PART I

Ready for Adventures:
1898–1914

If anyone told me “no” when I was growing up,
that’s when I was most apt to do it.

Hazel Wolf was born on March 10, 1898, in a Victoria, British Columbia, hotel. Her mother was an American, born in Paoli, Indiana, and her father was an immigrant to Canada from Scotland. The couple had left their home in Tacoma, Washington, just two weeks earlier to ferry the seventeen miles to Victoria. Wolf’s birth in Canada made citizenship an issue for her from the start.

Wolf begins her autobiography with her signature story, “The Bogeyman,” in which as a child she defeated the scare tactics of her Victorian parents and set off on a life of jaunty fearlessness. For 101 years, she challenged barriers and threats, right up to her confident confrontation with the ultimate bogeyman, death, on January 19, 2000.

Political, not psychological, theory informs Wolf’s childhood stories: she was not in the least interested in analyzing her family-of-origin issues. For insights into human nature, she relied on the British poetry she had memorized in Canadian public schools. Rather than a journey of self-discovery, Wolf’s life unfolds as the application of principles she gained early in life. From her family and neighborhood she learned her responsibility for the community, her freedom and playfulness, her understanding of the role of the working class in history, and her experience of unconditional love.

Water was Wolf’s medium: diving, swimming, paddling, rowing, active,
fluid, present, quick, constantly in motion at the center of a gang of friends. On land she was running across vacant lots in search of blackberries, clambering over fences to steal peas and potatoes, biking all over the city, or hiking to the lakes and beaches of Vancouver Island. Wolf’s unromantic wholeness with nature makes Part I key to her autobiography. She experienced as a child what she later articulated as an environmentalist: there is no split between nature and culture. We humans cannot “save” wilderness or the environment as if they were entities separate from us. There is no “intelligent” human fundamentally distinct from other forms of life. We are part of nature, and it is us.

Wolf spent much of the first sixteen years of her life running with her gang in immediate, sensuous contact with water, earth, wind, and rain. Her sense of self was rooted in her confident physical presence in the social and natural worlds. Knowing herself as creature of both nature and the working poor, she never let her social status interfere with her ultimate sense of her possibilities.

In her childhood stories, we see Wolf the mature activist who kept the interconnected universe in mind: everyone she worked with on both sides of an issue became her friend. There was no separation in Wolf’s practice between the personal and the political, the spiritual and the practical, or between individual and community interests.

1 / My Family

THE BOGEYMAN

I was born fighting the establishment: I was told I tried to bite the doctor when he smacked my behind to start my breathing. Hazel Anna Cummings Anderson—I never did like being named after a nut.

As a child, I was very self-willed. In the first picture taken of me as a baby, I am old enough to stand up and hang on to the edge of my crib, and I look real perky. My father wrote on the back of this picture in Spencerian script—it was supposed to be very elegant—“Ye sow the wind,
"ye reap the whirlwind," which indicates to me that, one, my father had a sense of humor and, two, I must have been a hell of a kid!

My mother, like all parents at that time, tried to discipline me with the Bogeyman. I remember this stormy night. I was real small, maybe four or five, and I don’t know what I did, probably wouldn’t go to bed or something awful like that. She said the Bogeyman was out on the front porch with a big sack and was going to take me away if I didn’t do this and this and this. And I’d had it, that night I’d had it with this Bogeyman. I opened the door to check it out and there’s nothing out there, nothing. And that taught me something that I needed to know: the Bogeyman is never there. So I open all the doors.

I remember I was scared, and I half expected he might be out there, see. It was a real act of courage that night. But it really destroyed any effect of my mother’s threats from then on. I called her bluff, or I just paid no attention to her.

She tried spooking me again when I was a little bit older. I liked to sleep out on the beach in the summertime when we were camping. I’d make a little place in the sand, well away from our tent on the edge of the beach. My mother was worried about my sleeping out there and she tried to get me not to do it. I wouldn’t pay any attention to her. So she cooked it up that one of the neighbors would put on her husband’s clothes and come in the dark to menace me. I woke up, and here’s this “guy.” I grabbed a bunch of rocks and yelled, “You better get out of here or I’ll throw all these rocks at you.” Well, the impostor didn’t want to be stoned, so she left. Pretty near sent her to her death. I went back to sleep. I wasn’t letting people spook me. I wouldn’t tolerate it.

I must have been a terrible child. I was into all kinds of mischief, but not bad mischief like stealing. In the rough neighborhood where I grew up, a lot of the kids ended up in reform schools and penitentiaries. I ran with that gang, but I never got into serious trouble.

I never was afraid of spankings, but I didn’t like to be physically mauled like that. To me, they were an outrage. And they inspired me to ever higher heights of misbehavior, to show that it didn’t do any good at all. My brother, on the other hand, was so sentimental that when he got a spanking he felt really bad about it and he was a good boy for a long time after-
ward. My sister was a timid person, afraid of spankings. To avoid them, she would tell lies and do all kinds of sneaky little things. I grew up with this fabulous reputation for never telling lies, and I was above telling lies, not because I was noble, but because I wasn’t the least bit afraid of what would happen to me if they knew the truth. That’s my cynical way of looking at my morals and virtues as a child.

I decided to put an end to my mother spanking me. I thought: “I’m not going to cry. Let her swack away.” So I stood there. She spanked and spanked and spanked. No tears, no emotion. Boy, that took the heart out of her. And she never tried again. She was a reasonable woman. She could see that I didn’t give a damn whether she spanked me or not, and that spanking wasn’t going to deter me from future crimes. There was nothing she could do to stop me, nothing.

There were times when I would come into conflict with my mother, and I would come to the conclusion, as children often will, that I really wasn’t her child—that I was adopted, or found on the doorstep. I wanted nothing to do with the whole crowd, and I’d run away. But I always fled in such a way that I would soon be found. And I never came back on my own. I was always brought back with my honor intact. Basically, I wanted to throw a scare into her.

One time I left, and I was not ever going to come back home again as long as I lived. I knew what I was going to do, because I’d been reading G. A. Hente stories. G. A. Hente was a popular English writer for children, presumably for boys, and the boys in these stories had tremendous adventures. They went right across South America, trapping birds, picking berries, and making little tree shelters. So I always daydreamed about catching fish and living off the land and having these adventures. This time I really was going to do it. It was late in the afternoon but still broad daylight. I thought, “No, I’ll start out in the morning. No use starting out now.” I was over in the big field in back of our place, waiting for darkness. And darkness began to come. Instead of seeing shining roads and beautiful sunlight filtering down through the trees, it looked kind of foggy. I was getting hungry, too. Just about that time, my brother came over and told me, “Our mother says if you want to eat dinner, you better come home.” I said, “All right,” and thought to myself, “I’ll still start out tomor-
row in the morning.” That ended that episode. I guess I was what they called a tomboy.³

MY MOTHER

Now I’ll tell about my mother, Nellie Frayne Anderson, because my orientation was toward my mother, and I grew up in a woman-centered culture. Nellie. She hated that name. She said every cow and horse in the country was named Nellie. I know her birthday: January 4, 1872. It’s about the only birthday that I remember. We used to save our money to buy her a present—something very impractical, as I look back on it, like a hair ornament that you’d wear in court. I always remember, when I wake up on January 4, “Oh, it’s my mother’s birthday.”

My father was injured at sea. I have no recollection of the catastrophe that hit the family. I was only five when he became an invalid. It was an accident, and in those days there was no insurance for injured workers, no widow’s pensions, nothing. They just threw you ashore and that was the end of it. So my mother was left with this crippled husband, and she just got busy earning the living. She didn’t have any education or any particular skill, but she did all kinds of things, from scrubbing floors to keeping boarders and nursing.⁴

As for my father, I always remember him in a wheelchair, or he walked with crutches. He lived five years after the accident and died in 1908, when I was ten years old. To me, childhood was fun, you know, but it must have been a bad time for my mother. We were very poor. I can only imagine that the poverty must have been pretty profound.

My mother was always moving, trying to find a better place. The more we moved, the more it was the same thing: miserable houses, prostitutes and drunks, very young and very old people left to their own devices in the streets. I was ragged and shabby, I’m sure, but I was robust and strong, a kind of leader with the kids. And I always felt secure because my mother was there. Even though she was out working, I knew she’d come home. It’s important that children have a feeling of security. I think that money has very little to do with that, very little to do with that.
Oh, she did all kinds of things, all kinds of different things to make a living. She wasn’t a nurse, but if they needed somebody to take care of an invalid, she’d do it. She would do housework. She worked in factories. I remember she was a salesperson in a cigar stand. She was always saying, “I want to keep the family together,” because there was always the danger of having to send us away. And I remember thinking, “Why does she bother? I wonder what it would be like in a foster home or an orphanage?” I thought it would be an adventure, and I was ready for any kind of an adventure. But we were together, and as I grew older, I realized that was a tremendous gift. I told my brother and sister many times, “That’s the legacy our mother left us.”

Once I almost slipped away from my mother. Her sister, Sarah, my Aunt Sally, lived in Seattle and was quite well-to-do. I spent my summers with her. She had four children who were adults as far as I was concerned, because they were so much older than I was, and they lived in luxury compared to my beat-up old home. They even had a servant who at mealtime appeared out of the blue. I always wondered how he knew that something was wanted. The truth was that my aunt had a bell under the carpet that she would push with her foot, but I didn’t find that out for a long time. They were very genteel, so every summer I had to change my personality completely when I went there. I couldn’t use four-letter words. Not modern four-letter words, but the slang of those days: gosh, heck, gee-whiz, golly, and darn. She wouldn’t tolerate that kind of vulgarity. I quickly adapted because I liked my aunt and my cousins. This family all doted on me, made a pet of me.

When things got really tough for my mother, there was talk about my aunt adopting me. So, okay, I went over to Seattle. I was all thrilled with the idea of being adopted by my aunt and basking in the love and admiration of these four cousins. I should have known, or they should have known from past experience, that I would get homesick sooner or later: on the summer visits, I would wake up one morning after a couple of weeks and want to go home. This time, I was there for much longer. I went to school—I was in the fourth grade—I don’t know how many weeks. Then I fell in the schoolyard and sprained my shoulder. I really wanted to go home! And home I went.
My mother wanted me home, too: she had made this sacrifice, letting me go. I remember her telling me how often while I was away she had taken out a plaid skirt that I hadn’t taken with me and put it up to her face and wept. Anyway, I was home, and my mother kept the family together. I shudder to think what would have happened had I stayed with my aunt and become genteel. An awful fate.

My mother was different. She came out into the street on summer evenings and played ball—no other kid’s parent did that! Maybe she’d had a hard day’s work, but she could still play with us. After dinner we played cards. We had a very short attention span and would start giggling and poking each other, and cheating, and it would annoy her to no end, so she would make cocoa and toast. And we were permitted to dunk the toast. I can picture her in front of the fireplace, down on her knees playing marbles on the rug that had a beautiful big dog woven into the pattern—it must have been hideous.

The fact that we didn’t have much money didn’t come into it. I didn’t know anything about money when I was a kid. If I wanted any, my brother and I went around the neighborhood and collected beer bottles and sold them back to the brewery.

My mother had dark blue eyes and a beautiful voice. She sang when she was working around the house, so I know all those old ballads: “I’ll Take You Home Again, Kathleen.” What a nice guy he was in that song. She was homesick, and he was going to take her home. “Do You Remember Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?” and “Annie Laurie . . . with a neck like a swan,” and I could just see this long neck of the swan.

She earned some money singing, too. It was during the Klondike gold rush [from 1896–97 to 1907–09]. There was a saloon in Victoria, and in back of it was a theater, with box seats. The gold diggers would come back with all their gold from Alaska to this saloon. She often sang there with her lovely red hair and black dress—what a gorgeous dress, long! It flared out at the bottom from the whalebone that made it stiff. She was completely covered, and she looked beautiful. Now, this was a rowdy bunch, but she was totally different, and that’s the kind of woman that guys liked to see, so they would throw money up on the stage. Once or twice I was allowed to go up in the balcony. All the women there were
prostitutes—not that I had to avoid prostitutes. It was just no place for a kid.

For a while she worked in an overalls factory and was secretary of the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] union. I’d go to meetings with her when I was seven, eight, and nine years old. When she got up to read the minutes and came to a word she couldn’t pronounce, she’d spell it, and everybody would laugh. I come from a long line of secretaries.

Mother was there. She was really with us. It’s just a feeling inside, not a fact to be documented. We children didn’t pay any attention to her jobs, and she never complained about the hard work. She was a social person, a live-and-let-live person. Lively, red-haired, left with three children, a disabled husband, and, finally, widowed, she simply rose to the occasion. I don’t know why.

MY FATHER

I wasn’t particularly fond of my father. Because he was an invalid for quite a while before he died, he didn’t loom very large in my life except for certain things that he told me that I remember very vividly and that affected my thinking. Apparently he went a little deeper than a lot of people, somewhat of a brain. I can remember them saying, “He’s never without a book in his hands.” I have a certificate from the high school in Sterling, Scotland, where he got an award in English literature and physiology. He told me about the middle class, and I carried a grudge against the middle class for quite some time, until much later, when I realized I was probably in it. He laid a foundation for a global look at things. He believed in socialism, and he explained it to me. And I believe in socialism—believe me, I believe in socialism, despite the Soviet Union’s failure. I hang on to that theory like grim death—but it’s got to be democratic. Eventually, that’s what we’ll have.

My mother was a socialist, too. Well, I don’t know that she believed in socialism, because she never voted. She said, “They’re all a bunch of scalawags.” She didn’t worry about theoretical things, but he did.

He admired China. He thought it would be the agent of great good in
the world at some future time, but that at the present time China was a
great monster, asleep. When it turned over and woke up, we would see
changes for the better. I had a vision of this yellow monster with a big
grin on his face turning over, saying, “Here I am!”

Another thing he talked about was religion. I have an image of my father
by an open window in a room that was sparsely furnished. I was quite
young. I don’t remember what he looked like, but I can see his hand, the
fingers spread out. He was telling me how many people there were in the
world. At that time there were probably a billion. On his hand he pointed
to one finger and he said, “Just a very small group are Christians, a very
small group. The rest of them all believe in something else: they’re
Muslims and Buddhists and Confucians and other things. And this
minority of Christians are in turn split into many different factions. There’s
the big split between Catholics and Protestants. And the Catholics have
a split between the Roman Catholics and the Greek Catholics. The
Protestants are split into Methodists and Baptists and all the other denom-
inations, each one thinking that if you do not follow their theory you won’t
get to heaven.” Then he summed it up by saying, “So what makes you
think that some little sect in a minority religion has the truth, to the exclu-
sion of all the rest of the human race?” And I thought, “Well, the arro-
gance of one of these little tiny sects thinking that they have all the
knowledge!” That shattered my belief in Christianity forever. So I grew
up like he was, an atheist.

Nobody in my family went to church. My mother had no time for fuss-
ing around with religion. She just worked all the time. Besides, I don’t
think she was even remotely interested, not a reverent person. When things
got tough, she would chant, “Oh, don’t it beat hell how Jesus loves me.”
Another thing she used to say was, “God said to Moses, ‘Come forth,’ and
he came fifth and lost his job.” So I was never sent to church. In fact, I
grew up without prejudice against religion, which is a nice way to grow up.
“Each to his own.”

When my father came home injured, in 1903, he had a very short fuse
and was in such pain that he took laudanum [tincture of opium] to ease
it. He tried to beat us children from his wheelchair with a cane. My mother
threatened him: “If you touch one of those children, you’re out of here.”
She separated from him around 1907, and he got his own place down the street. I saw even less of him. When he got bedridden, in 1908, she let him come home and nursed him until he died that year.

I barely remember my father’s funeral, though if my mother had died I would surely have remembered hers. In those days, death was really pretty exciting. People put a black thing on their door, a rosette with long ribbons. The men wore a black band on their sleeve. The women wore black dresses for a year, then they graduated to purple, and then finally they came out of it. When there was a death in the family, you just retired out of sight, presumably to grieve.

Now, I wasn’t particularly grieving about the death of my father. I wanted to go out and play. My mother wouldn’t let me, and I was chafing at the bit because I had to stay in. I remember the people going up and looking in the coffin, but my mother had me stay there in my seat and not go through that.

He had been a sick man and cranky. Undoubtedly I didn’t like him too well. One time he wanted me to bring home a newspaper. We might have been having some trouble, so I was mad at him. He couldn’t get it himself because he couldn’t walk, and I wouldn’t bring it to him. I just wouldn’t bring it to him. I must have been stubborn—I wasn’t that easy a child to raise. Later I realized that was very cruel, and it gnawed on me. I regretted it. So after he died and was buried, in order to appease my conscience, I took a newspaper out and laid it on his grave.

MY ANCESTORS

My Great-Grandmother Anderson was probably born in the early 1800s, and I think it is very remarkable that I have had physical contact with her and also with my great-great-grandchildren, who will probably live to the late twenty-first century. I’ve touched seven generations, spanning almost three centuries. It’s a long stretch, isn’t it, that I reach that far back from those days and then beyond it? I was born March 10, 1898, in the Dominion of Canada, during the reign of Queen Victoria. I’m not sure, but I think
Thomas Jefferson was president of the United States: I haven’t finished the research.

I was conceived in Tacoma but born in a hotel in Victoria, British Columbia, under “Old Glory,” as my mother called it, because she was an American woman and very patriotic. She didn’t like the idea of her child being born on foreign soil, so she had a flag hung over the bed. Not many people are born under the American flag.

My mother lost her citizenship when she married my father, a Scottish immigrant to Canada. Both in Canada and in the United States, women lost their citizenship if they married foreigners, and that law prevailed right up until 1922. After that, women could marry without losing their citizenship, and they could get their lost citizenship restored very easily with a simple application. My mother had hers restored when our family moved back to the United States, in the 1920s. They did all kinds of things to women in those days: identity, citizenship, all wiped out when they married.

I was born Canadian, but on the matter of nationality, I always contended I was half Scotch and half soda water. My mother didn’t like me to say that, because she was the half soda water. She considered herself an Irish American because her father considered himself an Irish American. They always go by the male line and forget that there is all this female coming in, which could be all kinds of things.

I had always understood that this Irish American father of hers was born at sea. It was hearsay. Recently, I found out from a long-lost cousin that this guy was born at sea in 1830 on the way from Ireland to the United States. I began thinking about that. The name was originally DeFrayne, and they were Huguenots from France. They fled France to Ireland in 1685, penniless. For the next century and a half, they must have been gang-ing up with the native Irish, fighting the British. Now, in 1830 it was a long and very perilous trip across the Atlantic. Nobody in his right mind would bring a pregnant woman onto a ship, knowing full well that the child was going to be born at sea. So they weren’t escaping starvation—no—they were escaping persecution. I figure that’s why they left in a hurry. They were on the lam.
That was my grandfather, Richard Frayne, born on the ocean. They dropped the “De” somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic. Legend has it that he became a doctor who left the South before the Civil War because his leanings toward the Northern cause made him unpopular there. I do know as a fact that he was a soldier in the Union army, a captain, and that he came from Kentucky.

After the Civil War, Capt. Richard Frayne settled in Paoli, Indiana. Nellie, my mother, was born there on January 4, 1872, the youngest child after her three siblings, Sarah, Howard, and Robert. Nellie’s mother, Eugenia Frayne, died in June of that year as a result of my mother’s birth, so my knowledge of my grandmother Eugenia was stopped cold. I suppose she kept house and took care of her children. Women did that in those days.

The motherless Nellie was farmed out among relatives in Kansas and Kentucky. She used to tell us that in Kansas cyclones would come, and the people would all go down in cellars. And in Kentucky she had a mammy that tucked her into bed and kissed her goodnight. My mother’s education was restricted to fourth-grade level, not unusual for women in those days.

After his wife, my grandmother, died, Captain Frayne came west in the early 1890s, bringing all four children and settling in Puyallup, Washington, where he opened up a hardware business in partnership with Ezra Meeker. Captain Frayne died and was buried in Coupeville, on Whidbey Island, in 1893, so I never knew him.

Sarah was fifteen years older than Nellie and looked after her. I think my mother was repelled by the stern moral stance taken by Aunt Sally, as I called her. Apparently, they drifted apart. Nellie supported herself as a waitress in Tacoma, where she met and married George Anderson.

Now for my father’s side, the Scotch half of my Scotch and soda. My father’s father, George William Cummings Anderson, was a marine cook. Unfortunately, I didn’t inherit his skill. He died before I was born. He had the rank of sergeant, and he cooked for the 43rd Highland Regiment that traditionally staffed (I refuse to say “manned”) the Fort of Gibraltar. His son, my father, was born on Gibraltar, May 24, 1869. My father and his brother and two sisters were christened by the Presbyterian chaplain: I have the certificate. When he was a young child they returned to Ster-
ling, Scotland, their home castle, where he grew up. The whole family migrated to Victoria, British Columbia, from Scotland when my father was about twenty years old. Isn’t it funny that I can dig these things out?

My father was a seaman, too, a sergeant in the merchant marine, and he, too, was named George William Cummings Anderson. He must have shipped into Tacoma and met my mother at her job as a waitress. They were married in 1894. He was at sea when my birth was hard upon them, so my mother crossed over the border and stayed with my father’s parents in Victoria to have someone to care for her.

I remember that grandmother in an apron, a very white, clean apron, tied in the back. I didn’t like her. She was kind of harsh. She died, fortunately. Pretty soon my mother had a falling out with these relatives of my father’s, and I never knew them, although I dimly remember my great-grandmother, a real old lady, who spoke entirely in Gaelic. She never said “cry,” she said greet—I remember that one word of Gaelic. My father knew a lot of Gaelic. He called me his little cuddie, which is “donkey.” I must have been stubborn.

All good Scottish people were baptized—even I was baptized, my grandmother saw to that. She died before the other two children were born: my brother, George William Cummings Anderson, in 1901, and my sister, Dorothy Patience Cummings Anderson, in 1903. So they weren’t baptized, and they are not going to go anywhere in the hereafter, just me.

SONNY AND DOT

My brother’s name was George William, but he was always called Sonny. He and I were pretty much inseparable. We quarreled, but between quarrels we were real buddies sharing adventures. We would build a ship in the kitchen with chairs, then we’d sail along for a while until we met a disaster and had to jump off the ship, shouting, “Aberdoon the ship,” because we didn’t know how to say “abandon.” When we pretended that we were loggers, both of us wanted to be called “Bill.” “Bill” seemed like a good working-class name to me. He would say, “Let go of the hose, Bill”
or “Take this ax, Bill,” and so would I. Fortunately, the name stuck with him, not with me.

He was very handy as a young kid, and he made a lot of money fixing bicycles. He picked up old bicycle frames in all kinds of places, straightened them out, painted them, put wheels on them, and sold them. His workshop was in his bedroom. A big frame up on the wall was made into a toolbox and filled with all kinds of tools. He was always fixing my bicycle, but I never paid him. It wasn’t a matter of principle. I just had other things to do with my money. I would say, “If you fix this once more, I’ll pay you,” and I never did. On the day of his death he said, “You know, you owe me a lot of money.”

My brother was three years younger than me, and my sister was five years younger. Five years when you’re little puts them out of your game altogether. So I ignored her. I never had to look after her, probably because I refused to do it. I remember her saying after she grew up that she never remembered my striking her. I said, “Well, Dot, you were beneath my notice, that’s why.” I didn’t mind pounding my brother, but I was not going to hit a little kid five years younger than myself.

She was born premature. There was a big stirring in the family that I was only vaguely aware of as she was between life and death. She was a seven-month-old baby when we almost lost her to whooping cough. She couldn’t get her breath. She’d whoop and get blue in the face. I can remember them swinging her by the heels, the way they did it in those days. Maybe she didn’t die in spite of it. She was kind of fearful because of her frailty.

She grew up liking fine clothes and dancing. As we grew older, her friends were not my friends. I had contempt for people who dressed up and went to dances. She was very artistic and created marvelous dresses. I remember one: it was dark, with a huge embroidered cobweb and a little spider up on the shoulder, beautiful on her, but on me it looked funny. If I wanted to get a laugh, I’d put on one of my sister’s dresses.

She also made pretty things, like lampshades and a whole series with driftwood—a lot of potential talent that was utterly undeveloped. I think she would have gone a long way had she been in a walk of life that would have sent her off to art school. Dorothy was the spitting image of my
mother, with really red hair, blue eyes, and a sense of humor, too. And my brother, well, nobody had ears that stuck out like that.

**MY WOMEN’S LIB PHILOSOPHY**

I never wanted to help my mother in the house, doing women’s work, and never wanted to cook anything for my little brother, but I did anything in that line for my sister because she was a girl. Here’s an example of my women’s lib philosophy. It’s a disgraceful episode, and I hate to tell it. My mother left home one morning and told me to cook breakfast for my little brother. She never should have done that, because I didn’t think that was a woman’s work, to cook breakfast for her brother. Why didn’t he cook for me? I never spelled that out in my mind, but I knew that I just didn’t want to cook for that guy. So I sent him to the store for something. Then I sent him back again, but he wouldn’t go. I said, “All right, then, I won’t cook your breakfast.” There was a woman, Stella, who had housekeeping rooms in our house. One door of her apartment led into our pantry, and the other door led out into the hall. She looked in and took pity on my brother. She said, “You come in here and have breakfast with me. I have some trout.” My scheme to keep my brother from having breakfast was falling apart at the seams. I was frustrated, lounging in the doorway of the pantry, watching them eat, and suddenly I got a fiendish idea. I grabbed a whole handful of salt, and I ran in there and dumped it on this trout. Then I ran out the other door and escaped. My mother came home and told me that I would have to tell Stella that I was sorry, or else. So I went in and said, “My mother told me to come in and tell you I was sorry or else she’d beat me up.”

I remember another incident that sort of fixed my women’s lib philosophy. It was Halloween, and we were all disguised. I was with a gang in the neighborhood, going around. It wasn’t “trick or treat” in those days. It was just tricks, and some of them were pretty bad—taking off people’s gates, rocks through windows—and people got injured. That’s why the adults changed it to “trick or treat.” For some reason, this bunch I was with had to run, and all the girls screamed. I noticed: girls scream, boys
don’t scream. And I never screamed again. I had no idea of leading a big fight for women’s rights, or anything of that sort, no idea at all. I’d heard about suffragettes, and I wasn’t tremendously interested, but I’ve fought my little individual battles all my life.

There was another very important incident while I was a young child. This was in Seattle, while I was with my Aunt Sally. My aunt had a friend visiting her whose name I don’t remember, but who had a memorable influence on me. She and I were picking blackberries in my aunt’s yard. An enormous big spider appeared, and I said, “Ugh, look at that ugly spider.” She said, “Now, now, I wouldn’t say that. Amongst spiders she might be a very handsome creature.” And I never forgot that. I never see a spider but what I don’t sit back and admire it, especially if it’s a big one.

I looked like my father. His brother was a barber and looked just like him. After my father’s death, I went to the barbershop. When I saw my uncle, I was looking right into my own eyes. I was like my father temperamentally, too. I wanted to be a seaman—crazy about boats—just like he was. I would get out of bed at night and sleep on the floor because I thought sailors slept on the deck. I liked to be in the water, even just my hands: I didn’t like to cook, but I loved washing dishes.

I loved storms. Victoria faces the ocean: it’s a straight shot for the wind, from the west through the Strait of Juan de Fuca and, bang, into the city. Great big rollers of storms would come up and, oh, would I get excited. I would go down to the place where the waves crashed onto the rocks, and as they receded, I’d run after them, watch to see when the next ones
were coming, and then run back to the shore. I was challenged to see if they could catch me. How I ever survived my childhood, I'll never know. It was hard to avoid swimming if you were a child in Victoria then. Sooner or later, you’d fall into the water and learn how to swim. Three miles from the harbor, the inlet that goes up through the city becomes very narrow. It is called the Gorge, the French word for “throat.” It was very special to us children, with a bridge across it. We swam on both sides of the Gorge, and sometimes we went through it on the riptides. There were maybe eight or nine of us, and we were great swimmers. We'd go to the Gorge every day after school. I’d take the streetcar or go out on my bicycle. We even swam in the winter. It was fearfully cold. Sometimes the water was frozen up at the other end. We just jumped in and out again.

I avoided boys my age and went around with my brother and a gang of younger boys. I remember this gang best when I was about twelve, in 1910. People my own age were too mature. I was small for my age and looked much younger, and I didn’t develop early. I actually liked girls better, but their ways bored me—sitting around, playing with jacks or dolls.11 I liked the things that boys did, though I never, I repeat, never wanted to be a boy.

The Gorge was way out of the city and very beautiful. The tourists used to come out by streetcar and head down to the lovely beach. On the way down, there was a Japanese tea garden where they could get tea and ham sandwiches for twenty cents. Then, before they went down to the beach, they would walk onto the bridge and see this very lovely current that went under it. The whole streetcar would empty of tourists, and as soon as they arrived at the bridge, Billy Muir and Buck Calder, who were great divers, would be standing on the railing making ready to dive—but “Augh,” they had to get back, it was frightening. They dared not dive. We’d be down below to egg them on: “Come on, now, you know you can do it.” “Okay, okay,” so they’d get up on the railing again, but “Oh no,” they were scared. So then we’d say, “Look, we’ll give you a dime if you jump off that bridge.” “Okay.” They’d get up there, but “Naw,” they couldn’t do it—they were scared, they were scared. “Come on,” one of the tourists would say, “I’ll give you a dime.” Pretty soon we’d get the crowd interested in this dime
business, and after we got all that we could shake out of that bunch, the boys would make one of their beautiful dives. Then we’d work the next streetcar, until we each had twenty cents to go and buy a ham sandwich and a cup of tea at the tea garden.

When the tide was low, we’d go out on the rocks under the bridge and inflict ourselves with little teeny cuts on the barnacles. Now, when you get cuts in salt water, they bleed profusely. We would come up from the rocks streaming with blood, horrifying the tourists on the bridge with this gory mess. We had a certain amount of contempt for them. Then there was an old canoe. I don’t know whom it belonged to. We’d turn it over, and four or five of us would get underneath it, and of course there’s space underneath, so we could stay there a long time. All the tourists could see was a canoe drifting down, and there’s singing coming from nowhere.

And the mudhole. Sometimes we’d cover ourselves with mud as a disguise, then we’d get buckets of water and make a charge and throw the water on the people sunbathing on the raft tied under the bridge. Then we’d dive into the water, which was full of swimmers, and the mud would all wash off. When we came up, nobody could tell who did it. I was always ready for adventures.

Not so many years ago, I read that they don’t swim at the Gorge anymore. It’s polluted. Something fell out of me when I read that they polluted the place where I played as a child! I don’t think any pollution I ever heard of anyplace affected me like the pollution of that inlet in Victoria, because that was my very own, you know, that was where I grew up and had my being for so many years. I have a feeling that if I had stayed there, I could have seen to it that it didn’t happen.

**CLIFF-HANGERS**

After a day in the water, in the evening the gang played wild games like Kick the Can and baseball, rough things that girls didn’t indulge in, in those days. There was this empty field, a couple of back lots—it seemed like a vast prairie to me. We’d play cowboys and Indians. I was always an
Indian, and I always escaped. I was physically strong, good at the high jump and the broad jump, and I could run 100 yards in eleven seconds, which few boys could equal.

One of the things about survival in this world, I think, is knowing when to run. I had that timing down. It helped keep me out of real serious trouble. I remember one of the boys went around trapping butterflies with a long pole that had a loop and a net on it. Then he stuck pins in them and saved them in boxes. He was much older than I was. One day he was chasing this butterfly and I interfered so he couldn’t catch it. Then he was after me. He didn’t catch me, either. I could run like a deer. But every day, coming home from school, I had to watch out for this guy because I had cheated him out of one of his prizes. So I was willing to risk my life for nature.

Now, I didn’t know one bird from another, one flower from another, one rock from another, and I never read nature books. I didn’t learn anything about the particulars, but I wasn’t afraid of anything, and I was concerned about living things. I didn’t like to step on flowers. I released spiders when I came across them and they needed rescuing. I felt sorry for the worms that got washed out of the soil and onto the pavement when it rained. I used to pick them up, dig a little hole, and put them back into the earth.

I would not enter on my list of friends
(Tho’ grac’d with polish’d manners and fine sense,
Yet wanted sensibility) the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.12

We had to memorize lots of poems in elementary school.
I didn’t want to take life. I didn’t even want to slap mosquitoes, but I did. Like the Indians, who always apologized to the animals they killed, I had those impulses.

Just a block or so away from our house there was a foundry. The gang had good relationships with the men who worked there. We would sneak bottles of beer from someplace and hand them up to the men through the windows. But there was an antagonism between the mill boss and our neighborhood gang. We were always teasing him, and he would chase us.
We had a curfew. We’d be out in the street after hours, then the cops would chase us home. There wasn’t a cop on the beat who could pull up along behind me and catch me. And besides, we had all kinds of holes we could dive into, fences to go through, and cracks in the walls. We were very poor and lived in the downtrodden part of town. If we had been in the wealthy district, we would have been gently taken home to our parents. The cops were looking for trouble, so we figured we’d give them all we could, so as not to disappoint them. Some of the kids did things like stealing and breaking into places and damaging things, so they landed in jail.

When they planned an adventure that had a penalty attached to it, I’d always wiggle out before it started. My mother was a cut above the other mothers in the neighborhood as far as propriety was concerned, and that influenced me in knowing right from wrong and consciously making decisions. She was an upright woman with a lot of self-respect. Having this middle-class background, she had all kinds of ideas about things such as table manners. You didn’t drink your soup from the bowl. You tilted your bowl back. You always left a little soup, just a little. Now, out from under my mother’s tyranny, I can eat my soup any way I want.

My mother had to work away from the home, and there were no “day people” looking after us. I think it was a good thing that we were neglected somewhat. She was not a strict disciplinarian. She vacillated, so we had to learn to be tough. It gave us a chance to grow, and we knew we weren’t going to be clobbered.

My mother worried. She thought I’d come a-cropper, but what could she do? I remember there was a cliff about 300 feet high on the beach along the sound. A little dog landed on a ledge—I don’t know how it got up there. I went up to rescue that dog. It was very dangerous, but everything would have gone fine if my mother hadn’t come walking along the beach at that moment, and here’s her darling daughter up there with this dog hanging around her neck, happily trying to bring it down from the cliff. It was things like this that worried my mother more than anything else. She would have worried if my brother did that sort of thing, too.

Another time that same dog—it wasn’t even my dog—got caught in the tide and couldn’t get back in, so I went out after it. On the other side of the bay was a fort, and the soldiers kept yelling at me, “Go back, go
back!” But I couldn’t—I had to get that dog. It just added a little spice to it, being able to show the soldiers that I could do it. So I swam out and started towing him back, and it was a real struggle, a real struggle to get out of that current. I didn’t think anything would happen to me if I had got caught in the current, you know. After all, I wasn’t going to go down. I would just have been swept out to sea, and surely somebody would have come along with a boat. Anyway, I got the dog.

Our most dangerous game was on the logs. There were big log booms in the bay [outside Victoria Harbor], and, of course, if a log rolled and you fell underneath, it would be the end of you. One day we were playing down there, and a woman called us over and said that she had lost a son on those logs, and would we please never play there again. We were just overcome, and we never did. But we still made boats out of them. That was the best fun. My brother and I would get a log, and with a piece of driftwood we’d paddle into the bay, our feet dangling in the water, out to the big ships moored [at a naval dockyard] in the Esquimalt basin’s Royal Roads. The ships’ cooks would throw us oranges.

The YMCA was looking for talent, and they heard about a bunch of rag-tail kids that were swimming all the time around the waterfront and the Gorge. So they invited the gang to join as a group. The gang was delighted—it was free tuition, use of the swimming pool, and all sorts of things—but they said, “What about Hazel?” “Oh, no way could Hazel come.” The kids said, “Well, then, we’re not taking it. You take Hazel, you take us all.” So they had to take me. I was on the boys’ 110-pound basketball team, and the only thing I couldn’t participate in was swimming in the pool because the boys went in without their bathing suits.

We called ourselves the Y-O-U Club, but I can’t remember what that stood for. Everybody paid twenty cents’ dues. We brought cans of beans to eat and had weekly team meetings. I was the editor, my first editorial job, of a little newspaper at the YMCA, which consisted mostly of insults among the people in the Y-O-U Club. I also ran a continuous story. It was one of those cliff-hangers. I’d carry the story on until someone was literally hanging from a cliff or lashed to a railroad tie, one little episode every month, a preposterous story that nobody could take seriously.

I liked to skate on thin ice, reckless in a lot of ways. My mother told
me later, “I worried more about you than you could imagine. I never, never understood you. But, really, I didn’t have anything to worry about.”

PROSTITUTES, NUNS, AND MUSIC

As a child, my first concern was swimming, biking, and playing, and I let nothing interfere with it. But I had other interests as well. I got my love for classical music early on from a boyfriend of a prostitute, Willetta, who lived at our house. He came up and brought records for her, not really for her but for himself, to play while he was there. He talked to me about the worth of this kind of music, and he gave me three records. One was Galli Curci singing “Brilliant Bird”—I could sing right along with her, no matter how high she went—and Mussorgsky’s “Pictures at an Exhibition.” I don’t remember the other one. I played them and played them and played them. Later, when I was able to buy records, I bought those kind, and occasionally went to a concert.

The boyfriend had a bulldog. He paid me to exercise it, but I was not to let it go into the water. Now, the dog wanted to go in the water, so I let him. Then I would dry him all off. It was kind of mean of me. The boyfriend was a photographer. He took a picture of the dog alongside of me, and I’m doing exactly like the dog, pulling a scowl. I have on my black-and-white checkered jacket, which I put on in the morning when I got up and took off at night when I went to bed. I loved that jacket. One time I had a little padlock that I was fooling around with. I got it locked in the buttonhole of that jacket and couldn’t get it out. So there it was, part of the jacket.

We lived in a tough neighborhood. The county broke up the red-light district and scattered the prostitutes all over the city. A lot of them came to live in our neighborhood, in housekeeping rooms, and they paid my mother walloping good money for them. They went to hotels when they had their clients, so we didn’t have a lot of trade going on in our house. They just lived there. I was surrounded by these women and a lot of rough elements.
I remember their names: Willetta, Irene, Mary, Stella, and Dutch Violet. Prostitutes don’t see children very much, and everybody likes young things. They were very sentimental women, and they made a big pet of me. I have a book up on my shelf that Willetta gave me: Lamb’s Tales of Shakespeare. She wasn’t so uneducated that she had failed to hear of Shakespeare. Later, her gift prompted me to read the original plays. The prostitutes at our house were very fine women and were attractive to men just as intelligent people.13

My education with the prostitutes was going along fine, but I had to go to kindergarten. My mother sent me to the Sisters of St. Anne, a French order. They had a boarding school as part of the convent,14 but they also took day scholars. I’d be at St. Anne’s only four or five months at a stretch, then my mother couldn’t afford it, and back I’d go to public school. I had to change my whole approach, switching back and forth from one to the other, a skill that I’ve never lost.

Of course they had a Christmas festival at St. Anne’s. The Sisters used to do what they called “tableaux,” nativity scenes. They would put some kind of powder in a frying pan, set it on fire backstage, and that would light the whole scene up in red smoke. Then they’d put some other powder in the pan, and beautiful green lights would come over the scene. There would be the cradle, and the infant Jesus would be a doll, of course. There’d be angels standing around, and shepherds, and the three wise men. The curtain would open, and the pan would flare up backstage, and here’s this beautiful nativity scene. I was an angel: big white wings, and a long white robe. I was so thrilled.

Right in the middle of all the rehearsals, news came that a bishop was going to visit the kindergarten tableau, so they were going to heat up the program a little bit on his behalf. Unfortunately, I had an unusually nice singing voice as a child. Sister decided that I would sing a solo, and I wouldn’t be an angel—couldn’t do both. Oh, I was upset. I wanted to be an angel so badly, stand there with these wings and that long white robe. They took my angel role away from me, for which I never forgave them. I must have known that was the closest I’d ever get to heaven.

I didn’t want to sing for the bishop. The act consisted of my pacing up and down on the stage, holding a doll, supposedly my baby brother, and
singing him to sleep with a lullaby. I was pigeon-toed, born with clubfeet, which my mother massaged into place somewhat. I’d worn braces as an infant and as a toddler. Eventually, I overcame this condition by roller-skating—you can’t roller-skate pigeon-toed. But at this point, I wasn’t cured. I’d walk up and down the stage, and the nun standing in the wings would put her hands together with her fingers pointed sideways to remind me to turn my toes out.

I was so rebellious, so rebellious, though I finally learned the song. The bishop was a big fat guy, and he sat in the front seat. I don’t know what was so hilarious about my performance, but evidently it amused him to no end. I can just see him right there in front of me, just laughing with his great mouth and teeth. One of those minor tragedies. That’s life, starting with kindergarten.

Leo

I went to a jillion schools. One time I went to a public school in Tacoma. I was over there visiting my Uncle Bob and Aunt Rose, my mother’s brother and sister-in-law, and it was during school session, for some reason. I was bored and had nobody to play with all day by myself, just my aunt. I thought, “I’m going to be here two weeks, I will go to school.” In those days, when you wanted to change schools, you just went in and sat down, told the teacher your name, and you were in. It’s not that simple anymore. You have to have a serial number and a computerized résumé and God knows what all. I went in and sat down, and the teacher came right over to ask my name. Now, as I mentioned earlier, I never liked the name Hazel. I didn’t like being called after a nut. I wanted to be called Rosemary, something pretty. I thought, “Here’s a chance to change it,” and it had to be done fast. Uncle Bob and Aunt Rose had a daughter named Leona, who was older than I was, and whom I worshipped. I probably had my cousin Leona’s name on the edge of my consciousness, but I only got as far as “Leo.” The teacher looked at me and said, “Leo?” “Yes.” I said it, so I was going to say that was my name. She said, “That’s a boy’s name.” I said,
“Yeah, I know, but that’s my name.” So I was Leo for the two weeks and I got to like it.

When I got home, I decided that I was going to change my name to Leo. My sister cooperated right away. I bullied and bribed and flattered my brother, but he still wouldn’t cooperate at all. What really turned it around was that we moved. I went to the new school with my new name. When the kids came over and called for me to come out and play, they all called “Leo,” and so my brother had to call me Leo. My mother was the last to give up, and she would have a throwback every once in a while. She’d say “Hazel!” and, oh God, I’d know I was in trouble when she reverted to Hazel. That’s the story of my name.

MY COUSINS IN TACOMA AND SEATTLE WERE ALL OLDER THAN I WAS, AND THEY WERE VERY IMPORTANT TO ME. I VISITED THEM ALL THE TIME. I CAME TO THE AGE WHEN YOU BECOME CONSCIOUS OF THE FACT THAT PEOPLE HAVE PERSONAL BEAUTY OR DON’T HAVE IT, AND YOU WONDER WHERE YOU FIT IN: YOU REALIZE IT’S IMPORTANT TO BE GOOD-LOOKING. I HAD A COUSIN, LOIS, ONE OF AUNT SALLY’S DAUGHTERS. SHE WAS PROBABLY A SENIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL. I ADORED HER. MY NICKNAME WITH THAT FAMILY WAS “ZED” BECAUSE AS A CANADIAN I ALWAYS SAY “X, Y, ZED,” LIKE THE ENGLISH, AND THEY THOUGHT THAT WAS FUNNY. I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER ASKING HER, “LOIS, AM I PRETTY?” AND I CAN REMEMBER HER LOOKING AT ME CRITICALLY AND SAYING, “ZED, NOT EXACTLY, ZED. BUT YOU LOOK VERY INTELLIGENT.”

And from then on, I never wanted to be beautiful. I wanted to look intelligent because Lois obviously thought that was much more important than looking pretty. I think that was good to have somebody to set a kid on the right trail, not to be worrying about what they look like. I don’t think I’ve worried since!

Things went fairly smoothly until 1914, when I was sixteen. I reached the age when little girls were to transform into young women. One was suddenly supposed to become sexy. At this age, one donned an array of clothing equipment: corsets, which were strangling garments reinforced...
by bone ribs, with really heavy steel ones in front and back; high-heeled and pointed shoes; long skirts flowing to floor length; and hair no longer blown in the wind but held under control, piled high on the head with dozens of hairpins.

My mother bought me a corset, insisting that without it I looked like a sack tied in the middle. “What would a man think if he touched you and encountered uncorseted flesh beneath your dress?” she asked pointedly. I said, “I’d punch him in the jaw.” Though I was very skinny, I buckled it on. I was so miserable. I climbed over a fence, and I broke one of those steel things. Then pretty soon I broke another one, and another one. And pretty soon I pulled them all out and stuck the lump of material in the drawer. It rested there peacefully for a while. My mother looked at me one day and said, “You have no idea how much better you look since you started wearing that corset.” So I went into the drawer and pulled it out and said, “Oh, do I?” That was the end of that.

My mother and I had a running battle about shoes. Remember Sir John Suckling’s verse describing the perfect woman?

Her feet beneath her petticoat
Like little mice, stole in and out,
As if they fear’d the light.15

I can also remember Sir Walter Scott in “The Lady of the Lake”:

E’en the slight hairbell raised its head,
   Elastic from her airy tread.16

In an age when women were supposed to have tiny feet, I wanted only comfort. But here I was, stuck with these high-heeled shoes. They weren’t spikes, but they were high. I was hobbling and unhappy. I started to school with them on for the first time, went through the gate in the backyard, and past the woodshed. Suddenly I had an inspiration. I went back to the shed, took the ax, and chopped off both heels. It ruined the shoes. So my mother didn’t try that one again, either.

Floor-length skirts were another problem. For a long time I had worn
my skirts about six inches below the knee—I could climb a fence with lit-
tle trouble. Girls avoided me, their mothers frowned, and I knew I would
have to give in and wear long skirts if I were not to become a social out-
cast. About the time I was reaching my point of despair came a gleam of
hope. The fashions, under French leadership, suddenly decided to shorten
skirts, not to thigh length as now, but to just below the knee. When I read
this in the newspapers, I knew the fashions in the United States and Canada
would soon follow suit if I could just hold out. And they did! Skirt lengths
went up. Like the river song, “Men may come, and men may go, but I go
on forever,” fashions may come and fashions may go, but my skirts stay
just below my knee.

No problem with my hair. The hairpins fell out, and my hair just flopped
around my face. Hair was supposed to be women’s crowning glory. “If
God didn’t want women to have long hair, He wouldn’t have let it grow”—
it went something like that. It was a moral issue. Then came the time when
women cut their hair short. I was in the hospital with a boil that looked
kind of dangerous. A snowstorm locked us in there. I wasn’t sick, so I was
running around helping the nurses. They wanted to bob their hair, but
the superintendent said any girl who bobbed her hair was out. That threw
them for a while. Then, one morning, the nurses came clattering, clat-
tering in with bedpans and cans of water for the washbasins, and they all
had their hair bobbed. Every one. They had bobbed each other’s hair. The
poor superintendent was stuck. She couldn’t fire the whole bunch. So I
cut mine, too. I wasn’t burdened with too much hair, anyway. It never
grew much below my shoulders.

Despite my rebellion against clothing, I think I was popular with the
boys. The kids used to play kissing games at parties. My mother didn’t
approve of such games, and she wouldn’t let me go to the parties unless
I promised not to engage in kissing. Okay, so I go to a party. The boys all
know that I’m not the kissing type, because I don’t play the games. I hear
them arguing at the foot of the stairs. “No, I want to take Hazel home.”
“No, I want to take Hazel home.” Something about what I was doing they
liked. I was pleased when I overheard this, but I was surprised. I had no
idea that they would vie to take home a girl they knew they couldn’t kiss.
They could only get her home.
None of that deflected me from my real interest, however, which was basketball. When I was in elementary school, which went to the eighth grade at that time, girls were discouraged from doing anything along the line of athletics. I was all for outdoors and sports, and I thought we should be able to play basketball like the boys. So I went to the principal, Mr. Campbell, and asked him why girls couldn’t play basketball. He said, “Girls don’t play basketball.” I said, “They don’t have a ball, and they don’t have any standards, that’s why they don’t play basketball.” That kind of threw him. He said, “If you can find two teams, I’ll provide the ball and standards. Come back and see me again sometime.” That was in the morning. I had done quite a bit of planning before I went up on this thing, and at two o’clock that afternoon we knocked on his door. We had two teams. So he had to provide the ball and standards. Total victory. That was my first definite bit of organizing on behalf of women’s liberation.

I remember the first game. It was raining, and the girls weren’t used to holding a dirty old basketball—or any muddy old thing—and the ball was coming at them, and they were backing away from it. They had no idea of teamwork. If they got the ball, they would shoot regardless of where they were on the field, not pass it to a player who was more favorably positioned. Boys started in right away on basketball, so they knew teamwork. The girls were used to acting as individuals.

Our neighborhood in Victoria was kind of mixed. There were working people and there were people not producing very much. We children were running in the streets, but it wasn’t because all of our mothers were working. Some were home—we just played in the streets and, later, all over the city. This was the dark ages: there were no electric lights, no Coleman lamps even, but it wasn’t all bad. There were no automobiles, either, so
we didn’t have traffic to contend with. We played a lot of community-type games like Run Sheep Run, Fox and Goose, and Paper Chase, which took us scurrying around for blocks. Nobody came down to bother us. We didn’t have anything worth stealing, I guess. We probably lived in the poorest part of the city, but it was still livable, a safe place, not like a real slum.

In our neighborhood we had plenty of immigrants from the old countries, quite a lot of Scandinavians. But, oh, we used to tease the Chinese. Really tease them. We threw snowballs at the windows of the Chinese laundry and took off running when one of the windows broke. Then, one time, the Chinese laundry sent back a very expensive pearl-and-diamond brooch that one of our renters had left on her blouse. It was tied right on top of the bundle. They could have kept it. I was impressed. I thought, “I’ll never tease the Chinese again, they are so honest.” And since I was a leader, nobody else teased them, either. I saw to that.

We had no African Americans. None. In Victoria at that time, we discriminated against East Indians and against the French Canadians. Since India belonged to the British Empire, East Indians could travel anywhere within it. I remember when I was quite young a whole bunch of very tall East Indians came by with their turbans. They were hungry. They’d go from door to door asking for food. They were dark, black, great big guys. People were scared of them. My mother was, too, but she always gave them food. It was a long time before they melted into the economy. I don’t know if they ever melted into the social structure. They seemed to gather around selling coal and ice, little businesses all over, just like the Japanese people went in for landscape gardening.

I stayed in touch with a lot of my childhood friends until they died, like Pinky. I have so many pictures of Pinky. She had very pale, pale gold hair. We visited with each other from the time we were about eight years old until she died, in the early 1990s. Our family lived at 626 Princess Avenue, in a row of houses, and Pinky’s family lived in one of them. Her father, Mr. Tippy, was a subcontractor who put asphalt on all the streets of Victoria. Pinky had a brother, Claude, so Pinky and her brother and I and my brother used to play all the time with Mr. Tippy’s truck drivers, who boarded at their house. When the streets of Victoria were all paved,
Pinky’s family settled in Tacoma, where I had an aunt and uncle and some cousins, so I visited her over there.

Audrey Griffin and I visited each other until she died, in 1995. There’s a set of pictures in which Audrey and I staged a three-act play at her family’s farm, not too far outside of Victoria.

May Neilsson was another one. We used to go to the stock theater together every Saturday. We wrote and visited until she died. Her daughter, Andrea, and I exchange Christmas cards.

Neighborhood is the people of the community. All these kids in the neighborhood played together. Then we went to school together. And then we went to work and knew each other all our lives. We were very close. I always was coming back to the neighborhood. Most of the people were poverty-stricken and uneducated. A lot of them were heavy drinkers, and there were sick people and old shabby houses and things like that. I used to daydream about getting an education, learning how to build houses, then coming back to this neighborhood and redesigning all the houses and fixing them all up, you know. I’d just look up and down and gloat at these nice houses. Those are the kinds of daydreams I used to have.

And I often dreamed that I was saving somebody’s life: people were in a burning ship, and I’d swim out with a rope and bring them all to shore. Or I’d save somebody from drowning. There was a background of an admiring crowd while I did this. Although I outgrew that solitary-hero business, I still wanted to be doing something for humankind. I wanted to be an architect, or a doctor, so that I could come back and cure all the people in my neighborhood. I wanted to go out into the big world and bring all these goodies back. Those people were my people. I respected them, and the neighborhood was home to me.

Why didn’t I dream, “I’m going out in the world and I’m gonna learn how to become a great architect and, gee, I’ll make a pot of money and then I’ll have the great big house?” Why didn’t I go down that avenue? No, I dreamed about going out and becoming a doctor, a person who knows how to deal with alcoholism, then going back and reforming all these alcoholic people. Of course, I couldn’t ever dream in reality of becoming a doctor. The nearest thing I could ever be was a nurse, because no women were doctors.
The dreams I had as a child, I lived out in my adult life, just on a different level. I didn’t go out in the world and become a great physician, but I worked on issues like health insurance. And I didn’t become a great architect, but I worked on issues like low-income housing and welfare for the unemployed. So you see, I lived to realize all of my dreams.