the village of Tasbapauni, Nicaragua seemed a little closer than it had two weeks ago.

I was part of a delegation accredited as observers of Nicaragua's February 25th election, and the towns to which I'd been assigned were Miskito Indian settlements accessible only by boat from Bluefields, across a bay and up heron-edged rivers to the Caribbean Sea. We got a late start that Sunday morning because Ramon, our panga driver, had to vote in his precinct before he could take us north.

A panga is a flat-bottomed fiberglass boat with three benches and a hold in the bow for gear. Ours was equipped with a 90 horsepower outboard motor, and Ramon proved to be the Mario Andretti of panga drivers. We pounded to Pearl Lagoon at top speed over a two foot chop and arrived soon after the polls opened. But our discomfort was a minor inconvenience compared to what most Nicaraguans had undergone for the privilege of voting. People had walked to the polls, some carrying children, on journeys of eight hours and more. They stood in long lines, in shadeless heat waiting their turn. One by one they presented registration cards, were checked against a masterlist, carried the three ballots to the curtained booth, voted for President, National Assembly and local officials, were checked again and fingerprinted. At Pearl Lagoon, the election was proceeding without incident.

Nor were there any irregularities at Sandy Bay, a three hour distance away. The town's chief election official--otherwise the school principal--brought us to a clinic which served as the polling place and we observed the last of the voting and the ballot counting. A group of uniformed young people were impatiently awaiting the results because they had been forbidden to start their baseball game until the tallying was over. A cool wind blew in from the ocean, rattling the palm trees. Chickens and piglets pattered among two-room wooden houses. We were each offered an unripe

coconut, peeled with a machete and cut to make a drinking hole. I thought of the men at the Barrington Emergency Medical Team table dispensing coffee and soda to the citizenry.

The mood in Tasbapauni was palpably different, tense. Camouflaged figures flickered in the rainforest at the entrance to the small lagoon. The mayor met us at the dock, anxious to know if we were from the OAS. He had been expecting observers all day, but no one had arrived. Our badges reassured him somewhat; he hurried us to the polling place where, in the last light, the final ballots had been cast and the counting was beginning. Over the next two hours, as three members of our team oversaw the process, the rest of us waited restlessly outside, sharing cigarettes with fishermen, talking to people. On the perimeter, groups of young men of military age gathered silently. "Daniel promised them immunity if they returned to vote," a Catholic lay leader told us. They had come home from Honduras and Costa Rica to a town edgy in the presence of armed soldiers. "Tasbapauni has been overrun by Sandanistas seven times."

Although we had been instructed not to travel at night, we could not refuse the officials' request that we accompany the ballots, sealed in red plastic bags for the trip, to the collection place in Pearl Lagoon. We set out in the moonless night our flashlights searching for the river's opening, startling egrets and kingfishers into flight. Suddenly, the sky was stitched with orange tracer bullets fired from automatic weapons, but it seemed to be only a strange warning or the bravado of young soldiers. Ramon guided the panga into the river and out across the larger bay, again at bone-shuddering speed, to Pearl Lagoon. The ballots had arrived safely. We slept in tents and traveled back to Managua the next day by boat and pickup. Only then did we hear the report that Contra radio had broadcast instructions to kill the election observers if the Sandanistas had declared victory.

On Tuesday, March 13th, at six in the evening, the Barrington polls closed, also without incident. In our town of almost 6000 souls, of the 3200 registered adults, less than one quarter had exercised their right to vote.

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1
All afternoon the bird's (insistent) song has circled me from the branches of every elm. The bird itself is elusive, taking as its shape clusters of dark green leaves. I must name it, "this drab summer resident," otherwise, the song will be the only sound I hear in my forest of noises. ~~Do you know what it is, this~~ compulsion to identify? I think of my mother. The definition is so familiar as to be without color, like a female bird. All my life I have taken it for granted, the notion of mother, but when I try to give it shape, the reality eludes me, ~~much like this bird I am trying to see~~. Who is she that takes the name? What does she have in common with others of her species? If I could think of her (My. Mother.) as a bird, she has acquitted herself. Her nestlings have hatched, thrived, flown. She's repeated the pattern and it has been enough. Over and over, the hatchings, the nurturing, the flight. When they return--at the end of this season or the next--does she recognize them? Has she anything to sing that they can improvise on? } "Song is Robin-like, but phrases are separated by brief pauses; the song typically continues for many minutes without a long break." } Now the bird comes into focus in my old binoculars. <It is not a cluster of leaves. It displays the characteristic broad white eye stripe. It does not have a red eye or the distinctive blue-gray cap and therefore must be the Warbling Vireo.> It is this. Only this.

sketch
what is this

I would -

1

All afternoon the bird's insistent song has circled me, from the branches of every elm. The bird itself is elusive, taking as its shape clusters of dark green leaves. I must name it, "this drab summer resident," ^{it will be} otherwise, the song ~~is~~ the only sound I hear in a whole forest of noises; I ~~can~~ ^{will} hear nothing else. Do you know what it is, this compulsion to identify the source? I think of my mother. The definition is so familiar as to be mundane, without color, like a female bird. I have taken it for granted, the notion of mother, but when I try to give it shape, the reality eludes me, much like this bird I am trying to see. Who is she that takes the name? What does she have in common with others of her species? If I could think of her (My. Mother.) as a bird, she has acquitted herself. Her nestlings have hatched, thrived, flown. She's repeated the pattern and it has been enough. Over and over, the hatching, the nurturing of helpless things, ^{the flight} when they fly back--at the end of this season or the next--does she recognize them? Has she anything to sing that they can improvise on? "Song is Robin-like, but phrases are separated by brief pauses; the song typically continues for many minutes without a long break." The bird comes into focus through old binoculars. It is not ^a the cluster of leaves. It displays the characteristic broad white eye stripe. It does not have a red eye or the distinctive blue-gray cap and therefore must be the Warbling Vireo. ^{It is} ~~This~~ it this. Only this.

All afternoon the bird's insistent song has circled me, from the branches of every elm. The bird itself is elusive, taking as its shape clusters of dark green leaves. I must name it. "This drab summer resident." Otherwise, the song is the only sound I hear in a whole forest of noises; I can hear nothing else. Do you know what it is, this compulsion to identify the source? I think of my mother. Why does the word ring hollow, like the notes of a thrush in the woods? Mother. The definition is so familiar as to be mundane, without color, like a female bird. I have taken it for granted, the notion of mother, but when I try to give it shape, the reality eludes me, much like this bird I am trying to see. Who is she that takes the name? What does she have in common with others of her species? If I could think of her (My. Mother.) as a bird, she has acquitted herself. Her nestlings have hatched, thrived, flown. She's repeated the pattern and it has been enough. Over and over, the hatching, the nurturing of helpless things. When they fly back--at the end of this season or the next--does she recognize them? Has she anything to sing that they can improvise on? "Song is Robin-like, but phrases are separated by brief pauses; the song typically continues for many minutes without a long break." The bird comes into focus through old binoculars. It is not the cluster of leaves. It displays the characteristic broad white eye stripe. It does not have a red eye or the distinctive blue-gray cap and therefore must be the Warbling Vireo. This it is. Only this.

The Trailways bus driver was standing by the open luggage bay arguing with a passenger, a gray haired woman who seemed to be trying to explain something to him about her ticket, but her down vest was torn near the pocket and her boots looked like someone else's and the driver was not about to be polite. His voice rose above the noise of diesel idle and pedestrian hum, then stopped abruptly. He boarded his bus, slammed the door and pulled away. In the space it left, the passenger stood looking dazed. After a moment she began transferring her belongings to the sidewalk. She picked up a red sleeping bag wound with duct tape and bulging with what appeared to be towels. She shrugged a large pocketbook onto one shoulder and took a blue suitcase, leaving two nylon duffels behind. These she retrieved next and stacked them with the rest against the window of the cigar store. She sat on her suitcase, unzipped a bag, pulled out a book and began writing. The sidewalk traffic continued by like a bright winter stream around a small boulder.

I had half listened, half watched from my vantage near the open door of the café. I was sipping a carry-out tea, briefcase resting against my leg. My attention was on finding the person I had come to meet, the mother of my son's girlfriend, a person called Susan, but no one had gotten off the bus searching the eyes of strangers. With growing impatience I decided to wait a few minutes longer. Perhaps there would be another bus shortly.

My thoughts turned, as they will at moments when reality veers from my careful shaping of it. Scrolling through the last few months, they locked on a Saturday morning in June.

It's a beautiful blue day. Driving to Hampton Falls to speak to a conference of student writers, I round the curve to the causeway with Vivaldi cranked full volume on the radio. A wind raises whitecaps on the reservoir. A solitary van approaches with a gray aluminum canoe lashed to the roof. Now, as if it had been poised for this very instant, here at the midpoint of its crossing, the canoe tears loose its moorings and hurtles into my windshield which, in turn, implodes in silvery fragments onto my lap. As with a dream or an astrological forecast, I could, I suppose, make something of this.

Another bus was arriving in the square. The only people who got off past the line of passengers waiting to board were three young women and a man in uniform. I had got something wrong. The date. What had my son told me? The time. I picked up my briefcase, tossed the empty styrofoam cup into the trash and started toward my car. Plans would have to be altered. A phone call. Appointments. I tripped on a nylon dufflebag on the sidewalk in front of the cigar store. I looked down. The woman who was writing looked up. Her brown vest was stiched with yellow letters: Five Years of Safety. She smiled a small lopsided smile and stuck out her foot to pull the bag out of the way.

This is Susan! My God, this is Susan.

It was in December I got the idea of the kite from a radio announcer who said the windy weather was perfect for flying kites. I went then and looked for a kite for you and wrote an essay (now lost) for your Christmas present. Alas I could not find a kite nor could I find the words that I wished for you, a sun washed beach, your favorite beer and a sausage and pepper sandwich for I had naught to give you but my goodwill, not even the warmth of the sun in that winter month.

I suppose the boat is your kite, to tack into the wind on a perfect summer day, those things you have the power to give yourself...I have only my goodwill.

I bring you the kite today as a symbol, you need not fly it. I know that the Christian calendar means nothing to you that is why I choose this perfect Junne day to give you an image. If you procede up father's road you will see on either side a lavendar haze of wild geraniums, and beyond that the green furze of fern and thicket, lilalac grown wild and scenting the air as only lilac can. It is too early for Honey suckle and bee balm, but the wild wood sprouts promise in a way father's manicured gardens cannot. Natiure left to itself will fill every nitch, for I have seen daisies and wild grasses sprout from the side walk cracks on Boston streets where concrete has blotted out the season and leaves only sun or rain to wash the man made structures where as in Genesis we have subdued the earth and taken "dominion over every living thing."

That is why I bring you the kite this June morning, for

as with the boat to fly a kite one must work in concert with
nature. It is only plastic picked up in a flash of remembrance
in an all night grocery store where I thought of you and
Christmas

Two score -and-ten feels overwhelming. I have become a survivor of a half century and gasp at the thought which seems almost incomprehensible to me. I flash back on a range of memories, some of them personal, some of them historical, but all tallying 50 years.

I always like to think that I am born after World War II because of D-Day on June 6th. It makes me feel more modern. However, the truth is, that I am about 7 weeks old when they drop the bombs on Japan on Aug. 6th, and exactly 2 months old when Japan surrenders bringing WWII to an end on Aug. 14th. If you want another guage of how long ago 50 years is, hell, they didn't even have all their vitamins, because 1945 is the year that vitamin A is synthesized. The year after, the xerography process for copying is invented, the year after that India becomes independent, Princess Eliz. marries, Henry Ford and Al Capone die, and Jackie Robinson becomes the first black to sign a contract with a major baseball club. In 1948 Israel comes into existence, and Gandhi is assassinated.

I come into this world with 2 sets of grandparents--my mother's side whom I adore and who treat me more valuable than gold, and my father's side, who frankly I could live without. I also have a great aunt on both sides, and an aunt on my father's side. I am born on Flag Day, June 14, 1945 on the wedding anniversary of my grandparents --the side that frankly, I could live without. This becomes an annual ritual of hell because most of my birthdays have to be shared with celebrating their anniversary. The final straw culminates when my 21st birthday falls on their 50th wedding celebration. In the days of yore, 21 was a milestone birthday because at that time they hadn't lowered the age to 18 for any thing that happens of consequence.

I grow up thinking that people are hanging out the flags for my birthday. It's pretty neat. At a very young age, I decide that I must be special because I am born in the middle of a month, in the middle of the year, and almost in the middle of the century. But the idea of not quite making the middle of the century will remain a nagging thought for many years. Much better to be born June 14, 1950---there is something about my timing that is close, but not quite right.

At four, I somberly ask my mother who the president of the United States is. She replies, "Truman". Even thinking about Nixon or Ford being President makes me feel old. I have finally arrived at the stage where, as my father used to say, "Caesar spoke well of me".

At four, I am living in NYC on the east side of Manhattan. The everyday loud noises of city life is something that will stay with me forever. At will, anytime, I can conjure up the mechanics of a thousand wheels turning down the streets, the blare of short blasts of horns, the roar of buses filling the air when they start up from their stops, the endless clip-clop of human feet, the frail voice of a beggar, "Can you spare a dime?". That frantic pace, that competitiveness, unique in all the world to NYC, shapes the core of my being that to this day makes it intolerable to take a rest. I must always be up and doing, or I feel guilty.

Somehow, I am born knowing that I am not a city person. I am taken several times a week to Central Park to play on the swings and see saws, to romp under hot summer fountains made for kids to get wet and cool, to the merry-go-round and the model sailboat pond where I always have a little boat to sail, to the small lake where my grandmother, with great patience teaches me to row, to the Central Park zoo to see the white polar bears bask on their rocks, to the seals who plummet into their watery enclosure, and to the ape house where a giant gorilla gives me the evil eye. I feel a great affinity with animals, but, I am too young to assess their habitats and well-being. I will revisit this issue later in life with a vengeance.

I never want dolls. I am very clear about this. I only want stuffed animals. I have a good collection, but it is my grandfather, Ernest, whom I love the very most in the world who crowns the assortment with a teddy bear almost half my size, when I am five. I tell the bear everything---every hope, every plan, every dream, for years. I say some of the things over and over, so that still to this day, I remember that he heard many, many times, "I want a house with grass, a dog, a horse, and a brother.". "Yeah, yeah, yeah," the bear said.

Every year, my grandmother, Elvie puts me on her lap and we sit in front of the kitchen table. She has her left arm around my waist, and in her right hand is a sharpened pencil. "Tell me what you want for Christmas," she whispers in hushed tones, "and we'll make a list." She is my confidante, and I know that because she is a grown-up she has powers that I feel I lack, and because she loves me she will try her best to make my deepest hope become reality. Right there in the middle of NYC and living in an apt., I say, "A horse." Right there and living in the middle of NYC, she writes down, and says, "Number one. A horse. Now, what for number two?" We repeat this scenario for years. She never says, "That's totally ridiculous". She never shares with me the impossibilities of the logistics, or the financial burdens of my wish. And when Christmas comes, she leans down and whispers in my ear, "Maybe next year," and I believe her.

When I am 4 1/2 I get my wish of a house with grass. I can hardly believe my good fortune. My parents buy a brand new house in Port Washington, Long Island, N.Y.. One thought I have never understood the origin of is how a 3 or 4 year old, hanging out a window in NYC, with nothing to see except pavement and buildings, can conjure up the idea of a house with grass. I must have seen it in a book. I know my father is sick and tired of being attacked with "Can we get a house with grass?" every day he comes home from work.

It is April, and I am 4 3/4. My grandfather, Ernest, brings me a stuffed Easter Bunny with long soft fur which is half white, and half black. It becomes my second favorite toy, unable to overshadow the importance of my beloved red and white-striped elephant named, Dumbo. One day my father decides to take the car to work, which he usually doesn't. This day, I am very sick and have 104 temperature. The doctor tells my mother not to move me under any condition. The house is new and there are no paved streets yet. There are foreign-speaking men outside digging ditches to lay sidewalks, and a bull dozer leveling the street. The phone company has not installed lines to all the houses yet, but there is a pay phone booth across the street. My mother hears water rushing in the basement, and she goes down to check it out. She runs all over the house and cannot find the source of the running water noise. She panicks, and against the strongest will of the doctor, she picks me up in a pink and white-checked blanket and runs outside with me. She dashes across the lawn and shoves me into the hands of the bewildered foreigners, while she herself jumps the sidewalk ditch. She is consumed with fear and cannot explain why even to herself, in these few split seconds that tick heavily into eternity. She grabs me from the men as they offer me up to her from their sunken ditch. She hugs me close to her body and in that instant, that one instant that remains freeze-framed etched in my memory forever.... our entire house, in one piece, bolts itself off the foundation and skyrockets up into the blue sky. Our mouths are falling open, and our house hurtles itself a good 3 stories high. It runs out of steam and falls back toward the foundation in one piece. When it impacts, it explodes, blowing our possessions as far as 3 miles away, and knocking out all the windows in the houses of the area. A neighbor pulls us to her house, while our house is consumed in a fury of fire. My father, who is thankful that he brought his car to work, reports later that some moron called him at work and said, "Your house just blew up, but your wife and kid are fine." He comes home early, but doesn't know if it is for real, or a sick practical joke. We make the front page of all the Long Island and New York papers. We are left with only the clothes on our backs, the car, and the pink and white-checked blanket. Doctors are running everywhere treating neighbors for shock. My mother valiantly reports that she is fine and doesn't need a doctor.

Lawyers converge on us the same day, while we are still at the neighbor's house. Not our lawyers, but

lawyers for the lighting co., the bulldozer operator, the architect's, the builder's, the civil engineer's. Everyone is sick with fear that the blame will lay at his feet. While the bulldozer was grading the street, he pulled the gas main to our house. It may have sounded like water to my mother, but in fact it was the whoosh of gas, and the very reason she could find no water leak. Every one is claiming it is the fault of someone else. "The blue prints were wrong," is the first accusation, and on and on it goes. I am sitting in a chair with the blanket wrapped around me. I am crying inconsolably. One of the opposing lawyers squats down and strikes up a conversation with me. He elicits that the reason I am bawling my head off is because I am missing my elephant Dumbo, and my new Easter Bunny. He comforts me, and hours later returns with a new stuffed rabbit. I burst into tears again at the sight of the rabbit, because it is not the same as the one I had. It's brown and has on a red jacket with bright yellow buttons. It has long ears that stick up, and long, long eyebrows. It is explained over and over to me how nice the man was to get me a new rabbit, and that he tried to get a rabbit like the one I had. I am not consoled, and in the depth of my little heart, I mourn for my grandfather's rabbit, and Dumbo. Later, I will trim the rabbit's long eyelashes back with scissors. I am astonished beyond words that they don't grow back. Additionally, I will have a life-long intense fear of gas.

I am also missing my first book, "Pat The Bunny", which I sat on the floor with for untold hours. I'm sure it would have been replaced if I'd only said something, but I had rather outgrown it. But I am excited to see it again at a book fair when I am in first grade. I try to buy it, and the teacher calls my mother in for a special conference. She tells my mother that she obviously has a mentally retarded child, and is bewildered as to how this wasn't diagnosed earlier. My mother, in her wisdom, tells the teacher off and explains how the book was burned in the explosion. We get outside, and my mother says, "Don't ever do that to me again?" "Do what?" I say, but she does not answer.

My Dumbo is found 3 miles from our house and returned. He is mortally wounded with heavy grease and char across his body. My mother, with dogged determination, puts him in the washing machine repeatedly. She always hangs him on the clothesline to dry by his ears. He never looks any cleaner, and one day she tells me that she thinks we will really have to give up. It is my first experience with finality and grief. I don't deal well, and harbor a long grudge about him being taken from me when I wasn't ready to let go. When I am 47, I go to a yard sale where there is a stuffed striped elephant that needs a home!!! I pay 50 and hug my new replacement all the way to the car, all the while being amazed at the look-alikeness of this elephant and my 43-year-remembered one. Wisely, Novella does not say, "Are you mentally retarded?"

When I am 8, they send me to a camp in NH. They send me many years, but at 8, it becomes the beginning of my life-long wish to live in NH and to never leave. I promise myself a dog, a horse, and to live in NH. I know I will make these things happen even if I have to move heaven and earth. There is nothing in NY like the smell of fresh mown hay, nothing like swift rivers and rapids to shoot down, horses to ride, hammocks to swing in, scent of pine trees in the rain, stars that twinkle in the night. I figure out, that if I had been born in the exact middle of the century, I probably would have been born, and lived in NH. Never mind, some day, I'll make it right, I promise myself.

When I am 9 we get our first TV. Of course, it is black and white. I am a devoted fan of The Pinky Lee Show because he often gives away a puppy at the end of the show. I try ever so subtly to get us to go to California so that I can get on the show and be the proud receiver of the dog. Of course, this doesn't work, so I throw my allegiances into watching Ramar of the Jungle where I can see wild tigers and lions, and am compelled to start my writing career by writing my own scripts for the show.

We move back to Manhattan, then the Bronx. My brother is born when I am 10, we move once again to a house with grass, this time in West Chester County, north of the city. My sister is born when I am 12, and somewhere along the line, my mother, at night, completes 3 Master's degrees. I run home after school right away to babysit for them. I do every thing for them, and love every minute of it. But it makes it so that I really have no urge to have children, because I feel like I have already raised two. When my brother learns to walk, he will only walk to me. My mother is angry at this, but many years later, when he becomes a confirmed alcoholic, then she will share the credit of mothering him and says to me, "What did WE do wrong?"

It is these 10 years between me, and my brother and sister that sharply contrast our separate childhoods. Many years later, I ask them if they remember the elevated train on 3rd Ave. in Manhattan---otherwise known as, "the el". It had special seats that were different from other trains in that they were made of cross-woven cane that had a bright straw color. They start to get a funny look on their faces, and I say, "Oh yeah, I forgot, they tore that down when I was a kid".

"Well what about the double decker buses on 5th Ave? Do you remember them?" I get blank stares. "Well, what about the train that ran around on the ceiling at Wanamaker's dept. store at Christmas and we could all get in it and get a ride?" Still no response.

"Well, what about the way they used to deliver coal down the chutes?" They lean forward in their chairs. "Coal???" they ask.

"Well, what about how there used to be tons of horses on the streets and they pulled those huge wagons where people used to buy fresh fruits and vegetables? Remember there was a knife and scissor sharpening guy? Remember the iceman?" They are laughing so hard they can hardly speak. "What's an iceman?" they howl, "You sound like you were born in 1902!"

We never had an iceman in my lifetime, because we had a refrigerator, but I do remember seeing the iceman deliver blocks of ice to neighbors on the street, and I do remember the myriads of horses lined up behind each other standing patiently next to the curbs. I remember a NYC that was 2/3 cars and 1/3 horses. I remember things my brother and sister only 10 years later, would never see.

I grow up thinking Russia is the enemy; people make underground bomb shelters in their backyards. On TV I watch the Andria D'oria sink, and by the time I graduate from high school in 1963, women's pants suits have not even been introduced. What a backward world I grow up in. And yet, the 60's will grow into a decade intensely different from anything we will have known.

It would seem that every generation has a tragic historic event, that later turns into a remembered nightmare. A young friend told me that for her, it is the Challenger disaster. My memories lie, however, with Walter Cronkite announcing that President Kennedy has been shot. I am a freshman in college. I don't remember if classes are cancelled, but they might as well be, for everyone is glued to the one black and white TV set in each of the dorms. Students are piled up against each other sobbing, holding hands, sobbing, holding their heads. I watch the funeral procession, hear the dolor the all day long continuous drums mete out, see John-John salute the caisson as it rolls by. I am taken by the enormous fanfare accorded a President. What I fail to appreciate at the time, is the historic significance that I, that we, as a nation, for the first time are seeing this live on TV. And furthermore, forever after, we will know what to expect should another President die in office, for whatever reason.

As the first days pass, there is still no knowledge of the Zapruder film, but Lee Harvey Oswald has been taken into custody. The TV in the dorm is always on and a rotation of students watch it, though fewer as the days drone on. It was quite by accident that I happen to be passing the TV when Lee Harvey Oswald is fatally

shot. I mention this recently to someone younger, and her reply is, "Everyone's seen that!" "No! No!" I reply excitedly, "I actually saw it live on TV, not a replay!" I remember clearly that I raise up my hand toward the set and my mouth drops wide open. No words come. This 18-year old is shocked into silence. We all stare in disbelief as they arrest Jack Ruby. So much is happening so very fast---and, it is only the beginning. In 1964 we watch in horror as President Johnson tries to create the Great Society while at the same time escalating the Vietnam War; we watch in horror, the subsequent slayings of Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X, riots in Watts, and even closer to home, New Haven, Conn. We watch some of our friends, husbands, and brothers march off to a conflict that is never declared a war. We watch draft card burners, flag burners, flower-children, peace rallies, drug trippers, and learn to distrust government, the police and the FBI. We watch, and we live, π in this unique era that melds us, challenges us, and hopefully, changes us for the better.

These incidents trip off our tongues so innocuously now as they mellow in the distance that time so graciously provides. Yet then, each separate incident was another Civil War--complete with the pathos, the uncertainty, the melodrama, the confusion. And in retrospect, the sorting out of the significance; the answering of the same enigmatic questions---Who won? Who lost? Will we ever figure it out?

When I buy my first house in Stamford, Conn. I let my brother live rent free with me for two years. I adopt my beloved little black dog, Duncan from the Connecticut Humane Society in 1975. He is just 5 months old. He will live until July 2, 1990, and take good care of me all those years. I work for Mobil Oil as an accountant and make untold riches, which I share with my brother. I feed him, clothe him, and buy him a car. I do this in case "we" was responsible for his alcoholism. But I cannot save him from himself, nor can I save my heart from breaking.

The Grandmother I worship dies in her sleep in 1978 when I am 32. She dies on Feb. 29th, already a make-believe day. I cry so much when she dies, that really I think I have never stopped. In fifty years of living, it remains the blackest day I ever live. Ten months later, I alone, find my cherished Grandfather dead on Christmas Day. My mother flies from Chicago and we make funeral arrangements together. One of the nights she takes me to an expensive restaurant for dinner. There are tons of plants there, which someone is watering. We sit at a table, me hardly able to not cry. All of a sudden I am rising out of the chair and sputtering through a torrent of water, which is now all over my head and on top of and inside my expensive two-piece gray suit. I look like a deep sea diver coming up for air. The waterer of the plants is apologizing

all over the place, my proper mother is aghast. I say to her, "You know, if I were born in the middle of a century, things like this wouldn't happen to me!"

I buy my 2nd house in NH, because Mobil doesn't care where I live. It's an inn with 18 rooms. While I am away at work, my brother accidentally sets my house on fire and I lose 5 rooms. I tell him we have to part ways. My mother comes to visit in NH to see my second house. Neither of us has any idea that less than a year later, in November 1980, she will die from melanoma--skin cancer. Before she dies, I buy a horse, and everything that a horse needs which costs as much as buying a horse. My mother asks for a picture of me on the horse, but she doesn't live to see it. My father asks me to make all the funeral arrangements for my mother and have the bills sent to him. I guess he wasn't up to coping then; like I was? At the florist's I am so upset, that I give the zip code for the street address, and he doesn't get the bill for months.

I meet Novella and Todd at a party to which I do not want to go. The people come down and get me because they want me to play Irish music on my fiddle. Todd says he knows how to ride and he and Novella are at my door the next day. It turns out he doesn't know how to ride, and the horse won't leave the barn. I'm good, I'm patient, I don't say anything, but I do, over a period of time, teach him to be an excellent rider, a daring sailor, and a competent carpenter.

Novella says I better come live with her and Todd for the winter, because it costs too much to heat that big house. Living in NH becomes not as cool as I imagine, because more relatives die, and friends too. I live with them 2 years before I sell my house in Strafford. We decide to build a house, and I buy a second horse for Todd to ride. I get a job at City Hall in Rochester as their accountant. Later, I become an electrician and then self-employed.

I think back on the decade of the 80's and events that occurred that my mother would not have known about. These events shape my fifty years, and your lives too.

1981- Scientists identify AIDS, Prince Charles and Diana announce their engagement, Sandra Day O'Connor becomes the U.S. Supreme Court's first female judge, Anwar Sadat, Egyptian President is assassinated, Todd picks up my aged dead goat, for which I will be eternally grateful, since I do not touch "dead".

1982- Canada blames environmental damage to its forests on acid rain mainly from U.S. industry and calls for extensive anti-pollution measures; combined heart-lung and kidney-pancreas transplants are successful; Todd drives in New York State. (I should explain this.)

1983- Challenger is launched on its maiden voyage and completes 3 missions; Sally Ride is the first American woman in space; after 11 years in flight, Pioneer 10 becomes the 1st spacecraft to leave the solar system; the compact disc is launched, Todd graduates from high school.

1984- The Apple MacIntosh with mouse is launched; "Baby Fae", a 15 day old baby has a baboon's heart transplanted and dies 20 days later; a toxic gas leak from the Union Carbide plant in India kills 2500 and injures thousands more; Novella receives her B.S. degree.

1985- Dian Fossey, American zoologist studying Silverback apes in Rwanda is murdered; the Titanic is photographed by a remote-controlled camera; Bear Hollow Electric is founded and also makes a commitment that all monies for charity will be donated to animal causes only.

1986- Voyager 2 flies by Uranus and discovers 10 more moons; the space shuttle "Challenger" explodes killing all seven crew members; Chernobyl blows up; and General Motors overtakes Exxon to become the biggest company in the U.S., Novella brings home 8 week old baby Dickens, the beagle; I join the Board of Directors of the Cocheco Calley Humane Society.

1987- The last wild Californian Condor is trapped and sent for breeding in a local zoo; Bill Gates at 32 becomes microcomputing's first billionaire; world stock market prices crash on Black Monday; Harry, the black cat becomes part of the family.

1988- Space shuttle "discovery" is successfully launched; fires burn 88,000 acres of Yellowstone; MacDonald's opens 20 restaurants in Moscow; U.S. airlines ban smoking on interstate flights, Bush wins the Presidency, Pluto is confirmed to have an atmosphere.

1989- Oliver North is found guilty; Voyager 2 reaches Neptune and its satellite Triton; the Exxon Valdez causes the world's largest oil spill (11 million gallons) in Alaska.

1990- English and French engineers meet under the sea as the Channel tunnel is linked together; a four-year-old girl is the first human to receive gene therapy; Iraq invades Kuwait; Noriega and Marion Berry are independently arrested for drug charges. The nineties continue with the break-up of the U.S.S.R.

The decade is pronounced in its scientific achievements, but is underscored with human and environmental tragedy.

Except that, Novella, Todd, and I all end up having good lives, good times, and good memories. Living in NH turns out to be as right as I always knew it would be. I feel very saddened at the death of my Duncan dog in 1990, and I am not real pleased on April 23, 1991 when the Humane Society rather foists 8 week old Daisy Mae on me. But the joke is on me, because by April 24, everyone is already sick and tired of listening

to how good Daisy Mae is. By April 25th they are ready to put tape over my mouth.

I'm glad I am Advanced Systems' electrician, so that as the economy wanes, I am able to find a job there. But I am also glad that I am able to spend 10 years out of an office, because now, I appreciate heat and a/c in the months we need them. Moreover, I can't say enough about how nice the people are who work there, and how supportive they've been since I got cancer, and Novella had her heart attack.

I can't say very much about cancer and chemotherapy to you, because talking about it makes me cry. But I can try to speak on a scientific level. In 1994, when I got cancer, they discovered genes BrCa 1,2,3, and 4. If any of these are defective, you get Breast Cancer. A month ago, in May, they discovered gene P53 that suppresses tumors. The significance of this for Breast Cancer patients is that even if you have a defective BrCa gene, some day they will be able to energize the effectiveness of the P53 tumor suppressor gene. Therefore, no tumor, no cancer. I am pleased at these large scientific breakthroughs, but they are too late for me and I find myself once again saying, "If I were born in the middle of the century, these things wouldn't happen to me."

Never mind, I am going to make it right. I am going to make my goal of living 5 years without cancer getting me, and then I am going to outlive my mother's 55 years, and then I'm going to make my next goal of living 10 years cancer free.

Every person in this room helped me in his own way get through the years, including the horrendous ones of last year and this. I can't begin to tell you what a great resource and cornerstone of strength each of you is, and how much I appreciate all the things you've done for me, including being here tonight. Your friendship honors me. If I had to be stranded on an island with any one of you, I would say that I got stranded there with my "best friend". I hope that that's the way I treat each and every one of you on a daily basis---as my best friend, because that's the way you each treat me. You are my finest treasure, my jewel box full of stars, my treetop full of sky. And you know, I probably have such good friends because I am NOT born in the square middle of the century!

If the saying, "Show me your friends, and I'll tell you who you are," is true, well, then, I'm golden because of you. Thanks for listening, thanks for being my friend, thanks for all you do for me. I love you all.