

Carolyn  
Golden



# A WORK IN PROCESS

How I Learned the Joys of Living  
and Creating Are In the Doing

# A WORK IN PROCESS

How I Learned the Joys of Living  
and Creating Are In the Doing

**Carolyn Golden**

Copyright © 2024 Carolyn Golden

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system now known or hereafter invented, without written permission from the publisher.

Cover and layout design by Shawn Hazen  
Edited by Michael Golden

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am incredibly grateful to my son, Michael Golden for editing this memoir and for his encouragement from the moment I got the idea to write it. His talent as an author and his advice and support have been a guiding light throughout this effort.

I wish to thank my two brilliant writing teachers: Kim Porter and Linda Pressman. These two wonderful authors have been beyond generous in helping me to develop as a writer. Each, in their own way, has been critical in motivating me to keep working while also contributing invaluable guidance and advice to the writing process. Without them, this narrative simply would not exist.

As well, I want to sincerely thank my fellow writing classmates, who've provided feedback, wise counsel, and become a truly trusted group of friends.

Finally, I want to thank Patricia L. Brooks, founder of Scottsdale Society of Women Writers (SSWW), for giving birth to this wonderful group of professional writers, publishers, and teachers. Her advice, education and support for all artists have been a beacon.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

6	Introduction	
7	Silk Painting	
9	On the Plane	
10	My Father	
13	My Mother	
15	My Sister, Barbara	
17	The Caretakers	
20	Early School and Reading	
22	Mother's Portrait	
24	Granny Stenge	
26	Seder at Caesar's 1950	
29	Me at Camp	
31	New Year's Eve	
33	Elvis in My Teens	
35	Mother-in-Law	
38	Portraits with My Foot	
40	Hives	
42	Michael and the Sistine Chapel	
44	Aix-En-Provence, France 1986	
47	Séguret, France - My Arrival 1986	
50	Artists and Friends in Séguret	
56	Albert at Séguret	
59	Matteo	
61	Christophe	
66	Florence, Italy 1987	
67	Still in Florence	
71	Grandma Minnie's Passing	
74	Sevilla and the Casa de Cucarachas	
80	A Robbery in Sevilla 1989	
82	The Bullfight of Sevilla	
84	Flamenco in Sevilla	
87	Exhibit of Dancers in Triana, Spain	
90	Maria Salles	
92	Semana Santa - Holy Week in Sevilla	
95	Hundred Year Old Spanish House	
99	Madrid, Spain 1990	
102	Dietlind and Hiking in Spain	
104	A Sneaker's Life	
108	Creation of Doors 1990	
111	Doors	
115	Return from Europe to Chicago -1991	
119	My Sister, Jean	
122	Nacogdoches, Texas Competition	
125	A Tiny Miracle	
128	Sabbath in New York	
131	Singing	
133	To Eat or Not to Eat	

# INTRODUCTION

Forty years ago, at the age of 42, I fell in love with a piece of fabric. Not just any fabric, but a type of silk that glides, floats and shines as it dances and moves — just as it did when I first painted it. A simple, billowy white piece of material that would become magical to me as my dye-filled brush touched it, making patterns of color over color.

Silk was my love and it made my life sunnier. Little did I know at the time that it would become a stepping stone to so much more. It was the beginning of an education that would teach me that creativity is more than a process; it is a life force.

The more I learned, the more I realized that the experiences along my journey are more important than any outcome. This new understanding was no less than a doorway that opened up a whole new chapter of my life. And then many more chapters.

I see “doors” as both a mystery and a metaphor for life. We all pass through so many of them, every day, and each one has the potential to open up into so many new possibilities.

Creating doors as an artist has been one of the most important areas of the work I’ve done. It was an epiphany that captured my imagination and still fills me with pride. In the pages ahead, you will see images of many of these doors, and I hope you will be as curious about what’s behind them as I was when I created them!

Full disclosure: I do not paint or create doors as much anymore; I do what my body allows me to do. But in keeping with the theme of “the journey,” I’ve embraced my transition to mostly painting through my words. It is hard in a very different way, but I now love it. And who knows — this memoir may be just one more door that leads me to the next. At this point, I’d bet on it.

I’m going to take you on a little adventure through the experiences that I’ve found most interesting and educational about my life. It all starts at a very young age — when you don’t even realize the clay’s being shaped.

# 1

## Silk Painting 1982

I was painting what I loved the most, and it was killing me little by little.

In 1982, I fell in love with a piece of fabric. It was not just any fabric, but a type of silk that glides, floats, shines, and dances as it moves, just as I did while I painted it. It was simply a billowy white piece of material in the beginning that became magical as my dye-filled brush touched it, making patterns of color over color. The entire process, the steaming, rinsing, and ironing, would bring it to life.

What I remember of those days was the joy of entering my sun-filled art studio which was a wing of my home in a suburb of Chicago. Each day I stepped into my red plaid carpeted workroom. At the far end of the room was a long padded table on which I painted fabrics for interiors. Immediately in front of me resting on 2 sawhorses was a long rectangular rack with nailheads sticking up at 2” intervals going all the way around. The white silk would be stretched over those nails and pulled taught stripping it of all movement in order for it to become my canvas. To my right were 3 tiers of shelves with jars of every different color dye. Each piece of silk was an experiment, nothing was planned which made it an adventure. Music filled the room and I danced to it as I traveled around the table grabbing colors and dabbing, splashing, brushing and stamping the dyes. The rainbow of colors blending told me what to do next. It was an intuitive joy that was precious to me. It took me away from the depression, nothingness and the neglect I felt in my marriage. Silk was my love and it made my life sunnier.

Then, one day I became allergic to the acid dyes, unable to breathe them. Through much research, I found the only way to work was in a hood with fresh air being carried to me. I looked like an astronaut, and I felt trapped with my peripheral vision blocked on both sides by the opaque white hood that my head was encased in. It was hot in there, and I had to move carefully. There was a plastic window in front of my face and a flexible hose that extended out the back of the hood and went through the wall to an adjacent room, where there was a generator that brought fresh air to me. I had lost what was so precious: the art I loved, music, and freedom. I didn't know how I could continue to work that way.

Several days later I sat down with a cup of coffee to ponder what to do with my life. My youngest son had been living with his father for 4 years since our divorce in 1982. My oldest



would be leaving for the university and there I sat feeling that this chapter of my life was over. Even though I would be leaving my best friends, women who I loved and were my support system for 17 years, I knew If I stayed there my world would continue on in a monotonous way and I needed a change.

I remembered 17 years prior on Mother's Day sobbing because my husband wouldn't live anywhere but in that suburb. He grew up there and loved it. For me, it was a place filled with bad memories. My family moved there during my last year of high school and I had to survive the snobby girls with different values who didn't need the cute new girl in town. It felt so lonely. Of course, what I wanted didn't matter and so we moved there. But now it was my time.

One morning I woke up saying to myself, "I'll go to France with my silk. But soon that idea gave way to a greater desire to go there, live, and grow as an artist. That was a new beginning for me. I needed to burst out and change everything. It was a very innocent spontaneous decision filled with hope and excitement. I knew somehow I would survive and that was the challenge. Who would I meet, what would I learn and how would it change me? It took me several months to prepare and search for an artist's workplace in the south of France. I chose an international atelier in Provence, where I would meet artists from other countries. Within 6 months I was on a plane not knowing what to expect in this new adventure.



# 2

## On The Plane

It's 1986 and I'm leaving a familiar world to go live in a foreign country. Not knowing what I need I pack one suitcase with some art supplies and the other with clothing. I get on the plane for a roughly 9 hour flight to France wearing my back brace. I know I won't be able to lift my suitcases and sit on the plane for such a long period of time without it. Over the years this brace has saved me from back pain while I was doing my artwork bent over a table daily. It is like a corset that hooks in the front with metal closures which I pull tightly so that the 2 steel bars in the back support me.

As my flight takes off I'm filled with excitement and anxiety and I begin to reflect on my life and how I got to this point.

# 3

## My Father 1945

When I was just a toddler, my mother would put me in my crib at night and I would cry and scream for hours. Through the crack in the door, I could see my mother walking back and forth — but she wouldn't come in. She would let me holler the whole night. I wouldn't quiet down until I heard my father's car door close and the sound of his key.

He would come in, dry my eyes, hold me and sing to me. He was my source of warmth. That's how I remember it.

But then, all of a sudden, he was gone. I mean physically gone. I was five years old, and I didn't know why. There was just silence. No one told me where my father went — or for what reason. Even though he disappeared, the image of him coming in the door and taking his hat off in the hallway did not. I was left. He was my world.

In later years I was told that he had a mental illness and had to go away for “a rest” to Arizona. Being a child I didn't know how long he would be gone or if he would come back.

He eventually came back.

I wanted to do whatever he was doing. He was fun and curious about the world and he let me share in that. He would invite me to taste whatever crazy food he was eating. When I was only five, he would let me taste his beer. He took me to outdoor food stands and showed me how to eat clams and oysters. I remember how he squeezed a little lemon on the slimy oyster and showed me how to take two bites and swallow it in one gulp. I'm not sure I liked it, but I never told him. I didn't want him to leave again (and I actually grew to love them).

Then there were the escargot in garlic and butter. I had to pull them out of their shells with a tiny fork. As with the other foods, I didn't question that they were snails. I just ate them and thought they were delicious. One evening, he brought home live lobsters that were crawling all over the truck of the car because they had escaped from the box. He kept running back and forth to throw them in boiling water.

I felt so fortunate having these experiences. How many other children got to crack the lobster legs and learn to pull them apart, suck the meat out and dip them in warm butter? I was thrilled eating these weird foods with my Dad. This was something we shared that was special. My two sisters were there but didn't have the same active participation. My focus was on Dad and me.

As I got older, he would drink his pitcher of martinis in the evening and have a jar of pickled pig's feet sitting on the counter. They looked gross, but I ate them anyway. Then there was the caviar on salmon and more and more martinis.

When he was sober, Dad took us on vacations. I was in the fifth grade when he took us to the Grand Canyon, and later to Colorado Springs and to Florida to ride the waves and collect sea shells. He taught me to put the shells to my ear and hear the sound of the ocean. That was magical.

We went to the horse races and I learned how to pick a horse and bet on him. He drew my attention to all of the interesting people from all walks of life at the track — and how they reminded him of Damon Runyon characters.

I wanted to be near Dad and participate in the excitement of life. He taught me how to play golf and showed my sisters and me how to make a garden by planting carrots, lettuce and zucchini seeds. He divided a plot in our back yard into three sections. One was for me, one for Barbara, who was 17 months younger, and one for Jean, who is 6 years younger. We were so excited to go out each morning and search for tiny leaves popping through the earth to become food. When Dad got home, we'd run to the front door to make him come quickly and look at the miracle we made.

But by then he was drinking every night, and the father who loved me and showed me how to live changed in front of my eyes. He became angry and yelled at the dinner table every night, mostly at me. I was the only one who challenged him or disagreed with him about his behavior. He never yelled at my sisters. My mother was a quiet, gorgeous woman, and his faithful audience. We all had to be his audience. All she wanted was him.

As he screamed at me, eventually I had to run away from the table to my room in tears. Night after night. She never rescued me. He came upstairs to apologize each time, until one



“The Confrontation,” Mixed Media - Madrid 1990

night when I was 13. I remember sitting on my bed with my fists and jaw clenched, saying to myself “He will never do this to me again. I was numb. This was a turning point in my young life. Somehow he knew that this was unforgivable and it would be the last time he would hurt me like that. I created a distance from him for years; a safe space for myself. Physically, my Dad was still there. But emotionally, he had lost me. It was almost like I was five years old again, and he was gone once more...

# 4

## My Mother 1945

Except for her beauty, she was largely invisible in our family. She used to say, “You know me, I have no eyes, I have no ears.” She couldn’t speak up.

My mother, whose every breath was for my father, sat there like a beautiful queen with her hair in an upsweep and wearing her brocade lounging gown.

At night, when my mother rang her crystal dinner bell, my two sisters and I came to the dinner table and the cook began serving the food. My father hired her after accusing my mother of cooking one meal he didn’t like. My mother would sit at the table smoking her cigarettes and biting her bright red manicured nails. This was his way of degrading her and showing his power. The cook didn’t last long. She wasn’t as good as my mother.

My father bought the house when I was six years old without telling my mother. We needed to hire a decorator after sitting on boxes for two years because of my mother’s indecision about purchasing furniture. Bernard the decorator was usually in jail because he didn’t pay his bills.

She was a gentle woman. Her constant presence in our home and her delicious cooking brought the family together every night for dinner and made holidays whole and special. But, I never felt my mother enjoyed being a mother or being with me. Maybe she didn’t know how. One day, when I was 10 years old she said, “Let’s go out to lunch.” I was so surprised she wanted to spend time with me, just the two of us. We sat in a small, charming restaurant and while we were waiting for our food all she could say was, “I wonder what Daddy is doing.” That deflated me. She was never with me, even when she was with me.

I remember one time when I was about seven years old, in our living room. She came up behind me, stooped down, put her arm around me and asked, “Who loves you?” I used to wonder why she couldn’t just say, “I love you.” To me it was half-assed and it didn’t feel good.

She was so elegant and proper that I used to do things that would aggravate her, like calling her, “Ma” instead of mother — which was straight out of the *Beverly Hillbillies*. One night at dinner I said the word, “shit,” just to irritate her. She gasped and put her hand to her mouth, horrified. My father said, “Oh Ruth, you wouldn’t say SHIT if you had a mouth full of it.” I loved when my father took my side.

Our whole house was a stage set. The living room had a wall of smokey mirrors, deep

purple walls and white drapes with purple satin lining. There was a Liberace piano with candelabras and a big bay window with custom upholstered seating with a quilted grapevine pattern. The sofa and chairs were covered with plastic.

My mother did try to teach me to be a lady, sent me off to college with a nice wardrobe and gave me earrings for my graduation. But my greatest disappointment was that she didn't save me from my father's anger nor did she ever support me. I couldn't confide in her because she would reveal my secret to my Dad and he would yell at me. Without any trust, I felt alone.

Anyone who ever met my mother thought she was beautiful. That's what she wanted. Most important to her was her beauty and her social life.



**“Look At Me,”Mixed Media - Madrid, 1990**

# 5

## My Sister, Barbara

My sister, Barbara had the most beautiful, long, auburn wavy hair that reached down her back. I used to just stare at it in wonder. And then it was gone. No one knew how or why this happened.

She was nine years old and I was eleven at the time. Some said she must have pulled it out but no one ever saw her. Others thought it fell out because she was nervous or anxious. Whatever the reason, it all disappeared and was very traumatic for a child. I think I felt guilty for even having mine, though my feelings were very bottled up during that time. She had to wear a wig in the 1950's when they were really unattractive.

Being completely bald made things difficult for her. She sat having dinner without her wig on and if the doorbell rang she would become terrified and scurry out of the room. Each week, my mother would take her to a renowned specialist to get treatments for hair growth. They didn't change much. She suffered at grammar school because the kids would tease her mercilessly. I just felt terrible for her.

One day, her art teacher called our parents into school for a meeting to tell them that Barbara was a talented painter. My father latched onto it. So, Barbara became, "The Artist." She needed to be something special and much time and effort was put into building that image.

Barbara got a lot of attention for being a "brilliant artist" and the "poor little one." To me she was getting attention for being the "poor pouty little one" — and it drove me crazy. The artist part of her was a wonder or that's what I was taught to believe. The artist part of *me* wished I could be a wonder too. I didn't even attempt to make art because it was her thing. To me it was untouchable.

I was the one who sat being pretty and doing nothing. In my parents' eyes, that was enough for me to succeed in life, but I wanted to be something instead of nothing.

I remember coloring in our coloring books when we were little. I was the one who colored perfectly in the lines. She scribbled all over ignoring the lines. That was the proof. She was the artist so I guessed artists were messy.

One of my aunts who was an artist and thought she was an authority said, "I thought Barbie had *it*."

Barbara and I shared a bedroom for 17 years. In all that time it was very hard to connect

heart to heart with her. There was certainly plenty of jealousy. But we never fought. There was so much unspoken. She wanted to be pretty and I wished I had some talent. She had a great sense of humor and I always wondered where she came up with that brilliant stuff. The kids really liked her because she was a lot of fun. It wasn't what she said as much as a look on her face or a quick response. She just seemed to have a funny aura. Being more serious, I was in awe of that cleverness.

Many Sundays our family would go to the The Art Institute of Chicago. The whole conversation seemed like it was focused on the impressionist artists and Barbara. My father, the forever educator, was teaching all of us about Van Gogh, his personality and paintings as though he was an authority. I just listened and let it soak in. The effect that had on me was for most of my life I didn't like Van Gogh's art and didn't want to look at it.

When I graduated from college, Barbara and I shared an apartment in downtown Chicago. Art education was my major at school and I brought back and hung a pen and ink drawing of a lion's head. It drove her crazy. She hated that piece and made fun of most of my artwork.

Years later as an adult, Barbara married, had a son and was divorced from her abusive husband. As the story goes, one night when her son Bernie, aged eight, and Barbara were at my father's condo, Bernie poured a drink on his grandfather's bald head. I wasn't there but assumed he was kidding around. His grandfather then poured a drink on Bernie's head. I can only speculate that my father was just having fun with him but for my sister that was the red line and seemed to be the superficial impetus for her break from my father. There was one other incident I heard of following that. My sister was sick with the flu and needed my Dad to pick up medication for her. After picking it up, he didn't want to go upstairs to deliver it to her. She would have to come down to get it and that made her angry.

Whatever the reason, she withdrew from the family soon after that, refusing to attend my son's bar mitzvah, though she did drop Bernie off at our house. Following that she cut off all communications with the family. If my parents knew the true reason for this, they never spoke of it. My father did everything to try to repair what went wrong but it was hopeless. He called her repeatedly and she refused to talk to him. She wouldn't take calls from anyone. We simply didn't exist from 1979 on.

After sharing a room with her for all those years this behavior didn't surprise me and I accepted her choice of wanting to break away. But I was also very hurt. I don't think she let many people in, but she could sure cut them out with ease. In later years I saw one of her art exhibits online. It had evolved from free abstracts in her youth to smaller, more controlled repeat prints using potatoes. I heard she married a very nice man and hopefully found happiness.



# 6

## The Caretakers

It all started one day in Chicago in 1956 when I was six years old. The door to our home opened and my brand new baby sister's nurse walked in. Miss Hazley was young and pretty. Dressed in a white dress, white shoes and an small white cap that sat on her dark curly head, she seemed serious. My parents ushered her into my sister Jean's bedroom and closed the door behind them. There was a big mystery about my sister. There were always strange noises coming out of her room and no one ever explained what was happening behind her door.

Eventually, I was told that Jean was born with a pressure on her brain which caused her to have seizures.

She was tiny and had been in an incubator. So Miss Hazley belonged to her. I was sure that she didn't like me because I remember my mother bringing a bag of cherries home for us and Miss Hazley grabbing the small brown bag away from me and giving it to my sister, rather than putting them in a bowl. She had no warmth and I didn't really understand it and felt badly.

Through much research, my parents found a specialist who in 1946 performed surgery on Jean to relieve the pressure on her brain. After that, she was able to lead a completely normal life.

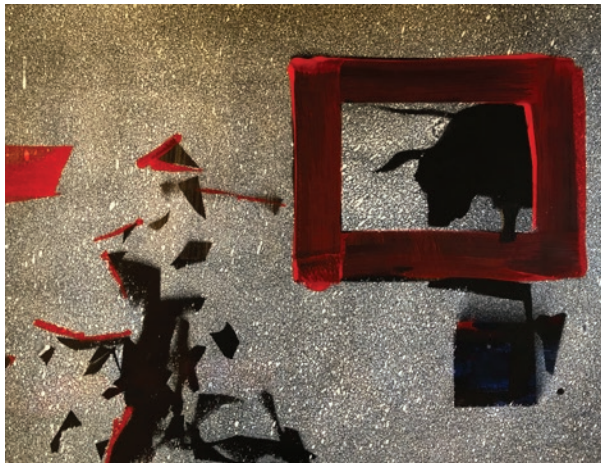
During that same year, my mother hired someone else to watch Barbara and me. Anna was an older, light-haired woman who rolled her hair over too many of those thin, white bone-shaped rollers to make tight curls all over her head. She was a heavysset Hungarian woman who had a thick accent. There wasn't much to talk to her about, as there was little we could understand. One day she asked my father for "pan-ti-cakes and steaks." It took a while for him to figure out that she wanted bandages and tapes. I don't remember speaking to her much or having any connection to her. I remember me and my sisters sitting in the backyard with Anna much of the time.

One afternoon, she locked herself in the hall closet and decided to stay there. I kept



knocking on the door begging her to come out but she was too frightened. I asked her why she was scared and she said, “Das income tax men come to get me.” At the age of 6 I knew nothing of income tax men. I was really frightened and kept knocking on the door saying, “Anna, no one is coming to get you. If you come out I’ll take care of you.” She finally did.

Then there was the time my parents sent me with Anna to a cabin in Wisconsin. I was thin as a stick and she was supposed to feed me chicken and milk every day until I gained weight.



“The Bull,” Paint on Paper - 1990

What I remember is that we lived across the street from a pasture where there was a bull that kept charging back and forth in his field. Our little cabin was so close and there were big windows in front so I could easily see all the bull’s behavior. He was behind a fence that consisted of two silly wooden strips laid horizontally on intermittent vertical posts to enclose him. I was sure he was going to jump out and get me. I could see every move he made. He was so close that I could just walk across the street and touch him. He scared me to death and I didn’t think Anna could protect

me much after the hiding in the closet situation. I mostly sat coloring furiously in my coloring book and trying not to look at the bull snorting and tearing around. I felt so alone. I have no idea how long I was there or if I even gained weight.

Our next caretaker was Ethel Buckwalter, a woman whose daughter visited from time to time. Otherwise, she seemed lonely. Ethel was unattractive, tall and thin — and had one of those 1940 hairdos that looked like the hair was rolled around a sausage in the back and sides. She walked up and down the garden path, hand in hand with me, singing, “Dear dear bread and beer, if I were married I wouldn’t be here.” She lived with us for quite a while until one afternoon when I overheard my mother tell my father that she found a lot of empty beer bottles under Ethel’s bed. She must have suspected something. Otherwise, why would she even be searching her room. That was the end of Ethel.

Next in line was Winifred Sweeney, a young girl just off the boat from Ireland. She was only a kid herself with very black curly hair, white skin and a baby face with freckles. She also dressed in white with white shoes and loved doing the Irish gig in the kitchen and giggling the

whole time. It was a little like a clumsy Riverdance that made you laugh along with her. Maybe she was 18 years old but very childlike. I remember my mother asking me to teach her to do what she was hired to do. Both parents wanted to have their freedom so this is how they got it.

I don't remember any of these women caring for us or having fun with us. They were just there in body so my parents wouldn't be leaving us alone.



**“Winifred Dancing”**

# 7

## Early School and Reading

As a child, I can't remember a time when I felt confident — especially through elementary school. It was the late 1940s when I was the kid sitting in school and hiding behind the little girl with the blonde braids so that the teacher wouldn't call on me. I can see that little brown desk with its historic dents and marks, the slot for my freshly sharpened pencil with its woody smell and how austere the room felt. I sat there feeling lost but pretending I could be smart.

A couple of years earlier when I was six, I came running home from school so excited, yelling: "I can read, I can read!" I had my first primer with me and sat down at our kitchen table sounding out the words, "See Spot run." So proud of myself.

But as time passed I had a secret that I couldn't tell anyone. There was no one listening anyway. I didn't understand, felt stupid and knew I was different. Math felt hopeless, especially story problems. In an effort to help, my mother sat down with me and asked, "If one apple costs 10 cents, how much do two apples cost?" If my parents were aware of my struggle, they never said so. Plus, they were overly busy with their social lives and gave my sisters and me to the sitters. Somehow I got through grammar school with my secret, though I was always nervous it would be revealed. If there was a multiple choice test I would just guess at the answer.

It was in high school when someone realized that I didn't comprehend what I was reading. I thought I did a pretty good job of disguising it over the years. But now they caught me. So they put me in a special class for mentally and physically challenged kids — all just thrown in a room. I was devastated. My greatest fear had come true. There was something really wrong with me. Being in that class gave me a self image that deep down I've always carried and yet done everything possible to overcome.

To make matters worse, there was a girl sitting next to me who was all of a sudden kind of bent over underneath my desk. I didn't look at her but kept saying, "Jan get up. This is no time to fool around." She was making sounds and then crashed to the floor like a brick. I jumped up from my desk terrified while I watched her rigid body contort and shake. Apparently she was having a seizure. The teacher searched for something to put in her mouth so she didn't bite her tongue. When she calmed down she seemed to be okay. The nurse came and escorted her to the infirmary. I was terribly upset seeing this and asked the teacher what was wrong with her.

She told me it was a seizure. I never saw Jan after that.

From that class they put me in a speed reading class which didn't help my comprehension. Because I had no direction, I was left alone to figure out who I was. Eventually I would find the world of art where I felt like I was in a safe space.

To get through school I decided to figure out my own system of learning. I would read a paragraph. Then I would write every sentence as a question and then I would write the answers and say them as I wrote them. It sounds complicated, and it was. But it worked. Sixty-five years later this system helped me to learn three foreign languages while living in Europe. Every night I would write every tense of a verb and say it out loud until it sounded like music to me. I've spent my life in an effort to overcome reading processing difficulties and dyslexia. I'm always jealous when I hear how happy someone is to sit down with a good book.

At age 52, upon my return from living five years in Europe, I decided to go get an IQ test to find out what was wrong with my brain. A very nice lady gave me the exam and I struggled through it. One part was a series of squares with cartoon drawings. I was asked to make up a story from those pictures. I remember telling her that I didn't know how, and she said I should do the best I could. At the end of the test, her analysis was that I was intelligent but had a learning disability. I already knew that but the intelligent part gave me hope. Her recommendation was that I write stories. To be a writer I think you must need to be a reader, but maybe not if I write my truth.

## Mother's Portrait 1948

One time when I was just a little girl, maybe eight years old, my mother brought me with her to have her portrait painted. We entered the artist's studio, an old cluttered space with a dirty floor, several huge paintings leaning against the walls, a tall easel and light pouring through a large window.

I met Robert, the young, mustached, aproned artist that my father had hired to execute this portrait. He sat me down at a little table in the corner with a vase of flowers, some oil paints and a small canvas. While my mother was changing into her dress, the soft-spoken artist explained how to use the paints and told me to paint the flowers. Mother, the beautiful queen, silent and elegantly regal, came out in her flowing white chiffon gown and took her place on the high-backed throne-like arm chair to be painted.

I looked at the flowers and didn't know where to begin. Sometime later, after I finished my painting, Robert seemed thrilled with the result and told me it was beautiful. "Really?" I felt so happy, so proud, so valued.

Upon returning home I was excited to show my father my painting but there wasn't a word spoken about it. "I knew it. It was no good." My sister was the artist and I was just the pretty one. It disappeared. I never saw it again. There was the same silence that had existed before, an emptiness. It was as if I had never painted it.

The years passed until I was a sophomore at Drake University taking an Art Education class in the School of Education. We had to take many different colored crayons and draw large areas of thick color on a piece of paper. Over that we drew heavy black crayon and scratched through the black, revealing a colorful design. It was a simple exercise that all grammar school



Pen And Ink Lion's Head -1962

kids do. It felt a little silly. The teacher, Mr. Francis, whom I had a crush on came over and enthusiastically told me my drawing was beautiful. “Really?” I looked at him in disbelief but I thought if this was so great — maybe I could do better. The following day I changed my major to Art Education. This was one of the turning points in the direction of my life.

A year later, I was walking down the hallway carrying a pen and ink and drawing of a lion’s head when Mr. Francis stopped me and inquired if I had changed my major because of him. I didn’t know how he knew that. When he asked to see my drawing, he put his hands on his head like it was going to explode and said, “I had no idea!”

I think we can all remember a special teacher or person who guided our lives. All I needed was one word: “Beautiful.”



“Tea House With Flowers,” - 1986

# Granny Stenge

One Sunday in Chicago when I was ten, I went to stay at my grandma Stenge's house for a day. I was dressed in a little gray suit with a red kerchief around my neck, shiny black Mary Janes and ruffy white socks. I walked up the gray porch steps to the screen door and entered her house, which always felt dark and old-fashioned to me. In the hallway there was an Oriental carpet. With each step I took, the floor creaked. To the left was a parlor with a grand piano. It was not a well lit room and seemed void of life. On an end table there was one of those old phones from the 1930s, the kind with a candlestick receiver and mouthpiece. It was a novelty to talk into it even for me. I can still hear the operator saying, "Number please."

My grandmother, my mother's mother born in California, was a quiet soft-spoken woman who lived in a silent world. She spoke rarely and as a child I had little to say to her. She wore a hearing aid, the kind that looked like a plug in her ear and there was a little black box on her chest that always had static coming out of it. Her long gray hair was piled in a bun on top of her head and secured with one of those thin wiry hair pins. She wore a granny print dress with granny shoes and a gold locket. Glasses hung around her neck.

As I walked upstairs and down a narrow hallway I came to my grandmother's small sewing room where she had her quilting rack. The walls were papered with Post magazine covers that she put up herself. In her silent world, she woke up at the crack of dawn when the light was pouring in the window and began sewing her quilts which I'd grown up hearing were masterpieces of the 20th century. She took me to a small bedroom and sat me down on the edge of a quilt-covered bed and showed me how to trace a bird from a picture for her



"Ladies Of Fashion" - By Bertha Stenge



quilt. I remember her teaching me how to crochet collars for my sweaters. I was so excited to be creating something that I became a crocheting fiend, unable to stop!

I loved her small kitchen with the old blue painted table in front of the picture window that overlooked her beautiful garden. The window had a shade with one of those pulls with a circle dangling from it. Often a friendly chipmunk would sit on the ledge outside. She made the most delicious food especially on Thanksgiving day. I remember a beautifully browned turkey sitting on an oval platter with shiny red crab apples traveling around it being carried to the dining room table which was dressed with flowers, beautiful China and elegant glassware. My grandfather was waiting, knife in hand, to carve it in front of all the crazy relatives. The whole scene was from a Norman Rockwell painting.

She married her opposite, my grandfather who was a warm personality and an emotional and bombastic lawyer. He would enter the house quietly and before you knew it he was blustering and arguing about something while stamping his cane on the floor to drive home his point. He was overly proud of her and her biggest advocate. They traveled the country together exhibiting granny's quilts and winning prizes.

I didn't feel much warmth from my grandmother or if she enjoyed me. I do know she has influenced me as an artist by her creativity and her meticulous devotion to detail, craft and story.

10

## Seder at Caesar's 1950

I'm 10 years old and filled with terror as I sit at the long Seder table at my Uncle Caesar's house waiting for the rest of the family to arrive. It's a very serious Jewish service celebrating our freedom from slavery, a yearly ritual and an evening full of order and rules. My father has lectured me and my two younger sisters on how to behave and show respect to my uncle who is a revered doctor as well as religious man.



So as not to embarrass our parents, we have to sit quietly, no wiggling or acting out for as long as forever. I'm so hungry but that isn't the worst of it. I'm scared I'll make a mistake when it's my turn to read from the Haggadah prayer book. It is the same fear every year on Passover that I have daily in school.

The table is set beautifully with a white table cloth, fine china with gold bordering each plate and cut crystal glasses. In the center of the table is a wrapped matzo that a family member will hide at the beginning of the evening and the children will search for it later (the "afikomen"). There is also the plate of bitter herbs that reminds us of that bitter time in history.

At the head of the table is my twinkly eyed uncle Caesar, a serious, self important man balding with puffs of white hair on each side of his head and a white mustache. He's sitting with my aunt Rose, a very large woman who was once quite beautiful.

Next is his adult daughter, cousin Mimi, a snob who keeps flipping her hair from side to side. Whenever we would visit my uncle I would watch her walking around, beautiful with her nose in the air.

Caesar begins the service bowing and praying. Everybody has a prayer book and the reading begins with my crazy uncle Sidney, my dad's jealous brother. He's a cocky surgeon

who likes to swear. But he is a heart-warming guy who was there for some of the best times of my childhood. One day he came over to our house with a chocolate-colored cocker spaniel. I begged and pleaded to keep it. Seder was more fun at Sidney's place because he and my father put lampshades on their heads and danced around the room singing.

Then there is Sidney's wife, my aunt Ada, the great artist and connoisseur who seems quite cold but I think she's just phony. Ada begins to read the next prayer.

I'm so hungry at this point that I'm elated to be able to dip a piece of parsley in salt water and sometimes sip a little wine.

Uncle Caesar's sister is my grandma Minnie and they represent the most colorful and lively Russian side of the family. Minnie always told me her brothers came over from Kiev first and she followed them alone at age thirteen.

I begin to count the number of people at the table in order to see which paragraph or which of the four questions will come to me. Then I practice reading the one I think will be mine.

My cousin Ruthie, my grandmother's niece, is here with her smiling eyes and her vivid personality. I love her. Ruthie usually has a handkerchief stuffed in her sleeve and dabs her eyes often. She picks up her prayer book to read.

I'm missing my cousin Arthur who is in New York with his daughters. He would walk in the door carrying two big grocery bags of hard candy and toss them both in the air so that it would rain candy all over the children. But not tonight.

Arthur's father, my rich uncle George, is a steely-eyed businessman who has no warmth. He has a wooden arm which scares all of us kids to death. We all know there is something different about his arm with the gray glove over his stiff hand. The story goes that when he was a child he jumped over a barbed wire fence and got caught ripping his arm. As a result of his wealth, his wife, Sylvia, a very peppy vociferous woman, is dripping in diamonds. The only one George is nice to is my sister, Barbara, who under her wig has lost all her hair.

My elegant mother's sister, Prudence — all two hundred pounds of her — is stuffed into one of her form-fitting custom-made ribbon knit dresses that was created in Asia. At the end of her tree trunk legs she always wears platform heels with skinny ankle straps. She would often come in giggling, wearing hats with birds nesting on top. She has a laugh that starts at high C and goes down in choppy tones like a scale. Her husband, who she calls "Baby Dear," and waits on hand and foot, is her father's doctor and 40 years her senior. He reads the next paragraph.

Francis, my mother's older sister, is also a large woman wearing a several tiered square dancing skirt with a peasant blouse. She has bows in her longish salt and pepper hair and

ankle strap shoes at the end of her unshaven legs. With her is her husband, Al the junk collector, who is missing an ear and talks out of the side of his mouth. She always calls me “Carol Barrel,” which I hate. For Christmas she gave me a pencil with a Santa Claus eraser on the end.

I still keep counting and there are two readers before my turn. In between prayers my uncle is chanting and we are singing. It will soon be time to ask the four questions. I wonder which one I’ll get.

My grandmother on my mother’s side is a quiet lady, a quilter and incredible artist. After she reads, my grandpa Stenge, a strong lawyer who must be heard when he speaks, takes his turn. I remember him every Saturday taking the elevated train from Chicago to the suburbs just to see me and I would run to meet his train and throw my arms around him. One day he told me all excited that he had gum with candy on it for me. I was so happy to see it and deflated when I got a box of Chiclets. He walked with a cane so it was a slow limp back to my house.

Back at the Seder table, it’s my turn to read from the Haggadah. I take my left index finger, set it on the prayer book and move it along slowly as I read word by word to answer the fourth question. I’m so relieved to have made it through another Seder.

# 11

## Me At Camp

This is me at eleven years old: a tall, long-legged, skinny kid dressed in ugly green shorts and a green shirt. My little legs and arms are full of mosquito bites that have turned into welts from scratching them like crazy. My mother insisted on giving me a perm before leaving on this two month overnight adventure in Minocqua, Wisconsin, so I look like a dandelion head gone to seed. I feel as awkward as I look, sad and just overwhelmed. This camp is not for me. It's divided into green and gold teams and is a daily competitive struggle to see who will be the champions at the end of the summer.

Not being a jock or terribly coordinated, I feel lost. Dressed in my prison greens, I make my best effort to hit the baseball and usually miss. On the tennis court, I don't seem to be ready when the ball is coming at me way too fast and I was even worse at volleyball. I look around at the "popular girls," the very wealthy big name girls. Penelope Ann Carrington is the spoiled daughter of the famous Cakes By Carrington. Susie Brooks is the daughter of Brooks and Mellon theaters in Chicago. They are the cool girls, very cocky and athletically talented.

I don't know whose idea it is to blow a bugle first thing in the morning and force me to jump out of bed and into the cold lake water with all the squishy muck on the bottom. If I can't get points for my green team I will be chopped liver. Really I just want to make lanyards, use raffia and sand my wooden craft book or see what's going on in their kitchen.

There was no golf at camp, and that was the only sport I practiced and was good at, going to the driving range with my father regularly. He had to be the star and was about excellence in all he did, especially golf.

I wanted to be excellent like him. When he played in the club championship, I would sit on the eighteenth green anxiously waiting for him to see if he was the leader. When he won everyone cheered with excitement. The other golfers put him on their shoulders and carried him around. I looked up to him and thought he must be a king. He taught me how to hit the ball and for a little thin kid I could really whack it. He was so proud of me. When I was five, he cut down a golf club for me to practice with. As a little girl I used to put on my ruffly white dress with my white fold over lacy socks and my mother's high heels and go out in our back yard with my special club to practice hitting the ball.

Back at camp, I begin searching for some sport that I can be a star at like my dad. One day

a group of us has to meet at the lake where there are several boats waiting for us to learn how to row them. I love to watch the oars as they cut through the water making little circles that grow larger. As small as I am I'm determined to muster the strength to row so fast that no one can catch me, thereby racking up points for my team. In this moment I have found it! I begin to feel stronger because I can do something. This is the day that begins to change camp for me. I am overjoyed and relieved to find a sport I feel successful at.

Following that I find that I love archery and can with great accuracy repeatedly shoot arrows into the target's bull's eye. Feeling lost disappeared. I know that when all the parents come at the end of the summer to see what we have accomplished, I won't be quite the loser. I want them to be proud of me. This isn't a camp that is well suited to me, but now I have figured out how to survive in it.

The last week of camp when all the parents came to see us perform, as I crossed the finish line and won, I stood up in my boat, held my oar in the air and called out to my parents, "Look at that!"

Many years following this experience I would become a camp counselor specializing in teaching archery. I was also determined to learn how to become a good tennis player. I practiced every day for hours. It was obsessive. To be honest, no matter how much I worked at it I was often late on the return shot — because my mind was easily distracted by a bird, a bug or a momentary daydream. But it was a daily discipline and I got much better.

# 12

## New Year's Eve, 1951

It was an evening of glamor, music, laughter, and drinking through the eyes of a child. I was that eleven year old little girl sitting at the top of the stairs in my nightgown waiting for the guests to arrive for New Year's Eve. Our home was a colonial style with gray front stairs, a porch and a swing. It was an unassuming house in Oak Park, IL.

From the stairs I could look down and see the dark purple walls of the living room, the sconces and the white drapes with rippling purple lining. There was a Grand piano of light wood with a candelabra on it and in the corner there was a bay window with circular seating covered with quilted purple and green grape vine fabric. This was the backdrop for the night.

The entry hallway had a parquet floor and green marbled wallpaper that made me dizzy. On the floor in the corner was a vent that piped music that filled the entire house.

Hours prior my mother spent a long time becoming as beautiful as a queen. My father, a charming, debonair, highly intelligent alcoholic looked very handsome in his tuxedo.

The doorbell rang and the hosts were ready. The finely dressed guests began arriving. The women were gorgeous wearing their jewelry and fancy dramatic backless gowns wrapped in furs. The men were dressed in their best dark suits. While eating hors d'oeuvres and drinking, the guests gathered around the piano player posing, singing and dancing. This was the social world my parents strived to be in. As I sat watching I wished they could have enjoyed me that much. But my sisters and I were to remain on the sidelines raised by maids.

While everyone was partying the three of us went into my parents' bedroom where all the fur coats were hanging on a special rack and we began trying them



**My parents**

on and pretending we were celebrating. As we were busy with that, the evening progressed downstairs until everyone was drunk and sloppy. The beautiful people were now falling all over each other. At the stroke of midnight everyone was kissing and singing Auld Lang Syne. My father called me downstairs to dance with me in my nightgown and wish me Happy New Year. That was the most fun part of the evening and I was so happy.

It was only a day prior when we were all seated at the dining room table. It was quite a different picture when their friends weren't there. My father was drinking and yelling, usually at me, until I would run crying to my room to get away, while my mother sat speechless and nervous.

Following my New Years Eve dance, I went to the bedroom I shared with my nine year old sister and fell asleep only to wake up to my father throwing up again on the other side of the bedroom wall. I hated that so much because it happened too often. I couldn't stand listening alone so I woke my sister and said, "He's doing it again!" Then I plugged my ears so I wouldn't have to hear and began singing the Star Spangled Banner. My poor sister had to listen to both of us.



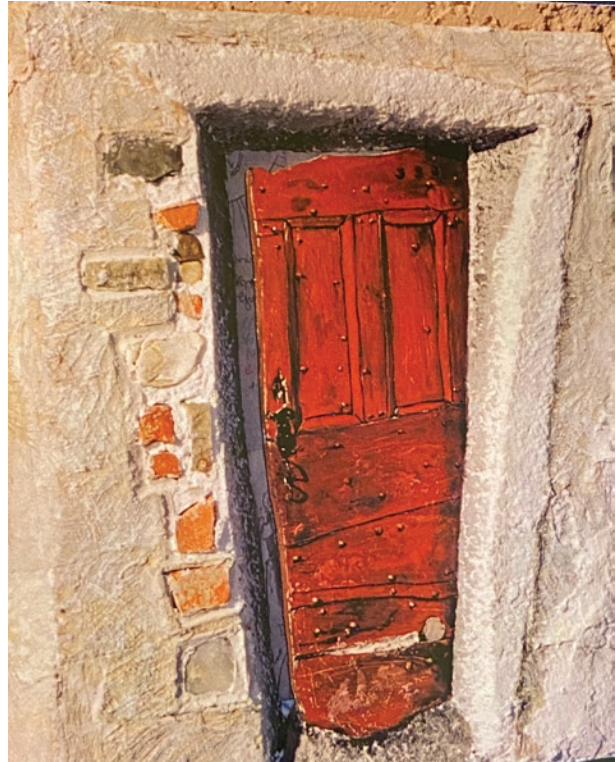
# 13

## Elvis In My Teens

A week ago my son called me to tell me to watch the most fabulous documentary about Elvis Presley. I told him I had seen all the Presley movies and I didn't think I'd watch. He kept saying, "Mom, you gotta watch it. You will thank me." You know how it is when your son insists on something.

As the movie began I was immediately drawn in because it was a black and white production that started with home movies and photos of him as a sweet kid who was dirt poor, loved his mother and just wanted to sing and please her. Nothing new there. But you do know authenticity when you see it and that's what I fell for.

The moment I heard, Hound Dog, I was transported all the way back to 1956 to the colonial style house I grew up in Oak Park, Illinois. It was an unpretentious house like all the others on our block. There were steps up to the front porch where there were two swings facing opposite each other and a white railing that ran the length of the porch. When you entered the home there was a large entry hall where I could see myself dancing the night away. My friends and I would roll the hall rug back to expose the parquet floor and go crazy. Those were the days when I would have dancing parties for everyone. I was 16 years old wearing my flared felt poodle skirt with all the crinolines underneath, my brown and white saddle shoes and bobby socks, and a cardigan sweater that buttoned down the back with one of the hundreds of crocheted collars that I made in one of my many creative frenzies. My hair was in a pageboy and I donned a gold bracelet that had a music box hanging on it that my mother had given me for my birthday.



Hearing Elvis brought back all the greats, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Bill Haley and the Comets. Powerful memories.

Then there was the hall coat closet that we used for playing Spin The Bottle. That was the best part of the evening. The coats were still in there so it was a little crowded. While playing that game there was suddenly a crash outside and lots of yelling. I looked out the window to see Franco Amato, a really popular hefty Italian guy who was a wrestler, jumping over the porch railing with his band of friends and crashing the party. I was thrilled that he was interested in me and my father probably got wind of that. It wasn't long after Franco's appearance that my father felt threatened enough to decide to sell the house and move all of us to Highland Park — where he thought I might meet a nice Jewish boy. That was the last thing I wanted.

The move presented a whole new world of cliquey, spoiled and threatened girls I had to survive with for the year and a half I had left to finish high school. My solution was to find a nice boy who wasn't Jewish.

But to get back to the movie, I don't think I realized all those years ago what a truly beautiful voice Elvis had. That movie showed the world what a great musician he was apart from his excitement and sexuality. Certainly as a young girl I loved the beat of those popular songs that propelled me to move, but to hear the clear as a bell beauty of his voice without any distractions all these years later was eye opening. Because it was done in two parts, it was long enough to include so much of his singing and interviews. That sweet soul of his had remained in tact all his life. As a teenager I was unaware of some of that. My son was right. I'm glad I didn't miss this.

# Mother-In-Law

Is this a nightmare? Am I asleep or awake? That's what I thought as I woke up slowly this morning with this story spinning round my mind.

I was taken back to 1961 when I was a junior in college in Florida and my mother came to visit during spring break. I met her in the bustling lobby of the Fontainebleau Hotel and as I approached I noticed she was sitting and waiting with a woman whom I'd never met before. Mother introduced me to her as someone she just met on the plane. They were peers living in the same area of Highland Park. Her name was Hazel and she seemed to be a lot of fun with her outgoing strong personality.

This was the time when twist-dancing was popular, so after dinner we decided to go to the bars. My mother didn't want to come, so Hazel and I headed out to see what was happening in the city of Miami. We had a great time together and I danced the night away. She seemed so much younger than my mother, at least her attitude was. She told me she had a son in college in Denver and she wanted me to meet him. I said, "I don't want to meet any mother's sons." That really meant that she and I were having fun together and I didn't want to involve dating.

A few years later when I was 23 years old, out of the blue, a guy named Jeffrey Gordon called me. He told me that a mutual friend named Abby told him to give me a call. Oh, "How do you know Abby, I asked? He proceeded to mention several people I went to high school with. We talked for a while and I agreed to go on a date.

He arrived at my door with his hair slicked back wearing a camel colored coat that had blood on the front of it. I asked him what happened and he said he somehow clipped his finger on the car door. After cleaning up his coat, he took me to a dark, smoky entertainment lounge in Chicago where Diana Ross was singing. We sat at a small cocktail table in front and while



Diana was singing, all of a sudden her earring flew off. Jeffrey grabbed it off the floor, gave it to me and told me to fix it. How would I do that? Somehow I twisted it and figured it out. He returned it to Diana.

Afterwards, while having drinks, he asked me if I knew what the word “serendipity” meant. It seemed to fit the whole evening. So far he came to my door bleeding and then grabbed Diana’s earring to come to her rescue. Jeffrey was charming in that he seemed to fall into situations naturally and then endear himself to those around him. Most of the men I went out with were just interested in sniffing the bouquet of the wine and impressing me.

When we went out with his friends there was nothing but fun and he was the life of the party. He was just naturally entertaining and one of a kind. Eventually he told me that his mother was Hazel. He said he couldn’t reveal that his mother told him to call me. That wouldn’t have been cool. After dating for six months to a year, one night he proposed. I was twenty-three and he was twenty-two. As I look back, we were both too young. Neither one of us knew who we were though we thought we did. For our engagement, Hazel took the diamond out of her ring and gave it to Jeffrey to have it set in an engagement ring for me, without asking.

Our families got along well superficially even though my parents thought they were better and that Jeffrey wasn’t good enough for me.

One night Hazel and George were invited to dinner at my parent’s place. I remember Hazel going over and doing a handstand against the dining room wall. She was wearing a short skirt and it fell completely over her head to expose her legs and entire panties. In those days — or any days — that just wasn’t done. My mother gasped and said, “Oh dear!” Hazel thought she had gorgeous legs and wanted to show them off. She would just do what she wanted.

I was her best friend until I married her son, at which point she turned on me, accusing me, complaining about me and finding fault with everything I did. She was like Jekyll and Hyde. When she called I would hold my breath so I wouldn’t say anything I’d regret. She made my life miserable. Once I married her son, our friendship became distant and she became my “mother-in-law.” She had taken elocution lessons as a girl and would enunciate clearly and loudly whenever she talked.

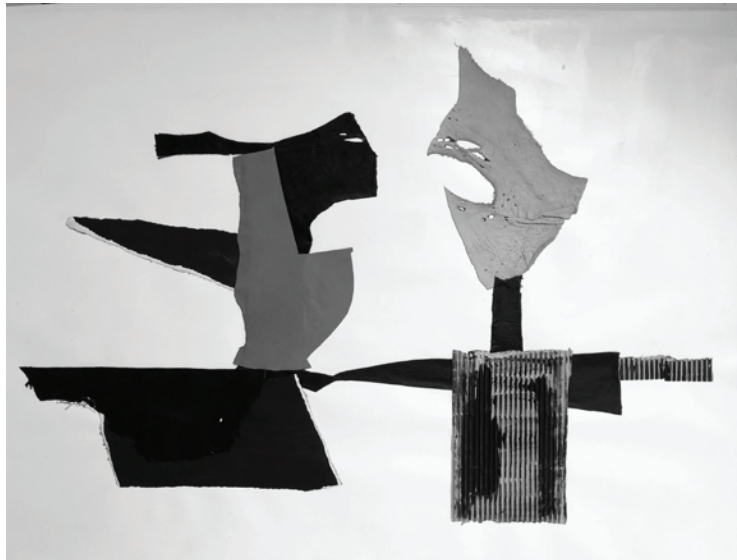
One day when I was a newlywed I went shopping with her at a little interiors boutique. There she saw a charming wire and metal sculpture of a boy walking in a forest. She pointed it out to me and I agreed it was cute. She said, “So buy it!” I said that I’d like to talk to Jeffrey about it before I do. That set her off and she yelled, “You are so cheap and you are so chintzy and you’re afraid to spend a dime!” I thought I’d die of embarrassment and wanted to crawl under a table. There were many times I told her that her behavior was atrocious, but it didn’t

phase her. She just thought she was terrific.

On holidays she'd walk into my home with her special sunshine cake, proud as a peacock, loudly announcing its entry — as though it was God on platter. Then she would project her chin into my children's faces and demand, "Give grandma a kiss!" They obeyed but would then stare at me like I should rescue them.

Once we were married, that wonderful personality of Jeffrey's turned off the minute he walked in the door. Every night he sat silently behind a newspaper.

After 15 years of marriage, his mother called me and said, "You know, Carolyn, we don't see eye to eye on anything so I would like my diamond back." I put the ring in a manilla envelope along with jewelry she gave me for an engagement gift and sent it back to her. The marriage was over long before that, but that was the clincher. When my father heard about the ring he said, "How could you give it back?" I said, "It was never mine."



**"When All Is Said And Done," 1990**

# Portraits With My Foot

One day 50 years ago I dragged a large canvas up a steep staircase to an art studio to take a painting class. I laid the canvas on the floor in front of me and sitting down I took a big brush and taped the flat part of the handle to the bottom of my foot, leaving three to four inches of bristles extending beyond my toes. I thought I could paint with the left foot while I stood on the right one. I knew I'd be ridiculed by the other students, and I was, but it didn't matter. I was just glad to be doing something after sitting around for six months while both my elbows were healing from surgery.

The teacher, Inez, had a great sense of humor. She approached me laughing and asked me what I was doing. I explained why I didn't want to stress my arms, so I thought I'd paint with my foot. She asked me what I was going to paint and I said, "I don't know. What should I paint?" She handed me a book of black and white photos. Leafing through it I found a portrait of a woman. She always looked kind of funny to me and this photo exaggerated that. Her hair was wild and curly and she wore a lot of makeup. Her nose was distinctive, and dangling through the fingers of her right hand was a sparkly stoned necklace. She wore a top that was trimmed in feathers that danced around her. "That's it! That's what I'll paint!" It was simply a reference. I never painted before — let alone a portrait — so this was quite a folly.

I remembered taking one drawing class prior and the teacher said, "Just draw the shapes you see." So I started with those words. I hopped on my right foot while I painted the shapes I saw using the brush attached to my left foot. It was physically difficult to get around the canvas without losing my balance. I remember having to sit down to rest at times and paint from a seated position. Three hours later, class was over and I started cleaning up. I was thoroughly exhausted and glad to be done. At some point one of the students came over and started yelling, "It looks like her!" I said, "It can't. I don't know how to do that." When I looked at the painting, I didn't see what they were talking about. To me it looked like a mess. I realized I had even forgotten to give her a nose.

I brought the painting home, set it up against the wall, got a glass of wine and stared at it. Of course the more I drank the more it started to look like her. The following week I took an album cover of Elvis Presley showing him in his white, star-studded Las Vegas suit and brought it to class with me. I wanted to see if I could do the same crazy thing again — and

I did! After that, I tried John Travolta, Charles Bronson, Sylvester Stallone as “Rocky” and Katherine Hepburn. The more I wanted it to look like the person, the more impossible it was. I forgot not to give a damn and just paint the shapes I saw.

Some weeks later a very important Chicago art critic came to our little suburban art school. I hung 4 of the portraits along with all the other artists’ works. Harry seated himself in the center of the room with his bottle and glass of wine and referred to the paper at hand. He said, “An artist should look like their artwork.” I hoped that wasn’t the case. “Who is Carolyn?” I carefully raised my hand. He then proceeded to destroy me. “Your color is tawdry.” He continued his rant for a long time until a voice from the back of the room yelled, “But she did them with her foot.” At that point he called me up and whispered, “Why did you do that?” He said whether I become a good painter or not will depend on how much I love to paint and if I have a need or passion to keep it up. I think he was right about that.

I decided this phase of my portrait painting was now complete. Two of those portraits hung in my living room for years afterwards. I would often sit and stare at them thinking, “Someone else must have done that. How could that have happened?”



“Barbara”

# 16

## Hives

In 1975 I was living with my husband and two young sons in a suburb of Chicago. One morning I woke up to find my face swollen and the features twisted. It was terrifying. I looked like the elephant man. It took four or five days for the swelling to go down. I could have thought it was an insect bite initially, but I knew it wasn't.

Meanwhile, as this kept repeating, I would go out and face the world doing my daily errands and being a mom with my face completely distorted. The minute I exited my house, I invited questions, suggestions and sympathy. And I had no answers. It got so bad that if I simply bumped myself anywhere on my body it would immediately swell.

I saw doctors in a quest for a solution. Some said this was an allergy but didn't know to what. They told me it was hives or angio-neurotic edema and gave me steroids and epinephrine to try to take the swelling down. If I got hives in my throat I would need a shot immediately. The truth is that I thought this was an emotional reaction to the situation I was living with.

At the same time, a show called *The Incredible Hulk* was on TV and very popular. I used to watch the Hulk go on screen from a nice easy going person to one who when he was angry blew up and became a raging green monster. He would burst through his clothing and swell. In my search for answers I identified with this character. How could I get control or understanding of what was happening to me?

I consulted a therapist but I already knew deep down that I was angry with my husband and keeping it buried daily. I was living with a man for ten years at that point who never once said my name, who was mostly on the road selling his merchandise and who would walk out of the room when I was talking to him as though I wasn't there. I felt like nothing, and that no matter what I said — I was not heard. I also knew that I was the only one who could figure out how to get rid of this. My mind had to be my strongest weapon.





I read a book titled, *Silva Mind Control*, which educated me about meditation and changing the recordings in my head.

After that, I signed up for a mind control retreat to be held in some hotel. There I investigated my feelings about my marriage and myself more deeply. I felt so disrespected and neglected in this life with my husband. I watched the rest of the world, his audience, who loved him. And I used to ask myself, “What did I do? Why didn’t he love me? Why doesn’t he care? Why is he ignoring me and why did I marry him?”

I think these are the questions that so many mistreated people ask themselves. The good news was that after I understood that I was simply an Incredible Hulk, too, the hives began to subside. After a lot of self introspection, meditation and analysis, five years later I got a divorce. I was 40 years old and ready to burst into a whole new life. The door was open to my freedom.

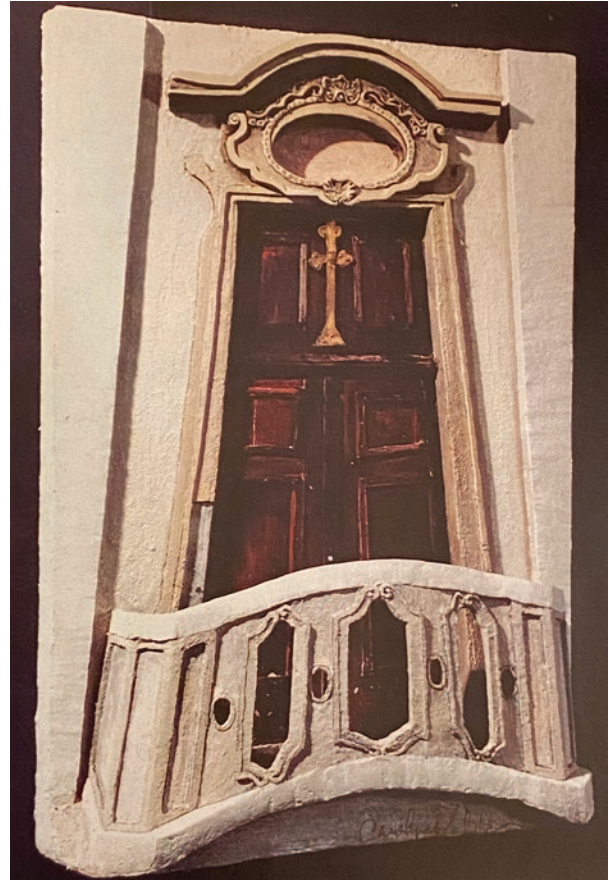
17

# Michael and the Sistine Chapel

One day in 1985, just after my oldest son turned eighteen and graduated from high school, I told Michael that I wanted to take him to see the Sistine Chapel. Having gone on a European tour when I graduated from college, I wanted him to be able to see something of the world too. This was my gift to him. “But mom, I don’t really want to see the Sistine Chapel.” I told him that there’s a whole world out there and this was a great idea.” So I prepared the trip to Italy and we left.

At the airport, he was lying down on a bench. I thought he was just bored with the whole idea of going. We got on the plane and he said he wasn’t feeling well. After arriving at our hotel in Rome, he lay down on the bed. The next morning he felt better so we were off to see the Sistine chapel. Just outside of the chapel he started feeling unwell again and spent quite a while in the restroom. So I brought him back to the hotel to see the hotel doctor. After examining Michael he advised, “I think you should go to the clinic where you can get better attention.” He was becoming sicker and sicker and I was really worried.

The clinic was run by nuns, none of whom spoke a word of English. I felt completely helpless. In my desperation I called the American Embassy. When they finally answered the phone, I explained my emergency situation. They told me they couldn’t help me, as everyone was on coffee break. Incredible! I sat there terrified. There was just no one! The nuns kept trying to teach me Italian saying, “Questa così, questa così,” and I just couldn’t understand.



While sitting there pondering what to do, a man entered the room with six doctors following him like little ducklings. Dr. Armani had the appearance of a silver bullet or a stallion. His hair was silver and perfectly groomed. His face was tan and he wore a meticulously tailored, gray, three-piece sharkskin suit, a tie and a gold watch fob that dangled towards his pants pocket. I was in the worst emotional state and yet I can remember this stunning first impression well enough to describe this man's elegance in detail. After talking to Michael in English, he wasn't sure what was wrong. He sent for another doctor to examine him and then returned to tell me he thought it was appendicitis and that he would have to do surgery immediately. I was frozen. I only remember looking at the doctor and saying, "This is my son. Do you know what you're doing?" His response was, "Madame, if you will be calm everything will be fine." But before he would do anything they needed \$5000.00. Well, I didn't have that much money with me so I had to contact his father to wire the money.

I sat waiting and waiting while Michael was in surgery. There was nothing to do but try to understand what, "questa cosa" meant, as the nuns wouldn't give up their effort to help me to communicate. There were no iPhones at the time, so praying or reading were the only options. Following surgery, Michael was in a lot of pain so I moved into the hospital room and we stayed there for 10 days.

Then one day Dr. Armani came in and invited me to have dinner with him and his wife at their club. His wife, Angelina, was a beautiful fragile woman in her thirties who spent the dinner asking me what to do with her young daughter who was such a challenge to handle. The doctor had spent much time in the United States, racing his boat in the regatta. I think he liked saving a sick kid and rescuing a damsel in distress. He was kind enough to check on Michael upon our return to the hotel. After all that, we cut our trip short and before we knew it we were on our way home — glad to be healthy but having missed all of Rome. Michael was happy to be heading home to his place of comfort. I was feeling triumphant that I had survived this stressful situation. It gave me a sense of strength and confidence that I hadn't known before. If I could do this, I could do anything.

On the plane Michael asked how I could remain so cool under pressure. "Weren't you scared, mom?" I told him I was but that we were in good hands with that doctor. "You really think so? You didn't see him in the operating room. As I was just going under I can remember him snapping his gloves on and turning the music louder and starting to dance."

I asked him what he remembers if anything of the Sistine chapel and he responded, "I remember the restroom. It was very modern with black marble."

18

# Aix-En- Provence, France 1986



After what seemed like an endless flight, I arrived in Aix-En-Provence, France with only a hotel reservation. That was it. It was 1986 and I was forty-six years old. I thought it would be a good idea to start there as it was very old, the home of impressionist artist, Paul Cézanne, and

about 51 miles by car from the village of Séguret, my ultimate destination. I would live there with 25 other artists from different countries and do my artwork.

I arrived in Aix feeling both exhausted and excited. My hotel was charming and located in the center of town, but I knew I'd have to find a rental for the two months I would be staying there. I walked around trying to get a feeling for this beautiful old city.

My friend in Chicago knew the president of the Institute of American Universities there and suggested I contact him for advice on renting a flat. Aiden and Cecile Brown lived in a home in the country and offered to have me live with them for the duration of my stay. Aiden was American and Cecile was French. They were in their 60s and had lived in New York for several years. I shared their home with their five cats and a large dog named, Pistou. They were crazy for the kitties and scolded the dog often, in low disappointed voices saying, "Awww Pistou," — as if he stole the jewels out of the cats' beds. They made him the scapegoat for everything he didn't do all day. I'm not a cat person and didn't think I outranked them in that house. So when all of them nested in my bed and there was no room for me, I tried everything. I asked them to get off but they didn't budge. I coaxed and nudged them but they stayed. I was so tired that I was ready to lay down on the floor to sleep.



**Lady at the Market**

I enrolled in French classes at the university and each day I took the bus to school. I remember the beautiful walk down those ancient, narrow streets with a community of strangers, while eating my fresh croissant and searching for the cathedral — my landmark on my way to school.

As a child, my mother would take me on the Chicago elevated train downtown to Marshall Field's department store. We would meet my grandmother for lunch around their big Christmas tree. Then I would return home alone on the 'L' train while my mother met my father for dinner. But I couldn't find my way out of the store. She would have to take me to the exit. Getting lost continued to plague me all of my life and had I thought of this fear ahead of time I might never have left home. So day after day I would ask people where I was going.

One day I was sitting in my French class when the president of the university made a special announcement warning the students of the street children who were adept at distracting visitors and stealing their wallets, especially at the post office. That was the only place to make phone calls.

Thank goodness he warned us about that, and yet while telephoning my sons, suddenly a girl about 12 years old came up pushing and jiggling a newspaper in front of my face. And I couldn't escape it.

I know what's happening! This is it and I'm unable to stop the girl behind me from snatching the wallet out of my purse. She is lightning fast. Furious, I drop the phone and fly out the door chasing them and yelling, "Donne-moi mon portefeuille! Give me my wallet."

All the flowers and produce are whizzing by me while the women at the market are shaking their fingers and shouting, "Faites attention aux voleurs!" "Pay attention to the thieves!" I catch up to one of the girls and grab her by her collar furiously shaking her and insisting on my wallet's return. Incredibly, her friend who ran ahead is coming back with it full of money — probably concerned for her friend's life. At the sight of that the women in the market begin



**Ladies at the Market**

cheering. I think the girls are used to getting away with this several times a day and no one can catch them. They hadn't expected a fight. I feel triumphant.

Being back at the Browns' home in the French countryside, I was never allowed to speak English. Relating this story in French during dinner was a huge task, but entertaining for them. Not for me. Sometimes it was exhausting and stressful, but to be immersed in a language is a better way to learn. I did my best by studying and writing the French verbs every night. Living with the Browns' gave me an introduction to France in the warmest way possible, and I felt somewhat protected there.

Aiden Brown drove me to Séguret in March, and once again, I was on my own.

19

# Séguret, France - My Arrival 1986

On a beautiful sunny afternoon in March of 1986, my friend Aiden Brown was driving me from his country home in Aix-En-Provence through the vineyards of the south of France up to a medieval village on the mountain of Séguret. He dropped me off at the entrance of a quiet, narrow cobblestoned village, the kind of place I'd seen only in books.

As I began to walk I noticed the high walls built of stone. You could see openings at different intervals in the walls where weapons were used to defend the village in medieval times. On my left was a wine cellar and farther down was a charming tea house. There was a printer's workshop and a little gift shop that sold souvenirs of pottery, jellies and wine. Graceful cypress trees gave the village an elegance. Adjacent to a medieval fountain were two troughs of water for washing our clothes. Two buildings would house 25 artists from different countries. On my right were French residents sitting on stoops next to their doorways and a woman holding her cat.

I was greeted by Henri and Ingrid Bouchet, the German couple who ran the atelier. I was soon shown to the room I'd be living in which was up a narrow creaky stairway. A young man with an oversized key opened the door at the top. I just gasped when I saw the storybook room I would be living in. It seemed as though it was cut out of a hole in the wall and then they took plaster and slapped up the sides and the roof. The charm of it grabbed me. There was a little chair on my left with a tiny provencal print cushion. A wooden support that jutted out from the wall on my right could be used as a desk or a table to paint on. At the far end of the





**The Mountain of Séguret, pastel - 1986**

I would soon hear the dinner bell that called me to join the other artists in the dining room where there were lights made of stained glass and the guest artists' paintings hung crookedly on the walls. I had counted on using my newly acquired French, but when seated at one of the long country style tables, I realized that everyone was speaking German and they all seemed to know each other. I had been educated about the horrors of the Holocaust since I was a child, so I found the situation very upsetting.

My mind wandered back 60 years to the beautiful seder dinner table at my uncle's house when we celebrated the Jews' exit from slavery. It was a ritualistic and proud evening with a family of characters. My mother was seated in her usual elegance, and her oversized sister, Prudence, was wearing a strange hat with small stuffed birds nesting on top. My serious Uncle Caesar led the service and my Uncle Sidney and father celebrated our freedom by dancing. I don't consider myself a religious person, but I take great pride in being part of a story and people who have survived our history.

Back at Séguret I asked myself, "How could I live here?" As I ate in silence, I could hear the mistral blowing violently outside, and without the sun it was getting colder. I felt like an utter stranger.

room was a stone wall with a small window. The ceiling was vaulted and nothing was quite right in that place. There were two beds with swirly wrought iron decorative headboards and sides. Covering the mattresses were 2 puffy printed coverlets that floated and seemed alive. Two vertical planks of wood with a shower curtain drawn across created my closet. The small mirror on the wall was like one of those in a funhouse that distorts whoever looks into it. It seemed as though all things "normal" had disappeared in that space.



**First Bedroom at Séguret, watercolor - 1986**



Walking around the village after dinner I looked out on the beautiful vineyard below the countryside and the mountain of Séguret where all the lights danced under the night sky. It was late when I returned to my room and I noticed that someone had brought in a space heater that had a butane tank which smelled like it had a gas leak. I thought, "Oh no, I'm not going to survive my first night here." I turned the heater off and buried myself under the covers shivering, frightened and alone. I fell asleep until midnight when a loud bell just above my roof began to clang 12 times.



Breakfast Room, Séguret, Pastel 1986



First Bedroom at Séguret, pastel - 1986



Laundry Room at Séguret, Oil - 1986

## 20

# Artists/friends in Séguret, 1986

It was really inspiring to be with all the artists in Séguret. As in any community or village there are all kinds of personalities and it seemed the longer I stayed there the crazier it got. These personalities — both the camaraderie and the contentiousness — shaped my life and work there.

I was the American completely unprepared for life in a medieval French village. I looked around and all the Germans were wearing large clunky sandals. I looked different with my short dark neat hair and very little about my appearance divulged that I was an artist. Most of the artists were out in nature painting landscapes with their watercolors. My work was abstract, decorative and on fabric. They were old world and I was new. I felt the heaviness of their history. They were intrigued by me, the alien. I had to start by teaching myself to draw everything. I didn't know what media to begin with. I went to the art store and bought materials that I never used before: pastels, gouache and oil paint were a good start.

As I got to know many of the German artists, my views started to change. They were especially kind to me. I made so many friends and loved so many people. It was one of the richest experiences of my life.



## HENRI

Henri was an artist and print maker who originated the atelier. The story was that he studied in Paris with Charles DuBuffet. I remember him as an elderly man with white hair and a

beard who was a difficult and controlling personality. He spoke little and didn't listen to his wife. He had a vision for the creation of that atelier that came to life with the help of a group of art students. That was probably 20 years prior to my arrival. Mine was only one of the unique amoebic shaped rooms they built in two buildings. Their imaginations ran wild. You could visualize all the fun they must have had creating the place. Three times Henri came up to me and said, "You made a good painting." One time he asked to borrow a very spontaneous gauche painting I made of a small charming French house right there in the village.



French Home in Village of Séguret, Gauche - 1986

I lent it to him and he didn't want to return it. I had heard he did this to other artists and got away with it. I was angry and kept insisting on its return everyday until one day he finally did. I was someone he couldn't control. I didn't obey his dictates so we clashed a bit.

I lent it to him and he didn't want to return it. I had heard he did this to other artists and got away with it. I was angry and kept insisting on its return everyday until one day he finally did. I was someone he couldn't control. I didn't obey his dictates so we clashed a bit.

## INGRID

Ingrid was Henri's wife and a Cordon Bleu cook who ran the atelier by doing absolutely everything for everyone all the time. She cooked for 25 artists nightly and assembled the baskets with cheese, yogurt, fruit and wine for our lunches. She washed the clothes, shopped for the groceries, and chauffeured the artists to and from the market on Tuesdays. If you needed anything you would go to Ingrid. After several months of living on the mountain, I asked her if she'd help me buy a car so I could be more independent. The only problem was that I couldn't drive a stick shift. We had to search for an automatic and finally found a blue Renault.

One day Ingrid asked me for a favor. She knew a farmer's wife who wanted her portrait drawn. Well, I didn't know how to do that! I was a wreck! I sat down at the farmer's old wooden kitchen table with pen and drawing paper on the spot. I had never drawn a legitimate

portrait before and didn't know how I was going to fake this. I think I began with her eyes and God knows where it went from there. When I finished with it I only hoped it wasn't hideous. I felt like a complete fraud. Ingrid never mentioned anything afterwards and I was too embarrassed to look and see if the lady was happy.

## VERA

Vera was in her 50's, a strange and measured German lady who wore her dark hair in a bun at the nape of her neck. She was always peaceful. Vera would wrap herself up in layers of fabric and don a large brimmed hat to go out into the Provence sun to paint her watercolor landscapes. She looked like yards of fabric floating through the village carrying her easel and paints. Vera mostly stayed to herself and exuded an unearthly persona. Sometimes she would leave a gift of a pressed flower at my door with a note that read, "Love will find its way." She used to say that often. I wondered if she was searching for love or if she meant I would find it.



Ingrid's Kitchen, Séguret, pastel - 1986

## ELKE

Ingrid asked me about my children often. "Do you miss your sons?" I said, "Yes." "Well, don't you feel guilty leaving them?" I said, "Yes." "Well, why don't you go home?" I answered, "Because I have to live before I die." In truth, whenever I thought about my sons I felt badly because they were angry. They were so encouraging, proud and happy for me to go beforehand but once I was gone that changed.

## **ERIC**

Most of the language spoken at dinner was German which was incredibly frustrating. They could all speak English but often chose not to. I was at a disadvantage and most of the time I sat there quietly, feeling left out. Sometimes I would get so angry inside that I would leave the table and go upstairs to my room in tears. One night when this happened, there was a knock at my door. I opened it shocked to see Eric, a young artist in his 20's who had only been at the atelier for a few days. He said, "Caroline, I have come to speak English to you." I had thought I was invisible. He put his arms around me and I fell into them being comforted. I'll never forget the kindness and understanding of that moment. He was going to return to Germany a few days later and he left me with a touching memory.

## **FELIX**

Felix was a wild looking, highly educated professional sculptor in his 50's from Vienna, Austria. He was also quite arrogant. I felt like a silly fraud next to him. In spite of his success he seemed quite childlike and I could have fun with him even though we couldn't understand each other. Prior to coming to Séguret, I was painting brilliantly colored free abstracts on silk. The artists would show slides of their work after dinner and silk was what I showed. Nobody there was doing anything like my art. I was a woman who left my country alone to be a stranger everywhere just to do my work. So I was a novelty and a free spirit to Felix. He didn't forget me because after returning to the United States he sent me drawings of him pulling a sleigh filled with gifts. There were a few blurbs of English words on the side. He invited me to Austria but I never went.

## **YOSHIKO**

Yoshiko was a beautiful Japanese girl who had long black hair and went about painting quietly. She wore brightly colored thongs that had three rubbery flowers going across each one. There was one flower missing. She showed me how to write my name in Japanese as well as the alphabet. I asked her if she would perform a tea ceremony for all the artists. She agreed even though she said she didn't have the proper dress for it. I remember how gracefully she poured the tea and how gently she caressed the tea cup in her small hands.

## **IRMA**

Irma was a young German teenage girl who was incredibly smart and made up her own language. She could write it out and even speak it. Of course she was the only one who knew what she was saying. She was so proud of it and had worked on creating this language for years. One day I was sitting in my room and I saw something dropping down and dangling just outside my window. It was a scroll tied up with a string. She was staying with her mom in the room upstairs from mine and she sent me her new language all written out with its own alphabet. She tried to explain it to me but how could I understand?

## **ANDRÉ**

One evening during dinner I heard the most soulful guitar music filling the air. It was the kind of beautiful sound that drew my heart. There was a comfort with his playing. It felt pure and truthful. I tried to picture this artist who moved me. I left the dinner table and went out into the street to search for the haunting sound. Sitting on a cement block just outside our door was a guy in his 30's, large in girth with a round face, full beard, rimless glasses, a hat and old sandals. He never had any lessons on the guitar. He was just one of those people who picked up the instrument and played when he felt like it.

André was a unique personality who had a vineyard below the village of Séguret. He worked there every day. I remember his shoes. They were lived in, caked with dirt, laces gone and stretched out from his full personality. He and his wife, Juliette, had a gift shop in the village and became great friends of mine. Their little daughter, Ava, used to come to my room and draw with me and dance around. They were a big part of my life and I learned to speak better French with them. Whenever I asked André to play the guitar, he wouldn't. He only played when he felt like it.

One night they invited me to dinner and André was cooking. I went in the kitchen to watch him make a fig appetizer and he said, "No one can be in the kitchen while he is cooking." He was an artist in whatever he did.

## **FERDINANDO**

There he sat, an older Italian gentleman dressed from head to toe in elegance. He wore white pants, a white vest and jacket, white shoes and his head was topped with a wide-brimmed straw hat. His cane was placed at his side. Day after day he sat in front of the Cafe Des Sportes

in the neighboring village of Sablet. I used to walk down the vineyard-lined road to Sablet, often carrying my sketchbook and dressed in my high-tops, shirt, shorts and yellow “Survival of the fittest” cap. Whenever I entered the village, he would welcome me by singing, “Carolina, Carolina.” He was a fixture there and I just loved his round face and dancing eyes. Ferdinando always made me feel good. He was so normal in a village that had a mental institution with many characters walking around all day. Some of the residents even worked at the cafe.

Sablet was the most interesting place to sit and draw people. In the midst of all the characters, Ferdinando stood out as unique.

These were just some of the many artists I lived with. I learned from them and my artwork grew from sharing our knowledge and opinions along the way. Because most of the artists came for a week, I got to meet many different people. Séguret had become a family for me with Henri and Ingrid being at the head of it making sure the artists had what they needed. I had come to Séguret with the intent of staying for six weeks but ended up living there for nine months.

During my entire time in Europe, my father wrote several times a week supporting and encouraging me in everything I did. I sent him my drawings and eagerly awaited his response. He spurred me on even though he missed me and wished I was close by. It was obvious that he studied art history in college, though he never mentioned it. He recognized and discussed all artists and their styles in his letters. He also never mentioned that he studied languages. His letters were filled with phrases and greetings in French or Spanish with a smattering of German. The love I wanted from my father as a child came to me when I was an adult — alone in another world, when I truly needed it.

After months in Séguret, I wasn’t ready to go home but didn’t know where else to go. There were many discussions between the artists about places they loved to visit in Europe. One of those was Florence, Italy. I decided that’s where I would go. It was 1987.

## Albert at Séguret

In 1986 during my time living in Séguret, there were many artists who came and went but a few of them stood out. Albert from Berlin was one of those special characters. He was an alcoholic with a head of crazy curly salt and pepper hair that looked like cork screws sprouting from his head. He had exaggerated features — large puppy dog eyes and a long nose. He was quite tall with a booming voice and a big personality. With his hair and clothing in disarray, he was a sight. You couldn't help but love him for he was always himself.

His clothes and shoes fascinated me because they were so natural with wear. One day I was sitting in the art room and Albert entered, hung his worn jacket on a hook, took his sneakers off and sat down to draw. I looked at the jacket and shoes with wonder. They could only belong to him.

Before living in Europe I don't think I appreciated the age of things. But soon after being there I began to notice that objects tend to take on the form people gave them while wearing them. When I look at an old chair I can almost visualize the person who sat in it because they gave it a shape and personality. Albert's shoes were alive with the form of his feet when he wasn't wearing them.

He loved women and knew how to have fun.

One beautiful warm day we packed our car with art supplies and went to Avignon, a city probably 40 minutes by car from Séguret.

In the 1300s it was the seat of the Catholic popes. There is a famous bridge there that dates back to the 15th century and a French folksong that refers to it. People danced under the bridge while they sang the song, *Sur Le Pont D'Avignon*.

So we went to that bridge and as we sang that old familiar song we clasped hands and swung around in circles until we were dizzy. I'll always remember that time in the sun in an ancient city and the



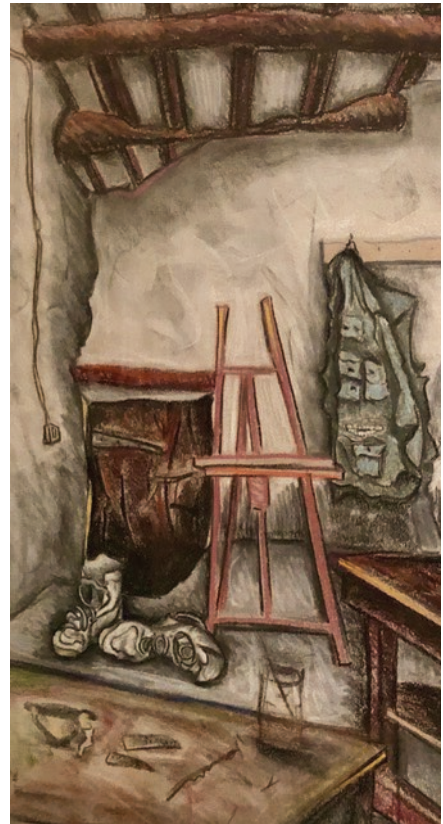


fun of acting that out. The world seemed to disappear as we spun around faster and faster. We walked through the city eating our cheese and drinking wine. From time to time we would sit on a bench, talk and draw something that intrigued us.

Returning to the village in the dark of the evening, we went out in his car with our art supplies, turned on the headlights and sat on the car drawing the mountain of Séguret with all its sparkling lights. We cracked watermelons on the rocks and ate them. It was such a day to remember.

A few years later when I went to several cities in Germany to visit friends, I stopped in Berlin to see Albert. There, he seemed to be quite a different person than the one he was while on his painting holiday. Reality set in and the alcoholism became more apparent. The free and easy, fun loving guy disappeared. That's the beauty of a vacation.

It was 1989 and such an historic time because the Berlin Wall was coming down. Albert took me to get a piece of the wall at night. As we approached we could see little but heard the tapping of hammers down a great distance as people tried to get mementos. We didn't come prepared with picks, but someone was kind enough to hand me a cement fragment. Most of the chunks with graffiti were gone by the time we got there because people had been chopping away at it for days. But I was grateful to have a piece of history. I never saw Albert after that visit but the whole event is etched in my mind forever.



Albert's Shoes, Seguret, Pastel 1986



Séguret at Night - charcoal - 1986

# Matteo

It was in 1986 when I was living in the medieval artists' village of Séguret, France that I met Matteo. He was a beautiful blonde headed blue-eyed ten-year-old boy seated in the corner of the Atelier dining room with his very serious parents. They had arrived the night prior from Mannheim, Germany.

The room was filled with artists seated and talking at long tables while they awaited the meal. The delicious aroma of Paella came wafting from the kitchen. This lob-sided dining room was the backdrop for the paintings of the day. Any of the artists could choose to display their work by sticking it in an old frame and hanging it up or by just tacking it on the walls. There was a floor to ceiling blue cabinet in the far right corner of the room and a colorful stained glass and wrought iron light hanging above the tables.

After dinner I walked over to that corner table and introduced myself to Matteo and his parents, Bertha and Alfred. His father was a musician and conductor and his mother was a teacher. I tried to talk to them but they weren't very forthcoming. I thought they might simply be quiet, shy people. They spoke to no one that night.

The following day I walked down the cobblestoned path dragging my music and art supplies to the old art room which was apart from our living quarters. Loud music usually accompanied me whenever I worked. As I entered on my left there was a toilet behind a shower curtain and a long rectangular table to work on. The floor was cement and there was a small opening in the wall directly ahead of me that looked out on the vineyards and tile roofs of Provence. On the right there was a laundry room where clothes were swinging back and forth while drying on the line.

As I turned on my music and began painting I could hear soft footsteps like the sound of feet walking on sand-covered cement. Then, the closing of the atelier's creaky old door. The music drew Matteo, and he entered the room. He stood watching me wide-eyed as I made big bold strokes of paint on my paper. He couldn't speak English nor could I speak German. But having been at the atelier for several months, I had learned enough to understand when he pointed at my painting and asked, "Was machst du und kann ich es auch tun?" (What are you doing and can I do it too? "Sure you can?")

I took a piece of my best watercolor paper, the kind that's thick enough to be indestructible — for I wanted him to be fearless. I shared my paints with him as he put the paper on the floor and began working intensely. While dancing he gave that paper a beating. It seemed like he had never been so free and for that short time it changed his life. He made an abstract painting and was quite proud of himself. That night at dinner he hung his painting in the dining room for all the other artists to see and discuss while we ate. This was one way we learned about and shared each other's work. His parents were thrilled and stunned at their son's ability.

Many months later I visited Matteo in Mannheim, Germany. The whole family warmly greeted me. Bertha had made pizza for dinner and afterwards we went to a concert that Harold conducted. On the morning I was to leave, as I woke up I could feel something wet on my face. I opened my eyes to a blonde fringe of hair tickling my forehead and tears falling on me. Matteo said, "Geh nicht, Carolyn. Ich liebe dich." (Don't go Carolyn, I love you).

We never know how we affect people's lives. It was just one hour and all these years later I remember him with love and wish I could see him now. Maybe he remembers the dancing lady who splashed paint and gave him permission to do it too. We were two people who couldn't understand each other's words, but there was a much deeper language that we shared.

# Christophe

One day in 1986 while seated in the dining room table at the artist's atelier in Séguret, I looked up to see a new artist had arrived. Painters came and went frequently often staying for a couple of weeks. A man seated at the far end of the table seemed to know the artists seated around him. I figured he must have stayed at the atelier many summers prior. He was handsome with chiseled features, warm eyes, a beard and mustache. When I met him after dinner I remember him sitting there drinking vodka straight out of the bottle.

Over the next few days, as we painted together and discussed art, I fell in love with him. He was a gentleman with a deep calm voice who was amused by my strength. I adored him. His drawings were detailed and technically correct. His oil paintings of people were educated, humorous and satirical. I was freer in my approach. He had rules, I had none. Everything was an experiment. We spent many days going to different French villages, picnicking with our wine and cheese, talking and painting. We kept it very private and no one at the atelier was aware we were seeing each other. It was our big secret.

He stayed for another week or two before going back to life in Germany. When he returned to France to be with me, we would meet at a charming hotel that I called the "House Of Love." I used to go there long before his arrival and anxiously wait for him. During that time I sat and drew the many charming rooms that the proprietor, "Madame," had created. Each room was a work of art with antiques sprinkled throughout. They were detailed, silly, and unusual. She had a knack for putting spaces together with great humor. You couldn't make up the stuff she did. She would put a crazy looking baby doll dressed in a lacy white blouse sitting in a highchair on the landing of a stairway. It made no sense at all. It was a little eerie but was so much fun.

Wherever I was living in Europe, Christophe would come and join me for several days. To be alone traveling and living in those different situations would have been far lonelier and more difficult without looking forward to his visits. I went to Munich by train several times to spend holidays with him. One time I remember sitting in the train station in Germany watching the people and drawing them until my train was called. I waited on that platform for what seemed like forever. They were calling the trains out in German. I finally asked someone about mine and apparently it was changed to another track. Had I not inquired, I'd probably



Kitchen In The House Of Love, Pastel 1986



Bedroom In The House Of Love, Pastel 1986

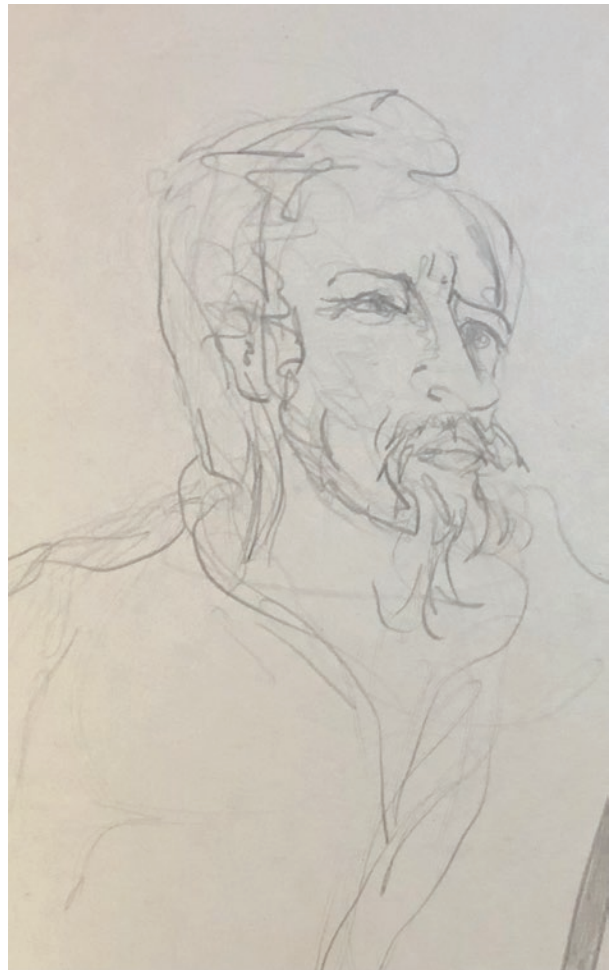
still be standing there waiting. I passed the time on the train by looking out the window and drawing the snow laden trees as they flew by.

We spent Christmastime together enjoying Munich and going to the evening markets which were lighted with tiny bulbs strung across the night sky. There were charming little gifts to buy and gorgeous aromas of chestnuts roasting. Cinnamon baked goods filled the air. And the market bustled with life, beer and music. It was so cold but I hardly cared.

Christophe erected a Christmas tree with each branch supporting real burning candles. I'm sure it was dangerous but it was very beautiful and the fragrance of evergreen filled the room. I made small clay painted ornaments for his tree that I brought with me as a gift. I remember one evening we sat drinking champagne and watching the candles flickering on the tree. He made appetizers of smoked salmon with cream cheese and a little dill on top. They were beautifully arranged on slices of rye bread sitting on a wooden cheese board that was in the shape of a pig — so delicious especially with the champagne.

He was the person in my life who cared for me in the most tender way, something I had never experienced before. He was patient and unafraid of my strength. I could speak frankly and he listened. I didn't feel I had to be less with him. We passed the time as equals.

However, as time would show, the man who was drinking vodka straight from the bottle when we met was still drinking. It had gotten worse and it began to destroy our relationship. Sometimes he would say I was a better artist than he was and that was uncomfortable for me. It wasn't true. I just approached art differently. He was an educated draftsman and oil painter. I arrived in Europe as a surface designer. He taught me a great deal about drawing, and with



Christophe, Pencil - 1986

constant work, my drawing gained depth. That feeling of inferiority and the drinking would eventually lead to our break. I will always miss what we had.



**Christmas In Munich With Christophe, Paint 1989**





Living Room In The House Of Love, Pastel 1986



Bathroom In The House Of Love, Mixed Media 1986

24

# Florence, Italy 1987

It was 1987 and I was 47 years old when I was waiting in a long line out the door and down the street to get into Zecchi's famous art supply store in Florence, Italy. I had just gotten lost on the bus trying to find my way from my apartment to downtown. While standing in that "forever line," my mind wandered back to the situations that had propelled me to that day.



I had overheard many artists in France talking about places they loved to visit in Europe. One of those was Florence, Italy. I loved Italy and decided that's where I would go!

So I did.

I had arrived in Florence to a flat that the Italian language school reserved for me. This was the place that I would share with five girls from Australia, Germany, Brazil, Finland and Great Britain. They were all younger than me, of course. I found it so strange that bottles of water were left for us on the kitchen table, but there was no toilet paper in the restrooms.

Rosanna from Brazil was gorgeous with long, dark wavy hair. She loved men, especially policemen, and they found her irresistible. I shared a room with Alisa from Finland who wasn't there when I arrived or went to sleep. I woke up in the morning to find her standing over me saying, "Who are you?" "I'm Carolyn." She rolled her eyes and said, "American?" I nodded. Well, Alisa, who clearly had a hangover was horrified. I, on the other hand, having experienced the Europeans' attitude toward Americans repeatedly, was used to Alisa's kind of attitude and hoped it would change.

I was usually the oldest one on my journey and didn't expect the kids to relate to me or consider me a friend. I think we all felt this was a temporary living situation to learn Italian. Not being their peer, I went my own way doing my art and didn't pay attention to them. It left

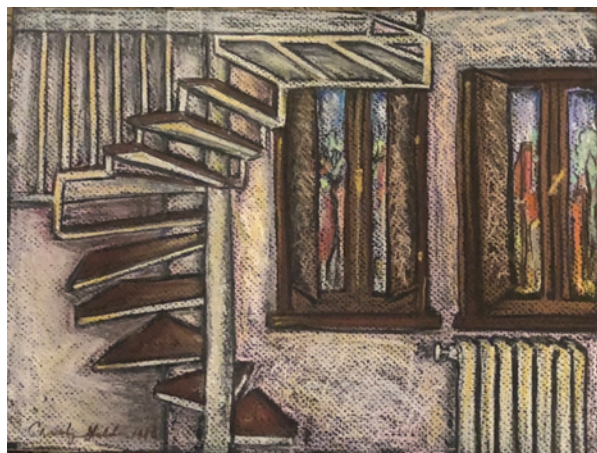
me feeling alone a lot, but I could always turn to my art when I felt that I didn't fit in. What usually happened was they became intrigued with the art I was doing and started to come over to me. Alisa was in her 20s and I was 47, an uncomfortable beginning. She was blonde and gorgeous but clearly drank too much and was quite sad. We shared that room and became good friends once we got to know each other.

After a couple of months studying Italian there, I needed to find a new place to live independently to do my artwork. I remember going to a rental agency for help with finding a new home. I didn't have the language skills to search for and sign a lease alone. I found a charming flat on a street named Via Guelpha. As I entered this new apartment there was a spiral wooden staircase on the right that led up to my bedroom and bathroom in a loft. It was just so crazy cool! A charming window looked out on the street. There was a small living room/dining room just big enough to have other artists come over to draw from a model.

The flat had a tiny kitchen with a strange old stove that didn't work very well. It was white with a small oven that didn't get hot enough. Four feet elevated it off the old floor. I think I used a toaster oven for most meals. There wasn't much water for a shower so I had to wash my

hair fast or I wouldn't be able to wash my face. The toilet seat kept falling off and if I stood up too fast I would knock myself out on the loft's angled ceiling. Life continued on without a telephone, something that I never saw as a luxury before. My father continued to write to me and I still had to walk 20 minutes to the post office to make a call. This was to be my home for the nine months that I would live in Florence.

My first effort to learn was to sign up for a class in photographic realism, which was an art form I never used before. They



Loft In Florence, Italy -1987



First Apartment In Florence, Italy. - 1987

taught you to look out the window and replicate the view you saw exactly on the canvas by measuring and using a plumb line. It was such an exact scientific method that I realized I was holding my breath, trying to be perfect but the end result would not reflect any of my soul. I decided it wasn't worth it.

After the long wait in line, I finally entered Zecchi's art store. It was like being in candy land. To the right and left of the main counter were shelves of lidded glass jars containing every rainbow color and shade of powdered pigment. It was delicious to look at them. I said, "I'll take some of that and some of that and that one too." I just wanted everything — though I didn't know what I'd do with it. As the clerk was wrapping up my many purchases, the girl standing behind me said, "Boy, you've really got a lot of work ahead of you!" "What? What do you mean?" "Well, she said, you know that's just powder and you have to mix all of that with a binder." I followed up in a heartbeat: "Do you know how to do this? Will you teach me?"

That was the beginning of my friendship and learning project with Karen, an American studying at the university who knew a lot about technique and preparation for paintings. She taught me how to mix all of the powdered pigment with egg yolk as the glue to make egg tempera for painting. It was incredibly tedious, grinding it all with a mortar and pestle. But that's how the old masters made egg tempera paint during the Renaissance, before there was the luxury of buying it in tubes. I was fascinated by the procedure of separating the yolk from the white and drying off the yolk. Doing that enabled me to pinch the sac together between my thumb and forefinger, thereby allowing the pure yolk to be mixed with the pigment. I know that's a funny thing to remember, but I do all these years later. Now, whenever I eat an egg, I also think about how it has also held paint together for centuries.

## Still In Florence

While learning with Karen in Florence, I got the idea to start a drawing group with models. Being connected to artists at the university enabled Karen to get models and students to come to my small living space to draw. We would set up the nude model and drape fabric behind and around her and use lighting to create shadows. I drew mostly in charcoal. It was a great working time.

When Christophe, my boyfriend I'd met a year earlier in France — came to stay with me, we painted and investigated Florence's great art. As we walked through the Uffizi

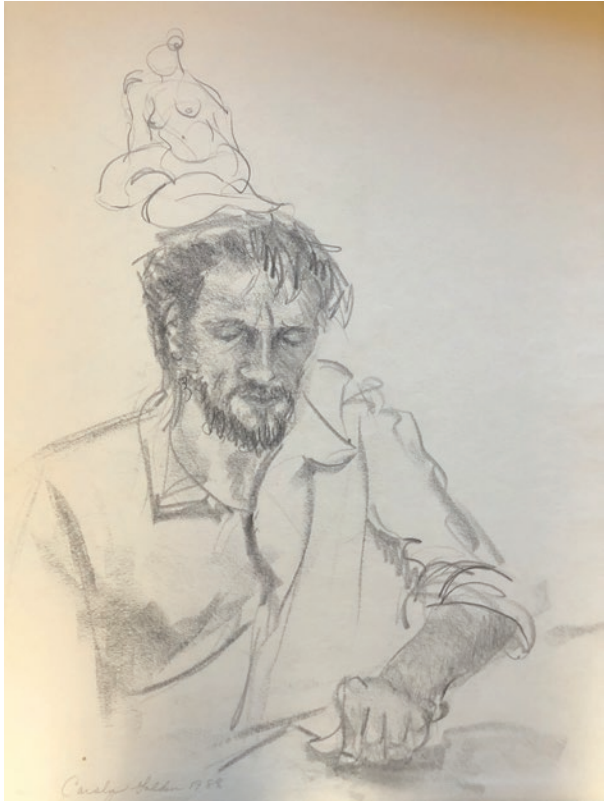
Museum, we talked about the art we saw. He was more familiar with the old masters' paintings and spoke to me about their styles and techniques. We found unique little restaurants on side streets and enjoyed musicians, pantomime artists and jugglers who were dressed up in colorful clothing and putting on shows all throughout the plaza. A highlight was going to the Duomo Cathedral for Christmas Eve mass. The Duomo was just a majestic place, but to be there that night was unforgettable.

Even with all of Florence's richness, it was a lonely place for me. I found it difficult to meet people and the Florentines weren't very warm. I used to play Barry White's "Can't Get Enough Of Your Love" and Neil Simon's "Diamonds On The Soles Of My Feet" to create a sense of comfort while I worked. I had met the challenge of the new language and was surviving. I loved my flat in this artistically inspiring city and was building my own art community.

Then one day I phoned home to find out that my grandmother, who I felt so close to, was ill and probably dying. I knew I'd need to return to Chicago to be with her. I had no idea how long I would be gone so I'd have to leave my flat behind. This would end my time in Florence. I was disappointed but looking forward to seeing my family.



**Model In Florence, Charcoal - 1987**



# Granny Minnie's Passing 1987

In 1987, upon hearing that my grandmother was ill and dying of cancer, I returned to the US to be with her. As I nervously I entered her hospital room expecting the worst, there she sat — bright-eyed and waiting. My return gave her a temporary boost for life. I remember my father being elated to see her liven up. But it would not last long.

For days I sat there, just Granny and me, while I drew her figure with tears falling out of my eyes. As I drew, my mind wandered back to a Sunday in Chicago sometime in the early 1950s when I was a young girl.

I remember going to spend the day at my father's drug store. It was located on the corner of a busy street in an old Chicago neighborhood. When you entered you saw that black and white checked tile floor and a rack of greeting cards on the right. On my left was a soda fountain where I liked to make black cows, green rivers and milk shakes for the customers.

Adjacent to that was the jewelry counter where my Grandma Minnie, a powerhouse of a personality —charming, independent full of laughter and charisma — reigned.

She did all the buying and selling of the gaudiest jewelry I'd ever seen. There were necklaces with huge red and green stones and big rhinestones that I knew no one would want. As customers entered they couldn't escape her. She would snatch them up and greet them, talk about their families, ailments, celebrations, what they had for dinner, recipes and tell them she had something special for them. Before you knew it they bought that terrible jewelry. I don't know if they wanted it — but they wanted her. So did I.

Granny's husband died at 37, and for all the years I knew her, she lived in an efficiency apartment the size of a box. There was a tiny kitchen, enough room for a small table in the dining area, windows to let the light in, and a bed. She always seemed to be running with her purse. She would sit at the dining room table, purse by her side, and when the phone rang she



**Grandma Minnie**

would grab it and run from the table to the bed, maybe 10 steps, to answer it. Some Sundays I'd go over there, bring her lox, bagels and cream cheese, and beg her to read my cards. She was like a gypsy in that she would lay them all out in a particular pattern and become very concentrated. If she saw the ace of spades revealed she would get upset, sniff in one nostril and then stop reading saying, "No honey, I can't do this anymore." "Aw, come on Gram, I want to know what the cards say." She absolutely refused. I figured she saw something terrible and I was going to die the next day, but I didn't dare press her on it.

She was so proud of her cheese straws, rolled up jelly-filled, crescent shaped cookies. I never had the heart to tell her I didn't like them. I just ate them.

I was her first grandchild and her favorite. When I was a baby in my playpen she would sparkle in the door and begin singing, "You are my sunshine," while clapping her hands. I would dance for her while her laughter permeated the room.

The only time she traveled anywhere was for my college graduation, when for my 21st birthday she gave me a necklace. It was a lacy, round gold pendant with a large sunflower

in the center, made of a topaz stone and surrounded by the words, "You Are My Sunshine."

Back in her hospital room, I wondered if she would mind me drawing her. I have one drawing that I kept from that time titled, "Cancer." It makes my heart sink whenever I look at it, probably for its truth. When my grandmother died, I felt like an orphan.

I had rented an apartment near Clark Street and Diversey Avenue in Chicago. I was hoping to reconnect with my sons, who



Clark and Diversey, Mixed Media - 1987



Chicago Zoo, Pastel - 1987



felt abandoned when I left the country in 1986. I continued my life in Chicago as I had lived it in Europe, drawing every aspect of it. At least my new stomping grounds were incredibly lively. My youngest son, Mark, came downtown and we reconnected by exploring the city by car and on foot. I drew everything from policemen sitting on barstools in shopping plazas eating hamburgers to the caged lions in the zoo. Even the pastry shop on the corner



Chicago Cops, pastel - 1987

with two Korean ladies decorating a cake became the subject of my work. Any bit of life was something to record. It was a way of continuing the lifestyle I had in Europe, which I missed. I remember sitting in the backseat of a taxi, drawing the driver in his red and green plaid shirt as well as the Playboy Bunny tag dangling from his rearview mirror. All the while I felt sad, but couldn't explain why.

One day when I was on a bus coming home from downtown I noticed a mother and child seated across from me. She was giving her baby a bottle. It was a moment in time, and brought back days long ago when I was feeding my babies. Descending at my stop I began crying as I walked down the street. Never before had I lived in the city of Chicago. My friends were all in the suburbs living their married lives as they had before. I didn't seem to fit anywhere. My sons had developed their own lives and I saw them from time to time.

When I reached my apartment I dried my eyes and sat down to think. Suddenly I said to myself, "This is no way to live my life." I remembered watching and loving the 1st flamenco show I saw in France in 1986 and saying, "One day I have to go live in Spain." I did some research on where to start out and in two weeks I was on my way to Sevilla and flamenco.

# Sevilla and the Casa de Cucarachas

On the day I arrived in Sevilla, Spain in 1988, I was so excited. The sun seemed to shine brighter there. I had been looking forward to this since I saw my first flamenco show in the south of France a few years prior. I loved it so. It was all of life to me: music, passion, fun, humor, grace and freedom of personal expression — all in one dance. I knew I would have to go to Spain one day.

Not knowing anyone or a word of Spanish was scary. I had enrolled in a language school and they found me a place to live. The taxi dropped me off in the old ghetto section of the city in a plaza with horse-drawn carriages and a majestic fountain situated in front of the grand Giralda Cathedral. I remember thinking, “I’m home.”

Everywhere I looked was a feast for my eyes. There were bougainvillea and orange trees lining the streets with the fragrance of orange blossoms permeating the air. The architecture and colorful tiles were so familiar. I had painted those designs on silk without ever having seen them before. There were tapas bars scattered around and there was so much life on the street.

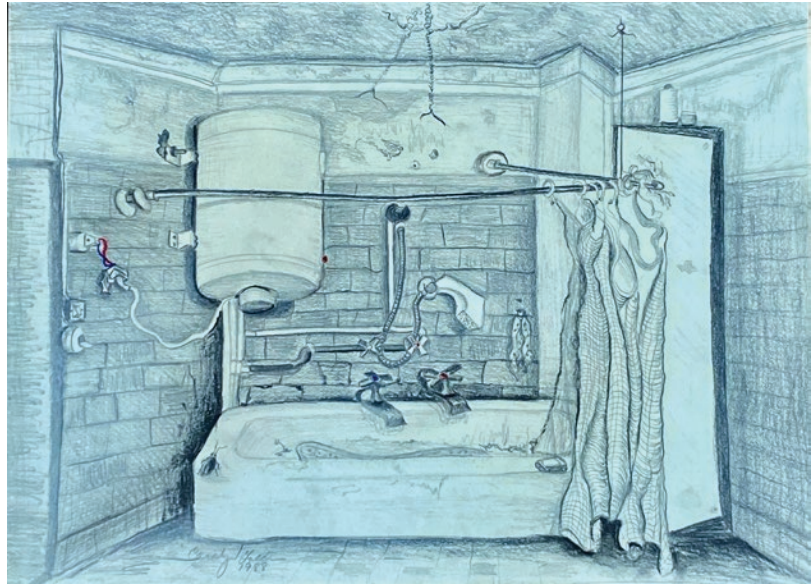
I was exhausted and there was no one to greet me at the school, not even a chair. So I took off my back brace, which was like a corset with steel bars in the back, and formed it into some sort of pillow. I lay down on the floor. I’m not sure who woke me, but I was given an address across the cobblestoned street near the ghetto section in the city where I would be living.

I approached a black door adorned with a Virgin Mary door knocker. After a few raps, the older woman who opened the door was unforgettable. Señora Sabater was a woman in her



Kitchen In Casa De Cucarachas, Charcoal - 1988

70s with gray hair that fell softly to her shoulders. She wore glasses and had on a shiny cream colored blouse, old yellowed pearls draped around her neck, and a red, knee length sheath skirt that zipped on the side but wouldn't close — leaving a large white oval visible. She had little thin bowlegs and wore white plastic ankle boots. I knew she would be the subject of my artwork.



**My Bathroom In The Casa De Cucarachas, Pencil - 1988**

Señora Sabater was the Spanish speaking landlord of this flat. Upon entering on my left I saw a long table with pieces of fabric and fashion magazines strewn about. A dress form stood off to the side. The place was old, dreary and dirty. The only lights were simply cords hanging from the ceiling with lightbulbs dangling.

She showed me to my small room where there was a bed, desk and chair. Beyond that there was a full length glass paned door that opened onto a patio that had a wrought iron railing and a lone flower pot. It really wasn't a patio, as it had no depth. But you could open



**Señora's Work Table, Charcoal - 1988**

the door and listen to the sounds of the street, noise of frying chicken in nearby houses, horses clopping along and women screaming when their purses were stolen. This flat was to be my home for almost a year, and during that time I would dance and fall in love with flamenco all over again.

I rented a room in what came to be known as "La Casa de Cucarachas"

One day while walking down the hallway in the flat I looked down to see a huge bug crawling alongside me. In my limited Spanish I screamed, "Hay un animal

aquí!” There’s an animal here. One of my flatmates, Gina from Switzerland poked her head out of her room, looked at the bug and nonchalantly said, “Ah Caroline that’s a cucaracha.” From that moment on I realized I was surrounded by them. They were in every corner of every room. Why hadn’t I noticed this before? I was 48 years old couldn’t speak Spanish and I knew no one there. I couldn’t afford to go live in a hotel for a year and didn’t want to go home. This was the most exciting area of Sevilla and I made a decision to stay for my art.



**Señora Sleeping After Dinner - 1988**

On my first night there I opened the bathroom door and it was a rude awakening. I remember not wanting to set my toothbrush down anywhere. The toilet had one of those tanks way up high with a chain you pulled to flush. One night when the toilet wouldn’t flush, I tried everything to fix the old relic without success. I can’t imagine why I even tried. The enamel in the bathtub was eaten away and the shower curtain rod was warped with the curtain unraveling and hanging by a thread. There was a hot water tank plugged in at the wall with red and blue wires exposed. Above the shower hanging from the ceiling was a chain with two little wires sticking out where a light fixture used to attach.

You entered the kitchen through a French door that had panes of thick smoky textured glass. One of those sections had been broken. The ancient stove on the left had a coffee pot on the burner and somehow there must have been a fire because the pot was all black and burned on the bottom. There were red wires exposed on the wall, everything was dirty, and there was no hot water.

There were five bedrooms in this “Casa de Cucarachas.” I lived there with señora Sabater, Julio, Brenda and Anna, who had all arrived before me.

Julio was an 18-year-old university student



**Señora Cutting A Pattern, Charcoal and Guache - 1989**



who lived there also and had a crush on me. I felt like his mother but others told me I was wrong. He was studious looking, skinny and wore round wire rimmed glasses. His mother had beaten Catholicism into him and that caused him to be rebellious. One day he asked me to teach him Hebrew so he could go fight in the Israeli Army. I kept telling him that was impossible and his mother would kill him. I didn't even know Hebrew so he inquired at his university searching for Jewish students who might be able to direct him. I never knew what his fascination was with Judaism and Israel. It was too difficult to have an in-depth conversation about this because he spoke quickly and only in Spanish. My comprehension couldn't keep up with him.

One day he came running to my room and begging me to go with him for support to a flat where Jewish people lived. I agreed and the following day he came running to my room with an address in-hand. That afternoon we went and knocked on their door. There was a light on but no one responded. It occurred to me much later that it was the Sabbath and they were probably observing it. I don't think Julio ever got in contact with them afterwards.

Listen, I have to tell you a side story real quick. Two weeks later a doctor I knew from Chicago came to Sevilla and contacted me for a visit. He pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket with an address on it and asked me, "Do you know where this is? I heard Jewish people live there." Amazingly it was the same address that Julio and I visited the previous Friday. Spain was devoted to Catholicism. I didn't even know anyone Jewish in Sevilla. Because this all seemed secretive I wondered if Jewish people were keeping a low profile there.

Okay, back to my story. Brenda was a 40-year-old American language teacher from Illinois who was full of life, had a great sense of humor, hated the cockroaches and loved young Spanish men. She was very flirty and never without a boyfriend. When I first moved in she wanted no part of me because I was American and she came to Spain just to be with the Spanish. Over time that changed and we became good friends.

Anna from Amsterdam moved in when Gina left, but she didn't stay long. She was disgusted with the place and was usually a little crabby. Someone else rented her space soon after she left. I never got to know her.

I spent every morning in my room listening to flamenco music. I became obsessed with

it and drove everyone crazy dancing and stomping my feet and clicking my castanets. The people living in the flat below used to complain that their light fixture was shaking. During the day I was busy going to the dancing schools to draw the flamenco dancers in motion.

The señora was a mystery. She seemed depressed and rarely spoke. She sat bent over at her old black Singer sewing machine in a small side room wearing her white winter jacket with a furry hood while she altered clothes. She had no family and revealed no history. She washed the floors only in the center and all the dirt would go out to the corners of the room inviting the roaches. One day I came in and the señora couldn't wait to show me that she sprayed the old eaten away black enamel bathtub floor with white paint. She was a character and I loved her for it.

In the evening, she sat on her long curved sofa, eating her dinner and afterwards either read the Bible, fell asleep or watched the TV — which was simply a black screen with a white horizontal line running across it. Later she would put on her pearls, spray her hair and go to church. Whatever she was doing, I would draw her. She didn't seem to mind and never asked to see it.

I drew a cockroach in every room. They were the bane of my existence and the best way I could describe my frustration with my living quarters. If I saw a flying roach I would begin screaming and the señora would come in with her broom and start flailing it around in the air to no avail. I invited friends over to cocktail parties knowing full well they would freak out when they saw the place. They also had a great sense of humor and laughter was my medicine for making a negative situation tolerable. I refused to look at the roaches and directed my life outside to the people of Sevilla.

Towards the end of my stay I taped all my drawings of the señora on my walls. It was a good way for me to have a visual of a certain body of work. One night she knocked on my door and wanted to see the drawings. I was very nervous because I drew what I felt, the



Señora Cutting A Pattern, Charcoal and Guache - 1989



**Señora At Her Sewing Machine**

sadness. She walked around looking slowly and quietly. Finally, she turned to me and said, “Eres muy inteligente” (you’re very intelligent), and walked out. She bought me a bouquet of flowers and quietly put them in a corner of my room.

Before I left the cockroach house the señora insisted on helping me take my art around to the galleries to see if they would be interested in selling it. I’ll never forget her carrying those heavy folders down the street. I could barely have managed it. She could hardly walk herself but she was determined to do this. It was so emotional for me. Though the galleries appreciated my drawings, they didn’t think their clientele would buy them. I wasn’t surprised. They didn’t have the upbeat personality of Sevilla. After I moved on from her place I returned many times to find the señora but she just vanished and no one seemed to know where she went.

When it came time to move out of the flat, Julio went out and bought me a black and gold watch with little sparkly stones in the center. It was very touching and when I told him I loved it he said, “If I had diamonds I would give them to you.”

Today when I see a roach crawling across my floor I go crazy over-reacting. Many times I’ve looked back and wondered how I was able to remain in that situation. But much of the world lives like that and not by choice. For me it was an incredible change from my prior life and a great challenge to survive it in the best way possible. I could go or I could stay and see it through. If I left I would have learned nothing and I could have stayed home. If I stayed and made it work I would become stronger and my sense of self would change, thereby affecting my personal and artistic growth. Looking back, it was one of the funniest and most interesting times of my life. I also got to know an intriguing older woman who became my good friend and constant model. Drawing the señora gave my artwork more depth. It changed from the quick gesture drawings to the essence of the person.

## A Robbery in Sevilla -1989

It was 1989 and I was 49 years old. Every day, I walked down the main street of Sevilla, Calle Sierpes. I loved watching the heavy set women selling flowers and carrying babies slung across their chests. I stood in the street and drew them over and over. They permeated the bars near where I lived in the oldest section of Sevilla, usually approaching the tourists with bouquets.

Even though I had been living there for two years, I certainly didn't look Spanish. Wearing black hose, a black straight skirt, red shirt and a bolero jacket, I was still a foreigner that they could immediately spot. They approached me in cafes usually attired in their colorfully printed aprons tied over their dresses with their chubby legs stuffed into little black slippers. They fascinated me.

One day while sitting in a cafe in Sevilla, a fat woman with long, dark wavy hair and large features carrying a bouquet in one hand and a coughing baby in the crook of her other arm approached me and begged for money.

I thought back to my experience in Aix-En-Provence, France when I was robbed by two young girls and had to chase them to retrieve my wallet.

At that moment I looked down at my hand and became aware of my grandmother's valuable ring which had been a fixture on my finger for years. I asked myself, "What will I do with it? Where will I put it?" I was frantic. Returning to my room, I hid it in my



Bar El Rinconcillo, Pastel, Sevilla, Spain - 1988



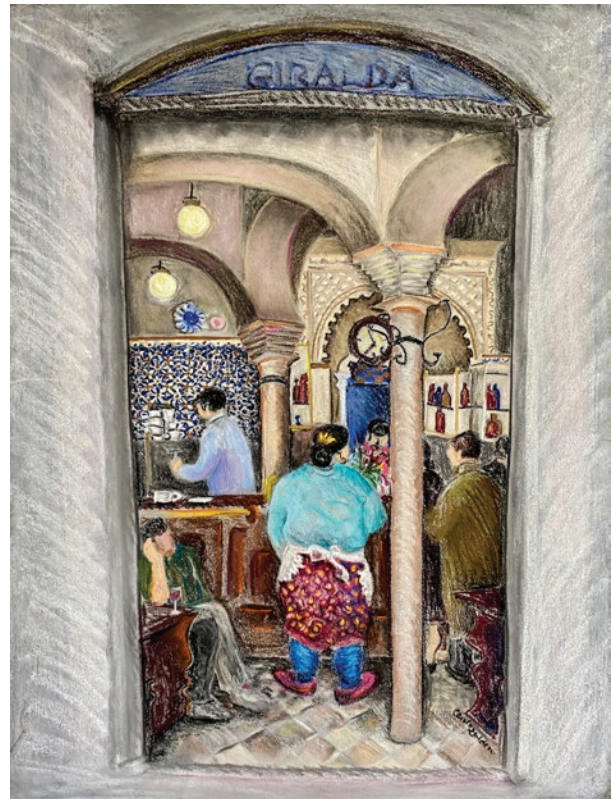
armoire under a medication kit apart from all of the other costume jewelry.

A night or two afterwards, a robbery took place in my room while I was sleeping. I awakened to see everything in total disarray, clothing strewn everywhere, drawers pulled out and the floor covered with stuff. Nothing was where I left it. I must have been watched by the robbers for quite a while or they wouldn't have known where I lived. I felt targeted.

Shocked and terrified, I began shaking and gasping just to think that I remained asleep while the strangers were robbing me. In my panic, I checked to see if the ring was gone. Thank God the thieves didn't get it. Even better that it wasn't on my finger. But they did get my passport, money and other valuables. How could anyone get into my second floor room that had tall windows and wooden doors that closed over them with a padlock? It was hard to believe that little fingers could be trained to squeeze through a crack in the door, unscrewing the metal plate that attached the lock to let the doors open.

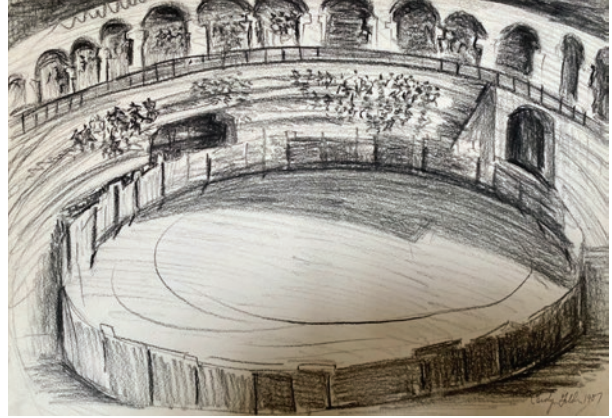
Following all this I needed to travel to Madrid to get a new passport. I went alone and struggled to explain everything that happened to the authorities in Spanish. I felt so inadequate and remember being terribly nervous. What would happen if they didn't believe me? Would they send me home to get another one? I eventually got my story out and was relieved when they granted me a new passport. The whole thing was a nightmare. The rule is to be aware of your surroundings all the time, especially in a foreign country.

I was told a week later that the police caught the young boy who was robbing people up and down my street.



Bar Ghiralda, Pastel, Sevilla, Spain - 1988

# The Bullfight of Sevilla



It's a sunny day filled with beauty and blood. I arrive at the Plaza De Toros with my pencils and sketchbook not knowing just what to expect. As I find my way up the stairs to a seat amidst thousands of Spanish people, I look out at the men and it seems like a sea of tall black hats.

The corrida below is empty. "Oh wait! Listen to that music!" Out comes a band with trumpets blaring to announce: "HERE WE ARE!" It's so exciting it makes me want to dance.

Now I see the matador dressed in his suit of lights. He's wearing a black bolero jacket trimmed in gold and sequins that is sparkling in the sunlight. His matching pants are tight and come to the knee with hot pink stockings that fit into what look like black ballet slippers. On his head is a black hat that looks like it has Mickey Mouse ears. There are other toreros also colorfully dressed in suits decorated with silver threads while there were ridiculous toreros running around with hot pink capes trying to distract the bull. It's all just thrilling and I keep saying to myself: "I wish my children were here, they would love to see this pageantry. It's spectacular."

Suddenly, I see a bull charging out of I don't know where. He's snorting, puffing, thrashing and kicking up dust as he runs around wildly in a place that is foreign to him. A horse that is completely covered in a padded coat enters with a portly rider called a "picador" who is wearing a black, wide brimmed hat, a decorative suit and is carrying a long lance. "Oh my God! He stabbed the bull behind the head and there is blood everywhere and the bull lowers his head." I'm so upset that I want to run out screaming, but I can't. I feel so alone while I listen to the crowd yelling. In my head I keep hearing my Spanish friends saying that bullfighting is an art. The matador comes out and waves his red cape to get the bull to charge while people are yelling, "Ole!" In the midst of this, a person next to me who sees me covering my eyes in distress, attempts to explain in Spanish that the matador can't move his feet on the pass of the cape. This helps me understand that there is a rhythm and beauty in the two adversaries' relationship.

As I watch the matador thrust his sword into the animal, I try to make sense of it. This has been a part of Spanish history and culture for centuries. It's a bloody sport that reminds me of gladiators or even boxing — although those don't involve an animal. Power and dominance are what's important in this fight. Sitting here, the temptation is to judge the horror of what I'm seeing. But I tell myself to snap out of it. I came here to learn about another culture, so I better go educate myself about what part of this is art and its nuances. I didn't draw anything today. But I will return again and again until I can feel and draw the moment and beauty of movement, the grace and balance, almost like a dance, and the courage it must take to keep one's feet still in front of a charging bull.



**The Bullfight, Paint - 1988**



**Sevilla Bullfight, Charcoal 1988**



**The Bullfight, Paint- 1989**

# Flamenco in Sevilla

It was in 1988 when I was seated in an old ornately decorated theater in the south of France awaiting my first flamenco show. From stage left entered a troupe of people in all shapes, sizes and ages to be seated in chairs that spanned the stage. In the center was an old fat woman with her hair in a top bun wearing a brightly colored dress with a fringed shawl, fancy jewelry and black heels. All of a sudden she began to cry out in Spanish, “Aye, aye, aye.” She sounded almost like a cantor. Her voice was powerful and began the most colorful and passionate show with flamenco dancers and guitarists. Even the children had all the macho dance moves of their grandfathers. This was a family full of life, music, passion, fun, humor and freedom of expression all in one dance. In that moment I fell in love with flamenco. I knew then that I would go to Spain someday.

It is 1989 in Sevilla. I’m dressed in my black bolero jacket, a red shirt, black sheath skirt and simple black pumps with chunky heels like all the Spanish women wear. I can hear the beat of my feet on the street, as I walk to the count in my head “UNO, uno dos TRES, cuatro cinco SEIS, siete OCHO nueve DIEZ.” It’s like the beat in any music that gets into my soul and propels me to get up and dance.

All that counting in my head came from the flamenco dancing class I enrolled in months after arriving in Sevilla. When I entered the school I found Anna, a stern teacher and lots of little girls dressed in polka dotted ruffly dresses wearing little black Mary Janes shoes with heels. The teacher didn’t know me or what I was doing there and it was a little embarrassing





because I was 49 years old. I was determined to dance flamenco so I did my best falling all over myself learning the steps until my feet danced without me thinking about it. All that practicing with castanets in the “Cockroach House” helped me to improve.

In order to better understand and get the feeling of flamenco I went to dancing schools — some famous and others quite small — and asked the teachers if they would allow me to sit and draw the dancers while they were dancing. Doing that really made me become one with the music. It also enabled me to draw the feeling and motion without any time to think. My goal was to describe a dancer in as few lines as possible, just seconds per drawing. I always left a few drawings with the class as a thank you for allowing me to be there.

Often I found myself in scary places. One door I knocked on was answered by a Romani family of 10 people just standing there staring at me while I nervously tried to explain that I wanted to draw their dancers. They did let me, though with skeptical looks on their faces, and I felt pressured to draw something credible.

Thirty five years later a Spanish friend in Sevilla walked into a popular dancing school there and saw my drawings framed and hanging on the wall. She recognized them immediately and said, “That’s my friend, Carolyn.” She photographed and posted them on Facebook for me to see.

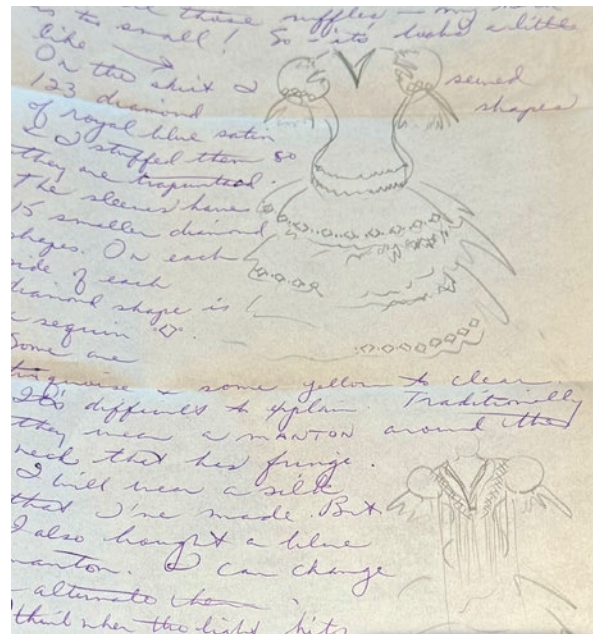
Every year there is a spring dance called “The Feria” in Sevilla. The señora made me a beautiful three-tiered black dress for the dance. I spent weeks sewing shiny blue, cotton-stuffed squares with sequins going around each row. I bought a pair of gaudy, blue plastic earrings, wore an artificial rose in my hair and a brilliantly painted scarf. All the Spanish women typically donned dresses with huge bright polka dots. I got in a taxi and the driver said, “That’s the most beautiful dress I’ve ever seen.” I felt like Cinderella.



Photo by Dietlind Castor

The Feria was spread out over acres of land covered with little red and white vertically striped tents or “Casitas” adjacent to each other. Each family had it’s own casita decorated like a charming living room with photos of the family and paintings on the walls. Invitees could come to eat, drink and dance all week long. Everyone was like family for a week, a fiesta unlike any other.

This was the promise of that flamenco show I saw in the south of France — and it was my dream come true.



Drawing of My Flamenco Dress In A Letter to My Father

# Exhibit of Dancers in Triana, Spain

It was 1990, the opening of my exhibit of flamenco dancer drawings at a popular bar in Triana, Spain. I was so excited. Here I was, a outsider having been accepted to display my work for the Spanish people. It was overwhelming! I framed all the drawings and my friends helped me set up the show.

The poster read:

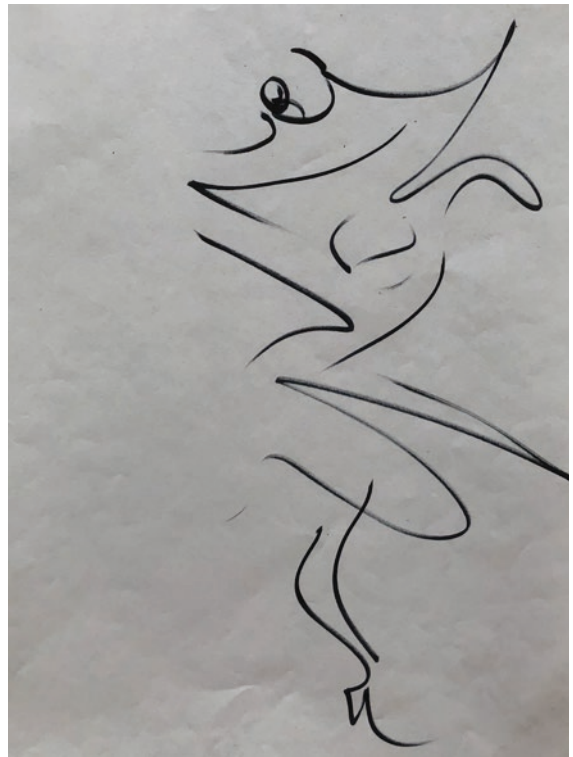
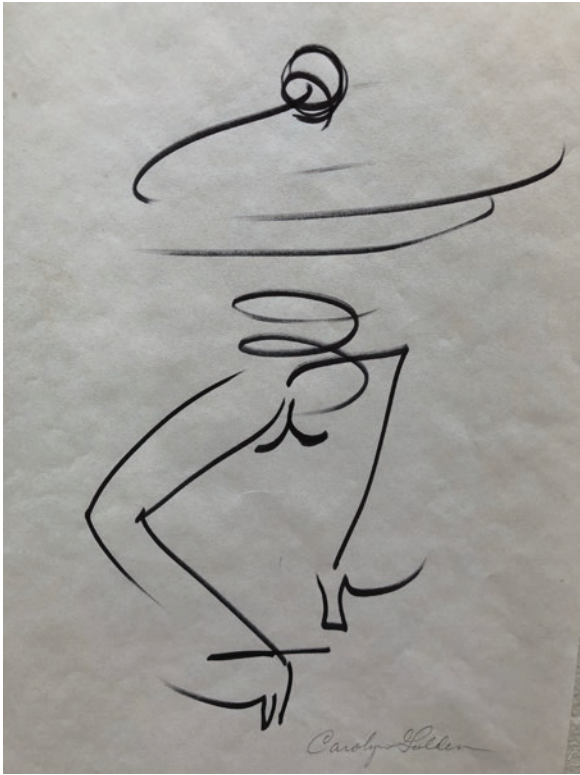
“El proposito de mi arte es expresar con movimiento y emoción como siento mi vida en este momento. Esta exposición es el resultado de mi participación, entendimiento y gozo, en la vida de los Sevillanos.”

“The purpose of my art is to express with movement and emotion how I feel about my life at this moment. This exhibition is the result of my participation, understanding of and joy that I feel through the life of the Sevillians.”







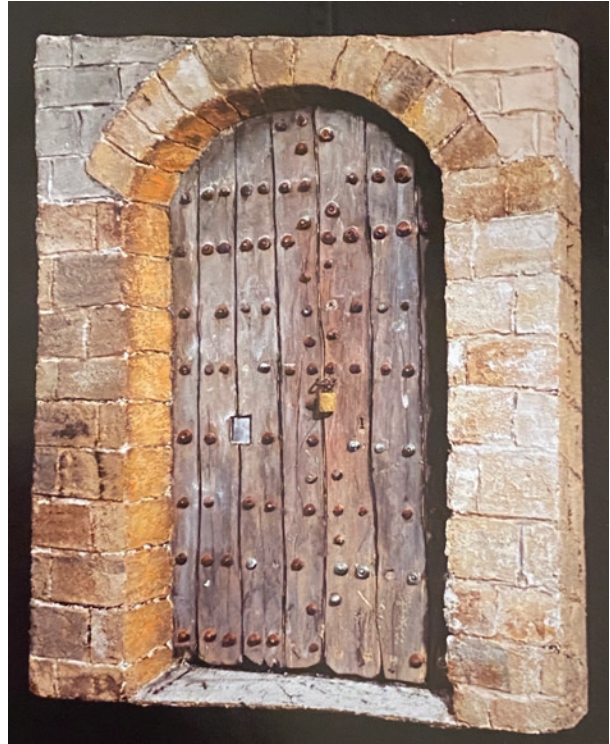


# Maria Salles

It was 1990 when we entered a smoky, dimly lit bar in Sevilla, Spain to be seated in upright, hand painted chairs at a small wooden table. I felt like I was sitting in a doll house. My friends and I ordered glasses of wine while we waited to watch a flamenco show. I had been living in Sevilla for four years and had seen many flamenco dancers. I hoped that this show would have the feeling of gypsy dancing, that which is spontaneous and raw as the dancer performs.

The room was filled with as many tables as they could fit into the small space. The walls were a warm wood and as I spanned the room I could see several tourists as well as Spaniards. It was difficult to breathe because of the smoke. The air was filled with the aroma of tapas, paella and pork while glasses of wine were filled and placed on the table in front of us. There was some recorded guitar music playing to give us the feeling of the evening. The stage was set with several chairs towards the back for the singers and guitarists who would accompany the featured dancers. Next to the guitar player was a male singer belting out his voice, clapping his hands and stamping his feet to the beat of the guitar.

Six female dancers in their colorful tiered flamenco dresses entered and began the simple dance of Spain called, “Sevillanas” to give us a taste of what was to come. This was the first and most common dance I learned upon moving there. There were four parts to it; each one being a little different. Everyone can learn this dance and I practiced it every day with castanets to learn to coordinate everything. At any time you could walk through a park or the Plaza De Espana and see grandmothers and their grandsons dancing this in their everyday clothes. The trick was to learn to use your hands, arms and legs together. Of course grandmothers are the exception as they don't move as they used to. If you follow the steps accurately it can be a little robotic but pretty. But if you dance it so much that it becomes part of you then you can play



with it and give it your own personality as in any dance. It's like doing anything so much that you become an expert at it and you don't have to think about what you're doing. I had seen little children and old men doing this dance with great humor.

I could never have imagined what I was about to see when those introductory Sevillana dancers walked off the stage.

Her hair was shoulder length, dark, curly and wild. She wasn't tall or gorgeous. Wearing a black tiered dress with bright red layers of fabric underneath, she gathered herself for a moment. As the guitar music began, Maria Salles paused and posed for a moment, head up and tilted back with a serious look on her face typical of flamenco. She pulled her skirt up a bit and with her first move she flew into dancing flamenco with her entire soul, as she had danced it her whole life. She moved with a fury as the red fabric flew up and encircled her in the air while she swirled and stamped her black heels on the wooden floor. She transformed into a fireball. It wasn't educated — it was simply felt. Something she was born with. It seemed as though everything inside of me was dancing with her. It was 1990 and I had been living in Sevilla for four years, but I'd never been as moved as I was watching her. Thirty five years later I still remember her and the passion with which she danced.



**"Flamenco Dancer" - 1991**

# Semana Santa, Holy Week in Sevilla

It is nighttime in Sevilla on the opening evening of Semana Santa. I'm presently standing in the street with friends and a sea of people who are waiting with anticipation for the first Paso of the evening to appear around the corner. I'm so squashed in the crowd that my feet aren't touching the ground. It almost feels like I'm floating — supported by peaceful strangers.

It's 1987 and for much of the year that I've lived in Sevilla the entire city has been preparing mentally and physically for Holy Week. My friends have talked to me about this repeatedly, describing it in every detail. It will last a week and the Pasos, or floats, will be carried through the city streets nightly for all to adore.

I think back to a couple of months prior when I went to several churches to see how they were getting ready for the holiday. They built scaffolds so that they could carefully transfer the delicate statues of the Virgin Mary and Christ from their elevated places at the altars to the platforms. They are experts at this, caring for each of these historic artistic creations. I thought it might be disrespectful to take them down. For the onlooker it seemed like they would be too fragile to be moved. But it's more important for the statues to be out amongst the people.

This reminded me of certain occasions in the synagogue when we take our torahs out of the ark and walk them down the aisles amid the people so they can reach out and touch the torah with the corner of their tallit.

But back to the practice session in Sevilla — underneath each Paso, I could see the costaleros, men who were practicing walking underneath, bent over and balancing the roughly four thousand-pound Paso on the padded napes of their necks. I couldn't imagine the weight of this on their shoulders. It had to be physically grueling and ultimately dangerous. But the costaleros consider it an honor to carry these floats and their passion for the story of Christ is the great motivator. There are 20-40 men under each Paso and they have to alternate or they wouldn't be able to survive the weight. I think of myself and how I've overused my body lifting and carrying my art over the years. It's taken a toll on my limbs and joints.

As I followed this practice procession down the street, while drawing it, a curious and

devoted crowd of Sevillanos anticipating the holiday accompanied me down the narrow streets.

An older woman who saw me drawing was all excited watching me. She wanted to show me something and took me by the arm to a church that the Virgin was taken from. She introduced me to the lady who made and embroidered the special dress and cape that the Madonna was wearing. They spoke so fast I could hardly understand what they were explaining, but I could see how proud this lady was of her artistic needlework.

Everyone seemed to be doing their part as a community, working together and dedicating themselves to this common goal: bringing a sacred ritual back to life every spring.

In Spain, I feel this unity of purpose often.

It reminds me of when my friend, Juan Antonio took me to see another holiday in Valencia, Spain. The community spent all year creating works of art called the “Fallas of Valencia.” Fallas are satirical scenes made up of sculpted figures that reach toward the sky and can be as tall as the nearby buildings. They’re filled with humor and full of life. Created from wood, cardboard and papier-mâché, there were eight-hundred of them planted all over Valencia on street corners and in plazas. Everywhere I looked there were colorful towering sculptures that seemed to have just arrived from Disneyland. Each falla reminded me of a pile of stacked cartoon-like figures on different themes.

On the fourth day of viewing the fallas, special firemen came and burned them down to the ground. I was so shocked to see this art turned into ashes. There is an art to burning them, as the highest part of the sculpture must fall last. I remember watching one consumed by flames except for the head of a horse on top that had yet to fall. There were piles of ashes all over the city. This was followed by an explosion of firecrackers strung above the streets and the most spectacular fireworks I’ve ever seen. Soon after that, the artisans begin creating new fallas for the coming spring. This is their concept of destroying the old in order to create the new. I can identify with this. When I painted silk I had a habit of throwing out the finished piece in order to create the new one. What I had completed wasn’t as important as the journey through to the next piece.

Getting back to Sevilla and the night of Semana Santa, I’m still standing sandwiched in between the masses. It’s a little frightening. What if everybody goes wild? So far I’m still in one piece. I look down both sides of the very narrow streets lined with apartments with wrought iron balconies filled with people and flower pots. All around me is a sense of respect and unity for one another as the excitement fills the air.

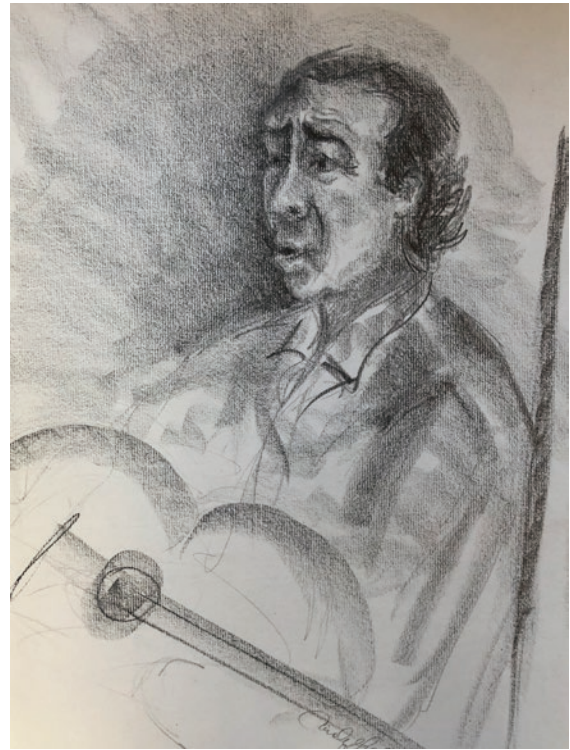
Suddenly the aroma of orange blossoms is replaced with the fragrance of incense and I can hear the blaring of off-key

trumpets and the beating of drums. Coming around the corner is the most magnificent Paso made of elaborate gold and silver designs. It's adorned with tiered elegant candelabras and an abundance of bouquets of white roses that encircle the elevated Virgin. The Madonnas are dressed in magnificent embroidered robes and velvet fabrics. Tiers of tall candles flicker as they reach for the heavens. Tassels and fringes sway from the decorative canopy above. With each step the Paso comes alive as it moves with the music from side to side down the street. It is a true work of art. There is drama from the crowd gasping in awe of what they see. It reminds me of the 4th of July and the sense of awe I experience at fireworks. There is a man in front of the float who calls out instructions to start, stop or carry so that those men who are hidden from view know what to do. As the float passes I catch a glimpse of the sneakers walking beneath it.

The light each Paso emits in the darkness makes me swell inside. It is a moving spiritual experience no matter what your religion, though I did feel like an alien. From time to time a male flamenco singer appears on a balcony and begins to passionately chant his love for the Virgin Mary as she passes by. It is truly theater.

This procession is followed by penitents dressed in robes wearing white cone-shaped hoods with their faces covered and holes cut out for their eyes. The Klan!!! They looked terrifying to me. After a week these statues are returned to their homes on the altars to wait for next year's Holy Week.

Early in the morning at the end of the last procession of the evening, having had no sleep, my friends take me out, as is the tradition, to eat churros dipped in chocolate — so delicious. This was the same community of friends who brought me into their lives and taught me about everything Spanish, especially this awesome evening.



Singer Semana Santa, Sevilla, Charcoal 1989

34

# One Hundred Year Old Spanish House 1989

At the end of my nine months living in the cockroach house, my friend Brenda and I moved down the street to a 100-year-old house in the same charming area of Sevilla. It was

such a privilege to enter the decorative wrought iron gate to an inner patio that was filled with colorful tiles and planters of beautiful flowers every day. To the left and up one flight of stairs that had wrought iron banisters was our new home. On the landing I was faced with a huge oil painting of someone seated in a chair, probably an old relative. There were four bedrooms, an entry hallway with one of those old coatracks, and a living room with treasures of hand carved furniture. From the fireplace mantel to the beamed wooden ceiling there was a giant mirror framed in ornate gold. A couple of old portraits decorated the walls. And at each end of the off-white fabric covered sofa, there were carved dark wood side tables that supported ugly lamps. The dining room was off the living room and there was an area that I worked in that was a great light-filled space with a large wall on which I could hang my artwork. As in all my art studios, I set up two sawhorses with a long board that made a table for me to work on.

The floors were a rust colored tile and there were floor to ceiling windows that were protected with wooden doors throughout the parlor. Because there was no air conditioning or heat, when it was hot out we would wash the tile floors and let the air fill the rooms to cool them. In the winter I would sleep in three sweaters, sweatpants, socks and a scarf. We would also go up from time to time to the roof to sit outside in the sun.

My friend from the cockroach house, Brenda, lived with me and two other ladies. Marta was a likable girl, a native of Sevilla who was a teacher. Clara was an uppity ballet dancer from



Sweden who appeared to be superior to everyone and seemed to always have her nose in the air. She had three different personalities: the good little girl who wanted to please, the bad girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead, and the intelligent adult who was cultured in some ways; she spoke French, English, Spanish and German. She had no limits and disrespected others' property, using everything as though it belonged to her. Brenda moved out because she hated living with her.

Clara took an art class on Saturdays and had a crush on the teacher for a year but she never went out with him. She helped him with the publicity for his classes. She told me that he didn't want her so she sat down and planned ways to get him. I suggested that maybe she just call and invite him out. She responded, "Oh no, I couldn't do that. He would want the pleasure of asking me."

In an effort to get his attention she decided to become an artist. One day I lent her my box of very soft expensive pastels and at the end of the day she said, "I'm finished." When I asked her for the pastels she replied, "They're finished too." The whole box?" I was furious at myself and should have known better.

Clara was both frustrating and amusing to me. Because she permeated the whole space and bugged me so much, she became the subject of my art. I drew her in each room wearing her pink ballet slippers.

One day while I was visiting my boyfriend in Germany, I saw some chocolates in the shape of cockroaches that were covered with gold colored foils that described their wings. I bought at least 25 of them and for my next party in our new house, I placed chocolate cockroaches going up the stairway and everywhere in the interior, even crawling up the mirrors. So it was the new cockroach house and a riot to hear old friends screaming upon entering.

Everyday I felt how special it was to be living in this beautiful old house. Most of the time I was out drawing flamenco dancers and the life going on in the bars. When at home, I enjoyed baking brownies and bread for my friends. We even had a Thanksgiving dinner. Spanish friends were dropping in from time to time and I continued to have guests visiting from other countries.



"Clara Stoking The Fire," Pastel 1989





“Clara In The Dining Room,” Pastel 1989



“Clara In The Bedroom”, 100 Year Old House - 1989

We all lived there for a year, at which time the lease ran out and I had to begin to search for a new place to live in and continue my art. I really didn't feel like moving again. It meant I'd have to get up very early in the morning, go to the newsstand and search the Spanish newspaper to see what was for rent. I didn't know who to trust and had to beat out everyone else who was looking for a new flat. I remember it was pouring rain out the morning I was supposed to have an appointment to meet a landlord. I stood outside, drenched for a long time waiting for him to arrive. But I got the place. Then it was time to set up a studio again in a new empty space that was void of laughter.

The first thing I did wherever I lived was to put up photos of my friends and family to make it a home. I had to start somewhere. But living there was not nearly home or similar to the old section of Sevilla. I was just on an ordinary street without much charm, bars, cafes or life. I didn't feel connected to anything that identified Sevilla. That was the beginning of the end of Sevilla for me.

“Who am I and where do I belong?” At the age of 51, that was the question I asked myself in 1990 after living and making art in Europe for 4 years. Feeling lost and wondering

if I should stay in Spain, I wandered in to a Romani fortune teller in Sevilla looking for an answer. Her home was small and a little dark with several framed photos of the Virgin Mary, Jesus and various knick-knacks everywhere. She was a heavysset older woman wearing a black dress with lots of jewelry and a floral printed scarf wrapped around her head. We sat at a small table covered with a black and red embroidered fringed mantilla. Taking my hand in hers she read my lifeline and told me that I'd have a long life and that I was going to go live in Madrid. "Aha! I knew she would know the answer." Over the next few weeks I spent time with friends reminiscing and preparing to move on to my next adventure.



Living Room, 100-Year Old House - 1989



New Studio, Sevilla, Pastel - 1989

35

# Madrid, Spain 1990

I arrived in Madrid by train from Sevilla to an old hotel on a dirty busy street in the center of the city.

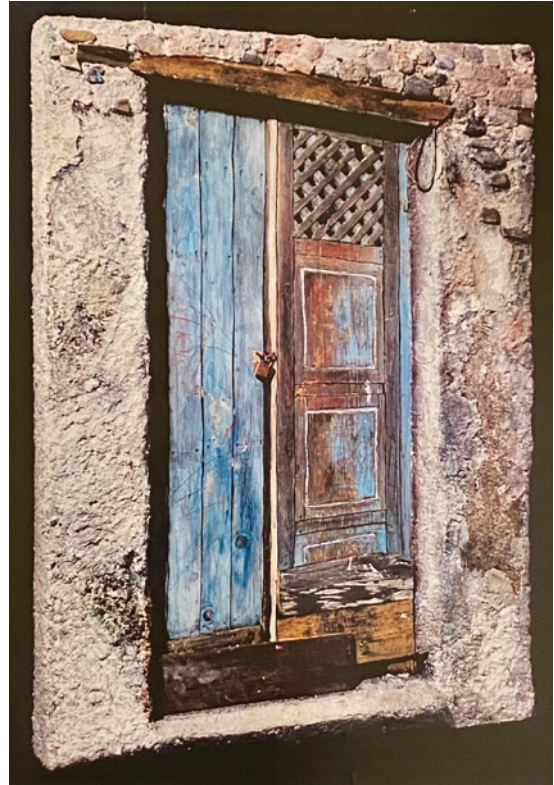
The room was small and bare with a shower drain right in the middle of the floor. I was so used to living in strange conditions that I just accepted it. I first decided to go out to dinner. Taking my sketchbook with me I searched until I found a Chinese restaurant where I knew I could order vegetables. While seated

and feeling uncomfortable alone, I grabbed the sketchbook and began to draw whatever was in front of me, the Chinese lantern, screen and table settings to pass the time. Ordinarily I wouldn't notice these things because they are so commercial but I needed to focus on something to pass the time until my food arrived.

On my way back to the hotel I noticed a homeless man making a bed on the street for his wife, covering her with a blanket and tucking her in. There was a tenderness that remains memorable to this day. I wondered what life conditions led them to have this life on the street as I do whenever I see a homeless person. As I walked on I noticed a brightly lit shoe store with all kinds of sexy gold and black high heels that were decorated with large red and black bows. I thought they were an example of high fashion.

Feeling sad and alone, I needed to hear a familiar voice so I searched for a phone and called my friend, Juan Antonio in Sevilla. He was elated to hear from me. "Hola, Carolina. I was thinking about you. Where are you?" "Oh, I'm at a Hotel in Madrid." "What street are you on?" When I told him he yelled, "What? "Estás en la calle de las prostitutas." "You're on the street of prostitutes!" It was then that I noticed ladies of the night on many street corners.

Following that, I went to an agency that found me a rental apartment which was



completely empty. That enabled me to set up another art studio. The first thing I did was go out and buy a bed, a chair and a TV. That rocking chair became my greatest comfort. The place was such a void that it was hard to feel at home.

During the day I went out walking and drawing the life and architecture in that beautiful city. Madrid had a darker and heavier feeling than Sevilla. I

spent time drawing in Casa De Campo park which was filled with peacocks that sauntered around with their gorgeous tails opening like exquisite fans. From there I would go to El Prado museum to see Velazquez's paintings and to draw the people viewing the art.

But mostly I remember how it felt working without a community. The paintings I created were no longer influenced by an old world and my love of it but more from an emptiness I felt.

Yet they are of great value to me today for they are the truth and a sharp departure from everything else. Each of these artworks were collages, made with pieces cut, torn and glued onto paper and painted. I think I felt a loss of fun and felt glued in Madrid. The artwork shows this. Much of it was made with pieces of corrugated paper ripped from the shipping of my art from Sevilla to Madrid.

One day, out of the blue, I was contacted by my cousin, Donald who I hadn't seen in at least 20 years. He was in Madrid for the opening of his art exhibit at a gallery. I was thrilled to hear from him. Over the years I kept track of his work. He had become internationally recognized for making art using everyday industrial type objects and transforming them into beautiful sculptures. I remember seeing an interesting circular textured piece of his from a distance. When I got up closer I saw it was made of fly swatters. There was also a book titled "The Book Of Knowledge" with a hole cut out of the center. Such a brilliant idea!

I remembered back to the 1960s when I was a young mom in my thirties and Donald was a hippie in his twenties studying ceramics at the University of Wisconsin. His teacher was a



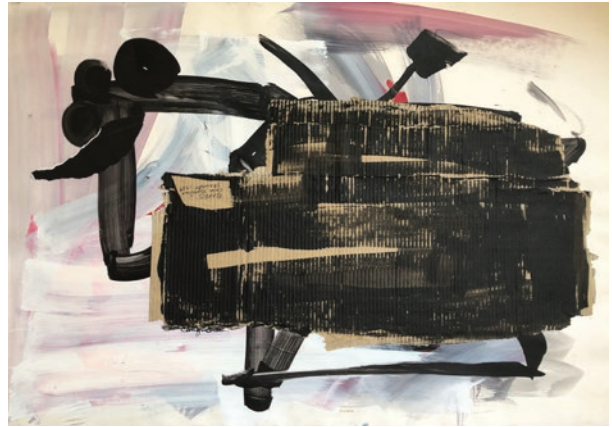
**"Bullfight In Madrid I," Paint - 1991**

renown ceramicist. Donald was the most creative and innovative artist and I was in awe of his talent. At that time my passion was making pottery. He would come over to see my kids and then we'd sit in my floral-wallpapered kitchen while we discussed ceramics. After college he went to live in New York and make a name for himself.

In Madrid he invited me to the gallery to see him set up his show and he included me in the gallerists' dinner. I remember a long dinner table in an industrial feeling room, with lots of gallery people impressed with Donald who was just himself and had a confident and powerful presence. Seeing him again was a highlight.

In my search for life and people in Madrid I found the American Club of Madrid where I met and spent time with Lily and Fernando, a wonderful Cuban couple who became my world. They enjoyed my art and talked so much about Cuba and how they lived under Castro's rule.

Nine months later, the answer to, "Who am I and where do I belong" became clearer. Did I want to be part of my family and sons' lives was the question. It was time to come home to another new world, the one I hadn't known for the past five years.



**"Bullfight In Madrid II," Mixed Media - 1991**



**Madrid Abstract, Mixed Media - 1991**

## Dietlind and Hiking in Spain

One day in 1990 I found myself on a mountain in the south of Spain surrounded by a group of German speaking Austrian mountain climbers wearing knee-high socks, heavy boots, leather lederhosen and hats with feathers sticking out of them. Their legs were like tree trunks. How was I going to communicate with them? And how was I going to make it around the mountain with this group of guys who were already laughing at the American? I felt so alien standing there with my twiggy legs in my sneakers.

A week prior, my friend Dietlind, a tall elegant blonde photographer from Germany whom I had met while living in a French village, invited me to go mountain walking with her and some friends. I said, “I don’t climb mountains and I’m scared of heights.” “But Caroline, it’s a really easy walk and you don’t even need boots.” She was used to traveling the world carrying heavy cameras on her back trudging in the sun, snow and rain searching for intriguing sites and people to photograph. I should have known that she had no idea of what an easy walk was. But I let her convince me to go.

I thought back to 1986 when I met her in Séguret. She took an interest in me partly because I was an artist from the United States and maybe because I came to Europe alone for my art. During our stay she had taken several photos of me drawing in cafes in France and sent them to me with the accompanying articles always written in German. We became friends over the years and I visited her at her home in Lindau, Germany. When I moved on to Spain, Dietlind came to see how the work was evolving and photographed me dancing in my flamenco dress in the streets of Sevilla.

Presently, on the mountain with the hikers, I felt absurd but tried to be a good sport. Unable to communicate in German, I walked along quietly terrified of looking down. I remember focusing on a



Photo by Dietlind Castor

tree that seemed to be spinning and feeling like I'd faint. One of the guys saw me faltering, and picked me up, put me under his arm like a rag doll with floppy legs and carried me around under his left arm until I got my bearings and wriggled out of his grip. Then he put me down, sat me on a stone and pulled a salami out of his back pocket. He hacked off a piece and offered it to me. That was the last thing I wanted. Meanwhile, Dietlind was entertained by the whole situation, busily documenting all the interactions as well as the scenery with her camera. I think I became a sort of mascot that day. By the end of the walk I felt relieved yet triumphant. Maybe a sense of humor saved the day. Ultimately we all had a good time and the group awarded me an honorary Austrian hiking pin. Hilarious!

For days afterward I could barely walk up and down the stairs my legs were so sore. But it was worth it to have an incredible experience and a good laugh then and all these years later.

## A Sneaker's Life

I'm a high-top, I'm a Reebok. I'm the coolest sneaker in the store with a spotlight on me. Here comes a lady looking for shoes. Over here, pick me, pick me! It's a perfect fit. I'm so excited I'm tongue-tied." I'm on my way and I wonder where we're going.

It seems this lady is an artist and she is bringing me on her journey through Europe. We're in France and she keeps walking and walking. I'm getting worn out and I'm still young. Wait a minute, she's got me walking on cobblestones and they're killing my soles.

I'm meeting lots of different people wearing old shoes here. There's Herbert, who is a very large pudgy comfortable guy with a beard and mustache. He's wearing Birkenstocks and they look like they're on their last legs, completely beat up, stretched out and faded. They sort of look like Herbert. My owner takes them, puts them in her room, gets her pencil and paper and draws the whole room with the shoes in it. I wonder why she would do that.

Along comes Sabina who is wearing escadrilles that look like they were nearly drowned. Every soft part of them has totally collapsed in on itself and all the threads that make up the soles are frayed and sticking out in every direction. "Well that's the end of those. Wait a minute, she's taking those shoes, putting them in her room and drawing them too. Why doesn't she draw me?"

That afternoon she began throwing all of her own shoes on a big, soft cushy rust-colored chair that has a rattan base and back. She has boots that are worn out, (she should like those), and puffy, fluffy turquoise slippers, some sexy black heels with sling backs and open toes and some white gladiator sandals. Now she's drawing all of those.

*What about me?*

I think we've moved on to Spain now because I hear lots of loud music and she bought a new pair of black shoes



Sabina's Shoes



with high heels and an elastic band going across the instep. She's enrolled in a dance class and there are lots of other black heels around me, tapping, clicking and stepping. She's really not a very good dancer because she's falling all over herself. I'm glad I'm sitting this one out. Sometimes she goes to other dance classes and draws the dancers. I see one flamenco dancer wearing those same black shoes but how can she be dancing in them? One heel is very crooked and her toes are peeking through on both sides while she is stamping, banging her heels and torturing those shoes. I'm glad I'm a sneaker. My owner is going up to that dancer and asking her if she could buy her shoes. She sold them to us and this is the worst pair I've seen yet. Not only were they split open on top but the soles revealed three layers of leather to the holes on the bottoms of both. She made several drawings of those right-side up and upside down.



Carolyn's Shoes



Flamenco Dancer's Shoes





Ladies of the Night



Clara's Ballet Shoes

Still in Spain, we're now living in a new place, a 100-year-old house with three other ladies and many more shoes. Today I met a pair of flat ballet slippers that are a mess, perfect for her to draw. They're black and have sides that seem to be folding in with holes where someone's toes tore through them. She'll love those. We moved on to Madrid where we are once again beating the pavement, walking day and night searching for restaurants and getting to know the city. She certainly picked a busy, dirty street to live on. I'm kicking up so much dust that it's making me want to sneeze and cough. I'm getting tired, worn out. I no longer have my youthful shape and I have so many wrinkles and creases.

Now we are approaching a store window filled with many black and gold high-heeled pumps, decorated with large red or gold bows on the backs of the heels and rhinestone studs all over the shoe. Some even have spikes going around. The insteps are all gold too. Wow, I never saw such original shoes. Walking home I see lots of those kinds of shoes on women dressed up and just waiting around on street corners. How did we end up here?

We'll have to find a better place to live. I need a rest after years of walking. It's been an exhausting day. As we go back to our place, she unties me, takes me off, and arranges me on the floor and begins to draw me. Boy, I must look terrible or she wouldn't be interested. It

seems to me that I have lived a life, my life. Maybe I look as old as the other shoes that have developed character over time. And maybe now I'm the kind of shoe she could love, one with an old soul that she values.



**Shoes with a Soul**

## Creation of Doors

It's 1991 and it's a scorching hot afternoon under the Provence sun. I'm dressed in my wide-brimmed hat and wearing my Reebok high top sneakers with shorts as I begin my walk around the mountain of Séguret. It's quiet and peaceful except for the faint sounds of nature. There are sweet wild flowers along the way and the fragrance of lavender fills my senses. I wish there was a breeze. I'm carrying my flat hard plastic container filled with paper and drawing materials that accompanies me wherever I go. It's a short walk and one that I made often in 1986 during my nine-month stay at the Atelier De Séguret.

As I meander around the mountain, I reflect back to earlier that morning when I walked a mile down the vineyard lined road to the neighboring village of Sablet. There, I sat at the sports cafe and drew the many interesting people seated outside, playing cards or having a coffee. After a while, I ambled down the narrow side streets lined by houses adorned with cascading flowers, laundry blowing in the breeze on their balconies and women half bent over sweeping stairs and entryways. I saw an old door that intrigued me. It was weathered, unadorned with several keyholes and an old lock. Taking a pencil and paper out of my carrying case, I made a simple line drawing of it.

Back at Séguret, as I continue wandering around the mountain observing nature, I look down on the ground to see one of those vegetable crates made of very thin wood and I visualize that I can cut it with a scissors. It's smashed, dirty and has bugs crawling on it. I pick it up and bring it to the artists' workroom thinking I might be able to use it for something. It's a good workplace because it's an old





“Door I,” Séguret 1991

room with dirty cement floors and light streaming in a small window as well as from a room off to the side that has laundry dancing on a line drying in the sun. The restroom is enclosed by a shower curtain and there is a long work table. The space has the freedom to work and make a mess which is a gift for any artist. There are no art supplies or shelves. I have a drawing and a dirty crate to work with. I’m thinking I could go get some paints and paint the drawing I made of the door but I decide not to do that.

I ponder what to do with the dirty crate I dragged back from the mountain. I decide that if I clean, dry, seal and paint it I could cut it in strips with a scissors and glue the strips onto the drawing — resulting in a wooden door on my paper. It’s quite a primitive idea. I decide to do it. I like the result because it’s so

uncomplicated. But it’s so simple that I dismiss the effort at the time.

In the evening while sitting in my room, there’s a knock on the door. “Can we come in and see what you made today?” I show the other resident artists the door and they say, “How did you think of that? It’s so different. I love it.” “You do?” I hadn’t expected that reaction but it leads me to making the first series of doors that are simply wood strips in the shape of a door glued on paper. For the following days I begin walking with my head down searching for pieces of French wood on the ground that I can use to build the new doors, giving them an authenticity. It feels like there’s a direction. I create six more doors in that style and I’m on my way with this idea.

Upon returning to Chicago, a longtime friend who is a docent at the museum wants to come over and see what I’ve been doing. I show her the series of doors and her reaction is so positive I decide to continue making them, but differently.

I don’t have French wood and many city doors



“Door II,” Séguret 1992

are glass so I begin driving around the poorer, more obscure areas of Chicago looking for interesting doors that I can photograph.

My first attempt is to paint doors with watercolors, even though I've never been drawn to that medium. It looks too flat. I'm thinking they need texture so I buy different spices, dried rosemary, parsley flakes and caraway seeds and glue them around the painted door to make a textured wall. Then I start using some sand for texture. One material leads to another over time.

What was originally the simplest idea little by little over the following sixteen years evolved into three-dimensional, detailed textured sculptures of doors from many countries.



**“Door III,” Séguret, France - 1991**

# Doors

The thing about doors is that they are mysterious. I love each one for the story it tells and the story I tell about it. Who lives behind it and what hints do I see in the details? The oldest and most weathered ones speak the loudest to me.

My treasure hunt for the doors that I would recreate as three-dimensional art pieces began while I was living in France and continued through Spain, Prague, Budapest, Turkey, Mexico and the US until about 2003. They were made of wood, discarded pieces of metal or remnants like used matches or batteries I found lying in the street.

I remember being all dressed up walking to a wedding in downtown Chicago carrying a plastic bag that I would fill with interesting stuff I might pick up on my way. Finding these treasures became an obsession. Most of the time I made the locks, tiles, mesh wiring, or hinges by hand. As I walked through the streets of small French villages, I found everyday doors that fascinated me. Their beauty was in their textures and what the human hand had given them. Each day I woke up so excited to see what I could discover.

In Europe I didn't have to worry much about my safety because I could find interesting doors on many busy everyday streets. To find really cool doors in Chicago I often had to go into dangerous areas.

One time when I was driving through an old graffiti-painted neighborhood in Chicago, I got out of the car to take a photo of a door on a lonely street where there were several boarded up buildings. Instantly, a guy came running out of the building and chased me to my car to stop me. It was absolutely terrifying and who knows what was happening behind that door.

From then on I stayed in the car to photograph. Doing so, I found several surprises.

There was the time I saw a dreary gray door in the Pilsen area of Chicago that had white paint splashed on the front in an interesting design that caught my eye. I took a photo from





“Door With Bottle, Pilsen, Chicago”



“Colorado Outhouse Door”

my car and only afterwards did I realize that sitting on the step next to it was an empty liquor bottle. That door was just dull until I saw that human element that created a story for me.

I remember a garage door I photographed in the Market district before it was the up and coming area that it is now. Only afterwards did the photo reveal that there was a door within that door.

Driving through Colorado on my search, at the side of the road I saw an old, gray, wooden outhouse door that had painted on the front in big white brush strokes, “The Good Old Days.” Off to the side of it was a ridiculous looking doll with wide eyes and crazy hair and it was just stuck in the dirt. There was a wire attaching it to the outhouse. I knew I would build that one someday but I would have to find or make just the right doll for it. Then one summer day I was walking through a store in Tempe, AZ that had lots of old stuff and there it was, an absurd old doll with crazy black hair sticking up, painted facial features with red lips and a yellow dress that had a big number 6 on the front. It was just waiting for me. I was out of my mind excited to find it and knew that I’d now make the outhouse door.



The Medieval wooden door to the village of Séguret, France with its history, distressed, sun-bleached wood and scores of nailheads opened a view into the lives of international artists revealing the similarities and differences between people and uniting them in a small world. At the entry of those doors, I put two small pairs of shoes that I sculpted. One pair replicated the old dirty worn out shoes of my friend who had a vineyard below. The other pair were sculpted, purple flowered thongs that belonged to Yoshiko, a Japanese artist. They both symbolized two of the very different people who lived behind that door.



“Door To Séguret,” - France 2006

In 1995 while in Istanbul, Turkey, I was on a tour of the Topkapi Palace when I found one of the most mysterious doors in a roped off room that was painted from floor to ceiling with decorative flowers and gold. As I was photographing a door’s unique hinges, a guard inquired in Turkish as to why I was doing that. Figuring out that we could communicate in French, I explained that I was an artist who recreated fascinating doors. He waited until the tour passed and took down the rope, allowing me to enter a place called the Fruit Room. He showed me a hidden door in an arched, sheltered nook not visible to the public.

That door had a worn, dark brown piece of leather stretched tightly across it and tacked at each corner with nails. There was a key stuck in the lock with a string attached and another key dangling from it. The walls were divided into many small sections with each one portraying a painting of a gold vase with what resembled Artdeco flowers, no two alike. Each floral segment was separated by a slab of marble. Turkish writing stretched across the wall where it met the ceiling. There was blue and white patterned tile as well as wood on the floor.

One day while crossing the street, I looked down to see two small keys attached by an old dirty string. Amazing that I should find such an incredible treasure; just what I needed for the

door. The whole piece was terribly ornate and took me a year to recreate. I could alter anything except the exact surface of the door — because that's the part that tells the story of the people and how they made it survive. I could only imagine a peep hole just behind that leather. Maybe it was a harem room. But that's only my imagination. Even though I created it when the door was completed, I still didn't know what was behind it. The best part is that I will always look at it and wonder. There will never be an answer.

That's the mystery I love.



**“Fruit Room, Topkapi Palace,”-Istanbul, Turkey-1996  
Mixed Media Sculpture**

# Return From Europe to Chicago, 1991

While riding in the back of a Chicago taxi in 1991, I remember looking out the window at a placard on a passing bus. It was a photo of Ron Majors and Carol Marin, two evening newscasters I used to watch on TV. They looked almost plastic, like they swallowed a youth serum.

I had recently returned from living in Europe and was used to walking daily amongst people in interesting markets filled with life, food, crafted goods and antiques, but at a slower pace. There was a feeling of community. Chicago was rushed. It seemed the goal for each day was to get from here to there, mostly in a car alone, knowing no one, fighting traffic, and being out of human touch. It was all about money. For quite a while I felt angry and depressed with life. I was 52 years old and had to start all over again. I was having trouble adjusting to this place called “home.”

I needed to get my act together and begin searching for a place to live and work. Through a friend, I heard about a space in an industrial building in an unsafe area. I say this because it was relatively deserted, and overnight my car was stolen. The space was a fabulous large and open area with a bedroom and kitchen. I grabbed it. I loved it because it was big enough to hold all my life and work and empty enough to give it a personality. The only item in there was a brown flowered sofa the renters had left behind. The story was that the upholsters couldn't pay their rent and left in the middle of the night to escape repercussions, leaving only that brown sofa that wouldn't fit on their truck. It became mine and I was glad to have it..

I created a living space that would make me happy and inspired. I bought a shower curtain with a map of the world on it. Between two floor-to-ceiling posts in the middle of the room, I hung a striped hammock and put in it what looked like a drunk six-foot stuffed man with long skinny legs wearing a top hat. I found one of those monkeys that claps when he hears a loud sound and every time I entered I was welcomed. I had illy toys I had collected from different countries hanging around and the room was filled with abstract painted canvases leaning against the wall. This became my world.

The walls were all brick and intermittently there were sections of those thick, foggy glass factory tiles. The kitchen ran the length of one wall and there was a separate closed off bedroom and bathroom. The floor was hard wood but it was so warped that it looked like it undulated down the full length of the room. There was plenty of space for my work tables and there was freedom to create. I made several pastel drawings of the space itself, as well as acrylic paintings.

Next door to me was a florist who specialized in wedding bouquets. I saw him seldom but one night a mouse ran across my floor, which freaked me out. I ran to the florist to have him catch it as I was too cowardly. He was useless and just as frightened as I was. It was left to me to go out and get a trap.

My sons, Michael and Mark, came over and I was thrilled to be back with them again. We had fun in this unlikely living space even though there were underlying issues about me leaving that had to be worked out over time. We celebrated Thanksgiving there and I was glad to be home. My friends came over and were horrified at my new stomping grounds —too deserted, too scary and too alone.

After about a year the landlord made changes and I had to find another work place and home. I moved into a condo downtown and rented a work room in an old factory along with eight other artists working in all different media.

Each of us had our own studio on the same floor. It was a great atmosphere because we had our own privacy but we could get together and talk about our work. There was laughter in that small community. This was the only art group I had ever been involved with. Usually I worked in spaces alone, so it was a welcome change. In my new workroom I began building old doors I had photographed in Europe using different textures and mixed media. I also started traveling in the United States as well as Turkey, Hungary and Prague, searching for the most intriguing doors.



I worked constantly and kept seeking feedback from my artist friends. I loved being there. It was one of those times in life when everything came together. All the personalities on that art floor seemed to jibe. I remember thinking how rich that time was and that I should enjoy it because as with many things in life, it might be fleeting. Eventually the camaraderie lessened.

While working there, I lived in an 800 square-foot condo downtown. Many evenings after his communications class at Columbia College, my son Mark came over and did his impersonations of his classmates. With just the sound of his voice and his talent he created a world of interesting characters. It was hilarious.

One night he came over carrying a large globe of the world on a tall pedestal.

We had many conversations about Europe, and knowing that I loved it, he brought the world to me.

But after having conquered four cold gray Chicago winters, I decided it was time to go live in the sunshine. As a child, I repeatedly asked my father, "Can't we go live in CA where the sun shines?" "No." When I was married I asked my husband, "Can we go live where the sun shines?" He didn't want to move either. I didn't have to ask anymore. I'd just do what I wanted. After talking to a friend in Scottsdale who lived there, I considered going to AZ. Without much research, I packed my bags and moved to Scottsdale where I initially rented a beautiful condo on a pool surrounded by bougainvillea and fountains. I felt like I was on vacation every day. I found a schoolroom to work in. It was another really large room that gave me so much space to continue making doors, enabling me to produce enough for exhibitions and galleries.

Twenty-six years of sunshine later, I now pray for a cloudy rainy day.



Monoprint, Chicago, paint - 1992



“Chicago Studio I,” Pastel-1992

# My Sister, Jean

It's July 2023 and I'm sitting in my Scottsdale home, grateful for my place of comfort and security that brings my history and present together to create my story. After each full day of running around I come home, kick off my shoes and say, "I'm home."

Three weeks ago, my youngest sister's caretaker, Alicia, called to tell me Jean was ill and that they were considering putting her in a hospice. I was shocked! She had early onset dementia since she was in her sixties and had spent at least the past ten years after her husband died in a facility in Nashville.

The following morning I received a second phone call saying that Jean had died that morning followed by a call asking what I'd like to have done with the ashes. This was sudden and I was stunned. She was my little sister and I felt like I was sinking. I said I thought that because she adored her husband so much she would want to rest near him. The response was that it was too far away and they didn't want to drive out there. I said, "Then, you should send them to me."

Remembering back, there were three of us. I was the older sister and Jean was six years younger. When she was growing up, I was at college. And while I was married with children in Chicago, she was living in Florida. Whether because of the age difference or because we each spun in our own orbits, I never knew her. There was no unity in our family. Jean followed my mother's example of waiting on and tending to the man and that's all she ever wanted. I, on the other hand, wanted to discuss things, be free and carve my own path. It was difficult to have a conversation with her. In her mind I was the beautiful older sister and that's where she was stuck. There was no more to me.

She devoted her life to her alcoholic husband who she adored, and to her work editing



the Tennessee Medical Journal. After each drunken episode, she happily picked him up, dusted him off and moved on.

Our middle sister, Barbara, left the family in 1979 and never looked back. She was unreachable and we simply didn't exist to her. That was the tragedy of our family.

Though Barbara was estranged since 1979, I felt a responsibility to try to reach her to notify her of Jean's death. I called the phone number I had for her and they said it was disconnected. I then called an art gallery she had an exhibit at four years prior. When they called back they told me she had died a year ago. That took my breath away. That was two in a week. I was the only one left. Quite an awakening.

The following week I got a call from the mortuary in Nashville. They left a message on my voicemail, "Your sister will arrive tomorrow."

The ashes arrive in a large tightly taped up box left inside my entry gate. I look at the box and I'm horrified. This is way too creepy — and it scares me. There is something almost macabre about it. I don't know what to do, for we weren't close and she never made her wishes known. I don't even know if she would have wanted me to be the caretaker of her ashes. This is way too heavy on me.

Now I call a local mortuary to find out my options for the ashes.

In the evening I sit down on my couch to relax and consider the situation with a little dinner and my dog by my side. While watching the news on TV, I glance over to the side to clearly see a mouse run across my dining room floor and up the stairs to my loft — lickety-split like this is his home too. I freak out! My heart is pounding out of my body, I'm a nervous wreck and I feel a danger.

I text my Croatian neighbor who is way braver than I am when it comes to critters. "There's a mouse in the house!" Her large Croatian mother comes running over with a broom ready to swing at it and smash it but it's nowhere to be found. I'm yelling in English and she's





answering me in Croatian. It's crazy. So, first thing in the morning I call an exterminator who comes out to tell me that it isn't a mouse. "It's rats."

There's something about that word that goes beyond fear for me. I think of every movie I've ever seen with rats running around in the alley behind restaurants eating out of garbage cans or rats in prison cells creeping around and eating the people. I cringe. It's Friday so I have to wait all weekend for the appointment. In the meantime I've spent nearly every minute sweeping droppings from every room and cleaning out closets and pantries. Everything has to be sealed in large plastic covered containers, and all shelves emptied.

My dog has a baby bottle I fill with kibble that she uses as a toy. I was told rats like dog food. I empty it and put it out of the way on the butcher block table in the kitchen. I don't want anything on the floor.

Completely exhausted I go to bed scared and close my bedroom door. Around 4:00 a.m. I can hear the familiar sound of the baby bottle with its faceted sides rolling and rattling on the floor. I freeze. Holding my breath, I lie there knowing there's a rat party in my living room. In the morning I wake up to find the bottle on the floor completely chewed up. I was sure I put it up on the table. I now have a vision of them crawling up there and getting it. Shaking, I take a paper towel and pick it up to save as evidence for the exterminator — who doesn't show up. In my panic, I call another one who comes out later in the afternoon. He sets up four traps in the house and three outside. I really don't think this guy is listening to me as I'm a crazed Scottsdale lady and he's numb from seeing these creatures daily.

The following night I go to bed leaving the TV and lights on. I heard that they don't like noise. In the middle of the night I wake up, take a broom out and begin banging it on the stairway to scare any rats away. I see none.

Two days later I find a dead rat in the guest bedroom. It's gross and stinks. Twenty-four hours later, I just stay in bed all day unable to move. The house has been quiet for a while now, but I'm still guarded looking around corners before entering any room. The whole situation is gnawing at me. I'd like to think this nightmare is over but they say it takes a long time to get rid of them. I hope not.

In the evening I sit down on the sofa again to relax and ponder my sister's ashes and the impossibility of scattering them in the desert when it's 115 degrees.

# Nacogdoches, Texas Competition

It was 1995 when I arrived at a hotel in Nacogdoches, Texas to compete in a national art competition. I entered the hotel lobby and was shocked to find myself in the midst of a *Gone With The Wind* scenario.

The men were dressed in gray, double-breasted, gold buttoned confederate army jackets with epaulettes and gold bands around the cuffs. They donned gray army caps that looked like someone sat on them and wore black belts and swords that hung at their sides. The women were copies of Scarlett O'hara with their corkscrew curls, gorgeous, full-skirted satin dresses, dainty shoes and wide brimmed hats. The soldiers stood erect as though they were truly in the army, proud and ready for battle. I was in awe of the whole scene. How did I even get here? I never imagined myself in this situation and certainly wasn't a southern belle. Coming from Chicago, this was another world. It felt like it would be intrusive to even ask why they were there. What I realized was that this southern event was completely unrelated to the art competition.

I read about this national competition in Nacogdoches, Texas at Stephen F. Austin State University. I had been accepted in many shows prior, so this wasn't new. The difference was that I admired the work of the internationally recognized political painter who was the judge. He was a Chicago Art Institute artist with worldwide recognition. His paintings were political, bloody and covered the Iraq war. I wondered if he would accept my category as well as my art.



I guess I wanted to know if he thought I was an artist. In most competitions you don't even know who the judge is. He or she could be part of an art committee or your aunt Rose.

My entry was a sculpture of a 40"x 30" door I had seen in Istanbul, Turkey. It wasn't happy or brightly colored but appeared extremely old and dirty as was typical of my doors. It was made of decayed wood and was painted a shade of pale blue with a couple of boards tacked up that blocked the deteriorating areas. The front had a large Y and S painted in black graffiti strokes along with various scratches. I attached an old Turkish lock that had a thick string tied onto it. The door was surrounded by a broken cement wall with a section of old exposed stone.

If the piece was accepted I would have to ship it for the upcoming show. After several weeks of waiting, I was thrilled to receive a letter accepting me as one of the finalists. Amazing! I decided to go to Nacogdoches for the competition. I called my friend, Nancy and asked, "Why don't you come with me?"

The night before the judging we were advised of the gallery where we could go to see all the entries on display. There hung my door amidst all the other artworks. It was so different. Art students were milling around trying to connect the contestants with their artwork and engage us in conversation. I was nervous.

The following day we were seated in the auditorium awaiting Leon's talk, the discussion and announcement of the winner. The room was filled with students wanting to hear from the judge. When my name was announced as the winner, I gasped. I remember tears falling out of my eyes and turning to my friend saying, "But I'm a woman." Those words were surprising for me to hear.

I had to stop and think about my own self-perception. The men in our family were the



stars. The women were to be quiet. Even my grandmother, who was a master quilter, was silent and let her husband boast and do the talking for her. She very quietly accepted her incredible artistic success. If she was congratulated she would simply smile and say it was her hobby.

After my win there was no tangible award nor was I introduced to the judge. There was no connection between us. The following day there was a big splash in the newspaper announcing the winner with a photo of me looking stunned. I felt very proud. This was a huge verification even though I'm the one who must know my own value no matter what label the world gives it.

The following morning I was invited to visit the studios of all the master's students. I loved their art and was so happy to talk to them. I felt unworthy having them look up to me while their work was so impressive. I answered their questions as best I could. All I did was figure out a way to say what I wanted through constant work. I was simply driven. As I tried to answer their questions, the most important thing I remember saying was to keep loving their work and don't stop reaching for your dream.

You will get there.

That is a cliché, but there's a whole lot of truth in it.

## A Tiny Miracle

I've never been a religious person — just not a believer. As a child, I had to say my prayers every night before bed. I only genuinely prayed when I was young and sick asking God to take the pain away. When that didn't work I gave up on praying and had no greater power to turn to than myself. That's how I've lived my life. Although there have been occasions when I felt there is something guiding me.

One day in 2003, while living in Phoenix, AZ, a friend of mine invited me to go to a Shabbat service at her temple. I had to think about it. It really wasn't my thing. But having lived in Europe where there was more of a feeling of community, I was missing that connection ever since my return in 1992. Also missing was the old world where the age of objects and people intrigued me and inspired my artwork. I thought that world could also be found in Judaism and I wanted to be involved in it. I remembered visiting Israel in 2004 and the feeling of no discrimination for being Jewish. On Friday night it seemed the whole world was celebrating the sabbath. That was an incredible feeling. So I accepted Selma's invitation and went to services. That night I watched a charismatic rabbi give a powerful sermon and unite a congregation who already admired him. He had creative ideas for learning and bringing people together. And he had a presence.

I joined the temple and enjoyed being in a community of friendly, down to earth people. Not long after I became a member, the temple committee asked me if I would consider making art for the entryway of a healing conference to be held at a hotel in the spring. They said there was little to no money to spend on this. I told them I had to think about whether I could do it. Through all my years of making art I've done it my way. I didn't take custom orders or try to please people. Making other people happy interferes with self-expression and it's stressful. So I hesitated when they asked me to do this project.

The entryway was simply a glass door with a horizontal metal bar. I thought it was pretty



“Door - Istanbul, Turkey” - 1995

cold and depressing. I couldn't imagine making that door feel spiritual. But to the right of the door were two floor-to-ceiling glass panels that were a possibility. I told the committee I'd try to create something for those panels. At home I began to visualize making two long, stained glass windows using Jewish healing symbols. The challenge was to create something that would feel spiritual and offer it to the congregation.

So in September of 2003, I climbed the stairs to my artist's loft hoping to be able to keep my promise to the synagogue. I love my loft. It's a quiet space with some of my favorite things. As I enter, there is a wall of book shelves straight ahead of me that holds everything from small sculptures and art materials to some silly toys I brought home from street artisans in Europe — super-creative, ridiculous hand-made toys. The loft ceiling is slanted and there is a recessed skylight that reaches up to the roof and gives the room a peaceful, light airy feeling. I like to go up there just to lie down and meditate. On my left is a long work table sitting on two sawhorses. The table's surface is old and filled with layers of paint and gouges from years of making art in a variety of media. Over the wooden floor I have stretched a wall to wall white canvas floor cover for protection.

I decided to design twenty-four 28" squares of different Jewish symbols. I would cut them out of black stencil paper and then fill the open sections with flat pieces of colored tissue. The light behind it would give it a stained glass effect. Initially I was excited about the idea, but I soon realized that this was far more work than I expected. It was a tedious process that didn't allow for mistakes with my head hanging down and me bent over a table. Gluing each section of the tissue was a sticky mess because it had to lay flat.

After completing four of the squares, I held one up to the light and was devastated to see that the light diffused the tissue color and it looked dull — just the opposite of stained glass. I had done so much work on this project so far and had such a long way to go. I felt so disappointed and my heart just sank. What could I do now? I chose the wrong materials to get the effect I wanted. I knew that the congregation was counting on me and I didn't want to disappoint them. I also didn't want to change paths. I decided to keep working anyway and just finish it. Maybe I'd get an idea along the way to save it. Never give up because you don't know what the journey will bring.

Then one day I was cutting a piece of pale turquoise tissue and it floated down onto the white floor cover. There it was! The white underneath the tissue lit it up. I was so stunned in that moment. I looked up at the skylight and thought, maybe there is a God! The blue reminded me of the floor of a swimming pool when it's lit at night, or like the naturally lit water of the Blue Grotto in the Isle of Capri. I was so excited, blown away! All I had to do was back each square with a white board. There was a world of possibilities open to me by using

tissue over tissue to create new colors. It reminded me of when I painted dyes on silk and how one color would bleed into another creating a 3rd.

It took eight months to complete the 24 squares that would be taped onto the glass panels. Some were quite simple, pomegranates in a bowl, a menorah and a Star of David. Others were more intricate such as the Wailing Wall with people praying and the Dome of the Rock in the background. There was another of a woman with her head bowed, praying over the sabbath candles with her hands covering her eyes. In a bright moment I remembered a roll of beautiful antique lace given to me by a German friend 17 years prior. I cut out a shape and draped the real piece of lace on her head. That was the only piece that wasn't tissue and paper. I was so glad to have completed it as I had imagined it. During the creative process, I laid each square on the floor in two vertical panels to see it as it grew and to balance the colors to create the whole.

When people entered the Healing Conference, there were gasps and awe. It was an important part of the whole evening and a great success. I hadn't realized it would be such a powerful presence — maybe because I got used to it while working and I didn't have an objective view of it. I was thrilled to see the congregants enjoy it. One of the members framed each of the 24 squares with archival glass and donated all of them to the temple. The artwork covered an entire wall at the entry of the synagogue for nearly 20 years. I only stayed at the temple for three years and then the community changed. When I last saw it, about eight years ago, the sunlight had faded it but it was still beautiful.

I felt I hadn't created it alone. I had help from above. I'm still not religious... but I wonder.



“Healing Conference Window” - 2005

# Sabbath in New York

The truth is that I'm Jewish but my family had not lived an observant Jewish life apart from having Passover dinners at my uncle's house which were beautiful and memorable. That didn't change much over the years.

In 1991, after returning from five years in Europe, I began searching for something with that old world feeling to inspire my artwork. A rabbi friend of mine carried a Bible which was so worn out that in order to preserve it she covered it completely with duck tape. Looking at all the fraying, gray textured tape and the various colored tabs extending out of specific pages with side margin notes all over, I realized she had given it a soul. It was her treasure. This was so inspiring to me that I made several drawings and a sculpture of it. I joined her synagogue in Phoenix and became intent on living a Jewish life, developing a community, attending Friday night services and having Sabbath dinners for everyone.

About that time an orthodox friend of mine gave me a 1-800 phone number to call saying that I could talk to someone anywhere in the world who would tell me about their life and how Judaism is observed in their home. I had no idea where I would be calling but it sounded like an adventure.

When I dialed that number, Rachel answered the phone. Through our once-a-week chats she talked about the beauty of her life. She had five kids and explained that her arranged marriage was a good one, "Thanks be to God." She described the Sabbath and repeatedly invited me to come to NY and celebrate with her family. Each time I declined until one day I was curious enough to decide to go.





To be respectful, I read the orthodox rules. Don't talk to, look at or touch the husband and make sure my clothing was appropriate with long sleeved tops, long skirts and shoes that completely covered my feet. I arranged my trip and boarded a plane to Borough Park, NY, a place I knew nothing about.

Rachel met me at the airport. She was a small woman in her forties with a lily white face and hands who looked younger than her years. She wore a black dress with a shoulder length dark wig which was one of the many rules women observed. Only her husband was allowed to see her real hair. She took me to her two-story home in a bustling Hasidic community where all the houses appeared to be similar. The streets were filled with bearded men with side curls, dressed in long black coats and wearing tall black hats. The women were completely covered. There were no individuals, I felt the sameness everywhere.

I met her husband the evening I arrived. He was very gracious and welcoming, not the stern person I had expected. I was relieved. I had made a small, three- dimensional synagogue door about 5"x7" as a gift for Rachel.

That evening we went to a basement where shelves of shoes collected by Rachel's women's committee were stored. So many poor people clothed from their hats to their shoes were lined up outside waiting to be fitted in them. I wasn't sure what I was doing but did my best to learn by watching how the other women helped.

The following morning we went to the indoor food market, which was a sea of bearded men in black hats, a lively fascinating place to look out on. I was so excited to be there that I took out my sketchbook and began drawing the people until someone spotted me and put a stop to it. I felt like I committed the worst offense. I was an insensitive stranger in their midst recording their life in that closed society. The only thing worse would have been if I was holding a camera.

Following the market we went shopping in stores that carried merchandise mostly for the Orthodox community. The remainder of the day was spent with Rachel making six loaves of challah, babka and other foods for the Sabbath. In her kosher kitchen I was afraid to touch anything for fear I'd put something in the wrong place.

We finished cooking for everyone so that at sundown when the water, electricity and activities would be prohibited we would be ready to celebrate the Sabbath.

The long dining room table was dressed with an antique white tablecloth, tall ornate sterling silver candelabras, bouquets of roses, and graceful crystal goblets for the feast. Tall backed chairs upholstered with pink and beige shiny fabric lined up along the length of the table. Rachel's husband walked in from studying Torah and put his black hat crown side down on the table with his necktie draped over it. His prayer shawl hugged his chair. All four sons

and one daughter were seated. As sundown approached, the lights went out and candles were lit, prayers were spoken over the wine and challah and a slow graceful dinner began.

A female guest seated next to me was wearing a short sleeved dress which was inappropriate. Rachel turned to me and said, "Ah, my son is a good son." I had no idea what she was talking about. Apparently he took his glasses off so he wouldn't have to see the girl's uncovered arms. I know Rachel prayed that one of her sons in particular wouldn't leave the fold. After dinner I went to my room and without a second thought flipped on the light switch only to freak out and immediately turn it off, praying that no one saw any glimmer of light creeping out from beneath my door. I was a wreck. The only thing left to do was pray that I wouldn't make another mistake.

Saturday, the Sabbath was the longest day for me because the rules say that you can't do much. I was nervous I'd do something offensive like lift or carry or turn on the water. The safest activity was to sit and read.

By Sunday morning I started to get hives from the lack of freedom. When Rachel took me to the airport she asked if I would come back or would she ever see me again? It made me so sad that I couldn't say, "Yes." They were so kind and opened the door to four unforgettable days in a world I never would have known, changing both me and my art. For the next several years I worked on art projects for my temple and I became a bat mitzvah at the age of 65.



**"Mari's Bible" -Mixed Media Sculpture 2005**

# Singing

In 2006 during my journey in Judaism a friend asked me, if I would be interested in becoming a bat mitzvah with her? At first it seemed absurd but then it evolved into, “Yes.” So, at the age of 65 I decided to begin the journey of learning Hebrew and preparing for the following year. I knew that I would have to read from the Torah but all of a sudden I became aware that I’d have to sing or chant the Hebrew in front of the congregation. I freaked out! What would I do? How had that not occurred to me? It was hard enough to learn Hebrew and now I had to sing it? I thought about quitting. I just didn’t know how I could climb the mountain in front of me?

I remembered back to the 1950’s in elementary school when I was told not to sing in the Christmas choir. Hearing me sing they told me to just mouth the words. There I stood in my green skirt and white shirt singing without a sound coming out of my mouth. I felt near tears, invisible. This reached out into many aspects of my life afterwards. Throughout the years I was careful not to even sing, “Happy Birthday,” for fear that I might be heard and ruin the celebration.

How would I ever chant from the Torah? “Singing lessons! That’s it! I’ll take singing lessons. Someone must know how to help me get through this. Everybody can get a little better, right?” The thing was that I was absolutely frozen with fear. I began searching for a singing teacher. Someone recommended a retired opera singer, Florence in Phoenix who gave lessons. I made an appointment and nervously entered her small but cozy home and introduced myself.

Florence was a tough character. She was a lady in her seventies who resembled an older version of Jayne Mansfield. She wore a shoulder length puffy blonde wig that was as exaggerated as her full make up. She wore heels and had wrapped a shawl around her shoulders. Florence was a diva who strutted around her house. There was stuff all over the room, knick-knacks, photos, paintings, flowers, lamps and even hanging beads. She reminded me of a gypsy, a really colorful character. At the far end of the room was a Grand piano with a large embroidered shawl with fringe that draped over the sides of it.

Florence quizzed me on everything in my life, “Why was I there, why a bat mitzvah and why now, why I never sang, who was my husband, why was I divorced, what was he like, did I have children, why why and why?”

Then she told me about her life and her husband who gave her roses on every Sabbath and that there were other brilliant singers in her family. When she asked me to sing I said that I couldn't. It was so embarrassing when I opened my mouth even though I had prepared her for the worst. She proceeded to teach me my scales and I dutifully went home and practiced endlessly. I sang to my dog everyday all day trying to get over my fear. My poor little dog just stared at me like I lost my mind. That's the beauty of a sweet dog. They love you no matter how badly you sing. When it came time for my bat mitzvah, terrified and shaking as I was, I did it. Chanting is kind of off-key anyway so I got through it with my heart in my throat in front of all those congregants and my son who came to support me. That meant the world to me.

Months later on a Friday night our rabbi mentioned that anyone could join the choir if they wanted to sing and that no former singing experience was necessary. "Well, I thought, maybe I could try that." I began singing very softly in the choir to see if I could even sing along with the others. As long as there were so many strong beautiful voices surrounding and guiding me I found I could do it. If I thought I couldn't reach a note I would sing silently. When the musical arrangement changed from the original melody I was completely lost because I had been singing by ear. I don't know how to read music. I continued to practice my scales daily and little by little I got better. I sang in the choir for 3 years and it felt good to be part of it even if sometimes I had to just mouth the words. Facing this fear was another mountain to climb. Thanks to having a bat mitzvah, I can finally sing Happy Birthday.

## To Eat or Not To Eat

One morning while waiting in the movie theater lobby, I noticed an older couple carrying two extra large bags of popcorn that seemed almost bigger than they were. They went over to a counter with those two bags of corn and divided one bag up into the two boxes that they'd brought with them. Then they squeezed a ton of butter on top and shoveled themselves into the theater with the boxes and the other large bag of corn. It was only 10:00 in the morning. As I sat waiting for the movie, I noticed a line of people climbing the stairs like worker-ants with their huge popcorn treasures on the way to their seats. This reminds me of all the buffets I've seen where people pile food on their plates like there is no future meal. But we know there always is. And I think of myself in the past and how I must have piled food on my plate too.

Did you ever watch the world go by eating? Maybe not — because you can eat. But having pancreatitis gives me a different point of view.

It was in 2006 when I first doubled over with the most excruciating pain in my stomach. It was so gripping that I was barely able to breathe. I began concentrating on inhaling very tiny breaths, very carefully. With each inhalation, no matter how small, the pain became worse until the ambulance had to come and rush me to the hospital. For whatever reason, when the pancreas gets inflamed, there's nothing to do but stop eating, rest and drink only water. The gray hospital walls created even more starvation; it almost felt like they were closing in on me. I've lost count of how many attacks and trips to the hospital I've experienced over the past 18 years. My diet had to change: no fat, no sugar, no red meat, no liquor or wine, no fried or sautéed food. It was a life-changing situation that has taken a lot of joy out of my world.

I watched everyone eating, drinking and having fun while I could only pretend. At breakfast people talk about what they'll eat for lunch, and at lunch they discuss where they'll make reservations for dinner and what they feel like eating. After that they go into detail describing how delicious it was. For some time I avoided joining others. But this was not the solution, as it left me alone. It took me years to come to terms with it. Now when I go out, I usually eat beforehand.

I do wake up daily and say to myself, "It's a beautiful sunny day, do something with it." Then just like the rest of the world I ask myself, "What I can eat."

At the same time, standing bent over a table with my head hanging down, as I created

art over the years, was making it impossible for me to continue. I kept taking classes in different media, but I simply wasn't physically able to do the work. Chemicals in many of the art supplies made me sick, plus lifting and carrying the art was heavy work. My body kept refusing to do as I asked, and I ended up in the chiropractor's office repeatedly. Most of the time I felt sad because I didn't want the art part of me to die. Creating something every day was my life blood and I felt lost without it. We see athletes retire because of overuse of their bodies. But we don't think of artists needing to retire.

I remember being called to jury duty and being asked about my occupation. When I responded, "Retired artist," one of the men began laughing and ridiculing me saying that art isn't a job. I was the one who always said one of the best things about being an artist was that you could do it all your life. But now I had hit a road block. I searched for new forms of self-expression: baking, singing and cooking.

Then one day I got the idea of a legacy project for my children. I simply wanted to describe five years of my life and art while living in the old world of Europe. But I made a discovery in the process that I wanted to tell a larger story — that the journey is more important than the outcome and to never give up. There will always be another door that opens.



