



a few words
from Pearl

11/4/96

THE DEPRESSION or THAT WAS THEN

by Pearl Barber

I came across a picture of my father at his desk. He was meticulous at home conforming to my mother's neat housekeeping requirements, but here he could let his collector's mania take over. Photographs of unremembered people, and reminders of something long ago forgotten, shared wall space with newspaper clippings of events passed. Here too he housed his collection of the American Mercury, and National Geographic Magazines too out of date for coffee table space at home. Then there were pencilled notes on his desk, figures, dollars signs. Money due, Money spent., bills.

Every Saturday morning he and I would subway to his Wall Street office. I was daddy's pal, and At 12, I treasured my first job and would diligently pursue the duties, in appreciation of his trust in me. He would hand me the the stack of insurance policies and I would verify their numbers, initial them, and place them in another stack. If they were not correct, I would remove them, and look for pertinent information. Later I would descend three floors to the Standard Insurance Company, where the telephone operator would show me how to work the switchboard, and the stenographers would inquire about my father's health. They were friendly to me, but I knew it was because they liked my father, who was good natured, and handsome.

If mail came in on Saturday, I would open it. Miss Prival, Dad's long-time secretary, who had weekends off had shown me how to separate the checks, and how to endorse them with a rubber stamp. Handling money bothered me. It was so important. I knew we needed it and never had enough. It had to be explained to me that most of the checks that came in, did not belong to my father, they belonged to the company, floors

below, and he would get his commissions later. That was why I realized that at the end of a working day when he come home exhausted he would lie down for a nap after dinner, and then would have to go to Throgs Neck or Forest Hills or Brooklyn, to sell a policy, or pick up a premium. How do other people live I wondered, when they had to pay for rent and lessons and summer vacations. How did they manage, because I knew we didn't.

We had a pleasant four room apartment with a view of the Hudson, and a grand piano, and there were treats like Saturday matinees and Sunday boat rides, and friends for dinner. We had our haircuts at Best, and a dressmaker and a maid, and much later I realized we were living beyond our means. I would hear my parents voices rise at night, when they thought we were asleep and day after day they seemed angrier with each other, and I worried, because I was the only one in the family who saw how hard my father had to work. Even in that one-half day a week, I realized the pile of problems in front of him.

I wondered how could I pretend to be happy. My sister was blissfully unaware and even my mother could not know the extent of his financial problems. She knew that he wasn't bringing home enough money but she didn't know of his despair, and every Saturday morning I would share it. What will we do, I wondered.

When our family friend Mr. Parks, a stock broker jumped in front of a subway train, I panicked. I had heard of the desperation of people at that time, but I didn't know where it could lead. My parents spoke guardedly, but the men selling apples on the corner, bundled up in overcoats, looking respectable and like anyone's father made me wonder. "Why did he ask me for a dime?" I asked about the elderly man who had approached me and ignored my parents. Mr. Parks's suicide terrified me. Only three weeks before he had been to the piano recital given by my music teacher for her students. I played "The Avalanche", and he had handed me a bouquet on the stage of Aeolian Hall. He was my father's friend, and respected by my mother because he was such a gentleman. They would invite us to dinner in their large apartment on Central Park West,

and they were so gracious, even I as a child appreciated it. He and his wife, both Viennese had one son, named Steven, my sister's age. What would happen to his wife, to Steven? Would they have to move? Where would they go.

The world was catching up with us. There was a name for it. It was the depression.

HOME AGAIN

Pearl Barber

I have come home again.

Our children are married and moved far away and we have given up the house. We lavish the time and affection we still have to give on Carlisle, the cat. The floor is cluttered with the balls we throw and she finds, and we have rediscovered the mutual ease and inconvenience of living in a small apartment on one floor. The telephone is our connection to our children, and we have one in every room. We attempt to satisfy our needs by constant rearrangement of space, which brings me back to remember my mother, respectfully and with admiration. I have forgotten the constant admonitions to put things away, fold, hang up,

I grew up in a 4 room apartment on the Westside of Manhattan, with a peek of the Hudson River. My mother had great style, and we had handsome furniture and a baby grand piano, and fine paintings which were mostly the work of my Uncle Abe who had studied in Paris, and came back to America and the Art Students League, and was mentioned favorably in art publications. My father was a hardworking insurance agent, who struggled to keep up with middle-class aspirations. His once serious literary ambitions were relegated to the "truth about insurance", which was actually a favorable column that ran in The Insurance Advocate.

Living on the tenth floor, we were dependent upon the doorman and the two elevator men, who kept an eye on my sister's and my comings and goings. When my mother was away for an entire winter, watching over me was simple enough. John, Carlos, and George made sure that neither I nor my nine year old friends roller skated in the lobby, played with the switchboard or ran from floor to floor ringing for the elevator. My sixteen year old sister was more challenging. She could slither in and out switching from the front elevator to the back so nobody was quite sure whether or not she was on the premises. My mother was in Atlantic City for months convalescing from several deaths in the family I worried about this cycle of events. Each one of my mother's

four brothers had lost a child by disease or accident and I knew our household, so far intact, was definitely on the list. Which one of us would be the next to go, and when?

In my mother's absence I had a charge account at a neighborhood restaurant (which my father insured) where I lunched daily, under the watchful eye of the management. I also ran up a handsome tab at the corner dairy, where I would take my friends for afternoon snacks.

My parents' managed apartment living very well, it didn't occur to me that we were cramped, because my mother had a place for everything and everything in its place. And there was the very big world outside.

Since I spent the first 20 years of my life living at home, without a prospect of ever leaving unless I joined something, I made what I thought was the best of it. I didn't consider myself good looking, and as a matter of fact, got very nervous when a young man got too close. I was amiable and even my mother's friends liked me. So while my sister was off some place having a good time, I was, having tea at Schrafft's with mother and the honorary Aunts.

Manhattan was an accessible and even wondrous place for a young child. I grew up, free to travel alone by Fifth Avenue Bus to dancing school, and Museums and subway to the wondrous world of 42nd Street and Show Business. I could walk to piano lessons, but despite the best of plans, I reached my musical heights with the "Spinning Song" and survived my once a week French because my father and sister would speak French at the dinner table, and I was a good mimic.

When we visited my Grandfather in Greenpoint I would fall asleep on the subway on the way home so if we went for Passover Seder, which was a very long drawn out affair, my father would drive us in a rented car.

There was Coney Island which we could reach by subway, or by boat. Mother loved the ocean, and while for me the excitement of Coney Island was arriving there, and spending an exhausting day on spinning and twirling rides, and marvelling at freaks, and

eating too many hot dogs, my mother converted it into a cosmopolitan adventure. My father and I would walk below deck and see the portholes and stacks of ropes, and smell the oil and hear unintelligible foreign garble, and I believed I was in a strange exotic country.

The trips to Indian Point and Bear Mountain, were much more respectable. We donned sporty clothes so we could sit on deck, and were accompanied by a hamper of food, and the family maid, and usually a friend to keep me company. My sister would find some promising young man, to take her on a tour of the vessel. When we reached our destination we would buy and mail postcards, and have ice cream, or I would coax my parents to let me skate in the rink. We would return home refreshed, as if we had really been some place.

Albany was the real thing. . There were staterooms on the boat, and meals served, and when we arrived we could take a tour of the Capital, and I would get a quick Civics lesson. I felt we were rich and well travelled.

We were far from rich, and sometimes I even felt poor. At one time during the depression I remember the landlord himself coming to our 10th floor apartment to collect the rent, and I worried that we would be thrown out on the street. At that time, men wearing hats, stood on street corners shivering in the cold, selling apples and "Brother Can You Spare a Dime" was more than a song. It was a chilling reminder. My friends and I usually thought we were well off even though doctor or lawyer parents were going through the same kind of fearful anxiety that we were. We young kids joined a "Block Aid Group" which would sell Block Aid stamps door to door in apartments, and turn all the money over to the Organization, and the funds were to be used for people in that same area, who had seen better times, and were temporarily in dire circumstances. We would seal the money in envelopes, and turn it in. I don't remember any scandal about it. Everyone was apparently honest. It was the city's way of handling an insolvable problem.

I was jolted into horrible reality when my father's best friend, Mr. Parker, a stock broker, threw himself in front of a subway train. A week before he had been to a piano recital where I played the Spinning Song , at Aeolian Hall, along with others of dubious talents. He brought me flowers, which were handed to me on the stage.

I never forgot my wardrobe for the recital, --a pink shantung dress with pearl buttons, white socks and black patent leather maryjane pumps. Mr. Parks was Rumanian like my father, and had changed his name from Pollack to Parks , his wife was a beautiful Parisian, they had a son named Steven who liked my sister. I had thought they were rich, and I wondered what happened when a father died.

I was aware of my mother's kindness. One day I came home for lunch from elementary school, and was surprised to see my mother having coffee with a stranger. The woman had climbed ten flights of stairs rather than be rebuffed by elevator men, ringing doorbells, for a job. My mother could only give her hospitality, coffee and lunch and understanding, and I was touched by this gesture from my very reserved parent. I was mostly raised that way. My father was always going out of his way, and whenever we went anywhere I was allowed to invite a young friend along.

HOPES & DREAMS & PLANS

By Pearl Barber

What do you see first when you step back in time into Apartment 10D

It would have to be the baby grand piano, impressively wearing a fringed shawl, & silver candlesticks, as my sister, the beautiful young girl at it, her hair turban bound in a turkish towel, plays and sings show tunes, and the forest green chair that sets snugly in the piano's curve..

Or Is it the mahogany secretary, tall, imposing, unyielding, guardian of the room, observer, protector. Mother sits on the lyre back chair and writes thank you notes, by the light of the classic lantern-type lamp .

Is it the sofa, ,sable dark mohair, with discreet curves of dark wood, for proper sitting. No bouncing allowed. Father alone permitted to stretch out on the sofa, before dinner, listening to Amos'N'Andy, while one of us sit in its matching chair. The handmade coffee table is delicate, from far east India one-of-a kind, and the end tables dark , the silver lamp on one, a delicate touch, filigreed. There is a Tiffany candy dish, the New Yorker and the American Mercury. The Persian rugs, muted, but with the slightest touch of blood red. The bookcases filled, up to the ceiling flanking the windows with a view of the Hudson River, when you pull back the lightly flecked damask draperies. Do you admire the lavish display of my famous Uncle Abe's paintings, on the pale grey Living room walls, oils and water colors, gouaches, scenes of Rockport,Maine, of Paris, of family, and flowers. Family photographs line the foyer, and gather about the oak bookcase, with its double glass doors.

Who would know they would have to sell the piano, but save the paintings for children and their children's children.

The Duncan Phyfe table, narrow against the wall, opens every night for dinner, straight back chairs pulled from corners and set with mother's china, and silver, crystal goblets, Only breakfast, lunch, and the maid's supper are allowed on the kitchen table

"You will do this for me," my mother says, as she lights the Friday night candles on the table.

"Oh, ma", I brush it aside, knowing that she will never die.

Years later, the bus takes me past 610, much as it was so long ago., I knew sadly that the living room would be much smaller than my memory, and there would be no more view . What would the building be without Charlie, the doorman or Gus on the front elevator, and Albert who drove the freight elevator. No skating allowed, no running in the halls. I remembered our neighbors' friendly chow who belied its undeserved bad reputation. My friend Irwin lives on the third floor, Martha the maid and proxy mother calls down from the opened window, "Oiwin, put on your coat," Oiwin, don't run."His father, a vaudeville comedian, his mother a still glamorous ex-chorus girl, give him almost everything he wants: parties for us kids, on Friday nights with movies and refreshments, and all the spending money he wants.

Where is Ellen, who is allowed to drink cocacola , because she came from the South. She is an only child, I envied her, until I realized she couldn't play with us, no skating, no movies at Irwin's , no swapping, no charging icecream cones at the corner drug store, no block sales, no participation in get-rich-quick schemes. In our most unsuccessful project, we pulled out stashed- away family jewelry from dresser drawers, and put them up for sale right there on Riverside Drive where our parents would come face-to-face with their treasures we offered at bargain prices. We will be up late, going from door to door of our neighbors, to retrieve, the jade, the amber, the brooch, the bar pin, that no one had been wearing anyhow.

Rudy Vallee's ex-girl friend lives briefly on the roof, in a not-quite penthouse, designed for servants, after she was rescued from a suicide attempt by my older sister, and a friend..

There are scenes when my sister, is forbidden to go out with a football player, and dramatically puts one leg out of our tenth floor window, threatening to jump. I love the excitement, and share it with my class for Show and Tell. My sister is already a celebrity, among my friends. It is as if she turns on the light in our subdued home, with her theatrical friends, her beauty and her flair.

Our small apartment vibrates with family parties, and those special evenings for reciprocating to their friends. "Never again" my parents swear to each other as they wash dishes and glasses, at 2 A.M. after the guests are gone. "Not until the next time" they agree.

For company, mother serves salads, properly scooped out fruit, vegetables garnished and decorated, and open face watercress tea sandwiches, or a log, decrusted loaves of bread, sliced horizontally and filled with cream cheese, and red caviar, or smoked salmon, and chopped hardboiled eggs, or whatever combination is in season. She is not fazed by my sister's parade of boyfriends, who come one by one to our Sunday morning table, each one on his way to a big career, the actor, the songwriter, the newspaper man. To me, my sister can do no wrong, so I ring the alarm, when I know Dad could hear her telephone conversations. Frantically Father pleads with her, "Don't aggravate your mother," whose blood pressure soars to frightening heights.

So, mother and I leave the apartment for the hotel in Atlantic City, for a month of calm, and lowering blood pressure. The cease-fire between my sister and father is maintained, but when they come for the weekends, sister is bored and tours the lobby and the dance floor, looking for and finding companions, who like herself chafe at being under their parents' watchful eyes. My friends and I have found the laundry chute, and

corners to hide, in the pantry or the garage, and there is the wonderful boardwalk, with its rolling chairs, games, and Heinz Pickle Pier.

As Mother and father stroll together on the boardwalk my sister and I follow, and I listen enchanted to her escapades. This is the last time, they drag me here, she confides. Mother promises she is getting better, and will be home soon, and father reminds himself to call the maid and the window cleaner in, before she does.

And I worry about a family truce, and the inevitable moment when my sister might escape, taking with her all that has made my own life thrilling and glamorous and bearable.

CUTTING SCHOOL

by Pearl Barber

The elevator took forever to reach the tenth floor. Alfonso, turned to face her, "so, you're learning something, you gonna be a school teacher? You smart, I can tell." This afternoon, she just wanted to be someplace else, she was a fool to have cut school again. What difference did it make, if she looked out of the window of the class, or the subway or her room at home. It was getting beyond her, everything. Each night she had promised herself, tomorrow I'll go back to school, but then she met a friend, on the subway, and instead of going uptown to school, they ended at 42nd Street and Broadway, and time for a cup of coffee at the Automat, which would drag on, in time to catch Frank Sinatra on stage at the Paramount, which would break at lunch time, and a walk up to the Capitol, or the 42nd Street library, which made the whole thing seem legitimate, because you could look up something you needed to know. But what you needed to know wasn't in the books. There weren't any answers for those disconnected feelings. But matinee days, were worth anything, everything. Seeing Talullah Bankhead and Helen Hayes out of her allowance money and another day would be gone. If she could only stay inside the darkened theater forever, listening to what went on on the stage. That was the real world She was different. She wasn't pretty, Frankie her best friend moved to Philadelphia, and she never had a real boyfriend, only Charlie who liked to dance, and that was all. He'd never even kissed her. Alva and Jean had gone "all the way," with their steadies they talked about it on the hike, and her ears and Frankie's almost dropped off. They lied, she was sure. "Almost all the way" they meant. All she had going was a sense of humor, and what did that get her.

This year she wasn't even smart. Math had gotten beyond her. All of a sudden it was too much, and English wasn't fun any more. The class she looked forward to, where Mr. Cusack quoted Shakespeare, and Shaw, and she had remembered the day when she had read Lady MacBeth, and they had applauded, and how about her St. Joan, her own eyes welled with tears when she said, "Never to hear the wind in the trees, and the blessed lambs in the frost, This I cannot bear." That was when she felt alive, and she was St. Joan, herself, choosing death to imprisonment. For wasn't this what life was about. Going through the paces, until, until what. How could she tell her father, that she didn't

care about anything, whether she stayed or went. Was it only last week that life had hope. Today she knew it was stupid meaningless, and would never be better.

She knew Alfonso was talking, she saw his lips moving, but not until she heard him say, "your father got home early today, first time before you did."

She would not ask him any questions, "was he mad, did he say anything?" Instead she said, simply, "Oh?" And then, because she couldn't resist, because she needed to know, "how is he, how did he seem. I mean coming home in the middle of the day."

"Oh, you know him, always friendly Asks me about my kids. He looked tired though. Your Pop works too hard. First time I seen him in daylight, except in the morning. Some father, he's proud of you too"

"Yeah," she said. Trying to remember what he was like when he got mad. Maybe he'll send me away to a strict boarding school, like Sylvia.

"Maybe you'll be a doctor," Alfonso suggested. "What with your books and all. A lady Doctor lives in this house, you know.

Could it only be ten floors. She wanted to get away, but to what? Her apartment was not safe. No place was safe, not even the IRT to 42nd street. There was nothing to be glad about, Not even Clark Gable on the stage at the Capitol, or Bing Crosby or the Music Hall Rockettes. They'd never let her be an actress and that was all she ever wanted. It's pretending, she agreed, that's what I'm good at.

Alfonso stopped the car. "Your home, madam."

I couldn't relax, kept looking out of the tenth floor window as if I could see herp I knew she'd be coming home any minute. I hope she wouldn't do anything foolish. She hasn't been in school for a week, they told me me. All those times when she told me she had turned in a report, how her English class went, that she needed a little help in math.. A week -- where had she been, what had she been doing? I told her I'd help her with her math, we'd get a tutor. Thank God, her mother is still in Atlantic City. With her high blood pressure, this would be the end of her.

She's a smart kid. we've been talking colleges. She doesn't want to work in my office, okay. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe I shouldn't have made her come down on

Saturday mornings. But I thought she ought to learn the business, get that theater nonsense out of her mind. Anyhow, she wasn't serious about it, if she was, I'd have known.

I just don't want her to be a wild one. I couldn't stand another one. I've got to straighten this out, this week, before Berty gets back.. That's it, she needs to talk to a woman, I'll call Dr. Tuttle.

Maybe, she's in some other kind of trouble, but she's only a kid, she doesn't even have a boyfriend. She's not wild or anything. we'll go out to dinner tonight, and a movie. That's it. I won't call on a client tonight. It'll be like it was --when we were pals.

Dammit, tomorrow I have to take her into the Dean's office. That's what they said, or she'll be expelled. No one in our family has ever been expelled.

Cutting school, is that such a big thing. What is she a criminal? They're making too much of it. I'm sure there's a logical explanation. She's always been the good one. Not even a boyfriend. No trouble at all. Ever. Till now. Where the hell is she, maybe she's run away. All I want to know is what could she be doing every day -every single day.

Who was she with. Somebody influenced her.

I hear the elevator. It's going to be alright. She's a good kid.

I know my girl. Everything's going to be fine.

Then & Now:

I realized this morning, I don't mind being old, -- it's getting there that's the problem.

Reviewing my past. Oh, the horrors of my life, the greatest trauma was when I cut school (hated math) so I didn't go in for the test on Monday, and then Tuesday I still hated math, and Wednesday I didn't have a note, and Thursday, so on, and I walked into the Rivoli Theater on Broadway and 46th Street, and when the nice man taking my ticket, said, and here we have the winner, this little lady is the 100, thousand (or whatever Number) to enter, you have won a prize young lady. That afternoon I walked into the elevator at the appropriate time, and Gus the elevator man, said "Your father's been lookin' for you." "And how was school," said Papa. "Terrific" "And the movie terrific too." he said having caught my name as I accepted the prize which was to be sent in the mail. Humiliation! I promised, never again. I subjugated myself, I volunteered in the library, I became a hall monitor, I swore it never would happen again. How could I embarrass my family this way!

How many years later: Today I pick up the New York Times, and there for all to see are a happy group of very recognizable teenagers at Woodstock, holding a banner -- Drugs wanted! What do you think their fathers said?

2/22/99

Pearl Dear, Sit Down.

As time goes by, I go back into the memories, of my childhood. A daddy who took me rowing in Central Park, to Steeplechase the Funny Place, where we rented overalls, and slid down the biggest slide in the world, and accidentally hopped aboard what looked like a tranquil ride through tunnels, only to find out it went on and on, and while others screamed with joy, I threw up. But I forgave Daddy. I remember mother as loving and meticulous and kindly. They were charitable and generous to others.

My older sister was beautiful and talented, she brought Tin Pan Alley into our living room, and her rhymes in those days, frequently headed Walter Winchell's columns. She smoked and had many boyfriends, and it seemed as if there were more than seven years between us,

As time goes by, I rethink. Was it so wonderful. What about those angry words between mother and dad, and I worried, Why were they staying together. What about mother's standards, we had to have the Baldwin piano, and summer camps, and the lady who cleaned from Jamaica, (and not Long Island) and why in an elevator apartment with a doorman, did the landlord ring our bell for our rent.

Who were we really? Didn't I wonder as a child, why does he stay with her?

I remember mother sitting with me at Best's Department Store on Fifth Avenue in New York while I got a haircut, and she directed, "don't shave the back of her neck" and she supervised my fittings for Indian walk shoes, and signed me up for dancing lessons, and piano lessons, while the French lessons were Daddy's idea.

In my first memories now, everything was fine. But I forget the other stuff, and then I remember.

As I light the candles on Friday night, I see mother, answering my question, "what for?" "You'll do it for me" she replied, "Oh, ma,"

I said, knowing she would never die. I do it for them now, for mother and daddy, and in my own special way. We have a private moment. I tell them what I couldn't when they were alive. How much I love them, how much I appreciate them, what they mean to me.

When cousin Paul, just two years older than I, died, Mother said, "Pearl dear, sit down," as she did when cousin Sonia went back to the hospital. She told me about our dear friend Steven Parks, a stock broker, who lost everything, and who had a few days before been to my piano recital, and who jumped in front of a subway train, she did it gently, "Pearl, dear sit down." when I realized Naomi hadn't gotten home from her date with that nice young man she had known only ten days, Mother, told me when I returned from school "Pearl dear sit down." That meant, I could sit on my made up twin bed, in the room I shared with my sister. "Naomi eloped," she said.

My reaction was pained. I wouldn't be her maid of honor. I had to call Arlene and Frankie, to share my betrayal.

Mother was fastidious. As soon as we left the house in the morning, she made up our beds, and we never sat on them, until we went to bed at night. Sitting on the bed was a special way for mother to convey bad news, -- gently she hoped

Mother and Daddy could be sharp with each other, but they were quiet. They never wanted to disturb any fantasy we might enjoy about our good family.

Daddy brought home a miniature Spitz, he had bought from a man who was selling it at the subway entrance at Wall Street, . We lived in a four room, 2 bedroom apartment on the 10th floor, and having a dog would be out of the question, but he was smitten by it. The chow who lived next door, with Mr. and Mrs. Altman, was like an old only child. That was different. Mother agreed to permit Muffins across the threshold until a better place was found .

That better place was Uncle Sam's and Aunt Esther's somewhat shabby house in the country in Peekskill, and their the two boys could take care of Muffins. We saw Muffins off on the train. It was a greater loss than anything, but mother said we would visit.

Six months later, we went up to visit. The family greeted us warmly, but there was no Muffins in sight. Their house so different from us, was simple and shabby, without the appertanances so important to my mother, our grand piano, our beautiful furniture and rugs, that my mother maintained in prime condition. My mother asked about Muffins. Out there somewhere they waved, she can't come into the house. Just for Pearl's sake, mother pleaded, and they boys went out to find her, and returned with a burr covered tangled animal, with no resemblance to my dear pet.

I went home heart sick, and nobody could say anything to appease me.

I could only hope they would take better care of her. Mother tried to comfort me, but there was nothing anyone could say. It was my private misery, we had given her away to a better home, only to realize that we had sent her into the arms of abuse. She'll run away, I thought. If only we lived closer.

I overheard my father talking to his brother on the phone, I hope you find her, before something happens to her" and my heart sank.

Arrangements were made so that we could get Muffins back, my father would pick her up. My good friend Eileen who lived across the street, and had a dog Muffins age, was willing to keep her.

That day I came home early from school, I looked out of the window, the phone rang, my mother answered, She called me lovingly, and led me to my bedroom, "Pearl, dear, sit down.

Mother met me at the door as I returned from school, I knew she had bad news, Mother's face was drawn. She walked me to my room, it was the end for me, when she said "Pearl dear sit down."

Pearl Barber

2/3/96

I WAS TALL

I was always tall, taller than my older sister, and much taller than my mother. Height was divided. Everyone on my mother's side was short, except for her tall father, while on my father's side they were tall, except for his tiny mother. I liked taking after my father, we were both good sports, and laughed a lot.

That's why this whole thing burns me up. I know that on skates I was taller and so is everyone else, that goes for rollers as well as ice. On the ice rink I was a whiz, and if I had put my mind to it, who knows I could have been in the Olympics, but believe me I would have played clean. And on roller skates I was the fastest skater on the block. In those days I could never sneak into high heels like my friends, because my mother swore by Indian Walk shoes for me, and they were just like they sounded. Large and flat, but I was still tall.

I went through the photo albums. In the 8th grade school pictures I was in the top row, with Jean, Eileen, Frankie and Arlene and we positively towered over the others. My friend Anita, was in the first row and looked like a midget. The boys, of course, were shorter than anyone.

I ran into David Herman on 91st Street and Broadway one day. I didn't exactly run into him. I was skating, and wearing gym bloomers, which made me look gigantic and I thought what a year can do. A year before we had both been living in a hotel while our apartments were being redecorated. There weren't any other kids our age living there, so David and I would have dinner together in the dining room, and I would sign my check, and he would sign his, and our parents would dine later at their separate tables. It was really my first romance, although I didn't think of it that way. He would call up on the hotel switchboard and ask if I was ready, and he'd meet me at the elevator. It didn't last more than a few months, because that's how long it took my mother to pick out the furniture and everything for our new apartment, and when we moved, it was goodbye, just like that. That is, until I saw him as I was skating home from basketball practice. Which also proves another point. You don't play basketball if you're short. I was a side jump I think, but I loved to shoot baskets, and I was fast.

I looked down at David with mixed feelings, and thought were you always this short, was I always so much taller than you, and why didn't I change my clothes at the gym. The first thing he said to me was "how is your beautiful sister". After that I didn't hear another thing. He hardly knew her. She would eat with my parents, and she was going to art school, and had her own snobby friends. I couldn't wait to get away from him then.

Rude, I thought. Rude and small, how come I never noticed it before.

I knew when I got home I would tell my sister that I saw "little David". I wasn't going to repeat what he said about her, she was already the most conceited person I ever knew. I would just say he said hello to the whole family. But I forgot, and blurted out that he'd said she was beautiful, and she laughed, and for a minute I felt sorry for him.

So now it's like none of this ever happened. I know I am exactly the same height I was in those days, and I stand up straight, just like my mother told me.

Time passes. My sister is at my house. We are friends, we can deal with our differences. She is looking at some recent family photos. "Your skirt is the wrong length, your ankles are too skinny."

"So what," say I. "I'd rather have skinny ankles than fat whatever you've got."

"I'm not criticizing" she says. "You're too short for those kind of skirts."

"Short?" I yell. "You're the one who's short. I'm tall. I have always been tall, and I always will be tall."

Some day what she says will not bother me, and I will still be tall.

PEARL BARBER

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(310) 479-8974 FAX (310) 445-8968

March 3, 1997

Dear Abby
P.O. BOX 69440
LOS ANGELES, CA 90069

Dear Abby:

Your letter from Anonymous in Oregon, rang a bell. He had told his children that when the time came he wanted no funeral service, and they indicated they would disagree with this.

I told our son that his father and I had decided that when "the curtain came down" we wanted our ashes to be "buried at sea."

His loving suggestion was, "wouldn't you rather have them sprinkled over the mountains, over a beautiful countryside."

My response was "David, surprise me."

Whatever, I'm sure we'll go along with it.

sign me "Not Quite Yet!"