OUTSIDER IN THE PROMISED LAND:

Black Family in Jewish Community

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Also by Gwendoline Y. Fortune

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Editor's Note:

I have had the pleasure and privilege of editing the very first draft of this manuscript, then subtitled *Skokie, 1964*, and the last draft. Unfortunately, Gwen died before the last edits were made. I have done my best to discern her intentions, but there are a few instances where I'm not sure what she meant to say. There I have left her words as they stand, for the reader to interpret.

Gwen could not get this "memory" (she does not call it memoir) published. She sent it first to university presses and was told it was not scholarly enough. They wanted statistics and a change in tone. So then she sent it to several mainstream publishers. They said it was too scholarly. As always, Gwen was breaking new ground.

This story is not written in a linear fashion. As Gwen says:

> *Images, incidents, and conditions had to be visited and sorted to compose my memory-visit. The mingling and merging of experiences over decades does not want to be tamed in linear, stair-step form. Our move from known to unknown was like an ocean, sometimes roiling, sometimes calm, the tides ebbing, flowing, merging, and fading.*

And, later:

> *Though apparently separate, memories/stories in this story are connected in my memory, for I seek and see connections, and find that the sum of the whole is greater than its parts...My mind operates in a kind of circularity, one item reminding me of another as I try to elaborate on what we called in the 1960s, "the whole ball of wax." The particle spins the wave and vice versa.*

I have set the chronological story in the Times New Roman font; *meta-observations are inset in italics*, and side-trips are in separated sections in the Avenir font. I hope you enjoy Gwen's unique voice.

There are quite a few interesting stories in the first draft which were subsequently cut. Gwen hoped to use them in future "faction," as she liked to call her novels. You can read them in the original manuscript that is now part of the archive of her writings at Cushing Memorial Library & Archives at Texas A & M University. To access the archive, contact:

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Barbara Clearbridge, September, 2017

Dedication

To my sons, Frederic Andre, Phillip Alan, and Roger Gerard Fortune, this reminiscence and personal expression are dedicated. I appreciate your unique qualities. I apologize for not fulfilling my dream of "giving my children happy memories.""Happy memories" is the dearest desire of parents, and the accomplishment of few. You have, I hope, created "happy memories."

"Mom, it's time for you to write your stories," Roger said. So I did. Writing has intangible value; the mind's memory energy is its bank.

Phillip created cover art and presentation for my poetry chapbook, "Dancing as Fast As We Can," and "Inner Scan," and the first and third novels, *Growing Up Nigger Rich* and *Weaving the Journey: Noni and the Great Grands*—my excursion into a trilogy.

Frederic Andre sees and understands. We will, in some space, laugh and agree. Freddie Cecil. Without you and your life adventure, there would have been no Skokie experiment.

For the ancestors, friends, and community, you are the rhythm of the path. To the children of the future who inhabit the Spacious Present, you make memory possible.

Pre-Face

Like Topsy in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, my family's move into a predominantly Jewish suburb "just growed." Moving into and living in the white, suburban community of Skokie, Illinois, was a multi-decades long experience that I needed to review forty years after that life-changing decision. I wanted to gather impressions beyond the bare facts of buying a house, a thing that millions of people do routinely, and the expected routine of an academic research paper filled with numbers and mind-numbing data. I hope this record reaches into human spaces and tugs out human responses. I asked myself, how did the reasons, conditions, and actions that precipitated and facilitated change from a familiar, comfortable, community and friends actually work for a family of two "average American" parents and their children? More than a transport by van and car to a new community, from city to suburb, ours was immersion in a tapestry of the unknown with impossible-to-anticipate results. I do not call our excursion a memoir. I take to heart the idea that, "All things are connected." This memory emerged from thoughts and feelings that slither above my bed when I cannot fall asleep, and when I awake in the after-midnight dark. What are my conclusions of this remembrance? Was the journey worthy of the investment?

Our family's Skokie adventure was an experiment, as well as an experience. I have been on a Serengeti safari that was less hazardous.

Chapter One—Not the Spanish Inquisition

"Mrs. Fortune, your neighbors aren't going to like you." These words snapped me to wakefulness as I was, finally, drifting to sleep. Fifty years later by the calendar, the pleasant, calm, well-fed, inscrutable face across a dark conference table, hands crossed lightly in the professional position of the trained therapist, spoke to me, as close as he had when I had heard him decades earlier. That night I had confidently sat in a commodious conference room on the second floor of a red brick building with white trim and a cupola that had been built to impress, as are all edifices of authority and control. The room was dominated by a long, broad, gleaming, dark, wooden table that stretched from a few feet inside the heavy double doors at the entrance from an equally impressive hallway, nearly to the multi-mullioned window that reached the high ceiling. Ten people sat on the sides and ends of the table. Chairs for the headman—*I almost, wrote, "Inquisitor"*—and council members swiveled in the hypnotic quiet. The Skokie Village Hall Conference Room was lighted by domed ceiling lights. The room was spotless; the furniture declared that this was no backwater town. The courteous men and women were seriously kind looking, and not intimidating, they hoped. The two invited guests knew only one another.

My husband and I sat in chairs identical to the assemblage, midway down the table. We were the youngest in the room, apprehensive, yet confident. Our words were careful. We knew that if we were, in some way, turned away from our goal of living where we had chosen to live, it would not be due to our failure. It would be the choice of fellow humans who were not our "betters."

Surprised, confused, I turned to the professor who, as I recall, wore grey. "Why not?"
Dr. Money continued in a measured, academic voice, "Because you are superior to them."
"Any Negro family that would try to do what we are doing would have to be," was my spontaneous reply. "Quick on the trigger," my father said about my responses to people, and conditions. "You go off half cocked," a less friendly person had said. The times I have been reprimanded for honest responses were—and are—uncountable. I have, on occasion, been slow, or unwilling, to censor my thoughts. This night, the trigger ignored rationality. The room was quiet. I do not remember smiles or frowns, although there may have been both.
Dr. Money's comment, and my reply, came during a meeting to which my husband and I had been invited, dare I say, summoned? That evening feels as odd decades later as it did on that hot, Thursday night in the summer of 1964. My husband and I had left our three children on the South Side of Chicago, to drive thirty miles to the northern suburb of Skokie, Illinois, at the end of our day's work. The entry marker at the border was a larger than life-sized, carved wooden Indian head in feather headdress, proudly proclaiming, "Skokie - The World's Largest Village."

That sliver of conversation is my clearest memory of that night with the village Human Relations Commission, a bit of conversation burned into my body and brain. That time and this story resonate deep in my mind and emotions. I wanted to record the memories before images and memories are gone forever. My thoughts and feelings were solely focused on *our* family and *our* search to find a new home.

Racial integration was not on our "required" scale from zero to one hundred. Racial integration was closer to one hundred for people who did not know nor care to know us— an American couple with the American dream in process for ourselves and our children. We were university-educated, middle class, in middle-America, in the middle of the twentieth century. Freddie Fortune and I had met at college; he was a senior with the reputation of being the smartest student in the architectural engineering department. He was handsome and owned a car. What more does a young woman notice? I was a first year graduate student who had been awarded a fellowship to work toward a Master of Science degree at South Carolina State College, where the first available graduate school for people of color—"Negroes" we said then —had recently been established after a lawsuit ended nearly one hundred years of legal racial segregation in the state.

The Korean War was winding down. Recently married, ROTC Second Lieutenant Fortune was shipped off to Korea to organize the "First Loudspeaker and Leaflet Division" in Seoul. His duties included dropping tons of leaflets from transport planes onto enemies below. The intent was to persuade North Korean troops and civilians to defect to our side. When he returned, he had flown more than one hundred missions over the Yalu River, with the reward of the Bronze Star with three oak leaf clusters, a recommendation for the Silver Star, and new First Lieutenant's bars.

Lieutenant Fortune led integrated troops, a post-World War advantage, thanks to President Truman, and he may have naively assumed that other divisive customs in the nation had changed. I think we both assumed more progress than had actually occurred. Plans and fate mingled in unknown quantities. We traveled north of Washington, DC and were able to sleep at Howard Johnson hotels, a luxury we did not know during our southern childhood.

Why did we want to buy a house in Skokie? We lived and worked in Chicago. We had friends, a church we enjoyed, and Chicago was a fun place to live. Would this evening's meeting be a gentler "Spanish Inquisition?" We were a long way from Spain. I later learned that descendants of Sephardic Jews, one of the targets of the Inquisition, lived in Skokie and may have been at the table that pleasant evening. Our residence in Hyde Park, near the University of Chicago had taught me of Ashkenazi and Sephardic. A neighbor described her Slovakian Jewish family having been "looked down on" by cosmopolitan German Jews. I began to learn that the world is not merely black and white.

A week earlier we had received a telephone call from a man who identified himself as a representative of the Skokie Human Relations Commission. He invited us to a meeting—a regular one, we were told—to get to know us. We were two Americans with roots in the continents of Africa, Europe and this hemisphere sitting with a complement of eight men and women whose roots were 100% European. Prepared questions and spontaneous answers continued for more than an hour. We did not know the outcome of our inquisition—sorry, meeting—when we returned home. Maybe we had "passed." A friend used to say, when faced with an obstacle, "You do yer durndest." We had, merely, been ourselves.

Hollywood calls the history of an event "back-story." This leads into the scenes that are portrayed on the screen in the movie. "Boomers," post WWII born babies, remember nationwide press coverage of a proposed "March on Skokie" in the 1970s by a hate organization, "The American Nazi Party." Freedom of speech notwithstanding, it has never been easy for me to understand the allowed parade of a symbol of a despicable, defeated cause,

the swastika. My point of view is affected by the American Civil War; I am a descendant of freed captives in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Texas who were descendants of captives from, maybe, a hundred years earlier. The continuing presence of symbols of the 1861-1865 war, waving, flying, "Battle Flags" throughout the United States, on massive 18-wheeled trucks wherever we drove, is depressive. I have never reconciled what I call the contradiction.

The Nazi flag is banned in Germany after the madness of World War II.The Confederate flag continues in the Federation of the United States of America. Our Skokie meeting pre-dated the Nazi march to Skokie by ten years. The hate group never marched in Skokie although many think it did. History and reality are not often the same.

Skokie, a suburb of 70,000 people, north of Chicago, was the home of an estimated 7,000 escapees and survivors from the years of Nazi-controlled Europe. Families of long-time Jewish immigrants, Ashkenazi and Sephardim, from the US east coast comprised the northern half of Skokie. In the 1950s Chicago Jews began to populate a forgotten area where residential development had been aborted by The Great Depression of the 1930s.

About 1962, the first couple from the African American discriminated-against ethnic group joined the European community of ostracized people. Mr. and Mrs. Jones bought a home in Skokie. A city-planner and his wife, a scientist, were unaware that their purchase would ignite its own latter-day pogrom. Stories of their move, called integration, were published in Chicago newspapers and broadcast on radio and television. The result was turmoil for the lone family and the village. The Human Relations Commission people said that the meeting with us was their opportunity to forestall possible hostile reactions to our move.

The first non-European, non-Jewish family to move to Skokie might be an example of "six-degrees of separation." Mr. Jones had been born and grew up in upstate New York. Mrs. Jones was from Kansas. Neither had lived a racially-segregated, southern life, as had my husband and I. On this night, nothing of the Jones' story did we know. Later, we learned that Mr. Jones and Freddie had been in the same US Army reserve unit in Chicago.

The Jones did not seek nor anticipate problems. Living near their workplaces was the reason to move to Skokie. The house they innocently bought happened to be next door "to a racist." The press published the house address, and a rash of drive-by insults erupted. News stories escalated threats and insults, mainly by non-Skokie residents.

The quickly-formed Human Relations Commission posted volunteer community guards at the newly-purchased house. The Commission decided to continue to monitor the contemplated integration of Skokie. Surely, intelligent, compassionate people would be able to manage problems, especially having one episode already met and resolved. Already, a few Japanese Americans lived in the village. This small group was representative, and vanguard, of those who left the negative environment of the post WWII west coast. Skokie did not, officially, embrace hostility to integration, as did many suburbs and Chicago neighborhoods.

The Human Relations Commission was "created to encourage understanding and respect between residents of Skokie with various racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The Commission is responsible for and actively involved in the enforcement of the Fair Housing Ordinance. The Commission sponsors human relations workshops, and works in the schools and community to further equal opportunity for all Skokie residents as well as to celebrate the community's ethnic and cultural diversity." *[Dr. Fortune took this quote from Skokie's website; the definition is somewhat different on that site now—Ed.]*

Most of Skokie's Jewish residents were mind-your-own-business people who were dismayed in the wake of the harassment of the Jones family. Being on the receiving end of, "Your neighbors aren't going to like you," those words still have the power to awaken me after midnight nearly five decades later. What lay beneath that trenchant comment? How were we to learn the truth or falsity of Professor Money's thoughts?

Freddie and I were stereotypical "best-foot-forward" representatives of our Negro/Colored/African American/Black heritage. We are of many names. Like our peers, after over five-hundred years of captivity and bondage, we were typical of our time. Our roles and actions followed the preparation we have been given by our "tribe." My father once told me, "Whenever you have an opportunity to show them you are as good as they are, take it." Like Dr. Money's words, heard only once, Dad's words needed only one time to be seared in consciousness. My "Why not?" to Dr. Money was honest and did not seem to me an odd assumption. We showered daily, were well-spoken, carried ourselves with decorum and poise. Naively, our people may have thought that "cleaning up" would win acceptance. "Your neighbors won't like you." Was this jest or an honest response to the information we had been asked to give the questioners? Their questions had been, "Where did you attend college?" "Where do you work?" "Where do your children go to school?" Job applications had not been as intense.

The answer to the last question was "Harvard-St George School." Smiles, nods and comments of, "That's good," were revealing in ways the questioners could not know. We were purchasing a house in a community where the children attended public schools, better than many Chicago schools, but public, nevertheless. Our sons were schoolmates and playmates with children in the world of university professors, medical and legal professionals, business owners, and elected officials throughout the University of Chicago . Many wives and mothers wore real fur *[a sign of wealth and prestige at that time—Ed.]*, designer clothes, exquisite jewelry, and their families vacationed in the foreign climates of every continent. Jesse Owens, Lorraine Hansberry, Oscar Brown, Jr., and Dick Gregory lived in Hyde Park. Cosmopolitan was what we assumed ourselves to be, neither ignorant nor naive.

What Freddie and I talked about on the twenty-five mile drive to Chicago, I do not remember. It was late, and he had to drive thirty miles back to Skokie for work by 8:00 a.m. the next morning. I would wait for the baby sitter, then drive the older sons to their school, then on to Chinatown where I taught fifth grade. Teachers had to sign in before 8:30 a.m. or the principal would put a red check at their signature line. Three checks for tardiness and a teacher was docked half a day's pay. No one wanted to oversleep.

We moved into our new house on the first day of school in September 1964—the traditional post Labor Day opening. Periodically, I have been asked, "Why did you want to move to Skokie? You knew you were moving into trouble." Naive, young, ambitious, in denial, we were all this, and more. Maybe, just dumb?

Freddie was the first Negro engineer hired by AT&T Teletype in Chicago. Within a few years all operations were moved to a new plant in Skokie. It looked like and was called, "The Campus." Initially, he took two buses, the subway, and another bus to get to work. When we were able to afford a second car, the commute was still nearly two hours in "Dangerous Dan" Ryan Expressway rush-hour traffic. I began to cajole him that we should move nearer to work. Living so far away was odd to me. My parents' offices had been a few blocks from our home.

His mother's grocery was next door to their home; his father came home for lunch. It made no sense that our children saw their father primarily on weekends. He left before they awoke, and arrived home tired. Getting to bed early for the return AM commute left little time for family interaction and fun. The daily, long distance round-trip was foreign and seemed stupid to me, so I pushed.

We searched weekend newspaper ads for houses for sale. Freddie used his weekday lunchtime to follow leads. Doors were slammed in his face, insults and confused or angry responses met him when he arrived for a scheduled house showing. We quickly learned that real estate firms would have nothing to do with us. On Sundays after church we would load our boys in the freshly washed '62 Thunderbird and drive through north suburban neighborhoods seeking, "For Sale by Owner" signs.

On one warm, sunny drive, with what may have been "deer in the headlights" eyes, Freddie stopped a few feet beyond a house with the requisite owner's sign. It was a relatively new contemporary structure. Architectural engineer Freddie was not interested in a fixer-upper. A white couple sat on folding lawn chairs, shaded under an open garage door. The man was reading a book, the woman a magazine. They communicated an air of detached interest, and the look, perhaps, of academia. Freddie got out of the car. I stayed inside, just in case. He returned with a cordial man, who looked the fortyish professor that he was. He had an out-of-state appointment for the next year. They needed to move, quickly. They showed us through their house and named a price. I felt confident that we might soon own this one, with its abundance of bookshelves, open design, enough bedrooms, baths, and a price we could afford.

It may have been later that evening, or the next, that the telephone rang. It was the owner of the house we liked. He apologized and asked that we "not consider my house." His neighbors had seen us. A contingent had come to ask him not to sell his house to the black people. He had been told that, after all, they, the sellers, would be gone to Oregon and their former neighbors would be stuck with a problem. Yes, the black people had arrived in a two-door late-model automobile, but they would later return "in a pickup truck with sixteen children."

People buy a house because they like it, it meets their needs, and they can afford it. We wanted a new house because our alternative was to stay in Chicago, with reasons in place that caused us to want to leave in the first place: safety for our children and convenience to work for their father. The house we saw and eventually bought had a price and was in a place that permitted us to make the move. That was all.

An unexpected telephone call from a stranger announced that he was a homebuilder. He said that one of Freddie's co-workers, a friend of his, knew of our difficulties, and had told him about our problem. The homebuilder would sell to us if we liked one of his houses, and he had one that was near completion. He invited us to his house in Skokie the following Sunday. After church we left the children at home and drove to the builder's home. The big boys were old enough to watch the baby, and we asked neighbors to keep an eye on them for us. The builder's wife drove me to a house in Morton Grove, the town west of Skokie. It was not the house he intended to sell to us, he said, but it was nearer completion, and we could see what our house would look like when it was finished.

A woman was walking a small dog along the sidewalk when the builder's wife unlocked the front door to go inside the brick and wood-sided tri-level house. It was not the

style I wanted. I prefer modern-contemporary. The house was Chicago-style, mid-century, standard builder design. It had the needed number of rooms and baths, including a lower level fourth bedroom and bath where the woman would live who was moving with us to care for the baby while I was at work.

Freddie wrote an "earnest money" check. The builder waved the check away. He said he did not want the village to know he was selling to a black family. He would let us know when the house was ready, when he had the occupancy permit. He gave us the address of the actual house he would sell to us, and we drove past the construction site, doing our best not to look at the people in the neighborhood who were looking at us. Later, I wondered, who knows who writes a check to whom? The check is "your" record with the bank. I have never learned the answer to that question.

Freddie had been recently promoted to Captain in the Army Reserves. Every summer he went somewhere for military duty, either nearby, in San Diego, or in Germany. He left for camp in Wisconsin and I waited to learn how our house was moving along. The day before he was to return, our lawyer called. "Your builder sold your house," he said.

I called the builder and asked, "What happened?"The man stumbled through a litany of evasions: "You folks don't know if you can get a mortgage," he said. Not so. We were weighing three mortgage possibilities. "You don't have the down payment," he said. Another, not so.

Freddie's co-worker, who had told the builder about our frustrating search, passed the word to friends that we had been denied the promised house. Skokie was not Morton Grove, where townspeople banded together, so we heard, to buy the house where the dog walker saw me—even though it was not the house we were being offered. Freddie had asked why the builder was willing to sell to us when others would not. The man said, "You can look at me and tell that I am Jewish." He told a story of driving to a resort in Wisconsin, where they had reservations. His wife went inside to register. When the manager came outside to get their luggage and saw him, he refused to allow the family to stay. His wife was the image of a proper Nordic. In mountain dress she could be a Heidi or Brunhilde.

The husband was browner than we were. He was obviously not a Negro, but not Nordic either. He had vowed that, because of the prejudice he had experienced, if he ever had a chance to help someone, he would do it. We were his chance. Fear of community sanction may have stopped him. He only built a couple of houses a year, "to keep my hand in," he said. His children had finished college, and he had two summer camps in Wisconsin. If his suppliers decided not to sell to him, "They can't hurt me," he said. What happened?

Freddie's coworker's network went into play. A stranger called; her voice broke, somewhere between sadness and anger when she said, "We Jews, of all people, should not discriminate." We were invited to their house for a Sunday afternoon cookout. Our new acquaintances had a friend who owned an identical house, a few blocks away, she said. Their friend lived in Washington, DC, and his rented house was for sale. "I'm sure he'll sell to you, if you like his house," our new friend said, clasping and unclasping her hands.

We spent a Sunday afternoon in their backyard. She and her husband were scientists, one at Northwestern University, the other in business. Their children, ours, and other guests had a fun afternoon together.

Freddie and I drove to a quiet spot in Chicago's Southside Washington Park and talked with our older sons of our plans. They would be in the minority, as Negroes (we said Negro, not black or African American, that we learned when we were children). We told them that there would be changes, and some might not be pleasant. We asked how they felt about leaving their neighborhood, school, and friends. If they did not want to move, we would stay in Chicago. Their non-sectarian day school was a microcosm of a United Nations: black, brown, white, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, a variety of the world's people.

"I want to try it," ten-year-old Phillip said. Twelve-year-old Frederic agreed. I wanted to stop teaching and stay home with the baby who was not a year old. The public schools in Skokie were known to be top-notch. Freddie would be fifteen minutes from work. What could be sweeter?

I would come to question the wisdom of asking children, ten and twelve years old, to contemplate and make a decision on a life-altering change. I rationalized that families throughout history migrated and moved, and that children were automatically inseparable parts of the ages-long practice. Ten years later our eldest criticized me for moving him from his friends into a hostile environment. I said, "We asked you if you wanted to make the move." My son said, "What did we know?" Double ditto for his parents. What did we know?

From a much longer time than Monday morning quarterbacking, I heard the voice and saw the concern on the face of the children's pediatrician, Dr. Runner. He had discouraged our proposed move. He had advised that it would not be healthy for them. His youth as an isolated Negro in an all-white Northern town affected him, painfully, despite a successful and prominent medical practice in Chicago.

A friend and I were chatting before service at church. She said that she and her husband had discussed having to chauffeur their two daughters and son until they went away to college. Their fear was two-fold: growing gang violence, and the often-voiced comment in the Southside Negro community that the Chicago Police Department was rumored to have a mandate—a "vendetta" was the word—"to kill every black male youth in the city." We had three sons; did we dare take the chance? We began to think and fear that Chicago had become a place of unhealthy tension for black youth, especially boys. Could being among fewer people of color and the political environment of Chicago mitigate the worst of a notorious urban environment?

Dr. Money, of the Human Relations Commission meeting, was a psychologist at an internationally recognized Chicago university. I did not sense that he was concerned for how black children might be affected by living in his world. His concern and that of the assemblage was how whites and their children would be affected by our presence. Knowing that we were not ghetto refugees was reassuring to the Commission. I think they gave a mental sigh of relief. What I would have liked to have told the Commission and its concern for our effect on their community was that our children were the inheritors of generations of accomplished, achieving Negro families: landowners, a magistrate, a judge, business owners, a college president, physicians, classical musicians, a Broadway playwright, and more educators than would fall from many family trees. What might be his community's effect on little brown boys? I could not, and did not, give the smiling faces in that official space my true thoughts; sometimes I do not "go off half-cocked." I was not aware of the ramifications of the meeting nor of the experiences to come, and I did not have the maturity to fear probabilities.

Soon after we signed for our new house, a Presbyterian minister invited Freddie to lunch to welcome him to the neighborhood. How he knew who Freddie was, and how to find him, I do not remember. I guess the "news" was making its way through the community. Is it good to be known to people if you don't know them? It is if it is goodwill that is intended for you.

The minister and his wife invited us to dinner at the manse, the official home of Presbyterian ministers. I knew the correct name for the minister's house because my paternal grandfather was a Presbyterian minister. As we left after the pleasant evening, the minister said that I ought to apply to teach in Skokie. I laughed. "They don't want me out here." We were back in Chicago when he called with the names and addresses of two superintendents that I could contact. Feeling sure that I would be ignored or rejected, I decided to call his bluff. I wrote to both school district superintendents.

Within a few days I received a telephone call to come for an interview with the principal of Old Orchard Junior High School. I left Chicago immediately after school and drove to Skokie. I found the visitors' parking area. There was a sign: "Faculty Parking." I had heard a member of the Chicago Public Schools' Board of Education proudly say during a radio interview, "I'm not in the business of providing parking for teachers." Already, I liked Skokie.

The principal gave me a tour of a sparkling, clean, modern, three-story school building with ample parking. He said that I would hear from him. A few days later I was called to meet with the District Superintendent. The phrase, "egg on my face" was my feeling when I was given a prepared contract.

Moving day and the beginning of a new life came. Freddie took the day off from work, supervised the loading of the moving truck, and drove our school-aged boys, the ten-month-old, and the baby sitter to our new home. I had not appreciated the organizational skills of my engineer husband.

Because I was new, Teacher Workshop Day meant a pep talk, rules, introductions, and regulations from the principal, then finding assigned classrooms, lunchroom, and restrooms. Teachers know the expected routines: gathering and checking supplies, light switches, fire exits, and putting up welcoming bulletin boards. Little differed from this opening day of school and former opening days in Chicago, or most schools anywhere, except that my new students were predicted to be unlike any students I may previously have taught. I was a test case: not merely a "newbie," but the first "Negro hire." In my culture, folks like me were called "tokens." There is a saying that is only a half-tease to label the "test case." It is, "Look, we got us one."

My sister had endured her personal integration by fire when she was the first Negro assigned to three successive, all-white high schools in Chicago, Farragut, and Crane. She and I talked of the cultural changes, expectations, and resolutions in our "got us one" experiences. We were not daunted; we'd heard the stories all of our lives. We were expected to cope and succeed, without complaint. Educator-mentors in our segregated educational systems shared their experiences, alerting us to our role as the outsider—the token. For hundreds of years our elders developed coping strategies in order to survive the captive/enslaved/segregated lives of people of color. They, and we, hoped that we were prepared for our roles in an unforeseen, hostile, yet changing world.

The chronology of that first Teacher Workshop Day at Old Orchard Junior High is a blur. It seems to have been routine and manageable, with an intangible air of a less mechanistic routine than the city school. I arrived home about 3:30 p.m. It felt good to walk into the house that had been empty four weeks before, to find our own neatly placed furniture. A surprise was our card table, set with one of our tablecloths, my best—and only—silverware, and the "good" dishes. In the oven, hot lasagna and a pan of garlic bread waited. A tossed salad chilled in the refrigerator. Home-baked cookies peeked from beneath a napkin on the kitchen counter. The welcoming had been prepared by members of the Presbyterian Church, a block behind our "new" house. It was unanticipated—a kind, generous, welcome.

The next morning, the first day for students, a small group of boys, the ages of our sons, gathered on the sidewalk in front of our house. Our boys went outside. Frederic, twelve, en-route to Old Orchard Junior High for eighth grade, and Phillip, newly eleven in August, who would attend Devonshire for sixth grade, were met and escorted by classmates to their respective schools. How different that scenario might have been in the "wrong neighborhood" in Chicago, or in another suburb. Pleasant scenes stay in one's mind, and this was a pleasant beginning. Freddie took his shorter drive to work. The baby sitter and the baby watched everyone leave. I was prepared, and only a wee bit nervous, to meet my seventh grade Language Arts and Social Studies students. Previously, my classes were self-contained; students stayed with one teacher most of the day, with Physical Education being the exception. My classroom was several rooms north of Frederic's homeroom. That short distance would prove to be cosmic for our eldest child.

The Human Relations Commission had done its job; no ugly prejudice tainted the neighborhood. Twice before, our sons had changed schools, from nursery to elementary school, then because of the merger of St. George with The Harvard School. They had never before been so alone, even with Mother down the hall, or less than a mile away for Phil.

Freddie had the easiest adjustment to make. He had worked for AT&T Teletype for nearly a decade. He returned to his work routine, altered only in that he did not have to make the nearly two-hour trek twice a day. He could have ridden his bicycle.

We inhabited a world of uncalculating naiveté. The words of the English philosopher, Alexander Pope, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," have meaning for how most people venture into the uncharted. I prefer an earlier, less derogatory definition of fool: "One who does something foolishly," with emphasis on the action, not the person. The Fortune family believed, as has every individual and generation that departs a known land, that by any name, heaven, or fate, they will conquer every adversary.

> *When I ventured into memory of the events in the time of change and challenge in the life of my immediate family, I asked the residents who had been compatriots during the move—the racial integration—of Skokie if they would participate in writing this story. Of that tiny collage of four families, in 1964, both Les and Vera Brownlee have died; the original couple was not interested, nor was the remaining member of the third. By default I became the sole reviver, reviewer, and scribe. Were their memories painful, unimportant, ignored, or denied?*

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My interest in people, nosiness, I call it, and our multiple worlds began consciously when I read the anthropological report, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, by the American anthropologist and philosopher, Margaret Mead. A relative lent me his copy to read the summer I was fourteen. I had never read a factual book about people different from the ones in my circumscribed life. I was fascinated by the story and remain a people watcher-wonderer.

Childhood reading had been European fairy tales, Greek, Roman, English, Irish, a few African myths, Lewis Carroll, Louisa May Alcott, and my dad's Horatio Alger boys' novels where there was always a happy ending. Mother's nightly recitations of poetry by nineteenth-century Browning, Bryant, and Longfellow loaded my head with words and images. I was told that my father had white relatives who were Presbyterian missionaries in China. Like children everywhere, I tried to dig to China in our back yard. I succeeded in breaking the handle of my ocean-blue, tin, sand shovel. Chicago had been different for my children than the places I had lived. That was not a problem. My childhood had differed from that of my parents, in place and conditions. I have a need to communicate—like the maternal great-great grandfather who according to family lore, may have been an African-healer-*griot [keeper of stories—Ed.]*.

> *This memory, that I do not call "memoir," is the response I might give Dr. Runner's concern for the perils of moving children of color into an environment that, even with the best of intentions by everyone, he said, would not have good results for the children. I wish he were here for the discussion.*
>
> *The fervent, supreme, desire of every parent is to provide a safe and caring environment to enable their children to grow into healthy, productive adults. Physical safety is primary, psychological/emotional safety is, often, unvoiced. Parents usually do not think of or remember the latter—or we are unaware. We are functional and dysfunctional, with much on our minds. Physical scars are visible, emotional and mental scars are invisible. No one knows what will be, and the consequences cannot be surmised.*

Family, school, church, and community instilled in my generation a need to continue tradition. The accomplishment-oriented Negro mantra was passed to us:

"You will excel; we have to show them." We were nurtured on the obstacles our forebears overcame. Our marrow was infused with the insistence that we must continue the drive to accomplish, our reach exceeding our grasp. The language of military recruitment is, "Be all that you can be." Achievement, regardless of perceived and unseen forces, was the principle driven into our elders, breathed as if it were the very air itself. I assumed—took for granted—that my vision was universal for people of color. The "color factor" was not allowed to leave our consciousness for a nano-second. Failure was not a consideration. Cooperation expected by the "village" gave strength for the mantra to grow and flourish. It was apropos that Skokie calls itself a "village." A village is the original , the nutrient ground for growth.

Freddie and I thought our presence and predicament in Skokie would be racial; the real distinctions proved to be cultural and class. My father and a number of his friends were overheard saying, more times than I can count, "What white people don't understand is that we have classes, just like they do." The opposite leg of that position was that whenever a crime was reported in the press, Negroes/Colored People automatically prayed, "Don't let it be one of us." Fear of censure outweighed the glow of accomplishment by Joe Louis or Julia Cooper.

> *Images, incidents, and conditions had to be visited and sorted to compose my memory-visit. The mingling and merging of experiences over decades does not want to be tamed in linear, stair-step form. Our move from known to unknown was like an ocean, sometimes roiling, sometimes calm, the tides ebbing, flowing, merging, and fading.*

Chapter Two—Adjusting the Covers

"Are you the mother or the daughter?" The question came from behind me, a surprise in the dusk. I turned to find myself a few feet in front of a smallish, middle-aged man in rimmed eyeglasses. His hairline was U-shaped, reminding me of my father.

"The mother," I said. Behind the man stood a teen-aged girl with dark hair, pale complexion and a face the same oval shape as her father. She had a shy, tentative, smile, as if she wasn't sure if she should be friendly or not. The man welcomed us to the neighborhood. His daughter's smile became broader, though she stayed behind her father. They moved on to the corner, made a left turn, and I did not see them again.

This visit was the beginning of a stream of neighbors from around a several-block radius of our new house—the house I did not like. The stream continued for several evenings, ceasing after about two weeks. A mother and daughter came across the street. They were natural blondes, as far as I could tell. I wasn't an expert on matching hair color and skin tone. A neighbor and her daughter from two blocks north of the cross street brought a pint of the smoothest ice cream I had ever tasted, aside from the hand-churned peach ice cream by my Texas Aunt Mamie. The mother and I continued conversations at PTA meetings for several years.

A new neighbor showed me the *mezuzah* outside the front door by the doorbell. She said it was a blessing on the house. She kissed her fingertips and stroked it. The *mezuzah* may still be there nearly fifty years later. A cantor's daughter told me that the neighbor was wrong, that the precise meaning of the *mezuzah* is, "a constant reminder of God's presence and God's commandments….and a daily reminder and a public declaration of Jewish identity and faith." How changed and different meanings become over time.

Like children everywhere, from infancy our youngest son absorbed and imitated the body language, gestures, and language that filled his days. So a shrug, with arms extended and palms up, and "*Oy vey*" were as natural for him as "Okey dokey" and rolling my eyes had been for me.

> *Maturity comes too slowly, gathering moments that add, subtract, build, destroy, bring remembrance or erase from memory.*

A few days after settling into our new surroundings, I answered the doorbell to a tall, slim, brown woman and a lighter-skinned, almost Asian-looking boy who was beginning to grow into adolescence. Vera Brownlee introduced herself and her son, thirteen-year-old Lance. From that day, for too few years, Vera became friend, guide, and supporter. Her husband, Les Brownlee, was a columnist for a major Chicago newspaper. She was an elementary school teacher in Evanston, the easterly neighboring suburb on Lake Michigan. I liked Vera, a quiet, elegant, and unassuming woman. She had dignity and wisdom that I miss, for she died too soon. Vera told me of two additional Negro families in the village. Vera's Lance and our

Frederic did not develop the comradeship that she and I hoped. They had different interests and attended different schools.

Vera relayed the story of her family's move to Skokie. She said they did not want to remain in Evanston, a migratory city for Negroes from the South from early in the 20th Century. Evanston migrants had moved from South Carolina and Georgia, with a trickle from other southeastern states. Negroes came north to find work as domestics, gardeners, and chauffeurs for wealthy white families along Lake Michigan. These were descendants of Africans who had performed similar jobs under captivity. Some of the wealthiest people in the nation had homes in Winnetka, with affluence of note throughout the northern Chicago area.

Evanston's Northwestern University was Lester and Vera Brownlee's Alma Mater. The university had been Vera's call to leave her home in Houston, Texas. Their draw to Skokie was to buy a house of the age, size, and style they wanted. They could afford an upscale neighborhood, not the upper-class wealth along the Lake Michigan shore, but substantially upper middle class. Evanston was older, with more established, traditional neighborhoods. Skokie was still growing from post WWII expansion with home values that ranged from "middle middle class" to "upper middle class." These were designations that assessed education, occupation, and income as determinants of social class that were just right for upwardly mobile Americans regardless of ethnicity.

Vera and Les found a house they liked. They bought the house from its owner and the family planned to move in. An official, perhaps, noticed that the Brownlee's home was two blocks from the first Negro family in Skokie. Vera said that she and Les did not know about the previous black family. Vera said, "They must have thought that two Negro families would constitute a ghetto." The Brownlees were approached by village officials and asked not to move into the house. The Commission negotiated to purchase the house from them on the condition that the village would absorb rent for the family in a different location, in Evanston, until they found a suitable home farther from the first Negro family.

Vera said that they were not discouraged from buying in Skokie, just not near the Jones family. She, Les, and Lance moved to a suite in an Evanston hotel. "We took our own sweet time finding a new place," she laughed. "There's nothing wrong with block after block of Jews, or Christians, anyone except us," she said. For nearly a year the family lived in the hotel. A friend, a white architect, would visit houses for sale in Skokie, sketch the floor plan, and bring it back for their approval. The game continued until their friend found a house they liked. The friend purchased the house in his name. The Brownlee family moved in and title was transferred to them. This practice was not unknown in places where there was fear of financially-able families of color who wanted to move toward the American Dream. Les and Vera did not know they lived across the street from the builder who became both a detour and a pathway in our hunt.

Vera knew Leon and Tempie Henderson and their son and introduced them to us. I decided to have a party, "a ghetto party," my sense of humor named our little wingding. What could be more appropriate, or ironic, in Skokie, Illinois, where European ghetto, pogrom, and Nazi Holocaust survivors lived? Mr. Henderson thought the idea was ludicrous, but he came, a quiet, composed man with a delightful wife who was born and reared in a western Chicago suburb. Their son was a precocious boy the age of our youngest.

We invited the Skokie families to the "ghetto party." The Jones, Henderson, and Brownlee families were fellow guinea pigs, or were we pioneers? We invited the Smith family, Chicago Presbyterian friends who had recently moved to Evanston. Our goal was to meet one another and give our children the opportunity to know one another and form relationships.

Party night arrived. Abel and Elinor Smith and their son, Abel II, were the first to ring the doorbell. Familiarity soothed my nervousness. Soon our Skokie neighbors gathered. The party was a "mob" of fifteen. The village was not blasted by loud music, nor the air filled with unfamiliar cooking and food odors. We were not enough to repel "intruders at the gate;" we were ignored.

The evening was cool when we sat to eat and drink what I had bought from a neighborhood supermarket. The children could learn that they may be a minority in their neighborhood, but they were not alone in a sea of non-comprehension, wonder, and questions. The Jones added three daughters and the Smiths added one son to our collective as the years progressed.

Every day does not produce a memorable event, so like spreading icing on a cake, the exterior days and nights plowed on in apparent normalcy. The dividing, deciding race factor did not pop its head from the Jack-in-the-Box regularly. Not long after the party, a tall, handsome, police officer came to our door. He was Skokie's lone officer of color. He said there was another black family in the south end of Skokie, the predominantly Catholic part of the village. He said we would not want to know them, that the police were sometimes called to the home for domestic disturbances.

He stopped to chat once in a while. One day he said that the embarrassing family had moved, and that he was glad. Class, rather than race, emerged as a salient factor in the Skokie experience. The policeman and I were aware of this distinction. I do not think the rest of the community saw the presence of people of color in the same way he and we did. Behavior, especially any that involved intervention by law enforcement, was the "no-no barrier" to respectability to which we agreed.

Next door lived Jack and Louise Feinberg, their son, Robert, who was a university student, and their recently divorced daughter, Linda, with her baby, Deanna. It was not long before there was a warm feeling back and forth across the Chicago-style alley that separated our houses. Deanna and our youngest, Roger, were infants, she six and he ten months old when we settled into the Skokie house. Deanna was a sober-faced baby, the kind you know is soaking in everything that enters her eyes and ears. Deanna had fine blonde hair, impenetrable grey eyes, and a body heft called "solid." I don't remember Deanna crying. Twenty years later, her demeanor had not changed.

Linda wanted to give me a proper Skokie Jewish introduction. She took me to a restaurant on Dempster Street and said, "I'll bet you never had one of these before. My mother can't really cook Jewish, although she thinks she can. She's a convert." Linda ordered a Reuben. Not a "Reuben sandwich," just "a Reuben." I loved it—ten thousand calories, no doubt. Weight was not an issue back then. I do not know if I've ever had a better Reuben. Louise may not have been able to cook "Jewish," but I was a convert to the Reuben.

Memory is like the recoil of a pistol with lapses of quiet until the next firing.

Backyard cookouts were weekend fun from spring to fall among the houses along our alley, a graveled roadway with openings in the hedges behind each house. On our little corner four families shared cookouts—we didn't call them barbeques. A cookout would be in one backyard this weekend with the others in rotation: Cohn-Feinberg-Zolly-Fortune.

Jack and his backyard-abutting neighbor, Zolly, sat under an umbrella-topped table, plates piled with food in front of them. I brought a dish that Louise had prepared. Jack looked up, chewing, and said, "You moved from a better house than the one you moved into didn't you?" Eyebrows knitted, I said, "Yes, how did you know?"

Not missing a chew Jack said, "Harold and Zolly and I drove down there. Nice neighborhood; everybody keeps up their grass." I realized that my neighbor had no idea of the insult he'd just uttered. He'd had a bit to drink, and that may have loosened him, but Jack was innocent of bad intent. I put the plate of fresh food on the table and returned to the kitchen.

Our hastily-bought house was too small for our family of five, plus the sitter. I felt forced into buying the house that Jack had said was not "better" than our Chicago house. It is the American dream to move up, isn't it? My parents' home had been a sprawling, prairie-style Victorian.

Less than a year after feeling claustrophobic in a house with one and one-half bathrooms for six, on impulse, I stopped at a real estate office near the border between Skokie and Evanston. I was quickly ushered to the rear by a startled agent, past angled desks to the owner's spacious office. I introduced myself, said that I was interested in finding a larger house in the neighborhood. The Realtor said he knew who I was and where we lived. Every real estate agent in the village knew. He said, "You keep your yard nice. Your grass is always mowed." He wrote our telephone number on a piece of paper, and said that he would contact me.

Leaving the office I knew that I'd never hear from him. A telephone number on a slip of paper goes straight to the trash can. Even my quick direction to the boss's office was a tactic, planned to "manage" anyone who looked like me who might walk into the business. By simple logic I knew why the man was upset. He knew we lived less than a mile away, knew the condition of our lawn, and behaved from ingrained fear and prejudice. Evanston, Illinois, the home of Northwestern University, multiple corporate headquarters, and millionaire mansions on the western shore of Lake Michigan, had its enclave for Negroes "quarantined" between McCormick Boulevard and Asbury Avenue. Middle income notwithstanding, Evanston's upwardly mobile citizens of color were corralled behind the equivalent of an Illinois Rio Grande, called "the canal." A drawbridge had been erected, hoisted high, and had been intended to remain in place. Given population growth and income, the black community was escaping its historic boundaries. At the real estate office I was the dreaded "other" from across the canal, or a worse place, Chicago.

Like a clog of phlegm in my throat, dissatisfaction has always remained for the house we had bought that caused such consternation for so many.

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For many, civil rights actions against residential segregation were an important part of the 1960s. Local Civil Rights activists asked me to join a protest against

housing segregation in downtown Skokie. On the designated day I took my place, with sign held high, in front of a prominent real estate office. Mine was the only brown face. My accompanists were solid middle class Euro-Americans who ordinarily would not be seen as contrarians.

The office door opened and a proper middle-American white male of an appropriate age almost rushed past me, stopped, turned and, close to my face, said loudly, "You look like an intelligent person, why are you out here?"

"Because I am 'an intelligent person,' is why I am out here," I said. The little protest group gave a whoop of laughter, and pushed their placards higher in the sunlight. The "appropriate" man rushed across the street to the Village Hall lot where his car was parked, frowning at the ground.

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We lived two miles west of the discarded telephone number and "the canal" water boundary. We did what we could to have a normal life. Toddlers Deanna and Roger attended the same pre-school. Neighbor Louise told me that Deanna was eating an after school snack when she said, "Granny, there was a little black boy at school today."

"I told her that Roger was at her school every day." Louise imitated the irritation in Deanna's voice: "Not Ra-ah-ger, Granny, a little black boy." To Deanna, who saw Roger almost every day from crawling to walking and talking, Roger was not a little black boy. He was simply Roger.

Linda remarried and moved. Deanna was no longer next door. The house across the street in front was sold to a Chilean physician, his wife, and two little girls. I performed the obligatory neighborly visit with a gift. Soon, Roger was playing with the girls. He would push them up and down the sidewalk in their wagon, perspiration pouring down his cheeks. On cursory glance, a passerby could have thought the children were a family, with big brother pushing his little sisters.

One afternoon the house across the street was filled with kids; a birthday was being celebrated for one of the daughters. Roger watched from the front picture window. He never did cross the street after that. We did not talk about what he saw.

Harold and Matilda Cohn's backyard abutted ours, with no fence between us. Harold was president of a bank in Lincolnwood, the intervening suburb due south between Skokie and Chicago. "Mattie" was not overwhelmed by her husband's position as a bank president. She did not want a larger house. She did not want to have someone come to clean it. No one could ever clean to her scrupulous standards. One evening Mattie brought over a large manila envelope. Handing it to Freddie, she said, "When I moved here they didn't send out a letter on me. I don't think they should have done this."

Freddie unfolded an aerial photograph of a several block area with our house centered. The name "Fortune" and the number, "9150" were printed across the roof. House numbers and family names were printed on the roofs of every house in the photograph. The photo and a letter, on village letterhead, had been sent to residents whose homes were in the image. The

letter was an "Introduction" of our family with a friendly summary of answers to questions that Freddie and I had been asked by the Human Relations Commission: names, education, employment, children's names, ages, and grades.

Now I understood what had sparked the greeting of our sons on the first day of school, and the parade of neighbors to our house as soon as we were moved. They knew who we were. We didn't know who they were. People who invested money in an airplane, photographer, the clerical work, and postage were seriously concerned about the invasion of their neighborhood. I did not then, and do not now think negatively of those people. Fear of the unknown does odd things to people, even where there is no evidence for fear. Mattie left the envelope and its contents. "I don't need it," she said.

> *Incidents are indelible, isolated, and insignificant. Singularly, they rise to awareness as barely flashes, but coalesce and linger to say, this is how it seemed, and what it meant. Seemingly unconnected events organically create a tapestry of meaning to our lives, benign and malevolent.*

It was a joy to have sufficient books, paper, and supplies for my position as Language Arts-Social Studies (LASS) teacher at Old Orchard Junior High. Careless wastefulness of these precious materials by students who had no "needs" came as a shock. I could not forget the paucity of day-to-day supplies and equipment, film projectors and enrichment materials, just a few miles away in Second City. We had everything in abundance in the suburban school. Once I absconded with a small cache of paper and pencils and took them to a colleague at the John C. Haines School in Chinatown. "Girl, you look as if you robbed a bank!" she said, when she met me at her front door. The suburban students wasted the amount I gave to her in less than one week.

Becoming accustomed to 150 twelve-year-old boys and girls with elevating hormones, rather than a self-contained class of thirty-five, was an adjustment. I had color-coded seating charts on my desk that I rotated when the bell rang for the next class. This was a device the students had not learned. They had been in self-contained classrooms at their elementary schools, and didn't know about the teacher's "crib-sheet." If a kid was out of order or I wanted to ask a question or hear a response, I called the name, looking at a particular seat. Startled looks were amusing. How did I know where to look and which "Susan" was in that seat? They quickly learned.

Parents' Night, an onslaught of families checking out the faculty, was scheduled several weeks after opening day. Teachers arranged fresh bulletin boards, put flowers on the window ledge and desk, and did their best to make their classrooms orderly and neat. We wrote statements to show parents that their children were in safe, competent hands. Their kid's schedule in hand, doors opened and closed every ten minutes, welcoming the guardians of precious cargo.

Six times I smiled and rushed through my welcome and explanation, and answered one or two questions before the bell rang to signal exit, and had a moment's rest, my blood pumping through my veins as if I'd had a morning's jog along Lake Michigan. The energy in each short, ten-minute meeting was a kind of curiosity, concern, and barely-veiled question. I

felt waves of pressure emanating from the room toward me each time the room filled. The next day in the faculty lounge, the teachers breathed collective sighs of relief. A colleague said, "You had more parents than anyone else." Then, it hit me: the curious came to see the curious, the new Negro, the coming-into-vogue "black" teacher. Do we, often enough, realize how we compromise freedom in fear and unique forms of enslavement and evaluation when we accept divisions and determinations that separate us into categories like animals or captive peoples?

Back home, a neighbor waved and hurried toward me, braving the intermittent traffic on Church Street. I remembered her from a PTA meeting. I took a deep breath. She was coming to talk about her son, who was in one of my classes. It was not the first time. He was a quiet boy with no signal of the great promise his mother knew to be his future. She was sure that he was a musical genius. Neither the music teacher, nor anyone else, was willing to say that Avram studied his violin dutifully, because his mother heard Isaac Stern whenever she heard her only child practicing. She did not notice that he played third violin in the last row in the school orchestra. He was a proper Jewish son who would never confront or contradict his mother.

I invited her inside, away from the sun. We had talked before. This day she turned her arm so that I could see the tattoo, the faded blue color of a concentration camp number. She spoke in a matter-of-fact voice that taught this *goy [Yiddish word for "gentile"—Ed.]* an important lesson in this special place. I remember her middle-European accented words, my ear tuned to the Jewish comics of the time in movies, theater, and TV. My neighbor and her husband had been teenagers when they were released from a concentration camp at the end of WWII. They first emigrated to Canada, then to Chicago, and finally to Skokie. Her husband was an auto mechanic with his own shop near the border between Skokie and Chicago. She stayed home in a neat, modest, beige brick bungalow that was typical for the north side of Church Street. It was not spacious and ornate as were many of the houses closer to Devonshire Park. Our modest house was on the cusp of the Highland-Devonshire border, ours inside the Devonshire line, and hers across the street in Highland. Avram had graduated from Highland School, not the more prestigious Devonshire. I became aware of the subtleties of class beyond race in what most thought to be a homogeneous Jewish village.

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I learned that the experience of parents does not transfer to the child in the same way the parents think and want. Students at the junior high discovered a cache of filmstrips in the library. These were photographs from the end of World War, II: gruesome gritty, grey, jerky images of the uncovered concentration camps. Word of the filmstrips worked through the building. Students would gather in groups and watch the gruesome graphics. They were not sophisticated enough to watch quietly, or out of sight. Soon, the librarians found the little "showings." The soft-spoken, Irish-American librarian was distraught. She reported that the children did not seem to understand the importance of what they were seeing. She said, "They laugh at the ragged prisoners and the piles of corpses." Was it their age, 11-13, that made them impervious to what they were seeing, the destruction of their ancestors?

The filmstrips were placed on reserve, only to be accessed by adults. I learned that many holocaust victims did not tell young family members of their imprisonment. After chattel slavery, American Negroes were ashamed to have been enslaved, and did not talk about their experience. Victims of horrifying history may not see that the imprisonment and degradation of their people were not marks of shame for them, but for their captors.

Chapter 3—False Security

We had left exciting, beloved, Hyde Park when we bought our first house. That house was the first new construction available to people of color in Chicago since the 1920s. Until the late 1950s Negroes were allowed to buy older homes vacated by whites as neighborhoods expanded block by block, whites moving further from the central city, and Negroes, many migrating from the south, filling the vacated apartments and houses. Housing integration was seen by the dominant society as unwelcomed, an intrusion, to be fought. Renting and purchasing houses was interpreted by the majority as "Negro creep," even though the people who were selling their homes were, themselves, following the American dream of "moving on up." We might think there was a war, and soldiers were fighting a guerrilla-style retreat.

Emigrants burst the seams of the south and west sides. Unable to see change as natural progression, as it had been for immigrants from Europe, or the suburbs, including Skokie, it was seen as Chicago moving outward; fear, hostility, and panic ensued. It was not remembered that humans are, basically, nomads. A difference in the complexion of the newcomer was a trigger for panic and flight.

The distance from Freddie's work in Chicago increased when AT&T Teletype moved all its operations from northern Chicago to the suburb of Skokie, following a national trend that eventually nearly emptied post-war American cities of middle and working classes. No one complained, or noticed, when the moneyed upper class left Chicago for lakefront mansions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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During our first year in the new house we went back to Chicago every Sunday. The boys were in their familiar church building with friends. We had not moved from one coast to another; a thirty-mile drive was not unusual across the metropolis. Because of our new friendship with the Presbyterian Church in Skokie, I began to attend it, and so did the children. The one block walk did not require as early a rise and rush. Freddie was an Ordained Elder, with responsibilities. He continued to go to "First Pres," where he began to stay all day. My city friendships began to fade. I missed Chicago, and Sundays required "homework" more than ever. "Six days shalt thou labor" was a commandment that could not be honored.

Our first autumn was followed by the expected Illinois winter cold and snow. The big boys helped their father dig paths from the garage to the street before and after school. Snowplows were swift and efficient in Skokie, unlike their absence in many Chicago neighborhoods.

Our family's transition to the suburb had been at the end of summer in 1964. We began to lack a sense of ease in the spring of 1965.

We tried to ignore the discomfort of the screech of car tires around the corner, and a chorus of young, male voices screaming, "Nigger House." The older boys' bedroom faced the offending corner. We braced for more, but nothing worse came. A continuing disturbance was empty beer and pop cans, drink cups, and food wrappers that Freddie picked up and put in the garbage on mornings before he left for work. Perhaps all corner lots have the same experience of overnight lawn debris. Devonshire Park was two blocks south. It was easy for the anonymous and disgruntled to dump trash on lawns as they sped down Kilbourn Avenue. The park could be reached from other streets, west, east, and north.

On Friday nights, Devonshire Park provided supervised indoor space for pre-teens to gather, have fun, and relax from the pressure of their high-achievement-focused . Our eighth grader joined his new friends each week. At 2 a.m. one Friday night, Freddie and I awoke to a ringing doorbell. A Skokie policeman, not our usual friend, his blue uniform showing nearly black, stood outside. He politely addressed us by name and asked to come in. He asked what time had Frederic came home from the park? I said, "10:20 p.m., his usual time. I was cleaning the kitchen when he passed through on the way to his bedroom." The officer asked to speak to him. We awakened Frederic and he came into the living room, rubbing his eyes.

The policeman asked him to describe his movements when the Pre-Teen Center closed. Frederic, called "Ric", said that when the center closed he had gotten on his bicycle, and started home. He described how he slowed, circling in the middle of the street to wait for a friend to catch up, and the two of them rode the rest of the way home together. The policeman named several boys and asked if Ric had seen them. Ric said, yes, they were sitting in the grass in the park when he circled for his friend to catch up. The policeman named another classmate, a girl. He asked if Ric had seen her. Yes, she had been sitting in the grass talking with several boys. No, he did not get off his bicycle and go into the park.

Ric went back to bed. His parents tossed for the rest of the night. The next morning Freddie and I went to the police station to find out what was going on. Our son was thirteen, by two months. At the station the officer smiled and joked that the girl in the park had gotten home later than her curfew. Giving her account of the evening to her father, she mentioned our son among classmates she had been with at the center.

The policeman continued to chuckle while he told us the outcome of the night's investigation. They had quickly determined that the girl was trying to escape her father's interrogation. I thought that the father's reaction to hearing that Frederic—the black kid—was at the park center with his daughter had ignited ages-old prejudice. Outsiders have a sixth sense when primal conditions are alerted, like a mother wolf on the prairie. My stomach churned; my head began to throb. My voice felt a theatrical steely cold when I asked, "Were we the only parents awakened at 2 a.m. this morning?" The officer had the good manners to stare at his shoes and appear to be embarrassed.

Freddie asked if our son's name would be removed from the record. The officer said no. There had been no arrests. The record would be removed when he was eighteen. Is there a log that is flagged to perform these tasks five years later? We left the police station with barely controlled fury.

Freddie called our friend Reverend Roseberry who contacted village officials. He was assured that there was nothing more to the affair. I wrote a protest letter that was published in the local newspaper. A thirteen-year-old black boy, who would later major in English, wrote a letter to the paper. In 1965, riding one's bicycle home from a park with a friend was to portend more than a mistake. Our fear of big city cops and their heightened attention to black boys, today called "racial profiling," crept in to our new-escape home. Stories of killings of young black males are national news fifty years later. Encounters with the wrong end of law enforcement were not anticipated by folks like us: normal, middle class citizens.

Phillip, our "number two son," as the Chinese say, was a quiet baby and child. "A deep thinker," a friend called him. Our older sons differed from one another, one outgoing and active, the other contemplative and thoughtful. At the end of Phillip's second grade his grades were As and one B+. I said to his teacher, "I didn't know Phil was that smart." His teacher, a bubbly immigrant from Taiwan, said, "Oh yes, Phillip is very smart. Because you teach, I'll show you his scores." She opened a folder to the results of a standardized intelligence test. Phillip's score was a few points less than Frederic, who had been designated "near genius" when he attended nursery school. Not only did we have a sweet kid, but a smart one.

Four years after that good day in second grade came Parents' Night at Devonshire School, where Phil had begun sixth grade. Freddie and I stood beside our son's desk. We opened a manila folder, identical to one on every desk. Every assignment in our son's folder was marked "Incomplete" or "Failed." We were confused and uncomfortable. We quietly exited—slunk— out of the rear door of the classroom and went home, in silence. We had never had a critical comment or a low grade for either son. We had no roadmap to deal with the shock. A few weeks earlier at the Junior High, I was busy with my professional assignment and had not visited Frederic's Parents' Night. There was no early warning that anything untoward was in the works.

Parents in District 68 were vocal in the protection of their children, merited or not. The attitude in the village was that the people paid high taxes; they expected special attention to their kids for the investment. Phil's teacher did not know that her only black student was a stranger, not to the sixth grade like all of her charges, but to a public school system. He had to learn to cope with a drastically new world, alone, and although the teacher's words may have sounded like teachers before, their meanings were as foreign as an incomprehensible language. Phil had said nothing. From that night onward, we gave keen attention to his homework. How much damage control were we able to accomplish?

Too late, I comprehended the trauma of the change in our sons' experiences. They were born and reared in protected, empathic environments, in a small, aware, supportive home and community, until then, when they were nearing vulnerable adolescence. Home from college, a six-foot Frederic confided, "I would come to you guys with my problems and I would try what you said to do and it didn't work."

Children trust adults. They are fortunate when their adults are trustworthy. The communities where my generation of Negroes were born and reared were inhabited by adults with relevant and related experiences to those of their children. What worked for them was passed to the new generation. The culture moved slowly enough so that continuity was possible between problems and solutions. Mid- to late twentieth-century changes were not as much evolutionary as revolutionary. A generation was on the cutting edge of a dramatic cultural

change and the "responsible persons," a term I learned in China, were not equipped for the altering version.

Freddie wanted to rear his children outside the south. He did not want them to have the fears he lived under growing up in segregated South Carolina. This was the hope and prayer of millions of Negro parents. This was a hope from days of The Underground Railroad to the Great Migration into an always ongoing Civil Rights Movement. Freddie was no stranger to integration. Commissioned as a twenty-year-old Second Lieutenant when he graduated from college, he was commandant of a troop train deployed for Korea from Fort Jackson, SC to the west coast. At the railway station, the station manager walked back and forth through the waiting room, staring at Freddie on each pass.

The second-in-command, a white Lieutenant, asked the station manager, "Why do you keep looking at the Commandant?"

The man said, "Shouldn't he be on the other side?"

The second-in-command laughed, "What are you talking about? Haven't you ever seen a Turk? The Lieutenant is a Turk." The station manager withdrew. Second commander said to Freddie, "If anyone gives you trouble, tell them you're a Turk. I've been to Turkey. You look like a Turk."

Freddie said, "I was the Commandant; how would it have looked if I had to go to the segregated waiting room? No way."

We met and managed our adult circumstances however we could. Our solutions were variations on a historical theme, expected rejection, and hostility, with solutions delivered from our elders, learned from their elders, and the elders before them. The new generation, our children, lived the beginning days of a superficial cocoon of acceptance, with the underlayment actually unchanged.

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Grown-ups forget that children store memories and impressions when they lounge on the fringes of adult conversations. My parents were social people; we had visitors from throughout the US and abroad. Their visitors were fêted with a party if they stayed long enough to summon a crowd. I overheard conversations that may have been intended as lessons for the youngsters, or the adage, "Little pitchers have big ears" was implied—we never knew which rubric was in play.

Our parents visited Mobile one summer, where we stayed in a friend's summer cabin on the Gulf. The children of the guests had been put to sleep on cots and pallets. Laughter awakened me to hear grown-ups talking on the veranda. I heard the story of a Negro scholar who was testing a thesis. A man's voice said, "He dressed in clothes from India, wrapped his head in a turban, and talked with a fake British accent. He traveled all around the USA without any trouble. He slept and ate while white Americans fawned over him." There were murmurs of agreement from the

group outside, and no laughter. The punch line of the story was that the presumed exotic foreigner and his world were preferable to an American of African heritage.

These stories of the perils and illogic of Jim Crow segregation were part of their rites of passage; I sensed the pain, anger, and frustration beneath the laughter of the adults, who were people that I liked and admired. Personal and communal, this history was a major factor that determined and defined perception and action for a lifetime. We adults and parents, in the 1960s, were uncovering a world further removed from any before us, in Skokie, Illinois, Amsterdam, Netherlands, and Nairobi, Kenya.

The same intent and some of the stories were shared with our children. I think that the difference in the effects was the apparent integration of the new day. The elders admonished my generation, at home, school, and church, "We have to be twice as good to get half as much." A variation of this mantra was drilled into millions of immigrant children.

I taught in Chicago's Chinatown before moving to Skokie. The John C. Haines School enrolled one-third of its students from "Chinatown," on and around Cermak Road. Most were first generation Americans. The Chinese have a solid, ancient history of achievement. The Great Wall of China was, supposedly, the only manmade earth structure visible from the moon. Peasant immigrants to America arrived with little to no economic assets, with different languages and cultures. They lived with innate, ancient histories of pride and accomplishment. Elders are vital to the "landings" we make as the next generation.

Crossing a border from the ancient land of China, or Howard Street between Chicago and Skokie, does not remove continuity. Nothing of significance is erased; memories and effects of what happens on both sides of the border are embedded. What I experienced spilled into and blended, making an ensemble as much as a matching skirt and shirt. Only in retrospect—remembering—is the blending apparent. When I was a substitute teacher in "changing" Kenwood Park, the enrollment book listed every child's birthplace as "Mississippi." "Changing neighborhood" was the designation for areas where blacks had begun to move in, as whites found newer houses in burgeoning neighborhoods.

In the Chinatown school, one-third of the students were African-American migrants or the children of parents from the southern part of the US. The third group was children whose ancestry originated south of and around the Rio Grande. Under the committed tutelage of a unique principal, a skilled, hard-working faculty, and a community of dedicated families, the Chinatown school consistently sent well-prepared, super-motivated eighth grade graduates to the city's secondary school

system. The Haines Parent-Teacher organization was led by three co-presidents, one from each of the neighborhood cultures. The monthly newsletter to the community was printed in English, Mandarin, and Spanish.

The distinction in Skokie was the lack of a substantial, surrounding community that could reinforce the home climate. Dr. Runner, who had advised against our move, knew this, but did not voice it. Perhaps he could not because while he knew intuitively what had been missing for him, he did not articulate it. We thought that summer visits to the family homesteads were enough.

I had attended elementary schools in South Carolina and Texas with children whose parents were not educated beyond elementary school. A few students' parents were illiterate. But, encouraged and supported by home, school, and community, achievement was no stranger to these children. They survived and achieved in a world where success was difficult, but not impossible.

Public schools are places for universities to gather research data. During one of the surveys, I was tapped on the shoulder by a high school classmate who asked, "How do you spell pharmacist? Your mother is a pharmacist and I want to be one when I grow up." Her question confirmed a value of community, where a spark could be ignited without awareness. It simply was—anticipated and accepted.

After China, "south of the border," and "Mississippi" cultures, our suburban landing brought different challenges and lessons to learn. Skokie students were generally good kids, just like most kids anywhere. I learned from them, their families, their feelings, and their dreams. The junior high team teaching format, with its relative openness, helped address their needs as students and as children who were becoming what they would be in the rapidly approaching years between then and when.

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We were invited into Jewish culture beyond what is in films and books. Neighbors invited us to their grandson's *bris*, the ritual circumcision on the eighth day after birth, required of all Jewish boys. Poor baby, even with a napkin dipped in wine to soothe the pain, his cry was unmistakably one of sudden intensity. The baby's grandmother, "Babe," made a most delicious chopped liver paté. A first grandson's ritual celebration was highly welcomed.

We joined in Passover with a neighbor's family; the youngest male reading the Four Questions informed on the importance of ritual, especially when the child was a neighbor I saw daily. Neighbors and new friends were eager to describe their customs to the *goyim [non-Jews —Ed.]*. We observed and listened.

Skokie was home to the variety of sects in harmony—or at least without open hostility. Hassidic Jews walked everywhere. The Orthodox walked less. Conservative Jews parked their

cars three blocks away for the walk to B'nai Emunah Synagogue for the High Holy Days. An outsider would not know if the children at the public schools felt separation between the Reform, Orthodox, and Conservative homes of their classmates. I did not pry. Hassidic Jews lived in Chicago near Howard Street. *Bar* and *bat mitzvah* and wedding invitations arrived regularly through the early years of our residency.

One success that I cherish in a lifelong protest against separation/segregation happened at work. It was not racial; perhaps it was "post-racial" that some people hope will become real some day. My subject discipline at the junior high was Social Studies, which really was US History. No geography, sociology, anthropology or any of the other social sciences officially crept into the state-designated curriculum. Preparing for the state-required US Constitution examination was the chore that held less interest, for teacher and students, than any topic in the year-long curriculum. This was not because the Constitution is uninteresting and unimportant, but because the examination asked the most mundane and routine questions about that vital and esteemed document. How old must the President be? How many amendments does the Constitution have? There was no inquiry built into the examination that encouraged students to be interested, involved, and knowledgeable citizens. If principles of liberty and justice were not taught outside the context of the examination, nothing of value would be learned. Students dreaded the "tricks" of the Constitution examination. There would be another test on the same subject to anticipate in high school.

An uneventful life is boring, and a balance of positive and negative effects is easily overlooked. During my first year teaching in the junior high, an irritant was building in me. I called it the "spoiled brat syndrome." Near the end of the day, the last period on a spring afternoon, I felt crushed under the pressure of a small, but ever-present burr of "spoiled brat syndrome." Today I would call the irritant, the "Paris Hilton syndrome."

Children who are constantly assured that they are perfect, with no faults, are not a delight to have in a classroom, even when twenty-four of the twenty-five present no problem. Confronted with continuous dependency, one learns to "suck it up." I had gone through a build-up of dependency and demand the afternoon I called Freddie and said, "I want to quit!" The silence in the faculty office behind me was as thick as the pool of caramel candy that men swam in in the TV commercial. Colleagues pretended they did not hear. Everyone heard everything across the Plexiglas pony wall. I hung up the phone and crossed the hall to teach the last period of the day.

Minutes into the lesson I had braced for, a note from the principal was delivered. He asked that I stop by his office at the end of the day. Wondering what I had done—the troublemaker kid expects the worst—I sat down across from him. He handed me a folder and talked about a new organizational structure the school was beginning in the fall. He said to take the folder home, study it, and let him know if I wanted to be part of the new structure. Students and faculty were to be organized into "Instructional Teams" and would I want to be an "Instructional Team Coordinator?" There would be a higher salary; the position carried a merit pay contract. I broke into tears. My principal's face was a picture of confusion. Poor man, I told him that I had just decided I wanted to quit. I did not understand much of anything he had said. I was tired.

That evening, I read the proposal, and Freddie and I discussed it. We decided that, given our roles as perpetual tokens, and our history of denial by the larger world, I should accept the

position. Dad's voice was in my mind, co-mingled with a chorus of voices from the past, mine and my cultural cohorts: "Whenever you have an opportunity to show them that you're as good as they are, take it." Dad had also said, "Take it," when he taught me to pass a car on a two-lane highway. Too short to reach the accelerator and see over the steering wheel, I sat on his lap as he "gave it the gas." I trusted him.

The commitment was to an eleven-month extended calendar, with additional responsibility and merit pay. This was an unanticipated sign of success as a teacher at Old Orchard. I forgot my consternation the day before with spoiled brats. Here was a challenge that might prove beneficial. Increased pay notwithstanding, the time for the new responsibilities would interfere with family time.

"Ability grouping" is the structure in many American schools. At the junior high, each teacher taught six classes a day: one was labeled "Above Average," four were labeled "Average," and one was labeled, "Below Average," determined by methods I did not know, except that testing was an important component.

One morning, after nights of reading and grading, I took stacks of folders from weeks of work to return to students. Before me was my first of the day, an "Average" class. The next would be my "Above Average" students. I struggled to compliment the students in the first class on their work for, frankly, their projects were pedestrian. On impulse I lifted the top folder for the next class and read from it. From the back of the room a girl's voice came, "Oh, I didn't know that could be done." I immediately understood from the tone of her voice, that by isolation in ability groups, "average" kids were not being exposed to creative ideas and thinking. I introduced to my team the notion of doing away with ability grouping. After all, I argued, these children will participate in the same society as everyone when they are adults; they would not be segregated by presumed and arbitrary IQ points, so why now, at ages eleven to thirteen?

Each instructional team had chosen a name. Our team was named "Oracles," with an owl as our mascot; an owl perched on top of a book. The Oracles felt that they were the "smart" team. I don't know how the Oracle teachers really felt. Did they decide that my subject, Social Studies, was unimportant in the grand scheme of mathematics and science, and let me have my way? The math and science teachers preferred, and kept, "Ability Grouping." Working in such a prestigious school district, the rule of competition dominated.

A few years later, shopping at Old Orchard Mall, a clerk called my name. She said that her daughter was a student at the University of Illinois, studying to become a teacher. Her daughter was the child who had said, "Oh, I didn't know that could be done."

Many nights I fell asleep on a stack of assignments. Enclosed by children, husband, household, and career responsibilities, I have an internal/eternal laugh/cry response when people say, "a teacher only works from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m." Someone has "teacher" confused with "banker."

The night before report cards were to be mailed home for the final marking period of the year, I made the obligatory telephone calls. Parents whose children would receive a failing grade had to be notified prior to receipt of the report cards. I gave students every chance to succeed that I could, and kept records of the evidence of failure, to share with parents.

Returning to class after lunch, I was holding open one of the double doors for the crush to ascend the stairs. One of Frederic's teachers hurried through the door and up the stairs. She

said, loud enough to be heard in the swirl of students, “Mrs. Fortune, I had to fail Frederic.” I climbed to my classroom to teach my next period “Below Average” class.

Frederic’s report card was similar to what we had seen in Phillip’s work folder, unlike any Ric had ever received. He had been identified as a gifted math student in fourth grade, and studied with an Illinois Institute of Technology mathematician. Stoically, our first-born explained, “At my old school, if I didn’t understand something, I raised my hand, and the teacher would ask what was wrong. I would tell him and he would explain. Out here, I raise my hand and the teacher ignores me. Other students start talking to him, and he goes over and talks to them.”

Why didn’t I confront his teacher? Was it because of my dual role as teacher and parent? I did not want to be thought of as asking for privilege, or as a complainer. Colleagues were not forthcoming. What were the assumptions about these children, the first Negro students in the district?

I had failed my children. One of Frederic’s teachers was aware of his needs for acknowledgement that he was “new,” and for support. The only teacher to say anything to me that showed that he recognized our son as a person was a gym teacher. He was from Oklahoma, part Cherokee. He knew the places where an outsider is touched.

Frederic had began having nightmares within months of our move to Skokie, tossing and talking in his sleep. An ugly allergic rash grew on the back of his neck. His eighth grade graduation picture is of a 13-year-old who was going through the throes of the damned. He did not look forward to going to the high school. His classmates would be from a wider area than the junior high, and the wider geography would have students who knew no black students. The faculty promised no respite. Leaving Skokie and moving back to Chicago was not an option. Compromise was the only solution.

I ordered and studied boarding school catalogues. Classmates from Harvard-St George were going “out east” to boarding schools. We could not afford Phillips Exeter, Choate, Andover, or Groton. We discussed arranging for a friend in Chicago to let him live with them, and he would return to his old school. He rejected that alternative, but was willing to go to boarding school.

I made an appointment with the headmistress back in Chicago to ask for a recommendation for a boarding school. She asked, “Why are you sending him away, he’s so young?”

“I don’t know what else to do,” I said. She told me that The North Shore Country Day School was in Winnetka, a few miles north of Skokie. She would call the headmaster, and tell him of her experience with our children, and I was to make an appointment with him.

After my interview, an administrator said, “You have two boys. We’d like to have both. Why don’t you enroll both?”

“Your school is twice as expensive as Harvard-St. George, we can’t afford it. I have a third son, too,” I said.

“If your boys qualify, we’ll assure them tuition relief,” she said. Both were accepted. We received half tuition for each, two for the price of one.

Ric and Phil were invited to spend a day at their prospective school. At dinner we asked how they liked it. Phillip said, “I like it. It’s like my old school. There are no locks on the lockers.”

Thus began "the big boys'" seventh and ninth grades at North Shore Country Day School, NSCDS. I was back to the routine of driving kids to school, driving to work, picking up kids after school, then home again, a familiar pattern. Roger's sitter returned to Toledo, Ohio, her family hometown. We hired a young woman from Jamaica to care for Roger and assist with the house. I teased her that she was like another child. It took nine months of legal work to get her to the USA. She stayed for two years, until Roger was in school the full day.

Life seemed to have returned to normal. Freddie was promoted to field grade officer, Major. At work he became Senior Engineer. He was the corporation's representative to the Lions Clubs International, where he eventually became president. The title I remember best was when he was "Lion Tamer."

I was active in my first love and therapy, singing at Evanshire Church, gigs in Chicago, with the Skokie Valley Concert Choir, and The Evanston Classic Chorale. The board of The Niles Township Mental Health Association was an opportunity to learn more about the village. We began to know parents at NSCDS and people who were involved with civil and human rights groups. Normal? What is normal? Being with others who see the world through a somewhat similar lens makes for good feelings. This was my "normal."

Children automatically develop their normality. Bicycles are real and symbolic freedom for children. Riding away from home, wind in our faces, no hands on the handlebars, is an icon of independence. The boys were less and less within parental sight and protection. Signals of freedom were, as with all parents, welcomed and feared.

I could not have imagined that each of our sons would have "a bicycle law enforcement" story. Imagination does not always predict accurately. After Ric's "Officer Friendly" meeting, brother Phillip had his rite of passage. It was a mid-20th century prelude to the 21st century's "stop and frisk."

Outside the kitchen door I heard, "Mrs. Fortune." I turned from the stove to face a young policeman. Beside him stood Phillip, flushed and near tears. I opened the door. Phil came in and stood behind me. The officer said, "Mrs. Fortune, I signaled Phillip to stop and he kept on riding his bike." Instinctively, I asked, "Why didn't you stop, Phil?"

Phil began to cry. "When I ride my bicycle in the neighborhood, guys pull up in a car beside me and throw plastic bags of urine at me. I was trying to get home." He had gone to visit a classmate. His friend wasn't home, so he was coming back. He was passing Devonshire School when a car blew its horn. "I thought it was those boys with the urine," he said. "Sometimes it hits me in the face, or on my clothes."

The policeman said, "We've had trouble with black boys from Evanston stealing bikes in the neighborhood."

I said, "That doesn't make sense. Phillip was riding into the neighborhood, toward home, not away from it." I sent Phil to wash his face, and confronted the policeman, "This is the first time my son has been out on his bicycle in a long time, and you frightened him."

The man left, mumbling something I could not hear. He did not say anything about the boys and the bags of urine. The rest of Phil's story came at dinnertime. "When I heard the horn, I pedaled faster. The police car pulled around and blocked me. The cop jumped out, and called me 'a son of a bitch.' He asked where I had stolen the bike. I told him, 'My daddy gave it to me.' He said, 'So what else is new.' He asked for my ID. I found my library card in my wallet, and gave it to him."

Phil was a slightly built 13-year-old. Asking a child for an ID was ludicrous. Seeing a library card from the prestigious North Shore Country Day School may have alerted the cop that he had made a mistake. His politeness did not obscure his senseless action, the kind that leaves a life-long imprint. Only then did I gain reason for my child's withdrawal during the past year. His teachers' comments on periodic reports were that he was "daydreaming." The boy was trying to figure out his survival in a different kind of "concrete jungle."

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Law enforcement as a factor of control is a pervasive presence in African-American life. There is one incident with law enforcement that differed from all others. I was driving Roger to first or second grade when he said, "I have to lead the pledge this morning." I had left no time for him to get to his class early, and with echoes of that honor in my head, my foot automatically pressed the accelerator. The car sped beyond the posted School Zone speed limit. A policeman on the corner immediately flagged me. I stopped and began to apologize, blurting out my reason for the acceleration. The man, middle-aged, probably with grandchildren, looked past me to Roger. He said, "Don't you upset your mother like that!" His voice was calm and grandfatherly, neither harsh nor punitive. Roger said, "I won't." We were waved on, the officer's, "Have a nice day," in our ears.

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Skokie's liberal-progressive community produced new activities and adult friends, many with progressive attitudes. One group marched on Michigan Avenue on Mother's Day, for peace and change. Looking up to the roof of the Daley Center as huge black cameras filmed, we waved and smiled with apparent bravado, not knowing if and when another conflagration like the 1968 Democratic Convention might erupt. We were fortunate, or somebody up there was looking out for us.

These change-oriented affairs contrasted with occasional posh North Shore parties in homes where, until this time, the only faces of color to walk in the yards and ballrooms had been those of servants who lived in Evanston. It was during this time that I began to think seriously about the contradictions in society.

My dissatisfaction with the house we bought in Skokie was not a constant annoyance. It was always in the background. I joked that I must have been a worker on the pyramids because I have a love affair with buildings. An attraction to Freddie, when we met, was that he was studying to be an architect. We made one addition to the Skokie house that calmed my movement urgency, for a time. The construction offered another racial incident, one of the annoyances in the lives of people of color that brings bitter tastes to the mouth, and will not die.

Memory is like the burn odors from the branding irons on the longhorns that my grandfather herded north out of Texas.

During construction, Freddie came home every evening and inspected the work done during the day. His "punch list" was always copious. After a delay and re-do because of a gross plumbing error, I overheard a worker say to the contractor, "We didn't know Freddie knew as much about building as he does." Was someone under the misapprehension that a black man couldn't know when the new toilet waste-line was connected to the city's rainwater line—in an area prone to flooding?

Contractors, like used car salesmen, carry a stereotype for "taking advantage." The "bad apples" are remembered, the "good apples" are recommended to family and friends. The tone I overheard by the "gotcha-caught" builders carried something different from joking about taking advantage of an unsuspecting customer. The contractor knew that Mr. Fortune was the Senior Plant Engineer for the largest corporate employer in the village. Alert to being discounted on every measure—beyond *caveat emptor*/let the buyer beware—is one of the ubiquitous results of being an outsider. The blueprints for the additions had been drawn by Freddie and approved by the village. I wonder if, where the stereotype of expectations is rooted, vision and common sense fade to non-existent.

Chapter Four—The Press and the Public

"I'm not talking to any more reporters." Freddie dropped his jacket on the foot of the bed, loosened his tie, and went into the bathroom, closing the door with more force than usual. When he returned, he picked up the newspaper that was under his jacket, shook it open, and lay down on the bed, propped against the headboard.

"They never get it the way I said it." Abruptly, he stood up, walked out of our bedroom to go to the back yard. I knew what he meant. Our move into Skokie was "news" for Chicago area newspapers. When the first family of color moved to Skokie, publication of their address brought the intrusion of cruising carloads of bigots, and epithets as they hurried past the house. Volunteers monitored the house day and night.

TV cameras did not follow us, and I was glad. When the crazies knew addresses and could locate telephone numbers a harassing frenzy would erupt. A media agreement was made with the village that there would be no location identification in published and broadcast stories. Without social media, the objects of attention were relatively safe.

I thought that telling our side of the story would foster understanding and empathy for citizens who were denied freedom to live where they wanted and could afford. At first, city and suburban reporters came to interview us. Each time we read the stories they wrote, we did not recognize the words inside quotation marks, supposedly spoken by us. The interpretation, the spin, was unrecognizable. What we meant about who we were, what we did, and why we did it was obliterated—gone. Not once were we pleased with a news story on our "integrating Skokie." Like my husband I grew wary of interviews.

Freddie never granted another interview. The words, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread" continued, until I reached my breaking point. One more reporter called to request an interview, a new young lady, not one of the jaded regulars from one of the big-city papers. Surely, her idealism would get it right. On the telephone and at the office I summarized our experience, repeating my husband's refusal to give another interview. I insisted that she bring a notebook or tape recorder. She promised she would. She took notes. When the article was published it had the usual skew. I wondered, do those people ever listen? It seemed that an agenda was in place before the reporter met the subject of the interview, and their expectation never altered.

"*Ne jamais pas*….Never again." These words, in several languages, are carved at Dachau Concentration Camp, *Konzentrationslager/KZ*, the first concentration camp the Nazis built, near Munich, Germany. I toured and smelled Dachau in 1979, more than three decades after its post-World War II liberation. Are the words, "never again," too strong for an innocuous event like misquotes in a local news story? Not really. I think violation is never minor.

News is old the next day. Following that interview, one more reporter called. No thanks. Whew! Good riddance.

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On vacation, travelers like to talk to children. Many ask, "Where are you from?" Once, a woman asked our boys where they lived. They replied, "Chicago." I said, "You don't live in Chicago." Phillip said, "Who ever heard of Skokie?"

The anonymity changed thirteen years after we moved to Skokie. The village became so well-known that a tour guide in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1979, said, "That's where the Nazis marched." When I said I lived in Skokie, I didn't have to say Illinois.

In spring of 1977, an ever-ready-for-sensation media reported the pronouncement by a dysfunctional bigot and leader of a hate group, Frank Collin. The National Socialist Party of America distributed fliers to local synagogues that it intended to make an appearance in the village. Collin's purpose was to instill fear, to intimidate the residents in the northern half of Skokie where most Jews lived, including the survivors of the Nazi Holocaust.

Residential restrictions, called "red-lining" in most of the nation, were not legally abolished until decades after World War II. Restrictive covenants against blacks, Jews, and other "outsiders" denied access to the purchase of homes outside of predetermined sections of a town or city. Red-lining to maintain segregated ghettos did not begin with, and was not reserved exclusively for, people of color.

> *The comfort of one's own culture runs deep. Long ago, mountains, ravines, rivers, and, oceans were nature's separations broken only by conflict when new food sources or population growth necessitated migration. Modern people think we are different from our pre-civilized forebears. Biological evolution is a terrifically slow process; technology, the implements developed within cultures, moves more rapidly.*

Accounts of the Nazi episode, called "The Nazi March on Skokie," fill a number of books and news archives. A first-hand account is, "Skokie and the Nazi Threat, A Coming Together of Religious Communities in a Time of Crisis," by The Reverend Phyllis G. Koehnline, © 2000, a Presbyterian minister at Evanshire Presbyterian church during that trying, infamous time. I was attending the Evanshire congregation. Our sons attended Sunday school there. Rev. Koehnline's husband was the founding president of Oakton Community College, where I had been hired in 1970.

Rev. Koehnline reported that Collin issued a notice to the village that he intended a half-hour silent demonstration at the Village Hall on Sunday, May 7, 1977. The Mayor, a fair-minded man, and a Catholic, granted permission that also allowed counter-demonstrations.

Rev. Koehnline wrote, "It seemed perfectly reasonable to say, 'They're just a bunch of nobodies. Let them come and ignore them. It didn't take us long…to realize this attitude would never work." (pp. 8-9)

A flurry of legal machinations began. I knew only that the Nazis were coming. I heard that The Jewish Defense League, an activist group of young Jews, would be "waiting and ready for them." Violence was anticipated.

To the relief of most, on the day of the proposed march, a rumor went through the village that the coward Collin, egoistically thinking he had made his point—to rabble-rouse his rag-tag gaggle of misfits—decided to stop their caravan when they reached the village limits. "The coward chickened-out—kosher chicken," a neighbor said. Officials in the Village Hall (where Freddie and I had faced our "inquisition") were able to go home in peace. Actually, a legal injunction had stopped the Nazis at the Interstate exit that led into Skokie: Touhy Avenue. The AT&T Teletype plant where Freddie worked was on Touhy Avenue.

An Interfaith Plan took months of meetings and discussions. I found my way to the Niles Township East High School football stadium on Sunday, April 16, 1978, to a crowd of people who did not condone bigotry, hatred, and violence. Supporters of the safety and dignity of Skokie's Jewish community were from every religious group, denomination, and sect in the village and nearby, an estimated assembly of 3,000.

I recognized the man beside the portable organ at the edge of the football field. He said, "Thank you for coming." He was a music teacher at North Shore Country Day School. In cross-cultural gatherings I am surprised when someone says, "Thank you for coming." Why not? Are we not one community, one tribe?

The Frank Collin problem did not disappear. It will not. Given subsequent legal decisions, he was free to march on July 9th in Chicago, at Marquette Park, in a predominantly African American community. This march had been Collin's initial and intended target. He was jeered, and rocks were hurled. Marquette Park is not remembered as a Nazi target as is Skokie. The continuity of holocausts in the heart, mind, and spirit is forgotten. This ability is known as "historical amnesia." People of color do not have tattooed numbers on their arms nor the preserved images of camps and furnaces. Black peoples' tattoo is the envelope of indelible skin color and facial features. A long-sleeved shirt cannot cover experience and memory.

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Seemingly disconnected memories have their way of making themselves stick together. I testify that there has to be validity to

the research on "six degrees of separation." Words that wound lose power when we deny their impact. Re-opening the wound holds onto the power of the original injury. Resolution is elusive, perhaps even impossible for a long time.

I went to a weekend poetry festival at a nearby university. One workshop leader, a poet and editor of a university poetry journal, complimented my poems. He said that when I returned home I should submit several to his journal. Following his workshop, the workshop leader was a featured speaker in a plenary. He spoke, eloquently and emotionally, of the Nazi holocaust and his loss of family. At the end of his talk, he asked for responses. Among others similarly moved, I took my turn at the microphone. I thanked him for sharing his experience and said, "We have all had our holocausts." From the podium several feet above the heads of his audience, the poet castigated me for appropriating the word "holocaust." I felt like an amoeba in the auditorium of several hundred writers. I felt naked. At the close of the session I left the hall, staring ahead, trying not to look whipped, like a slave on the auction block. On the steps, another poet stopped me. "I don't like it when people appropriate the language," she said. "I couldn't say anything because I am a Christian." She looked genuinely pained.

I neared the parking lot, wanting to run to escape the feeling of having been punished. Another poet stopped me. "I agreed with you," she said. "I'm ashamed, but I couldn't say anything."

That evening I consulted Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, looked at the etymology and meanings of "holocaust:"

"Holocaust-GR. Burnt whole.

1. a burnt offering, the whole of which was consumed by fire;
2. Complete destruction of people or animals by fire;
3. Great or widespread destruction; the Holocaust, [also h-], the systematic destruction of over six million European Jews by the Nazis before and during World War II."

The dictionary made no negation of my purpose or the validity of my using "holocaust" to identify the massive killings, by any means, of populations of people because they are seen as different. I was expressing a felt identity, a commonality, with the speaker. I have read of mass destruction and seen photos of burned, lynched victims historic and recent: Gypsies (Roma), homosexuals, physical and mental outcasts, Jews. That, and this poem that has been erroneously attributed to Martin Niemoller, demonstrate more than a one-time event. The meaning is true, regardless of who the author may be:

"First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a communist;
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist;
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist;
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew;
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak out for me."

My thinking goes like this: *homo sapiens* are one species among billions on the planet and in the universe, with more factors in common than perceived differences. I wrote a note for the poet with the definitions of "holocaust" from the dictionary, and my concern about misappropriated language.

The last day of the poetry festival, the campus was lively. Folk music came from an impromptu stage; clumps of writers and visitors dotted the campus. We could have been a medieval fair with jesters and jousting. The poet was within sight, in front of a pavilion of performers. I walked over to him, forty or fifty feet, handed him my note, and went back to my original spot. He opened and scanned the note, folded, and placed it in his briefcase. He walked away without turning in my direction. I did not mail poems to him. His was a prestigious little journal that might have opened doors.

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Many people are "walking wounded," and we are perpetual children, not quite grown up. I've read the truism, "Life is hard, and then you die." We do not reach adulthood without scrapes, hurts, and scars. I wonder if maturity will engulf us, where we will understand and accept commonality. The father of Frank Collin, the American Nazi, was, by birth, Max Simon Cohen. Cohen said he had been imprisoned at the Nazi concentration camp in Dachau. The contradictions that we carry around are akin to looking into a rear view mirror that is not properly aligned. The mirror, correctly placed, prevents accidents from the rear—the past. Even a tiny misalignment can result in a collision with what is following us. Consequences that might have been averted can only be contemplated.

Jews have been significant in world events for about three thousand of the forty thousand scientifically-presumed years of modern humankind. History records the Jewish/Hebrew people as originally being a nomadic tribe with roots in a geography that is seldom viewed from what I call "a moon's eye-view." The Mediterranean, Aegean, Red, Black, Arabian, and Caspian Seas, and the Gulfs of Aden, Oman and Persia, are water barriers and bridges to the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. The land junctures of Asia, Africa, and Europe have been home and passageways throughout human habitation. The ancestral geography of the Jewish/Hebrew and African people has a narrow waterway that separates the two homelands. Jews, whose tribal identity has been maintained by religion, have imposed and chosen "outsider" status.

From our beginning, humans lived in communities called tribes. Jewish history retains this memory in its "twelve tribes" story. Instilled while a persecuted and pursued people, a sense of identity, origin and community has never been lost.

Religion, unfortunately, tends to deny assimilation. To assimilate, to join with the outsider, the other, may signify a loss of uniqueness. Memory of "who we are" as a distinctive people may be perceived as annihilation of what is unique. Attributes of dress, decorations, and ritual become entrenched and valued in isolation. The thought may be that we will not be party to the death of who we are.

African peoples' tribal identity status is kept alive around the world on the foundation of physical appearance, not religious ideology. The captors of African tribal people, from the late 15th through the 19th centuries, interrupted the continuity of tribal people who had been the inhabitants of their own geographies before the European invasion and colonization. Unique histories, senses of identity, origins, and distinctiveness were fractured and rebuilt on a different base. Prior to the four-century epoch, the "inferiority" of Africans was not a concept. The library at Timbuctu was known and used by scholars throughout the circle of the Mediterranean Sea.

African people inhabit thousands of tribes and hundreds of languages and cultural variations on the planet's largest contiguous continent. Because of the domination, dispersal, and control of African captives as property, and by sexual exploitation that altered the physical appearances of their children, identity became muddled. The destruction of languages and cultures left scattered remnants and forgotten memories. The result for African peoples has been the contradiction of enforced and denied assimilation.

Africans have no singular theology, no "Book/Torah," no unitary language, social mores or traditions that link the African captives and their descendants with the millions who inhabit the continent. Their Diaspora varies more widely than the eventual segmentation of Jews into Hassidic, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Secular, "Jews for Jesus," Israeli, and those of other nation-states.

The lead character "Abe Yellin" in *My Suburban Shtetl*, by Robert Rand, a novel about a Jewish family in Skokie, defines a commonality, a possible link for the "wandering Jew" and the chattel African, when Abe's character says after confronting Frank Collin, "We can be Jews here." Through the thousand years' Diaspora, "The Book," the rituals and customs, had been held, remembered, and passed to the next generation by Jews. Not so for the multiplicity of "diaspora-d" Africans. Abe Yellin meant that in Skokie, with its community of tattooed numbers on the bodies of Nazi survivors—photographic documentation of the death camps —"We can be Jews here" met the longing to be themselves, living their identity, and having the advantages of a democratic society merge with the complexities of assimilation, or not, on one's own terms.

The African Diaspora did not produce a geography where its people could say, "We can be ourselves here." Jews, and those with no single, common name—whether designated as black, African American, Negro, or Colored—are unlikely partners in Diaspora. Despite a lack of visible commonality, the two peoples have, on occasion, found related responses to their "outsider" statuses. There is a saying that "war makes strange bedfellows;" isolation and denial can activate an empathetic response, or fear of tribal survival. Both responses are available to the tribes. At its best, the divergent stories of descendants of African captives, and the children of wanderers in the Arabian desert, have a lesson of merit for a world that has not been found, so far.

Tina Levy was my classmate in junior high school. The Levy family descended from a Jewish man and a woman of color in South Carolina two generations prior to Tina. Asian or Hispanic-like complected, with the face and body of pretty Middle Eastern girls, Tina and her sister could have "passed" on the streets of an Arabian country. Friends and relatives named Zimmerman and Reese were of similar heritage. The stories in my neighborhood were that Jewish merchants traveled south, and because they were not Christian, and there were no Jewish women, the men cohabitated with Negro women, who then were accepted as their common law wives. The men left a reputation of being generous to their common law spouses and children. They educated their children and set them up in businesses. Julius Lester, a Hebraic scholar, wrote of his black and Jewish heritage in *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew*.

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With my desire to make a tiny opening in the walls of fear and bigotry, I would ask students, early in a semester, to stand in the four corners of the classroom according to their blood type, if they knew it. I approached those who were Type A and said, "I have Type A blood. Be careful on your way home. If you have an accident I might be needed for a blood transfusion." My idea was to spark awareness of the four blood types that humans share, and that all are able to transfuse across external appearance as long as the match is biochemically compatible. I'd say to the class, "Be sure that you're A-positive, not A-negative, because I'm A-positive." I asked, "Do you know what a mule is?" For contemporary suburbanites, this was a stretch, not knowing the word or the animal. I would explain that a mule is a hybrid, a cross between a female horse and a male donkey, and that while the union can produce a baby, the offspring is, generally, sterile. I would say, "Humans mate all over the planet, and their offspring are not sterile. We are not genetically incompatible." This was part of my effort to open minds and erase stereotypes.

My memory is by someone who identifies with the experiences and responses of discriminated-against people everywhere. Empathy, spirituality, philosophy, and science combine into the mix that compounds value by moving from saying, "I know how you feel," to, "I feel as you feel."

Chapter Five—Routine Surprise

This memory cannot be a strict chronology. I offer an analysis of racism as we experienced it, subtle racism and ignorance or intentional racism and ignorance. It was impossible to know in advance if we would be included or excluded in any situation or circumstance. Status as "other" is a murky no-person's land. My word for its actions is "gotcha!" We needed to remember the Scout motto, "Be prepared." Constant awareness leads to existential angst, like feeding time in the wild. There is scant relaxation time and space.

Three years before we moved to Skokie, every morning I drove our sons to their school, then went on to my school. I felt as if I were an extension of the car, a motor-mom. Then in the afternoon there was the reverse, Monday to Friday. Searching for a less demanding schedule than the "Chinatown cycle," I requested a transfer to a school closer to the boys' school. I was accepted at Bret Harte, midway between our house and their school. I vaguely remembered the name, a 19th century Midwestern author from the days when writers could be heroes. Summer was nearly over and I began to think of what I would do at the new assignment.

It was dark when I answered my doorbell to a man not much taller than my five feet three inches, leaning against the doorway, one arm stretched to the opposite side. One leg crossed over the other at the knee, he said, "I'm the principal at Bret Harte. Would it be presumptuous of me to come in?"

My impulse may have been to say, "What the…." The school's name blocked my rudeness. It said, "Don't antagonize your boss." The man followed me inside, inspecting the room as he entered. I gestured to the couch. He sat, spreading his arms across the back of my Danish couch; his eyes roamed the room. "Please, excuse me," I said, "I'm putting my children to bed."

I returned a few minutes later. My new boss-to-be sat with one leg crossed over his knee; the sole of his shoe was nearly worn through. His movements were almost birdlike. I sat across from him in one of two orange, vinyl 1960s fashion-statement side chairs. His head tilted back, nodding, he looked around the room, pursed his lips, and murmured, "Nice, nice." His head snapped to look directly at me. "How would you feel being the first Negro hired at our school?"

"I wouldn't know. I've been a Negro all my life," I said.

He laughed, "I guess you're used to it."

"Something like that," I said. This was a conversation I'd never had before, although I had often been on the receiving end of odd perceptions. I still am. Our bodies learn to appear unperturbed, not battered, after an onslaught. Friends and I have wry laughs over remarks by the likes of the principal. Was his perception prejudice or ignorance in its original definition: not knowing? The rudeness of inappropriate intrusions is usually ignored. My generation early on learned to mask insult and pain. By our teenage years, instinctive defense automatically runs deep. The ill-at-ease little man stood, slapped his thigh, and said, "I'm satisfied. We'll see you soon." He left.

Was the qualification needed to pass muster, the decor of my domicile? My academic credentials and work record were in a file "downtown," as teachers called The Board of Education headquarters. My photograph in my file had to have raised his concern. After one semester I requested transfer back to my Chinatown assignment. Shorter commute time was no balance for an unsatisfactory working environment. Recurring incidents like that evening visit were adequate preparation for our visit to Skokie and our "inquisition" three years later.

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An outsider in one's own environment is not an oxymoron. How to become a member of an in-group instead of remaining an outsider may be easy, difficult, or impossible. From out to in depends on the rigidity of barriers. Is the limitation temporary or permanent? A once-lanky four-eyes in junior high can become a world famous super-model. Or effects on the individual and group can be difficult to remove and to move beyond. The hermit does not often come out of the cave to talk with the hermit on the backside of the mountain.

Old Orchard Junior High School was a highly rated school, in highly rated District #68. Northwestern University assigned student teacher apprenticeships in this district because of its outstanding structure and achievements. University students practiced teaching under the guidance of experienced classroom teachers. One of my student teachers was a woman with two children who returned to the university after having left to marry. When she graduated, her proficiency and maturity were assets in a school where a number of teachers were often barely a decade older than their students. She was hired. An insider joke was that the goal of the youthful teachers was to get their "Ph.T." This translated to "Putting Husband Through;" they were teaching only until their spouse had completed graduate or professional school. My apprentice and I became opera- and theater-going buddies. Our engineer husbands preferred sports.

On a sunny day early in the spring, I took my lunch tray into the faculty lounge. As I walked to a space near three student teachers, one of the women said, "Will you sit and eat with us? We've been talking about you. We wondered who your friends are."

I put my tray on the table, sat down, and thought for a few seconds. I actually have no memory of what I said, but something about friends and neighbors from our old Chicago neighborhood and church. My childhood friends were scattered from east to west coast, southern to northern borders, and overseas. A former playmate was in Africa as a US State Department translator. I had a plethora of newer friends from Chicago and the North Shore, including Skokie.

The students looked more questioning than before. "Oh, our friends are the girls we grew up with," one said.

Willingness to take risks may be the factor that divided the friends I enumerated from the white women, who assumed that because I did not live in one of the ghettos of the Southside or Westside of Chicago, and I was a person of color, I must be friendless and unhappy in all-white, minimally-Christian Skokie, if they happened to think of religious affiliation at all.

Whether by choice or circumstance, leaving the cocoon of the familiar, the sameness of the same—the comfort of the tribe—requires taking risks. If a person stays in the familiar, figuratively turning around and around to find the soft spot to curl up and rest, this seems to me to be stagnation. Awakening in this personal place might be frightening. The student teachers were startled by my ease with people who were not "the girls I grew up with." No world beyond known insularity would be boring, for as Phillip had said, "I want to try it."

Exploring our new environs took me to a mall about ten miles west of Skokie. The further west or north I went, the more unusual was a person of my physical appearance. A group of women had stopped to talk. An infant smiled over her mother's shoulder. I smiled. The infant bounced with baby glee, kicking her legs, waving her arms, and cooing.

The mother looked back and saw me. She grabbed her baby with a sudden, protective hug. The baby's face changed from pleasure to one resembling the student teachers at the junior high when I described my friendships to them. The corners of the baby's mouth turned down, her eyes widened. The mother had communicated primal fear to an infant who was beginning to learn her world. In the isolated, white world of northern Illinois, that child would have no chance to forget and to move from fear of a brown face.

The award-winning Broadway musical, *South Pacific*, by Rodgers and Hammerstein, was made into an award-winning movie in 1958. Juilliard-trained Negro singer Juanita Hall was able to pass for Asian. The historical mixes of African captives, their descendants, and different racial groups have produced a variety of physical types—some leading to passing as another ethnic group. Hall did not perform the break-through number, "You've got to be taught to hate." She made the song "Bali High" famous. Juanita Hall's small, round, beige-brown face and figure merges with the face of that frightened baby girl when I hear or think of the tune and the words:

"You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a diff'rent shade,
You've got to be carefully taught."

Hope is tantalizingly deep and long. When I was a child, a favorite afternoon activity was to lay on my back in the grass of our side yard watching clouds, finding shapes, and making up stories. Several of us played the cloud game after a tiring, hot, stickball game. One day, alone, inside myself I heard, "When I grow up, get married, and have children, I want to give them happy memories." Today, when I look at the canopy of cumulus clouds in the North Central Florida sky, there is something about the soft-edged shapes, the slow, unpredictable movement, and the cleanliness above my head that inspires me. I know from flying in airplanes that earthbound vision is less than complete, but a childlike memory of open non-expectation, and the sense of unfettered imagination, untied to stricture and rule, calls out to a bit of happiness.

Every parent's best dream is happiness for their children. Deviations on the road to happiness, success, stability and health are unplanned, dismissed and denied. Skokie was that better day with happy memories for the children of my cloud dreams.

The change to a more familiar setting at the day school for the older boys raised hope that, figuratively speaking, relaxing our collective, constricted breaths would bring greater satisfaction for the family. I wanted to believe that our third child would have smoother progress in his new neighborhood. He was beginning to walk when we moved. There is glass and there is ice; both can be broken. We hoped for tempered glass.

When Roger neared age five, Freddie decided that Roger had not had experiences like his brothers had that had precipitated the need for their change from public back to private school. Devonshire was our nearest public elementary school, the closest and the best in our district. It was next to the park where big brother Frederic had had his brush with legal authority that sprang from racial fear, and where big brother Phillip had been confused in a strange learning environment.

We adults have had time to develop coping strategies for new events; the growth period for a child is in process. My principal was surprised when instead of automatically enrolling Roger in Devonshire, I asked if I had a choice of schools. He said I did. I selected Jane Stenson School. It was the smallest and the farthest school from our house. I had formed an opinion, a personality profile, of incoming seventh graders each year. I observed that students coming to the junior high from Stenson appeared less stressed or "hyper" than incoming students from the other "feeder" schools. Devonshire was reputed to have the smartest students, and its graduates felt that they were. I liked the energy of Stenson kids. Their neighborhood was more diverse, less affluent, with fewer parental expectations for super-achievement. I wanted my youngest to be competitive because he had the ability and enjoyed doing his best, not to "beat-out" other students.

Before we left Chicago, the headmistress of the day school said that when Ric didn't make the highest grade on a test, one other classmate always did. "And they are the best of

friends," she said. This was an attitude I admired, not dog-eat-dog competition, merely friendly spurs, one to the other. Stenson seemed to be an environment where that opportunity would happen.

Stenson's principal, George Slawik, seemed to know every child by name. He talked to students with a soft hand on a shoulder and a smile. At an early parent-teacher conference, Roger's teacher said that he was in the group of popular and personable boys. That was good; he was with not with the nerds or the jocks and was not an isolate. I was invited to be a Cub Scout den mother with a great bunch of mothers. In Chicago, the mothers of my students were professional, working moms; their time was structured and efficiently managed. Relationships there had been warm and friendly, but with time pressures. Stenson mothers mainly worked at home; they were den mothers and baked cookies.

A reporter from the local newspaper requested an interview. Ignoring my vow never to give another interview, I agreed. Her story would report on a five-year-old boy who was driven to the junior high every morning, where his mother taught. At his mother's school he would board a bus for his school. In the afternoon the bus would return him to his home where a sitter waited. The accompanying photograph is of a grinning Roger sitting on top of the patio table, while I smiled from the bench beside him. There was no need to mention that the five-year-old was a little brown boy. A photograph is worth a hundred words. His presence was no longer a total abnormality—to the reporter or to the local paper.

After the story appeared in the local paper, I received a telephone call. The caller was a woman of color and lived in Skokie. She suggested that we meet and introduce our sons, who were the same age. She was an editor at a major textbook and children's book publishing house. Her husband was a US postal employee. Her only child was a potential athlete, with enough energy for three boys his age. We took our sons to sporting events and to the traditional Christmas ballet, "The Nutcracker," in Chicago. He attended a Catholic school in the next town. I have been asked why so many people of color send their children to parochial or private schools when we are middle-income, not wealthy. We do because we hope to find havens that do as little damage as possible to our children because of race. So we become "status inconsistent," similar to, but different from, those who migrated to Evanston from "down south" between the two world wars. We are minimally successful.

Twice I was concerned for the well-being of my youngest son in his new school. During his first year the principal called me for a conference. He looked perturbed and seemed uncomfortable, but got to the point immediately. The physical education teacher wanted Roger tested for Special Education, the class for kids that were unkindly called "retards." The principal described a child in the class with motor-skill problems. I said that five-year-old Roger rode a two-wheeler and did physical activities just as had his brothers. The principal's face relaxed. He said that the other child suggested by the teacher would never be able to perform the physical actions that Roger easily performed.

I wondered about the little girl who may have had normal intelligence, but with a physical problem or an emotional or mental one that had not yet been identified. She may have been clumsy or with delayed muscular coordination. Roger once said that he was fortunate because his mother "had a reputation in the district."

My motherly concern reared a second time when Roger asked why his teacher did not like him. I had noticed a kind of 'removal" by his teacher from an affectionate little boy who

liked pretty ladies. I couldn't tell my child that there are people who just don't know how to treat little brown boys the same way they treat boys and girls who look like themselves. It is not easy to explain stupidity to children. By the end of fourth grade he volunteered, "I love my school." I said, "Remember that, because you may not be able to say the same thing in the future."

My hope for a smooth rite-of-passage for my third male child was dashed at Christmas break during Roger's last year in elementary school, sixth grade. "Why are you hanging around? Why aren't you with your friends?" I asked.

"They're all having sleepovers, and I'm not invited," he said. What had happened between fourth and sixth grades, between ages nine and eleven? Where were the cookie-baking moms from kindergarten and those first years, the families who sat in our back yard, and we in theirs, eating burgers and laughing as we watched our kids play? Sixth grade, eleven years old, was the place and time where the reality of being a black male caught up with the last child that a mother had wanted to "give happy memories."

One of Roger's buddies since kindergarten had a Jewish father and an Italian Catholic mother, an unusual but not unknown type of family. A neighbor watching Roger and his friend together whispered, "You know, he's not being raised Jewish." I always thought of this friend as "David Goldberg, the altar boy." Diversity, religious and racial, was not happily welcomed regardless of desire and actions to overcome.

One Monday morning in June, 1967, my first period students were in their seats. After a weekend of *bar* and *bat mitzvah* celebrations, students were sometimes subdued, tired and sleepy. This morning the room was alive with unusual buzz. The kids talked across aisles and behind them, not at all the scene of the opening lines of "The Night Before Christmas."

"What's going on?" I asked.

Heads turned in my direction. Pre-pubescent voices nearly shouted, in unison, "We're going to give it back." I knew that something was happening in the Middle East. A war between Israel and its surrounding nations, Jordan, Egypt, and other names from history and geography classes, was not front and center in my thoughts.

I grasped the basis of the agitation in the room. I asked, "In case of war between Israel and the US, for which would you fight?" The children answered in concert, "Israel."

Their answer, one I would not have gotten in a Chinatown classroom where most of the students' parents supported Taiwan, was not unexpected in my Skokie neighborhood. That evening I wrote:

The Big Parade

She was captured
to be bride, by strangers
from the other side of the sacred mountain.
Too soon, memories faded,
of Mother, Father and clan
who migrated on glacial lakes.

Eons gone, laughing boys in loose jeans,
girls too young for bras,
re-create an ancient battle
in a "homeland" they've never seen.
They are asked, "In the event of war
between this place and that
for which would you fight?"

Eyes wide, their lips tight,
with a single voice the children cry,
"That place."

Fright harbors in hyphenated names;
isolation is primal hubris!
Ages pass, the beat remains.
What flag will wave,
what anthem blare,
what bands, what drums?
Will new eyes forget, forgive,
Or always remember?

One morning the sewing and art teacher, a friend, drove into the faculty parking lot a few minutes later than usual. School buses were unloading. One of our junior high students said, loudly enough for her to hear, "I didn't know she had a Mercedes-Benz." The teacher said, "There are two more in the garage at home."

Her experience demonstrates a distressing attitude I noticed. Teachers are often regarded as peons, especially elementary school teachers. They are expected to provide the learning for children to become doctors, lawyers, corporate and community leaders, but teachers, themselves, have low value, and are often perceived to be servants.

My friend's late arrival brought to mind a similar encounter before our move to Skokie, on a day I needed to rush to an appointment on a school day. Inhumane humanity is not localized. Teachers always brought up the rear of the day's schedule; classrooms had to be prepped for next morning, papers gathered to take home and grade, telephone calls made to parents, and principal's instructions completed. I crossed the street to my car. Passing eighth graders saw me. One said, "I didn't know she had a car." The perception was that a teacher should not be able to afford a car. The Chicago Transit Authority was our just desserts. The students lived in a low-rent housing project on State Street. Neither the community's Chinese nor Latino adults portrayed a similar attitude. Teachers were respected. What is valued by society determines how we treat people, and how we value ourselves and our aspirations.

Decades feel as if they move slowly until they have passed. Did I learn anything worth remembering during the seemingly random events of the steady chronology of years and decades? That is what I am exploring in this memory venture. The process begins

at birth and ends at death. Pausing to roll the record back, stop, contemplate, then roll forward again is a privilege, totally individual and personal. What I record is not the memories of family and cohorts of the same time. "Getting inside heads" is a skill I have not learned. The Skokie period gives me opportunity to think of the same life differently than if we had remained in Chicago, or moved to Zambia, as I once tried to convince Freddie that we should do.

There is a difference between a neighborhood and a community. A neighborhood is physical; we can walk through the neighborhood. We may call our physical neighborhood our community; there are intangible features for a community. The word derives from the idea of the common, a place where residents gathered for tribal/communal business. The links and connections are often grander than neighborhood. We lived in a neighborhood of physical proximity with other children, adults, families, and businesses. Roger went to school in what the village had established as a school district, a neighborhood within Skokie, "The World's Largest Village." His elementary school was not, officially, in his neighborhood. When the sleepovers began, neither community nor neighborhood was an appropriate designation. Psychological relationship is the hallmark of community.

A neighborhood can exist without a sense of community. A community can exist with and without a physical neighborhood. I thought of my work environment—Old Orchard Junior High School—as a community. When the students made the distinction between the career of a teacher and her luxury car, dissonance became descriptive. She was not a neighbor, nor a member of a community. She was an outsider.

Chapter Six—Branching

My fifth year at Old Orchard Junior High, 1969, the local buzz was of a soon-to-be-built "community college." I was familiar with junior colleges, the first two years of post-secondary education; my grandfather had been president of a Presbyterian Church-related junior college. The use of "community" to describe the first two years of higher education was new to me.

Statewide studies had shown that a substantial percentage of Illinois' higher education students dropped out before graduating, some after only one year. The state legislature decided that it would build a network of colleges around the state that would offer college courses for years one and two. The colleges would be called "community" and would have no student housing. They were really commuter colleges. The plan would save money and provide the beginning for those who would later complete a four-year curriculum. Also new to me was an emphasis on vocational training in locations where business and industry were likely to hire the graduates. Skokie was strategically located mid-way in one of the designated areas. I had not thought of college as training for jobs other than the traditional liberal arts curriculum that led to work in teaching and graduate and professional schools.

Looking back, those first years appear to have rushed by. In real time there was no sense of rush or slow motion. Ric graduated from high school. Phil was nearly through, and Roger was in first grade. My first students at the junior high from 1964 were now seniors at Niles North High School. A number were aware, social-activist youths. About seven former students came to our house. They wanted to circulate a petition with my name to be a candidate for the Board of Trustees for the new college. "We think you should be there," they said. "We'll do the work. You won't have to do anything."

What motivated those young idealists who, before our family, had seen Negroes only on TV or in movies as servants, or in newspapers being held for criminal actions? Dr. Runner's caution that we would do our children a disservice by moving them to "foreign" territory was not at a conscious level for them. A person can deal with a blister rubbed by a shoe by removing the shoe. Leave the shoe on and the blister becomes infected.

I agreed to let them circulate the petition, having no expectation, thinking that nothing would come of the effort. I admired the students' interest in their community, education, and politics. They garnered enough signatures to get my name on the slate. I was called before the caucus, interviewed, and deemed qualified. Across the two-township area more than forty citizens filed. The caucus decided that because only seven would constitute the full board, they would hold neighborhood presentations, hold their own voting, and support only seven of the nine they had qualified. Because of the semi-official status of the community caucus they were certain that their seven would win all the board positions.

The candidates who passed muster by the caucus were invited to speak to public meetings to address their reasons and qualifications for wanting to be on the Board of Trustees. One forum was held in our neighborhood, at Devonshire School. A resident confronted me. His face was not friendly when he said, "You took your sons out of the Skokie schools."

"Yes, they were not happy," I said, confused as to what a family choice had to do with the meeting. I forgot to say that our sons had completed the local elementary and junior high schools. I had given no thought to a community reaction to our individual family's choices. I realized that our personal choice had been perceived as rejection of schools of which the community was very proud. The turmoil in our household did not register for us as anything more than the protection and support of our children. The absence of thought as to the effect of the migration on our children was thrown at us now, five years after our decision to move to Skokie.

The final community hearing before the election was in the western end of the new college district. I stared into a crowd of middle-European immigrant descendants. Stony visages, arms crossed, backs rigid against their seats, a wall of disbelief, critique before fact, and ill ease were not my imagination. The ten caucus-approved candidates spoke. The community voted. One man and two women received the fewest votes and would not have caucus sanction.

A few weeks before the election, one of the caucus candidates was legally indicted for a business-related problem. He was removed from the slate and one from the bottom three was chosen to replace him. The person who was chosen to fill the vacancy was an occasional substitute teacher in the junior high school district. We met in the hall. She said, "Why don't you apply to teach at the college. We need people like you."

Twelve and thirteen-year-old children, no matter how intelligent, were becoming predictable. They were still interesting, yes, but not exciting. I like new projects. New ideas and possibilities are stimulating. At a spring curriculum-planning meeting at the junior high, I stifled a yawn. If fine-tuning was going to be all that I did for the rest of my career, I didn't think it would be satisfying. I was earning decent money in a system with merit pay. Freddie and I had a good life. We could afford what we needed, and some of what we wanted. Weighing what if and why not, I applied to teach at the new community college. A quarter loss in salary, staff support, and a small but relevant influence as an "Instructional Team Coordinator" was a lesser priority than the events in the nation that could be probed in college history and sociology. Similar to having applied to teach in Skokie in 1964, my thinking was, if they don't want me, there's no problem.

Racial bias is like the backside of one's hand in the USA, because of its history of chattel slavery and "Jim Crow" discrimination. Gender bias, a longer, more effective, and more insidious discrimination, came to my view later than the color bar. I had not consciously known gender discrimination until I was in graduate school. Outside the office of my research professor, three "A" grades topped the posted list. The first "B" was mine. I protested to the professor, asking who earned the top grades. He told me. I agreed that the top two were "A" students, but not number three. I said, "Oh no, Mr.__ showed me a paper he wrote. It was not well done. His contribution to class discussion was mediocre. Mr.___ and Mr.__ deserved their 'A,' but not Mr.___." The professor turned to a nearby colleague, "Tell this young lady that a 'B' is a good grade in graduate school."

"I do not work for 'Bs,' and I did not earn a 'B,'" I answered. There was no racial bias in this conversation. He and I were both Negroes. Negro and Colored are identities I learned early on, and with which I am comfortable. Black and African American are latecomers to my lexicon.

That encounter, two decades earlier than the racial questioning, supported my reaction and response during the interview for a teaching position at the community college. My only post-secondary teaching had been a semester as a teaching assistant for the head of the university Sociology Department during work for a Master of Science degree at South Carolina State University.

The Dean of Instruction for the college interviewed me. At the end of the interview he stood, leaned over the coffee table, and snuffed out his cigarette in an ashtray. Contemplating the smoldering cigarette, he said, "I want you to know that if I hire you, I won't be hiring a house-nigger."

I stood, and said without hesitancy, "I want you to know that if you hire me, you won't be getting a house-nigger." If he was trying to gauge how I would fare under pressure, he found out. He hired me.

The United States of America is called, by scholars, an experiment in history. The community college that hired me was an experiment in education. It opened in Morton Grove, the town west of Skokie, where the woman with her dog had been spooked on the Sunday Freddie and I went inside a house we were not going to buy. Classes began in September 1970, in the abandoned facilities of Cook Electric Company. Given a tour by an administrator, we newly- hired academics were told that this was where the Norden Bomb Sight was manufactured for use during WWII. The map-room where General Joseph W. Stillwell planned strategy was a tiny alcove with slanted wooden strips on the walls, to hold maps. Hiroshima and Nagasaki came to mind as we left the once-secret room.

The latest war was over—or was it? The Vietnam incursion had stirred controversy and conflict. I have the emotion of a lifetime that we live in one continuous war: WWII-Korea-Vietnam-The Cold War-Iraq I-II-Afghanistan… War is not simply warriors, guns, and bullets. Every "war" seems a skirmish of episodic battles, linked in one extended conflict that increases and decreases on an unknowable but perpetual schedule. Life is war.

Teaching at a college would be an opportunity to engage students in adult ideas, with information of substance. "The life of the mind," indeed. I would not need to be as circumspect as with pre-teens. There were no parents before whom professors must carefully tread, I thought.

At Oakton Community College the administrative and curriculum structure was "the Cluster." The philosophy was similar to the one in District 68 that I had embraced and in which I was able to function without feeling constricted. Faculty was not divided into departments and divisions, in the academic tradition. The interdisciplinary, free atmosphere was exciting. In sending our boys to private schools we hoped and were pleased that they engaged in a variety of progressive learning activities. To work in a related environment was a blessing.

Core courses were organized in a structure that supported the philosophy of the institution: the Student Development Model. The Dean said that he wanted me to design a course that used the social sciences to inform students, not merely standard introductions to the subjects. The theory was that many graduates might have no further involvement with college after two years at OCC, so we would give them a framework and basic knowledge that could serve them for their lifetime. This philosophy, structure and implementation by the unique founding president forced faculty to work harder, differently, and, for many, with greater enthusiasm. We were part of something grand and good. A joke arose that a student could

remain at OCC for ten years and graduate with a 4.0, because students could drop classes and retake them until they passed—meaning, we hoped, they had learned.

I learn better and function more productively when I am in an open, encouraging environment. It is possible that this could be the same for other people. Threat of punishment has been ground into most of us so deeply that many do not know how it feels to be free. We who liked and believed in the new attitude and focus were not prepared for the backlash from a punitive tradition that was unhappy with a freeing difference. "Why didn't we do it like Northwestern?" more than a few complained.

I would say, "Because we do it better than Northwestern." Some people in the community said we were coddling students, being "easy graders." OCC offered students, faculty and staff a chance to *be*, something many may never have had before or since. Because of the downturn in the economy in the early 1970s, scores of recent doctoral graduates were seeking work. Oakton soon had the largest complement of community college faculty with earned doctorates in the system.

Many students were soon pleased with the new approach to them and to learning when they saw that they had a stake in their own learning, especially creative students. For others, trust in a new process was not easy to develop. A dozen years of the opposite was difficult to overcome. I thought of their pre-college schools as having prepared the top ten percent of students to continue successfully as top students, the National Merit Finalists, while self-esteem for the lowest ten percent, gauged by test scores, was enhanced. I guessed that eighty percent washed along like flotsam and jetsam, barely noticed if they were no trouble.

A student whose bedroom was lined with an eclectic array of books and who had an interest in musical composition became an unforgettable favorite. He enrolled in one of the college's multi-discipline programs, "The Green Turnip Survival Seminar." He was given the opportunity to write a prose poem, compose the music for his garage band, teach his band, reserve the auditorium, mount the publicity, and present his cantata to an audience. The professors were from Philosophy, American Studies, Social-Science/History, and Psychology. We worked cooperatively doing what I liked to say was "real education."

The public school in Chinatown-Chicago had had an innovative principal. Some of the new things he tried worked well; some were not successful. All were needed efforts. I read everything that came my way and met fascinating people. While I was at the junior high, it had begun a change-oriented, progressive model of teaching and learning. There I was exposed to a non-traditional, researched theory and practice that was good for students and education. Thereafter this was a latent interest waiting to emerge whenever a door opened, and I was lucky. Progressive parents in Old Orchard Junior High's community had wanted the newest and best for their children. District 68 took part in an experiment with The University of Chicago. The reward for faculty who were curious leaders was a summer workshop in small group development under the auspices of National Training Labs. This future-oriented experience led to experiences that I continued to pursue.

An outsider is less outside when the environment is supportive. I hoped that my children were receiving as stimulating an education, but I only had control in my little world. On occasion I have wished I could have taken my three to the other side of a mountain, away from hostile, limiting influences. Ah, we do dream.

At the college, a large contingency of my Cluster mates were outsiders. The move to Skokie appeared to have been serendipitous: "things experienced by accident or happenstance, not hoped or planned." Like a childhood game of "Mother, may I," forward movement demanded payment, after a secret password.

The college students were, ostensibly, more of the Skokie community we were learning about, just from a wider geographic area. I thought the larger district, four townships instead of two, to be a good mix. It added diversity to the Jewish, eastern, slightly more affluent; and the Christian, less affluent, western, sides of the district. The first day of our course, "The Individual in Modern Society," my co-professor, a political scientist, suggested that he and I wait for the students to get into the room before we did. We loitered around a corner where students would not see us. We could see students checking schedules against the posted room number, tentatively going inside, and finding seats. We entered the room side by side. Eyes turned to a sight not before seen by these suburbanites, a brown—they would say "black"—woman and a white man together, smiling. Creativity among the faculty stimulated positive energy for others.

My colleague and I often showed documentaries as well as what text and non-text curricula we could find. After a film, he asked the class, "What do you think of what we've just seen?" The room was silent. We waited, and after a long pause, turned to one another, shrugged, and walked out of the room. A minute or two later, we returned. Not a student had moved. I said, "You saw and heard a film that relates to what you are studying. What do you think about what you saw compared with what we're reading and talking about in the class?"

He added, "Why do you think we used class time to show it to you? What did it say to you? Does anything you saw mean anything in the context of what we're reading? If you have nothing to say, we don't either." He and I began to gather our belongings to leave the class. Slowly, a conversation began. We encouraged students to seek relationships between themselves and society outside of the classroom, between causes and effects, reactions and responses. Considering the modest diversity in the suburbs, a few students were from Chicago, a few were foreign-born, and few had traveled beyond their local towns. We encouraged them to think and speak, to pull from experiences they had, but had not thought were of individual and social importance. Our observations were that our students were not accustomed to being involved in their own learning. I said, "Take off your mask. You're welcome to be here."

The students were generally middle middle class, often first generation beyond working class. Former junior high students began to appear, some for summer school classes after a year "downstate" at one of the universities, for an easy grade, they thought. This was the reputation of community colleges. They were disappointed.

> *The incontrovertible fact of being Negro, female, as well as educator, conditioned and guided how I thought, felt, and acted. Like an ancient tree, those roots are too deep to be seen, and they keep the tree from toppling. Marriage and family are intimate extensions that envelop more than the self. I grew into awareness of the lessons my elders and age-cohorts lived, and consciously and unconsciously taught: resolve, commitment, drive, and action. An outsider in Skokie was an obvious prod, not unlike the*

prods my maternal grandfather may have used when he drove cattle northward of Texas late in the 19th century.

The adults in our outsider transplantation were faring well. Freddie had been promoted to Senior Engineer. The grown-up members of the family could be pleased with our accomplishments in The World's Largest Village. Were we "over the hump?" These were words I had heard my father say to my mother. I was about eight, when they came home from the office one Saturday night. Counting the day's receipts, I heard him say, "Babe, our first hundred-dollar day. We're over the hump." In Skokie I might have asked, "Will we ever be over the hump?"

Ric and Phil seemed revived, enjoying and having success in their new school. Friends and enemies are the stuff of living. The new kid is always an outsider, until the barriers of suspicion loosen. Our sons were born into and had grown naturally integrated, with minimal racial fear and antagonism. The world had seemed to be one of normal growing pains. We merely had to do our part—work hard, love and provide for our family—and be productive, contributing voyagers in the world.

Ric had attended The Harvard School for Boys before we moved to Skokie. This was an elite school for wealthy families in Kenwood and Hyde Park, once wealthy towns near Chicago. As the city grew from its 19th century origin, outlying towns were absorbed but retained their names, becoming Chicago neighborhoods. Harvard was the school in old Kenwood from which Leopold and Loeb kidnapped their neighbor Bobby Franks, in 1924. This news resulted in one of the most publicized criminal cases in American jurisprudence. Clarence Darrow, the great American barrister, saved the privileged young men from the death penalty.

By 1960, much of the traditional Chicago wealth had moved to the northern suburbs like Glencoe, Wilmette, Glenview, Winnetka, Highland Park, and Deerfield. Enrollment plummeted at The Harvard School. The owners of the integrated St. George School bought The Harvard, renaming it, The Harvard-St. George School. In sixth grade, Frederic had reported for the first time being bumped on the stairways, in the halls, and hearing racial epithets in the building and outside. His willingness to move to Skokie may have been influenced by his new treatment. Similar behavior continued at North Shore Country Day School, where Ric and Phil were the first Negro students in the middle and upper schools. Ric said that his books were thrown from his desk onto the floor.

But most students and families were welcoming. We were invited to social gatherings. A classmate's father gave Ric a key to his locker at the country club. It would not be the child of this parent who would throw his classmate's books on the floor. Or would it?

Children learn, early, how to play the game of hide and seek—the double-face. Someone said that children are naturally cruel. Often, the presumed cruelty is testing, the same way that animal cubs test in the pack. When it escalates it becomes bullying.

Phillip's artistic interest and eye developed in high school. One of the music faculty members at OOJH staged a "Multi-Media Happening." He had seen Phil's photography, and asked Phil to photograph the show. From a seat in the bleachers I was proud as my son slithered across the gym floor and climbed the bleachers to photograph the action from all angles. Phil was encouraged by his art teacher at NSCD to follow his artistic interest. His

portfolio to college included the slides of the "Multi-Media Happening." The show was an opportunity to build on the potential for the artist that he became.

Introspective Phil was a child who pondered before he spoke. I confronted him for behavior I did not approve. He said, "Mom, you and Dad are not the only influences on us." What a lesson, and a fear, for parents.

> *Memory has an agenda for what is significant, good, and not so good. What effects were building for our children? When pioneers to the Western Hemisphere crossed the Atlantic Ocean, drove wagon trains, rode horses, donkeys, and mules, and trudged on foot across the continent, children accompanied the family. Whether one is Abraham Lincoln or Jesse James, the interface of inheritance and experience forms and shapes individual identity. How the memory works as interpreter of events is beyond knowing. If only we could really know the thoughts of others, whether children or grown-ups.*

North Shore Country Day School required that seniors complete an independent study, called the "May Project." Graduating seniors were allowed to follow their interest for a month, off campus. They developed an academic and a personal journal. Frederic's interest was to become a psychiatrist. He asked to go to South Carolina for his month of independent study. He was taken to the County Memorial Hospital where his grandfather and great-uncle Morris were on staff. Given a badge, "Medical Student," and assigned to hematology, he said, "I had the run of the hospital." His teacher at NSCD was impressed with his journals, writing in summation, "He definitely should follow a career in science." Hanging out with interns, residents and surgeons in the doctors' lounge, Ric had mixed feelings about his experience. He said that the physicians were excellent technicians, but they were not scholars. I did not know to say that, after what goes on inside a hospital, a surgeon may need relief with the ordinary, even the crass and gross. Following a quintuple by-pass, who wants to discuss Nietzsche, Kierkegaard or Kant?

> *Four generations passed on to us their experiences under legal segregation. My generation lived in a segregated world physically separated from racial adversaries, except for the epithets thrown across close, impenetrable barriers. Our "advice" was inherited and learned. The Daddy and Mommy of the 1960s and 70s were unfamiliar and unknowing in the supposedly integrated world of our children. Our children were forced to devise coping methods and skills that may or may not work for them. On the pioneers' wagon trains, the survival rate was not high.*
>
> *In "our set," my father's term and label for the social class with which he identified, children were shielded from "slings and*

arrows" when that could be done. We modern-day pioneers cast our progeny before the "slings and arrows" sans effective armor and weapons. It was up to the kids to make it or break it, sink or swim.

Before we realized it, our "big boys" were in college, and Roger graduated from Stenson, the elementary school he loved.

A Friday night activity among a small group of Oakton faculty was watching movies from a flickering 16mm projector. We brought children and snacks. The children stretched, chins in hands, below black and white images of Ingmar Bergman's "The Seventh Seal" and French films with English subtitles. Roger called those casual get-together evenings, "film festivals." The children chased one another up and down the halls. There were no fights.

Kids' identities relate to their responses to family experience, and as Phillip knew, with multiple experiences. Roger's friend, David, the altar boy, was visiting after school. I needed to go back to the campus, so I took them with me. While I searched for what I needed, Roger showed David around, "My college," he proudly said. I watched him project an aura of ownership as he introduced his friend to the buildings, telling him what went on here and there.

I think of my fiction writing as "faction." That's what Alex Haley called his book, Roots. I read a first draft of a scene from my first fiction effort to a childhood friend. I would have sworn that what I wrote and read was just like it happened. My best buddy from age six, said, "But that's not the way it happened." My buddy, who was as close as the brother I did not have, made clear to me what I had not known before, that no two people see anything from the identical vantage. What he remembered and what I remembered were two stories, not one. If another character in that scene could pop into the room there would be a third "way it happened." No doubt the puppy in the scene would have had a point of view. Our move to Skokie has no single memoir.

Chapter Seven—The Beat Goes On

Our Jewish neighbors generously shared their culture. They were eager to welcome and show us what they valued. I wanted to return the favor. Four generations into traceable family, my generation was middle-American mainstream Christian Protestant. Ho hum. Christmas was our time for the sharing of stories. One story, recounted with jokes and laughter, was of the grandfather who would travel wherever it was needed, up to a hundred miles, to purchase fresh oysters for Christmas morning. This gave family gatherings a feeling of continuity, coast to coast, for two additional generations, knowing that no matter where they were, descendants of Calvin Monroe (1859–1929) and Clarkie Hannah Clinkscales Young (1869–1918) and their siblings were sitting down to an artery-clogging breakfast that began with fresh oyster stew.

The recipe follows a routine of sautéing the shucked oysters in a saucepan with half an inch of melted butter, pouring cream, whole milk, the oyster liquid, and seasonings—lots of pepper— into the pot. Served with Oyster Crackers, this was the first course of a breakfast that was followed by hot grits, hot biscuits, toast, homemade fruit preserves, bacon, sausage, ham, and eggs, with the ever-present butter dish. The creamy oyster stew was liberally splashed with the ubiquitous Tabasco sauce, for those old enough to handle it. Breakfast would be continuously washed down with gulps of hot coffee into which had been stirred spoonfuls of sugar and splashes of cream, and, for the children, freshly-squeezed orange juice and cold milk.

I did not want to invite my neighbors to breakfast, so I dredged up a southern custom from a classmate's family with whom I had once spent New Year's Day. The menu was any kind of boiled greens that were in season: turnip, mustard, kale, or collards. Greens were eaten to bring the good luck of money in "greenbacks" in the new year. Black-eyed peas were boiled with cured pork to assure lots of "coin-money" during the new year. The table would be laden with the greens and peas, a covered tureen of spaghetti and meatballs, macaroni and cheese, platters of roasted pork and ham, fried chicken, stacks of corn bread, and a crystal bowl of tossed green salad. The dressings were only three: mayonnaise, French, and Thousand Island. On a sideboard or extra table, fruit pies and layer cakes waited, although the well-fed guests might need more than an hour to complete the meal. Pitchers of iced tea were abundant. I do not know how Italian pasta found its way to the Piedmont foothills of South Carolina.

An important dish for the celebration that I could never eat was chittlings, or pig "innards." Mother would not allow the smell in our house. Mother was Louisiana-Texan. Beef was the sacred meat in that part of the world. Daddy, South Carolina born and bred, liked chittlings and several times each winter would bring home a covered dish that a patient had cooked for him. I called a friend whose family had migrated to Chicago from the south. "Frances, do you know how to cook chittlings?" I asked.

Frances Hines Hayes' mother was a childhood schoolmate of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s mother, Alberta. When the elder Mrs. King came to Chicago, she stayed with the Hines family. No impersonal hotels for those who would not have found accommodations at the prestigious Palmer House a few years earlier. Cozy homes were available to visitors, and hosts would be insulted if their hospitality was not accepted.

Frances told me on the telephone how to clean chittlings. She said to mask the odor I had to put slices of bread on a top burner and let each piece toast while the chittlings cooked "to fork tender." Chittlings were boiled with the southern seasonings of salt, black pepper, and the southern "holy trinity:" onion, celery and chopped green pepper. Despite the desensitizing effort, the pale, oddly-shaped critters smelled less than appetizing. I aired the house before guests came, and put the burned toast in the garbage outside. Next-door neighbors, the Cohns and son Robert, arrived first, a direct path from their back door to ours. Robert, a fastidious young man, said, "Why, nothing smells offensive. So often, ethnic food smells offensive."

Our pseudo-southern New Year's Day dinner went off with no disasters. I never repeated it. I have yet to taste a chittling, nor do I think I ever will. The official spelling of the meat is "chitterlings." No one I know pronounces the second syllable. I would not tell Robert, or anyone, that I had never, would never, eat *gefilte* fish. Why not? Somewhere, I heard that *gefilte* fish, like chitterlings and "Philadelphia scrapple," were "unclean," meaning the parts of the creatures from which they were prepared do not smell good and only indoctrinated aficionados eat the delicacies. Prejudice, judging before evidence, abounds with food, people, and places. Chopped liver I liked, and Reuben sandwiches, but not "knoodle pie."

> *The Fortunes gave the appearance of normalcy, adjustment, and assimilation, nothing out of the ordinary. In some ways this was true. "What a lovely family," we were told. A life of total peace and calm is a fairy tale. One person can ignore or forget—even forgive. For another, the occasion is a burr under the saddle that throws the rider as surely as a rodeo bronco. What reverberates and remains in the psyche is outside my awareness. Is residue washed away in the next rain, or does it harden to concrete?*

Teachers often have one absolutely adorable kid whose memory makes them chuckle years after he was passed along and graduated. The favored student is, sometimes, everything good except an "A" scholar. One of the cutest boys at the junior high had a dimple in his chin, dark, curly hair, and eyebrows that promised to be wild and unkempt when he became elderly. The memorable student was not a member of my Oracle team. His best friend was in one of my morning classes. The friend would stop to say "Hi," and the two would make a mad dash to their next class.

Six years later, the dimpled face appeared in a class at the college. I did not ask students to buy textbooks. The point of view of a single textbook does not foster the inquisitive attitude that I encouraged. Two or more authors in several paperbacks were not as forbidding for students who had not been National Merit Finalists in high school. "Dimple" bragged to his classmates that he had gotten through high school without ever reading a book.

We enrolled a large group of students that we called "mothers returning to college." These were women who had finished high school and maybe had begun college. As babies came, they dropped out. Adorable "Dimple" became the protégé of the mothers in his class. They encouraged him when he doubted that he could do the work required. At the end of the semester, he innocently and proudly announced, "This is the only teacher I ever read a book for, all the way through."

A few years later, I was invited to the wedding of an up-and-coming businessman. I walked across freshly-mowed country club grass for the ceremony. Someone grabbed and hugged me, and guests, musicians and caterers heard a booming voice saying, "This is the only teacher I ever read a whole book for." I don't remember the title of the book. I do not think "Dimple" did either.

My world shifted a bit when a telephone call brought attention to the interest that is my second vocation, writing. A woman's voice said, "You know my son. I'm starting a newspaper and I heard you like to write. I want you to write a column for me." The "like to write" that Freda Aron mentioned was my penchant for dashing off letters about a social ill to newspapers and magazines. I learned that Freda's son was "Dimple."

Students and friends regularly said, "You ought to write." I told stories to flesh out the matter-of-fact textbook information, like my favorite teachers had done. When Miss Skelton or Mr. Stewart were "personal," what they taught came alive and we remembered. I shared the exploits of family, friends, and life in the south. In the West African tradition there was a tribal elder, the *griot*. It is the task of the *griot* to learn, preserve, and tell the stories of the ancestors. I named myself "a writing *griot*," and took on the role of creative historian with the written word.

> *My father's cousin was the first Negro playwright to have a play on Broadway. Hughes Allison's "The Trial of Dr. Beck," was staged in 1937. Practically everyone in the family had and has an affinity for the written expression.*

I had an insatiable appetite to share in words, whether on paper or in person. The first of my missives to be published was in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The Civil Rights Movement was incipient. A reader had written that if Negroes were not happy in the USA, "Why don't they go back where they came from?" My reply said that Negroes were not newcomers to the US, that this is our home; Africans have been in this hemisphere since an African, Estevanica, explored Florida with Cabeza de Vaca fifteen years before de Soto, from 1527 to 1535 (*Harvest of Empire, A History of Latinos in America*, Juan Gonzalez), if not earlier. Of course, anthropologists have found that the original home of the species, *homo sapiens sapiens*, is Africa. Unlike recent immigrants through Ellis Island, our ancestors met the ships, and some of our ancestors were on the island when it was Lenape Algonquin territory.

Sporadically, my letters would be published in one or the other of the Chicago newspapers. Each letter was to set the record straight. I discovered that if I wrote factual, brief, grammatical notes that were not polemical, they were published. If I yelled—was "too emotional"—the letter was never seen. My five minutes of fame were letters in *Life* magazine and on "60 Minutes." No one had offered me a column, until Freda Aron.

Freda said, "You'll have to have a byline."

"What's a byline?" I asked.

"A name for your column that's used every time," she said.

I hung up the phone. A student had come to drop off an assignment. I told him of the call and request. "I don't know what name to call the column," I said.

The student said, “You’re pretty smart, and you teach a lot of dumb people, why you don’t call it “‘Smarts and Dumbs?’” We settled on “Smarts and Dums.” I asked Freda what I should write. She said, “Whatever interests you.” I learned to dash off a 700-800 word piece in half an hour, plus editing time.

Freda is from Brooklyn. One never says, “was from Brooklyn.” Brooklynites say, “I am from Brooklyn.” They admit to having left, but only temporarily. Many neighbors were transplants from Brooklyn or the Bronx. Freda loved to write. She was a “stringer,” writing articles that newspapers would, occasionally, buy for a few dollars. Freda knew how to put a paper together, and she had friends who knew the details and technology. An impromptu, volunteer staff gathered at Freda’s apartment on Niles Center Road once a month to “put the paper to bed” on her dining room table and kitchen counter. When the papers were bundles on her hall floor, they were taken to shops and restaurants in our area. Freda mailed bundles to friends and relatives from California to New York. *Serving Human Equality—SHE* was brash, with a progressive, feminist focus. Effervescent Freda attracted male and female writers. Artistically attractive, the paper reached an intelligent readership.

SHE gained readers. Freda found more than enough good writers nearby. Freda published for three years before the reality of the fiscal world went “BOO.” She and I became tight friends. She and her husband, Richard, lived not too far from our house. He, a physician, and she, a nurse, planned to travel and serve as volunteer medics when he retired. Richard died before they could exercise their dream. Committed to fulfilling the dream, Freda wanted to join the Peace Corps. Her attentive sons said no, so Freda joined Vista Volunteers, went to Utah, and worked as a nurse on a Ute Reservation. The end of her contract brought her back to Illinois.

Boredom, again, rang her bell. Freda volunteered and moved to Sitka, Alaska where she headed a battered women’s center. A bout of ill health, and she was back in Illinois. At age 95, Freda flew “home” to Alaska where she wrote a column for the local newspaper and was disk jockey for a weekly radio program. Sitka heard music and reminiscences on the heyday of Jazz in New York City, in Freda’s instantly-recognizable accent. She eventually had to return to the “lower forty-eight” where she bossed the staff at her son’s nursing home until she decided to leave, permanently, in 2013.

This lady was a mentor on how to live without giving in to the imposed limitations of gender, age, and physical vicissitudes. I dedicated my first publication to Freda, a poetry chapbook, *Dancing as Fast as We Can* and *Inner Scan*.

My world shifted again with the publication of my first novel in 2002. Being genuine has results. A number of former students found me. The best-laid plans oft go astray. It is the perception of the other that determines the result.

> *Memory runs both ways. I’ve tried to find students from the years in Chinatown. Females change their names with marriage, and that makes them impossible to locate. Where are you, Kathryn and Christine Moy?*

Assessments and judgments fall into the metaphysical or the symbolic. I think of stories as the content of philosophy. My writing trigger is wondering on the meanings inside thoughts

and actions. To ignore how I view the ties, linkages, connections between the mundane and the impossible, real and ideal, material and imaginative, denies a strong pull. When I convinced Freddie that a venture I wanted to make was educational and important to my job, he was agreeable. He could "take it on the income tax." He did not want to travel. Africa, China, Europe, and South America were travel/study, therefore educational expenses.

> *In a workshop, the kind of thing I attended as often as I could, the leader said that humans are on earth by choice, that before we are born we choose a life path, including a family. Our purpose and task are to navigate our choices. How well we navigate is said to be evidence of soul progression: to escape or to repeat the lesson. This may be pure fantasy, but for me, it makes sense of explanations I have heard. The Ibo of Nigeria speak of ogbanje (The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals, Luisah Teish, Jambalaya Press) who repeat life on earth until they earn a respectable death-release. Greek pre-history has the Sisyphean task of continuous advance and retreat, or the completion of Herculean challenges to earn a return home. A lot of energy is given to solve the riddle of the meaning of life. Some pray; I investigate. Then I wonder at the choices I made and participated in for life and family.*

Roger had his day of being accused of stealing his bicycle, as had his big brothers. He was in junior high, riding to Evanston to visit his friend, Abel Smith, three miles down Church Street across the canal and up the hill to Asbury Street. The Smith family had bought a house at the breakthrough line of the once-upon-a-time Evanston black/white divide. Abel and Roger were friends since birth, and later were Best Man at one another's weddings. Roger noticed that he had a flat tire. He decided not to turn around and come home. He pushed his bike toward Abel's where he could fill the tire with air. A Skokie policeman stopped him just short of the dividing line at McCormick Blvd. and the canal. He accused Roger of stealing the bike. I have an odd perception that trained observers, like policemen, ought to be able to discern what constitutes a threat and what does not. Our children were well-groomed and well-dressed. A white child or adult similarly dressed would not be suspect; he would be presumed to be "safe." The Ted Bundys of the world are deceptive, not obvious.

At the junior high, a new boy had moved into the neighborhood and the seventh grade. Ted and Roger often walked home together. Ted would stop in our kitchen, sniffing the cooking odor. He would come to the stove, lift up a pot lid, and ask, "What you cooking, Mrs. Fortune? Smells good."

I liked the spontaneous boy. After a number of "stop-bys," Ted's mother rang the doorbell. "He acts like this is his home," she said apologetic with a worried frown. I told her I did not mind, that he was welcomed. I spoke with his mother and stepfather at school gatherings. I invited them for a weekend afternoon cook-out. They came. Ted would say that he was coming to visit on Saturday, but he never did.

In Chicago, parents made friends with their children's friends and parents, if they had not known them before. When we moved to Skokie, a classmate from Chicago came to stay overnight with Phillip. His mother said, "I don't worry when he is with you. I know we have the same values." This was a familiar, comfortable feeling.

Ted's birthday was coming. Roger bought an LP that was Ted's favorite. Friday afternoon, I picked up Roger from school. As soon as he closed the car door, he said, "Mom, I want to return that record I bought for Ted." I watched unspoken thoughts play across his somber face. We retrieved the record and took it to the mall for a refund. On our way home, I asked, "What happened?"

"I was at my locker and one of the guys said that he would see me at the party on Tuesday. Ted elbowed him and said, 'Shut up.' I didn't know the party was Tuesday."

Silent for a few seconds, I said, "Ted has disappointed you over and over. I hope you've learned your lesson." The day after the party to which he was not invited, Roger said that Ted tried to talk with him at the lockers, and he had ignored him.

Ted's father was a black American GI. His mother was Asian. Ted was like Tiger Woods, darker in skin color than Roger, with little to note his Asian heritage except a head of straight, shiny, black hair. His mother was remarried to a white American. Did she imagine she could deny the mix of her only child? I never saw Ted again.

Roger said that Abel had "saved his life." I think he meant that the lifeline of having a black friend who did not walk the Skokie tightrope saved his sanity, and perhaps his physical existence. We did not continue the Ted conversation. I feared what I would hear, and my child did not rush to elaborate on his story. Adulthood carries some protection against slings and arrows of unfortunate fate, but the cloak is not a complete armor. My "baby" announced near the end of his first year of junior high, "When can I drop out?" This was a child who two years earlier said, "I love my school."

> *As parent, teacher and human being, I ponder, why do we act as we do? The greatest philosophers, psychologists, biologists, and seers—the wisest ancestors on the planet—ask and explore the same question. Our children were born into privileged lives compared to the overwhelming majority of children on the planet. Little or large, the question has developed no intelligible answer.*

The Civil Rights Movement was no stranger to the suburbs. I joined a few activist groups. A young woman was one of the hardest workers. We had attended a number of meetings together before I said, "I don't want to offend you, but you're the only Asian I've met working in Civil Rights."

She was cranking out fliers on the Xerox machine, and never stopped grabbing at flying sheets of paper. "I decided I had to do something when my brother came home from a company bowling team outing. He told us that the manager, where they stopped at a restaurant for something to eat, did not want him to come into the restaurant with his co-workers. He was called a 'dirty Jap.' His co-workers stuck with him and they all left," she said. "When we were looking for a house, the real estate people would only show us houses in one place, along

Crawford." It was after that night that I noticed several homes along Crawford Avenue were owned by Asian Americans.

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When Freddie and I made our Sunday afternoon "For Sale by Owner" treks, a house on Golf Road in Skokie once caught our attention. The owner was mowing his grass. We stopped, asked if we could see his house. The man invited us in, and showed us through his house. His wife was in the family room, sewing. She spoke to us. Freddie liked the house. He said that it reminded him of my father's house in South Carolina, an open-plan ranch. I was not sure. Golf Road is a busy street, and there was hardly any distance between the narrow front yard and the sidewalk. This would not be safe for the children.

We were getting into the car when the owner said that "another family" lived across the street, and one lived around the corner. "Nice people," he said, "Very nice people." Freddie started the car. His face was taut when he said, "I see what he's trying to do." He had picked up on "the code." We learned that the first house the owner pointed to, across the street, was the home of Leon and Tempie Henderson. The one around the corner belonged to the Jones family. The homeowner had not said "Negro" or "black." Tone and body language, especially facial, are language every bit as much as the spoken word. The game being played could be called, "First, create the ghetto, then call it a ghetto."

Chapter Eight—Why Do Black People See Race in Everything?

What is the meaning of, "the elephant in the room?" How about, "the 800-pound gorilla in the room?" Or, "Why do you climb a mountain?" "Because it is there." Black people are the literal embodiment of these analogies, huge and unseen —ignored, and that darn mountain is not shrouded by clouds. Black people see race in everything because we do not inhabit a universe that allows us to ignore it.

When the Oakton Jazz band played, I was often in the audience. The director and I would chat. I told him how much I liked jazz, and of my experiences in the theater in my youth, when I was a music student at the Juilliard School. I danced in the chorus line in a Billie Holiday engagement, and in film shorts called "Soundies." He said, "Let's have lunch sometime." I grew up in a house filled with jazz and classical music. Enjoying a warm, sunny, spring day and a meal, my lunch companion, whom I thought of as a colleague and a musician in common, said, "You're my first black friend. I never had a black friend before."

I knew the stories and music of early, great, jazz musicians Kid Oliver, Louis and Liz Armstrong, and contemporary ones: Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie "Yardbird" Parker, and Miles Davis. Davis was in wind ensemble and orchestra with me at Juilliard. I played a piano number by Bix Beiderbecke, whom I never met, and was brushed by Gene Krupa, who sat in on gigs at Eddie Condon's Saturday sessions on Fifty-Second Street in Manhattan. Jazz musicians were friends in the most essential way, lovers of the common. These were white men and musicians, and we could communicate. My colleague was a middle-aged jazzman in Chicago in the seventh decade of the 20th century with no black friends. This was unfathomable—except for it being a fact of life.

Experiences imposed on people of African heritage, and increasingly on new immigrants that are no longer European, render people as novelties, the exotic other, and the everlasting outsider. "You've got to be carefully taught."

One time, a brilliant, talented, attractive friend sat in a restaurant slapping his forehead over and over. "Do you think I chose this? What idiot thinks I chose this? Would I choose a life of pain? Am I stupid? I would never choose to be gay. This frigging world defines me, I don't."

Like my homosexual friend, if I had my "druthers," been born on a different planet, solar system, galaxy, or universe, I might be a gardener. Really? Every plant that I try to grow turns brown like the grass and leaves in autumn. I have a brown thumb. The envelope in which I was mailed to planet Earth, family, children, genetic

heritage—color, is my constant companion. It is what most people see and to which they respond —pretending to ignore the elephant-gorilla-mountain. I have no idea how I could not see race everywhere, because the world in which I live uses race as the mountain that is there to be climbed. I would dearly love not to have that definition as the lodestone. I am happy with my inheritance, proud of the struggles overcome—not the ones imposed.

A university administrator from Thailand sat beside me in a graduate class. He began to talk to me about the babies of Thai women and US military men of color. "Some of them even have the curly hair," he said. There was no context for his comment in the class we were taking except my physical appearance. Sometimes thoughts have to burst through in spoken words to relieve the tension inside.

In opposition to the elephant, gorilla and mountain that the "other" tends to ignore—but is confounded by—"blackness" is an identity dumped on us. Even when the skin color of the non-US person is as dark-skinned as, or darker than, the American of color, there seems to be something about Africa and African that calls forth attention and comment. The biological factors of physical attributes are the visual context for people. A natural curiosity toward what is new and different is taken from "interesting" to "dangerous." From there, labels emerge with words that are not to be uttered in polite company, lead even to ostracism, attack, and annihilation. Continual, constant notification that you are outside a person's world view, skewed and different, can only hammer that awareness that elicits the question —and annoyance—of what appears to be an obsession with color/blackness/race, cum African.

I am of the opinion that the opposite is the truth. The awareness of being seen as "the other" evokes the startle reflex, then the expectation of the reflex, until the reflex is bone deep. The response is not a choice. It is a protective cover that rattles when touched like the sound of a sword against the armor of a medieval warrior.

I feel fortunate to have been born black. Few perches offer such an insightful platform to understand the human condition as thoroughly as does wearing the wrapper, the external envelope of, "the other." Does it "take one to know one?" I admire the few who identify, genuinely and unselfconsciously, with the insiders and the outsiders of the world. I have compassion and concern for my compatriots who do not. I have the deepest concern for the power of the determiners of status that ruin the peace.

In European colonial history there was a phenomenon known as "going native." When a European colonial overlord adapted comfortably to another culture, chose a mate, had children in another way of life, the colonial overlord seemed to

become a different person. The changed person was ostracized by his original culture. The individual was no longer "one of us." "Good Lord, he's consorting with the natives," seeps from an old, black and white movie screen. The white (European) man wears a sarong, is barefoot, and hasn't shaved for months. He lies around with natives—called "savages" by the overlords, his former comrades—who wear proper khaki, have groomed hair on only their upper lips, and talk with curved pipes clenched between their teeth.

There are, now, two outsiders. The old outsider is a new insider and a new outsider. The change has meaning in the contemplation of the power of the outsider, denied though it may be.

A number of spiritual and religious traditions teach their advocates the practice of discarding worldly goods. Devotees flagellate themselves to identify with the suffering in the world. Hallucinogenic herbs are ingested, chanting lasts for hours and days; vision quests, meditation, telling the prayer beads—all are attempts to be different, more than ordinary. When the different is met does the exploration continue—going native—or does fear send us back to the known?

Black people see race everywhere because our noses have been pushed into the toxic waste of race from conception. Writing the last words, I heard the phrase, "Dear Reader," a salutation by writers more than a century ago. My mother told of taking me to a department store in Houston when I was an infant. Clerks gathered, she said, and remarked that I was a pretty baby. "Is her daddy Mexican?" one asked. Mother replied, indignantly, "No, her father is Colored, just like I am." Denial is buried deep when an infant is qualified as acceptable if it is one kind of "other," and not another.

Booker T. Washington, a post-Civil War advocate of freedom for the formerly enslaved, said that a man (*sic*) cannot keep another in the ditch unless he keeps his foot on the neck of his captive. Move his foot, and his captive escapes. Keep the foot on the neck and both are trapped. You cannot move as long as you are holding another down.

Dick Clark produced a popular radio program for American youth in the 1950s. "American Bandstand" was a great success. It catapulted Clark to superstar, multi-millionaire status. Don Cornelius, a black promoter of the same music, was able to get his locally produced "Soul Train" to a national network in 1965. Clark's "American Bandstand" featured white bands and dancers. "Soul Train" played Rhythm and Blues and "in-group" black music with teen-aged black dancers.

The difference between the programs was glaring to young viewers, with teasing and laughter by black youth about white dancer's stiff backs. Forty years later the spines of young dancers of any heritage are equally supple. "Cross-over" was coined to explain the merger of both styles. One of my white students listened to a white rock band and to my surprise said, "They have a black drummer." My ear was not as discerning as his, and the time was the 1980s. Again, times may be a-changing.

Racial distinction by dance style is difficult to see in the 21st century; hip-hop is everywhere, even beyond this hemisphere. Can an insider/outsider choose to comprehend the meaning of "I danced seven moons in your shoes?" I want to believe transition is possible. It may be probable. Socrates taught the youth of Athens by questioning. For this, he was forced to drink the poison hemlock by the established authority. The "questor" is an outsider—until s/he can find other outsiders.

When our upwardly mobile, atypical, American family moved to Skokie, in good faith and intended cooperation on terms we thought we understood, we reflected Shakespeare's changeling Puck's view, when Puck said, "What fools these mortals be." Beyond the elephant and the gorilla, is there anything else in the room? Tarzan was a misplaced European in the homeland of elephants and gorillas. We were not allies with Tarzan.

Elephants and gorillas are powerful animals. They survive treacherous adversaries in their natural habitat. Pound for pound, either will be victorious when the odds are even. In Las Vegas, Atlantic City, and Monte Carlo, the house holds the winning advantage. When I try—and the Goddesses know I try— to discuss, clarify, and resolve the limitations and effects that a person of color lives every moment, I may think that the goal is near attainment. If humans choose to work out issues, our Skokie integration was one minuscule component in the equation. Then what?

Neither Freddie, I, nor our children were partners in a conspiracy, grand or petit, to integrate the white world. Rosa Parks' refusal to move from her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama city bus because she was "tired" is metaphorically true. She was, also, trained in non-violent protest strategy and tactics. Secretary of the local NAACP office, she was consciously part of the process toward human rights. The Fortunes' little facet in the momentous struggle was not obvious to us. Ours was one of billions, a particle-wave in the element that drops onto the stone until the stone breaks open. Intuitively, we understood the infinitesimal significance of our move, for family and "the race," combining our effort with proponents of human rights in the elusive dream and work, the personal and political. Our determination was that we were certain in every cell of our bodies that we were qualified, that we stood on the

figurative shoulders of millions who were qualified. Being born into the human race is the only qualification. Isn't that the way it's "s'posed" to be?

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About a decade after I left OOJH for Oakton Community College, the local, suburban newspaper announced that the District School Superintendent who had surprised me with a prepared contract to teach in Skokie was retiring. I went to his retirement party. "Dr. Gibbs," I said, "I want to thank you for hiring me when I was the first African American to apply."

Dr. Gibbs, handsome heartthrob for hundreds of District #68 mothers said, "You weren't the first to apply. You were the first who was qualified."

I have no idea how many Negro applications were rejected before I was accepted. I find it unlikely that I was the first qualified. Why would a person of color apply to be a pioneer teacher in Skokie in 1964 and have deficient qualifications? We'd been taught that we had to be twice as good to get half as much. Kudos to the district for its foresight in refusing to hire black service workers before hiring a professional. Two teachers were hired before the first custodian. In this way the visual stereotype of blacks being only servants was forestalled.

One of the Instructional Team Coordinators had resigned and moved to California. She wrote that she was returning to Skokie for vacation. I invited her to stay with us, and planned a welcome back party. I did not know what had happened with former OOJH colleagues over the years that I had taught at the college. I looked forward to seeing and hearing their stories.

I opened the door to the first familiar face. His first words were an apology. He had been one of Ric's teachers. He said he was sorry, that he realized he had been unfair to our son. He was now principal of a junior high school. Being the well-reared daughter/representative from my family and community, I didn't know what to say, so said nothing. He was a guest in my home. I remembered the lack of discernment and compassion my twelve-year-old had gotten from this really nice man. I did not deserve his apology; my son did.

Some years earlier, a belated apology had been given to me by another of Ric's teachers while I was still teaching at the junior high. She had returned to the junior high for a visit and came to my classroom. "I didn't understand," she said. How enlightened life would be if black and brown children, the unattractive females, the less than "high-achievers," the poor, the outsiders, could receive the awakening from the unknowing that ignores, masks, and denies its connection. Ah, yes, *hope,* that tiny entity that Pandora allowed to escape the box where it had lain with negativity for eons. Passages open, from the other—to the other. With both these apologies I wanted to scream that my children still hurt. But it wasn't polite, and what would be achieved?

Late night planning, grading, controlling the temper, being wife, mother, and teaching three or six classes a day, leaves no time or space for an oasis. A while after the welcome back party, I waited for the next class of the day with icky feelings in my stomach. One of my students asked, "You don't look so good. Are you okay?"

"I feel as if I'm coming down with something," I said.

She said, "My Daddy is an internist. Why don't you go to see him?" She gave me her father's office number. I called and was given an appointment for the same day.

I looked up when the doctor entered the examining room. He brought to mind an old saying that if a girl looks like her father she is born for good luck. He and his daughter were definitely family. The opposite is the "old wives tale" for boys. I thanked him for seeing me on short notice, and sent a thank you to his daughter for telling me about him. He examined me and wrote a prescription saying that I had influenza. I was to come back in a week, when the medicine was gone.

I returned for the follow-up appointment feeling tip-top. My file had been laid on top of his desk. I am easily bored. I opened the cover. In the doctor's handwriting on the first line was an initial impression of his new patient. I read, "Thin, nervous Negro." "Thin?" I weighed 110 pounds, and was five feet three inches, ideal for a young American woman at that time. "Nervous?" I was shaking because I was feverish and ill. "Negro?" This was a designation that, to this day, I cannot fathom as a medical diagnosis. I wondered not because he wrote "Negro," but, if he had to categorize, why not "female?" We humans are a naming, counting species. The good doctor never saw this patient again.

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It is not that race is on an active search to be recognized, but it does pop up at unexpected times and places. My first Skokie friend, Vera, had recommended her hairdresser. Bob was a quiet man; his wife was a nurse. They had two little boys, Robert (Bobby), Jr., and Trevor. Their very British names point to how truly American the nation's black people are by taking proper English names, even as they are denied recognition of a common identity by the only culture they know—Anglo-American.

Bob wanted to buy a stand-alone shop, to move his salon from the basement of his home in Evanston to the business district. He wanted a newer building, much as Vera and Les Brownlee didn't want to buy a house in older Evanston, particularly only where blacks were permitted to purchase. A commercial building a few blocks across the canal that segregated Skokie from Evanston was advertised by a private owner. The location offered easy access and parking for his clients.

He bought the building and applied to the village Building Department for an occupancy permit. The village rejected his application; not enough parking, he was told. Bob received a lengthy list of required improvements before he could move into his building. I told Freddie of his dilemma. He volunteered to design the changes that would comply with the village demands. Freddie was responsible for alterations and improvements to the Teletype facility. His plans were routinely approved by the village. Bob's renovation could be completed by a few hours on the drawing board.

Shades of our meeting with the Human Relations Commission—the meeting room for Bob's zoning hearing was packed. I accompanied Bob and Freddie to the

hearing for the use of a commercial building in a commercial strip that had been commercial, with adequate parking since it was built. The atmosphere in the room was not the genteel one of our meeting with he Human Relations Commission fifteen years before. The energy crackled more like the feeling at my address to voters for the Board of Trustees for the community college a decade earlier. Residents argued loudly that there would be overflow cars from the parking area onto Oakton Street, that there would be noise, all manner of disturbances, walkers on the sidewalk would be blocked by traffic in and out of the strip. A man in tears protested that there were elderly people in the neighborhood and getting around the crowds of customers could be dangerous to folks in wheelchairs.

Bob responded in a soft voice and gentle demeanor that he worked alone, that he never scheduled more than two clients in his chairs at one time. He did not accept "walk-ins." Fear of a quiet, unassuming man, about five foot six, who weighed no more than one hundred forty pounds, who had a record of success, a health care professional as wife, two model children, and the approved remodeling plans, did not bring rationality into the midst of irrational fear and racism. He was the darker non-brother, the outsider. Decades of similar fear-filled reactions to change of a stay-in-your-place attitude toward people of color were as predictable as thunder accompanying lightning.

The room felt as if its gathered community were watching a sociopathic monster on trial for having raped a pre-pubescent child in the village. I saw the dead victim of a racist attack, a legal lynching, when I was less than nine years old. A twelve-year old boy could be suspected of an unspoken violation, then why not a grown man?

The village demanded changes to Bob's building: to wall off and make unusable half the building's square footage. This would assure that the space could not be used for beauticians' stations. Bob completed the required modifications and opened his salon. The empty space was used for storage. He was never able to get a bank loan to remodel and beautify his salon. Small scale and large scale red-lining were everywhere. I watched beauty salons around the village open, refurbish, and promote their shops with no apparent limitations. A salon with multiple stations opened two suites beyond Bob's—with brightly colored paint, red and chrome, swiveling chairs and "Grand Opening Day," and "Walk-Ins Welcome."

The Pottawattamie word "Skokie" translates as "swamp." An Evanston resident said that he had been offered land for purchase in Skokie before the 1950s expansion. He laughed, "Nobody wanted to buy in that swamp. Houses near the

canal needed sump pumps. Our basement flooded regularly until we installed a sump pump, and we were more than a mile west of the canal."

Not too much later, Bob was approached to sell the salon. He had not been happy with his investment. Some of his clients did not want to cross the canal and McCormick Boulevard into Skokie—"swamp" in the old language. After he moved back to Evanston, once in awhile I would drive by the old salon. An older white man usually sat inside, smoking and reading a newspaper. I do not remember ever seeing customers in that shoe store. I read that the business had been raided and closed. It had been a front for a bookie joint.

The experience brought Freddie and Bob into a friendship that lasted until Bob died. He was not an old man. Quietness can mask stress, but stress cannot long mask a pained heart.

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Neighborhood parties extended for several blocks beyond our initial four: Feinberg, Cohn, Zolly, and us. The Dietz family was renting our house when we bought it. Following initial cold feelings that were later described as reactions to family difficulties, and an apology, we became friends. They built a beautiful new home at the far end of Devonshire Park. At a party in their new house, a neighborhood couple attended. The man talked with Freddie. He said that he employed a black man, a talented fellow, who designed custom furniture for his furniture store. The storeowner described his employee as "the creative brain" of his business. What a shame that the guy was an alcoholic, the neighbor said. Head down, shaking it side to side, he said that his worker's daughter had to come to pick up his check on paydays so that he wouldn't drink it away before he got home.

Freddie listened. He questioned, "You say the guy is the creative brain of your business. He lives on the Westside. He takes the bus to work. He has a bunch of children. You live in an up-scale neighborhood, with two cars. How much do you pay the guy?" Not waiting for an answer, Freddie said, "Why don't you give him a better position in your company?"

Chicago's Westside once was the home of working class European immigrants. The Westside had become a decaying black ghetto. Our neighbor had a white baby grand piano gracing the living room picture window, with music on the open stand. I never saw one of the teen-aged daughters practicing the piano. The owner's wife and two daughters were beautifully dressed, coiffed and made-up. The two cars were recent luxury models.

The conversation between the men was audible across the high-ceilinged room. I listened with as straight a face as I could manage while Freddie used the skills of a Psychological Warfare Colonel in the seemingly pleasant conversation. That neighbor was never at another party to which we were invited. Inquisitions can emanate from different places, with different results.

The discussion and the underlay for this memory have as much evidence for validity, and variations on the theme, as there are

people of color. The essential story will be very much the same. I dare to say that every person who is the other, unless s/he is a native of Antarctica, has a collection of comparable stories, laundry lists of experience, tumbled and scrubbed in the washing machines of culture.

It was Friday, the last class day of spring semester. A student asked to accompany me to my office. As we neared the door he stopped; so did I. "There's something I want to tell you," he said. "The first day you walked into the class, I looked at you and said to myself, now what can that black woman teach me? I want you to know that I've taken everything you've taught, and if I weren't graduating on Sunday, I'd take more."

At the end of each semester the college administered Course Evaluations. An anonymous written comment surprised me. The evaluations were designed to help professors improve our teaching. The evaluation asked students to comment on the quality of textbooks, assignments, exams, access to, and helpfulness of, the professors.

When I distributed the forms, I emphasized that the evaluation was not a personality quiz on the friendliness of the professor. A student wrote in the space for comments at the end of the form, "I didn't get much out of the class. I couldn't understand her dialect."

For my high school's weekly radio broadcast, because of my diction, the drama teacher asked me to be the announcer. Mother would have my sister and me sit by the radio in the evenings and listen to the NBC announcers. She said they enunciated well. I was trained and sang as a classical soprano. Dialect? Enough, already.

I was a child of dark Texas loam and the red clay of the Carolina piedmont. The family sat at holiday dinners discussing cousins, "white cousins," the relatives said. One was a physician and his sister who were missionaries in China from 1942 until they were repatriated on a Swedish ship, *The Gripsholm*, in exchange for Japanese nationals at the beginning of WW II. I had added incentive to dig in the back yard, all the way to China—I knew people there. After the return from China, one cousin told of the school she started in Suchowfoo in Northern China, and of her student Hu Shiu Ying, who became an outstanding botanist and authority on Oriental shrubs at Harvard.

At family gatherings our elders told stories. We knew that our "blood" roamed Africa, Scotland, Ireland, and England. This was Daddy's side. Mother's side had the addition of a Texas great-grandmother who was American Indian. I vowed that one day I would go to the lands of all my ancestors.

The first opportunity arrived in 1976. I was firmly entrenched at OCC, and because anything mailed to the college that seemed remotely foreign, especially African, turned up on my desk, I read of a study tour to Egypt, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania in north and east Africa, and Nigeria, Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire, and Senegal in West Africa. Sponsored by Cleveland State University, I applied and was off. I achieved the first leg of my childhood goal.

In Africa, I walked the ground, smelled the air, talked with people, and plucked my supper chicken in a village lit only by the fire under the cooking pot. It was a worthy supplement to all that "book larnin'," for sure.

I wrote and taught "African American Roots and Heritage" and "Racial Minorities in the US." These were my effort to fill some of the many omissions in standard US history,

which I also taught. A student complained that he had not signed up for a "black history course." I organized and taught US history to give requisite balance to native peoples, as one historian, Jesse Lemisch, wrote, "history from the bottom up," beyond just the "great men." Students joined "Collage," the organization of the small, growing enrollment of foreign students. Our "bring food from home" pot-lucks were tasty and fun.

A friend from the Africa study tour called the next spring to say that Michigan State University was sponsoring a study tour to China, and did I want to go? One hundred American educators were invited to join The US-China Peoples Friendship Association, the first such group to visit China after President Nixon "opened" the country. Another leg of the ancestral trek was accomplished.

I wanted to share real-life learning with students. The community/junior college was situated in an affluent area. Gaining permission from my dean, and persuading a colleague, a Humanities professor who spoke fluent French, we recruited for two study tour courses. We flew to Senegal, with a trek into The Gambia, where Alex Haley researched his roots. A small emblem of the continent that I cherish is a gold facsimile in the shape of Africa. It was mined in The Gambia.

After the African study tour, my colleague obtained a grant to establish an International Studies Program at OCC. I had written a grant proposal the year before, but the college did not have a professional grants writer. Those forms are precise and tricky. A grants writer was hired after we returned. Timing is essential.

I was invited to the initial meeting of the International Studies Program. Apportioning responsibilities and making plans, another colleague volunteered, "Why don't we make ___ head of African Studies? After all, she is our Africa expert."

Unlike my usual loquacious persona, I sat mute. Not a word, not a change in facial expression or body language did I observe around the table. Would anyone question the proposal, say something, speak up? This was after our initial tour; the colleague named had accompanied the tour as a vacation. Now she was now "our Africa expert." Newly enamored of Africa, she enrolled in an African studies program at a nearby university.

Perception is reality, and two perceptions are two realities. I conclude that the wrapper color/race that is, strangely, both invisibility and hyper-visibility, is the deciding factor in the unconscious perception of who is an Africa expert.

> *I have often been asked, "Why do black people see race in everything?" It could be a mosquito syndrome—the female who does not buzz but who leaves itching, red, bumps all over your body that you just have to scratch.*

Chapter Nine—Neither Fish, nor Fowl, nor Good Red Herring

My parents were jigsaw puzzle fans. I remember the card table pushed against a wall when they stopped working on it. The puzzles were relaxing, mentally engaging, and distracting from the workday. The random, jagged puzzles, in varying stages of completion, would look as if they were a tablecloth with tops, bottoms, and parts of the middle of a house, flower, or person not yet born. I try to recall how puzzle pieces fit together, and hearing Yul Brynner in *The King and I*, with his perception of the European world he was learning, saying, "It is a puzzlement."

At its eastern end, Skokie is flat, mid-western prairie land, gradually rising to slight hills to the west. The village is bordered on the south by Chicago and Lincolnwood. The nearby towns of Glenview, Morton Grove, Deerfield and Highland Park are the other puzzle pieces. As with booms and busts of cycles from cosmic to individual, the economic good times of the 1920s led land speculators to extend and expand. Streets, alleys, and sidewalks were laid out and some were constructed. Green spaces were allotted. Mindful of the visionary Daniel Burnham, who saved the lakefront and forests that preserved the ecology and beauty of Lake Michigan for Chicago, the village kept the elm-lined streets and greens. Everything was in readiness for the next real estate explosion, not unlike Florida and the west. The disaster of the financial crash of 1929 ended in a predictable "bust." The Skokie Library has a collection of grainy photographs of those empty thoroughfares.

Skokie, named by the departed Potawatomi people, flourished with truck farms as sources of fresh produce for the markets of Chicago. German Catholic immigrants were the mainstay for these markets through World War II. After 1945 the urban part of the village again began to grow, rapidly.

The new Skokie story, perhaps apocryphal, is that Jewish Chicago lawyers discovered the vacant, partly-developed space in north Skokie. Jewish residential expansion into north of Chicago had been limited by restrictive covenants. The practice was identical to the "redlining" that kept Negroes in ghettoes. The history of Jews is of communal cohesion, support, business knowledge, cooperation, and shared resources. With access to family and community money, including bank loans, a vacant landscape filled with homes, synagogues, and schools that facilitated the tradition of learning for "People of the Book." Quietly, so it is said, the young Jewish lawyers and entrepreneurs had informed the community of Jews in Chicago's west and south sides of the availability of land. By the 1960s, the northern end of Skokie was predominantly Jewish. Followers of traditional customs and a generation of modern, non-ghetto-conditioned Americans established a unique community.

The close of World War II was a spur to change and growth for the younger generation in all cultures. The smoldering African American/black Civil Rights Movement was ignited by returned Negro GIs who had "seen Paree." No more the farm or the *shtetl [Yiddish for small town or village—Ed.]* for the young.

There are, as always, the irresistible force and the immovable object. Whether force or object, interaction is the process, like the clang, clang of metal balls on the desk of a busy executive who welcomes the distraction of a change in focus. Our little family was one of the

metal balls hanging from a thin wire. Our "ghetto party" guests, and serendipitous events, rolled on as the years sped to the next millennium.

Escape is a primary tool in flight-or-fight survival. Plant and animal life—I'm not sure about mineral—die in the search for freedom, a choosing to be. The impulse to escape capture, imprisonment, and confinement is pull and push. The chrysalis that becomes the moth or butterfly began as a grub, an underground, sightlessly crawling, digging thing.

What is not always remembered is that the escapee brings its history with it as it tries to survive and be free. Skokie was a symbol, model, and example in the unstoppable survival game.

I would not admit the fear and frustration of our decision to arrange puzzle pieces into a finished scene on a folding table. Denial is a survival tactic. We do many things to avoid admitting that the puzzle may not be finished as we wish, and in the time we wish. When I would say that I wished a thing, Mother said, "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride."

> *I was involved with a learning experiment in my first venture into non-traditional education. I participated in an exercise called "The NASA Experiment." Small groups of ten or twelve participants were given the task of selecting a specific number of items from a downed space-craft on the moon to help the group find its way to rendezvous with a spaceship that would retrieve and return them to earth.*
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> *The debriefing demonstrated that prior expertise may be of no value in choosing the proper survival tools, An intuitive suggestion by a non-scientist or engineer often proved to be the item the experts would ignore, but was crucial to completing the task in the allotted time. Hubris and arrogance may enhance error. Listening and cooperation were the lessons from the exercise. That lesson stays with me. We are told that the definition of insanity is repeating the same failure many times, expecting a different outcome.*
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> *The lesson I learned is to be careful what you jettison and what you keep. A seemingly insignificant item could be the key to your survival. Or you could lug something along that is a detriment. Pride and arrogance are not always out front to see. The pieces of the jigsaw puzzle did not always remain neatly on the card table of my childhood. They were thrown back in the jumble of the box.*

A major reason for many parents moving to Skokie may have been to find a non-corrupted environment, to rear their children away from the "bad influences of the city." Drugs are a dreaded corruption. Surely, if good folk troop together they will escape. Very soon after I began teaching at OOJH I heard that seventh and eighth graders were bringing pills to school,

sharing and enjoying them. Soon we heard rumors of "pot," and learned that more than "enough" of our children knew hard drugs before graduating from high school.

Roger's new bicycle was stolen from our garage. Circumstantial evidence suggested a neighboring kid and his buddies. The theft was not racial. The neighbor had a reputation that causes people to look back years later, and say, "I knew he was headed for no good end."

An irony of the bicycle saga was a gang of youngsters who roamed the Devonshire neighborhood grabbing bikes from yards and riding off with them. Roger's bike was snatched when he stopped at home to go to the bathroom. The thieves left a girl's bike on the lawn in its place. The gang members were recruits for a "chop-shop" operation. The bikes were driven into neighborhoods where they fit in. On that day the police were alerted and the bicycles were returned.

What is the bugaboo named race? We carry unknowns in our "racial memory," barnacles on our hulls, real puzzle pieces. Children do not escape intact, as we desire, expect, and work to make happen. The markers are with us, like a dimple in a chin that neither Dad nor Mother has. Cousin Ida does. Phillip was born with blue eyes. They are now hazel. His blonde hair turned deep auburn, then disappeared. Neither Freddie nor I have blue eyes. Freddie's grandmother did. My father's emerald-green eyes were my envy. Dividing the world into dualities, black/white, female/male, up/down, and religions into which we were born, seems to me an encouragement to lazily take on what we are handed at birth. If I see the world as black and white and I am black, my tendency is to resent the white. If I see the world as black and white and I am white, my tendency is the same, only with the opposite selection. Nature has multitudes of hues and tints. A paint company commercial advertises that it has sixty-two colors to choose among. Most people take vanilla or chocolate.

Moving to and living in Skokie was venturing outside of vanilla and chocolate, ethnic/racial and religious boxes. If we had not made the move, our lives, as individuals and family, would have differences that would fill other memories and are pages impossible to contemplate. What our presence meant to our neighbors, if anything, is their story. The risk taken is a response of courage, opportunity, and willingness to venture. The payoff is what a person—and a community—reap from the experience. "Ya pays yer money, ya takes yer chances."

The important reason for moving to Skokie was to provide opportunities that would enhance our children's life-chances beyond "Second City Chicago." I loved Chicago, but was it a safe environment for our children, was the question.

> *None of our cohorts in Skokie wanted to make a contribution to my memory, nor did Freddie. This memory is not the place to analyze our family relationships beyond what I write here. We did the best we could with what we knew. When we parted, and I chose to leave teaching and try my hand at writing, being on my own afforded the large swaths of time that a writer needs. I found communication from two sons, Ric and Roger, that I have chosen to include in the memory.*

"The boys" were the significant reason for the two-decade commitment to Skokie. What do they remember?

Roger said that he always felt like an immigrant. His adult life has been comfortable with friends who feel, think, and identify as members of immigrant cultures in the US. He said, "Mom, do you know that all of my business partners are Chinese?" I understand something of what he means. Driving along the beautiful Outer Drive in Chicago, I pulled behind a slower car. Something made me turn my head to the left; you know the feeling that someone is watching you. Beside me, in the left lane, a man's eyes met mine. I looked toward the front of my car, smiled, and pretended to bear down on the accelerator, as if I were going to crash into the car ahead. I glanced back at my fellow traveler. We smiled and laughed aloud simultaneously, even though we could not hear one another. The outsider/immigrant/alien memory, and experience of what a *Mississippi* license tag meant to us, a man and a woman with the African "one-drop," was our commonality, our community.

My son identifies as an immigrant. I do not. I observe this world, its history, and its present from the experience of being, culturally, an American. I love the croissants in France, the diversity of Suriname, SA, the openness of Amsterdam, and the history of every place. I have visited several cultures, but the creature comforts and familiarity of the US of A are my heritage.

Homo sapiens sapiens originated in Africa about 200,000 years ago, scholars have discovered. Out-migration from Africa is how the planet became populated as it is today. We're all migrants—every breathing, walking soul on the planet. Feral cats look like domestic cats. They act as wild as any jungle creatures. One observer wrote that cats are wild, that they only pretend to be tame. They seek corners in which to hide, hissing, scratching, and biting. They do not know that their parents were once pets. There are no corners of seclusion in a cyclical universe. Even feral kittens can be tamed, if they are caught soon enough. My choice, then, is to accept my outsider status, but not the immigrant. I belong. And so do many.

There are people who never leave the metaphoric village in which they were born, even if the village is Rome, New York, Nairobi, Skokie, or "Podunk." I would love to see love everywhere. Love is a commodity scarcer than fear, prejudice, and denial.

The remembered experience that epitomizes my favored image of our move is one that began and has endured nearly five decades. Within a few weeks of Phillip's attendance at Devonshire School, I received a telephone call. A woman said that she was looking for her son, Albie. Was he at our house? I looked out back to see Phillip and a boy with a thin build and the same height as Phillip. "Are you Albie?" A nod said yes. "Your mother wants you to come home."

Albie's mother, Blanche, and I had several conversations before we decided to meet for "Coffee and." "Coffee and" meant we weren't going to eat a full meal. We were invited for dessert, so eat before you come. Blanche and Jack Foreman, their son Albert, and daughter Toby, soon became friends. Jack was an engineer for General Electric. The mechanically-minded men got on well. Blanche and I seemingly had little in common except our sons. There were more good times with Jack and Blanche than I can remember. We went to see the play, "For Colored Girls who Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf." One night, we drove thirty-five miles to Illinois State Beach Lodge for Chicken Kiev that I had found to be sublime

when I attended a retreat, only to find a badly prepared Chicken Kiev because the chef was not the same chef.

Phil and Albie did not remain close friends after they went to different high schools. The Foreman-Fortune adult friendship continues. What has endured is a connection that is more community than neighborhood. Blanche was born and grew up in Washington, D C. Her family owned a neighborhood business, a grocery store, as I remember. The store was near Howard University. Howard is a federal university. Negroes, native people and foreign students comprised the student body, with the largest group being Negroes. Many students were from Negro professional families. The professors were outstanding scholars, graduates of top US and foreign universities, who would not be hired at top US universities.

Blanche said she looked up to, and admired, the Howard University students who came to her mother's store. Her family was not college-educated. Was her ease with our family due to her childhood experience? She grew up seeing Negroes that were not the stereotypical underclass. Her acceptance contrasted with a proper Jewish neighbor who quizzed me on my background, family, and schools, not unlike our "inquisition." When I answered all of her questions, she said, "Oh, you've always been middle class." Surprise!

Jack was a New York City kid, from the Bronx. Go Yankees. He grew up with "all kinds." After becoming friends with Albie, Phil said, "Albie's Daddy is from New York, Albie says larw for law." Jack confided that he was leaving General Electric, that he did not see that he would ever be given the managerial position he deserved, because he was a Jew. He went into business with friends where he was happier, and made much more money.

Jack and Blanche's daughter, Toby, married and moved to Wisconsin. Blanche became ill and moved to be near Toby. Her health worsened and she had to enter a nursing home. I asked if I could visit. Toby invited me to stay with her family. I drove from Skokie to a windswept western Wisconsin I'd not seen before. The Lake Superior coast has a prairie landscape feeling, a sparsely inhabited world with discernible echoes of the time before the Menominee nation was decimated. Illinois long ago lost the view, sound, and feeling of a deserted world. Toby was at work when I reached her house. Her husband Steve welcomed me. Toby, Steve, their son Robert, and I ate dinner and talked until bedtime.

In the morning I drove to the nursing home. Blanche and I cried. Blanche loved to walk. We'd had many swift walks together. It was painful to see her no longer able to out-walk me, not able to walk at all. I drove back to Toby's late in the afternoon. Steve was home, Toby was still at work, and Robert wasn't home yet. Steve said, "Toby didn't tell me her friend was black." After another pleasant evening, I drove back to Skokie the next morning.

I told Jack what Steve said. Jack's answer was, "Why would she? She's been raised right." Like Deanna, who on her own toddler cognizance had a friend named Roger, not "a little black boy," Toby viewed Phillip as her brother Albie's friend, and the rest of Phil's family as friends, not black friends. To identify by color and/or race would have been as nonsensical as saying, "My friend wears glasses," or a brand of athletic shoes.

Person-to-person touch and caring, sans erected walls that have no value and meaning, is what makes the relationship of Foreman and Fortune the pinnacle of what I remember, and want to remember, as the adventure of my family in a Jewish community. Beyond the meritocracy of career and "place" in the community, this relationship is most valued. Insider/outsider schisms are everywhere. From gender dominance to age discrimination,

conception to burial, the outsider/insider teeter-totter seems to be a human condition. Discernment is necessary to make the distinction between a wall and a door. When there is no wall to bump, why do we need to have more than curiosity, like a dog that smells a new dog in order to identify and remember it? We are taught that competition assures the survival of the fittest. Dogs are pack animals, living cooperatively, as do many life forms. If the lion is no longer hungry, the gazelle has nothing to fear. "Survival of the fittest" says, to shortsighted vision, only the strong survive. Extension across the fulcrum of cooperation balances competition, and ultimately may offer safety, security, and survival. We won't know if we don't try it. When I'm asked to check "RACE," I have been known to draw another square box and write "Human."

I sent my sons an article on education and race that I thought they would find interesting. One offered the following:

> "Several teachers I had at both high school and the university would not give me an "A", regardless of my performance. The recommendation I received from my high school Head of Upper School was mediocre, despite my receiving the third highest SAT score in my graduating class. I was mistakenly given my entire file while I was attending college. I had one professor give me a 'Pass' on my undergraduate thesis (the options were Pass, Fail, and Honors. [He] told me, 'I think you'll be happy with your grade." The other faculty readers (many of whom didn't know who I was) gave me an 'Honors,' one of only two given in my graduating class. Another professor (who gave me straight A's) told me that he was surprised that I was the best student in his class. I didn't ask him to elaborate for fear of him changing my grade. Another professor took a dislike to me when she found out that I had attended private school; she told me, 'If I have anything to do with it, I'll see that you never graduate from this university.' Another professor gave me an oral exam with two of my classmates. I answered all the questions, but was given a 'Fail,' while my two white classmates, who didn't answer any questions, received a 'Pass.'
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> "While working at one job, I was fired when I asked for a promotion, and a less competent African American was given the promotion I requested. I think the underlying issue is that too many Blacks refuse to understand that we are seen as the most threatening when we are successful. No one except middle class Blacks (or those with middle class aspirations) believes that America is a meritocracy. Every other American has outgrown that delusion."

Copying these words, something I once said to my son came to mind, like residue in an upset stomach. I do not know what had happened. I remember saying to one of my sons when he was in a crisis, "I'll kill for you." A parent does not have to be black, brown, or white, to know this feeling. Every molecule of energy is transferred to the children who are born through you; the meaning of survival flows in every cell.

I shared the process of this memoir with my youngest. During our correspondence he wrote, "Whenever I visited Evanston to play baseball or basketball during my junior high school years, one of the players would walk over to me and say, 'So tell me again, why do you live in Skokie?'

"I would answer, 'My parents live in Skokie, I just sleep there.'

"And he would say, 'Oh, okay, I understand.' And he would turn to the other players and say, 'His parents live in Skokie. He just sleeps there.' And the other players would nod in unison as if a great mystery had been suddenly explained. This happened almost every time I went to Evanston."

I doubt that Roger remembers this. He was in second or third grade. Membership at the local Presbyterian church had changed, there were no children now. I watched a variation on tribalism that intrigues me. Almost no families with children remained in the community. Many had moved to Morton Grove and other "Christian" towns. One mother told me, "There are no children for my girls to play with." She meant there were no Christian children. When we moved to Skokie, the Sunday School had a lively contingent of children and youth. Now more Asians were moving in. A congregation of Presbyterian Chinese-American families was meeting in homes, and had outgrown their space. Finding that Evanshire had unused classrooms, they contracted to rent the space. I asked the Sunday school head if Roger could come to their Sunday school. Without hesitation, she said, "Yes."

Several months into his new religious schooling, Roger came in from class and threw his Sunday School lesson book across the table where I sat grading papers. He said, "I'm not going back. I study my lesson just like in school, and when I ask questions the teacher looks at me as if I'm crazy. They are too conservative, and they take the Bible literally," said this child with brothers a decade older than he was. He continued walking to his room without a pause.

A few weeks later, at the mall, I saw his teacher and another woman from the Sunday School. The teacher asked, "Where is Roger? We haven't seen Roger, and we miss him."

I gulped, and said, "Roger felt that his questions weren't being answered, and he didn't feel comfortable."

The teacher looked sad. "Oh," she said, "we like Roger's questions. The Chinese children don't ask questions."

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I gazed out of our living room window into a clear, sunny, not too warm day, as that part of the Midwest can be before it turns blisteringly hot. My first-born walked from the front of our house across Kilbourn Avenue to the front of our neighbor's house. He turned left, took a few steps to the end of the sidewalk, looked both ways, and crossed to the north side of Church Street. He stopped under the post with the marker, "Bus." He was six feet tall and handsome, if a mother's vision can be allowed, with his portfolio of sketches he was taking to an appointment in The Loop. He had been home from the university only two weeks. Impeccably dressed, as he had been since he was old enough to know that clothes are for wearing, he waited. The bus was not in sight. Traffic was sparse.

My attention was attracted to a car traveling east on Church Street, toward Evanston and Lake Michigan. I would not have noticed it except that red brake lights flashed. Two heads with short-cropped hair snapped with the precision of "eyes left" from a commanding officer. The men stared. The brake lights went off. The driver's eyes turned back to the front of the car. His partner continued to gaze at the young man on the corner, his portfolio in his left hand, nearly touching his shoe top. The Skokie police car continued east. I watched my son as he waited for the bus to the Skokie Swift, and into Chicago. He saw the same thing. He was not twelve years old as he had been the night he sat on the couch, sleepy and confused at 2 a.m., telling a policeman step by step how he rode his bicycle home from Devonshire Park Pre-teen Night. In the intervening decade, he had learned what his mother and father had hoped he would not have to learn.

Ethnic cohorts and I continue to be accused of being "angry black people, seeing race everywhere, having a chip on our shoulder, and practicing reverse racism." The denial of one's personhood is denial of the essence of being, of the life in which we are all parts. Heritage, rearing, education—this is what we are. I have a theory. There is scientific research to lend the theory validity. How about remembering that biological, genetic predetermination is ancient survival-oriented fear of difference, that desire to run away, escape—the "fight or flight" disposition under the skin and in the brain. We can, if we choose, call on higher brain functions: reason, compassion, and curiosity, to overrule fear-fight-flight impulses. Believe it when I say that I'd love to have never heard the words, or had to respond to the notions of black, white, and all related synonyms. Too much vital energy has been used up in the battle against the illusion of Don Quixote's windmills of color difference.

"Blacks ought to go back where they came from," is a sentiment said and unsaid, but felt, by many non-black and non-brown Americans. That would be the mother continent, Africa, where science says the species began. Maybe everyone should go back where they came from. Wait a moment, that would not work. Many are "mixed" with the people who were here when Columbus—or the Vikings—arrived. First Nations Indigenous "Indians" came across the Bering Sea 40,000–80,000 years ago, en route from the Mother Continent—so the experts tell us.

Chapter Ten—Where is Everybody?

I watched the flight of the shuttle Atlantis as it began its final trek to The International Space Station. Atlantis vibrated with disparate rhythms and tunes, generated thoughts and feelings, a coming to an end of something important. Coming to the end of this memory I hesitate. I have no intent to wound anyone. Feelings, images, memories, and thoughts have come to the fore as I tried to compose a story with which a reader can resonate as I did to the immediate image of the shuttle. Forty years of my life compressed into a flash, formerly buried, are now released, much as those moving clouds that disappear with the summer tropical wind in my current abode.

On the page there is an illusion of solidity, of permanence. I want to imagine that my interpretation of the forty-year experience in Skokie will encourage one person to kindness, when they might think otherwise. My hope is that this mosaic of memories by an outsider has effects like roads taken and roads not taken. My tale focused on an environment in which a predominantly Jewish community was the stage and character for stories of actions that held possibilities of productive, healthy change, and its opposite. For hopeful people, the opposite is not allowed into consciousness. The unconscious will hold in abeyance an escape hatch.

These final words are a sweep, a summary, closing down over the landscape of a minuscule village venture, from the early days of September 1964, to waning involvement with the village after our sons were on their own. The name Fortune is different enough to raise questions. Someone asked if it had originally been the Italian, Fortunato. I said, I was told that Fortune came from England, a remnant of the Roman conquest. Maybe, there is an ancient touch. Family lore said that my father-in-law's father was a mixed-blood in Florence, South Carolina. There is a "Fortune Street" not far from what was once the center of town. Someone of prominence once lived there. The name evokes success and good luck. On which end of the spectrum are the Fortunes of immigrants of color to Skokie?

It was not surprising that the Christian communities where we thought we might live rejected us. It is not strange that a Jewish community embraced our family to the best of their ability. Without the Holocaust, though, would that acceptance have happened? We will never know.

It was not strange that we adults were more positively affected than our children. Children can be unbelievably generous and unbelievably cruel. Race is not the only fulcrum for change and effects.

Shortly after moving to Skokie, I began attending Friday evening discussions, invited by the generous lawyer who volunteered the legal work for the house's purchase. An exodus of clerics and nuns from the Catholic Church coincided with the tumult of freedom aspirations of the 1960s. As our racial movement into the world of others proceeded, it was with a small group of former priests and nuns that I sat to talk about religion, philosophy, and personal journeys. We met in various homes in the next suburb, Morton Grove, and once or twice in a house at the fringe of Skokie/Chicago. After years of cloister and celibacy, this was a gathering of married couples, except for the lawyer. He was Catholic, and had not been a priest. A sweeter roomful of thoughtful, caring people, outsiders amidst outsiders, would be difficult to find. Where else, except Skokie, would there be such a rich amalgam of apparently disparate people in proximity: Jews, Christian-Catholics, and a Christian-Protestant of a different ethnicity?

We shared close space, not the wide spectrum of a New York City or Chicago. How much of our happenstance was community? From a moon's-eye view, the juxtaposition of all the people, influences and actions on people who thought themselves insiders, and people who knew they were outsiders, is the exciting energy of evolution, life, and growth.

To return to a beginning that was also an ending, as is the journey of life: on my first workday in Skokie, I met my office partner, the Latin teacher. He had left a Jesuit Seminary the year before he was to graduate. The last male in his family, he left the celibate life with the plan to marry and assure continuation of the family name. My new buddy was of Italian and Italian-Irish descent.

My office-mate and I traveled to Houston, Texas for a conference of The National Teachers of English, late in November. We both taught English and Social Studies, called "LA-SS." I do not know what my office partner thought of the implications of a red-haired Italian and an African-American woman traveling together in Texas in the late 1960s. His life was different. Jesuits are known as the intellectuals of the Catholic Church. I have family in Houston and welcomed the chance for a free visit.

He and I were were registered in different hotels, across from one another. He helped me get my luggage to my room. He said that his room was more attractive than mine and I should come to see it. The next morning I went to his hotel room. We were to have breakfast before the conference opened. He was right. My room was Southwestern blue and brown; his was a warmer red and tan. Just as we left his room for breakfast, the elevator door across the hall opened. It was packed with speechless Texans.

At breakfast, my companion, the perfect gentleman, made a performance of holding my chair for me to sit. A Texas-sized round table was in our sight line. The men sitting in barrel-style oak chairs stopped eating, their forks in midair, and turned to look at us. I whispered, "Their hominy grits are frozen."

Later, at a nearby mall, my friend was enjoying every moment. He bought gifts for his niece and nephew; I did the same for my sons. The clerk and shoppers gaped, looking as if they would have strokes or heart attacks as they watched us discussing what outfit would look good on the children. My colleague did not seem to be aware of a risk; I was afraid, for this was sort of dangerous fun in 1967.

We joined my mother's sisters and their families for dinner at one aunt's house for a "down-home" meal. We took photographs in the front yard. The neighbors did not stare at us or call the police. People of color, the perennial outsiders, engage freely with strangers. Already dominated, there is less fear of loss. My Italian colleague was experimenting, like a babe beginning to walk; it was all real for me.

Latin was phased out at the Junior high school. I did not see my buddy again.

The 1960s and 1970s moved quickly into the 1980s and 1990s; children at the basketball hoops and skateboards on Skokie's streets became more colorful, in the jargon of now: more diverse. The faces peeking out of school bus windows began to have sprinkles of brown and black in the vanilla. English-as-second-language classes were needed when immigrants from the ever-opening world migrated in pursuit of the American dream. Mid- and late-twentieth century immigrants were not confined to the crowded urban ghettos of the nineteenth century. These were not Ellis Island lines with names and destinations pinned to their clothing. They were a more affluent, urbanized, sophisticated "coming to America" starry-eyed bunch. A survey at Roger's former elementary school counted dozens of languages on the playgrounds. Like a time-lapse film, a single, somewhat "waspish" Skokie school turned into a mini United Nations.

> *The human mind is not a linear computer. Mind is a process, a collage that forms wholeness, constructing meaning even where there seems to be no meaning. Experiences connect and become significant as an intricate narrative develops, not necessarily focused or with guided intent. Life and change is the natural order of chaos, so it seems to me. Ideas, like flashbacks in a movie, are not unusual for me. Ideas seem to me to be particles that morph into waves and back again, like the quanta of physics. I imagine that this movement is normal mental action that energizes, connects and makes sense of space, time and the dimensions available to us.*
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> *I have not returned to Skokie in ten years. I miss it. I miss Chicago. I love the alive, urban scene, familiar places and people, and, always, something new to explore. In the newly-arrived 21st century, the strife of religious and racial distinctions is resurfacing, erupting, in the US and the rest of the world. Efforts to bridge multiple chasms of difference are barely voiced and heard in the chaos of things as they are. I would like to think that every effort carries a bit of the singularity, is a fractal of resolution into wholeness in a world of outsiders. The origin of*

the notion of religion is to re-align. The theory is that humans, in some way, have become disconnected from their complete selves, their Supreme Self/overlord or God, and that re-alignment, religion will heal the breech. Really?

The episodes that follow and complete this memory may seem to be a random amalgam of disconnected episodes to the reader who is, first and foremost, an analyst, seeking a consecutive accumulation of similarity. I prefer the Jungian-Buckminster Fuller synergy understanding—that the disparate forms the collective, sort of like "all roads lead to Rome."

I have ambivalent feelings of the years our children were nurtured in Skokie. Neither I, nor anyone, can imagine how life might have been if we had remained in Chicago. Would Chicago have been better for our children? Would Freddie's health and stamina have remained intact through the brutal commute until he retired? Would I have been able to last twenty years in the bureaucratic, punitive, Chicago school system?

In a phone conversation, Freddie and I talked about the Sunday drives to find a house closer to his work in the suburbs. He shared his memory of lunchtime drives and of interactions. Freddie's stories differ from mine. Such is perception, and memory. "Roshomon" is not merely a Japanese folk tale.

When I read or see what happens in Chicago, even in beloved Hyde Park, I remember a friend from Ric and Phil's Sunday school days at First Presbyterian Church who was killed on the street as he walked home, presumably by gang members, two weeks before he was to begin college at Northern Illinois University.

At the end of his first year at college, Ric went back to the Southside. Five years in Skokie were not equivalent to the twelve-year formation of Chicago—especially with its more "normal" surroundings. Back home, he told of seeing an elementary school classmate nodding-off on drugs. "He's gone, he's gone," he said. I felt sadness for the boy and for his parents whom I had known when parents and children were young and innocent. What decides how this or that child lives and dies?

On a late afternoon, nearing the end of spring semester, I walked from my office to the parking lot at the college; a co-worker came out of the building across the street, and we continued side by side, relaxing into the end of our workday. He had been Director of Personnel at AT&T Teletype. After retiring, he began a second career in an administrative position at the college. Without warning he said, "Teletype didn't treat Freddie fairly. Freddie should have been a Vice President."

"I know," I said. "Thanks." We parted at the lot entrance and walked to our cars.

A student and a couple of his friends came to my office. The student asked, "Are you related to a man named Fortune that works at Teletype?"

"Yes, he's my husband," I said.

The student's face and voice changed to what came across as awe and respect. He said, "My brother works in the shop. He says that Mr. Fortune doesn't report to anybody but a Vice President."

In a world of hierarchies, shop, or "line," workers respect "the boss." The student's brother, who was a shop employee, has a supervisor and the supervisor has a manager—a boss. To my student and his brother, from a working class family and culture, seeing Freddie, a black man, conversing with and in the offices of top management, the assumption was that he was reporting to a Vice President. Seeing the black man meant that "Fortune" was high-up on the totem pole of "bossism." I can imagine the conversations at the student's dinner table. The student and his friends came to my office in disbelief. Despite having me, his black teacher, as a reality touchstone, he was still surprised.

Reporting to a Vice President and being a Vice President are qualitatively different in a culture of boss and worker, landlord and serf, and master and slave. Oakton Community College students were often first- to third-generation American born. With the first generations to attend college, substantial Polish and Central and Eastern European families had moved from laboring class roots in the nineteenth century to middle middle class income by the 1970s. Skokie's inhabitants, after the Potawatomi tribe was eliminated in another forgotten holocaust, were German Catholics who established lucrative truck farms that fed Chicago homes and restaurants.

Irish Catholics moved further west and north with the end of World War II. They were no longer attached to the transported-from-Ireland county and pub structure in Chicago that thrived from the mid-1800s to the the Daley "machine" of the mid-twentieth century.

I was surprised, really shocked, to find strong anti-union feeling among the descendants of workers who had clawed to the middle class on the gains of organized labor unions that benefited their families from the 1930s to the 1970s. Studying history and sociology, students can detach from attitudes and positions because they do not know the truth of their own history. Parents dislike for their children to study certain courses in college. The youth begin to observe the tradition they have inherited differently, beginning to think rather than merely absorb the stories they have been told.

Historical amnesia is a common affliction. It takes only the failure of one father or mother to transmit the family stories. One of my history students was vehement in his dislike of Indians. He said the adjective "dirty" every time he said Indian. I did not confront him in class. I assigned the readings and led the discussions. Humiliation is the most direct route to closing down communication. He graduated from the community college and went to Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. A telephone call and a visit after he graduated from Trinity evoked these words, "I want to thank you for teaching me that I am an Indian." In class he had proudly proclaimed his Aztec ancestry, saying, "I am Azteca," with no consciousness that it was the Spanish Conquistadores who destroyed his ancestors who had been misnamed "Indian." For this Aztec/Indian/Mexican American and millions more, historical amnesia is rampant, as it is for the descendants of the Conquistadores.

One quiet student, whose eyes betrayed his intense attention, told me a story as he struggled with mixed emotions. His parents had emigrated from India. He spoke with frustration, shame, and consternation of his father's hatred of black Americans. He said the family car developed a flat tire on the Dan Ryan Expressway. No one stopped to help them, and his father did not know how to change a tire. A car with black men stopped, changed the tire, and would take no money. "See," he told his father, "They're not all the way you think." He

said the strangers' kindness made no difference in his father's attitude. This young man had the opportunity to see and be different from his father in important ways.

> *Though apparently separate, memories/stories in this story are connected in my memory, for I seek and see connections, and find that the sum of the whole is greater than its parts. In discussions I've been accused of going off on tangents. One of my students said that he enjoyed it when I wandered from the structure of a formal lecture, which I did more often than staying on the expected topic. He said that he knew I would always get back to the point and wrap it up. My mind operates in a kind of circularity, one item reminding me of another as I try to elaborate on what we called in the 1960s, "the whole ball of wax." The particle spins the wave and vice versa.*

A different "racism" surfaced in the class "Racial Minorities in the USA." Students were asked to create independent studies of their family history. A beautiful, shy young woman began her presentation, saying, "All my life I was called a dumb Pollack." She told us about her grandfather, a scholar of Polish history. She showed and read from his books in Polish. At the end of her excellent presentation to her dumbfounded classmates, the recently-shy girl sat taller, looked directly at everyone when she spoke, and demonstrated the attractiveness that she had previously hidden.

The environment at the college was conducive to learning that defied its location at a tag end outside of "Second City" Chicago, and the label "community college." One young woman asked if she could bring a visitor to class. Permission granted. At the next class, a skinny young man accompanied her. He sat in the back row, leaned against the wall, his dark brown hair covering his eyes. During discussion, which he entered easily, I was impressed by our visitor's knowledge of American history. He discussed the ideals of the American Revolution and the Civil War with information and understanding at a level superior to my students.

Our guest was introduced as her cousin, Sandy. His Northern Irish accent was unmistakable. There were Friday evening meetings at her house and I was invited. I could not attend. I already gave too much time to work, and not enough to my family.

Not long after our visitor, an article appeared in the Chicago Tribune on the violence in Northern Ireland, the conflict between the IRA/*Sinn Fein* (the Irish Republican Army) and the British government. Included were several photographs of Sinn Fein fugitives. I was drawn to one face, nearly hidden in a group of young men. The visit to Illinois, and to Oakton Community College had been a respite for "Sandy"—his real name was different— from the stress of the war between the Crown and its allies, the Protestants, and the Irish Catholics. *Sinn Fein* translates from Gaelic as "We ourselves." I am happy that my student trusted me. Honesty and being genuine does add taste to the dish.

Mother said that her father's family descended from "Orangemen." I did not understand that she meant her father descended from Scots-Irish Protestants. I wonder and marvel that he

knew this and passed it to his children. Such is the value of family tales. My empathy is entwined with the "other sides" of history.

Mother told of another ancestor, her mother's father, a runaway captive. Monroe was a half white-half black man who, she said, "would never tell his natural name because he hated his father for keeping him a slave." When he heard the Union troops were nearby, he traveled on Louisiana roads at night, sleeping in ditches in the daytime, to join the Union troops at Natchez, Mississippi in 1863—100 years before his great granddaughter's family decided to establish a home in what he might have called, "the free north." I heard and repeated stories in the *griot* tradition, where a member of the tribe is the keeper of the stories which are the soul of its people. In this tradition, one person/tribe's terrorist is the other person/tribe's freedom fighter.

I drove to Skokie from my home in retirement in North Carolina for the fiftieth anniversary of my first writing group. The Chicago skyline from Gary, Indiana, brought a stream of tears. "I didn't know I loved this place so much," I said to the enclosed space of my car. Only a few friends and neighbors remained from the three-decade abode in the village. Freddie kept the homestead—mowing the grass that the Realtor noticed as the focal point of our worth forty years before. Neighbors and friends had moved to Arizona, Florida, Georgia, New Mexico, Texas, and Israel. Some, as the euphemism goes, had "passed away." The last time Louise and I met, we cried. Jack was gone, taking his funny ways with him.

The neighbor who always brought us *challah*, the twisted bread loaf, at the High Holy Days, died. His daughter remembered her father with her yearly gift of challah delivered to the house of her first black neighbor. He and she were the father and daughter who stopped to chat on our first night in Skokie.

The Cohn family moved to Arizona. Their house was bought by people from India, not South Carolina and Texas. The new owner saw Freddie mowing and trimming. She remarked that his yard looked very nice. She asked, "Would you take care of my yard?" She was surprised to learn that Freddie was not the hired gardener; the grass he cut was his own. The neighbor's assumption reflects the adaptation-assimilation by immigrants from "developing" countries that black Americans are servants. The culture has done a magnificent job of inculcating racism worldwide. Ellis Island descendants and newer immigrants may pass the Constitution test, but the history they learn is filled with omissions.

American blacks, in their myriad of mixes across Africa and the world, were a catalyst for the notion of democracy in America and Skokie. Many Americans of color resent the more casual acceptance of foreigners of color when our forebears have been on the soil of this hemisphere since before colonialization. Estevanico, an African, was in present-day Florida and the west in the 1500s, before Coronado.

Our sons' experiences with Skokie law enforcement were traumatizing versions of "stop and frisk," as much as in New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago, no different in effect and affect from the experiences of thousands of Negro boys who are accosted and detained in the chain gangs of the twentieth century. Humiliation cuts to the soul regardless of the degree of the circumstance.

Descendants of the first humans built much of this nation as captive slaves. Scholars, using a variety of agricultural, construction, and personal service factors, calculate 85% of southern ante-bellum/pre-Civil War wealth, and substantial contributions outside the South, are

the result of captive-slave labor. There were slaves in New York southward, with a few scattered northward into New Hampshire and Maine. But the "peculiar institution" was frozen out of those areas, and the argument over slave/free states extended into the warmer west to California, via the Missouri compromise. My memory cannot include the contributions of all subject people, such as the Chinese who built the railroads or European wage-slaves in New England. It is enough to know that whenever those who have the power to enslave can, they do.

The indigenous inhabitants of this hemisphere are known accurately from history or inaccurately from entertainment. I like that Canada calls its original inhabitants, "First Nations." Labor/work is the energy on which the human world evolves and revolves. Knowledge and respect for the facts of our lives could have made this memory of the outsider unnecessary.

> *These seemingly random, isolated memories of a life in Skokie are not unconnected, separated, and segregated. These are remnants of material that built itself, like a basket or a building, each story an evidentiary part of a total experience. The remembered stories are portions that emerged to awareness while others are buried in the sands of unconscious time. In their own ways they are a tapestry, a mosaic of seeming randomness woven into a personal and communal whole.*

Dr. Money's words, "Your neighbors won't like you," are faint. Another image comes to the fore, one of sitting at the counter in my neighbor Babe's house. Babe said, "The women in the neighborhood are jealous of you."

"What?" I said, my mouth dropping, a frown on my brow. "Why?"

"On Friday night when you and Freddie go out on dates, he walks around the car and opens the car door for you," she said.

Hmmm...Dr. Money's words bubble up. Did that mean even when we behave nicely with no idea that anyone is watching? How can the rock/hard place or devil-and-deep-blue-sea be eluded? Were the neighboring women surprised that a black man behaved as a gentleman? Perhaps their husbands had never opened doors for them? Neighbors can be nosy, and the outsider can be different in more than one way.

> *It would be cool, delightful, a blessing, if honest thoughts and feelings were the "open sesame" to the confusion that renders any member of a community an outsider. Everyone is living life the best they can. If they could do it better, they would.*

What effects did one family have, if any, in one neighborhood in the World's Largest Village? I read how people like the Fortunes were thought of in the novel on the village by Robert Rand, *My Suburban Shtetl:* not well. Presence and remembrance are our contribution. The neighborhood and community influenced us in ways known and unknown. Where a person grows up is essentially and profoundly influential. Escaping those sights, sounds, tastes, smells and feelings is as impossible as shedding one's skin.

On a scale of one to one hundred, how do the sons of Freddie and Gwen Fortune rate the effects on them of having lived in The World's Largest Village, with the lowest number meaning failure, and the highest number meaning success? I am afraid to ask. We did our durndest.

Childhood cohorts say, "Girl, you and Freddie were c-r-a-zy."

Dr. Runner, who had advised against our move based on his own childhood experience, might say with a sad smile, "I warned you."

Post-Face

"May you live in interesting times" is attributed to the ancient Chinese. Whether true or not, people once reverenced ancient wisdom. "Interesting times" is a double entendre, just not with a salacious side. The explanation I was given is that "interesting" translates as "unforeseen." The affirmation is for positive and/or negative outcomes, because the future is unknown.

Moving to Skokie was an "opportunity," a word related to "interesting," but less ominous. Westerners like to define opportunity as a fifty-fifty proposition. I have related personal experiences that may be interpreted as positive and negative. How our Skokie neighbors remember us, if at all, I have no clue, except for the few who remain friends.

On the larger stage, similarities between the histories of peoples of African and Jewish heritage are a special case in the story of human migration. Our experiences are at once unique and common. I do not excuse or deny the realty of our histories, but long for a window into an effort toward harmony. I have never understood the comment, "the exception proves the rule." Does it have something to do with the mathematical definition of "proof?"

Our family's journey from the Southside of Chicago to the suburban Village of Skokie is a microcosm. It was our microcosm, with a profound effect on five people under one roof, and the results are still incomplete. With the high probability that we would not be able to safely rear black sons in 1960s urban America, suburbia promised a kind of salvation. One mother's desire was understandably simple to every mother on planet Earth: to give her children happy memories.

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About The Author

Daughter of a physician and a pharmacist, granddaughter of a college president, Gwendoline Alpha Young Fortune was born in Houston, Texas, with paternal roots in the Carolinas. She lived most of her adult life in the Chicago area. Her ancestors included Native Americans, Scots-Irishmen, a free-born black great-grandfather, a Confederate great-grandfather, a cowboy grandfather, and relatives who were missionaries in pre-World War II China. She enjoyed having a "one-world family."

After graduating at only 15 years old from Mather Academy, a private black boarding school in Camden, South Carolina, which her father had attended, she matriculated at Bennett College, a private historically black liberal arts college for women in Greensboro, North Carolina. She then studied voice, clarinet and piano at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City, along with classmate Miles Davis.

She returned to the South to earn a B.A. in elementary education at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she graduated *cum laude*, followed by an MS in Social Science from South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, both public historically black universities. She then earned a Masters in Philosophy from Roosevelt University and an Ed. D. in Higher Education from Nova University.

Dr. Fortune taught elementary school, junior high school, and community college. She was a Professor of Social Science at Oakton Community College in Skokie and Des Plaines, Illinois, and Ethnic Studies Consultant for the Chicago Consortium of Colleges and Universities at Loyola University.

Dr. Fortune was inspired to write her first novel, *Growing Up Nigger Rich*, a project she started while a freshman at Bennett, because, "Every story I read about my people they're barefoot, pregnant, and in the field. I know a different life and I never read about the kind of people I

know. There are hundreds of girls on this campus and we all speak English and wear shoes." Later in life, she quipped, "If I hear of one more book or film depicting the great love a white American received from their 'Mammy'—oops, sorry, I mean their 'maid'—I will have no choice but to turn up the volume of a Paul Robeson recording to the highest possible level." The goal of all of her writing was to share perspectives on American life that differed from the stereotypical model of people of color.

Dr. Fortune began writing fiction professionally at the age of 55 and has since won a number of prestigious grants and awards. Selections from *Growing Up Nigger Rich* were finalists in the annual Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society competition and won second place in the National Black Writers' Conference Awards. Other awards include a Blumenthal Readers and Writers from the North Carolina Writers' Network, QBR-Poets and Writers, and the Toni Cade Bambara Fiction Contest. Dr. Fortune has delivered papers at Meredith College in North Carolina and The African American Association of Historical Research and Preservation Conference at Seattle University.

She wrote regular columns for suburban Illinois and North Carolina newspapers, was a guest columnist for several magazines and journals, and contributed to online forums such as The Feminist Wire.

Later in life, Dr. Fortune produced and narrated a 13-disc CD collection, "We Do It All: Classical Music Composed and Performed by People of African Descent," for WUNC, North Carolina Public Radio.

Books:
Growing Up Nigger Rich (Pelican Books)
Family Lines (Pelican Books)
Weaving the Journey: Noni and the Great Grands (Self-published)

Poetry chapbook:
Dancing as Fast as We Can and *Inner Scan*

Memory:
Outsider in the Promised Land: Black Family in Jewish Community

Music Collection:
"We Do It All: Classical Music Composed and Performed by People of African Descent"