



Still Determined After All These Tears:

A Story of Tragedies,
Tumors and Triumphs

by
Regina Louise DeMarassé

Regina Louise DeMarassé 1958-2004

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

DeMarassé, Regina Louise, 1958 - 2004.

Still determined after all these tears :
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ISBN 1-895418-56-9

1. DeMarassé, Regina Louise, 1958-2004. 2. People with disabilities--United States--Biography. 3. Authors, American--Biography. 4. Counselors--United States--Biography. I. Title.

HV28.D39A3 2005 158'.3'092
C2004-906359-6

First Edition - 2006

Printing: Communitas, Manchester, CT. 2006
E-book - Inclusion Press, Toronto Canada 2006
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**From a note to her friends
10/24/2004**

***“If you cry at my death, let it be tears of joy,
for I have finished my tale, done all my deeds,
said all my words, and am welcomed into the
light. There I shall see without eyes, dance
without legs, touch without hands, and feel
with only a heart of a tried, but not tired,
spirit.”***

Regina DeMarassé

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Regina Louise DeMarassé

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PART I

Moon River Motet

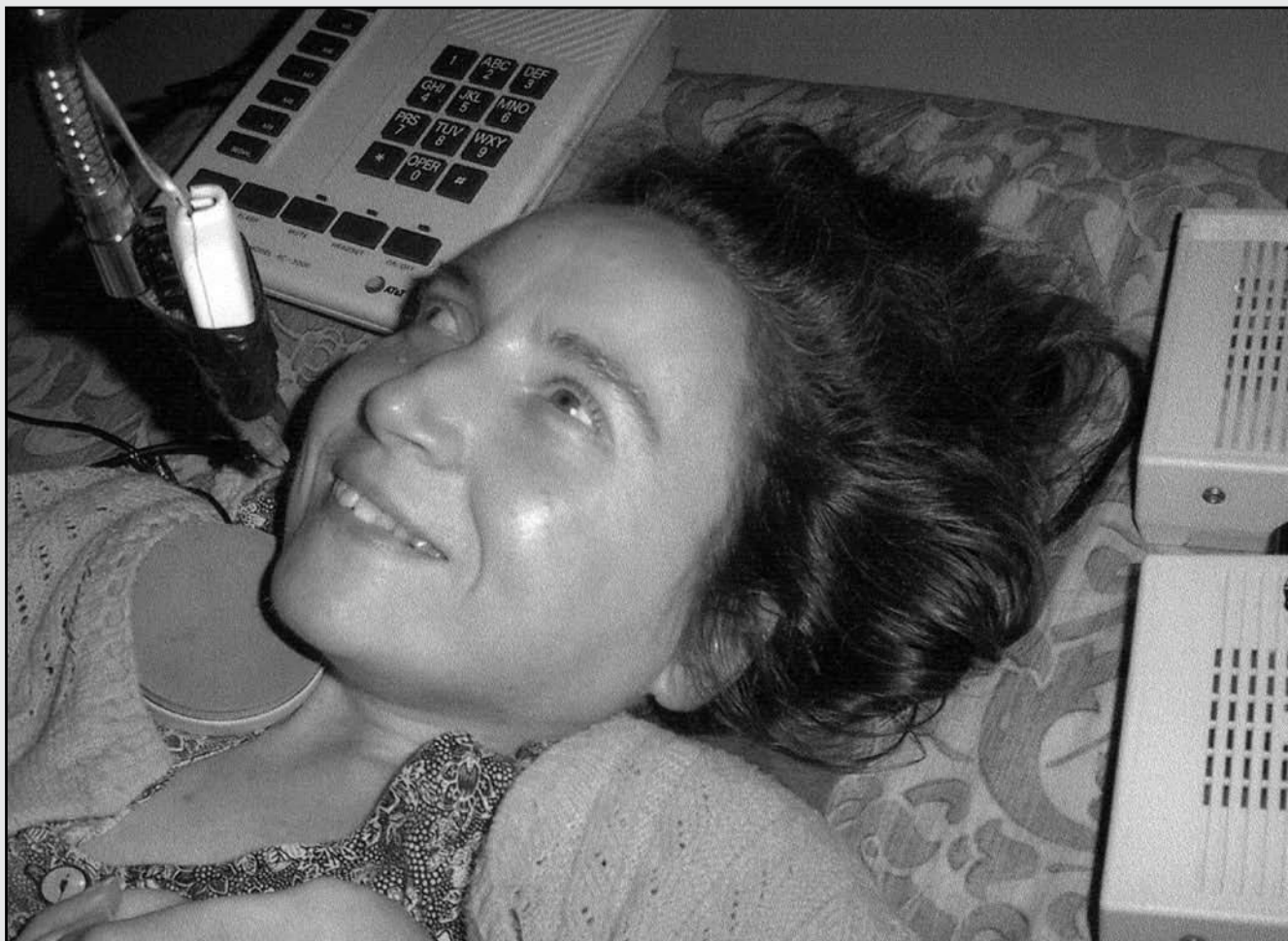




Photo by Neil Osborn

Puffing the Morse code into her computer
- to write papers, letters, editorials, poems, etc.

Introduction

What, in God's wonderful, but baffling, creation is a motet, anyway?

A motet (with the second t pronounced) is a song. My life has been full of music - in my living room, in halls, in parks, on the stereo, in my high school, in the trees and from sparrows perched on the telephone wires. I like to think of my life as a song, as full of poetry.

In the thirteenth century the motet was a religious song, sung in three polyphonic parts. By the eighteenth century, it ... wait, wait, don't close the book Bear with me and I will tell you how best to get what you want out of this personal narrative. It's a great book to read as a whole - filled with drama as well as cozy scenes, philosophizing as well as descriptiveness, personal growth experiences as well as disability rights issues, and just a story I hope you can enjoy.

Various people as well as themes weave in and out of this narrative. That's one reason I call it a motet, which you'll understand if you have the patience for metaphors. If not, you can cut to the quick and I'll tell you how.

Read the Prologue.

If you're less interested in my background than you are in what it was like to experience a devastating and life threatening disease, and the resulting disabilities, skip ahead to Chapter Three. If you want to know the spiritual story, as well as the cures and treatments I sought out after conventional medicine no longer proved helpful, skip to Chapter Seven. If you want to read about my re-emergence and work toward inclusion back in the world outside my door, skip to Chapter Thirteen, but I tell you if you do skip everything before that, you're missing a lot of good stuff.

And, of course, if your interest is in a story about life in an institution and how with the help of my circle of friends I was able to leave that institution, you'll have to skip all but perhaps the last segment of Part I and read Part II.

When you come to your senses, you could always go back and read Chapter One and learn what formed me. In Chapters Two through Four you can learn how active as an able-bodied person I once was.

So, by the eighteenth century, the motet expressed romance, political satire. The Harvard Dictionary of Music says, "Second half of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century, the motet was at the center of fundamental changes - a regular beat consisting of three semibreves and that freed the composer from the fixed rhythmic patterns

That sounds something like my life.

In essence, my life, despite severe disabilities, has been a song - one sometimes slow and winding, one sometimes gushing with love of all kinds and upbeat. It has had many voices. It has been full of irregular rhythms and texts or contents; it has been political and spiritual, and it has had romance. Most of it has taken place in New York City, and thus the allusion to "Moon River" (also a song) - the most wonderful name for that calm, cobalt body that I once sat by, once worked by, once played by, once created by and once dreamed by.

Because there are rivers, there are cities. Because there are cities, there are schools, medical centers, places of great art. That describes my life, too - a vessel for learning, a channel for creative expression ... the medical center kind of describes what my house sometimes looked like.

But I digress.

I wrote this book because I had to. We all have a piece to sound and this is my personal song.

About the Photos..

A collection of photos, drawings, clippings and Regina memorabilia are placed throughout the book. We had planned to spend many hours selecting locations, clarifying labels and generally deciding how to add and round out some of Regina's other talents with these images. We made a collection, but fate intervened. Thus, the images appear virtually randomly - like life happens - and add shape and depth to the Regina who writes so beautifully in this book. There was more to her art. These images hint at her remarkable other talents - and hopefully will add depth and enjoyment as you read Regina's tactile phrases and gifted descriptions.

Regina Louise DeMarassé
June, 2004

Duffy's Waltz

Regina De Marasse' page 1

Regina wrote Duffy's Waltz

play it if you like...

LOVE OF MUSIC written by Regina 12/16/74

→ Why is music so great? Why does it pull my heart out and hurt while it delights? When I close my eyes Faure's Pavane transforms everything around me to a purple sea of clouds. My body floats on waves. Every wave is gentle, yet each movement's intensity startles me. It pulls me ever so gently along, very gently. The flute is a tiny green leaf in the wind, blown off a tree on a summer night, floating slowly to the ground, dancing gracefully in the breeze as it goes. It is a lonely sight, yet it feels not lonely. It feels beautiful and free, resting on the waves of air. Soft sweet breeze. It is happy to be alive and green. The future does not matter, nor the past. All that matters is this moment. This moment in heaven, floating.

Oh music! Each new chord is another dart into my heart. How much more can I bear? I love you. Never leave me, no matter how much it hurts.

Regina De Marasse

Page 2

How can some people claim to have lived without being in love with the world's great classical music? How can one stick to folk or rock when some of the sweetest and some of the most exciting music is off the classical tradition? It takes hard listening at first to discover all the beauty that lies within the strings of the violin, to feel the heart beat of the bass, but God, is it ever worth it. It is the reason for living.

All those I know and love may leave me, they may pave over the grass where I used to play, bitter winds may blow and chill me to the marrow, but there will always be music. What misery for the deaf Beethoven.

Nothing excites like the Fifth. Nothing is as climatic as Wagner's overtures. As a child I missed all this, as many adults and adolescents still do today. They have not lived, believe me! You can experience the excitement of a cave excavation, or hang off a cliff awfully, you know not what, but never does the excitement and intensity build up like that of a symphony. Never can your brain be so aware as when you rest and listen. That is the secret — the intellectual quality. Your mind has the greatest awareness, it explores the furthest depths, beyond anything your physical senses can reach. Strains of music can fill it like no other substance. Music is whole, it reaches out to all levels of thought and existence.

Prologue - The Decision

Outside the cool, clean, glass doors of the automated post office, my knee and palm met the carpet. (I wanted to introduce them formally, but they insisted I dispense with amenities.) Everyone should get to know their friendly, neighborhood mall, or at least its carpet.

This mall had storefronts and windows, a gallery which was closed, a cookery, closed also; hollow, dim interiors looked like I felt. The post office dispensed stamps, even had a machine that could weigh your package, affix proper postage, and return the proper change. I would have to keep it in mind if ever I wanted a machine to pay proper attention to me.

Calliope sounds of a bouncy "Tie a Yellow Ribbon" kind of melody had drifted my way when I first heaved open the glass door on Peachtree Road. Sure enough, there was the skating rink right in the middle! I stood a time watching little girls and daddies make their way toward the entrance; once inside the girls glided off to lessons. This was Saturday morning for them. I longed for a Saturday routine - to have someplace to go without question, without hesitation. I longed to have someone to take me.

After several minutes, I turned away; that world was not going to absorb me into its fabric, its clockwork, nor its agility.

Trudging on toward my adventure, I crossed carpeted floors, which silenced my existence.

I had forgotten to make a conscious effort to move my right foot at a pace equal to my left and the rest of my body. Picking myself up from my sprawl, I moved on, unnoticed. Moments later my upper body lunged forward again; the foot just didn't want to accommodate to the pace. Perhaps I had seen enough, anyway.

Entering freshmen at Antioch College were expected to choose a core course in urban studies and to further

explore in various other cities. In the Fall, prior to this January, 1977, Sally, in Atlanta, our **Cities for People** class had made a field trip to the small city of Springfield, Ohio. The old arcade, our first stop, had a row of mostly unused store-fronts, facing each other across an indoor walk a city block long. Rococo swirls and scallops of ecru on faint blue-gray embellished the archway, doorways and the ornamental balcony, giving an old world flavor. It was rather quaint. Save for a crowd of about fifteen Antiochians, it was also rather empty. And in disrepair.

Exploring other parts of Springfield in groups of two or three, we had noted architecture. As the late afternoon sun was about to set and a November chill crept in, Trish, my strong and gentle nature-loving mid-western chum, and I rejoined our class in the parking lot. Piling in our nicely heated van, we headed for the other side of town.

"Everyone balks about including the mall, with all its commercialism, in our study," one of the instructors said. "Once you get there, however, that's where you'll find yourself spending the most time."

He was right, I realized, sometime after traversing a windy parking lot into its warm, windowless entrails. We left behind all time, all seasons, save for premature Christmas displays popping up here, there, everywhere, enticing us near. Several times I found myself captured within a store I couldn't afford (not without Visa).

Bright red, blue, yellow, green, orange arrangements dazzled my eyes - STAR TREK! MIDDLE EARTH! TEACHINGS OF DON JUAN! I hadn't been in the market for books - how did I get in Brentano's? Certainly not by opening any doors. I was surrounded, seduced to buy.

Were all malls alike? Could you place yourself in the middle of any mall in America and know you were in the middle of some mall in the middle of America? Perhaps, but I did not feel at home exploring Atlanta's Colony Square that latter day in January.



Photo & Drawing Notes:

There were very few photos of Regina's early years - and none of her 'institution years'. That is a story all by itself.

Many of the 'scans' are from Regina's art books - drawings from art classes - and a few from childhood school note books.

Out on the pavement, hard ground made me more aware of my right foot's location. I noticed the street incline for the first time. No doubt, the incline had been there the other day when I visited the Fine Arts Center, but somehow the trek hadn't seemed quite as tiring, quite as demanding.

Back in my room at the women's residence, I nibbled pumpernickel bread and cheese I purchased earlier that week. For a while I read, studied maps, and paced. I wrote in my journal:

Saturday, January 8, 1977

Sunny, warm today, people out washing cars in shirtsleeves. What beautiful, spacious houses Atlanta has. I wish I could share with a friend.

My walking is slow, tired and does not correspond with my darting, ambitious mind. I feel no escape from this loneliness that has been with me before; all relief seems temporary. I feel singled out - destined.

Could the future possibly hold any good? Perhaps for someone else. I am lame. I am weary.

My pace has a definite long-short, long-short beat. Where did this limp come from?

The next day the leg was no better, nor the next. It seemed to grow heavier as I stumbled more and more, even in the short stretch between my bed where I passed time reading, and the bathroom. In my journal:

Sunday, January 9th

What did I do all day but rest and hobble? Outside it rained and winded, so I missed nothing but the Sunday papers. Contemplating calling my sister to ask

advice - should I go home?

On weekends they only serve breakfast. My Mexican TV dinner thought itself Natalia Makarova, honoring me with a gaudy over the oven door. Wiping off pasty burrito slosh wasn't the tough part, cleaning it from the eyelets of my shoelace holes with toilet paper was.

I need Mamma's tender, loving care. I need Mamma's cooking.

Waiting in the front office my first afternoon at the residence, for heat on our floor, I got to know Tammy and Maria. Tammy was enrolled in secretarial school; Maria, just arrived from Argentina, was attending school to learn English. At meals I usually looked for them.

I never seemed to run into any of the other women more than once. Nonetheless, I remember their stories: "Ah's bawn an' raised in Soddy-Daisy, Tennessee jus nawth of Chattanooga," a thin, round-shouldered woman with limp, mousy brown hair told me over yams, green beans and fried chicken (no grits). "Ah'm an only chile an mah pearents ah payast on. Don't hayave no one. Ah reckoned Ah'd make a new life faw maself an' move on down heya. Ah bin heya fahw months, nayow workin' fahw a teyemp aygency. Ah reckon Ah'll stay awwahl an' see whah hayappens . . ."

"June Louise jus' luuhvs Cairey Grayant," piped in Martha Elise, who hailed from the backwoods of Georgia. Martha Elise looked to be in her forties and was also without ties, but in contrast to June Louise, she held her broad shoulders back squarely in her blue plaid, flannel shirt. She spoke of her experience as a farm day laborer. I was fascinated, having grown up knowing only kids and their parents living mostly in Queens (or Manhattan), working in stores, factories or office buildings. This transient, small town and backwoods stuff sounded like something out of a Flannery O'Connor or William Faulkner novel.



It would have been a little more exciting if June Louise said she was a waitress or a barmaid. Then I could have pictured her in some greasy spoon joint, a “poor girl” trying to rise above circumstances and maintain her integrity in a brutal, seedy world. Still, a Walter Mitty typist from Soddy-Daisy was as exotic to me as a woman in a sari might be to a girl from Idaho. Martha Elise, too, intrigued me. I wanted to read on.

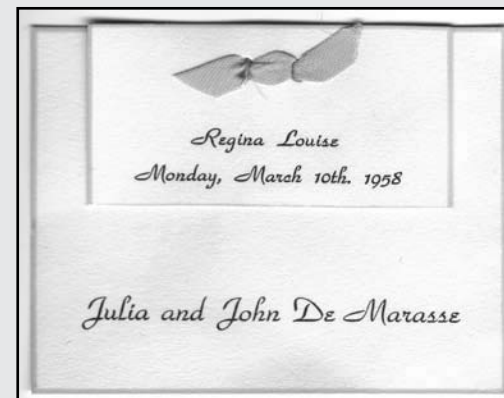
Tammy, the first soul I had seen that Sunday, was in the kitchenette ironing. “Mind if I unburden myself a few minutes?” I asked.

“Go rah-ight ahead,” she replied.

“I’ve had this problem for the last year and a half; it’s a tumor in my spine. They treated it with radiation and I got better, but now I feel like something’s getting worse, only this time, instead of it being my hand, in the last few days I’ve developed a limp. Maybe I should go back home to New York and see my neurologist. If I do though, I won’t be able to afford plane fare to return.”

“Amery University Mehddical Cenna is an ehcellent hospital,” she said, stressing the “eh” in excellent. “Heyave you cunsiduhd going theya?”

“Well, the thing is, the doctors back home know my medical history, which spans sixteen years. They knew me before and after and have a better basis with which to judge. Besides, I’m afraid if I delay too long, I may not be able to walk out the door.”



1 - Meet my Sibs, and me as a Kid

Back in the early sixties, after Mom left for work at 4:00 we were on our own until Dad got home at 5:30 or 6:00. Valerie, just twelve, warmed the supper Mom prepared. Evan was fourteen, Raymond eleven, I was four.

"Regina, say 'shit,'" Evan instructed. His wide Anthony Perkins forehead, under a Vitalis-ized semi-pompadour, was matched in width and depth only by his grin. He sat at the head of the table, Raymond sat tittering at the foot.

"Don't, Regina," Valerie admonished.

"Go ahead," Evan egged. I giggled too, knowing there was something devilishly delightful about the word. Still, I opted to take Sister's side; after all, she was the one who would entertain me and get me ready for bed.

By the way, rest assured the above is only one of the few instances of profanity in this book.

Amongst my earliest memories of Evan Raymond in the 1960s is two boys in dungarees, red plaid flannel shirts, and conductors' caps, manning controls. They may have been twelve and seven years old respectively, or fourteen and nine. Down in the basement, on a slab of wood across pillars of toy chests and cartons, train tracks, railroad crossing signs and a plastic station with billboards, nineteenth century Lionels chugged and whistled. Painted in greens and blues were grassy prairies, ponds and streams; little kiosks dotted the landscape. It wasn't an F.A.O. Schwartz panorama with mountainous terrain, tunnels, trees, and shrubs, but the train sure had a cute caboosel!

Now and then, one of them would give the train a pill, "so it can smoke," Raymond explained.

Later, metal, ties and rails were replaced by smooth, curved plastic black strips snapping together into all kinds of configurations. The boys raced toy cars.

"Ever since Evan was old enough to speak," Mom says, "and I'd ask at the Five and Dime 'What would you like?' he'd say, 'A cah.'

"But you got a car last week.'

"That was blue; this one's gween."

When I was in kindergarten and first grade, Raymond and I walked to school together. Valerie and Evan were teenagers while we were still children. Ray, hair sandy-brown before deepening to chocolate years later, was not my playmate, but was my buddy, cheering me up when I was sad. His silly faces made me laugh after I fell and scraped my knees. Children on the block made fun when I jumped rope by swinging the cord around and then stepping over it. I honestly thought that was how. Raymond comforted, "I like the way you jump."

I could recall cuddling in an armchair with him watching *The Twilight Zone*, *Topper*, *Car 54*, or even some creature feature. At other times we sat in the artificial fireplace pretending it was something it wasn't; unfortunately what it was escapes me. We also played subway, sitting on the crosspieces under the large, Mediterranean solid oak antique dining room table.

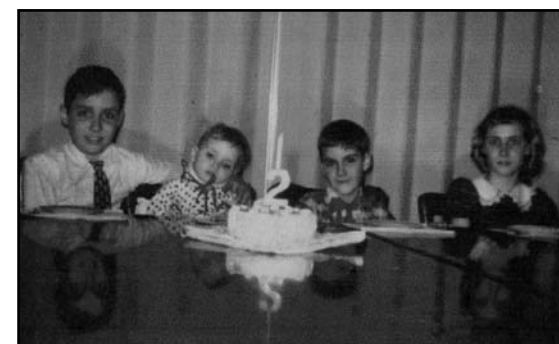
With the money Evan saved working a paper route, after buying me *Good & Plenty* and paying for photographic equipment, he purchased a secondhand '62 convertible Chevy Impala which he started driving no later than his seventeenth birthday, the legal age for a license in New York. After that, we didn't see him much, but as he pulled off, we'd hear from the trunk the rattle of his collection of empty beer cans.

"Paul McCartney's coming to see me," Valerie announced at the age of sixteen, when I was eight.

Teenagers had it made. Back then Valerie wore mascara, and presented quite the fashion plate, sewing her own clothes - like her orange and blue floral print dress. With the money she earned on Saturdays, she bought matching accessories, - an orange belt, an orange handbag and orange shoes. (Her mascara, however, was not orange).



infant photos of Reg



L-R: Evan, Regina, Ray, Valerie (March 10, 1960) Regina's second birthday

She was always going somewhere, no doubt to all the swank teenage hang-outs, so why shouldn't she brush shoulders with Paul McCartney?

"Will I get to meet him?"

"Oh, you'll be long asleep, but I'll ask him to sneak in and kiss your cheek."

"How's he coming?"

"On the Q45."

"Do you think anybody will recognize him?"

"Well, he's going to wear rollers in his hair and dress like a girl."

This made perfect sense; the Beatles had "long hair" (by mid-sixties standards). As my father used to say, knowing John Lennon had wed, "Which one is he married to?"

At this juncture, I should mention someone very important to me, though he had nothing to do with this plot. I don't know, maybe he has. After all, he showed me a thing or two about patience, perseverance, forgiveness and was just sweet and cuddly and lovable. Nigel was my first cat.

The only black kitten of the litter and not as pretty as his black and cream siblings, but he came straight to me and licked my knee. So I chose him. Ironically, he grew into a sleek, black beauty.

More on cats in my next books.

Frequently one could find Evan, that is, his feet, sticking out from one end or the other of his car, tools arrayed nearby. Also nearby, one little boy or another would sit, or sprawl. Sixteen year-old girls with long hair and make-up also sat, patiently . . .

Children take to Evan, even now. Our nieces used to jump, crawl, and paw all over him, tying pink ribbons in his hair.

In his forties, Evan drove a '67 Chevrolet, his third second-hand purchase, repaired and repaired again. The car saw its twenty-fifth birthday in 1992. Evan also rides a bike.

Valerie was an art major at the High School of Music and Art. As she approached seventeen, she prepared her portfolio for college. Numerous sketches of nudes began to adorn our living room - everywhere - atop the piano, the bookcase, along

the top of the couch. Standing back, she'd squint at them with a critical eye. Years later, I discovered this technique of leaning back and squinting did wonders to improve my own sketches.

The following year she left for SUNY at New Paltz and lived in a dorm, which seemed pretty cool to me; I could hardly wait for the day I'd do the same.

"Do you miss Valerie?" Dad asked.

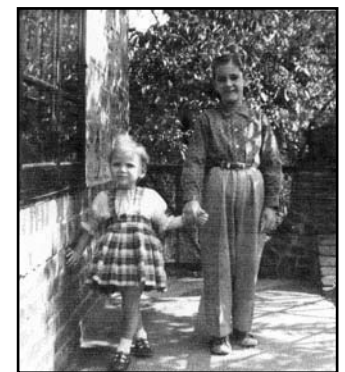
"Eh, she was hardly home, anyway." Still, when Valerie came down the first weekend in October for our Babcia's eightieth birthday, I was thrilled.

After graduating from Brooklyn Tech High School, Evan went on to Queens College, where he decided he took no interest at all. After nearly flunking out, he transferred . . .

"I'm surprised at you, a student at The Academy of Aeronautics," Raymond recalls the airport security man saying. "Evan and his friend, Fesameyer, brought my friend and me to take pictures on this runway. All of a sudden a pack of guards bounds toward us. Evan hollers, 'You two go that way,' and he and Fesameyer scam in the opposite direction. Well, when the guards caught up and hauled us into the security office, who's there getting bawled out but Evan and Fesameyer!"

That was only a year or two after the time park police at the '65 World's Fair pulled Evan and his friend, Isola, over and told them "quit with the white towels" wrapped around their heads like turbans.

Evan has been frequenting airports for years, not only as a flyer, when he worked consulting at various nuclear plants as a mechanical engineer, but probably ever since he knew how to get himself there. Mom recalled "showing the children" (not me, the unborn) the airport the first time, back in the days when people stayed local more and even time didn't fly by so quickly. Evan, upon returning home, expressed his delight crayoning all sorts of planes. "Most people consider it noise when the planes use that runway," he once noted regarding the onslaught of aircraft Mom observed coming straight for her house. "Me, I head down to LaGuardia and watch them take off."



Regina & Evan

Valerie spent one more Summer with us at home; the next, she flew off herself and waited tables in a London hotel. She returned enamored with British culture and was ready to forgo her next two years of college to go back.

"You can think about that after you graduate," my parents advised . . . rather insistently. She finished all but her student teaching, and worked the next two Summers waitressing at Lake Mohonk Resort, in New Paltz, saving money.

In the Fall of '71, troubled, insecure and recovering from a broken love affair, Valerie set out with a backpack and an uncertain itinerary.

Landing in Iceland first, she changed planes and flew to Belgium or France or some middle country, then made her way through Germany, Italy, and Greece by November. With only the clothes a backpack held, she welcomed the Mediterranean warmth at the Grecian shore. (When she returned home a year later, we had to take her to Greek pastry shops in Astoria, Queens for baklava.

Meanwhile, I was about to have some mini-adventures, and some small but significant learning spurts, back in my little old home town of New York City.

Rumor had been Mr. Sosis would give us one tough year in eight grade Social Studies. It was said he was merciless, but I discovered he actually was quite a good-humored fellow. The 56 I received on his first exam, however, was not so hilarious. Normally, I studied little to maintain a B+ average, didn't need to study more, didn't much care, but geez, I had to at least pass! Obviously, a brief perusal of my notes was not sufficient anymore.

Mr. Sosis rarely used the blackboard; that didn't mean my hand should rest. I had to learn to think for myself and discern what was important in taking notes. It was a good foundation for college.

Unlike seventh grade American History dealing mostly with wars, not people, Urban Affairs helped me understand how

the poor got poor and stayed poor. We studied neighborhood development, social problems and crime, the formation and immobility of certain classes - basically, human beings in the modern city.

Minorities weren't in ghettos because they were innately stupid, evil or "savage"; they were victims of vicious economic and cultural cycles. There was hope. With understanding, change was possible. With supportive programs, wrongs could be righted, inequalities leveled. I was buzzing with pubescent optimism and wanted to overcome my own prejudice and hoped others would, also. Later I'd learn things wouldn't change too soon.

Anyway, reviewing my noble exam, I noted Mr. Sosis was fond of "obscure" details. (When you're young, anything you skipped studying is obscure.) Not knowing what to focus upon, I studied everything and had my first lesson in thoroughness. In each succeeding test I improved, but it was the determination, not the grade that mattered. God gives us lessons not for our egos, but our souls. I was learning when I applied myself, I could go past what at first seemed impossible.

Somewhere around that time, or maybe a year later, Evan also got more serious about his studies. Thanks to the generosity of his firm, American Electric Power Company, he returned to school. When Evan pursued a baccalaureate at Polytechnic University at night, we saw little of him (nothing new) but a lean, dark-haired figure bowed over a textbook on the desk in the basement - where Lionels once reigned.

One Winter's eve, after a fulfilling hour of piano playing, I pranced down to find my studious brother with a ninety-minute, reel-to-reel tape playing . . . the whir of a fan. "It blocks out noise," he commented.

Seeing his fondness for lulling sounds, I asked how he liked the chirp of crickets. To me the sound was music.

He replied, "It's okay, but can get annoying if you're trying to concentrate."

One of Evan's favorite pieces of music seemed to be Saint-



Regina & llama



Always climbing trees



Saens' *Danse Macabre*. Generally I like Saint-Saens, but this piece, or that version, was particularly weird. Raymond later learned to play it on his Hammond organ and Valerie would call it his "ghoul music."

By that Christmas of 1971, Valerie was in Bethlehem, which was less spiritual than she had hoped. She stayed in Israel a time, working for a potter, making ceramics (probably to be sold to American tourists). She also worked on a kibbutz.

"Enjoy the view while you can," the pastor of Trinity Church had said as we stood with him by the window of his office in the tower, gazing across a block wide building still adolescent and unfinished. "Within a year that will be known as the World Trade Center, and will be the tallest structure in New York, the second in the nation." Annette, Joyce, Jean and I had been invited up when we asked for the signature from the pastor of this two hundred year old Wall Street church for our eighth grade scavenger hunt. Studying Urban Affairs that year, the Social Studies Department had conceived the fifty-item hunt to encourage us in getting to know the five boroughs of our great and diversified city.

Other items in the hunt had included a description of Picasso's "She-Goat" at the Museum of Modern Art, an application for a marriage license down at City Hall, an account of how many steps it took to cross the Brooklyn Bridge.

Following instructions to photograph ourselves beside the fifteen foot white marble lions flanking the pantheon-like Beaux-Arts steps of the main branch New York Public Library, we walked through Room 315, a large hall housing the card catalogue. Cabinet after cabinet contained row upon row of index cards – literal millions!

Amongst our thirty or more adventures – the Bronx Zoo, Brooklyn Promenade, the Stock Exchange, the Frick Museum, the Guggenheim, the Lower East Side. Unable to convince the proprietor of the nearly empty Bleecker Street café in Greenwich Village, to donate a menu to our cause,

we had to steal it. In Chinatown, we tried to determine what the vegetables were in Chinese vegetable soup. We visited penguins at the Coney Island Aquarium.

The signature of a captain brought us an exceptional view from the helm of the Cornelius A. Knoff – a noble vessel. Unlike modern glass enclosed Staten Island ferries with air conditioning, the old C.A.K. allowed us to stand out on deck, feel the sea breeze, and smell the salt air.

And then that summer, as I sweltered in a cubicle, stamping "Pediatric Clinic" on myriad urinalysis sheets, my three siblings had been off to the ends of the Earth: Valerie to India, visiting monkey and other temples, Evan to Scandinavia, viewing fjords and the midnight sun; Ray, cross-country, seeing the Grand Canyon and Lake Tahoe on the way to California. They all worked since an early age and had accumulated finances to travel, while I trailed behind ... in body, in mind and perspective.

After having made her way to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and India, Valerie had seen the Taj Mahal, as well as much poverty. Gradually, skins had been darkening. Eyes became almond shaped, but before they gained an epicanthic fold, she hit her farthest east in the mountains of Kashmir and Nepal. There she acquired delicately painted papier mache, boxes which she carted all the way home to ciocias*, Mom and me. She acquired hepatitis there as well.

My childhood playmate Andrea and I worked as "candy strippers" at Elmhurst General. Her assignment was on a med/surg floor – making beds, filling water pitchers and talking to old people. Mine was in the Pediatric Clinic stamping pink slips, stamping yellow slips, stamping charts, turning pages, stamping more. Occasionally I trotted down to X-Ray with some "intimate" photos, or to pathology, or with a weepy mother to Admitting.

"Could you show me how to get to the cafeteria we peons are supposed to use?" I asked the other girl in blue and white stripes at the clinic down the hall. "Yesterday I wound up with



Cats, trees and Regina always seemed to find each other...



the higher echelon.”

Her name was also Valerie, and she too would venture to India someday. At that time, however, she brought me to the cafeteria for the livelier bunch – Maintenance, Housekeeping, volunteers – including the fellow who told me he wanted to be a proctologist.

“What’s that?” I queried.

“I’ll write it down; you can look it up.”

The American Red Cross Hospital in Nepal took good care, netting my sister’s bed against flies, feeding her Yankee dishes she thought she’d never miss. Karen, a secretary from Minnesota she had met, checked on her from time to time.

Within a couple of weeks, Valerie recovered and was on the road again. In the two months that followed she made her way back to the West and sent word she’d be home in October.

By fourteen I had already decided most of the world was not too swift . . . well, maybe it wasn’t true of people in exotic cultures, but around me, people were just plain shallow, or something. My sensibilities were rather high strung I suppose; by the age of twelve I was wearing a black arm band for the folks in Nam, by thirteen reading the Communist Manifesto, by fourteen feeling alienated from mainstream society, carrying a strong prejudice against Conservatives. Basically, they were wrong and Liberals were right; that’s all there was to it. They were mean, rotten, one-dimensional beings responsible for all evil. Some were particularly superficial, females wore packs of make-up, and were not even worth the time of day.

I must have neglected paying attention to my habitual views when I became friendly with Irene and Kathy; they worked the floor with me, and we just had a good time together - quipping about one of the clerks who talked to herself, reiterating the highlights of the David Steinberg Show, and just generally finding witty ways to pick on each other. When one of us was having a problem or a bad day, however, there was a lot of concern. Both Irene and Kathy, unfortunately,

supported the re-election of Richard Nixon(!!)

That Summer I learned even if the other side wasn’t in agreement with me, the people holding those views could still be caring, thoughtful individuals with feelings, their own struggles and inner conflicts. We could still find common ground.

When I opened our front door the night of Valerie’s return, she was leaning forward, laden as much by her bulging backpack, as propelled by her intense eagerness; tears glistened in her eyes. After a hug, I stepped aside to let her and her bulging brown Santa’s pack in.

We called Mom, who was visiting with our ciocias; shortly she arrived, eyes bearing the same sheen. Mom, Dad and I sat down to a long “tea” with Valerie and began hearing a tale even today we have not heard in its entirety.

Active that Fall in the McGovern campaign, it bothered me when people disagreed with my views, but most did. It also saddened me to think about our government, the lack of concern for the poor and common people. In some colossal way, I wanted to help. I even considered political activism as a career, enjoying the excitement and energy of the campaign.

George lost by a landslide. My youthful faith plummeted; apparently politics was not going to bring about the rapid reforms I hoped. It would take too long to change too many minds.

I now realize I can influence change and increase awareness by writing letters to representatives, newspapers, people in prominent positions. I can meet with them, talk with them and educate them, as well as the public. The process is a slow one, often taking months or years, people suffering as they wait for legislation affecting their health, their income, their lives, but if we want change we must begin somewhere.

And I have become an activist.

When Valerie expressed an interest in volunteering with me on the George McGovern presidential campaign, I was delighted. For a change, it was I who was bringing her around. In the three or four months that followed, we grew as peers.



She joined me with my friends; I joined her with hers. We discussed my work on the school newspaper, staging mock interviews over our ritual 10 p.m. tea. I had never known she could be so funny, so bubbly and such a ham.

The year before, I had joined the school newspaper's staff. Scented with Lily of the Valley, Fay Silverman, a girl with long red hair, edited the paper. She entered the room heels clicking. Everyone ceased to speak. All eyes fixed on Fay - making suggestions, doling out assignments. When she graduated, I wondered who would take her place.

In eighth grade Mr. Michaels, our English teacher, assigned J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, a fantasy about little men with furry feet, elves that demonstrated great hospitality, fairies and trolls that did not, and a wizard who puffed marvelous, multi-colored smoke rings, amongst other tricks.

Bilbo Baggins, a humble, shy, homebody Hobbit, found himself in a curious position. One fine day a real live dwarf came knocking at the door of his modest abode set in the side of a cool green mountain. Flustered, but with a habit of graciousness, he invited him in, as well as the eleven other dwarves who successively followed.

At last Gandalf, Bilbo's favorite wizard, joined them and explained to Mr. Baggins that for centuries a dragon had been robbing the dwarves of their rightful inheritance. Bilbo's mission - to lead an expedition to the Black Mountain to slay said dragon. Bilbo never participated in such an adventure before, and had grave reservations concerning his ability, not to mention his desire. At the same time he was intrigued.

Gandalf had no doubts; in fact he recognized Bilbo as the only one truly capable of assuming the role. Despite his shy self, Bilbo agreed to the task and off he went, before he even had time to think to pack a handkerchief.

Mr. Michaels had a quiet gentle voice, and a slow, but warm, smile. I could picture him a tall, bespectacled high schooler, slightly stooped, quietly, unobtrusively, negotiating his way through a hallway of chattering peers. In 1972 he stood before a class

of thirty - Mr. Michaels who always picked up the one small voice in a crowd timidly struggling to be heard. Mine was one such voice.

Appointing me editor, Mr. Michaels conducted the first meeting; holding me aside after the second he said, "One of these days you'll have to run things yourself . . . but I'll be around."

Unlike Fay, I never had the gumption to walk in ten minutes late, my shoes soft-soled, my voice mild, a murmur was often present amongst my staff, and, at best, I probably emanated nothing more than Bohack's generic brand Prell. Still, there was more news, more humor, more illustrations, surveys, biographical sketches, a Dear Abby, horoscopes, puzzles, old songs with new lyrics; Annette, my assistant editor, created a comic strip in which Cornelia (Corney) Collins saved the likes of J.H.S. 73 from wayward principals and PTA presidents.

By the end of the year I was able to acknowledge myself capable of leadership, thanks to Bilbo and Mr. Michaels.

For a time Valerie floundered, working in a candle factory for \$ 10 a day, smelling of sandalwood, vanilla, raspberry, mint and other aromas by night. Mom and Dad hounded her to "get serious" and use her education. That Spring Valerie finished her last degree requirement doing student teaching with a junior high school art teacher in Pomona, a suburb of New York. She rented a room in a house owned by Jesse Hawks, a spry and wise ninety-year-old woman, whom she continued to visit even after she moved out. Mrs. Hawks, we found out four years later, was my nurse Ria's adored great aunt.



Being a Teenager...

