

LINES
WOOD &
WATER

A MEMOIR BY

Bernette Rudolph

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An example of my nude sketches

LINES, WOOD & WATER

I draw lines, I cut wood, and I seek the shores of the ocean or river wherever I travel.

Lines

A line is a simple direct statement that tells it all.

Drawing lines on paper brought sheer enjoyment to me at a very young age. Cursive writing was my favorite subject in elementary school. To my young mind drawing lines, circles and arches was art, even though the teacher said it was writing. I have drawn lines on the sand, on rocks with charcoal, and etched lines on copper and zinc. Any surface—from a napkin to a newspaper, to fine paper—beckons me to add lines.

Wood

Wood challenges my skills and never ceases to amaze me.

I started my art life painting, drawing and carving wood. At an early age I found painting did not inspire me. A demonstration of woodcut printing, with the well-known artist Irving Amen, started my exploration of wood. Wood cut printing combined two of my loves, cutting wood and drawing lines. Wood became the primary material for all my work. I carved it, printed it and collected it. I used fine imported wood and found wood; wood with knots that I incorporated with the subject. I picked up fallen branches in the parks and wood washed up from a river or the ocean. I cut wood by hand, as well as on a band saw and scroll saw.

Water

I have sand in my shoes.

I grew up on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Sand, the sea and the surf are etched into my soul. I am drawn to all moving water, be it a river, a stream or a waterfall.

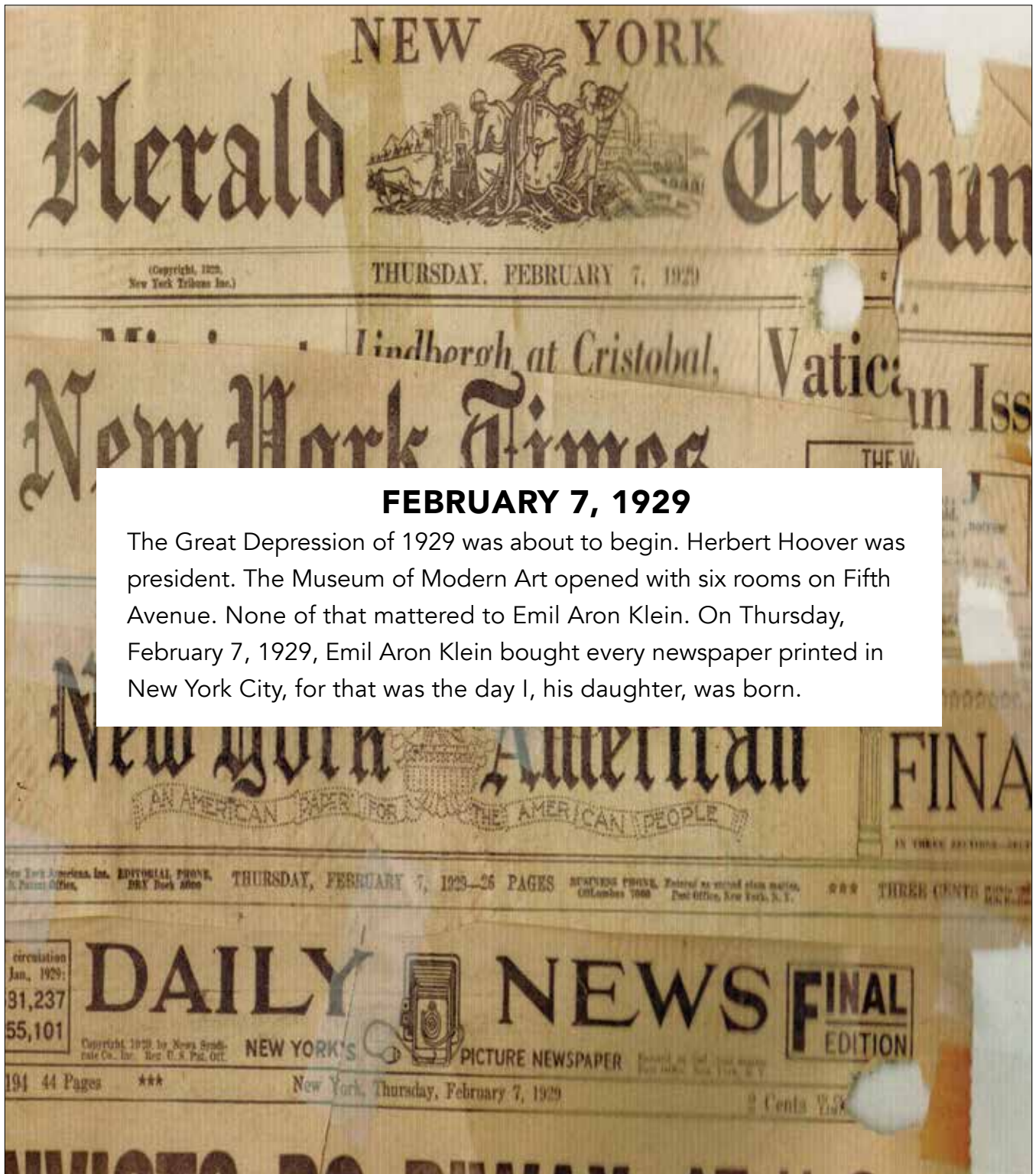
My Ashes Will Be Cast

My ashes will be cast
In the East River
Under the Brooklyn Bridge
I will share secrets
With creatures of the sea
I will explore places I've never been.

—*Bernette Rudolph*



*A promotional photo of me, holding one of my woodblocks.
In the background is one of my woodblock prints.*



FEBRUARY 7, 1929

The Great Depression of 1929 was about to begin. Herbert Hoover was president. The Museum of Modern Art opened with six rooms on Fifth Avenue. None of that mattered to Emil Aron Klein. On Thursday, February 7, 1929, Emil Aron Klein bought every newspaper printed in New York City, for that was the day I, his daughter, was born.

2018: THE YEAR I WROTE MY MEMOIR

Over the years, when people have suggested I write about my life, my answer has always been, "I am too busy living to write my life story." Now I have time. I am no longer teaching the love of art making to children or to adults; I am simply creating my own work in my beloved studio.

I have long since come to terms with the facts in my life, facts that I wish were different. I will never have an adult relationship with the children I gave birth to. The art world of Christie's, Sotheby's and MoMA never discovered me.

I outlived three husbands and have learned to live as a single woman. I produce my work, and enjoy the love and company of many people. I have patrons and collectors who hang my work on their walls, despite my being slighted by the million-dollar art world.

Writing journals has been a tool to help me make decisions and to consider things I could share with no one. I have chosen some of the journals to share with you.

I dedicate my book with love to my family and friends,
and to all the talented artists who are not a household name.

“The way one creates art is private but what the artist does belongs to everyone.”
—American architect Louis I. Kahn



Bernette Sally Klein, of 72 Commonwealth Ave., will be one of the entertainers in a Kiddie Revue to be held at Ebling's Casino tomorrow evening.



Mr. & Mrs. Emil A. Klein
announce the arrival of their daughter
Bernette Sally
weighing 7 lbs. and 19 ounces
Thursday Morning February 7th, 1929
five-fifty o'clock
Res. 1208 Steatford Ave.
Brooklyn, N. Y.



THE GIANT IN MY LIFE

My father was a rather small man but a giant in my eyes. His style of clothes was ordinary but neat. Years later, in his retirement, his choice of clothes matched the bright colors of his Miami home. His smile and friendly manner was his winning trait.

Dad lived and survived the Great Depression of 1929. He sold car polish and went into people's homes to sell dinnerware. When he sold dinnerware he had to prepare a meal using the utensils, he was a terrible cook. Dad was not the handy man of the house. When it came to painting a room or fixing anything broken we dreaded what he would do.

Dad loved playing the piano. He could not read music; he played by ear. He knew all the popular music of the day and I sang along. His music and my voice were not for anyone to hear, but we had the most fun. Singing along with a piano player in later years always brought back those early memories.

His favorite pastime was smoking cigars. When I was a child, if I had a nickel I'd buy him a cigar. As I grew older and started earning money I bought more expensive cigars. It was easy to get him gifts. When the grandchildren arrived he always said, "Just give me photos of the children." He loved being a grandpa.

When he finally found a good job as a bookkeeper, my mother told everyone he was an accountant. My mother chose to upgrade every situation. He was a fine bookkeeper. Every dollar was accounted for—he was a whiz at figures. He knew the tax laws and did the tax returns free for everyone in the family; others paid five dollars for his service.

Early photos of my father holding me in his arms show a gleam in his eye and a smile on his

face. The day I was born my father bought every newspaper printed in New York City. Emil Klein thought that it was the most important event that took place on Thursday February 7, 1929. For my eightieth birthday celebration I made a photo collage of family photos and included those headlines from the New York newspapers.

My father easily met new people and engaged them in friendly conversation. People responded to his warmth. He was well liked by everyone. I attribute my ease with new people to him.

A new car every two years—that was my father's hobby. He would take everyone for a ride the day it arrived. We took many trips with my dad. He never hesitated to veer off the road to explore uncharted areas. My spirit of adventure was a gift he gave me. I always want to see what is on the other side.

He gave me the most valuable gift of my life. He gave me his boundless love and laid the ground for my relationships with men.

Another very important man in my early life was my grandfather Louis Friedman. Grandpa Louis was a very tall, stately man who called me the angel in his life. Grandpa Louis and I would bike together. We biked several miles from our Rockaway house to visit my great grandparents in Long Beach, Long island.

My grandfather was the only man I saw cry during happy family events.

When my grandfather attended temple on the high holy days of the Jewish religion, I went with him and waited outside so I could walk home with him. I loved my grandfather. He was a very special man.

MOTHER'S SEWING MACHINE

A sewing machine and cloth were as integral to my mother's life as a band saw and wood has been to mine.

My young mother left fashion school with plans to become a women's clothes designer. She quickly learned that she would have to start at the bottom, not at the top. Mother landed a job in a fashionable Fifth Avenue shop in Manhattan as a seamstress. She remade and altered the dresses of wealthy women. Famous movie stars were among her clients. She was a fine seamstress. The women who employed her expert skills were fortunate.

Some time later, Mother began designing clothes for herself. In the 1930's, women wanted all labels removed from their fine clothes. She gathered labels from Henri Bendel, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Lord and Taylor, and put them on her original designs.

At first I thought, "how clever of my mother to do that." Later, it dawned on me that she put more value on other designers than on her own designs. I was very proud of my mother's work and wanted her to be proud as well. I finally convinced her, and she had labels made with her name as creator.

When mother became president of her B'nai Brith Society she led every meeting in a new dress. It was simple for her to purchase a cloth and in one day come up with a smashing design. As mother of the groom at my brother's wedding, Mom made a dress from cloth she had purchased for only three dollars. She wore capes and gowns that were the envy of everyone at the affairs she attended.

Mother never wore a store-bought garment, but she did long for a mink coat. When my father

began to do well, he could not afford a coat but could buy a mink jacket. Mother proudly sported her mink. This was her way of showing the world that my father had survived the 1929 crash and was now doing well. However, no one acknowledged her jacket. To many women, it was Mom's own designs that were the envy of her friends!

She was the seamstress for the entire family. Everyone went to Mother with clothes to be revised and altered. She only made original designs for herself and sometimes for me. I was happy to wear her designs. My clothes were always unique.

When my parents moved to a retirement home in Miami Beach, Florida, the sewing machine went with them. My father died shortly after their move. For my mother, sewing became a welcome distraction from her loss. She got a job in a fine Miami shop and did alterations for her neighbors.

When my Mother became frail, I stepped in and encouraged her to come live in New York so I could care for her needs. We began to pack for her move. What shall we do with the sewing machine, which has never left her side? My mother said:

"Leave the sewing machine, I have done enough."

At my mother's death I was in charge of distributing her belongings to members of the family. My niece Rachel wanted a special piece of Mother's jewelry. Others members of my family took their choice among her simple belongings.

When my parents retired to Miami Beach they gave away all their winter clothes. My mother kept one winter garment, her red coat.

Mother visited New York at least once a year. She always wore that red coat. The coat was made of red cloth, with pink and gray threads running through the wool plaid. Large wood buttons matched the red in the plaid.

I kept the coat in my closet and touch it every once in a while. When I touch the coat I feel my mother's warmth. Mother's spirit is not in the cold cemetery on Long Island where her bones are buried. It is with me in my Brooklyn home.

BRONX TO ROCKAWAY: CITY TO THE SEA

The sand and the sea beckoned my father. Our small family moved from the busy borough of the Bronx to the shores of the ocean in Rockaway Beach. I was 9 years old, and my brother Herbert was just 2 years old. Discovering the ocean was like finding a new friend. I watched the waves rippling along, one after the other, rushing to the shore. It fascinated me that each wave was different. The magic of the rolling waves still amaze me.

We were a conservative Jewish family. My father was a bookkeeper, my mother a dressmaker. My parents skills helped pull us through the difficulty of the 1929 crash, and we were able to establish a comfortable life along the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

We rented an apartment with a lovely Italian family. Grape vines lined the walkway, with succulent grapes waiting to be turned into wine. Every time they had a big family meal they would bring us a sample from their table. The goats in the yard provided milk. I didn't like its taste, but I didn't let on. Living with the landlord and his family was like living in Italy.

My father began to recover from the difficult years of the great depression. He found his calling as a bookkeeper with a wholesale butcher firm in Rockaway. My father was able to purchase a small house for us in Far Rockaway, a short distance from the ocean. We left the lovely Italian family. Far Rockaway would be my home until I married.

The house had two floors. Every summer our family squeezed together in the upper floor and rented the ground floor to "summer people." Many full time residents rented part of their homes to summer folk. The depression days still had its effect on middle class America. My mother took in sewing for extra money and Dad did taxes for people.

Every member of our family offered services free to the family members. Mother did everyone's alteration. Dad did tax returns and my grandfather did everyone's dry cleaning in his Bronx store. I decorated family walls with my artwork, and Grandma continued to cook great meals and mouth-watering apple pies.

Years later, when I married my dentist husband, I told him family members would get free dental care. This was a new concept to him but he was happy to get on the list of family offerings, and now he was in the loop.



*Mother and me, in Rockaway,
with our wearing matching dresses*

SUE'S PORCH IN ROCKAWAY

We were innocent teenagers just hanging out in the seaside village of Neponset on the Rockaway Peninsula. Sue was blonde, beautiful and not too swift. Felice was rather pudgy and very bright. Judy was an over the top beauty and a dancer. Then there was me, plain pretty, serious and always with a pencil in my hand.

Among the boys there was serious Craig, handsome Ralph (a very fine artist), and Eddie, the fun master in the group. Then there was Bob, who had his eye on Felice early on, and Harold, who was a big, innocent guy well loved by all. There was tall, handsome Marty, who was on his way to become an engineer, and last but surely not least was Jules Rudolph, whose ambition was to become a concert pianist. He ending up becoming a dentist, just like his father.

This motley group hung out on Sue's porch. Sue was not allowed to venture from her house. Her family had lost their only son in WWII. He was a pilot in the US Air Force and was shot down somewhere over Europe, never to be found. Sue's parents became over-protective of their only remaining child. The tragedy of a war loss affects the family as well as the community.

The group on Sue's porch in 1946 was surly very innocent. There was no pot-smoking or drinking; just pure fun. There was cigarette smoking. Smoking was very much accepted at the time. It was cool, it was glamorous, and Hollywood's leading actors promoted it.

Some serious dating went on between us. Judy, the very beautiful dancer, was sought after most of all. However, her self-involvement quickly put off suitors. This did not, however, stop Ralph. He married her. Judy and Ralph were a team, had children, and eventually divorced.

Felice and Bob made a very committed marriage. Jules dated a fine pianist as well as Judy, the dancer. He was determined to marry an artist. Jules and I were friends.

I went "steady" with Marty. We held hands in the movies, and necked in the dark, a 1950 version of dating included kissing and going a bit to far, but not all the way. It was a very innocent time.

Marty's picture of marriage included a woman in the kitchen and a house with a white picket fence in suburbia. This was not my picture.

We did, however, stay together for five years. He went on to study engineering at Syracuse University. During he last year of college things got serious and Marty proposed marriage. I turned him down.

I pictured a life of adventure and a career in the art world; Marty was much too conventional for me. He was bereft and married shortly after we broke up. I hope he had a good marriage and got his house in the suburbs.

Army enlistment broke up our porch group. Everyone except Jules went into service. Jules, much to his chagrin, was rejected due to flat feet. He went to dental school instead.

My contribution to the war effort was my drawing. The Internet and electronic mail was not yet an option. One connected with "snail mail," a physical envelope with a US postage stamp on it.

I drew a pin-up girl on the outside of every letter I wrote to our boys in the war. Those envelopes were handed from one soldier to the other at every mail call, until it finally landed in the recipient's hands.

As far as I know, all the guys in our gang got home safe and went on to have productive lives.

Sue and I remained close friends until we went to a hotel in the Catskills, accompanied by her mother. At the resort I dated the waiter and Sue landed the only male guest, a wealthy young businessman. Sue married that guest and our friendship was never the same again.

Jules and I became close friends. One night we took off in his open convertible. We necked in the parking lot and a policeman caught us. Apparently necking in the car was illegal. After the officer left we continued kissing.

That night in the open convertible I said, "We could be more than friends." Jules gave it some thought and that was the start of what became a twenty-year marriage.

It has become apparent, in writing this section of my memoir, that I indeed lived in another era. So many things have changed in the social world. Divorce was unthinkable then. Today it is common to have a second or even third marriage, with a lover on the side. People called gay people "queer." The gay world was hidden, for the most part. People communicated by dialing a phone or putting a nickel in a public phone to contact friends and loved ones. Riding the New York subway cost a nickel!



Me (middle left) with my friends



Jules and me in our courting photos

MOTHERHOOD DOES NOT COME IN A HALLMARK GREETING CARD



*Mother and child sculpture
created when I was pregnant*

A kick in my abdomen wall was the first real sign that my baby was preparing for her life to begin. My abdomen was stretching and my nipples were ripening in preparation for the milk that I would give my firstborn.

As my child was developing in my body my hands were carving a wood sculpture. Inside a fine triangle of wood a nursing mother with three hands soon emerged. Like Michaelangelo said when he looked at a fine piece of stone, "There is a figure in there and I will find it."

My child arrived at the same time the sculpture was completed. My journey as a mother and as an artist was well on its way.

Time would tell that carving wood was far easier than raising a child. Wood gives you some resistance but with time you can deal with its properties. A child is a complex person. You have no guideline for what will transpire at each stage of her life.

Today the carving of the mother with three arms sits, stately, on a shelf in my studio. The child that was in my body became an English citizen at age 30, and was never heard from again.

Motherhood does not come in a Hallmark Greeting card. With motherhood come joy, grief and the reality of life. No woman is ever prepared for being a mother.



Jules and me with with the children

MY CHILDREN

I always thought I would have four children. Life does not follow your plans, and it turned out I had two children. My daughter Robin was born in 1953. My pregnancy was a very happy time in my life. I was feeling extremely creative. Surely nothing in life could be more creative than producing another human being. I had a natural childbirth, not a normal practice in 1953. I went for classes to learn as much as I could about my pregnancy and delivering a baby. I was well prepared. I wanted to be part of the process and to be awake to watch my baby being born. All went well and I nursed my newborn.

My second child, Barry was born in 1955, also a natural childbirth. The early years with my children went well. Unfortunately that did not continue. Robin was a very difficult child. Things went very wrong. We had a love-hate relationship until, as an adult, she moved to England. There she became an English citizen and cut herself off from the entire family.

When Barry entered kindergarten, we were called to a meeting with his teacher. Barry was acting out and poking children with a pin.

Many difficult years followed Barry. He was a good reader and excelled in math and science. These skills could not compensate for his bizarre behavior. It took many years of therapy, and varied medications before the final diagnosis was determined. Barry suffers from manic-depression also known as bi-polar disorder.

Barry could never hold a job for more than a year. His first marriage ended when he was rushed to the hospital with an acute manic episode. The marriage lasted three years. My granddaughter Jessica was born to that union.. One never knew when encountering Barry which side of his illness would surface.

Barry met Becky Ross and they became a couple. Becky had two children from a previous marriage. Having neither more children nor a legal marriage was part of their agenda. Becky helped Barry with his weekend visits with Jessica, and was also instrumental in helping Barry get a disability grant from the government.

After eighteen years living with Barry's manic/depressive personality, Becky left their relationship. They remain friends but Becky no longer has to worry which side of Barry personality will greet her when she returns from work.

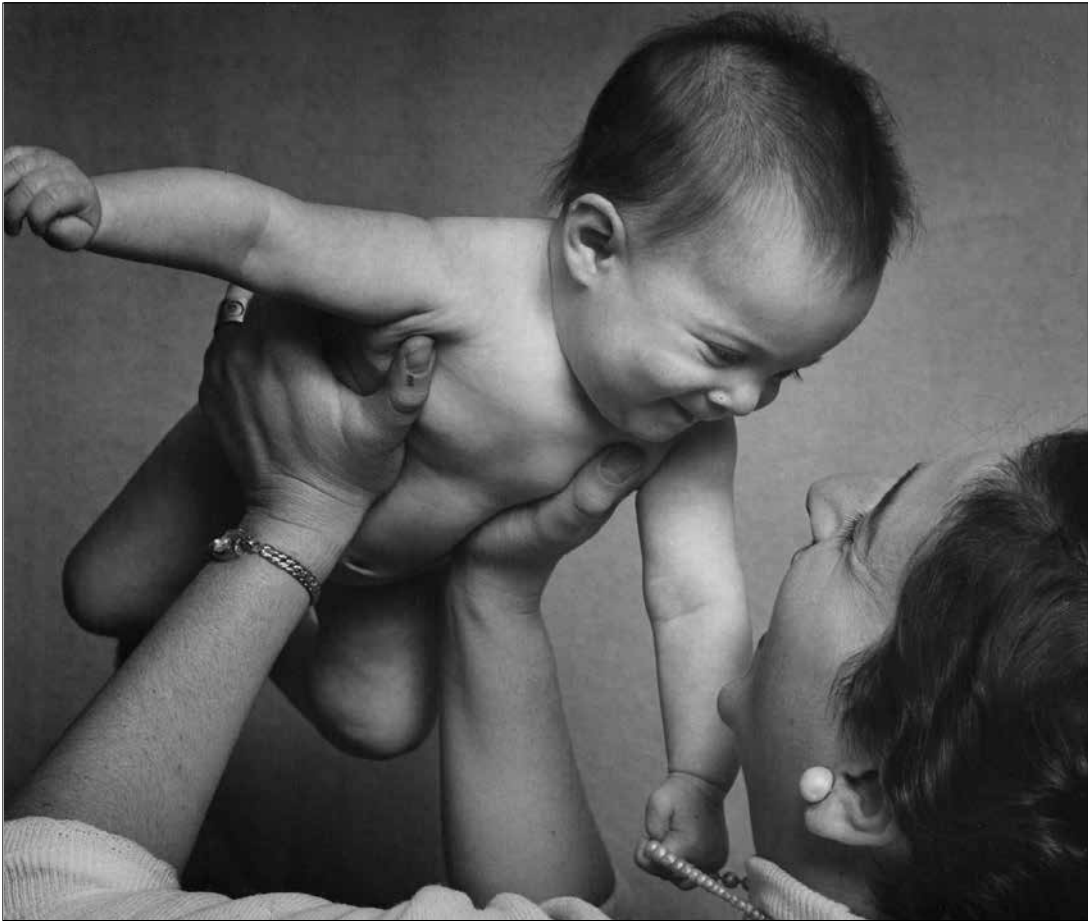
Barry's manic/ depression has lashed out at every member of our small family. No one wants to be in his company. Jessica, Becky and I stay as close as we can. Every time I get a phone call or am in his company I do not know what to expect. His manic state can be cruel and cutting. He can also have a one on one meeting that can be very pleasant.

At a private dinner with Barry a few years ago, Barry and I reminisced about good moments in his youth. It is hard to remember that there were good moments between us. During the years I traveled art shows in a van, Barry became a helpful companion. He built stands for my work and enjoyed helping me. Life with Barry is like a roller coaster, with very high, highs and very low lows.

Barry cannot live with anyone. He left his life in California to start anew-in New Mexico. He was able to buy an adobe house with ten acres. He has a horse as a companion and has relations with neighbors who live quite a distance away. I have visited with Barry in his home. For one day all is well, then all changes for the worst. I no longer choose to visit him. Our current communication is by phone with several months apart. The phone calls are difficult.

Some time in March 2018 Barry phoned me. At first to delight me and then to startle me with his angry chants. I have heard them many times before, but the sting of his bi-polar personality always pierces my soul. He is aware how much pain he inflicts and that seems to give him pleasure. I have dealt with his bi-polar personality for many years. Today both came at the same time. His anger was furious and after shouting all the anger he could come up with, he hug up.

I sat, absorbing the silence.



Robin

THE CUTOFF IN MY FAMILY

“Estrangement is more common than many assume, researchers say.”
—Science Section, *The New York Times*, December 26, 2017

Estrangement is when one or more relatives intentionally chooses to “cut off” contact with some or all-family members. The cut off in my family is my daughter Robin, who once declared, “You are not my mother.”

“Unfortunately, that relationship is set in blood,” was my reply.

Robin was a difficult child. She was not a giving person and could not share herself or her possessions easily. We had moments of love but it was the exception. I knew the special relationship I had with my own mother would never happen with my daughter. She felt, long after a mother directs a child, that I was still running her life.

One time, during her teen-age years, she ran away from home. Actually it was a long day and she phoned home in the late evening to say she was in Long Beach, a town over a bridge and quite a distance from our Rockaway home. I told her we would come for her. She said, “I only want Dad to come for me.” Her relationship with her father was close. I was a thorn in her side.

My daughter moved to England and became an English citizen. With the exception of two family occasions, she has not returned to the US. On one occasion, Robin came to visit my mother in her sick bed. On the other occasion, she came to the memorial service for my husband Al Wyatt. Robin has a beautiful voice and sang at the memorial. It was during this period that Robin began in earnest to cut herself off, not only from me, but the whole family.

I attempted reconciliation many times over the last thirty years of our stormy relationship. Some attempts resulted in temporary peace but, ultimately, the relationship would never be resolved.

The pain I feel from Robin's estrangement cannot be described.

To completely understand why my daughter chose to cut herself off, one would have to hear from her directly, since all my reasons are without merit.

Once, I attended a lecture given by two women therapists whose specialty was mother/daughter relationships. Robin agreed to attend one session with me. We enjoyed about three weeks of peace before the attempt again fell apart.

In 1990 there was a terrorist bombing at a busy London metro, and I panicked. I contacted the British Embassy and asked them to locate my daughter. I did not have her address since she had moved several times. The embassy agreed and would get back to me. They did locate her and told her of my concern. Her reply was, "Tell my mother I am OK and I want no contact."

Refusing to give up attempts at wanting an adult relationship with my daughter, I consulted Dr. Anne Klaysen, a spiritual leader at Ethical Culture, Manhattan, who espoused forgiveness. I brought photos of Robin and me in happy moments and her last letters to me from England. Dr. Klaysen declared, "this relationship cannot be resolved," and she suggested I sit Shiva, a Jewish ritual of sitting on a box for seven days after the death of a family member.

I knew of this ritual and did not feel this was for me, since I am a secular Jew. Instead I wrote the members of my family and told them I was declaring Robin dead.

My brother Herb is the only family member with whom Robin had maintained a connection. My brother has been to England several times and has visited with Robin. Each visit he has asked her if she would want to contact me. Her response is always negative.

In my eighty-seventh year I decided to make one final attempt at connection with my estranged daughter. I gave my brother a message to relate to Robin. I would pay for her passage to New York and put her up in a hotel, just for a short visit, or I would come to England.

To Herb's and my amazement, Robin said she would visit but only in England. My brother asked her a few times if this is truly what she meant. She replied in the positive, and Herb booked us both a hotel room in London and we purchased airline tickets.

As soon as our arrangements were in place Robin emailed my brother with negative demands. Apparently her old hatred resurfaced and we canceled our trip. Robin could not let go of her hatred. I finally gave up all hope of ever seeing my daughter again. Herb has also severed his relationship with her.

I changed my will to a trust so that Robin does not have to legally be informed of my death. With deep regret I finally have given my daughter what she wants—No Contact. I have asked my family not to apprise her of my death.

Built on Hope

I started with hope

To no avail

I tried intervention

Which also failed

Reaching no solution

I did not try again

NOTE: *The Cutoff in My Family* has been the most difficult memoir piece to write. I have survived many tests in my life to reach my eighty-nine-plus years, but losing my daughter has been, by far, the most challenging of losses. It is the only one that could not be resolved.



Biking with the children.

WE LIVE IN FRANCE

1956 – 1957

When my husband Jules Rudolph was a young man, he wanted to enlist in the US Army. He was rejected because of his flat feet.

In 1956—after he had become a husband and father, and was beginning a new dental practice—the army decided he should serve his country.

He was drafted as a dentist and given the title of captain. Jules was sent to San Antonio, Texas for basic training. Our two children and I joined him there. Texas was big—big bugs, big army and lots of army families. I was furious that we had to leave the life we had just begun. Then the Army sent us to live in France and all was forgiven.

Jules left for France first. The children and I moved back into the beach house, in Far Rockaway, to stay with my parents until we received orders to join Jules in France. We rented our home in Valley Stream, Long Island, and closed the dental practice.

It was strange living at my parent's home, but for the children it was a treat to have loving grandparents dote on them. The army called for us. My father took the two children, a guitar and me to meet the plane that would take us on our journey. My father took one look at the army plane and was horrified that this was not a slick modern aircraft but an old army combat plane. That his daughter should go in this plane was not good. We did board the plane and landed safely at Orly Airport in Paris.

Our station was Verdun, where the largest and longest battle of World War I took place. It rained the day I set foot in France, the world of artists. I was ecstatic. On the bus ride

to Paris' inner city we passed landscapes that Matisse, Van Gogh and Cezanne no doubt painted. It was wonderful. I was now in the land of the Impressionists. For me, an artist on the threshold of my art career, this could not have been any better.

We found an apartment on a busy street with a coal-burning stove. Our small apartment was two flights up, with a small balcony overlooking the daily life of Verdun. We had to bring the coal up from the basement to heat our apartment.

My one-year-old son, Barry, slept in the bathtub in the kitchen. Robin, my daughter, found a little French girlfriend whose father had a pub on our street. Everyday, after attending nursery school, the girl called up to our window for Robin to come play. She would shout, *American petite American!* and Robin would run to play with her in the back of her fathers' pub.

We lived opposite a *butcheries chevalier* (a horse meat market). One day we felt adventurous and bought horse meat for dinner. To our surprise it was good. However, horse meat was not on our dinner table again.

Robin went to Catholic nursery school where she learned French and would give money to Jesus. While Robin was learning French from the nuns, they were learning English from her. It was a very poor school. Every day at snack time the nuns laid down the same paper mats on their desks. Paper was at a premium in Verdun. Nothing went to waste.

The first day in Verdun, Jules left us to go to the local diner for breakfast. I didn't know how to order our meal. It was very embarrassing. I began speaking Spanish, the only language I had learned in school. Finally I did begin to speak French. I could greet people and make myself understood when shopping. I learned kitchen French.

Jules loved being a dentist in the army. He did not have to deal with the business side of being a dentist. Every serviceman got the best dentistry money could buy. He considered staying in the army full time. But that was not to be, and I did not want to be where war was always part of our life

We made many friends with both French citizens and army personnel. We met an elderly couple who became surrogate grandparents. They took us under their wing and taught us the customs of French friendship. One custom was—I thought this very strange—to never walk into a friend's home unless you had exchanged written messages in advance. We became very fond of our newfound friends and followed their French customs.

The husband was an artist and encouraged me to exhibit with the Verdun art association, which I gladly did. We exchanged works of art as gifts.

The army built Levittown-type houses for the officers. We were expected to move into them. We flatly refused. We liked living in town with the locals. It wasn't a hardship to bring up coal from the basement for our fuel. We knew we might never have such an opportunity again and didn't want to miss a beat.

Jules and I loved food shopping in the local markets. You had to bring your own bag and all the food went into that bag, no plastic. You bought the cheese in one store, mouthwatering French bread in another, and meat in a third. We always bought two baguettes and extra brioches so that at least some of what we bought made it home! Eating French breads was so fattening, but who cared? No supermarkets. Shopkeepers were friendly and you got recipes from them. It made the foods that much better. And we never forgot the wine!

I was busy making sketches of the things I saw in our little town and exhibiting in local art shows. I painted a mural on the wall for the army base nursery. I invited one of the nuns at Robin's school to see the mural and suggested I make one for her small school. The nun said the army base mural was much too big for them. I assured her I would be more conservative with her walls.

I researched French nursery rhymes and showed the nun my plans. I got the go ahead, brought a ladder to the school, and painted a mural on their wall. The children watched me work and it was much fun for all.

Jules and I joined a drama group that had been started as part of the army recreation program. There was no war during Jules' term in the army so the army provided special activities.

Jules became a villain, and I a madam of a whorehouse in an Army melodrama. Jules had to repeat over and over, "I came for the rent, the rent, the rent." He was a very wicked villain. I had to belt out the song, "Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets." We were a hit! We traveled throughout France performing at different Army camps. Bernadette, a lovely young woman, kept our children while we traveled. The children's French improved greatly during our absence.

Our life in Verdun was a dream. And like a dream one must wake up to reality. Our reality

hit hard: my husband was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and sent to an army hospital in Germany. Jules was treated in the army hospital in Germany and was then sent to a hospital in Queens, New York, for final treatment. He never returned to Verdun.

In a state of shock and with a heavy heart, I gathered my small family and left for the States. Saying goodbye to our French friends was very painful.

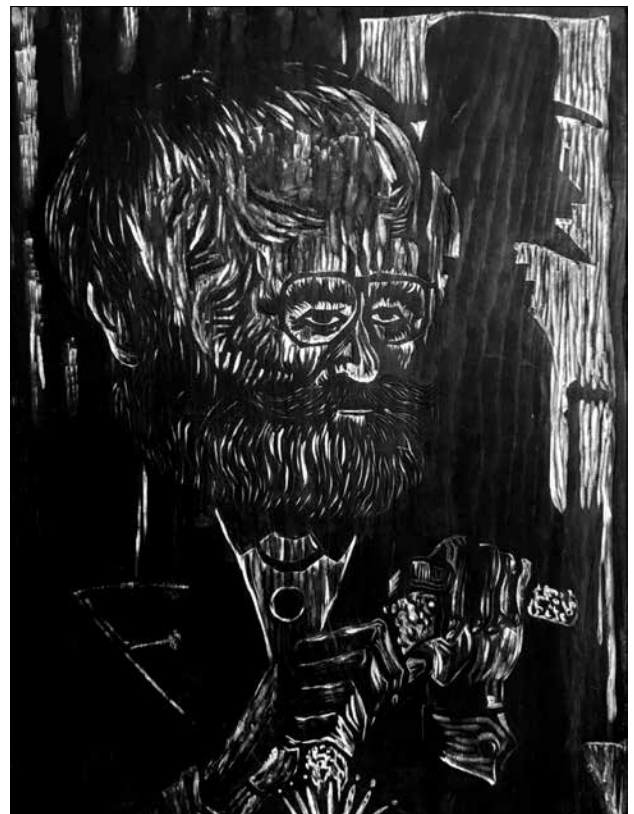
Jules got a medical discharge and we began to put our lives back in order. We sold our Valley Stream home and moved to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean where we had spent our youth.



Our life in France. We lived off-base, in local housing. The children attended a local school.



This is a woodblock portrait of Jules playing guitar.



This is a woodblock portrait of a doctor we met in France.



Family day on the waterfront.

THIRD STREET HOUSE AT THE OCEAN SHORE

Lederhosen, a baguette, wine and memories of France followed my small family to a house by the sea. The smell of the ocean, the sand and surf were ingrained in both Jules and me. We were home and once again began to rebuild our lives.

The ocean shore was new to our young children who had already known three homes. We found a small apartment on the second floor of a house that had once held one family. Shortly after moving in we had the opportunity to buy and remake the house.

We put a skylight into an upstairs room. That room became my art studio. The children each had their own bedroom. Jules had a garden where he grew a small jungle with a small lagoon where goldfish swam. We adorned our working wood burning fireplace with beautiful ceramic tiles we had bought in Italy.

Jules began his dental practice in Ridgewood, Brooklyn while I taught art in a private high school, a mansion in Jamaica Queens. The children attended local schools.

We swam the ocean in summers and strolled its shores in the winter. It's said that Rockaway people always have sand in their shoes and we certainly did. To live at the ocean's shore was a gift.



*I welcomed Shiko Munakata and his family to our home.
Photo published in Life Magazine.*



*Shiko Munakata playing with Barry on the beach.
Photo published in Life Magazine.*

NEIGHBORS ON THIRD STREET IN ROCKAWAY

There were two grouchy sisters, next door, who were puzzled by the artist in their midst. They barely said hello and were outraged when my son and husband began to build playhouse on the side of our house. This primitive structure was in their view. They contacted the New York City Housing Department to complain. The Housing Department sent someone to our door to ask if we had a building permit for this playhouse. "Sorry, but your playhouse will have to go." Perplexed and sad, my son and my husband began to demolish the house. I made a BIG sign "Illegal Playhouse being demolished."

Sometime later the same neighbors began to make an extension on front of their house. I called the housing department to see if they had a building permit. They did not have a building permit and their construction had to stop. Better clean your own house before you call your neighbors dirty.

Mr. Nason was the self-appointed police of our street. He kept non-residents from using our "private beach front." I was horrified to watch him angrily toss people off our beach. Secretly I was glad he took on that job, I could never do it but I really appreciated that we had a beach just for our neighbors. Sometimes fishermen went on the rocks to get lobsters. As long as Mr. Nason did not see them, I let them fish. I often got a lobster as a thank you.

Mr. Nason and I had an ongoing contest. We were the last on the block to swim everyday until way past the warm season. Mr. Nason always won the contest. I gave up, as the water got really cold! One day, Mr. Nason took his last swim of the season and went home to die. It was a fitting end. He loved the beach.

The family on the other side of our house had a lovely daughter named Maxine, who became

our babysitter. Later in her life she fell in love with a young college professor. Her parents vehemently disapproved of her pending marriage, for no valid reason except, perhaps, that they felt she was too young. However, both young people were well on their way to their own careers, were the same religion, and devoted to each other. The young man's family welcomed the union. The wedding took place in their home. Maxine's family did not attend. Jules and I were invited and were her only representatives.

Other neighbors included a Canadian nurse who was married to a Latin doctor. They were very quiet. The couple lived down the middle of our block. We frequently saw the nurse with bruises that she claimed were from a fall. One night she ran to a neighbor naked, frightened, and very pregnant. Her doctor husband came after her to heal her wounds—wounds he had inflicted. Angry words were passed between the couple. She returned to their home. Shortly after that terrible night the couple mysteriously left and we never saw them again.

Tubby was the fellow who ran the boatyard at the far end of our street, at the creek that was a block from the ocean. Tubby was strangely quiet—a real loner. He worked on his boats and kept the boatyard in constant disarray. My son Barry made friends with Tubby. It was a great relationship. Tubby ran the fireworks every Wednesday night during the summer. Barry, to his delight, was invited to man the boat with Tubby. The Fire Department came each week to inspect the boat before it went out. I worried about those fireworks but Barry came home happy and safe each week. One day, Tubby became disoriented and ended up in a mental hospital. Barry lost his friend.

* * *

Our beach house was a wonderful meeting place for friends and family. One day we entertained master printmaker Shiko Munakata and his family, who were all visiting from Japan. I had the honor and privilege to study woodcut printing with him at Pratt. I invited him and the entire class to lunch at our home. It was a momentous day. Jules made a fine bouillabaisse soup. We visited the beach where Mr. Munakata made a quick painting of the beach. A photographer from the popular *Life Magazine* came photograph the occasion. He took many pictures. One photo included my young son Barry and our teacher looking at a crab. The photo was published in *Life*. No words were ever exchanged between Mr. Munakata and me. He spoke no English and I spoke no Japanese. Our connection was through art.

Many memories were created in the Rockaway house, some sad and others joyful. . A house holds all those moments inside its walls. The moments are kept alive by those who remember them.

MAXINE

After moving to Texas and raising three children, my young Rockaway neighbor Maxine was divorced and returned to New York. Upon her return, Maxine sought to reunite with me. I had become a widow during the time she was away, and I had left Rockaway. After much searching Maxine found me in Brooklyn and we rekindled our friendship.

Every year in my Brooklyn home I invite the public to my studio. For two days the public gets to see an artist at work and to consider buying art at studio prices. Over one hundred people typically attend my annual open studio, and I always need hostesses to greet people as they come to the door. I asked Maxine if she would consider becoming a hostess. She said she would be delighted.

That weekend each guest was greeted with, "I'm Maxine. Welcome to Bernette's studio." Allan, my upstairs neighbor, came to the door and got her greeting. Maxine and Allan began to talk. He was a single dad at the time, with two grown daughters. Their talk turned to dating and within a very short time they became man and wife.

All the single women I knew wanted to become a hostess at my next open studio.

THE WEEPING WILLOW TREE

We were renovating our kitchen. The window at my kitchen sink looked out on the garden. I wanted to look at a tree while I did the dishes. My husband obliged and bought a small weeping willow tree. While he planted the tree I directed its placement from the window.

Willows grow fast and strong but not fast enough for my young son Barry. He wanted to build a tree house. We told him, as he and the willow grew, one day they would both be big enough for a tree house.

That day finally came and Barry built a fine house in the willow tree. On completion of the house he made a sign, "No girls allowed." He meant his sister. Barry did let one girl join him in his tree house, a "tomboy" from the next block. They had many fine moments in that tree and we enjoyed the shade of its long, flowing branches.

The day came when our family came apart with the sudden death of my husband. The children were big enough to branch out on their own and I moved to Brooklyn. I sold the house to a lovely family with several children.

Many years later I met a young man who became friends of the family that bought my house. He told me that the neighbors complained that the willow branches were coming into their yard. The family cut down my precious family weeping willow tree.

I cried for the tree, for my family and for the house by the sea in Rockaway.

THE CELEBRATION OF PASSOVER

The holiday of Passover celebrates the liberation of the Jews from slavery in ancient Egypt, under the leadership of Moses.

My earliest memory of the family holiday of Passover was in my paternal grandparents' home in the Bronx. I was a child and became mesmerized by my grandfather's reading of the Haggadah (the story of Passover). He read entirely in Hebrew. No one understood anything he read and the family paid little attention to the message, but I was glued to his every word. I vowed that, when I grew up, I would conduct a Seder (the Passover dinner is called a Seder) all in English, and everyone would surely listen.

My parents never conducted a Passover dinner. When I married Jules I announced we would have a family Seder. My husband was not keen on the idea but he conceded, once I agreed to add French wine to the table, along with the traditional sweet Manischewitz wine. I did not keep a Kosher home and my paternal grandparents would not attend. Every other member of our family gladly attended.

THE LAST FAMILY PASSOVER IN ROCKAWAY

The next year, Jules asked if we had to celebrate the holiday. I told him we would celebrate every year. He never questioned me again.

My home in Rockaway was the gathering place for my whole family. We celebrated Passover, Thanksgiving and many summer barbecues at the Rockaway beach house. Passover 1969 was very different. It was the last time all my family would be at my dining room table.

My parents were retiring to Miami Beach. My grandparents were moving to a nursing home in the Bronx. My cousin Anita and her mother Marion were relocating from Long Island to Anaheim California. My brother Herb, his wife Harriet and their three children were moving from their home in New Jersey to Chicago, where Herb would be a professor at the university.

I knew this would be the last time we would gather as a family.

What I didn't know was that my husband Jules would die shortly after this Passover.

I have attended many Seders since, in the homes of other families, and even public ones. The most memorable one was a Seder I conducted while I was working as an art therapist in an adult home for the mentally ill. I prepared my own Haggadah and told the residents the only requirement to attend was to dress in their finery. This was difficult because looking good was not a priority. To my delight most came clean and nicely dressed. I did send one resident back to her room to change, which she did. There was much love in that room as each person took turns to read from the Haggadah.

I had fulfilled my early childhood vow.

A ROOM IN WINTER

Law books lined the shelves of the lawyer's home office. The soft chairs invited you to curl up with any book of your choice. Soft earth colors added to the warmth of the room but could not warm my body. I was chilled and wrapped in my winter coat waiting for a decision that would dramatically alter my life.

Behind a closed door was the legal office where the determined lawyer sat with my bewildered husband. It was only fifteen minutes, which to me seemed like a lifetime before the door opened and I was called into the adjoining room.

It is 1969 but the real story began in 1950 when I married Doctor Jules Rudolph. Everyone thought my marriage to Jules was perfect; he was very bright and handsome, a renaissance man who was talented in the arts. Jules was a dentist and from a Jewish family. If you weren't a doctor yourself, marrying one was equally good. No one seemed to notice that Jules had a drinking problem.

I never saw anyone in my family drink, except for the occasional wine at family holidays. No one drank hard liquor. Jules proposed to me with a bottle of wine in hand. I kept that bottle for many years not knowing that I had married an alcoholic.

I loved Jules. He supported my life as an artist and for that I was grateful. He was a very creative man. He made a garden in our yard that was the envy of all our neighbors. He was a great cook and made all our guest dinners. He served a before dinner drink, wine during the meal and an after dinner cocktail. One could get high on his soups, which were laden with wine. About a year into our marriage, when friends asked if Jules still drank as much as in his youth, I replied, "Oh, his love for me has limited his drinking." I lied.

It took nineteen years before I fully accepted that indeed Jules was an alcoholic. The mantra for recovering alcoholics is "Denial is not a river in Egypt." I was in denial for far too many years.

Jules was not a drunk, so his drinking didn't affect the quality of his dental work. But his relationship with his patients was affected. He was reserved. He never drank at work. That was saved for dinner and at home in the evening. He never went to bars. Jewish men drink at home.

Over the years Jules did cut down on his liquor because he sensed that something was wrong. No one identified his real problem.

Family problems brought us into group therapy. Jules and I were in separate groups. In my group was a lawyer who was a recovering alcoholic. He said to me, "your husband is an alcoholic, and I want you to bring him to my office." I went into shock, what did he mean?

What he meant was to give Jules an ultimatum: give up drinking or your family will leave you. He would send Jules an official letter requesting him to visit his office. That was how Jules and I were in "the room in winter." After meeting with the lawyer, Jules agreed to attend a meeting of Alcoholic Anonymous.

The following night, Jules and I stepped into the room of Alcoholic Anonymous. A member approached us and Jules said, "I hate my work." "You hate yourself," was the reply. Thus began a life I could never have envisioned for Jules and me. Indeed Jules did hate himself and was very conflicted by the messages he heard in that AA room. Deep down he knew he had a serious problem but did not know how to get out of it. Jules accepted the philosophy of AA and never took another drink.

I joined Al Anon, a group supporting families of the alcoholic. In a short while I became a leader in the Al Anon group, and Alcoholic Anonymous became an important part of our lives.

Jules blossomed and fully immersed himself in the AA community. His dental practice improved with his more open attitude. It was very strange to see him order a coke in a French restaurant instead of the usual wine. Jules was sober two years before a massive heart attack took his life. It was October, 1970, on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur.

His funeral was an AA meeting. The many friends he made in the program spoke at the

service, there was no religious leader. The room was filled to capacity. The lawyer who had given Jules the ultimatum was the prime speaker. I knew Jules wanted to be cremated and have his ashes scattered into the ocean, at the end of our Third Street house in Rockaway.

One moonlit night my two children, ages eighteen and sixteen, and I walked to the end of our block, each holding a memento important in Jules' life, along with an urn holding his ashes. The silence of the night was broken only by the sounds of the waves and the splash of our holdings.

NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO SAY GOODBYE

We never had a chance to say goodbye'.
My husband would have asked if I loved him.
I would have told him I loved him very much.

He would have hesitated but asked, "Do you love me?"
My response would have been, "I love you very much."

In twenty years of marriage we never spoke of our love.
We were busy raising children and getting on with our careers.

Now it was too late.
His sudden death took that conversation
with him to the sea along with his ashes.
On the anniversary of his death
I go to the water's edge,
throw a rose into the sea,
and shout, "I loved you very much."





Family photo taken a week before a sudden heart attack took Jule's life. It was Yom Kippur 1970.

THE SLIDING DOOR

The beach house on Third Street was a dream house until the sudden death of my husband Jules, when it turned into a nightmare. The children moved out and onto their adult lives and I was the only occupant. The house I loved had become a cold shelter, a place I ran away from as often as possible. The empty walls echoed silence. The loneliness was unbearable.

I had the unimaginable good luck when visiting a fellow artist in Brooklyn, Jean Zaleski. Jean had a six-room apartment in Park Slope. The large dining room and living room was where she painted. The rest of the apartment was her living space. I told Jean, I could no longer live in my beloved house by the sea. I had to move. Jean told me that an apartment similar to hers was available on the second floor of her building. Without a moment's hesitation I phoned the landlord and with sheer good fortune I was able to rent that apartment. I never looked at another apartment. I now had a place for my work and me.

The rent for a six-room apartment in 1974 was \$200 a month. Today, 2018 it rents for over \$2000 a month.

I set up my space just as Jean had done. My beloved studio had two large rooms for all my equipment. I had a wall for my stacks of wood and a wall for all my tools. The front room housed my large drawing table, paints and varied glues for my work. A chaise lounge resided near the front window for resting, and folk music CDs lined another wall.

The most important part of my studio was the sliding door. It remains so today. It separates my living space from my workspace. Unless that door is closed I cannot work. The door slides across the opening, shielding me from all the mundane chores of keeping a household, and to the problems of the world I live in. My art studio is my castle and I am home.

THIRD STREET, ROCKAWAY TO THIRD STREET, BROOKLYN

Sadly, my new home in Brooklyn was not near the ocean. The polluted Gowanus Canal was the nearest body of water. I acquired a beautiful studio/home but didn't know if I could live without the daily walks along the seashore. My only previous contact with Brooklyn was the Brooklyn Museum and Coney Island. I knew nothing else about my neighborhood.

I began to explore Brooklyn with my trusty bike, riding up and down the charming neighborhood of Park Slope. I discovered brownstone houses. Taken by their charm I began a series of woodcut prints showing the varied styles of the Brooklyn brownstones.

Beyond the brownstones were the skylines of Manhattan, with their bridges and rooftops. I created woodcuts of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty, both visible from my new Brooklyn home. This body of work was exhibited in an art gallery in Park Slope. This was my first art exhibit in Brooklyn. My Brooklyn series generated a lot of excitement, and my patron list grew.

I had become a professional artist in earnest when I became a wife and a mother, choosing wood as my basic material. Early themes for my work were a nursing mother, my children at play, my husband at the guitar and our life at the ocean. When our family lived in France, my work incorporated the French people and Verdun, our small French town and its history in World War I.

The Brooklyn series began a new way for me to work. Rather than cut wood by hand I began using electric tools: an electric printing press, a scroll saw and a band saw. My woodcut prints no longer had a traditional look. Each color in a traditional print is made on a separate block. I used only one block, cutting the wood in a similar fashion to a jigsaw puzzle. Each part came out of the puzzle to be inked and put back in place. The block was printed once. I did have to

re-ink the whole block every time I ran it through the press. To my knowledge no printmaker used this method.

Living in Brooklyn, only my work as my companion, it finally began to sink in. I was a single woman. Art was the only way I could express my feelings. Another series of works developed: single women, all white wood images.

I incorporated found objects such as keys, flowers and junk jewelry. Everything I used was painted white. I found white plastic faces in a Japanese gift shop. I enclosed the faces with folds of protective wood simulating waves of the ocean. I named the series, "Women In White." The cover image of this memoir depicts one such figure, a single woman rising above rows of people who unfold at her feet.



Heavenly Angels



Keys to My Heart



Woman With Dove

DRAMATIC LIFE CHANGE

I followed the customs of the day. I married young, had children and, except for being an artist, did what was expected of a woman in 1970. Women went from their parent's home to a married home. If you were not married by the age of 25 you were considered an old maid. Looking back, I find these customs not only cruel but very unfair to both men and women. Women took their husband's last name and were expected to follow a man if his job took him to another location; women kept the house and children, men brought home the paycheck.

Early in my marriage, I chose to work. My mother-in-law was horrified. "You're married to a dentist! Dentists' wives don't work!" My husband Jules was torn between his mother's statement and my determination. He did bring home a paycheck, but my money brought in the extras. Jules finally saw that not only I was happier, but the extra income was welcome.

Jules Rudolph and I were married for twenty years when, with no warning, he died. I faced what would be the most dramatic change in my life. At age 40 I became a single woman. I had no clue how to live a single life. I did not know how to not be married. By custom, society expected you to be a married woman.

"The man of the house" was expected to handle banking and money matters. I owned a car. One day I asked an attendant at a gas station to put oil in my tank. "What oil does your husband use?" he said. "I own this car. Put in the best oil you have," was my reply.

Learning to be a single unmarried woman was the most difficult adjustment I have had to make in my life. I had to shed all the customs I had grown up with, and find new ways to live my life. The first change I made was to move from my seaside home to Brooklyn.

THE COBBLER

The Cobbler is a movie I discovered on Netflix. It is a charming film about a cobbler who inherits his father's shoe shop. When the son fixes a shoe on his father's old sewing machine in the basement of the shop, magic happens. He can put on the fixed shoes and is transformed into the owner of the shoe. The young cobbler gets into a lot of very strange adventures. For one, he becomes a gangster who is being hunted down by violent criminals. Having never been a gangster, he is lost and in serious danger. He is able (since this is a movie) to extricate himself just in time. He is also transformed into an abusive lover.

The cobbler lives with his very elderly mother. She does not have long to live. Her son asks if there is anything that she would like. She replied "if only I could see my loving husband once more." The young cobbler retrieves his father's shoes, repairs them on the magic sewing machine. He is now his father. His mother tearfully embraces her deceased husband suddenly brought back to life by her son. I am in tears.

This is not life. We all know the message, "you can not step into someone else's shoes." However people do try. When my husband Jules died, several people told me they knew how I felt. One woman told me she knew how I felt because her brother had died. I asked her if she had slept with her brother.

Another woman said, "I know how it feels; my husband goes away on business trips."

"Does he come home," I asked.

Many people did not know what to say to me. A simple statement like, "I'm sorry for your loss" is just fine.

After my Shiva week, the first day I stepped into my class to teach a lesson, the class was silent. I broke the silence by saying I know you are aware that my husband died and now let's get on with the lesson.

No one except another widow could ever know the pain of loneliness.

The broken heart is real and painful. Being with another couple, even close friends are difficult and very lonely. I tried attending events that I normally would enjoy only to run out after a few minutes.

You never know what will turn on the tears. The first time I sat in a dental chair that did not belong to my Husband Jules, I cried. The nurse came in and said, "the dentist hasn't seen you yet." She could not know why I cried.

On a trip I took with a group of women, we were returning much later then we had planned. The women called home to tell their family that they would be delayed. I had no one to call. Pained by that experience later when I planned a trip I'd phone a friend to let them know I'd be away. It helped. Nothing could completely hold back the pain of loneliness except possibly another relationship.



Photo: Martin Kozák

ALFRED WYATT

By 1976 online dating became popular. I went into the new way of dating with full steam. My theory was that there is someone out there looking for me and I will find him.

The pain of loneliness was overwhelming. I missed the warmth and companionship of a man. My friend Paul lost his wife a few months before Jules died. Paul came to visit. We sat on the couch in my home and Paul put his arm around me. That won't do, I said, "take me to bed." Paul said, "You are not ready." He was right. I waited. A few months later Paul took me to a motel. We made love. I was an active woman but suddenly I became a very passive lover.

I had been a virgin when I married. I had never been to bed with anyone except Jules. I did not know how to respond to a new man. This was the introduction to my new life. I soon adapted and went on to live in a way I could never have imagined. Sex without marriage was now accepted behavior.

I answered an ad for singles in the Village Voice and told no one. I was sure this was the way to meet a companion because going to bars and single dances was dreadful. The men looked you over and could only see you from the outside and knew nothing about you.

My friend Paul came to my rescue once again. Paul had moved on with his life and joined a men's group in Manhattan. He met an artist who he thought I should meet.

My mother was always afraid I'd meet an artist. I'm not sure what mother was afraid of. Perhaps she had heard that artists don't make much of a living wage. Alfred Wyatt was an artist and worked as a window dresser for very fine Fifth Avenue shops. His specialty was women's wear. His fat fingers held very fine, silk clothing. His skills with women's wear were

superb; his displays were very imaginative.

Al lived in a lovely duplex apartment in the bustling Upper West Side of Manhattan. He lived near the mouth-watering Jewish deli, Zabar's. I had never lived in Manhattan and always wondered what it would be like. This was my opportunity to sample city life.

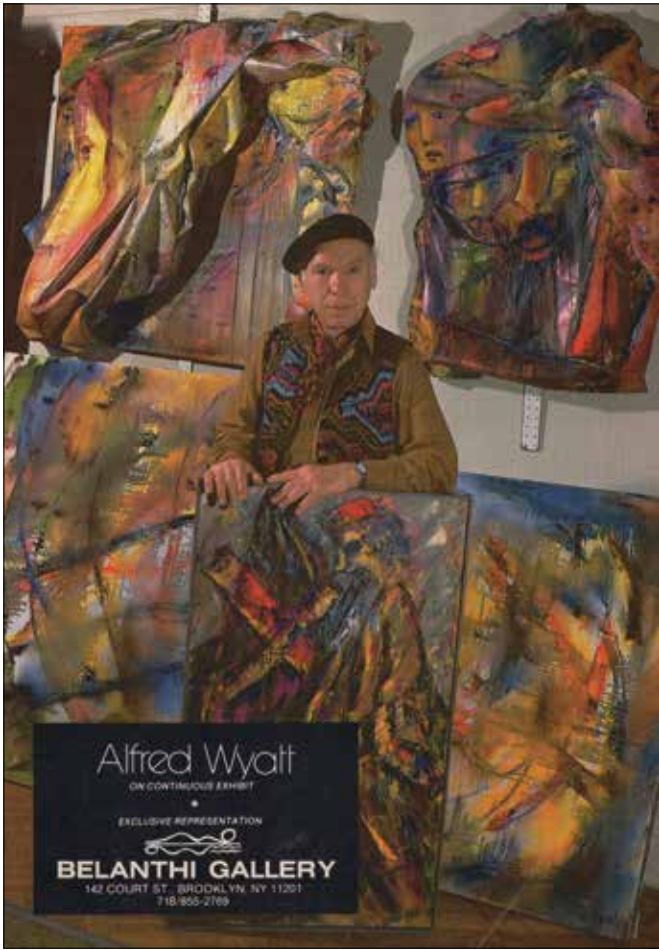
Al was a very gentle man with a special wisdom and warmth that could capture anyone, even my estranged daughter, who no one could reach. He and I began a very warm and loving relationship, sharing time between Al's Manhattan apartment and my Park Slope home.

One day Al informed me that his landlady wanted to double the rent on his duplex apartment. Now we had a problem. I had finally learned to live alone and enjoy the space I created in my new home. I suggested Al start looking for a new apartment. It soon became clear that this was not a good option, given the high price of real estate in New York City.

Al needed space to paint and to live. After serious consideration I offered Al a plan. I would share my bed with Al but not my studio space. He could live with me but would have to paint elsewhere. Al moved in and found a studio space just up the block. We shared living expenses and household chores. Before Al moved in, he assured me he did his own laundry and was a good cook.

We both loved to dance. We joined a wonderful folk dance group and went dancing in Greece with them. We considered it our honeymoon.

Soon, Al began a series of large paintings on cardboard tubes. I continued creating my woodcut prints. We joined a growing Park Slope art association. And we began exhibiting at Belanthe Gallery, in Brooklyn Heights. Belanthe became our exhibiting space and social place to meet with other artists. We had several one-person and group exhibits in the gallery.



A poster for Al's retrospective exhibit at Belanthe Gallery.



Al and me at the Brooking Museum, in front of my sculpture, Paper Arch, which was on exhibit.



Al is wearing a needlepoint vest I made especially for him.

WELLFLEET, CAPE COD: BOTTLE YOUR FAVORITE WAVE

Life's obstacles come like rippling waves. The ripples follow one another, unending, eventually telling a story. A wall may interrupt the flow but the wave simply goes around the wall and continues its journey. As an artist, a wife and mother, I have met many walls that have stopped me, momentarily, before my life has continued on. Here is one of those special times.

July, 1985

Al Wyatt and I had the good fortune of meeting an elderly woman who owned a home with a cottage in Wellfleet, Cape Cod. She offered us her cottage by the sea in exchange for our companionship. We enjoyed the cottage with its porch and all amenities, and joined her occasionally for dinner in her lovely home.

Our cottage had two bathrooms, one with a tub, as well as a well-equipped kitchen and a cozy living room. The bedroom had glass doors that opened onto a small outdoor deck surrounded by trees and birds everywhere.

I rented a bike and began to explore my new community. Unlike my experience of New York City, I didn't need to lock my bike. Stores were open, without gates, and had no buzzers to let you in. Natives of the community were friendly and welcoming.

I rose early, before Al woke, and biked along the shoreline. I found the fishermen preparing for their day's catch and joined them for their morning coffee. They shared stories and speculated on what they might catch that day. I loved meeting them and hearing about their lives. I rode past the dunes, spotted the early swimmers, then returned to the cottage to wake Al so we could continue exploring Wellfleet together.

We visited the craft shops and I bought earrings (I never miss an opportunity to purchase earrings). A local vendor sold empty bottles for you to package your favorite wave! You cannot bottle that wave nor can you bottle the peace and serenity of a good vacation.

Back in Brooklyn, a month after our glorious summer vacation, Al began preparations for a retrospective exhibit at the Belanthe Gallery. All the work was chosen for the exhibit, his publicity photograph was in place.

On the night of Yom Kippur Eve, at dinner, Al put his head to one side and died.

What had been scheduled, as an art opening, now became a memorial service in the gallery, where we were surrounded by Alfred's paintings. The many people who had learned to love Al as much as I did attended his memorial service.

My cousin Anita and her husband George came from California. It was one of the last times George was able to walk before he became a quadriplegic. My daughter flew in from England. My son Barry and my granddaughter Jessica flew in from California.

Many people spoke of their fondness for Alfred. My daughter, with her magnificent voice, performed. It was to be the last positive moment I would have with my daughter. Robin returned to England and has never spoken to me, or any other family member, again.

Alfred Wyatt was cremated. A small ceremony was held at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge. Having thrown my first husband's ashes into the sea, I could not perform this ritual again. There was a young Indian man who considered Al a father figure. I asked him to scatter the ashes under the Brooklyn Bridge where a small group of us would be gathered. Bereft beyond belief I decided I would never have someone live with me again. Al and I enjoyed a love life for ten years.

THE SPOON IN MY CANTALOUPE

At dinner Yom Kippur eve
He put his head to one side
He did not choke
Nor call out in pain
Did not touch his heart
Nor look troubled
He just died
Peacefully as he lived
I screamed and called his name
He never heard me
And the spoon stuck in my cantaloupe for me to take the next bite
I never ate cantaloupe again



Photo: Wikipedia

A ROMANTIC TRYST IN THE CHELSEA HOTEL

Every year since I moved to Park Slope, Brooklyn I have opened my art studio to the public. Local newspaper ads and a mailing to patrons brings over one hundred visitors to my studio, looking at art or buying art. One year, Betty Elder and Piri Thomas walked into my studio. They soon became best friends with Al and me.

Betty was Jewish and a brilliant international lawyer. Piri was a macho Latin, who, after writing three books, was now living on the success of his books. Piri had spent time in jail and his books were about his experiences. His books had become an inspiration for young, troubled men.

Al and I took a few trips with Betty and Piri to visit Puerto Rico. Piri was our special guide to the rain forest and to many off-the-beaten track locations there.

Much to our disappointment, Betty and Piri moved to California. We remained in touch. Life has its way of causing great pain. Shortly after Al died our friend Betty came down with cancer. Friends from Park Slope went to visit Betty in California. I was unable to join them since I was still in shock over Al's sudden death.

Cancer took the life of our friend Betty.

Piri decided to have a memorial service for Betty in New York. Before the service Piri came to visit me. We were both in pain from the loss of our partners. Piri brought me flowers, put his arms around me and gave me kiss. I was startled by the affection but it felt right for both of us.

Piri invited me to visit in his room at the Chelsea Hotel. We engaged in a very romantic tryst. I now knew what kept Betty in this relationship.

I spoke at Betty's memorial service. Well-known celebrities from the legal and theater world attended. I was honored to be among very distinguished guests. I never heard from Piri again.



Photo: popejon2 from Paddington, Australia

HARRIET'S FRIEND JACK

Jack Rabinowitz was an artist and teacher of my friend Harriet Epner. I was in between lovers and in search of a companion once again. Harriet thought he and I would be a good match.

Jack was a fine figurative painter; his small frame and demeanor reminded me of Toulouse-Lautrec. Jack charmed me with his wit, intelligence and fun spirit. Jack also had a very big ego. After his divorce he sought out dancers and artists with whom he could make love and share his views of the arts.

I became one of his new loves. At the time I met Jack I was involved in textile arts, a short diversion from woodcut printing. Jack liked that I was an artist but did not take my work seriously. Only his art was important.

Jack lived in a small Soho loft and owned a barn upstate New York. Both abodes were crude and minimally furnished. Paint cans and brushes took major space in his living quarters. Jack and I made love in both homes. The barn of course was the most exciting. We made love in the barn with the straw, no cows, horses or chickens in sight. A bathtub out in the meadow was another fun spot.

Jack was just plain fun and bright, and we played like kids in a pool bouncing off each other. One day while I was standing on a platform outside his barn, Jack called out the names of famous artists and I posed in the style of the artists. I posed like a Giacometti stick figure, a Degas dancer, a Henry Moore reclining figure, a chorus girl in the style of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and as the famous Gaston Lachaise woman with her hands on her hips.

Large lofts in Soho were becoming available for sale and Jack suggested I buy a loft and he

would live with me. But it soon became apparent that Jack was the only important person in his life and no one else mattered. I ended the relationship.

A few years later I attended his funeral. At the funeral home were his former wife and all the beautiful artists with whom he shared his life.



A collection of promotional postcards from art shows and exhibits

WANTED: CREATIVE WOMAN FOR HUGS AND KISSES ELI SCHEFER

January 1, 1987

Once again I was without a male companion. I was now comfortable living the life of a single woman and no longer felt the need for a legal marriage. I had come along way in my life and like women in the twenty first century I could take care of all my own needs.

Dating on line had become mainstream but there was still personal ads in the newspapers. An ad in *The Jewish Week* newspaper caught my attention:

*Widower on North Shore of Long Island
seeking a creative woman for hugs and kisses.*

I answered the ad with a handwritten note on a very special card and wrote:

*I am a creative woman.
Hugs and kisses are fine but do you dance?*

Eli Schefer did not dance but he was a creative man with lots of love to give. Going against one of my dating rules I did let Eli meet me at my home on the first date. That day it snowed and he drove from the North Shore, gift in hand, to take me to dinner.

When he entered my studio he was taken back by my wood tools, and asked if I made anything practical? To his confusion I replied, "I make art, you put it on a wall and look at it."

Eli was a mechanical engineer and worked for Revlon Cosmetics as their package designer. An artist creates a product and Eli figured how to make it. He went to glass factories and ceramic studios world wide to find what will work for the package. When we met he was entering retirement after thirty years with Revlon and was ready for a life in his workshop and a woman in his bed.

Eli was married forty years to Rose, the love of his life. He did not want to marry again. He wanted a companion part time. This suited me very well. For over twenty-five years we spent weekends together in his Sands Point home. We also traveled to many countries including Italy, The Netherlands, and Israel.

I was in Eli's life when all four of his grandsons were born. We made Thanksgiving dinner for his children and his grandchildren as well as the Passover meal. I was part of every birth, death and family celebration.

We both had difficult illnesses, as well as family problems during our life together. We supported and cared for each other through every crisis.

My art education did not include woodworking. Eli, with great patience taught me many woodworking skills. With his engineering knowhow and my creativity we made toys for our grandchildren. We developed a sailboat made of cardboard boxes and taught this to all the third grade classes in his town of Sands Point. The sailboats were taken to the local river for a real sail. We had fun with our combined talents and shared them with loved ones.

Eli decided I needed to add a band saw to my shop. He took me to a woodworking trade show in Atlanta Georgia. We selected a fine saw and Eli loaded it in his Mercedes Benz and off we went to my Brooklyn studio. Now I could really cut wood.

Street Shows Up and Down the East Coast

I had a commercial idea. I wanted to make wood sculptures with personal photographs. I would take actual photos and make them three-dimensional. Eli's skills helped solve all the many "bugs" that came with this idea. Together we created a very presentable commercial product, and began to think about marketing.

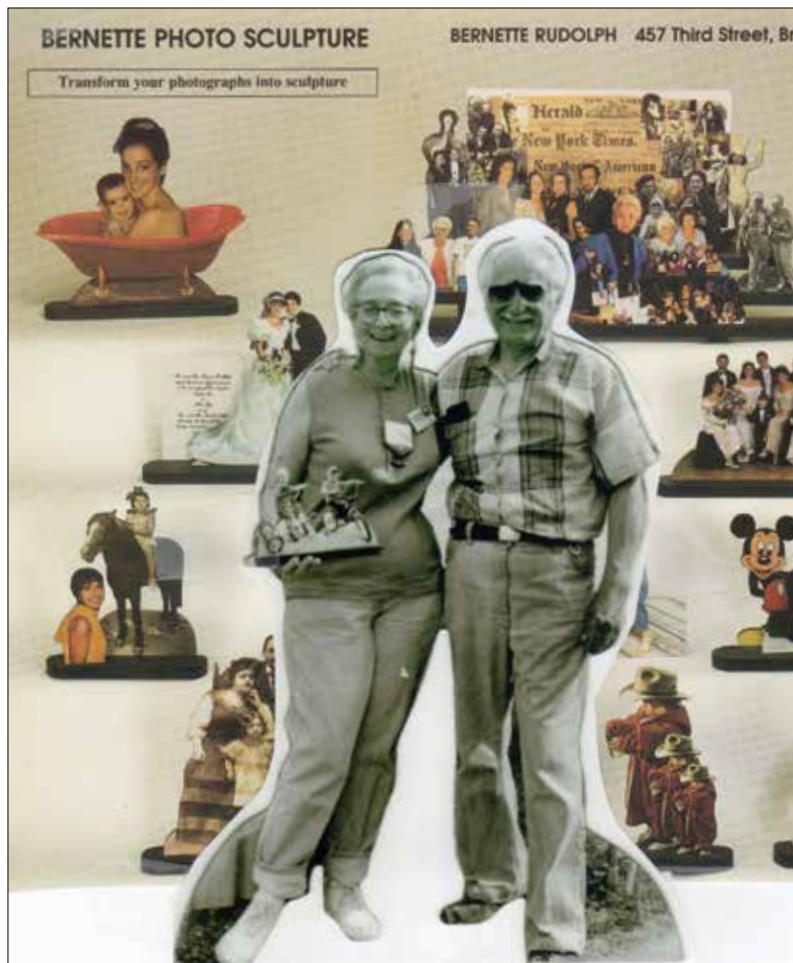
We bought a tent and take to the streets. I sign up for fine craft shows up and down the East coast of the US. We exhibited from Boston to Cape May and Virginia Beach. In New York we were on Central Park West and Greenwich Village. On Long Island New York we went from

Long beach to Montauk Point. At every exhibit Eli used his fine skills to help fellow crafts people with technical problems. We became salesmen as well as artisans.

I made over three thousand "Bernette Photo Sculptures."

I sold nothing at the shows. I only had a display of samples. People had to send me their photos in the mail. I reproduced the photo and returned the original. I lost many sales with snail mail. Today, with digital photos sent through email, I could have more then doubled my sales. I still get calls, twenty years later asking for orders. Unfortunately, I no longer make "Bernette Photo Sculptures."

It was a wonderful fourteen years before Eli and I decided we had enough. We had exhibited in fine hotels, on the streets of small villages, and on the boardwalks of Virginia Beach. We encountered snow, rain, traffic, good shows and bad shows. We made many friends along the way.



Eli and I did many street shows with "Bernette Photo Sculptures"

A WORLD OF GODDESSES

While working on a series of artworks that incorporated manhole cover images from all over the world, I discovered a world of goddesses.

It started with an image of a manhole cover from Austria. In the town square of Salzburg there stands a statue of the Goddess Athena. I researched the Goddess and found her to be a very colorful woman. I made a wood sculpture of **Athena** holding the manhole cover.

Athena's birth is unique in the annals of mythology. The Greek god Zeus swallowed his wife Metis, who was pregnant with their daughter Athena. Shortly afterwards, Zeus was tortured by an intolerable headache. To cure him, the God Hephaestus split open his skull and out came Athena, fully armed.

Athena is the goddess of beauty, wisdom and creativity. Legend has it that Athena advised the Greeks to build a huge wooden horse filled with soldiers to attack the Trojans. In addition to the manhole cover, I gave Athena a crown that had a horse with tiny soldiers hidden inside.

This was the beginning of my adventure into the mythological world of goddesses—my next series of artworks. I did extensive research, and chose women who had a did amazing things. Each woman had multiple histories that sometimes conflicted or overlapped. I made all the goddesses in birch wood, about three feet high. The women were decorated with jewelry and clothes depicting their culture and status.

The challenge to dress and decorate these amazing women led me I into multicultural neighborhoods all over New York City. I also surfed the Internet, looking for the objects I needed to authenticate these women. I found garage sales on Long Island that had ample

junk jewelry to satisfy the goddesses. My studio filled with more stuff than I could ever use—I had to be certain I had just the right objects on hand so as not to rouse the wrath of the goddesses.

Chinatown, full of magic, provided the Chinese goddess **Kuan Yin** with many of the treasures she held in her twenty arms. The silk cloth for her dress came from China.

The Indian community in Queens had bangles and beads just right for the arms, ankles and forehead of **Sarasvati**, the Hindu goddess of the arts. The goddess plays music on the Veena (an ancient Indian string instrument) while sitting on a swan. Her dress is made of the same fine Indian cloth used for saris.

Yemaya, healing mother goddess of the ocean, wears seashells from suppliers in Florida. Her multiple babies were made in Canada and purchased from a store in Harlem. The fish her babies sit on come from a bait store in Long Island and her necklace was bought from a street vendor in Coney Island. Yemaya is worshiped today in Brazil, Cuba and parts of the United States. A visitor to my *World of Goddesses* exhibit told me Yemaya was his idol.

I made a collage of old and new photographs for the body of the American goddess, **Lady Liberty**. A photograph of my grandparents holding my mother is in her torch. The Tenement Museum on the Lower East Side provided early immigrant photos. Photos from many of my friends and family are also included.

Local immigrant shopkeepers were happy to let me use their photos for Lady Liberty's current section.

The source of **Lilith's** one hundred babies pays homage to the Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vineland. The goddess Lilith was Adam's first wife. Lilith flew away from Adam and cavorted with demons to have her babies. The babies were slain later—by God in his anger—an intriguing Bible story.

Freya, the Scandinavian goddess of life's seasons, flies across my living room wall in a cloak of chicken feathers, pulled in her chariot by cheetahs in their fake fur coats. Her eyes are amber.

I visited members of the Goddess Temple in Irvine California where goddesses are inspiration for the member's lives. I showed Ava Park, the spiritual leader of the Temple, photographs of the goddesses. She was very moved by the works and said she would be glad to write a

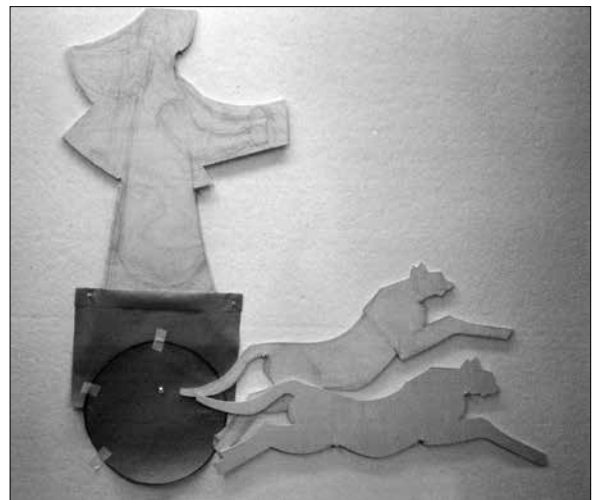
comment for a catalog I was preparing for my Manhattan exhibit. She wrote:

This beautiful and compelling body of artistic accomplishment quickly and gracefully brings the viewer, man or woman, closer to the sacred feminine spirit within.

The fifteen goddesses I created came alive in my Brooklyn studio. They went on to have two major art exhibits, one in Manhattan, the other in Manhasset, Long island. The exhibits were very well received. The Long Island exhibit led to a live interview with Shirley Romaine, a well-known figure and the art newscaster on Long Island cable. The video is on my website.



My initial sketch for Freya



The buidling of the sculpture.



Freya, the Scandinavian goddess of life's seasons, in her final glory



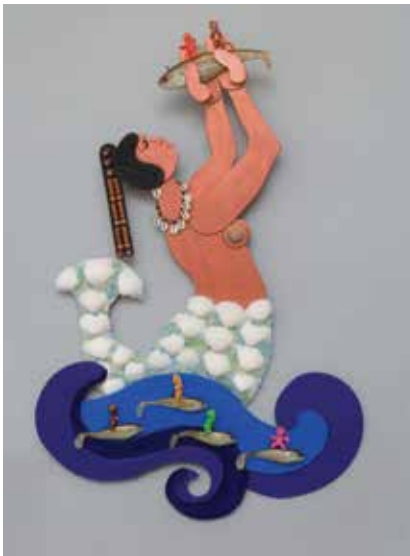
Mary



Kuan Yin



Isis



Yemaya



Sarasvati



Lilith



Athena



Lady Liberty



Tara

Creating the Goddesses

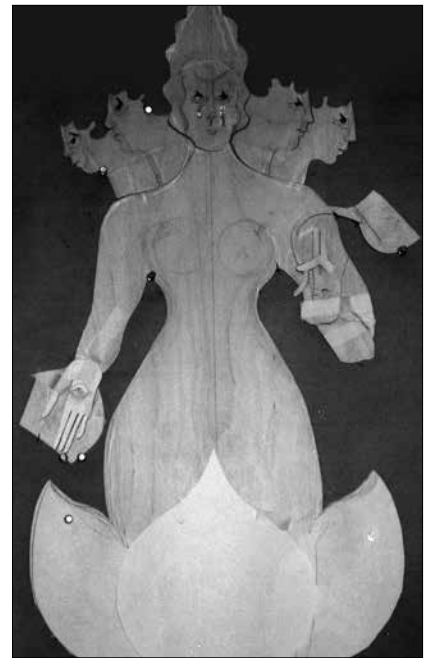
When I created my Goddess series Eli helped me one again, with many of the technical problems. When the Chinese Goddess *Kuan Yin* needed arms, Eli figured out how they would attach to her body. In legend, she has a thousand arms. My *Kuan Yi* would only have twenty arms. Into those arms I put gifts to the world: babies, strong men, cows, and a New York Taxi to get you to China Town. The Scandinavian Goddess *Freya* rides through the sky in a chariot drawn by cats. Eli constructed the chariot's wheel with all the aplomb of a master. I could not have created the most successful series in my career with out Eli's skills and love.



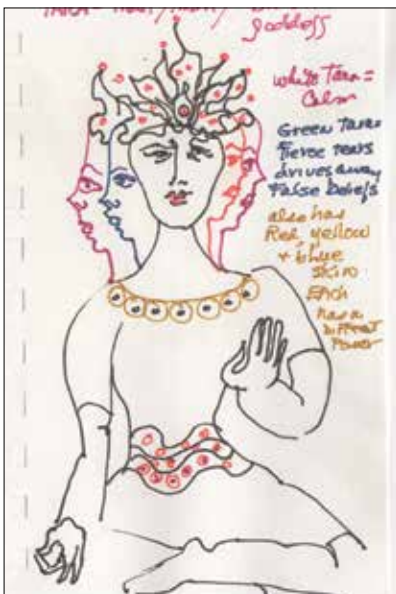
Early sketch of the goddess Tara



Sketched to full scale



Plywood cut and assembled



More developed sketched concept



A detailed sketch of the goddess Tara's many heads

ANOTHER YOM KIPPUR

During the week, Eli worked in his wood working shop and I worked in my art studio. Weekends were for fun and games. Midweek was for work. We were a perfect match. The nemesis of my life, Yom Kippur, struck again. On the day of Yom Kippur, 2010, while in Temple, Eli began acting very strange. There were four doctors in Temple, so I asked one doctor at the service to talk with Eli. The doctor said Eli was having a stroke and we needed to rush him to the Hospital. We went to North Shore Hospital on Long Island.

I phoned his two daughters in Manhattan and they met us at the hospital. By saying that I was his wife, I could get him and myself into the hospital to take care of him. I was in crisis mode and took care of all necessary steps.

The stroke made Eli very confused. He left the hospital after a few weeks and I went to live with him. I stayed with him till he began to regain some ability to care for himself and the confusion abated.

While taking care of Eli I was also preparing for an important one-person exhibit in Chelsea. I needed a stand for a full size wood figure I planned to display in my art exhibit. I decided to ask Eli for help, just as I had done over the past twenty years of our relationship. His confusion was not completely gone but he was unable to get his mind to work. For the first time in all the years we had been together, I hired a carpenter. I told Eli I resolved the problem myself. It was so sad.

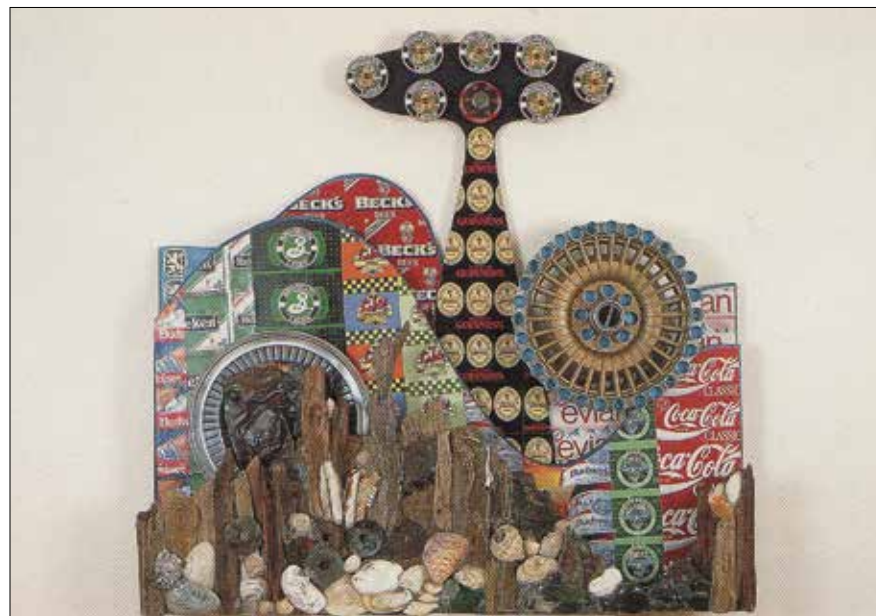
Eli recovered to some extent but the damage was done and dementia took hold. I stayed in his home for about three months to care for him. It was a very painful experience to watch this fine, skilled man slowly diminish. I knew there was nothing I could do to bring him back.

Eli asked me to live with him. I told him it was twenty years too late.

The dementia took over and Eli went to an assisted living facility. He resisted the move. His only way to fight it was to wear his winter coat all the time. He was waiting to return home. I had never seen him so lost.



Eli and me in front of one of my collaged pieces. It depicts Coney Island.



Coney Island, 1991—An exhibit at Belanthe Gallery May 5 - 26, 1991

PROMOTING MY ART

Many people have offered unsolicited advice about selling my art: Bring your art to MoMA, get an agent, place an ad in The New York Times, donate your art to an institution, raise your prices, lower your prices. These are the suggestions offered by people who have never had art to sell.

MoMA will only see your work through an agent. I did have an agent at one time. He did not take my work to MoMA. He took my wood cut prints to galleries in and beyond New York. The galleries bought the prints for half-price. The agent took a quarter of the return and I got the rest. The gallery sold the prints at full price or above. If I sold the prints directly to a customer I got full price. I dropped the agent. As for an ad in The New York Times, unless you have a spare thousand dollars for a tiny ad forget it. Lowering or raising sale prices means little. If someone really wants your work the price doesn't matter.

Promoting art is not simple. I have been promoting my work and myself ever since I was a teenager. I hung art on the walls of my Rockaway home, making small art shows and using my family members as sales help.

An artist must learn to accept rejection as a norm. Many art competitions have hundreds of applicants with one curator who judges who will be accepted. The curator has his or her favorite form of art and if your art does not fit that category you and many other wonderful artists get a rejection letter. You pay to have your work reviewed, which is not refunded, and you are asked to enter again with the next curator.

In addition to art competitions, I have submitted work to the commercial world of art and design. Several years ago a producer of wood frames and objects saw my woodcuts at

an art exhibit. Her specialty is making molds of wood objects and reproducing them in polyurethane. It is hard to see where the final reproduction differs from real wood. The woman wanted to reproduce my woodcuts to add to her commercial line of products.

Two of my very popular images were chosen for reproduction in polyurethane. I made a special wood mold in oak for the client, and then shipped the work to California from my New York Studio. I was curious about the reproduction process, so I flew to California to visit the factory where my oak wood molds would be transformed into this new medium, one every three minutes.

The client took my two works to JC Penny's. JC Penny's looked at both pieces and was ready to buy a line of my work. I flew back to New York with dollar bills floating in my head. With the ability to reproduce my work in minutes, I was finally going to see some of my art become a commercial success!

Not so. I got word that the client decided my work would not fit the look for her new line. She returned the polyurethane wood images and another commercial dream hit the growing reject pile.

In 1978, with my teaching experience and an MFA in hand, I applied to teach at college. The best-laid plans go astray and I landed a job with preschoolers in a fine private school in Manhattan.

Knowing nothing about preschoolers I began to experiment. I brought all manner of odd and found materials to class, just to see how the children would use them. Young children have no preconceived ideas about art and are very imaginative. I was learning from the children while they were learning from me, and I had a wonderful time. I started to make toys and puzzles just for the children in my class.

Puzzles from my studio soon became very popular with the children. Mothers asked to buy them for their children to play with, and to give as gifts. I started to give them as gifts to friends and family. Now, I thought, I have an item to market. I looked at children's puzzles in toy stores and felt mine was more original and creative than what I found.

I could not possibly produce puzzles for mass production in my Brooklyn studio. I decided to sell my idea to a manufacturer. After some research, I contacted a major toy manufacturer to present my puzzle. The indifferent response to my query was, "what makes you think your

product is any better than what we already have?" I told the company my puzzle was very popular with the preschool children in my class and that parents were buying them as gifts. My response fell flat and that was the end of another attempt at marketing my art skills.

When I was marketing my early work, artists' websites weren't yet on the Internet. You carried a large portfolio from gallery to gallery only to be told, "We don't show that kind of work this year. Do try the gallery on the next block." Rejections were part of the routine.

The most successful commercial item I produced and marketed on my own was photo sculptures made in wood. I would photograph local people, then make the objects and figures in the photos three-dimensionally, on wood. I thought taking people's personal family photos would be unique. There were many technical problems to solve before this could become a salable item. I used the photos of family and friends to experiment with before I created items that were salable.

I bought a van and a tent, and traveled the coast doing outdoor and indoor art shows. I set up a display of examples and asked people to mail me their original photos, which I would then reproduce and return to them as a sculpture. I did this well before people could send photos through the Internet. Today I could more than double my success with Internet access. I did, however, make over three thousand-photo sculptures during those fourteen years on the road. I still get calls today from people who ordered the sculptures over twenty years ago, inquiring if I still made these works. It is very heart-warming to know how much these personal works meant to people.

After fourteen years of enduring rain, sleet, snow and wind, as well as some shows with no response, I retired my tent and van, and returned to the art galleries once again.

From 1980 to 2004, I was a member of a fine art gallery in Brooklyn Heights that was run by two art promoters. I exhibited and sold art at that gallery for over twenty years. I had a one-person show every two years, and sold many works of art until the gallery closed in 2005.

I won a membership in a Chelsea Art Gallery, in Manhattan, when I entered an art competition in 2005. Finally! I had hit the BIG time! I would now show in the heart of the art world in New York City!

Pleiades was an artist-run gallery. For a monthly fee you were entitled to participate in two group exhibits per year and a one-person exhibit every two years. My two one-person exhibits

cost me many thousands of dollars in ads and preparations. Both exhibits were well attended, but sales never came close to the cost of the exhibit. After four years with the gallery I ended my membership.

I currently exhibit with the Brooklyn Working Artist's Coalition (BWAC). They have three yearly exhibitions in a huge two-story building in Red Hook, Brooklyn. I also open my studio to the public once a year. I have begun to give away art as well as sell it at this event. It's a way of reducing my large collection of works

I may not be a household name in the art world, or be sought-after by Sotheby's, but I have made my mark. I have a large following of devoted clients who collect my work. They buy my artwork to hang in their homes. My art does not go in a vault to be used as collateral.

I get calls and emails regularly, because people find my art in very odd places. I always sign my name on my work. The name Bernette is unique and finding me on the Internet is very easy. People photograph the work and ask if I am the Bernette who created the art. The second question is what is the value? I am pleased with my place in the art world and honored that so many people enjoy my work.

ELI WAS LAID TO REST TODAY

July 18, 2012

Eli was laid in a simple pine box, something Eli would have appreciated. He also did not have to wear a formal suit, which he would have resisted. Eli Schefer was given an Orthodox Jewish burial, washed by religious men and put in a shroud. Three broken pieces of ceramic were laid on his face. The ceramics, I later found out, had to do with returning to earth. Some religious rituals make sense. Mostly it is a *mishagas*, Yiddish for meaningless.

After the burial we returned to Eli's home for a meal and to share thoughts about him. It was a very strange experience to return to the home I had lived in, part time, for twenty-five years. Phyllis, his daughter, had totally cleaned the house and removed all personal mementos. I later learned that the real estate people advised you remove personal items to make the home more sellable. For today however, Phyllis put out all the photo sculptures I had made of Eli, of his work and his family. I did not realize how many I had made.

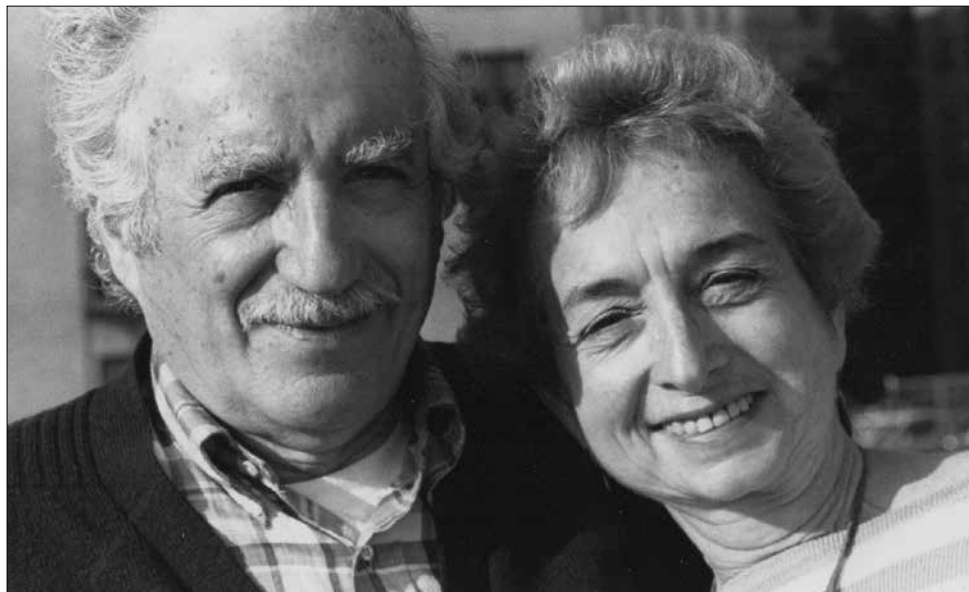
I walked through all the rooms feeling like I had never been there. Then I went to Eli's workspace in the basement. Nothing had been touched and I cried. Eli and I spent many moments sharing our creative talents in that space. It was the best part of the house.

A beautiful bagel spread had been laid out for the friends and family. Many of us spoke about our relationship with Eli. I told of our meeting through the personals in *The Jewish Week*, and that we met on the first of January, 1987, a month before Ben, the first grandson was born.

I spoke of Eli's failure to understand how I could have an art studio full of wood working tools, yet not make anything functional. I told him, "All you do is put my work on a wall and look at it." Over time, he shared his skills with me and began to understand my work as art.

Eli and I were a couple for over twenty-five years. This was the longest relationship in my life. We loved and cared deeply for each other. Eli always said, "I had two wonderful women in my life, Rose and Bernette."

With Eli's death, his children no longer considered me part of their family and ended all contact with me.



Eli was a creative man with lots of love to give.

GREAT GRANDMA WITH BANDSAW IN LIVING ROOM

Park Slope Art Tour Lets Public Peek Inside Artists' Studios

By Leslie Albrecht / Park Slope News / September 27, 2013

PARK SLOPE — When you devote your entire life to making art, you might end up with a band saw in your living room.

That's the case for BERNETTE RUDOLPH an 89-year-old artist who's been creating artwork since she was 7. Her sprawling Third Street apartment is chockablock with her wood-based artwork and the tools for making it.

She's got two heavy duty saws that look like they belong in a carpenter's shop and an industrial size color printer, as well as coffee cans stuffed with paint brushes and a drafting table. Rudolph's extensive creative output is crammed into every available space, even the bathroom.

"I live here with my work," Rudolph said, adding that making art has always been her first priority, she also teaches art and has worked as an art therapist. Her four great-grandchildren make art every time she visits them in California.

The public will get a chance to see Rudolph's unique living situation during the weekend of Oct. 12-14, when she and eight other artists in Park Slope and Windsor Terrace will open their studios for the weekend.

Rudolph has been participating in open studios events since 1985, when 70 local artists showed off their workspaces.

NEW KNEES WILL DANCE

During my life with Eli I found myself suddenly unable to walk. Arthritis had broken down the cartilage in my knees. I was unable to walk and surely unable to dance.

After trying acupuncture, physical therapy, a magical metal piece held over my knees, and several other non-working results I decided to have surgery. A good friend of mine who had the surgery done successfully recommended her surgeon. I took her advice. I would have both knees repaired by Dr. Russell Windsor at the Hospital for Special Surgery in Manhattan. During my hospital stay, I took copious notes and made drawings of my experience.

The following are some of those notes.

Monday, October 11, 2004

Eli and I take the early commuter train from Long Island to Manhattan. As we approach the city the rising sun kisses the tops of the urban skyline and the mist begins to fade. Eli sleeps and I await my new adventure with great apprehension.

As always, we arrive early for the appointed time. The receptionist asks me to fill out some forms, which I already completed and had on hand. Apparently people don't always follow what is requested of them.

We wait. I make a drawing of a plump man who also waits. Later, at the rehab center, I see that man again and show him my drawing. "That's me," he says. Everyone snacks on coffee and cookies, except the patients—no eating before surgery. We wait and I draw to offset the anxiety. As the process begins, they ask me to repeat my name and birth date several times. The hospital is well-run and leaves nothing to chance. The staff addresses all my concerns.

I am prepared in every way I could possibly have prepared. I bought a new sweat suit, a pretty pink robe and had my Brooklyn mail rerouted to Eli's house. My nails and toes are manicured and ready. This is going to be a long adventure. Everyone is very supportive, especially my cousin Anita and my niece Rachel. Bob and Katia Goldberg gave me a send-off party with all my Park Slope neighbors. I was so moved by their concern and thoughtfulness. Most of all I could not venture into this without the love and encouragement of Eli. He insists I stay in his home after my rehab, at least until I can climb steps. I have two flights of steps in my Brooklyn home.

I am told one knee will be operated on first; if it goes well, they will do the second one. Both were done at the same time, thankfully. The recuperation time is the same for two as for one.

It is evening after the operation. I stay in the recovery room. I am tired. Nurses keep taking my temperature and testing my vitals all night long. I can't sleep.

The Next Day

I can't move; I am in terrible pain. Eli has hired a private nurse for me, which is the best gift he could have given me. Ann, my nurse, moves me into my regular room. The room faces the wall of a nearby building. I am given the bed next to the door; someone else has gotten the window bed. Even if I had the window bed it would have been worthless, since it faces a dark, blank wall. I tell Ann, "I must have a window bed. I will not get better without a window."

Ann scouts the floor for another room and comes up with a miracle. A patient in a room with a window that faces the East River is about to leave. I move in. I am certain this will affect my recovery in a very positive way.

I move into this sunlit room overlooking the East River with its barges and large ships floating by. The sunsets are splendid. I'm in an Edward Hopper painting.

Surgery is the Easiest Part

Recovery, it turns out, is the most challenging part of knee surgery. The pain is unbearable. Ann wants me to get off my bed as soon as I move into my room. I can barely pull myself off the bed or step onto the floor. I think I will never walk again. Ann assures me all will be well. I find it very hard to believe. The next day I get off my bed and walk three steps to the window. I am exhausted and chilled.

A roommate joins me and takes the wall bed. She is a lovely woman who has had a hip

operation. We become friends. When we are able to move, we both sit near the window at mealtime. "Seaside dining at The Hospital for Special Surgery."

Grueling Exercises in Bed

Everyday, Ann puts me through exercises. This is an unbelievable experience; the pain is excruciating. Pulling my knee up takes tremendous effort. When I finally take four steps I feel perhaps I am on my way to walk again. I could never have done as well as I did without a private nurse.

A Step Up

One day a young man, a physical therapist, comes to take me for a walk down the hall. We get to a set of steps. "Go up," he commands. "Who me? No way. You are charming but I can't go up the steps," say I. I finally do make the stairs, but with great difficulty.

Eli Visits Everyday

He brings me all manner of things to make my life in the hospital stay easier. Hospital food is not restaurant food. Eli brings real food. He also brings art supplies to help distract me from the ordeal.

Ann's Last Day With Me

I have hit a real low. I can't make a move without help. Helplessness overwhelms me, and it's not easy for me to accept. The ordeal I have been through has hit me hard. I do well when crises hit. It is after the fact, when things are on their way to being solved, that I fall apart. Ann's parting words are, "walk proud, head up, backside in, look straight ahead, do not lean on your walker, and go."

The Rehabilitation Center

I leave the hospital with stitches up both legs, ready for the next procedure in this arduous process. I choose a rehab center near Eli's home to make his visits easier. I learn how to put my clothes on, how to shower. Pulling on pants is not easy when knees don't bend. I hadn't showered in the hospital; I could only sponge bathe in bed. So my first shower was glorious.

They tell me I can only shower with an attendant, which will limit me. I learn to leave my bed and shower without an aide. The nurses are not happy, but I am.

Art: My Life-Long Companion

Here at the rehab center, I start drawing on tee shirts. Before long I am decorating tee shirts

for the staff. One nurse brings her daughter's tee for my handy work. Eli buys me plain tee shirts, which I decorate and give to anyone willing to wear them. What fun! It surely helps keep my mind off my pain. Creating art makes every crisis in my life easier.

A Full Year Has Passed

I am beginning to feel normal again. I celebrate the year by walking without a cane from Central Park West to Central Park East, and climbing the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Fifth Avenue.

OUR MOTHERS WERE SISTERS

My mother and Anita's mother were sisters, making Anita and me cousins. The wide discrepancy in our ages leads people to assume I am her aunt, or even her mother. As the family story goes, my grandmother had two grown children when she unexpectedly became pregnant. After trying unsuccessful attempts at abortion, her neighbor suggested she devour a bottle of whiskey. The only thing that happened was that Grandma got drunk and Marion was added to the family.

Marion was my mother's baby sister and adored by all. She was the flower girl at my parents' wedding and, later on, became my babysitter. I loved my Aunt Marion.

Marion taught me how to ride a bike, for which I am eternally grateful.

In 1953 my aunt and I both became pregnant, she with her last born and me with my first. Our two daughters were born three weeks apart. Marion thought the girls would be close cousins, but that was not to be. My daughter, Robin, was a difficult and self-absorbed child, and didn't retain friendships for long.

When Marion and her husband ended their marriage, she moved to California with her then teenage daughter Anita. Despite the distance, Marion and I continued our wonderful relationship until her early death in 1994, when she was 74 years old.

Upon Marion's death, her daughter Anita and I became very close. When we are together people always assume I'm her mother. Anita does not want another mother and I do not want another daughter. We are happy to be cousins.

Leaving her New York home, Anita soon became a citizen of California. She continued her

schooling, and later met and married a true California native. George Gonzales and my cousin Anita fell in love on sight.

George had a paint business, which soon turned into a specialty business that produced paint for highway markings. The business did so well that Anita stepped in to work with George. Business was good and their loving marriage was just fine until one day George went on a business trip to Texas.

It was Anita's 35th birthday when she received a call from a hospital in Texas. An argument with a Texas man had ended with a bullet in George's neck, leaving him a quadriplegic, and changing two lives forever.

George could not move anything below his neck. Every normal function had to be done for him. For George, that dedicated person was his wife, my cousin Anita. She catered to his every need with love and devotion. George could speak clearly and with his mental capacity intact, he was able to maintain his business mind. George and Anita continued the business they had started together, to the amazement of all who knew them.

With Anita's care and love, George lived twenty-six more years, well beyond any statistic. Anita held a memorial service for George, and asked me to officiate the service. I was honored to accept that role. Theirs was a true love story.

Anita and I have a very special bond and I love her dearly.



Anita and me on a Staten Island visit to my friend Robin Locke Monda.

A BANDSAW IN TROUBLE

July 13, 2016

My wood working tools are my most precious possessions. They are partners in my private world. Eli, my guide and mentor, is surely missed at this moment.

Eli grew up with tools in his hand. He bought tools from childhood to the day he died. I grew up making art without the faintest knowledge of wood tools. Woodworking was not part of the curriculum at art school. When I turned to wood as my art medium, I had no idea what was in store for me.

I worked with a simple scroll saw to start. Eli had me purchase a "real" scroll saw and I was off on a new adventure. One day Eli announced, "It is time for you to add a band saw to your studio." I hesitated at first. Eli took me to a trade show of wood working tools in Atlanta, Georgia. At the trade show I was able to try several band saws. Women were not expected to use heavy wood tools. I asked a salesman why he was willing to let me try the saw. "I tell my sales people to respect women's skills, they sometimes know more than the men!" We choose a saw and Eli loaded it in his Mercedes Benz and we were off to Brooklyn.

The band saw soon became an indispensable tool in my work. My first band saw was soon replaced with a very fine machine made by a company in Canada. The video on the home page of my web site shows me with my arm on the platform of my band saw. The video opens with me cutting wood. Whenever I am photographed for publicity, I ask the photographer to shoot me cutting wood. The public has a hard time accepting a woman with a band saw. At my art exhibits, someone always asks, "Who cuts your wood?"

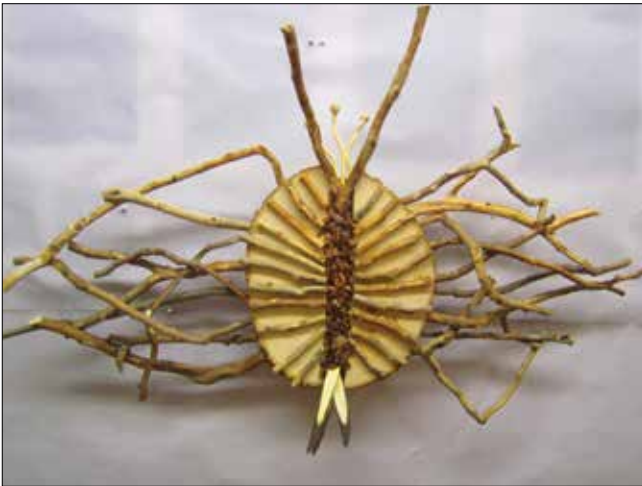
One day my precious band saw was is in trouble. The blades were breaking much too often.

Like a mother who knows when her child is sick, I knew something was not right. I searched online for help and found a gentleman in New Jersey who suggested a solution. The rubber tire holding the band saw blade had worn out, causing the blade to bend while cutting. I had never looked at the rubber tire. A call to the manufacturer in Canada got me a replacement tire. My delightful superintendent and handy man, Jesus, came and replaced the tire and I was back in business.



In my studio, working with my scroll saw.

BLOCKS TO BRANCHES



Bug

In my late teens, I studied drawing with Abbo Ostrowsky at the Educational Alliance in lower Manhattan. I was an anxious teenager and I wanted to get to my real career! I wanted to paint. Drawing huge plaster Greek heads with charcoal was getting tedious. “No,” said Abbo, “you must learn to draw before you can paint.” Today, many changes have made the academic approach nearly obsolete. I am now very grateful for Mr. Ostrowsky’s strict academic approach because I can draw.

While at the Alliance I also wanted to study sculpture. Chaim Gross, a well-know sculptor, told me you can’t paint and make sculpture. No one was hearing me.

Sarah Axelrod, my mother’s friend and mentor, worked at the *New York Times*. Mother said, “Sarah will know where to send Bernette to continue her art journey.” Indeed, Sarah knew. I was to take lessons with artist Nat Ramer, whose studio was in the heart of Greenwich Village. Mr. Ramer was a good next step on my way to my art career.

I began to draw, paint, and carve wood. I was never without a pencil, a pen or a carving tool. Having a pencil in my hand is like the conductor of an orchestra having a baton in his. Wood, not paint, became the final medium of choice in my professional life. At first I carved wood blocks and hand printed woodcut prints. I soon discovered the scroll saw, band saw and the electric printing press. These tools launched my mature career from blocks to branches.

BIRTHDAY LETTER TO MY BROTHER

January 6, 2014

Dear Herb,

I cried the day you were born. I was seven years old and I wanted a sister.

You soon became a cute baby and fun to have around. After living in the Bronx a short while, Dad decided we should move to Rockaway. He loved the beach. The first day in our new home in Arverne, you decided to take off and ran away. It became my job to run after you and bring you home.

We settled in on the ground floor of a lovely Italian family home. There were goats in the yard and grapes on the vines. One day you came running home with blood all over your face. Mother fainted. It was up to me to clean your face and discover your eyes were fine but you had a cut over one eye. It was a bike or a bat that caused the cut.

As we got older you became a big pest. You followed me around, wanting to join me and my friends. You finally found your own way. We each pursued what would become long, exciting careers.

Though an average student in school, you grew into a serious academic. I started taking art lessons, first with local artists. I then graduated to study with Nat Ramer, an artist in Greenwich Village. At this point in our lives, you never have enough bookshelves and I never have enough wall space. You have continued to write books and I will never stop making art.

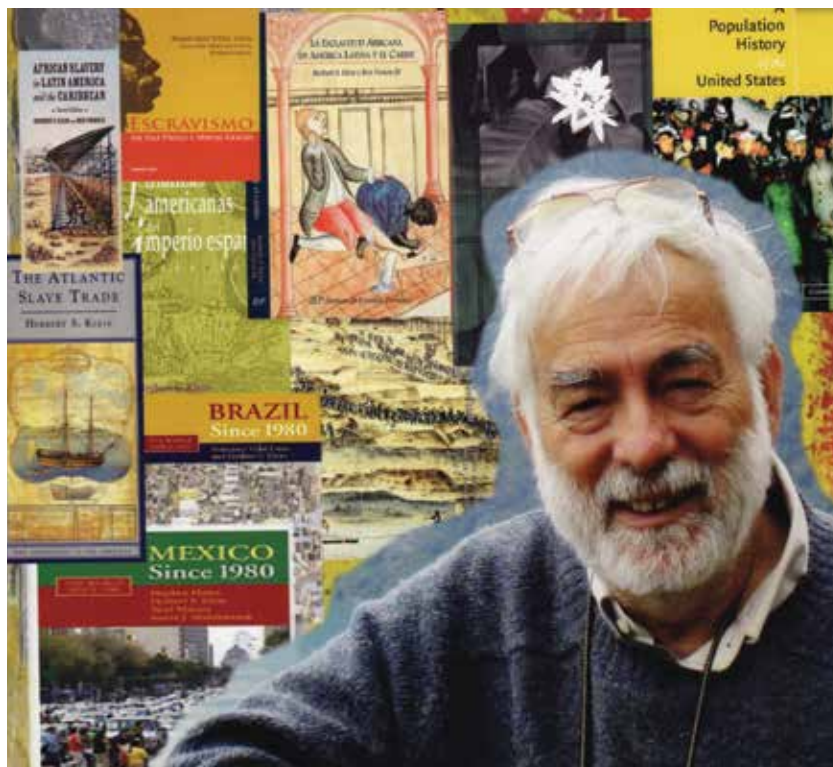
You found friends who had real goals. You started a long, exciting career, married your childhood sweetheart, Harriet Maniles. I married Jules Rudolph, who you claim influenced you in your pursuit of academia. Busy with careers and family life, we saw each other mostly at family events and holidays.

We both have the same energy and drive to pursue our goals in our chosen field. I have several of your books on my shelf, and you have a fine collection of my art on your walls.

Many family events have come and gone. Dad died when he was in his early seventies. Mother stayed on a bit longer in her Florida home. Then it was time for her to return to New York, where we could take care of her final needs. We joined in the care of Mother. She had a good life. I miss them both.

Now we are grandparents with new spouses. I am a great grandmother. Our children are scattered. You are a constant traveler, but we get to visit more often than ever. I cherish our visits.

Although I did not get a sister, I did get two wonderful sisters-in-law. I thank you for that. And now, dear brother, I wish you a very happy seventy-eighth birthday. I'm glad I have a brother.



My collage of Herb with some of the books he has authored.

FOLLOWING THE COLONY OF CAN PICKERS

True to my work, I do a lot of research for each series of artworks I produce. In November 2010, I joined the can pickers in my neighborhood. I followed them to the place where they redeem their precious finds. After photographing them, I decided to get to know the group.

I decided that I, too, would pick cans from the garbage and redeem them. I donned my gloves and started to search the street pails. I very quickly learned my first lesson. You empty the cans before you put them in your bag. You also have to know when the best time for picking, not first thing in the morning; only Starbucks coffee cups are there. Of course, you also have to get to the trash cans before the sanitation department takes off with your stash!

I learned that glass and plastic, as well as cans, are redeemable. But I decided not to pick glass; only plastic and cans. I didn't open closed bags. The can had to be on top of the pile, which limited my findings, but hey, I was new at this! I was in it for the experience.

Happily, I marched off to the redemption center only to find it closed. It was a Saturday—it's a no go on Saturday or Sunday. The worker at the center said come back on Monday.

On Monday I was ready for my big adventure. With my shopping cart filled with cans and my camera at my side I started off for the big haul. One of the workers showed me how to put my cans in the machine. One third of my cans were not accepted.

Disappointed that some of my collection would go to waste, I took the coupons from the machine to get my money. I earned fifty cents from two days' collection. A very lovely Chinese gentleman came to the center with his bags. He saw my cart and I showed him my rejects. He looked in and took about four cans out. They are redeemable, he said, and he got a slip for

twenty cents. I told him to keep the coupon.

He didn't want to take what was mine so he offered it to his friend, who was bringing several loaded bags for redemption. She wouldn't take money from anyone, so the Chinese gentleman kept the coupon and thanked me kindly.

It was cold and I was tired. I went to the coffee shop next door with my fifty cents, and bought a small black coffee for one dollar and seventy-five cents.

The can gatherers are a warm loving family and search the streets many days to earn a decent wage. They should be commended. After my experience, throwing away a can will never be the same for me.



A 3-D photo collage of one of the can pickers

MY LOVE OF TEACHING ART

September 22, 2016

Today, with mixed feelings, I dismantled all the children's art material in my studio.

When I moved to my Brooklyn home/studio in Park Slope there were four families with little girls living in the building. The parents asked me if I would give the children art lessons. Thus began my teaching young children in my studio.

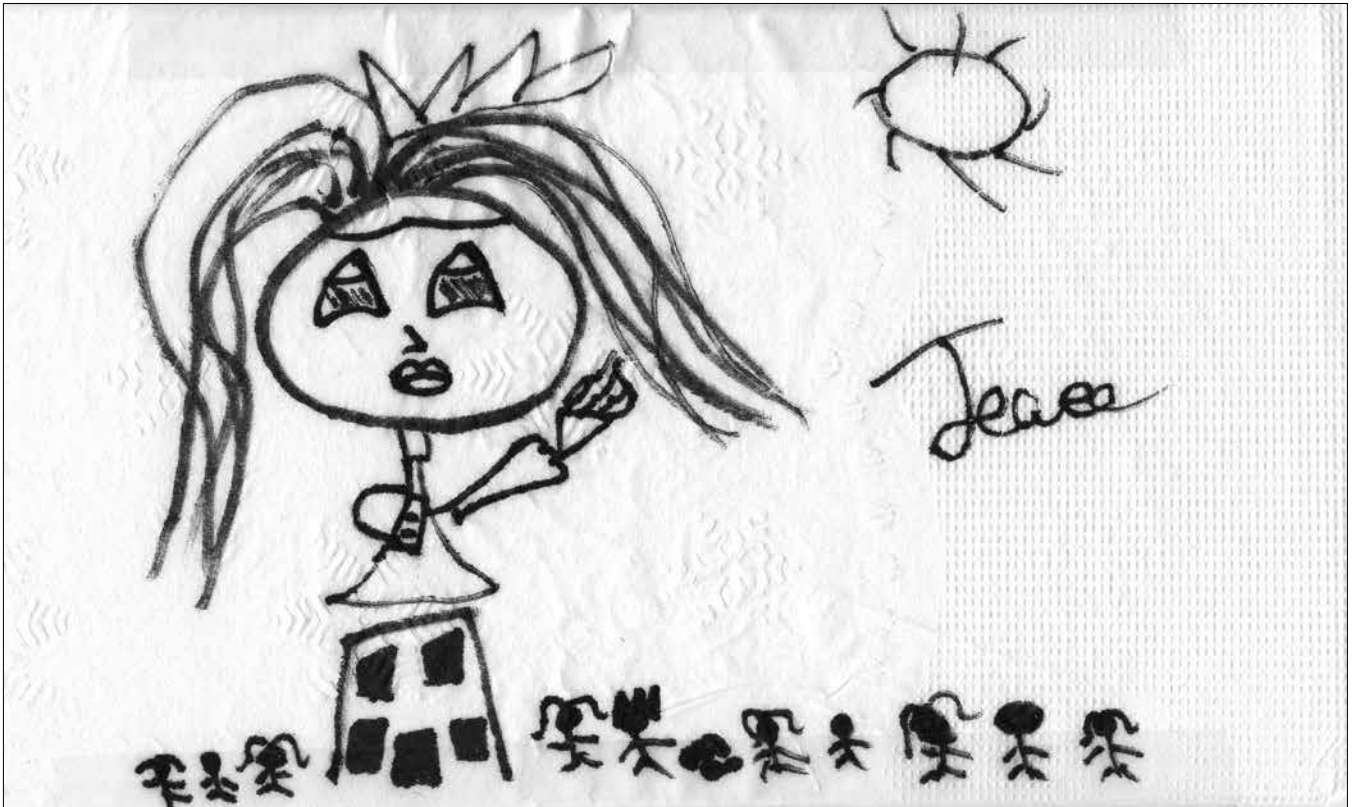
I had already stopped teaching in schools and mental health facilities, and was just doing my own work. The idea appealed to me. For the next eighteen years, I took in not only children in my building but neighborhood children as well. My class was very popular. I even had to hire an assistant.

The little girls I started with are now young women, well into college and dating young men. It is time for me to just do my own work. I do not want to share my studio space now, except for an occasional visitor and my annual open studio.

I am winding down any activity that takes time from my work. I loved teaching in private schools and in facilities with small classes. It was very rewarding, and though I realized public school teachers made better salaries than I did teaching in private quarters. However, the small classes and generous expense budgets made up for the smaller salary.

There is nothing more rewarding than passing your love of your work on to others.

My great grandchildren visit New York City



Jewel



Jasmine

DISASTER VISITS MY STUDIO

July 2016

Many artists suffer from the effects of the materials they work with. I was suffering symptoms from exposure to wood dust. I developed shortness of breath and lost my voice. The fear that I might not be able to use wood devastated me. It is like losing a dear friend. So I hired a team to do a major clean up of my studio. I ordered an overhead filter to clear the sawdust as I worked. I began to wear a mask over my face and purchased non-toxic finishes for my art. I now keep a vacuum cleaner in my studio and clean my machine each time I cut wood.

Over the years I have used wood purchased in lumberyards—clean sheets of plywood—to no ill effect. However, when I began a new body of work using found wood, driftwood and wood sent to me from around the country, I began to have problems unlike any I had encountered before.

Example: I found a lovely log in Prospect Park. I brought it to my studio unaware that I had brought a colony of unwanted ants into my studio! It wasn't until I cut into the wood that the ants appeared. Immediately I swooped the ants into my vacuum cleaner—I could not have them living with me! A friend sent me some wood from Oregon. It was beautiful. But it jumped back at me as I cut into it. Luckily it only made a minor cut on my finger as it flew off the saw platform.

The odd woods I have worked with have magical qualities, but they also produce an enormous amount of sawdust. Cutting into an ugly piece of wood is like the frog turning into a prince.

Today my overhead filter, my vacuum cleaner and my mask keep my studio free of sawdust and I work to no ill effect. My precious wood can stay in my life and my work once again.

CLOSE FRIENDS I MISS

August 2016

I shared very personal moments with my dear friend **Fran Korins**. Fran was an early riser and a biking companion. We shared things about our children. Fran was the only woman with whom I could share concerns about sex. Women share many things, but personal sex is not one of them—at least in my generation. Things may be different today with young women.

When my husband died suddenly she watched me very closely. Her husband Saul would soon die, and she knew she, too, would be a widow. Sadly, Saul's departure took a long time. None-the-less Fran knew she to would be a widow.

I was forty when Jules died and I was not about to spend the rest of my life without a companion. Fran watched my venture into the single world very carefully. When she finally became a widow we shared that, too. Fran found a lovely companion who was at her side when she died of cancer.

My very dear friend **Irma Leboff**—my maid of honor at my wedding and a childhood friend—died suddenly last year. Irma had a special way of resolving problems, especially when it came to family matters. I respected her opinion. The only thing she could not comprehend was my being a single woman. Irma had one husband for over sixty years. Allan survives her today.

Much to my delight, Irma's daughter, **Susan Leboff**, has kept in touch with me. She is a lawyer, and she took me by the hand to help me cancel my will and form a trust instead, which has been a far better way for me to handle the last years of my life. Susan considers me a family member.

Tina Silverman and I met when we were young married women in Valley Stream, Long Island.

Tina was a fine ceramic artist with a huge kiln in her studio. We exchanged many art and life moments.

I met **Harriet Epner**, an artist and a dear friend, shortly after we had both become widows. We had much in common. We were both married to dentists. We were both professional artists and printmakers. Harriet did etchings and I did woodcuts. On becoming a widow, Harriet retreated into her studio. I, on the other hand, could not work in my studio and joined the society of single women. Over time, Harriet helped me return to my studio and I got Harriet to join the world outside. She found a husband and I found an apartment in Brooklyn.

Though new to my Brooklyn life, **Ruth Block** quickly became a very close friend. She was twice widowed when we met. Ours was an easy relationship and we had many wonderful adventures together. We explored Brooklyn, and went to Russia and Guatemala together. I spoke at her funeral. I miss her terribly.

Ruth Schwimmer and I met at Kelzmer Kamp in the Catskills. Ruth was fluent in Yiddish. We became very good friends the moment we met. She wasn't interested in having a companion after her husband died, but she became very involved in Yiddish activities. We shared many fun times together. One time Ruth and I walked from the lower East Side of Manhattan to the 92nd Street Y for a lecture. We laughed and exchanged adventures along that route. Ruth died of cancer.

Billy Gilbert was an older woman who was living alone in Manhattan when I first met her. Both of us had signed up to go to Oxford University in England to study Yiddish. She had a Yiddish background and it was a delight to be her companion in the UK. On our return to the states she became infirm and went to live in Boston to be near her son.

Billy died soon after moving to Boston. Her family decided to have a memorial service in Rattners Jewish Deli on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. We gathered in the restaurant and everyone told of a special incident with Billy. Billy was a brilliant woman and always ended her conversation by telling a joke. Her memorial was a fun affair. She would have been very pleased. Today, not only is Billy gone but Rattner's Jewish deli is gone.

I am saddened by the loss of these close friends, but added to this loss and very unreal to me is another loss. Fran Korins had three daughters. This year, Fran's daughter **Joan Korins** died of cancer leaving Dan, her husband, and her son Josh. Joan was a very dear woman.

The following thought is chiseled in stone on a memorial near my Hudson River bike path. I recited it at Ruth Block's memorial.

*I can sail without wind
I can row without oars
But I cannot part with my friends without tears*

AS FALL THE LEAVES

by Edgar Albert Guest

As fall the leaves, so drop the days
In silence from the tree of life;
Born for a little while to blaze
In action in the heat of strife,
And then to shrivel with Time's blast
And fade forever in the past.

In beauty once the leaf was seen;
To all it offered gentle shade;
Men knew the splendor of its green
That cheered them so, would quickly fade:
And quickly, too, must pass away
All that is splendid of to-day.

To try to keep the leaves were vain:
Men understand that they must fall;
Why should they bitterly complain
When sorrows come to one and all?
Why should they mourn the passing day
That must depart along the way?

ANATOLY'S ATELIER

September 2003

I wore my red shirt so that Michael and Anatoly, when they came to the reception room at the Hotel Ukraina in Moscow, would have no trouble finding me. This meeting was prearranged through the Internet.

In 2003, I was creating art images that included manhole cover designs from New York City, and worldwide. During an online search, I found a website called *Sewers of the World Unite!* It had been established by a young Russian couple, Natasha and Alexander. I contacted them so my work could be added to the website.

Meanwhile, I had been planning a trip to Russia with a tour group. Having exchanged emails with Natasha and Alexander, I alerted them to my plans. Unfortunately they had been called to Poland to show their work at the same time I planned to visit them. "Not to worry," they said, "We will send our artist friends to meet you!"

Natasha and Alexander's friends were Michael Lomanov, professor of physics, and Anatoly Vrubeck, professor of drawing and sculpture, both from the Moscow University. They met me at the hotel and took me to Anatoly's sculpture studio. Michael spoke in limited English and Anatoly spoke with his sparkling eyes and gestures, in Russian, assuming I would understand what he said.

Michael said Anatoly's atelier was nearby and asked if I'd like to walk or take the trolley. I chose the trolley, not knowing how far "nearby" meant. I chose well; the studio was quite a distance from the hotel.

We boarded the trolley and I didn't pay a fare. Michael explained that seniors in Moscow ride the trolleys and metro free. Normally, a senior tourist would pay but since I was with two Russians, I also rode free.

We arrived at Anatoly's basement studio and walked down broken cement steps to a large room filled with classical sculptures. Nude studies in plasticine clay, plaster heads and figures were in every possible bit of space. Old tools covered with clay and plaster was arranged neatly in boxes throughout the studio.

Anatoly cleared a space on a worktable and lowered a basket from the ceiling that contained a feast of cheese, bread, and fruit. I had stomach problems that day, part of the traveler's syndrome, and couldn't eat anything. I managed to have some bread and a bit of cheese so I wouldn't upset my companions. They were disappointed that I did not have wine or vodka.

We sat at the table and Anatoly brought out an old yellowed folder of reproductions of work by Michelangelo. The papers were frayed, as if they'd been handled a million times. He treasured this folder and showed it to us with great pride. They then proceeded to have a heated discussion on the pros and cons of physics and art in very rapid Russian. Every once in a while Michael would tell me bits of what they were discussing.

I wanted to photograph Anatoly in front of his work. I chose one sculpture but, no, he insisted on the headless nude figure cast in plaster. That was his favorite, and so that was the photo I took. I showed my companions photographs of my artwork, but had difficulty explaining the images since my art is very contemporary and Anatoly's work was steeped in academic classical art.

I told Michael that I was going to make a photo sculpture, a three-dimensional work combining the image of Anatoly with his sculpture, and I would send it to him from New York. "But I cannot pay for the sculpture," said Anatoly. I was told the recipient must pay a tax on the value of a gift sent to Russia. Michael told me to consult my tour guide about their concerns. To avoid this tax, I was to put zero value on the package, which of course I would did.

Anatoly cleared the table, put all the food in its basket and returned it to the ceiling. More conversation took place. I thanked Anatoly for his generous hospitality and gave him a big hug. He said, "Now, I have a girlfriend in America." Both men were charming, with old style elegance. Michael held my arm protectively as we returned to the trolley and my hotel.

On my return to New York I made the sculpture of Anatoly as I had promised and sent it, claiming zero value, to Moscow.

A few weeks after my return to New York I received an email from Michael. Anatoly had died on a street in Moscow. My heart was broken. Michael said he wanted me to know the news and thank me for the visit. That evening was the last time he had an opportunity to exchange ideas and philosophy with his friend, and that would not have happened had we not had that special visit to Anatoly's atelier.



Anatoly in his Moscow studio.

FRIENDS ON THE HUDSON RIVER BIKE PATH

*You didn't stop riding your bike because you got too old,
you got old because you stopped riding your bike.*

This anonymous quote sits prominently on my bulletin board as a reminder of why I continue to ride my bike in my senior years.

I keep a bike in my companion's apartment in Battery Park City. I bike very early in the morning along the Hudson River, and watch the sunrise and the New York skyline close its night lights.

In the summer months I ride at five AM to avoid the heavy sun. There are other people who also choose early morning for their trip along the Hudson. They jog, play basketball and tennis, walk their dogs, do Tai Chi, and all manner of exercise. Some I see, they don't see me; others wave or greet me, and some I just observe on a regular basis.

One gentleman yells at me at five in the morning with not a soul around, and lets me know that the pedestrian path is not for bikers.

He yells, "What is wrong with you? Don't you read signs?"

I simply avoid the gentleman and go on my way.

On my return trip I do ride on the bike path because I do not want to deal with pedestrians. I got a fifty-dollar fine from a policewoman who saw me on the pedestrian path. I am very careful to avoid police cars. Once the sun is up, I obey the law.

Every morning, at exactly 7:30, I watch a thin man with a long ponytail play basketball by himself. He never sees me.

At my first rest stop at the top of a long pier, there always sits a man and woman, each sporting a big dog. One day the woman appeared alone with both dogs. The man was in the hospital and quite ill. Shortly afterward the woman did not return. I then saw her host several news stories on Sunday Morning news TV. You never know!

I see Donald Trumps' helicopter land at the VIP Heliport along my route. The Donald does not make an appearance but his name is clearly displayed on the helicopter and there are security men, dressed in black, positioned all around.

A lady biker stops at a park bench to read a huge book in Hebrew every Friday morning. She is the Torah reader at her local Synagogue. We talk. I told Sheri that, at the end of our yoga class at Yiddish camp, we don't chant OM but SHALOM. She was amused.

One day I appear with two hug tree limbs I am taking to my studio. I tell Sheri I am an artist and work in wood. Sheri replies, "My wife is also an artist." Without missing a beat, I ask what does she paint? Sheri's wife is a figurative painter.

A huge Russian man sits on a railing near a tree with his morning coffee. We smile. One day we talk. I see he does not get coffee at the same shop as I do. He tells me he gets his coffee at the candy store for \$1.25. At the corner where I shop it is \$1.75. We are now friends and in true European fashion, he kisses my hand.

I wave to an older gentleman on his bike each day. For a long time I did not see him and I worried. One day he reappeared and we were happy to see each other. We have never spoken but we are biking friends non-the-less. We bike in opposite directions. Maybe one day we will chat.

Each morning a lady sits on a white pillow under a large tree facing the river. She is in deep meditation. It is her special tree.

I never purchased a chain for my bike because I never leave my bike alone. My bike and I are a team. Searching for a coffee shop along 42nd street, I come across a lovely supermarket/ coffee shop. I hesitate at first and take my bike just inside the door. The owner of the shop sees me and suggests another place for the bike. Now, when I stop for my coffee break, the

owner or a customer will hold the door for me to enter and exit.

One day, I have breakfast at the coffee shop, at the common table. Two gentlemen, one a foreign visitor, the other his New York friend, sit down as well. They include me in their very lively conversation about how the world views New Yorkers. What fun for me!

I have had many interesting things happen in that coffee shop. One day a woman holds the door for me as I enter. She offers to pay for my coffee. She then proceeds to tell me her life story, the price I paid for the coffee.

There are lovers of all sexes who sleep in the park at night. On a hot summer night, sleeping under the stars along the Hudson is ideal. The homeless sleep there, too. One woman always chooses a huge hill of white rocks to bed down for the night. Another woman prefers a bench. Both women sleep with all their belongings in the same spot each night. They sometimes greet me. It is very sad.

Three ghost bikes are placed along the path. They represent bikers killed by a crossing vehicle. One was a young doctor killed by a drunk driver. Another was a young woman killed by a car who could not stop in time. The bikes are painted white and are adorned with beautiful flowers and hand written messages.

One very cold winter morning, I go for a short ride. It is bitter cold and I decide to turn back. Instead I pass out. Two men dash over to pick me up, and I pass out again. The second time, they refuse to pick me up but summon the park police. Within minutes, an ambulance appeared. I tell the medics that I am only cold and want to go home.

They insist I sit in the ambulance and proceed to take my vitals. They find nothing wrong and I feel better in the warmth of the ambulance. According to the rules, the medics have to take me to a hospital or I have to return home on my own. It is bitter cold and I ask if they can take me back to my residence. The two men confer and decide they will take me back. But I say, "I can't go without my bike."

The medics put my bike in the ambulance and deliver us both home. Sometimes rules can be broken.

I watch the new Trade Tower emerge from its ashes to become a major monument to freedom. I see the new Whitney Museum of Art rise in the rundown meat district of Tribeca.

Every day I see demolition and rebuilding of an area on the Hudson. It is not just a morning bike ride; it is a New York experience.

*Life is like riding a bike
To keep your balance
You must keep moving*
—Albert Einstein



A digital print I created from a photo of me and my bike, down by the Hudson

DAVID WITH TATTOO

Tattoos have served as rites of passage, as marks of status, and as marks of religious and spiritual devotion. Tattoos show signs of love as well as marking outcasts and slaves. In medicine, tattoos are used to locate application for radiation treatment. Despite some taboos surrounding tattoos, the art continues to be popular in many parts of the world.

Seeking a way of making art that changes one's appearance I investigated many possibilities. I made Goddess Thin Is In, which depicts the problems of losing and gaining weight. I explored bodybuilding, and found many men and women with gross muscles. Neither of these captured my imagination. Then I came upon the art of tattoo and I was hooked, but not inked.

I explored designs of different cultures; Japanese art of "Yakuza" (whole body suit), The Maori culture of New Zealand. The Samoan culture is thought to have the most bizarre beauty practices in the world. Samoans cover the face as well as the body. In Japan, tattoos are associated with crime and tattooed people are barred from public baths.

I visited many tattoo parlors in Manhattan. In one, I asked an artist at work if I could watch. I told him, "I am doing research." He obliged, explaining what he was doing and showing me his tools. He then said, "If you are doing research you should get a tattoo." I'm a senior with many natural age marks, so I said, "I have plenty of my own marks! If tattoos weren't permanent, I'd try it." I thanked him and considered how I might fit into this community.

I decided to color my white hair purple. I went to a beauty parlor and at a very dear price became a purple-haired lady. Later, I spotted a young woman on the street with jet purple hair. I approached her and asked how she had got her hair so purple. "Manic Panic," she said. No more beauty parlor expenses! I would do my own hair now, and love the fun of it.

I was ready to begin my tattoo series. I put a wood tattoo on the famous statue, David, and the lovely lady, Venus. I created over fifteen male and female figures with designs from the various cultures I had explored. T-shirts are a common item in the tattoo culture, so I made my own. I designed a t-shirt with David in front and Venus on the back. I had shirts with my image manufactured in California. They sold very well at my Tattoo exhibit in Chelsea.

Leaving no stone unturned, I went to Philadelphia and attended a tattoo convention—an amazing experience! I bravely asked a well-tattooed gentleman if he would take a photo with me so I could prove to my friends back in New York City that I did, indeed, go to a tattoo convention. He willingly obliged.

Being a very Jewish woman, I have what is called chutzpah, so I experienced no hesitation in calling a magazine for tattoo aficionados to tell them that I had a story to interest their readers. Voila!! They sent a reporter and photographer to my Brooklyn studio. To my delight, I got a four-page spread in the August 2009 issue of *Skin & Ink Magazine*.

I completed my Tattoo series with an exhibit in Pleiades Gallery in Chelsea, attended by a large and enthusiastic group of friends and patrons.



Me, at the Philadelphia tattoo convention, with a new friend!



My tattooed David and Venus, shot in my studio for Skin & Ink Magazine

PEARL PAINT ON CANAL STREET

I shared a bench with a young lady and her very large package from the Blick art supply store in Manhattan.

“What kind of art do you make,” I asked her. She was an interior designer.

We got into a lively conversation about art. Somehow I mentioned Pearl Paint. The young artist looked at me blank.

“Oh my God,” I thought, “she has never heard of Pearl Paint on Canal Street!” The beloved art supply store was home to every artist in New York City from 1933 to 2014.

Pearl Paint had everything a budding artist could want from handmade paper that cost five dollars a sheet to inks, paints, and colored papers you could find nowhere else. It was a six-story dilapidated building with a rickety old service elevator that took forever to come. In sheer frustration everyone would take the stairs to their destination.

The sales people were art students or established artists who needed extra cash. They always knew just what you needed and could locate it in a minute. They could also provide you with information about art materials that you would never have learned in Art 101.

Art students and art teachers got special discounts. The bulletin board announced all the art exhibits in town and where to study nude models. We truly loved the store. It was the artist's home. We were welcomed.

The store was located in the heart of Canal Street, surrounded by stores full of odd found

objects that we all collected for that special project. Walking on Canal Street was like going into a jungle filled with glorious surprises that only an artist could appreciate.

Artists wept when the rumor got out that Pearl Paint would soon close. It was like losing a family member.

Bruce Springsteen, famous American singer/song writer wrote:

*Everything dies, Baby,
that's a fact,
but maybe everything that dies,
someday, comes back to life
as luxury housing*

And so it came to pass. Three years after Pearl Paint shuttered it's doors the building was converted into four luxury residential apartments, the cheapest going for \$16,000 a month. They kept the Pearl Paint sign to capitalize on the store's historic cachet.

The young woman on the bench next to me had missed out on buying art supplies at our beloved Pearl Paint on Canal Street.



MY HANDS

My hands have been covered in clay

Whitened by plaster

Blackened by printers' ink

Cut many times by an Exacto Blade

At eighty-nine my hands have

Loose skin

Purple lines

Blue veins

Brown marks

Push wood through the blade of a band saw

Hold handlebars of a bike

Caress the body of my lover



My hands at work

GIVING ART AWAY

Every year since my move to Brooklyn, I have held an open art studio. I invite the public into my private space. The exchange between my visitors and me results in sales, friendship, and an opportunity for the public glimpse the world of a working artist.

In the past two years I have been giving art away. I have several bins marked with a green dot. Anything with a green dot can go free. To my surprise many sales resulted. No one is obligated to buy art but getting art free seemed to encourage a purchase.

People ask me why I am giving work away. The answer is simple. I am entering the last phase of my life and I want to leave my family with as little to take care of as possible. My home will be very easy to sell. It's in a very desirable area. However my art legacy is a problem.

When my husband Jules died suddenly, he left behind many works of art, as well as his dental practice. He also left a pottery studio full of ceramic works and unfinished pots waiting for his glaze formulas. Family and friends could take only so many pieces, leaving me with the problem of disposal. It was a very painful project to dismantle the ceramic studio Jules loved so much.

When my partner Alfred died, he left very large paintings as well as a studio full of art supplies. At his memorial art exhibit the gallery claimed they would promote Al's art posthumously. That never happened and Al's work rotted in their basement.

The joys and rewards of being an artist lie in creating the work. Once a work is completed the job is done and the art takes off on it's own. It's very much like giving birth to a child. Once it leaves the womb the child is on it's own in the world.

Disposing of work is not on your mind because you are moving on to the next work with anticipation. Giving art away solves part of the problem of a lifetime's worth of art. Destroying works is also a very important part of the art process

Over the years I have destroyed works that did not seem as relevant as when I first made them. I have no difficulty destroying some works, while I continue to cherish other works. Over the many years I have been a working artist, I have gone through this ritual. It is never easy. Sometimes I invite dear ones here to take away work they would like to have.

I am reaching the age where artists must begin to think about the vast collection in their studio. Giving your art to an institution, as some people have suggested to, is a problem. I did contact one organization that distributes works to needy institutions. They wanted a list of works with all pertinent information. Their list of requirements would have taken me days to prepare. They didn't want to just come to the studio and take what was left.

If MoMA wanted my art, the problem would be solved. Unfortunately MoMA does not know I exist.

I do have patrons. For that I am grateful. There are many people who have my artwork and enjoy living with it. My work has found its way into antique shops and has been resold in odd places. I often get calls from people who have discovered my work very far from my Brooklyn studio.

Today, I will clear my studio of less deserving works and make room for new creations to follow.



Huge bugs on display at the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition (BWAC)

THE CASHMERE COAT REVISITED

When I lived at the water's edge, I saw many fish pulled from a fisherman's hook and tossed onto the dry dock. They scramble and flop about until the fisherman puts them in a protected bucket.

After my twenty-year marriage ended in the sudden death of my husband Jules, I felt like a fish out of water. I did not know where to put myself. I was cold and in foreign territory. Everyday I sat by the burning fireplace in my living room staring at the flames. No place felt safe or warm enough.

One day I saw an elegant black cashmere coat with fur trim hanging on a department store rack. I slipped into the coat and felt warm and protected, like a baby with a security blanket. I bought the coat. I wore the coat on very special occasions in my new life, but mostly it stayed in the closet.

Years later, during a visit with my newly widowed cousin Anita, we visited the Russian neighborhood in Brighton Beach. Anita bought a white rabbit fur coat. Her new purchase reminded me of my long-ago purchase of the cashmere coat. We returned to my home to retrieve it.

We found the coat hanging deep in my closet. We retrieved it and removed the plastic hanging from its shoulders. A shower of fur came flying out, leaving clumps all over the room and all over us. The coat had shed its fur with a vengeance!

Was this the coat I remembered, this heavy, old, dilapidated coat? It was a certain sign that the new woman I had become no longer needed protection.

BEING WITH ONESELF

Being alone can be an escape from the harsh realities of life. One can be alone and enjoy the sheer silence of space. Other times being alone is painful.

My life has been full with loving partners, friends and family who suddenly died leaving a void to be filled or dealt with in whatever way possible. I gave birth to two children who are not in my life. Life has been a series of dealings with loneliness.

A pang of loneliness can come at any moment, seemingly out of nowhere. Today I joined six people to tour the beautiful New York Public Library on Forty-second Street in Manhattan. It was exhausting but lovely. Why then, tonight, do I feel very lonely?

From past experience I know this will not last, and that my reliable friend and lover—my art work—will once again come to my rescue and all will be well once more.



Sy and me at one of my art openings

J DATE

January 2011

Once again, I answer an online dating service. I have truly come into the New Age way of dating. I learned how to live as a single woman and can keep up with the new cyberspace technology. My six-room studio/home is well established after 42 years. I still have sand in my shoes, and dearly miss the ocean, but have come to terms with the Gowanus Canal.

I answer an ad on a Jewish Dating service on line. Seymour Amkraut responded to my email. He did not ride into my life on a white horse but he has a white ponytail and is quite handsome. Sy had been widowed twice and was willing to become the fourth man in my life. Given my history with men, Sy was really very brave. There was just one serious problem. Sy wanted a full time companion. "Not me," says I, "I'm part time only. If you want full time, you will have to keep looking." I need time for my work and do not want to live with anyone. With great difficulty Sy came to accept my terms. I spend weekends in Battery Park and weekdays in Park Slope.

Sy Amkraut is a young man of ninety-four years. I made him promise he'd live at least another ten years or it is no deal. We are good together. Sex is not as it was during procreation years but we certainly like to cuddle in bed. We also share a desire to go out on the town. Sy's residence in Battery Park City provides all the fun and excitement of the Manhattan culture scene—and being right on the Hudson River suites me just fine. Once again I am near water.

People see us together and think we have been married for years. Young people want to believe that despite the divorce statistic, people can stay happily married for many years. We don't disappoint them.



My great grandchildren visit in NYC



My grand daughter, Jessica

HOLLYWOOD

We were all going to marry movie stars or at the very least, men like the idols portrayed in Hollywood. That was the message implied to young unsuspecting women by the movie industry in the 1920's.

Our prince would come riding on a fine white horse and scoop us away to a perfect life. Clark Gabel, Errol Flynn, and Robert Taylor were there for young girls to swoon over, but I wanted to dance away into the sunset with Fred Astaire. Hollywood could never write about the perfect life because there isn't one.

What I envisioned as a young girl did not come to pass exactly as I had imagined it, but I did come close. I became an artist, just as I had always wanted. For that I am eternally grateful. I had envisioned a long-term marriage like my parents and grandparents had before me. Unfortunately the men in my life died early, making me a widow three times. However, my vision of dancing with Fred Astaire did materialize in a way, through my first two husbands, Jules and Al. They were fine ballroom dancers. When I danced with either of them, a crowd would circle around us. We danced at every opportunity we had. At our wedding, Jules and I danced with a small band we had met during our engagement. Al and I folk danced and ballroom danced on our trip to Greece.

My third husband, Eli, did not dance. But his devoted love and special woodworking skills enriched my life. We were together twenty-six years, the longest relationship I had.

I had wanted four children. I have two. I have a granddaughter and four great grandchildren. My dear grandfather called grandchildren his profits, and indeed he was right.



Just off the plane (from left, front): Jewel, Jordan, Great Grandma "B", Jasmine (front) and Jemari (back)



Van Eyck double portrait revisited

Writing my memoir has been a challenging as well as deeply felt experience. I have written journals all my life. I started in my teens and continued to write and draw in books. I did not realize how important a role my writing would take. I knew drawing was essential to my life; writing was just something that helped me get through life's joys and sorrows. It helped me make decisions. Writing was my close friend. I could confide the most intimate thoughts there, and know they were safe. I looked through the writings I have kept and chose some to relate here. I am allowing the public into my private world. I do hope you enjoy the readings I have chosen. Perhaps you will get a laugh or two. Perhaps you will relate to the challenging moments. It is a life well lived. It is my life, and I have chosen to live it the best way I could.

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