

Your Voice, Your Life, Your Story



A BRIDGE TO THE PAST THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVE WRITING
FALL 2021 ANTHOLOGY



Brooklyn Public Library Services for Older Adults

“The true alchemists
do not change lead
into gold; they change
the world into words.”

~William H. Gass





“Memory doesn’t come as a straight narrative, it doesn’t come as a block of story. It comes in moments, and these moments are photographs and the photographs begin to tell the story.”

– Jacqueline Woodson, Writer

CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP
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The following is the seventh anthology produced by the Brooklyn Public Library's Services for Older Adults Creative Aging writing workshops during the pandemic. Since late September, the participants have spent Wednesday afternoons writing about their childhoods, their memories of growing up in Brooklyn, in England, in a traveling carnival around New England... They have shared happy and funny memories as well as painful ones. This is a unique collection of writers who have arrived every week with their hearts and minds open, and with incredible depths of kindness to one another.

It is so inspiring to not only get to hear their words,
but also to witness their warmth, respect
and care-taking of each other.

– *Susan Buttenwieser, Teaching Artist*



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Leah BERKOVITS

MINE FOR KEEPS

I want to keep the crazy paving path
to the front door from the wooden gate
the arch above it hidden
beneath the fluttering pink petals
of the scented wild rose bush.

I want to keep the two Ionic columns
And the three steps that led up to the
Double front door
And the Victorian windows
Their panes in tidy small squares
Each framed and sealed with lead.

I want to keep the terra cotta floor tiles
Between the outer and inner front doors
That we kids loved to polish to a high shine.

I want to keep the Morning Room
Where we ate our meals
On the massive oak table
My father bought at auction for five pounds
Then called the auction house
Because it just had to be a mistake
And he actually bid fifty.

I want to keep the glossy ceramic stoves
That we filled with anthracite
Brought up from the cellar in coal scuttles
And heaped into the stoves' mouth
Watching through the mica windows
As the coals caught and glowed
Radiating their warmth
On those bitter winter days and nights.

I have never been back
I won't go back
I want to keep it
I want to keep it all
Just as it was.



Barbara BROWN

OUR OWN DISTANT PLANET

As a young child, I remained blissfully unaware of the seriousness of the outside world. Troubles abroad and at home would soon enough cloud my vision and permanently alter my perspective. Ah, but Thanksgiving Day. The only holiday celebrated with a gathering of the entire family, but blissfully without the prerequisite of attending Mass.

The heavenly pies my mother had already baked would be ready for departure to Grandma's house: cherry, apple and mincemeat. For decades I believed mincemeat to actually contain animal product. That particular piece of misinformation was laid to rest upon my own making of a mincemeat pie during a three-day pastry intensive at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City. Mind you, I was well into my forties at that juncture. This recollection, among others recently, makes me ponder about my own sense of natural curiosity as a child, or lack of the same.

The drive to Grandma's in the Buick consisted of four daughters in the back seat, giggling with anticipation, while my mother and father, seemingly miles away in the far-off planet of the front seat, smoked cigarettes and chauffeured us to Lowell Avenue.

The journey involved crossing the Kansas River along an ever-vibrating steel bottom bridge. The Rock Island Bridge. The hum of rubber on steel was almost deafening. It rattled my rib cage while my belly did its own version of somersaults. Delivery to the safety of Grandma's house was most welcome after my silent and internally devoured bridge crossing fear subsided.

Upon our arrival, the aroma of sage and roasting turkey commingled with cigarette smoke; laughter and dancing children greeted us at the door along with hugs and kisses all around.

Grandma held court in the kitchen basting the bird. Mom and Aunt Dodi, mock arguing over who would be the recipient of the turkey neck. Somehow it remained Mom's victory year after year. Children sampling radishes, green onions and olives from the cut crystal relish dish. Nothing tastes as simple or as delicious as a spicy radish or chilled green onion tip carefully dipped in salt.

The smoothest, lump-free mashed potatoes anyone ever tasted, compliments of Aunt Dodi. Mashed entirely by hand, we still marvel over it all these years later. Pots of coffee consumed while preparing the feast. Tending to children all the while, smoking cigarettes and laughing. Always the laughter, threading its way through my mother and her family, whenever, wherever they gathered.

Certainly, Aunt Jackie had a chore, but as she was perpetually pregnant, I imagine her sisters and mother were apt to shoo her out of the kitchen to the comfort of the sofa, ready to administer a bottle to the smallest member of what would eventually become a family of 12 children.

Oyster dressing – a family recipe I managed to harvest before being taken to the grave. A moist, in spots spongy dish, which when prepared correctly yields the perfect crackle upon spooning a portion from a warm casserole to a dinner plate beginning to take the shape of a Thanksgiving Feast. This recipe I've prepared many times for our adult family, minus the older generation. It is now made with fresh oysters rather than canned and fresh Italian parsley – neither of which I ever witnessed in my Grandma's kitchen. It was Grandma's recipe. We continue to reference the dish as "Grandma's Oyster Dressing." There is little doubt she would mind the slight alterations.

While the adults, otherwise known as mommies, prepared the feast, we children were left to our own devices and imaginations. Grandma's basement was a virtual stage in our wondrous eyes. The entrance to the basement was in the kitchen so we were never far from our mothers' ever-watchful gazes, and always within earshot as the ladies in their holiday aprons stood endlessly in a kitchen with only a stove, a sink, and a refrigerator. A refrigerator containing the tiniest of freezers I vividly recall Grandma defrosting regularly.

The basement stairs were wooden, painted gunmetal grey and the first three steps curved, asymmetrically, in order to make the quick turn to the balance of the descending flight. Sandy, Judy and Donna were naturally in charge, my eldest cousin and two older siblings, thick as thieves. They would stand at the foot of the stairs and give commands. They were playing "teacher" and we, the siblings and cousins, were the "class" sitting patiently on the stairs for the next cue from our "teachers". The game involved advancing down the stairs with each correct answer. To be certain, our games were highly influenced by a strict Catholic upbringing and schooling by nuns.

There were also games of tag and hide-and-seek in Grandma's basement. The opportunity for places to hide under the floor joists were numerous. The scent of the basement now resides at the end of a fraying thread of my memory. I recall it being stronger and would welcome the recurrence of that aroma. The wringer washer, Grandpa's tools and worktable, the monstrous boiler, which gently heated the house through cast iron floor grates embedded in hard wood, provided endless fascination for young minds. To be certain, I was busy dragging Nancy with me to sit on the stairs or finding the perfect hiding place for us two. My little sister, the ultimate baby doll.

With the finishing touches coming to a close, turkey on the platter, smooth mashed potatoes in bowls, oyster dressing, cranberry sauce, creamy gravy, green bean casserole, dinner rolls and warm butter, it was time for dinner. The younger generation would be seated at a separate table, the children's table. It was fun, but I mostly recall wanting to be with the adults who willingly accepted our eager bodies on their laps while lingering over dessert. Mom's pies would make their entrance. The flakiest crust, the juiciest of fruits, yes, another glass of milk please. A cheddar cheese slice tops a serving of apple pie for Mom. Some actually asked for mincemeat! More rounds of coffee, conversation, and laughter from the dining table. The wriggling of small bodies away from secure laps as it was time for the annual walk around the block.

The walk, which resembled a small parade, involved every child in the house, and was led by my father. Coats, scarves, hats and gloves were required most years, but others realized the awe of an extended Indian summer and providing a more leisurely pace. I realize now the walk was nothing more than a vehicle to transport the children out of the house in order that the ladies dive into mounds of dishes requiring hand washing after such a feast. The adults were now available to speak freely. Those are the conversations I wish I could listen in on. Those voices are the ones I most desire to hear again, if only for a brief time. The voices that belonged to the arms that hugged me, emanated from the faces that smiled at me, and the hearts that loved me. I dearly miss them all.

Dishes dried and put away, more coffee brewed, adults retiring to the sofa and chairs in the front room for even more conversation. Encouraged by the adults, cousins, nieces, nephews, sons and daughters, all played in the yard. We climbed the narrow 3 feet high retaining wall bordering the drive. Up, traverse across and back down. An endless parade of still growing bodies, scaling heights and balancing with arms fully extended. Repeating this same balancing act and running, endlessly running after one another until our waning childhood energy, lasting well until dusk, ushered us inside to the warmth of the house. And then an evening snack. Still warm turkey slathered in mayonnaise on a soft roll beginning to harden at the edges. A small slice of pie is deliciously devoured while the combination of evening light and turkey's natural chemical yields each child to a round of yawns and sleepy-eyed stretches.

A gathering of coats, gloves, scarves and hats while sharing in rounds of kisses and hugs. The rush of deep autumn air brushes our cheeks before entering the heated warmth of the Buick. No doubt my mother's suggestion to my father in order that her girls are ever comfortable.

Continually waving goodbye from the back seat until we can no longer see Grandma or her house. The hum of cobblestone streets under tires, lull us toward sleep on the drive home in the enormous back seat of the Buick, our own distant planet.



Béatrice CHAÏNE

INNOCENCE

An egg. Cardboard pink.
I think it was for Easter.

But I can't remember. Only the happiness. And then ——
screaming. The nun. Always the nun.
My mother never knew .. until years later. When they told her, that the nun had been
fired.
Ever the French immigrant woman, she didn't know.

Never could tie my shoelaces
until college.
That's ok. I found ways.
But not the teacher. She hated my willfulness.

So did the girls on the playground
at school. Never allowed to play
with them. So the boys took me in.

La grande bourgeoise
en version petite
à la française bien sûr
Mamina ne me voulait pas en jeans.
Little French party dress. Bourgeoisie haircut à la 90's.
queue de cheval sur le côté.
knees scraped,
running before walking, singing before talking

Little girl! Don't do this. Don't do that.

My great-grandmother's willfulness,
Alsatian suisse,ssesse,
in me. Go for it, girl. Go. Run. Run forward. Fuel that wind.

until the day the men caught me. Iron fist on my upper arm, dragging me in the gravel.
Help me God, help me. Where are you?

What did I do to deserve this assault? Verbal, physical, what does it matter
when it's all bullying.
when it's hatred.

The ballet class never getting me a sticker.
You're not good enough. Not today.
Not today.

You're just like your mother.
The shame.

Why so willful, girl? Why?
Screams in my head. Why? Why?

I remember.

9/11

The smoke. my mother's furious glare. The screaming.
The teacher's response: it was history in the making. The kids had to see it.
But I saw it for months.
I saw it for years.
I saw it on the television,
at the dinner table. 3 sets de table le soir mais papa n'était jamais là...
I lost my innocence for the first time
that year.

I lost it more when the men caught me.

I remember my sisters and losing them when we were growing.

I remember the loneliness and the dinosaurs,
my first radio,
and dancing everywhere.



CONFECTION

A child
enters.

Temptation.

Top
left
middle.

Brownies
blondies
bear claws
macaroons
mousse
muffins.

No where
to hide.



Janet Michele FLYNN

TAKING CARE

Coffee in my favorite lime green Las Vegas Speedway mug, a giant double cup, creamed and sugared, steaming on the stainless-steel bedside tray with my meds, all five: one salmon pink, another a capsule casing beige and blue, one oval white, one white round button and Calcium too.

“Wake up, Mom, while the coffee is hot. Take meds, mom. Don’t forget!”

When did this start? Coffee served, my meds as well. Waking me as I had said. My daughter, my barista, med giver, hand to shoulder shaken, voice activated clock. A reversal!

I, waking her at seven, each weekday morning, balancing bowl of cereal, frosted flakes and whole white milk, meds, tops and bottoms, over and under in hand, tossing feather and down, dressing her as she crunches, then off to brush teeth and comb tousled tresses, slip into socks, shoes.

“Did you take your meds? I left them there by your bed. Homework handy? Money, books in backpack too? Check, please. Check!”

School starts at eight and we are late.

Years have passed, part of our past.

She, COVID fears fearsome and I, now age of arthritic knees and other grumbles, cancer checks and dental crumbles.

Alessandra, twenty-five, graduate cum Laude, not working, now hiking outdoors or indoor rigorous routine of steps and weights, video and editing classes via computer. Quiet, engaged, earphones and computer clickety clack.

“Mom, did you take your meds? Don’t forget like yesterday. I had to remind you. Class today? Get ready. It’s late.

“What’s for breakfast? I’m hungry. I’m ready to eat. Please feed me. I’m Starving. Could you make me something with meat?”

Time to take my last sip, time to take care.



MarieHERSHKOWITZ

ATTENTION SHOPPERS

One month before the grand opening of the Kings Plaza Shopping Center, in my Brooklyn neighborhood, back in the 70's when I was a junior in college, it occurred to me and my best friend to apply for sales jobs at the two department stores anchoring the mall: Macy's and Alexander's. Macy's told us outright, smirk included, that we were much too late, the positions had been filled months back, and with a gentle push, "no need to leave your name, long lists of potentials are at the ready," we were ushered out the door. At the Alexander's interview, they gave us a simple math test, which we both aced, took our contact information and availability and told us they'd get back to us with our start dates and schedules within the week. We were elated until our schedules arrived and we learned, much to our dismay, that we'd be working, not at the mall walking distance from home, but at their flagship store on 59th Street and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan, a nearly two-hour commute! But, since we'd already be near the train after classes which would shorten the daily commute, we decided to give it a shot. So, we went to classes at Brooklyn College from 8 AM until noon weekdays, then grabbed something quick at the Sugar Bowl to eat en route or in the staff room before our shift, walked the short block to the Junction, hopped on the train which took us all the way to 42nd Street where we switched to the local and arrived at the 59th Street store in plenty of time to stash our books and outerwear in our lockers in the staff room on the top floor, throw on our maroon vests, and dash off to our posts where, other than for a ten minute bathroom break, we stood behind our counters from 2 to 6 PM before venturing out into rush hour knowing we'd have to stand in the crowded train car all the way to the last stop at the Junction and then wait in a long line for the bus. If we were lucky, we'd be home by 8 where dinner would be waiting along with hours of homework.

I worked in Ladies Accessories where I pedaled no-name-brand handbags, coin purses, compact mirrors and lipstick holders, hats, gloves, scarves, kerchiefs, belts and the like. We catered to the masses of middle-class shoppers who'd first go across the street to Bloomingdale's to eye what "Who was Who" in New York was wearing and then dashed over to us to recover from sticker shock and, having found their voices returned to audible levels, complained to us about the prices we dared to charge. They managed to touch, unfold, and displace everything we had on display and ask to see items stored behind the counter seemingly just to amuse themselves. Rarely was the intention to buy.

The best thing, or maybe the only good thing, certainly not the \$1.85 an hour we earned, was that both of us became very good friends with our sales partners, one friendship that lasts to this day and the other only ending when she succumbed to cancer several years back.

My friend and I managed to stick it out through the holiday madness, the winter weather and spring break, but once classes ended for the term and the warm weather steamed in, we could no longer bear the commute on the hot, crowded trains, trapped in our pantyhosed legs and did not look forward to the wait for the bus in the heat of the day and the extra half hour it added to the trip into the city from home now that we were not already at the Junction after school, so we asked for transfers to the store close to home.

Our request was denied. Neither of us wanted to waste the last free summer we'd have before graduating and moving on to the world of work, so we quit. And, neither of us ever worked in retail again.

You'd think I'd be good at accessorizing but it's something I rarely do. I'm not a fan of pocketbooks. I prefer clothes with pockets, preferably pockets with zippers. I like having my hands free. I've tried to wear the scarves I've gotten as gifts but I never get out of the house with one still around my neck. And hats and gloves, well, only when frigid temps make it absolutely necessary.

I remember very little about all those hours behind the counter. But there is one thing that will stick with me and define my time there forever. As you may remember, Ladies Accessories was the first department off the main entrance from the street so I was the very first Alexander's employee all those shoppers would meet when they'd entered the store. I only wish I had a dollar for every time I was asked, "Where's the Ladies Room?"



FOOTPRINTS

We went to elementary school together
Joyce and I
Walked up Rochester Avenue
To Public School 191
On Buffalo avenue
There were no buffaloes
But Mighty Joe Young in a storefront
Who in his leopard leotard
Pulled vehicles with his muscular physique
We played in empty lots
Barbara and I
Rita was a buddy too
We swam and did belly flops
At the St. George Hotel
Made footprints in white powder
Tossed olive pits over locker doors
Linda went to elementary school in a Blizzard
She made off with a ton of Yellow lined paper
Her catch of the day
She was so proud
Of her accomplishment
We grew up
Hit the beach in Arnie's convertible
Um, Warm was his constant conversation
As we headed to Rockaway
The waves were like Tsunamis
Compared to Brighton
We partied with neighborhood guys
Who harmonized on street corners
Engrossed in fifties tunes
Bowled in a pool hall on
Utica Avenue called The Pit
And ate awful tasting burgers
From White Castle



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE FORK, KNIFE, AND SPOON

The stuff we hear during these dinner affairs is so disturbing. The world certainly has its issues. Who could think of a dinner affair without considering the lives of a fork and a knife? We settle together on their plates, and we last sometimes longer than, husbands and wives.

Well, what about me? The spoon says, we certainly have our issues. You both think the most important job is handed by the two of you.

Who do you think they turn to when their servings are too tough, says the fork?

The spoon gets upset and ask the two, have you heard of a thing called soup; what would you both do if a bowl was in front of you? Also, history reports I have been used long before the both of you.

Speechless, the knife glances at the curved body in all the right places of the spoon, and say's that is a good point.

The fork waits patiently saying not a word now and hoping that the infatuation the knife has with the spoon will spill and go away.

Heart beating fast, the fork is happy that the main meal is about to be served, and the knife is all hers again. She is pleased that she is rid of that spoon who is nothing but a flirt.

ABOUT THIS POEM

At dinner gatherings during the holidays with family and friends, sometimes things are said that are not always pleasing to the ear. A thought struck me...the fork, knife, and spoon hear it all. This poem hopes to cheer you.



THE HUNT

I'm out looking for Louie again
Avenue A
1st Ave.
The stoop on 7th Street

This is before things got really bad,
Or maybe they always were, in a way.

Sometimes I would find him- "oh there he is"
....It never really ended well
Until, maybe, it was over for good.

Still, that time-
Hanging out on the street,
Experiencing so much I had never experienced,

Before the really bad times,
Or maybe then too-

The police asking me if I had kids,
Looking at the drawings taped to the door-
Spaghetti thrown against the wall
The dog running loose somewhere.

Almost a cliché:
"I'm going to the corner for some smokes"...

Avenue B before the cabs were there
13th street before the tank,
A forge on the block +
The hydrant was on

I made him an espresso
My first mistake,

Though I (must have) needed to experience
This basic case of-
...like a class in domestic violence 101.

George's where I escaped to pass out on the sidewalk,
Ozzy's + I couldn't move from too much whiskey

Like a lifetime ago
I am here now with my tea and my miso soup

I got away.

But, remember?

Before it got really bad,
When there was all that-

Was it love?

And the huge chubby man
And the very thin one...

Before I got hurt,

The love

was,

in

the

air...



THE HAPPY HOUR GROUP

We are the Happy Hour Group. In the first dark days of fear and isolation we would meet each night at 7pm on Zoom. I would come in after clapping and crying for essential workers (remember that?) and join these women. I, the only one in Brooklyn but no distant from anyone else.

They were mostly Carol's friends. Carol who I've known since junior high. I knew them all but not well.

Our conversations were silly and serious. We talked about appliance and politics still in the ugly days of the previous administration. No matter, this was my bridge to connection.

We've shared happy and sad news, the recurrence of cancer and the birth of a grandchild. We've since seen each other in person. We still meet on zoom. We are sisters bonded by the screen.



Lorraine PORTER-BELL

A POEM FOR CAROLE BY LORRAINE PORTER-BELL, ONE OF HER CARETAKERS

Throughout our friendship I wanted to have been there for you, more than I was, to have watched for dangers that could have been avoided before they became critical.

Then when you were facing the worse days, instead of shushing away your tears, I wanted to have accepted your need to want to cry because you were feeling fear.

To have accepted sooner you no longer could take in wanted food or water, food could no longer sustain you, and they both were too difficult for you to swallow.

I held your hand in mine and spoke the words “love you” many times. Instead of what was taking place, I wanted to have held you cradled in my arms against what you having to face.

Saying aloud to others, around us “she can still talk to us even if only in a muted voice,” but not in whispered words the response back was, “she's dying.”

Even though you were so physically fragile, I was in denial that you were enduring such exhaustion and pain. My anger firing back at those words, “she's dying” spoken out loud, but still not sinking in.

When we were counseled only morphine could bring you relief, although it removed you from reality, I hoped you'd been given the respite to reside within your happiest dreams.

I didn't think that your dying would be so swift, but you died soon after we began the morphine.

Because I want to remember our shared gift of a lifetime of friendship and that I want to accept letting you go without feeling deserted or regretful;

Whenever I need to reach you, I write you a letter and send the letter out through time addressed to the beyond and in remembrance of knowing you.



BUT IN THE MEANTIME, A JOB

1.

Young

15 years of a young age

Mom gave permission to use her face powder makeup,
rouge upon cheeks bright shade of lipstick, a hint of Maja perfume
snug fitting shirt to match with hip hugging bell bottoms

A job for the summer months

With permission but illegal

In a factory where Mother worked

where stuffed animals were made

who knows who schemed and lied?

Mother? No?!

An Aunt who happened to be the shop steward? Maybe?

How was this possibly permissible? Accepted by the owners/managers!?

I should not have been there

less work there

I was age illegal by labor laws

But I was there

first day introductions and followed as directed by the foreman

passing a large area filled with only women

sitting in front of sewing machines

but I was brought to work to the referred "floor area"

I stood for 3-4 hours at a time

10 minutes of a break and 30 minutes for lunch

four women in a row each of us with a task

brush the fake fur in one direction, glue on the eyes,

felt material used for a nose or mouth.

My favorite was to take a wide ribbon and make a neat bow with a tag around the necks

The foreman liked my work especially making the bows.

Fridays cash wages distributed in small beige envelopes.

Happy and rich to have monies for college come September.

Mother was proud.

I was happy to gain job experience.

I never forgot this job experience.

as it lent itself to respect ALL factory workers

They worked. They worked hard.

Factories located in clusters throughout the NY boroughs.

I became adamant in my decision

working in a factory was not my future.

But in the meantime a job, for a short time, with permission but illegal

Young

the beginning years of a young age

2.

Young

19 years of a young age

a job just to have money in pocket

have employee experience

to add unto the resume

while simultaneously applying

for the real job of my heart's desire

But in the meantime this was the job

as a sales girl in a prestigious clothing department store

There was a required custom of attire

wear a dress, or a skirt their lengths at or below the knees

never ever wear pants

blouses worn had to be in conservative taste

meaning, no showings of frontal chest skin

and long sleeves even during the summer months

Once I wore a sleeveless jumper dress

and a supervisor with a stern look and authoritative voice

gave permission to take a sweater off the clothes rack

to cover my bare arms as it was a sin to their eyes.

Always, a must, wear stockings and always, a must, closed shoes

even during the summer months

The spacious floors with beautifully designed dresses on mannequins

and glass counters filled with fashionable displays of accessories

Each day, going through spacious room after room

surreal to me as if in a castle entering in the west

walking forward towards the east wings

to the assigned department area.

Most times I never saw people as I recalled, the vast spaces created great distances

between the employees and the public

I used a machine to create an embossed print of a credit card,

learned to use a register with heavy weighted keys and from the total amount

counted the correct change witnessed by the customer

and with a smile whether I felt like it or not

Short forms were filled out when one acquired

a few multiples of monetary hundreds or in need of change

It was all placed in a tube to be placed within another tube

of an elaborately constructed system of a very long pipeline

Instantly, immediately, the tube was suctioned to a fast journey—but where?

Anyway, this was but in the meantime a job

of many to come unbeknownst to my future

Young,

the beginning years at a young age



CARNEGIE HALL FOREPLAY

Vaudeville. The word enchants me.

My fraternal Grandfather, a bootlegger, piano player and vaudeville entrepreneur in no particular order, swung his trade in the axis divining Harlem's Appollo Theater and Second Avenue just south of 14th Street.

The Angels sang and I was destined to fall in love at age fabulous four with Jazz.

What an enduring legacy since before my Arrival he had been called Home to Glory.

In the finest swing-song tradition of that night and that day, I cooed “Darktown Strutters' Ball”, the dulcet tones of a tyke rhapsodizing with the Band.

“Darktown Strutters' Ball” literally became my ‘calling dance card’ refrain.

Shortly after it's publication in 1917, Sophie Tucker’s adoption of “Darktown...” into her vaudeville repertoire, heralded that the real bread stick.

“I’ll be down to get you in a taxi honey, better be ready ‘bout half past eight...” was surely directed straight at me.

I was ready long before eight, I could never be tardy, instead try half past four and say no more.

Strike up the Band!

How well "Darktown... “-rehearsed for my “Mary Queen of May” pageant pre-initiation first grade interview audition did I appear?!

Simply smoking and belting “Queen of the May” as if Sophie Tucker had taken over my very being.

The Nuns were hallowed eerie aghast. Out of deference to my totally Robert Goulet-style Big Brother who could really sing – and who they all worshipped from afar - the Vestal Virgins insisted that I lip sync.

In the ensuing Spring reverential procession I executed a lip sync-er of the first magnitude.

Fast forward, Fall 2018, Carnegie Hall.

As the Conductor swings his bulb eyes trained on my first row Chorus perch, for a New York minute I out-of-body re-incarnate into that six year old as the Spirit of Sophie Tucker whispers: “It's half-past eight”, Kid. Sing.

I've been swinging ever since.



FIRST JOB

One-bushel basket had a crayon-lettered sign that said “Boys.”

The other said “Girls.”

“25 cents!”

They were brimming with brown paper bags filled with novelty toys made in Japan: Bamboo whistles with two or three notes to toot; rubber razzers that Mom called a Bronx cheer; sheriffs’ stars and policemen’s badges; beads and brooches and more.

With a money apron double-tied around my waist, I sat in an aluminum lawn chair behind my baskets on the midway at the Bethlehem, Connecticut, Fair. Mom and Dad tried to keep an eye on me from their games across the way. I was working in my very own stand for the first time. I was only six years old.

I got the rent-free location when Frank, the friendly Superintendent of Concessions, saw my grab bags on the counter of my mother’s Pitch ‘Till U Win.

“What are you doing with that here?” he said.

“You should be out on the midway!”



A WORLD OF BOOKS

High School, my senior year
I worked in the Brooklyn Public Library
Midwood Branch
Part-time, after school.
The head librarian seemed to me to have the best job

I just loved physically being in the library, surrounded by books
Books are more than just paper and ink
They are a passage to other places, other lives
The cover art catches your eye and draws you in
There is something special about the feel of the pages
The smell of a new book

My job was not very glamorous
Mostly shelving the returned books
I would make sure to line up the spine of each one
Evenly on the shelf
But never before at least one title caught my attention
Finding myself reading the book jacket
Later checking out a book
The never-ending worlds I could disappear into
I thought of becoming a librarian, selfishly, imagining access to all of the new books first

There were other aspects of my job
Working at the circulation desk, checking out the books and processing the returns
Sometimes typing new library cards, which I was never very good at
I remember once, a family wanting library cards
For all five of their children
All with very unique names
You can only imagine how nervous I was
And how the line in the library grew and grew
As did everyone's impatience, as I tried to hurry
Fingers fumbling over the keys of the typewriter
Errors mounting, too many do overs
Wishing I could disappear

The best part of the job were afternoons in the children's library
Where I could recommend books to all of the wide eyed children
seeking new adventures
I never became a librarian,
But I never lost my love of books and reading



***Thank you all for your participation.
Your talent is truly amazing!***

