

Emily Cheney Neville

1919-1997

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11
12 I started writing this autobiography in a little blue
13 notebook in my lap on a packed train going
14 through the People's Republic of China. That
15 was in February 1985, and China was the farthest I
16 had ever been from home, or from my birthplace in
17 South Manchester, Connecticut, a silk-mill town. I am
18 sixty-five years old, a lawyer, the author of six novels
19 for young people and a new book for small children to
20 be published in 1986. I was born the youngest of seven
21 children and grew up among many cousins, and I am
22 the mother of five children. I cannot live without read-
23 ing, and writing and walking around, sometimes quite
24 a distance.

25 The occasion of my trip to China and Siberia was
26 my son-in-law's one-year appointment as an exchange
27 professor teaching English literature at Beijing (Pe-
28 king) University, known as Beida for short. He and my
29 daughter Tam and six-year-old granddaughter lived in
30 Shao Yuan House, the foreign experts' apartments at
31 Beida; and February was their vacation month, when
32 they could travel to see more of China. Their presence
33 in China provided a once in a lifetime opportunity for
34 me to see China with friendly companions but no tour
35 group.

36 My real reasons for making the trip go far back of
37 the opportunity. Partly, the reasons are in books—the
38 hours I spent in adolescence with Pearl Buck, as an
39 adult with Barbara Tuchman's *Silkwell*, with Farley
40 Mowat, George Kennan (the elder), and the Russians
41 themselves, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov. From
42 reading, I cannot doubt that these people and Ameri-
43 cans are made of the same bone and soul, and I want
44 to see, hear, and touch for myself. I want to know from
45 my own senses that the rantings are false that claim
46 these people are not like us, hardly human, perverse
47 peoples with no sense of good and evil.

48 On a much less lofty level, I took the trip because
49 my life at home was in a rut. Most of the last twenty
50 years, I have lived in Keene Valley, New York, a tiny
51 summer-and-ski village in the Adirondacks. In the last
52 ten years, my life had filled up with a law practice
53 which seemed somewhat useless, inefficient, and un-
54 profitable, and with the meetings and agenda of count-
55 less community groups. It was high time to shake loose,
56 not for a quick vacation, but for a good long change of

pace and place. I packed the essentials for about three
months into two cases that I could carry myself, be-
cause all my life I've been pretty set on doing it all by
myself. In China it turned out this was a very wise
preparation—all Chinese trains, busses, and cities are
crowded, and most everyone's carrying what they own.
After six months of furious letter writing to China and
to travel agents and dickering for visas and tickets, I
arrived in Hong Kong and met my youngest son, Alec,
who had got himself there on business.

Three days later, we made our first error, or stroke
of genius—we failed to make reservation for the good
through-train to Guangzhou (Canton). Reservations
are needed for almost all Chinese trains. In sign lan-
guage and Chinese the railway official indicated, Take
local, walk over bridge to China. We agreed, happy
that we didn't have to wait around all day. We
couldn't have had a better introduction to China than
that local and that bridge. Thousands of Chinese
massed themselves in a series of funnels, first Emigra-
tion from Hong Kong Territory; then Immigration
into China; then Health, Money, Tickets. Each was a
separate assault by thousands of us, all carrying our
burdens for a hundred yards or so between each gate
and, midway, across a small arched bridge over a
muddy creek. That was the border. The Chinese have
extraordinary ability to push, to carry, and to be
pushed without getting angry. For many of them the
trip was long sought (only permitted in the last couple
of years), perhaps a once in a lifetime project, to get
back into mainland China to see lost families. They
carried a few clothes, bedrolls, food, and maybe a flow-
ering plant. Alec and I, the only English-speaking peo-
ple I saw on that train, carried our tourist bags and
thought, Are we really doing this? When we actually
got tickets and could board the train, both the Chinese
and we, the tourists, let out a whoop of joy. We'd made
it!

I cannot detour this brief autobiography very far
into a travel journal. Enough to say that China on
your own, not in a tour group, is quite possible, but
vigorous. We walked a lot or crammed ourselves onto
the city busses, not too certain where they were going,
through five cities and (best of all) one small village.
We bicycled, boated, ate, drank beer, waited, and
read. Sightseeing was included—the Great Wall, Sum-
mer Palace, Forbidden City—but what I wanted and
got was just being there, seeing people. I saw none who
were unfriendly to us. Among all those millions of peo-
ple on crowded streets and vehicles, I only saw two
family arguments, between either parents or children. I
never saw a drunk, or a beggar, or anyone sleeping in
a doorway. I saw very few who were frail or crippled or
disabled. The air is terrible for breathing, from truck
and bus exhaust and coal fires, and I coughed and
breathed through my mouth for most of two months.

My best day in China (everyone who goes has
one) was the day I spent finding and visiting the China
Children's Publishing Company. I had written to them
from back in Keene Valley and had got a reply, signed

117 "Editor for Literary Works," with no name. There was
 118 an address written in Western letters. I got a student at
 119 Beida to put the address into Chinese characters, so
 120 that I could show it to people on my way as I searched.
 121 He also wrote down the proper avenues and bus num-
 122 bers, but still I searched and bussed and walked for an
 123 hour or two. Finally a solid middle-aged Chinese inter-
 124 rupted his "sacred" lunch in his office to walk out to
 125 the sidewalk and draw me a little diagram, indicating
 126 one avenue and two lanes: Turn left, *there*. I did so, and
 127 followed the numbers down the lane from 82 till I
 128 came to 23, an apartment building. Three old men sat
 129 smoking their pipes in the gatehouse and were quite
 130 astonished to see a big Western woman. They directed
 131 me to the next gatekeeper, who offered me his chair
 132 and got on his phone for reinforcements.

133 A young woman appeared who spoke halting but
 134 correct English. She also was astonished to see me. Af-
 135 ter we'd talked a few minutes, she smiled widely and
 136 said, "I never speak English before. I never hear any-
 137 one speak English. Is first time!" I was a gift from
 138 beyond, an English speaker. She was also astonished
 139 because no one had ever arrived at that office before
 140 without exact arrangements being made through the
 141 proper offices. Chinese do not just drop in and cer-
 142 tainly do not expect Westerners.

143 She led me up four flights in the apartment build-
 144 ing, and there in two rooms was the China's Children's
 145 Publishing Company, its editor, its Party representa-
 146 tive, and an editor who spoke fluent English. What, he
 147 asked politely and a little embarrassed, did I want? I
 148 said I just wanted to see what books they published for
 149 children and to talk about it. I didn't want to sell my
 150 book (which I showed them) or buy theirs. Soon the
 151 question began to fly back and forth, theirs and mine,
 152 as we talked about authors and their royalties in Amer-
 153 ica, and their salaries and the hard-to-enter writers'
 154 association in China, and I probed politely on the mat-
 155 ter of the International Copyright. They said that
 156 would come, but they also said they sell their children's
 157 paperback novels for less than fifty cents, in order that
 158 children can buy them. We made some sly little jokes
 159 about how publishers can interfere with authors, and
 160 the Party functionary smiled, too.

161 My stomach rumbled—I had left Beida before
 162 eight, and it was now 2:00 P.M. Chinese never skip
 163 lunch, and magically the young lady appeared with a
 164 large enamel basin of *jiaozi*, dumplings stuffed with
 165 ginger and cabbage, to be dipped in hot soy sauce and
 166 accompanied by much tea. We felt very festive—it was
 167 an event in all our lives. On my way back down
 168 Dongsu Lane with its old one-story brick houses, I
 169 stopped at the community outhouse, where three old
 170 ladies were laughing and chattering. I went to put
 171 down my pocketbook, and a lady shook her hand (the
 172 Chinese sign for no) and indicated the hook on the
 173 wall. Theft is unthinkable, but in a toilet house you
 174 don't put things *down*, you put them *up*, where it's
 174.1 clean.

175 My best days in Siberia were several days on the

Trans-Siberian train. Between Irkutsk and Novosi-
 birsk, the friendly lady train-car attendant insisted on
 applying mustard plasters to my chest and wrapping
 me in blankets, to remedy my Chinese cough. Then we
 sat and "talked," passing back and forth the dictionary
 in the back of Berlitz's *Say It in Russian*. We found out
 all about each other's families and living places.

For the five days from Novosibirsk to Khaba-
 rovsk, I shared a compartment with a quiet Russian
 lady of about forty, who had one shopping bag for her
 food and one for her good clothes, to wear when she got
 off the train. On the train, we wore almost identical
 brown corduroys. She was on her way to the Far East
 because her brother had died. Generally we ate to-
 gether in the compartment, from her well-chosen sup-
 plies, my few snacks, and what I bought at station stops
 or from the train attendants. She gave me a little his-
 tory at different stops and was very worried when I
 dallied too long at a station and had to jump onto the
 slowly moving train. (People in both China and Russia
 seem to feel *responsible* for others, in a way that is unfa-
 miliar to Americans.) We read our books together or
 dozed, companionably silent; she had a book of Rus-
 sian poetry, a revolutionary novel, and a biography of
 a nineteenth-century philosopher.

Perhaps it is only on a train that a Russian and an
 American could spend five low-key, restful days to-
 gether. Her English was self-taught and adequate. Her
 trip across Russia and Siberia cost her only about \$40,
 since she was an employee of the railway newspaper.
 My ticket was about \$200. She said she'd like to visit
 America, but she knew she could never do it—too ex-
 pensive.

Siberians were well dressed and rather formal.
 Everyone wore overcoats, fur or fur-trimmed hats, knee
 boots, and women all wore skirts. The Chinese dressed
 in a variety of jackets and pants, some Mao style but
 more not. In both countries people make or have made
 most of their clothes; what I saw on the streets was
 consistently better than what was shown in department
 stores. Stores were crowded with both goods and peo-
 ple, but the people most looked, compared, and
 waited. A purchase is a big decision. Most of life goes
 on with what is already at home, in the way of dry
 goods, clothes, and staple groceries. The atmosphere of
 life is very different from America (or Japan) in that
 there is no continuous assault by advertising to buy this
 model, or that, or a dozen of these.

I don't know how to re-set my cheap digital
 watch, so it stayed on New York time, and when I was
 in Novosibirsk that was again the right time (12 hours
 difference). The farthest I'll ever be from home, the
 other side of the globe—what a place to run out of
 books to read! It's hard to carry enough books in two
 bags that you're determined to carry yourself. I had
 wedged in four long ones: a Trollope, a Dreiser, a
 George Eliot, and Paul Scott's last volume of the Raj
 Quartet; and for my granddaughter, by request, two
 volumes of Laura Ingalls Wilder. My most vivid early
 memories tend to be pegged by what book was being

236 read to me, and thereafter by the book I was reading
237 myself. As I traveled through China and Siberia, mus-
238 ing about what Chinese and Russians thought was the
239 right way to think and act and be, and how to manage
240 the money, there on the seat beside me was Dreiser's
241 *Financier* and George Eliot's *Felix Holt*. They were won-
242 dering about the same things, in nineteenth-century
243 England and America. Especially the money.

244 I had almost finished both books and was looking
245 at five days and nights on the train, when I found an
246 oasis in Novosibirsk, a bookstore with a section of En-
247 glish books. Most were standard English and American
248 classics for Russian students, but Progress Publishers
249 also publishes some contemporary Soviet fiction. *Sibe-
250 rian Short Stories* was my favorite, together with *A Man
251 in His Prime*, by Z. Skujins, a sort of Latvian-Soviet
252 Man in the Gray Flannel Suit. Neither is an epic, but
253 they're good reading, well written.

254 In wartime, or if trapped in any way, I have no
255 doubt that we American democrats and Eastern com-
256 munist will be capable of acting with unspeakable in-
257 humanity. But as you read the literature, you cannot
258 doubt that both our authors and theirs probe what it
259 means to be human, how people love and hate, what
260 honesty between people means in different circum-
261 stances, how self-worth grows out of work, and how
262 money—which was perhaps intended as a mere mea-
263 sure—confuses and confounds human loyalties.

264 As detours will, this one got longer than I in-
265 tended, but it was while I was on this trip that I started
266 to look back at my own life and to put it on paper.
267 There was the first day, December 28, 1919, and baby-
268 hood which I don't remember, followed by childhood
269 and youth vividly remembered, and three years of
270 newspaper work. That brought me up to age twenty-
271 five and the final end of childhood. During the middle
272 years, I was a mother, wife, and writer of children's
273 books, and then for ten years a law student and lawyer.
274 When you start to draw Social Security, you have to
275 admit you're old; so here I am, living in a little town
276 that my great grandfather, Horace Bushnell, one of the
277 "climbing clerics" of the Adirondacks, discovered for
278 my family back in the 1850s, and I can say I'm old.

279 **W**hen I was born, my mother, who was a Christian
280 Scientist, did not go to a hospital, and the story
281 goes that my father called a doctor friend who was a
282 psychiatrist. His presence at my birth accounted for a
283 lot, Father said. I hear the echoes: "Emily, sit *down!*
284 Don't fidget so!" And at school: "Emily could be a
285 good student, if she would learn to concentrate." The
286 earliest picture I have shows me dressed in my best,
287 about two years old, sitting quiet and prettily. But the
288 only way they could get me to sit still was to let me
289 hold Father's gold watch.

290 I was the ninth baby born at home to my mother.
291 Seven of us grew to adulthood, and five of us are living
292 still, ages sixty-five to eighty-three. Most of us were
293 born in the brick house on the Cheney Place in South
294 Manchester, Connecticut. The Place was like a golf

course—green, mowed, fragrant or snow covered, and
laced with curving red-dirt roads connecting a dozen
or more Cheney houses. Father and Mother built theirs
about 1899, soon after their marriage. Father had
seven brothers, four sisters, and eleven first cousins,
most of them living on the Place in Manchester, and
many working for the family Cheney Silk Mills. You
can see now why it is natural for me to be family-
centered, and why many of my good friends are cous-
ins. That family childhood is almost a stronger bond
than any later friendships from college or work.

My father worked at the mill, first as boss of the
ribbon mill, later as head of a network of paternalistic
labor relations and services. The mill whistle blew at
seven o'clock, and we woke up. It blew at noon, and
soon father came home to lunch. He came home after
the five o'clock whistle and soon he could read us a
story. Uncle Remus was his favorite. My sister Mary
and I liked the story too, but we liked especially the
moment when Father's voice trailed off into a drone
and he fell asleep, then jerked up his head and contin-
ued reading.

Superficially at least, the relationship between my
parents and me was nothing like that of any of the
family groups in my books. My father and mother were
both forty-nine when I was born and so from the start
they were almost in the position of grandparents. I
wasn't conscious of this, as my best-friend cousins were
also the youngest child of *their* middle-aged parents
and, like me, had grown-up brothers or sisters. I as-
sumed this was the ordinary family. We also all had
nurses, cooks, or maids intervening between us and our
parents.

I think of my father and mother as moving con-
tinuously through my childhood years, but mainly out
of sight and out of my mind, reappearing as figures of
authority, benign but absolute, and occasionally as
providers of a treat. I picture my mother dressed al-
ways in pale gray-green dresses with white at the V-
neck, cool and distant as a forest tree. She was slender
and fairly tall, the same height as my father, who was
pinkly roundfaced and chubby. I remember him com-
ing to our nursery supper-table one afternoon, red-
faced and sweating from playing golf, and putting
down on the table a tiny turtle he had found on the
course, kissing ~~we~~ wetly and departing with a grin but
no words. I remember going quietly past the nurse's
door and down the long, long dark hall to my mother's
bed in the middle of the night, because of a leg cramp.
I whimpered and pulled at her sheet, and she mistook
me for the dog and said, "Down, Jump, get down."

On the one miraculous occasion when I alone
went on a trip with my parents, to Charleston, South
Carolina, there was another leg-cram night, and
Mother sat and rubbed off and on all night. In Keene
Valley, where we went in the summer (again always in
the same house), mother and father took us swimming
in brooks, picnicked and climbed mountains with us.
But we were returned to our keeper for early supper
and bedtime. Evening family life could go on without

me

355 us downstairs.

356 While I resented being shunted away, something
357 more complex and important happened in those nur-
358 series, Keene Valley or Manchester. I had a third par-
359 ent, the pillar of my life between the ages of about five
360 and nine, Mrs. Goodall, a governess. The word govern-
361 ess itself now seems as antique as the wimple, but Mrs.
362 Goodall herself was solid. She was English, in her fifties
363 at least, and she believed in authority. She also had a
364 great need to love and be loved by children. She ob-
365 served instantly that Mary and I had many shrewd
366 forms of bad behavior which had routed a succession of
367 prior governesses, and she let us know that such behav-
368 ior was now at a stop. Right now. This established, she
369 took us to ponds for skating, hills for sliding, lanes to
370 pick fringed gentian; she helped me with my chickens
371 and goats, and taught me to read and write and sew.
372 She read aloud every evening or rainy day. The best
373 were the books of E. Nesbit, especially *Oswald Bastable*
374 *and Others*, coupled in my mind with *An Island Story: A*
375 *Child's History of England*, by H. E. Marshall. The two
376 kinds of books went together, humorous fiction and his-
377 tory, and I attained a second childhood home, in Eng-
378 land. Many later inhabitants came into this world:
379 *Children of the New Forest*, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Bob*,
380 *Son of Battle*, *Greyfriars' Bobby*, *Men of Iron*, *Otto of the Silver*
381 *Hand*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and *Merrylips*. The list could
382 go on forever, most being books I eventually read to
383 myself, but Mrs. Goodall always read, too. Mary and I
384 often tried to grab the book she had been reading to
385 read another chapter by flashlight under the covers.
386 We had such harmless sins.

387 Perhaps next in importance to books in my child-
388 hood was food. I didn't like it, furch in the family
389 dining room, I ate almost nothing. I hated all vegeta-
390 bles, except maybe beets; I hated potatoes, creamed
391 codfish I positively could not swallow, and I didn't
392 much like milk. Frequently, I could get Mother, Fa-
393 ther, and Mrs. Goodall into a three-way scolding ses-
394 sion which distressed all of them, and led to my being
395 sent from the table. This was most satisfactory. I could
396 snuggle in my bed, with or without a book, and I could
397 always steal sugar lumps later when I got hungry.
398 Mary and I ate supper upstairs while Mrs. Goodall
399 had her tea, and that was a good meal—hot milk or
400 cocoa, toast and jam, applesauce and friendly conver-
401 sation. Jump, my dog, lay under the table, and crust
402 corners could be sneaked to him. Breakfast was all
403 right, too, once the amount of sugar for the cereal was
404 settled. It was only dinner in the dining room that was
405 full of bad flavors and had vibrations. On my un-
406 healthy diet, I had colds most of every winter. Cod
407 liver oil in a thick molasses base was administered by
408 Mother, and hot-mustard footbaths by Mrs. Goodall. I
409 survived both the colds and the cures.

410 From the list of books, one can see that I liked
411 dogs and boys. I didn't just like them—as a small
412 child, I intended to *be* a dog; later, to *be* a boy. In my
413 first written epic, of which four pages survive, I wrote
414 in the first person the story of Jump and his arrival in

Manchester:

4
At last a little girl ran out with fair hair, blue eyes and a nose that turned up slightly. I didn't like the turn-up nose, but I thought she had a kindly eye. Her first question was, who did I belong to. She was to be my fucher Mistress.

I worked much harder on trying to become a boy. Whenever possible, I wore pants and insisted that they be real boy's pants, and I had my hair cut short. I wished to be not only a boy, but a knight or page. When I was decked out in a silk dress with a frilly collar for my older sister's wedding and had to pose for the photographer, I clutched the side of my silk dress in a bunch. At least I knew that that was my sword, and that I was only in disguise as a girl. Of all my books, my favorite was Beulah Marie Dix's *Merrylips*, and I reread it every year until I was well into high school. *Merrylips* goes through the English Wars of the Roses—disguised as a boy.

Aside from books and avoiding food, a large part of my life was lived outdoors, in company with two boys who were cousins and our various animals. Teddy, who lived next door, had rabbits, so I got rabbits. Then I also got chickens and kept laborious note-books of profit and loss, in pennies. On a long bicycle ride or a walk with Mrs. Goodall, I discovered a goat farm, and soon I got a baby goat. She was returned to the farm for the summer while we were in Keene Valley. Next winter, I noticed that she was rather fat, though I sometimes forgot to feed her. One winter night, she gave birth to a kid, which died, on one of those days that I had forgotten her. I felt very guilty. It was also the very first time that a birth had happened in my life, and at age ten I had no idea how it happened, or that it could be predicted.

My sister Mary had matured very early, when she was ten and I was eight. One day she was mysteriously kept in bed, in the little room down the hall, not our nursery double room. When she went in the bathroom, she locked the door. Mrs. Goodall was jealous and angry that Mary was removed from her care, and no one would explain to me what was going on. No adult ever did, as it turned out. I got an inkling that it was something to do with becoming a woman, and I simply became more determined to become a boy, so that it shouldn't happen to me. Probably because of my skimpy eating habits, nothing did happen till much later, when I was past thirteen. Other girls and an older cousin told me what to do about it, and it was years and years after that before I ever saw the word "menstruation" written in a book or magazine. I did wonder why no heroines in books were troubled by this problem.

I knew in the back of my head that governesses were not forever, and of course Mrs. Goodall knew it, too. However, a governess was supposed to nurture the child's first love and loyalty to the parents, never to act as if she wanted the child's love herself. As for me, I just

474 avoided letting that question of whom I loved best,
475 Mother or Mrs. Goodall, sneak into my head. Practi-
476 cally speaking, there could be little question: I was *with*
477 Mrs. Goodall from first shoelace to last goodnight, with
478 Mother only at intervals.

479 On a summer day, in the Pierce Arrow driven by
480 Joe, the chauffeur, we went to visit my oldest sister and
481 her new baby, the first grandchild. On the way,
482 Mother announced, "You're growing up now." This
483 made me feel good, and I listened attentively. "When
484 we go home," Mother went on, "Mrs. Goodall will be
485 leaving. You're old enough to take care of yourselves,
486 now." As the car rolled along, all was serene. Mother
487 left no space for protests or tears. I knew something was
488 terribly wrong, but I was not able to name it.

489 When we got home, Mrs. Goodall was at her most
490 brisk and British. There were no little pats or smiles,
491 and love did not seem to exist. We got through supper
492 and baths, pretending life was normal. We got in our
493 beds. I could hear the mumble of Mrs. Goodall's voice
494 down the hall, saying goodnight to Mary. Finally she
495 came into my room, swooped like an eagle to kiss me
496 on the cheek, said goodnight in a voice tight with anger,
497 and was gone. I no longer had a third parent.

498 The memory and the loss remain, but childhood
499 does not stick in one bad hole, and my life went on
500 after Mrs. Goodall's departure quite happily. Perhaps
501 from this I assume that the preadolescent years are
502 happy for most children. They were for me, because at
503 last I was in charge of my child life. I could read, swim,
504 bicycle all over town, and telephone or just wander out
505 the door to meet the cousins who were my constant and
506 only playmates. The older cousins were now the au-
507 thorities, sometimes bossy, but still firmly part of the
508 child world, a phalanx that did not ask help or tell
509 tales to adults.

510 I had been to school with all of them for my first
511 three years of schooling. Then, as the older cousins
512 (and a few neighbors) went to high school or boarding
513 schools, six of us younger ones went to school in, of all
514 places, my house. My brother's piano was pushed into
515 the corner, and the downstairs playroom became the
516 school room for Mary and me, two boy cousins who
517 had been my steady friends, and two other neighbors.
518 With only one teacher, Mary and I did the same work,
519 making me feel insufferably proud and bright.

520 The big school event occurred when I was ten and
521 Mary twelve: we went to seventh grade in the public
522 school. I was ecstatic, Mary was not. At last I could be
523 one of a group of kids, I could have friends in the town.
524 Until then, since my family owned the silk mills, we
525 children were conspicuous. When I walked or bicycled
526 down Main Street, I could feel or hear a whisper,
527 "Cheneys." To complete my new identity, I insisted
528 that Mother buy me some dresses at the local depart-
529 ment store, not the made to order models she used to
530 get from the Hartford dressmaker.

531 But I did wear dresses, and my new friends were
532 all girls. That was revolutionary—at age ten, I had
533 never before had a friend who was a girl. We bicycled

together, I went home with them and they with me.
We fired our slingshots, and I learned petty shoplifting.
Before that, badness had consisted of stealing sugar
lumps or gingerale and reading under the covers at
bedtime, but now chills of excitement ran down my
back as I left a store with a stolen trinket, or as I fin-
gered my cache of stolen goodies in a bottom drawer.
Nothing I took was ever for actual use. After a few
months, I stole a wooden necktie rack in the hardware
store. It was too large to hide in a pocket, and I knew
the hardware store men recognized me as I ran out of
the store. I felt no more excitement, but real terror.
What if they called Father? I couldn't think of it. I
dropped the tie rack in the woods and gave up crime.
(They never called Father.) I can still remember how
my fingers yearned for that rack. At ten years old, and
with friends who were girls, I was still working on be-
coming a boy.

There were two excursions with Mother, before
she departed from my life. Though there are many
things I remember about the trip to Charleston, South
Carolina, the overwhelming one was simply that I,
alone, was with my parents in a grown-up's place.
Mary and I were both in bed with colds, when Mother
came in and announced that I would go with them to
the South. (Mary's cold was a single event, not a
chronic condition, therefore not qualifying her for a
trip.) I can't remember that I spent much time feeling
sorry for Mary. I said I was sorry, and she did *not* say,
That's all right. I've thought of it since, perhaps espe-
cially after my own children came and I realized how
hard it is to do something with just one, how agonized
a left-behind sibling feels. Off I went to the hotel coun-
try club in Charleston. There were no other children
there, and I played backgammon with grown-ups. I
ordered anything I wanted from the menu, everything
with a French name, just to find out what it was, and
no one nagged me to eat it all.

The last excursion with Mother took place in May
when I was eleven. Of her own accord, Mother pro-
posed that she would take us for a Saturday picnic at
Marlborough Lake, where many Cheney families
jointly owned a camp. The key was always kept in the
black walnut desk in the living room with a brass tag
on it that said Howell Cheney. Mary and I both liked
to hold it as the car bumped up the dirt road to the
camp. On this day in May, Mary asked first to hold
the key.

Mother patted her pockets and said, "Oh, I must
have forgotten it." We knew that was a joke. Mother
didn't forget things. When we arrived at the camp, Joe
waited for Mother to hand him the key. She went all
through her handbag and pockets and finally admitted
it—she really had forgotten the key. We walked over to
a pasture with a brook and picnicked on the grass, and
Mary and I built dams in the brook.

The next day, Mother was "not feeling well." It
was the only day I ever remember her not coming
down to breakfast. We went to her door and whispered
good morning and goodnight that day, but I never

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really saw her again. She had pneumonia and refused for several days to have a doctor, or even to go to the hospital. She died at home within the week.

I did not grieve, and that worried me. Children in books were always devastated by the death of a parent. They moaned and sobbed and couldn't talk or eat. In our house, life went on, on the surface, as usual, and everyone talked about Mother all the time. It was my first inkling that some of my favorite books told untruths, emotionally speaking.

My mother's death occurred when I was eleven, and so that event marks a definitive end of childhood. The following years of adolescence would have had their distresses anyway, but I remember acutely the bewilderment and confusion of those first summers. We were supposed to be "good" and take care of ourselves, but there was nothing to do and no one in charge. The cook and maid and chauffeur, who had been our friends, were fighting among themselves. In Keene Valley I had no friends beside my sister, and no idea how to make any. There were kids around the swimming pool, but I didn't know how to become one of them. I had no idea how to call someone up and make a date.

I took refuge inside my head, where I was an entirely different person, living a whole other life. I remember people constantly wanting me to pay attention to something here, but I was walking around somewhere else, and the effort of jerking back to reality was wearisome. I lay around a lot, reading or doing nothing. I have no memory now of where those places were that I lived in my head, but they were concrete, and they were full of conversations. Long afterward, I found Jean Stafford's *Boston Adventure*, which described expertly what I remember, as the boy in her book kept having to switch back and forth between his two worlds, interrupting himself in mid-sentence. At the time, the stories in my head obsessed me, but I also knew there was something wrong with this, and I worried that I was not sane. I rushed to do something—swim, tennis, climb, anything—though activity didn't really help.

All this is associated in my mind almost entirely with summers, either in Keene Valley or Manchester. My ardent seventh grade friendships faded away when, the following year, Father sent Mary and me to a girls' day school in Hartford. As the Depression came on, we spent more summers in Manchester, hot, bored, and lonely. Since we have all grown up, I've talked to my older brothers and sisters, and they share the same sense of a lack of friends in childhood. The Cheney cousin club was valuable, but it wasn't everything.

In 1931 when Mother died, the Depression closed tightly around Cheney Brothers, and most of its family executives had to leave the business. Father had never worked anywhere else. Without a job, and without Mother, his whole familiar world appeared to be vanishing. For one year, Mary and I traveled in and out to Hartford with cousins, and then Mary was sent off to

boarding school. The next winter, for the first time in my life, I felt protective toward another human being, my father. We had our arguments, over when I could stay with new friends in Hartford, but in my bones I knew he shouldn't be left alone in the evening. Sometimes we sat, the two of us, eating dinner in the big dining room and saying nothing, but I knew I had to be there.

Father got a temporary job in Hartford, and slowly his world began to re-form. Our most cheerful and companionable times were spent in the car. Conservative, rational, and disciplined in all else, Father associated the automobile with adventure. He liked buying cars, driving them, and teaching his children to drive. He had taught me on the dirt road in Keene Valley as soon as I could reach the clutch and brake and see through (not over) the wheel. Now he let me drive occasionally on our commuting trips in and out to Hartford and on weekend excursions. He paid little attention to motor vehicle rules—he passed cars when he deemed it safe and convenient, and he let me drive when he felt sleepy. We had adventurous trips when the Connecticut River was in flood, and we went fifty miles upstream to find a high bridge. When Mary came home from boarding school on vacation and couldn't distinguish a Ford from a Chevy from a Buick, I was amazed. These were the important facts of life.

The bewildering double life of summer dropped away from me when school began. Before starting at Oxford in Hartford, I had my tonsils out and spent two nights in the hospital, a not wholly unpleasant event. School was totally satisfactory, full of sports, books, and friends. There were about ten new eighth graders that year, and we were in our own room; a tight group of comrades. At lunchtime, I observed that other girls ate, even with enthusiasm, and I began trying food. It wasn't bad, and nobody said I had to eat it. I got healthier. I had a minimum of trouble with clothes, manners, and boys (unlike my sister at boarding school, who was miserable because of all three). Other girls, who had grown up with radios in their homes, hummed popular tunes like "Night and Day" and sometimes talked about boys and parties. But I and my close friends were busy with field hockey, basketball, bicycling, learning to drive, reading books and doing school work. I saw myself in print: two stories in the school magazine, one a fable about a camel, and the other about a girl who visited her strange old uncle. The girl in the story, who had gone out on a date, was sketched satirically, and the sympathetic character was the old man, immersed in his work and the thoughts inside his head.

Dates with boys were no part of my highschool life. I, who had spent childhood trying to become a boy, found young men daunting. I didn't know how to talk to them, and my first juicy kiss disgusted me and made me feel evil. I had no conscious desire in those years to be either feminine or masculine, just to be me. My body was not so easily satisfied, and it produced in my head masochistic fantasies involving either men or

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women. It wasn't until ten years later, when sex became a regular and satisfying part of my life, that the fantasies departed and I realized what had caused them.

As for the difficulty with talking to men, I made the discovery so many teenagers do, that talk came more easily after a couple of drinks. Rather surprisingly, in that New England background that sounds so staid and sheltered, my older brothers and sisters gave me cocktails from the time I was thirteen or so, and there was alcohol in the punch at our proper holiday dances in Hartford. Looking back, I wonder—how else could we have stood them? It was formal dancing, sweaty cheek-to-cheek, waiting desperately for a boy to cut in, so as not to be trapped forever with one partner. I knew none of the boys, never saw them at an easy, informal occasion.

At sixteen, I went off to Bryn Mawr College, both because I wanted to, and because there was nothing else I could possibly do. Teenage babysitting for pay hadn't been invented, and girls from good schools with good marks didn't waitress or work in the five-and-ten. My older sisters had gone to college, and all my family and my teachers headed me in that direction. What advice I got was to study broadly, to stretch my mind, and not to worry about a job. In fact, in those still-Depression days, we all rather assumed that a job would be enormously difficult to get.

College for me, in 1936, was definitely a step into a bigger and freer world than the Cheney Place or Hartford. (I think the reverse is now true for kids who go from high-flying suburban high-school life to a college dormitory. They find it unbearably confined, or so raucous that it's unlivable.) At last, I was living with a bunch of people my own age, with minimal adult interference, and on the whole I loved it. I majored in economics and history, and spent a good deal of time on the college magazine and newspaper. The extracurricular activity eventually turned into my first vocation, but the interest in history has continued—my current reading includes a book on medieval usury, a biography of Mao, as well as new fiction. The college friends have lasted all my life. Whether I see them or not, they are *there*, part of my life. In the final week of senior year, I wept openly because I thought I had failed an economics exam, and a few days later enjoyed myself enormously giving a hammed-up speech on the steps of Taylor Hall, an experience in public speaking that was not to be repeated for twenty-five years.

I graduated from college not knowing what I wanted to be. I knew I wanted to go to New York City and live without being directed by parent or teacher. I applied for jobs as an economic researcher and as a newspaper errand boy, and the latter came through first. I had a letter of introduction to the publisher of the *Daily News*, and he saw that the oncoming war would siphon off his copyboys, so he decided to be first in hiring a copygirl.

My first lodging in the Big City was a boarding house with bedbugs on East Thirty-sixth Street. About

my third day at work, my fellow copyboys took a brotherly look at the welts on my forehead and told me how to check for bedbugs. I did, and set out to hunt an apartment. To hunt one's own place to live, what a revolutionary activity, for me who had always lived in the same family house! A series of apartments followed, with a series of girls as roommates. Rooming with the opposite sex would have been a highly unconventional activity. I had dates, but even if it was dawn, I came home. As World War II continued, my roommates disappeared one by one to get married, follow a husband to an Army camp, or to work in Washington.

I carried copy for a year at the *Daily News*, a vast private bureaucracy in which promotion was years away. I quit and got a job at the neighboring, and competing, *Daily Mirror*, a place of personalities, tempers, cliques, sex, and talent. Looking back, I'd have to say I got the job on the basis of sex—a young editor thought it would be fun to have the “blonde bomber” flying about the office. While the copyboys at the *News* had been brotherly, even protective, the boys at the *Mirror* were not. When I got a promotion ahead of another copyboy, he dropped the rumor that I was really a divorced countess. That did it—the wolves gathered. However, they also got drafted, and after a year or so I moved into writing the “Only Human” column, a daily profile. My life eddied back and forth between two shores: the excitement of learning to write (and photograph) and turn out a column every day, and the miseries of dealing with one or another pursuing male and thinking myself desperately in love with some. There is a myth that girls love the feeling of being pursued. It is a myth; they don't, or I didn't. Everyday I went out to lunch alone and thought of quitting. Then I had a beer and decided to go back to work.

Glenn later said that he saw me fleeing through the city room, where he was night city-editor, but it cannot be said that I saw him until he came, as chief editorial writer, to the small feature room, 602B, where I worked. As I filed his name and address that first day, I thought regretfully, he's married. (It was well known that everyone who lived in Queens was married.) He walked up and down our long hall whistling and singing and bouncing on the balls of his feet, the way he walked all his life. He smiled at me, and it was a pleasant smile, not wolfish. Pretty soon he asked me to have a drink after work, and pretty soon that became a daily event. The drinks became a vehicle for talking, something we both needed. Since he was married, we both assumed nothing more was involved. After a few months, there came a Primary Day, and the bars were closed, and Glenn came home with me for the usual drinks, and he kissed me goodnight. It was most of a year after that before we slept together, and many months more before I was pregnant. Things ripened slowly, as I believe for many of us they have to.

I quit the *Mirror* in June 1944, and went to Colorado to stay with friends of Glenn's, Frank Mechau, an



*832 artist, and his wife and four children. The whole Me-
 *833 chau family, and the whole Rocky Mountains, seemed
 *834 to support me and my swelling stomach. I loved being
 *835 pregnant, then and four more times. It's the only work
 *836 I've ever been able to do without effort, the only times
 *837 at which the body needed no directions from the brain.
 *838 I didn't even have colds when I was pregnant. I wrote
 *839 pages and pages of letters to Glenn, and more pages of
 *840 stories that never got published. I hadn't told my fam-
 *841 ily that I was pregnant, just that I was taking a vaca-
 *842 tion. I luxuriated in being part of the Mechau family,
 *843 so unlike my own. They were warm and openly affec-
 *844 tionate, and we discussed love and war, sex and giving
 *845 birth, music and art, all together, children and grown-
 *846 ups. When I went back to that house in Redstone,
 *847 Colorado, twenty years later, I felt as if it were a child-
 *848 hood home.

849 Glenn came out to Colorado in August, and we
 850 returned to New York City together to live together in
 851 my little apartment, to have our baby, and to tell my
 852 father. The latter seemed to me the greater hazard.
 853 Characteristically, I wrote him a terse letter, telling
 854 him the essential facts without emotion. Glenn was
 855 rather appalled at my letter. Unrealistically, back in
 856 my bookish fantasies, I pictured my father being dis-
 857 traught at the news of an illegitimate child. I forgot all
 858 that I knew about my real life father, who in fact got
 859 on the phone and said he would come to New York the
 860 next day and see us at noon.

861 Then seventy-three, he came up our three flights
 862 of stairs, puffing a little. Glenn arrived, puffing a good
 863 deal more, having run the six blocks from the *Mirror*
 864 office. We all looked at each other and smiled and
 865 kissed and said, Well. There wasn't a whole lot to talk
 866 about, except the practicalities of where and when the
 867 baby would be born, and where we would live. After
 868 lunch, Father winked at me and said he didn't intend
 869 to omit his traditional "look here a minute" with a
 870 prospective new family member, and he arranged to
 871 meet Glenn alone for lunch the following day. On that
 872 occasion he told Glenn. "If you don't love Emily, you
 873 can leave right now and don't worry, we'll take care of
 874 her." Glenn said he was staying, and from then on he
 875 and Father got along very well. They shared a love for
 876 me, for Keene Valley, and they both leaned to conserv-
 877 ative politics and found my politics childish or incom-
 878 prehensible. (Earlier in our relationship, Glenn had
 879 once declared that William Randolph Hearst was a
 880 great man, and I had burst into tears.)

881 Since that day some forty years ago, I have re-
 882 peatedly found that children miscalculate their par-
 883 ents' ability to absorb bad news without falling apart.
 884 Most of the disasters have been pre-thought, lived
 885 through in imagination, in the dark hours of some wor-
 886 rying night. When the thing actually happens, it's
 887 something like hearing the second shoe drop, and the
 888 parent simply starts taking the appropriate actions. Fa-
 889 ther's only real concern, after making sure Glenn had
 890 an income and we had a place to live, was that there
 891 should be "no more false pride or secrecy about this

baby." So, when our baby Tam was a month or two
 old, he held a Cheney christening party. Several cous-
 ins whispered to me that they weren't sure whether to
 wear their wedding or their funeral faces and clothes,
 but they all came and all had a good time. It is prob-
 ably worth noting, for those who grew up in the forties,
 that I never really encountered any embarrassment
 over my unmarried state. In December of 1948, a few
 months before our third child was born, Glenn and I
 were formally married. By then, Father said he real-
 ized it hardly mattered, as he knew we were committed
 to each other.

The main difference between my experiences as a
 mother and that of most of my earlier friends was that
 I always lived in the city. My babies started making
 friends as soon as they could walk, and I made at least
 two lifelong friends among other mothers, as we all sat
 in the parks day after day, first Beekman Place, then
 Stuyvesant Park, then Gramercy. We exchanged child-
 ren each day it was too rainy or cold to go out, or if
 one of us was sick, and we fumbled and grumbled
 through the problems of children in the big public
 schools.

When I had three children below school age, I did
 indeed sometimes feel trapped, and there came into our
 lives a lady who had a name but was always known
 simply as Mademoiselle. She was sixty-five when I first
 knew her, and slowly she got older. She was instantly
 devoted to each baby in turn and jealous of me, the
 mother. It was evident to her that I knew nothing
 about raising children (true), that I had too few rules
 and too little patience, and that if she were not there to
 protect and direct them, my children would never sur-
 vive. She was a very different person from Mrs. Good-
 all, and I was looking at her from a different perspec-
 tive, but there was a reassuring continuity.

I started writing regularly about 1961, when my
 youngest child started school. Before that I had made
 erratic attempts at a story or an essay, but nothing was
 published. Fooling around one day on a cranky old
 typewriter with sticking keys and no return lever, I
 started being a boy arguing with his father. They ar-
 gued about cats and dogs, or teenage music, or hair-
 cuts, or any other old thing. I had never written in the
 first person before, and it was fun, wonderfully freeing,
 just to *be* someone else, finally to *be* a boy in a way that
 came naturally, in writing. That experiment grew into
 a story, "Cat and I," which was published in the *Sunday*
Mirror. (I sent it in without telling my husband or mak-
 ing any reference to him. I was still New England and
 stubborn, determined to do it all myself.)

I sent some picture-book stories to Harper and
 Row, and I met Ursula Nordstrom. The picture-book
 stories were never published, but Ursula looked at the
 cat story and said, "Why don't you try making this
 into a book? I'm so sick of manuscripts starting, 'Gold!
 the cry went up.'" At that time there were practically
 no contemporary books about boys in the city, and it
 was well accepted that children didn't like books told
 in the first person. I didn't know that, so I went ahead.

952 With Ursula's tender loving editing, her urging me to
953 keep going, the story grew into *It's Like This, Cat*. The
954 day I signed the contract and knew it was actually
955 going to be a book was the big day of my life. Getting
956 published is the difference between writing and being
957 an author. When the book won the Newbery Medal for
958 1964, I went into a new excitement, which lasted into
959 the American Library Association convention that
960 summer. Glenn and I and our youngest son went, and
961 Ursula held all our hands. I made my speech before
962 the convention and discovered again that having a
963 crowd respond to my words was heady stuff.

964 In order to write the book, I had taken its hero,
965 Dave, and his cat to all the places in New York City
966 that I had trudged around with my children. The de-
967 tails of the city are accurate, and so are the details of
968 my characters' language, clothes, food, and friends,
969 which pretty much came from my children and their
970 friends. However, the emotions and characteristics of
971 the people in my books are not my children's.

972 Young readers ask me where I get the ideas for my
973 characters. Most of all, they come out of remembered
974 childhood emotions and wants. Anyone who is reading
975 this autobiography and has read my books will imme-
976 diately say that the situations in my books are nothing
977 at all like my own childhood. This is true. I probably
978 write more often out of the felt lacks of my childhood
979 than out of its actual events. But there are many
980 bridges: when I described two boys fighting on the
981 sidewalk in New York City, I remembered the tears of
982 frustrations when I fought with my sister in our nursery
983 room; Dave's attachment to his cat parallels my own
984 attachment to my dog, and also grows out of the fact
985 that my father hated cats and I never could have one.
986 The funny portrait of Mary's beatnik mother in *Cat*,
987 and of Sandra the girl-next-door in *Berries Goodman*, are
988 both based directly on myself, parts of myself that I
989 realize are absurd or unlikeable. The whole loving, ar-
990 gumentative but often silent, relationship between
991 Dave and his father echoes my childhood with my fa-
992 ther, and I have tried to create mothers who lasted and
993 are *there*. The focus of all my books is how the child
994 works out (or fails to work out) the relationship with
995 the adults in his or her life.

996 **A**s for me, I find it more difficult to write in this brief
997 autobiography about my grown-up years. Per-
998 haps that's why my books to date have been about
999 children, and mainly for children.

1,000 The years between forty and forty-five were prob-
1,001 ably the most satisfactory years of my life. I had work I
1,002 enjoyed and knew how to do; after that work, children
1,003 to work or play with; food to cook and a husband to
1,004 come home at night. Glenn didn't get home till seven
1,005 or eight each evening, after the children had eaten
1,006 their supper and were ready for bed. The two or three
1,007 drinks we had started having each night at Benny's
1,008 Bar near the *Mirror* continued as an every-evening
1,009 event at home, virtually each night of our life together.
1,010 Very occasionally, we had company or went out in the

9 evening, but mainly our life was self-contained in the family.

They were very nearly ideal days, except for the fact that those evening drinks became almost our only idea for recreation and the goal of each day. We had many wonderful times together—writing, reading, fishing, having and sharing our children—but each event seemed to be aimed toward first-drink time. In 1963, Glenn had a mild stroke (in the summer, while reading *Little Women* for the first time) and was told to quit smoking and cut way back on drinking. For a year, I gave up drinking. I began to realize that we hardly knew how to talk to each other without that glass in the hand. The glass trap, even to those who do not become alcoholics, is that each drinker is two people, the original one, and the hazed-over one. What Glenn and I would have done and been with each other, if we had just been ourselves, I'll never know.

The easy days ended with Glenn's second stroke and death in June of 1965. The *Mirror* had gone out of business the year before, and after his first minor stroke we had spent the whole year in Keene Valley, hoping he would recover his strength. I didn't go back to New York City, because without a job to do there it seemed impractical and too expensive. I've missed it, and so at times have the children—they thought of it as home. The months of shock and grief at Glenn's ^{death} gradually moved into months of bewilderment. At my mother's death, I had had to establish an identity as a child. As an adult I hadn't really made decisions or thought who I was—certainly I never consciously planned to be a mother or a wife. Things had happened and carried me along. Now, without Glenn, I wasn't at all sure who I was, what I liked, or what I wanted to do. It went to things as trivial as wondering if I really wanted garlic in the stew. I'd always put it in, and it had seemed good, because he liked it. I'd loved going fishing, but it didn't seem worth doing alone. Why had we collected that set of Kipling, or all those stainless steel bowls? It was a long process, probably still going on, to find out who I was as a single middle-aged person.

I knew what I was doing writing books for children, and I didn't have to be "in the mood" to write. I've written best on some of the days when I felt worst. Each book seemed to take a little longer than the last, but I kept at it up until 1970. My books for young people are nothing like the books I read as a child. My own favorites were almost all heroic, and suspenseful. Courage and loyalty were their standard motifs. When I began to look at children's literature as an adult and an author, I began to see that heroes and villains are most useful in creating suspense, and also that teaching children to admire courage and loyalty teaches them to be obedient, a useful lesson from the adult perspective. (In real-life emergency situations, acts of courage are mainly performed by those who are trained: it is the skilled swimmer who saves the drowning child.) All of my own writing that I have liked has been rather loosely plotted, episodic rather than suspenseful; very conversational; and my characters tend to be individ-

1,071 ualists, not loyal team-players. A perceptive reader in
1,072 St. Louis said he thought *Cat* was the character I ad-
1,073 mired most in that book.

1,074 A book I started, in about 1969, ground to a halt.
1,075 My characters wouldn't talk properly, and the book
1,076 would not go. In Keene Valley, I like the outdoors, the
1,077 quiet, and the sparkling air, but sometimes humanity
1,078 seems constricted. People look at the mountains and
1,079 don't talk and wonder how to get out. I sprung myself
1,080 out by talking the St. Louis city schools into hiring me
1,081 as "author in residence," since they already used *It's*
1,082 *Like This, Cat* for eighth-grade reading. I worked in five
1,083 or six different classrooms each day, getting children to
1,084 write, and I enjoyed it enormously. I lived in a sparsely
1,085 furnished apartment, the only place I've ever lived that
1,086 I got just for me. I would have considered staying, but
1,087 I knew of no other job I could get, I had a cold con-
1,088 tinuously, and it was too far from "home."

1,089 Out of that experience came my last book for
1,090 young people, *Garden of Broken Glass*, not completed for
1,091 several years. The plot, involving three black teenagers
1,092 and one white, all of different families, gave me trou-
1,093 ble, and so did the languages, black English and white
1,094 English. When I came home from St. Louis, my work-
1,095 able house in the village was rented, and I prepared to
1,096 live and work in the big old summer house, two rooms
1,097 of which could be heated effectively. A young friend
1,098 who was an artist needed a place for the winter also,
1,099 and together we hauled wood and shoveled snow, and
1,100 she painted and I worked on *Garden*. It didn't go well. I
1,101 wondered what I'd do next winter—the friend would
1,102 be moving out to get married. I couldn't live in this
1,103 cold house alone, and I didn't know of anyone I
1,104 wanted to live with. I looked at the pages in my type-
1,105 writer, and there was Melvita, my strong, bouncing
1,106 black girl, looking at the houses of the rich outside St.
1,107 Louis and saying, "When I grow up, I goin to be there
1,108 when they make the rules." It occurred to me that
1,109 Dave's father in *Cat* was a lawyer, that my own father
1,110 had had to leave law school because of illness, and that
1,111 my hero in *Fogarty* was a law-school dropout. Person-
1,112 ally, I hadn't thought of law school right after college,
1,113 because I emphatically wanted no more schools right
1,114 then. But what about now?

1,115 I didn't really make a decision. One blizzardy
1,116 day, I sent for the LSAT application. I got a trial exam
1,117 and did it for fun, the way one might do a puzzle. Just
1,118 by a day or two, I was still in time for the February
1,119 exam, the last date for those wanting admission in the
1,120 fall of 1973. It'll never happen, I thought, and took the
1,121 test. When it did happen, and Albany Law School ad-
1,122 mitted me, I went.

1,123 For three years I lived in Albany with an old col-
1,124 lege friend, and there I had a new identity: law stu-
1,125 dent. It was hard for me to remember that, at fifty-
1,126 three, I didn't look anything like the other members of
1,127 the class. In a highly structured system, one assumes
1,128 that all the pegs are alike. At the end of the first year,
1,129 I had a grade point average of 64.54, which was just
1,130 four-hundredths of a point from the flunk-out level. At

the moment that I found that out, I was in New York
City doing a final revision of *Garden*, which had been
accepted by Delacorte. I kept writing.

I also went back to law school and, if for no other
reason, it was worth it as an experience in doing some-
thing I wasn't good at. I had never before come even
close to flunking out of a school—I thought anyone
could pass if they did the work. But in law school, I did
the work, but I still didn't think like a lawyer. It gave
me a whole new slant on the educational process, and a
new real sympathy with children who can't hack
school. By the strategy of electing courses that required
a paper, not an exam, I managed to graduate. That
thirteen hour endurance test called the New York Bar
exam consists mainly of written essay questions. My
endurance was good, and way back at the *Mirror* I'd
learned to write under pressure, and I passed.

Now, after eight years of law practice, I realize I
will never really think like a lawyer. I think like a
fiction writer. The actions and the conclusion emerge
from the process of writing, of letting characters talk
and seeing what they'll do. A lawyer must identify the
goal at the start and plot strategies for reaching it
through the complicated procedures of the law. I can
do it, but not well. I've always made bread without
measuring or keeping my finger in the reference book,
but you can't practice law that way. I've always
thought more about *why* people do things than *what*
they do, but for a lawyer the whys are mostly irrele-
vant. It happened, and this is what you've got to do
about it. Practicing law I have picked up many super-
ficially interesting anecdotes and life stories, but few of
them will ever appear in my fiction, because I didn't
know any of those people well enough. I wasn't inside
them, I was just trying to figure what they wanted
from me. The writing that is associated with the law,
motions and appeal briefs, also have nothing in com-
mon with fiction writing. A brief must be full of quoted
precedents; fresh new ways of saying something are not
helpful, ~~unless you're a U.S. Supreme Court justice.~~

The law has taught me something about how
money, and rules, direct human activity. I didn't really
know anything about that. Of course, I'd been short of
money and altered plans to fit, but I'd never been
aware of the pursuit of money as governing my activi-
ties. In my family-oriented life, including my life as a
writer, I had seen the emotions of love, hate, vanity,
jealousy, affection, protectiveness, and fear dominate
people's actions. I had not realized that money is often
the instrument, especially of vanity and fear, but of all
emotions. In practicing law, I've seen how a minor
change in a Social Services regulation (or even more, a
Securities and Exchange rule) affects wave upon wave
of human activity, far from the apparent sphere of
that regulation.

More directly, however, money is the soul of the
law. It is the substitute for brute force, the use of the fist
or the gun to settle differences. Identify the difference,
and measure it in dollars. In the lawyer's practice,
money is the absolute measure of the value of what she

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1,191 does for clients, and for herself. As a lawyer, I don't
1,192 have a product to sell like silk, or shoes, or carpentry
1,193 skill; I sell my wits and the only measure of how good
1,194 they are is money. I don't really like the hustle to get
1,195 good cases and to win them, and therefore I am easing
1,196 out of the practice of law for a good lawyer's reason—
1,197 I hardly more than break even. I enjoy talking to peo-
1,198 ple about what might be called preventive law, how
1,199 not to go to court, ever.

1,200 Meanwhile I'm writing again. I have two books
1,201 for young children in the works now, some other things
1,202 in the brewing stage. I realize there's no way I can live
1,203 alone in a little rural village and have enough stirring
1,204 in my head to write about. The trip to China was an
1,205 eye opener, and I intend to leave home more often,
1,206 though I certainly don't plan to become a continual
1,207 tourist. My identity as a ~~senior citizen~~ is still growing,
1,208 as whose isn't?

person

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