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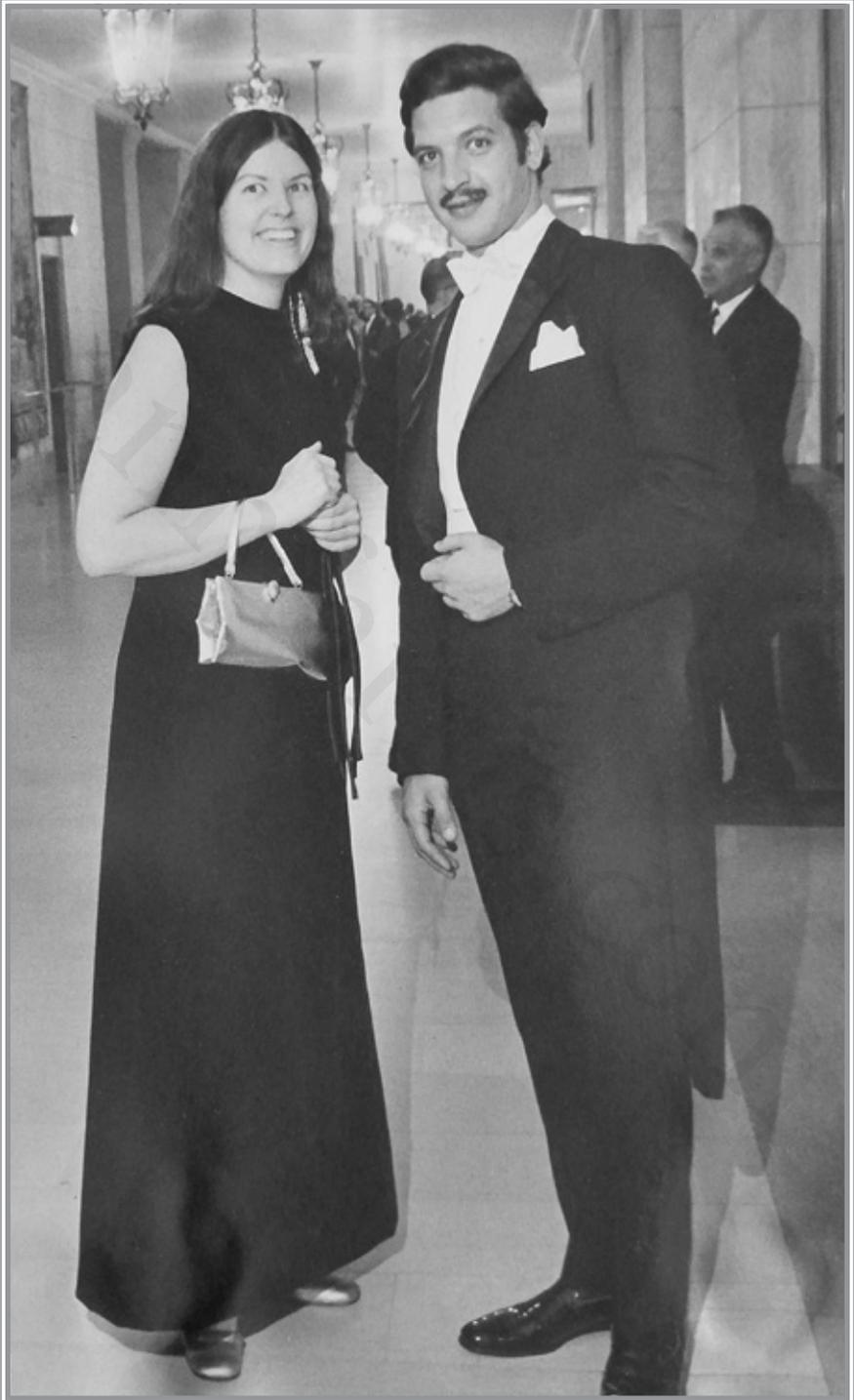
TWO ENGINES  
*One Voice*



Ann Farris  
[ *An Autobiography* ]

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Openness Books



ANN FARRIS AND RICHARD RODZINSKI, OPENING NIGHT AT THE SAN FRANCISCO OPERA, SEPTEMBER 1969

## TWO ENGINES ONE VOICE

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*To all those who have crossed my path  
and given me support, lessons, love and opportunities.  
Without you, my life would not have been so rich.  
I am deeply grateful.*



annfarris.com

Also by Ann Farris



*The Other Side of Dyslexia*

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## PROLOGUE

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**W**E COME TO HAVE FUN, we come to struggle  
We come to explore, we come to hide  
We come to laugh, we come to cry  
We come to learn, we come to let it all go  
We come to love, we come to experience hate  
We come to sing, we come to croak  
We come to give space, we come to claim space  
We come to be silly, we come to be serious  
We come to take responsibility, we come to give it away  
We come to be grounded, we come to float  
We come to feel, we come to close down  
We come to share, we come to claim for ourselves  
We come to be angry, we come to forgive  
We come to believe in a universal god/goddess, we come to deny  
that the divine exists  
We come to dance, we come to be still

We come to experience the dark, we come to experience the light  
We come to laugh, we come to cry  
We come to get it, we come to deny  
We come to shout, we come to whisper  
We come to cheer, we come to be silent  
We come to exercise, we come to be a sloth  
We come to deny, we come to accept  
We come to experience the dark side of our ego, we come to experience  
    the light side of our ego  
We come to uncover, we come to reject what we know  
We come to receive, we come to give  
We come to stand up for our beliefs, we come to let them go  
We come to see life is a paradox: contrasting points of view  
We come to learn to experience it all without judgment

## CHAPTER 1

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# EARLY DAYS



[ 1948 ]

**I**T'S RAINING, BUCKETS OF RAIN! The bus is jammed with soggy, quiet travelers watching big juicy droplets of water running down the steamed-up windows. The smelly wool coat of the man next to me is as distasteful as the long-haired coat of our Irish setter, Banshee, when she comes in dripping wet from the pouring rain. It's all annoying. Won't this bus please stop picking up passengers and get me to 16th Street? I am the guest of honor today. I need to be on time!

Pushing open the heavy wooden front door of my grandparents' home  
I announce my arrival

Yoo-hoo. Hello, I am here.

Nursie Leith rounds the corner by the alcove where the brown gramophone sits. It plays beautiful orchestral music.

Goodness child! You are dripping with rain. Remove your galoshes and wet coat and give them to me.

Thanks, Nursie Leith.

I love Nursie Leith. She's fun. This afternoon she is wearing her party

outfit, black dress with white decorative designed collar and cuffs and a white apron outlined with white lace. In her bright red dyed hair, she has pinned a small crown of more white lace. She's adorable.

Am I the first?

No, your mother and Mrs. Ralph are in the living room.

Nana instigated the idea of Nursie Leith, Nursie Reid and Annie, the cook, calling her son's wives by the first name of their husband. Otherwise, the staff would say, Mrs. Farris, and no one would know which Mrs. Farris they were talking about. Wasn't Nana smart?

I love coming into Nana's house, especially at Christmas. The green dangling fir boughs are hanging around the entrances to all rooms on the main floor and are attached to the wide, wooden stair balustrade all the way up to the balcony that encircles the front hall on the second floor. Christmas cards jauntily sit on the ledges above door frames adding a special element of color to the elegant hallway.



NURSIE LEITH, ANNIE COOKIE, NURSIE REID,  
FRASER MACKAY [PHOTO BY GRETCHEN CREERY]  
CIRCA 1961

Oh Nana, I am so happy to be here.

Nana, in a soft-blue wool afternoon dress with long sleeves and a double strand of pearls giving a finish to the top of her outfit, gives me a hug saying

Dear, come in the living room. Tea will be served when the others arrive.

Today is the tree lighting celebration. No, it's not the twelve-foot pine Christmas tree decorated in the bay window in my grandfather's law-book lined library. It's the seventy-foot fir tree at the beginning of the

driveway entrance to their home on the steep Granville Street hill. Last week workmen put deep red, crimson, blue, bright yellow, vibrant green and ugly orange lights through the many chocolate-colored limbs laden with dark green needles. The celebration is a tradition now. A grandchild flips the switch to turn on these lights. The first year it was Wallace Michael. He's the oldest. Then, it was Evlyn. Now, it is me!

Great! The tea tray is set up in front of Nana's chair in the living room by the stone hearth and the brightly burning fire.

Whoops, sorry, Nursie Reid.

...I almost ran into her. She is carrying the polished silver tea pot filled with #22 tea from Murchies Tea Shop and needs to place it on the ornamented brightly polished silver tea tray in front of Nana.

Finally, finally, my aunts, my cousins: tall lanky Wallace Michael who's great at playing classical music on the piano, very proper Evlyn, fiery-eyed Wendy, sweet Gretchen, a very young Jennifer, mischievous Lauch and my trick-loving brother, Haig, have arrived. All of us girl cousins go to the same school, Crofton House. Yes, we are all dressed alike in our uniforms: a dark navy-blue square-necked tunic which is not allowed below our knees, a white square neck blouse which peeks about the top of the tunic, long black stockings, navy blue bloomers and black shoes. To keep warm we have a navy-blue blazer.

Wendy, Evlyn, Aunt Shirley and Aunt Katherine are settled into the huge sofa covered in a rough brown fabric. I hardly ever sit there. I don't like the rough feel of it. Rather I cozy up on the deep rich blue velvet-covered fender stool in front of the fire, next to Nana's chair and the tea tray. There's another reason for this coveted seat. I am close to the covered silver dish sitting on the brass tripod on the hearth. Inside, keeping warm, are delicious homemade scones dripping in butter.

Ann, you are the guest of honor today. I will serve you first. How do you take your tea?

With cream and sugar, please Nana. Thank you. Would you like me to pass the biscuits?

Please, dear. That would be helpful. Be sure to take napkins.

I have method in my madness: The scones will return with me.

I deserve two for my hard work.

I know the ceremony will be soon because night time has arrived. It's dark outside. It's easy to tell at Nana's. She doesn't draw the curtains. No need to, no one can look in. The house is in the middle of an acre of land.

Finally, the gentlemen, our fathers and grandfather (the Senator) have arrived. My grandfather has taken his chair opposite Nana on the other side of the fireplace. He fits the perfect description of a grandfather with a twinkle in his eye and an open smile which tells me he's always pleased to see me. The other gentlemen – my father, a round-faced man with a great sense of humor, Uncle Ralph, whose dark hair and nervous energy sets him apart from the rest, and Uncle Donald, the shy one – are busy going around the room giving each lady a peck on the cheek as they pull up dark decorative oak-backed chairs stationed against the walls.

Nursie Reid has just replenished the tea pot.

Oh dear, a little more time to wait!



JOHN WALLACE  
DE BEQUE FARRIS  
[GRAMPOO]  
CIRCA 1912

*I am taking this hold on the tree light ceremony to tell you about Grampoo and how he came to Vancouver. He chose to "Go West, Young Man" to join his brothers not long after he graduated with a Law Degree from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Hailing from New Brunswick, these young men wanted adventure. Grampoo was the last to arrive, in 1902. With little money in his pocket at first he slept in a tent, cozy in a sleeping bag, on a beach near Stanley Park. His first jobs were clerking for a lawyer, which paid very little. Then one day the City of Vancouver posted a position: City Prosecutor. With his law degree he got the job and became Vancouver's first City*

*Prosecutor. At that time the population of Vancouver was TINY, about 30,000 residents. The sidewalks were wooden and roads brick. Now forty plus years later (1947), there are about 300,000 people and cement sidewalks in parts of Vancouver.*

Oh, Grampoo has stood up from his chair. I can see our Christmas tree lighting ceremony is about to begin.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention. It's time to light the tree. This year Ann has that privilege.

The chattering has stopped.

I am positioned by the window-paned door at the end of the sofa and adjacent to the switch on the wall. My hand is close by. Everyone has moved down by the long oak refectory table where there are seven-foot tall windows looking out into the dark. We can just see the bare outline of the tall majestic fir tree hidden from us in the dark.

It's quiet. We are ready, I know we are ready.

Ann, dear, light the tree!

Oh, what fun! With a flip of the switch protected in its brass cover this gigantic tree is sparkling with many colored lights dancing as the cold winter wind blows the branches covered in raindrops. My huge family is cheering and whooping and hollering. We Farris' like to do that when we celebrate.

This is the best Christmas tree yet!

"Mil"

That's what my mother and aunts call Nana. You got it, its short for mother-in-law.

You have added even more lights this year. It's beautiful.

There is a chorus of tumbling congratulations falling over me.

I am getting lots of warm hugs, too. That feels wonderful.

I had a good time. It's odd something so easy to do, flipping a switch, can create such magic.

I wish my studies at school were this easy. Grade Six and I don't like each other. Today was the last day of school before Christmas. It was terrible.



WALLACE AND EVLYN FARRIS FAMILY CHRISTMAS NIGHT—CIRCA 1950

*Left standing:* SHIRLEY FARRIS, KATHERINE FARRIS ROBSON, EVLYN FARRIS

*Front on or by bench:* BETTY FARRIS, WENDY FARRIS, DOROTHY FARRIS [MY MOTHER]

*Center, back row:* DONALD FARRIS, CHARLIE ROBSON, RALPH FARRIS, JOHN FARRIS [MY FATHER]

*Sitting:* WALLACE FARRIS [GRAMPOO] WITH JENNIFER FARRIS IN HIS LAP,

EVLYN FARRIS [NANA], WALLACE MICHAEL ROBSON, ANN FARRIS;

*On the floor:* LAUCH FARRIS, HAIG FARRIS, [MY BROTHER] GRETCHEN FARRIS

I had to recite a poem. The teacher never seems to get it that I have a hard time remembering long strings of words. They just don't stay in my head.

Well, today, the worst happened. She chose me.

At first, I was very proud of myself. I remembered the first few lines.

Then, my head went blank. Yes, it just goes blank! So, I said

And, she faded through the floor.

My classmates laughed.

I sat down so embarrassed. But, you know what? I am pleased with my comment. It was the truth. That's how I felt.

I am glad school is over for a while. This celebration has made me feel better.

A couple of years ago when my family moved to our Matthews Avenue house I made a new friend. We crossed paths while riding our bicycles putting our feet down on the dirt path to stop by the central garden of The Crescent Park, filled with many colored dahlias standing tall and proud.

Hello, my name is Ann.

Mine is Sherry.

Sherry has dark brown curly-hair and friendly eyes that match the color of her hair.

Do you live nearby?

We live on Matthews Street, a block away. Where do you live?

She pointed across the park to a large white house with blue awnings and a spacious front lawn separated from the street by a stone fence.

My sister, Romilly, my baby brother, Dal, and I just moved in. My mum is having another baby. Do you want to ride bicycles together?

Yes, yes!

We took off cycling to the edge of the park, bumping our bicycles over the curb and into the street. Down one side of Osler Street with its tree-lined median we went, returning back on the other, chattering away. That's when I learned she likes to roller skate. We have returned to Osler many times. It's an ideal street, it's smooth.

Our skating was almost spoiled today. We skate beside the wicked witch's house. That's where it is the smoothest. The witch came out of her thatched roof house with tiny windows with even tinier panes of glass lined in metal carrying her ugly brown wicker laundry basket screaming at us

If you girls don't stop roller skating here I will be picking you up in pieces and putting you in my basket! Her face was really red as she disappeared back into her house.

We continued.



School is difficult, you know. It began in Grade One. Mrs. Scott told Mum I needed help with reading. She recommended to my parents to hold me back a year. Mum didn't buy that. After school for several months

she and I sat in our library in front of the gently burning fire. It was cozy.  
Ann, what book do you want to read?  
One with huge letters and nice pictures.  
How about the book about a cat?  
Yes, I love it.  
What are the letters in cat?  
C, A, T  
Good for you.  
Now, what do those letters sound like?  
I don't know.  
I'll go first.  
C is *Ke*, now, you say it.  
*Ke*.  
And so it went. By the end of Grade One I could read words.

In Grade Three I told my parents  
There's a problem at school. I can't see what is written on the blackboard.  
What do you mean?  
I need to understand what is written on the blackboard.  
Mum took me to the eye doctor. He told us  
Ann, you have twenty-twenty vision. Your eyes are very healthy and in  
good shape. I am sure you will be fine at school.

It wasn't true. I still couldn't understand what was written on the  
blackboard. We went back to the eye doctor. He gave me glasses. They  
were awful, gave me a headache. I purposefully lost them.  
Then, the eye doctor had me come to his office for eye exercises. I put my  
head into a viewer where I saw two pictures of Mickey Mouse. The lady  
in the white jacket told me  
Please make them become one, using a handle in each hand  
That was easy. But, and this is a big but, it didn't help me understand what  
was written on the board.  
So, I made a decision. It was near the end of Grade Three, I know, because  
the delicate pink cherry blossoms on 16th Street were lying gracefully on

the ground. In any case, I said to myself  
If people believed me that I can't read the board they would have found a solution. Okay, there is no solution. I will never complain again. It makes me feel I am not good enough. I don't like that. I think I am wonderful. And, my parents think I am wonderful. They don't seem to mind that I get only C+ or B average on my report card. They always say Ann, you are doing very well.  
My reading problem from now on is my secret.



My brother Haig is learning how to play the violin. He makes screeching sounds a lot as he moves the bow over the strings. My father makes funny faces as he plays the banjo. My mother is a very accomplished pianist and accompanies them on the piano. I thought it would be wonderful to play the piano. It didn't work out. I could read the notes but the sounds I made did not sound at all like what the composer wanted. It sounded awful. I was too embarrassed to continue.

But I love listening to music. Mum doesn't know it, but she gave me a way to help myself far away from all the words at school. Words, words, words. They drive me nuts. But on Sunday afternoons Mum and I go to the Vancouver Symphony at the Orpheum Theatre. I love singing "O Canada," our national anthem, at the beginning of the concert with the orchestra accompanying me. I love watching our conductor, Sir Ernest MacMillan, a short man with a shock of white hair. He faces the orchestra, but sometimes we see more of his face, like today. He spent a lot of time looking at the pianist who was sitting at a large grand piano to his left, in front of the violins. At intermission, I asked Mum  
Why did Sir Ernest turn around and look at the pianist so often?  
He was making sure that the orchestra and pianist were playing together. Sometimes the soloist has a different musical idea of how the piece is to be played and pays no attention to the conductor. That's what happened today. Sir Ernest had to follow the pianist.  
Hmmm, I bet he didn't like that!

Most often, though, during the concert I look at the gold walls of the theatre; it's like being inside Aladdin and his lamp. Then I drift off into magic land floating with the music. It makes me feel so good. Don't worry, at the end of the concert I come back when we all stand and sing "God Save the King" with the orchestra before we leave. After Sundays at the Symphony and no words, words, words, I feel much better at school.



My friend Sherry also helps me. She's a quiet person and reads a lot, even *The Book of Knowledge*. I would never think it fun to read those brown thick books with fine print and tiny pictures. But I love listening as she reads the information to me. We sit in the green banquette around her family's large kitchen table waiting for thin, grey-haired Mrs. Boomer, the cook, to bring chocolate chip cookies out of the oven. All the while Sherry tells me what she is reading. It's a very peaceful way to learn.

Sherry just told me

My mum is having another baby.

Oh, I am so jealous. She has two sisters and two brothers and now there will be another baby. I have only one brother. You know, I have tried badgering my parents saying

I want a baby in our family. I love seeing so many children in one house. It's more fun.

They just laugh.

Grump, grump.



You know my life has parts to it. There are times when I am very happy and having fun. My parents seem to love finding different activities for us. But there are times when life feels dark and sad particularly when my parents argue. This happens mostly at night. My bedroom is across the hall from theirs, so I hear *everything*. I have since we moved to our new house.

John, you promised you would come home after preparing your case at

the Law Court Library. Where have you been? It is 1:30 in the morning.  
Having a drink with the boys.

Then silence—for just a moment.

Mum gets really angry. It is frightening to hear her crossly say  
You are being unreliable and unfaithful

I know what unreliable means, it's when I don't do something I was  
supposed to do. I wonder what unfaithful means? It must be awful.  
You know, they are really mad. They sound like cats hissing at each other  
because they are whispering. We used to have cats until our neighbor  
stole them away. Mum thinks she feeds cats richer cream. I know what a  
cat sounds like when it hisses.

Then, it all becomes quiet. Which is all well and good for them but, I am  
wide awake buried and shivering with fear under the covers. I wonder  
what will happen. I have just made a decision. I am going to see if I can  
wake up each night when the front door opens. I need to know what is  
going on. I fear one night he will leave forever after their whispered  
argument and I need to be ready. What will happen to us?



Everything seems normal this afternoon. Isn't that strange? When I left  
for school my parents were still asleep. Now, Mum is busy in the house  
and Mrs. Speaker, our housekeeper, has just taken homemade bread  
out of the oven.

Ann, do you want a piece of hot bread?

Can I have butter and your homemade raspberry jam with it?

Here you go.

I will take it to my bedroom and do my homework.

*Mrs. Speaker has been with us for several years. She has nine children all  
grown up and gone. Her home is near the airport. With half an acre of land  
she grows all sorts of vegetables and raspberries, tons of delicious raspberries  
which become scrumptious jam. She can get my father to agree to anything.  
Recently we got a new refrigerator that doesn't need ice, thanks to her  
request. No one argues with Mrs. Speaker!*

Mum, will you help me with my homework when I am done?

Yes, dear, bring it down.

We have just finished, and Daddy is home. My parents are having cocktails. Everything seems normal. I guess we are safe. You know, my parents love to have a good time. And give us a good time. In fact, my mother always says: Find the positive in what is happening. But I don't like these nighttime arguments.



A special person—Sherry's grandmother, Bizzy—has come into my life. Her name fits her. She is always bustling about and she is always at Sherry's. When she comes into the room everyone knows. And, when she asks Now, dear, what has happened that is interesting in your life?

I know she wants to know and has the time for me to tell her.

Why I love Bizzy most is she takes us to the theatre. We all get dressed up. Bizzy wears dark silk patterned outfits covered with a beaded necklace and scarf thrown on top. As we drive to the theatre in the pouring rain she tells us a bit of the story but never the end.

Tonight, we are going to *The Mikado*. It's a Gilbert and Sullivan piece, an operetta.

What's that?

An operetta combines both music and dialogue, meaning the characters both sing and speak. Here's the story. The Mikado is a make-believe leader in Japan. He has a son name Nanki-Poo who is in love with Yum Yum. There are two other characters in the operetta, Ko-Ko, The Lord High Executioner of Titipu and Pooh-Bah, the Lord High Everything Else. Sherry, Romilly (she's Sherry's sister) and I are laughing at how ridiculous it all sounds.

It's very rainy tonight. We arrived just in time. The overture was great. But I am having a hard time keeping up, understanding what the singers are singing. They go much too fast.

At the intermission, I asked

Isn't it too fast?

No, Gilbert and Sullivan wrote words and music that go at a very fast clip. I have made a decision. I am not going to try to understand. I will just allow the music and words to float over me. The performer's antics, slapping one another on the back, tripping each other tells me all I need to know. They are very silly.



I don't think I have told you that my father is a lawyer. Sometimes he has a case to argue in the Supreme Court in Ottawa. Usually, Mum goes with him. Then, they go to New York City to visit with my godfather, John McCormick and his wife, Cheechee. Most importantly, they go to a Broadway musical. Haig and I always await our present, a recording of the show. Recently, it was *Oklahoma*. During cocktail hour tonight, Daddy put the recording on the gramophone. My parents are being silly, acting and singing the show.

Mum said

Curly, a cowboy, came on stage and sang the most wonderful song: "Oh what a beautiful morning."

Daddy's trying to sing it. He's not very good.

We are playing the recording over and over again. And, you know what? On Thursday evenings, Mrs. Speaker's day off, Mum and I do the dinner dishes. We put on *Oklahoma* and sing lustily. Our favorite song is "Everything's Up to Date in Kansas City."

Can you image a city in the middle of a wheat field where the corn grows as high as an elephant's eye?



Sherry, Romilly and I are being given an exercise class from Mrs. Walker once a week in their family playroom.

Mum said

Mrs. Walker came from Austria to Vancouver during World War II. She is a specialist in exercise.

I love her. She's tiny, wears black pants and speaks English with a strange accent. She asks the three of us to connect with one another by using blue

and brown rubber rings. It is all done to music. I am very happy in her class. These exercises make it easier for me to do my homework later.



We have a boat, eighteen feet long, being built for us, a Turner boat. My father tells us it will be sturdy with a hull made of overlapping wood. For weeks at dinner we searched for names. None fit. Then, one night, Mum suggested  
 How about *Honey Pie*?  
 Mum, calls Daddy by that name.  
 We all laughed, but it didn't seem quite right. My father mused.  
 I could see his brain ticking. And, then, he came up with  
 How about *Sea Pie*?  
 Yes, yes, we all shouted!  
 You know all my friends call my father Pie—forget the honey!



HAIG FARRIS AND *SEA PIE*

Well, now there's more good news. This summer we will go to the Gulf Islands for two weeks and take our new boat. I can invite Sherry. Where are the Gulf Islands? Nestled between Vancouver and Vancouver Island away from the rough Pacific Ocean. We will stay at a lodge at Active Pass on Galiano Island. My father is very excited as he says  
 There is great fishing, lots of salmon.

I have never seen a place like our lodge. There's a big wooden house where we eat. Our rooms are separate from the house. They are attached brown wood boxes. That's all. You open the door and you step outside or

you step inside. Isn't that odd?

Tomorrow morning, very early, we are going fishing.

Daddy told us at dinner

We have to fish when the tide is changing.

What does that mean?

The ocean comes in and then the ocean recedes. The time when it is beginning to go out is the best for fishing. It means we have to be up at 5 a.m. while it is still dark. Everyone to bed early to-night!

It's cold. We are cozy in our parkas on the dock. Daddy and Haig are taking the cover off the boat. Sherry and I have been given our marching orders

Pull out the slats that keep the cover firm overnight and roll them in the cover. Haig and I will load the boat.

Mum is wiping the dew off the deck at the back of the boat, so we don't slip.

We're off. Daddy says

Bumpers up!

That's Sherry's and my job. You know, bumpers are those tall round soft cylinders that protect the side of the boat when it is tied to the dock.

They would bounce about as the boat careens through the water if they are hanging down. And it doesn't look nice.

In the time that it takes to wink three times we are in middle of Active Pass. No wonder my parents chose this lodge. It's close to fishing.

Daddy just announced

I am turning off the motor. We will drift while we jig for herring.

It's still kind of dark. I can see the dangerous water currents swirling around us making our boat rock.

How come there is light in the water?

That's phosphorescent light. It means there are some tiny, tiny organisms in the water giving off this light.

It sure is beautiful.

Daddy has handed us a piece of round wood about as long as a 12" ruler and thick as a spindle on a chair.

These are your jigging gear.

There are hooks tied to the thin nylon line wound around the wood.

The last hook is attached into the top of the wood. Be careful as you undo your hook that you don't cut yourself

This is weird; you have hooks, every six inches. And, why is there red wool on the tip of the hook?

It's the bait. It's how you catch herring.

I thought we were fishing for salmon.

We are. But we need bait for the salmon.

Oh, I pricked myself.

Okay kids, now here's a one-pound weight. It has a metal opening at the top and bottom. Thread the end of your line through and tie it.

Good, now, put the line over the side of the boat and move it in a slow up and down motion. That's called jigging. When you feel something, you may have a bite.

It's getting lighter in the sky, but the water is very dark.

I can't see anything. Sherry is shouting, unusual for her

Pie, I feel something.

Good, wait. Keep jigging.

How long?

Until you have felt something for five or six times. When you bring in your line you want to bring in several herring.

Okay.

Now, I have six hits.

Okay, slowly wind your line around the wood. As soon as you see the first herring, flip your line into the boat.

On the deck?

Yes.

Oh, my goodness. This is so much fun!

Our deck is wet with flapping herring.

Now, take the herring off the hook and put them in the bucket of water.

We want them fresh when we start trolling for salmon.  
They are slithery and hard to hold.  
You can do it.

Mum has a big rag and is mopping the deck to clear off the slime from the herring and the wet salty water.  
I just tossed my red-covered hooks over the side of the boat again.  
I had five herring. I am told we need lots more.

Okay, we're done. We have more than thirty herring.  
Is it okay if take off my parka? I am hot.  
Fine, toss it under the bow of the boat so it doesn't get fishy.  
Now, I will show you how to fillet a herring. Here's a knife for each of you.  
It's very sharp, be careful. The goal is a triangle that you make from the back of the herring. We will put your triangles on the hooks to catch the salmon.  
You make it look very easy.  
Just try. First you cut the top of the triangle, then, cut into the two sides down to a point. Good. Next step. Watch! You dig under at the top of your triangle; flatten your knife cutting about a quarter of an inch thick to the bottom point.  
HmMMM  
Soon you will be good at it.  
How's this?  
Perfect.

Next step. Here's your fishing rod. See those two large hooks close together. Put the wide part of your herring triangle on the top hook and the other on the lower near the end of the line.  
Gosh, is this okay? It looks wiggly.  
It's fine  
What's that silver thing?  
It's a dodger. It dashes around in the water as the boat moves.  
We hope it will draw the salmon's attention.

The motor of our boat is still in neutral. Mum is keeping an eye for drift wood that might damage our new boat. Or watching to see if a ferry is coming. We might have to get out of the way.

Sherry, you take the left side of the boat. Haig, the back and Ann, the right.

Hold the rod over the water and pull out an arms-length of fish line, one after the other until the water catches the weight and you can see that the dodger is doing what dodgers are supposed to do, dodge about! If they spin, bring the line in and start again. However, it may be we are going too fast.

Mine's working.

Okay, pull out more fish line, about fifteen arms-length and you are fishing.

Mum, can we have breakfast?

As soon as you children are fishing, and your father can take over piloting the boat.

Oh, okay. I am hungry.

Mum is producing goodies from the lodge. A banana, creamy egg salad sandwiches, oh, yea and homemade strawberry jam and peanut butter sandwiches.

Can I have some hot chocolate?

Sure, it's in a big thermos.

My father is singing.

Fishy, fishy in the brook come and bite on the children's hook.

Haig suggests

How about you steering us to a salmon?

Whiz, whiz. Haig has a salmon on the line. Daddy is giving instructions.

Reel quickly, as long as the salmon is swimming toward the boat.

How can we tell if the salmon has stopped swimming?

When your line becomes heavy, it means the fish has stopped moving.

Keep your attention on the line, the fish may begin swimming in your direction again and you will need to reel quickly. If it goes the other way let it go, otherwise it may break the fish line and you will have no fish and no dodger and no hooks and no herring strip.

That would be boring.

Yes, but it will happen.

Haig's fish is close to the boat now, we can see its silver body in the black swirly water. Mum is standing by with the net to scoop the fish out of the swirling water.

Watch how your mother does this. She's a pro. She puts the net in the water, so she can get under the fish. That way it doesn't get knocked off.

Yea, Haig. He has caught our first fish.

The deck is slimy again.

We are back on the dock. Sherry, Haig and I all caught fish this morning.

Haig's is ten pounds. Mum took a picture of our bounty.

Okay, kids. Now you have one more step to be a good fisherman.

You have to clean your fish.

How do we do that?

Ann, take this bucket and fill it with sea water.

I am flat on my stomach on the dock.

Haig, help! It's too heavy for me to lift alone out of the water.

The first step is to cut off the head. You go under the gills.

Let me show you.

He sliced right through and picked up the head.

Have you noticed all the sea gulls around us?

Yes.

They are waiting for their breakfast.

He tossed the head and a gull caught it in the air. Amazing!

Next, you make a slit down the side of the fish and clean out its innards.

Start at the tail and move up to the top of the fish.

Throw this to the seagulls?

Yes.  
 They are really greedy.  
 Yes, and watch your salmon.  
 They might steal it away from you.  
 Now, put the salmon in the bucket  
 and give it a good clean.  
 Nice going, you three.

Mr. and Mrs. Robson  
 They run the lodge where we  
 are staying.  
 Look what we caught! Can we  
 have salmon for dinner?  
 Yes, you can. Congratulations  
 on your catch.



HAIG AND JOHN FARRIS ABOARD THE *SEA PIE*

I told my friends at school about our  
 vacation and the fun we had fishing.  
 I was so surprised when one said  
 Ick! I wouldn't like to go fishing. They are slimy. And, I certainly wouldn't  
 clean a fish.  
 Why? How are you going to eat a fish if you don't clean it?



Grade Seven is very difficult. I am getting lost with my studies, more and more. Grump, grump. And I can't stay focused on something very long. My mind wanders, no matter how hard I try to concentrate. I love the teachers who go slow and explain each step. I write down the information as fast as I can and I stay with the class. And teachers who make their material come alive by telling stories, such as the Battle of 1066, are high on my list of favorites. I can image the Dark Ages with the people wearing crosses around their necks and living in small homes with animals running about. Then I can see ships arriving in at the bottom of boot-shaped England and soldiers in their clunky and noisy chain armor looking

most uncomfortable walking into these tiny houses and frightening everyone. The more the teacher gives the information in story form the more I learn.

Some teachers with sour faces make rude remarks

Ann, are you ever going to learn this?

They make me angry and leave me with a very hopeless feeling.

You know what I did today? I said

I am doing the best I can!

Other times I am quiet and sad. I don't want to share my troubles. I know they have no answers. I am following Mum's suggestion from years ago. Keep positive and find other solutions.

Here's one of my other solutions. I sit at the back of the class now, next to the window. Our classrooms have big windows. That is a big help. I get up all the time, very quickly, so the teacher doesn't know.

But it helps; my head gets cleared.

Sometimes, I look out of the window to the tall green trees whose limbs bend with the wild wind. Then sometimes they assume a peaceful pose.

Whatever. They work magic for me. My head clears.

And, when it gets really bad, I go up and above my head. I leave my body. Yes, I do. That removes the pain of trying to learn. I can rest there.

Or I dream. I see myself at my desk at school, understanding what is written on the blackboard. That dream makes me feel better!

But, of course, it doesn't happen.

Oh, learning is so frustrating and confusing especially because I know I am smart.

My mother stills listens to my lessons. That's good. Except she no longer can help me with math. She's not good at that subject either.

My father is trying. Today he got stumped. Do you know what I said to him?

Daddy, you and your mythematical mind.

Gosh, we laughed hard. I have no idea where that word came from.



You know I am making up words more and more these days. My parents tell me I have an unusual talent. They think it is just fine.

My father calls it Annisms.

The other evening our family and some friends went out for dinner.

As the hostess showed us to the table I blurted out

There is one too many few!

The hostess looked at me, puzzled. My father jumped in and said

She means there are one too many of us and too few chairs.



I was at my grandparents Farris' house today with my parents.

They were discussing a bill before the Senate. I don't think I told you that my grandfather was appointed to the Canadian Senate in 1937, the year I was born. Grampoo is making a speech soon in Ottawa and wanted feedback. My parents are often sounding boards for him. Haig and I love sitting in Grampoo's library with them, listening. It's always fascinating because they get so involved in the discussion and sometimes they ask our opinion. Not that we know much but we are included.

Nana and I went to the kitchen to get more ginger cookies. As we were walking in the main hall, she said the strangest thing to me Ann, don't you worry about not reading. You are the smartest of them all. My parents must have told her about my reading problem. Before I could say anything, she had gone on into the back hall.

You know, it isn't that I don't like school. I love to learn new things. When people tell stories and make learning fun, I love it. It's just I don't like not understanding what I am seeing on the board or what I am reading.

*I think this is a good time to tell you about Nana and why I am paying attention to what she just said. Nana was a schoolteacher. She grew up in Wolfville, Nova Scotia where her father was president of a Baptist college. In 1894 she obtained entrance to Acadia where she met my grandfather, J. Wallace de Beque Farris. In 1899 they both graduated from Acadia and Grampoo proposed. However, the marriage was postponed because Grampoo went off to Philadelphia to study law. With her college education,*

*Nana chose to be a school teacher and moved to Middletown, Connecticut for five years while waiting for Grampoo to both graduate in Law and then discover where he wanted to live his life, which became Vancouver. Patiently, Nana waited. When she arrived in Vancouver with him in 1905 she was unprepared for the rough and tumble environment. To her amazement there was no college or university. She gathered together a few women who were graduates of colleges and universities in Eastern Canada and the US and who, like herself, came west for their loved ones. The result, many years later, was the formation of the University Women's Club. However, first there had to be a university. She was one of three leading the pack to bring into being the University of British Columbia. So, when Nana talks, I listen.*



EVLYN FENWICK FARRIS [NANA]—CIRCA 1912

The midnight arguments have given me a new talent. I can sniff when anger is in the wind especially when walking into a room. I can see when they are pretending to be having a good time. I can sense who is telling the truth and who isn't. I can tell who will be fun to be with and who will be a bore. I love this talent. I am ready when anger bursts forth. I have two options. I can leave the room or dive into it, trying to stop it. The worst thing about anger is that afterwards, I can't concentrate.

My grades are at an all-time low. I have gained fifteen pounds.

The doctor has put me on thyroid pills and taken away starch from my diet. That makes me very unhappy. I like potatoes, I love Mrs. Speaker's homemade bread. Oh dear, oh dear.



Mum told me the other day

We are going to an opera that is coming to Vancouver.

Mum is very excited. She thinks I will like it.

What's an opera?

The music is like listening to a symphony only there is a story that is sung by the singers. It's not unlike the Gilbert & Sullivan performances that Bizzy takes you too, but opera is sung in a foreign language, a language other than English.

That's weird. Why haven't we gone before?

Vancouver doesn't have an opera company. This performance is happening because the musicians and singers are coming to Vancouver for the performance.

Oh, I can hardly wait!

We are dressed in our best for this evening performance. I have on my new dark green velvet dress and am wearing a string of gleaming pearls my parents gave me for the occasion. Of course, it is pouring rain.

It does that all winter in Vancouver. We are going to a different theatre.

It's on Hastings Street.

Mum, the musicians are below the stage.

Yes, that's the orchestra pit.

I just had the best time I have ever had. I love listening to the singers with the orchestra. It's so beautiful. It doesn't matter that I can't understand what they are singing. I know when they are lovers. They sing to each other and make us cry. I love opera. (The name of the opera eludes me.)

Sherry's parents are having a party for these singers. The late evening supper is laid out on the dining room table, the candles are lit, and the overhead lights are very dim. Sherry and I got our supper quickly, so we can follow the tenor. We want to talk to him.

Great. Sherry, look! He's chosen the love seat in front of the gentle, burning fire. There's a Lauren Harris angular, pale yellow and grey painting powerfully positioned above the hearth.

It makes us and the room feel very comfortable.

Sherry, let's sit beside him.

There's just enough room for us as we claim our seats on either side of him, being careful not to spill our food. The tenor, who is a little pudgy, doesn't seem upset with our questions. He asked us to let him get a bite to eat as we talk.

Of course, we chorused

What is it like to be an opera singer?

We have our own train. We visit many different cities staying just a few days performing in a theatre most of us have never seen before. There are more than one hundred of us: musicians, singers, stagehands, chorus. And we love singing the beautiful music. Of course, it's wonderful to hear the audience clap.

Do you like it?

Oh yes, I love to sing. However, we do miss our family for we are away from home a long time.

Driving the few blocks home tonight I said to my parents

I am going to work in opera when I grow up.

My father asked

Are you going to be a singer?

No, I don't know what I am going to do but I know there is a place for me.

I am going to work in opera.



Grade Eight has brought more new learning problems, especially grammar, math and French. I don't seem to be able to figure them out. They don't make logical sense to me. What is a misplaced modifier? Why is it misplaced and how do I to fix it? To make matters worse, the information in my classes is being taught very quickly. I can't get it all down to check with Mum later. This puts me into confusion. And with confusion comes sore upper arms. And sometimes there's a strange inner rushing moving up the core of my body. You know, I don't know how to share this with anyone. Not even Sherry. It's because I am not clear what is happening.

If it happens when I am home I have a solution. I go downstairs and put on classical music often the Bruch Violin Concerto. Sitting on the soft brown covered sofa in the living room I allow myself to sink into the beautiful sounds. The confusion clears.



Two big surprises tonight. My parents asked  
 Would you like to have a new bedroom on the third floor?  
 You can choose the décor.  
 Yes, I thought, yes, I would love to move away from the midnight arguments. I bet I will sleep the night through. But why is this being offered? There's something they aren't telling me.  
 Mum just said  
 We have a surprise for you. I am having a baby in May.  
 Oh, I am so excited. That's five months. Oh my goodness, I am so happy!  
 I can hardly wait!  
 Did I tell you? Sherry's mother is also having another baby. It's coming soon. Our babies can be good friends.

I told my school friends  
 today while we were  
 changing for gym.  
 My mother is having a baby.  
 What?  
 Yes, it's true.  
 I bet you are excited.  
 Yes, I can hardly wait.  
 I have been asking for  
 a baby for years. Sherry  
 will now have five brothers  
 and sisters. I will have two.  
 I know these new babies  
 will be very good friends,  
 just like Sherry and me.



KATHERINE COLLEDGE FARRIS IS BORN  
 ON MAY 5, 1951. ISN'T SHE ADORABLE!



# SUMMER MUSICALS BEGIN MY THEATRE TRAINING



[ 1956 ]

**I**T MAY NOT BE OPERA, but I have a job apprenticing at Theatre Under the Stars, (TUTS), an outdoor summer musical theatre company, performing in Vancouver's Stanley Park. It happened this way. In January, with my first term at the University of British Columbia (UBC) behind me I set out to find my summer job.

Mr. Buckingham.

He's the Manager of TUTS. Dressed in a sports jacket, he has a welcoming smile.

I will do anything. I can sew, I can organize. I know I don't have any theatre experience, but I have been to shows.

At Theatre Under the Stars?

Yes, my favorite was *Oklahoma!*

Let me introduce you to Randy and Alma.

Down a wide dark hall, we went to a small office room with closed venetian blinds over the windows, under which are two desks squished back to back. There's also an old army grey filing cabinet with many

scratches on it and a drafting board and stool in a corner.

Randy, she's the red-haired one, motioned to a chair on the side of their two desks.

Ann, sit here.

Alma explained

We need someone to help us with filing in the summer. Have you done that before?

No, but I can learn.

Randy commented

We also need someone who will work in the costume department for Cy Cook. Do you sew?

Yes, I make clothes. I took home economics at school and summer classes at the Singer store in Kerrisdale. I can sew a dress from scratch.

Good.

And we need someone to run errands.

I am reliable at that.

And your job would have you working in rehearsals with the director.

I take very good notes.

I didn't tell them that I have to, that's the only way I can handle all my school work.

Mr. Buckingham came in at the end of our meeting and said

I will get back to you.

Well, he did, and I am now working for TUTS.



How did I get to this point? Let me tell you.

I came into myself in Grade Nine. It began when I moved to the third floor. Finally, I slept well. Gone were the nightly arguments that I waited for and worried about. I began to feel more confident and lost fifteen pounds.

And I had my adorable baby sister, Katherine, to take care of and play with. I had a real purpose at home. She's five now.

Oh, I love her so much.

My high school years passed passably. At school my tricks – sitting at the back of the class so I could get up when I needed and writing everything down – seemed to help. And I was aggressive in telling my parents what works and doesn't for me. After one year of Latin I said

No, my brain doesn't like it. French is enough.

Between you and me I would give that up too, but I know I have to have it to graduate. It's because Canada is a bilingual country. Oh well, my grades are not all that bad, B's and C+s.

At night, still till to this day, I go over my schoolwork with Mum.

My memory is just not good at holding all this information until it's burned into my brain.

I replaced Latin with home economics. I loved going to the large room lined with three white stoves on one wall and Singer sewing machines on another, under tall windows looking out to a forest. The environment gave me a great sense of freedom. Learning to cook white sauce and cookies and cakes was fun. And I loved figuring out a McCall's pattern to make clothes for myself. But you know what I think was most important about home economics, I was away from words. Words, words, words – they can be overwhelming!

Home economics gave me another gift. It showed me that I am a good organizer. When it came time to plan the logistics for the tea room at the Annual Crofton House School Bazaar, my teacher included me. I learned how to plan a menu for two hundred, participated in the cooking and setting up the tea room. By Grade 12, I was organizing and running the tea room. I loved the responsibility. I did it well. It was fun.

And I want to talk about fun. To me, if I am not having fun I have a hard time feeling successful. Yes, I know, my parents and others tell me, life isn't always a bed of roses, but I sure try to make it that way.

I feel so much better.

Going to the symphony has always been fun. It's odd no more operas have come to Vancouver. Too bad! But musical theatre is not far from opera.

That's a good beginning. And I know it's just the beginning. I know my life will be in theatre. I don't want to be a wife staying home. I want to see the world and be free, and I am certain a life with music will make this happen.



The workday at TUTS begins at 9:30 a.m. I am busy from morning till late in the evening, yes with a variety of tasks. The office, rehearsal space and costume shop are in one building on a pier jutting out over English Bay with the ocean's salt water beating against the base of the thick wooden struts holding the pier up. This long, white, wooden structure used to be a dance hall and restaurant. The rehearsal space at the end of the building has floor to ceiling windows on three sides looking out over the blue (some of the time) ocean, the Strait of Georgia, as well as the Coast Range Mountains. On lovely days the sun streams in and the ocean breeze wafts through the open windows. On rainy days it feels like we are in a glass bubble singing our way through the rain – all we were missing is Gene Kelly.

I am Jill of all trades. It's a real apprenticeship.

Randy is a taskmaster.

Ann, first thing each morning please sort through these invoices.

Some are marked paid. Put them in a manila file in the grey filing cabinet.

Those unpaid go in this file on my desk.

Okay.

I like it. I am learning where all the theatrical supplies come from.

Around 10:30 Randy says

Go to Cy and see how you can be helpful.

Cy's costume studio is on the opposite side of the building. The sun streams in the window and we can see the Molson's beer sign across the bay. Cy is a small wiry man who worries all the time. My seat is next to the hat lady, Ida Thiery, who sits in the corner on a stool surrounded by feathers and more hats. She dresses up for work, looking like Bizzy in brocades. And, of course, each day she sports a different hat.

I am sewing sequins on costumes next to seamstresses whose heads

are bent over their sewing machines creating new or altering pieces from Malabar's, a costume house in Toronto. In the late afternoon after school, a young teenager, Ron McDougal, who lives nearby, joins me.

And I am working in rehearsals. The stage manager, Tommy Lee, is only available in the evenings. He has shown me how to set the props for rehearsals. I am in heaven.

It's fascinating learning the intricacies of producing a show. First of all, you have to know the characters who make it happen. There's Jimmie Johnston, the stage director, who tells the actors where to move and helps them become the character in the musical. He's a solid sort and has a quiet sense of humor. Harry Price, the conductor, is always very well-dressed, including a tie. He is a perfectionist, very specific on how the music is to sound. Aida Broadbent, the choreographer, comes just for the summer. She's a Canadian but lives in LA and works with the comedian Jimmy Durante. Aida is a disciplinarian. There's no fooling around with her.



*Front Row: ANN FARRIS, HARRY PRYCE, JIMMIE JOHNSTON, DORIS CUNNINGHAM, SHIRLEY CHAPMAN  
Back Row: ROBERT GOULET, DON MCMANUS*

Beverly Fyfe (we call him Bev) is the chorus master, a tall, thin, intense man who walks with a score in his arms and a pencil behind his ear. This team has worked together for years. It's clear they respect each other. And they create a happy environment in which to work.

And then there is Hugh Pickett, press agent and promotion manager. He's larger than life and much fun. He has taken me under his wing and is teaching me his techniques of getting press attention. Daily, he talks with Jack Wasserman, the town's nightlife and celebrity columnist. TUTS, its artists and activities, are often mentioned in his column.

Hugh suffers from ulcers.

Ann, please bring a glass of milk from the refrigerator and place it on my desk when you come in. I never know when an attack might come.

There are even more people. Gail McCance, the technical supervisor, runs a shop constructing the scenery in an old stable in Stanley Park, a couple of miles away. I worry about him. He's thin, drawn, dark-haired and coughs. Gail's tiny office has intsy windows that look out into the park. His walls have stacks and stacks of designs for shows, past and present. The rest of this small building is jammed with stored scenery, platform units, trees, banisters, bundles of drapes rolled up awaiting to be taken to the theatre. An able assistant, Harold Laxton, is at the paint frame putting the final paint touches on a column. Al Baratelli, a tall young man with a great sense of humor and sporting a red UBC Engineers polo shirt somehow finds floor space to build scenery. Out of this chaos comes so much magic.

Our first show is *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*. Fran Gregory and Robert Goulet are the stars. I have been watching Fran. She's a tall lady with a mass of very bleach-blonde almost white hair and is married to Jack Wasserman. When she belts out "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend," she pouts which makes her song much more appealing. Aida and Fran, in very high heels, are spending hours working out her dance routines. Her height is not a problem for Bob Goulet. He's tall, but tall isn't what

is important. He has a beautiful voice. Who could not fall in love with him swooning at you? And you know he has the best time being on stage – and off, I might add. But what matters is being on stage. Like Fran, he takes his work very seriously. I love it when I have time to be in rehearsal.



We have moved to the outdoor theatre, Malkin Bowl in Stanley Park, for final rehearsals of our first show. It's a strange-looking building, a half-moon shape. I have a new title, Assistant Stage Manager. My job is making sure artists are ready for the entrances. Tommy Lee is putting the lighting and scenic cues in his script. He sits on a high stool against the proscenium arch on stage right. I am watching, a lot!

*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* opened last night. It almost rained but didn't. The audience loved it and so do the critics. When the final curtain was pulled, I felt so happy. That's my first show.



JUNE 1956, VANCOUVER SUN NEWSPAPER,  
ROMILLY GRAUER, ROBERT GOULET, ANN FARRIS  
[PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN]

I am amazed at how fast we can change from one show to another. Now, we are in rehearsal for *The Merry Widow* with Wilbur Evans and Terry Saunders.

Mr. Evans is a handsome man with a rich voice and incredible career in opera, Broadway musicals and much more. He starred opposite Mary Martin in the London production of

*South Pacific*. Now he is playing a man of a certain age out to get the heroine.

We rehearse a show for two weeks, open it, rehearse another for two weeks and on the Saturday night when we close the first show, the scenery

is struck away and the new show is set up in time for dress rehearsal on the next night. Our only companions in this huge park during these midnight hours are the animals in the zoo not far away. The monkeys and their croaks, the seals and their groans give us much amusement. It's cold out here, though. I bring a thermos of hot chocolate.

The company gives us clubhouse sandwiches.

Rehearsal finishes sometimes as late as 2 a.m.

No rest for me. I show up at the Pier by 10 a.m. Yes, bleary-eyed but ready for my next assignment.

Gosh, the summer is zipping by. We just closed *Finian's Rainbow* with Bob Goulet and Betty Phillips, and are into our last show, *South Pacific*, again with Bob Goulet (how lucky are we and the audiences to have this talent in all our shows), Wilbur Evans and a newcomer, Mary La Roche, who has many operetta and Broadway credits. You know, our producer, Mr. Buckingham, does cast very well.

The summer is over. I worked hard and learned a great deal, I loved everything. And I was appreciated. We had good reviews and packed



1956 TUTS CLOSING NIGHT PARTY: ANN FARRIS, ALAN BROWN

houses even when it was chilly. I am proud of our product and being a part of making it happen. This has been more than I dreamt it would be.



SHERRY AND CHRISTOPHER GRAUER

Sherry has been home for the summer. She was in finishing school in Switzerland for the year. Soon she leaves for Wellesley College.

Sherry, my first year at the University of British Columbia was a relief and a challenge.

I must say after twelve years of a private school environment with black tunic, square neck white blouse, long black stockings, bloomers, black blazer, black beret and black raincoat,

I love being free to wear what I want. Yes, I am still challenged with academics, but I love the freedom of

being in a university environment where there is a flexibility so different from a private school and rigorous curriculum. I can breathe. It's a relief.

You won't believe my math mark. A first class! The professor was amazing. He was methodical, reasonable and made each class so much fun I never wanted to miss one. You know my brain needs more than the information to "get it." It needs a supportive environment. Don't ask me why, but it does. Oh, do I wish there was a French professor at UBC like him!

I just scraped through French. Could it be that the manner by which the professor teaches is affecting my learning? This man was very dour. I don't sense he cares about his students. It's just a job.

But Sherry, I have a dilemma.

I want to work in the theatre and there's no theatre program at UBC.

What do you think if I find theatre work in Vancouver and don't return to University?

What do your parents say?

I haven't said anything.

You better tell them.

My parents just listened. No comment. That usually means they don't yet have a response.

I am very frustrated. I can't find theatre employment in Vancouver. There is almost no professional theatre activity. Jimmie Johnston, his wife Kathy and Hugh Pickett aren't surprised to hear about my dilemma. Hugh said Ann, go back to University, get your degree.

Jimmie surprised me

Join the student musical society, MUSSOC.

Oh, I saw their show, *Maid of the Mountains*, during the winter term last year.

Well, I am going to direct this year's show, George Gershwin's *Girl Crazy*.

And Harry Price will be music director.

All does not seem lost. I can keep my theatre training moving forward.



My car pool is calling. Are you going to rush for a sorority?

Oh, I don't know.

Wendy, my cousin, always with a new adventure to report, Judy King who makes great fried-egg sandwiches, and Judy Harker, who recently moved into our Matthews Avenue house when we moved to Angus Drive, are interested.

Well, they talked me into it.

Rushing. We dress in our best and go to tea parties, one after another, all hosted at different people's homes. There are no sorority houses on the University of British Columbia campus. The goal is to learn as much as we can about how we feel with the group of women at the tea party. Did we feel in sync with them? Did their process of running their group

feel comfortable? Were their projects of interest?

At the end of each party we climb into the car and chatter away.

All of us are drawn to the Kappa Kappa Gammas.

I told Mum tonight. We were sitting in the kitchen on the high stools that surround the counter by the stove.

Mum, I am planning to join the Kappas. I like their energy. It's clear, enthusiastic and fun.

Oh dear, I can tell by her downturned mouth that Mum is sad.

She joined the Delta Gammas (DG) when she was at UBC.

Ann, I was hoping you would join the DG's. But it sounds like you are experiencing with the Kappas what I experienced with the DG's.

I am disappointed, but I understand.

Whew, that's a relief. I am happy with my choice. University and MUSSOC will offer me a chance to learn more about the theatre. Being a Kappa will keep me connected to my friends, and this year, I can begin to choose my academic subjects. The University has just started a Fine Arts major. I am taking history of art and classical music appreciation with Harry Adaskin. Mr. Adaskin has a real talent for exciting his students. He loves the music. Now, French is my only *bête noire*.



WILLIAMS THEATER, WILLIAMSTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

—•••—  
Williams.com

# STEPPING OUT



[ 1959 ]

I AM OFF, STEPPING OUT and into a world beyond Vancouver. I can do it now! My undergraduate years at UBC are behind me. My next steps are uncovering a career in the theatre, hopefully opera. A friend, Barbie Sanderson, and I are off on a ten-day trip driving in my TR2 down the West Coast to Route 66 and then across the wide expanse of the USA. Our destination: New York City. Barbie is on her way to study at the New York School of Interior Design. I will continue to Williamstown, Massachusetts for an apprenticeship with the Williamstown Summer Theatre.

Early on the morning of our departure my adorable eight-year-old sister Katherine awakens me with a glass of orange juice and a tiny brown teddy bear, and with tears streaming down her face admonishing me Ann, never forget me.

I promised I wouldn't. And I haven't.

I knew I never could. I love her dearly. We are best friends!

Many of our University buddies came to my house this morning as Barbie and I loaded into my car. We had a great send off. About a month before we left Vancouver my Green Card, my permit to work in the US, arrived. I had been forewarned by the dancers at TUTS who are in the kick line at Radio City Music Hall in the winter. They told me Ten months before departing Vancouver go to the US Consulate office and complete the immigration paper work. Their advice was right on. As Barbie and I reach American Customs at Blaine, very quickly I was processed through. I can now work in the United States.

Our first stop is Seattle. We are checking out our place of residence which we will use when possible as we drive across the country – the Kappa Kappa Gamma houses – at no cost. Who should we meet at Frederick and Nelson's Department Store but my Aunt Katherine and Uncle Charlie? They were on an up escalator and we on a down. We dined royally that night. Then with a AAA TripTik® to guide us, we headed south. Leaving Reno, our next destination is Las Vegas. Top down on our grey blue roadster, roaring along through the bare, sandy brown terrain, which seems to continue forever, the 90-degree weather was welcoming. We knew Nevada was a state with no speed limit. Barbie, let's see how fast we can go on this straight stretch! Okay with you? Yes! Ann, you are at 100 mph. Wow!

Suddenly, smoke, billows of white smoke, starts pouring out of the engine! Quickly I turn it off. By sheer luck we coast into a garage on the outskirts of a tiny town: Tonopah, Nevada. Lady, you have blown a head gasket. Oh, dear. Please replace it. Not so easy, Ma'am. We have to order the part from Las Vegas. The car will not be ready until tomorrow morning.



TONOPAH, NEVADA

Now, let me tell you, Tonopah is one desolate town – a main street and that’s about it. A policeman took us home for dinner and back to the motel with an admonition  
You are not to open your door until I arrive tomorrow morning.

We didn’t. He arrived and drove us to the garage. Our beautiful, sleek blue Triumph was sitting proudly awaiting us. Well, kind of proudly!  
Lady, your car is ready.  
We have put two water bags on your front fender.  
What?  
They are very ugly, beige canvas bags, like you see in the movies on the side of a horse as the caravan goes west. Now, they are



OUR CARETAKER IN TONOPAH

hanging down in front of our elegant car.

He had another instruction

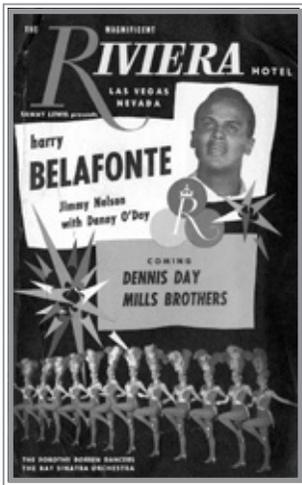
As soon as your motor starts heating up, stop wherever you are and fill up the radiator, it's your cooling system. It's tiny. Remember, no speeding!

We were looked after in Tonopah!

Las Vegas is another desolate town with one main road. The Strip contains a few low sprawling hotels/casinos with flashing neon signs and swimming pools, interspersed with tiny upscale stores. That's it. Oh well, we came for the theatrical content. Two shows a night including Patti Paige and Harry Belafonte, and at almost no cost, just the dinner, which we can afford.



BARBIE SANDERSON WITH TRIUMPH  
AND WATER BAGS



HARRY BELAFONTE AT  
THE RIVIERA, LAS VEGAS

This afternoon, we had a Las Vegas moment, window shopping in I. Magnin's. Thumbing through the clothes racks in this tiny shop, our attention was diverted to the entrance of a very tall blonde wearing a long mink coat and high silver heels on the arm of a very short man with a cigar.

Barbie, I whispered  
She has to be sweating.  
It's 90 degrees outside!

Nope, she just dropped the mink coat into a chair, revealing her gorgeous tanned body covered by a white bathing suit.

A sight to behold!

Taking good advantage of her escort she bought several items, including another bathing suit.

We love Vegas but time to move on. The splendor of the Grand Canyon and the uniqueness of Santa Fe with its artists and native Indian culture grab our attention. Our water bags are put into action at least three times a day.

Suddenly, we are done with sightseeing. Now, we are powering over the Appalachian Mountains heading for New York. I just made the mistake of misreading our TripTik and took us 100 miles south rather than north. Barbie is grumpy. Rightfully so, that decision delays our trip to The Big Apple.

With the top down, hitting the George Washington Bridge in mid-afternoon on a glorious sunny June day with the skyline of Manhattan drawing us like a magnet into the City, we are silent. We are so excited. We even missed our exit off the West Side Highway and ended up midtown at 42nd Street. Somehow, we found 5th Avenue and are cruising uptown. We thought we were home free until Barbie said Ann, the car has heated up.

Oh, my God, we are in Fifth Avenue's center lane right across from the Plaza Hotel. It's 5 o'clock traffic. The two of us burst into gales of laughter.

We stopped right there,  
right then. With horns  
blaring all around us  
we shouted  
Can't pay attention  
to you, sorry!

A tall policeman in a dark navy-blue uniform with a gold crest reached us and was rather amused.



FILLING OUR WATER TANK FROM OUR WATER BAGS.

Looking at our license plate he asked  
Did you drive this thing all the way from South America?  
We are polite  
No, British Columbia. It's north of Seattle, Washington.  
You drove from there?  
Yes,  
The horns are really going crazy now. Cars are weaving around us.  
He doesn't care.  
Do you have enough water?  
Yes, thanks.  
The radiator is filled.  
Okay Officer, thanks for your help.  
Where are you heading?  
72nd and Riverside Drive.  
Go straight ahead, turn left at 72nd street, go through Central Park  
and in a few blocks, you will find Riverside Drive.  
Thank you so much.  
Whew. That was lucky.  
And you know what, later that night after having dinner with my Uncle  
Donald, who amazingly was in New York staying at the Waldorf Astoria,  
the same policeman was guarding our car parked on Park Avenue. He said  
I have been worried about you two.  
Uncle Donald looked at us astonished  
Even the NY police are looking after you! I can hardly wait  
to tell your parents.

You know what this cross-country trip has taught me? If you drive across  
the continent it never seems that you are very far away from home. Kind  
of surprising but true.



Williamstown! I ended up here thanks to the *New Yorker Magazine*.  
I wrote them  
Can you please tell me how I can apply to summer stock?

They responded

Purchase a copy of *Summer Theaters*. It's sold through the Drama Book Shop. Here is the address and the cost.

I shall be ever grateful to them because the recommendation worked.

From this small book with a soft cover I chose eighteen companies from Maine to Pennsylvania and off went my handwritten query letters asking for an apprenticeship opportunity. To my amazement I was accepted at twelve. Miss Somerset, a theatre professor at the University of British Columbia, helped me choose which one to pick.

Ann, you can't go wrong with either of these: Williamstown Summer Theatre at Williams College in Williamstown, MA. The producer is Nikos Psacharopoulos, a professor at the Yale School of Drama, or the summer theatre company in Boston with Rosemary Harris as artistic director.

I chose Williamstown. I thought it amusing that I would somehow be attached to Yale. My father and my two uncles are Harvard graduates. Why not have a little rivalry in the family even if Williamstown Summer Theatre isn't really Yale!



ANN AND NANCY DONOHUE

It's been a fabulous summer, a wonderful apprenticeship with the best of all talents: Carrie Nye, Dick Cavett, John Conklin, Peter Hunt, Lee Starnes, Nikos, Thornton Wilder and many more. I made several wonderful friends, one of whom, Nancy Donohue, loved late night escapades

through New England. We escaped the hot humid air in my car with the top down. My duties as an apprentice included building scenery, hanging

lights, sewing costumes, and taking an acting class (a requirement) from Lee Starnes, an articulate, amusing, tall southern gentleman. I was also cast (God forbid) in *Streetcar Named Desire*. That experience confirmed for me that I was not interested in being an actress. Delightfully, Nancy and I were taken out for a strawberry milkshake by Thornton Wilder, who was playing the stage manager in our production of his play *Our Town*.

Nikos and I passed one another outside the rehearsal hall this morning.  
He had a message

Ann, you are Yale material.

What? Women, they don't go to Yale.

Oh yes, they do, in the Graduate Programs. You apply, you will be accepted.



And, that's what happened. But I had a year to wait. My question was how best to use it? My parents gave me a year's support, \$200 a month. I decided to explore. New York was my first stop and then eight months wandering through Europe, youth hostelting. My journeys began in Paris, up to England, then to the Continent and as far north as Finland, down to Italy, and finally to Greece where I spent the summer. I have seen so much, met so many and found my way in different foreign lands. Yet, my goal of a life in the theatre and, yes, eventually opera, has not changed. It's just that I have more life experience now behind me, as I become a theatrical professional. This past year was an amazing adventure worth a book in itself. Yup, I have grown up some.

Now I am sailing back from Greece aboard a majestic Holland America ocean liner, waiting for the Statue of Liberty to wave at me. When I left Vancouver fourteen months ago, all I knew was it was time for freedom. My mother and I needed space. My expansive energy and independent nature put us at loggerheads – polite loggerheads. My father's unpredictable anger had grown old. I needed space from it all. That was then and this is now. I can hardly wait to dock and see them and my brother Haig, who is off to the University of Pennsylvania to study law.



AUGUST 1960—PIREAUS, GREECE [HARBOR FOR ATHENS]—ROBIN STOLK AND ANN ONBOARD AN OCEAN LINER FOR A TRIP THROUGH THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA AND ON TO NEW YORK.

Ann, dear, I am amazed you can navigate us out of New York City!  
The traffic is awful.

Mum, remember? I lived here last fall!

Our destination is New Haven. Yesterday, Mum and I accompanied Haig to Philadelphia and bought his sheets and towels. He's settled.

Now, Mum has a colorful patterned scarf tied over her recently coiffed hair. We have the top down on my TR2 and are leaving the Madison Hotel behind, cruising across 57th Street to the West Side Highway and north to Connecticut and Yale.

Arriving at our destination, Helen Hadley Hall, we are confronted with a utilitarian, ordinary-looking piece of architecture, a rectangular structure with layers upon layers of flat windows.

Gosh, Mum, it seems odd that Yale didn't given more thought to the look of the women's residence.

She nods in agreement.

I wonder what we will find inside.

It's okay. I have been assigned a corner room, lots of light. A quick shop for my basics – sheets, pillows, blankets – followed by unpacking my trunk that had arrived from the ship, and my room is set. It is fun unearthing memorabilia from my divine summer in Greece. I now have my blue and white hanging piece from Rhodes on my wall. Mum's gone, and I am perusing a map in my welcome kit which is showing me that the Drama School is a fair walking distance from Helen Hadley Hall. I like being punctual, especially today. I will leave myself plenty of time to get lost. This evening I am meeting my colleagues and the faculty, some of whom are friends from Williamstown.

My saunter, this September day, allows me to savor Yale with its Gothic towers and Romanesque-style stone buildings. Last spring I was in England for two months. Sheila Thrift, a Kappa friend, and I did a two and a half-week tour working our way from Southern England to Scotland, visiting primarily Gothic and Romanesque cathedrals, the designs of which are replicated, kind of, at Yale. I feel very much at home.

The Yale campus seems intertwined. There's no clear path between the buildings. The late day sun is slowly descending into the horizon leaving western structures of the college quadrangles bathed in a warm glow. Uncle John, a Yale graduate and my godfather, explained over dinner in New York

The undergraduates, all men, are divided into groups and assigned to different colleges.

I am passing through Saybrook College quadrangle. The windows are flung open and an Elvis Presley song is blasting out of them. This cacophonous noise does jar with the architecture. Oh well, I am moving on.

Wonder why I am not excited? Isn't that strange? I had thought I would be. Perhaps it is because I know I am in the right place and there is no need for anything more.

Gosh, am I acceptable as I am dressed for this reception? I decided against jeans. An introduction to Yale deserves an upgrade to my dark

blue skirt and matching sweater with my brown wooden-carved necklace. Oh well, no time to rethink. My trusty map tells me I am near the University Theater which houses the Drama School. Good thing I paid attention to this map, not something I always do.

Entering the open, chunky wooden front doors of the stone Romanesque-like structure, the University Theater is the beginning of my sacred journey. As I suspected, the interior is styled after a Broadway theatre with a tiny lobby and a small auditorium of dark wood and forest green walls. I think I will feel comfortable working in this space.

Oh, there is a reception line in front of the stage. I will wait a little and watch. Yes, Nikos is correct. There is a mix of men and women. Of course, how could you produce a play without actresses? I want to find Nikos, the tiny Greek man with piercing eyes that dance, to thank him for helping me get into Yale. Oh, there are Lee and Mary Starnes. I know they will be glad to see me. Yes, I am home.



I am enrolled in the Technical, Design and Lighting (TDL) Program working towards a Master of Fine Arts degree. There are five of us in my class: David Nancarrow, a Brit and a perfectionist with a lovely wife; Jim Rose, a puppeteer; Michael Price, who has a fascination with musical theatre; Marc Cohen, a secretive one, and me.

Orientation made it clear there is no loitering: classes from 9-1 p.m.; crew, turning the theoretical into the practical from 2-6 p.m. and 7-10 p.m., including most weekends, more crew. It's going to be intensive.

My first crew assignment is lighting, working as assistant to Elisa Ronstadt, a tall, blonde fastidious woman in her second year as a TDL. We are light board operators and squeezed into a tiny booth which is shoe-horned into a new 4 x 6-foot space at the back of the theatre auditorium. There are two boards, in fact. Elisa sits at one, a desk housing the master console, moving levers to change the light clues while watching the stage in the

process. I am behind on her left, at right angles, facing an upright “board” about five feet tall and wide with ten rows of sixty tiny, tiny rolling dimmers numbered one to ten. I move them up or down upon direction from the lighting designer and stage director who sit in the auditorium and talk to us over headsets. When a light cue is set, Elisa has her console memorize it and we move on.

Lighting and stage rehearsals take many hours. The attention is not always on the two of us, which is giving Elisa and me time to chat. Ann, tell me about your theatre background.

Well, it’s brief. During University, my summer job was an apprentice with an outdoor summer musical theatre company. We did not have a theatre program at my University, but I found a way to keep involved with the theatre by joining a university club that presented musicals. One year, I was producer of *Call Me Madam*. When I graduated, I came East and was an apprentice at Williamstown. How about you?

I graduated from Vanderbilt University in Tennessee majoring in theatre. It’s apparent she came to Yale with more training. I am glad she doesn’t seem concerned that I am a novice.

Periodically, George Izenour, the developer of this prototype light board and a professor at Yale, drops by. In fact, his lab is in the basement of an old Victorian house on Park Street, down the alley from the stage door of our theatre. He fits my image of a scientist, an odd duck giving the impression of walking on air, except when he is checking in on us, squishing into our tiny space. His questions are to the point  
What could be improved?

Elisa responds

Perhaps the dimmer control levers could be a little closer together.

I comment

It would be nice to have a little more light behind each dimmer so it’s easier to see the numbers.

He listens and departs, giving no indication he will take these suggestions.

Elisa and I became friends by the end of the run. She is amusing, smart, knows the ropes and the gossip. A wonderful connection as I begin at the Drama School.

Yale has both old masters and new innovators in the lighting department. Not only is the Drama School on the leading edge of technology with George Izenour, but Stanley McCandless, the much-respected lighting guru, is also on the faculty. Considered the father of modern stage lighting design, he has been around since the founding days of the Yale School of Drama in 1925. My four classmates and I gather at 9 a.m. in a tiny dark room in the basement of the Yale Theatre two mornings a week to listen to Mac and his lighting theories. He places a candle before us, lights it and begins

Let's first consider the power of a candle and how it radiates light.

I am surprised how much light one candle gives in this dark room.

Moving on, he starts describing his method of lighting design.

Mac makes the process of lighting design comprehensible. It is both methodical and embraces the emotional. I like the sense of order.

Yes, the creative imagination of a designer can shine with these tools.

There is one downside to Mac's lectures. He has a monotonous voice.

As the classes are in the small dark room, sometimes, I nod off, especially when I have been up late working on a project. Words, words, words make it difficult for my brain to compute on a continuous basis.

I never sleep in Dr. Nagler's theatre history class, a requirement for all first-year drama school students. Tall and statuesque, he speaks with a slight, undefined accent. His stories entertain us at 9 a.m. in the Experimental Theater. History comes alive! My last eight months in Europe, browsing around ancient theatrical relics, dovetails with many of the visual images he shows us. When the slide of Epidaurus on the Peloponnesus in Greece came up, I exclaimed

Oh, I was just there. I saw Maria Callas sing *Norma*. In fact, I was there twice. The first visit my friend and I came face to face with Maria Callas dressed in a tight-fitting purple jumpsuit which continued up and over her head, walking on the arm of Aristotle Onassis.

Good afternoon, Miss Callas.  
 She just smiled at me and continued on.  
 Our first performance was rained out fifteen minutes into the first act.  
 It poured!

At the end of the summer the performance was rescheduled.  
 Thank heavens, it was just before I left Greece. Oh, my goodness,  
 could that woman sing and act. When she walked to her death at  
 the end of opera with her lover, we were engulfed with her tragedy.  
 How wonderful to have all these memories flooding back as  
 I watched Dr. Nagler's slides.



My interaction with stage directors, playwrights, and actors happens  
 when they come to the scene shop. That's not always their first choice,  
 but a requirement for graduation. They help build scenery, set up lights  
 and run the shows. Yes, some grumble, but...we are glad for their labor.  
 And we hope that perhaps they will have a little patience with technical  
 challenges as they move into the real world and their careers.

Mostly it's fun to know them.  
 Joe Zeigler, a playwright and I  
 are assigned to *A Midsummer  
 Night's Dream* during its run  
 on stage. We and others are  
 manipulating puppets from a  
 bridge hung thirty feet above  
 the stage. Titania's fairy  
 servants, flocks of them –  
 Peaseblossom, Cobweb,  
 Moth and Mustardseed –  
 are designed by Robert Darling  
 and built by Jim Rose.



ROBERT DARLING, JIM ROSE AND ANN



On cue, Joe starts at one edge of our forty-foot swinging bridge, I at the other. Running slowly, with our mobile of tiny diaphanous materials simulating fairies hanging below, we swoop our mobiles down around Titania, sitting elegantly in her throne, deluged with the glorious *Midsummer Night's Dream's* music of Mendelssohn.

Reaching midpoint Joe shouts

Get down Ann, I am going above you.

We don't collide, neither do our mobiles.

Joe and I became good friends hanging out on that bridge.

I am learning how to draft technical drawings from the stage designer's renderings. Yes, and how to build scenery, hang lights and, of course, work as a stagehand during the run of the show. The experience is intense, enormous fun and all-consuming. Our prowess is measured in how effective we are in our work and the projects we submit. We are not subjected to written exams with one exception: Dr. Nagler's class.

I joined a study group and theatre history is being blazed into my brain.

My first year has flown by. One March day Elisa asks

Would you like to share an apartment next year? John Brockington and Angela Wood are graduating and vacating their apartment.

Did you know they come from Vancouver?

No. But, they have a large apartment right across the street from the Drama School. It's available. Want to see it?

Sure.

It's perfect, lots of light with plenty of space for two drafting boards in the living room. Yes, let's do it.

The proximity, the facility to cook my meals, and the camaraderie will be fun. We sign on the dotted line. Julie, the owner of the restaurant two floors below, is our landlord. He's a character, can't sit still and loves to fling his arms about. Most amusing!



My first year is near completion. I am returning home after a two-year absence. I had thought of working for Nikos until my father told me Sherry's father is very ill with leukemia. He is not expected to live beyond the summer. Wow, there is no question, I am coming home. Haig and I will drive together across this wide country.

Mary Larsen, Haig's girlfriend, met us in Chicago for a wedding of one of Haig's friends. She pleaded  
Please, let me drive with you back to Vancouver.  
The only space for her is a narrow slit behind the seats. She insists, we acquiesce, and head off into the dark of night. Four hours later we realize our folly, Mary is squished and very unhappy. We change our plan and accelerate the trip to Vancouver. The top's down, hats are on our heads, the sun shines brightly, and then the dark of night embraces us as we whiz through Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, and field after field of hay, green hay, early hay. The Rocky Mountains provided us with relief from the heat. Each of us takes a turn squeezed into the back. I hang my legs over the side of the car. That's some relief. Thank God for Haig's duffle bag of dirty laundry. At least we have a cushion.

It's 3 a.m. Yea, we have reached the West Coast and the US/Canadian border at Blaine. The custom's officer, discovering our bedraggled shape and our cargo – bongo drums, guitar and duffle bag of dirty laundry – commands  
Pull over to the side.  
I comply.  
We are looking for drugs and are going to search your car including taking a wheel off.  
Do what you must; we are going to sleep on the benches nearby.  
And did so!  
A tap on my shoulder awakens me as does the early dawn light.  
Move on, you are clear.  
He handed me the appropriate papers.

An hour later we arrive home, 1403 Angus. It looks just like it did when I left two years ago, inviting and spacious. We have no house keys and its 6 a.m. No matter, we'll serenade the parents! Around to the back of the house, slipping our way over the dewy grass, Haig starts strumming his guitar. The three of us warble

Home, Home on the Range where the deer and the antelope play.

Mary and I accentuate our arrival by banging on the bongo drums.

Meanwhile, two flights up, Mum hears us and pokes Daddy, saying John, I hear the children.

It's been a two-year hiatus with many adventures, and I am home again.



Death. A new experience for me, for all of us. How can a middle-aged man, Dal Grauer, be dying? Well, the reality is he is, and he is choosing to spend his last weeks at home. Aunt Shirley has moved into one of the kids' rooms to give him the space he needs. Nurses go in and out of the sick room. His door is closed. Lally, the youngest daughter, is grinding carrots, having been told carrot juice helps heal leukemia.

One afternoon we are swimming in the large pool to the side and back of their home. On the upper patio, he appears on Aunt Shirley's arm, a mere shadow of himself, in his maroon dressing gown and slippers.

We stop our thrashing about and call out greetings

Hi, it's so good to see you.

Daddy, Daddy, I wish you could come swimming with us.

We are thinking of you all the time and love you.

He waves, turns and leaves with Aunt Shirley. That is the last time I saw him. At the end of July, he is gone. Fifty-five is much too young to die.

The next evening, during drinks before dinner, we are all together.

Death and the sadness hit me. I break down and sob. I can't imagine not having a father.



My parents feel it's time for a resurgence of positive energy and invite me to come with them to a cocktail party at the Boyce's, friends of theirs. There are many people and much chatter. A tall, rather thin gentleman with a narrow face, pointed chin and impish smile comes through the crowd

How do you do! I am Nicholas Goldschmidt, Artistic Director of the Vancouver International Festival. I hear you are a student at the Yale Drama School. Come, let's chat.

What I don't know is once you start talking with Niki you are in for a long fascinating conversation as he shares, almost spits with excitement, his ideas. This man loves his work! He is just as intense in garnering information about me and Yale and my intentions for my future.

Then I hear him say

Would you be interested in volunteering for the last couple weeks of the Festival? Herbert Berghoff is directing *Do You Know the Milky Way?* a play with two actors, Hal Holbrook and George Voskovec. He needs an assistant. Would you like to help us out?

I would love to.

My summer ends on an upswing.

I join them just as rehearsals move into the Lyric Theater, a charming Broadway-style house, intimate and physically comfortable to be in. It has those cute little side boxes where box-holders can be seen by the audience if the velvet blue curtains are not closed for an intimate rendezvous.

Herbert and I settle into seats half way back in the auditorium. A wooden board has been slung over several seats to create a table for us. My role is simple: fetch and carry. I feel rejuvenated being back in the theatre, watching the dynamics of a production being pulled together.

Herbert is not only a celebrated stage director but also the founder of the HB Studio in New York where he, his wife Uta Hagen, Fritz Weaver and others coach many an actor or actress to great fame. Herbert's engaging and loves to tell stories. We have become good friends.



I sold my car, a wrenching decision, but necessary. It's time for me to contribute to my Yale Drama School fees. A plane trip and I am back in New Haven. Elisa is already in residence. The place is spic and span. Lucky me! We have inherited a very large, like nine-foot-long, kidney bean-shaped tufted maroon velvet sofa, nicknamed the Brockington couch. It's a Drama School legend; seems many liaisons started there. Now, it's a dominant feature in our living room with its three huge picture windows.

This year I am Oren Parker's assistant in the shop, ordering supplies and keeping fiscal records for the University finance department. Orey (that's his nickname) is a quiet man with an even quieter sense of humor. He is also unflappable as he is bombarded with scenic and technical questions.

The number of my classes increases. In addition to technical and lighting courses, I am enrolled in a stage design class with Donald Oenslager. I knew this class would require my producing a stage design a week – a rendering, it's called. In preparation, I took a painting class over the summer. I found it difficult to learn the techniques but am keen to learn more. I have signed up for Herbert Gute's watercolor class in the Art School.

It's odd, but I love my watercolor class. Mr. Gute is a quiet man, befitting my image of a watercolorist. We have large tables with slanted surfaces which mean water runs on the page. Yes, it does, especially when I don't tap my brush on the side of the water container. I soon learn. Who wants a puddle at the bottom of my painting?

Mr. Gute is teaching me how to paint light and shadow.

Ann, look at that tree. He is pointing out the window.

What is happening with light?

The side receiving the sun is more grey than brown, the other side is dark brown.

Yes, now paint that. A big part of painting is seeing what you are painting. Like my classes with Mac and the candle, my eye is being trained to look at the effect of light.

I wonder why is it I sometimes have a problem seeing? Sometimes I don't want to see. It seems silly, but I don't. Hmmmmmmm.



Lee and Mary Starnes have become my family at Yale. Their laughter is much gentler than mine, but they love to laugh, and laugh we do. Lee, always impeccably dressed in grey pants, dark blue blazer and well-polished brown loafers, has an undying curiosity and a passion for the theatre. Mary, an accomplished actress and Yale Drama School graduate, has chosen to teach English in a high school where she also directs plays. She makes the most delicious pecan pie.



My life has a rhythm, theory and practical. I love that. No time to get bored, and perhaps more important is the constant change. It allows me to focus better. I am forever being challenged to walk into a new experience. Like climbing sixty feet up a circular iron staircase in the corner, upstage left of the stage to the grid, a maze of narrow iron bars over the stage. Pipes that move the scenery in and out are hung off these bars and the counterweights that move those pipes are stored there on the side. My first journey up, my heart is in my tummy. Soon I think nothing of dashing about, sixty feet up.

I discover an unexpected talent. I am a smell bellwether. I can detect when the glue, cooking in a large vat on the stove by the paint frame, is about to burn. It's used for gluing canvas to large wooden frames that we construct and upon which scenic artists paint pictures for the shows. The glue needs to be soft and flowy like ripe camembert cheese for application. My smell talent is much appreciated. Walking into the scene shop, I call out  
Hey, you guys, the glue's burning!  
Sure enough, it's true.



Austin Pendleton, a Yale undergraduate, taking a directing course,  
approaches

Ann, I am directing a scene from Shaw's *Saint Joan*. It's my next  
assignment for Nikos. I want you to play Joan.

Austin, you can't be serious.

He doesn't know I have a problem with memorizing! He doesn't know  
what he's taking on. I hear him say

Yes, I am serious. You are going to be perfect in the role.

Oh my God.

Then I remember. I have an acting requirement to complete,  
best get it over with.

Okay Austin, I'll do it.

It feels as if I am forever on my knees, praying to God in my role as  
Saint Joan while praying to this same Divine being that I remember  
the words as I emote my part

"One thousand like me can stop them. Ten like me can stop them  
with God on our side. You do not understand, squire..."

We rehearse so much, the words sink in.



One morning during Mr. O's class I hear a commotion outside the door.  
Where is Ann?

As I emerge, I am greeted with a *huge* (7'x 9') wooden box with Sherry's  
handwriting.

I know what it is. It's a painting. My friend Sherry is sending me a painting.  
She's a student at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Three of us gently pry open the box, one suggesting

Let's keep the lumber for scenery.

From the crate emerges an image of a pensive girl in somber blues  
and reds, looking out a window, yearning. It's beautiful.

Elisa runs to the scene shop for rope saying

It's too large to navigate up the stairs of our apartment.

We will have to take it through our large window.  
 Many have gathered to watch our antics. The painting is now hanging  
 on the wall behind the Brockington couch. The colors of both work  
 wonderfully together.  
 I am thrilled with my gift.

Romance hasn't been a big feature in my life. Well, this year  
 I had two nibbles.  
 Lloyd, a design student with an outrageous sense of humor,  
 grabs my attention until he says  
 Ann, I am gay.  
 We are wonderful friends, now.  
 Not long after, Robert Darling, a quiet, extremely well-read man with  
 whom I enjoy sharing ideas, captures my heart. We dated for a while.  
 One night I ended it. He never seems to have time for me.

I am miffed. Robert is dating another design student? He has time for her.  
 Hmmmmm, I wonder what she has that I am missing? My heart is not  
 broken, just hurt.



1962 VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL  
 FESTIVAL BROCHURE



I had an exciting call.  
 Niki Goldschmidt asked  
 Would you like to be assistant stage  
 manager on *The Magic Flute* and  
 production assistant for the other  
 attractions in the summer's (1962)  
 Vancouver International Festival?  
 Yes, yes, I would love to.  
 An opportunity to work in opera!  
 How fabulous!  
 My summer plans are now set.



I am back in Vancouver before I know it. *The Magic Flute* rehearsals are on a basketball court in a community center. It's large enough to replicate the stage of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre which has a sixty-foot proscenium opening. That's wide! It's an unusual rehearsal space, with loads of windows thirty feet up allowing light and the sun to stream in. Harry Horner, a scenery and costume designer for both movies and opera, has just come from a major success with *Aida* at the 1962 World Exposition in Seattle. He is also the stage director. The *Aida* platform units are doubling for *Flute*, a wise cost consideration, and have been installed on the basketball court. Gail McCance and his skilled scenic crew are working away in the stable in Stanley Park finishing the last *Flute* scenic pieces. Derek Mann, a friend from UBC days, is stage manager.

I am in Mozart's music heaven, ten hours a day, with operatic heavy hitters: Mattiwilda Dobbs, a soprano who frequents the stage of La Scala, Metropolitan Opera and more; William McAlpine, a British tenor and a Canadian baritone, Bernard Turgeon, are prompt to arrive for rehearsal. Bernie Turgeon is singing the role of the much-maligned bird man, Papageno. We are rehearsing Papageno's lament. He believes he has lost his love, Papagena. Bernie not only sings the aria so beautifully, he also is a wonderful actor. I find myself with tears in my eyes. Otto Werner Mueller is conducting. A tall, thin man, he is very strict and stops the rehearsals often for musical corrections. I am glad I took piano lessons when I was ten. I was unsuccessful. What emerged from my fingers on the piano was not musical and sounded awful. However, now I am glad that I went through that experience for I learned how to read music. This skill is now important.

Occasionally I am off to the hairdressers. It's the era of the bouffant hair style and hard to do on my own. I spy a strange sight, a woman under the hair dryer sewing on an amazing trail of many types of fabric and colors and feathers. I ask Charles, my hairdresser  
What is she doing?

That's Maureen Heneghan, the costumer for *The Magic Flute*. She works with Harry Horner making sure his designs are realized as intended. She's much in demand by designers both in North America and Britain. At the moment she is working on Papageno's costume. Go over and say hello! I shout over her hair dryer  
I am Assistant Stage Manager on *Flute*.  
She smiles, and we arrange dinner.

*Flute* moves to the dark and cavernous Queen Elizabeth Theatre for final rehearsals. It's my debut working in a large theatre with an orchestra pit for sixty musicians. The QET feels like another hallowed space. I am discovering that each backstage of a theatre seems to have a distinctive smell, a pleasant odor, a wood smell, which greets one walking in the stage door. It sets the tone. Funny how a smell can do that!

I am positioned Stage Left, making sure artists are ready for their entrances, props are where they need to be and on and on. The orchestra has been added. I am in heaven. Nothing seems difficult to do. Music takes all the tension away. In the wings, I am often ten feet away from the singers on stage. Karl Norman, a bass singing Sarastro, has a deep rich voice. At times I feel as if he is singing to me – quite a thrill. The music, orchestra and voice bring me such peace.

Our dress rehearsal went well yesterday. Today I am in the production office just off-stage, pulling together the last few pieces for opening night, tomorrow. Maurice Wood, the Head Stage Carpenter who runs the stage crew, has an office across the hall. He's concerned  
I've no time to prepare the weekly stage crew payroll sheets. I need help. Yes, he has a daunting challenge with a huge crew of forty stagehands: carpenters, electricians, flymen, and props for the QET as well as a separate crew in the Playhouse Theatre, a small theatre for intimate productions, attached to the QET.  
Maurice, I will tell Gordon your problem.  
Gordon Hilker is the Manager of the Festival.

Morris continues

And, one more thing. We have no advance material on the *Bayanihan*, the Philippine dancers and musicians. They move in on Monday, ten days away.

Gordon's solution is me, for both problems.

Ann, the *Bayanihan* have a New York touring manager. Call him.

And, you will help Maurice with the preparation of the payroll sheets.

And, by the way, *Beauty and the Beast* has its dress rehearsal tonight in the Playhouse. Please check that their needs are in hand.

I get the picture; nothing has been organized around the production and technical details for the other eight touring attractions that Niki has programmed. My Production Assistant cap is on. Strange, there is no Production Manager. Who am I assistant to? Everyone, I guess!

By definition, the word Festival means much going on. When I was in Scotland a couple of years ago. Sheila and I stayed with a family who were involved in helping raise funds for the Edinburgh Festival. I listened with great fascination to the stories of the diverse theatrical activity that happens each August. Well, now I am experiencing it.

There seems to be one rule that Artistic Directors and Managers keep to: no dark nights, in some cases this means daytime also, which results in double bookings. The QET Playhouse is experiencing continuous action. Four days a week for five weeks there's Music at Six: chamber orchestras including the Juilliard Quartet; Louis Kentner, a pianist presenting seven recitals; Vronsky and Babin, the famous duo pianists, and more. They need the stage in the morning for rehearsal and the afternoon concert. As the crowds file out, *Beauty and the Beast* scenery has then to magically reappear on stage for an 8 p.m. curtain. The key to making this kind of schedule work is information. Overnight I have become that funnel. It's fun and I am *learning*.

Today I have squeezed myself into Maurice's office by the four-drawer legal-sized ugly grey filing cabinet, laboring to decipher the time cards for each stagehand, determining which hours are regular, overtime or double time (God forbid!). Recording the details on a master sheet, I find myself enjoying it. I like getting a glimpse into the workings of IATSE, the stagehands union, and learning the names of its members.

I just discovered that the *Bayanihan* is performing at the World's Fair in Seattle. I called the tour manager for the details; he was most accommodating

We use a black surround (meaning black velour curtains as wings and a backdrop) and the full stage. That's all you need to prepare.

Tonight, *Flute* opens. It's not the opening event of the Festival. The ten-day *International Film Festival* preceded. Now, the Festival's focus is theatrical.

As I am walking across the stage I hear a voice from the auditorium calling me and turn. It's John Ellis in his cubbyhole of a space, the light booth, at the front of the auditorium amongst the high-priced seats.

Ann, you now have a headset on Stage Left.

Thanks John. Hey, it's neat, you have an Izenour board! Do you like it? John just smiles.

Vancouver is up-to-date with the latest technology.

Opening night went well. Yes, opera is definitely my path.



Gordon has requested I come to his office. It's serious Ann, when Niki booked the Comédie-Française I sensed three performances in the QET with its twenty-eight hundred seats would be a hard sell. I am trying an idea. I engaged Aristides (Ris) Gazetas, a stage designer and professor of Theatre Design at the University of British Columbia. He has created and had made banners to hang from the top balcony. They will hide the mezzanine seats. When *Flute* closes next weekend, these banners must be hung. Don't spend money, our budget is tight.

Meanwhile assistance is being requested by the stage manager of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*. The show is in its final rehearsals in the Playhouse. Leon Major, a young, energetic, stage director with a loud voice is requesting more props for Mavor Moore, who is playing Caesar. They both smoke cigars in the theatre!!

The Comédie-Française arrives tomorrow and the banners are being installed. God bless my sister, my eleven-year-old sister Katherine and her pal Christopher Grauer, Sherry's youngest brother.

They have gamely agreed to help me with this task.

How's it going?

Ann, this is the most fun. Do you think the knots we have tied are alright? They look good to me. You are doing a great job! Come down to the main floor of the auditorium and see what a difference they make.

I am taking them for lunch. The Festival can, at least, afford this cost.

The three performances of the Comédie-Française did not fare well.

Yes, their acting is superb but lost in our huge theatre. And, their scenery seemed dollhouse in size. Our tiny audience, mostly English-speaking, was lost with the story and lost in the house despite the banners.

It was a zero-sum endeavor! I am sad for both the artists and audience.



My weekly task of summarizing the stage crew hours for payroll is made pleasurable by the close access to the stage. Zubin Mehta is here conducting the Festival Orchestra. Vera Zorina is the soloist. Classical music gives me such joy as I labor with the payroll details.

Zubin just dropped by the Production Office to ask

Want to have dinner and go with me to *Caesar and Cleopatra*?

Love to, didn't get to see the dress rehearsal.

At intermission, he asked

How do you light a show?

I am thrilled, first time I have been asked that question.

I point to the lights above us.

They are called front of house lights. See how they are angled across the stage. The designer divides the stage in blocks, and...

Later we talk about color. My Yale education to the fore! It is fun.



The Festival is over. The strangest thing happened as I was driving home on the last night. I said out loud

This crazy six weeks are a blessing. It has given me my Yale thesis topic: organizing the production and technical aspects of a festival.

Artistic chaos is a part of the game. That doesn't mean we have to endure technical and production chaos...

Climbing into bed, I take a piece of paper and begin a long list of problems we faced this summer.

It is very dark when I turn out the light and look out my window.

The Coast Range Mountains are silhouetted with just a few of the chair lift lights glistening. Closing my eyes, I feel so grateful. I may be working hard, but I am happy. I love making sense of chaos in the theatre.

It really is about mastering the process.



Sad news! Niki Goldschmidt has resigned as artistic director. No question he has done extraordinary programming over these last five years. However, the bottom line, the financial side, is not in good shape. Even so, I know this decision is a great loss for Vancouver. Too bad the Board didn't provide him, at the outset, with the management support he needed.

The summer is ending with a celebration – Haig and Mary Larsen's marriage. Mum has been apoplectic about my dress. Now we have a design and the dressmaker is busy. I love the organdy floppy hat that's to go with it.



My last year at Yale is intense. And it is going by at a fast rate. I had the responsibility of lighting a main stage show, *High Cockalorum*, a new play by Robert Murray, a student at the Yale School of Drama. This was my first experience collaborating with a stage director and designer. In the last phase, I set cues creating the atmosphere of *Meanly, Kansas*, a whistle-stop on the Santa Fe Railroad. The stage was almost empty except for tumbleweed that zigzags across the stage. It's hot, really hot. Desperation and loneliness are the feeling.

Nikos is one of my evaluators

Ann, the light is well-balanced. You have achieved the atmosphere dictated by the play. Is it perhaps too hot?

He has a point, too many candle powers!



Gordon Hilker just called

Dino Yannopoulos has been engaged as the Artistic Director of the Vancouver International Festival. I have suggested you as Production Stage Manager. He lives in New York and wants to interview you.

Expect a call.

My Yale colleagues know of Dino and his successes as a stage director

at the Metropolitan Opera. I do a little more research. He created a festival in Athens.

My interview is set. I am on the train from New Haven after my morning classes, missing crew this afternoon. My colleagues were sympathetic; it's a job interview.

We are meeting at Dino's apartment on 58th Street. That's an impressive address I muse, getting off the 5th Avenue bus and walking past the Plaza Hotel. The leaves on the trees that line the street sidewalk indicate the end of fall.

As Dino opens the door, I am hit with a stream of sun blasting through a cream-colored living room peppered with dark antique furniture. Blocking some of this dazzle is a man, slightly stooped, with an unlit cigarette hanging out of his mouth, holding onto a little boy, perhaps five years old.

He says

Come down the hall with us.

I follow.

We turn into a dimly lit room. I almost step on a train set that takes up all the floor space. There is a problem, a serious problem to the old and young men in the room. The train won't work.

Dino comments to the youngster

It needs a part.

The next thing I know, we are in a taxi headed for Grand Central Station and a train store. At first I am annoyed. Then, I get it.

This is a perfect introduction to Dino. He, too, marches to his own tune. Better I understand that now.

The part is purchased and installed. Yea, the train is working. The little boy is over the moon with excitement as we watch it chug around and around his room. Dino is smiling. I can see he has a huge heart. He wants his son happy, and if it means getting the train to work, so be it.

We start talking, two hours later than intended. By evening I am engaged as production and stage manager. Dino's Festival includes two operas,

two plays, a musical, a play for children, a popular review and symphony concerts, all to be rehearsed and performed within six weeks, opening in June. Wow, nothing like putting one's feet into a fire. And my classes at Yale aren't over till the end of April. That's tight scheduling. I fear there won't be much preplanning. Thank goodness Orey Parker and John Hood accepted my thesis topic. At least it will provide some theoretical preparation!



I am now functioning as technical director of *Man Better Man* written by a recent Yale Drama School graduate, Trinidad playwright, Errol Hill. Nikos is the stage director, an artist who likes the theatrical. Jim Gohl's design matches the needs of the script and Nikos' approach. This show is big with lots of scenery flying in and out. The first and second year TDLs are drafting. I am overseeing and John Hood, with a pipe in his mouth, is nearby keeping a watching eye. I am glad. I appreciate his method of coaching. He asks questions. That way I find solutions. We have a goal: most of the scenery to be built before Christmas.

This is not all that is going on. I am also acting as a theatre consultant for Hank Hawthorne who is studying architecture at Yale. He and his wife, Pamela, who is at the Drama School in the Directing Program, are from Vancouver. Hank is very articulate, has a quiet voice and a cute smile. I am discovering that the architectural process is not unlike scenic design. There's just a different purpose.



Dino has invited me to New York for opera auditions just before Christmas. Most of my school colleagues are gone. We made our goal. The scenery for *Man Better Man* is almost entirely built and on the paint frame. Dino, I would love to come.

It's a very rainy December day in New York. Four of us are sitting at the back of the room at the opposite end of the small stage and a piano. The other two men pay little attention to us. Dino whispered

The man in the brown suit is Kurt Herbert Adler, General Director of the San Francisco Opera. The other is Otto Guth, his associate and a much-respected opera coach.

Adler speaks his mind to each artist as they depart. He is not very pleased with this afternoon's show of talent. In fact, he is quite obnoxious to one poor woman. She was dressed for the season in a bright red suit, white fur collar, muff and hat. Her departing words are an apology I am sorry for being overdressed. I am on my way to a friend's wedding. Adler quips

Too bad it isn't yours!

Yikes! His temperament matches his brown suit – ugly.



In my last term, I decide to take advantage of another course through the Yale School of Art. I want to learn a bit about color. They offer a course based on the theories of Joseph Albers. I am intrigued. We work with strips of color and play with them, so we begin to understand the effect of the interaction of colors side by each. And we learn the effect of adding white or black to a color – all through strips of color. I purchased a huge box of color chips and had fun doing the exercises. It wasn't just an academic approach, it also involved the senses. I was very comfortable with the latter. Little did I know this would be a harbinger to understanding how my brain and feelings work or don't work together.

Yale is almost done. *Man Better Man* went well. Mum came from Vancouver. She seemed impressed asking

Now, dear, what exactly does it mean to be a technical director?

I take the designer's pretty picture and make sure that the design is translated into working drawings so scenery can be built...

Oh goodness!

Mum, it's not unlike planning a party, making sure all the ingredients are in place. Just a few more technical details!

*Telling the story about Mum coming to Yale and her interest in what I am learning makes me realize it is time to tell you about her parents, William and Mary Colledge. Grampa Colledge was born in 1868 and lived till the mid-1950s. His life story is one of determination. He lived in Ontario with his family that immigrated from Scotland. His father came to Canada, thinking he would be a farmer. Sadly, his talents in that field were zero and he lost all the money he brought from Scotland. Grampa Colledge was sent out, at twelve years old, to work. The family needed money for food. No more schooling. He became a carpenter, a highly skilled carpenter, and eventually moved to Winnipeg and teamed with another, Mr. Sharp. Together they oversaw the construction of apartments. In his mid-thirties he married Nana (Mary Colledge), who was probably ten years younger. She was a schoolteacher in Ontario with a one-room school. Each morning she rode her horse to school, patted it on its back and it trotted home. I know Grampa Colledge would have been most interested in what I was learning at Yale.*



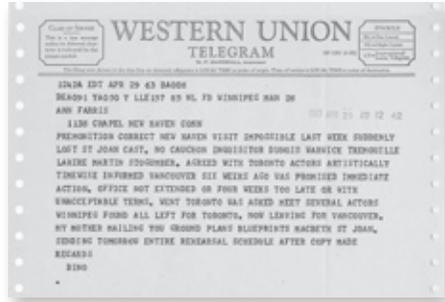
MARY COLLEDGE [NANA]



WILLIAM COLLEDGE [GRAMPA] AND ANN FARRIS

My focus is my thesis. It is easy writing up the problems but not so easy with the solutions. It helps envisioning Dino's upcoming Festival. John and Orey are reading my drafts and have many questions. What do you need to know from the designers? How are you going to improve the sharing of information with the stage crew?

Will you have meetings with the stage managers? And on and on. Their input is very helpful. Dino Yannopoulos communicated with me through telegrams (1963) before I arrived to work for the Vancouver International Festival starting in May.



I am sad I can't stay for graduation, wearing my cap and gown and marching with my colleagues. But a job awaits! I am excited for my future and ever so grateful for the training at Yale, my professors, my colleagues and, of course, Lee and Mary. It has been comprehensive and challenging. I am confident that I will have a successful career in the business. Not only have I learned the theatrical technical basics, I have discovered that I have an easy time of seeing a project as a whole and then breaking it into parts. I know that the breadth of training at Yale – technical, theoretical, historical, artistic, practical, and yes, even acting – will make it possible for me to ask the questions that need to be answered to be successful in the theatre. Thank you, Yale!



1963 YALE DRAMA SCHOOL COLLEAGUES CELEBRATING [NOT SURE WHAT]

# AN OPERA CAREER BEGINS



[ 1963 ]

**D**INO, WHERE ARE YOU?  
Alaska.

Did I hear him correctly? Alaska? Dino is Greek/American. I think English is his second language. He can be hard to understand. You mean, Alaska, above British Columbia?

Yes.

I am so relieved to hear his low, mushy voice, I let go of my need to voice annoyance.

When are you coming back? Everybody needs you!

For two days he has not been at his hotel nor around the theatre.

Dino has been gone, gone. He disappeared the day after our grueling schedule of four consecutive openings. No sign of him. I have been doing my best to keep it a secret.

Sorry, Dino is not here at the moment. I will let him know you are asking for him.

He is the kind of person you want to cover for: deeply contemplative, easily bruised by verbal attacks and scattered when the chips are down.

I was beginning to feel I might have to change my tune and be honest,  
if he didn't at least call. Thank goodness, he is on the line

When are you coming back?

There is no point asking what  
he was doing in Alaska.

Tonight. I have chartered a plane!

Oh, Dino, I have been so worried.

Please come to the theatre  
first thing in the morning.

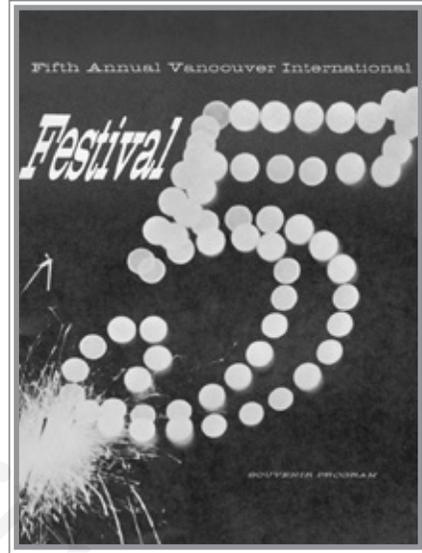
Yes.

The line goes dead.

The grueling first three weeks  
of the Festival was a baptism  
by fire. Dino directed two  
productions, including Verdi's  
*sturm und drang* opera *MacBeth*,  
our opener. The New York designer  
Wolfgang Roth took advantage of  
our wide proscenium opening and  
has filled the stage with more platform units than Harry Horner's  
production of *The Magic Flute* last year. That's not all. There are falling  
trees and smoke and a huge cast including dancers as witches rushing  
around, singers from the Metropolitan Opera, our wonderful chorus and  
supers brandishing swords while rushing up and down and backwards  
and forwards all over these platforms.  
Yes, the effect is startling. It's a nightmare backstage making  
all this magic possible.

Opening day, the *MacBeth* premiere, I am upstairs in the Festival office  
to have a word, a venting moment, with Gordon.

We are no more ready to open than fly to the moon. What could you and  
Dino have been thinking? This year's schedule is more intense than last  
year. If we are going to produce so many shows on such a tight schedule,



FIFTH ANNUAL VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL  
FESTIVAL [FESTIVAL 5] BROCHURE—1963

we need more advance rehearsal time and more staff. Please read my Yale thesis, *Production Managing an International Festival*. And let's talk after. I feel better having let off steam.

Opening night is a nightmare. I have Betty, our rehearsal pianist, at the stage manager's desk. My attention cannot be 100% on the score. With only one assistant stage manager, Katy Robertson, who's holding down Stage Left, I have to check entrances on Stage Right, which means moving away from the score where there are two hundred cues to call.

Betty, please keep a close eye on my score. I need to know the precise bar of music when I get back.

Tonight, I am very nervous about one cue. It's only been rehearsed once. Three, twenty-foot trees come crashing to the floor as the stormy, scary Verdi music blares, the witches screech their warnings and the dancers swirl about the stage in their witch routine.

I am back at the score just in time to say  
Go trees.

My heart flops down into my stomach. Even the gorgeous music doesn't remove my stress. Barney Soros, an electrician, is by my side. He has to move a light during the scene and knows how scary this moment is. Seconds seem like minutes.

Finally, the crash!

Thank God, everyone is safe.

The mere fact we came through with a good *MacBeth* review is still a miracle to me.

It's been a see-saw. Each day a show is struck and another setup.

Today it's *Floradora*, yesterday it was *MacBeth*, tomorrow it's *Saint Joan*, and so it goes. We have sixty stage crew moving scenery to the sidewalks, the loading dock, the stage. Every nook and cranny is jammed.

Hey, you guys, you are amazing!

No question, they are meeting the challenge. But they are stretched.

We are into a lot of overtime.

During the frenzied ten pre-opening days, I gain perspective by stopping to clean. That helps when it gets just too crazy. I clean the production office, taking everything out, sweeping the floors, dusting the walls, wiping the surfaces, the drawers, then putting everything back. All in an hour. Maurice comes down to his office, across the hall, and has to climb through my clutter, mounded in piles in the hall.

What are you doing, Ann?

Clearing my head.

He just smiles.

I am ready for the fray, once again.

Dino's other show is Saint Joan. No, I am not stage manager of *Joan*, Al Wallis is. However, after my Joan acting stint at Yale, her character is in my blood. I enjoy watching scenes from the wings. Our Joan, Susan Kohner, has a different interpretation, less dramatic than mine. Probably closer to what Bernard Shaw was looking for.

Dino had the brilliant idea of casting Mike Nichols as the Dauphin. He is wonderfully pompous as he projects the Dauphin's narrow-minded personality. Our audiences chuckle a great deal, an effective antidote to the seriousness of the play.

*Floradora*, a British musical that had great success on Broadway in the early 1900s, has an inane plot of a young woman looking for romance as she searches for her stolen inheritance. The hit song is "Tell me Pretty Maiden." It's charming. The show is easy to stage manage.

The final night of this Festival opening quartet is *The Best of Spring Thaw*, a Mavor Moor and Alan Lund Canadian review. Their rehearsals went smoothly in the Playhouse and the audience lapped up the show.

Dino disappeared after *Thaw's* opening. I could see he was stretched but didn't know how much. Alaska must be a great place to breathe!

The schedule is easier now. Katy and I are preparing for the next batch of openings. She has taken over the stage crew hours for payroll. We are in rehearsal for the British comedy by Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being*

*Ernest*. Mike Nichols has added another hat to his involvement at the Festival. He is directing. The famous British actress Kathleen Nesbitt is Lady Bracknell. It is *Ernest* that needs Dino's attention and he isn't here. Al Wallis, the stage manager, came into my office this morning Ann, Mike Nichols has not shown for rehearsal. I called Gordon and explained. Gordon suggests Ask Al to run lines (with their blocking).

Al counters

There haven't been enough staging rehearsals yet for them to know their blocking, (that's where the actors move on stage.)

Okay, setup chairs and run the lines.

Not an ideal situation. There is no alternative.

We are also in rehearsal for *Peter Pan* directed by John Hirsch, a much-respected Canadian stage director. Norman Young is stage manager of this production. There's loads of room for the house and window plus tons of space for Peter Pan to fly in and out of. The kids in our audience will be enthralled.



Dino is back and Mike is in rehearsal. He needed space to figure out how to deal with Kathleen Nesbitt. It seems she has a traditional Victorian approach to the role of Lady Bracknell and is not interested in adapting to a new one. To Mike's credit, he seems to have come to peace with the situation and is creating an entertaining evening. I am sure it is not what he had originally intended.

(Note: In May 1980, I met up with Mike Nichols once again, this time at Sardi's, a popular post-theatre Broadway restaurant in New York. He was a co-producer of the Canadian play, *Billy Bishop*, opening that night at the Morosco Theatre on Broadway. The opening night party was at Sardi's. We had a chat and I mentioned our previous meeting in Vancouver during *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He looked at me with a very sad, serious face and said That was one of my worst experiences in theatre.)

*Merry Wives of Windsor*, the opera, is beginning rehearsal. Herman Geiger-Torel, the General Director of the Canadian Opera in Toronto is directing. I am enjoying working with Mr. Torel. He is very organized.

Oh, dear, another drama! Peter Pan is giving us challenges.

After this morning's final dress rehearsal, John Hirsch, the stage director, who can exhibit highly strung behaviors, came to me, pronouncing The show will not open. It isn't ready.

I know it isn't my position to comment. But I sympathize having just been through this *exact same experience*.

Guessing John wants me to tell the producers. I call Dino and Gordon.

In short order, they arrive backstage with Mr. Beaupre, President of the Board of the Festival, in tow. That's odd, wonder why he is here? He is a businessman and a buddy of my dad. In my short professional experience, board members don't make production decisions.

We gather in the side lobby, near the pass door to backstage on House Left, for privacy. John is pacing, exclaiming

The show has not had enough stage time. The technical details are not worked out and the actors are unsure on the set. The show will not open this afternoon. It will be a dress rehearsal and *no* audience.

He sits down looking very glum and determined.

Gordon counters

We will bring lunch in for the crews and work right up to curtain time to correct these technicalities.

John counters

No, this afternoon's performance will be a dress rehearsal.

We will open tonight.

Gordon explains

This afternoon's opening performance is almost sold out. Can we find a way to honor those who have bought tickets?

No, no! John was up on his feet again

The show isn't ready!

Dino enters the fray

John, I watched the entire dress rehearsal last evening. Yes, there are

some technical snafus that need to be sorted out, but the show is charming. You have done a wonderful job. I know you would like another run-through, but it just isn't possible.

John shoots an angry look at Dino

No, the show will not open.

Gordon glances at Mr. Beaupre asking

Do you have an opinion?

The show will open. Get all the technical staff you need to be prepared.

I am shocked. Why is the board president calling the shots? Hmm.

There must have been more to this than I am privy to.

We have rave reviews for *Peter Pan* and sold-out houses. The few technical glitches went unnoticed and were corrected by the evening performance.

John Hirsch has relaxed. I am impressed at his talent in engaging a young audience.



The last day of the season, Gordon and I talk about my thesis.

Ann, you have described with precision our production shortcomings.

Gordon, is it a matter of budget that doesn't allow for the needed staff?

Yes

What if the schedule were not so tight?

Costs increase because we are holding the theatre and have to pay rent on dark days.

What about one less production?

Then, do we have a Festival?

At least we had a meaningful chat.



My parents dropped me off at the airport this morning for an early flight east. My destination is Holyoke, Mass. I am stage-managing a season of summer stock, seven plays and one musical – a typical summer stock schedule, a show a week. Nikos is running two theatres this summer, Williamstown and Holyoke. I am slipping in late, a week before opening.

Nikos doesn't seem to mind. And I know rehearsals will be in good organizational shape. Most of the staff are Yalies from the Drama School. We know how to work well together, and we are trained to be organized.

I have company on my flight, ten artists from the *Merry Wives* and *Ernest* casts. Our seats are adjacent! How amazing is that? Our plane needs to refuel in Minneapolis, en route to New York. Tyrone Guthrie, the legendary theatre stage director, has just joined us on this last leg. I don't know him, but the artists do. Mr. Guthrie stages works at the Metropolitan Opera. The Guthrie Theater Company, a new regional theatre company, has just opened in Minneapolis. *The New York Times* made a big splash about it. We are intrigued to know more. Once airborne, one of the artists asks Please tell us about opening your theatre.

This tall, imposing, Irish gentleman took his cue, stood in the aisle of the plane and gave us a half hour lecture on the trials and tribulations of opening a new theatre company and a new theatre complex on the same evening. His charming Irish accent made the description more fascinating. At one point, Mr. Guthrie commented

There was many a moment when I wondered if we would make our opening night. Can you believe, during final rehearsals, construction was still continuing around us?

Then, he turned philosophical

You know, in the theatre, you have to make your opening night.

We did and it was a great one.

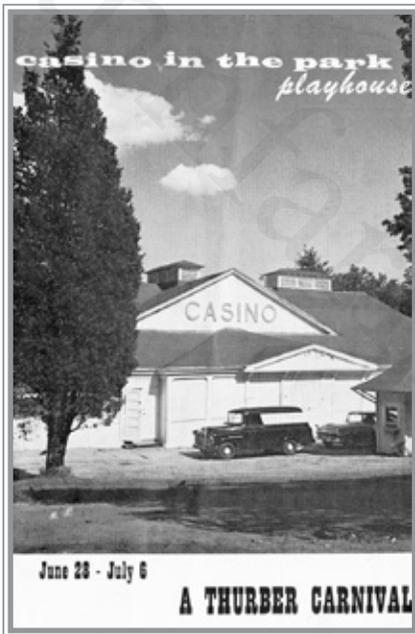
We and other passengers give him a hearty applause. I thought of the John Hirsch incident and could see that yes, unless disaster is before us, we do make our opening night. I am excited. My career in the theatre business is beginning.



And my opera career path emerged as my summer in Holyoke ended. How did it happen? I guess luck, talent, and my innate ability to know what works for me and what doesn't. Here's what occurred.

In Holyoke, we are living and rehearsing in facilities provided by Mount Holyoke College with performances at Casino in the Park, formerly an outdoor theatre. It's covered now, feels a bit like an airplane hangar on a slope.

I have forgotten how hot, humid and sticky summers are on the East Coast. No, we don't have any air conditioning but that doesn't seem to bother our audiences.



A THURBER CARNIVAL AT CASINO IN THE PARK

Our opening, *Thurber Carnival*, is a big hit. Not so much luck with Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.*, a Pulitzer Prize-winner based on the biblical story of Job. Too bad, because it's well-done. Perhaps it's too moralistic.

A nice surprise has happened.

I am being courted.

Yes, I am dating. His name is Bob Matthews and he's managing our company for Nikos. He's several years older than me, slightly balding with a gentle sense of humor. During the final rehearsal week of *Thurber Carnival*,

I was in and out of his office, a hut plunked at the entrance

to the theatre, also housing the box office. Much to my surprise, on opening day, he invited me to the cast party. We hit it off – tossing *bon mots* back and forth.

I rather like this attention, a new adventure, a summer romance. It's fun to have someone to go off with after the show. It's fun to feel my heart go pitter patter, it's even more fun to kiss and yes, this summer I became a

woman. That's a new adventure. As much as I am enjoying this, it's odd. Something is nagging at me about betrayal. Why would that be?



CASINO IN THE PARK PLAYHOUSE  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, BOB MATTHEWS

We are half-way through the season into Bertolt Brecht/Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera*. After stage managing four plays, *Threepenny Opera* seems a dream to work on. Music is back in my life. I am glad to be away from the monotonous rhythm of words. Words make my eyes hurt. You know a stage manager has to keep a close eye on the script, not only to call light and scene changes but also as support for the actors on stage. If one forgets a line, I have to prompt. It does happen, you know.

I ask Bob  
Can you find me an eye doctor?

I have a problem staying focused on the script. He did. The doctor confirmed I have twenty-twenty vision. No problem with my eyes. Same answer as years ago. Okay, I just must concentrate harder on those words.

As we are nearing the end of the season, two job offers appeared. One from Nikos  
Ann, I would like you to stage-manage my show opening on Broadway in the late fall.  
Now that's an offer but...  
Nikos, do you think I have the experience to stage-manage a Broadway show?



FOWLER



NANCARROW



FARRIS



WATSON



ANDERSON and CRICKARD



GOHEEN and COLTON



HOVER and NEUMILLER



Yes, I do.

Hmm. Let me think about it.

Can you believe, a day later Herman Geiger-Torel, General Director of the Canadian Opera, called

We are producing five operas this fall season: Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*, Verdi's *Aida*, Puccini's *La Boheme*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

My heart pounds with excitement.

Would you like to come to Toronto the day after your season closes at Holyoke and be an assistant stage manager for this season?

I don't think twice.

Yes, Mr. Torel. I would love to come. I want to work in opera.

Labor Day weekend, Saturday, is our last performance at Casino in the Park. It's been a good summer. Busy yes, but in hand. Now, we Yalies are departing for different places, some have positions in universities, others are returning to New York to pound the pavement, others have no plans. Bob is returning to New York. It's been a lovely summer and it's over. We promise to keep in touch and catch up together soon. I feel sad to leave him but thrilled with my next adventure.



I load myself and my luggage into a taxi at the Toronto airport, asking the driver

The Waldorf Astoria, please.

This is my first visit to Toronto. I wonder will this Waldorf Astoria be fashioned after the elegant art deco Waldorf Astoria gracing Park Avenue in New York?

No, it's two, three storied ordinary-looking apartment buildings, the Waldorf and the Astoria, operating as resident hotels. Thank heavens, the rooms are spacious, comfortable and have kitchens. I can make my breakfast and maybe occasionally another meal. We'll see.

I didn't realize how tired I am until the ring of the telephone.

It's Mr. Torel.

Ann, welcome to Toronto.

Hello Mr. Torel, I croak.

Glancing at the clock I see its 7 p.m., Labor Day.

I have slept twenty-one hours!

Tuesday morning, I am slept out, feeling bright, cheerful and excited to start working in opera. Leaving the Waldorf, I turn right on Charles Street, walking towards University Avenue, carefully following Mr. Torel's instructions. The leaves have begun to turn orange and yellow. Everything is new about Toronto, even fall. Where are the red leaves? I am not sure about the architecture. These houses are built of big stones, they feel clunky. This look is going to take some getting used to. A rose vendor is selling twenty roses on very long stems with the green leaves still attached, for a dollar a bunch. I can't resist.

May I have two bunches?

The pink-red variety is for me, the yellow ones for Mr. Torel.

As we exchange two dollar bills for roses, the vendor says

I am here each Monday morning with fresh roses.

I will be back.

And I am. The rose man becomes a ritual. My apartment loves these cheery flowers keeping it company when I am gone.

The COC office is a former house. Now its spaces are broken up. Hard to know whether Mr. Torel's office was the living room or dining room. He's awaiting his production staff. We report on time and Mr. Torel, sitting behind a large desk with a big ashtray and partially finished cigar hanging off of it, begins

We are doing a new production of *Aida*. Dino Yannopoulos is directing. Dino, working with Murray Laufer, the stage designer and Marie Day, the costume designer, have a new approach to *Aida*. Mr. Torel spreads the designs before him and we gather around.

I am in awe, very exciting. This is not your ordinary Egyptian-styled *Aida*. Yes, it has the flavor but updated into contemporary times. There's a lot of energy in those designs. It is clear many resources are going into this.

We spend the morning going through *Aida's* production needs, including an enormous number of supernumeraries in the triumphal march in the second act. My role begins to be unveiled.

Ann, you will co-ordinate with the super-captain, making sure his troops are ready to show up for rehearsal, oversee them at rehearsal and keep them informed.

We move on to the rehearsal schedule, not just *Aida*, but all five operas. Mr. Torel has an outline for the next two months, including the stage, orchestra and dress rehearsals

Ann, you will produce the daily rehearsal schedule. Please meet daily with the stage directors and finalize the schedule so it can be posted by 5 p.m. each day. Remember, I must approve it before it's printed.

Yes, Mr. Torel.

Mr. Torel knows what he is about. Opera has been his business for many years. He's a perfectionist. I am in the right place. I will learn a lot this fall. And under his gruff demeanor is a gentle soul with an amazing sense of humor.

But what's with these Canadians? They like cigars: Leon Major, Mavor Moore and now Mr. Torel!

Rehearsals are taking place at the Edward Johnson Building, a large new music building on the University of Toronto campus, a few blocks down the street. It's named after a Canadian, Edward Johnson, who had a venerable career in opera including being General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

My first week is spent getting my "sea legs." Not only do I not know Toronto, I don't know the staff or artists. There is much to grasp. The musical staff is young. James Craig is a wild one with reddish brown receding hair and an outrageous sense of humor. George Brough is the

quiet, serious one. From dawn to dusk, they are at the piano. Wally Russell oversees the production and technical aspects at the Edward Johnson Building and doubles as Technical and Lighting Designer for the COC. He and I are reviewing the plans for another new production this season, *Der Rosenkavalier* designed by Horst Danst. Mr. Torel is directing. It's clear Wally respects Mr. Torel. In a way, they are similar. They like all the details figured out. Wally confirms This Company stays in budget.

I am learning that there is an art to developing a rehearsal schedule. Not only do I have to talk to the stage directors, gathering their needs, I have to pay attention to what is possible for the artists, not to mention the stage and rehearsal room availability. Mr. Torel is coaching me Ann, review the Actor's Equity Contract rehearsal stipulations. Equity is the opera singer's union in Canada. Yes, there are a maximum number of hours in the day allowed, but perhaps more important is considering the pressure for the artists singing *comprimario* roles – supporting roles. They are the ones who bear the brunt of a rigorous rehearsal schedule, especially if the style of music is different in each opera. Okay, Mr. Torel. I will make an analysis of the scenes in the operas and the characters needed. That will help. And then, of course, there are artists who get special dispensation from Mr. Torel to be absent for an afternoon. That really puts a spanner in the works unless I can find a way to make sure the understudy is available, but then understudies sometimes are covering two roles. My goodness there are complications!

As I am gaining approval from Mr. Torel one late afternoon,  
I giggle saying  
I sure know the gossip.  
He retorts, moving his cigar from side to side in his mouth.  
You have to, to create a workable schedule. Make sure it's posted by 5 p.m.  
Yes, Mr. Torel!  
There's just a little time to accomplish this publishing feat.

The information has to be typed onto a stencil and run on the Gestetner, a stencil duplicator, a copy machine. There are three potential hitches: typos, ink, crinkles.

The only way to correct a typo on a stencil is to plaster red “gunk” over the error. That’s okay but it takes forever to dry. I daren’t take the stencil from the typewriter to decrease the drying time because it’s impossible to return it to the same position to continue typing. So, I wait. I want the rehearsal schedule to look tidy.

Next up is inking the Gestetner. It’s an art. The ink is inside the machine. The challenge comes in knowing how many pushes one applies to a couple of buttons at the top. These buttons dispense ink. Next, I crank the handle moving the barrel, upon which the stencil is placed, to distribute the ink. Sounds simple? Nope, it can be a real mess if I push that button one too many times. I am still learning how to avoid ending up with ink up to my elbows.

Okay, now I am ready. It looks shiny on the applicator.

I hook the stencil to little “stems” at the top of the machine and gently massage it onto the ink.

Darn, there is a crinkle in it. That won’t do. That crinkle, you devil, you will look like a black line on the copy. Lifting the stencil from the bottom, just to the point of the crinkle I pull it ever so carefully just a tiny bit. Whew, crinkle gone.

I start cranking, turning out page after page of legal-sized pages.

The rehearsal schedule is being birthed. Quickly I collate, leave a few copies at the COC office and head out, down University Avenue five blocks to the Eddie J. Building to post my results. Why is it, artists almost swamp me when I arrive?

We’ve moved to the O’Keefe Center where our final rehearsals and performances will take place. The theatre is in downtown Toronto. I am discovering that Toronto is a very cosmopolitan city: there’s a subway, a handy way to get downtown. I am feeling the size of the new theatres in Canada, built in the late 1950s, they are huge. Both the O’ Keefe Center and the Vancouver Queen Elizabeth Theatre have sixty-foot proscenium

openings and their auditoriums are somewhat unfriendly in feel.  
Oh, well.

As I walk on stage this beautiful fall morning, I am greeted by the gorgeous Strauss *Der Rosenkavalier* music wafting up from orchestra pit. Walter Suskind, the conductor, is rehearsing the eighty-piece orchestra in the pit. Across the stage, the extended offstage right-side area is the loading dock door. It's open and luscious warm fall sun rays are pouring in. On the stage is the *La Boheme* scenery. Wally and his staff are sitting at the improvised desk in the auditorium, setting lights for the Act One garret set. Wally calls  
Ann, please go and stand by Marcello's easel.  
I do, saying to myself  
I know what heaven must be like. This is all too delicious.

This morning Mr. Torel and Wally called me into Mr. Torel's temporary office, just offstage with a surprising piece of news. Mr. Torel said  
We want you to call the light cues during each opera's final rehearsals and performances.

How is that going to work? I am manning Stage Right.

Mr. Torel chews on his cigar and grumbles

Others will cover that responsibility. Wally and I want to try something.

There are so many light cues for each opera, we have decided to have one person calling them. And that person is you.

Great. I would love to. Where will I be positioned?

Wally jumps into the discussion

In the levers.

Oh, what a great idea, I will be able to see the stage.

The levers, adjustable levers, running floor to ceiling maybe thirty feet high, that open and close, are squeezed into tiny cubby holes at the extreme edges of the orchestra pit. Stage lights are hung on poles in these niches.

Wally continues

We will put a chair with a music stand in between two of the levers

closest to the audience so you can both watch the score for cues and take other cues visually, like Mimi blowing out the candle in *Boheme*. You will be on headset, so the stage manager and Jimmie Fuller, who's running the light board at the back of the house, will hear your cues.

For twenty-five performances and many rehearsals I take my seat, which has great advantages. I am at the edge of the orchestra pit (House Right). Night after night gorgeous music is flowing into my body. And I am learning five operas. Yes, I am learning the plots and the characters, but more importantly the different musical styles are being dropped divinely into my body forever. *Der Rosenkavalier* is my favorite. At one moment it's very romantic and lyrical, then suddenly shifts into musical chaos and then relaxes back to romantic. It's fascinating.

Twenty years ago, I created magic for my Farris family by flicking a light switch to reveal the huge fir tree outside blowing in the pouring rain and bedecked with a myriad of lights. Now this opportunity! Yes, life is best when it's a magical theatre experience!

The end of October is here, our season is complete. We have worked seven days a week for eight weeks producing a product we are proud of. I have learned so much and made many new friends. And I have some sad news. A letter from Bob in New York just arrived. He is ending our relationship. I was surprised and disappointed.

This morning Mr. Torel asked

We have an upcoming tour of *Die Fledermaus* which runs January to May; performing one-night stands throughout Eastern Canada including Newfoundland and the US. Would you like to be the stage manager?

Yes, I would love to.

There was no question in my mind about that. I want to continue working in opera. And I will visit Eastern Canada. My ancestors come from there. Maybe I will see something of their life-style. What could be better!



Mum came for the last week of the opera season. We continued down to New Haven to ship my belongings back to Vancouver, as I have no idea what will be home for the next while. Poor Mum, who loves things to be neat and tidy, has a basement filling up with memorabilia. Most of it's gone into the homemade jam and jelly basement storage room.

Our biggest challenge was getting Sherry's huge painting out of the apartment. The large window and rope worked again. Now it's in Vancouver at 1403 (That's short for what Haig, Katherine and I call our home for it is our address!) and hung on a wall above the landing of the wide staircase to the second floor. Sherry's pensive girl is looking out at The Crescent and the beautiful park. Not a bad view for her!

Having some free time in Vancouver, I am exploring more about my eyes. While I had no problems in Toronto, the stress of looking at the scripts at Holyoke does concern me. The eye doctor confirms

You have twenty-twenty vision. There is no physical reason for your discomfort. I wonder if the problem could be emotional?

Why would you say that?

Perhaps something happened as a child that caused this eye problem.

I suggest you see a psychiatrist.

Now, this is 1963 and not something one "does." I tell no one and make an appointment with the recommended psychiatrist. After one session I stop.

The doctor in an ugly brown suit informs me

This process could take years.

I am only in Vancouver for six weeks before returning to Toronto for rehearsals. I don't have years. As the problem doesn't happen working in opera, I will let my exploration go. I feel relieved with this decision. Years? Come on, who's kidding whom?



*DIE FLEDERMAUS* IN GERMAN MEANS BAT.  
 SOMETIMES IT CAN MEAN PLANNING AN ACT OF REVENGE AGAINST YOUR FRIENDS  
 FOR WHAT THEY DID TO YOU WHILE IN A STATE OF DRUNKENNESS.  
 IN PART THIS IS THE STORY OF *DIE FLEDERMAUS*.

Just before I leave Vancouver for Toronto and rehearsals of *Die Fledermaus*, Gordon Hilker calls. This year he is programming the Vancouver International Festival.

We will be producing a musical, concerts and presenting other attractions. No opera this year. The Vancouver Opera, recently formed, feels the Festival draws audiences from their fall and winter productions. Hmm, I think and share

So, the VIF board is abandoning the presentation of opera. The concept of an International Festival is diminishing. The board isn't holding to its original premise. Too bad politics and battles about which group should be producing what art form is dominating the scene. They manage in Edinburgh with a Festival. I learned that when I was there. How come the boards can't make space for each other's undertakings to be creatively successful? Territorial imperatives are settling in. That's very sad.

Gordon continues

Will you return as Production Stage Manager? And yes, your contract will begin a month before rehearsals.

Thanks, I would like to. And thanks for respecting the need for organizational time.

# ONE-NIGHT STANDS TURN ME INTO A PROFESSIONAL



[ 1964 ]

**O**H MY GOD, IT'S COLD IN TORONTO. Winters in New Haven didn't prepare me for this bitter chill whipping through my body. But I found the perfect solution: a dark brown suede coat, long to the ankles lined with fleece and sporting an attached hood. Now I am toasty warm; only my nose shivers and turns red.

We are rehearsing two casts for our tour of *Die Fledermaus*. It's an operetta written by Johann Strauss. A comedy of sorts. Rosalinda is a bored wife whose husband Eisenstein is a playboy busily trying to catch a young soubrette, Adele, who is the maid to Rosalinda. Rosalinda has an admirer in a voice teacher, Alfred. He is trying to have Rosalinda pay attention to his amorous approaches. She has no interest. The second act is a costume ball party at Prince Orlofsky's. The last act is in a jail. It's frothy and fun, nothing serious.

Our rehearsal space is a dreary hotel meeting room on Yonge Street. The spacious Edward Johnson Building where we rehearsed the fall

operas is not available. Students have returned from the Christmas vacation and are using the facility. However, the music is delightful and the artists are wonderfully talented. Each role is double cast because of the number of performances we give (more than sixty). No opera artist can afford to stress their voice that often over three months and hope for a continued career. Mr. Torel evolved the concept of the tour to not only bring opera to small communities in Canada, but also to extend employment for Canadian opera artists. As a result, these artists do not have to live in Europe to make their living.

Ron Hastings, one of our assistant stage managers and doubling as Frosch, the drunken jailor in the third act of *Fledermaus*, tells me Gander, Newfoundland has a tiny stage, a twenty-foot opening and only twenty feet deep with no offstage space.

That's a challenge. Okay, there is a reason for being in this dreary small room. We need to train ourselves to be flexible.

As rehearsals continue, I learn. Our scenery is modular and very adjustable. The frames are built out of steel and break up into pieces making it easily adaptable on any stage. Many of our theatres will be school auditoriums. But there's another reason. It has to travel in the hold of our bus. One bus for us all: artists, staff, luggage, scenery, costumes and props. Every inch of space counts. Bill Lord, both our tour manager and scene designer, has ingeniously created tiny backdrops: scenes painted on canvases that unroll and attach to each frame to create the atmosphere for each act. Touring is going to be a very different experience from Yale Drama School stage and the O'Keefe!

## HALIFAX

Our first performance is in an old school auditorium. Mr. Torel and Andrew MacMillan, his right hand, are with us for a couple of days to make sure all is working as planned. It isn't actually. Mr. Torel just shared Ann, you have upset the IATSE stagehand who is traveling with the

Company on the tour. You are not responsible for measuring out the stage, indicating where the scenery is to sit. That belongs to the IATSE stagehand. Goodness, okay. I will put away my trusty measuring tape.

I wonder why the stagehand didn't tell me yesterday. Oh, well, he's an older man. Maybe it felt better for him to take his complaint to Mr. Torel. I am discovering that everything I was taught at Yale is not necessarily transferable to all situations.

### ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND

Ron Hastings, the other assistant stage manager, is very excited. He's a history buff. Flying from Halifax, he fills my ears with stories of the battles of the French and English trying to gain hold of St. John's protected harbor.

This morning at 7 a.m. he's knocking on my door, admonishing me to get up.

Ann, are you ready? A beautiful sun has just risen. Let's go. I want you to see the battlefield.

It's sub-zero weather. Cozy in my newly acquired warm coat, we take off walking over mounds of glistening snow, heading up a steady slope to the entrance to the St. John's harbor.

Look, look. See how narrow the entrance is. That's where the battles over three centuries ago took place between the French and the English. Come, look at these cannons.

Indeed there are steel cannons poking out of holes in a long continuous nearly two-foot high wall.

Hey, that wall, over there, is not very high.

High enough for soldiers to lie down and shoot their guns through the little holes.

Yea, but not much protection for those firing the cannons!

And so it went as we imagined the battles. I enjoyed this excursion, learning more of Canadian history.

Back at the hotel, we barely had time to grab some breakfast before we set off for the theatre and a 10 a.m. call for the technical load-in. Our stagehands today are nuns. That was a surprise. However, they are very effective and by 1 p.m. we are set and ready for the show. Tonight's performance is sold out. It's amazing to me how, in this extremely cold weather, there can be such a large audience.

During the second act intermission, Jimmie Craig, our conductor/pianist, and I are chatting. Tonight his wife Connie is singing Rosalinda. The three of us are becoming good friends. Jimmie is a music scholar. I learn a lot from him. Connie is just plain fun to be around and knows the business well. She offers wise advice masked as humor.

#### GANDER, NEWFOUNDLAND

As predicted, the stage is miniscule. It matters not to the audience. Our artists are pros and adjust their staging accordingly. Because *Die Fledermaus* is a frothy piece with a silly plot, the audiences love it.

Can you believe our free day this week is in Gander? What can we possibly do with ten feet of snow and freezing cold weather outside? Our sponsors are imaginative. We are invited to sit in the control tower of the Gander Airport.

What a strange idea. I will go. I have often wondered what went on in that little room high above in a tower at an airport.

Ten of our wandering minstrels and I pile into cars and learn.

In the 1950s the Canadian Government, at great expense, built a beautiful airport in Gander to provide a location for refueling of North Star airplanes. Now, seven years later the jet plane has made the North Star obsolete as a mode of transportation across the Atlantic.

Gander has become an emergency base.

We sit in a dark room with many screens watching blips move across them. Pilots check in with Gander giving their status. Some have very proper British accents, others have an American Southern drawl,

and others a clipped German accent. Listening and deciphering is a much required skill for a controller.

Nothing dramatic this afternoon. I guess that is a good thing.

I am the only one on the tour who is new. Each day the singers provide me with surprising tidbits. Jimmie and Connie Craig are amusing with details on our next journey, to Corner Brook, on the west coast of Newfoundland. Ann, we're traveling on the Newfie Bullet. From the twinkle in their eyes I know something is different.

It's a train that creeps across Newfoundland on railroad tracks narrower than the width of the train. Narrow gauge it's called. Wait till you hear about the accommodation. It's like a long, long, narrow hotdog.

We sleep in bunks that drop from the ceiling on either side of the aisle of the car and have little curtains for our privacy. I am amused.

And then I am really amused when I climb into my bunk, pull my curtain, change into pj's and snuggle under for a good night's sleep.

Wrong, The train car is on a tilt. I keep sliding towards the aisle and fear I will fall out.

Hey Connie, I call, using a stage whisper, loud. How come we are tilted? She laughs, her witch laugh, and even louder whispers

Remember, we're traveling on a narrow gauge. The car isn't supported under the bunks on either side. Unfortunately for you and me the singers on the other side weigh more than our side. Our hefty tenor is on that side.

Yipes. All night long I hold on so I won't fall into the aisle.

The tenor had a great night's sleep.

#### CORNER BROOK, NEWFOUNDLAND

This is a "company" town. Its business: paper. The mill is close by.

We are booked into a beautiful company hotel sporting wood-paneled lobbies, spacious hotel rooms, and bathrooms with huge bathtubs sitting on adorable curved legs. The chef produces delicious home-cooked meals, crusty rolls, grainy brown bread, rare roast beef, puffy Yorkshire pudding, lemon meringue pie and on and on.

We are a hit in Corner Brook. Our singers do a wonderful job of making the audience feel as though this is an opening night. Their performances are sharp and witty, full of pathos and romance, delightful. I love having music dribbling through me every night.

As we finish loading our scenery into the hold of the bus, slipping and sliding across the icy hard-packed snow, our sponsor says  
In all likelihood it will snow for a couple of days.  
Our next gig is Halifax with orchestra in five days. Wise Mr. Torel built in snow days for protection.

It snowed, yes, it snowed. And it's continuing to snow. All is white outside the window. Never mind, we are eating well. I have my knitting; I am creating a blue wool turtleneck sweater, making great progress sitting in front of the huge stone fireplace stacked with logs burning brightly in the spacious reception area.

Day One passed without incident.

Day Two, we still are snowbound. The airport is at the American Air Force base in Stephenville, some thirty miles away and the roads aren't ploughed.

Day three. The sun is brightly shining. Bill says  
The RCMP will not sanction our trip from Corner Brook to Stephenville where the airport is located. The banks of snow on either side of the road are taller than the bus. If the wind comes up and begins to blow the snow across our bus, we could get buried.

Everyone is antsy. We're ready to leave. Someone suggests we vote on what step to take. A company meeting is called.

The hands go up. We want to leave.

Okay, says Bill. Eat a good lunch, be checked out and ready to board the bus at 2 p.m.

The RCMP are correct, the snow mounds are higher than the bus. Mile after mile we are inching along in a tunnel of snow. And sure enough, the wind does come up. Snow swirls in front of the bus. The bus driver goes

even slower. He can see only a few feet in front of him. There certainly is no turning around here.

We are a quiet bunch.

It's very dark now. The bus pulls up to a low-slung building looking like an expanded Quonset hut. This is the airport terminal! A three-quarter-hour journey has taken three hours. As the bus door opens, a man clamors up the front stairs announcing

We have tied a rope from the bus door to the front door of the airport hut. Hang on to that rope. It is solid ice underfoot.

One by one, we inch our way across the grey ice, banging against the howling wind trying to hang on to our few belongings, in my case, my purse and knitting.

It's warm inside the airport lobby but only for a relaxing moment.

Now, we must board the aircraft. Same procedure: a rope, a slippery trip across black, black ice buffeted by a howling wind and upstairs covered with chunks of ice. The door slams shut.

Bill, did the scenery and our luggage get aboard?

As far as I know.

We are very silent, silent, wondering how a plane can take off in such weather. I pull my seatbelt extra tight, I don't want to be bounced about in the plane like a kangaroo. The motor starts. I feel movement.

The plane races down the tarmac and into the air.

Our noisy crowd remains silent – until, until, until, a hour later, we view the lights of Halifax. Civilization! Our cheers must have been heard in Vancouver, 3,000 miles away! It has been quite an afternoon.

## HALIFAX

Halifax feels like New York. There is traffic, there are people about. Yes, trudging around in snow, but the roads are cleared. We are staying in one of the historic Canadian Pacific Railroad hotels with its elegant interior carved wooden lobby. Only, to our amazement every stick of furniture has been removed. In its place are stacks of refrigerators, dishwashers,

washing machines and boxes and boxes of other goods. Bill asks  
What is going on?

The Moscow Circus artists are staying here. We are accommodating a request for a place to assemble all the goods being sent by ship to the Soviet Union as part of a deal the Russians have with Nicolas Koudriavtzeff. He's their host/sponsor and booked their tour.

I had met Mr. Koudriavtzeff in Vancouver and couldn't forget him and his wonderful open face and big smiles. He's Russian, too, now living in Montreal.

Halifax for two days. An orchestra rehearsal this morning, our only performance on tour with orchestra. Jimmie is conducting. So great to hear the sounds of the string instruments.

#### GUS AND OUR BUS:

#### OUR DAYTIME HOME FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS

A short, round man with a smiling face, Gus, our bus driver, loves his job, returning year after year, welcoming all the singers back as we board on our first day to our assigned seat.

As expected, Bill Lord, our tour manager, and his wife Arlene Meadows, a soprano also singing Rosalinda, have the best seats in the "house." Front row, looking out the window. That makes sense as Bill is constantly jumping out at stops to check details.

He tells me

Ann, you are sitting with John Arab.

He's one of our tenors, quiet and funny. I sense we will have a good time.

We are sitting right behind Arlene and Bill.

On performance days, we travel no more than four hours. On other days, we whistle through village after village heading through the Maritimes.

I am excited to travel the Maritimes, even if it is winter.

## WHITE'S COVE

I asked Gus to point out White's Cove. My grandfather grew up there.

Ann, come, time to stand in the steps at the front of the bus.

Gus points to the right

There is White's Cove.

It's but a sign in the road, nothing more, except fields and fields of snow.

That's White's Cove? Somehow I am not surprised. My grandfather has painted a landscape which is tucked on top of the cabinet with tiny wooden drawers in his library. It's a summer scene, but there is little about except landscape. I used to wonder where the water was.

It seems there isn't any.

## WOLFFVILLE, NOVA SCOTIA

Last night we performed in Wolfville, where my grandmother grew up.

It's a university town with Victorian-style homes. My great-grandfather was professor and then President of the University. My great aunt, Aunt Francis, still lives here. Tonight she invited me to dinner in an old Victorian home painted in soft yellows with many candles burning. She explained

I didn't know your grandmother Evlyn very well, even though we are stepsisters. I am sure you have been told that Evlyn's mother died when Evlyn was twelve.

Yes, I have. Nana told us many stories about her mother and her sudden death.

Well, our father didn't re-marry until Evlyn was in her middle teenage years. My mother was his second wife. And I am almost twenty years younger than Evlyn.

Aunt Francis continued through the evening sharing family stories.

It was a very special time.

I took many pictures of Aunt Francis and Wolfville for my grandparents.

## ON TO THE UNITED STATES

It's a ten-hour travel day: through Maine, the tip of New Hampshire and into Massachusetts for a six-week tour in the US.

Fifteen years ago, at the tender age of 12, I made a decision to work in opera. My conversation with the tenor on tour with the San Carlo Opera is passing through my thoughts as we leave the Maritimes and head south. He described moving by train from town to town and being intrigued with all the differences. Well, that's what we are doing. There's a difference. Our tour is on a bus with one-night stands most of the time. We glimpse a city, the interior of a theatre, a hotel and move on, experiencing the expanded terrains of North America. I like it. I like seeing what each city feels like – some busy with action, much traffic, others sleepy and quiet, others filled with students. Right now we are being deluged with snow: some dirty from cars, some pristine white. Each day unfolds a new architectural edifice – wonderful or awful. It's what it is. One day our stage crew again were nuns in their black flowing robes, another time outside of Pittsburg the crew were hoodlums trying to go straight. Their leader barked at them. The work got done. Our hotels varied greatly. The most chaotic was being booked into a flop house! No sleep that night; we sat in the bar. I had no idea that touring in opera would have so many adventures.

## VIRGIN ISLANDS

Easter Week and no bookings, a ten-day break. Nancy Donohue and I are meeting at LaGuardia airport, heading to the Virgin Islands. She has a week off from her understudy responsibilities in *Never Too Late* on Broadway. Orson Bean, one of the show's stars, came back after Christmas raving about our hotel. So, Nancy booked us. Lazy time in the sun and watching turtle races is quite a contrast to opera singers squished in a bus. Those turtles don't keep their eye on the goal, though. They keep turning around and going backwards. They are so silly.

## ONTARIO, CANADA

This morning I was swimming, now I am back in snow. That's odd.  
We are in the home stretch, the last three weeks of touring,  
this time in Northern Ontario.

## GUELPH

Everyone has warned me  
Ann, we have to carry the scenery and costumes up two flights to the top  
floor. The theatre was originally a ballroom. Now, there's a stage at one  
end. There is another surprise, you wait.

Everything is loaded up those stairs, puff, puff, puff. Our setup went well.  
Nothing surprising yet! Tonight, the tenor with the substantial  
circumference is performing. In the first act, he jumps through the  
window to surprise the soprano. Well, he surprised me, the soprano  
and the audience. The floor of the ballroom is on springs and moves up  
and down especially when the tenor jumps through the window.  
Gosh, we and the audience laughed.

## STRATFORD

Our last performance, a Sunday matinee. It's springtime and it feels warm.  
I like that. My father is in Toronto for business and comes today.  
He's driving me back into Toronto.  
After four months and more than sixty performances of *Die Fledermaus* –  
mostly one-night stands – it seems strange to say goodbye.  
But it isn't really goodbye. I was able to say to my colleagues.  
See you for the fall season in Toronto. Mr. Torel has invited me  
to stage manage.

Daddy and I drive back to Toronto. He makes no comment about our  
show and I didn't ask. Perhaps our show is stale. So be it. I loved touring

and I learned tons. I can handle a different location each day preparing our show, I can set light cues quickly, and I can live with forty people day in and day out and get along just fine. The IATSE stagehand and I became good working colleagues. I love what I am doing, I love being around music. I enjoy my colleagues and my work is appreciated. It's a wonderful career. And no problem with my eyes.

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