Practice the here and now: selected writings of Edith Nash. 2001

Nash, Edith

Ellison Bay, Wisconsin: Cross+Roads Press, 2001

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The Here and Now

by

Edith Nash

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About the Author

Edith Nash is a retired educator who spends most of her time writing poems, short essays and letters to the editor. She was co-founder and director of Georgetown Day School in Washington, DC, a parent-owned school of the liberal establishment. Edith is involved in statewide and local Democratic campaigns and has had a lifelong involvement with Native American Issues. She lives in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to DyAnne Korda for putting these poems and prose pieces together: finding them in our vast arsenal, deciding what to include and what to leave out. To Norb who made this chapbook happen. To my daughters who listened to various parts at various times and gave helpful suggestions. And to writer-friends who are most forgiving.

Several of these works have appeared in *Wisconsin River Valley Journal, Wisconsin Poets' Calendar, Heart of Riverwood, Free Verse*, *The Door Voice* and *Ninth St. Center Journal.*

Publisher/Editor N. Blei

Editorial Assistant: Barbara Vroman

Layout Editor: Jan Mielke

Cover Art: (front cover) Charles "Chick" Peterson
(back cover) Herbert Lewis

ISBN: 1-889460-05-0

CROSS ROADS PRESS
P.O. Box 33
Ellison Bay, WI 54210

This one's for you, Norb.

What Is Practice

I do my practice
to stay in one place
not to flee from my life,
my lover, my mind, my memory.
I put down my shovel
where I am
and dig my peace
with home, hearth, family
and neighborhood.
I want to stop desperate travel
and get off the road.
I want to make a difference
in the small world and
forget fame and fortune
in the big world where
everything is fleeting.

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After the trial by fire
After the long walk uphill
After the cold and sleepless night

When I arrive at the mountain top
I can feel
My feet, my legs, my gut, my rigid chest,
My sore shoulders,
My teeming head with its hair,
And my face with its rough skin

I can see far away now
From the mountain top
Into the next century
More crowded than ever.

The Words

Someday I will remember it all
It will all belong to me again
The sleeping porch, the two quilts sewed together
The little colored dots
Swirling in the air
The bed-full of stuffed animals

The wooden spade and knife and gun
That I hid in the forest at Neebish
So I could play my very own house

The Ojibwe family coming downwind
With a pink sail
Bringing blueberries
The boy named Louis
He said good-bye to his grandfather
    in French before he died
"Dormez bien, grand père," he said

On the way home from school
A little girl yelled at me
"You dirty Jew"
I sat on my mother's lap
And cried and cried
It was on the landing
Next to her desk, outside my
    parents' stormy bedroom
She told me I was Jewish
Whatever could that be?

All the people at my house
Were in some kind of rage
So I thought it best to absent myself
And watch the verbs on the page
Transform themselves into nouns.

The Naming

When I was five I went to Sunday School at All Souls Church every Sunday — all the way to the south side of Chicago from Oak Park. Mr. Jenkin Lloyd Jones kissed all the little girls in the front row of the kindergarten class. He had a long white beard and I thought he was Santa Claus. He died when I was five and we didn't go there anymore. I'm named for Edith Lackerstein Jones, his wife. And my middle name, Henriet, is because my mother's best friend was Henriet Roos all the time she was growing up. Their photos in the bathing dresses of the period are a touching picture of female love. I think of them when I see the Primavera of Botticelli, restored and glowing at the Uffizzi in Florence. When I go there I sit in the attendant's chair and just look at this one picture for an hour, entranced.

Eating Snow

When snow was fresh, my mother thought it was pure enough for us to eat. And once she took a dish-pan out into the yard and filled it with snow with her gloved hands. Then she brought it into the house and put vanilla and sugar on it and we spooned it into our cold mouths — my brothers and I. What a miraculous transformation — to make ice cream from snow! Not in the kitchen, not with indoor equipment or the ice box or the Green Mountain hand-turned freezer, not with the hair-netted cook or the washed bowls, clean spoons, purified everything, but just a big pan in the outdoors full of snow.

At the Hemingways

I am sitting at the Hemingways' table at 600 N. Kenilworth in Oak Park because my very best friend has invited me to have dinner. My friendly hero, Dr. Hemingway, is at the head and his majestic wife opposite. Older children all live somewhere else — Ernest, their already notorious son; Marceline, Ursula, and Madeline (Sunny). The people still at home are Leicester, called Gaspipe, and my friend Carol, called Beefy.

Beefy and I are together in all ways — in 8th grade at Oliver Wendell Homes School, only a block away — in our Lodge. Beefy made buttons for us five girls. Orange cloth sewed around large buttons with Q.A. lettered on them (for Quinquae Amicae — Five Friends). I admired Beefy more than any of the others. I thought the sun rose and set on her command.

I loved Dr. Hemingway and especially when he made "hockies" — a meat dish cooked in a bean pot on a shelf in their coal furnace. It filled the house with the most wonderful smell — clouds of temptation rose from their basement. I wished my father would be like him.

Gaspipe was a nuisance — younger brother to both Beefy and me, tagging along, making stupid fun all the time. I envied Beefy having Gaspipe to look down on, since I had only older brothers, three of them, who looked down on me.

Gaspipe said, "Do Jews eat pork?"
And I said, "No, that's forbidden."
"What's forbidden?"
"They're not supposed to eat pork."
"Do you eat pork at your house?"
"Yes, we do. We don't go by those rules."
"Do they eat pork and beans in a can?"
"No, I don't think so."
"Do you eat canned pork and beans?"
"Sometimes."
"Why do you?"

"We don't go by those rules at our house."

"Why not?"

"We just don't. We aren't part of the Jewish religion. I used to go to the Unitarian Sunday School. Now I go to the Congregational Church with your family."

"Why?"

"Because your sister is my best friend."

"Oh... What would you do if you had a helping of canned beans on your plate and you could just see a teeny, tiny sliver of pork in it?"

"I would eat it."

I sat at the Hemingway table, smelled the good smells of Dr. Hemingway's "hockies" and wondered what country I had come from and where I belonged.

Sixteen

I graduated from Oak Park High School at fifteen and was supposed to attend Vassar College in the mysterious East. My mother thought I was too young — that I should wait one year. I considered myself sixteen, going on twenty-five and planned a year of educational entertainment to pass the time: a sewing class at a downtown school (this was really my mother's idea but I went along) and a class each quarter at Lewis Institute on the west side with our family friend and my mentor, Edwin Herbert Lewis. He taught really interesting subjects like Romantic Poets and Creative Writing.

I had morning classes and spent afternoons at the movies in downtown Chicago. If I timed it right, I could go to two shows, only the Oriental had a stage show with a movie and that took longer. Then home to Oak Park on the Elevated and if luck was with me and a brother was available, we could eat dinner at home in a flash, escape from the house and go to another movie, this time in the car. At one time there was vaudeville at the State and Lake, and Paul knew the names of every act. I enjoyed them, not as much as he did, because I liked movies better — the darkened theater, the big screen, the fantasy world inhabited by familiars, like Ronald Coleman, who played out wild and improbable lives so reassuringly, compared to the vast interior drama in my head.

I can't remember my parents ever questioning my attending movies two or three times a day or even asking me what I had seen or how much it cost. I always seemed to have money in my purse, from what source I can no longer say. It was just there.

So one day in Dr. Lewis' class, a man bet the teacher and won. The bet came about in this way: Dr Lewis often lectured on the events in the great world, scientific and political, that took place at the same time poems were written. And on this occasion, he said, "I'll bet a good red apple that no one here knows when George Washington was born."

A thick, nondescript man said, "1732."

There were shouts and laughter and the Dominie, as Dr.

Lewis' daughter Janet always called him, acknowledged his defeat. Next day he brought a good red apple and put it on his desk. Then he called the man, whose name now surfaced as Bert Luckenbach, up to the desk. Bert split the apple in half with a practiced gesture, offered half to Dr. Lewis and returned to his place, happily munching on the other half. My heart turned over. He suddenly appeared larger than life: urbane, witty, masterful. I imagined him on his horse. (It was the era of *The Desert Song*.) He had challenged our beloved teacher's authority and gracefully accepted his token of victory.

I had to talk with him to find out if he was real. We went for coffee and soon became friends, Bert Luckenbach and I. He was mysterious and adult, worked for City News Service, haunted police stations all night. Sometimes he said he was on parole from some place in Pennsylvania. He swore me to secrecy and said he would come after brother Paul to beat him up if I told anybody, so of course I never did.

The first project that I managed to complete at sewing class was a pair of underpants, pink checkered gingham with a white waistband, and *Lucky,* as he preferred to be called, went with me to the office building downtown to pick up my masterpiece. I showed him my pants and he took them and put them in his pocket. I wanted them back but he was adamant, laughing all the while. I was flattered and confused at the same time, but I could not figure out how to get them back. I guess he still has them; it was seventy-one years ago.

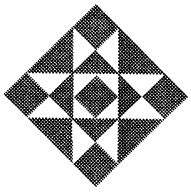
Only once I remember eating with him in a restaurant. We went to a favorite place of his, the Red Star Inn. Although I was familiar with many of the well-known Chicago restaurants, going to most of them with my parents on Thursday nights when we went to the symphony concerts downtown on the cook's night out, I had never been to the Red Star Inn. It had a German menu and was known to be a Bund hangout, and as the word rumbled out of Germany of the rise of National Socialism and the persecution of the Jews, the whispers reached even our un-Jewish Jewish family and put a negative mark on the Red Star Inn.

In any case when Bert Luckenbach and I met at the Red

Star Inn for dinner, I felt a thrill of a forbidden place, a forbidden meeting, and a very adult assignation. But the only thing I remember about the meal, which must have been very good, was that my partner ordered steak and asked for mayonnaise to go with it. This was absolutely astonishing to me, and he suddenly dropped several feet in my estimation.

Another time I went to his apartment, somewhere on the north side. I went mostly because I had been told never to do that. We talked and once embraced, standing. He ran his finger just above the neckline of my dress and urged me to leave and go home to Oak Park. I felt little or nothing. His physical presence was so much less than the image of him I had carried in my head.

I remember telling one or two of my girlfriends about this mammoth affair and in the telling I felt a sense of romance never experienced in Lucky's company. Perhaps he left town or didn't take any more classes at Lewis Institute. The following year I went to Vassar as planned and learned to believe, to love some people, to hate some, to act in my own behalf and even occasionally on behalf of others. I had turned seventeen and didn't go to the movies anymore.



Homework Excuse

I was a senior at Oak Park and River Forest Township High School in 1928-29 and my favorite teacher was Miss Essie Chamberlain. My 16th birthday came just after graduation in June, 1929. One time I met my best friend Carol's fabulous brother when I went to have supper at her home — and I did not get my homework for English done. So I wrote Miss Chamberlain a letter, a homework excuse.

Many years later, at a 65th high school reunion I got to read this letter in the Hemingway room at the High School. I was glad I save everything.

— E.N.

To Miss Chamberlain for her personal (very) perusal —

Please read it (but not carefully) for it is spontaneous (entirely)....

I had imagined he would either be silent and contemptuous of family, friends, and Oak Park, or else loquacious and dogmatic. He was neither. He was brotherly; he was sonly; he was fatherly; he was comfortable; he was courteous; he was funny; he was a laughing, happy kid.

He was showing some pictures, snaps of his friends. "This is John Dos Passos," he said. "The only thing I remember about him is his 'Lines to a Lady,'" he laughed. "The only part of that I read was the last couple of verses in italics, and the only reason I read those was because I sang them to him one night in a tent in Spain." Mr. Forever-The-Fond-Parent (Dr. Hemingway) broke in with, "How do you like *Lord Jim*?" He said, "Darn good book," and added in a voice so low that only the rug and I heard, "Better book than I'll ever write."

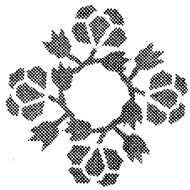
He insisted on fist fights with everyone. He loved to throw his small niece up into the air and in a gruff tone say, "Do you love your Aunt Ernie," to which she would always reply, "Yes," and she would be brought down to earth. He told about Ford Madox Ford and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and his small son, Bumbie (John Hadley Nicanor Hemingway), and barracuda

fishing, and what they used to do years ago when he was an editor of the *Trapeze*, and the first time he got drunk in Kansas City, and what a darling boy Bumbie was, and what terrible pictures the *Chicago Tribune* took, and all with the air of a college sophomore, not a man who has lived in the world and experienced its hard knocks. Not a man who ran away from home at 17 and who has written four best-sellers. Not a man who is the father of a boy of 5 years and another of 3 months, by different wives. He was merely a sweet, happy kid.

He said, "I sure would like to go back to school and see Gehlmann and Bobbitt, and all the old Oak Parkians, but I can't bear to see Mac, so I guess I won't go."

I closed *Kenilworth* and forgot Treslian and Amy Robust and Burlam or whatever their names are, for all my dreams had come true. He was standing before me, grinning and talking, his hands raised for a fist fight.

— From Edith Rosenfels, in memory of a happy evening (yesterday). He is going away Sunday, so I shall read *Kenilworth* and write my report for Monday.



Grape Pies

When Paul and Walter, Richard and I were growing up, we celebrated Thanksgiving with a vengeance. All the relatives came from far and near. The children had a special children's table (greatly resented by me) with a favorite aunt. There were two enormous turkeys to be carved at the end of the big table, one with oyster dressing and one with chestnut, carved by my father at one end and an uncle at the other.

In later years family friends joined us, and one of them, Edwin Herbert Lewis, wrote a blessing to be read as a responsive reading that was very beautiful and very thankful, and did not mention God once.

Our mother was the queen of the occasion. Our father made the place cards, carved, and read the blessing, but his contribution paled beside the majesty of her hospitality.

Sometimes there were humorous skits performed in the sated afternoons, written by our clever aunts. One time the twins, Paul and Walter, who were apt to wear different colored ties so they could be told apart, sneaked upstairs and exchanged ties to confuse their adoring public. The afternoon wore on, later and later, and although everyone said they could never eat anything again, our mother began to get out the turkey and the vegetables, the whole groaning board again for supper.

After this had happened several years and was therefore a tradition, Paul announced that it was boring to eat the same food twice in one day, and he would make a special dessert for supper. Our mother did not really care for competition in meal planning, buying, writing menus, and organizing the cook and the two maids who served for the occasion. But he did it anyway and decided on grape pies. I had never heard of them and was therefore fascinated by the idea of an exotic dessert.

Paul bought dark, dark blue grapes bursting with juice, cooked them to extract the juice, and made a custard. Somehow I associate this with Mrs. Moody's cookbook, but it is not known to me today, although I have the book and still use it

often. The wife of William Vaughn Moody, the poet, headed an organization at that time called the Home Delicacies Association, and Paul was so taken with her and her elegance he sensed from the cookbook that he went once to call on her. Then he constructed the pies, with a marvelous crust on the bottom and a careful lattice top. When supper took place, he produced three of these pies, and the accolade was immense. Paul had beaten Mother at her own game.

One time in Falls Church, Virginia, where my husband and children and I lived briefly during World War II, we invited a lot of people to the house for a joint Thanksgiving — everybody brought something. We did the turkey, and a whole pound of butter was used, although butter was rationed and red points had to be saved for some time to get that much. Beef and butter used the same red points; chicken and fish were free. One of our friends came out to the kitchen with all the bustle around her, and said, "You're just like your mother!" which hurt my feelings. I did not remember any open heartedness or excitement from that family Thanksgiving, only my mother's controlling hand, and her rejection of me and of Paul. I did not want to seem like her.

When Paul usurped our mother's role at home, I rejoiced and celebrated with him his greater competence in cooking and in nurturing.

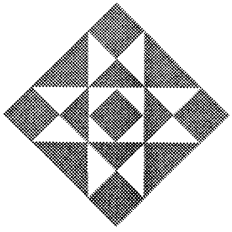
The Dining Room

At the house in Oak Park where we grew up, the dining room was the most important room of all, the setting for the most meaningful events. The room was large and well-windowed. On the walls was a blue figured wallpaper, very intricate design, with whirls and scrolls in a pale gold, giving a rich effect. This is where it all happened—the serving and the stuffing of food and drink, the arguments, the expectations and the disappointments, the competition for the presidency of the table, the smashing and the force of parental authority.

I found the succession of courses at the dinner table very depressing, and they killed whatever appetite I had by that time of day. The food was gorgeous, both well-bought and well-cooked, and there was a lot too much of it. We had soup, always homemade, a roast or steak, potatoes, two vegetables, a salad, and an elaborate desert. Everything was very nourishing, and the vegetables were a glory of crispness and green color, long before people learned to cook vegetables underdone. I know Paul introduced the cooking of vegetables in the Chinese mode to our household. Meat was cooked slowly at a low temperature after he got a pamphlet from the Government Printing Office that described this method. During the season for shad we had it or whitefish every Friday night, cooked perfectly in the broiler. Julia, who came every day all the way from the south side to clean and do laundry at our house, had to stay through dinner on the night we had fish to help the cook turn the fish over on the broiler, since it took four hands.

Paul and Walter never ate fish and rarely the vegetables or salads. They ate rare beef and potatoes, in quantity. I cannot remember what Richard ate, nor my parents. I was so reluctant to be hungry and to want all that food, that in the afternoon I stopped at the blind man's candy shop on Lake Street and bought two Tangoes, my favorite candy bar with nuts and caramel inside and chocolate outside, and ate them walking home. Then when dinner time came, I sat at the table in the protection of my satisfied self, mildly nauseated, watching the food come and go, and the family drama playing itself out.

One time there was a doorbell ring just as we sat down to dinner. Paul was dispatched to answer the door and to get rid of any interruptions. He came back to the table rather crestfallen and said that whoever it was wanted to see our mother. She stopped carving and serving, went to the door and returned very annoyed. It had been someone selling something door to door. Richard giggled and made a slighting remark, that I cannot remember, about Paul's handling of the door. Paul picked up a glass of chocolate pudding and threw it across the table at Richard. He held onto the glass, it had a pedestal, and the solid pudding flew in an arc, sailed across the space, and hit Richard in the face. Richard laughed very loudly and started wiping the pudding off, eating it, and enjoying the whole comedy routine. Paul burst into rageful tears and ran upstairs to his room and slammed the door. I can still see the pudding flying through the air and feel Paul's pain.



First Seder

I was very drawn to Jewish things. We didn't celebrate any Jewish festivals at home and never entered a temple or a synagogue. I got a pathfinder badge from the Girl Scouts when I was an active Scout and one building I had to locate was the nearest synagogue. No one in the family knew where one was, and I finally located one in Austin way into downtown, outside the excessively churched Oak Park.

One time Mrs. Platt invited my mother to her Seder and my mother brought me. I was about ten. Where were Father and brothers? Don't know. We drove to the west side of Chicago, dangerous territory, not like Oak Park. A big table, lots of family, three rambunctious children, my age and younger. They didn't listen, they didn't sit still, they complained about the food; I hated them. I thought the ritual was magic and I sat entranced through the speeches, the memories, the stories. When the old men ate the horseradish on their matzoh and tears ran down their cheeks in memory of the slaves in Egypt, I cried.

Much later, I learned that the Seder celebrates two events: the deliverance from Egyptian bondage and the time of the barley season. When my mother and I were planning a reception to follow Philleo's and my wedding ceremony at home, Mother said, "We'll have to start after sun down so Mrs. Platt can come." I was amazed at her even noticing any Jewish Sabbath observance.

I Can Only Remember

What am I
a mother, a wife, a widow?
Or a black-haired girl
in my brother's pants
running down a path
barefoot through pine woods.

Relatives say I was always laughing
I can only remember fear, nightmares,
disappointments, uncertainties.

I can remember stealing hard money
from my mother's purse.

I can remember my father
gathering up little packets of chocolate cigarettes
after he had thrown them aside.
I had put them around his place at the table
at his birthday breakfast.

I can remember coming home late
and my mother surprising
my best woman friend sitting
on the floor outside the downstairs
lavatory while Danny Ryan threw up.

Relatives say I was always laughing.

The Comics

In answering an e-mail from Danny Rosenfels, Paul's son, who lives in Austria.

You asked me if we were allowed to read comics — I remember Paul, Walter, and our father being great comics readers. I remember the titles: Gasoline Alley, Orphan Annie, The Katzenjammer Kids. I don't remember these being forbidden, but Paul evidently said so to you. I do remember my mother saying the boys could not go out on Halloween with other boys to do damage — soaping windows, overturning outhouses. Because Jewish boys had to behave better than others.

Toledo Wheelbarrow Company

Whenever I read about a train hurtling through the darkness on its way from St. Paul to the East or into the Middle West from some mysterious eastern location, I remember my first trip away from home. I had been to Girl Scout camp for a week or two when I was younger, I had visited my aunts on the South Side of Chicago, and I had been to California without my mother to visit other relatives. But going away to Vassar College for Women and living away from home for a whole year — just thinking about it still affects me with the same terror and the joy that that dramatic escape opened up for me. "Free at last, free at last" are the words that come to mind, in time to the wheels of the train, carrying me from slavery to freedom.

I quickly got used to the college. Mostly I remember horseback riding in the morning before class. The hills and the fall color of the eastern landscape were unbelievably beautiful after the flat prairie that I came from, and I remember the smell of my horsey clothes as I sat steaming in my first class. There was no time to change, and the other girls smiled and gently moved away.

I had one close friend. Once we went walking in the snow, so fresh it was clinging to all the branches, and we ate the snow off the branches and recited, "What can ail thee, knight-at-arms, so haggard and so woe-begone?"

So then it was Christmas vacation, and I came home on the roaring train and it all started over again — the sudden rages at the dinner table, the long, heavy meals, the angry yelling up and down the stairs, the grabbing and the force of parental authority. So we went, my brothers and I, to a speakeasy on Wacker Drive called the Toledo Wheelbarrow Company and the tenderness of the bartender whose name was John Morth enveloped and sustained us.

One night I was talking to John Morth and he asked me, "What are all those other girls at your school doing now that they are home for Christmas vacation?" And I told him that they were mostly coming out. "They been in?" he said. "What

for?" I had to explain they belonged to a social world where, when daughters got to a certain age, their parents gave a big formal party and introduced them to all their friends, whether they already knew them or not. He wondered if I wanted a party like that, and I said my parents didn't belong to that world. "Oh well," he said. "We could have a party right here." So he set a date and told everybody. All the regulars came, the reporters from the *Tribune* and two of Al Capone's runners who dropped in often to test the beer. My brothers and I had steak sandwiches on the house, and altogether it was a lovely party. Afterwards we drove John home, way out in Forest Park, and he showed us his garden in the dark. Everyone at his house was asleep.

We all grew up and started homes of our own, in one place or another, as much like the Toledo Wheelbarrow Company as we could make them — lots of food and drink, a careful listener always in attendance, acceptance of strangers, the Law and the Syndicate together, and no one to tell you whether you were too young or too old or too rich or too poor or not one of the right people. The speakeasy moved to 112 East Illinois Street from 69 Wacker Drive, and after that I lost track of it.

The past unrolls in stages on a giant reel, sticking and jumping as it hits a break in the reel, gradually lying out flat to show what it was like to grow up back there in another country.

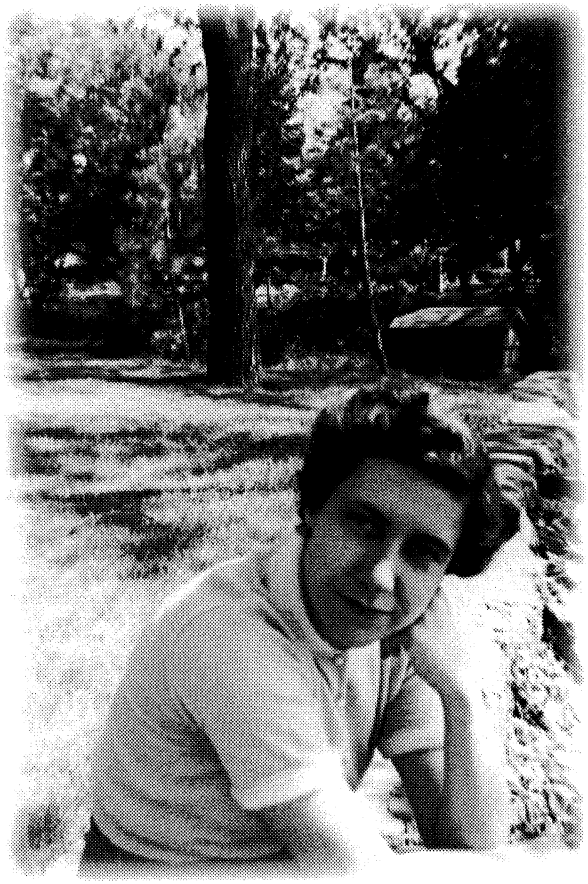
New York Cousins

I was only 15 years old when I graduated from high school and my mother said I was too young to go away to college so I stayed home for a year. It was a very educational period for me. I took wonderful English courses at Lewis Institute on the west side with Edwin Herbert Lewis, a family friend and my mentor in those years. I met two men in that class. One was Bert Luckenback, who worked at the *City News* Bureau, had been in jail and was my first encounter with an adult male, not a brother or a chum. The other man was a studious Jew who asked me if I was Jewish (Jew sounded harshly in my ears; "Jewish" seemed softer, less accusatory). He wanted me to go to the synagogue for a ritual bath after I menstruated. I was horrified and fled. All these questions flooded my mind: What makes menstruating so dirty? Am I really Jewish? Why am I talking about my body with this creature? Why does he want me to do this? How can I get out of it? Will there ever be a man to love me — all of me?

At Vassar, the only year I spent there — eager to escape to the University of Chicago, find life with men on the street, study Marx and Engels, be grown up — I went to my cousins' in New York for weekends and holidays. These cousins were real Jews, relatives of my father, prominent in social betterment and philanthropy, cultivated in the world of literature and publishing. They were proud to be Jews. I couldn't believe it. I became attached to their home, a city apartment with a study lined with friends' publications where we sat after dinner and discussed worldly affairs. They listened to everything I said. And I felt no hidden rage typical of our family dinners in Oak Park. Their children were away from home at their schools, and I loved their New York life style, their ease in accepting me, a lonely relative from the western frontier.

They took me to their Jewish country club on weekends where everyone was proud to be Jewish. I had pickled herring with onions and sour cream. I was amazed at what sour cream could do to a herring! And I met four boys in swimming, shipped off from Hitler's Germany to live with their grandpar-

ents. The boys discussed the Great Lakes knowledgeably and insisted they were salt. "Oh, no," I said, "I was just swimming in Lake Michigan. The Great Lakes are fresh water. The largest in the world." "Oh, no," they said, "The Great Lakes are salt. It is in our geography book." "Wrong," I said. "Right," they said laughing, and we swam some more.



Three Fruits

Orange-yellow juicy flesh
Melon falls in pieces

There's a brown flecked banana
Lying in its basket

And the wrinkled peaches
Shed their skins in hot water

All these fruits are ready
To eat, to wish for, to remember

A handsome man ordering breakfast
In a Santa Fé café

"I'll just have 3 fruits today
Whatever you have..."

Let it go from long ago
All the peelings into the compost

Seedlings grow —
Omen of new fruit.

Zuckie

My mother's grandfather was Jacob Schwartz, I think born in Germany — who married three times and had 17 children. He lived in Woodville, Mississippi. He went to New Orleans during the Civil War, changed all his Confederate money into greenbacks and became a wealthy man — much to the consternation of his Southern neighbors. The Zuckerman uncles told me that one of their ancestors walked across the continent selling needles and pins from the pack on his back. I have an autobiography written by my grandmother Zuckerman, whom we called Zuckie — her name was Julia Schwartz Zuckerman.

When Philleo and I were married, we visited Grandmother Zuckerman in California. It was 1935 and she asked Philleo about Hitler. He explained carefully the rise of the Nazi party and the horrors of the death camps, and Zuckie said, "Just what those German Jews deserve." She was a Christian Scientist and took us to dinner at a restaurant at 10 o'clock in the morning — a whole dinner, soup to nuts, and then we went to Santa Monica to play Bingo.

No wonder I thought of myself as the third generation of anti-Semitic women!

Sour Eggs

Instead of thinking all the time of What Happened in my life, trying to piece it together, trying to explain it to myself, trying to find the real ME, I'm thinking of what will happen in the next 30 minutes. I'll write my third journal page (this one) and finish in time to hear my chief medical consultant, Zorba Paster "On Your Health" on Public Radio. And I'll make breakfast. Of course without going to the store — 22 below zero outdoors — but the river is still wet and flowing and shiny. I'm just home from Chihuahua, Mexico on the longest travel day — Hurry, hurry and wait, wait all day and overnight at Maggie's house in Chicago when the plane for Central Wisconsin finally did not fly.

We lived in Berkeley, California in 1936 for six months in an apartment on Ridge Road called Shyster's Roost. It was only a block from the other gate to the Berkeley campus and, although often chilly, was our very first home. We bought sawdust logs, three for a dollar, for the fireplace. Philleo and I had been married at home in Oak Park in 1935 and spent most of our first year of marriage on Klamath Indian Reservation in Oregon where he was doing a study of a religious revival among Klamath and Modoc people for his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Chicago and I was working only somewhat on a paper on the present Klamath community. I was actually learning how to be married, keep house, make lemon soufflé on a wood stove, walk through the mud to the railroad station in my riding boots to get the Portland *Oregonian* for my husband — a compulsive newspaper reader most all of his 78 years.

We had the second best house in Chiloquin and the only one for rent with running water. A little channel ran around the fire part of the wood stove carrying water. It made just enough hot water to take a bath in the bathroom after breakfast, and when my mother came to visit after my father's death she found this most comforting, used to a daily bath.

Our best friends in Berkeley were Abe Halpern and Mary Fuji — fellow anthropologists and entirely compatible. Years later when Philleo and I took our first airplane together to

Washington, D.C. from Toronto where we were living at the beginning of World War II, we had to decide on someone to bring up our children in case we were killed and we chose Abe and Mary. All four of our parents were living, but we were not eager to have our children in their clutches.

Mary Fuji had read a recipe in *Gourmet* magazine called Sour Eggs and often made them for us — at our place or theirs. She fried a little cut up bacon, added chopped onion and let it get somewhat soft, added vinegar to taste, a little water, a little corn starch in the water, and salt and pepper. When it thickened, she put in 2-4 eggs, covered them and let it cook, probably less than three minutes for just set, and plopped it all on a plate.

I'll go make some now.

Mary was a careful cook; everything tasted delicious. We spent a Japanese New Year's festival time with her family in Hayward, California and had raw fish (sashimi) for the first time as well as several other wonderful delicacies to our great delight. Her younger brothers and sisters ate fried chicken which they preferred.

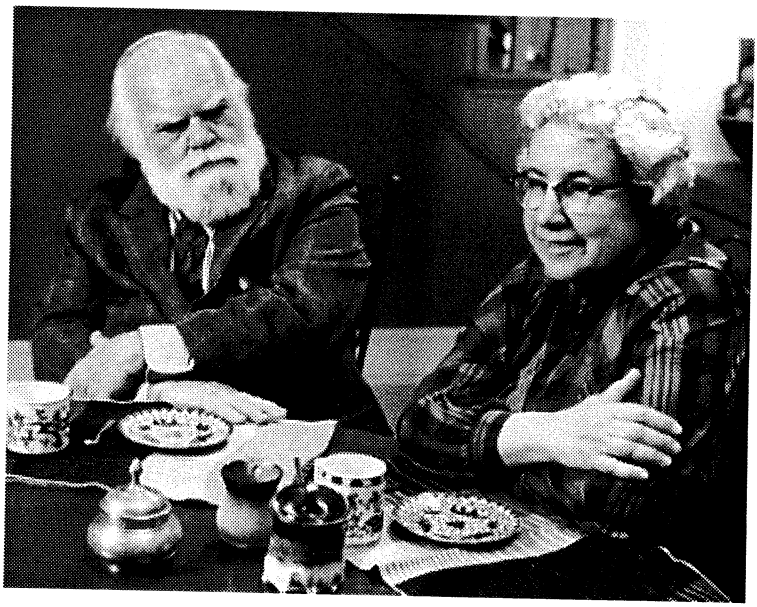
This was all before the Japanese families of California — Japanese born and U.S. born alike — were suddenly banished from their homes and businesses and spent World War II in desert camps. Abe and Mary were graduate students in Chicago by then and chaired a Korean language project for the Army, but this did not protect Mary's family from removal. They were luckier than most of their neighbors. Their flower growing business and home were well taken care of by strangers who rented it while they were gone.

Marriage

Before we were married
I always had a poached egg on rye toast for breakfast
But since my husband didn't like rye toast
And didn't want to eat the same thing every day
I would make white toast, and scramble or fry...

But I still liked eggs my way
So every once in a while
jaw set, lips clenched
I made rye toast for us both

And one day
Only 52 years later — my husband looked at me
And said,
"You know, rye toast and poached eggs
Are quite good."



The Joys of Yiddish

When Leo Rosenberg and Priscilla Mead were about to marry (I had introduced them to each other), Leo wrote us that he was changing his name to Leo Rosten. As the author of *H*Y*M*A*N*K*A*P*L*A*N*,* then running in the *New Yorker*, he said, "If Winter comes, can Smith be far behind?" Philleo and I were living on Klamath Indian Reservation in Oregon, doing anthropology. We were learning to value equally all cultures, religions, and people.

Leo said that the German Jews of the south side looked down on the immigrants of Leo's tribe — Polish or Lithuanian Jews. I had no knowledge I belonged to a German-Jewish tradition although my father often referred to Bavaria as his father's country of origin. And then he boasted that there was a Sephardic ancestor — those Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. I learned to look up Yiddish words in Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish*. I never knew what any of them meant, and Jewish students I met in college didn't believe I didn't know them. They thought I was just hiding being a Jew.

A Letter to Sally

September 19, 1958
Wisconsin Rapids, WI

Dear Sally,

....I got your letter and can see you were plenty upset by death and dying last week. I really don't know which is best: to spend your time living and let dying take care of itself, if it will, or consciously and systematically turn your attention to the whole problem in a philosophical way, to face up to the "whole thing." If you want to think about it systematically, reading might help. I do not agree, however, that thinking about it will ward off an anxious moment when it sneaks up on you. Things like this can sneak up on one and frequently do whether you keep them in mind or not. So don't force yourself to "keep scared" to think yourself through. When you have interest and energy to devote to this problem, think about it, relate what you read to it or even get some help on it. I am sending you a book of Freud's in the laundry that you might read. It has some interesting remarks on people's egos in it. When you don't feel the interest in the problem to think about death and would rather turn to something else, for heaven's sakes, do. Living is the main thing; dying is simply its absence. Some thinking is a form of living. Sometimes when you're going in circles, it's a form of dying. You can tell pretty well after a while which it is. I know what you mean about "forever." Living "forever" would be awful too. This is what Freud calls the "oceanic" feeling. And he thinks it has something to do with the source of religion. It's hard to make up one's own religion, and you must feel very strong within yourself to be willing to attempt it. I do not think most people "face up" to dying, ever. But they work out some adjustment or understanding of living. Some part of their living includes the possibility of dying. Their world includes the fact that they will die. That is about all the facing up they can understand.

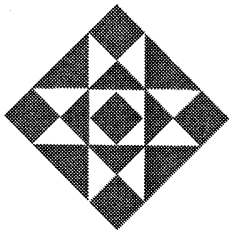
My brother Paul likes a book very much by Hans Zinsser, author of *Rats, Lice, and History* (popular book about typhus

of a few years back), called *As I Remember Him*, evidently an autobiography, written as biography, when Zinsser was dying of an incurable disease. You might find it in your library. I don't think I ever read it, but I think Paul liked it because it showed an attitude toward death that was reasonable. My own attitude has been more like the poet's, "I have been half in love with easeful death." Guess it's Keats, guess it's the old attitude, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." I kept looking out the window when Ted O. was dying, thinking if death came down the river to pick him up, he could whip over here and never go hardly out of his way at all, sort of like planning to visit the Red Owl the day I go to the shoemaker's so's not to go out of my way. Well, it's not exactly rational, but it makes the whole subject more familiar, like an old shoe.

Love,
Mother

Changes

Turn, turn into the river.
Trees up-ended in the still water.
Our house wraps around me, warm or cool.
My stiff self loosens; turns into movement.
New friends come; old ones die, one or two
And sometimes more. Babies are born.
Papers float into the wind; mine, Philleo's.
Deer bed down in my prairie.
New thoughts whirl; I write them down.
Birds crash into windows.
Leaves tremble and flutter
Waiting for the long sleep,
Make their way down.



I Do My Shopping

I do my shopping very carefully in this town.
I don't pick up my husband's shoes at the shoemaker's
Across the river
Until I have to go to the Red Owl next door.
And get a new book to put stamps in
So I can do the most things with the least
Driving and parking.
I often wonder about this, because I really enjoy
Driving and parking.

And when I look out over the river at night
To the white house across, where a neighbor is dying
I think how easy it would be for death
To stop by my home without going too much
Out of his way.

Going down river it would only be a little jog
After he left the white house, to cross over and come by
And then there's a long space below without any
house calls to make
Of course there might be birds or squirrels or even dogs
Waiting for him in the park.
It's hard to know what lists of errands others have.

I like to save the pieces of paper
So I can cross things off when they are done
But I'm always losing them or leaving them
Or letting the wind get them.

It's awfully hard to keep track.

Edith's September Song

Single branch reddens
Cold breath of swirling wind
September trembles.

Soft water flows
Quiet air surrounds
Yellow sun in sky.

Watching the sun
Heavy air drifts into me
Make tea now.

As virus multiplies
Rumble in gut
At war with yogurt.

Yellow cottonwood
Foretells the season's changing
Outside my window.

Feeders in shadow
Seeds for waiting birds
Where are my children today?

Wild scarlet, orange and red
Shoot up into eastern sky.
Walking out at six-thirty.

A Letter to Maggie

September 21, 1983
Wisconsin Rapids, WI

Dear Maggie,

....Your letter describing your spiritual journey has been read and re-read by me. It is hard to absorb as it is so full, so meaningful, and so new an explanation of yourself. I have to give up many beliefs I have held about your life. I also have to overcome a feeling that you have turned against me in turning towards your call. I know this is not true, in fact, your lifelong "independence" as you describe it, was more a rejection of your parents than your present growth in the spirit. But I cling to the evidence that I am included in your life. When you called on the phone at the time of your conversion, you said to me, "You see, it's all your fault." And when I laughed, since all human activity is some mother's fault, you said that when you were a kid you asked me, "Why do we celebrate Christmas?" And I said, "At Christmas we celebrate the mystery of life." I loved this statement. I do not remember it, but I believe I said it, and I have felt a part of your spiritual development since you told me.

I have become much more aware of spiritual awakenings in the last month. If I can find it, I will send an ad for a magazine where Robert Coles writes that a curtain drops over any references to religion in his writings. I have found this to be true in my talks with almost everyone about you. When I describe your work, a curtain drops, as though I had described a crime you were committing. But as a result of your letter, I am much more interested in religion than formerly and much freer in talking about it and acknowledging your spiritual development, to myself and others.

At a wedding last Saturday in the United Methodist Church, a very strange service, I bowed my head when the time came. I have always, since attending Congregational Church at age 11, looked straight ahead whenever "Let us

pray" came over the loud speaker — all my life — at funerals, weddings, church services, whatever, even at Larry Nash's home mass.

Eric asked me what did I think about when I attended mass with you all at Easter time since I had said I did not understand the liturgy. I said I thought about our relationships, within the family, the daily work of love, and my own death. I see now I have added the daily work of love to this, but the other two I did tell him I was thinking about. My mourning is over my whole life now, and the project of organizing the files and books in the basement is an autobiographical task.

As you know, I think more in Freudian terms than in religious, although I do not see them as diametrically opposed as some people do.

I got a lot out of the Miller book you gave me for my birthday. The first thing was about mirroring — how important in the first year of life this is — and how a mother whose own narcissistic needs are satisfied can mirror her infant easily and successfully. I did not do that very well with you. The "touch-me-not" quality in you as an infant that I have often remembered was accompanied or caused or echoed by my removal from closeness with you and deep concern for my own wholeness, which I saw as threatened by your separate existence. The next thing in the book was a feeling the author was describing, in very pungent terms. The development of everyone, at least everyone we know. The push towards achievement, the pride in excellence of one's children, the very word "gifted" as applied to children seems to me to be one of the basic scenarios of child-rearing. It is surely related to some lack of respect for the child's real feelings and the mother's lack of feeling for herself. The child so deprived of what the author calls a healthy narcissism often becomes a helping person, a psychoanalyst, or — like me — a person with a lot of needy friends. Is it because one needs to be needed or also because one can relate more easily to weaker, more helpless people — infants, neurotics, depressed friends? When I first read the Miller book and thought about your work in a spiritual direction, I experienced it as a rejection of me as

a mother. But as I re-read it, I see other insights in it and am still getting them.

Now I am re-reading the summary of Christian faith you sent from the *Catholic Reporter*. It is marvelously clear and succinct, more than I can absorb at once. But I am attracted by his clarity and will read it again and again to understand your work in theology.

Now, to indulge myself, I will write you a newsy regular letter, separately.

Love,
Ma

The Lesson

When I was a child
I was always laughing
I hear this from
Outside-the-family people
The Inside thought me sad

The photographs can be read
Either way

Sometimes I can remember
My father and I, outdoors
Picking up pretty snakes
To look at them

It was early spring
Snow on the ground
The little snakes were sleepy
From their long winter's nap

And I was just waking up
To see things, to feel objects,
To notice
How my father smelled

He was teaching me
How to like the snakes
How to play with them
And be careful.

My father had a pessimistic temperament and thought the League of Nations would never fly. He was not going to vote for Mr. Wilson, and this annoyed my mother very much. She belonged to a club called the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and my father thought they were dreamers. She objected to the U. S. getting into World War I and years later her signature surfaced on a document of conscientious objection sent to the President. Her name was in first place.

***

When I left Vassar at the end of my first year to go to the University of Chicago, I had an exit interview with Mildred Thompson, the Dean with the little dog. She wondered why Jewish girls from Chicago were always leaving Vassar after one year or sometimes two. I was speechless to explain what I wanted: to be with men, to spend time on the streets, to know working people and understand unions. And so I just said, "Maybe they all want to go to the University of Chicago."

Hallie Flanagan taught drama at Vassar and had I stayed, I could have taken her wonderful class and worn jeans. During the year I was there, she produced a play based on a short story, *Can You Make Out Their Voices?* by an unknown writer who turned out to be Whittaker Chambers. The story had been published in the *New Masses* and so the magazine sent Frances Straus, one of the editors, up to Vassar to see the play. She was housed off campus and when we met she seemed lonely, so I brought her over to our dormitory and found her a bed. She invited us to the New Masses Ball in fabulous New York. I believe four of us went and I can remember Mike Gold sitting on the floor of the railroad station, singing with us and waiting for the train back to school. We sang *Joe Hill.* We sang *The Cloak Maker's Union.* We sang *There Once Was A Union Maid.* We were a hit and I felt that night as though the Left was my home.

Frances Straus and I became good friends and the next summer she visited me at home in Oak Park. She was vocal in her criticism of all manner of capitalistic endeavors which annoyed my father, then a vice-president at Sears-Roebuck.

***

At the University of Chicago I belonged to the International Labor Defense which met where the old streetcars had a turnaround just off Harper. Most of the discussion was about the difference between the Second and Third Internationals. We also sang *The Cloak Maker's Union* which savages the socialists:

"The Hillquits, Abe Kahns, and Norman Thomases
Are ruining the woikers with their promises
They teach socialism but they practice fascism
To presoive capitalism by the bosses."

I can't quite remember what started our benefit show at an abandoned movie house downtown, but I think the profits were meant to go to the FREE TOM MOONEY campaign. I opened the program in a white cotton lace dress as the Spirit of the Haymarket and read, beautifully and sincerely, Vachel Lindsay's poem about Altgeld, the governor of Illinois who pardoned the Haymarket anarchists, falsely accused. It has something to do with an "eagle forgotten" and I felt noble reading it. The show must have happened after Scottsboro because we had a dozen young Black boys singing a song about it, and we persuaded a friend named Horace Cayton to do offstage shots with his pistol. Before he came to Chicago to do graduate work in sociology, he had been a prison guard in Seattle so he had a gun but forgot to buy blanks. He didn't hit anybody backstage although there were a lot of little people running around.

We auctioned off an unemployed man, with a text written by a once-only collaboration: Robert Morss Lovett and John Dos Passos. Dave Scheyer played the part. I remember his naked torso and long strands of hair carefully brushed over his bald head.

***

Philleo Nash and I met in the Anthropology Department of the University of Chicago. He was a graduate student and I was an undergraduate. We both took Robert Redfield's course called *Peoples of Mexico*. It was a graduate level course and the catalog said "consent of instructor." So I went to see the professor, lean and horse-faced, with the gentlest smile I had ever seen. When I asked him if I could take the course, he said, "Why, of course. You and I will be the only people there who have ever been in Mexico." My roommate, Del, came too. We imagined Philleo was a rich, older man dabbling in anthropology who might be maneuvered into a liaison with Del, providing dinners, theaters, and maybe even a posh apartment while she waited for her student fiancé, Johnny, to grow up. Although Philleo wore a velvet collared overcoat and a derby hat and had white hair, he was young, poor and a student fresh from Wisconsin. We became friends, became a pair, clung together as unformed adolescents and spent the rest of his life together, more than fifty years.

We went to the Workers' School somewhere on the near South Side to hear Harold Lasswell discuss Marx and Engels and their miscalculation as to the imminence of revolution. We read Engels' *Anti-Dühring* which made us instantaneous Marxian scholars. It was fairly near Chinatown and a group of students met to eat at a cheap place in the basement. We ate well for thirty-five cents before each class. Someone started calling the restaurant *Der Kellerplatz* (maybe it was Philleo; he spoke German at that time).

***

I met a woman who wore black clothes all the time. She came to a party my roommate and I gave in our apartment for a friend who was getting married. The woman sat on the floor and read the whole of *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot. I had never read or heard it before and I was mighty impressed. She was getting divorced from her musician husband, and she met

the Black man who was organizing the Trade Union Unity League, which became the cutting edge of the Left union movement. She came to have dinner with me one night at the International House where I lived and told me she was pregnant again. "I have about exhausted the emotional possibilities of abortion," she said. We were looking out the window of my room toward Rockefeller Chapel. When her baby was born, two interns from one of the city hospitals delivered him at the foot of a flight of stairs in the tenement where she was living. So her story was written up in the *Chicago Tribune*, since she came from a standard family in Michigan and had crossed the color, caste and class lines all in one fell swoop.

***

My husband's first teaching job after he got a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago was in Toronto, called *Toronto The Good,* and both our children were born there. When our older daughter was about two, we noticed a nursery school just down the street and went to visit. It was a lovely place with a wonderful teacher whose child was just Maggie's age. The group was only four or five children. The husband was a pleasant colorless man who was never around much but didn't seem to go anywhere to work either. It turned out years later when the Canadian spy case broke, that he had been a Soviet courier at the embassy in Ottowa. This was just before Canada entered into the war, after Hitler invaded Poland in 1939 and everything was starting to get tense.

***

When Sally was born at the Women's College Hospital, a young friend who was a physics instructor came to see me. I liked him a lot. He and a group of young faculty members had been meeting once a week at our house to write a popular science column for the *Canadian Tribune*, a leftist newspaper we subscribed to. The physics instructor was entirely unsocialized and brought me a copy of a graticule table to entertain me in

the hospital. He explained it very well. It's a chart with cross-section lines representing a geophysical method of locating ore bodies. His naiveté had been further demonstrated by putting up two Communist acquaintances who left a lot of their Communist literature in his house when they left. Of course, it was during the short Hitler-Stalin pact period so most of these pamphlets were anti-war. He was arrested and jailed and many of our friends offered to testify in his favor at his trial — for sedition I think. Philleo testified as a character witness. The physics instructor was convicted and served time in jail. He was released and as he left the building, he was arrested again and taken to a detention camp somewhere in the Maritimes under new Defense of Canada regulations, no trial necessary. As he left the building, Philleo saw with horror that our friend's prison jacket had a large round target painted on it, just in case.

***

Philleo was on Truman's staff, and McCarthy had another reason besides nailing Truman with "disloyal" associates for devoting several minutes of his Senate time to saying Philleo was a Communist. When McCarthy visited Philleo's hometown, Wisconsin Rapids, at the invitation of the Chamber of Commerce, Jean Nash, Philleo's sister, and a woman friend, Gloria Schneider, took out an ad objecting to McCarthy in the local newspaper. The Citizens vs. McCarthy ad was signed by 15 leading stalwarts including the mayor. This split the town wide open and attracted national attention, leading to the Joe-Must-Go movement. Sometime during this donneybrook, someone told Joe McCarthy that the promoter of the ad was the sister of someone at the White House. That was enough to start the train.

***

I was interviewed many times by messengers from various investigative agencies, both at home and at the Georgetown

Day School where I ran the office. The questions about various friends were always the same and became a litany in my memory, "Was he a member of the Communist Party?" "Did he advocate the overthrow of the U. S. government?" "Did he have nude parties in the backyard?" or "Did he socialize with Negroes?" Sometimes I asked to see their identification since there were a lot of free-lancers floating around looking for story material.

Once a parent at the Georgetown Day School called me at home and again at school to see if we could provide breakfast for her child. Her phone was being tapped, for what reason I have no idea, so one of the FBI reports mentions how many calls from "suspects" went to the school. The reports of those days were so voluminous I can imagine them stumbling over each other.

***

Whenever McCarthy ravings are referred to now, someone says, "Of course it was a badge of honor to be accused by McCarthy. I know people who felt left out if they were not attacked by him. They call it subpoena envy."

But it was not like that then. Philleo was well defended by the President, but after the end of the administration, Philleo found himself unemployable. Suing McCarthy for defamation of character or libel, although it took most of the year following to decide it, was abandoned. The privilege of U.S. Senators is awesome when it comes to saying anything they please, about anyone, on the Senate floor or quoting from a speech made on the Senate floor. It was a bad time, a contradictory time, and we were all genuinely frightened. We could not accept that our own government — not Communist, not Fascist — could neglect the standards of justice and due process we had been brought up with.

The Changing Of Places

The electric control
For the blanket on my side of the bed
Doesn't go on, has burned out.

A friend came to help me
Turned the blanket over—
Attached the control
From my husband's side
And now it goes on....

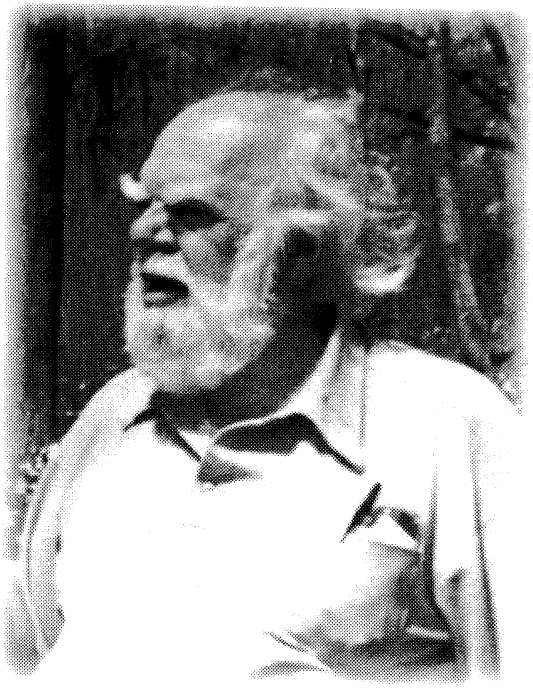
We used to argue
About the police
I said they were awful
I would never get in the car
With five cops,
No matter what.

My husband said
Police had been helpful
In the small Wisconsin town
Where he grew up
They made him feel safe
When he was little
"Cossacks," I said.

We were having a drink
Outdoors at the hotel
At the foot of Central Park
It's next door to Rumpelmayers'
I can't remember its name.

Most of a lifetime later
We sat on the sidewalk
Next to Rumpelmayers'
And I said the police were good,
Reliable, faced with serious problems

Not heroic, but often useful
And my husband said,
"But they're still Cossacks—
I would never trust one"
We never noticed;
We had changed sides.



Getting Ready for Winter

My car is greased and checked
My furnace is called to account
The bird feeders are up
And filled with suet and seed

Today I bought new boots
Short and warm and cleated
So I won't slip on the ice

I made my cranberry pudding
And steamed it in the steamer
I turned on all the lights at once
In the living room

I bought two tape recorders and microphones
So I can exchange letters
With my blind friend far south

Getting ready for winter
For the dark that is coming
For the long, dark time.

The Potluck

The Master of Ceremonies at the memorial event invited everyone to the house and they all came. I recalled the deceased saying, "You do not get a figure like mine by trifling with food or drink."

First: raw meat brought by the neighborhood hunter — a woman who prowls the yards at night with her gun to destroy her garden enemies: rabbits, raccoons, ground hogs, or squirrels. The carefully chopped meat was piled in the middle of the platter, surrounded by little excremental piles of onion, capers, anchovies, and red and green peppers.

Next, our smoothest friends brought liver paté chopped by machine to a creamy paste. Their faces, both man and wife, were made up for television, since they are always being seen. They said soft, unctuous things to me and my two daughters, the bereaved. I was wearing a new green wool dress, my daughters in dance tights, draped with Native American jewelry, in honor of their father, the Great White Father.

The green salad was beautiful, composed by one who had already seen her salad days. A daughter said, "This is not a bunch of hot dishes; this is real food." Sometimes one daughter writes restaurant reviews for a weekly paper.

The WASPS nested on the porch with gin, whiskey, and rum, while the preacher's family looked for cranberry punch, the color of blood.

"You don't sit shiva any more, do you?" I never did, but wish I had:

...Only the mourner initiates all mention of the departed, sits on a low stool, has food brought to her, does no work. All the members of the community hold her and her children in their loving suspension.

No chatter, no distraction, no chirping — just a short visit.

A shifty person brought a jello ring; a chocoholic brought chocolate brownies; the flatulent brought beans; the couple with new and ill-fitting dentures brought pasta salad al dente.

Everyone chirped like birds, sashayed like ducks, were

proud like lions, gaggled like geese, mourned like doves, boasted like bantam roosters (Rhode Island Reds), and sang a loony tune.

Cranberry Beds

From all the woods and water
The heavy trees, the wild prairie,
Where the deer bed down
Cleared land for new cranberry beds
Stars and constellations are fixed
The center holds and holds me in.

I Live Here, Too

Once I got out of the closet about being Jewish in my husband's home town, I began to enjoy my status there as Resident Jew. My husband's sister had become the guardian of their family traditions — the cranberry business; the Congregational Church, where their mother played the organ; the ancestor worship, centered around the successful grandfather on one side and the newspaper editor on the other. She died the same year as my husband. No longer were there guardians of the family memory to bar my entrance to this kingdom. I stopped trying to be one of them. I could pick and choose what part of this lore I wanted to accept as mine, and what part to reject. And I stopped mentally air-brushing myself out of their family pictures.

I started identifying myself as a Jew in public places and in print. It is no longer news, and the hidden Jews come around to say they are glad I live here. I am glad, too.

Looking at a Photograph in Winter

I like the naked tree.
The skeleton exposed
and the short house
nestled up to the tall barn.

It's a lonely edifice,
proud and sturdy.
Not near anything else
and connected with its outbuilding.
Isolated, exposed to wind and weather.
Contemplative, beautiful.

Is it time to repair, rebuild
or just survive.
Batten down the hatches.
Let the wind come.

But You Don't Look Jewish

(On reading *Nobody's Jew* by Steve Orlen)

What does that mean? Looking Jewish —
That I'm not dark enough, although I have olive skin
That I'm not curly haired enough, although my hair is the envy
Of all my women friends — "naturally curly" they say
That my nose is not big enough, although I can sniffle and snort
As good as any Mediterranean ethnic person
That I don't believe Jesus is the son of God
but remember him often
As a nice Jewish boy, well-raised and compassionate
And heir to the Great Tradition
That I don't know the slang words of Yiddish
But have to rush to Leo's *Joy of Yiddish*
To find out what a "schlemiel" is
That when I want to celebrate Passover
With friends, Protestant and Catholic
I have to read *Gourmet* magazine and *The New York Times Passover Cookbook*, and *A Haggadah for the Seder*
Since I yearn to belong to the Great Tradition
For this short time
Maybe I just don't conform to your stereotype —
Fawning or grasping as in the *Merchant of Venice*
Or rich and loud as in *Good-bye Columbus*
Or reserved and haughty and still rich
With a faithful Black hovering as in *Driving Miss Daisy*
Or boasting and athletic
As in *The Last Jewish Shortstop in America*
Never slow or stupid, never loyal or patriotic
Never two parents working double jobs
To send their kids off to college

Once I sat next to a Harvard admissions officer
At an educational conference
"We can't use SAT scores too much," he said
"Because if we did, the whole entering class
Would be Asians and Jews
And where would the alumni's children

Be with their gentlemen's C averages? So unfair"
Jews shouldn't be so bright, nor so committed to learning
It takes away scarce places at prestige colleges
From real American children.
I wonder about myself
Was I not a real American child?

Anniversary

Seasons end, red berries in the box.
River shines, flattens, softens into stillness.
Soon solid. Underneath life starts —
Swells, stops, tarries, moves.
Do plants yearn upward? Or is it only our intent
To make fruit? To be? To begin again...

Christmas Morning

There is nothing like the loneliness I feel when I am with people I love. No solitude can approach it. Christmas morning comes up on the screen in living color. I am sitting in the living room of our house in Georgetown in my red Viyella bathrobe, full of freshly squeezed real orange juice; a buttery croissant made by my faithful husband; black, black coffee; champagne expiring in a wine glass; and the feeling of surfeit only the opening of piles of presents can bring. Our beautiful daughters have opened stockings in our bed upstairs and now have opened their big presents in this room. They have new electric blankets and fuzzy nightgowns and new books and are on the way to retire to their beds and read. I am in the middle of piles of wrappings, string, tissue paper, boxes; some to save, some to cast away, and my husband is starting to scrunch trash into balls and put it in a basket.

I am assaulted with the loneliest feeling I can remember. "Why have you forsaken me? "Where is home? What am I doing here on earth? What do I want? Does anyone love me — anywhere, any time? Who are all these people?"

I am surrounded by the three people I love more than anyone or anything in the world and I yearn with my whole body for something else — I do not know its name. I dissolve in tears and no one can comfort me.

It's fifty years later. It's Christmas morning and I am alone in my living room along the Wisconsin River. My husband has been dead 10 years, and I only occasionally talk to him in the middle of the night. I've moved from May Sarton on solitude to Harriet Doerr on life in aging times. My daughters and grandchildren live at a distance and we visit back and forth, in person and recently by E-Mail. I can send and receive although I worry a lot about whether my messages actually go or not. I keep looking into *Sent Items* to see if they show, and it sometimes takes quite a while.

I drink strong coffee — Starbucks if I have any from the bookstore in Madison — and freshly squeezed orange juice and a smoked chub from the store and a croissant made by

Sara Lee, although Pepperidge Farm is better but not always available where I live.

I open very few packages, one from each daughter, chosen with exquisite attention to my real self, either homemade or a book I might have written — it speaks to me so clearly. One year both daughters sent me *Home Cooking* by Laurie Colwin, and I wept with joy at their understanding of where I was and what I was doing.

My old women friends who have me on their Christmas list for small remembrances have mostly died, since I generally survive my age-mates. So I don't have to wonder where to put the Christmas ornaments, candle holders, or mysterious kitchen gadgets that accumulate in my arsenal.

I relish recent communications — telephone calls, E-Mails, whatever comes. Plants bloom in the living room. The tree is decorated with all our family mementos but I didn't do it myself. My household helpers have an artist's eye and hang them with love and remembrance, many made by daughters and grandchildren.

I feel at home. I look out the window at the frozen landscape, watch the squirrels chase each other around the bird feeders, admire the snowy river. I think about anything and everything, write in my journal, wonder about the land above the sky inhabited by people I have known and treasured.

When either daughter asks if I want to visit them or have them come to be with me on this loaded day, I say, "If you *are* alone it is better to *be* alone," and I rest in my skin, homeless no longer.

The Ring

A fog lies on the river
My finger swells at the joint
I can't get the wedding ring
Off my finger, have to go
To the jeweler's today — on the main street

A call-in woman on the radio
Quoted Marcella's recipe
Sounded like the time we ate tripe
In *Firenze*, in the sun
Near the boar sculpture
Sold from a cart

Then my wedding ring fit me
And Philleo had his gold ring
On his own finger
When he died I took his wedding ring

Off his sturdy finger
And put it on the third finger
Of my right hand
Where it binds me to the marriage

In case I forget the whole thing
And fly off into outer space
Rootless and footloose, with no center
Pursued by demons, lost in the sky.

Le Déjeuner des Canotiers

If you drown in a marriage
Do you come up speaking French?

We are looking at Renoir's *Boating Party*
At the Phillips Gallery in D.C.

We both see how happy they all are
The women voluptuous in their hats

One holds a little dog up for a kiss
Another in a blue dress tilts her head with attention

The men so secure in their leisure
Wearing their manliness like a badge of honor
Relaxed in their soft clothes, bare arms

And in the blue corner, Gentle-
men: top hatted, intent, upright

Over it all the blessed sunlight
Highlighting the dark wine in the carafes

And the grapes messed on the table
Bodies are swaying to the boat's movement

Intimacies are exchanged, songs are sung
Stories are told, Blue hangs in the corners

And my young husband says in his
choked up and musical voice,
"Why don't we do that any more?"

Things I Didn't Know I Loved

I didn't walk in the fog today
and I love walking in the fog when it is warm —
at least for Wisconsin in early December

I missed doing this because hordes came,
events transpired, phones rang, ornaments came out,
the Christmas tree went up, lunch got made

And I forgot about the fog
The way the prairie would look—
gorgeously colored grasses,
mahogany red-brown waving masses

I forgot how when I walk in the fog
my hair begins to curl at the ends
and my face feels bathed
with fog's soft wash cloth.

A Morning Practice

When I wake up in the morning, always looking toward the window to see if the light is on, I wonder if there are vegetables in the ice box bins to eat later that day. Sometimes there are carrots, or green beans, or eggplant, or cauliflower. And I feel a deep pleasure in my center if I know this.

Then I can get out of bed, with my sore joints, totter into the bathroom and sit on my new tall toilet, relieve myself of the night's water, and know I can go to the kitchen and prepare vegetables. With strength returning I get to the kitchen, my soft shoes on and my bathrobe snapped, and take out the vegetables before I turn on the morning radio. I heat some Starbucks coffee in the microwave and arrange the pills for the morning: one orange, a half white, two blue and two jelly-covered. I make a big glass of water: ice cubes from the freezer with water from the tap. And decide on carrots first.

I peel them into the sink, to put them later into the compost pail and sit down gratefully on a step-stool in front of the radio, always tuned to Wisconsin Public Radio. I cut them with a good serrated knife on a wooden board that pulls out from the counter-top. I practice the rolling cut, Chinese style, and the pieces are nice — not slices, not chunks, but something Chinese and appealing.

If I find an eggplant, I have to decide whether to peel and chunk it, or slice it thickly. If sliced, I leave the skin on, salt it and later pat it dry so I can grill it on my Jenn-Air stove, with olive oil for basting. I consider chopping some garlic and putting it into the olive oil, but I don't want to interrupt my cutting.

If I find green beans I better use them first so I take off their heads, sometimes break them into pieces, sometimes leave them whole, leave the tails on, since I have found these are good to eat. I often soak them in cold water for a short time, not all day, to restore their fresh look.

If it's cauliflower, I take off the green heavy leaves and cut out the central stem, leaving as much as seems tender and put all these discarded pieces into a plastic bag for the freezer to

use in soup. Then I have to decide to leave it whole, to steam and bake with cheese sauce, or bread crumbs and butter, or make a whole cauliflower salad — after steaming until *just* done, dress it with ripe spiced olives and pimentos and an olive oil vinaigrette. Or maybe I am thinking about a sauce for pasta, in which case I will cut the cauliflower into pieces, some stem and some flower in each piece.

If by chance I find a globe artichoke languishing in the refrigerator, I trim it so it looks ready — I clip the prickly end of each leaf with a kitchen shears, peel and trim the stem and rub the exposed parts with lemon. None of this is necessary — I am going to boil it whole anyway, but it looks prepared, and I like to do it.

As I work at this quotidian task, I begin to feel centered and my stiff joints loosen. I feel more awake — a little news, not too much, has drifted into my head from the radio. I think about writing in my journal or working on a piece I have begun or writing a haiku on my porch, close to the natural world. This exercise continues the work of my apprenticeship.

Why Women Write

Why do I write — why do I breathe, walk, speak, and eat? To stay alive, to think, to look out, to be. I used to say I was writing about my life to find out what happened but I no longer say that. I don't care as much as I used to whether I am remembering episodes that really happened or repeating the stories I have heard, or made up for myself about these episodes.

I used to think of my life as stretching out ahead of me, almost to infinity. It seemed an endless journey full of anguish, trials, disappointments, conflict, and struggle. I thought I would never arrive at a destination.

Recently I have been planning my 88th birthday celebration. I settled on a picnic outdoors at our cottage on the river, similar to the 4th of July celebration we have often had. We cook a haunch of venison on the fire, sometimes swim or take a boat ride on the river, and retreat to the gazebo if mosquitoes emerge at dusk.

The planning of the birthday made me realize the journey will end — not just now, but in a while — maybe a few years down the road — (my mother died at 89) — my daughters think I might last another 10 or more. Of course I may die tomorrow — people die every day. But I feel unbelievably well, satisfied with myself — because the end of it all is in sight. The journey will end in arriving somewhere — not necessarily here, but somewhere.

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~~[illegible]~~ ~~the~~ The Luncheon of the Boating Party
Renoir, Auguste

Le Dejeuner des Canotiers

If you drown in a marriage
Do you come up speaking French?

We are looking at Renoir's Boating Party
At the Phillips Gallery in D.C

We both ~~notice~~ ~~sense~~ see how happy they all are
the women ~~so relaxed and~~ [illegible] voluptuous
in their hats ~~and [illegible] the little dog~~
One holds a little dog up for a kiss
the men so secure in their ~~manliness~~ leisure
Wearing manliness like a badge of honor
Relaxed in their soft clothes, bare arms

Over it all the blessed sunlight
Highlighting the dark wine in the ~~glasses~~ carafes
~~Food on its way to mouths~~ Grapes pressed on the table
Bodies swaying to the boat's movement
Intimacies are exchanged
Songs are sung, stories are told
the Blues hiding in the corners to show you ~~what is not yellow not illuminated~~ —
And my new husband says in his
Choked up ~~but~~ and musical voice

"Why don't we do that any more?"

$6.00

The Poet Saigyō
Would have written a poem
Even for the woman
Washing potatoes.

– Bashō

ISBN: 1-889460-05-0

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