

News

Say you're a mom, a wife, a jewelry maker. Okay, say it. Today's world, put that in. And the way the days shut down this time of year.

My Elizabeth is nine and quite the artiste. She studies both flute and tap. She taps everywhere — she can get a sound even with bare feet on a wood floor, just slapping away. We'll say, time to brush your teeth, and there she is, Gregory Hines in pyjamas, good to go.

Recently I went to a fund raiser — "Friends of Granville School." There was to be a silent auction, discussions. I had to bring something — I mashed up lox and cream cheese and put that on bagel pieces — Elizabeth said, shocked, as I was going out the door, "Mom, it looks like krill."

The house was in an upscale part of town, right on the lake, with a sloping lawn. They'd lighted a carriage lamp down at the boat dock. It was a soft, late September evening. There

was a lamp swooping over the buffet table on a metal rope. I hadn't been there five minutes before our hostess, in a relaxed little purple pants and top combo, grinned over to me and said in a jolly way, "Still making those pins?" I did what I always do, blush, mutter. But soon there was the auction and task forces on site based management, violence, under and over-achievers. I keep thinking I'll sign up when our life is more organized. Danny and Elizabeth and I will go hiking more often, and we'll have a pet. I'm not ruling any of these things out. As far as volunteering, it isn't for lack of respect. At parents' night Elizabeth's teacher, who is pretty and no-nonsense and has her blonde hair going down into her eye on one side in sharp points, when she talks about how awesome the kids' seal projects were and more I feel like crying and shouting, Right On, Yes, Have Mercy. It's just that I don't see myself a joiner, a group person. But then maybe sometimes that's what's called for.

This was a dream. I was in an R.V. encampment, a huge sprawling one that was ever-increasing, like the mid-western floods. I was in a back-water, a small clump of little mound-like tents. I didn't want to sleep in my tent, the R.V.s were looming in the background.



Danny knows I've been hurting, struggling with the way I am, the way the world is, all a big toxic bundle I've been carrying around, adding to. Turning on a rock and roll station and hearing a creepy Paul Harvey clone going on about *black* teenagers "and if that's *rasccissist, sssobeeit.*" A few days after the fund-raiser Danny brought me an article with advice for people who have trouble knowing what to say at public gatherings. It was by Marilyn vos Savant, who is in the Guinness Book of Records for being one of the smartest people of all times. Her advice: *Read a newspaper every day, and particularly be sure to read the stories you want to skip.*

We don't get a newspaper. It's amazing how much news you find you can do without. Not that people, the radio, your husband, your child, don't tell you. Not that you don't stand in front of the rack and try to read the paper down to where it curves around the fold.

October 13, 1993. Our local upscale cafeteria is tiled and chromed and full of little black chairs and cafeteria stools. The motif is penguin — a number of large plastic versions of these birds look at us from niches and tops of refrigerators. I pay good money for three newspapers including *The New York Times* and treat myself to breakfast. Cappucino and what they call

"breakfast cobbler" which is a spongy bread with a thin layer of fruit on top.

I tear out a picture of 18 white fiberglass domes, like little half eggs, for the homeless in downtown Los Angeles. "The cluster is expected to house 24 people and will contain kitchens and laundries."

Here's a picture of 15 year old Gerard A. McCra arraigned in the fatal shootings of his parents and his 11 year old sister. He's handcuffed and broad shouldered, in a sweat shirt, a small pencil mustache, hard-set mouth. His eyes thread into the camera. A photo of the Labor Secretary with his hands pressed together in prayer, and his eyes go up instead of down like Gerard's, pleading.

Danny can take on the world. He teaches English at the high school. He has 130 students. He gives a pop quiz every day, a vocabulary quiz every week, a paper every 2 weeks and a test every four weeks. We're talking heavy night and week-end involvement. He's a born entertainer, for all his wire rims and mild ways. Mostly the students love him. Even when they hate him, they love him. He tells them, *listen up* — that's from his days in the army.

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I try for balance. I clip out recipes: "A prescription for low-fat chicken enchiladas," "Cornish hens get a crunchy revision." "French clues for spring: a fragile and softer look." Listen Marilyn, I'm not reading any of these articles, I'm just not. That includes the local story of a 16 year old high school student beaten unconscious by three ex-students. I know about it, because Danny told me. It wasn't his school. No one from the school went to the hospital with the boy. I cut out an article on local pan-handling and one about Oprah Winfrey ordering french fries but not eating them. "She told me she just wanted to look at them," said Brian MacGillivay, owner of Alison's Restaurant. A Gary Larson *Far Side* Cartoon, "Daffy's Resume":

Experienc

Aug '63-Nov. '67

Jumped around a lot and went "Woohoo, woohoo, woohoo!"

Jan. '68-Sept. '83

Jumped around a lot and went "woohoo, woohoo, woohoo!"

Oct. '84 - present:

After a short stint in politics, jumped around a lot and went, "Woohoo, woohoo!"

SPECIAL SKILLS: Can be blown away by shotgun at close range without dying. Jumping around a lot . . .

Behind me I hear someone talking. "I'm better than I was. I couldn't venture . . . is better . . . it's not too bad . . . preparation . . . get up at 4:30, shower . . . no way . . . so I explain . . ." Clatter of dishes, trays whapping onto the metal

runner of the cafeteria line. A man skims the *Times* standing in front of the open pile of newspapers, caught, he shifts from foot to foot, wearing jeans and a flannel shirt, finally lays it back down on the pile with an air of *that's that*.

Elizabeth is not partial to bad news. She says the newspaper is "boring" and does not like her "current events" homework. She's not partial to bad news in general. That includes doing her homework. She has three times the amount of homework she had last year. When she's in a bad mood, like when she has to do her homework, she'll appear in some kind of funny hat; her favorite one is a head-band with little glittery balls attached on springs. She also has to practice her flute, which she enjoys, except for having to be told to do it. "I'm so tired," she'll say, swooning on the couch. So Danny and I are nipping at her heels all the time, like sheep-dogs.

Elizabeth got an appeal in the mail to join the National Parks Association probably because someone gave her a subscription to *National Geographic*. You get a free fanny pack and a magazine. You were supposed to answer a questionnaire. Do you believe in national parks? Biodiversity? Elizabeth carefully read the material. She said she felt it was her duty to join. She had some allowance saved, some birthday money. We

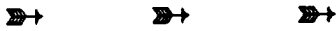
kicked in some. I told her her grandfather would be proud of her, my father that is, who died October 7th, 1962, while campaigning for public office, in the crash of a Piper Apache, aged 45, as I am now. At nine, Elizabeth doesn't have any living grandparents, and three of them have died since she was born.

Here I am, here, in this crowded place. I watch how people have dressed. Jeans and sneakers, a suit or two, a beard, a french braid, an oboè on the loud speaker. Now this lady's a - looker, chocolate brown with hair flat to her head, a black hair ribbon, gold earrings, fur trimmed hood. The man working the cash register has a cowboy hat. I am in jeans, my safest bet, a red rayon shirt and large silver earrings with brown-red beads that clink a little and brush my neck. Voices in my ear, "*Literally* as you drive in . . . politics of building a house, you drive in every day. . ."

I said I'm not reading, but of course I am: "Poor Haiti's Slender Hope: Will 'Thug and Drug' Thwart Aristide?" "Conservatives take aim at a dragon named Pumsy." (He's a blue cartoon dragon who helps with self-esteem.) Evidence on the trade center bodies: "Dr. Jacqueline Lee, an assistant New York City medical examiner wearing a black dress and dangling gold

earrings, testified to the injuries in detail as she was walked through the autopsy findings by J. Gilmore Childers, the chief prosecutor." She told, for instance, about the exact fatal injuries to the baby that one of the victims was carrying. Locally, a couple from Kenya who run a restaurant and world beat musical establishment. A picture, their children and sunny smiles. Mostly though, the pictures are of guys in suits, like the beefy Detroit cops and their lawyers.

The President came to our town last night, to speak to our university, the town industry. It was 200 years old yesterday, the first state university. Danny and Elizabeth were in the 50 thousand people crowd. I was at yoga, that's my excuse. When I got home, I turned on the t.v. I did not get to see the huge solemn faculty procession, but I did see most of the President's speech: his hair is much better and he was youthfully cheerful and moving and afterward he bounded into the crowd like a heedless rock star. He was as eager as the well-wishers wanting to touch him or his garment. As straight and grim as the secret servicemen looked, I felt for them. I wanted to remonstrate with the President. You have to give up childish things now, I wanted to tell him. Elizabeth's teacher complains Elizabeth's cubby is messy. Elizabeth says sometimes she is rushing so hard to stay on task, that she just pulls things out of her cubby and lets the stuff fall as it may.



Things falling out reminds me of last Saturday. Danny had gone to the library to grade papers, and Elizabeth was at tap and I was going to pick her up and take her to Karen Rizzuto's and then Karen's father was going to take her to Naomi Kaplan's slumber party. This was all so Gwen and I could drive down to Raven Rock State park for a real day hike. All I had to do was make a sandwich. Turkey loaf I'd bought the day before on wheat bread with fresh basil and horseradish and mayonnaise. I couldn't find the mayonnaise in the refrigerator, partly because of everything we've stuffed in there, chutneys in case we might want to make Indian food, pineapple juice that still might be good, a container with a 1/4 leftover hamburger, the beets with their tops rotted Danny was going to make a week ago, but he got a phone call and made noodles with tomato sauce out of a bottle, rotting lettuce. It reminds me of how my mother's refrigerator was, all this rotten stuff saved just in case, in fact there was a small separate refrigerator just to hold the rotten cheese, and when I came home to see her I'd clean it all out and throw everything away and my mother would be pissed at me for throwing out perfectly good food. Don't get me wrong, my mother was a person of many talents, refrigerator maintenance was just not one of them. Anyway, I decided that since I couldn't find the mayonnaise I would get the back-up one in the pantry, even if that would make two open jars of mayonnaise it would be worth

it for my sandwich, but there was no back-up jar because Danny has used it and not written it on the grocery list, he will never write down when he uses up staples. So then I go back to the refrigerator. I am beginning to have a psychotic break over this ridiculous thing because everyone is waiting on me, and I know the mayonnaise is in there and I start banging everything around and finally get some satisfaction by getting the milk to flip out of the refrigerator and spill some, so that I can just give up and develop a small ray of sense of humor by remembering Otis Redding singing "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" and riffing *mayonnaise mayonnaise mayonnaise*.

At Gwen's I get some Miracle Whip to put on my sandwich although I do not agree with Miracle Whip in principle.

I watch mouths here at the cafe. A mouth can be eating or talking or quiet for reading. Then there is also here a white boating cap, a purple jacket, an arrogant slouch leaning on the counter. Or a lady might touch her mouth, lean back to finish. The rolls and scones and oatmeal. Heavy white cups and saucers and plates and bowls, stainless steel metal counters and napkin holders, salts and peppers and sugars. Rain outside in sheets, leaves flaring up in the gloomy day.



They gave the President his honorary degree and went on about how brave he'd been being a President and that when he was governor Arkansas spent 60% of its budget on education and had many new small business starts — it seemed kind of embarrassing, he's the President now, and above that kind of praise. But Clinton also seemed sweet and dear, willing, like a grandfather playing Legos on the floor with a two year old. The President standing there, being draped with our university mantle. The *New York Times* coverage did not show how splashy and exciting and beautiful it was. They had a short article at the back with no handsome color picture like our newspapers — it discussed his various political problems. It said he was searching for "the political high ground."

Let's face it, Clinton is a boomer after all. The political high ground is our meat and potatoes. Yes? No?

Yes and no. Sitting on my little cafeteria stool, with that miracle that is memory, I can whirl back to an earlier time.

WHEN WE TOOK ON THE PENTAGON

I never would have been at the March on the Pentagon, if it hadn't been for several flukes. The first was my rich great-uncle coming into Chicago from Reno and taking me to the University Club, wearing his big Stetson, his ears wonderful bat-like protuberances. He was crazed with rage about the planned demonstration. He had an evil tone. I sat across from him in a prim wool suit,

tried to caution him. He was for rounding them all up. Communists. Criminals. I remember my mouth opening and closing but not much sound coming out.

As I got off the Elevated in Hyde Park, on 59th Street, Lenny's hand-painted lime green Valiant was idling on the curb behind some buses. I'd told him I wouldn't go. I had some of my father's aversion to splash and risk. To unseemliness. My father had seen enough at the Battle of the Bulge and believed that people more easily stayed alive and did good through caution, restraint, lack of bravado. The family lore is that during the war he'd been told he couldn't have children because of his prolonged exposure to ice and mud, and that he'd cried when my mother told him she was pregnant.

I had a history with Lenny, and wanted desperately for more of one, in fact had just about wrenched my arm out of its socket reaching for him. I'd slept with him more than once, but the first time had never been repeated. I can't remember how I ended up in bed with him, but I certainly can see the room, now, the dark and light of the night and the street-lamps. We didn't have to want, or worry about giving. That was new to me.

Adrienne and Cal were in the back seat of the Valiant, already making out. Lenny caught sight of me and yelled out of the window, joking,

People in here are middle aged mostly, even older, stain of gray in their hair and beards. The stomach straining against the belt, but this lady has such a pretty dress, blue flowers on a black background, a pretty free material, swinging at her calves as she walks with a dancer's step. It's not exactly that I wish

I was back there. It seems like such a dim dusty confusing time. But it draws me.

because he didn't expect me to say yes, "Hey, wanna come?" My uncle sat on my shoulder like a genie. Yes pounded in my head like a rock and roll beat. "When are you leaving?" "Right now, we've got to leave right now. We were waiting for Ace, but I don't think he's going to show."

Lenny had tight-to-his-head curly hair, blue eyes, a small tense body.

"All I have is twenty bucks and my driver's licence." I was calculating the drive in my mind. About 18 hours, probably, without stopping. Formidable, but then again, small for such a cause.

"We'll front." Cool man, great, chorused from the back seat, as they saw me on the edge of the diving board.

I got in, explained, "I just had lunch with my Nazi uncle, he pushed me over."

We drove straight. That is, when it was time to drive the designated driver was separated from his/her pot haze by three cups of coffee and eggs and bacon. At one point, Cal pulled over and we all zonked out for a few hours, all tangled together like a heap of dolls. Lenny dutifully tried to kiss me and I think was relieved that I ignored this. My wool suit felt like a tight little mummy case.

We parked at Adrienne's family house in Chevy Chase. She went in to ask if we could take showers, faces appeared at the window. She came out with a straw hat in one hand, slammed the door

I say I was timid, but the wastefulness, going 105 on the Oakland Richmond Bridge, motorcycles without a helmet, high on

acid driving aimlessly in the Berkeley Hills trying to find my way down to my house, now with Elizabeth, what do I have to offer her? So trite, wasted youth, boring middle age — don't make the same mistakes, I don't want to be over-protective, it all does come to something after all, doesn't it? Hair pulled back someone covers her mouth with her hand, cocks her head to listen to her friend. The friend's hands are tense, changing as she molds her thoughts to say them.

angrily. "Fuck-heads."

We got there by bus, by hiking. We agreed to meet back at the car if we got separated. In front of the Pentagon was a big flat field, filled with people. The action up at the Pentagon was very far away, people getting arrested. There was one time when the crowd began running and then stopped, I saw how it would be easy to be trampled, for things to get bad, very bad, very quickly. I don't know how the four of us stayed together, or what we talked about. A few times Lenny took my hand, I remember, but we were all dazed, abstracted. None of us wanted to go any closer than we were. I remember how silly Adrienne felt about her straw hat, but how she held onto it the whole day and then Cal sat on it by mistake on the way back to Chicago and she cried.

We were lucky to have our own car. There was a problem with the buses and the people riding in them had to traverse late at night what seemed like an endless row of stony faced National Guards, mostly kids of course, like us.



I've now drunk two of these cappuchinos at \$1.43 per, and am feeling appropriately expansive, although my mouth tastes bitter and my stomach is jumpy. Having been here two hours, I've created a little nest, with my newspaper trash around my feet, my pile of clippings, my cup and saucer, my empty bowl. My friend Emma waved to me, but didn't come over. She could see how down in I was, or maybe she wanted her own space. Emma is wearing a big bulky green wool sweater with jagged blue lightning on it, and has long wild hair. She used to have a jagged front tooth but had it capped, which was a loss and a gain. It makes me happy to see her, holding her coffee cup. The loggy oboe reels its sad sprightliness against the piano. A lady sits down with her muffin and presses her fingers on either side of her nose before eating. Now I will start this day.

So what about my day of news. Was it just stupid? What am I trying to answer? Is making pins boring me? Am I sick of fighting with Elizabeth about doing her homework, and dealing with Danny's mega-schedule? Is it that Danny and I are supposed to be the grown-ups now? Or maybe because the glass door in the shower came off its runner, and while staring at it I had to look down at the grunge in the runner and remember how my mother-in-law said to clean it, with a cotton ball on the end of a screw-driver?



This is how I make my pins. I use friendly plastic, metallicized soft plastic. Pick the colors, cut out the shapes I want, birds, houses, cars, trees. The cars are the most popular. Bake them in the oven in Pyrex baking dishes fifteen at a time. When they're hot, I can press jewels, other materials, into the plastic, or make indentations. I use a miniature ice-pick, tweezers, an x-acto knife. It's a cottage industry. The only bad part is the paper work and mailing. But it blows my mind that I actually make enough money to help us afford to buy a house, our own square piece of the world.

I listen to music while I work. My current most favorite is Kenny Burrell. I know he plays chords, but what I hear is note after note — a thread or wire, a high, strong voice. I hear him say *hold on*. To myself? the world? I don't know the answer to that. I don't believe in head phones. The music fills up the empty house, leaks out into the street. Sometimes what the music does inside of me is so intense I start crying and have to put my work down. I can't do that when the pins are just out of the oven — that's 5-6 minutes where I have to be very focused.

Last night Elizabeth got a call. She'd picked up the phone, and I picked it up in the other room just after her.

"Could I speak to Elizabeth Turner?" said the smooth selling voice. "That's me," said Elizabeth with some surprise. There was a short silence, then the voice continued, "Ms. Turner, there never seem to be enough ways to thank people like yourself, and because of your membership in the National Parks Association, we are offering you a credit card. . ."

I dreamed I was at a jewelry maker's convention. The speaker was down in a well and the seating graduated upward. We all had tables in front of us, like at the UN. Danny came in with Elizabeth, from her birthday party. They were carrying the remains of a layered pizza-cake combination. The bottom layer was lentils. I was trying to listen to the speaker but someone next to me was speaking into my ear in an English accent. I wanted to get home with Elizabeth and Danny and have a quiet at home time, just the three of us. But obstructing the house there was tiered construction, a hospital or barracks.

This morning we could not find a brush to brush Elizabeth's long, curly chestnut hair, so I wanted to hand comb it back in a pony tail — I thought that would be more orderly. She didn't want that. I stalked her all over the house, she yelling, me getting more and more hyper as the clock ticked. Then I gave up and said okay. We'll get a new brush, and have a special place

to keep it, but then if you lose that one, then I'll have to just pull it back into a pony tail. Then she said every day, a pony tail every day? And I said well, if we can't find the brush. Then she said okay, you can pull it back into a pony tail today, and stop being in such a bad mood. And then she wouldn't let me take out an old hair band and little braid, so it's there like a little bump on top of her head. As she hopped out of the car at school, she turned to wave goodbye, and I blew her a kiss, and she blew me one back.

As the weather's turned colder, Danny and I reach for each other more as we're sleeping. Sometimes it's hard to know if we're helping each other sleep or waking each other up. The luxury of touching him — I move into him, then roll away to my own side. He was gone already this morning when I got up at 6:30, and he was wakeful in the early morning — I'm used to that, I kind of wake to it then fall asleep — a kind of humming from him — he's thinking about a particular student, or a book he's teaching.

Say you're a woman, but not a mom. Or say you're a man, a dad, maybe. Say you're — you know — there are a lot of ways to be. In my way, I've made an installation here, to mark this time.

Resume: Jumped around a lot, woohoo woohoo. You start out, you imagine that after a while you will come to the place called home, your real home, not the way stations of being a kid. Now I remember those places, so many of them, my uncle's fishing boat in Fort Bragg with its little bunks, the round little trailer my parents dragged up to Washington State for vacations, the way the ketchup bottle would rattle out of its holder, bang around, the small camper my grandparents had, the bedrooms and halls and cars of my college years. And then there's the here and now always to reach for, so sheer, so jumbled, so shy and loud.