

## Chapter One: WRITING MY WRONGS

*Memories; Fantasies; True Lies*



## The Dare/ Pre-Birth

I'm in Heaven, hanging out with some angels. We're playing catch, tossing around a ball of clay, and with every throw, its shape and color and texture alter, right in midair. It keeps rearranging itself like it can't make up its mind what to be. It's supposed to coagulate into a form with color and texture and possibly some kind of translucent substance, something complex.

The ball is supposed to contain certain patterns that have to do with the form my next lifetime on Earth will take. After many tosses, it becomes evident that the clay is refusing to hold to one form or plan; it remains a dull ball containing no imprints or designs.

Finally one of the angels tosses the ball in the air, catches it, and announces, "It's not time yet." I reach for the ball; I don't buy it. "The odds are stacked against you," he warns and throws it to me.

"I'll take my chances," I answer, throwing it to someone I'm hoping might be more sympathetic. But the next one has the same impression and says, "Forget it," dropping the ball to the ground. I make a mental note not to ask that one for advice in the future.

Another one, a female, says, "Why don't we sit down and talk about this?" and then everyone sits in the dandelions, some smiling sympathetically, others very solemn.

They try other tactics, saying I'll be alone, that my pals the Native Americans won't be coming back for a long time. I remain unmoved, so they try pleading. They tell me that there are people on Earth who won't be able to understand me. I say I'll educate them. They try frightening me with the assertion there are people whose souls have wandered off, leaving them like machinery left idling while the owners are at lunch.

But I am unconvinced. So what if the present structure down there has absolutely no use for me; so what if I have no idea what to do in such a place? So what if I'm setting myself up for failure? I only see incarnation as a win-win situation: I will probably learn something, but even if I don't, I will eventually come back here, which isn't so bad. I have nothing to lose. I say I want to try. I insist on another chance.

An angel with maternal energy whose gender is difficult to discern reaches for my hand. He/she looks above my head at my darkening aura and says gravely, "You don't just throw yourself at the world; you work your way up through lifetimes," meaning that I don't have enough past lifetimes on Earth to pull off this next venture. Meaning that it will be a waste of time.

But I hold to my resolve. He/she wants to say that it can't work, that others will suffer, but instead she looks piercingly into my aura, as if instilling her light into my energy body for a time when I will need it.

I experience a feeling of suspension, like the pause at the bottom of an exhalation. I can't see her anymore; I only see that exploding golden light that never fails to appear at momentous beginnings and endings.

I hear a river, but it is no longer by the field of dandelions where we had tossed the ball; instead, it is rushing through me, and its sound is that of a long universal sigh. My Gods and Goddesses are sitting in heaven, shaking their heads, saying, "Have it your way, then."

When the rushing subsides, I hear, "It is done." And at that moment, I am unbearably sad. Only then do I reconsider, but like a babe being born, I cannot crawl back into the womb.

"Can't you make some kind of provision?" I call out in terror as I feel myself propelled through a tunnel swirling with the muted and changing colors of my own thoughts. I call out, but everyone has passed beyond my awareness. Far, far ahead I see a spinning vortex of golden light. "Remember!" something echoes, "Remember!" Remember what? I wonder. I'm spinning down, squishing through a pinhole, it seems. I can't imagine how I will survive. I am sure that I will pop right back out and land in that field. But I don't. The noise has stopped. Silence brings one true thought: The light – it must be the light that I need to remember.

From a long, dreamy distance, I hear a voice faintly calling out to me, using my other name: "Little Sun! Little Sun! If you succeed in this, the gains will be enormous!"

~

Life has been unequivocally proven to be the number one cause of death. You can't really argue with life's obscure logic, because if you do you just die sooner. First life beats you up and then it kills you....What a deal....

## **Disclaimer 1**

**"It is easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission."**

Dear Family and Others Who Believe You Know Me,

Some of you are at a disadvantage: you are dead. And so I am not too worried about how you will be affected by my writing. Not because I believe you won't catch a ripple out there wherever you are but rather because you will not care, as you have no doubt cast off your egos. I hope. I presume, since none of you are presently haunting me. I also presume that you may want to correct me where it is warranted. However, I urge you to use constraint, as those living will no doubt use none.

Now to you who are still sludging along in this morass of misery—I have to clear myself. I didn't mean it. Whatever I wrote that you thought is about you was purely coincidental. And as for any men who think I am writing about you, hey don't flatter yourselves, you're not that important and you're not the only men I slept with or even married and besides you're not that exciting. I hold no grudges.

So there it is. My disclaimer. Now please take the next opportunity to clear out of the courtroom in my head? There are ample exits.)

Oh, and Mom, you had mentioned that the people in the book all are evil except me: Your point?

Sincerely,  
Misunderstood

~



**My Evil Mother Reading Up on Witchcraft**

## Disclaimer 2

The psychologist and hypnotherapist, Milton Erickson, understood that , “any story told twice is a lie”. To that idea I would like to add, that while much of what I recall as true has been distorted by my own projections, some which had not occurred in normal waking consciousness reflects a truer and deeper reality. Hence, in the following pages you will find a collection of “faction” from my life, including my memories, dreams, true lies, and ravings. Where damaging remnants remain, names and places have been changed, as well as some dialogue scrambled between my mind, the muse, and what

some one might have said, had they the insight or will to say it.... or had they been who I wanted them to be.

## Origins and Things Mom Might Deny

### *The Mistake*

**“There is a crack... a crack in everything.... That’s how the light gets in.” Leonard Cohen**

In the beginning, Dad and Mom made a Mistake. As it grew, it split in half. As mistake number 2, I hid directly behind my other half. That way, no one could detect me until it was too late, and, what’s more, when we fought over turf, “twin A” wouldn’t be able to kick me back. When, two months before we were due, the doctor had finished pulling one baby from Mom’s drugged body, I’d followed my other half’s rear end. Clocked at a close 60 seconds, I’d made my indomitable debut on the birth certificate, as “Twin B”.

Mom hated doctors, calling them “false gods” who gave bad advice. When the doctor awoke Mom, with, “Guess what, Millie, you have twin girls again!” she’d retorted with an exhausted, “knock it off”. When he convinced her that she’d done it again, she decided that here was a a second chance to get it right.

While Mom believed in fate and some intellectual form of God, Dad, the agnostic and traumatized war-hero, was infuriated by mistakes and bewildered by surprises. How had he and my mother could have produced girl twins twice, in seven years?

Only the hospital administration was genuinely happy when we made Medical history in Hartford on January 23, 1953. My life would henceforth be stamped with existential doubt and generalized guilt.

I’ve read that the mind naturally groups things in fours. As child- number- five, I must have tipped the scales. If we had been Pueblo twins in times past, Cindy and I would have been left under a tree or

thrown into a river. Pueblos believed, or rather, they understood, that twins brought bad luck. But my folks, not being privy to such options, were forced to do the job themselves: subtly and over time. I would have to fight back....

Thus began my lifelong career of upsetting my superiors’ norms and expectations.



The Mistake

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Mom is brushing out our long brown braids. She is pulling them too tight. Tomorrow Danny will promise to cut my hair to look just like the girl down the block. Louisa May has silky brown hair down to her butt. How exactly he will do this is magic. Mom leaves me with him the next day, while she goes shopping and he all but scalps me. I take a deep breath at the boy in the

mirror and forgive my brother because he is the smartest person in the world and I am grateful for any attention from such an important person. Mom comes home and almost drops the groceries on the side doorstep. The next day she takes me to a barber. I don't know why she gets so mad at him.

I am obsessed with a mica rock behind the house with its sparkling sheets of silver. I pee back each sheet, trying to get them thinner and thinner like paper

before they'd practically dissolve. I take the thinnest sheets and looking through them at the sun, I inspecting colors and textures in different lights. I would have probably eaten the mica, too.

David Winkler who lives down the street is my best friend. We play doctor with eyeglass handles we take each other's rectal temperatures. One day we break open a thermometer and roll the

mercury around in our hands and the little balls of silver split and split again. We decide to make ice cream by mixing the mercury with some ashes from his

wood stove and adding cool aid and freezing the concoction. We eat small bites and insist it is the most delicious thing and somehow we don't get sick from this or die. [Maybe this memory is smudged....How else could we have survived?]

David Winkler eventually grew up to become a millionaire. I know this because Mom tells me that she ran into his mother who said something she couldn't relate to: "so are your children rich yet?" Mom asks me, if that isn't an odd thing to say to someone you haven't seen in three decades?

I am having conversations with everything, especially the one big maple tree on which I draw with crayons in the front yard. I'm apologizing as I do this, feeling guilty because I'm worried that the tree won't be able to breathe as well with it's pores clogged up.

I am amazed to see that the reds and blues when on top of each other look brown. I am looking at flecks of dust in the sunlight and seeing the whites aren't really white but rainbow colors.

The rain pounding down on the grass played a rhythmic beat on the drum of a hungry earth. The dropped foliage crackling under foot spoke to me loud and clear; respond to my feet with their crunchy talk.

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Mom is in the kitchen preparing a bloody brisket and roast potatoes. I want to go sneak over to her and untie her space shoes when she's not looking. I want to come up behind her and untie her apron then whip it off.... Suffice it to say, she doesn't understand.

Dad doesn't understand either but pretends: he will haul me up on his shoulders and sing loudly and parade me around. I will be scared because he's so big and he never bothers to find out if I want to be up there and I'm never sure if he'll put me down right away when I ask and he feels sweaty and fat and the back of his neck is red and tight. It makes him so happy when I let him play with me. I'd rather play with someone not so bulky and unpredictable and I squirm away while he mimics my "oh daddy" groans, to go looking fo Danny to swing me around. My brother Danny holds my head at arms length from him and tells me to go ahead and hit him and I am swinging my arms now at him but I can't reach him. I wish my older sisters had time for me; if I could only figure out what I'm doing wrong.

### ***Things Mom Would Deny***

My mother might tell you I'm lying if I write that she told me she married my father for sex. I don't know if she would soften if I wrote that it was the only way for a nice Jewish girl to get laid in 1942. She would probably call me insensitive if I wrote that she knew as well as us four girls did, that she should have married Uncle Jack instead.

Mom firmly believed you always put your sisters before your self, and stuff any resentment about doing so. In fact, she taught me that if you and someone else were on a life raft and one of you had to drown, it had to be you. While doing the right thing can be costly, being at odds with your siblings and parents is even more expensive.

As a child, I protested to Mom about my violent father, "Why did you marry him? Why couldn't you have married Uncle Jack instead?" I would have insisted she divorce Dad to

find someone more my type, but I knew from experience that her ensuing denial would have grated on me in that unique way known to Jewish mothers, which could cause an un-scratch able itching in my brain.

Uncle Jack had met her sister first. “You always put your sisters before your self” (and stuff down any resentment about doing so). I took on the self-ordained job of proving Mom wrong. My needs came first, even if hers did not. I felt I had to be selfish, or I would have turned into my twin. Besides, my generation was the “me” generation. I tried to teach Mom that you had to think of yourself if you were to become a real person. It wasn’t beyond me to try to raise her consciousness about what she/ I wanted. Didn’t you need to have a self before you could give one up? And how were you to not hate your sisters for all the little pieces of your heart you gave up to them, despite your best efforts at egocentrism?

Uncle Jack, the comic shrink, was playful without being ridiculous, like my father, the “chronic” war hero, who made dumb jokes, tickled too hard and basically had no idea how to meet kids on their own turf.

While Mom was always working on Dad to be more patient and understanding, my uncle Jack gave Mom advice, like, “When he does something that bothers you, Millie, tell him how it makes you feel.”

I’d always warmed in the easy rapport between my uncle and Mom, who smiled and was able to laugh at herself when he came around, not nervously fixing up hurts and figuring how to avoid against Dad’s potential blow ups.

Jack and Mom discussed psychology and politics; swapped advice, and argued happily over a Sunday brunch of bagel and lox, white fish and cream cheese while my Dad seated himself over blueprints in the living room and chain smoked Lucky Strikes down to the unfiltered end, with yellow stained square fingers. I always felt cheated when my uncle would wipe his mouth and raise his mythical, large frame from the kitchen table, to callously return to his coveted life.

In spite of her denial and general annoyance at my routine bluntness, or perhaps because of it, Mom accused me of always saying what people thought but didn’t say. I would walk into the room from outside, and ask who was yelling long after they’d stormed out. While my wisdom told me to get what you want or die trying, Mom seemed to live by the wisdom of Jewish mystics, who’d advised not wanting what you don’t have and wanting what you have (or, in her version, at least, appearing to want what you have). Mom was not held hostage to her desires, not tormented by visions of what could be, if only she could force others to comply. However, when I was in my twenties and my uncle suddenly divorced Mom’s sister and dropped his adoring nephews and nieces without so much as a goodbye, I reconsidered. Uncle Jack’s only explanation regarding abandoning us all was to Mom: “Millie,” he’d said sadly, “I promise more than I deliver”.

At age 32 I ended up with a man who had dated my sister years before, a man who was just like Uncle Jack: funny, well liked, and a people-person. When in 1996, Mitch, turned out, just like idealized Uncle



Jack did, to promise more than he could deliver, I started reconsidering Mom's views. For one thing, the bells and whistles didn't necessarily point to good marital material. For another, I learned not to mistake intensity for intimacy. I began to see that the men with great acts were simply great actors; and not the loyal soul mates I'd romanticized them to be. Mitch, like uncle Jack, had hung in there for decades, probably pretending that one day he'd make good on his vows to love, honor and obey a wife who unnerved him.



The pined-for Uncle Jack

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## ***Mom's Meddling and My Madness***

### **A Child's Nature Is So Inconvenient!**

A housewife marries the house. A dad marries the job. Mom, dad, and the kids all feel abandoned or betrayed as each tries to fulfill their role in a system that is ultimately geared towards one thing at the cost of our souls.

Not yet the feminist she became after Dad died, Mom's early Myths and rules seemed to include, "I own my children's bodies. Trust people. Say what you think. Don't express negative feelings or it might kill people, particularly your parents; Intellect and debate are good. Don't think too much or you'll go crazy; it is selfish to trust yourself. Don't grow up or be sexual. Always tell the truth/ Protect your siblings and parents from the truth. Don't be selfish. Don't be angry. Watch your mouth and above all else: Don't disappoint Max! To disappoint her father, Max who boasted, "My children are my assets and grandchildren are my dividends," was to fail God.

During much of the first eight years of my life, ours had been the home where the neighborhood kids all congregated, visiting my big sisters. In the fifties in the finished

basement, they were spinning records, making out in corners, and sometimes they would let me sit and watch them twist, from where I was stationed quietly on the stairs. I was in love with all their male friends, who fawned over me, but fussed more over Jacky, the dark eyed beauty, the sensitive smart one, they did not seem to fuss over Eleanor, the book worm, picking at her face.

Extended family was in and out constantly, especially weekends at barbecues, with Dad grinning over the hamburgers, cigarette smoldering nearby.

In the late Spring and Summer evenings when the shadows grew long over the manicured lawns and ample old houses of West Hartford., Mom reads “When We Were Very Young” to us, making her voice go way up and way down, stern and growling one minute, whining and infantile the next.

The neighborhood kids play kickball in the driveway are interrupted by mothers calling out their doors, “MICHELLE! It’s time to come in!”

Cindy and I have to get into our matching light cotton PJ’s which is an unforgivable waste of precious daylight time. I want to yell “no!” , refusing to come in, and when Mom would come out to tell me that I was getting tired, insist, I’m not a bit tired. And when she would tell me I was, because she knew everything about me better than I knew myself, as if she was omniscient and in my body and in my head, I wanted to yell, “I’m not tired, You’re tired! You go to bed!” But that would have thrown her world into chaos and Mom was too in control of everything to ever let me have my own way.

I would like to scramble up a tree where Mom and Dad couldn’t get me. And when they would see me smiling down on them, like an intangible Cheshire Cat , they would finally admit defeat. They would throw up their hands and look at each other and shrug, saying “you win!” and shaking their heads at each other, marveling, “what a little imp!” And then, poof , they’d disappear, too.





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## Existential Warfare

Before I was born I must have said, “let’s see, who will not “get” me at all? I’ve got it! My parents.” Mom and I were opposites. While she suffered from cold hands and feet, I complained about sweaty extremities. She didn’t whimper, purr, wail, or whine. She was thrifty and unassuming, while I was the glutton for attention and favors. I had not grown up in The Depression, as she had...and the depression that I was working on in my head, apparently didn’t count.

Mom was not ruled by love, recklessness or intuition, but by her unique mix of fear and her socially acceptable balance scale of justice. When Millie had a goal, it was done efficiently and against the grain of nature: just as she put us away for the night, and always much too early. She was a slave to the almighty clock.. She was not prone towards indulgence or spontaneity and put her easel and oil paints away, to care for her children and later go out and work as a dental-hygenist.

My mother had been a humming, buzzing nineteen-fifties’ “housewife: the house’s wife”. She was stove mistress, washerwoman, dryer-spouse, an refrigerator wife, her feelings compressed and stilled, like a bottle of chilled preserves. I thought she was simply crazy for making her life surround meeting the petty endless needs of the energy gulping house, and had no respect for her authoritative stance from which she issued orders, warnings and admonishments designed to avoid spoiling or soiling the minds or bodies of her children.

Circa age 6.

Mom habitually exiles us to bed early, especially when they have company. I feel restless, deprived, I can hear the kids playing in the street at dusk, I’m aware their parents are having lemonade on their porches and I’m in bed for no reason. I feel like a trapped animal. I feel small and punished and put in corner. I could scream but it wouldn’t do any good. I’m itchy with energy and water laden with tears that I need to cry. I’m tight in the head and I can’t keep my eyes closed. They flutter open and I am feeling panicky and claustrophobic.

I am twitching and full of energy to go outside an get away from the feeling that the adults are in special, privileged, sensuous, talkative, world and I’m forbidden and unwanted and in the way and at the same time I’m supposed to be there like a pet that gets locked in the garage. My room is supposed to be my haven when it’s my jail. I have my eyes closed when I realize that it is not completely dark behind my lids, that I am seeing pricks of moving light. Instead of darkness, there are spots and points of colored lights, swimming and swirling. I open my eyes and they are not there. I close them and they are. White silvery specks and paisleys swim wildly an randomly in every direction. They give the impression of fuzzy dots on a defective TV set. I try to make them disappear. They persist.

I throw back the covers, jump out of bed, an scramble towards the living room. I stall in the hall; fretfully, beckoning my mother. She looks at me with puzzled concern and comes to me. I try to explain what happened, and when she stares I begin demanding explanations.

Wide eyed and spooked, she pronounces “they’re just dead cells floating around on your eyelids now go back to bed”.

They didn’t look dead, not one bit. I whimper and stall until my father looks over and

starts to get up and then I go back in a huff. I close my eyes and there they are, alive as ever. I panic. I can't make them go away. I lie awake until the sky is almost light. Every night it seems, from then on, I avoid going to bed.

~

A child's Nature is so inconvenient. I once read that the very word, "child", means something like "interfering" in people's lives. Surrender to Mom was a small concession really; since according to her, I couldn't possess a self, could I? Wasn't I simply a lump of unformed clay, as far as my personality went? But how far did my personality go?

I had needed a friend that I could talk to about both my fears and my ideas. At times I could find that friend in my mother. She listened to my meanderings with respect and curiosity, until I frightened her with spiritual ramblings and meanderings that she couldn't address. My mother was not an agnostic like my father, but she seemed content with viewing life as a mystery, full of unanswerable questions.

She grew more perplexed as I approached adolescence. Mom gave me alarmed blank looks in response to my esoteric questions... "What is before the beginning?" I can't go to sleep until I know. Instead of answering, she pushed back my hair from my eyes because she said I had to keep it out of my face in order to see, when all I wanted was long bangs I could hide behind. When I pressured and asked, "what if I don't really exist," she told me not to make crumbs. And when I demanded to know what "never" and "always" really meant, trying to comprehend the meaning of the infinite, with a finite brain, she said to sit only at the table and pull up my chair. My questions got tougher. "Why are we here (on Earth)?" I am answered with being reminded to do my dishes. If I ask, "What exactly is time, would it exist if it didn't have a name?" Or, "How can there be such a thing as not existing?" Mom answers suspiciously: did I do the dishes—all of them. If she gets desperate she goes into a litany: Did I use Brillo; did I dry my hands and face; let me see them. If she is truly worried about my impending insanity she will go on ceaselessly, just to be sure to drive me there herself: come here in the light; don't frown; what were you and Cindy fighting about and yes you were fighting. Why are you so mean to her when she loves you so much.

What else had I eaten? When? Had I washed my hands? Had I been biting my nails and did I know there were microorganisms under them that were very bad for me? Why was I scratching down there- did my behind itch?

You could get an infection. Go wash your hands. Aren't you hot? Get your hair away from your face! You must be freezing in that thing! You are tired! You need to rest, go lie down.

~

Mom jumped out of bed to the alarm, fussed over Dad and all five kids at once, fought with the twins about matching clothing she'd bought without their consent. Then shuffled us all out the door to walk the mile and a half instead of driving, arguing, "when I was a girl". She plugged herself in to the wonderful middle class world. "Would you prefer low class?" she asked me, when I accused her of liking her rank.

There were telephone calls, buying and returning things, with the driven efficacy of her Singer Sewing Machine. "What did she run on?" remains an unanswered mystery of all

mothers throughout time. But my hunch is that whatever it was, it was aided by her perceiving herself as having no real needs of her own beyond the maintenance of her body.

Sometimes if Mom was busy and wanted to address me when I walked into the room, rather than stopping and straining to recognize me or asking simply, “which one are you?” she would run through the gamut of names until she hit the right one. I was “Cindy, Laura, Eleanor, Jacky” all in one breath.

She once even attempted to give Cindy medication twice, thinking Cindy was me. When Cindy protested, Mom looked more closely and realized her mistake.

If we had been born fraternal, like Eleanor and Jacky, we could have at least had an egg each. Splitting ones’ egg-self in two, seems to me, to be a sure prescription for psychological problems, later in life. I would have to fight massive existential fears that I was an extension of Cindy.

Sometimes it seems that had I been a kitchen utensil, Mom would have returned me, having failed to read or understand all the directions. Mom handled me like I was made of glass, at arms length, and with great trepidation. The world was also glass and the best way cope was to avoid it.

~

### **The wolf is dead**

I was sick; I was going into a trance over a romantic era painting by my bed of a dog howling over a dead sheep on the snow. I loved that picture.

When Mom came into my room to force more ginger ale down my sore throat, she found me transfixed, as if I’d actually stepped into it. If Mary Poppins could walk right into chalk sidewalk drawings, so could I? She look at me with anxious worry, most likely thinking I was being traumatized, lying that, “...The dog is howling because the sheep is sleeping”.

I snapped out of trance. “No, the sheep is dead!” It made her recoil but what could she say? “Oh Laura, don’t be so real”?

She could have fought dirty, with, “Don’t be rude”, or, “Don’t interrupt me”, but Mom always did have a weakness for truth.

If necessary, Mom would drive us both mad so that I might one day awake well adjusted.

### **Squirrels**

In my forties, I went to visit Mom and I saw a squirrel jumping onto her bird feeder. I was quietly

cheering its antics: it had to throw itself, onto the window ledge and then bolt towards the feeder. So clever!

Mom is horrified. She yells like a cop to my step-dad, to come quick and shoo it away, "... that one! That little shit with no manners! The nerve!"

I shrink away, half-thinking she's talking about me, until she adds, "They're so damn wasteful. I saw that squirrel the other day stealing apples from the tree; you know what that little rat did? He takes an apple, one bite, ONE and throws it on the ground and reaches for another."

Neither that "rat" with the big tail, nor I, grew up in the depression like she did, and we will forever be on her shit list.

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Millie was the middle daughter of her family of origin; she was the peacemaker, lost child, and the good girl. Mom's goal was to be loyal to everyone except herself.

Her mother, Sonia, having survived rape in pogroms, had had good reasons to try to freeze dry her three girls. Mom said Sonia was "fear personified". Sonia taught her daughters not to do anything original, creative or impulsive. Sonia's myths included: "The world is a bad place for women and children. Sex is dangerous. Children don't know anything, and Women in my family must never mention sex or look provocative."

Mom bought the package without examining its contents, just as she no doubt, bought into motherhood without considering if she were emotionally fit for the demands of playful children. Underneath that proper exterior, however, something subversive stirred: something that defied her awareness. But I saw it.

Tried to name it. "You're not nice"; I'd charged Mom, who looked blank and wounded beyond reproach. Mom hired herself a woman to help with the kids and chores. When we would become too old for a Nanny Mom would be plunged back into Motherhood Hell.

At age 40, Mom got up off the couch where she'd lie exhausted begging me for foot rubs. Unexpectedly, she pursued a new career in teaching, with a tenacity I'd not formerly seen, studying what she quipped was "Sadistics" (math) with nothing but enthusiasm. She changed her career from dental hygiene to teaching. Her job expanded from saving Dad or us, to the more realistic arena of educating the world and rehabilitating inner city Gang Leaders.

Mom gave me alarmed blank looks in response to my simple questions such as "What is before the beginning? I can't go to sleep until I know.

Instead of answering she pushed back my hair from my eyes because she said I had to keep it out of my face in order to see, when all I wanted was long bangs I could hide behind. When I pressured and asked "what if I don't really exist" she told me not to make crumbs. And when I demanded to know what never and always really meant, to sit only at the table and pull up my chair. My questions got tougher. " Mom what am I doing here on Earth?" is answered with do my dishes and I fight back with "what exactly is time, I mean what was it before it had a name?" She's ready when I toss her what comes after the ending and returns the curve



ball with asking suspiciously did I do my dishes all of them. Then she goes for a home run with a litany of did I use brillo and did I dry my hands and face and let me see, come here in the light and don't frown and what were you and Cindy fighting about and yes you were fighting, I heard it all and why are you so mean to her when she loves you so much? She didn't tell me she hadn't the slightest clue what the hell I was talking about or suggest that maybe someone else much smarter than her did. That would have meant I'd won and you can't let a child get the upper hand or the child will grow up with no respect for authorities who don't know the answers to life's most basic questions. Instead she focused on finding the thing that was wrong in me, in my body, that made me act so incomprehensible.

### ***Dad's Denial***



**A Worried Dad; and Mom**

Dad had stopped playing piano in big Swing Bands for a living because it wasn't a considered a respectable career and because he felt threatened by the unbridled bar scene. He began inspecting jet engines at Pratt and Whitney Aircraft.

Phil, Lennie's disapproving dad, was a Polish immigrant who worked as a self-employed upholsterer, and didn't value my father's music. His wife, Sonya, was a strict German Jew who ruled her two sons with an iron thumb. Phil imparted to dad the myth. he wasn't a man until he made it in his own business. That myth killed him.

Peculiarly, as I grew up I got the idea, that I wasn't a woman unless I was a man. To be a man meant I had to make it in the business world as well. But conversely to Dad, I had to be able to work for someone else.

As a young man, my father had felt so threatened by the raucous bar scene that he stopped playing in big swing bands for a living when he started having children and began inspecting jet engines at Pratt and Whitney Aircraft instead.

After the move, Dad became a compulsive neat-nick who believed that children should be seen and not heard and who couldn't stand growing girls. . He made rules such as "no playing in the house".

When Jacky was a budding adolescent she went to sit on Dad's lap. He pushed her off. When he was at a dinner party with mom and a beautiful woman sat next to him, rubbed his arm by mistake, he bolted from the table, all flushed.

Dad's rules must have included, "don't be sexual, be warm, don't talk, be out front, don't have feelings, don't be silly, don't be serious, don't play in the house, b gratefully, don't make a mess, don't be a girl.

Perhaps the most important was "there's no such thing as sex. " In my promiscuous heydays of the sixties I proved to him that there was such a thing.

Dad and I had a love/ hate relationship when I was little: he loved me and I hated him. Later we learned to agree and hated each other. He couldn't break me and would have done better to try controlling himself.

Although Dad had issues with women, he made an exception for Mom. She didn't take shit and she didn't scream and hit, (like his mother had done).

According to Mom, he worshiped her. She seemed to take him on with the same resigned sigh, mixed with a cool love, that she dealt out to us and probably to all things in life.

I let Dad know he wasn't alone by reacting to his strict controls, by exploding, an act that was supposed to be reserved for him. I didn't want a militant father, no matter how brave; any more than Dad had wanted girls.



Dad; pre-children....

~

### ***The Twin Trap***

Everyone wants a twin. Even I fantasized about having that twin, without the inherent confusion. Sure, I wanted that special relationship—the Hollywood version. But we were not Hayley Mills, playing her double role as identical twins in the movie, “The Parent

Trap”, and the only parent trap we dealt with was the one called “home”, from which we tried to escape.

Cultural demands upon twins wreak havoc with our minds, not to mention friendships and romantic relationships, as we fight external expectations to remain “one”, while at the same time trying to develop into individuals. You find it hard to hide, although you try. You try to make her go away. But she’s haunting you as if the egg never truly split: she’s in your dreams, your moods, thoughts. I’d have to fight overwhelming fears that: a) I didn’t really exist b) My mother or someone else could control my thoughts, or c) I was an extension of Cindy.

~

When people think of a twin, they imagine a blissful soul mate. Even I was subject to, hypnotized by, the myth of blissful twinship. The reality is, I’ve been struggling to be singular from as early on as when I was four or five. Cindy had absolutely lost it once because I had the nylon socks she wanted and I wouldn’t give them up. When finally I gave her the good socks I had been about to put on, taking the floppy cotton ones she’d rejected just to shut her up, I was saying to myself, “so this is what it means to be grown up.” Now I knew who was who; what was me; or, rather; “not Cindy”.

When Mom claims that I was her best friend when I was little, I can’t agree. If it were so, it is probably because she made sure I had no others. Cindy was supposed to be all I needed. Mom believed that twins should share. Everything: friends, clothes...but wasn’t it enough we once shared the same embryo? And who in their right mind would want to share a womb? Mom would escalate her efforts from trying to teach, to trying to force me to put Cindy the less resilient, first. When I refused to let Cindy play with me and cousin Jane, Mom called me cruel. When I took from the drawers the shirt that Cindy had wanted to wear and refused to give it up no matter how much Cindy cried out in protestation, I was “selfish”. And when we both liked the same boy and I won his affections, she dubbed me “Sadistic” and did my best to prove her right.

She would do everything from revoking my social privileges to covering her ears. She once cried out in utter exasperation, “You want what you want what you want!” and I wondered what else a person could possibly want.

### **Who’s Who in the Mirror?**

At G. Fox clothing store in downtown Hartford in the early sixties, Mom tried on clothes while Cindy and I played hide and seek until we were lost. Surrounded by stocking-clad legs and whirling, circular clothing racks, I’d panicked, until I thought I spotted Cindy amidst the merchandise that was threatening to swallow me.

It was a real Kodak Moment: the estranged beloved, re-uniting in slow motion ecstasy, right up until the instant my nose slammed against a full-length mirror. Not being “all alone” hurts---when you’re rudely awakened to the reality that you really are just you.

I don’t know what’s worse, being alone or being cloned. Oh, it was great to have a person in the nearby twin bed, who’d finish my sentences when I got groggy.... or to have someone who could look at me and giggle in response to my unspoken musings. When I was three or four, I turned to Cindy, asking, “...isn’t it funny, the way we loves each others?”

We felt privileged, eulogized even: when out in public, we'd draw small crowds of wistful admirers. Lunching on the deck of a prestigious L.A. restaurant (after my Hollywood brother's wedding in the early seventies) we'd given patient explanations to the familiar inquiries of "fans", who looked upon us as if we were some exotic, endangered species. We felt smugly superior, sharing a window into the rest of the world that we found so absurd; a world where people pressed their noses up against imagined barriers of separation. Weren't we all kindred? To us, the unaffected perception of childhood twins required as little explanation from us, as the world required explanations for its valuing individuality. Our bond held at bay the forthcoming tide of doubts regarding finding a place in that dizzying world where people perceived themselves as islands. If there was a country of loneliness and alienation, from which those questions whose answers we thought obvious came, as long as we had each other, we were immune to living there.

~

I'm six. I'm in the kitchen, bombarding Mom again with details from last night's dream. Cindy overhears it from the living room, and bursts in. She chokes out through tears, "That was MY dream!"

Bedtime in the summer cottage at Amston Lake: I say, "Goodnight, Cindy".

" Goodnight, Laura".

" Night".

" G'nite,"

"OK this is the last time, now, GOODNIGHT."

Silence... the clock ticks... she can't stand it; her words hang in the air unspoken, begin to condense, and then swell in her mind towards overflow. Finally, shamefully, she whispers, "goodnight".

"I mean it, and this is it! Goodnight!"

Tick, tick, tick.... Cindy. "Goodnight, now that's it."

"Goodnight" you whisper; hoping against all odds that you will be allowed the last word.

~

Cindy making a scene in homeroom

Cindy and I had the same home room in seventh grade. "You look terrible today" Cindy told her homeroom teacher, in all earnest concern. It got worse. One morning she started laughing in class, fell onto the floor and lay there writhing with laughter and tears, had to be physically moved, and started a minor hysteria in that seventh grade home-room. They carried her out, laughing the whole way. She started giggling after we said the pledge of allegiance. We all giggled too. But then when she began outright laughing, the giggles became uncomfortable and eventually subsided around her.

When the teacher asked her what was it that she found so funny, she didn't answer. Rather she laughed even more, and louder, hysterically. Until finally the teacher came over with her ruler, but Cindy, at the point when the teacher was almost pointing the ruler at her arm, Cindy fell onto the floor and lay there and writhed with laughter until I feared she might pee her pants. The teacher became alarmed and sent for the principle but when he came in Cindy was crying with laughter, clearly unable to stop. They carried her out. I don't remember a word being said about the incident at home or at school, although at school there surely must have been talk. I was so worried that the rumor would spread that it had been me and not her that I probably lost complete awareness of her from that day on, more or less. I only know that Cindy was no longer in that homeroom after that. No discussion.

~

trading classes

In seventh grade we traded places in a junior-high school class. Cindy had successfully taken a test that I wasn't prepared for and offered to take it for me, pretending to be me. I went to her class; no one knew the difference. It was too much. I felt that someone should know. So I wrote in a note to someone in which I discussed our prank. The teacher intercepted it. First he looks at it, then at me, and then he tries to hide his amusement. "Get up," he says, clearly trying to keep a straight face, "we're going to the Principal's office". He hands him the note and to my disgust, I find they're both barely suppressing amused smiles. I am scolded, told never to do this again, and sent back to my own class. Then Cindy is pulled and given similar treatment. For the rest of the day, the students are atwitter at learning of our charade. It seems that I am the only one who is not amused. The entertainment factor only added to my feeling of being "other" and my confusion about just who I was without Cindy. Naturally, I decide I have to get free of her. Even the serious guys are enjoying the charade that is obviously ruining my life. I began saying to hell with Cindy's unmet needs, overlapping and colliding with my own.

There is only one thing left to do: Kill her.

There is more than one way to kill a twin, the

physical being the most obvious but least sophisticated. As virtually every twin I've ever met will attest to, you can do it most cleanly and candidly by becoming the good twin. Then the other will find herself taking on what's left, which is by default, to fulfill her role as, and "the bad twin". Well, Cindy took to her role like a fish to water

~

### ***Max's Maxims***

It was Mom who first taught me to interview and record parental history; an excellent way to insure that that one's parents can continue to trouble and confuse them and future generations after they wear out their welcomes in the world. She made an audio-taped interview of Max, when he was 94, in which he'd relayed how he'd become "the little man" of the house after his father, a produce store and inn owner, died when Max was five.

When Max was six his mother gave him the job of taking a chicken to the local slaughterer. When mom asked Max why he, at age 6, had to work instead of his mother, he'd said impatiently, as if it were obvious, "she was only a poor widow."

As the new man of the house, he was obligated to walk seven miles each way, past dense woods (holding so tightly to a squawking chicken that he could have saved himself the trip altogether, were it not unkosher to strangle it.)

Mom didn't consciously mean to go for the juggler by asking things like, "What did it feel like being so young and running alone through those dark woods at night? Weren't you afraid they were haunted? Weren't you terri..." Just then Max broke in on her inquisition into \_his vulnerabilities, roaring (like Mel Brooks' two-thousand-year-old-man), "Feelings, shmeelings! You did what you had to do!"

Unlike her father, my mom was complexly cerebral and disconnected from nature. Max was a farmer turned businessman and never forgave his wife Sonia, for "making him" give up farming to go into business. Max was a simple man who praised his cabbages and said not to pick all the weeds because you never knew which ones would turn into something beautiful. Max espoused many proud ideals, including, "Work hard and be responsible for what you do. Women must be modest, helpful and cheerful. Men must be strong and not take any shit. Never complain. Be loyal to family above all others. Be loyal to your country above all else. Never talk about anything personal. Persevere. Moderation in all things. Pretend there is no sex. Eat good food."

Max said, “Take what you want but eat what you take,” (which is how I get fat). “A man without a family is like an island: water all around but not a drop to drink” (which is how to stay in a miserable marriage). My favorite was “the truth is the best lie” (which I adopted to the demise of many a job and relationship.) Of course, my brand of honesty (along with later obsessions like, Sex) never washed well with Mom, who, as an adolescent fantasized getting pregnant before she was married, and committing suicide.

”Be Proud of Who You Are” was inscribed on Max’s fiercely proud face, chest puffed forward, shoulders back. I recall that from a photo taken in the mid-eighties, only a few years before he died at age 96. He is taking a long stride; as if walking at a good clip on the yearly 10-mile marathon he took to raise money for Israel.

Max ran away from his home at age 11, to avoid apprenticing with a tin roofer. He left behind a brother and a sister.

At age 14, he tried working for his uncle who lived near Kiev (not in it, since Jews were forbidden to reside within the city). He’d said to the peasants, who were regularly robbing his uncle’s wagon of the grain, “When you steal from us, please steal from the bin marked, ‘received.’” That way, at least his uncle could get reimbursed.

Later he joined the army. A day came when Max was denied permission to attend the classes in reading and writing because he was a Jew. That night he threw on an overcoat to hide his layered his civilian clothes, and walked to Germany from wherever they were stationed, knowing fully that if he were caught he would be shot by a firing squad or sent to Siberia. Max never could bring himself to blame the Czar, to whom he always held and irrational Patriotic allegiance. He must have said, “hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil,” when he set his sights on America. He traveled third class with the steerage cattle. In steerage, it was common policy to throw overboard passengers who became seasick. He arrived in New York in 1910. With a few dollars from his brother, who was to join him later, and with the help of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, an organization with an office in Ellis Island that helped Jews with immigration, Max relocated to Hartford. There he re-connected with his older sister, Tanta Malka, who was engaged and getting ready to move to California. Max immediately started working in a factory. After one week he said, “Not for me!” And went down to a bar on Front Street where despairing immigrants discussed their options. A man suggested they rob a train together and Max told him that he had to be crazy. A man owed Max some money and had none, so he gave Max his milk-delivery business instead. The had a problem getting up. Max had to hoist her before he could get her to work. Max bought the horse and wagon for ten dollars and began making milk deliveries. Delivering a staple excused Max from having to serve in World War I. Max adored animals as much as his cabbages and tomatoes. He probably observed, unknowingly, the Jewish practice law requiring us to feed our animals before ourselves. After a couple of years, Max sold his business for twice his investment and began peddling fruits and vegetables. Within a year he had enough money to send for his brother, Morris.

A few years later, as business progressed to fruit stands and wagon deliveries, he sent for his cousin, Sonia. They married shortly after and 2 generations matured before anyone



[yours truly] questioned the effects of such a marriage. [Why are our eyes so close together? Why are people in my extended family bi-polar?]

My grandmother, Sonia, had neglected to mention most of her family to my mother, who only recalled stories about a peasant girl who worked for them, who slept above the stove in the kitchen. Sonia did once mention a brother, who, during a fire in their house, had run back in to save his books, nothing else. Mom deduced that he was an intellectual, like herself and regretted having never met her uncle. All she knew of her grandfather was that Max had once remarked that when there was trouble, he would take to his bed.

Max dreamed of farming. Sonia discouraged him from farming but he married her and resented her for it for the duration of her life. She died much younger than he from a weak heart. By the '30s, Max developed a relatively booming business, United Fruit and Produce.

"Money will come, money will go," he insisted, and when he was convinced to sell his property on Front Street for thousands, he sold it because it sounded like a lot of money. When he learned it was worth millions, he didn't miss a beat. But when his son and he disagreed, he was too anxious to sleep. Max, who hated excuses and cons, used to say, "You don't get something for nothing."

When a man came to his warehouse, asking for a job, Max said "okay", he would give him a job. But when the man replied, "You know Mr. Karp, you'd have to hire me anyway, because I'm a Jew, and Jews have to hire Jews," he bellowed, "What! You're a Jew! I don't hire Jews. You're fired!"

Max was with immigrant Italians most of the time, and often enjoyed speaking like a genuine Italian when in their company. In the mid-'40s, he was negotiating with a man to rent his cottage at a beach for the summer, when just before the deal was to be signed, the man said, "And you know, Mr. Karp, the best thing about this place is there are no Jews!" Max exclaimed, "Why you goddamn Guinea; what the Hell do you think I am?"

"God has been good to me," he'd announce before we ate from the head of his son's long dining room table in Manchester. Family gatherings were jovial with Max boasting and telling stories, giving away or hiding dollar bills to us grandchildren, offering us sips of his frosty Budweiser, and a seat on his sturdy knee, neutralizing and potential mystery and cravings towards alcohol.

He believed in Moderation in All Things and imparted feelings of trust and entitlement to his children and to his children's children, forever reminding us of all the good things that blessed his family, and his part in providing that we should be happy. He only exacted from us one cost, and it was meant especially for our parents. That was to "Remember who helped you," which included to "Always kiss an adult who hands you money."

There were no alcoholics or addicts in this lucky family. It is a waste that he and I never hardly spoke, that he was rather a temperamental, but benign king and I one of many lovely children that graced his

castle, but to whom he didn't relate directly. At least that was the best I could make of what might otherwise have been a cranky old man. For all his charisma, Max was hard to get close to and did not like uppity women. And for that reason I secretly rejected him: How could such a great man find a little of interest in me? Of course, by the '60s, I was anathema to my grandfather, who balked at my generation's indulgences. My twin and I were fashionably out of control and when we joined a commune in Massachusetts, he was appalled. It was not the American Way. Mom humored him, saying, "they will outgrow it soon." Max somberly shook his head as if he knew the power of masses under the influence of other charismatic leaders, as if he'd been usurped by an evil and alien enemy. He sighed heavily and if he could have cried he would have, and replied, "I don't know." Max couldn't articulate his outrage and disappointment that this place was not a place from which we could graduate or move on. It was another planet, and leaving all ties to the past behind because they were ties to materialism and emotion, was to him a denial and betrayal of all he valued most: honor and loyalty \_to parents and family members.

To us it was a heroic effort to save the world. It was to be a blueprint for a New World, which would eventually provide a better life for all.

But to him it didn't mirror a man who'd gone out and made it on his own, with, as he would say, "God-given gifts," his brains and his brawn. A man who had taught himself to read and to write once he came to America;

had made sure to invest in college tuition for us. No I was betraying, not just his ideals but my own vision, for I'd formerly been eagerly awaiting my enrollment in Goddard College. Max had hated

fanaticism. I wish I had hated it also, but who knew. If I was trying to match Max's life of adventure, I should have included his strong sense of self-preservation. The preservation however, didn't seem to stop. Mom, finding Max overbearing, had looked elsewhere for help teaching her daughters how to survive. She gave up and absorbed herself in less confusing topics like Einstein's theories of relativity, Jewish History, and Zen Buddhism.

"Max wasn't angry, was he?" She'd typically ask Dad when Max snapped at her. She seemed to believe that if someone didn't want to talk, they would just talk about not wanting to talk.

"How the hell would I know what he felt?" would put an end to both discussion and the possibility of a non-verbal friendly encounter. Which would have been just what Max would have done. Max influenced us all with an impatient bluntness that could both charm and shut up as he saw fit; a useful survival skill for a person who refuses to be a stranger to the wide world of human nature, wherever he travels. In this day of confusion between what is politically correct and what is honest, Max could have been the savviest of us all, had he not married his first cousin and possibly caused the bi-polar illness in the generations to come.

