

Sabrina Lewins

My Life

A collection of memories, short fiction, and verse



First Edition

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Letter to Myself

11 April 2018

I have been thinking about the topic of happiness a lot. Why are there so many people who are unhappy, and what effect does this have on society?

My thought today is that people who are happy are less likely to be greedy, to commit crimes, to be unkind to others. In fact, a world full of people with a capacity for happiness might be a very much better world. I am not talking about people who are rich, or successful in their work or have lovely families. These things do not necessarily make a person happy. I believe there is something I will call “a capacity for happiness”. Lots of people don’t seem to have this. Even when their life is good, they fear losing it all, or they want yet more, or they just feel that they should have or do something different. People feel guilty and miserable about the daily news, however little it is affecting them personally. We seem to have, in fact, developed a capacity for “unhappiness”. I’m not saying we should not try to help those who suffer or are in need, but I think if we lose our capacity for happiness, we have less to give to the world and to ourselves.

Everyone has some troubles in life. Everyone dies - that’s it! So what have we got to be happy about?

Well, firstly life is a gift we have been given. Think of all those millions of eggs and sperm who never made it-who never tasted one breath of this beautiful world. We did it! Here we are, able to watch the endless formations of clouds in the sky, sunsets, starry nights and big, brilliant moons; to hear the songs of birds, the music of orchestras, the voices of loved ones; to feel the velvet of moss, the roughness of bark, the beating of a one’s heart, the cold of ice and the heat of the sun. We can enjoy the playfulness of cats and dogs, the beauty of deer, and the strangeness of

many other animals. Who can feel indifferent to the ever moving sea and rivers, the towering mountains or golden grassy plains. Even our cities abound with beauty; buildings reaching towards the sky, parks, gardens, people in all their variety and energy. It is all so rich.

So – I think we owe something back to this creation in which we live. Why not pay attention, daily, to the wonder and gift of our life. We could all set aside a time, maybe a half hour or so, every day, to just feel happy. To consciously blot out all the things that worry us, all the world's woes which will ever be with us, and feel grateful and joyous just to be here. Like all worthwhile accomplishments, the capacity for happiness is something worth cultivating and working on every day. Let's just do it! Now!

Love, Sabrina



My Life



Lloyd Moss and his children outside 22 Buffum St. Salem

We lived in a white clapboard two-family house, our half being the ground floor with two bedrooms, My parents' bedroom at the front of the house which opened on to the living room and a bedroom shared between my brother Gaylord and myself, with one door to the living room, one to the bathroom. On the other side of the bathroom was the kitchen and pantry, beyond which was a series of rooms known as the “shed” because these rooms were used for storage and were not insulated or painted inside. The house had a large front hall, more like a living room, with a staircase leading to the upstairs apartment. There was a small back hall, also with a staircase leading to the upstairs apartment and the attic; another staircase leading to the cellar. Let me fill each of these rooms with memories.

The front hall was at its best during the Christmas season, when a bowl of pine and holly, decorated with Christmas tree ornaments was placed on the mahogany table against a wall facing the front door, over which hung a round gilt mirror. The walls were covered with a very pretty colonial style wallpaper with white background and diamond patterns of greenery and red berries which also contributed to the festive feeling of this hall. The floor was polished wood, with a braided rug in the centre.

From here, one entered the living room to our apartment, a room that changed style several times as my mother changed her ideas about how to furnish it and as we grew and changed our lifestyles. There were varnished wood floors throughout the house, except the kitchen which had linoleum, and there was a braided rug in the living room made by my maternal grandmother. The kitchen was always a place of gathering by the warm stove, oil burning when I was small and later a gas stove set in front of a red brick fireplace and Dutch oven, which was a deep black iron oven set into one side of the fireplace surround, used for baking bread originally. We had a big round table in the kitchen where we ate meals, did homework, played with modelling clay, did art work, played cards.

When I was four years old, I became very ill with pneumonia. I remember clearly that Gay was trying to show me a model airplane he had made, but I kept saying, "I can't see, I can't see". Perhaps the high fever made me unable to open my eyes at that moment but for some reason I wasn't able to see just then. Later, an ambulance arrived to take me to hospital and I was carried out to it through the front hall at the same moment that a new gas stove was being carried into the house. I vaguely remember being in a hospital room next door to some glass panels, beyond which babies were crying. Then there is a memory of being in a special treatment room, comforted by a nurse while my lungs were being drained through my back. I don't recall if this was much of an ordeal or not, but I do remember my mother coming to visit and definitely wanting to go home. When I did come home, I was very frail and didn't want to eat very much. To tempt me, my mother roasted a tiny stuffed chicken and brought it to my bedside on a platter with a small

sharp knife so that I could carve it for myself. It was a wonderful stimulus to my appetite and I greatly enjoyed carving bits off, putting them on my plate and eating them. The doctor suggested that I be given a glass of stout to drink every day as a tonic. It was very bitter but I was allowed to eat a large slice of white bread with marshmallow fluff and strawberry jam as an accompaniment and this made it very tolerable, though a stranger combination I can't imagine.

There was a corner cupboard in the kitchen where my father kept his gardening clothes, an old leather jacket that I can still smell in imagination, a walking stick he had made from a stout branch he found on a walk one day, and our boots. He also kept a large glass jar in the cupboard with the lid taped in place and a slot cut in the top. Into this he would put all his pennies or other small coins, to save up for a trip to the Sportsman's show in Boston once a year. He would take my brother there on the train and they would spend a happy day looking at boats, and other sporting items, all sorts of gadget displays and I don't know what else. They would try foods such as fried bananas and bring exotic things home for us to enjoy. One year Gay brought home a chameleon which amazed us, poor thing, it didn't live long in captivity. Another time they brought home a tortoise. There were stacks of brochures about all sorts of boats, which was their main interest, and also kitchen gadgets for my mother, some of which appeared later in her Christmas stocking. Of course I felt sad at not being able to go too, but this was a man's outing. My mother took me to the ice follies in Boston Garden one year as our treat, but I was very disappointed to find that Boston Garden was just a huge, cold exhibition building and not a beautiful indoor garden as I had imagined it to be. The ice follies was lovely, beautiful women skaters dressed in fairy tale costumes glided across the ice in formations, whirling and twisting like dancers, performing scenes from fairy tales, accompanied by a fine orchestra. There were clowns, and a daring male skater called Harris Legg, who was very handsome (at least from a distance) and flew across the ice at an alarming rate, performing all sorts of leaps and twists, one through flaming hoops, to thrilling music.

When I was six, Gay and I became ill one day, with some sort of gastroenteritis I suppose. We didn't recover quickly and my parents became very worried, my mother calling in Dr Moulton. He really couldn't say what was wrong but we became worse and worse, growing very thin and weak. Eventually my mother wrote to the Lahey Clinic in Boston asking for us to be seen by a specialist there. I remember travelling on the train and subway to the clinic - Gay and I sat on a back seat in the subway car, watching sparks from the electric rail in the dark tunnel and saying the names of each of the stops, which we got to know quite well over the next few weeks as we attended the clinic. Eventually we were diagnosed as having ulcerative colitis, and were both admitted to the children's ward at Deaconess Hospital on Brookline Avenue in Boston for observation and tests. One night we heard thunder and the howl of a great wind which was very frightening. The nurses said it was a hurricane and the next day Mother told us that a tree had blown down in front of the house next door. As our stay in the hospital lengthened, we were moved into a double room on our own, and Mother had to find a way to visit us every day. She hired a room in a home nearby, took a temporary job at Sears Roebuck to finance her lodgings, and then came to visit us early in the morning so that she could bathe and see to our breakfast, came again at lunch time and again in the evening. Father had to stay in Salem and visit us at the weekends. This was 1943, in the middle of the 2nd World War, nurses were in short supply and only minimal care could be given to patients. My mother would visit other children in the children's ward because their parents lived far away and could only visit occasionally. She read to some of them, combed nits out of their hair, and did whatever she could to help. Gay was much more ill than me and had his first ileostomy surgery which in those days was extremely painful, especially since there were not enough nurses to change his dressings when they needed it. I was allowed to roam at will, used to answer the telephone when the nurses were busy, saying "Good morning, Deaconess 2", and take messages. I also answered the patients lights when they needed attention, brought water for them to drink or perhaps a bedpan. And of course would run around in great anxiety when Gay was screaming in pain for a nurse to come and change his dressings.

To keep us amused, my father made us a couple of ingenious interconnected message sender/receivers with lights operated by a press button. We could send each other messages in Morse Code on these, which obviously helped us to improve reading and spelling skills, as well as teaching us Morse Code. Mother brought us foreign stamps from her work at Sears, where she had to open all the letters for the mail order business and we started a stamp collection. She also realised that there was very little appetising food available in the hospital, so to encourage us to eat she left packets of graham crackers, jars of honey and peanut butter and a knife to spread it with hidden in our chest of drawers. Being allowed out of bed, I could make us little snacks whenever we wanted one.

Many of the nurses were very young and spirited and used to sing war songs like:

“Whistle while you work, Hitler is a Jerk, Mussolini is a meany, but the Japs are worse.”

Of course we learned these songs and sang along with them, probably to my parents’ regret. The nurses also sometimes brought us through the underground hospital tunnels to seminar rooms where we were displayed to trainee doctors as a curiosity. Then the nurses would have wheelchair races with us up and down the steep slopes of those tunnels, sometimes nearly crashing us into one another.

Our room was really very isolated, being a private room far from the children’s ward, and we were warned that there were dangerous rooms nearby that we mustn’t go into, probably treatment rooms. But I was able to wander about fairly freely in our section of the hospital and one day attended a demonstration to diabetic patients on how to inject themselves, using an orange to practice on. I thought that diabetics injected orange juice into themselves after that.

We were in hospital for 10 weeks, long enough to see early autumn turn into winter, and it seemed like a very long time. Finally we were to go

home and Mother asked what we would like to eat for our first meal at home - our reply was immediate and unanimous - hamburgers in gravy with mashed potatoes.

We were very delicate for some years after this and I guess I must have been away from school for at least a year, during which time we had a visiting teacher from time to time. One day my mother gave me some money to buy a tennis ball to play with. I played various games by myself with the ball, then wandered over to North Street where two small girls invited me into their garden so that they could play with the ball too. We were having a grand game of catch, when the ball rolled into some shrubs where we searched for it. Suddenly their mother came out of the house, asking me why I wasn't at school. When I explained that I was recovering from an illness, she became panicky, afraid her girls would catch it I guess, and ordered me to leave the garden at once. I asked her if I could at least try to find my ball because I knew my mother could not afford another one, but she said "no" I must leave at once. I went home crying and told my mother what had happened. "I know her", said my mother, "she used to be in my class at school and I never liked her." My mother marched around the corner with me in tow and gave her ex-classmate a piece of her mind for upsetting me, but although we were then allowed to look for the ball, we didn't find it.

My parents had a brilliant idea to help Gay and I return to health by enjoying sea air and outdoor life. They joined a little sailing club at The Willows, a seaside park 3 or 4 miles from where we lived. Dad bought a small second-hand sailing boat, brought home books on sailing from the library and taught himself to sail. Finally the day came when we were to launch the boat. The plan was that at 6.00 o'clock one morning we would place the boat on three red children's carts tied together so that Dad and Gay could pull the boat to Ropes' Point, about 1/2 mile from our home, mother and I would follow behind carrying the spars (mast and boom). The boat contained our picnic lunch, oars and a home-made mooring, an oil drum filled with concrete with a ring set in the top. Such a clatter we made parading down the narrow streets at this ungodly hour of the morning, fearing that someone would rush out of a house and

shout at us for waking them. But Salem must have been tolerant that morning because we arrived at the little beach without much incident, save a few bruises and cuts from our unwieldy burdens.

Dad tied the mooring tight against the stern of the boat so that it wouldn't drag, we hid the carts to collect the following morning, and pushed our boat into the water, then all clambered in ready for Dad to row us along the shipping canal to the Willows, a distance of about 2 miles. The sun beat down, Dad rowed and rowed, became more and more exhausted, we grew hot, impatient, the boat inched along. About halfway there we stopped for lunch, then Dad set to rowing again, completely mystified as to why it was so difficult. Finally, when we were nearly at our destination hours later, Dad went to the stern of the boat and found that the mooring rope had loosened and allowed that heavy concrete filled drum to drag about 10 feet behind us instead of being tied up onto the boat - so he had been rowing against this terrific dragging weight the whole time.

After this inauspicious start, our boat proved to be a great joy to us all. Nearly every morning in summer, we would lay out slices of bread to be buttered, make various fillings (egg & olive, crab meat salad, tuna fish salad, egg and bacon, cream cheese and olive, peanut butter and banana) then construct mounds of sandwiches which were wrapped in waxed paper. Cucumber, carrot and celery sticks were sliced and wrapped and perhaps a thermos of soup or a hot macaroni, tomato and ground beef mixture that my mother called American chop suey would be packed in a large square green picnic basket. There were jars of pickles, packets of chips, cookies, pieces of cheese, apples and bananas. When all was ready, we would set off with our little brown and white dog, Bonnie, to wait on North Street for the very crowded bus that would take us to the Willows. We would all have to stand on the bus, separated from one another and that drove Bonnie mad - she ran yapping back and forth along the bus trying to gather us together which hardly pleased the other passengers on a hot summer day.

How wonderful it was to get off the bus, walk across the park and through the swing gate that said “Members Only” into Salem Willows Yacht Club. There was a small clubhouse built on stilts over the water, a porch with rocking chairs, and ramp leading down to a float, a large raft where dinghys landed and tied up or were hauled out of the water until needed again to take their owners out to their sailboats or motor launches moored out in the water. We looked out onto a long arm of the sea that went right up to Ropes’ Point, with a deep shipping canal in the middle so that some commercial ships could come near to the leather factories and other industries that required their cargoes. Straight across from the Willows, half a mile away, was the Beverly Shore and a fine beach, Danestreet Beach, where lack of shade produced lobster red sunburns on sunbathers, as I learned to my cost.

Mother put our picnic basket in the small kitchen of the clubhouse, we changed into swimsuits in the sun-warmed, wood and tar smelling sail loft where oars, outboard motors and sails were stored, and ran off to play in the park, leaving Mother to sit in the long sitting room with its brown leather covered captains’ chairs, or out on the porch in a green rocking chair where she would knit and chat with other Mothers and some of the older men who were no longer working. The park was really very large with several distinct areas. There was a small beach just beside the yacht club where there were large rocks exposed by low tide where we could play, or a very sheltered swimming area at high tide. There was a pier where people fished and excursion boats came and went, a second and much better beach with a raft one could swim out to, a street of food kiosks selling candy kisses in soft pastel colours that were stretched on machines which we loved watching, ice cream, hamburgers and hot dogs, chop suey and pepper steak rolls. There was a shooting gallery, a whip and dodgem cars, a merry-go-round with calliope that played “Tico Tico” and had real flying horses, and two penny arcades. If we had any money, we loved going on the rides, eating hot chop suey rolls, watching a peep show that one had to crank along, trying our skill at the driving machine where one had to manipulate a steering wheel that moved a car along a road that twisted and turned and went much too fast for us to steer along. There were pin ball machines,

fortune telling machines and a machine that stamped out badges. How we loved buying boxes of the salt water taffy in assorted colours and flavours; pale green mint, pink raspberry ripple, tan peanut butter filled ones, brown chocolate ones, and others I can't remember. Ice cream also came in many delicious flavours like chocolate chip, blueberry, pistachio, strawberry, maple walnut (my mother's favourite), black raspberry, butterscotch and of course vanilla. Then there were the acres of grass in the park with little pavilions for bands or dancing in the evening, big willow trees, the ladies and gents toilets, and an outdoor concert area with stage and seating. Further along the park one came to a more hilly area where there were three large square green wooden restaurants with big porches overlooking the sea. The Chase House, Swenbecks and Ebsen's, all fine fish restaurants and why there were three in a row I can't imagine. One of the cooks at Ebsen's was a member of the yacht club and he offered to give us free fried fish if we went to the kitchen of Ebsen's just before lunchtime and asked for him. Those fish filets were probably among the best I have ever eaten, very fresh white flounder dipped in batter and fried to perfect crispness. Beyond the restaurants was an area used mainly by the boy and girl scouts with huts for overnight camping. I stayed there myself with a brownie troop for a few days once, scaring the other brownies in my hut by telling ghost stories when we went to bed, and one little girl burst into tears so the brownie leader had to come and comfort her, while asking me to stop telling such stories.

Gay and I had complete freedom all day, every day, to swim at the two beaches, run around the park playing, enjoy the amusement arcades if we had any money, climb on the rock cliffs, dig up blue clay on the beach and make things from it. When we were hungry, we rushed over to the yacht club where mother gave us food from the picnic basket or occasionally money to buy something special like a chop suey roll. There were other children at the yacht club sometimes and we played with them as well. Dad came down to the Willows after work, being let out early on particularly hot days, and then our picnic basket was loaded along with oars and sails into the dingy and off we went to our sailboat for an evening sail, supper on the water, and perhaps even a swim from

the boat. Weekends we spent whole days out on the water, sailing sometimes along the Beverly shore, sometimes over to Marblehead Harbour where there were magnificent yachts and very fine yacht clubs for extremely wealthy people and what fun it was to sail amongst all these marvellous boats, some with crews all dressed in white. Other days we sailed out to islands, Big and Little Misery (which had poison sumac and poison ivy), Coney Island, Baker's Island that was the largest and farthest out, where about 50 families owned fine summer homes served by a ferry boat three times a day so that husbands could commute to the mainland every day.

After our evening sail, Mother and Dad used to sit and visit with other couples on the porch while we children ran about in the dark, chasing around the park until quite late at night when it was time to catch the last bus home. Two or three times schools of tiny silvery fish called sperling appeared around the float, floodlights were turned on and we all rushed down to catch these little fish in nets or our hands. They tasted very good dipped in flour and fried for breakfast the next day. We also did a little fishing from our dingy, catching crabs more often than flounders I'm afraid, but they tasted good too.

Every summer there was a day that was very special because a man named Mr Reed had left some money when he died to pay for a picnic for children at the Willows every summer. We children would line up in the park waiting patiently for the mayor to arrive and then we would each be handed a clean white shoebox containing sandwiches, an orange, a chocolate bar. I don't suppose any of us really needed this treat but it was definitely considered something special and no child would have dreamed of passing up the Reed Fund Picnic.

One day all the church bells around started ringing and my mother said the war had ended. We were extremely excited - I must have been eight years old then, and I had to do something so rushed to the ladies room in the middle of the park and banged all on the stall doors shouting "The war's over, the war's over". Some time after that an LST was anchored a little way out in the harbour and there were launches from the pier taking

people out to see the ship. Gay and I didn't stop to ask permission from mother, but just piled into a launch and had such an exciting ride out to this big naval ship, where we then regretted that we had come barefoot because hot sunshine had turned the metal decks into baking sheets. We decided to enter a hatch and climb down a ladder into the ship where we talked to sailors who were playing cards until it was time for the launch to take us back. We felt very proud telling Mom and Dad all about our adventure.



Boats at the Salem Willows Yacht Club

Another special day was the Misery Island Picnic where boats of people from the yacht club sailed or motored out to the island for a day of games, picnic and socialising. The night before this adventure, a number of men from the club would gather at Hobb's restaurant where the salt-water taffy was made and down in the basement they made great cauldrons of proper New England style fish and clam chowder. The next

day these were loaded into boats along with ears of corn for roasting, and butter for melting to go with the corn. How exciting it was to land on the small beach of this inhospitable island with its dense poisonous foliage and briars so that one kept mostly to the beach. Races were held while the chowders were heated and corn roasted, then with good appetites we gratefully received cardboard cartons of chowder, corn dripping with butter, coca cola and whatever other food our parents had brought.

Once a year also there was a meeting of boats from several yacht clubs, only some years held at the Willows. We referred to this occasion as “The fleet coming in” as boats would arrive from quite some distance, moor, put up flags and their owners come ashore for festivities. There would be dancing in one of the pavilions after dark, boat races during the day, and people sleeping on the boats at night. One hot summer night my father and I slept on our boat, which was really not very comfortable, and we had great fun delivering newspapers to the other boats in a little motor launch the next morning. My father found a praying mantis on the end of the motor launch, which was very interesting to me as I had never seen one before and thought it a most amazing insect.

At the end of the season, there was celebration with fireworks in Marblehead Harbour quite late at night, after dark. Twice we were taken to enjoy this in a larger boat that had a cabin and engine. This was great fun since there were three families on board, quite a few children and we played in the cabin, wrestling on the bunks and I believe I received my first kiss there from my boyfriend, Billy Maguire (I didn’t think much of it). People stood all around the harbour holding flares which they lit at a given moment, making a marvellous ring of light before the fireworks began. It was very thrilling, and I think we were extremely tired when we finally got home, probably around midnight.

Eventually Gay and I returned to school part-time and then finally full-time. I had to wear warm snow pants under my skirt while walking to school so that I wouldn't catch cold and some of the girls in my class would wander around the playground taunting me. Finally Gay told

them to stop or he would beat them up. It was hard to return to school after such a long absence, to find that friendships and cliques were already formed and, I, a thin, sickly child, was not likely to find a friend. This was really the beginning of my becoming an inward-looking child, living more in imagination than in reality much of the time, and being somewhat too goody goody to be accepted by my peers.

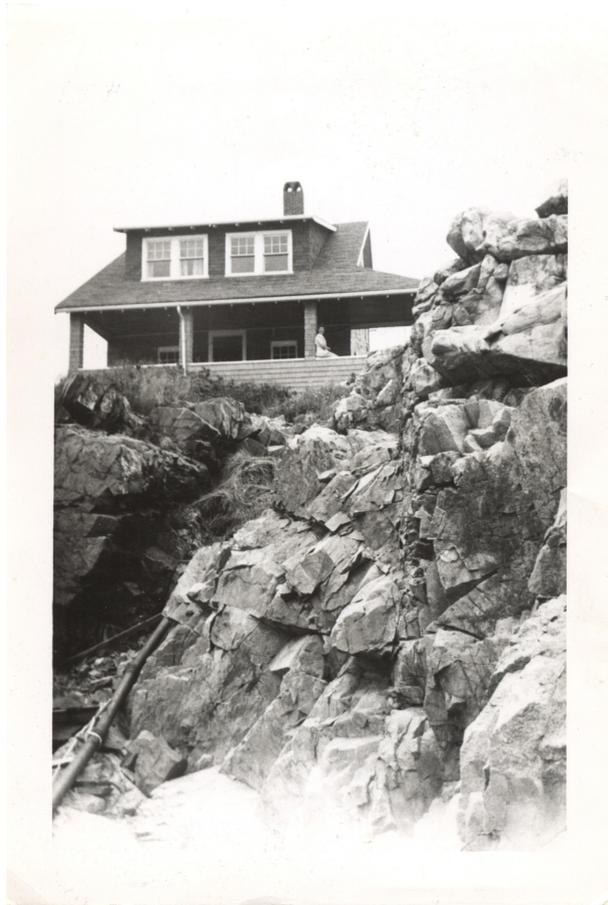
Around this time the elderly woman who owned our house died, and it then went to her daughter, Anna, who with her husband and family moved into the apartment upstairs, to my great joy. There were 4 daughters, the youngest of whom, Lois, was just a year older than me, immediately a friend although her interests were very different from mine, being by no means academic but centred on boyfriends and outdoor activities. Her 3 older sisters seemed very glamorous, and there was always plenty of noise, arguing, even occasionally throwing things at each other going on above our ceiling, which I adored. We were a very quiet, well-behaved family, conscious of our lack of money and status and anxious to please so that we could remain living in an apartment that we knew was worth more than my parents could pay. But my father spent hours cultivating the garden, keeping it in trim, and providing currants, grapes, pears, and cherries for both our families to eat in season and bottle for the winter, which may have been one reason we were allowed to stay. I think the Nicholsons were mainly just plain kind and understood how much we needed to remain where we were - they always treated us as equals and I spent a great deal of time upstairs enjoying the whole family. Mr Nicholson was a lawyer and Dean of a law school in Boston, a large, gentle, slow talking man who loved climbing and camping in the White Mountains.

The House on Baker's Island

The family also owned a large, grey clapboard house on Baker's Island, which we were allowed to open up for them one spring, staying there for a week while Mom and Dad cleaned the house, swept the fireplace, mowed the lawn and paths leading to the house and did various other jobs. We children just ran about the island in utter bliss, thinking it the most wonderful place on earth. There was one general store in the middle of the island, a jeep to carry provisions from the thrice-daily ferry to the store, a small meeting house/church, a lighthouse, and then about 50 privately owned houses connected by carefully tended grass paths. No electricity or running water meant that we used oil lamps and a fireplace for light in the evenings, large porcelain bowls and pitchers in each bedroom for washing ourselves, a chemical toilet in a small room at the back of the house, and trips to the well along a narrow snaking path to fill buckets of water were made several times a day. There was a cistern to collect rainwater which was used for washing ourselves, clothes and dishes, but certainly not for drinking. A large oil stove in the kitchen was used for cooking and heating water. Inside, the house walls were just plain unvarnished wood, a thick rope with knots in it served as a hand rail for the stairs leading up to four bedrooms. There was a very large stone fireplace in the living room and wide window sills with collections of rocks on them, faded blue cotton curtains in the windows. The house felt scoured by wind and weather, clean like a beach, empty of all clutter, but furnished with memories, summers enjoyed year after year, it smelled of sunshine, seaweed, and woodsmoke. There was a wide porch and a swing on the seaward side of the house, always cooled by a sea breeze. Below the porch a grassy space gave way to grey rock cliffs that one could scramble down, searching for seawater pools as waves dashed and pounded. I loved walking from this wild wave-struck, wind blown area, screaming gulls wheeling above, down sunny grassy paths with tall grass either side and small, stunted island trees - sumac and such, to the still centre of the island where butterflies flicked about, bees hummed, and a sun-rinsed sky boomed lazy clouds overhead.

At night light swept across the bedroom over and over from the lighthouse and sometimes one could hear a bell buoy in the distance or a foghorn ominously sounding as fog rolled in. One day Gay found a sea urchin among the rocks and picked it up to investigate the animal, much to his chagrin because it immediately filled his hand with sharp spikes, which my father had to remove with Gay hollering in pain. There were mussels on the rocks which mother cooked and served at dinner and they were quite delicious, being very clean so far from any land. Sometimes Dad cooked a stew and potatoes wrapped in foil in the fireplace, which was quite delicious. On Saturday night there was a country dance in the island hall where people of all ages gathered to socialise and do some square dancing. Then on Sunday there was a short church service. It was always fun to meet the ferry boat and see who was arriving, what they brought with them, and often people would rush down from their houses in whatever state they were, mothers with their aprons on, children half dressed, just to meet the boat.

I was fortunate enough to have several chances to visit the island with Lois and members of her family and once with just a family friend. Always it was a thrilling time. We might swim off the wooden jetty that had stairs leading down to different landing stages for the ferry boat so that it was the right height for high or low tides. At night there were phosphorescent plants that glowed with eerie beauty under the water. Best of all was the silence, the absence of all modern intrusive things like cars, radios, electric lights - here was space, quiet and natural beauty.



The House on Bakers Island, July 1950

Snow

Snow was very much part of our childhood. In winter we always had a season of snow, falling silent and heavy, remaining feet thick, drifted, covering fences between gardens, changing the landscape in which we lived. Snow ploughs would clear the streets leaving only an inch or so of packed snow on the surface, perfect for sliding down on sleds, with six foot high banks of snow on either side. Sidewalks became walled-in passageways with perhaps a few cars buried in the walls, covered by snow as the ploughs went by. I would wake in the morning to hear a scraping sound and knew at once that snow had fallen, Dad was shovelling a path from our back door, and the world seemed strangely hushed. Sometimes the street lights remained on after the day became light, and then we would turn on our radio to listen to the “no school” announcements. How glorious it was to hear the words “Salem, no school, all schools, all day”. Hooray - we shouted for joy and put on our warm snowsuits to tumble out into the snow and play, making snowballs, snow forts, digging out a great circular area to be flooded with hose and made into a skating rink in the garden. Sometimes we made a short ski run from the front garden down a bank to the lower back garden. Great jagged icicles hung from eaves and smaller ones dripped from window ledges. These could be plucked off and sucked or used to build sculptures with snow and ice. We made snowmen of course, rolling a small snowball along the ground letting it gather snow into itself and grow until finally it was huge enough to use for a snowman’s body. We lay in the snow waving arms and legs to leave “angel” imprints in the snow.



Once when I was very small, my mother woke me after I had been put to bed. She dressed me in a snowsuit and mittens, placed me on a sled and drew me along in the thick, silent snow under the stars, Gay on another sled being pulled by my father. I could feel their excitement as we went along the dark streets to Kernwood Country Club where the golf course formed smooth, rounded hills of snow, blue in the moonlight and there were many other families with sleds, sliding down the hills, pulling sleds back up after them, tumbling into the snow as sleds turned over, laughing and excited, enjoying a night-time holiday in the snow. My mother lay on her stomach on our sled and I lay on top of her, then whoosh, down we went, freezing wet fluffs of snow stinging our faces, speed thrilling shouts from our mouths. My father and Gay flew down past us. Over and over, the sleds were dragged up a hill and down we went, until the cold air and tiredness made us long for bed. I hardly remember mother pulling me home on the sled, but can just picture Randall Street, a narrow street leading to ours, and knowing we were nearly home.



*1943 - Sabrina in front of the house at 22
Buffum Street, Salem, Mass*

Randall Street was a poorly lit street, with few street lamps and old, dark grey houses along it on either side so that as I grew older and had to walk along it alone after dark, I always hurried, fearful of ‘bad men’, ghosts anything that lurked in the dark. Yet I also remember walking down it on starry nights with my mother, being especially aware of the stars and coloured Christmas lights glowing from windows, casting pastel colours onto the snow.

Salem was a town with a history of witchcraft that was perpetuated by the preservation of a witch house and jail, restored and open to the public; stories and plays (Arthur Miller's “The Crucible” among others); and gallows hill where 19 witches had been hanged. Our town was tainted by its evil past, and there remained for many of us a feeling that unappeased spirits wandered in dark places, that danger lurked in high, dark houses and cemeteries, that lonely streets might suddenly become endless in the white heat of summer and lead one on to nowhere. Leather factories had spilled their chemicals into the North River, which was heavily polluted and smelled foul. The factories themselves were closing, work being moved to the South of the country where labour was cheaper, as had happened with the cotton mills many years earlier. The city had areas of beauty such as Chestnut Street, Broad Street, Essex Street, where handsome homes, some built for the sea captains who traded with the East India Company had lived. Hamilton Hall was a gracious building, named after Alexander Hamilton, and turned into a lecture hall downstairs, a dance studio above, used for coming-out balls .

My Father's Room

Underneath our house, reached by a dark wooden, cobwebby staircase from the back hall, was the cellar. A sandy-coloured earth floor was packed hard underfoot and a narrow path of long wooden boards ran its length to the furnaces, black and hot in winter, their gaping mouths glowing red as my Father fed coal into them with his rasping shovel. Pipes ran along the rough wooden ceiling, and there was a musty smell of earth and coal dust, paint and metal, wood glue, turpentine and grease that attracted me into this shadowed, untidy underground place.

My Father had constructed a workbench out of old boards and bits of fencing. A metal vise was clamped at one end, and an old brown plastic radio played tinny music and news as he sawed and hammered, reaching for bits of wood or piping which was stored in a rumbling pile under the workbench. Beside him were two built-in cupboards stocked for the winter with bottles and jars of pears, grape juice, grape butter, tomato marmalade, and red current jelly that he and my Mother had patiently bottled in the Autumn, boiling and stewing great pans of fruits, fragrant with cloves until the house was filled with their delicious steam. The doors of these cupboards had for years been used for trying out paints; they were daubed with wonderful colours brushed on in bold strokes as each new paint tin was opened.

I loved to sit on my Father's high stool under the naked light bulb, breathing in hints of sawdust. It was safe and exciting there among all the noise of his hammering, the radio shouting through its plastic case. I could see out into the shadowy places the dark odd-shaped areas between the furnaces, the coal bins, under the stairs where the potatoes were kept, the small high window by the bulkhead, peering into the dark night. I looked up at gleaming coils of wire hung on nails from the ceiling, string wrapped around an old chair leg, glue pale and sticky, oozing from a large brightly-labelled tin. This was my Father's world where he was totally in charge, successful, no longer just a factory

foreman but a creator, an inventor, making useful things out of discarded chaos. No wealthy man in his leather-aroma'd library ever savoured his soul more finely than my Father did in his subterranean room.



1987 - Cellar at 22 Buffum St. Mrs Nicholson?

The Magic Christmas Tree

Snow had been falling and piling up in deep drifts for days as Christmas drew near. Outside the window, the world had turned into a white wonderland, trees and shrubs all laden and laced with snow, icicles like glass swords hanging from the roof. I was eight years old and had a very bad cold that had kept me indoors for what seemed like weeks. I had spent the first few days in bed, feeling very sorry for myself, continually blowing my runny nose that soon became sore and then stuffy. As usual, once the Kleenex box was empty, I was allowed to cut doors and windows into it, paste bright paper curtains inside and turn it into a little doll's house inhabited by my latest paper doll, and this kept me entertained for a while, but as I grew better, and was allowed to get up, how I longed to be outside again. I wanted to smell the fresh outdoor air, to play with the cold, wet snow, moulding it into balls and a snowman, to lie in its softness and wave my arms and legs to make an "angel" print in the snow. I was tired of the indoor world, the smell of furniture, of cooking, the sound of grownups talking, the radio.

One day mother filled the dishpan with snow and brought it into the kitchen for me to play with until, all too soon, it melted and I was left with a few inches of cold, dirty water. Somehow it seemed very sad that the beautiful white fluffy snow had so quickly vanished before my eyes, like a spring flower withering in my hand it lost its beauty and freshness in moments, having been removed from its natural place in the world. I didn't want another batch of snow indoors because once inside it was no longer really snow.

So the days dragged until one evening when Dad and Gay brought home our large Christmas tree, and Dad wired it upright in a large galvanized pail full of water, then stood it in a corner of the living room. Next we did what was a frequent custom in New England, threading needles with long strands of doubled white thread and stringing popcorn and cranberries to make garlands for the tree. Mom popped the corn in a

long-handled wire basket with a sliding lid, shaking it over the oil stove until fluffy white beads of corn appeared ready for the stringing. We sang carols, ate some of the popcorn and each designed our own garlands, according to how many pieces of popcorn went between each cranberry. A few pricked fingers did nothing to daunt our excitement and soon we were ready to decorate the tree. Dad put on the coloured lights, spacing them carefully all over the tree so that the electric cords hardly showed and the colours were balanced. Then the garlands were placed around the tree, looped gracefully, the white popcorn and red cranberries contrasting beautifully with the dark green, woods-smelling tree.

We unpacked our shining ornaments, coloured balls and icicles with silvered rims, and stars with points made of mirrors that fitted over the tree lights, giving them a depth and brilliance that much increased their beauty. Silver tinsel, hanging like streaks of rain, added the final glittering touch to our tree.

When it was done, we sang one more carol before going to bed, each of us feeling reverence at the transformation of a pine tree into this glorious object in our living room.

The next day I was as bored and restless as ever, still kept indoors by the tail end of my cold and the wintry weather outside. In the afternoon, I took my paper doll over to the tree, turned on the tree lights and began to make her walk among the branches. Blue light radiated against a mirrored star and glowed soft as starlight along a dark green branch, deep into the tree's centre. As my doll walked along the branch, suddenly it became to me a real woods, in starlight, and I too walked, smelling the rich piny smell, into the dark outdoor world. Some change had taken place, some magic thing had happened, turning our Christmas tree into a forest that I could enter whenever I wished, and I could walk along piny paths bathed in red light, or gold, green, blue or white, depending on which branch I chose to follow, for the tree lights in turn gave all these colours. Oh the marvellous freedom of running and playing among the pine woods, of smelling the rich scent of pine and seeing the lovely branches bathed in soft colours. I was thrilled,

transported to another world, a secret world I told no one about, for this was my discovery and to tell it might make it vanish. Someone might try and make me believe it wasn't real, but I knew it was real, for me, and for no one else. My days became days of mysterious joy and I'm sure everyone wondered why I was so content to stand by the Christmas tree walking a paper doll among its branches day after day. They did not know I had a whole world to myself, an enchanted world where only good and beautiful things happened and where I was free to wander as I chose regardless of having a cold. I was really outdoors, really free.

Christmas came and went, as did my cold, and soon I was outdoors playing with friends again, sliding down our street on my sled, skating on a round pond that Dad had made under the maple tree by digging a big shallow circle in the snow and flooding it with the garden hose so that it froze overnight. Evenings I skated round and round by yellow light streaming from the kitchen window and silvery stars glinting through tree branches overhead. And I sang carols softly to myself, remembering my enchanted forest.

The next year our Christmas tree was beautiful but not magical and I never again was able to re-capture that experience. It was something that just happened all by itself, some little chink in reality that let in, for me, the light of another and better world and I have remembered it all my life.

Screaming

One winter day when I was eight, I had a sudden longing to shout and yell at the top of my lungs, until I had expelled all my pent-up feelings.

I could have screamed and screamed, great gulps of air pumping in and out in joyous release. But I made the great mistake of asking permission first, would it be allowed? Could I just once scream in the house or garden? No, I couldn't. It would upset the neighbours, disturb people, someone might call the police.

"Wait", my mother said, "Wait until the summer." Then we could sail out to Coney Island. Far out on the edge of the rocks where only the birds live and nobody to hear, I could shout to my heart's content. I waited.

When summer came at last we sailed to Coney Island and climbed the hill. To the square concrete house, open to winds and weather; a fortress high above the shingled, rock strewn beach, covered with crunching shells. White droppings from the gulls like graffiti defacing the cliffs.

I wandered out alone to the far end of the island where clinging weeds and barnacles covered the rocks. Birds wheeled and screamed, then dived at me for disturbing them . I put a basket on my head for protection. Then, at last, filling my lungs with air, preparing to shout, not really wanting to now, I cried out trembling the air, but knowing the birds could cry far louder. Their screams drowned me as I stood sadly knowing how small I was.

Winter Morning

I knew as soon as I woke
And lay listening for the sounds of the morning
I knew that it had snowed.
Everything sounded much further away and softer,
muffled and cushioned by the white blanket
that lay deep and crisp outside.
Then came the scrape, scrape sound
of my Father's shovel and thud!
As he flung the snow from our path onto a bank.
I leapt up, my feet dancing on the icy floors,
As I rushed to the window to see.

Oh wonderful wonderful snow sparkling in the morning sun,
Icicles hanging from the pointed eaves of roofs
Trees like thick lace
their intricate branches snow-coated.
A sudden shake from a bird on a wire and down came a haze of snow.

Soon we would put on our snowsuits,
our hats and our mittens,
clip clip we would do up our boots, each cleat snapping tight round our
ankles,
Scarves wound round our necks and then out in the cold bright air,
Pulling our sleds to glide with a rasping sound over the snow
down
the
hill.

We'd make snow forts and snowballs, snow houses, and snowmen,
with this wonderful stuff dropped from the sky,
we could make anything we wanted! No one told us how to use it,
or not to waste it - it was free and plentiful - it was ours!

One day when it thawed, small rivers gushed and flowed down the gutters,

We made dams and sailed boats, watching our magical snow

run

away,

until next year.

When on another such quiet morning,

We knew as soon as we woke - we knew -

IT HAD SNOWED!



1942 - The path by the east side of the house at Salem Mass, Sabrina's doll

The Moss Family launch Sea Moss

“Dad is going to buy a sailboat.“, my mother’s words filled us with great surprise and excitement. “He thinks it will be good for us all to get out in the fresh sea air every day in the summer”. My brother, Gay (Gaylord) and I had been very ill the previous year, spending over two months in hospital, and we were still very thin, pale and weak. My father had decided that we would join a yacht club at the Salem Willows Park overlooking a sea channel between the towns of Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts. We would travel by bus from our home to the Willows every day, wonderfully free to spend the days swimming from one of the two little beaches, playing on rock cliffs and wandering around the park and amusement arcades while Mother sat in a rocking chair on the porch of the club with other grown up members, talking, knitting and producing food from a big square basket when we returned hungry. In the early evening Dad would join us as soon as he could get away from his work and if the wind was suitable, we would go out for a sail in the harbour. Weekends we would spend all day at the Willows, or out sailing among the many interesting islands in the bay, sometimes landing on one to cook a picnic meal, swim or explore.

But first, we had to take our boat, now sitting in the yard of our house, to a beach at Ropes’ Point, about half a mile away, christen her Sea Moss, launch her into the water and then Dad would row her down the channel to the mooring area of the yacht club. Dad had filled a large oil drum with concrete for a mooring. He embedded a ring in the concrete, connected a chain to it and rope to the end of the chain, with a wooden buoy on the end that would float on top of the water and mark where our mooring was located once it had been sunk into the sea bed.

“But how will we get Sea Moss to Ropes’ Point, Dad?” we asked. “Let’s see, now you have a red metal cart, Gay and your friend Sonny Miller also has one I’m sure he’d let us borrow. We can tie them together, put the boat on top and pull it along the streets to the point. Mom and Kathy

can carry the spars (mast and boom). We'll have to get up early in the morning of course, 6.00 o'clock so we can get to the club by noon before the sun gets too hot". Dad always longed to get us up early in the morning because he was an early riser by nature and he usually greeted us in the morning with the words "get up, the day's half over already!"

The day arrived, we packed our square picnic basket with food, and gathered around our boat which had been lifted and secured onto the two carts the previous evening. Sonny arrived to help us pull the boat and he would take the wagons home after our launching. Mother and I lifted the spars, which were certainly heavy on my shoulders and off we rattled down the streets, making such a clatter and rumble in the early morning silence that I'm amazed people didn't yell at us as we went past, but no one did. A few rest stops were necessary, but puffing and sweating, we arrived at Ropes' Point, pushed the carts down into the sea, unlashed the boat and christened her, then handing the carts to Sonny, we stepped aboard Sea Moss. Dad tied the mooring can tightly to the boat's stern and started rowing. We waved goodbye to Sonny, promising him a sail on another day.

Now the sun was getting hotter, glistening on water all around us, silver bright. Big ships made their way down the shipping canal nearer to the Beverly shore and we watched them with interest. Dad rowed and rowed. We had made good progress at first, but now we seemed to be moving very slowly indeed, really hardly at all despite Dad's pulling at the oars until he glistened with sweat and panted from the effort. We stopped for a sandwich and drink, then Dad rowed again. "Will it be much longer?" I whined, "I need to go to the bathroom and it's very hot". "Use a tin can", said Dad, so I crouched down in the boat tinkling my pee into the can and throwing it into the sea. Mother looked worried.

Hours had gone by and we were still a long way from the yacht club. "What could be wrong, Lloyd" asked Mother. "I don't know, Floss", he replied. "Something seems to be pulling us backwards." Dad peered over the back of the boat to see what was making it so hard to row - was something caught on it? "I see what's wrong", he moaned "The mooring

has pulled loose from the boat and is dragging about ten feet behind us on its chain, acting like a sea anchor. No wonder it's so hard to row". He lowered himself overboard into the sea, swam back to the mooring and brought it up to the boat, lashing it tightly against the stern again. Then he climbed back into the boat, his clothes dripping, and began to row again, this time making some progress.

How long the day seemed, how hot we all were and sunburnt by this time. We were very sick of the sight of Beverly, of the channel, of sea gulls complaining and sun, sun, sun. We had sung "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" and other jolly songs several times, but we no longer felt like singing.

At last in the late afternoon we arrived at the Salem Willows Yacht Club, feeling like adventurers coming home from the sea. Dad let us off at the raft below the club, sank the mooring, tied Sea Moss safely in her new berth and was fetched ashore in a dingy. We were on land again, thinking it wonderful to be able to run and play, wash ourselves, drink cool water and sit in the shade. Our first day at sea was ended and we felt ourselves tested by adversity, no longer sissy landlubbers us, but hardened sea folk ready for the thrills of adventure on the high seas. Oh, but how good it was to get that bus home, have a cold shower under the hose tied up against our house, and sink into a cool bed that night.

Sailing

“I’ll butter the bread”, I said, starting to spread margarine over the slices of bread spread out in rows on the kitchen table while Gay mixed fillings of crabmeat and egg salad. Mom filled the wide thermos with a hot mixture of macaroni, tomato and ground beef that we called American chop suey, wrapped cucumber and carrots sticks in waxed paper, and soon we had filled the large, square picnic basket with enough food to last us for the day, adding fresh fruit and Graham crackers for desserts.

We walked to the bus stop, Gay and I carrying the basket between us, Mom laden with a bag of swim suits, towels, sweaters and warm clothes for evening. The bus was crowded and very hot, we squeezed on, becoming separated from one another, each clinging to whatever strap or seat back we could grab for the stuffy half-hour bus ride. We were patient and happy because we were going to the Willows, to the green park beside the sea with its cool salt air and big shady trees, its two little beaches where we could swim in icy water when the tide came in. And if we were lucky, Dad would be released from his work at the electronics factory earlier than usual because of the heat, and we would go out for an evening sail.

Mom was soon settled at the yacht club, beyond the swinging gate that read “Members Only” and with what pride we would push through that gate, knowing that other people passing by could not enter like us. The beach beside the club was very small with some large, smooth rocks forming a protective semi-circle like a threshold to keep us from drifting into deeper water once the tide came in. We played on these rocks while the tide was low, examining pools of water left among them, searching for small pretty stones. When we felt hungry, we dashed back to Mom for sandwiches from the square basket and off we went again.

This time to the only street leading from town to the park, where there were penny arcades, stalls selling food, a shooting gallery, dodgems,

whip and merry-go-round that played a tune called “Tico Tico” on its calliope all day long. We watched people go round and round on the whip, whizzing so fast at each end of its oval track that they lost their breath, then on to the dodgems where people drove little cars round and round the greasy floor, trying to bump into other people’s cars and then they all got stuck until the man operating them came round to push them apart. There were wind-up peep shows in the penny arcade, an electronic fortune teller, a car driving game and many things I hardly remember. Without money, we still had plenty to see, watching people try their skill at the shooting gallery, watching salt-water-taffy being pulled on big electronic machine arms that stretched the different pastel coloured candy over and over itself, then another machine wrapped the finished taffys in waxed paper, twisting the ends and dropping them into boxes.

The tide was in and off we sped to the beach to swim and play in very cold water, coming out to dig in the sand when our lips turned blue. In and out of the water we went, now hot in the sun of an afternoon that may have been in the upper 80's Fahrenheit or even warmer, so that we were hot hot hot one minute and then shrieking with cold as we dashed into the icy sea.

Tired at last, we returned to the yacht club where Mom rubbed us down with towels and we changed into dry clothes. Dad arrived early as we had hoped. Soon he had the sailbag down from the hot, wood-scented sail loft, the oars, rudder and tiller which we all carried down a steep ramp to the float (a large raft) where people brought their boats in to load and unload or tie up their dingys. Dad and Mom borrowed a dingy to row out to Sea Moss, loosed her from her mooring and Mom rowed the dingy back while Dad brought Sea Moss back to the float. Carefully stowing the food basket, warm clothes, and oars, Dad then rigged the sail, attached the rudder and tiller, lowered the centreboard and we were gliding away with the wind.

Dad had learned to sail by reading a book, and truth to tell he didn’t really know all that much for he found out at the end of the first year that the sails were on upside down, but we were certain that he knew all there

was to know and furthermore, that he would cope with any emergency. Dad had been in the navy as a young man in the 1920's, had spent four years in China and Japan, not just as a common sailor, but as the engineer in charge of the gyroscope compass, a new and almost magical instrument in those days. He had had adventures that we could only dimly imagine, looking at photos of him in an old album he sometimes let us see – Dad riding in a rickshaw, on the Great Wall of China riding a horse, with a group of very young and happy looking sailors against a very strange and foreign background. This highly experienced adventurer, our Dad, would surely be equal to anything that happened at sea.

So we sailed, and I soon learned that one needed to take no toys or things to do in a boat. The sea itself plays with you, slapping and gurgling against the boat, stringing ribs and circles of water and bubbles beside and behind you, sometimes chopping into rough little waves that toss and bounce, sometimes smoothing into great long swells that draw you along and up, along and down, letting you see only sky when you glide along the valley between these long waves. And if the sea plays games, so does the wind, for a sailboat is not like a car that can drive steadily in any direction, but must tack and veer to catch wind from the right directions, so that you might sail out of a bay in one smooth ride, but find on coming home that you have to turn the boat back and forth catching the wind at this angle and that, zigzagging across the bay for a very long time to travel a short distance ahead. The sun too has games, turning the water into greens and blues, greys and golds as it strikes the surface and sets its silver fire upon the waves, or plays hide and seek among the clouds, hiding and letting the world go grey, then piercing the sky and lighting a section of water, land, a house or island as if to say, “look! look! what I have found! See well this moment, for it will never come again and be just like it is now!”

Fish played with us, schools of silvery fish glided beneath and around us, large black skates slid past from the depths, porpoises wheeled their sides along the water and jumped joyfully with a splash of sudden excitement. Sometimes a piece of cork or wood drifted past, from who

knows where? Sometimes I stood on the tiny deck at the bow, holding onto the mast as Sea Moss leaped and danced over waves that sloshed my feet and sent spray on the wind to lick my face. Sometimes I lay on the floor of the boat, my head under the deck, and listened to water slap, crunch, slap, crunch, and gurgle its long, liquid sound as it flowed away under me.

We sailed along the Beverly shore to Beverly Farms where fine big houses stood on lawns and gardens extending down to the sea. Some way out was our favourite, a large white house with a Spanish red-tiled roof, and this became a waymark for us. "See, we've reached the house with the red roof", meant that we were well on our way to Baker's Island, beyond which we hardly ever sailed because that was open sea.

Now as sunlight waned and evening drew in we anchored to eat our supper, the American chop suey that tasted better than I think any other food could ever taste, out there in the salty air with sea gulls crying now here, now there, and hunger from our day's swimming pinching our stomachs. We ate buttered bread too, and the carrot and cucumber sticks, apples and graham crackers. Then turning for home, we found the wind had played a trick and left us, our sail flapped uselessly then hung still. Oh dear how would we get home, would we spend the night there or drift out to sea and be lost? "Whistle for the wind", said Dad and we all whistled for a while but still the air was motionless and so were we. Finally Dad began to row, a very heavy job because our sailboat was not really built for rowing, but he made some slow progress and then suddenly we saw little ripples across the water that came steadily towards us. A puff of wind, and then more ripples; our sail started to fill out and soon we were gliding homewards as darkness closed in around us.

A tired Moss family landed at the yacht club and soon we had packed everything away again, returned Sea Moss to her mooring and were heading home on the late evening bus. Not a crowded bus this time, nor a hot ride, but a cool, smooth journey of people leaning towards each other or slumped in their seats at the end of a long summer's day.



Sea Moss II

A.D.

Down the street I wander slowly
Past the houses draped with snow
And the Christmas lights within them
Cast a softly tinted glow.

To the square my footsteps take me,
To the Crowds, the bells, the song,
And my heart beats wild within me,
As I join the festive throng.

All around me there is color,
Blinking! Rushing! Steady! Bright!
Reds and yellows, greens and violets,
Lighting up the Holy night.

Through the crowds and then beyond them
Do I wander through the snow,
Then the lights fade out behind me,
Faint the joyous noises grow.

From the distance new sounds reach me,
Strains of music soft and dim,
Then my thoughts turn to the manger,
To the wise men and to Him!

Too Late

Anticipate your precious dream
Oh fool, oh human thing;
At last it comes
And then it's past
A pity that it could not last
But it was only time,
Fleeting, rushing, transient time!

A moment, then a memory,
A smile and then a dream.
Too soon it comes
Too soon it's gone
The starry night soon fades to dawn
For it is caught in time,
Cruel, restless, careless time.

Reach out! Grab! Clutch! Take what you can,
It slips right through your hands.
The moments fade with hours and years,
Too late for hope
Too late for tears,
They're swallowed up in time,
Marching, beating, steady time -
They're gone!

The Awakening

Stark and bright against the sky,
Sway the limbs to autumn's sigh,
As the wind whips briskly by,
The city.

Swirl the crispy, crimson leaves,
From the giant Maple trees,
And adorn with careless ease,
The city.

Whisks the wind coquettishly,
Part of fall's conspiracy,
To wake from summer's lethargy,
The city.

Night

What sort of magic is the night
When all is soundless and the light
Is gone!

Whence comes this wonder dark and deep
That lulls the weary into sleep
Anon!

What king of power can this be,
That rules the world so quietly
'Till dawn!

Transience

Hear the lonely cry
As the gulls wing by
To the land lost in the sea.
Where the fresh salt air
Blows everywhere
As the waves toss – wild and free.
Where the sand-grains sing,
And the seaweeds cling
And the rocks gleam,
Washed with foam.
And the clouds unfold
To a sky of gold
As the gulls soar swiftly home.

Commonplace

A magic moment sweet and precious soars
High beyond all telling and all words.
Never prosaic, earthly; silence sings,
And takes the magic moment on its wings
To where no human voice can stop its flight
No tongues its wondrous majesty recite.
For he who turns his moment to a phrase,
Destroys the lace-spun dream-worked drifting haze
That keeps the moment splendid – his alone.
A shimmering jewel, his magic moment shone,
Then it was told and magic fell away,
Celestial moment – common; everyday!

Sing Out Sweet Land – No. 1

Sing out sweet land,
Land of the free;
Let your great mountains
echo liberty.
Sing out sweet land,
Of patriots' dreams;
Thunder Oh falls,
And murmur O streams.
Sing, Sing America,
America my home.
You are my country,
My heart will never roam.
O roar with your rivers,
Whisper with your sand.
America, my country
Sing out Sweet land!



1955 - Salem High School - Sing out Sweet Land

Sing Out Sweet Land – No. 2

A land of peace and happiness
Where every man is free.
A land of youth and progress
And of opportunity.
This is what the pilgrims dreamed of
And their dream has come to be.
Sing out sweet land, sing out.

A land of giant buildings
Reaching high into the air.
A land of trees and mountains
And fields of flowers fair.
We will keep this for our country,
Through the hardships we must bear.
Sing out sweet land, Sing out!

O Land sing of your glorious past,
Your wondrous future too!
Sing out, O land, of days gone by
And of days that are new!
Sing out O land
No other land is half as grand as you!
So
Sing out
Sing out
Sing out
SING OUT SWEET LAND!!!

Mr & Mrs Clark & Percy
painting by david hockney

standing by the balcony
in her purple dress
she is edged with light
but her eyes are dark and knowing
sprawled in his chair
cigarette dangling
he digs his bare toes in the carpet
and his eyes are wary
percy the white cat sits on his lap
like a great white stone
looking out
the jingly-leafed lamp
pokes fun at the silent telephone
and on the table
fluttering white lillies wave
at the young couple with ancient eyes
and today's love.

From "To The Lighthouse"
by Virginia Woolf

They had tacked, and they were sailing swiftly, buoyantly on long rocking waves which handed them on from one to another with an extraordinary lilt and exhilaration beside the reef. On the left a row of rocks showed brown on one, higher rock, a wave incessantly broke and spurted a little column of drops which fell down in a shower. One could hear the slap of the water and patter of falling drops and a kind of hushing and hissing sound from the waves rolling and gambolling and slapping the rocks as if they were wild creatures who were perfectly free and tossed and tumbled and sported like this for ever.

Poetic Assault on Above Paragraph
by Sabrina Lewins

They tacked then sailed swift, buoyant on the sea,
That rocked them on long waves liltingly
Handed them from one wave to another
exhilarating wave,
Then tossed them further.
They saw brown rocks beneath the water's veil,
Which thinned, a high green rock to then reveal,
Drops spurted, broke then fell in ceaseless shower,
Hushing and hissing past as they sailed nearer.
Waves like wild animals completely free
Rolled, slapped and Gambolled on eternally.

Friends

A room deep with spring evening,
Colour reflecting from a garden
And voices from the street remind us of a world outside
Going by.

We sit, wrapped in space,
Riding our conversation like waves,
Lifting our words, joining them
Into a sea of thoughts.

Shadows outline our shapes,
Define our separateness in the room.
Darkness grows, marooning us.
The world outside still glows and
Church bells ring.

Then someone puts on a lamp.
The image reverses and we are joined by the light.
Reassured, we draw the curtains,
Safe in our room
Our friends.

Jessie

I first met Jessie Lewins when she flew to America for the wedding of myself and Jeffery in February 1959. She had purchased him a military sword and felt a bit nervous bringing it on the plane, but in those days such things were allowed. After our wedding she spent a few days in Salem staying with my parents, and unfortunately experienced her first big New England snowstorm. Without boots, she was confined to the house for some days and felt very frustrated at not spending the time with Jeffery and me in Cambridge. I was able to change her flight home so that she did get a visit with us after all.

In November 1959 Jeffery and I arrived in the tiny village of Meysey Hampton, Gloucestershire, where she had purchased a very old cottage using money both she and Jeffery had saved. It is a charming village near Cirencester, though at that time of year it was cold and damp - of course no central heating and the bathroom had a chemical toilet that had to be emptied in the nearby farmer's cesspit (discreetly). Jessie had a small sitting room kitchen and bedroom upstairs while we had the living room, tiny kitchen, bathroom and bedroom downstairs. We were there for two or three months because Jeffery had a couple of months of embarkation leave before his next posting, which was in Germany.

Jessie loved her small raised garden and learned about "double digging" to prepare trenches for growing vegetables as well as shrubs and flowers. I remember well her rattling buckets in our tiny kitchen in the early mornings as she worked in and watered her garden. Jeffery was working into the early morning hours trying to write a scientific publication and I was not popular for getting up late with him instead of appearing at a "decent" hour with Jessie. So our first few weeks were somewhat strained and I knew I was not the kind of daughter-in-law she had envisaged, but we slowly grew used to each other and when it was obvious that a grandchild was on the way there was a much happier feeling between us.

I was fascinated to learn that my rather stern mother-in-law worked part-time in a bookmakers betting shop in Cirencester. She had a good French vocabulary, could pronounce the horses' names easily and was a very capable woman. When my first child Lloyd, was born I had to remain in England with her while Jeffery returned to Germany and his regiment following a course he had been sent on. The few weeks of waiting were very amusing for both me and Jessie. I drove us around in a small Volkswagen car, hardly able to get behind the steering wheel and quite a novelty to the farmers in my big bright red maternity dress. We visited several picturesque villages, went to a movie and watched tennis on TV to pass the time. When the baby was overdue, I drove myself to the maternity home. The next afternoon Jessie caught a bus to visit me but I was in the delivery room and all she experienced was a very low, masculine cry from her new grandson, Lloyd, before she had to catch the bus home.

As the years went by, and we saw Jessie for visits and periods of leave and I began to realize what a difficult life she had been dealt. Chris says she had received a scholarship to the Royal College of Music (she played piano) but eventually had to leave for financial reasons I guess. Money had always been tight and two world wars ruined the lives and careers of both Chris' and Jeffery's fathers. I know there was one time where Jessie and the children had to live in a tiny, flimsy holiday cottage for an extended period.

Eventually her sight failed and she sold the cottage, buying a small but very comfortable flat in a building just behind Hughes Parry Hall (London University Student Residence) where we lived. She used to have the children over, one at a time, and was also able to babysit for us once in a while. She sang to them sometimes, often old music hall songs and was very fond of them all. Sadly her health deteriorated and eventually she died in a care home in Caterham, Surrey after breaking her hip. Clearing out her apartment, I found only a few clothes, personal essentials, and household items - no letters, no clues to her past. She left life with hardly a trace after living what must have been an

extraordinarily full, varied, challenging and hopefully, sometimes happy and rewarding existence. I do wish I had known her better but I think she preferred to remain discreet about much of her life and I had to respect that. I just think she was a really colourful character, willing to fight for her children's education, health and welfare, with a wry sense of humour and courage well beyond the ordinary.

I have only one photo of Jessie taken at the cottage in Meysey Hampton, which I attach. In her 70's she was still slim with a girlish figure, but she really didn't want to be photographed. Her funeral was at a crematorium in London and her ashes were scattered there.



Marooned at Kew Gardens

Sailing on the River Thames, escaping from our central London flat for a peaceful afternoon in our new polystyrene boat, was our dream. With our three children aged 9, 8 and 3, we drove down to Kew Bridge, lifted the boat off the roof rack of the car, and with a good deal of struggling and a few bashed knuckles, managed to plonk it in the muddy water, its gleaming white sides already black, streaked with slime from the Slipway. Wading out into the ooze, my husband lifted the children, bulky in their life-jackets, and placed them in the boat, I scrambled aboard and we pushed off, the sail rattling across, cracking a few heads as we huddled, bent over and desperately cramped, the little boat floating sluggishly towards the centre of the river. We had a plastic box of sandwiches, some cakes, and a flask of tea stowed at our feet, though whose feet were whose was not particularly clear just then.

"We'll sail down-river against the tide", said my husband, "Then it will be an easy trip back with the tide to help us." Logical enough we thought. Unfortunately, the wind didn't appear to be quite strong enough to carry us against the tide and it soon became obvious that with 5 people in the boat, we were going to drift along with the tide and then not be able to get home.

"Lloyd," said my husband brightly to our elder son, "I'm going to sail over to that beach just a little further down from where we launched the boat, then you can jump off and with the load a bit lighter, I can soon pick up speed, sail back to fetch you, and we'll be away." For some reason we believed him. Lloyd was landed on this deserted strip of grey sand and we optimistically pushed off, to continue drifting helplessly along with the tide.

"Sorry", said my husband, we still can't make any headway with so many people in the boat". So he sailed across to what looked a reasonably pleasant beach on the opposite bank and left the other two

children and me there with a cheery promise to be back in a few minutes once he got sailing properly. We settled down to wait, watching our forlorn elder boy wave to us from the opposite bank. A police launch went past, creating quite a chop on the oily water. Then a large pleasure cruiser and a tourist boat filled with people singing and waving merrily, unaware of our plight. There were horrid little black flies on the beach, dirty froth from the river crusting the sand, and worst of all, there was no way we could get inland to Kew Gardens and back to our car, as marshy land and impenetrable grasses separated us from civilization. We sat on the beach and watched Daddy slowly drift with the tide until he was out of sight. We munched a sandwich without appetite, just to keep busy, and mooched around the beach but it wasn't really much of a place for collecting shells and we were getting bored with the whole thing. Lloyd began waving and shouting from the opposite bank.

"Don't worry, I've found somebody to come over and rescue you", he yelled. He couldn't mean the young couple floundering about in a rubber dingy and sputtering outboard motor that kept stalling as the choppy river waves gushed over its sides, he couldn't - he did! They battled across, stalling in front of a large cruiser that swerved just in time to avoid colliding with them.

"Are you sure it's safe, Mommy" asked my younger son, doubtfully. "Not really, hold on for God's sake and sit on your feet to try and keep the rest of you dry". I helped him into the grey bathtub ankle deep with river water and closed my eyes and prayed. Finally getting up the courage to look, I saw him landing safely on the opposite shore. As the couple fought their way bravely across again, I tried not to visualize tomorrow's newspaper headlines, MOTHER AND CHILD DROWNED CROSSING THAMES IN DINGY. The young couple were back and I lifted my small daughter into the muddy, waterlogged boat, then scrambled in myself, clutching the box of sandwiches. Terrified, I clung onto both child and boat, trying not to look at the cruiser bearing down on us, and concentrating on keeping my balance as the little dingy pitched across the waves, water pouring onto our feet and the sandwich box floating around our ankles. Finally we reached the shore, sighed

with relief and tumbled out onto a beach a few hundred yards from the slipway, separated from it by a ragged rock cliff. My elder son scrambled across to meet us and led us precariously across the cliff whilst a ferocious sounding dog barked menacingly at us from some unseen yard - we hoped he was restrained.

The four of us gathered wet, muddy and hungry around the car, little black flies settling on us as we waited in the gathering twilight. Then a red sail appeared down the river, and our polystyrene boat, towed by a motorboat, gradually moved up the river towards us, my husband lolling in the gunwale.

Driving home a short while later, my husband remarked gaily "I must see if we can launch the boat at the Welsh Harp - we could have a lovely day's sail from there!"

War

The feeling swelled and grew until,
Pain deep inside produced a wail,
Which pierced the air and growing stronger,
Released itself on earth as anger,
That rolled its dark, destructive ball,
Through centuries and gathered all,
The refuse of man's hate and fear,
Then spewed it forth and called it War.

And we have invented a killing machine,
That razes the landscape and licks it clean,
We shoot, we bomb, we curse and we fight,
In the name of religion, or freedom or right.
Our armies thunder and people die,
But its in our hearts the seeds of war lie.

Our hearts too separate each from the other,
To feel the pain which we share forever,
The pain of living and loving and dying,
We kill each other crying,
crying.

Aunt Rachel, a portrait

My great-aunt Rachel stands fourth from the left in a photograph of her family - nine brothers and sisters, the girls in white dresses, and while they are looking outwards with rather determined faces, she stands slightly askew, her dreaming eyes turned towards an inwards vision.

I first knew her as a middle-aged woman in plain, richly coloured Woollen dresses, her silvery hair curled neatly about her head, bright glasses framing her strong, intelligent face. She brought a sense of drama with her, describing events at the Bank in Salem where she worked or tales of people at the Church where she devoted a good deal of her energy. A sensible, solid woman one might think, Ah, but there was also mischief and fun combined with a constant extravagance that sprang from her love of beautiful things.

She had been caught between generations, the last child, and not a wanted child, born of parents too old to welcome her. She had grown up amongst my mother's family, trying to be one of them but never quite managing it. Her urge towards mischief made her tell wild and frightening tales which reduced the younger children to tears, she hid jingle bells in her bed on Christmas Eve and would terrify the little ones into thinking they would receive no gifts, because they were awake when Santa's sleigh was coming. And this slightly naughty, fun-loving character never left her. She would come at Thanksgiving or Christmas with a basket of mince pies and brandy butter, holly, and bright sweets, dancing about the kitchen with excitement at the smell of the good food to come. She always had special things - angel chimes, a wreath made of silver and gold coloured metals, different curtains for summer and winter, antique furniture in her tiny, tiny apartment. Everything she cooked was made with real butter and cream, brandy, nuts and lobster, or other expensive ingredients that no one else we knew could afford. Once she gave a lobster party for her women friends and became ill later in the evening, vomiting. Her friends, suspecting ptomaine poisoning all

rushed to the hospital to have their stomachs pumped out. But Rachel, it transpired, had only come down with the flu.

She had married, but her husband died soon afterwards of an infected blister on his heel, after an evening's bowling. Her son Warren, product of this excessively brief union, was a pale, sensitive boy with perfect pitch, destined for a musical career. But alas he was snatched from High school, put in military uniform and suddenly found himself on the beach at Okinawa, amongst dead and dying. Scared literally out of his mind, he was ill for a long time and eventually returned, a strange and withdrawn young man. Rachel's hopes for him faded and he re-enlisted in the Intelligence Corps, going to live on islands in the Pacific and gradually fading out of her life altogether.

She lived on, alone, working at the Bank and living in her flat near the Bay in Marblehead. She represented for us all the last of the family, long dead or scattered, who used to gather at the house on Upham Street at Great Grandma Ely's. When Rachel played the "Rustles of Spring" on the piano or accompanied herself as she sang "Tit Willow", shadows of the past seemed to surround us and through her presence we could re-live all the joyful family parties and fun that the Elys and Poiriers had enjoyed.

Then my parents migrated West, and Rachel's terror of travel prevented her from joining them.

She wrote seldom and then not at all. I am left with this picture of a wistful face, long black hair tasselled on one side of her head as she muses - and I wonder what she was thinking about then.



1916 - Family reunion in Salem: Frank Cyril Ely, Olive Clara (Clarise) (Liberty) Ely, Frank Ely, Rachel Ely, Lena Ely, Florence Ely, Anastasia (Ely) Poirier, Ruby Ely, George Ely, Victoria Ely, Oscar Ely

Tollesbury Evening

Grey clouds roll across a turbulent sky,
Tearing into light blue holes,
And opening to the universe beyond.
Sunset colours the world's edge to brilliance.

I walk between deeply shadowed hedgerows
A breeze behind me leafing through the trees
pursues me; makes me anxious as I climb
along the winding path to higher ground.
Where fields of dry, clattering, cream-gold grain
Bend and blow beneath the darkening sky.

I watch the evening cast its net of mist
across the silent marshland, while
an ice-bright moon hangs in the endless air.
Huge and black the power station hums
all alone, far on the other shore.

Riding The Tides

Grey green salt marsh clean swept by sea wind,
Edge washed with salt-filled sea water breaking,
Shells scooped and scattered, left by the low tide,
Beaches of crushed shells fringing the lowland.

Waving, bending grasses and reeds blow,
Rippling with shadows as clouds travel over,
Whispering, whispering dryly they murmur,
Secrets they carry out on the saltmarsh.

Now with the water far out for hours,
Mud gleams and shines, still wet from the ocean,
Bright blue reflections mirror its surface,
Bright blue memories linger upon it.

Boats slowly tilt as the water recedes,
Hulls loom dry on the channel-carved saltings;
Where are the people who raced them through sea spray?
Why are they lying alone now forgotten?

Sad as the grey gulls fly over them crying,
Wheeling and wheeling above the cracked landscape,
Sucked dry and emptied, silent and lifeless,
Pierced by spikes of greeny-grey samphire.

Now the tide turns and water advances,
Spreading and washing its way up the inlets,
Filling channels, floating seaweeds,

Wetting the rocks and low-lying sand bars.

Birds scream and scold at the intruding water,
Angry to see that it covers their playground,
Boats in their mud berths right themselves slowly,
Floating again on the sky imaged water.

Two men are coming with oars on their shoulders,
Tramping the sea wall in thigh boots and oilskins,
Dragging their skiff over mud across shingle,
Launched on the water, they row to their vessel.

Clusters of sails glide and turn down the channel,
Crossing and tacking, then catching the wind,
Whipping, the cracking sails flutter and billow,
Chasing and racing the boats out to sea.

Gone are the beaches, gone are the sand bars,
Covered and vanished, their silence forgotten,
Hugging the shoreline the sea calls us outwards,
Flashing and dancing and teasing us on.

Tollesbury 1984
Sabrina Lewins

Phone Calls

I had just stepped out of the shower with my hair dripping, when the phone rang, and hoping it was Tony, I rushed into my parents' room to answer it. We had had a bit of an argument the night before and for the first time in ages there were no plans for us to meet tonight - it was a real tragedy considering I was only 18 and it was a Saturday night. I flung myself across the bed, careless of the wet patches I was making on the bedcover, and grabbed the phone.

"Hello", I said, trying to sound casual. "Hello, is Cathy there?" a voice, definitely not Tony's, inquired. "There's no Cathy living here", I said in annoyance, "You must have the wrong number." "Wait." the voice persisted "Look, I'm sorry to be a nuisance but I've got a hell of a problem and I've obviously dialled the wrong number but I really need someone to help me this morning. I'm a writer, and I'm also blind. The thing is a student named Cathy was supposed to come and read to me this morning, a really important reference for the final chapter of a novel I'm writing. It's due at the publishers in a few days and I just must get someone to read to me - Cathy hasn't shown up. You sound like you've a good clear voice. Would you consider coming over and doing a bit of reading - I'll pay you well, five pounds an hour." "Um, well", I hesitated, "I was hoping to go into town later..." "Great", replied the voice, "Look, I live near the town centre, 8 Meldreth Crescent, and I'll be waiting for you as soon as you can get here, Larry Stone is the name, see you soon", "But," I tried to reply, only he had rung off.

This was ridiculous, why should I go and read to some poor blind guy I knew nothing about. Why indeed? Because Tony, damn him, hadn't rung, because I could use the money, because my parents were sure I never did anything useful or helpful for anyone, since I left school three months ago and started working at the bank. They couldn't understand why I went out every night, sitting for hours on end at the pub with Tony. Come to think of it, neither could I. Tony wasn't particularly bright or

even fun to be with, and he certainly didn't treat me very well. He was madly jealous if I even looked at another chap, but he never spent any money on me and we never went anywhere but the pub. He was dead sexy though with his black leather jacket and kind of mean look about the mouth.

Mum and Dad were out shopping so I borrowed some of Mum's nail varnish and a pair of her knickers (mine were all in the wash) and sat on the end of the bed drying my hair. Tony really was a sod, the more I thought about it the less I wanted to speak to him. Suddenly I decided: I would go and read to that blind chap, anything for a change.

I felt really nervous standing at the door of his house waiting for him to answer the bell. What on earth would I say to him, what would it be like talking to someone who was blind? What would he be like? The door opened suddenly and I stood facing a tall, lean man with curly reddish hair and light blue eyes. He must have been about 27 or 30 at least, but really nice-looking. I felt awkward and almost pretended not to be there, thinking that perhaps if I didn't answer him he'd believe I'd gone. But he reached out and touched me lightly on the arm, then asked me inside. I'd expected that the house would be all dim and dingy, what with him being unable to see and all, but it was bright and sunny, full of plants and polished wood furniture. It was peaceful too.

So I read to him and he liked my voice, saying it was musical and he enjoyed listening to me. Then he asked if I could come regularly two or three times a week to do a bit of reading and perhaps some typing for him - same rate of pay. He must have had a lot of money it seemed to me. I couldn't get over how well he seemed to manage finding his way about the house, even making sandwiches and tea for us at lunch time. And he was a real gentleman, really treated me like a lady. I was very impressed and said I'd be glad to help out for as long as he needed.

The weeks went by and I began to look forward more and more to my evenings at Larry's and Saturdays and Sundays as well. Tony seemed like just a kid to me now and I hardly bothered to talk to him when he

phoned - he seemed amazed that his magnetic charms, such as they were, no longer held me in thrall. In fact I could see what a louse he was. My parents were a bit puzzled of course, wondering why I suddenly found it so interesting to spend hours of my free time helping an elderly blind man (well I had to lie a bit to keep them from worrying). They were pleased of course that I wasn't hanging around the pubs with Tony, but you know parents, if they aren't worrying about one thing, they're desperate about another. It's their age I guess. I wasn't sure why I was enjoying being at Larry's so much either, but it was nice to have someone treat me really well for a change, and I really enjoyed the work. It was fun to read the books he was writing and when I read things he needed for reference, it was as if we were sharing together in some special way. He even began discussing his work with me and asking my opinion on passages. I was definitely flattered.

One day I had more typing to do than usual and it struck me that the way the desk was positioned was nothing short of maddening. It was alright for a blind person who didn't need any light to work, but the way I sat, I was always casting my own shadow on the paper and it was slowing me down a great deal. While he was making lunch in the kitchen I hit upon the idea of moving the desk around the other way and putting the telephone on the left-hand corner instead of the right. I was typing away, oblivious to everything when Larry came in to ask if I wanted tuna fish or cheese in my sandwiches. The phone rang, he stretched across to answer it, lost his balance because the phone wasn't there and the chair was, and he fell over me, knocking us both onto the floor. His body lay warm and tumbled across mine, his hands seeking to find something familiar closed gently around my shoulder, my waist, and then he was kissing me. The phone rang and rang.

My Mother said the other day, it seemed odd that someone as vain as I used to be could marry a man who didn't even know what she looked like. But Larry knows, he can tell by someone's voice whether they are attractive or not, while Tony, whose eyes have 20/20 vision, had really been as blind as a bat.

Dialogue on a Winter Morning

It was foggy this morning. As I approached Cutter Ferry Lane, groups of tall young men jogged past me, their brightly coloured track suits bobbing cheerfully up and down as they exchanged comments in low, breathless voices and disappeared around the corner ahead of me. Leaves, wet and black, lay in a muddy clump on the path by the bridge. I walked to the middle of the bridge and then stopped for a moment to watch one of the crews rowing - the shell glided beneath me as a voice from the shore shouted "You're getting sloppy in the bows there - together now - that's better!" A white swan watched disdainfully by the bank and some ducks laughed coarsely "quah, quah, quah," not impressed by the precision of the crew.

I thought of you, in the California sunshine, dying. The golden warmth and the bright sea cannot keep you alive, anymore than the chilled breath of the winter-damp fenland can quench the youth and vigour of those young men, running past me, or the rowers gliding under the bridge. We each have our own time, and I, standing halfway between your time and theirs, can feel tenderness for both - for the agonies, the decisions, the loves and the losses yet to come to the young, and the memories, perhaps regrets, that pursue you down your last days & hours.

But I must move on. I walk down the narrow lane with the school on one side, small houses set back behind little front gardens on the other. What wonderful gardens they are! Thick evergreens and hedges fill and shape them, edging lawns onto which spill the drooping heads of crimson and mauve fuchsias, chrysanthemums and dahlias, tinged with frost, and the last remembrances of roses, brown and crumpled but still faintly rosy hued. A large ginger cat sits contemplating some steps leading down to a low front door.

Emerging onto Parker's piece, I see the blue bulk of the Catholic Church and its steeple blurred into a misty shape. My journey's end is in sight - I wonder - can you see yours?

Spring

Cold grey mist over the Common
Drains colour, enlarges space,
Pale grass spreads to where
Ghostly spires rise above the town.

I remember
Banks of Gazanias blazing yellow and red,
Poppies blowing on golden cactus hills,
Always in sun, warmed by baking sun,
In California.

But here are gardens too.
The tangled wires of branches,
Brown humps of mud topped by
Dry dead canes, old leaves and
The blackness of rotting death,
Reveal among them new green buds
And strong leaves unfolding.
For a moment I see trees fragrant with spring blossom,
Iris and daffodils, bees among the lilac.
And I believe, this miracle will come again.
Slanting rain drops suddenly
Deathly cold on my face.
The grey-brown landscape returns.

Another Garden

This sunscape land, this California place,
Of poppy fields and golden prickly hills,
Volcanic mountains interspersed with space,
And houses perched high up on rocky sills.
Your giant people grow on dreams and heat,
In shimm'ring sun 'neath skies too blue to bear,
Too good, too bad, too rich, too poor, too great,
There are no halfway measures living here.
The earth already quakes with warning rage,
The ground begins to slip; to slide and tear,
Land falls and cliffs reveal another edge,
Then people shake and in their hearts know fear.
I think this garden too will cast them forth,
To search for home again on this fair earth.

Remembering June 1984

"Dad always enjoyed tea at this time of day, with a little bit of cake or some cookies". My Mother smiled, remembering all those shared afternoons when Dad had retired and they had time to enjoy being together in their Sunny California garden. "You know, we would have 360 days of sun in a row, but if it rained even one day, Dad would be standing at the window all day long just like a kid waiting for it to stop."

From my distant New England childhood, pictures filled my mind of him coming home from his hated factory job, putting on old clothes, a leather jacket, and working alone in the garden whenever the weather allowed. In bad weather or after dark he would go down to the cellar and make or mend things at his workbench, the radio on very loud for company. He had seemed so out of place there, like an exotic plant flowering by itself in an empty lot full of weeds.

"I'll bring the tables out" I said, carrying two green and gold folding tables onto the red-tiled patio, shaded from penetrating sun by bamboo matting which roofed over the patio area.

"Let's have some Mrs See's", my Mother came out with a pot of tea and the gold candy dish filled with huge, soft Mrs See's chocolates. "We might as well enjoy ourselves."

She was enjoyment herself, plump and shining, her silvery-white hair falling in soft waves about her smiling face. She wore a bright red and white blouse and large pearly earrings. She had always looked well in red and I can remember a red coat she had years and years ago that my father had loved to see her in. A few years ago they had finally managed a trip to Hawaii, a place that seemed to represent all that was abundant and beautiful to them and they came back with bright Hawaiian clothes that looked wonderful on them.

My Mother and I drank tea from iridescent rose-patterned cups, looking across the red-tiled path to tall eucalyptus trees creating a dark backdrop, but breaking here and there allowing brilliant blue patches of sky to show through. Bright red, yellow and pink flowers bloomed abundantly in clay pots and wooden planters here and there in the garden: scarlet impatiens and a silly-looking green mop-head succulent hung from the patio frame. A square area of round white pebbles that my parents had gathered over the years made a restful pattern, in the middle of which stood a new birdbath surrounded by pansies. A black iron Japanese Lantern swung from a chain.

"Oh oh, here comes Dorian", wait a minute boy, I'll get you some cheese". The blue jay seemed to understand and sat patiently waiting while my Mother went indoors to fetch bits of cheese for him. We suspected he was feeding young with it as he always flew off with his titbits, soon returning for more.

A tiny white plane flew like a fish in the pool of blue sky and I shaded my eyes to see it disappear in a wisp of cloud. I inhabited it mentally, seeing again that strange self-contained world where people sat eating, sleeping, watching films in timeless suspension. Only two weeks earlier I had lived 12 hours in such a plane; unbelievable, unreal, and yet soon I would be flying back to England, a disappearing speck in the sky, while the magnificence of California remained and my Mother continued to sit in this garden, drinking tea and remembering our visit. We had so much to say, too much ever to express, I longed to keep this moment still and stop it from passing. We drank tea, playing with Dorian, eating chocolates.

"Shall I pick some lemons and make a lemon meringue pie?"

"That would be marvellous, I haven't had one in years, Dad couldn't eat rich pastries anymore".

My Father had died the previous year after a long spell of heart disease and he had been on a restricted diet for years. It had taken most of the

fun out of cooking. I couldn't bear to think of him as frail and ill, but remembered his smiling, tanned face as he stood proudly by the white creature, part frog, part imaginary being that he had made out of left-over cement. It sat hunched in the garden, surrounded by flowers, winking its silvery metallic eye in the sun and my Mother and I felt Dad's joy and humour sitting there with us.

A dog barked in a nearby garden, was answered across the valley, and our solitude was shattered. We heard Helen next door dive into her pool with a splash, the children playing in nearby houses. Why had we not been aware of these sounds before? Had we been so lost in our own thoughts and our enjoyment of each other that sounds were blotted out?

Now, a year later, on a hot June afternoon, I see a tiny silver plane cut across the sky above my English garden. My mother is dead now and there will be no California visit this year. Did we say enough, love each other enough, touch enough? No, we could never do that. And yet, we shared as deeply as two separate beings can, the passing hours we had together. I hope someone is feeding Dorian this year!

Swimming

Under a morning-silvered sky,
Paused at the water's edge,
I hesitate
As clawing waves tear stinging pebbles and sand,
Back to a hungry sea.

Then as a new wave gathers,
I plunge into shattered water,
Breathless, swiftly swimming outwards,
Where on the breast of heaving ocean,
Rising, falling, rising, falling,
I ride on a rocking sea.

Caressed by moving water,
My body remembers another embracing,
Another loving that carried me floating,
Touching, sighing, touching, sighing,
Lost in a deeper sea.

Must I swim back towards the shoreline?
Battle breakers, scrape on shingle?
What if I rest on the undulant ocean,
Lying still on waves that enfold me,
Finally merged in water and sunlight,
At one with the endless sea.

Sindrella

Not so very long ago, there lived a wealthy businessman who had one daughter, named Sindrella. Her mother, who had died shortly after she was born, had been neither beautiful nor particularly intelligent and, sad to say, Sindrella was like her in every respect, including her one asset: a bust of mighty proportions which presumably was the reason for Sindrella's father having singled her out to be his wife. However, he was a wiser man thereafter and chose for his second wife a charming, intelligent and beautiful woman whose flat chest was the joy of her dressmaker (a hideous crone who adored young men and designed all her dresses with them in mind). Sindrella's stepmother came ready supplied with two absolutely delightful daughters of her own – Marianne and Marcia. They worked industriously about the house cooking, sewing and cleaning all day long while Sindrella who was lazy as well as slovenly sat about eating chocolates and painting her toenails. However no one blamed her for her indolence because they were an exceptionally kind family and managed to love her for providing them someone to serve.

Now it so happened that a European politician who had two highly intelligent and handsome sons, decided to come to England and give a big party, inviting all the prominent businessmen of his acquaintance to bring their eligible daughters – you can imagine why. He had known Sindrella's father in the time past and was very impressed with his business acumen, not to mention his wealth, so of course Sindrella and her father were invited, but not her stepsisters, as this politician was out of touch and had no idea that Sindrella's father had remarried. Marianne and Marcia were sad not to be invited to the party but they bustled about making Sindrella as presentable as possible, lending her their stockings, jewellery and a locket which she particularly liked. Off she went looking as well as can be expected, considering her rather dumpy figure. Her stepsisters had managed to curl her mousy hair into long ringlets, tied up with a silver clasp, and they spayed her hair silver which gave her a bit of

class, but unfortunately the silver eyeshadow she insisted on using made her look glassy about the eyes. Never mind, she wasn't too bad, smiled the sisters sadly as they waved her off. Unfortunately, due to industrial action, there were no fairy godmothers about that evening, so the sisters had a dull time of it watching boring panel games on TV and went to bed early in disgust.

Sindrella had a delightful evening, dancing with both of the sons as their father had bidden them to dance with every girl invited. The eldest son, Gabriel, was especially handsome and polite, trying desperately to make some sort of conversation with this dull-witted girl. Finally he noticed her locket and asked "Whose picture do you wear?" "Oh", replied Sindrella, "This contains pictures of my stepsisters, look". He looked. They were gorgeous, radiant, he must meet them, but how? "Ouch", yelled Sindrella as he clumsily trod on her foot, causing her to lose her balance and crash heavily to the floor. What a scramble there was! Sindrella's father called for a doctor before she could be moved, then she was bundled off to a cab, crying more with embarrassment and anger at having to leave the party than in pain. However, Gabriel looked more thoughtful than abashed at his loutish behaviour...?

The following day, two handsome young men called at the home of Sindrella to give their apologies and wish her well. The elder, Gabriel, asked Marianne if he could possibly pick a few flowers from their garden to give Sindrella, and of course she went off into the garden to help him choose the best blooms.

The other man, George, had brought some special wine which should be gently warmed over a candle flame for Sindrella, and he managed to convince the lovely Marcia that she should help him with his task in the kitchen. Some time later, the two coupled emerged ready to visit the sickroom, but with noticeably sparkling cheeks and lips reddened from kissing. Poor Sindrella, one may think? But not a bit of it. For the local country bumpkin, Clive, who though witless was passable handsome, had been paying his own visit to the ailing heroine and had cheered her mightily with his attentions, for he was without doubt a connoisseur of

large bosoms, and he also knew that he would marry money and opportunity when he married her. And so it was.

Sindrella married Clive, they started a business running world-wide operatic tours for wealthy people and lived a life of great comfort and bliss. What happened to the stepsisters? Well, they married their handsome European suitors, but soon found they had roving eyes so Marianne and Marcia left their unfaithful husbands, joined a rock group in Paris, and are remarkably content with their new lifestyle. This involves a great deal of travelling about, though they are not away at the moment, and if you care to call around for tea they'd no doubt be glad to see you.

Balloons

Bright bouncing shapes,
That grow on our exhaled, dream-filled air,
Skins expanded around our desire for joy,
Our need for celebration.

Make our dull rooms festive,
Give pleasure to our children,
Teach adults to play for just a while.
Help us forget the straight lines,
The difficult angles of our lives,
With your curving, fat, ridiculous shapes,
Your squeaky rubbery sounds,
Your ability to float and bump around life's edges.

Make us laugh and forget that only one tiny prick,
In your vulnerable skins
Will kill you with a bang.
And even if you escape that fate,
Slow leakage will leave you limp and wrinkled,
Like rotting fruit,
Hideous in death.

Keynote

"Don't go home", the note said. How strange thought Jean with annoyance as she pushed the ragged scrap of paper back into her coat pocket and fished again for the shopping list she had made hurriedly that morning, knowing she would have time to pick up something for supper at Sainsbury's before driving home after work. She paused in front of the meat counter to choose some chops, then pushed her trolley towards the rows of vegetables which were trying, no doubt, to look bright and fresh though by this time of day they were all a bit limp and it was obvious that outer leaves had been trimmed to make the cabbages look less withered. Reading her list, she thought again of the torn scrap of paper with just those few words "Don't go home". Where had it come from, was it torn from the bottom of a longer note and out of context, or was it somehow meant for her. Silly, she thought, I shall throw it away as soon as I find a trash bin.

Home, she thought, her bright kitchen with the gleaming new dishwasher that finally stopped all the arguments about who would do the washing up. Her teenage son and daughter, at an age to be more concerned with their looks and their love life than how much work she had to do to keep the house tidy. Well, they were alright really, just a bit touchy as teenagers often are, and not very aware of the fact that maybe she had feelings and a life to live too. Still, she had a lovely home, and her husband was very considerate really. Yes, they led a typical family life and she even had a part-time job and could afford little luxuries for herself sometimes.

She pushed her trolley to the checkout, paid, and gathering up her bags, walked out into the street in a light, glistening rain. Not far to the car park, but it was pleasant walking alone down these little back streets, looking into the lighted windows and wondering how the people in each house lived and what lay behind their screens of climbing plants, their round paper shades like moons casting a soft glow on colorful, empty

rooms. Strange how seldom you could actually see anyone in one of these lighted rooms - they were like stage settings viewed from the street, with the actors just offstage.

She must hurry now to get home before her son arrived back from his job, her daughter would already be home, most likely listening to music in her room, selfish cow, when she knew there was the dinner to get. And how nice it must be to have a room of your own, thought Jean, to be able to sit for hours reading with the door firmly shut, not thinking about other people and their needs. Her husband would be home soon too, after his "exhausting day at the office", wanting to sit down and expecting dinner to be ready. Yes, she must hurry!

She reached her car, opened the door and put the groceries on the back seat. Feeling in her coat pocket for her handkerchief, her fingers closed again on the crumpled piece of paper. "Don't go home". She shut the car door thoughtfully, and walked slowly away, her feet finding the direction on their own. She walked in the shining rain, soft and somehow comforting it felt now that she wasn't hurrying. A weight seemed lifted from her as she pushed open the door of the White Boar, went in and sat down at the bar. She ordered a drink. It was incredible, she couldn't be doing this, and yet here she was. It felt like she had stepped off a roundabout and all the dizzy whirling of her life for years and years had suddenly come to a stop. It felt good!

Later she went to a call box and phoned her husband. "I'm not coming home tonight", she said, "No, nothing's wrong, I'm just staying in town overnight at a hotel, I'll be home tomorrow." She hung up before the full impact of his astonishment could reach her.

An hour later she stepped onto the London train and stood in the corridor as it moved out of the station. She opened the window and leaned a little way out, feeling the breeze, no longer wet with rain, sigh past her face. Goodbye, it seemed to say, goodbye. It was alright, she thought, her car would be safe in the car park and she could come back and drive home tomorrow and think of some explanation; surely she could think of some

explanation. Her fingers reached into her pocket again to make sure the car keys were there. Then, wonderingly, she took them out and slowly dropped them out of the window, her fingers returned to the pocket and closed warmly around the tattered remains of the note.

Old Man and Birds

An old man now, my rumpled clothes have bulging pockets
of brown paper bags containing
peanuts, seeds and crumbs.

In the park, pigeons gather round me,
sitting on my outstretched hands, my shoulders, my head.
Pecking food I have placed there for them.

I walk slowly, a king among minions,
watched by solemn children and busy mothers,
who throw crumbs to ducks. Surprised by my appearance they
follow me with their eyes.

An old man now, I shuffle along with my birdy friends,
Grey city birds, not upper class folk I assure you,
but glad of my company, as I of theirs.

And would you wonder to know,
that inside me lives yet that dreaming boy
who lay in summer long ago
in a field so sweet with scents and swaying grasses,
That even the cries of skylarks high above, wheeling round and round in
the sky
Did not dissuade him from thinking this was heaven.

Creatures of Light

Friends, some of you will know I have had an unexpected stay in hospital recently and came very close to dying of a pulmonary embolism. This experience has focussed my mind – there’s no surprise in that!

When I was stable and moved into a small ward, I saw some of the women in beds around me watching the evening soaps on television. Then they told those who hadn’t watched, what had happened in each soap. It astounded me to hear of all the dreadful things being recounted – “He got drunk and hit his wife and then he hit a policeman, stole a truck” – that sort of thing. It seemed nothing good at all was happening in these stories but a whole litany of the lowest of human behaviour was being recounted.

I turned to the woman in the bed next to mine and said “that’s such a terrible thing – that television is lying about human behaviour and telling us that so many people are so bad.”

“Oh”, she said casually “80% of people in the world are evil. In a state of shock I replied “No, no, 80% of people in this world are wonderful. Look at my visitors as they come tomorrow – you will see a procession of angels. That is what people are really like – look at the nurses and doctors here – they are angels and this is the real world”.

My friends, look at someone near to you. Look hard because you are seeing an angel. Oh yes you are – in each person here there is mercy, pity, love and peace. Together we make this room, this church a place of love and peace. Can’t you feel it?

TELL THE TRUTH

Speak no more in smart retorts, in cliches, in dumbed down language. Use your words for glory. Lift your voice above the rumble of discontent, the murmur of evil and the despair around you. Join your hearts and voices with mine and connect to each other. Let us weave a fabric of goodness so strong that the powers of evil will fall through and sink back to the dark corners from whence they came.

TELL THE TRUTH

The Relationships Great and Small that have meaning to us

Our families and our long-standing friendships mean a great deal to us, but as we know, they may not all endure as long as we do. People move away, lose contact, become ill or die and how are we, particularly older people, to fill those spaces in our lives? We probably have friends from our working lives, and from volunteer organizations we worked for, from courses we took, clubs we belonged to but some of these friendships may slowly fade with time. This church is a great source of connection and friendship to me – and it is here for us on a regular basis without our having to arrange meetings to get together.

However, new relationships of all kinds are of great value to us, even if they are more fleeting or less deep. We can and do have relationships with people at many levels and these are all important in keeping us connected to life, reflecting back to us who we are, and bringing warmth and affection which dispels loneliness. Buying a daily newspaper or doing a little shopping may bring us into contact with shopkeepers with whom we have pleasant exchanges, maybe about the weather or children, holidays, or whatever else feels comfortable and of interest. We get to know some of them a bit better and although they are not “friends”, they are people we relate to on a regular basis. We may smile and have a short chat with someone we meet frequently walking along the street, admire a dog walker’s dog and get talking with the owner, or have a chat with someone on the bus whom we may never meet again. It doesn’t matter – this is a bit of communication and it enriches us.

For example, I was recently asked for money by a homeless person, I gave him a little money and he asked where I was from, noting my accent. We got chatting and I learned why he was in his dreadful situation. Subsequently I met him several times, stopped to talk, and gave him a little money. Then recently I saw him and he greeted me with a huge smile, saying he is now offered a place to sleep and possibly a

new job. He was ecstatic, and I was so glad to be someone he could share his joy with. It ended with a big hug and both our hearts were lifted by this shared moment.

The elderly Pakistani lady who works part-time in our greengrocers shop is also a “chatty” friend and we have many conversations about cooking, or people or life in general. Her daughter takes her home mid-morning every day and several times she has asked me if I would mind the shop for a few minutes while she takes Mum home. I enjoy sitting on the high stool, telling customers to wait a few minutes and am rewarded by a free punnet of strawberries.

Of course I treasure the frequent phone calls from my sons who live with their families in America and love it when they visit. We send each other email and photos, sometimes share quite deep philosophical conversations, and moments of joy. My daughter here in England leads a totally different life and I am fascinated by her experiences. And you know I am lucky enough to share my daily life with my husband, John.

These primary relationships are wonderful but we all need to relate to others at whatever level is appropriate and we should value each and every encounter, knowing that if we find it hard to make new deep friendships as we grow older, we can still find ways to make connections with people. Even the internet, dare I say it, can be a lifeline to people who live in more isolated places.

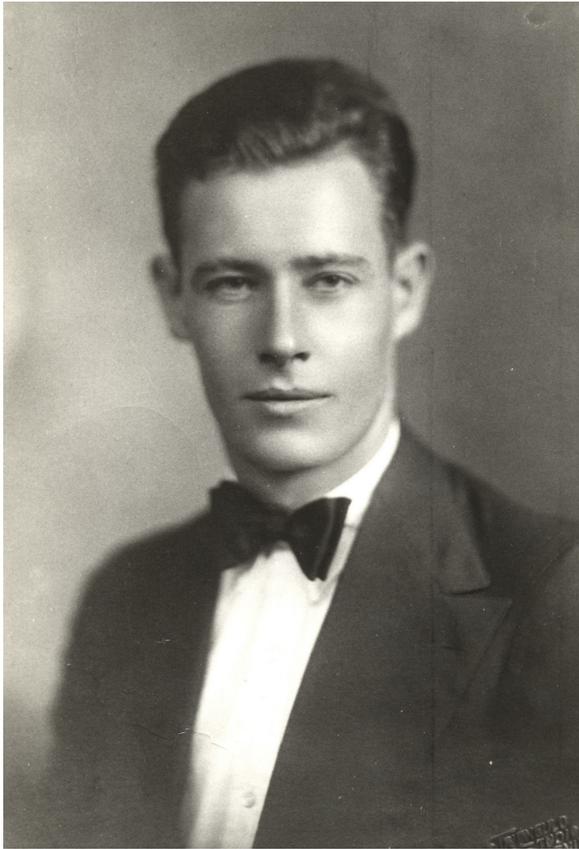
As we have our lunch, let’s spend some time telling the stories of our own attachments to people on different levels and enjoy hearing each other’s experiences.

Memories of a Much Loved Father Lloyd Joel Moss

“We'll have to get up early in the morning!” father would say joyfully whenever any outing was being planned. For he always got up early, and felt sad that no one else was around to keep him company. Any excuse to get the rest of us up, preferably at 5.30 am was his delight. Most days at 6.00 am he would turn on the radio to a news and pop music station, nice and loud (he was fairly deaf from childhood) while he potted about getting his breakfast and we tried to sleep through pounding melodies such as “The House of Blue Lights”.

Lloyd Joel Moss was the eldest child in his family; he had three brothers and one sister. He was born near Williamsburg, Virginia in 1907. His father was a farmer, not always with his own farm, but often a tenant farmer working in peach or citrus orchards which meant that the family moved about a great deal, living in Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Florida and Connecticut.

At around the age of 17 Lloyd left home without permission and joined the navy. He was trained in engineering and was put in charge of the new invention, the gyroscope compass on one of the navy ships (The Marblehead). During the following four years his ship was sent to China and Japan to quell riots and keep the peace. He roamed across the countryside on horseback with white Russian friends, picking up weapons that had been dropped by fighting bandits. Three of these weapons he brought home; two bloodstained wooden clubs with notches carved for each person killed, and a sword in a green sharkskin sheath. I remember them hanging on the living room wall, most impressive if a little frightening to me and my brother Gaylord, but comforting when our parents were out. Then we would keep them by us in case of burglars. Of course we wouldn't have known how to use them but we would have tried!



Lloyd Joel Moss

Lloyd met a lovely young woman named Florence, at a dance when he was home on leave and being very taken with her, he got her address. Some months later, he wrote to her and thus began a long-distance romance by letter over a period of two years. Suddenly he was on leave again, arrived in Salem and asked Florence to marry him. She needed a bit of persuasion because she brought much needed income to her mother and siblings since her father had left the family and also she had long wished to become a nun. However, Lloyd was determined, spoke to her mother about immediate wedding plans and very soon Florence and Lloyd were married, she in a 1920's pink flapper dress that I wore in a high school musical many years later.

Lloyd soon wanted to leave the navy to be at home with his wife, but times were hard and jobs scarce. There were some difficult years during which Gay was born, probably the worst time was when they went to live with Lloyd's grandfather and his stingy second wife. They nearly starved there and Lloyd worked extremely hard for little pay and less food. Finally they left and moved to Salem where he got a job as foreman in a factory (CBS Hytron) that made radio tubes and there he remained during my growing-up years. He found the rough language used by the women he supervised very distasteful and tried to minimise this. But he also protected these women and if anyone shouted at or berated them he would insist that any criticism should be given to him first and he would speak less harshly to the worker concerned.

Father loved poetry and good literature. Among his favourites were "Leaves of Grass" by Walt Whitman and novels by Willa Cather. Mother and father read many Shakespeare plays together when they were first married and continued to read aloud to each other all their lives, sharing books of many kinds. I particularly remember them reading Thoreau's "Walden". Having had to leave school at early ages, they both longed to improve their education and knowledge.

Father was always an adventurer at heart, living a very routine, conventional life in Salem, totally reliable and steady, but we always knew that inside he was still that daredevil sailor who rode along Chinese streets in rickshaws and on horseback along the Great Wall of China. Yet as a farmer's boy he was very practical and capable. He loved to garden, growing all sorts of vegetables and fruits which he and mother bottled and put in the cellar for winter use. We had purple grapes that yielded grape jam, jelly and juice, tomatoes that were bottled whole or if unripe, made into green tomato marmalade, currants for redcurrant jelly, cherries and pears that were a wonderful dessert in the winter. He even constructed a bedroom in the back shed area of the two-family house where we lived. That became Gay's bedroom which was absolutely freezing in winter!

Evenings father would spend working in the garden until the daylight faded. Then he spent time in our dirt floored cellar, pottering away at his workbench with a radio for company. I sometimes hung out down there with him, inhaling the smell of sawdust, fascinated by all his tools, reels of wire, jars of nails and bits of wood. Other times he worked in the living room perhaps caning a chair, sitting in the living room with his reeds soaking in a bucket of water, or beating out a pewter bowl for Miss Todd, using a mould he made from a tree trunk . Miss Todd was an elderly spinster he did odd jobs for and she sometimes wanted very special things done that he was able to manage, having looked up how to do it in the library. While he worked, father loved to listen to radio shows, comedies like Bob Hope or Amos & Andy, and he loved quiz shows because he had somehow acquired a lot of general knowledge.

At the supper table, father would ask us questions about geography and other things, which we usually couldn't answer but mother could. He used to make her cross by saying "See, your mother knows that and she never went to school!" She did of course go to school at the French Convent but had to leave at an early age to help support the family. She could speak fluent French and she had a lot of general knowledge through reading. Father was a bit of a tease, I have to admit, but he was also very soft hearted. One time I didn't feel like eating my supper because it was something I didn't especially like and father insisted I sat at the table until it was gone. Of course, he gave in when I began to cry miserably and he sent me to bed. As I was falling asleep, he crept in and put a quarter (25 cent piece) on my pillow as an apology. One Christmas he made us a blackboard which he screwed to the wall while we slept. When we awoke in the morning we saw not only the new blackboard, but a drawing he had done on it of a delightful frog dressed in a three piece suit and with a watch-chain and watch.

Gay and I had a long period of illness that kept us in a Boston hospital for ten weeks, during which time my parents visited us when they could get there. To help us pass the time, father made us each a wooden board with a small light that could be lit briefly by pressing a button and these

were connected to each other by a wire. We had to learn Morse Code so that we could send simple messages to each other across the room from bed to bed.

When we recovered, father took us for long walks to build up our strength. We would follow railroad tracks all day, sometimes accompanied by a large golden retriever we borrowed for the day from an elderly neighbour. Father would sometimes run on ahead and hide up a tree, leaving us alone and frightened as we searched for him until he called down to us laughing and pelting us with sticks. Other times we would walk in one direction as much as we could, climbing over fences and going through yards, to see where it would lead us. These “straight-line” walks were amusing and we once ended up ignoring “no entry” signs to get up close to a naval submarine and were invited on board since Father had been in the navy. We had cook-outs on an open fire father would build, toasting hot dogs and marshmallows on sticks. Sometimes we picked blackberries and blueberries all day, which mother would turn into delicious pies when we got home.

One day father decided we needed a sailboat to get us out on the water, breathing the bracing sea air. He bought a small sailboat and of course a book about sailing, made a mooring out of a large oil drum which he filled with concrete, joined the Salem Willows yacht club and planned the great launching day. He had Gay borrow carts from two of his friends, which he tied together with rope and attached to Gay’s cart. At 6.00 the following morning, we heaved the boat onto the carts, Mother and I took the mast and boom between us and thus began the most noisy, rattlesome, clattering procession down the little streets of our neighbourhood half a mile to Rope’s Point beach. We had to stop and rest many times and it’s a wonder we weren’t arrested for making such a clamour at that time of day. We got the boat launched, Gay and father wheeled the carts back home while mother and I guarded the boat, and finally we set off with a big picnic basket as the sun rose hot in the sky. Father had tied the mooring drum tight onto the stern of the boat and then began rowing us across the two miles or so of the harbour to the yacht club. I have to say that it turned into one of the most miserable

days ever with hot sun beating down on us, no wind to catch the sail and father rowing this heavy boat and mooring for hours and hours against the tide, all of us wondering if we would ever get there. Eager anticipation turned into resignation and finally near despair as the morning turned into afternoon and on and on we went. Finally father discovered that the rope of the mooring drum had come undone from the stern and the heavy mooring was trailing some feet behind the boat, putting a huge drag on it, making it very hard for father's rowing to be effective. We finally arrived at the yacht club in early evening, sunburnt, tired and totally fed up as you can imagine, and of course worried about Father who was truly exhausted. He really was a hero to have done it. In future days when we enjoyed sailing out of Salem, swimming from the boat, landing and picnicking on islands, we felt we had earned our pleasure by that one horrible day.

We enjoyed that boat "Sea Moss I" and its successor "Sea Moss II" for many years, spending every day of our summer holidays down at the Salem Willows Park, where Gay and I swam at the two beaches, clambered over rocks, and raced around the grassy park, dashing into the yacht club for sandwiches from our big square picnic basket when we were hungry. At 5.30 father would finish work and take the next bus down to the Willows where we would all go out for a sail and often have supper on the boat. Weekends we went out for whole days, landing on islands sometimes or sailing around Marblehead Harbour looking at the wonderful big yachts owned by wealthy people. Later my parents would join others in a line of rocking chairs on the yacht club porch, chatting and watching fireflies while Gay and I raced around the now dark park with our friends. We often took the last bus home around 11.00 or midnight because it was too hot to sleep until very late anyway.



*Florence and Lloyd Joel Moss at
the Salem Willows Yacht Club*

One day when I must have been about 11, my parents went down to the yacht club for a sail, leaving me at home because I didn't feel like going. As I played and read happily, the sky suddenly darkened and a terrifying wind began to blow, bringing with it torrential rain, thunder and lightning. Hugging my doll close to me, I sat curled in a corner, terrified to be alone in such a dreadful storm. Meanwhile, my parents, having noticed a strange grey wall on the horizon, were suddenly enveloped by a tornado, the boat flung on its side in the water where they held on for dear life, being banged against the boat continually and nearly drowned by the rain. Father was able to grab a rope and wrap it around mother so that she wouldn't be carried away by the waves and somehow they clung on for the half hour that the storm raged, lightning striking all around them. When the storm blew away as fast as it had come, bright sunshine returned and motor launches came out to save those who had survived.

My parents were rescued and driven home and I was shocked to see mother's white shorts covered in what I thought was blood but it turned out to be red paint from the bottom of the boat. After that experience, they lost their taste for sailing and the boat was finally sold.

As the years went by father became more and more tired and discouraged at his work. There was an air of discontent in the factory where he worked, many people wanted to join a union but the factory owner said he would close the factory if people voted to be unionised. Meanwhile, Gay and I went through our college years and Gay moved to California while I married and moved to England. Father was aging, getting very set in his ways, unwilling to drive on the highway unless necessary and then only at 35 miles an hour.

Then Gay invited mother and father to California for two weeks and they flew out, expecting to dislike it intensely. What a surprise they got! Having flown to San Francisco and taken the train down to Los Angeles, they experienced the most beautiful scenery they had ever imagined and found Los Angeles to be wonderful, bright, vibrant and rich with culture. Within two weeks of returning to Salem, father had quit his hated job, they sold much of their furniture, got in the car towing a small hired trailer containing the rest of their belongings, and drove slowly west to California. They lived first as caretakers on a large private estate owned by a couple whose hobby was collecting animals for zoos. This couple were away much of the year, leaving my parents in charge of the gardens and grounds, and totally free to enjoy the beautiful estate, picking oranges and avocados off the trees for their meals, swimming in the pool and tending the lovely flower beds. It was a very happy time for them both.

While they lived there, my husband, the children and I came over from England and stayed in a guest house on the grounds. I was amazed at the change in father. His enthusiasm and energy made him seem years younger and he drove fast — I mean fast (over 100mph) — along the highways, going very long distances to see an art fair or show or

anything else that looked fun. The adventurer was back and all the drudgery of Salem worked out of his bones.



Lloyd Joel and Florence Iva Moss

During this time he chose to work without pay in his spare time at a local nursery garden to learn about West Coast gardening. After two years, he applied for the job of head gardener at a beautiful Japanese garden in Bel Air owned by the University of Southern California. He was successful and had several very happy years there, spending his days in what he thought of as paradise. His job often entailed showing small groups of visitors around the garden and explaining what made Japanese gardens so special and different. Sometimes the visitors would be groups of school children, or wives of famous movie stars and he received many lovely letters of thanks from them. Mother would often spend the day there too because it was such a delightful place to be. She would bring a tape recorder and listen to Japanese Koto music while writing letters. I remember watching father feeding Cheerios to carp in the little pond there and placing single blooms in stone troughs throughout the garden for visitors to enjoy. He would hand pluck the

trees to make them the correct stylised shape for a Japanese garden and prune the shrubs equally formally. His love of this very elegant type of garden and his memories of Japan were combined to make this probably the happiest time of his life.

Another new chapter in their lives began when they decided to visit me and my family in Germany where we were living while my husband was in the British Army. Mother had never expected to travel abroad, and was thrilled with the wonderful trips to visit us in Germany and back in London when we lived there. They would get rail passes that allowed them to travel anywhere in Europe and after spending some time with us, off they went on trains to Vienna, France, Italy and Spain, simply getting on and off trains as they felt like it, staying wherever they found a room. Mother has written many detailed letters about these travels, including a very poignant description of arriving in a Spanish City tired, dirty and hungry very late at night, buying some watermelon from a vendor and sitting by a fountain in the street eating watermelon and crying from exhaustion, while my father went in search of somewhere for them to stay. Which of course he did — he never failed! They both adored London and went to plays as often as they could. Being hard of hearing they would book seats in the front row but one time they arrived late, had to sit at the back, and found the play “Prometheus Bound” consisted of one actor tied to rock, and speaking — they of course heard nothing. Not a successful evening. They did take me to see the musical “Hair” which was considered outrageous at the time.

When father retired, he and mother went to live in a house that Gay had bought in Thousand Oaks, then a new community north-east of Los Angeles. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at home there with a big party attended by us and many other relatives and friends. Father’s heart began to fail and eventually he had a triple bypass operation that wasn’t successful. He died in hospital in 1982. His remains along with mother’s, are in a tiny crematorium building in downtown Los Angeles. A last happy thought is that he delighted in the knowledge that his ashes would be placed in a drawer right near those of Marilyn Monroe’s.

My Son Walks the Trail

From Devil's Postpile to the top of Mt Whitney,
My son walks his dream – The John Muir Trail.
While I, his mother in the early morning
Practise Tai Chi in my garden.
Wind blowing leaves, birds chirping gently,
A pale blue morning sky etched with transparent clouds,
Connect me to the moving elements
That pass between my son and me,
As we share the earth's spirit together.

My morning is his deep night-time.
Perhaps he sleeps on dry grass, or scree among boulders,
There could be bears or coyotes on the prowl.
As the stars cruise across the sky,
Will he lie awake listening, watching for two eyes glistening in the dark?
Or will exhaustion soften his bones into sleep?
And slowly edge his thoughts into dreams.

Tomorrow there may be waterfalls, or rivers,
He may swim in deep pools feeling icy water,
Running like silk past his limbs; numbing, embracing;
Cleaning and waking each fibre of his being.

I stand in a cold shower imagining what it's like,
To plunge into a cold river and swim above its pebbled bottom,
Surrounded by tiny silvery fish.
My shower becomes a waterfall fringed by fragrant pines,
Tucked between giant boulders – is this what he sees?
In dawn light, I imagine him standing
Below a rocky peak tinged with pink,
As he sings a psalm, blessing the land about him;
Blessing the rocks, the birds, the sky and mountains.

His voice is ringing through wind and shadows,
Echoing across the landscape.

I would like to experience such freedom,
To follow bravely the trail in a wild place,
Not knowing what lies before me, but trusting the heart of things,
To lead me through this life and whatever lies beyond.
To follow a wild, unknown and joyful trail.

Sea Gulls

Hear the lonely cry,
As the gulls wing by,
To the land lost in the sea.
Where the fresh salt air,
Blows everywhere,
And the waves toss wild and free.
Where the sunbeams sing
And the sea weeds cling
And the waves toss wild with foam,
Then the sun sinks low
In the evening glow,
As the gulls soar swiftly home.

Meditation

Sitting, but not silence
Children excited, laughing shouting
Tiredness bends me forwards
I straighten, disturbed, falling
Sitting up, sleepy, relaxing slowly
Voices, children, happy, playing
Where? What are they doing?
I want to look, no, I am sitting
sitting in meditation, bending
sinking under the noises
Jerk awake again - at last
the bell is struck, I open my eyes
I feel me.

Into the Light

A black sky lowers, lacking light,
Now softness grows, a tinge of white,
A hopeful dream of something bright.
Stars come dancing through the dark,
And moonlight gently makes its mark.
Soon dawn will bring another day,
of what? I hope but cannot say.

Unpacking After Summer School 2017 – Great Hucklow

Home now, time to begin unpacking.
Clothes are easy: most go in the washing basket,
A few hang in the cupboard.
toiletries have their places,
Papers, stories, songs pile on the table
Waiting to be read again, digested, kept or discarded.
An unexpected note and gift from a new friend,
Is eagerly unwrapped and read.
The warmth and beauty of the gift and note flood me
with feelings I am scarcely able to contain.

But now, what shall I do with all the memories,
All the shared words and hugs, the faces and voices
I came to know as, yes, such lovely friends.
And the morning meditations in the yurt,
This round shape that contained and gathered us
In silence, save the sounds of birds and breathing.

The talk, oh such a lot of words,
Sometimes with all of us in one big space,
Or one-to-one, or twos or threes and more,
Such openness, such noise!

Sometimes it seemed like half the world was there.
And then again, the silence as we walked with lanterns
To the old chapel,
Ending our day with words and prayers and singing.

Sometimes we had to be alone, to think and feel,
Maybe to cry or read or simply be.
Sometimes we had to laugh and fill our hearts with light,

Or walk the village street or up a hill to get a larger view.

Where shall I put all this? Pictures for my inner eye,
Love and kindness to pack into my warmed heart,
Shared stories, sad or joyful have their places too,
They build up friendships, teach the heart to feel,
Illuminate our lives through other lives.

These won't be neatly packed.
Their shapes are too diverse, they have no corners,
They shift and grow and will not be confined.
Like bubbles they float upon the mind,
They may fade for a while and then return
When something stirs them back to life again.
No I can't pack them, I will let them be,
Let them find their own spaces in my life,
And be grateful.

Helplessness

I want to fix a problem
that is not mine to fix
I want to shed a light on a life
that is not my life
I want to right wrongs that I did not do.
How can I face the world
knowing what I know, what I know now.
My love, my love, my love
I gave my love and received your love.
Was this thrown away? Without worth? A mistake.
My love, my love, my love
What can I do for you? For those you have hurt?
For me?
I ache, my very heart & bones feel torn,
my hands feel empty, useless, unable to touch
the heart of my despair.
I can only hear the echo of my love,
my love, my love..... trembling and fading in the air.

Tree Prayer

Hello tree,
I am speaking to you in the only language that I know.
My feet are my only roots to the ground,
Skimming over the surface,
While yours reach deep,
Deep into the earth.
For so many years you have stood
Reaching your wisdom, imparting your own voice,
Wind and rain carrying your words through our beautiful world.
Your leaves shimmering and dancing,
Calling birds to your branches
And us to your graceful shade.
Forgive me, that my shallow understanding
So damages your world,
For it is yours so much longer than mine.
Stand for me, for us and grow tall,
Spread wide and send your message
Into our proud, thoughtless, and selfish hearts.

Hospital Visiting

You see me sitting alone drinking tea in the concourse,
Or silently meditating in the chapel,
Maybe I am walking along the corridor looking at current artwork,
Or reading a book in the large canteen.

You wonder if I am ill, or visiting a friend or relative,
Or there for a scan or other procedure.
No, not this time. You see, I am visiting the hospital.
This place where I have so many memories stored.

On a day when loneliness overtakes me, when friends and family are
away or busy,
When somehow I long for company but there is none available,
And I feel suddenly desperate, needing to be with people.
Because I am old now, living alone, my children grown and gone.

Yet here, I can remember those times when I felt precious,
When family needed me, when friends missed me,
When I had a place in society, a job, volunteer work, a role to play,
My illness must be cured, my part in life continued.

Sitting in bed, doctors, nurses hovered around me,
Friends and family visited, other patients surrounded me, talked with
me.
We shared experiences, helped one another as we could.
Faced the fear and pain together, survived the long nights, the possibility
of death.

How can I explain the comfort of being here – it must seem odd to you.
And yet, the memories are not so bad as you might think.
Here was nurture, here was hope, here were visitors and new friends.
There were cards and letters, sometimes flowers or little gifts.

Do you understand why I like to return, silent and usually unnoticed and alone.

Yet, not alone, but surrounded by busyness and memories and even perhaps encountering someone I know.

Who needs to be here for some other purpose. And we can have a chat. It is a healing place, rich with humanity and I am consoled.

So, if you see me here, do not assume I am suffering and ill,
Perhaps I am just drinking in the place, the people, the life that throbs here,
And healing myself, not with medical attention, but with company,
Soon I will take the bus home and bid farewell to this hospital, this friend, I visit with love.

Advent

Standing here, waiting,
How many times have you waited,
For a train,
A friend,
The sun to break through a cloud
And give glory to your photograph,
Or rain to awaken your thirsty garden,
Someone to come home?
Longing for action to make this dragging time end,
You shift your feet, adjust your body,
Nothing else seems important but the waiting.
Whatever you hope for, whatever your dream may be,
Is it good enough to endure this torment?
This loss of freedom, this unwanted stillness?
And yet you must wait, to hope, to believe,
in the coming.
Watching the scene as it changes,
Entering into this time fully,
You are here-now.
And you realise,
That you are not just waiting,
All this time
You are living!

Winter Scene

A yellow rose uncurling on the fence,
white birch tree swaying thin branches,
its dark buds unfurling in sparse sunlight.

Wisps and sweeps of clouds swimming
 across a pale blue sky.

Bright red berries on nandina,
cones of brilliance olive shades of green.

Yellow bricks of neighbour's house
under dark tiled roofs,
soft wind and silence.

High evergreen branches toss lightly in the breeze.

A bird glides and floats across the sky.

This jewelled moment,
 this once in a lifetime moment,

Present to me now - then gone.

Even the memory of it faded,
erasing magic.

Daily life resumes.

Sea Song

Hear the lonely cry,
As the gulls wing by,
To the land lost in the sea.
Where the fresh salt air,
Blows everywhere,
And the waves toss wild and free.
Where the sunbeams sing
And the sea weeds cling
And the rocks gleam tossed with foam,
Then the long day ends
As the sun descends,
And the gulls soar swiftly home.

Notes

Letter to Myself (11 April 2018)

My Life (Memories from Salem in the 1940's)

The House on Baker's Island (Memories from the 1940's)

Snow (Memories from Salem in the 1940's)

My Father's Room (1984)

The Magic Christmas Tree (Memory from 1945)

Screaming (1984? Memory from 1945)

Winter Morning (Memory from around 1945)

The Moss Family launch Sea Moss (Memory from 1945)

Sailing (Memory from 1945)

A.D. (about 1950, typewritten by "Sabrina K.")

Too Late (about 1950, typewritten by "Sabrina K.")

The Awakening (about 1950, typewritten by "Sabrina K.")

Night (about 1950, typewritten by "Sabrina K.")

Transience (about 1950, typewritten by "Sabrina K.")

Commonplace (about 1950, typewritten by "Sabrina K.")

Sing Out Sweet Land – No. 1 & 2 (1955, Salem High School)

Mr & Mrs Clark & Percy (1984, first published in "The Writers Craft 1984-5")

Poetic Assault on Above Paragraph (1984?)

Friends (1984)

Jessie (Memories from 1959 to the 1970's)
Marooned at Kew Gardens (1980's describing events from the 1970's)
War (May 1984)
Aunt Rachel, a portrait (1985)
Tollesbury Evening (1984)
Riding The Tides (1984, first published in "The Writers Craft 1984-5")
Phone Calls (1984/5, first published in "The Writers Craft 1984-5")
Dialogue on a Winter Morning (December 1984)
Spring (1984)
Another Garden (1984, first published in "The Writers Craft 1984-5")
Remembering June 1984 (1985)
Swimming (1986, first published in "The Writers Craft 1985-1986")
Sindrella (1985/6, first published in "The Writers Craft 1985-1986")
Balloons (1986, first published in "The Writers Craft 1985-1986")
Keynote (1983/4?)
Driving Home (1984)
Old Man and Birds (24 February 2003)
Creatures of Light (2006, first published in "The Herald – The journal of the Unitarian Christian Association – No. 62".

The Relationships Great and Small that have meaning to us (2006-15?)
Memories of a Much Loved Father: Lloyd Joel Moss (2007)
My Son Walks the Trail (August 2012)
Sea Gulls (2010's?, A reworked version of Transience)
Meditation (2017)

Into the Light (2017)

Unpacking After Summer School 2017 – Great Hucklow (2017)

Helplessness (2017)

Tree Prayer (2017)

Hospital Visiting (2017?)

Advent (October 2019)

Winter Scene (16 January 2020)

Sea Song (2023, The final reworked version of Transience/Sea Gulls)



October 2024

About the Author

Sabrina was born in July 1937, in Salem Massachusetts. Her parents, Lloyd Joel and Florence Iva Moss, named her Kathleen Peters Moss, “Peters” being the maiden name of Lloyd’s mother.

She attended Salem High School, taking the Commercial stream, learning shorthand and typing, but also pursuing her interests in art and creative writing. She worked on props for senior student revues in 1954 and 1955, the year she graduated.

She won a scholarship to college at the Boston University College of Fine Art, graduating in 1959 as a Bachelor of Fine Arts. On her first day at college, a new friend asked her name and she said “Kathleen but I don’t like it” and he said “What would you like to be called” and she said “I always liked the name Sabrina”, so he immediately introduced her to everyone as Sabrina.

1959 was also the year she met and married her first husband, Jeffery Lewins, an officer in the British army, who was studying nuclear engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

This marriage led to Sabrina living in Meysey Hampton with Jeffery’s mother, Hanover with the British Army, London at Hugh’s Parry Hall, and Cambridge, where, having brought up three children, she worked as the personal assistant for both directors at the Open University (OU) headquarters.

You can read more about her life here:

<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Moss-12465>

In addition to this collection of her writing, she also wrote and illustrated the Blume stories:

https://www.shelaghlewins.com/other_stuff/sabrina.php