

Katherine Connella's heart-wrenching memoirs of growing up a combination of gender.

Sugar and Spice and Puppy Dog Tails: Growing Up Intersexed

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Sugar and Spice and Puppy Dog's Tails:

Growing Up Intersexed
An Intimate Memoir



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Foreword

My name is Katherine Victoria Connella and I am an intersexual. Sounds like I'm standing in front of an AA meeting, doesn't it? Perhaps that's because most people aren't aware of intersexuality, unless they happen to be born intersexual. What is an intersexual? Well, first I'll tell you what it's not. An intersexual isn't: a homosexual, a shemale, a crossdresser, a transvestite or a transsexual. The word for someone like me is pseudohermaphrodite. What a mouthful! Most people don't know what a pseudohermaphrodite is. They've heard of a hermaphrodite (or morphadite, in some less-educated circles). But they don't know what I am. So let's get this out of the way right off the bat. There are two types of hermaphrodites. The first is called a true hermaphrodite. This is what the majority of people think of when they hear the term -- someone with both sets of genitalia: your classic half woman/half man. The other kind of classification is the pseudohermaphrodite. With this individual, the blending of gender is more subtle. They don't have both genitals, but their bodies are gender-diverse in other areas. This is not a definition I found for myself until I was well into my adult years. In the meantime, I and my family suffered through various levels of ignorance and pain as a result. Which is why I'm writing this now, as you'll read on the next page or so.

I am approaching middle age all too rapidly. When I was a child, I dreamed of escaping the stifling, repressive Texas mentality to live in glamorous Hollywood California. I was going to be a big star! Probably a musical-comedy star along the lines of Julie Andrews or Barbra Streisand. I would be well-known, respected and have untold wealth. That was going to be my life, no matter how far-fetched it seemed to anyone else.

The reality didn't match the projections I so confidently predicted. Or did it? I am indeed a resident of Hollywood. Sad, underprivileged and rundown Hollywood -- it's still the object of so many people's dreams in spite of its battered condition. All the trappings of the Golden Age of movies are still here. Hollywood Boulevard, with its Walk of Fame, is just down the street from me, yet I've never traversed

down it to count the stars' names. I've never been to Mann's Chinese Theater, even though it's just a few blocks away. Beverly Hills is just another affluent neighborhood -- miles away from my own, literally and otherwise. It seems as distant from my own reality as Hollywood used to be when I was in Dallas. I am somewhat well-known. But in spite of the films I've made, I've survived the final cut of only a couple. I've performed all over this town in nightclubs and cabarets, and many times I've had people in the supermarket look at me and say, "Excuse me, but aren't you...." But that hasn't happened in a while. (In fact, a year or so ago, someone actually had the nerve to ask me, "Hey, wait a minute. Didn't you used to be..." I doubt if you have much trouble imagining my reaction.) Instead, my celebrity tends to be generated from the writing I do. Since 1993 I've had an astrology column running somewhere here in Los Angeles (or in 1997, across the country) and now I'm on the web as well. I do other writing too, including for one of the very movie studios which released a couple of films I did in which you cannot find me. But it's the metaphysical side, the mystic persona, which gathers admirers around me. If you'd told me how life would have turned out as an adult when I was seven years old, I would have been shocked and appalled. I am a spiritual person, mind you. I'm no charlatan, either; I strongly believe in metaphysics and it's an important part of my life. But still...I should have known when the first psychic who ever read for me told me that she saw me on the Johnny Carson show, being very show-biz but discussing metaphysics. Well, her timing was obviously on the optimistic side but it still might come true. As they say, truth is stranger than fiction. I'm living proof!

This isn't to say that my life isn't wonderful. It is. Just not in the sense that I imagined it would be. Let me give you an example. In 1969, my parents took me to see the glossy MGM remake of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* starring Peter O'Toole and Petula Clark. A disappointment at the box office, to be sure. Yet when Petula Clark sang her first song (a lavish music-hall extravaganza entitled *London Is London*), my fate was sealed. I felt transported. I *was* going to be a performer! All my earlier fantasies merged into a new, single thought. And just because of Petula Clark. Over the years, she has become and remains my all-time favorite singer. Some people look at me askance when I admit

this, but who cares? Taste is taste, just as London is London. In 1995, my dear friend Sean Frye took me to realize a dream. Petula was touring with David Cassidy in *Blood Brothers* and -- as usual -- my finances were much too precarious to permit me to go. Sean, being the unbelievable darling he is, bought first-rate orchestra tickets and off we went. Oh, sitting in that darkened theater watching my idol, older but much like she was in *Chips*, was almost a religious experience. Afterwards, Sean insisted we go to the stage door and see what would happen. (After all, Sean knew his share of fame and didn't mind being bold. When you're a child star like he was, I guess this whole celebrity thing is something you take for granted. He was a *talented* child actor, too; just watch *Fun With Dick And Jane* or *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* if you don't believe me.) Making a long story short (and cutting Sean's punchline; sorry, Sean, but I thought you'd want to save it for *your* book!), I met her and got her autograph. The downside is that I was so awe-struck and agog that all the thousands of things I wanted to say were momentarily suspended and I could only mutter a timid "Thank you". I was kicking myself, on the inside, of course. Miss Clark turned to speak with someone she knew. An instant later, a loud and unmistakably gay voice asked in a booming voice, "My God! Aren't you Katherine Connella? Oh, my God! I am one of your biggest fans!" Ms. Clark continued her conversation but looked my way in bemusement. You could almost see her thinking, "That dumbstruck oaf has fans?? Who the hell *is* she?" And that, my friends, made the entire experience worthwhile. Just knowing -- for that second -- Petula Clark had to wonder who I was to have fans boorish enough to steal her thunder will last a lifetime. And yes, I still love Petula Clark to this day. Ask any of my friends. They'll tell you the only music I play is hers. And it's almost true.

So you see, in some ways I do have the life I envisioned. If only somebody had told me that fame and wealth didn't always go together, I would have been much more prepared!

Now, as to why I've decided to write this: it isn't an easy answer. In fact, the subject discussed herein is one which I actively avoided discussing or even revealing to most people throughout my life. I felt

its disclosure would be the single most terrifying event of my existence.

I always said that I would write my autobiography when I was in my later 50's, whether I was famous or not, because it would sure to be shocking enough to be a best-seller. Well, I've amended that. This is not an autobiography, per se, but a memoir: the telling of a specific span of time in my life with a particular theme. And the reason I came to this conclusion is simple.

In March of 1998, I finally joined the 1990's and discovered the Internet. I joined America Online right away. The great thing about AOL is that once you've created a specific account name, you can create alternate screen names. So I created one which would allow me to be totally honest about who and what I am. I called that character GrlGuy, thinking that if nothing else it should be a conversation-starter. Was it ever! I had been on AOL for a month or so and with this tell-all account, I got a *lot* of attention. Mostly from men and mostly those who were looking for casual sex. Big yawn. This isn't to say that I didn't encounter quality men. Ho, no! I've made many new friends who understood and respected my circumstances, and who could appreciate my candor on the subject. There is one man in particular who, as of this writing, is very promising indeed. We'll see.

One Saturday afternoon, I began receiving messages from yet another new person. I wasn't in the mood to educate anyone -- believe me, the stupid questions I've been asked just since March could fill a book. But they would be so boring, no one would want to read it! This person, who went by the screen name of Addrew, turned out to be the first person in my life who was born somewhat as I was. I was stunned. To think, at my age (whatever *that* is!), I had never been able to discuss certain things with someone who didn't just understand through logic but who had *experienced* some of the same things I had was earth-shaking. For a time, Addrew and I communicated quite a bit but then things slacked off. I think that's okay, too, because our interaction gave us both something we hadn't had. Like two lonely travellers passing each other on a moonlit stretch of road, it was nice to stop and share and then go on about our journeys. I'm grateful to this incredibly beautiful fourteen year old girl in England for giving me that experience.

Several times this year -- for the first time ever -- people have told me that they thought my story should be told. And, for the first time again, I actually began to consider the possibility. Prior to that, my gender issues were something to be jealously hidden from the world. I very seldom told people who knew me about it. They just assumed I'd always been Katherine. And the last thing I wanted to do was to clarify the situation! But it wasn't until Addrew, however, that I realized who different my life would have been if I'd met someone like me when I was fourteen. Or even better, ten! And with today's openness about sexual divergence, it's not the stigma it was even a decade ago. So thank you, Addrew, for making me decide to bare my soul and tell the tale I thought I might go to my grave concealing. It feels nice to finally emerge from the cave and say, "This is who I am. No, really!"

I would also like to thank the friends and family who have supported me through the years, even when things looked their darkest (which was a lot of the time!). In addition to the aforementioned Sean Frye, I wish to thank Patricia Dunn Busbice (my favorite aunt, and not just because she accepted me from the get-go) and her husband Wayne. They not only provided me with invaluable insight as they read the manuscript almost as quickly as I could write it, but Patricia proofread it for me as well! I'd also like to thank Laurie Cheele, Craig Chester, Jackie Beat, Brian Garrido, Jeff Jenkins (who directed me in the film *Play Dead* and whose first screenplay -- *Second Skin* -- planted the germ of what ended up becoming the book you're reading now), my cousins Stephen and Melanie, my Uncle Steve and Aunt Marilyn, my near-sister Cousin Tracey, my wonderful and madcap Aunt Juanita and David Helber. Also to Joe (wherever you are!) and to Jon; thanks for being with me since childhood. And of course, James Redmon, usually referred to as my ex-husband. Thank you, all of you. I love you. I will always love you.

I would also like to thank Frank Ferrando who, at a critical moment, saved my life. He changed it and cleared away a lot of mystery and confusion just by being the supportive and caring person he was. Without you, Frank, I would not be here today. You were a gift from the cosmos for me, whether you realized it or not. I will always be in

your debt, and you will always live in my heart with much gratitude and -- more importantly -- with much love.

In addition, I would also like to thank those cherished friends no longer living who assisted me greatly on my journey. They are David, Robert Levy, and Bruce. You are all with me still and will be until the end of my days.

A special thank you goes out to Nick, who understands.

I must thank Patty Duke and Petula Clark as well, since they were the singular inspirations for me. Petula with her golden voice and Patty...just being Patty -- they both helped to mold me into who I am today. Which I *hope* they see is a compliment!

One other performer must receive kudos as well. I would like to thank (believe it or not) Miss Mae West, who (believe it or not) offered me such wise and supportive counsel last year that I was able to create this book. It's not often that someone can be dead for over fifteen years and still be a source of warmth, information and love. But if anyone could achieve such a thing (believe it or not), Mae West could and did. *That* story, unfortunately, doesn't belong in this tale. But I'm sure it would end up prominently displayed in my second book. Believe it or not!

And most of all, thank you to my wonderful mother and father. These two people, who felt that having a child would be such a simple and predictable thing, didn't deserve to get the handful I was. I am sorry for all the pain which ensued since my birth, especially the parts I could have avoided inflicting and didn't. We were three lost souls groping our way through the darkness. Now, at last, there is a happy balance and we are truly a family. I hope this book doesn't complicate your lives any further than the story it tells already has.

I must admit that, in the midst of writing this rather extraordinary tell-all, I was moved to tears on more than one occasion -- genuinely upset, as if it were all happening again in front of me. I was surprised by this because I have been through so many years of therapy and have retold so many of them often, I thought it was all ancient history. I guess I learned a long time ago that a quick wit and a nimble tongue can sometimes hide tremendous pain. As flip and pert as my writing

style might be, it's only a mask. Remember that!

One of Petula Clark's most successful recordings was *This Is My Song*. And now, ladies and gentlemen, this is mine.....

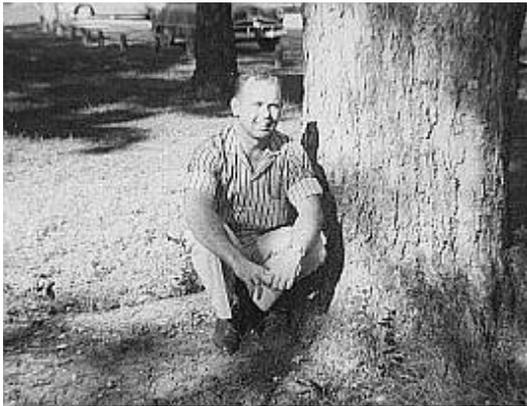
Part One:

Fool's Paradise

I

The Other Egg And I

Someone once said: You can't know who you are until you know who you were. I wish I knew who said it so I could ask them what it means. Before I get into telling my tale, perhaps I should explain from whence I came. I am the product of a second marriage for each of my parents. Both of them wanted children and neither had them.



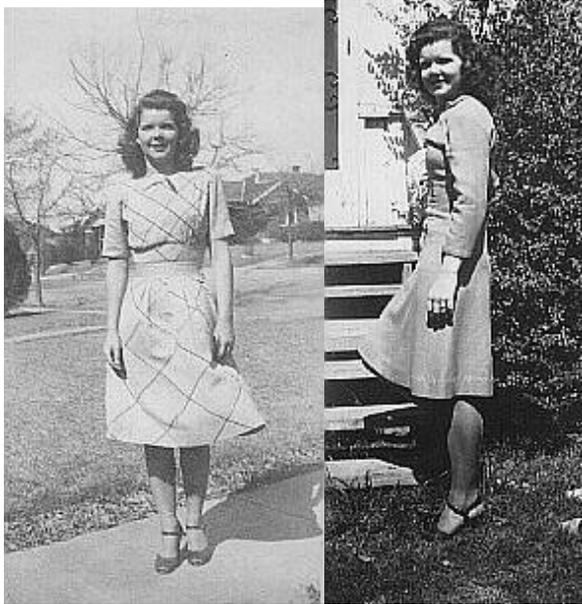
My dad, when he was dating Mom

My father came from seemingly endless siblings. His name is Charles Lemoyne Busbice. (Catchy last name, eh? No wonder I changed it!) He was born and raised in the thriving metropolis of Eros, Louisiana. My Dad is a fraternal twin. His brother was named Temple and he died in the early 1980's. Anyway, Temple and Dad were born in 1928 to my grandmother Talitha Faye Connella (from whom I got my looks and my last name) and Oates (pronounced Otis) Oliver Busbice. The Connellas were big plantation-owners in those parts. Most of what is now West Monroe, Louisiana was once family property. The

Busbices, on the other hand, were less sophisticated and more folksy people. The Connellas thought that Faye married beneath her socially (which she did), but this was apparently a true love match. Oates and Faye eventually produced: Helen, Connella, Junior (Oates, Jr. who died in 1948, long before I was born), Dad, Temple, Wayne, Billy, Marilyn and Bernarr. Not in that order. Hey, I'm lucky I can recite them all without flash cards. Okay?

Growing up on a farm in the Depression sounds just like The Waltons, which is probably was. All of Faye's and Oates' children spawned so there are hundreds (maybe thousands, for all I know) of their progeny running around the world. There was a strange standard of three in our family. Just about all the brothers and sisters had three children. Or more. And they were Protestant! Good down-to-earth people. But, alas, the Connella blood brought with it the show-biz taint. After all, my Great Aunt Heloise shocked the family when she went into "vaudeville". I use quotes because, while she did appear in such venues, she worked in circuses as well. Horrors! My Uncle Wayne became a country and western singer in the 1950's and 1960's as Red McCoy. His baby brother Bernarr entered the same field under the name of Buzz Busby, recording for a time with Starday Records, performing on the Louisiana Hayride and becoming the "star" of his generation. (Just as I am the "star" of mine, I suppose.) For a year, he hosted the *Hayloft Hoedown* in Washington, D.C. and is in fact credited with popularizing bluegrass in the DC area. Washington is now known as the Bluegrass Capital of the World, thanks to Uncle Buzz. Yes, it seemed he was definitely walking the high road. Until he went to prison, anyway, thanks to drugs and liquor. Such a cliché, isn't it? The glittering pinnacle followed by the crash down into the bowels of the earth. Oh, well...I didn't meet Uncle Bernarr until I was almost grown, so he didn't have much impact on me except through his music and keyhole gossip. The best kind! My Uncle Wayne wasn't quite as big a star as his brother but his life has been significantly more fulfilling and productive. He was in the military the whole time I was growing up, so when I saw him it was usually in uniform. Very impressive! He ended up going into what I consider the family business -- education. (I often heard we were a family of geniuses.) There were more teachers and

principals in my family than you could shake a stick at. Wayne was both, living far away in Maryland. And probably happy he didn't have to live in the midst of relatives everywhere! Overall, no matter what I used to say as a child, they're a pretty fascinating collection of people. A motley crew, as my cousin Stephen once called them. Indeed.



Two shots of Mom as a teenager during World War II

On the other hand, my mother is an only child. Of her side of the family, I have little information. My mother was born Juanita Doris Johnston in Negley, Texas (a small town just outside Clarksville, which I'm sure you already knew.) The story of my grandparents and their relations with and without my mother would fill a whole chapter by itself. So let's just say that I never met my grandfather, although he outlived my grandmother. All during my childhood and adolescence, I assumed my grandfather was dead. It wasn't until I found a newspaper

clipping in my mother's Bible announcing a revival he was holding that I discovered he was alive. I always felt badly that I never got to meet him. My grandfather was named Hassell Johnston. He was a minister of some sort, although he was apparently a house builder as well. How confusing. What I *do* know of him and his family was quite shocking. I was talking to my mother in the early 1990's about a guy I was dating who was a Scotsman. I was telling her about how I was bragging to him about being Irish/English with a dash of Scots thrown in. "Don't forget that you're one-quarter Austrian," she chimed, as if it were something I already knew. I won't go into the pulling-teeth contest this conversation turned into, but it turned out that yes my grandfather was from Austria! The good folks at Ellis Island had changed the family name from Schmidt to Johnston. Hmm...can someone explain the logic of that to me? It was when I asked where it was in Austria that the family came she became really difficult, crying and everything. "It's a very small town," she kept sniffing, over and over. I finally learned the family seat was a town called Linz, which just also happened to be the home town of one Adolf Hitler. "Oh, my," I sighed, sitting down at this piece of news. "Mother...are you trying to tell me that we're...uh.....related to Hitler?" Her tearful response was, "I don't know! *But it's a very small town!!!*"



Grandfather in the 1930's



My grandmother in the late 1940's

So I don't know a lot about Grandpa. About Grandma, on the other hand, I know much too much. Her name was Ethel Louise Sanders. Her mother ran away with another man when my grandmother was around ten, leaving her and my great-grandfather to tend to four small children. I can't say I ever really understood my Grandmother; she was always something of an enigma to me. Her desire to control and dominate are more understandable when you know that she was only a child taking care of other children herself. But more on that later. My mother grew up with a stepfather she despised, and whom she once tried to kill. I think he was making some kind of molestation overtures. She has a scar on her knee to this day from where the knife slipped. In her teens, things were so bad that in the end she moved in with the family of her best friend, Mary Farr. My mother is very small, petite and pixie-like. Mary was a tall, statuesque brunette beauty who really should have tried to go into modeling or the movies. A Southern belle to the teeth, she and my Mom were Mutt and Jeff. And no doubt Mom

was painfully aware of the difference. Still, it was World War II and they were two happy-go-lucky high school students in Dallas, riding the trolley cars to school and to work. (Mom started working as a telegraph girl for Western Union in the luxurious Baker Hotel in downtown Dallas when she was about fifteen. She remained with them until she retired.) I think that was a great time in Mother's life; the Farris felt like family to her. And from what I saw of them as I was growing up, it's no wonder. I saw Mary as the most beautiful and glamorous woman in the world! So many memories of overcast days spent as a pre-schooler in Mary's dining room, with her and Mom sipping coffee and gossiping. I was quite content to nibble on the cinnamon toast Mary would make for me while I listened intently to their conversation. I still can't have a piece of cinnamon toast without thinking of Mary.



Mary during her cinnamon toast period

Sometime late into the war, my mother met a man named Burl. He

was very good-looking, with his blonde hair and blue eyes. (Very Aryan -- Cousin Adolph would have *loved* him) and they had a gentle dating romance before he shipped off to war. While he was overseas, they became pen pals and Burl felt that he had fallen in love via the postal system. (Mother is quick to point out that she did not feel the same way!) When the war was over, he came home and they got married. And THEN they started getting to know each other. I have a strong impression that my mother felt a little lost, what with no real home life to guide her. So when he proposed, she felt that accepting would at least give her a sense of purpose. And besides, he was attractive! Let's just say that they stayed together for ten years and were happy together for about two of them. The divorce was bitter (infidelity, of course; doesn't that always happen with good-looking Aryans? To prove he was a red-blooded American male, he even made a pass at my grandmother!) and Mom was left feeling pretty doubtful about getting involved again.

In the meantime, Dad's marriage to the glamorous Betty (who looked somewhat like Gale Storm; but then, so does my Mom! Am I picking up a pattern here...?) ended with a bang I'll discuss later. Dad was left in dire financial straits and, I think, more than a little disillusioned as well. I don't think either one were looking for romance and marriage when they met.

Uncle Temple, my Dad's twin, was married to the vivacious Juanita. (Which, if you recall, is my mother's name as well! Those twins and their similar tastes! Mom was always called Doris, which I suppose was the lesser of two evils, just to avoid confusion.) Juanita and my mother worked together at Western Union and became friends. And Juanita started telling Mom about her brother-in-law. Such a nice guy, also going through a divorce, ex-wife is a bitch, has a good job at Dallas Power & Light, etc. Eventually Juanita played yenta and got Mom and Dad together. It wasn't exactly fireworks. But they dated, each one finishing off their respective divorces. Oh, this is such a cute story but I really don't have the time to tell it. Let's just say that there were a few eleventh-hour clinches and a deathbed scene and....boom! Husband and wife. That may not sound like a promising beginning, but they were married in 1956 and are still very much together today.

Which I think qualifies as a fairly solid relationship! Never any major fights, never any threats to leave, never any affairs (that I know about, anyway.) I was stuck with Dagwood and Blondie as parents!



Mom and Dad while engaged



A bag of groceries for
a wedding present?



Leaving for the honeymoon
Note the sign: Just MARRED!

My parents had been married for a few years, living in apartments and looking for houses to buy. But their finances weren't offering much support in that area. My mother was granted the small house in the Oak

Cliff area that she and Burl had lived in towards the end of their marriage. But I think Mom felt a lot of hesitation about living there again, so it was occupied only by my grandmother. The two of them had lived there together after the divorce. So after this year of cramped rental living, Mom and Dad decided to risk living there with Gram. (This was no easy decision, I'm sure; Burl and Mom had lived there with Gram -- and apparently Burl found this quite a hardship.) Nevertheless, it made sense economically so the three of them lived in this two bedroom cottage. After about a year, Mom and Dad built on an extra bedroom so that there would be enough space for a nursery. They were determined to have children, you see. And eventually, Mother conceived.

It's at this point that the story gets tricky. I didn't know this key piece of the puzzle until I was an adult, and it's a rather amusing story. So I'll tell you. I was somewhere around twenty two (funny how the closer I get to 40, the fuzzier my memory gets when it comes to how old I was at any given point -- especially the year I was born!) and pursuing my metaphysical bents. I had heard about this fabulous astrologer in town named James Redmon. In fact, I knew a woman who was madly in love with him. But the feelings weren't returned. I was determined to find out what the stars had in store for me, so one day I boldly picked up the telephone and called him up. I told him I was a psychic (which I was, and still am) and that I wanted to give him three readings for one chart analysis. He took me up on my offer and I met him for the first time a few weeks later. This meeting would trigger one of the most passionate and painful periods of my life but that story won't appear here. Believe me, there's enough angst to come.

I still have the audio tape of that first session. And the funniest part to me (at the time) was that we spent an inordinate amount of time arguing. One of the first things he said to me was, "All right, now is your twin a brother or a sister?" To which I replied, "Neither. I'm an only child. My father is a twin. I'm not." This basic discussion was carried on for twenty minutes. He insisted that I had a sibling, probably a twin. I got a little huffy, responding that I thought I would know whether I was an only child or not! And that kind of blew a large part

of the reading he had prepared. When I got home, I was talking to my mother and I said, "You know, Mom, maybe you're right. About this metaphysical stuff being all bunk. I went to an astrologer today, and all he could talk about was this twin I had! Have you ever heard anything so crazy?" I turned to her, laughing, but her expression was serious. Serious and guilty. Uh oh, I thought to myself. Sheepishly, my mother began telling me, "We never really thought to tell you..." Don't you just love the South? Only there will people edit the basic facts of life so thoroughly!

When I was created, there was another me in the womb. We floated around in the amniotic fluid for several weeks together, presumably happy as clams. In the seventh or eighth week of pregnancy, something happened. Something dramatic enough to make one of us leave. No one knows what transpired. In fact, it seems as though the handling of this whole incident was rather nonchalant. I'm sure mother was crushed when she thought she had lost "the baby" -- only to discover that there was still another chick inside trying to hatch its way out. And I don't use the term 'chick' loosely, either.

I've been told by more than one doctor that the chances of one twin surviving at that point of pregnancy are something like a million to one. Almost always, they either both go or they both stay. I never felt a sense of awe that I was the lucky one to stay alive. In fact, I felt quite a bit of guilt. As though maybe I had done something to make my twin die. If you think the Jews experience guilt, try the Baptists sometime!

But whatever it was that happened was traumatic enough to have some serious effects on this little embryo. That was mainly because of the timing. My other half vacated our space right before the third month of pregnancy. In case you don't remember your biology (or you're like me and always found science baffling), all human fetuses are female until the third month. This is why all men have a scar running up the middle of their scrotum; it's where their vaginal lips sealed. And their clitori started growing until it becomes the thing men seem to prize above all. With most children, this process of determining gender is an easy and automatic process. With whatever-it-was that happened in my case, mixed signals were flowing aplenty. Picture it like this: I hit the

trimester mark. My chromosomes asked my genes, "So is it a boy or a girl?" and after some consideration, the genes came back with an enthusiastic, "Yes!"

Now this story may be hard to believe, but I'll tell it anyway. I possess memories prior to birth! I can recall playing in front of this one particular front door with another tiny child. I remember that my parents were inside with other adults and I wasn't allowed to go in. The front door had a porch with white wrought iron railing on it and steps on either side leading up to it. I and this other kid (I don't remember the child's gender) played on the rails and the stairs waiting to go home. That's it; end of memory. When I was around eleven or so, I came across photos of my Mom and Dad posing in front of that very entrance, wearing the same clothes I recall them wearing that day. "Oh, I remember that place," I casually comment to my mother, who was looking at the photos with me.

"You were never there," she responded.

"Sure I was!" I replied. "I was outside playing with that kid and you guys wouldn't let us come into the house. Was it because we were too small and you were afraid we'd break something?"

At that point, Mom told me in a puzzled tone that those pictures were taken before I was born...but after I was conceived. I guess the house belonged to some friends of theirs or something. I just nodded and acted as if that answered everything. But it didn't. I remember everything, in vivid color. (The snapshots were black and white.) There was a blooming bush close to the door which both looked and smelled delightful. The air was clean and warm. No doubt about it, I was there.



From the expression on the face,
I must have had a good idea what I was facing!

I was born on December 12, 19&\$, at 6:33 p.m.. And I still prefer to have a late dinner. (This is truly bizarre, but after I was grown I met a man to whom I was magnetically drawn. And he to me. It turns out that we were born on *exactly* the same day, exactly 12 hours apart. He was born in the morning and *he was a twin, too!* He was a fraternal twin, like my Dad, and his sister died a few minutes after birth. He started calling me his Other Half and saying that he felt I was the spirit of his dead sister, and things were so crazed between us I halfway believe it to this day. Unfortunately, he already had an Other Half on the physical plane, and she was bound and determined to get me out of his life! She succeeded quite easily.)



Newly home from the hospital

I certainly looked like a normal, healthy little baby boy. I had all the right parts -- at least it looked that way on the outside. I have some "nudies" taken in my crib at around eight months of age, and even *I* think I looked like a little boy! What nobody knew was that I possessed no internal male reproductive organs and that my entire body make-up and chemistry was that of a female. I was named Charles Lemoyne Busbice, Jr. Since just about everyone called my Dad Lemoyne, I was referred to as Charles immediately. It was a name I grew to despise at a very early age. Uncle Temple and Aunt Juanita had given birth to a daughter named Tracey fourteen months earlier and my Aunt Marilyn (my Dad's baby sister) was pregnant with what would in March become my cousin Melanie. The three of us would be very, very close all during our childhoods. Perhaps one of the reasons I never felt a great deal of sorrow at being an only child was that Tracey and Melanie and I were together several times a week. Closer than cousins, less than siblings. It was a good recipe for me.



A facial expression I've worn most of my life

My memory has always been exceptional. I can recall quite a bit of the months before my first birthday. Although not every day still lives in my recall, I'm stunned to realize how much of life seems clear and uncluttered as an infant. I do know that there was never a moment of my life when I thought I was a boy. True, at that age I didn't give gender a whole lot of thought. But the fact that I was a girl was just as unassailable to me as being alive.

We lived in a quiet street in a middle-class neighborhood. I remember the house vividly, and a few of the children who lived around me. Other people and places remain a blur. Mother took a leave of absence from work to be with me and I only have very good

memories. My mother likes to tell the story of one time in the summer when we were lying on a blanket in the back yard (we had no air-conditioning then, only an attic fan and a cooler in their bedroom). I recall doing this quite a bit and enjoying it immensely. What I don't remember is one day we were laying quietly together, probably a little close to dozing. A bird was perched in the peach tree in the back yard and began singing. Mother says that I turned to her with a look on my face as though a momentous discovery had just hit me and I exclaimed, "God made the birds!" Perhaps to my seven month old mind, this was a startling revelation. I really can't say. Apparently, once I learned to talk, no one could make me stop. (It's still true today!) I know I went through a period at just over a year old when all I would say to people was, "**Shut up!**" And I know I did it once too often and got the bejesus spanked out of me by Dad. Mom was the primary disciplinarian in the family, but when Daddy got mad enough to spank -- watch out! Another time, Dad was loading his pipe in his bedroom and spilled tobacco on the floor. I witnessed this and ran to my Mom tout de suite to reveal, "Umm! Daddy make mess!" Well, I guess one had to be there....



The...er, proof of my claims!

I remember getting sick for the first time right before my first birthday. There are pictures taken on that day, which only reinforce the

memory. And I remember learning to ride my tricycle. It seemed that I spent the first three years of my life on that trike! Restless, even then. I also know that I made a friend who lived down the street named David. He had a tricycle, too, and we used to ride together. His was one of the new, streamlined brown-and-white thin metal type. Mine was older, maybe from the early fifties, red with a black seat and black handlebar grips and the metal was thick and clunky. I thought it was ugly and wanted David's like nobody's business. (Besides, mine had a screw or something just below the seat that used to pinch my naked thighs until they were quite bruised -- but I didn't tell David that.) I think we traded once but our parents made us trade back. David always called me a name which the family spelled Sagh. Like Ma, with an S. The grown-ups always said it was because he couldn't say Charles. I'm not so sure. Even stretching my imagination, getting Sagh from Charles takes a lot of effort. Who knows? Perhaps I had been an Indian princess in a previous life and David had been my bodyguard. Does anyone know if Sagh is an Indian proper name, or perhaps a title of respect? David's family eventually moved away, as did the entire neighborhood.



Pedal to the metal!



They say the camera LOVES me!

The Turneys lived on one side of us and the Smiths on the other. I liked both families. The Turney's had a daughter named Marsha with whom I was friends. The Smiths had a teen-aged daughter, but sometime after my birth they had a second one named Kelly. She and I also chummed around. Wanda Smith was blonde and leather-skinned. I guess she got too much sun. I adored her. She seemed ultra-sophisticated and she smoked like a chimney. Her laugh was both raucous and phlegmy. It's a sound I've never heard duplicated. I always had to laugh every time Wanda laughed. Mrs. Turney, on the other hand, was a typical suburban Mom. The clearest memory I have of them is when they got a movie camera. I was about two years old at the time. I must have always been deeply impacted by the television and motion picture media. (Especially TV. I vividly remember watching *The Flintstones* in their initial run on prime time. The first movie I ever

saw was at a drive in with my parents. It was *The Ten Commandments*. I slept through almost all of it. And yes, it was a reissue! I hadn't even been considered when the movie came out in 1956!) The fact that the Turneys could make MOVIES excited me more than I could bear. And one day, while I was riding my omnipresent tricycle, Mr. or Mrs. Turney shot some footage of me. Oh, I can remember the exquisite excitement when the film was processed! We all viewed it on a wall of the Turney's living room. I watched myself laughing and peddling and showing off...and I was hooked. On being in front of a camera, that is. It took a lot longer to get hooked on myself.

During all this time, my perceptions were beginning to form. For years, my mother blamed my "strangeness" on the fact that she dressed me in little dresses as an infant. Not so, mother dear! That would underestimate my thought processes considerably. I always perceived myself as a female. I *knew* it. And I also know that quite early on I realized that I seemed to be the only one who had this discernment. I have often been asked when I "decided" that I was female. There was no decision to make. People who are born secure in their gender have absolutely no idea of what this understanding is. I guess it could be somewhat like being an Asian child taken at birth and raised with Pakistanis who never acknowledged the child's Oriental heritage. In that case, all the child would have to do is look into a mirror to see the difference. With me, all I had to do was look inside myself.

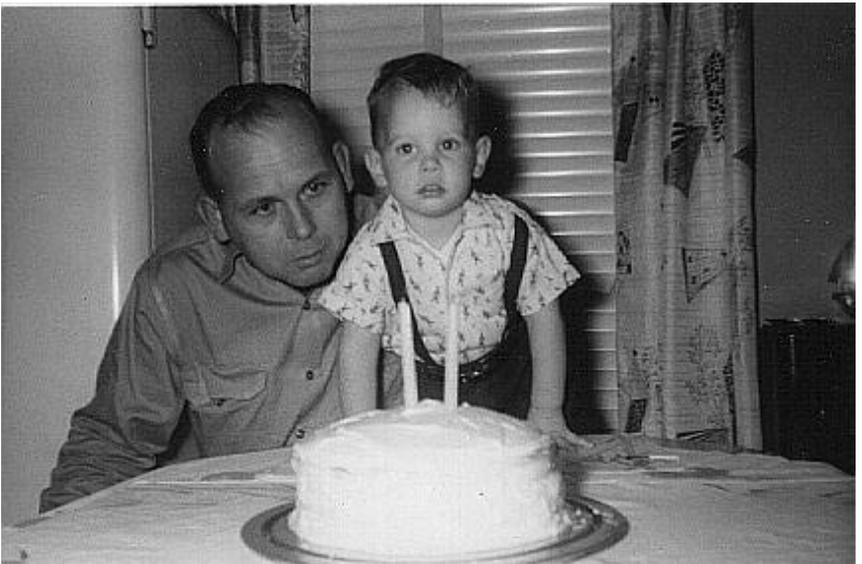
Somewhere around my first birthday, my parents started noticing my feminine proclivities. For instance, when I was eight months old or so, I developed a daily pattern which I stuck to stubbornly. Every day when my grandmother would come home from work, I would insist on and was allowed to put on her hat and her ear-rings. There is a photo of me being surprised in such gear. Months went by and no one said anything. One day, out of the blue, I was told that this was no longer permissible. I was confused. What had I done wrong?



Guilt on my face, a hat on my head
and faux pearls on my ears!

As my second birthday approached, I was asked for the very first time what I wanted for a birthday present. My answer was immediate: a baby doll. Tracey had one or two and Melanie had some as well. It only seemed right that I got one, too. To my puzzlement, the answer was no. I didn't throw a tantrum or act up. But I was upset. Really upset. This was the first in a long string of incidents where I would pose what seemed perfectly reasonable requests and I was denied. There were several photos taken of the moment when I blew out my two birthday candles (with able assistance from Tracey's older brother Michael). In all the pictures, I can be seen grasping my favorite birthday present in sheer delight: a baby doll. I didn't get it from my parents. My wonderful Aunt Juanita (whose birthday, incidentally, is one day before mine; fellow Sagittarians must stick together!) gave it to me. It was a boy baby doll, which I think was a calculated decision on Juanita's part to make it harder for my Mom and Dad to say no. She's so

clever! I think Mom and Dad were a little upset at the gift. All I know is that I thanked God extra hard for Aunt Juanita every night for the next several weeks!



Two years old. And they said I wouldn't make it!



My cousins Tracey and Michael are there for the cake. Although you can't really tell, I am delirious to have my *very first doll!!!*



Getting help for blowing out ALL those candles!

Somewhere between my second and third birthdays, my mother went back to work part time. I never respected or understood this aspect of my Mom when I was growing up. At that time, women still tended to stay at home and try to be June Cleavers with their coffee klatches and their bridge parties. My mother was a career woman. Of course, the extra income was important. But I truly think now that my Mom was happiest when working. Back then, it seemed unusual. I'm sure my Aunt Juanita stayed away from work for a time, because she had a son named Dale not too long after I was born. My Aunt Marilyn didn't go to work until I was already in school. There was no precedent for my mothers actions to me. I think a part of her wanted to stay home and tend to her child and bake all day. But being Donna Domestic just wasn't her thing. Now, of course, I understand exactly how she felt. Back then, there was a small sense of betrayal.

There was a woman named Mrs. Hulen who lived across the street from us who ran a day care center. I remember being there for a while,

although the name of the facility remains a mystery. I learned how to interact with other children on a daily basis there, and the best part was that there were many more girls to play with there than there were in our neighborhood! Whenever we all went somewhere, we would pile into one of those really cool, wood-paneled 1950's station wagons. We were driving somewhere one day when a car came driving up beside us. What makes this exceptional was that the car had no wheels! We all heard the the forest green automobile coming up behind us; metal on blacktop creates a terrible racket! It quickly drove by and we all stared at it, open-mouthed. When I got home that day and related the whole story to my parents, I once again got the catch-all explanation for everything bizarre, "You were dreaming." Yeah, right! I asked some other kids at the day care about it the next day, just to be sure. They, of course, concurred that it had indeed happened just as I had told it. But no one would believe me.

I also have a dim memory of a strange, red plastic trailer which had been gutted parked behind the day care center. The 'big kids' went there, but I was invited in one day. I have no recollection on what occurred when I went inside, but that memory scared me for a very long time. Sometimes even the color red made me frightened. But overall, I adapted nicely. I really loved Mrs. Hulen as well, so the experience wasn't unpleasant. I recall feeling grown-up when mother packed a sack lunch for me to take, just like Dad did! (I had some Tootsie Rolls in my sack, though, which I think Dad didn't carry.) I can remember saying some things about that, about how something or other was for "just us fellas." So new to speech and already learning to tell them what you think they want to hear.

I was home often enough to have plenty of memories about being there during that time.

I'll share two of them with you. The first one probably just sounds silly. As mentioned earlier, we had a huge attic fan built into our hallway ceiling, with large metal shutters which would open when the fan was on and close again when it was turned off. It made an awful racket when it was running. Still, I suppose it must have been reasonably lulling for me because one hot night, the fan shut itself off and the house went suddenly quiet. The absence of noise startled me out of my

slumber. I sat bolt upright in my bed and cried out to no one in particular, "Turn that attic fan back on!" It was turned back on. To this day, I have no idea why it seemed so important.

The other story is really confusing and a little chilling. I'll tell it anyway. I always had to take a nap after I had lunch, whether I needed one or not. I must have been waking up early and prowling around the room because a rule was passed that I could not get out of bed until Mother came in and told me I could. One day in particular, I woke up and instinctively knew that Mom's wake up call was some time away. As I usually did in this circumstance, I rolled over to look out the window next to the bed. The peach tree was out there and sometimes birds would play and fight in the branches. It was a reasonable way to pass the time. This time, however, I was in for a surprise. The window wasn't there! I rubbed my eyes and shook my head. But the window was still missing. I scooted my body over to the edge of the bed to examine the wall. It was only then that I realized that my headboard was touching the ceiling. Yep, I rolled over onto my back and lifted my legs and -- if I strained really hard -- my feet could touch the ceiling, too. Intrigued but not frightened, I looked over the side of the bed closest to my wall. And there I found my window! It was just below the bed, instead of next to it like it usually was. I know I lied back and tried to figure all this out, but I went back to sleep. The next thing I knew, mother was waking me and telling me I could go outside and play.

This continued two or three days a week for several weeks. I got no closer to understanding what was occurring but accepting it was easy. I even liked the difference in perspective in the window now. I could see the ground instead of the sky! I liked it. Nap Time Levitations continued on this way until one afternoon. Jackie Phillips and I had been playing that morning. Jackie was the daughter of a co-worker of Mom's and Aunt Juanita's named Myrtis. Jackie and I were friends. She had gotten a paper bag full of jelly beans that morning. I had never tasted them and asked if she would share. She wasn't in the mood. Jackie didn't like the black jelly beans, though, so I was allowed to have them. I didn't care of them much myself, but I eagerly took what I could get. The result was the my mouth was full of black food dye. When I woke up from my nap and found myself ceiling-adjacent, I

leaned over as I usually did to look out the window, propping myself with my left hand against the wall. I'm left-handed, you see ("She'll do *anything* just to be different", I'm sure you're thinking) and on top of that I was an ardent thumb-sucker. The truth be told, it's a habit I haven't broken to this day. I can't believe I just admitted that!!! Back to the story, though. While propping myself against the wall with my hand, I didn't realize that my thumb had been firmly dyed black along with my mouth. It wasn't until I woke up at the right time (and that's a weird thing; I always remember having to go back to sleep before the bed would float down to the floor. I never saw or felt it happen) that I realized with horror that my thumb had left a very visible smudge at the very top of the very white wall. Even at that point, I felt sure I'd get busted with the truth so I decided to confess right away.



If you had a levitating bed, you'd look puzzled too!

When Mom came in to wake me up, I admitted that I had been sucking my thumb again. This displeased her. When I told her that the jelly beans had darkened my thumb (showing her the thumb in question

as evidence), she was more upset. Then I told her that I had left a stain on the wall with my thumb. She was really mad. She darted off to get her cleaning things and re-entered the room asking, "All right. Where's the mark?" I then quite innocently pointed up at the edge of the ceiling. For a second, it seemed that she didn't believe me. But she obviously could see the smudge as clearly as I could. And the ceiling was so high that she had to get a dining room table and stand on it to clean up the stain. I remember her looking down at me quizzically, as if the thought had hit it that if *she* had to stand on a chair to reach it, there was no way I could do it. After she finished, she came down and asked me what had happened. I told her everything I knew. At first, she insisted that I had been dreaming. But I was adamant and told her how many times it had happened and (I think) some things I had seen that I couldn't have spotted from the normal window perspective. When I finished -- ending with my credo, "It really *is* the truth" -- she calmly gathered her cleaning equipment and grabbed the chair. As she headed out the room, she looked up at where the mark had been, back at me and said, "We're never going to talk about this again." And we never did.

That was the last time it happened. It's a part of my life I don't usually share with people, because it defies explanation. Was I using psychic energy to lift the bed? Were unseen forces at work? Were aliens in the room with me? I honestly don't know. I do know what I saw and what I experienced. Whatever it was, it was fun. And I felt a tiny bit guilty, as if I'd broken a spell or a secret trust by disclosing the secret to my mother. Is that what happened? You tell me!

Then came my third Christmas. In the midst of all this, I began to realize that I had other relatives. I remember my great-grandfather (Gram's Dad) staying with us for a time, but unfortunately the only thing I can recall about him was a large, purple and perfectly round cancerous growth on his wrist. It fascinated me, because it looked like a marble or a piece of costume jewelry. I think it hurt him when I touched it, and I touched it a lot. Pinched it would be a better description. No wonder he didn't stay long! Also around that time I met my Great Aunt Heloise (always known in the family as 'Dede' -- pronounced as deed. Not dee-dee. That was my mother's family

nickname for her. Listen, if you were cursed with a name like Juanita Doris at birth, you'd want a nickname, too!). Aunt Dede seemed like a very tall and imposing woman, with a voice that was both booming and yet laced with such a heavy southern accent that it took forever to say what she had to say. But boy, could she say it loud! My Mom used to have a joke, back when people timed their long distance calls in three-minute increments, that when Aunt Dede called and Mom answered the phone it would take Dede so long just to say "Hello? Dooooorrrriss?" that the three minutes would be up. Still, even then I liked her, as initially intimidating as she was. Her husband at the time was with her. Uncle Tignall (now *that's* a name!) was mildly eccentric and always amusing. I remember him wearing a big coat with a giant beaver collar. Years later, when I saw Rudy Vallee on TV for the first time, I thought he was Tignall! He seemed utterly devoted to my great aunt, which seemed to be her pattern. She had three husbands, at least two of whom were incapable of having sex. (Tignall was one of them.) But they all loved her. From her vaudeville and circus days, she'd traveled far for a girl of her generation. Remember, her father was a plantation owner and their upbringing was quite genteel. And as much of a Southern cabbage rose as she was, there was something very strong and determined in Dede that I could sense and admire. And I like to think that, of all her sister's grandchildren, she liked me the best. I liked to look upon Dede as a kind of substitute for Faye. Even then, people were starting to remark on how much I looked like my grandmother. I was flattered; if they'd said I looked like my grandfather or any other male, I would have been upset. Dede knew what to tell me. It was a good beginning.

Christmas of that year, pedal-cars were all the rage. And I was convinced that Santa Claus would bring me one. I even knew what kind I wanted: a station wagon model. That way I could put my dolls in the back and pretend to be a mother driving her kids to school. A suburban fantasy come true! One day, early in October, I was looking for something in our garage. There were many tall overhead cabinets built into the back wall, and one was half-open. To my astonishment, I saw the back half of the exact station wagon pedal car I wanted Santa to bring me! I was so excited I started to scream. Running into the house,

I breathlessly announced that Christmas had come early and all about that car in the cabinet. Obviously my parents, well-organized as always, did their Christmas shopping nice and early that year and someone hadn't closed the cabinet door properly. In a typical deluding-the-child-for-the-sake-of-the-child technique, I was taken out to the garage and shown the cabinet -- now empty. Again, I was told I'd dreamed it. As if I spent that much time dreaming while my eyes were open! I went out there every day, checking to see if that car would magically reappear. I knew what I'd seen, but I was truly puzzled. Surely, my parents wouldn't *fib* to me! Parents didn't do that! I didn't know what to make of it all.

Fast forward to: Christmas. Guess what's waiting under the aluminum table-top tree for little me? A STATION WAGON PEDAL CAR! I don't know how long it took to put the pieces together, but even then I began to suspect that this whole Santa Claus business was smelling a little fishy. But as long as I got what I wanted, I didn't care.

Gee, with all these memories flowing so effortlessly, I'm surprised I can't recall my potty-training period. I know we kept my wooden baby potty chair in our storage building for a long time, and I used to look at it in disbelief that I'd *ever* been small enough to use it. I guess it wasn't very traumatic, or else I'd have lots of things to remember! What I did have a problem with, and this takes a lot to admit, was wiping. Either I just couldn't do it right or I flat-out refused to do it. Either way, I was potty-trained reasonably early but it took until I was four or five before I was a self-contained toilet user. I quickly learned to expect others to do the wiping for me. As soon as I was finished, I would bend all the way over, my little hands touching the floor, and sing out "Somebody come wash my bottom!" I wouldn't even chant it; I had a special little tune. I know my parents were embarrassed on more than one occasion because I'd put on this little production when company was around. But hey -- when you've got to go, you've got to go!



My favorite photo of me as a child

As if that weren't enough to occupy my time, I had my first traumatic experience (out of the womb) about this time as well. I was outside playing one day and some little dog, I think it was a Chihuahua, ran up to me and started barking it's little head off. Shortly before that, while over at Steve and Marilyn's house one night, I was alone in their back yard for some reason. Maybe I was hiding. All of a sudden, out of nowhere came this great deafening growling noise. I was petrified -- it was a lion. A big, mean *hungry* lion! Dashing into the house sobbing and hysterical, my parents and my aunt and uncle tried to explain to me what a fire engine siren was, but I wasn't buying any of it. There was a lion skulking somewhere out there and he knew my name. I don't remember ever going into that back yard again.

So now, with this apparently wild and vicious little dog telling me

off, I over-reacted like nobody's business. Again I ran into the house in tears and babbling. My Mom tried to get me to tell her what had upset me so badly and all I could say was, "That dog ruffed at me!" And do you know what? I still feel a mild tremor of that today, whenever some yappy little dog starts vocalizing my way. I am a tremendous animal lover, but not with them. I have to fight the urge to kick them across the room. Poor pooches; I'm not even mad at them but one of their ill-tempered ancestors. I've managed to harness my kicking impulses. So far.

It wasn't but a month or two later that we began preliminary preparations to move. In a pattern which originated then and somewhat continues to this day, when one of the three families decided to do something, we all did. Consequently, Mom and Dad frequently joined Temple and Juanita and Steve and Marilyn in house-hunting expeditions. I don't know why the other two families wanted to move. I think Steve and Marilyn might have been renting, but it was most likely the arrival of Jeffrey (Child #3, that pattern I told you about) that made them realize their present house was too small.

Our story was something else altogether. There was a phenomenon going on in that time in Texas and elsewhere in the South (maybe everywhere in the US) called blockbusting. All I ever thought that meant was a big success, but back then it denoted when a black family moved into the neighborhood. The block had been busted of its white segregation, you see. Within a year, everyone we knew in our cute little Oak Cliff neighborhood was gone. Including us. No one explained it to me at the time, which was just as well. I probably wouldn't have grasped the concept anyway. I didn't even know there *were* such things as other races at that point. Life was *so* insulated for me. The household's goal apparently was to move as fast as possible, before real estate values began to fall.

I recall a couple of chilly mornings when all us kids were playing on driveways of empty houses some parents or another were checking out. I vividly remember standing in the garage of the house that Marilyn and Steve would buy. Of our own house or Temple's, it seemed to be a *fait accompli*. Maybe I was so dazed by all the property

we'd visited I couldn't tell them apart.

All I knew was that by summer we'd left our neighborhoods behind and now the families were much more geographically divided. Steve and Marilyn were living in an outlying suburb called Lancaster (pronounced LANK-aster, not LAN-caster, just so you know). Juanita and Temple settled into another Oak Cliff neighborhood miles away from their old home or ours. And our new house was in a suburb called Irving.

Yuck. *Irving*. What a name for a town, especially in WASPy Texas! I didn't like the name at all. I remember hearing it for the first time while I was eating my favorite dinner, frozen fish sticks. (Thank goodness tastes change!) I was having creamed corn with the fish. It had the texture of snot, in my opinion. But I loved it just the same. So the name Irving and the feel of creamed corn were embedded into my subconscious for life in that moment. I didn't feel excited about moving. I don't think I really understood what it meant. And if I *had* known of all the distaste and pain waiting for me there, I probably would have run away. If I'd known how.

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