

# ALL WAYS A WOMAN



Yette '86

**EDITORS:** .....Pat Post-Kochanski  
 .....Christine Cea  
**EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS:** .....JoAnn Calacibetta  
 .....Denise Zawada  
**COVER:** .....Yvette Mandel  
**ILLUSTRATIONS:** .....Jane Butters—Mommy's Piglet  
 .....—South Africa  
 .....Yvette Mandel—All others  
**PROOFREADER:** .....Kathy Devlin  
**FACULTY ADVISOR:** .....Professor Jo Gillikin

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### POETRY

Christine Cea PERENNIAL .....	3
Dawn Guostavino I'M A MAYTAG .....	3
Spessa Djonbalic I'M A PASSAGE .....	4
Kathy Devlin GRANDMA, LET ME TELL YOU (TELL ME) .....	4
Ellen Navarro MISTAKEN .....	5
PM CHORES .....	6
Jane Butters PIGLET'S MOMMY .....	7
Lynda Nelson IF ITS OPTIMUM .....	9
WHEN DID WE CHOOSE .....	10
A SHORT PIECE ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA AND WHAT I READ IN THE NEWS .....	11
Ellen Rothberg BOSTON—DECEMBER 1966 .....	12
Marguerite Musso THE GAME .....	13

(Continued on next page)

## POETRY *(continued)*

Kathryn Fazio	
BEDSIDE CHAT .....	14
CROSSING THE VERRAZANO .....	15
A SCHOOL GIRL'S DREAM .....	16
FOR ALL I KNOW OF DR. HINSLEY .....	16
Lynda Durinda	
ONE SHORT DAY .....	18

## SHORT STORIES

Pat Post-Kochanski	
REPAIRS .....	19
Margaret Droge	
THE HILL .....	22
Maureen Pecoraro	
A MOTHER'S DAY .....	24

## ESSAYS AND INTERVIEW

Pat Post-Kochanski	
AN INTERVIEW .....	27
Denise Zawada	
WHY I WANT A HUSBAND—OR DO I? .....	32
Carol Chouinard	
TWO HOURS IN THE LIFE OF CAROL CHOUINARD .....	34

## Perennial

I'm a pillar,  
My mother's work of art.  
A shelter, a new home.  
Tall torso, strong arms reaching,  
O tiny one, smooth ripe peach.  
I hear a new life singing,  
Petal pink, feathers, fragrant pine.  
Windblown, weeping, covered with snow.  
I'm bound to earth,  
I touch the stars.

*Christine Cea*

## I'm a Maytag

I'm a Maytag on the gentle spin cycle,  
The calm before the storm,  
The eye of the storm itself.  
I'm Theresa in Calcutta,  
Leonora in the Palace,  
A scale weighing good, bad, right, wrong.  
The diligent detective seeking clues  
Boomeranging through the lost years  
A legend on a map  
Getting nearer to the I.

*Dawn Guastavino*

## I'm a Passage

I'm a passage in many mazes  
An owl, a marble hall,  
A flame burning on two candles,  
O long stems, thorns, red satin,  
This forest's elongating omniscient trees,  
Silk's newly spun luminous flaws,  
I'm a hope, a hurricane, a still ocean,  
I've built a wall of unfounded restraint,  
Explored the ocean,  
There's no floor insight.

*Spressa Djonbalic*

## Grandma, Let Me Tell You (Tell Me)

I'm snails in black bean sauce,  
spare ribs, cumquat with pineapple:  
one from Column A, two from Column B;  
a pink and blue buffet.  
O bad penny, wrapper on the grass,  
crackerjack box with someone's prize,  
I've seen you coming  
but the mirror needs some Windex.  
Piece of fluff and pillow feathers falling:  
Look what the cat dragged in.

*Kathy Devlin*

## Mistaken

As weather tends colder  
when seasons move slowly  
nights,  
I run by the cemetery  
and take deep breaths  
with the upgrade;  
matching headstone names  
to imagined faces  
that surround me  
in the lifting fog.  
Voices fill my ears  
as I speed up  
on the swing downhill.  
A November sky  
sits gray  
upon the lake  
and folds its arms  
motherly  
around the wind-bent trees.

I called I'm home,  
ascending steps  
in twos  
—that glass door,  
old,  
slamming shut as always.

Events twisted  
time constant  
—like a heartbeat.  
You were gone  
and left no choice,  
I said goodbye.

The bed is rumped.  
I iron before work  
—my hair, wet  
in a towel.  
A radio whispers  
weather reports.  
I remember how lying  
so close to you  
nights,  
lulled me to sleep  
and cry.

*Ellen Navarro*

## PM Chores

Tyrone Power just washed two days'  
dirty dishes tonight  
quite unexpectedly.  
He *Crash Dive*'d right onto my  
kitchen countertop from out of the  
t.v. screen and walked up to the sink  
gentlemanlike.  
Of course I declined; but, he  
insisted.  
Later, he helped me do the unmade bed  
— started sorting laundry,  
whites from colors mostly  
and what a conversationalist!  
Soon, he leapt back into the burning,  
oilfilled waters surrounding the enemy  
ship, sinking  
— held his breath at least 10  
minutes underwater.  
Flashing eyes?  
He's so brave; I called farewell but  
it was too noisy, all that paddling  
and danger; torpedoes hitting their mark.  
Arriving safe, I turned the dial  
— finished cutting coupons with Ava Gardner.  
Who knows what may stop by tomorrow —  
Godzilla??  
I'll do some ironing then.

*Ellen Navarro*

## Piglet's Mommy

I.

Piglet's Mommy went to town  
Spent food money on a gown  
For the party New Year's Eve.  
Gee, his Daddy sure was peeved.  
All week long they just made rice,  
Noodles, Kool-Aid to suffice.  
Piglet didn't eat so much  
He got weak, depressed and such.

At the party Mommy dazzled  
Punked her hair into a frazzle,  
Painted eyes, and mouth, and nose  
Put black spots upon her toes.  
Mommy thought she sure looked Bad,  
Piglet didn't, he was sad.  
Piglet's pains were not obtuse,  
He's victim of child abuse.



II.

Piglet's Mommy loved Punk bands—  
Banged on tables with her hands  
When the Punky music played.  
She loved music, night and day.  
Made her hair so stiff and straight,  
All she liked to do was mate,  
All her clothes were slick and black,  
Leather buckles, steel pegged hats.  
Thought she was so hep and smart,  
She smoked pot, and broke his heart.

Piglet's Mommy left one day,  
On her cycle, drove away.  
Hair was yellow, pink and red  
We assume that she's not dead.  
She drank beer and snorted coke  
She thought life was just a joke.  
Piglet's left alone with Dad  
Both of them are very sad.  
Cause the Mommy's Bad..bad..bad.

### III.

Piglet's Daddy's all worn out  
All day long he runs about.  
First with cooking, cleaning then  
Off to work to clean pig pens.  
Daddy Pig comes home at six  
To make supper and to fix  
Next day's lunch and wash the clothes  
Help with homework, then he'd show  
Piglet how to vacuum clean  
Shop, and make vanilla creams.  
Daddy has no time to play  
Since his Mommy went away.  
Piglet gets upset with Dad,  
Always tired, hurried, mad.



### IV.

Piglet's Mommy was so sad  
She was sick of being bad.  
Loneliness and conscience stung  
She was tired of life among  
The Punk Rockers, smoking dope...  
All that racket with no hope.  
She snuck into Piglet's room  
Just to watch him sleep. But soon  
Piglet woke and shouted out  
Mommy cried and sniffed her snout.  
They cuddled, wept and loved and then  
That Mommy never left again.

*Jane Butters*

### If it's optimum

I carry the sands of deserty skies home  
(it sieves through the clutches of my own disregard)  
where my sisters in their own homes  
will never understand me  
where my husband will grow to unlove me  
sand is sliding out of the shell bottom  
sifting in the wind, swirling gently to the earth  
its discontent spheres laughing, cracking, splintering  
while my pottery smokes.

I gaze at the sky, towards its back, past its forever  
to the other side of the world  
where the night keeps strange primeval continents  
darkly strangulated,  
and see a comet shining in its galaxy  
its dust is sifting down through time  
landing slowly, musically in this canyon.  
the t.v. announces whines  
I hear my husband stirring in its glowing blue halo  
he is learning to unlove me  
while my sisters in their homes are  
sitting quietly in their lives.

*Lynda Nelson*

## When did we choose

When did we choose  
the daily persistent abundant washes,  
frail dancing children tended before ourselves,  
an exhausted existence where morning rises like a smog  
on our weighted sadness and the  
works of clocks spin logically.

When did we choose  
husbands, lovers, advisors, bankers,  
appointed aliens who notice our differences  
as if they were a frightening revolution.  
When did we choose these to whom creation is no miracle  
and evolution is not either, processes to be ignored.

I see their blue and strangulated faces  
behind smirking glass  
(they who choose to keep this system of racial, masculine,  
spiritual and financial apartheid)  
looking to see us bent, washing by rivers  
foul and toxic winds blowing all our hair like snakes rising  
breathless.  
choose to read us in magazines  
choose to view us on billboards  
choose to ignore us in life.

We vicious asps who alienated god in the garden.

*Lynda Nelson*

## a short piece about south africa and what I read in the news

We were all waiting. It was our moral duty to observe the events that were unshaping a nation.

Every day there are riots. I saw on television people dancing around a burning auto, a regular bonfire and celebration. I mean those people were really dancing—they were all tribal dances, ancient, ancient dances that these people have been moving to since time began. They're dancing in modern africa around 20th century technology as if there is no tomorrow and there was no yesterday. Also they were singing. It was an act of rage and a song of courage.

*Lynda Nelson*



## BOSTON — DECEMBER, 1966

Blue women walk early in Boston.  
Their plants and dogs are watered and walked.  
Husbands are breakfasted,  
Newspapers read.  
Children are bundled up,  
Bussed off to school.  
Fingers are bony-cold,  
Lips cracked and dry.  
Women with blue lips walk early in Boston.  
Church spires are outlined in patches of snow,  
Dry air feels brittle.  
The sidewalks of Boston  
Are click-clacked and pounded by hurrying heels.  
Boston-blue women walk briskly this morning,  
Hurrying home to their rooms neat and bare.

*Ellen Rothberg*



## The Game

Across our space  
Words travel  
We parry  
Wanting to be understood

To sound favorable  
We are misunderstood  
Not following through  
Hesitant to give too much

Advance to truth  
When swords cross  
Retreat, don your mask  
The opposition waits

*Marguerite Musso*



## Bedside Chat

These sheets are too white  
They blind me fly  
You buzz right by me and tease my eye

Quick! Off my leg!  
Not in my ear  
I hear you buzzing everywhere

The straps on my wrists  
They make me red  
And still you buzz by me  
“What’s that you said”

The map with directions  
On how to get out  
Of this hospital bed  
“Oh fly, you have CLOUT!”

But fly, I am naked  
Without wings like you  
How can I follow  
Shuuuuu the night nurse shoe

*Kathryn Fazio*

## Crossing the Verrazano

Crossing the Verrazano reminds me I’m a fly  
Riding through the inside of a piano with sky  
Dodging hammers from pounded keys  
Spiked with burnt rubber and toxic breeze

I’m busy with thought, the dog is not fed  
I’m busy with thought, your gold watch is gone  
And in its place beside my bed  
Is the busy memory you laid on its lawn

Outside the old upright  
Cuts thick slabs of fog  
With thin metal strings  
And a vibrating chord

And from my car window  
I squint to see  
Through the slices of sunlight  
Split just for me

I wallow in spectrum  
I drive through the green  
To violet  
Too busy to realize the toll of the breeze.

*Kathryn Fazio*

## School Girl's Dream

I used to think  
from the core of cellular life  
girls harvested women

Spontaneously  
undoubtedly  
but erroneously  
I grasped at womanhood before  
I was a child

And mistakenly  
clutched the legs of a man  
before I could walk

*Kathryn Fazio*

## For All I Know of Dr. Hinsley

In a place  
Where a retina undresses all senses  
I saw an image of a dot round as a pearl  
Fall off a page

In the place  
Where you left me  
I knelt in a desert dreaming  
Scantly dressed but with pearls and gold cider  
Both the same

And in that tangible place  
In the throat that knows  
To flap up and down to direct where drink and air go  
Like the rational mind that knows to go quite insane  
The Pharynx simply offers a space  
To unwind a choke or a blue-red in the face

And in that place in the heart  
A node called the Pacemaker  
A nerve acts like muscle  
And muscle vice versa

In a place  
A mathematical set can be graphed by your hand  
Where a beer stinking bowler  
Meets the blond hand of a gay man

In a place  
Where mind covers matter  
With a blanket for a body to make love under  
You slip to two sides of my brain

And I see you there at the junction  
Standing on a trains' crossing track  
Walking away from me to a space in a tunnel  
And then walking back

*Kathryn Fazio*

## One Short Day

How I put my life together  
Amazes me.  
The fact that I've grown in one short day  
It amazes me.  
To put the puzzle together  
And not be harmed,  
Amazes me.  
To be lost yesterday  
And be found today  
Amazes me.  
To know I know my own mind  
Amazes me.  
Not to fall apart at a drop of a hat  
Amazes me.  
To know I am a grown up  
Amazes me.  
To know I have so much talent hidden in me  
Amazes me.  
To write the poems I write  
Amazes me.  
But wait though, why should it  
Amaze me?  
I've worked so hard to get where I am now  
To feel as I do  
And to think that I'm so proud now  
Does not amaze me now  
Or ever.

*Lynda Durinda*

## Repairs

*by Pat Post-Kochanski*

The snow had just begun to fall as they began their slow ascent. Despite the heaviness and volume with which the snow was falling, she did not alter their pace. From time to time, she would stop and wait for the child to close the distance between them.

Occasionally, she would become aware of how tensely she carried the brown paper bag in her hand. When her arm did not sway with her gait but instead hung rigidly against her side, she would uncurl her stiffened fingers from around the fold at the top of the bag, press it against her like a pregnant belly, hook both hands under its bottom and relax her hunched shoulders. Moments later she would find the bag straining again in her left hand as her nails tried to slice their way through the dampened paper. She would loosen her grasp, allowing the veins to lie down.

When she reached the crest of the hill, she stopped to wait for the child. She studied the row of stores which sat below. She watched as men and women ran frantically from store to store; body after body passed each other on the street, not touching, not seeing, not hearing. A car horn screamed through the walls of her thoughts. She lurched up, then forward as she grabbed and pulled the child against her. She let out her breath, walked to the curb and bent down to the side of the car. Mrs. Michaels stretched her body over to the passenger side.

"Sorry if I startled you, Helen. I thought you might like a ride into town. That's where you're going, isn't it?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Michaels, but we'd rather walk. The baby is enjoying the snow. Thanks anyway."

She pulled away from the car to leave.

"Helen, I don't want to press you, but the invitation still stands. Please feel free to stop by anytime. I know you must get lonely sometimes living with just a small child. I can introduce you to all the girls. They're interested in your work. Just stop by. And please, call me Marie."

"Thank you, Marie. I'll do that. I'll stop by." She abruptly stepped off the curb and back onto the sidewalk, waving goodbye. She turned to the child, smiled and said, "Come on, Candy girl. Let's get going."

They began their descent at a faster pace demanded by the wind which had kicked up behind their backs. The closer they came to the town, the more anxious she became. She began to gnaw at the soft, moist skin which lined the insides of her cheeks. With her free hand she twisted ringlets of her hair about her fingers.

"Mommy, snow went on my tongue," the child cried with excitement.

"Mommy," she repeated tugging at her mother's sleeve, "I'm talking to you."

"What, I'm sorry, baby, I didn't hear you. What did you say?"

"Snow went on my tongue," she repeated.

"Oh yeah. What did it taste like?"

The child hesitated. Her eyebrows crinkled earnestly in thought. "It tasted like strawberries," she squealed jumping up and down.

"Aren't we lucky we live in a place where the snow tastes just like strawberries? We couldn't ask for more than that now, could we, Candy girl?" She reached her hand out and slid it slowly down the side of the child's rosy face. She cupped her

fingers around the tiny chin and gently squeezed it. She smiled, bent forward at the waist and while waving her arm in the direction of the town she said, "After you, Madame." The child marched forward grinning with importance.

Soon the town stood before them. Faces she had seen but never knew passed silently by. They passed the candy store window, which was decorated with toys and games. The bright colors caught the child's eye.

"Mommy, Mommy, let's go in there," she cried, pulling at her mother's leg.

She quickly scanned the store's interior through the door. People were milling about inside laughing over cups of hot chocolate and coffee.

"It's too crowded. I'll buy you something next time we go to the supermarket."

They came upon the shoemaker's. She looked at the brown bag, then inside the shop. Marie Michaels was inside, examining a pair of shoes. She quickly took the child by the hand, went around the corner, and stared through shop windows. When they returned, Marie was gone.

As they entered the shop, the door top chimed against rusted, tin bells. The shoemaker stood with his back to them deafened by the whirring of his machines. To the left of them were three stalls of red leather chairs with footsteps. The child ran to them, pushing the swinging doors back and forth, stopping only to stare at her feet in the small mirror which sat on the oily floor.

"I'll be right with you," the shoemaker said without turning.

She approached the counter littered with soiled cans of shoe polish. She studied the back of his body which stood slightly hunched. A thick green apron hung loosely from his greasy pants. His shoes were ripped in the small seams at the back of the heels. His neck, embedded with deep, black, branching lines, was short and broad like a knot of wood. His hair was cropped close to the scalp.

He turned to her as if drawn by her searching stare.

"What can I do for you?" he asked as he switched off the machine.

From across the counter his face slowly moved uncomfortably close to hers. He squinted through the dense, yellow film which enveloped his eyes. His face bore the same lines as his neck. He was old, very old. Her head smoothly tilted back as she placed the brown bag on the counter.

"My boots," she explained, "need to be repaired."

He did not move to open the bag but only moved closer to her, straining from behind his glasses.

"You are new here, Mrs. Somebody. I no see you before," he said with a heavy accent.

"Yes, I'm new, well pretty new. I moved into Greeley about nine months ago. But I've never been in this shop before. We rarely come into town."

The shoemaker looked over at the child. "Nice boy you have."

"She's a girl," she said.

The shoemaker turned to her. Straining again. "You have light eyes, no?" he asked.

"They're blue," she answered.

"Ah—blue like the sky or blue like the ocean?"

"Blue like the sky, I guess," she answered beginning to tense at his questions.

The shoemaker gently nodded his head and smiled, exposing his fleshy, wet gums. She recoiled, looking away at the child who was sitting on a footstep. He pulled the

boots from the bag and held them close to his face. He peered through the magnifying glasses which were attached to the front of his glasses.

"Very good leather," he said as he ran his fingers over the boots. His blackened fingers moved quickly and knowingly.

"You no buy in this state," he said.

"No, I bought them when I lived in New York."

"You need new soles, whole soles, not halves. And lifts too. Eighteen dollars. If you have time, I do them now. If not, then goodbye to you Mrs. Somebody."

Rather than come into town again, she decided to wait. She went over to a chair, took off her jacket, and sat down. The child followed her mother's actions.

While the shoemaker worked, he talked, if not to her, then to himself.

"I too live in New York when I come to America. Then I move here. Life for me has been lonely. First my wife die. Then my son. Then me. It be forty years now that I am dead."

There was a long pause as he hammered the lifts to the heels.

"I wake up. I eat. I work. I sleep. My wife she had blue eyes too. She died when my boy was born. He was my life for nine years then Jesus take him too. Cancer they say. Death is death I say. I live here for forty years and go no more than the grocery store. I eat. I sleep. I work. I turn away from people. I turn away from life. I embrace my death before it comes."

He paused again as he groped for his hammer. She thought about New York. She thought about her husband. As if sensing these thoughts, the child climbed into her mother's lap.

The shoemaker's hammer struck a nail. She looked at Candy's right snowboot, still shedding drops of melted snow. She shivered as she felt her pants absorb the water from her child's shoe. She looked down at the girl, as if from a great height. Such a sense of being alone, separate. But in a surge of — *almost pleasure*, she thought — she said, "Listen, Mr. Shoemaker, I changed my mind. We will come another day."

"Well, then, come get your ticket, Mrs. Blue Eyes Like the Sky."

"Thank you," Helen said taking the ticket from his hand, "thank you."

"Come on, Candy girl. Let's go see if they know how to make real egg creams in that candy store."



## The Hill

by Margaret Droge

She knew, from the first moment she laid eyes on it, that it was no place for a farm. Eighty-six acres climbed steeply, relentlessly, to the bald summit of the hill. It was barren land, devoid of trees. A gray barn and shed clung precariously to the sloping earth; they rattled and moaned in the wind that came in sudden gusts from the crest of the hill. Across the road to the south, the land finally leveled. Here scrub brush and squat huckleberry bushes almost obscured the skeletal remains of an apple orchard, its brittle, sun-bleached limbs broken and piercing the low, static horizon.

She just had a feeling about it, right from the beginning; people weren't supposed to live like that, she thought — on a slant, never having both feet planted level at the same time. But Lonnie didn't mind the hill; having one leg shorter since the war, he stood lopsided anyway. Besides, it was all they could afford, he argued, since the drought had wiped them out. He swore he could clear the stones away, and plow and harrow the hill.

Even the little farmhouse, with its swaybacked roof, stood on a slant; none of the floors was level, so that if you dropped an onion it would roll away from you to the south the way everything did on the hill. When they moved their bed in, Lonnie put bricks under two of the legs to level it; most of the furniture had to be propped up that way.

And so they bought chickens, and hung a sign by the road saying "fresh eggs." Lonnie planted a willow tree behind the kitchen, so that Aggie would have something to see from the window besides the bare hill. He brought home a one-eyed, yellow dog to keep the foxes out of the chicken shed; they never gave the dog a name, but it kept Aggie company as she worked and sang in the kitchen. The egg money came in while Lonnie spent the days carting rocks from the field and shoring up the sagging buildings. He bought a second-hand tractor and began to plow the hill.

Aggie stands by the barn and scatters feed for the chickens, knowing the yellow bits of grain will hit the ground and bounce southward. The white Leghorns, Lonnie's pride and joy, scratch and peck around her feet. There are fewer chickens now, but lately fewer people have been coming for eggs. There is only one Rhode Island Red left, and Aggie thinks it would be good for stewing, but she needs all the eggs it can lay.

The old yellow dog has been gone for some time now; Aggie last saw him chasing a rabbit over the top of the hill. When she enters the coop in the morning, she often finds that the fox has been there; the shed is strewn with feathers, and another bird is missing. Sometimes she finds a torn off wing, or a foot with the toes still clenched, and the dusty floor is dark and glistening with a trail of blood that leads to a hole under the wall. But now she is tired of closing the holes, and the fox has been using the same entrance for two weeks.

Aggie crosses from the barn to the pumpkin patch, a tangled mass of green rope and leaves as big as her hand; the fat, green globes are already beginning to ripen. She runs her fingers through her matted hair. Was it two years ago, or three, she wonders, when she lost that baby? She had been working among the pumpkins when the first pains had come. And that year she hadn't harvested the pumpkins, but had let them rot. Funny, she thinks, how they keep growing back again by themselves. In

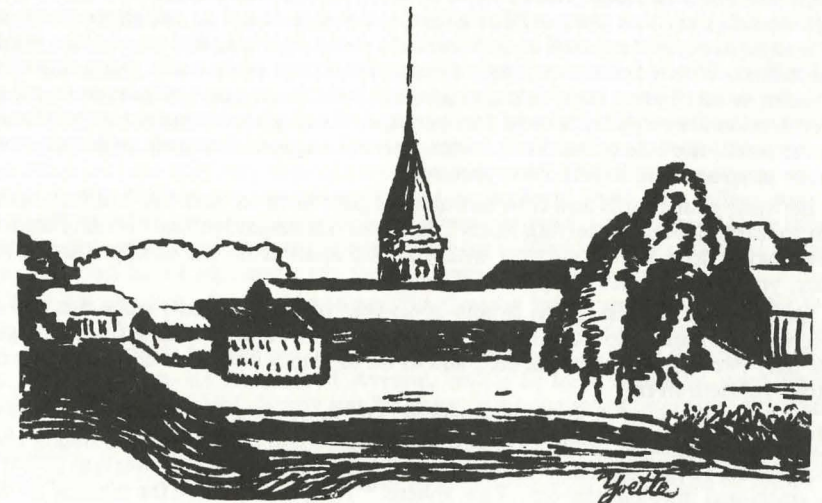
October she used to hang her pumpkin sign by the road and sell them. Now she would like to cut their stems and let them roll down the hill, southward, bouncing and shattering against the rocks.

Back in her kitchen, Aggie checks her cupboard and decides she needs cornmeal, and perhaps some carrots and greens for stewing. But she seldom drives the pick-up into town now. The townspeople gesture and whisper when they see her; the children giggle when she approaches, or they run away.

Aggie scrubs potatoes at the sink and begins to pare and slice them. She is singing to the yellow dog, and then remembers that he is gone. She cuts her finger; she can see the blood but feels nothing. Examining the wound, she notices that her wedding band is gone; she wonders if it fell and rolled to the south wall of the kitchen. Suddenly she decides she will kill the red chicken; she will wring its neck, butcher and stew it. A thrill sweeps over her as she stifles a giggle; maybe, while she is twisting its neck in her hands, she will finally be able to feel something, to cry, to laugh the way she and Lonnie did that night long ago when the bed broke, the bricks having slipped from under its legs as they made love.

She looks out the kitchen window, where her willow tree has died and there is only the hill behind, looming buff-colored and stark, as if it has been cut out of cardboard and pasted against the black-and-white sky. It is a sky that threatens storm; swift, strong gusts of wind pour from the crest of the hill, battering the now knee-high grass until it becomes a turbulent, brown sea. And there, half buried in the waving field, is Lonnie's tractor, left where it had flipped on its back like a huge, dead insect, now silent and rusting on that damned hill.

She had been right; it was no place for a farm. It was too steep for plowing. She thinks she can still hear his screams, feel them in the very marrow of her bones — but it is probably the barn moaning in the wind that pours from the top of that damned hill.



## A MOTHER'S DAY

By Maureen Pecoraro

It's been two hours now since Mike's last call. As always, when I'm feeling anxious and completely helpless, I remain in bed with the covers over my head. A casual observer might think I am at rest; but nothing could be further from the truth. How prophetic, I think, that you should have your moment of triumph as a woman on this day, Mother's Day 1984. It seems like only yesterday I carried you home from the hospital, long before the days of car seats.

There were no washing instructions, words of caution, or even a label attached when I first inspected you, head to toe, for flaws. I found none. You were only minutes old when I first took you into my arms; I, nineteen years; we were both children, actually. I guess you might say we were to grow together. Maybe that is why you will always be very special to me and why I will always love you so very much.

You seemed to know I came with no prior experience; yet you trusted me anyway. I would have preferred to have given you the most experienced and loving mother in the world, but from this day on, you would have the maturity of nineteen years, all of my love, and as much pink organdy and satin ribbon as I could find.

I took you home to your bassinet fit for any princess. Nana really outdid herself. Yards and yards of embroidered white organdy gathered to reveal the palest hint of blue from underneath, with a ruffled hood in a form not unlike a huge bonnet, and with blue satin ribbon woven throughout its eyelet — a truly regal bed. For the next four years, you and I would be "steadies," exploring each other, getting to know one another, and learning to love one another in an uninterrupted, exclusive relationship.

Grandma said, "You shouldn't take her out at night. There are poisons in night air." "Stop reading that god-damned Spock book," Grandpa said, "and buy her some stretchies that don't make her toes curl." Even then I didn't realize how fast you would grow. You always did remain just one step ahead of me, although the only reading material I enjoyed at that time was every child care and psychology book I could find. With a feverish hunger I devoured each and every word. (How incredible it seems to me that to enter into any professional career, years of intense study and certification are required, except for, perhaps, the single most important profession in the work, the role of mother.) I found myself engaged in a truly authentic work-study program long before its conception.

Between your fourth and fifth birthdays, I gave birth to your two brothers within ten months. I began receiving notes from your kindergarden teacher. She told me you always drew family pictures with yourself apart from the family. During role play, you always chose the part of the baby.

How could I explain to this twenty-or-so-year old teacher that, while this twenty-five year old mother loved her daughter as much, if not more than before, God gave her only two hands, one mind, etc., and as far as responsibilities would go, "My cup surely runneth over."

You began to hold in bowel movements, Dr. Betty prescribed enemas. How deep your anger must have been, for it gave you the strength to prevent both daddy and I from giving you an enema. When I mentioned this to Dr. Betty, he was curt, "This is an emotional problem and out of my sphere." I began to picture the medical profes-

sion as a small parts factory: place the patient on a conveyor belt, send him / her to various departments; but, above all, do not dare let one department know what the others were doing. It was then I became angry — angry that you were hurting and angry that I was responsible for your pain, even though, logically, I was without guilt.

I found you lying on the sofa totally lethargic from impacted stool. "Lisa," I said, "you are going to have this enema now, and I am not waiting for daddy to come home. I am going to give it to you myself." I received a broken finger in the battle, but I did take care of your immediate medical problem. I then took you into my arms and carried you into my bedroom, where I literally threw you onto my bed. "I love you," I screamed, "I love you more each day, not less. I just happened to give birth to two babies within the last ten months, and babies require a great deal of care. But they do grow; it won't always be this way. When you were a baby, you received all of my time. Right now they need me very much. They cannot feed themselves or talk to me. Without my care they could die. Don't you understand that love is not just feeding and changing diapers. It is many things. It is driving you to kindergarden, putting ribbons on your shiny, brown pigtails. It is holding conversations. It is hanging your drawings on the refrigerator. It is crying when someone you love hurts. Lisa, you will always be so very special to me; you were my first child." I squeezed you and hugged you, as I cried. Although psychologists would not recommend this type of shock therapy for a five-year old, it seemed to work. I don't know which message filtered through, but your problem disappeared. I would like to believe you understood my love.

The greasy dust balls hung from my rag just like my bottom lip hung from my face, both frozen in space. "Mommy," you said, "Shelley said that to get a baby, the daddy has to put his thing into where the mommy goes to the bathroom. Is that really true?" The first 180 degrees of my mind's revolution begged me to lie to you. How could I be able to explain this to you in a way that you could understand. You were only eight years old. How my heart ached at this occasion of lost innocence, too soon to be fair. As I looked at your radiant face, your large, brown eyes, filled with expectation, I realized I wanted much more for you than just to preserve your innocence. I wanted to give you something solid to hold on to in the confusion of this world, a word you could always trust, always rely on. How could I possibly teach you the meaning of true love if I began on a foundation of untruth? Inside I silently cried for your lost innocence, as outwardly I tried to impress upon you the critical aspect Shelley's ignorance failed to include — love! I explained that without love the act was merely a physical union and totally empty. But when two people truly love each other it is the only way they can truly become one. "From that love, you were born," I said. "When you are older, you will understand what I am telling you." Seemingly satisfied, you no longer questioned me. Instead, you bounced cheerfully from the house; I remained at the kitchen table for a very long time with tears in my eyes, my heart in my lap, and a rag full of dustballs in my hands.

There are all sorts of adorable names like "puppy love" used to convey the insignificance of first experiences with love. How anyone can define parameters for pain by age of sex is beyond me. How well I remember your sitting in the corner of your little bedroom on Ridgewood Avenue, crying so hard I thought your heart would surely break. I think Jimmy was his name. How irrelevant he is now; but your pain will never be irrelevant. I hurt so for you then that the feeling remains vividly alive today. It was the first time I related to you on an emotional level apart from mother-child in the stricter sense. I began to empathize with you female to female,

woman to budding woman. "Oh Mom, how much it hurts," you cried. How well I knew. All I could say was how very, very sorry I was, as we sat on the floor together, hugging and crying until you were spent.

Once again, my heart aches for you today; my entire self lives this gruelling battle with you, though in spirit only. Would that I could spare you this pain and suffering; yet to do so would be selfish. This is your pain, your day in the Sun. The pain you have today is not one of the heart. It is the sort that will surely do battle with your entire self, body and soul. Warning of its impending attack will be an innocuous dull ache forming a halo around your lower torso, taking its battle position before it attacks. It begins gradually at first and builds to a crescendo, assaulting you, consuming you, rending you almost senseless. Then, when you think you can no longer stand the pain, just like a tide, it ebbs away, giving you moments' rest, before the next affront to your being.

After several hours (or is it days?), the restful moments come less often, the pains come closer together and become much more intense; you no longer can tell the difference between reality and this nightmare. Finally, a searing sensation enters your womanhood, and you cannot resist an overwhelming urge to bear down, as though you were experiencing an enormous bowel movement. Total concentration on this new exercise dispels your awareness of pain, as your entire self, body and soul, unite to expel this intruder within.

You push, grunt, moan and scream until you are finally victorious. Totally spent, you would surely become lethargic, were it not for the sight of this bloody covered little creature lying now on your belly. You, instead, become euphoric and awed before the mystery of life. Exhilaration fills your soul, like no other experience in your entire life has before filled you. For you — and only you — could have accomplished this wondrous deed. No other woman in this entire world could have become this child's mother. No other woman could have given life to this child, this child of your love and your flesh.

As though my heart were heard, Mike just called again telling me you wanted to speak with me. "I am holding your grandson in my arms," you said. Tears of joy streamed down my face, as I ran to get my car keys and recalled that day twenty-one years ago when your perfectly beautiful, 20-inch long, blood covered body sat upon my belly.



## An Interview by Pat Post-Kochanski

*Several times during the course of my life, my mother has mentioned that G., a long-time friend of the family, had been incarcerated in a concentration camp in China as a young child. I never pursued the topic until I was required to do an oral history for my Women's Studies / English class.*

*G. and I originally met to tape the interview; instead, we spent several hours talking while she showed me an album of photographs which illustrated her family's life in China.*

*As you will see, G.'s articulateness called for very little questioning on my part.*

- Q. According to the 1949 newspaper article describing your arrival in the States, your grandmother was born in Russia. Why was she living in China?
- A. Well, you have come to a very important and interesting person in my background who has had a lot of influence on me. My grandmother married young, as most women did then.
- Q. When was then?
- A. The early 1900's. She was living in Russia in Khabarovsk. At that time, she married another Russian. They had three children: my mother, who was the eldest; my aunt; and an infant son. One of the reasons why my grandmother left Russia was because of the political climate: it was at the time of the Russian Revolution. Unfortunately, they belonged to the wrong political party and her first husband was murdered, as well as her infant son. She remarried shortly thereafter, I guess, hoping that things would get better. Her second husband was also killed during the Russian Revolution. Subsequently, she decided to leave Russia and go to China since Khabarovsk was not far from the border of northern China. Arriving in China with two small children, without very many options for women in those days, she set up a cottage industry making neckties. During the day she stitched up neckties and probably sold them on consignment to stores. At night, she and the children performed on the stage. Their performances were comparable to the vaudeville acts we had here in the States. Besides whatever they were paid, people threw money on the stage for them. So that is how she earned a living and when things got a little better, she sent the two children away to a boarding school and she continued with her cottage industry. She then tried her hand at other things. She was a physical fitness nut in her early days; in fact, it continued throughout her life. She is now 91 and I attribute it to the fact that she has always taken care of herself. She opened up a health studio, "The Shanghai Health Studio" which catered to pudgy ladies living in Shanghai.
- Q. Was her clientele mainly Chinese?
- A. Mostly European because Shanghai had a very large European community. She hired a number of women who worked for her and she worked right alongside of them. She usually put the ladies through their exercise paces and the other women worked as masseurs and did manicures. It wasn't a hair styling salon but mostly physical fitness exercises. She also developed a line of cosmetics. She could have been a Chinese Helena Rubinstein but she didn't pursue that. She was a very ambitious lady.

- Q. After establishing herself in Shanghai and getting her family back on their feet, what did your grandmother do next?
- A. She met and married an Englishman about whom we know very little, since he spent so little time in her life. I don't remember what he did for a living. All I know is that he was a very miserly man. He doled out the pennies which my grandmother never liked receiving. She liked being her own person and doing things on her own, not having to ask permission: Can she spend money on this or can she spend money on that? She just wanted to go ahead and do it. She did. He left China on a short trip to England and in the interim, my grandmother had written a letter seeking a divorce. This same letter must have been crossed by one from England stating that he had died of cancer.
- Q. So that was her third husband and she eventually went on to her fourth. What prompted such consistency on her part?
- A. Well, I guess she was the marrying-kind-of-lady even though she was independent and did not need a man to support her. She met another Englishman, who was the only grandfather I knew because she married him long before I was born. He was really a great favorite in my life because he never had any children of his own; and since I qualified as his granddaughter, I was the apple of his eye. He doted on me and nothing was too good for me. So when we had it, I had everything; and when we didn't have it, I still had everything because I felt a great deal of love from both of them. (More from him because he spoiled me.) So she married him. He had his own business and she had her own business and they owned this large building in Shanghai. She had her health studio which eventually branched out into a boutique. She sold silk lingerie trimmed in lace, the finest French laces which were imported. She had Chinese seamstresses who would sew them. He had a similar business, although not a boutique; it was a men's tailoring shop where custom-made suits were outfitted for the businessmen in Shanghai. So both of them had thriving businesses and she continued with her endeavours. She had the health studio which she phased out and then she had the boutique. At about that time (just before World War II) the Japanese take-over of China occurred. When the British and Americans finally did enter the war, that is when the Japanese rounded up all the foreigners in Shanghai. Of course, the Americans left the country but the British had settled there, including my grandfather and his Russian wife, my grandmother. They lost their businesses which were confiscated by the Japanese and the people were sent to concentration camps. I believe it was late 1941 or early 1942 when my grandfather, my grandmother, my Aunt Edie (whom my grandmother had adopted as an infant; she was only 10 years older than me) and I were all sent to concentration camps outside of Shanghai.
- Q. How old were you?
- A. About 5 at the time. We spent two and a half years in the camp. And again, my grandmother, being a very resourceful woman, decided she was going to work in the dispensary. It was a very wise move on her part. She got all the medical supplies and all the vitamins she could get her hands on. I was well taken care of. We all lost weight during those two and a half years but I had no lack of medicines, quinine or vitamins.

- Q. Were you separated as a family in the concentration camp?
- A. I was with my grandmother and my aunt. My grandfather was separated from us and lived in the barracks for the men. However, we saw each other during the day.
- Q. How were you treated in the concentration camps?
- A. We weren't maltreated. We had food rations. We were counted every morning and every evening. We had to stand at the doors of our rooms for roll call. We were guarded by the Japanese.
- Q. Japanese men?
- A. Right, the Japanese soldiers which were occupied there. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire and dogs outside the compound. Naturally, there was very little escaping. In spite of the hardships that we endured in the camps, my grandmother was an organizer. She organized theatrical groups to put on shows which were morale-boosting activities. She had a lot of friends there. Most of the people there were, of course, British women and men. There was quite a contingent of Russian wives of British men and these were the most resourceful women. Even though the British women had great stoicism, keeping of stiff upper lips, ("not letting the bastards get them down"), the Russian women were more resourceful. We were allowed a small piece of ground to plant things on. Most of the British women planted flowers while most of the Russian women planted vegetables. We got to keep what we grew. So we had eggplant, which I hated with a passion, and tomatoes. But camp was not the worst experience for the children because we played. The adults tried to institute some kind of school for the children and it didn't work out well because I don't remember going to school. I recall having a card with multiplication tables on it and I didn't know what it was for. I knew I had to learn it but it never made any sense. We were there for two and a half years when we were released after the war. My grandparents, once again, took up life in Shanghai, to rebuild their businesses and move on with life.
- Q. In other words, they lost everything while they were imprisoned?
- A. The Japanese had confiscated everything and they were running the businesses because I remember after the war, while the Japanese were still there, we visited my grandfather's business and I saw Japanese soldiers in uniform actually in the store, behind the counters, operating the business to whatever extent the business had been operable during the war. But in any event, my grandparents started up again. It was just a way of life for them; if you had a setback, you just picked up the pieces and started all over again. You're probably wondering why I have mentioned only my grandparents and not my parents. Well, my grandmother settled in Shanghai, as I told you earlier, and my mother had grown up there. She was a rather attractive woman as you saw from some of the photographs I showed you. She was a very vibrant, party-type girl, also extremely attractive and was engaged to a nice young Russian man in Shanghai when my father came along. He had been a friend of the family. He knew my grandmother; actually, he was her contemporary. When he finally met my mother as a grown woman, he fell in love with her, swept her off her feet, and married her. My father was a sea captain, was born in Brooklyn, and was of Swedish and Danish descent. He was also very adventurous. He decided in 1939 to outfit a fifty-foot



Chinese junk and sail across the Pacific with my mother and a crew of five Scandinavian seamen. My grandmother would not hear of them taking me along on a trip; I wasn't quite two years old. It was a wise decision on my grandmother's part. I'm sure my mother concurred, for a two year old would not have survived that trip. It took the fifty-foot junk 113 days to cross the Pacific; and although my father was a very skilled seaman, an excellent navigator, and a good skipper, a lot of things did go wrong. They ran out of food and water; and just in the nick of time, as in all good melodramas, they were rescued at sea by a large passenger ship that sighted them, and filled their barrels full with fresh water and supplies. Fortunately, they did not have to eat the cat and dog that were on board the junk. They continued their journey across the Pacific and ended up on the rocks off the coast of British Columbia, Canada. That was a thousand miles off course. They had planned to land in San Francisco for the 1939 World's Fair (the San Francisco Exposition) and exhibit the junk. To make a long story short, the junk was being towed to a port north of Seattle, Quatsino, for repairs; she was so badly damaged she started to sink. They had to cut the lines and she went down. They never got her to San Francisco. My parents settled in Seattle with all the intentions of sending for me but the war broke out in full swing in 1941. So that was the end of any efforts to get me here to the States.

- Q. At this point you were still living in Shanghai with your grandparents. What was happening to your life while your parents were in the U.S.?
- A. While my parents were here in the States, life continued for us in Shanghai. The war years came and went. My grandparents survived the two and a half years in the camps. They came back to Shanghai and rebuilt their business. By this time, when things were going well — I was about ten years old — and my grandparents decided that I had to start school someday. I hadn't been in a formal classroom setting at all up to this point. They decided to send me to Hong Kong to the same boarding school that my mother had attended. There was another reason for sending me out of Shanghai. It was 1947, the year of the Chinese Communist take-over. My grandparents were, again, on the verge of losing their businesses— everything they had worked for. The most important factor, of course, was that I could not prove my American citizenship. Although my father was an American citizen, he could not prove his citizenship because there were no birth records. So without proof of citizenship that would make me Chinese by birth and unless I got out of the country at that point, I would, no doubt, have had to stay. My grandparents sent me to Hong Kong for two years but at that time it was an indefinite stay because they did not know how long all the red tape and paperwork would take in order to send me to my parents here in the States. I had not seen my parents since they left for that trip in 1939 which made it about ten years altogether that I hadn't seen them. I spent two years in the boarding school in Hong Kong when finally all the paperwork was squared away. I boarded a plane and came to the States. I met my parents for the first time, as well as my two younger sisters who were born here.
- Q. After the Japanese retreated, I take it that your grandparents just picked up where they had left off?
- A. That's right. They reopened their businesses and our home. My grandmother had her business on the third floor, although not to the extent that she had it

before the war. She became more the hostess, the social person, helping my grandfather with his business. In 1947, when the Chinese Communists took over, they sent me to boarding school and they continued with their life. In conversations with my grandfather, I understood that he never believed that the Communists would take everything away in the way that they did. He kept running the business for another two years until he came to the realization that the Communists were not going to let them continue the way that they had. The Chinese Communists wanted China for the Chinese and they wanted all the foreigners out. My grandparents managed to take some of their belongings, none of their cash or the money that they owned in the business. They soon realized they were not going to be able to take their business out of China. Their first stop, on their long trip to settle here in the States, was in Thailand. They lived there for a short while. After Thailand they made their way to Australia. I know my grandmother did some civic work by exhibiting the costumes that she had acquired and collected over the years. I don't know what my grandfather did at that time. I had lost touch with him. I was already in the States, living in Seattle with my parents and I corresponded very rarely with them. I just lost touch. After spending about five years in Australia, they finally made it to the west coast of Canada and settled in Vancouver, British Columbia. That was when I saw them again after six or seven years. When they had sent me to boarding school at the age of ten, that was the last time that I had seen them until I was sixteen. I was in high school here in the States and had become thoroughly Americanized. I took a bus trip to Vancouver, British Columbia, and visited them. They had settled in an old farmhouse which they had purchased, sight unseen, while they were still in Australia, little realizing that the farmhouse basement flooded everytime the river rose. But they loved it. My grandmother thought she was a real lady of leisure again, living out on her estate. She always had a way of seeing things through rosy-colored glasses. They lived there for a while, in the meantime, working on plans to come to the States to live in San Francisco where my aunt had settled. Things were really very difficult for them after leaving China because their whole lifestyle had changed. They no longer had servants, which was something they were very used to. They were used to hiring people, commanding people, organizing things and now they were just ordinary, hard-working people. It was a big come-down for my grandmother. I don't know whether she had any difficulty in accepting it. Today at the age of 91, a lot of memories are fading for her. Things seem different. She changes the stories and she embellishes them, but she likes to remember all the good times.

- Q. Did her last husband pass away?
- A. Yes, my grandfather died about 15 years ago. They were living in San Francisco at the time. He went out to the corner store and never came back. He had a heart attack right there on the street. He went very quickly. The neighbors came upstairs and told my grandmother that he had died. They had a very good life together for many, many years. They went through bad years and good years. They had an indomitable spirit that no one could get down, not the loss to the Japanese, not the Chinese Communists, not the adversity of the modern life which they tried very hard to adjust to.

## Why I Want A Husband — Or Do I?

by Denise Zawada

Why I want a husband? Often, I ask myself this question. So, I will attempt to verify my qualifications for a husband and exemplify a husband's "finer qualities." I'll show how a husband and wife can share, enjoy life together, and offer proof of why it's great to "have a man around the house." After all, they're so helpful with their thoughts and deeds.

To begin, I want a husband so that I can share my time with someone. After all, I have so much time to spare. I want someone who will add a variety of stimulations to my existence (added work, more wash, etc.). I want a husband who will share my bed — including both of my pillows, my half of the bed and my half of the sheets. I want a husband who'll let me get up early so that I can prepare his breakfast, make his coffee, pack his lunch and send him off — mind you on time and if he's late, of course, it will be my fault. I want a husband who will let me do these things for him so that I can start my day off right — with more work — and then let me go to my other job, the office. I want a husband so that I can constantly have more work to do — I don't need to relax.

I want a husband who says he's working overtime and then comes home early, usually five minutes after I've arrived home, and then asks, "Why isn't dinner ready yet?" I want a husband who will grace me with his knowledge of the culinary arts (you know the type, a non-cooking gourmet). I want a husband who will bring joy to the table by exclaiming that "...my mother makes it differently, more flavorful... but yours is okay." I want a husband who will tell me a better way to cook and to season, although he's never boiled an egg and doesn't even know where the silverware is.

A husband is what I want and need. You see, I need a husband to smother me with compliments. Compliments such as "That looks awful on you! Why don't you change" (even though he loved it on me before we were married); "Your cooking needs refinement" (he loved it before the marriage); and other wonderful words of praise.

I want a husband so that I can have a personal "sidewalk superintendent" to tell me how to do everything better; after all, his way is better. I need a husband to tell me how to clean better, how to wash better and how to shop better — how can I survive without him?

I want a husband so that I can be a sounding board for all of his troubles and his frustrations. I want a husband who will teach me self-control by telling me not to show *my* frustrations. I want a husband so that I can be a mother without the inconvenience of giving birth by being his "mother." A husband who will depend on me to be his nurse and his maid. I want a husband so that I can prove to the world that I have an unlimited supply of energy. This way, when I get home from work, I can wash the clothes, vacuum, dust, and prepare the dinner. After all, work is good, and letting me do all of it helps to keep me in shape. After all, husbands want wives who have good figures, particularly since theirs are nothing about which to write home.

I want a husband because he's logical and women are not — or so I'm told. A husband who wants his house clean and his dinner on time, extra income coming in, but doesn't want any of these things achieved on his time. He wants me to relax with

him. I need a husband who thinks of my need for interesting hobbies which apparently is housework since that's how he feels I fulfill myself. I want a husband who will "occasionally" perform one household chore, for which I must be eternally grateful, stop what I'm doing and praise this major accomplishment. Because, no matter who completes the task, the job will always have my name on it and he will always be "helping" me.

I want a husband who wants my opinions, even though he only wants them when I agree with him. I want a husband to provide intellectual stimulation every day of my life. I want a husband who constantly says one thing, but means another. By doing this, he will test my psychic prowess. I want a husband who will also test my knowledge and skill by asking me questions and expecting me to give the right answer — *his* right answer, mind you, one not necessarily to be confused with the correct answer.

I want a husband to provide me with children so that I can have less free time. I want a husband who will grant the responsibility for the children to me — except when he's in the mood. I want a husband who will be a willing babysitter at all times, and who promises to tend to their needs until they cry. Then, he will graciously send me "my children."

I want a husband who will expect me to wait on him hand and foot. This way, if we need extra money, I've already been trained as a maid and a waitress. I want a husband who will teach me the value of money — that money is useful for savings and investments, but not for spending. I want a husband who will show me that my need to spend money is wasteful, that the only important things are food and things that are useful to him. After all, husband works so...hard.

And, I want a husband who will fulfill me in every way imaginable.

The big question is: "What did I do before I had a husband? How did I survive?" From what I can recall — not too badly! So, to answer my question as to "Why I Want A Husband — Or Do I?", I think I can safely answer, "No, who would?"

## Two Hours in the Life of Carol Chouinard

I reach forward and turn the large stainless steel knob which projects from the gold colored tiles on the wall. The water from the shower head shifts to the faucet below. I then grasp the knob to the left which is etched with the capital letter H. Giving it a sharp twist, I shut off the supply of hot water, leaving a stream of cold water to splash down on my feet. Taking a step backwards, I quickly cut off the remaining flow. The bathtub drain gurgles and burps as it sucks the small whirlpool of shallow water through its tiny round holes.

Grabbing an edge of the plastic shower curtain, I push it to one side. I stare at the empty towel rack on the wall across from me. Shit, why didn't anyone else ever remember to put the towels back; why didn't I remember to check *before* I got into the shower?

I soon become aware of the chilly morning air. Shivering, I step out of the tub onto the cold tile floor and tip-toe to the door. As I grasp the shiny brass knob, I inhale deeply, and holding my breath, I brace myself against the rush of icy air which seems to burst in and engulf my wet body, as I push open the door. Sheeit!

I call to my daughter, "Marie, honey." I know she is awake. She is always the first one up. Some little internal alarm clock goes off in her head every morning around 6 o'clock and it's not long after that, she's up and about, getting ready for school.

Receiving no answer, I call to her again, "Ma-riee-a." No answer. I take a deep breath and force the sound from my throat in a loud ear-piercing screech, "Maaa-rieee-aaa!"

"Yeah, Mom?" I hear her reply come from the kitchen downstairs and at the same time notice the clinking sound of her spoon against her cereal bowl.

I make my request, "Marie, could you please come upstairs for a minute and get a towel out of the hall closet for me?"

There is a brief pause and then the drawn out answer, "Oooh-kaaay." There is another pause before I hear the chair scrape against the linoleum floor. I listen to Marie's slow and deliberate footsteps on the wooden stairs. The beads of water are quickly evaporating from my flesh leaving tiny goose pimples in their place. Geezus! I wish she would hurry up! I am most uncomfortable, standing wet and naked in the crisp morning air.

Finally, I hear the tap-tap-tap on the hollow wooden door. I stick my arm out through a crack in the portal and Marie shoves the fluffy terry cloth into my hand. "Thank yooo," I call out through the crack. I blot the remaining droplets from my skin and wrap the towel around my torso, tucking one corner in under my arm.

I turn toward the sink and face the mirrored cabinet on the wall. Grabbing a tissue, I wipe the thin film of fog from the glass, leaving particles of yellow paper among the streaks. I study the reflection, feeling as if I am looking at a stranger. I frown at the woman in the glass. God, am I really that old? Is that a new wrinkle? Ugh! What a horrible complexion! I grip the corner of the mirror and yank the cabinet open. On the second shelf, easily accessible, is a square glass bottle with a black, plastic cap. Inside the bottle is a creamy, pink fluid. I apply this fluid liberally while trying to convince myself that this ritual will stave off any more of the epidermal creases.

After replacing the bottle and closing the cabinet, I pick up my toothbrush and

resolve not to look back into the mirror. I pick up the multi-colored tube from the counter top and squeeze out a glob of blue paste onto the worn plastic bristles. I shove the toothbrush into my mouth between my cheeks and my teeth, and proceed with the next ritual, jerking the implement up and down, up and down across the small enamel projections. Turning on the cold water, I cup my right hand under the faucet, lean forward over the basin and scoop the water into my mouth. After swishing the water back and forth between my cheeks and over my gums, I spit and then repeat the process.

There is the hollow knocking at the door again and I listen for the familiar whimper, "I gotta go to the baff-room." I open the door and admit my five-year-old son, Jamie. His eyes are half-closed and still puffy with sleep. His blanket-sleeper is already unzipped to the knee as he shuffles past me toward the toilet. I pick up my watch from beside the sink and leave the steamy room.

I proceed down the hall toward my bedroom, stopping to poke my head in the doorway to my boys' bedroom. I blink my eyes hard, half wishing that the chaos before me would come to order. I rap on the wall with my fist and call, in that same annoying tone of voice my mother used to use, "Rise and shine! Bright eyes and bushy tails!" Why do I do that? I hate myself for it, even as the words leave my mouth. John stirs, slightly, beneath the neatly draped covers. John, straight as a board, the child barely moves in his sleep. You could mistake him for dead.

B.J. sleeps in the bed next to John, at least I think he's there. I really can't be sure, however, for his covers are jammed into a heap in one corner and there is a stuffed dog, a stuffed bear and a huge E.T. doll among a scattering of playing cards across the mattress. But he's probably under that mess somewhere. "Let's go boys!" I call into the pit. I dare not enter for fear of getting tangled in the disarray of clothing and toys strewn across the floor. There is a moan from the corner, the heap seems to grow and a moment later the tousled blond head of my son emerges. Satisfied that there is life in this remote corner of the universe, I proceed, once again, to my room. I realize, however, that I am being followed, for I can hear the shuffle of little feet behind me. I do not stop, but continue down my path.

Richard, my husband, is lying on his stomach with his head half-buried in his pillow. I wonder how he can breathe like that. I sit on the edge of the bed and bounce up and down, not hard, just a little, so as to jiggle him awake. "Rich, time to get up." Richard moans. "Are you awake? Richard, are you awake?" I know he's awake, but I have to get it verified in case he goes back to sleep. Otherwise, I will be blamed for not waking him up.

"Yeah, I'm awake."

I strap on the cheap digital watch that I wear every day and read the time out loud, "It's 7:35 Rich; O.K.?"

"Yeah, O.K."

I am satisfied. I have done my duty. He is awake. He has said so. The rest is up to him.

Jamie shuffles up and plunks his head in my lap. I brush his soft wispy hair from his eyes with my finger tips.

"How about some breakfast, Pumpkin?"

Jamie rubs his eyes with his tiny fist and stands erect. He yawns and stretches his arms upward. He nods his head up and down, "O.K."

As I lead Jamie to the door, I call to his sister, "Marie, fix some breakfast for

Jamie, will you?" Jamie shuffles down the corridor.

Before I turn back into my room, I see John step into the hall. "Mom, did you wash my white shirt? Today is assembly day."

"Yes John, it's in the dryer." A curse on the principal of John's school for making them wear white shirts and ties on assembly days. The kid owns one white shirt and I always forget to wash it until the night before when he reminds me on his way to bed.

"Don't forget, I have assembly tomorrow." Which means, "Did you wash my white shirt?" I'm just going to have to go out and buy more white shirts for the kid, that's all there is to it.

I shuffle through the clothing closet, knowing each item by heart yet still expecting something new to pop up. I finally resign myself to wear my black skirt and my oversized striped blouse. That's O.K. because they're my favorites anyway.

Now I must find a pair of nylons without runs. I rummage through my dresser and pull out my undergarments. I pull on my underwear. I am very cautious with the hosiery, removing my small emerald ring before sliding my fist into the leg. Carefully, I gather up the nylon into the other hand until I have both the waist band and the ankle in my grip. Slowly, I slide my foot into place and pull the stocking half way up my calf. I use the same caution with the other leg and then carefully tug the pantyhose up, a little at a time, until it is snug around my waist. Now, I place my hands at my ankles and run them up each leg, smoothing out the silky material. Good, I've done it without a snag. Now to put my feet into some shoes before I catch my toes on something and poke a hole in them.

But what shoes should I wear? The black pumps would go best but they pinch my feet. I consider the fact that I am taking the train and the bus to school today. I have to walk three blocks to the train station and two blocks from the bus stop. Actually, it's not really far unless there's freezing rain or snow outside or unless your shoes are too tight. I decide on my old, worn, white pumps. I shrug, knowing that I am not one who will often give up comfort for style. Oh well.

"Richard, get up!" I call over my shoulder as I leave the room. On my way to the stairs, I stop again, outside of the boys' room. B.J. is sitting in a slouched position, on the edge of his bed. He seems to be staring, without seeing, at the wall in front of him. I say his name and the sound of my voice seems to snap him out of his daze. "Are you getting ready for school?" I ask. Obviously, he is not. He is daydreaming again.

"Yeah, Mom. Oh, Mom?"

"Yes?"

"Do you know where my sweats are? I have gym today." It seems like he has gym every day.

"Did you check in your dresser drawers?"

"Uh, No. I mean, not yet."

"Check."

On my way down the stairs, I hear John calling me from the basement, "Mom, this shirt is wrinkled. Can you press it?"

"Plug in the iron," I call back.

I step into the kitchen, take a deep breath and sigh. There are last night's dinner dishes which Richard was supposed to put in the dishwasher. That is his chore. We

all have our chores. If the family did not share the household chores, I would go insane trying to keep up with them and my school work, not to mention helping the children with their studies and tutoring my college friend, Margaret. I mean, I'm not even talking about all the errands that have to be run, costumes for school plays which must be made, meetings with teachers, appointments with dentists. . . That reminds me, the boys have a dental appointment today after school. Anyhow, I can't do it all, can I? I tell myself I must not feel guilty. After all, I'm a liberated woman, aren't I? I feel guilty anyway.

I open the dishwasher and pull out the bottom rack. I pick up a plate from one of the stacks. They have not been rinsed and the tomato sauce has dried into a thin crust across its diameter. Bits of petrified pasta have adhered to the plate. The plates should be soaked but there's no time, so I place them in between the rubber-coated prongs of the dishwasher, lining them up on their sides as compactly as possible. There is a residue of oil and vinegar on the salad bowl. The bowl slips from my grip when I pick it up and crashes into the drinking glasses which fill the sink. "Damn it!" I swear out loud.

Marie calls her concern from the living room. "You O.K., Mom?"

"Yeah, just fine," I reply through gritted teeth as I pick pieces of broken glass from the sink.

Jamie shuffles in, "What happened, Mommy?" I shoo him out again, afraid that he will somehow get cut on the shards.

As I finished loading the dishwasher, cramming every last knife, fork and spoon in, Marie pops her head in around the corner, "Bye, Mom, gotta go."

"Have a good day," I wish her as I glance at the digits on my wrist.

8:05, better get moving. I head for the stairs but Marie has come back in and she cuts me off in my path. "Oh yeah, Mom, I forgot, lunch money." I make a detour into the living room and grab my pocketbook off my desk. Shoving my hand inside, I rummage past envelopes and coupons, checkbook and calculator. I find my wallet at the bottom. I count out seven singles in all and hand three bills over to Marie, shoving the remaining four back into my purse. "I still need a quarter," she complains.

"Check my change purse in my coat pocket," I tell her as I turn toward the stairs again.

John looks up from the t.v., catching me before I make the first step, "Mom, are you gonna iron my shirt?" I bite my lip and try to swallow my panic as I rush to the ironing table. I lay the white shirt down and smooth it out with the palm of my hand. Taking the nearby spray bottle, I aim it at the shirt and give a quick squeeze on the trigger. A mist of water sprinkles onto the shirt. The iron is hot and steam rises off the white cotton cloth as I press the creases out.

Suddenly, Richard is behind me, "Can you hurry up, please," he pleads, "I have to iron this shirt and I'm running late!"

"So, who's not?" I reply without sympathy. I feel as if I have been accused because I do not press his shirts for him. Don't feel guilty! I feel guilty anyway.

I throw the shirt to John then bound up the stairs, taking them two at a time. I run into B.J. who is coming out of his room. "Mom, do you know where my sneakers are?" he asks.

"I don't wear them, B.J."

I brush past him and drop to my knees in front of Jamie's dresser. Yanking out the

bottom drawer, I reach in and grab a pair of corduroy overalls and a pullover shirt. From his top drawer I pull out a pair of cotton briefs and a T-shirt. I glance at my watch; it is 8:20 and I start making a mental list of the day's itinerary: Train station—8:55; Drop Jamie off at day care—9:40; Astronomy—10:00... Where are Jamie's sneakers? There they are, under the bed... Tutor Margaret—12:00; English—1:00; Dentist appointment—3:15.

Richard calls up the stairway sending his goodbye and wishing me a good day. I send back my love as I scurry down the steps. The boys are on their way out of the door and are bidding me farewell. "Boys, don't forget your dentist appointment after school today, so, be home on time!" I call after them. The door slams shut before I have a chance to say goodbye.

Jamie sits on the floor, mesmerized by the silly cartoon antics which illuminate the t.v. screen. I grab him around the waist and pull him to his feet. He turns his attention to me and notes the stern expression on my face. "Are we late again, Mommy?" he asks.

"Afraid so Pumpkin. C'mon, help Mommy now." I strip off his pajamas and underwear and hand him the fresh garments. "Quickly, Honey, put these on."

Jamie fumbles with the clothing but manages to pull on his underwear and socks while I gather up my text books for today's classes, and stuff them into my book bag. I take his shirt and pants and practically shove him into them. I secure the small metal clasp over the brass buttons of his overalls. I check my watch—8:35. It is times like this, I know I must believe in God, for I always say a little prayer, "God help us, please."

I stuff his feet into the empty sneakers and tie the laces. It is amazing how fast your fingers can work at looping and wrapping two ends of string into an intertwining pattern that will secure a shoe so firm and snug about a foot. Done!

Jamie is in step with me now and he runs to get his coat as I shrug my shoulders into my own jacket. I hike the strap of the weighted book bag onto my shoulder, pick up my purse and once more check the time. It is 8:42. We can make it. It is a ten-minute walk to the train station (You can't run with a five-year-old in tow.) if you cut through the lot behind the Masons' Temple and use the back steps to the platform. O.K., let's go. Jamie grabs his toy puppy in one hand and I clasp his other hand in mine. We step out into the chilly morning air and I slam the door shut behind us.

*Carol Chouinard*

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ALL WAYS A  
WOMAN

