April Halprin Wayland

1954-

I have always loved words. My whole family did. I loved more than words, though. I loved pictures and words, color and words, music and words.

I grew up and tried different things like farming and being a nanny and being a teacher and being a world traveler and playing the fiddle and working in a huge office building making what seemed like gobs of money, and I finally found that the thing that made my heart sing was writing children's books. The pairing of words and pictures. Blending them both so that one was not complete without the other.

So, here I am, an author of children's books. And very happy, too. But of course it all started in 1954, when I was born.

"You didn't want to come out. You were perfectly happy there, in my womb. Happy as can be! Finally, the doctor said, 'It's time,' and gave me a shot, and you came sailing out of me fast, like a football, all red and greased, with a shock of black hair. The doctor had to catch you!"

My mother would tell me this on my birthday, or driving up from Los Angeles to northern California each summer.

There was my mother, Saralee, my father, Leahn, my sister, Lyra, who was two years and ten months older, and me. My father was a walnut farmer. We had three hundred acres along the Feather River in Yuba City, California. My mother, sister, and I lived in Santa Monica, the beach town of Los Angeles, from September to June.

We left our home in Santa Monica when school was out every year for the whole summer. I knew the beach best in the winter. In those days, you could take your dog right on the sand, and we did. We took Peanuts, our very sweet and incredibly stupid cocker spaniel. We'd take family walks, all four of us wearing yellow sweaters and wandering the quiet beach in the fog, looking for shells and moonstones.

April Halprin Wayland at age six

January. Santa Monica

Mom on the prowl:
her scarfed head,
her back bent down,
hands behind her, intent

amid the piles of shells
swarming on the sand.

Our own beach,
ours alone.
Just us and the gulls
and the wash of the shells.

On the prowl
for moonstones.

A moonstone looks like a frozen wad of clear spit—a plain old stone that you think is nothing special and you are about to throw back, when you notice that it is translucent. We have a bowl filled with moonstones we found on those winter beach walks. I think of moonstones as

our family stone. Some families have secret handshakes or family shields or a family song. We have a family stone. I wear my wedding ring on my left hand and a ring with a moonstone in it on my right hand. When moonstones are polished and set, they look like small crystal balls with a bluesy shimmer.

In Santa Monica, we rented the house at 903 Twenty-second Street. Nine-oh-three was the setting of lots of big Konigsberg (my mom's side) family gatherings: Uncle Raphael and Aunt Sylvia, Uncle Max and Aunt Polly, Uncle Moish and Aunt Sue, Uncle Avrum and Aunt Fanny, Uncle Art and Aunt Cissie, Uncle Davie and Aunt Marge . . . and the cousins. We counted and came up with twenty-one and one-half cousins when Marsha was pregnant. My mother's family was one big, safe grove of trees between me and the world.

Party in the Park

Surrounded by shedding eucalyptus trees,
been here forever, they'll be here forever, too.

And all of my cousins, aunts and uncles
spreading table cloths, taking out potato salad,
handing me hugs and presents and long kisses,
talking to everyone as they talk to me,
big arms and bodies and laughing, laughing
cousin Bruce, cousin Marc-David, my sister,
cousin Franklin

running after pigeons, running after a football,
running into me
more presents and pass the plates and did
you have enough?
Taste some of Aunt Sylvia's kugel, yes, says
Uncle Raphael, taste
Fran's chopped liver, is it time for birthday
cake? asks Uncle Moish,
and we all gather 'round for two cakes, for
Dad and me—mine is pink.
Dad says I can have a corner flower

Mom and Aunt Cissie are putting the little
candles in the plastic flower
holders and sticking them in the cake and
then Mom lights them with a little
match, lights the last one holding the very
teeny part of the match, burning
close to her fingers, but she's fast and they
burst into song and I feel full and like
bursting
full of cousins and aunts and uncles and
potato salad

Surrounded by shedding eucalyptus trees,
been here forever, they'll be here forever, too.

"My mother looking for moonstones on the beach at Santa Monica"

During the school year, Daddy would drive those five hundred miles back and forth between Santa Monica and Yuba City every month or every few months. When he did, he would look at the darkening landscape as music and whistle those highs and lows as he drove.

My Father Whistles the Hills

In the bare light of the stars
my father is driving home.
I am raking my hair with a comb;
my father is whistling out there.

He whistles high for the hills,
trills low for the canyons.
He follows the natural notes of the land, and
the wheel moves in his hands.

While I stare into the mirror,
somewhere my father
is whistling nearer,
nearer.

It was always an event when he came home. We were never sure when it would be. But he would try to finish the walnut harvest in time for Halloween, so that he could see our costumes and be part of my favorite holiday.

When Dad Comes Home

My heart beats wild—thumps loud all day at
school.
I tingle! I disguise it, I act cool.
I chew my nails and nibble on my hair.
My friend thinks there's an earthquake . . .
my nervous legs are shaking on her chair.

The long day done, I get in bed sooooo
slooooooow . . .
and as Mom kisses me and says, "G'night,"
I hear the groan of the garage door low,
What's that? Your car! Leap out of bed
and fling the back door open for your
hug—*hello*!

On Christmas night, 1955, when I was one year old, the Feather River flooded, killing forty people. It swept away our farmhouse and nine other buildings without a trace. The only thing we found of ours was one blue plate.

Besides the buildings, the flood washed away all the rich topsoil, leaving acres and acres of sand. And unbeknownst to us, the river clay, soil, and rain water, compacted by equipment used to rebuild the levee, created impenetrable layers below the surface. So when Dad and Grandpa planted walnut trees, they did not die, but simply did not grow when they reached the layer of compaction. Dad tried countless methods to solve this problem, but none worked.

My father said that sometimes the best way to solve a problem was to sleep on it. So he did. In frustration one day he took a nap. He dreamed of digging holes through the wet clay; in his dream, trees grew on our land again.

When he woke up, he designed an eight-foot-tall hydraulic auger, which looked like a gigantic screw attached to his little tractor. With it, my father dug five holes for every tree he planted. The auger dug through the compaction. Then Dad mixed the soil and refilled each hole, relayering the soil. The trees began to respond. Some grew seventeen feet in one season. He dug 37,000 holes. It took years. The trees flourished.

Daddy lived several miles from the farm at 1229 Siccard Street in Marysville, in a small one-bedroom apartment which all four of us shared every summer. At night you heard the song of the train as it passed the apartment. One long cow sound. Strong and sweet and comforting, and me curled around my pillow.

My Father's Plan

This morning on the farm, we carved oak balls,
laid fat black figs to dry on the shed roof,
and when my father stepped off the tractor,
we had lunch on the huge wooden spool we
used as a table
under the oak trees.
My father ate his tomato
as if it were an apple
and so did I.

Tonight, in these two rooms,
it's my turn to sleep
on our old army sleeping bag
on top of the wood and canvas cot
that creaks.
My sister sleeps on the couch.

But my father has a plan:
He's planted walnut trees all over our farm
except
near the hundred-year-old fig tree.
There, he's cleared a big rectangle.
No trees.

"One day, we'll build a big farm house there."

And I will never have to sleep
on this wood and canvas cot
again.

He never did build the farmhouse. My mom couldn't be at the farm full-time. She was a concert pianist, and her career depended on her living in southern California.

In the summers, Mom found a piano to practice on at Yuba College. She would drop Lyra and me off at the farm, and we would play with that summer's batch of puppies, explore the farm, drive the jeep around, or pick soft black figs in aluminum buckets. There were spiders inside the tent of that tree, yes, but there were soft, sweetmeat figs, too. You took your chances. The leaves of the fig tree were like spreading green hands. Some of the figs dried on the tree, most of those had been pecked a time or two by birds, and they dried like long, sweet raisins, but better—like candy—waiting for us or for the birds.

When our buckets were filled with those soft black balloons, we would climb up the ladder propped up against the shed and spread them on the tin roof to dry. Yum! Dried figs! You had to be careful not to eat too many or you would get the inevitable stomachache and other undesirable consequences.

April and her father, 1960

My father sometimes spent eight hours on the tractor. He did not have a radio on the tractor. He did not believe in air-conditioned, enclosed cabs, either. He felt a farmer had to stay in tune with his surroundings. The philosopher farmer. That's what our friends used to call him.

At noon, on a lunch break from driving the tractor, Daddy would meet us in the farm yard. We would eat sandwiches on good whole-wheat bread, stalks of celery, and big ripe tomatoes. And always ginger ale. Oh, how good that ginger ale tasted on dusty, hot farm days!

After dinner in the summer, we would sometimes play Monopoly.

Monopoly

It's quiet in our kitchen except for the dice
That my slimy, scheming sister gets to toss
out twice.
They rattle in her ratty fist, then spill across
the board
My mom and dad and I watch as she adds to
her hoard.

The summer night blows soft—my favorite
kind of weather
The light above the table seems to gather
us together
I concentrate, I lie in wait for someone's
unsuspecting piece
To land on St. James' Place . . .
Instead, Dad rolls, buys B. & O.

It's my turn next, I wish—then throw.
I buy Vermont. My mother wails.
It's her turn and she lands in jail.

The summer night blows soft—my favorite
kind of weather
The light above the table seems to gather
us together
It's quiet in our kitchen except for the
dice.

Each morning, Daddy would get up at 5 A.M. and come into the kitchen/living room to make breakfast. He made hot cocoa and toast slathered with peanut butter and butter. Sometimes he would have to make a phone call. He seemed to believe that the farther away the person lived, the louder one had to speak into the telephone. "Joginder! We are moving the pipes on the north quarter this morning, right? I'm stopping to fill the gas tank on the jeep. I'll be about thirty minutes," he'd shout.

I'd plug my ears and cover my head with my pillow and ache to keep sleeping.

But sometimes he took us with him. We'd drive to the gas station and jump out of the old green Willys jeep and inhale that luscious smell of gasoline.

At the farm, I learned to drive at five or six years old. On cold, cold mornings, in the dark, I'd drive the tractor v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y down the rows of young walnut trees, while Daddy and Joginder Singh Toor unhooked the iron-stained irrigation pipes and loaded each one onto the wagon behind the tractor.

The first time I drove that shift, the sky was dark. Black. Then, a huge orange blob appeared on the levee. I was terrified. My heart stopped and I could not squeak out a warning to my father or to Jo. It was a Martian, or something bad. I knew we were going to die.

"It's the sun," my father laughed. I had never seen the sun rise. The sky was toasted with colors. The smell of wet Johnson grass brushing the boot tops of the men was fresh, and I! I was driving tractor on the farm!

Because we got up so early at the farm, we had to nap, even when we were older. The only thing we were allowed to do while we lay in the apartment with the loud air conditioner

on, sweating on top of the blankets, was listen to baseball games on the radio. The Giants were northern California's team. The Dodgers were southern California's team. Lyra and I rooted for the Dodgers. Daddy loved the Giants.

Daddy took us to see a few games at Dodger Stadium. We saw the very first game that Don Sutton ever pitched. The red clay baseball diamond against the jewel-green grass woke you up in the night games' lights. It was glaringly beautiful.

Mom wasn't particularly interested in sports. She used to read aloud to the whole family. She just couldn't keep funny writing to herself. She would read to us from Mark Twain—his version of Adam and Eve—and hilarious stories by James Thurber about his relatives. Mom would laugh and sputter and laugh, read and roar and read, until all four of us were in hysterics. She laughed us through Dorothy Parker's monologues, read to us from *The Devil's Dictionary* by Ambrose Bierce, and later *The Joys of Yiddish.* I see my mother in the little Siccard Street apartment, sprawled on the couch after dinner, reading and laughing as I made an elevator from a milk carton for my troll dolls so that they could ride to the very top floor of their bookshelf apartments.

Mom would take us to the cool, shady library in Yuba City every week. I especially remember her handing me *Moon, Sand, and Stars* by St. Exupery, so poetic and a true story. I felt very grown-up reading it. Perhaps I was ten or eleven.

We bought fresh corn from Hoon's farm on Bogue Road. And when I was little, we would wake up early and drive out to Handy's Dairy for milk. I remember that distinctive watery-milk smell of the dairy mixed with disinfectant and wet cow hair. The stinging sound of milking. The morning cold. Thick cream at the top of the milk. And I loved those names: Hoon's farm. Bogue Road. Handy's Dairy.

Lyra and I hoed rows of walnut trees for fifty cents a row. The sun was *hot.* My wide-brimmed hat helped. The sandy soil was *hot.* My canteen of water helped. But each row was long, long, long. My arms ached from lifting high and throwing hard that wood-handled hoe.

Sometimes when we were on the farm, we would cross the levee, driving the old Willys jeep up, up, up, right up the side of the bumpy-pebbled levee, until I was sure we were riding straight up the side of a piece of paper, sure that we would tip back . . . and then we would bump down the bouldered side to the river, lined with cottonwood trees shimmering in the wind and big drifts of blackberry bushes. The days were hot. You'd plop your whole foot in cold river water, and on the bottom was squish, squish, lovely sssquishy clay. Sometimes there were lazy old frogs. It smelled of river mud, cottonwood trees, fish, and lovely muck.

In the middle of the river was a small, sandy island. Even though it was only as big as our living room, it was *our* island. We named it Franklin Island after Cousin Franklin—Uncle Raphael and Aunt Sylvia's boy. The island came and went . . . some summers it was long and wide and sandy, some winters the river was so fat and so full, the island disappeared completely. My cousin Franklin got bone cancer when he was in his twenties and had to have his leg amputated. He moved to Santa Barbara, took wheat grass, and taught me about light and shadow in photography, in life. Franklin died at the age of thirty-four. I don't know if the island has returned.

On my tenth birthday, long before girls were on sports teams, my father gave me my favorite birthday present of all time: my own baseball bat. Daddy and Mommy and Lyra and my father's mother, Little Grandma, and Peanuts and I played in our Santa Monica backyard: the apricot tree, the clothesline, and the avo-

"With my big sister, Lyra, at 903 Twenty-second Street, Santa Monica," about 1960

cado tree were bases, the swing was home plate. Smacking that ball hard, running, running, scrambling around the bases—outrunning Little Grandma—playing baseball was better than any orange-freckled, dripping, sweet apricot from that most perfect tree.

And I remember another birthday:

Birthday by Mail

At the farm
In the blustery spring wind,
The fields crazy with purple lupines,
My birthday comes la-la-la leaping!

Feeling lucky, riding in the cab of Dad's
truck
Smelling the good strong smell of gasoline,
We stop at the post office.
The line slowly winds to Sylvia's window . . .

And finally
She doles out an envelope, another envelope
. . .
and one purple package.
From Mama! For me!

I rip off the wrapping:
. . . a shoe box.
Shoes? You didn't send shoes, Ma, didja?
I tear off the tape, open the box
and find lavender fuzz
in tissue.
Slippers?
Surely not slippers on my BIRTHDAY!!!!?????

But it's not slippers.
I lift up the lavender stuffed puppy. For me!
I name her Lavender,
Introduce her to Poochie (they get married),

And after lunch,
Lavender gets burrs in her fur. Just like
Poochie.
I love purple puppies! Spring! The farm!
And birthdays by mail.

During another spring vacation, my sister and I walked across the farm to the edge of our field of winter wheat, where the Johnson grass grew in a big, undisturbed patch, high as our heads. We made a house by trampling down grass for each room, but leaving wide swatches for walls all around. We gnawed Johnson grass stems, chewed winter wheat, and drank hose water with its strong taste of iron from our canteen. We lay on our backs to read or to dream and saw green grassy walls and sky, sky! My sister named it Sleepy Hollow. It was heaven to me.

Peanuts, our cocker spaniel

My father was slow and deliberate. My mother was fast. He savored his soup. She was already on dessert. He was just coming out of the shower. She was practicing some big piano piece loudly, smelling of Sen-sen, Shalimar perfume and lipstick, waiting for him. Once he got a traffic ticket for going too slow.

My father savored books slowly. Drank them in. He would study a problem for a long time. He would walk around it and look at it from all angles.

My mother would rip out a rose here, zip! zip! dig a hole, there, zip! zip! stick it in. Water it. If it grew, fine. If it didn't, it was too bad for the plant. She had some very hardy rose bushes.

Mom would comb the tangles out of our wet hair roughly. Not without love—just in a "let's get on with it" way. It's amazing how your scalp gets used to it. She used to comb her poor dog's hair that way, too. The dog just sat there in the sink, dripping wet, waiting for it to be over. I think that's how I comb my son's hair, too.

Daddy was gentle. If he was home when I was sick, he would tiptoe in at night and read

"My parents, just before their marriage, with my father's parents, Anna and Morris," 1948

to me by the hall light, so as not to wake my sister in the next bed.

Medicine Man

Night tightens my burning brain;
my throat shrieks with a fiery pain

then

my dad lays his hand on my head
sits himself on the side of my bed

and reads to me from *Sherlock Holmes*
in low, even tones

in the hallway light
that softens this night.

I loved when Daddy read to me, and I also loved those rare occasions when he would talk about his family. His father, Morris Aaron Halprin, came from Russia in the early 1900s, possibly escaping from a pogrom. Morris and his family were farmers in Russia and owned land, which was unusual for Jews living there.

Daddy's mother was Anna Lamport Halprin. A trained teacher, she had a master's degree in mathematics and was a suffragette—she marched and worked to win the women's right to vote in the 1920s. She was a fireball and should have become a politician. My sister and I called her "Little Grandma." Our other, taller, grandmother was "Big Grandma."

In 1923, Morris and Anna bought a farm in northern California. They raised tomatoes, pears, peaches, and hogs on that rich farmland. But during the Great Depression, they struggled financially. They were going to lose the land. Then, in 1932, a miracle: President Roosevelt signed legislation to stop foreclosures on farms, and ours was the first farm that was saved.

After that, Grandpa Morris drove five hundred miles south to Los Angeles to see if he could earn money to keep the farm running. The story goes that he ran into his cousin walking down a street in Los Angeles, whose textile company was in bad shape. Morris turned the company around and became its president, running it and the farm simultaneously. My father

later became vice president of the company, and I remember making dolls with fabric from the Pacific Coast Textile Company when I was little.

While Grandpa was driving up and down California from the textile company to the farm, Little Grandma lived on the farm with my father, Leahn (pronounced "Leon"), and his older brother, Elm. In addition, a Japanese family lived on the farm, and Daddy and Elm loved spending time with them. Years later, Daddy taught my sister and me how to use chopsticks, and each member of our family had our own beautiful pair, inlaid with shells. I still use mine.

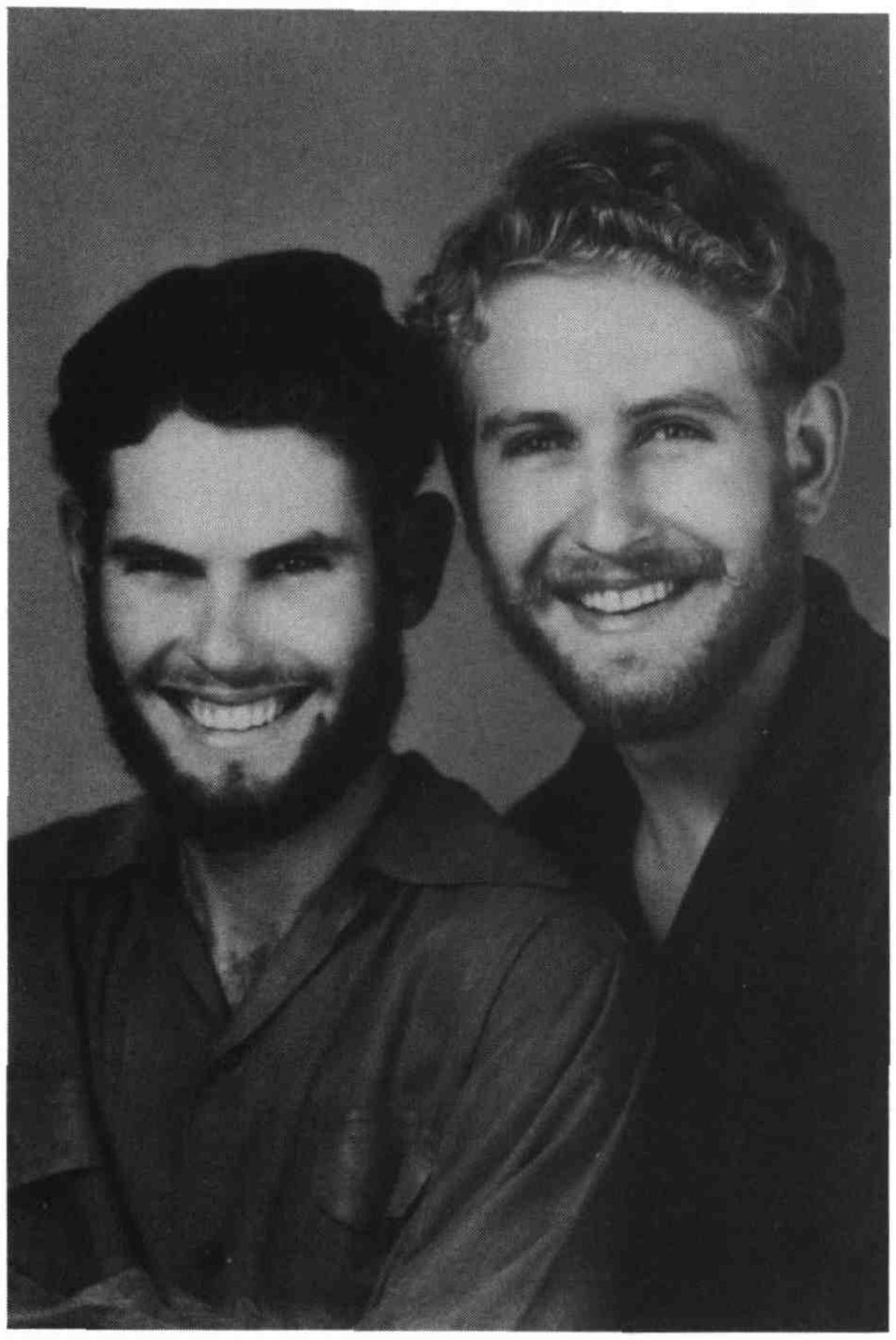
When my father was about ten, an incident occurred which began a life pattern of major events involving water. He was swimming in the Feather River when a boat's anchor tangled around his feet and held him under the water; he nearly drowned. He became a strong swimmer after that and swam whenever and wherever he could.

Daddy worshipped his blonde, blue-eyed brother, with the beautiful singing voice. Elm was a bombardier in World War II, and died when his plane was shot down. Though I never met him, I always loved Uncle Elm and felt as if I knew him. I used to imagine that he was behind me when I was taking French tests in junior high school, encouraging me and giving me back rubs.

After the war, my father went to college, majoring in art and anthropology. He taught us how to design and cut linoleum block prints, always brought his sketch pad and colored pencils when we went to concerts, and could often be found on the couch, sketching my mother as she practiced.

My mother's father, Julius Konigsberg, was born in Glaicia, a region whose boundaries have been in both Austria and Poland, depending upon the political situation. He left home when he was barely a teenager. He was scrappy, a survivor. When he returned to Glaicia, he married my grandmother, Chana (Anne) Singer.

Julius and Anne entered North America through Canada, and later came to Cleveland, Ohio. They had ten children; nine survived. The whole Konigsberg clan—eleven kids (Julius had two children from a first marriage), two adults and, invariably, one or two relatives new to America—all lived in a house with *one* bathroom!



Father, Leahn, and his brother, Elm

My mother's family kept kosher and honored the Sabbath. The boys went to Hebrew school, and they all went to temple each week. Many men and boys in their neighborhood wore yar-mulkes and grew long sideburns. My mother and her siblings spoke only Yiddish until they went to kindergarten.

Grandpa Julius sold curtains and rugs door-to-door. They were far too poor and there were far too many children to send them all to the movies each Saturday, so they sent the one with the best memory: my aunt Fanny. When she returned, they would gather around her and she would re-create the whole movie. I always envied my mother for her large family and loved to hear her tell stories about her childhood.

Mom remembers that the piano in her home cost twelve dollars, and that it took them two years to pay it off. When the piano arrived, four-year-old Mom listened, hidden on the stair-

way, as her mother's singing club gathered for the evening. The next morning, she played the songs she had heard the night before. My mother was clearly the pianist of the family!

She was also an actor and, in her adolescence, had to choose between music and theater. She decided to pursue music. She studied at Julliard and became the pianist for the Cleveland Orchestra when she was twenty-one years old.

Mom followed her family to Los Angeles in 1946, when she was twenty-four. She met my father who wanted to learn to play the piano. He never did learn how; he married a pianist instead. In 1948, shortly after they were married, my mother soloed at the Hollywood Bowl, a huge, open-air concert stage in Los Angeles. I have memories of Mom smelling of perfume, dressed up in beautiful gowns, and leaving the house to perform when I was little.

Mom's oldest brother, Raphael, was the first of the Konigsbergs to come to Los Angeles. He was a social worker, a law student, and he made history. I was in awe of Uncle Raphael. We all were. He stood for something during a dark time in our country's history.

In 1953, after my uncle Raphael passed the bar exam, the Committee of Bar Examiners asked my uncle if he was a Communist. He refused to answer, based on the protections of the first and the fourteenth amendments of the United States Constitution. The committee denied him the right to practice law.

He took his case to the California Supreme Court, and they would not hear his case. He appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which reversed the committee's case. But despite the ruling, the committee still refused to let him practice law.

He appealed to the California Supreme Court again . . . and again the court refused to review the case. He went back to the U.S. Supreme Court. This time, the Court affirmed the action of the committee—he could not practice law.

While he was fighting for his career, Uncle Raphael continued to be politically active and supported his family as a real estate broker specializing in selling hospitals. He hated sales. He hated traveling the Los Angeles freeways. He wrote funny poems for Lyra and me and even for Peanuts. He often stopped by between clients to give a hug to his baby sister (my mother) and us after school.

Finally, in 1977, Uncle Raphael took his case to the California Supreme Court again. By this time, there was a new Committee of Bar Examiners and also a 1971 Supreme Court decision that upheld a bar applicant's refusal to answer questions regarding membership in the Communist Party. Uncle Raphael won! He was finally admitted to the bar, eighteen years after he first applied. This landmark case is still cited in law schools today.

I was in high school when he was admitted. I cried and cried. It seemed too late. He never did practice law. By the time he was admitted to the California State Bar, he was quite sick. I think about him often, how he stood for a principle and never wavered.

When I was growing up, Mom performed four-hand piano works, cello and piano sonatas, trios, piano quartets, and taught piano every day after school.

"My mother's mother's family, the Singers: Grandma stands on the right, her brother and parents died before World War II, her youngest sister Esther (seated) escaped to America in 1939, her sisters Celia and Regina (standing) were murdered in concentration camps"

My sister and I would come home from school to scales, arpeggios, Mozart, Beethoven, notes escaping down the hall to the kitchen. In the kitchen, a note: "Please slice the carrots, celery, potatoes, and cut up the chicken. At 4:45, pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees."

Our hall was a subway station of Mom's pupils. One waiting for a lesson, one waiting to be picked up after his or her lesson was over.

When Mom Plays Just for Me

My mom is playing piano with Sidney.
I like making my bed to the music
that bubbles under my bedroom door.

Mom and Sidney are still playing piano.
I like pouring milk over my cornflakes
trying to match the tinklings that spill into the kitchen.

Now Sidney's gone home. Mom plays just for me
and I run around in circles in the living room
and collapse on the lambskin under the piano.

I look up. I see the hardwood and pedals
of the moving hammers and strings—
the piano's heart—when Mom plays just for me.

She tried to teach us, but taking lessons from my mother just didn't work. So, I took piano lessons from her friend, who kept a glass jar of red and black licorice on her piano. Eventually, I switched to violin, and took lessons from Fran, who made great chopped liver, enveloped me with her hugs, and had a big, beautiful sound on the violin. Fran's daughter, Debbie, took lessons from my mom. That arrangement lasted for many years.

We listened to Mom playing Brahms, Schubert, Debussy, and we also played records: "The Camp Town Ladies" and "Good Night Ladies," "Joe Hill," "The Battle of New Orleans," Paul Robeson singing "The Four Insurgent Generals," Malvina Reynolds singing "Little Boxes," the 1950's hits, "Catch a Falling Star" and "April in Paris" (which complete strangers often sing to me as they greet me); "The Universal Soldier" sung by Buffy St. Marie. I wore the carpet out, walking around and around the little living room, belting out those songs to sweet Peanuts, who would watch me and waggle his stumpy tail.

Daddy taught us to sing "My Grandfather's Clock" and "I've Got Sixpence," both of which he learned during World War II when he was an army radio operator. We'd sing while sitting on the chrome and yellow plastic kitchen chairs before dinner in Santa Monica. On the table, our small turtle (the kind you aren't supposed to let kids have as pets anymore because they transmit some kind of disease) listened from its plastic island under a little umbrella, as we sang all the verses and started over again.

When I was eleven, we began house-hunting in Santa Monica. I said, "I have dibs on the small, blue room if our new house has one." Mom and Dad said that they would keep this in mind.

The house we bought did, indeed, have a small, blue room. It was downstairs, while the other two bedrooms were upstairs. I'm not saying that the small, blue room made me a writer . . . but this is when I began to write—typing late at night when everyone else was upstairs asleep. Tap tap tap on our Royal portable typewriter. Love poems about Jordan Schwartz, who played violin in the orchestra with me. Tap tap tap.

The beginning of a novel about a white girl and an African American boy who lived in different states. They were both hit over the head, taken to a deserted island, and left there with one can of tuna fish—and no can opener.

The Konigsberg family:
the author's mother is on the floor (second from left), Uncle Raphael is standing (second from left)

"My mother and me," 1961

Bits of dialogue. Profound musings. Nonsense. Every joke from the weekly TV show *Laugh-In.* Tap tap tap.

And when I was fourteen, a bombshell. Our friend brought us a record by Joni Mitchell, a new folksinger. We put the needle on the record. She began to sing, her clear voice gargling glass words in her mouth. I was blown away by her poetry. I sat on the couch in awe, listening to the songs over and over, every day after school, repeating the same song until the record was scratched, memorizing the words. How did she do that? I thought. How did she put words together like that? How does she get me to feel that way?

I memorized Simon and Garfunkel songs, too. How did Paul Simon write that way? How did he get away with using technical, complex, and clumsy words and creating fantastic, poetic songs?

How did they do it? I wanted to do it, too.

I loved school, especially elementary school. I loved the school librarian, Elise Orbach with her smoky voice, and all those books: *Harold and the Purple Crayon, Mr. Mysterious and Company, Caddie Woodlawn,* anything about Houdini, Socrates, ESP, or the supernatural. Mrs. Orbach stretched her rules and let me check out *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* over and over again until I finished it. I was a slow reader, as I am today, easily distracted by things happening around me.

Inspired by what I read, I made my own blank books and loved filling them with stories and drawings.

My sister warned me about junior high school. She said not to wear socks (wear peds instead) and not to buy any elevator passes, which the ninth graders would surely try to sell us seventh graders (ours was a one-story school). I liked junior high. I loved being in orchestra, being part of something larger than myself.

Taking Violin at School

I open my case
tighten my bow
pluck a string to tune.
I love to listen to it chirp across the echoing room.

My friends are in class
reading about
a famous English king
but I am training this wooden bird upon my arm to sing.

I adored my drama class, too. As I prepared for my first Shakespeare festival, in which I would recite a sonnet, the orchestra schedule was announced. A conflict. Both the Shakespeare festival and an orchestra performance were on the same day at the same time. The orchestra teacher told me that if I did not perform, I could not be in orchestra. With a heavy heart, and convinced that a career as an actor lay somewhere down that road not taken, I played in the concert.

I always know what year I was in which grade, because it corresponds with the calendar year. In 1967, I was in seventh grade. These were exciting and frightening times. The Vietnam War was raging, and so was the building opposition to the war. In my history class, a parent came to talk about all the good our military was doing in Vietnam. The next day, a boy named Frank Constantino and I responded. I brought in a powerful book of photographs called *Vietnam, Vietnam,* which showed most vividly the savagery we were doing to the Vietnamese civilians. I also spoke of the map that Uncle Raphael had shown me, pointing out the location of oil fields in Vietnam. "This is the

real reason we are fighting this war," he told me.

I wrote poems of anguish about the use of napalm during the Vietnam War, a horrid burning, clinging oil that was poured out of airplanes on human beings, burning their skin, burning and burning and burning as they ran away, screaming in agony.

My family marched in antiwar marches, went to protest rallies, and collected political buttons. I remember going on a "date" to an antiwar protest when I was about thirteen with a boy named Lee. Folksinger Phil Ochs sang at that rally. It was very moving. At the end, we all stood up and sang, "We Shall Overcome." When we came to the verse "We'll walk hand-in-hand," Lee took my hand. I had never held hands with a boy before. It was electrifying.

Months later, when Lee tried to kiss me, I broke away from him and ran home, frightened. I wanted to roll up into a ball and crawl into my mother's arms. I burst in the front door but she was teaching piano. I flopped onto my bed and sobbed.

Lee

You are the first boy
who has tried to kiss me.

I am running two blocks
at top speed

frightened
at the open canyon
    the implosion
    the lights
    the foreign language
delivering unanswerable letters

to me.

Junior high was passion about the outside world and politics, and passion about Jordan and Frank, both budding actors, best friends. Jordan, a violinist in orchestra, was a brooding, black-haired, freckle-faced boy with a deep voice and a scar across his chest from open heart surgery. Frank was theatrical, funny, ridiculous, loud, and off-the-wall. Frank rode the bus in the morning and dominated the entire ride, belting out smart, rude, witty comments over all other conversations.

In high school, in the 1970s, I was a hippie. I wore my hair in braids with a leather headband and made up my eyes like the model Twiggy, with big, black, mime-like lashes painted on my bottom lids, and on the top lids a line of white eyeliner, and then a line of black eyeliner.

Every day I painted a flower or some other design on my cheek. What was interesting about this was that my mother got a kick out of it. I had "with-it" parents who were in tune with the era. Later I found that there was almost nothing I could do that they disapproved of (though I never really did anything awful to test this), so I didn't go through a typical teenage rebellion. Until later.

When I was in high school, my English teacher wrote a note across the top of one of my poems: "this should be published." I was thrilled. I decided to send off some poems to *McCall's* magazine, not whispering to a soul. I would knock their socks off when the poems appeared, I thought.

All three poems were rejected, with a form rejection letter. I was more than crushed. I was absolutely devastated. I wish now that my teacher had been able to guide me to magazines published for and by teenagers. It would have been better to start by competing against my peers, and developing a track record, rather than plunging into the adult world and hoping to be published. I try to teach this to students today. I did not submit anything else for publication for fifteen years.

But I did not stop writing. I couldn't have.

I kept a journal. When I was angry, I wrote angry notes leaning on the pen, shoveling into the page. Writing was a critical part of my teenage years, a place to let out all of my passions, my ideas, my puzzlements, and to tell my history.

Daddy wrote, too. He wrote poems to my mother and letters to the editor, to politicians, and to prominent citizens about issues that raised his body temperature. Once, he sent what he called a "Paul Revere letter" to every single senator and congressperson in Washington, warning them of the dangers of nuclear weapons. When Daddy came home to the apartment, the first thing he did was enter a few lines about his day, the weather, and the crops on his big calendar tacked to the back of the front door.

He was a historian, and so is my sister, and so am I.

Following my sister's example, I went to Europe the summer after high school and kept

a journal when I traveled. I stayed with a family in London, while their daughter came to Santa Monica and stayed with my family. Then, I stayed with my old friend Elaine, who was working as a governess in Paris.

Though I had been wrestling with it for several years, my problem with food and overeating leaped out of its cage when I was in Europe. I was a twelve-year-old in an eighteen-year-old's body, unaccustomed to taking responsibility for things like travel arrangements. It was thrilling, liberating, amazing, and frightening. Eating seemed to fix it. Eating too many pastries in Paris gave me my first "sugar blues"—in which sugar began to affect my moods and make me cry. It would be years before I understood how profoundly sugar affected me—how it stole my ability to concentrate, gave me headaches, made me weepy, sapped my energies. At the time, I was simply caught in a rapidly accelerating cycle of eating and weeping and gaining weight.

My parents were both very attractive; to be fat was completely unacceptable in my family. I had finally found a way to rebel!

When I returned to the States, I attended college at the University of California at Davis, where Lyra was in her last year. The university was only an hour's drive to the farm, and at long last we could see the farm (and my father) during the harvest season. I lived in a coed dormitory and enjoyed college immensely . . . and continued to gain weight. I was overwhelmed by everything—good and bad.

In my first year at Davis, I took a wonderful poetry course and continued to write poetry and prose in my journal. My escape. My love!

I also found a group of singers, banjo players, guitar players, and fiddlers who played folk music in someone's living room each week. After I had attended for some time, I began to bring my violin, but I didn't take it out of its case for several months. Then I took it out of its case, but kept it on my lap for many meetings. And finally, one day, I lifted my heretofore classical violin and tried to play harmonies to accompany a man who was singing an English sailing ship song. It was glorious. I was hooked. The music! The poetry in the songs! The community! What else did I need? I had originally named my instrument "Viola Violin." I renamed it "Hank Fiddle."

I even wrote some folk songs. It seemed to combine all of me: words, music, and community.

I played music in Davis and at folk music camp-outs near San Francisco, and in 1978 I started the Santa Monica Traditional Folk Music Club. It's still alive and well. Once a month, twenty-five to seventy-five folk musicians and singers gather in a big circle to play, sing, and celebrate.

In my second year of college, I joined the women's track team. You didn't have to prove your talent to be on the team—you just had to show up and run the daily two-hour workouts. I had never considered myself athletic, but I wanted to lose weight and I loved to run.

In my second year I also moved to an on-campus house called the Davis Student Co-op, which was a commune: a cooperative household of twelve people, six guys and six girls. We were like a big family whose parents were on a very long vacation. Everyone signed up for house jobs: we shopped, cooked, gardened, baked bread, and cleaned. I had finally succeeded in imitating my mother's life that I had so long envied: lots of brothers and sisters in one big house. It was wonderful.

My first job was to clean the downstairs bathroom each week. But there was a problem. Spiders. I had a ferocious fear of spiders. There must have been twenty daddy longlegs living in that little bathroom. I couldn't admit to this fear. What was I to do? I took a card and put the name "Charlotte" on it in fancy script. I chose one spider to save and taped the card near her web. Then, I took a deep breath and killed all the other spiders.

Thereafter, I would talk to Charlotte as I cleaned the bathroom. I was never frightened of spiders again.

But my tremendously accelerating weight did frighten me. Finally, after searching for solutions from counseling to behavior modification to hypnotherapy, I found a group that addressed more than the diet/food/weight aspects of overeating, and I began to lose weight and change my reactions to life so that I didn't have to overeat.

I had always thought that I was doing something terribly wrong in this eating business, that everyone had been given a rule book of life at birth but me. I kept looking for that green button to push, or the right street to turn down,

certain that once I found it, all my eating problems would be behind me. I could catch up with the rest of the world, the "normies."

In this group for compulsive overeaters, I learned that I wasn't dumb, and that it wasn't a matter of "willpower." I learned to treat compulsive overeating as if I had an illness. To be gentle with myself—it wasn't my fault, it simply needed to be dealt with. I also learned that I might always have this illness, just as a diabetic always has diabetes, although she can keep it under control with insulin. Though I have been at a normal weight for years, I still attend meetings and help others who are fighting food. It is a circular sort of program: when I help others who are struggling, I don't have to go back to the food struggles myself.

In the spring of 1976, my senior year in college, right smack in the middle of my recovery from compulsive overeating, I became very ill with what they thought might be mononucleosis. I had no energy and was in a constant state of having the flu, with fevers, night sweats, and fatigue.

I lay low, missing track meets and school tests, and felt awful. Slowly I recovered. In June, I had enough energy to go to a conference representing Davis. On June 2, 1976, a group from the conference went out to dinner and one of the teachers said that he was a palm reader. We begged him to tell us all! He walked around the table and read each person's palm. Laughter followed each prediction. When he looked at my hand, I swear he turned white. Then he said, very solemnly, "Something will happen in the next thirty days that will affect you the rest of your life." I was excited. What could it be? That night, I wrote his prediction in my journal.

On June 6, 1976, the week before my graduation, I remember walking home from the store with a big bag of groceries, feeling quite well, finally, and making up a song about my family, with a verse for my mother, one for my sister, one for me, and one for my father. It was a good song, the sun shone on my back, and I was feeling healthy and strong.

As I opened the door to our apartment, the phone rang; I answered it, still holding the bag of groceries. It was a nurse in the emergency room of a hospital in Yuba City. My father was hurt. He had had an accident in the pool of the apartment. I had to come right away. She had tried to contact my mother and my sister but she could not reach them.

I wanted to talk with him. I wanted to know how badly he was hurt. She would not tell me. My knees began to shake; they became rubbery. She just said, "Come as soon as possible."

I asked my roommates to drive me.

I brought the block print that I was carving for Lyra's birthday, thinking that Daddy would like to see it. We talked and joked that long, long, interminably long hour drive to the hospital. I hoped and wished and tried not to think.

And when I got there, my father's closest friend and two deputies walked me into a small room and shut the door. One of the deputies said, "Your father is dead."

Daddy had had a heart attack while swimming in the apartment pool.

Father Music

What drew him from the shore?
Water, always water, water, more . . .

My father nearly drowned when he was
ten
His foot caught on an anchor then . . .
What tangled to his foot and pulled
him down?
Water, always water, flowing 'round . . .

He always loved the river, loved the sea
he fished and swam and built a raft
and he
was twenty when he swam far off the
coast
was trapped by some tight tentacle "the
most
incredibly painful sting, is all I'll say"
he swore he swam the fastest in his life
that day

What drew him from the shore?
Water, always water, water more . . .
What tangled 'round his neck and
pulled him down?
Water, always water flowing 'round . . .

And then the flood that washed away
our land
the trees, our house, the shed, the
tractor and
left only one blue plate unbroken in
the sand

While he rebuilt the farm and planted
hay,
he swam six times across the pool each
day . . .
Then one June day his heart gave
out—he drowned
what tangled in his heart and pulled
him down?

What drew him from the shore?
Water, always water, water more . . .

The next week I graduated with a B.S. degree in human development. I thought perhaps I would be the farmer in the family and live on the farm. We did run the farm for awhile. But I couldn't find the cultural underground there—the folk music, art, dance, drama, the political liberals. We eventually sold the farm with great sadness.

I went back down to Santa Monica and began to work part-time for the Rand Corporation on a government housing study. I wrote a lot of poetry over the next painful months. And I ate. A lot. My mono-like illness reared its ugly head again. I worked and slept and ate and mourned and cried. I was lonely and sick and trying to rebuild my life. I wrote one poem after going to the Laundromat:

I Dreamed I Saw My Father

A man folding his wife's denim skirt
is complaining to the woman who talks like a
lawyer,
while I put my dime in the wall dryer chorus
line.

You float in. Like lint.
Like dreams I don't know I dreamed.
Like old Sherlock Holmes tales I barely
remember.

Your sleepy smile, chlorine eyes,
patient patience.
Ah. . . . your stunning hug!

These days
I see your sleepy smile
in slowed motion.
And only
in my dreams.

I was sick for a year. I wrote in my journal, worked at Rand, volunteered with a local theater company on weekends, and was in my bathrobe a lot. I lived in a little cabin behind a house near the ocean. I planted flowers. I painted my front door bright yellow. It was a narrow little place, like a box car. I had a calico cat named Barley.

Second grade, 1962

Slowly, with the help of health food remedies, I began to get better. My sister helped me by long distance telephone. She said, "Do you pick your face? Well, you could be running during those minutes that you would be picking your face." And so I started to jog again.

My sister was going to graduate school at this time. She and I were always close; we grew so close after Daddy died, we nearly drew the same breath.

As a child, Lyra was quiet, smart, cautious, an observer, who read constantly. If she was reading the back of a box of cereal, she wouldn't hear my mother calling her. When she was about thirteen, she began to grow quite tall, and all those years of reading *Mad* magazines served her well: she suddenly became witty. She was, as we said, a "crack-up."

I looked up to her, adored her. She was my Big Sister. We fought, played, formed a

neighborhood club, had a tree house, were the only kids at the farm, and made up stories at night in the dark of our room, creating families and decorating houses by describing everything in vivid detail.

She attended UCLA and then UC, Davis as a sociology major. She went on to get a master's degree in journalism from UC, Berkeley.

Today, she is an editor and journalist specializing in the field of sustainable agriculture on the UC, Davis campus. She is funny, warm, politically active, loves to shop at farmers' markets, and loves to water ski almost as much as her husband and two children do. She is still my Big Sister. I still look up to her and adore her. My book *It's Not My Turn to Look for Grandma!* is dedicated to her.

As I got better, I longed for some kind of an adventure. One of my friends from kindergarten, Teri, sat me down and asked me what I would be if I could have any fantasy in the world. I said that I would be Mary Poppins.

The next day, she sent me to South Beverly Drive in Beverly Hills where all of the domestic employment agencies are located. I dressed as I imagined a good governess would dress: in a dark blue skirt and a frilly white blouse. That day, I interviewed at the home of comedienne Joan Rivers and was hired to care for her nine-year-old daughter, Melissa.

As always, I wrote. My sister had encouraged me to keep a detailed diary from the beginning of this adventure. I bought a big, black blank book. Each night, I spent at least an hour recounting every single detail of my life there. I felt as if I were a sociologist observing some foreign culture.

I moved into their huge house with sixteen telephone lines (in the days before faxes and computers), a secretary, a cook/chauffeur, a maid, and me. I slept in a huge and beautiful room. My shower was enormous—as big as my kitchen in my old apartment.

My duties included driving Melissa to and from school each day, making her breakfast and lunch, driving her to activities, baby-sitting, cleaning her room, bathing her, helping her with her homework, and tutoring her when we were out of town.

My favorite part of being a governess, besides meeting celebrities, was working with Melissa on her homework. Sometimes we read in the bathroom while she took a bath. Some of her fourth grade work from private school was as challenging as my biology and history classes in college.

I ate with the family at dinner, but before I did, I was given an hour's etiquette lesson by Peter, the German cook/chauffeur. It was a different world. We sat on fancy chairs at a lovely table with elegant plates and silverware. There was a silver button at the table which we pushed when we were ready for the next course. Sometimes we were served hamburgers and French fries out of silver dishes.

Joan treated me as family. One Sunday, I brought up a breakfast tray for her daughter as she cuddled in bed with her mom and watched cartoons. Joan said to me, "We aren't eating until you bring up your own breakfast and hop into bed with us!"

After working for Joan Rivers, I explored the East Coast, backpacking with my fiddle, visiting friends and relatives. Directly thereafter, my friend Elizabeth and I decided to start our own business.

We knew our strength was in teaching, and so in 1978 we formed Positive Education Inc., a tutorial agency. We worked with the Santa Monica Joint Unified School District, the city's Department of Social Services, and the YWCA to provide after school tutoring.

Though our business was thriving, we found it difficult to make money. We worked with business consultants but were still not sure how to make a living with Positive Education. And I wanted a boyfriend so badly I could taste it.

I went on a walk on the Santa Monica Pier one night with my mom and with a friend from the Davis Student Co-op who had just come back from South America. I felt as if I hadn't had any adventures, not really. Perhaps I should buy a house with my share of the money from the sale of the farm? But my mother said that one day I would own a house; not to buy one now. It would tie me down. Now was the time in my life to have adventures, to be footloose. Bless her!

So, I contacted my friend Teri, who by now was living in England, and flew over to start my meanderings at her house.

The first thing that Teri did was to go through my overstuffed backpack and send home half of my clothes and possessions. She was ruthless.

"What are these for?" she asked.

"They're walking shoes," I said.

"What are you wearing now?" she asked, looking down at my feet.

"Another pair." I said.

"We're sending these home," she said.

"But what if they get wet or muddy?" I pleaded.

"Home," she said firmly.

Thank heavens for Teri! I schlepped that backpack and my fiddle across the British Isles, Switzerland, and Israel for over five months.

When my plane touched down in Israel, I was shocked at how very foreign everything seemed. I had been traveling in England, Ireland, and Switzerland, where they used my alphabet—I could guess my way around. The cultural ways were vaguely familiar. But here, the alphabet was startlingly different, hiding any kind of meaning from me at all.

The people seemed harsh and brazen. Little ladies would move quickly through a busy bus depot, aiming their elbows, using them to move others out of the way, swimming hard against the current of the crowd. They would say, "slicha," which means "excuse me," but they would say it roughly, as if they were saying "get out of my way," sticking their sharp elbows into you.

The Israelis were like walnuts. At first, all I saw was the shell. Hard on the outside. Later, I found them to be amazingly generous. Soft and sweet inside.

I stayed with my friends and then lived on Kibbutz Ha Ogen for a month. Ha Ogen means The Almond. Thirty years earlier, a group of Israeli settlers developed a dairy farm, planted a grapefruit orchard, built a child care center and a mess hall. They ate meals as a group and lived in small cottages in the center of the farm.

Ha Ogen welcomed volunteers from all over the world. I lived in crude barracks with a group of Swedish students and was assigned to work in the children's cottage. I helped with the children and cleaned the floors. We poured buckets of soapy water over the smooth floors. Then, we used long-handled squeegees, instead of mops, to push the soapy water into the drains in the center of each room. The hot air dried the floors in a few minutes.

I played my fiddle with kibbutz-niks—one played a flute, another played the guitar. We rehearsed in one of the bomb shelters on the kibbutz and worked up a beautiful rendition of a little Hassidic melody to play at the evening meal one Friday night.

Staying on the kibbutz was wonderful. I had a base. After working there for a month, I backpacked my way around the country and even played my fiddle in exchange for lunch one day.

When I first came to Israel, I was timid and pale. By the time I left, I was proud, confident, and tanned. A true transformation. Strangers would ask me for directions in Hebrew. I came to Israel knowing only the word "shalom." I left knowing enough to get by.

While I was overseas, I read the book *Games Mother Never Taught You—Corporate Gamesmanship for Women* by Betty Lehan Harragan. It was a step-by-step plan for women to join the business world. I read it to see how we could run Positive Education better, but I was seduced to try Big League corporations.

The first step, the author said, was to work in a sales job where you earned a commission for each sale you made. In this way, your worth is very black and white—either you made the sale or you didn't.

So, when I returned to the States, I got a job selling a computerized credit and collection system. I loved sales. Each opened door was a glimpse into someone else's world. It could also be hard, discouraging, and very tiring. I longed for role models—people my age who were "doing the corporate thing." So I joined the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

All Junior Chamber members had to volunteer at events. Ordinarily, I would have signed up for arts-related events, but I was tired of meeting musicians. I wanted to meet people who ran and hiked and did things. The Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce sponsors an event called the L.A.-Watts Summer Games—a sort of city-wide Olympics for high school students. I signed up to volunteer at the site closest to my home, which was hosting the men's basketball semifinals.

I didn't know *anything* about basketball. Nothing. Never watched it. Actively disliked it. But it was close to my home. The night before I was to volunteer, I broke up with a fellow I had been dating. I was so angry at him and at myself that I decided that I didn't want to have anything more to do with men. Forget it. I would develop female friendships.

So, I brought my old friend Debbie (who had studied piano with my mom while I studied violin with hers) to volunteer with me. Debbie is beautiful. She has a great figure, green eyes, black hair and pale skin. I, on the other hand, was overweight. But, I was on a new food plan and very optimistic about finally getting down to goal weight. I brought lots of sugarless gum and handed it out to all of the other volunteers.

There was a guy in charge of all of the volunteers dubbed "Mr. Manpower." He was full of life, full of vitality, funny, relaxed, confident, and very kind. His eyes sparkled. I was very attracted to him, but I knew that I didn't have a chance.

That night, Mr. Manpower called to make sure I would be at my assignment the next day. I thought that it was very responsible of him to call—and what a lot of volunteers he had to call.

The following weekend, I was assigned to wrestling. I had to throw in the white towel. Mr. Manpower came around to check on all of the sites and see how we were doing. What a responsible guy, I thought.

On the last day of the games, I returned to see which team won the men's basketball tournament. I had become interested in basketball . . . and I was also hoping to bump into Mr. Manpower. He sat next to me. Me! Plain old me! Then he asked if I would ever be interested in going out to dinner. What do you think I said? He said that he would call me.

The next week, I stayed home every day after work, so as not to miss his call. My girlfriend Elizabeth, who was still running Positive Education, had more experience dating than I had.

"Promise me," she said, "that you will not let him know how anxiously you have been waiting for his call."

I promised.

A week later he did call. "What have you been doing?" he asked. I couldn't help myself. It just tumbled out of my mouth. "Waiting for you to call," I said.

Mr. Manpower was Gary Wayland. As it turned out, he had gotten Debbie and me confused on that first weekend. He thought he was calling this green-eyed, dark-haired beauty when he was checking up on volunteer assignments. And, no, he didn't call all of the volunteers. Only me. Or Debbie. Whatever.

Anyway, we did go out. I fell head over heels for this man, so opposite of me and all that I knew. I was always worried about when the other shoe would drop. He was completely at ease in the world. A member of the majority culture: a Christian white man raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Full of good humor.

In Love

He
swarms in my ribs.
Circling, clattering, buzzing, alive
inside me
without pause
a thousand bees
two thousand wings
bound by invisible threads
doubling in strength in my stomach and throat
filling the bones in my legs
behind my eyes
the roaring noise
takes over my insides.

I am a shell
to this second life
this surge
crashing against my skin
keeping me up all night.

We married in 1981. These days Gary is a CPA in his own firm, men's basketball referee for major college conference games and for the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games. He plays soccer, coaches Little League, and loves to work in local politics. He is funny, kind, a great listener, smart, athletic, and my best friend. His parents and sisters, too, are warm and generous, and made me feel like part of the family from the very beginning. How did I get so lucky?

While Gary and I were engaged, I picked up the book *Games Mother Never Taught You* again. Step two, said the book, was to get a job in a corporate marketing department, using your track record in sales to get the job. I was sure that I would get a job in a day or two . . . I now thoroughly understood the corporate game. I had the world by the tail, right?

Well, it didn't turn out exactly that way. I knocked on doors and sent out resumes for five months. It was very, very discouraging. Finally, I found work with a temporary agency and was assigned to Pacific Tele-

"Some of the Konigsberg clan: I am in braids on Uncle Raphael's lap, Mother is next to him, Lyra is on Uncle Moish's lap, Cousin Franklin in a tie is on the floor"

phone's marketing department for one day. I liked the company, interviewed for a job, and was hired.

Yippee! A corporate job! I wore suits and high heels! I drove on the freeway to downtown Los Angeles! I carried a beautiful leather briefcase! I had my own cubicle office that I could decorate anyway I wanted! And I got a paycheck! Brave new world.

My parents had both been independent and were distrustful of the company environment—and here I was working in the heart of the corporate world, with my own bunch of work buddies. I had found another way to rebel in my family.

I worked there for four and a half years. And I enjoyed it for awhile—especially at the beginning. But the truth was that, whenever I was supposed to be learning how to design voice and data communications systems for our multimillion dollar customers, I was usually doodling, designing elaborate worlds, drawing elephants, trees, bubbles, noodles, weird dogs, rubber-faced people. I designed announcements for up-coming sales meetings and became known for the drawings of ducks marching up the sides of my flyers. As I moved up in the corporate world, bringing home bigger and bigger paychecks, my mother would stand on the sidelines and sigh, "You should quit and become a children's book writer; you'd be so much happier."

Why are mothers always right?

During this period, my nephew, Josh, was about to turn three. I wanted to make him something. So, I wrote him a book called *Joshua Visits Grandma Saralee.* It wasn't brilliant literature, but I illustrated, Xeroxed, laminated, and bound it.

The night I finished it, I was so jazzed, I couldn't sleep. It was a feeling I had experienced before, when I fell in love with Gary. The same chemicals, the same floating sensation, the same rush. I didn't need sleep. I was somehow home. But in real life, I was still trapped in my job.

So, I took a class through UCLA Extension called "Writing for Children." The teacher was Terry Dunnahoo, whom I now call the Johnny

Appleseed of Southern California Children's Book Writers. I was in love again. With the subject. With the possibilities. With life. I couldn't wait to get home to work on my stories. I couldn't wait until Monday night—class night—came around each week.

During that period when I walked past the construction sites downtown, as I had walked along for months, the workers whistled at me. They had never noticed me before. I was walking taller, lighter. Yes, floating.

At work, the end was near. I was the liaison between Pacific Bell and our biggest customer, First Interstate Bank. We were designing a voice and data communication system for the bank, and I was at a meeting, supposedly taking detailed notes. Instead, I began writing a story about a child who runs away. She runs away and lives with rabbits. She stays with them so long that she turns into a rabbit.

I wonder who was running away?

I had no idea what was coming out of my pen. It was one of those experiences that every writer has occasionally. I often had it when I wrote poetry. It was as if a pink cloud had floated above my head and was pouring something soft and wondrous through my arm and into my pen. It's as if I was not writing it. I was taking dictation. Was it a poem? Was it a story? What was it?

I wrote it and rewrote it over a period of several months. I remember sending manuscripts to ten publishers and to a children's radio program. When I got back from a trip, there were nine rejection letters . . . and an acceptance from the radio program. Even though it wasn't published, the programmer "Uncle Ruthie" wanted to read my story on the air! Wonderful!

I took classes (from Ruth Lercher Bornstein, Sonia Levitin, Barbara Bottner, among others), ran long distance races, and continued to be a workaholic. I would come to work before the sun came up, and go home long after the sun went down—I never knew what the weather was like outside. I was miserable. I would cry to Gary at night about work, get stomachaches on Sunday nights, and have an extra bowl of cereal each morning because I didn't want to push myself away from the breakfast table and go to work.

There were moments when I knew my life was horribly out of balance. One was when we could finally afford first row, center seats to see the world-famous mime, Marcel Marceau. I was so looking forward to it. Gary and I got all dressed up . . . and both of us fell asleep during the performance. Where was the quality in our lives? We were missing the very things we could now afford.

The wake-up call was when I started wanting a gold watch. One that cost a lot of money and was very show-off-y. I started saving for it. I deserve it, I thought. Haven't I been slaving away at this job for fourteen hours a day, seven days a week? I deserve this watch. It was so unlike me to want something like that. I had gotten by comfortably with my little old Timex for which I paid sixteen dollars when I was a waitress in high school, which still worked fine.

Then we saw the movie *The Killing Fields.* I was weeping in the theater. What did I need a thousand dollars for a crummy watch for? I want to send the money to those Cambodian war orphans instead, I thought. How had I moved so far from the old me?

I had to quit. It came down to the fact that I was losing the "me" in me.

One March morning, I walked into my boss's office and told him that I was leaving the company. I was scared. I was relieved. What would the future hold?

I decided that I wanted to design greeting cards, so I began working for a greeting card company, stocking cards in stores. I submitted designs to card companies. I found it harder to show my artwork than my words. If someone rejected my stories, I simply sent them off to another company. If someone rejected my drawings, I felt personally wounded.

Shortly thereafter, *To Rabbittown* was accepted for publication by Green Tiger Press. When the editor called to tell me that they wanted to publish my work, I, so long trained in savvy business negotiating techniques, nearly collapsed in a heap, and then said, "I'd pay *you* to publish it!" Very savvy.

But Green Tiger was itself collapsing in a heap. It never published my book. Instead, my teacher and friend, Barbara Bottner, suggested that I send it to her editor at Scholastic. Scholastic changed only three words in the original story and paired the text with dreamy watercolor illustrations by Robin Spowart. Robin is as gentle and beautiful a person as his illustrations. I dedicated it to my mother and father. Here is the beginning:

To Rabbittown

I opened her rabbit-y cage
and while she nibbled celery
I asked her:
Where do the rolling hills go?
She said:
Beyond the wheat
to a pine forest
to the edge of it all
to Rabbittown

I snuggled her close
She told me:
Hop there
Ride the green waves
Find the cliffs
past the smell of the sea
There you'll find
those brown rabbit eyes
And so I went

One evening around this time, I went for a run in the rain and then went directly to meet a friend for dinner. The restaurant was cold, we were right near the fan, and I had not brought a sweater. The next day I got what I thought was the flu: slight fever, chills, headache, the desire to do nothing but sleep.

But this "flu" did not go away. I was essentially bedridden for two years. It turned out to be a recurrence of what I had in 1976, what at the time was called Epstein-Barr virus. These days it is called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Next to the death of my father, this was one of the very darkest times of my life. I could not do anything. I could not think. Some people doubted that I was sick at all. Sometimes it seemed even to me that I must be making it up.

If I had been handed a letter that said, "Dear April, You are going to be sick for two years. Here are the lessons you need to master: learn patience, learn to do less, learn to listen. All the best, God," it would have been easier. One of the tortures of this illness is that you don't know how long it is going to last—or worse, if it will ever go away.

But, with a combination of a wonderful doctor, vitamins, acupuncture, homeopathy and daily phone calls with a friend who was also sick, it did go away. Very, very, very slowly.

I would measure my progress when I went to my weekly doctor's appointment. At first I had to take the elevator to the second floor. Then, slowly, very slowly, I could walk the stairs. Then, I would trot up them. Finally, I could skip up the stairs two at a time.

In 1989, after I recovered, I gave birth to Jeffrey. He was born underwater at a birthing center and, to this day, water is his favorite environment: baths, showers, rivers, pools, and the ocean. Get him wet and he is in heaven, just like my father.

We had struggled for many years to have a baby and were never able to have any more. What a privilege and a pleasure it is to have a child! I know how lucky I am. My local children's librarian got a kick out of the fact that I finally had a child; I had been coming to Pajama Storytime for years by myself, and now, finally, I had a "legitimate" reason to come!

These days, Jeff is tall and blond and loves to joke. He likes to come home after boogie-boarding in the ocean or playing soccer or baseball, and take apart a computer or romp around with our dog, Rosie, our two cats, Lucy and Elsie, and our two frogs.

During this period I was writing and sending things out. I figured that now that one of my books was accepted, the red carpet would be thrown out whenever I submitted a manuscript. I opened my files and started to send manuscripts. In the next three years, about thirty of my stories were rejected by every major publisher of children's books.

I wondered if I was just a "one trick pony."

I kept taking classes. One of the classes I took at UCLA was "Writing Poetry for Children," taught by Myra Cohn Livingston. Myra was a crusty woman. Opinionated. Passionate about metrics, good poetry, not talking down to children. Her insistence on excellence was hard. I cried after many of her classes.

I also learned a tremendous amount. She had us do what I called "poetry scales"—lots and lots of practice of the basic tools of poetry. She piled on the homework. It was understood that if you signed up for Myra's class, you signed away your life. You had no time to work on other writing projects.

One assignment was to write a children's story in iambic pentameter rhymed couplets. That means that every two lines have to rhyme, the stress is on the second beat, and evèry line had to have five "beats."

I went up to her, after class, trembling. I was thinking that, after all, I had gotten a

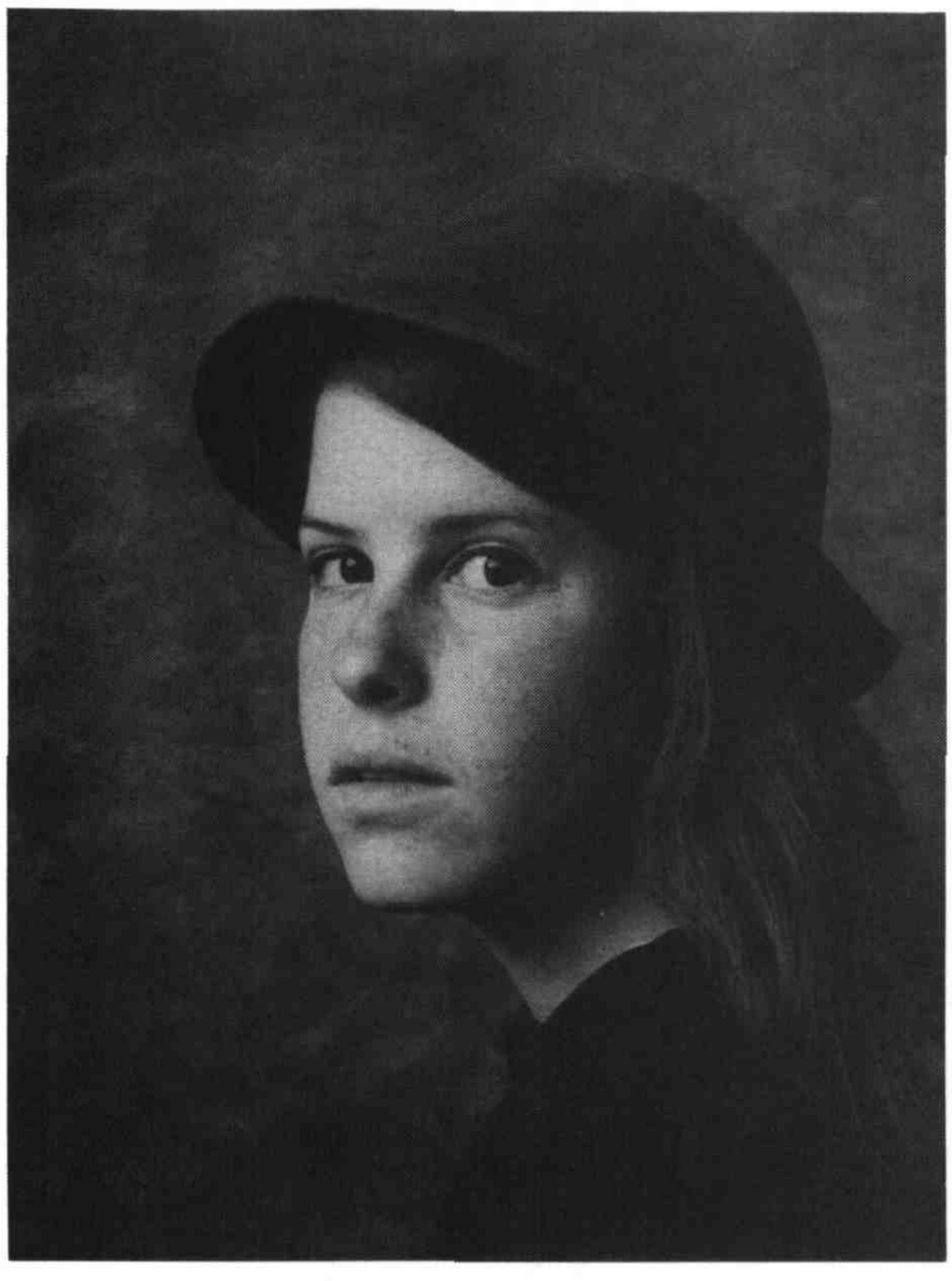
children's book/poem accepted for publication that did not rhyme, hadn't I? And it was Myra who had accepted the first poem I ever had published in her book *Poems for Mothers,* and that poem didn't rhyme. So I said, "Myra, I would rather not rhyme this assignment."

Myra looked at me for a moment. Then she said, "You will not only rhyme this assignment, you will rhyme every assignment for the rest of this class, even if the others are told not to."

I went home, tail between my legs, and struggled with iambic pentameter couplets. I brought it into class the next week, triumphant. She returned it with her trademark red, unreadable, small handwriting covering—*covering*—both pages of this work. I burst into tears.

But Myra was not saying that my idea was abominable or that I was a terrible writer. She was saying, "This idea has promise. Work on it. Here's how. You can do it."

She worked closely with me on that story for a year and a half. At the end of that time, she said, "It's ready." I sent off my manuscript and Scholastic accepted it and published it as *The Night Horse,* with illustrations in pastel colors by Vera Rosenberry. It is dedicated to Gary. Here is the beginning:



High school graduation, age eighteen

The Night Horse

Last night I did not sleep at all. I listened from
my bed.
I knew the sound. I knew it, but things jumbled
in my head.
Outside, the leaves were pounded by a strong,
steady rain.
I watched the branches moving in the wind: a
tangled mane.

The rain was pounding, pounding—I thought I
saw a horse.
I held my breath—she nosed my window open
and the force
Of rain came pouring in. Lightning hit a
bough.
She glowed a neon blue. She whinnied to me,
"Now."

I mounted her. My barefeet felt the mist upon
her side.
I knew it was just rain; still, I hugged her
neck to ride.
We passed my parents' window; our dog
outside on guard
Howled up. We flew! We soared above the
darkened yard.

It was another kazillion stories and another three years before my book *It's Not My Turn to Look for Grandma!* was accepted.

This story started with the title. Someone had asked my niece, Katie, to find Grandpa. Six-year-old Katie put her hands on her hips, stomped her foot on the ground, and said, "It's not *my* turn to look for Grandpa!," and we all laughed—because that was so *Katie.* I thought, "That's the title of a children's book!" wrote it down, and saved it in my "Hot Idea File." Then, two years later, when I had time to write but didn't have a specific idea in mind, I opened up that file and was intrigued by the title. What could that book be about?

I wrote fifteen possible stories for that title, writing and rewriting for about eight months. I took the story to my critique group and worked on it intensely with fellow writer Karen Vik Eustis, the best critic this side of Mars.

I sent the manuscript to my agent, who sent it to several publishers. Finally, Knopf said that they wanted to publish it! Hooray! They sent me my advance payment, and then the editor called me.

"We really love this story," she said.

"Great," I said.

"Could you rewrite it?" she asked.

I knew that this was not an insult. Lord knows how many times I had rewritten things for Myra. "Sure," I said, proud of how professionally I took this request. When I had rewritten it and sent it back, she said, "This is worlds better. Can you rewrite it again?" "Sure," I said.

When she received the rewrite, she said, "Really terrific. Could you rewrite it again?"

I rewrote it twenty times for her over a period of about a year. I didn't rewrite all of it each time, but certainly large chunks of it. I wrote it fifteen times for myself and twenty times for her.

And this story is only 765 words. All of which only confirms what writer Mem Fox meant when she said, "Writing a children's picture book is like writing *War and Peace* in haiku."

Then my editor said, "It's done."

"Great," I said, with a sigh of relief.

"But this story needs a song," she said.

"What's your point?" I asked.

"You need to write a song for the story."

"I CAN'T WRITE A SONG!"

"Sure you can. Go write me a song."

I was terrified. I was tempted to hire my cousin Phil, who lives in Nashville and writes songs for a living. But, I thought I'd give it a try. I listened to folk music recordings, talked to fellow folk musicians, sang lots of old songs . . . and finally found a tune that I liked. It is called "Ruben and Rachel," and was written by W. Harry Birch and M. William Gooch in 1871. Then, I dug deep into my life at the farm as a child—hoeing weeds in the black-eyed peas, white-washing the trunks of walnut trees, the iron-tasting water from the hose by the oak, swimming in the river with the farm dog . . . and I pulled out all of the poet's tools that Myra had insisted we learn by going up and down those "poetry scales" . . . and I did it. . . . I wrote a song. I was so proud. I sent it to my editor.

"No," she said, "not this song. Write me another."

So, I wrote three more versions. She liked the last one.

In the course of the rewrites, a young boy named Woolie emerged in the story. "Hmmm," I thought, "a boy and a grandpa . . . too many male characters." So, I changed Grandpa to Grandma, thereby (inadvertently) making one of the wisest marketing decisions I have ever made.

If you ever write a children's book, put the word "Grandma" in the title. Grandmas live longer than Grandpas, and Grandmas buy books. "A funny book about a Grandma?" a customer in a bookstore will ask, "I'll take one for each of my grandchildren!"

This story was paired with zany, hilarious illustrations by the *New Yorker* cartoonist George Booth, who is a generous and funny human being. Here is the beginning of that book:

It's Not My Turn to Look for Grandma!

Dawn was just cracking over the hills. Ma was splitting kindling on the back porch.

"Woolie!" she called out. "Where in the hickory stick is Grandma?"

"Dunno," said Woolie. "It's not my turn to look for Grandma!"

It was Mack's turn.

"Maaa-ack!" called Ma, and sent him a-lookin'. Mack looked and he looked and he sure did look, and well, friends and neighbors, he finally found Grandma and her dirty old dog telling jokes and soaking their bones in the stewpot on the kitchen stove.

"Grandma!" said Mack, out of breath, "Come tell us stories while we split kindling."

"Tell tales?" said Grandma. "Too busy."

So Mack leaned in and listened hard. Then he ran back and told a tall tale of his own to Woolie and Ma as the wood chips flew.

Noon was sizzling like an egg in a cast-iron pan. Ma was whacking weeds in the garden.

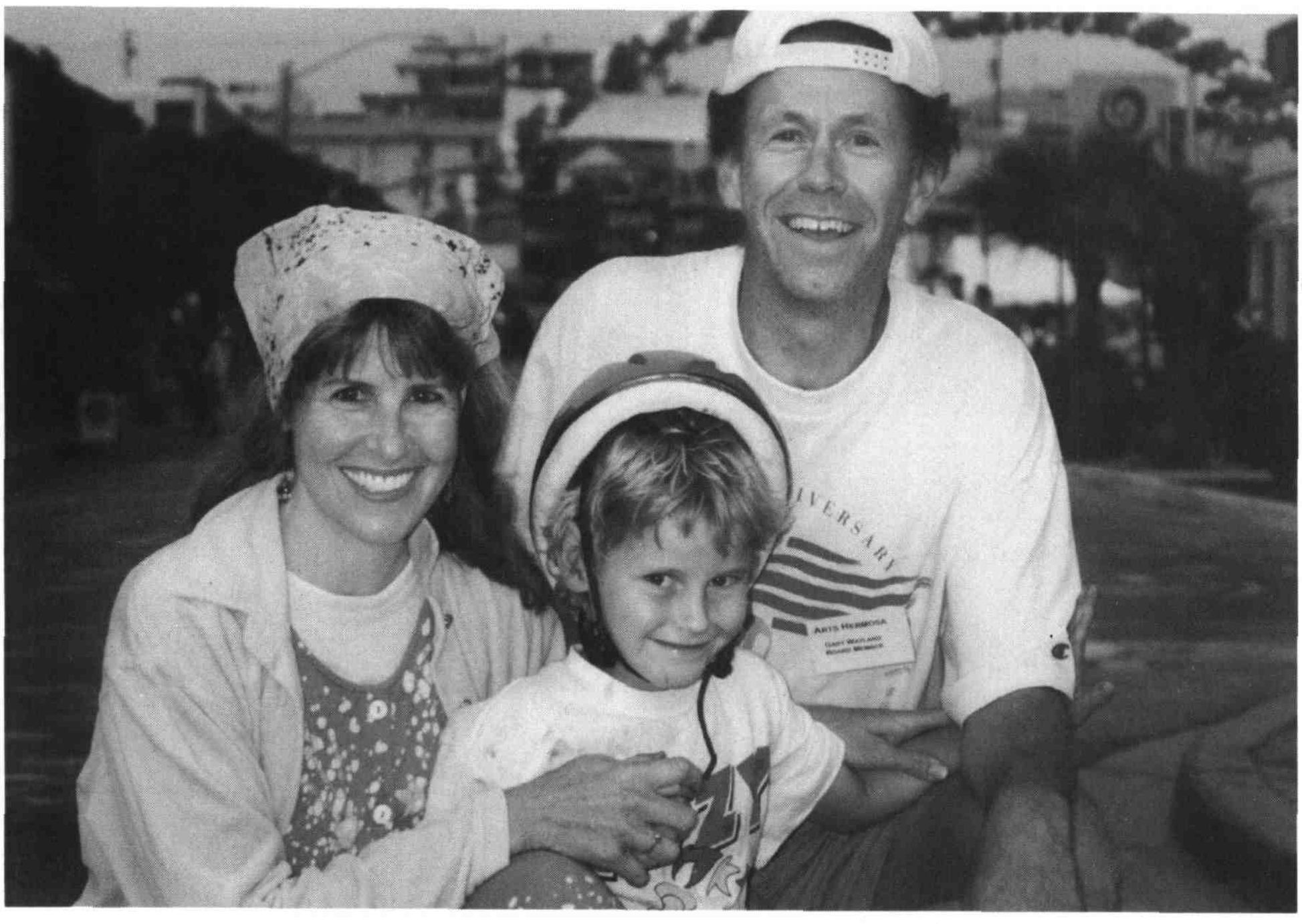
"Woolie," she said, "where in turnip tarnation is Grandma?"

"Dunno," said Woolie. "It's not my turn to look for Grandma!"

It was Oleanna's turn.

"Oooleannnnnnna!" called Ma, and sent her a-lookin'. Oleanna looked and she looked and she sure did look, and well, friends and neighbors, she finally found Grandma, her dirty old dog, and all of her ducks in the hall closet, painting the coats new colors.

One of the surprising results of this most marvelous profession is that I have turned into a teacher, a storyteller, and a performer



The author with husband, Gary, and son, Jeff, 1996

(yes! I play my fiddle when I tell the Grandma story!). I perform at schools all over the country and was invited to Germany by the Department of Defense Schools to speak at the Heidelberg Young Authors' Conference.

I bought a tape on how to speak German and took off. I spoke (in English) at two conferences and toured U.S. military base schools in Southern Germany. What a wonderful trip! I stayed with teachers from each school and learned about Germany (it is so beautiful, and so *green!*), including ways that it differs from America (they allow dogs in their restaurants and they sometimes serve strawberries with pepper!).

Of all the countries in Europe, I would not have chosen to go to Germany. All of Big Grand-ma's family had been killed in the Holocaust, and I had grown up with a hatred for that country. As much as I enjoyed being in Germany (to my great surprise), the horrors that my relatives experienced were always on my mind.

So, I went to a concentration camp. I felt I had to pay my respects, but I was very frightened, taking the train that morning. I was frightened for what would explode inside me. I went expecting wide pain lancing my stomach, I went expecting to splinter. But I did not split apart. I walked around the grounds of Dachau for hours. I wept. I felt holy. I left. On wings.

Dachau

Sixteen of my relatives
died
here
or somewhere like this place.
I bend
reverently
to find a smooth stone
to hide in my pocket.
The young guide walks us to the
Crematorium—I look for more stones: smooth.
One has a white line through it.
One is speckled green,
one is wide and flat and tan . . . four,
five . . .
Each
is holy to me . . . seven, eight . . .
Each has been blessed

ten, eleven . . .
I will send one to my sister, my nephew, my friends,
my relatives, thirteen, fourteen . . .
I will tell them about you.
I know they will put you in a place
near their hearts.
. . . fifteen, sixteen of my relatives
died
here.

I learned so much. I wanted to keep traveling forever. And yet I missed my family. Very much. I have been invited back to Europe. This time, Gary and Jeffrey are coming with me.

And what about the future?

I would like to illustrate some of my books. I love teaching and performing my stories, and know I will jump on this magic carpet of a career and keep teaching and performing in new lands.

I also know that I will continue writing, sometimes because I very much want to publish a book or a poem, because I want to send something wonderful out to the world. More and more I write for the pure pleasure of getting lost in writing, for looking up at the clock and realizing that four hours have passed in one breath, that I haven't started dinner yet, that it is now dark outside.

I look to the future and know that I will be writing for the delight of diving back into that great creative sea, swimming around, and bringing combinations of color and words, music and words, pictures and words to the surface to share. With you.

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FOR CHILDREN

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Also has contributed numerous poems to *Cricket* magazine, including "Taking Violin at School" which appeared in the April 1995 issue, and "My Father Whistles the Hills" which appeared in the June 1998 issue. Wayland's stories for children have been presented on the *Halfway Down the Stairs* radio program for KPFK-FM, and she has produced *It's Not My Turn to Look for Grandma and Other Stories* (audio tape), Moonstone, 1997.