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Parents

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Museum of Contemporary Art at Wright State University

Dayton Art Institute

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*In loving memory of
the Reverend William Clair Geibert
and in honor of
Dorothy Evelyn Kuntemeier Geibert.*

Dedicated to the exhibition artists and their parents.

*Museum of Contemporary Art
at Wright State University
Creative Arts Center
Dayton, Ohio*

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April 13 through May 14, 1992



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Ronald R. Geibert, Curator and Editor
Foreword by Ronald R. Geibert
Introduction by Sherry M. Stanley, M.D.

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at WSU, 1992

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Cover photograph by Linda Connor
My Hand with My Mother's, 1987

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The exhibition *Parents* and this publication have served as the focal point for a host of events. These include a public forum examining the needs and concerns of the aged and their families, an artists' dialogue and photography workshop, a performance by the Grandparents Living Theatre group, and a variety of writing workshops and supplemental publications. Helping me to keep all of these on track were several key individuals. Special thanks are in order to Dr. Sherry M. Stanley, Medical Director of SeniorCare, Miami Valley Hospital; former WSU museum director Barry A. Rosenberg; and Dayton Art Institute board member Robert Shiffler. Complementing their guidance through the complicated maze of fund-raising, project development, and program implementation were the efforts of Annette Rezek, the museum's manager; the DAI staff; and Theresa Almond and Connie Steele of Wright State's Department of University Publications.

Finally, I want to thank the artists for their cooperation during the past two years. They were culled from a group of 250 artists and represent in intimate ways the complex concerns and needs of the "adult" child in a child-parent relationship. It behooves us to listen carefully to their clear voices. Their stories are ours as well.

Ronald R. Geibert
Professor of Art
Wright State University

FOREWORD

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Martin Luther's *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* was one of my father's favorite hymns, not a surprising choice for an ordained Lutheran minister. It is also the *only* memory that I have of the day of my father's funeral, now twenty years past. Based upon Psalms 46, the hymn's verses speak to the presence of God in the midst of troubled times. Each time I hear or sing it, whether troubled or not, I feel the presence of my father as well, and am comforted by our shared memories.

I created the exhibition *Parents* in response to those memories, or more accurately, my want for such pleasures. With each passing year my "mind's eye" of my father has become regrettably clouded by the difficulty in distinguishing the actual events which occurred between my father

and myself from those that I wish had. Did he teach me how to ride a bike? He did. Who taught me the Ten Commandments? My father. Did he show me how to catch a ball or read me stories at night? I can't remember.

The artists selected for this exhibition bear witness in many ways to the profundity of that first and possibly foremost relationship in our lives: that which we share with our parents. With uncommon candor they illustrate the complexity of child-parent relationships that are filled with joy, anger, hope, guilt, love, and pain. Avoiding the contrived, cliché, and idealized, they have used their *own* parents as catalysts to speak about a shared past, present, and future with revealing clarity and courage.

Like myself, artists Tom Chambers and Carrie Mae Weems can find themselves unexpectedly reliving their childhoods by the chance encounter with a 1930s' record hit or the sweet chocolate-like aroma of fresh-brewed coffee. For Albert Chong, Tony Mendoza, and Lorie Novak, tangible letters, keepsakes, and snapshots provide very real, although at times elusive, connections to times past. A small lovebird that flew into Hannah Wilke's SoHo apartment while she was at

synagogue praying for a mother lost to cancer became Wilke's companion pet and a daily reminder. The bird was reverently named Chaya, her mother's middle name and the Hebrew name for "animal."

The past and the present are linked in the works of many of the *Parents* artists. Bea Nettles's three generations in *Faces/Phases* and Adina Sabghir's *Life of the Mother* invite us to compare daughters and mothers, while Ann Fessler and Linda Connor investigate their adoptive pasts, one recalling a childhood lesson in genetics and a recent awkward encounter with a stranger, the other documenting the successful conclusion to a birth-mother search. Stephen Turlentes pays homage to his father, past and present, with a timeless, oversized Polaroid portrait, and Sabghir's *Gilka Fagundeo Frota* reminds us of the additional parents and history that we inherit through marriage. One father's perplexity about his daughter's artistic exploration of the theme of sexuality is "reframed" by Dorit Cypis as she appropriates his "classical nudes" made in response to her works, while teacher/artist Kathleen Kenyon honors her mentor teacher/mother through the collage process.

The uncertainty of life is documented by Doug DuBois as his parents deal with the stress of a debilitating accident, and the unforgiving realities of illness are endured by the mothers of Jeffrey Wolin and Andrea Modica, one the victim of a stroke and the other, a former classical concert pianist, shown as radiant and inspirational despite the loss of fingers and independence to a degenerative disease which began during her final pregnancy with daughter Andrea thirty-one years earlier. Finally, with brutal directness, *Portrait of the Artist and Her Mother* by Barbara DeGenevieve presents to us the artist's personal inquiry into the possible causes of a parent's suicide.

A commonality found in the *Parents* artists is their contemplation of the future. For example, Larry Sultan's parents remind us of the adjustments to be made when one reaches retirement, while Turlentes's *Dad Floating in Big Sugar* provides a whimsical portrait of the same. Deborah Tharp and Susan Unterberg are each given a crystal-ball peek at their future faces, while Duane Michals must face a future void of a father's love.

Although *Parents* confronts the faces and life situations of one generation, the works ironically speak just as deeply about another. The artists have searched their hearts and examined their child-parent relationships, taking an emotional roller-coaster ride filled with thrills and jolts. Unlike the amusement park ride, though, this one has no height or age restrictions, and once the ride has begun there is no turning back or getting off. But for anyone who has experienced the fear and exhilaration of such a ride, the payoff at the end is nothing less than memorable. It is my hope that *Parents* will provide the impetus for you to take your own ride.

R. G.

Parenting

by Sherry M. Stanley, M.D.

To parent is the biological bringing forth of offspring, but the act of parenting goes much deeper. As young children we need parents to teach the basic activities of daily living. We need to be nurtured and loved, to be protected from all harm. From this foundation of discipline, limitations, and control, our parents give us wings to move toward our twenties when we test the world. In our thirties we produce and perform in a timeless world where we seemingly will live forever, and our parents will always be there. By forty we again turn to our parents for guidance and support as we begin to reevaluate our lives and realize that we and our parents will someday die. It is a time to prioritize, a time to learn from their wisdom, a time to accept their knowledge as truth.

Through longer, healthier life spans, modern medicine has created a new age of parenting: the seventy-three-year-old parent and the fifty-year-old child. It is a time of sharing wisdom, friendship, and grandchildren. Our aging parents begin to give us the richest gift, accepting our own mortality. As we see our parents understand and accept death with an inner peace, we, too, can appreciate the gift of life and death. This defines the total act of

parenting—to give life to children and to help them accept the responsibility of living and dying.

Even though I am a physician who cares for patients who are sixty-five and older, I still struggle with the legacy of my own parents. At a very young age I lost my parents to the very forces I combat daily in hospitals and nursing homes—one to death, the other to dementia. My father was sick when I was an infant. He was diagnosed with stomach cancer and when I was four or five years old, his stomach was removed. I know that he spent months in the Cleveland Clinic, but I did not know they sent him home to die. My child-mind remembers the winter an ambulance brought my father home on a stretcher covered with a top that looked for all the world like the top of a baby buggy. I was delighted to have him home, but then I was sent away to stay with relatives. Perhaps they thought I was not old enough to experience death, so they tried to shield me from it.

I last saw my father the day I was called from my second grade class. Our white cat was on his bed. My father had butterscotch drops for me, my favorite candy. He asked his nurse to leave the room. I can not talk about this; even now that scene

brings raging tears. I really don't know what he said. He told my eighteen-year-old brother to make sure that my mother married again. (She did not.) What did he tell me? I think that he tried to share a lifetime of parenting wisdom with his precious little girl. He probably tried to give me strength and courage, to help me understand life and death. This lesson was too difficult for a seven-year-old, too premature. Too soon.

Other memories of my father are dim, yet I've always felt that he is watching over me. I think he has given me good luck. Alone in the dark, I've confided in him. I've discussed difficult issues, I've asked for advice. I really don't remember him, but to this day I feel his love. Recently when I was ill, depressed, confused, and tired, I cried myself to sleep, wishing my father could hold me in his lap and make the pain go away. I'm so sorry my father could not see his little girl grow up. He would have been so proud. I know he loved me very much.

He must have been the nurturing force of our family because with his loss no one could love again. My mother seemed angry with the world, as if she had been fatally wounded. I remember writing her love notes, begging for her love, but I never felt

her love in return. I needed her to hold me and tell me it would get better. I needed her to fill the void in my life, but she, too, was trying to cope and she could not fill the void. We all mourned alone. She became cold and withdrawn, even though she worked for \$25 a week to give us the only security she could. She felt as though everyone owed her something; she became a martyr, a martyr who seemed to die with my father.

So I grew up without parents. I learned to be independent and hard working, but when my need for being parented resurfaced, I worked at making myself lovable. The need for love became the driving force of my life, but I was cautious in giving my love because those who loved me had left me. Sometime in my late teens, my mother began to change from anger and depression to dementia, subtly and slowly. First her personality began to change. She was more outgoing with strangers, but more strict with me. She wanted me to be perfect, to somehow replace my father, and I tried, I really tried. I did everything I could to make her happy, but she was unable to give love or support. When I was twenty-one, my mother was a stranger; by the time I turned twenty-eight, she did not know my name.

I think I've always worked hard to prove to myself that I can survive. When I entered medical school, my mother, who was incapable of speaking, was living in a nursing home. I cannot blame her because I know that she did not get progressive dementia purposefully, yet...the guilt of avoiding my mother, not sharing in her death, will never leave. The doctor part of me knows now that my mother's illness was organically based and secondary to cellular destruction, and the absence of certain neurotransmitters caused her brain to malfunction. However, the daughter part of me will always believe my mother willed herself into being afflicted by this disease to make me feel guilty. It was the only control she had left.

When I'm sharing my story with the children of my patients, I often share my two sides because I know that I can help children who have dysfunctional relationships with their parents. I understand and encourage them to be honest and to set limits with their parents, but I also hope they can stay involved. I rarely visited my mother in the nursing home because I just couldn't, and no one helped me visit. Now I try to help.

Today I spend many of my working hours kissing the mothers of other children. I know I'm kissing my

mother, proving to myself that I'm not a bad person. I mourn for the children who don't have this chance. I know it has helped me work through my pain and my anger. I'm so lucky that I can begin to turn my anger and pain into caring and love. I think that helps to heal my wounds. I worry that my patients' children will not have that chance.

I recently visited the cemetery where my seven-year-old psyche had watched as they dropped my loving father into the ground. I felt so young and so vulnerable because I realized my need to be parented was still great. Now I need the love and security and guidance of my parents more than at any time in my life.

Many people ask, "Why would a young woman like you want to spend her time with old people?" They must think of older adults as selfish and demanding, but I have such different experiences. My entire working life is spent with people sixty-five and older and at their weakest times. Though they are sick and vulnerable, these people are not selfish and demanding. Can you imagine going on when you cannot hear or taste, can barely see, and hurt with every step? Most of their friends and loved ones are gone, yet they find hope and purpose amid this despair. Somehow they continue

to see the positive moments that occur each and every day.

I have spent hours talking with my favorite ninety-four-year-old, "Mrs. Smith." She tells me that she has lived a full life, that she has learned, enjoyed, and shared. She still enjoys each day for its individual joy but would happily fall asleep tonight and never waken. She wants to die as she has lived...peacefully.

I first met another favorite, eighty-four-year-old "Mr. Smith," in the emergency room. He had been mowing his lawn and became acutely short of breath. He had been rushed to the emergency treatment room and nearly expired on the way. He made it clear to me that his was a good life. He had outlived two wives and was ready to die. When I discovered the cause of his illness was a tight aortic valve, the major outflow tract from the heart, we discussed his options. He was very clear. He was not afraid of death, but he was afraid of life with prolonged suffering. These acute episodes of shortness of breath would surely recur, and he did not want to live through another, yet he decided to have surgery to repair the valve. He went into the surgery with no fear of death, and the surgery was successful. He recovered slowly, but fully, and continues to have great

respect for life, as well as numerous girlfriends, although he still tells me I am the light of his life. He winters in Florida, enjoys golf and an occasional highball. But most importantly, he is not afraid of death. He has a peace and understanding that allow him to enjoy each day. He is happy and full of life because he understands the meaning of life is the present moment. Although I felt somewhat abandoned at the age of seven, I am now surrounded by caring, loving parents.

During my twenties, I, too, became a parent. I had been so unsettled when I was twenty-one, still searching for a foundation. At twenty-three I became pregnant. Giving birth to my son changed my life. I became less cautious with my love, less fearful of loss, yet my foundation was still weak. So insecure with no one to teach me parenting, I made many mistakes.

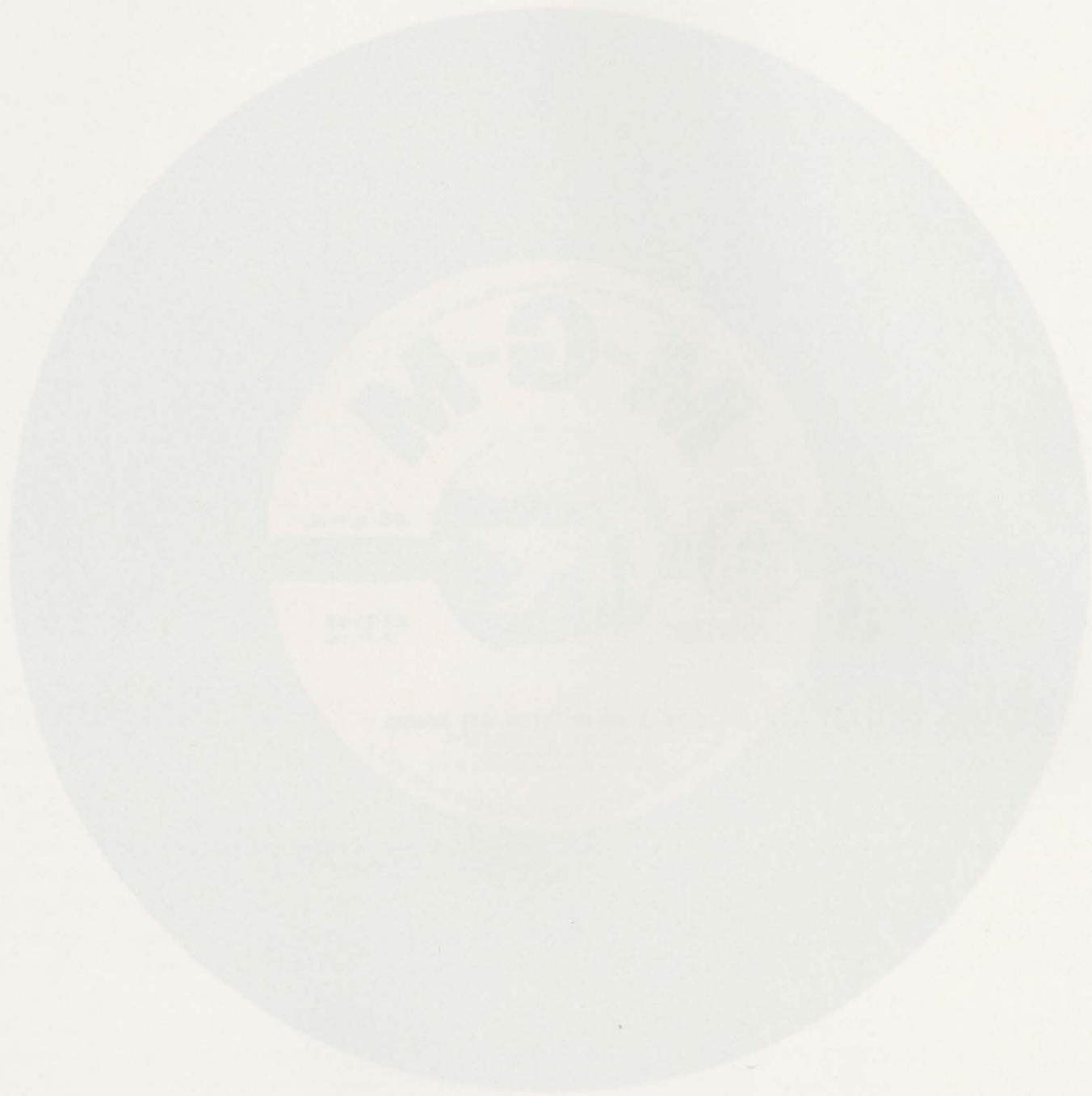
My son is now nineteen, a loving and honest, successful human being. I hope that my foundation is now firm enough to help him through the coming decades. I hope to improve my parenting, though my need to be parented is still very strong. I look forward to being a solid foundation for my son—to having a newfound friendship when I'm seventy-three and he turns fifty. I hope to help him

accept the final stage of living and see in my death the beauty of life. I do not want to abandon my son.

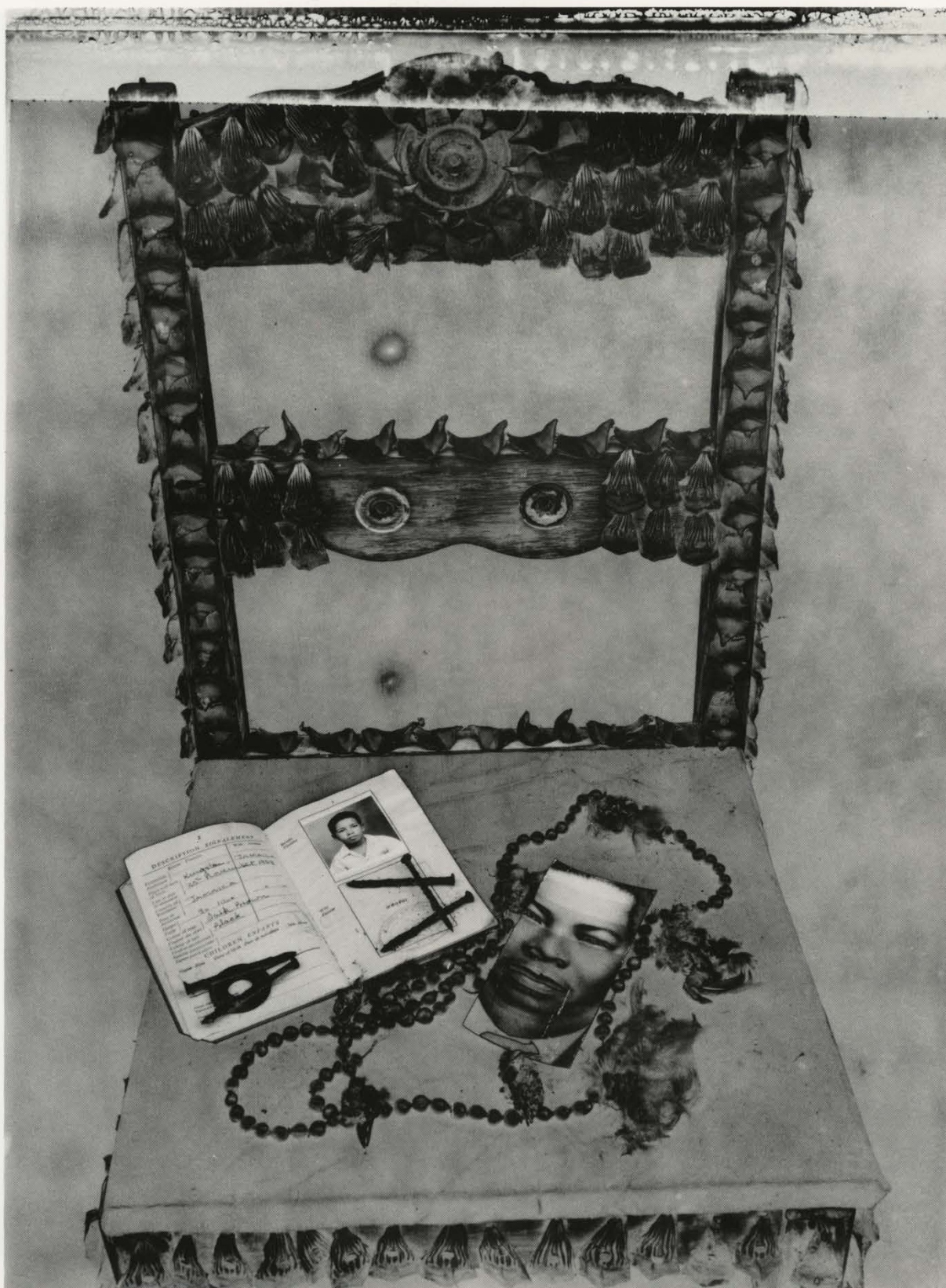
As the aging population changes, we will all be forced to see parenting differently. As the life span is prolonged, we may see our parents as dependent and needy, almost like children. We may feel there is a role reversal. However, as children we need to respect our parents as role models at all times. As we assist our parents at the end of life, and as we participate in their struggle to remain independent at all costs, we must learn from their strength. We will never be their parents. They will always be sharing with us the beauty of life and the meaning of death. Listen to their lessons. Learn from their love.

Parents





Albert Chong
Throne for the Justice, 1990



Parents



Linda Connor
My Hand with My Mother's, 1987



Life Itself

by John Boe

My mother, born in 1911, was a teenager when the twenties roared: she responded to the call and became a flapper. (It's no wonder that a generation later I similarly rose to the bait of the sixties and became a hippie.) Her favorite flapper item of jewelry was a live chameleon. The chameleon had a collar and chain around its neck, so she could pin it to whatever dress she was wearing. And so her lizard would shade its color to match whatever my mother was wearing. Whenever she'd tell me this story, I'd imagine the shock of her date noticing that the chameleon pin on her chest was moving, was alive.

She had many boyfriends, not all of them denizens of the moral high ground. When she was fourteen, her first real boyfriend, Norman Kruppelvitich, gave her a garnet and pearl ring, which he had stolen from his older sister. My daughter Amy still wears that ring.

My mother didn't tell me traditional nursery tales; rather she told stories of her flapper days. I especially loved to hear about St. Louis's most bizarre criminal, "The Feets Burglar." Summers in St. Louis were unbearably hot, so everyone would sleep with their windows open. This one summer, a young man, wearing only his underwear, began sneaking in the windows of bedrooms

where young women were sleeping. He would creep up to their beds and tickle their feet till they woke up. The women would of course scream at the sight of a strange man in his underwear tickling their feet, and he would then disappear out the window. The newspapers named this summertime intruder "The Feets Burglar." The Feets Burglar became the talk of the town that summer, a summer when my mother had a steady boyfriend named Freddy ("a very nice boy," my mother always added). Imagine my mother's surprise when one August morning she opened the paper to find that The Feets Burglar had finally been apprehended and it was Freddy. Her steady boyfriend had been The Feets Burglar!

Friday night was the big party night. My mother and her girlfriend Marge (both good Catholics) would look in the paper to see where there was a wake being held, then they would crash it! They'd go into the living room, look at the body, commiserate with the weeping women, then head to the kitchen where the men would be drinking and the party would be getting down. Wakes made for excellent parties, she always assured me.

My mother frequently gave me two pieces of advice joined into one

sentence: "Don't be the first one home from the party and don't worry about your grades." Ironically, I turned out to be motivated in school (I ended up with a Ph.D.), but I never worried about my grades as much as others seemed to worry about theirs, and I have never been the first one home from any good party.

Throughout my childhood, whenever I left the house she would kiss me goodbye at the door and then add, "And remember to keep your big mouth shut." Actually, this advice served as much to remind me that I had a big mouth as to remind me to keep it shut.

You see, my mother was not a loud person, but she attracted (even encouraged) loudness and laughter. Just as she was the perfect party piano player, creating a mood for others to be the lives of the party, she was the perfect social companion, creating a mood for others (such as myself) to come to life. Many's the time I was at a restaurant with my mother and the conversational hysterics got out of hand, so that she became embarrassed, even angry, that we were too noisy, laughing too loud. I was always slightly surprised because I'd feel that she was really the cause of it all.

Once my wife and I and our three daughters were out to dinner with her

at a fancy restaurant, when my two-year-old, Lily, needed to go to the bathroom. I offered to take her to the men's room. My mother was aghast.

"You can't take her in the men's room," she insisted.

"Hey," I protested, in my modern mode, "when I was little you used to take me to the ladies' room."

"That's totally different," my mother maintained. "In the men's room there are all these men in there waving their things and going 'ho ho ho.'" The conversation soon degenerated into an increasingly boisterous discussion of men's rooms and then of urinal cakes—like many women, my mother didn't know what a urinal cake was—until finally, amid laughter turning to tears, she had to adopt her serious tone and tell us all to quiet down. "Ho, ho, ho," I replied.

When we moved to New Jersey, in the summer of 1956, I didn't have much to do so I would go shopping with my mother at the A&P. I was at first somewhat embarrassed to find her regularly doing therapy (although I didn't know that word yet) for strangers in the checkout line.

Throughout her life, people asked her advice. One of her secrets as a lay therapist was that she gave her honest responses; she wasn't California non-committal, with the "What do you think, how do you feel about that"

approach. I remember hearing one young woman detail her problems with a boyfriend. My mother listened intently, then told the girl, "Dump him."

I think she became so sure of herself because my father travelled regularly throughout their married life. When I was a child, I usually wouldn't know whether he was in Pittsburgh, at work, or just upstairs sleeping: We just didn't see him that often. Thus my mother became independent, self-sufficient. When my father died, my mother grieved, of course, but she was, after all, pretty much used to living alone. She liked it.

Every year for the last twenty-one, I have gone backpacking for a week with three men friends. When my mother was alive, she'd always call my wife after I'd left and say, "Isn't it great to have him gone!" She believed that men and women should enjoy being able to take care of themselves, to have their own friends, live their own lives.

Late in life, she began using a variant of "Don't be the first one home from the party," telling any young person who wanted to stay up late and/or had to get up early: "Don't worry, you can always sleep while you're old." But when she was old (in fact throughout her life) she hardly

slept at all. She loved life and I don't think could ever understand how someone like me could seem to prefer sleep to life. She'd listen to talk radio all night long, not wanting to waste life in silent darkness. When a certain set of young grandkids would visit, they'd sneak in her bedroom when it was still dark and tickle her feet, and (amazing!) she would wake up laughing.

She was a great mother. On cold winter mornings, when I was little, she would warm my socks and underwear on the radiator before waking me up by slipping warm socks on my feet. And she always had new jokes, dirty ones and clean ones. When I was a young boy she made me promise that if I ever heard a dirty joke with the punch line "Not tonight, Josephine" to tell it to her. She had heard the joke once, thought it was tremendously funny, but had uncharacteristically forgotten the set up. This task of course gave me maternal encouragement to spend a lifetime listening to dirty jokes, but I am sad to say I never did hear the "Not tonight, Josephine" one.

She was a great cook—to my wife and me her most valuable heirloom was her recipe file. After she died, my sisters and I spent weeks cleaning out her apartment; one evening we defrosted some frozen enchiladas she

had made. Eating her food after she was dead was poignant—mother still feeding us—enchiladas salted with tears—but it was also just good food, no doubt the best enchiladas being eaten in New Jersey that evening.

After dinner the doorbell rang. It was a neighbor, offering condolences. This woman hadn't known my mother particularly well, but she summed her up for us, saying with a shrug, "She was life itself."

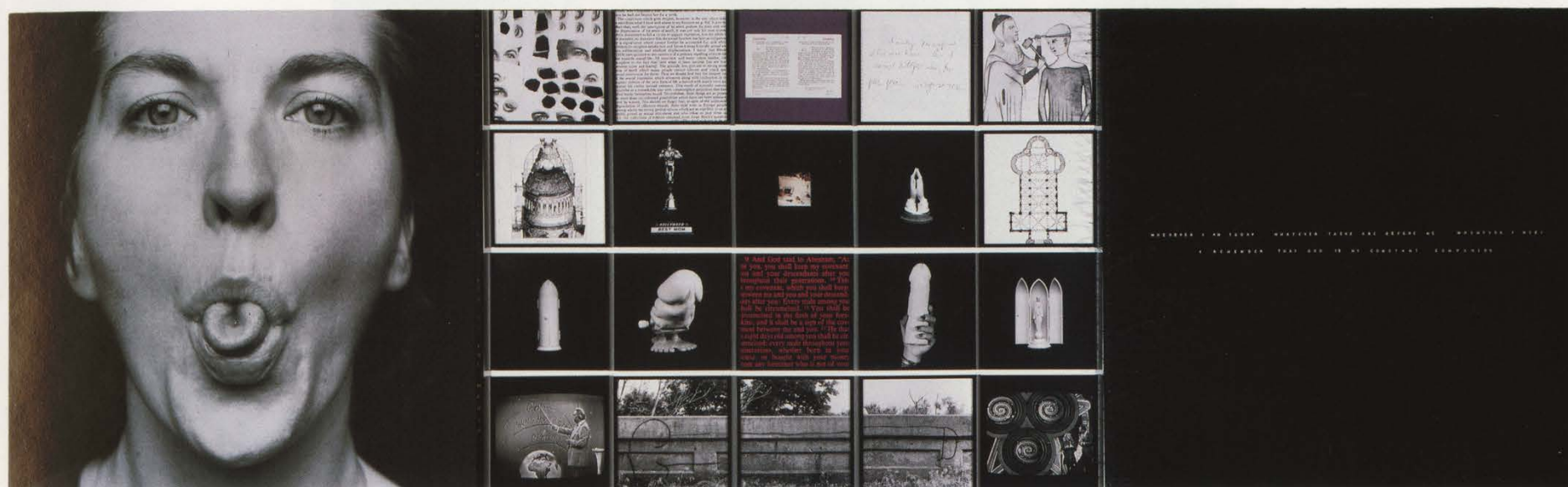


Dorit Cypis
My Father's Nudes, 1989



Wherever I am today
Whatever tasks are before me
Whomever I meet
I remember that God is my constant companion

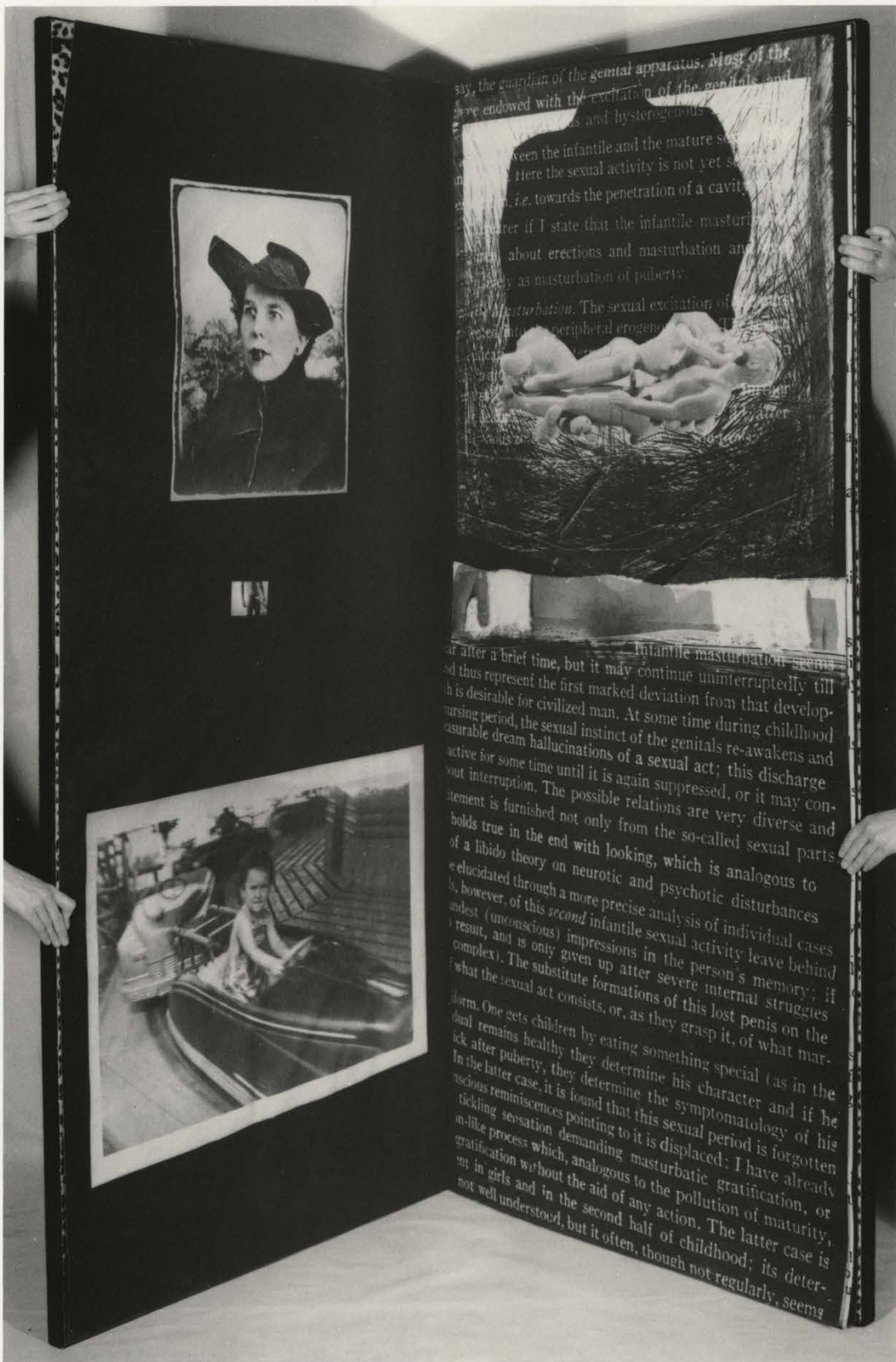
Barbara DeGenevieve
The Artist and Her Mother, 1991



Parents




Barbara DeGenevieve
Narcissistic Disturbance, 1985, (pages 2-3)



53y, the guardian of the genital apparatus. Most of the
are endowed with the excitation of the genitals and
and hysterogenous

between the infantile and the mature stage. Here the sexual activity is not yet sexual, i.e. towards the penetration of a cavity. I state that the infantile masturbation is about erections and masturbation and not about masturbation of puberty.



after a brief time, but it may continue uninterruptedly till it thus represent the first marked deviation from that development is desirable for civilized man. At some time during childhood-nursing period, the sexual instinct of the genitals re-awakens and consumable dream hallucinations of a sexual act; this discharge is active for some time until it is again suppressed, or it may continue without interruption. The possible relations are very diverse and development is furnished not only from the so-called sexual part holds true in the end with looking, which is analogous to of a libido theory on neurotic and psychotic disturbances elucidated through a more precise analysis of individual cases is, however, of this second infantile sexual activity leave behind modest (unconscious) impressions in the person's memory; if result, and is only given up after severe internal struggles (complex). The substitute formations of this lost penis on the fact that the sexual act consists, or, as they grasp it, of what mar- form. One gets children by eating something special (as in the dual remains healthy they determine his character and if he lack after puberty, they determine the symptomatology of his In the latter case, it is found that this sexual period is forgotten ascus reminiscences pointing to it is displaced: I have already tickling sensation demanding masturbatic gratification, or in-like process which, analogous to the pollution of maturity, gratification without the aid of any action. The latter case is not in girls and in the second half of childhood; its deter- not well understood, but it often, though not regularly, seems

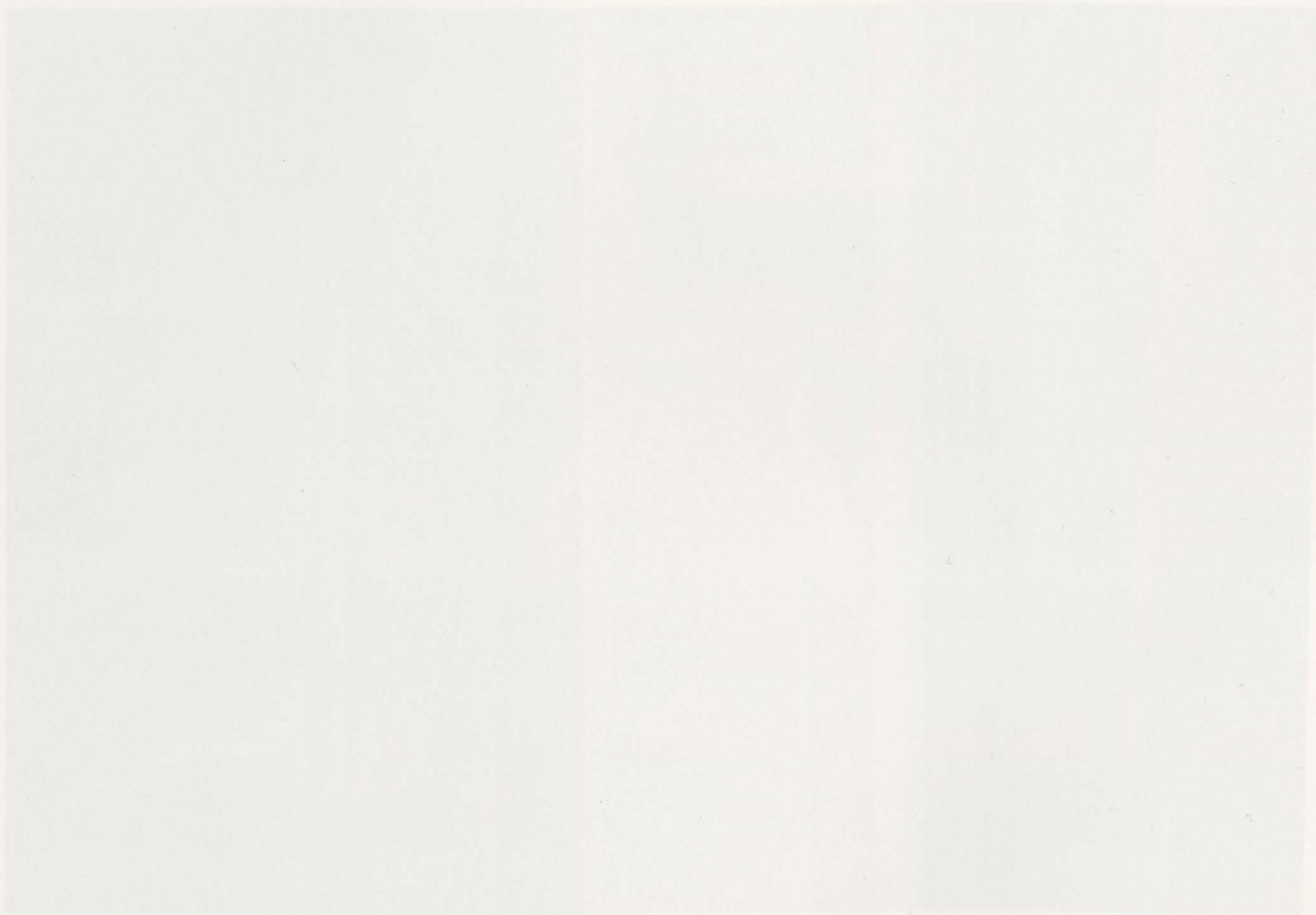


Doug DuBois
My Father, August, 1985



Doug DuBois
My Mother, May, 1985

Parents

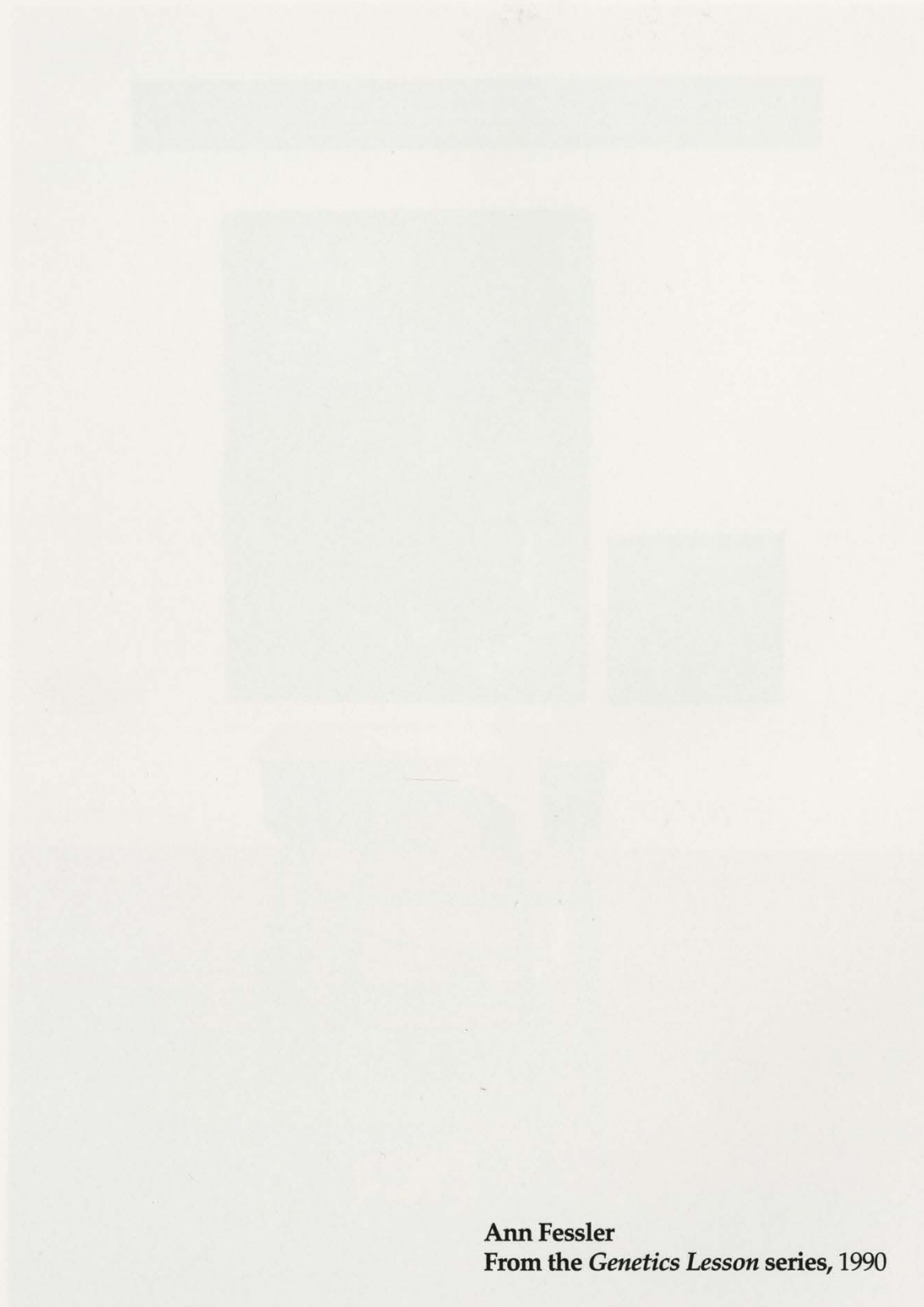


Ann Fessler
From the *Genetics Lesson* series, 1990

I was at an art opening and I noticed a woman who looked very familiar. I couldn't remember where I knew her from, but I had a distinct memory of talking to her. I asked several people if they knew who she was, but no one knew. I was sure I had just spoken to her. I decided it would come to me eventually so I proceeded to look at the exhibition.

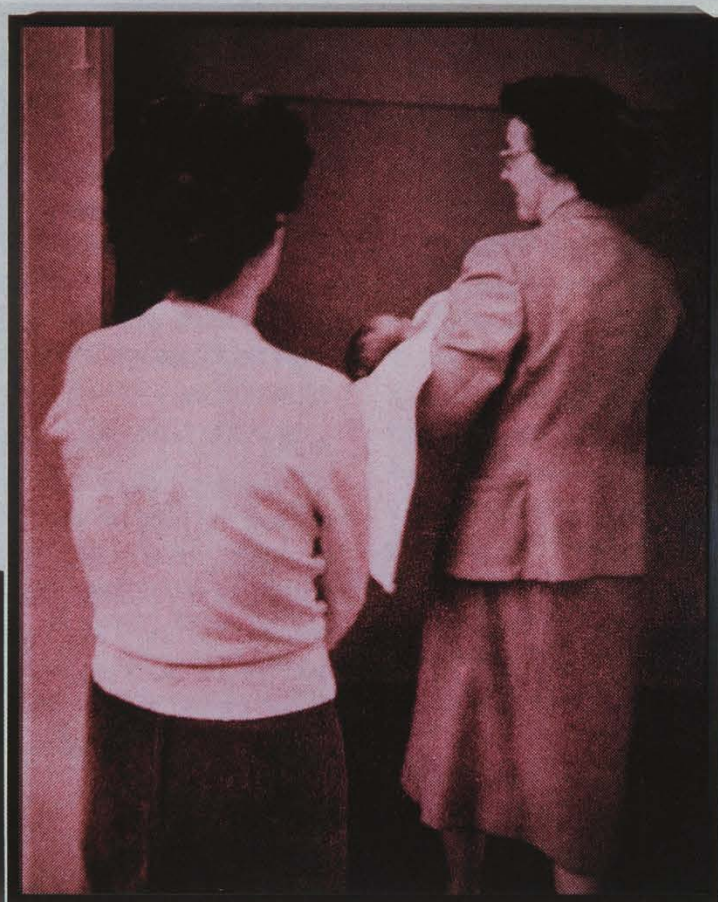
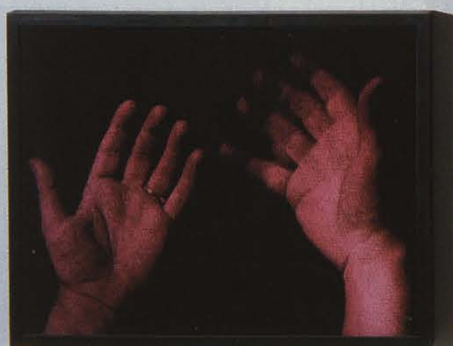


Parents



Ann Fessler
From the *Genetics Lesson* series, 1990

Not long afterwards the woman approached me and with no introduction said, "You could be my long lost daughter. You are the perfect combination of myself and the father of my child." I said, "You don't know what you're saying. I could be your daughter. I was adopted." We both stared at each other for a moment not knowing what to say next.



Letters to Mom

by Julia Swale

In August 1986 I discovered my birth-mother's name, married name, location, even her wedding picture in the *Times*—she had been married ten months after my birth. A social worker at the original adoption agency contacted her, Caroline, on my behalf, saying I would like to be in touch with her but not revealing I knew her identity (in fact, her phone number).

Thus, I now concede, I here played my part in the adoption deception, even as I seemed to be striving to ring it down.

Caroline agreed to receive a letter from me, saying "I shall do my utmost to respond promptly." The social worker, Alison, did however warn me that Caroline's first response had been fear, and a quick cleaving off of other branches of the family tree: "Her father's dead; my (other) children don't know." Her last words were, "Thank you so much for calling," though Alison remarked to me, "She wanted so much to get angry . . . but she sounds like she has to be polite, or die."

I never listen to the weather report, either.

August 14, 1986

Dear Caroline,

For a long time now, I've hoped you somehow knew that I was well and wished you well. I'm so glad to be able to thank you for your courage and your wisdom all those years ago, during what must have been a very, very hard time: losing a man you loved; bearing and placing a child. Please know first of all that you did the right thing for both of us. My parents have loved me all my life, and I have always known that they adopted me.

About you, my mother would say, "She was someone very special. She wanted the best for you, and I think she gave you a good start in life." I know that my mother would also want you to know that I was loved, and we are close enough that I can speak for her in saying thank you for doing all you could, and for all you did.

I realize that you weren't able to grow up with two parents, and how much you must have wanted that for me. Please know too that I'm delighted you are part of a marriage and a family of your own. I don't mean to distress you by wrenching your thoughts back to another love and time—perhaps though I might help

you think of it as a good and beneficial thing, certainly for my family and me.

(Here follows a page of alternately coy and candid autobiography, the Walt Disney version of my life. With this deceit, I told myself, I was protecting her.)

Overall I count myself rich in friends, rich in experiences, and rich in gifts and insight. These people and things have taught me how to think, and think again; how to love, and be glad of it. And I think my mother's right: I had a very good start in life.

Finally, then, the things I'd like to know from you are straightforward, I believe: the story of my coming to be. How you met him, what he was like, what it was like to be with him, and then not. Perhaps you can understand that what must be often painful memories for you is, for me, a very moving and dear knowledge to have of myself. Beyond that, my hope to someday see you, if you will, is truly not an effort to "regain my mother." I have, and love, the mother you helped give me. And insofar as you also gave me life, I can't really ever have "lost you" as you are to me: the giver of that gift.

Yet perhaps now we can find something more from one another? I've always known myself best through the people who have loved me, and you were the first. It's that knowledge—as facts, not feeling—that I'm asking here. I would cherish whatever you feel you can offer (a letter, pictures, more background on your family and his, some news of you and your life since, a meeting when and where and however you'd prefer), just as I have always admired what you did for me back then. And because my own family loves me, they accept this.

Most of all, and despite any apprehension I may have caused you now by this intrusion into your present, I hope I may have helped you think of that brief time in your past a bit more gladly, with a little more serenity. You can, you know, and I should know. I'm very glad of you, Caroline.

All the best,
Julia Swale

Caroline did not answer for six months. When she did, it was in response to what had, at the time, seemed an impulse: a phone call from me. Her first words to me, after the maid got off the extension and I

identified myself, were "Hi, how are you?" in her amber, Southern drawl.

We spoke for eleven minutes, says the phone bill; two clear impressions remain. When I asked her if it were really true that my father was blonde and blue-eyed (I am not, at all), she laughed and said warmly, "He had light blue eyes . . ." When she informed me that though her husband knew of my existence she had not told him of my contacting her, she remarked, "That's the only secret I've kept from him in all our years of marriage. And if that makes you feel guilty . . . it shouldn't." Finally she said that though she could not meet me, she would now indeed get down to the business of answering my letter.

Two weeks later, Alison called to tell me that she had received this letter, with a cover note asking her to read it first and be present with me when I first read it. She added, "Julia, you have to somehow be prepared for this . . . she says she wishes she'd had an abortion."

So the storm.

(undated)

Dear Julia,

This is not the letter I have rewritten so many times for you. That was torn up with the phone call. I'm sorry your patience after thirty-three years of not

knowing could not wait six or eight months. With my first contact from Alison, I was shocked and felt a blow to an old wound that had healed and now was reopened. After your phone call terror set in. I am sorry you did not have the kindness to respect my wish to be anonymous. If I had wished it any other way I would have contacted you. I felt perhaps we could be friends and write through Alison. Now that is no longer possible. The fear that you will get in touch with any member of my family terrifies me. They love and respect me for my honesty. Except for a nine month period in my past I have never lied to them. I don't want to lose the trust I have instilled in them. My integrity will be doubted in all things: "If she kept *that* from me, what else did she hide or lie about? For the *first time* in my life, you have made me doubt my decision not to abort you. That is a terrible thing to say but it is my honest feeling at this time. If I had chosen the other route I would have had the pain of losing you, which I still had, but not the fear of exposure.

I was telling people you can go on with life after a great loss; now I'm afraid of my own advice.

You have taken away all my rights. My right to be anonymous, even my right to sue the agency, for that would

Letters to Mom

by Julia Sachs

expose me. I feel like a naked person in a field of thorns. I have no protection.

I have called and spoken to Alison.

Now to the part of the letter I had started to you.

I'm delighted that your life was all I would have wished for you at your birth. Please thank your family for all they have done in my stead. From your letter I find an intelligent, literate, analytical, sparkling, and loving daughter. Who would want more. Your parents are lucky and also should be congratulated for their hard work in raising such a fine daughter.

Here follows a generous, poignant account of my birth parents' courtship, my birth father's nature and background, my conception the night before he left for the Air Force and Korea, his death in a training flight while he was still Stateside—"He never knew of you, as he died before I knew I was pregnant. The loneliness, fear, sorrow, despair, and shame all set in at once"—and her pregnancy in a distant maternity home. Through an elaborate cover-up, as she says, "*No one* in my family knows of my unmentionable motherhood."

Next, she gives another three pages of personal and family information, details from whom I inherited each of my physical features, lists of her interests and foibles. It is a remarkably gracious offering: indeed, her "utmost," under fire, from within. She concludes,

Julia, I had finally made peace with my heart and feelings. I did the best I thought possible for you at the time. When I gave you up for adoption, I did it with sorrow but the knowledge that you were better off with two parents and no stigma of illegitimacy. I still know I did the right thing. As soon as I signed those papers, I had to start erasing you from my mind and turning you over to them. It was a *final* decision and *must stand as such*. I have never kept anything from my husband and now I have the secret of writing to you. I don't wish this secret but I don't want to reopen any bad memories. He accepted me and loved me in spite of my past. Thus I must keep my promises.

I feel your present family is a warm and understanding place for you. Once again, I thank them for their care of you.

I can't end this without *begging* you to *forget my existence* and go on with your family and your life. I was more or less a surrogate mother for your parents and should have no more place in your life than that.

I am very truthful about the terror you have evoked in my life by your phone call. I hope your curiosity was worth my piece of mind. I'm now in an emotional turmoil. I went from pain, to an open wound, to terror. I can't blame you for wanting more information, but I do blame you for not doing it through the proper channels. Thus this is a final letter and a good-bye.

I wish you a long, successful, and healthy life filled with joy.

Caroline

PS: I'm returning your childhood picture because it looks like it came out of an album. Since your phone call I decided not to include any of me.

Caroline had asked Alison to call her after I had received her letter. At my request Alison waited a week, until I had a message to dictate to her over the phone, which she in turn read to Caroline, in a final phone call:

"Fear nothing. I am not a nightmare.

I am sorry to have made you afraid. I will not hurt you again. I will not contact *any* member of your family. *If you agree*, I may contact you again by mail, through the agency, to let you know important news. I will never simply show up on your doorstep, or ever again, on the other end of the phone.

Thank you for giving me so much of what I wanted, and all that I needed. The need is not curiosity. The need is to know where I came from, so I can know who I am. That's a real thing, as innate and tangible as the color of my eyes. You have hurt me, but more important, you have helped me feel whole.

Thank you. I love you. I'm sorry that I hurt you and was hurt before I said that. I did not trust you. But please trust me. Like you, I keep my promises."

And so I have; have done and shall do, for it is I who claim that a bond does exist, therefore I who must honor it faithfully—or honor it anyway. Like her, I keep my distance. But I did not say good-bye.

Parents

My mother has told me very little about her life.

What she has said would fill a thimble.

She was an only child.

She had step-sisters whom her mother would not let her see.

Her mother gave her cake to eat in the morning instead of cereal,
and the nuns were scandalized.

Her past, in words, is mysterious.

Kathleen Kenyon
Queen of the Night, 1985



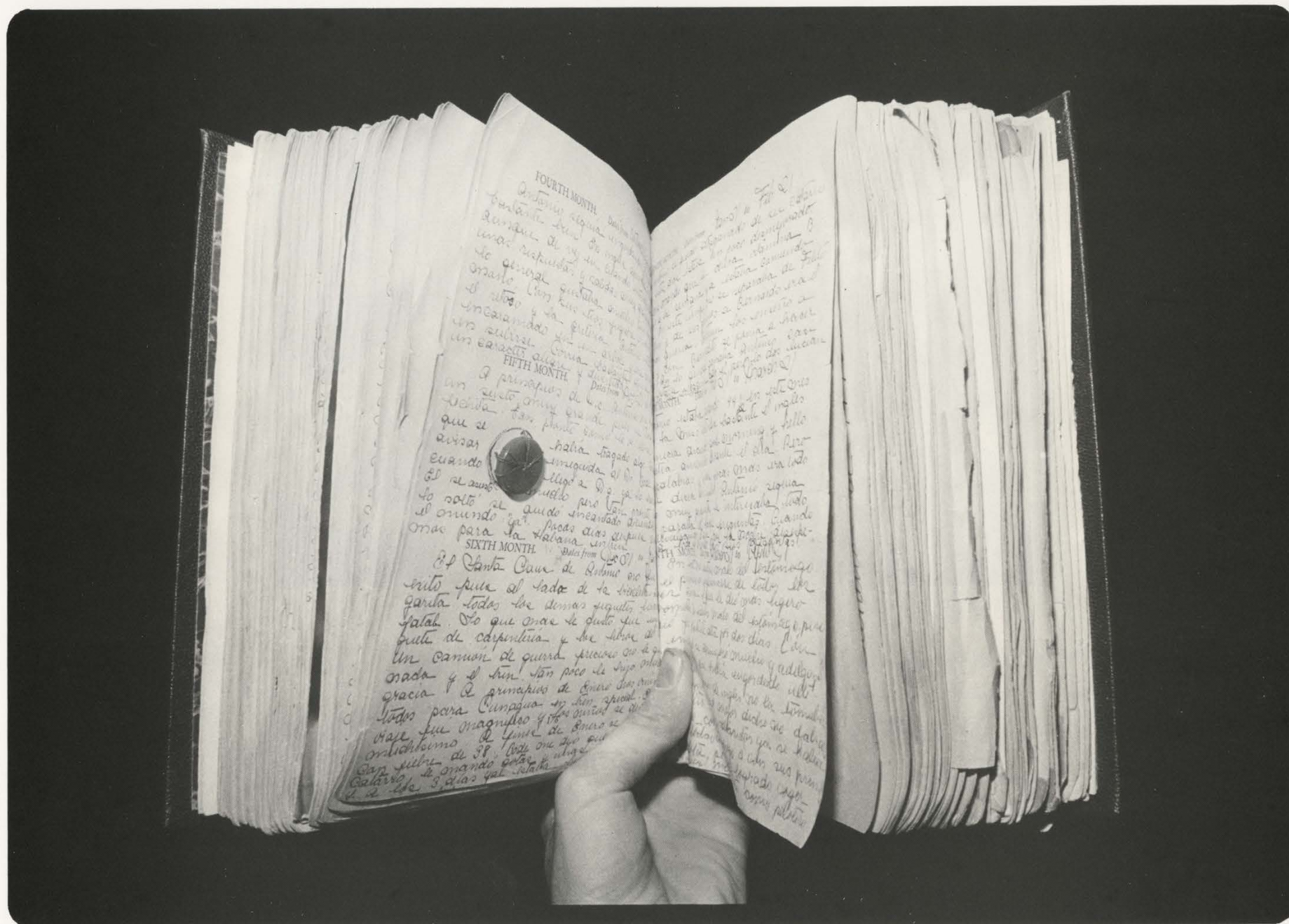
How can man stay alive in space?

The inside story:

Parents

Tony Mendoza
*"My mother kept a detailed
baby book," 1989*

My mother kept a detailed baby book for each of her five children.



Sewn to my baby book is the green Parcheesi chip I swallowed when I was 5 months old.

Parents

My mother kept a detailed baby book for each of her five children.



Duane Michals
A Letter from My Father, 1960-1975

was to my baby book is the green patchwork quilt I swallowed when I was 2 months old.



A LETTER FROM MY FATHER

As long as I can remember, my father always said to me, that one day he would write me a very special letter. But he never mentioned what the letter would be about. I used to try to guess what family secret the two of us would at last share, what mystery, what intimacy could now be revealed in the letter. I know what I wanted to read in the letter. I wanted him to tell me where he had hidden his affection. But then he died, and the letter never arrived. And I never found that place where he had hidden his love.



Duane Michals
My Father Could Walk in the Sky, 1989



MY FATHER COULD WALK IN THE SKY,
HE PROMISED TO TEACH ME HOW,
BUT HE LEFT WITHOUT SAYING GOODBYE.
I DON'T CRY, I'M A GROWN UP NOW.



Andrea Modica
Brooklyn, New York, 1985



Andrea Modica
Putnam Valley, New York, 1989

Notes: My Mother at the Piano

by John Boe

For years, when I'd sit down to play the piano, I'd often get a funny feeling of almost remembering something. I'd try to let the memory come, to see what my mind had over there in the corner, off to the side, but when I'd try to look, it would be gone, when I'd try to listen, it would fade away. So I'd forget it and begin to play. I was regularly haunted by this lost memory, but I recently discovered what it was.

My mother's mother, my Grandma Schneider, once started taking secret piano lessons in order to surprise her husband, who loved music (sometimes going to German beer gardens in St. Louis and singing with the band, or taking over the conducting). Grandma knew Grandpa would be pleased if she learned to play the piano, so she started lessons, practicing when he was out of the house, at work. But one day, before she had progressed very far, he came home early and heard her practicing. Her surprise was ruined, so she gave up the lessons and never played again.

Grandma Schneider, a German immigrant and former housemaid, continued to encourage her children to be musical. She used to give my mother, Margaret Schneider, the choice of cleaning her room or practicing the piano. I guess my mother practiced the piano a lot. She never was neat.

One of her piano teachers was a nun, who would hit her on the hands with a ruler when she made a mistake, or when she didn't cup her hands sufficiently. My mother always had very good technique.

As a teenager she used to practice the piano and typing on the bus, silently playing Rachmaninoff or "The Quick Brown Fox" on her lap over and over till she got to her stop. The skills of typing and piano playing are related—both develop and require finger coordination and strength. My mother had, as I do, these large piano player hands (good for basketball and rock climbing too, I've found). As a small child, though, my mother had the tip of the index finger on her left hand cut off when she caught her finger in the falling top of a desk. Her sister, a gifted classical pianist, feels that this accident kept my mother from really developing as a classical musician, that this accident led her more to popular music. It was also the tip of this finger being gone that allowed me positively to recognize her bloated and strange body after her death, to make the ID required by law.

Of course she studied classical piano and was musically gifted (learning the cello in her spare time when a nun informed her that the St. Louis Youth Symphony needed a cello player), but she really took to

popular music. Her first marriage was to a jazz drummer, a relatively despicable man as far as I can tell. Shortly before her death, one of her grown-up granddaughters asked why she had married this eccentric, obnoxious man. "I was a shithead," my mother explained succinctly.

Part of the attraction, though, was no doubt his drumming: the piano player and the drummer making beautiful music together.

Musicians, like most artists, don't make much money. And so the marriage with the drummer, despite two kids, was soon on the rocks ("When money goes out the door, love goes out the window," Mom used to say). My mother took a night job, playing the piano at a speakeasy. My mother always played great party piano. She knew more songs than anybody, and could fake anything—if you'd hum a few bars, she'd play it. She was also beautiful, very thin and tall, with savage black hair and strikingly high cheek bones (as an old woman she said of her earlier beauty: "When I needed it I had it; now I don't need it and I don't have it"). I can't imagine a better piano player for a speakeasy.

One night at the speakeasy, a World War I vet came in. He had this steel plate in his head. Because of the plate, he wasn't supposed to drink,

but, of course, being in a speakeasy he knocked back a couple of drinks. Then he decided to tear the place apart. It became the classic bar fight, bottles breaking, chairs thrown. My mother hid under the bar. Also under the bar was a salesman, hat in hand, the man who would become my father. Meeting this attractive woman under a bar during a bar fight he did, I suppose, the natural thing: he grabbed a bottle and poured them both drinks. (It was never made explicit to me whether my mother was still married to or living with the drummer at this time, but I always assumed she was.)

Until my mother was an old lady and the doctor suggested it for her high blood pressure, she never drank at all. She'd play the piano through many a party, but never had a drink. Maybe she remembered the dramatic changes that could come from a drink, like the time at the speakeasy when she took the first step towards a second marriage (and consequent excommunication).

My mother divorced the drummer but, freaked out from having been poor, refused to marry my father until he had \$500 in the bank. Finally my father said he had the money, and so they got married. Unfortunately, my father actually owed \$500 at the time. He never

worried about money, and ended up making a lot of it. He never would allow my mother to work though, maybe remembering that he met her when she was working. And so my mother, before, during, and after having three more kids with my father (making us a family of seven), became a volunteer or amateur piano player. She refused any jobs playing the piano if they required her taking money.

My earliest nighttime memories are the sounds of the party downstairs, the sounds singing around the piano: risqué songs like "Twelve Old Ladies Locked in the Lavatory" ("They were there from Monday to Saturday/ Nobody knew they were there"), with the obligatory twelve verses about various old women named Elizabeth, such as Elizabeth Wren (who "got in the wrong door and had to stand in line with the men") and Elizabeth Crandall (who suffered the indignity of sitting on the handle); sad songs about old hometowns (like the poignant "Southie," which some guy from Boston would always request); songs with bawdy lyrics it took me a few years to get ("When roses are red they're ready for pluckin' / And girls of sixteen are ready for high school"); holy roller songs like "The Joy" (First stanza: "I got the Joy Joy Joy Joy

down in my heart, down in my heart, down in my heart/ I got the Joy Joy Joy Joy down in my heart/ Jesus is keepin' me alive." Second stanza:

"The holy ghost the ball of fire keepin me alive," Third stanza: "Oh it's all over [fill in name] and it's keepin him alive"); the popular songs of all eras; the song games, with improvised lyrics; taking people's phone numbers and making them into songs; her trick of taking a well known song, changing it slightly (playing it real slow, putting in 3/4, and/or shifting it into a minor key, for example), so that you could almost recognize it, but not quite, then when you did recognize it, you'd feel that "Oh of course" epiphany. My father with his astounding memory for lyrics, loud (though rarely on key) voice, and large capacity for liquor was the leader at these song sessions, which would go on and on long after I'd fallen asleep upstairs, the twelve old ladies dancing in my dreams.

"The Twelve Old Ladies" actually led me to my first conscious lie, I suppose to my beginnings as a storyteller. We were living in L.A. and I was in kindergarten. The teacher decided as part of Show and Tell that everyone would sing a song. We sat in a circle and each of us in turn stood up to sing. What would I

Notes: My Mother
at the Piano

by John Doe

sing? The only songs I really knew were "The Joy" and "Twelve Old Ladies Locked in the Lavatory." I knew from the other kids' songs ("Mary Had a Little Lamb," "Mairzy Dotes," "Oh My Darling Clementine") that mine wouldn't fit in, though, so on my turn I copied some other kid and did "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

When I got home, though, I told my mother about that day's Show and Tell. "Yeah, Mom, I sang 'The Joy' for them," I lied, not quite knowing why I was lying but loving my mother's combined horror and amusement, "and they all liked that so much I sang 'Twelve Old Ladies Locked in the Lavatory,' but Miss Duncan wouldn't let me sing all of it. I guess it was too long." My mother gasped, her eyes opened wide, but she laughed. "Wait till I tell your Father." I was pleased with myself and never revealed the truth.

When I was little, my mother used to give me sheets of music paper. I'd sit on the floor and draw in circles, filling some of the circles in, putting staves on various of the notes, connecting some of the staves. When I'd finish, my mother would play my compositions—intuiting the divisions between bars. These songs, played with full arrangement, chords and all, were usually beautiful. If she or I

didn't particularly like one of these songs, she'd turn the sheet of music upside down and play it again (John Cage would have been proud). One way or another, either upside down or right side up, I'd have composed a lovely song.

The only problem with my love for music was that I seemed to inherit my father's musical abilities and was pretty much tone deaf. My mother, though, in her own undisciplined way, educated my ear. When we'd drive somewhere, she would kill the time by singing notes, at first one very high, one very low. Then she'd ask me which was higher. At first I usually couldn't tell, but soon, through this auto-ear training I began to notice differences in pitch and she correspondingly brought the notes closer and closer together.

She didn't force piano lessons on any of her kids, but she exposed us to them. My sister Margaret—who remembers nights of wishing she would go to sleep and wake up in the morning and magically be able to play as well as Mom—persevered with them for years, becoming a real piano player. But after only a few months of torture, my sister Karen and I decided to quit. Unlike Karen, I wanted to quit in person. I dutifully showed up at my lesson, not having practiced *at all* during the week, had

my piano teacher scold me, then at the end of the lesson, told her to her face that I quit. I've quit many things since then (mostly jobs) and always, like this first time, found the experience exhilarating.

When we'd visit my mother's parents in St. Louis, I'd always end up playing the piano, perhaps because the only toys in the house were numerous decks of cards and one set of ivory dominos. But there was something fascinating about that beautiful black baby grand with the framed picture of my mother at nineteen sitting on it (the same picture now sits on my piano). So bored, with nothing else to do, I would fiddle on the piano. But all I knew how to do was play the three notes of a major chord—so I'd put on the loud pedal and play those three notes over and over, rippling them together in a shower of sound, a blurry cascade, and my grandma would always come into the room and tell me how nice it sounded. She said it so genuinely that I'd think, "Yes, it really does sound nice."

By the time I was in high school my older brother, a jazz fan, had taught me how to play open sevenths with the left hand and fiddle around with any notes at all with the right, so that the result sounded vaguely like jazz piano. This new ability to make

jazzy sounds on the piano inspired me to try lessons again. I really learned to play, at age sixteen or so, from these six months of lessons from a guy who'd studied piano with John Lewis (of the Modern Jazz Quartet). He taught me the secret of how to play from chords, so that I could read music without having to read all those damn notes in the left hand, so that I could start to improvise by playing around with notes in the chords. But after these six months of lessons, my mother was my only teacher, though she never sat down to give me a lesson. I have hundreds of memories of sitting at the piano, playing something, then hearing her voice from the kitchen, full of pain at my dissonant mistake but full of love too—"B flat! B flat!"

During those high school years she used to regularly play the piano for the mental patients at Bergen Pines Hospital. Once a patient snuck up behind her when she was playing and dropped his false teeth down the back of her dress. Another time a woman started screaming at her when she was playing Mozart. "That's not right! That's not right!" the woman kept shouting, growing more and more upset, till the orderlies dragged her away to sedate or restrain her. My mother felt guilty about this, for she knew the complaining woman had

been right. My mother had been playing a Mozart Sonata from memory, a piece she *had* known years before but was now, in her fashion, faking it, playing mostly Mozart, but clearly not playing it right.

At the mental hospital, sometimes she'd accompany a woman who sang opera music. I don't remember her name, but I do recall that she was the actor Adolph Menjou's sister. My mother was a great accompanist, used to slowing down or speeding up as singers capriciously changed their tempo, but this woman had the especially annoying habit of changing keys in the middle of a piece. After a long rest, when the woman was supposed to come in a cappella, she would come in with her long high beautiful but wrong note, and it would put the piece in a whole new key. My mother would complain at home, but at the mental ward she'd just change keys and keep playing.

In high school, summers and weekends, I got into the habit of sleeping late. When my mother thought I'd slept long enough, she'd start playing the piano, each song louder and faster than the previous one, on into barrelhouse and boogie woogie, till I'd wake up to the sound of music. When, later in life, I'd visit her, she'd still wake me up with her piano playing (sometimes because it

was time for us to go to garage sales). Her piano playing was the best alarm clock ever invented.

There was a time when my parents stopped having their all night singing parties and we kids started having them. My sister Margaret would play the piano (I wasn't good enough for a sing-along yet), and we'd sing the good old songs ("My Buddy," "Ready for the River," "Ragged But Right," "Put the Blame on Mame"), Tin Pan Alley songs from George M. Cohan to Cole Porter, and the new songs of the day (Beatles, "Abraham, Martin and John," "You're So Vain"). My mother had this huge collection of sheet music, to which we added.

There'd come a time, usually around two in the morning, when we were just going good, that my mother would come down the stairs in her slip and plead for us to keep it down, "or else your father will be up making coffee." I guess it was karma or just our turn, but it didn't feel like sweet revenge—they hadn't wanted to keep us up with their singing any more than we wanted to keep them up. We just wanted to sing, so we'd keep singing, but with the soft pedal on, or sometimes we'd break up the party and go to bed, or sometimes, we'd get loud again and in a few minutes, at 2:30 or 3, my father would come

down the stairs in his polka dot boxer shorts and old fashioned T-shirt and start making coffee. He never seemed to mind having been wakened; it was my mother who couldn't stand the idea of his waking up this early, starting his day when his kids were still at the end of the night. We'd sing a few more songs, then, to the smell of coffee brewing, say goodnight and go upstairs, leaving my father to read his morning through.

Once she showed me this beautiful, slightly dissonant, but full rich chord. It was at least eight notes, played with both hands, then as you'd descend a half-step at a time down the scale, the chord would resonate, hauntingly. I played it for a few weeks when I'd sit down to fiddle at the piano. Then I stopped playing it, forgot about it. One day, years later I remembered and asked my mother to show me this haunting chord again. What chord? she said, I never showed you such a chord. The Lost Chord died with my mother, indeed died before she did.

One of the distinctive features of her piano style was how much she loved the low notes. She would stride down to the very bottom of the piano with her left hand, making a full deep bass sound for the melody on top. Now, when I play, I still try to learn from her, to not dwell too long or too much in the easy middle.

I was always shocked by how little she liked to listen to music. She appreciated it—she always knew where in the melody the jazz soloist was—but she always felt that if she wanted music she would play it, not listen to it.

As a writer I can identify with this attitude. I once heard Raymond Carver say that writers were people who wrote little books of their own instead of reading other people's big books. Of course you appreciate other people's art, but the main thing is to do it yourself, to play your instrument, to make your music. I used to read all the time, with music in the background. Now more and more I write, I play the piano.

Shortly before she died, we went to her friend Vivian's house for dinner. Vivian was still dressing upstairs, so my mother, my wife, and my kids sat in her luxurious living room while I helped myself to Vivian's piano. I played for a few minutes, till I heard Vivian descending the stairs. "You know," my mother said to me, "You play the piano very well." These words were as sincere as her own mother's compliments had been (and indeed I had become a piano player). Her praise not only made my night, it made the rest of my life.

One Monday when she was seventy-five, she had heart surgery, and I sat on the opposite coast waiting for the phone call and playing the piano. I played out of one of the many fake books she had given me (Fake Books are books full of the melody and chords for hundreds of songs; when the writers of the songs are given no royalties, such books are illegal, but nonetheless invaluable to musicians. My mother bought several of them in the late '50s for \$25 each). I played over and over the sweet sad song "I'll Never Be the Same" ("Life has lost its meaning to me/ And when the birdies that sing/Sing in the spring/ They will not sing for me/ I'll never be the same/ Again"). When I got the call that she had died on the operating table this became the last song I would associate with her.

One of my strongest ways of remembering her is by remembering, and playing, the songs I remember her especially liking. Old songs like "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans" and "Mean to Me," obscure jazz tunes like Russ Freeman's "Happy Little Sunbeam," and Lennie Niehaus's "Whose Blues," classical music by Brahms. Once in the 1970s, she mentioned how much she liked John Lennon's song "Imagine." Ah yes, I sympathized, glad that she'd finally come around to the movement.

What wonderful sentiments in those lyrics, "Imagine all the people...." But she cut me off: "What lyrics? I just think the tune is nice."

When my sisters and I attended Ridgewood High School in New Jersey, my mother began playing piano for *Jamboree*, an annual fund raising musical show the Ridgewood High parents and teachers put on each year. After we had all graduated, she, an exception to the rules, kept being asked back to be the piano player, logging 1,300 hours at rehearsals and shows. She also acted as song finder—finding melodies in her sheet music collection for new lyrics to be written to. After her death, one of the *Jamboree* producers wrote a little eulogy, in which she referred to "Shy Margaret, hiding behind the drummer."

Like many introverts, she could seem loud and even boisterous to those she met in a small group. But she didn't want to be the center of attention. She was the perfect accompanist—preferring to have herself unseen and her music heard, hiding behind the drummer (I think of her first husband, the drummer).

For her, music was a social act. Late in life, when she had arthritis in her fingers, she practiced regularly, not so much for the pleasure of

playing, but so that she could continue to play for people. She liked to play for parties, for friends, children, and grandchildren (one set of grandkids always requested her rendition of Mezz Mezzrow's "Kitten on the Keys"), for dancing schools, for shows big and little, for churches and for synagogues, for people. And after playing, her music was of course gone forever, a momentary gift that brightened life but couldn't last, a genuine spiritual act.

The painter J. B. Yeats (the poet's father) called art the social act of the solitary man. When I'm at a party and there's a piano, I understand what J. B. Yeats meant, I understand how my mother must have felt, I understand the desirability of getting to hide behind music, to hide behind the piano, to not have to mix and seek people out, but to still be contributing to the feeling of the party.

Whenever I see a strange piano I want to touch it, to play it. The piano in any room calls to me, like an attractive and willing woman who wants me to love her, to play with her. Freud would probably say this feeling has something to do with my mother complex, with how I associate my mother (my first image of the feminine) with the piano.

When I recovered my lost memory, the memory that sometimes tried to come up when I sat down alone in a quiet room at the piano, I was amazed I hadn't figured it out before. I was trying to recall what is undoubtedly my first memory: the sound of piano music. Here I am, *inside* my mother and I hear this wonderful stuff—piano music. There I am, in my cradle, and I hear strange but beautiful sounds. What are they? What is it? It's my mother at the piano.

We all knew the music box was running down.

Slower and fainter it chimed

A bit off-key.

Still

No one was prepared

When it stopped

In the middle of

Bea Nettles
Faces/Phases, 1989

Picture



Picture

Parents



Lorie Novak
Critical Distance, 1987–89, (excerpts)



"She is still talking about divorce after forty years of marriage and five sons. Her husband still locks the gate, and she never learned how to drive. Everyday after breakfast she begins cooking lunch and is still cleaning up after two. She has always dreamed of painting and singing and publishing her poems. She tells me that she is still waiting for the time when things in the family will get better. She assures me they will, 'We women must be patient.' She says if she could get divorced she would get half of everything and she asks him for grocery money. He has not kissed her since their last son was born, except on New Year's. She is sixty years old and still waiting.

"Her father wouldn't let her work. She got married when she was twenty and had four sons by the time she was twenty-five. She left her husband when she was twenty-six, then went back to him because she was afraid to raise the sons alone. Her mother told her that was her place. She had her last son when she was twenty-seven. Her husband was a violent and abusive father and husband. Her oldest son was a heroin junkie at seventeen, twenty years later he's fine. Her youngest is an alcoholic and still lives at home. The middle son is in and out of institutions. She's still waiting for them to get better. She takes care of them. She feels needed, helpful, and loved.

"He told her he would love her forever. He bought her a house by the river where she was born. All her sons were born by that river and swam there and fished and played and got into trouble. It was wild then. They were wild then. Now it's a high-class neighborhood and the river is polluted. Her life goes on...much the same."

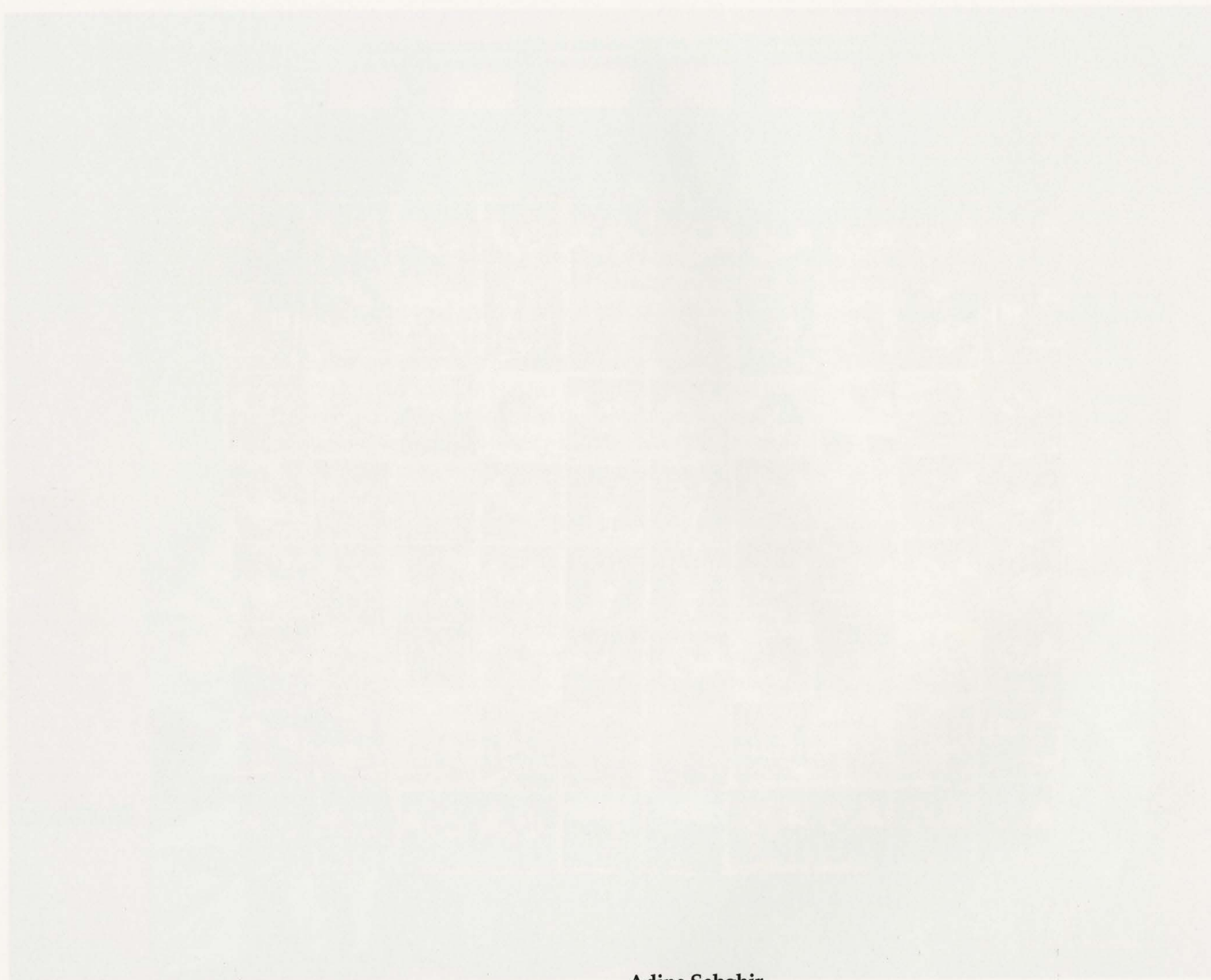
Adina Sabghir
Gilka Fagundeo Frota, 1990

1992



QUILTED PHOTO ALBUM

Parents



Adina Sabghir
Life of the Mother, 1990





Larry Sultan
Untitled (Business Page), 1989



Larry Sultan
Untitled (Mom on Chaise Lounge), 1989

The mother sat in quiet desperation. There was a decision to be made. Security was attached to bouts of unbearable conditions while a search for satisfaction would take her to uncertain lands. Five mirror images of herself awaited an answer in silence. Walking in the daylight seemed to be her only path. She hoped and prayed that it would bring change.

Deborah Tharp
From the *Relationship Series*:
Self-Portrait with Mother, 1988



Parents



Stephen Turlentes
Thomas Turlentes, 1989



Parents



Stephen Turlentes
Dad Floating in Big Sugar, 1990



Life with Father

by Joseph Squier

"The body is the cave on whose wall are cast the shadows we mistake for reality."

—Jamake Highwater

My father was a strong, athletic man; a high school wrestler, weightlifter, even an accomplished dancer. In one of my earliest memories of him, I see myself riding atop his back as he swam the length of our backyard swimming pool. Although terrified at being surrounded by rushing water, I was also sure that his broad shoulders would support and protect me, having absolute faith in my father's body as impenetrable barrier and protection. In spite of being so young, this particular memory is quite vivid; my arms wrapped around his neck, the smell and feel of his wet skin, the muscles that moved beneath me with each stroke. But this memory is also peculiar because it contains feelings of touch and safety, which are a rare component of our shared history. Most of the boyhood memories I have of my father tell themselves through his body, and nearly all have a dark and unsettling resonance.

More typical of my childhood were the periodic "spankings" I received on the bathroom floor. I remember the dread as a physical sensation in my stomach, while I took as much time as possible unbuckling my belt and pulling down my pants. I would then lie on my stomach, head next to the toilet, the linoleum cold against my face—which would soon provide a balance to the hot sensations emanating from my exposed behind. When the blows started to come I would begin screaming hysterically and reaching back with my hands to try and shield myself, even though I knew this would only fuel my father's anger and prolong the punishment. He began holding my wrists in one hand and striking with the other, and when this became too difficult he started tying my hands behind my back with strands of heavy string. This finally ended when I began breaking the strings at the height of the exercise. From then on my physical punishment became more spontaneous and less ritualized. I imagine he discovered that a more impulsive use of violence caught me unprepared, achieving more satisfactory results. In any event, the use of violence was a defining characteristic of the man. It was as close to a complete language as he

ever got. When angry and at a loss for words, which was often, he would express himself physically with direct and frightening eloquence. These violent incidents were perhaps the only times when he felt truly lucid, and I suspect he savored the power of expression and sense of control this language gave him.

And his violence wasn't directed just at me; my mother was a frequent target as well. I remember a particular New Year's Eve during which my father flew into a violent rage. My parents had planned on going dancing that evening. They had met when they were both professional dance instructors, and I was always thrilled to watch them dance, because it was the only time when I saw them touch in a way that did not frighten me. I no longer remember what they argued about, I just remember the sounds of my mother being hit and thrown around our house, her crying and pleading, and the sounds of furniture being smashed. At these times I would escape to my room, close the door, climb into bed deep under the covers, and try to shut out the sounds. I eventually fell asleep that night with the battle still raging in the other room, but on New Year's Day I awoke to a completely still house. I silently crept into the living room to discover a scene of

devastation: every piece of furniture was overturned, the dining room table was upended with only one leg still attached, the Christmas tree was snapped in half, there were holes in the walls and debris on the floor. Later that New Year's Day, my father demanded that my mother and I clean up the mess, and silently observed while we obeyed his command.

It was through events like these that I was initiated into the vocabulary of the male body. It was here I learned that actions speak louder than words, physical force being ultimately more expedient; and that swift brutality can be a vehicle for gaining control and a type of respect. Most important, my father taught me to view the male body as a weapon, associating its touch with anger and violence.

Not surprisingly, I came to fear and dread any physical contact with my father. Looking back at my boyhood, I can remember almost no incidents in which he touched me, other than to discipline or punish. I have no memories of my father running his hands through my hair, holding my hand, or holding me in his arms. In those rare instances requiring that he touch me, I retain only the memory of his haste and awkwardness.

It's funny how small events can take on iconographic significance. I

particularly remember sitting in the bathtub one evening, and my father deciding to dispense a lesson on how to properly clean one's face. He grabbed the washcloth and proceeded to scrub my face as if he were scouring a dirty skillet, leaving it scarlet and stinging. Of course, what I did not understand at the time was that my father was afraid to touch his son in any way that revealed delicacy or tenderness, which was to him a sign of weakness. Instead, the incident became emblematic for me of some basic lessons about human interaction. I interpreted his behavior as a sign that human touch was something unpleasant and shameful, that it was something mildly repulsive, something to be executed with haste and avoided if at all possible.

Standing in sharp contrast to this example was the touch of my mother. Sometimes she would come into my room after I had gone to bed. We would talk in whispers for awhile, then she would stroke my face, tuck the blankets under the mattress, and kiss me goodnight. It was a simple ritual, but one filled with significance. I remember not wanting to move for fear of washing away the trace of her touch, the way the sheets would always feel afterwards. My bed had been transformed into a safe vessel

that I lay in, savoring the lingering sensation of her presence. I would try to fall asleep in this motionless state, always waking the next day to mourn the evaporation of my mother's touch.

The physical intimacy between my mother and me provided an alternative to the model presented by my father, but it was made clear that I was expected to emulate his example. Being a child, I accepted this dichotomy without question, struggling to learn the lessons presented. It was at this point that I began to associate aggressiveness, harshness, and distance with masculinity; passivity, tenderness, and a gentle touch with femininity (and it would be many years before I began to even suspect what an insidious lie this was). Wanting approval from my father, I tried to invent myself in his image, accepting his vocabulary of the male body as my natural inheritance. Much of my childhood was spent trying to emulate this language, but I proved to be a poor student. I was a small and introspective boy, not physically dominating like my father. I grew up with the certainty that he was deeply disappointed in me.

By the time I reached my early teens, I had almost completely internalized my father's notions of masculine identity. But I did receive

Life with Father

by Joseph Epstein

one last lesson, and this related specifically to relationships with other men. There was another boy in my neighborhood, my age, with whom I became close friends. We began to see a great deal of each other, sometimes spending the night at one another's house. At first my father encouraged the friendship, but after a point he began to taunt me, often referring to my companion as my girlfriend. Although too young to understand the full implications of his innuendoes, I understood the message well enough. Shortly afterwards the sleep-overs ended, and with time the relationship did too. Until this point it had not occurred to me that sleeping with another boy might be taboo. I did not understand why this was forbidden, and of course it was not explained in any fashion. But I was well-schooled enough to realize that, along with all the other taboos of the male world, it involved something contrary to the natural order of things.

Oddly enough, one of the last boyhood memories I have of my father involves sleeping in the same bed with him. It was towards the end of high school and we had gone on a weekend fishing trip together, staying in a tiny cabin with only one double bed. In all my life, I had never slept in the same bed with my father, and the thought terrified me. I spent the entire

day dreading the coming of night and the inevitable encounter. It was a hot and humid midwestern night, the kind in which the air seems to envelope and caress you with its sticky humidity. We undressed and lay uncovered on top of the sheets, each careful not to touch the other. It was as if an invisible line was drawn down the middle of the bed, the boundary line between friendly and foreign territory. My father was clearly uncomfortable, but eventually his steady breathing indicated that he had drifted off to sleep. I remained awake much longer, sweating in the hot night air, afraid that I might fall asleep only to awaken with the feel of my father's flesh against mine; or worse yet, that I might have to face his wrath and disgust if he should awaken first to the discovery of such an unpleasant situation. I finally slept fitfully and uncomfortably at the furthest edge of the bed.

It was with this inherited language of the male body that I eventually entered manhood. As my father became less able to dominate me physically, a vast chasm of silence seemed to open between us. The fear I had always felt for him gradually evolved into an icy indifference. In my adulthood he came to symbolize the antithesis of what I wanted to be. Maturity had begun to allow me to

see, or suspect, some of the deeper motives that guided him, and with this came a more critical attitude towards ideas I had absorbed as a child. But old ideas die hard, and the irony of this evolution in myself and in my relationship with my father was that although I began to reject his model of masculinity, I interpreted this as a failure in myself. Instead of considering that there might be alternative models for masculinity, I assumed that I simply could not measure up to the standards due to some inherent defect in my own personality. Instead of feeling liberated from the chains of an inadequate definition, I felt resigned to accepting my own limitations.

But then came the year I turned thirty, the year my father got sick, the year that everything changed. As a child, my father's body could strike terror in me, he was invincible and all-powerful. In adulthood, his physical presence was still intimidating, and it had never occurred to me that he might get sick. I saw his body only as a threat and an all-encompassing symbol, not as the fragile container that it was as well. But he did get sick, and over a period of six months I watched my father's body deteriorate, and eventually I watched him die. This was the last great lesson he taught me and like all those before it,

he passed it on unconsciously and unknowingly.

The cancer in my father's body methodically stripped him of his strength and power, leaving him vulnerable and childlike. This was the cruelest of circumstances for a man whose body had always served as a metaphor for his self-image, as the center for his identity and the source of his masculine pride. His illness and the ensuing physical incapacity also forced us back into a physical relationship that had been abandoned many years earlier, but this time on completely different terms. At the end of my father's life our roles became reversed, I was the powerful one and he became the frail child. As his body failed him, my father was progressively silenced. His body had always been his expressive vehicle, the vessel for communicating meaning. As this language was slowly denied him, he was forced outside of his familiar boundaries, and within this silence touch again became important, but in a reinvented form. I hugged my father for the first time that I could remember, and held his hands more in those last few days than I had in a previous lifetime. This was an entirely new vocabulary of touch which my father accepted and clearly wanted, and very significantly,

this new vocabulary was invented on my terms, not his. It allowed me to see for the first time, in those last weeks and days of my father's life, the fear that had always been well hidden, yet a constant force in his life. As I watched him slowly drift away, old memories reworked themselves into new stories. I came to realize that his violence was the compulsive narrative of a man deeply insecure about his masculinity, afraid to be out of control, fearful of having his authority undermined. I came to pity him for the curious double bind that he had lived in, on the one hand fetishizing the strength and power of the male body, in fact embellishing it into a cult of power; yet on the other hand being deeply fearful of his own body, his need for touch and physical intimacy, and being afraid more than anything else of the bodies of other men. I had always cast myself as my father's victim, but I began to see that he also was a victim, of himself and a whole mythology of the male body that he had merely passed on to me because it was his inheritance as much as it was mine. I realized that I had constructed a mythology of the male body through my father just as, through my mother, I had invented a mythology for all that was soft and warm. And for the first time I realized that he was

not the inventor of this mythology, this fraternity of silence, but merely one of its unreflective messengers. And as he lay dying, I stroked his head and looked into those unseeing eyes, holding his hand until it began to lose its warmth, and only then did I have the courage to lean forward to kiss his forehead and whisper very softly, "I love you, Papa."

Susan Unterberg
Self-Portrait/Mother Series, c.1985

Exhibit



Parents



Carrie Mae Weems
Coffee Pot, 1988

As a child I loved the aroma of coffee. Smelling it drove me nuts cause it reminded me of cocoa, of chocolate, candy. Anyway, my parents rarely drunk coffee. But when they did, I'd stand at the kitchen table begging like a salivating dog for a lick. Momma and daddy would be sitting up, elbows on table, talking, sipping like white folks on t.v., shooin' me away with, "Ya don't need no coffee, coffee'll make ya black."



When my mother died, I cried

My little bird is dead

No hair upon her head

My little bird is dead

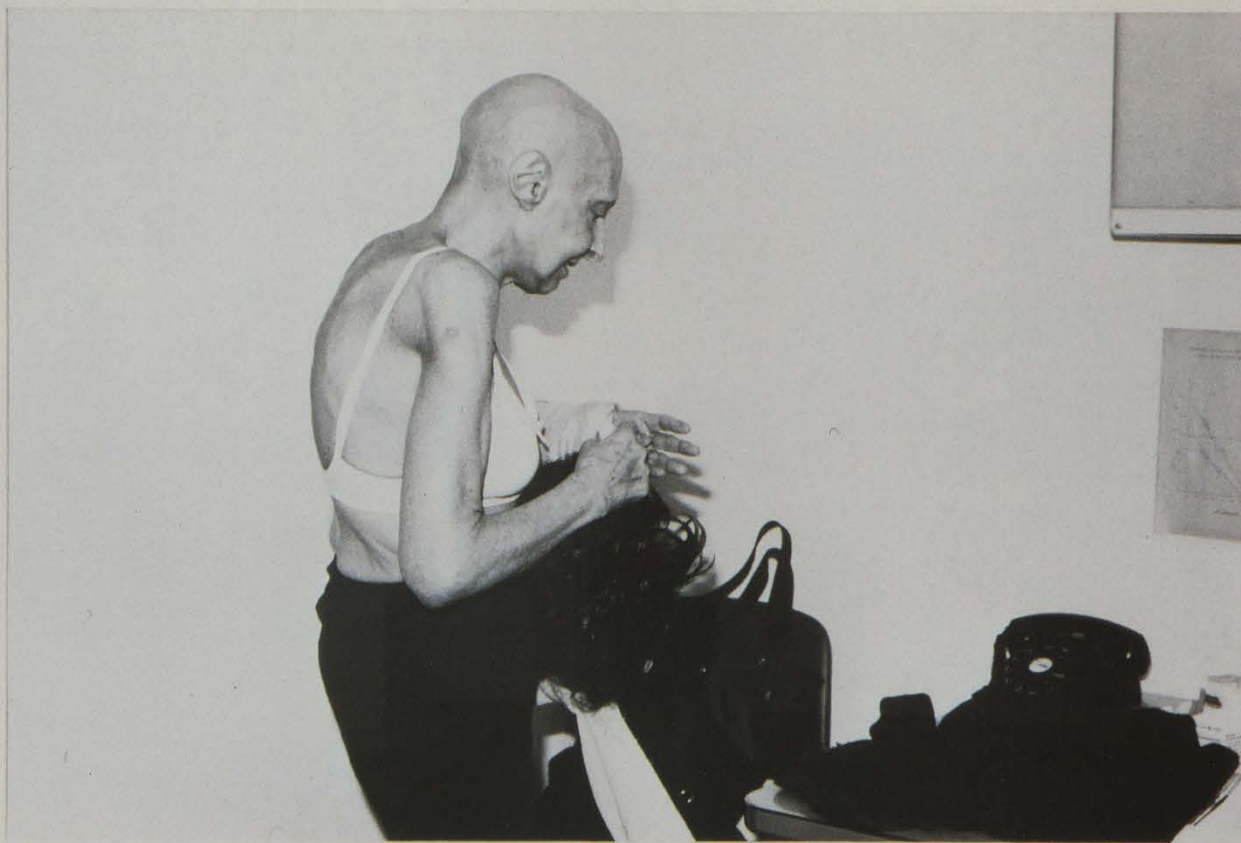
To Synagogue I prayed

A bird flew in and stayed

To give my heart a lift

My mother's little gift

Hannah Wilke
Seura Chaya #2, 1978-89



Jeffrey Wall
My Mother, 1987 (oil on canvas)

Before retirement at the age of 63, crippled with arthritis, my father worked for over 40 years as a butcher, a cutter of meat and bones. Every working day he would rise at 5:00 in the morning and drive to work in Brooklyn, returning home at 7:30 at night or later. Sometimes in winter, as a child, I would wait by the front door for his arrival. As I stood by the storm door condensation from my breath would frost the glass. I'd draw little figures and landscapes on this temporary sketch pad until hearing the thud-thud of card doors closing and the crunch of footsteps in the snow. More often than not the pain of the long day and the bone rotting in his hip would be marked on my father's face. Some of my favorite childhood memories involved going along to the store with my father after being awakened from my warm bed. "Time to get up son." Our Chrysler New Yorker had a console from the aerospace industry lit up in phosphorescent green. I dozed in the back seat. The sun wasn't up yet. At the meat market ancient wooden floors were covered with a thick layer of sawdust to absorb the blood of freshly killed chickens and cows. Morris the dwarf chicken man was already scalding and plucking birds. There was a certain smell of death which creeps up on me to this day. Customers began to trickle in. Most were elderly women with thick Yiddish accents like my own grandmothers had. "Maxie," they would say to my father, "give me a pound lamb chops. Is that your son? Mazel Tov, you must be proud. Is the lamb fresh?" I would spend part of these childhood days with my grandmother who lived a few blocks away in a rent-controlled apartment on Benson Avenue. Her building, with a lobby as dark as a medieval cloister, smelled always of cooking. My grandmother's tiny apartment on the sixth floor had a fake fireplace with metal logs that seemed aflame when a switch was thrown. The mantle contained an enormous array of bric-a-brac including the little gifts we had given her over the years. Such as the loving cup inscribed "World's Greatest Grandmother." There were innumerable family portraits everywhere. Pictures of my grandmother as a young girl in the town of Kovno in Russia where she grew up stood beside photographs of my father and his four brothers as children. They looked like they stepped out of a Lewis Hine photograph. My father had a rough childhood; to bring in extra money he worked odd jobs like setting pins in a bowling alley. He had a father he seldom saw sober when he saw him at all. On my outings to Brooklyn we would have lunch at a restaurant called "The Famous" where everybody in the place knew Maxie, my father. They had known him when as a young man his considerable athletic abilities were celebrated all over Bensonhurst. He swam across Sheepshead Bay, a great distance, with friends rowing in a boat behind. He could take on and defeat, by himself any two opponents at handball and he was a star at basketball with a deadly accurate two-handed running shot. That was, of course, before the arthritis had taken its toll. After work with dusk settling in all around us, red as meat, we would make the trip home past railroad yards, gas storage tanks and amusement rides of Coney Island. Past garbage dumps and shopping centers my father deftly drove in and out of traffic on the Belt Parkway. I would gaze outside at airplanes screaming overhead as they prepared to touch down at the airport after long flights from Europe. My thoughts would wander to far-away places until we pulled into the driveway of our suburban ranch-style home. I'd run into the house as my father limped painfully behind. For him another day of walking into and out of a cold meat locker was over. Time for dinner, a hot bath, some television while tallying up the day's sales, and finally bed so he'd be ready to start all over again the next day. Stiff as he was I'd have to help him take off his shoes and socks. "Never go into a retail trade," he would caution me. I think he would have liked to be a gardener surrounded all day long by green, living things.

Jeffrey Wolin
My Father, 1986

My mother is losing gradually, several noticed her forget normally would not, down, slurring-long conversations. At thought it had all effect of a commonly prescribed medication for high blood pressure, now off the market. But then as her mind continued to erode and more and more memories of her past were lost to her they conducted sophisticated tests which showed she had suffered a mild stroke. A Telephone Conversation with my Mother: "Fine, except my mind. Physically I'm perfect. What else can I do? Kill myself? I'm not going to do that... I've seen millions of doctors. They say I could recover maybe another 15%... I stopped the speech therapist... Look honey, a stroke is a stroke. There's nothing anyone can do... Everybody else is fine, except my sister, Miriam has to have an amputation. She's had two by-pass surgeries. The doctors say another surgery would only be good for six months or a year. They'll take off her toes, maybe more. They have to see when they start to cut. Her toes are black, dead. They may cut off up to the ankles. Who knows?... Some days are fine.

her mind. It began years ago. I first thing things she her speech slowing pauses during phone first the doctors been a side

others I can't remember a thing. My friends say, 'hey, everybody forgets,' I just forget. My mother had a very sharp mind before all that. When I was in high school she'd help me with my Latin homework translations from Caesar's Gallic Wars, declensions (mater, matris, matri, matrem, matre) and conjugations (amo, amas, amat) all remembered from her years as an honors student at Erasmus High School in Brooklyn at the height of the Great Depression. And she won a scholarship to Hunter College though she dropped out her sophomore year. Her immigrant father (and illiterate mother, too) saw little use in higher education for a young, marriageable woman and pressed her to quit - something she always regretted. So when I was the first one in the family to graduate from college, it was a special source of pride for her. Last year after a disastrous visit on my son's first birthday, my mother misread her airline tickets. We arrived at the airport five minutes after her flight for Florida had already departed. Standing at the curbside check-in, it finally sunk in, as I looked at my mother, how far she had deteriorated. This woman who had memorized great works of literature in dead languages could no longer read an airline ticket. I just received a New Year's card from my mother which in a shaky hand she had scratched, "I love you with many years. Mom." I'm sure I know what she meant to say.

Jeffrey Wolin
My Mother, 1990

Checklist for Exhibition

Tom Chambers

Mother's 45's, 1990

Installation of forty-five framed 45's and record player with sound via cassette tape
Courtesy of the artist

Albert Chong

The Two Generations, 1990*

From the *Ancestral Throne* series

Gelatin silver print with copper foil mat
40" x 30"

Courtesy of the artist

Albert Chong

Throne for the Justice, 1990

From the *Ancestral Throne* series

Gelatin silver print with copper foil mat
39" x 29"

Courtesy of the artist

Linda Connor

Our Hands, 1987*

Gelatin silver print
9 1/2" x 7 1/2"

Courtesy of the artist

Linda Connor

My Hand with My Mother's, 1987

Gelatin silver print
8 3/4" x 7 1/2"
Courtesy of the artist

Dorit Cypis

My Father's Nudes, 1989

Tabletop installation of twenty-two framed Ektacolor prints
Courtesy of the artist

Barbara DeGenevieve

The Artist and Her Mother, 1991

Photo linen, velvet, gelatin silver print, and SX-70 Polaroid
42" x 135"
Courtesy of the artist

Barbara DeGenevieve

Narcissistic Disturbance, 1985

Book with photo linen and mixed media
84" x 60"
Courtesy of the artist

Doug DuBois

My Father, August, 1985

Ektacolor print
15 1/8" x 22 3/8"
Courtesy of the artist

Doug DuBois

My Mother, May, 1985

Ektacolor print

15¹/₈" × 22³/₈"

Courtesy of the artist

Doug DuBois

*December, 1985 **

Ektacolor print

15¹/₈" × 22³/₈"

Courtesy of the artist

Ann Fessler

From the *Genetics Lesson* series, 1990

Ektacolor prints, desk, chair, book, lunchbox

66" × 48", 22" × 22"

Courtesy of the artist

Ann Fessler

From the *Genetics Lesson* series, 1990

Ektacolor prints

60" × 48", 28" × 22"

Courtesy of the artist

Kathleen Kenyon

*Teacher's Husband, 1984**

From the *Mother Teacher* series

Toned gelatin silver print with collage

20" × 16"

Courtesy of the artist

Kathleen Kenyon

Queen of the Night, 1985

From the *Teaching Mother* series

Toned gelatin silver print with collage

21¹/₂" × 17¹/₂"

Courtesy of the artist

Tony Mendoza

"My father has overdrunk,"

1989*

Gelatin silver print

15⁷/₈" × 19³/₄"

Courtesy of the artist

Tony Mendoza

"My mother kept a detailed

baby book," 1989

Gelatin silver print

15⁷/₈" × 19³/₄"

Courtesy of the artist

Duane Michals

A Letter from My Father,

1960-1975

Gelatin silver print

16" × 20"

Courtesy of Sidney Janis

Gallery, New York

Duane Michals

My Father Could Walk in

the Sky, 1989

Gelatin silver print

11" × 14"

Courtesy of Sidney Janis

Gallery, New York

Duane Michals

*Self-Portrait Shaking Hands with My Father, 1987**

Gelatin silver print

4⁷/₈" × 6⁷/₈"

Courtesy of Sidney Janis

Gallery, New York

Andrea Modica

Brooklyn, New York, 1985

Platinum-palladium print

9³/₈" × 7¹/₂"

Courtesy of the artist

Andrea Modica

*Brooklyn, New York, 1987**

Platinum-palladium print

9³/₈" × 7¹/₂"

Courtesy of the artist

Andrea Modica

Putnam Valley, New York, 1989

Platinum-palladium print

7¹/₂" × 9⁵/₈"

Courtesy of the artist

Bea Nettles

Faces/Phases, 1989

Triptych; gelatin silver prints

40" × 20" each

Courtesy of the artist

Lorie Novak

Critical Distance, 1987–89
Projected slide installation;
four projectors with dissolve
units. Originally created for
the Independent Curators
Inc.'s travelling exhibition *The
Presence of Absence: New
Installations*, curated by Nina
Felshin.

Courtesy of the artist

Adina Sabghir

Gilka Fagundeo Frota, 1990
From the *Inheritance Series*
Cotton velvet and lace, dress-
maker T-pins, Ektacolor
prints
60" × 60"

Courtesy of the artist

Adina Sabghir

Life of the Mother, 1990
From the *Inheritance Series*
Ektacolor print, wood
cornice, latex paint
48" × 120"

Courtesy of the artist

Larry Sultan

Untitled (Business Page), 1989
From the *Pictures from Home*
series

Ektacolor plus print
30" × 40"

Courtesy of Janet Borden
Gallery, New York

Larry Sultan

*Untitled (Mom on Chaise
Lounge)*, 1989

From the *Pictures from Home*
series

Ektacolor plus print
30" × 40"

Courtesy of Janet Borden
Gallery, New York

Larry Sultan

*Untitled (Mom against Green
Wall)*, 1989 *

From the *Pictures from Home*
series

Ektacolor plus print
30" × 40"

Courtesy of Janet Borden
Gallery, New York

Deborah Tharp

*From the Relationship Series:
Self-Portrait with Mother*,
1988

Ektacolor print
24" × 20"

Courtesy of the artist

Deborah Tharp

*From the Relationship Series:
Self-Portrait with Mother*,
1988 *

Ektacolor print
24" × 20"

Courtesy of the artist

Stephen Tourlentes

Thomas Tourlentes, 1989

20" × 24" Polacolor image
transfer on 22" × 26"

rag paper

Courtesy of the artist

Stephen Tourlentes

Dad Floating in Big Sugar,
1990

Mixed photographic
mediums

56" × 64"

Courtesy of the artist

Susan Unterberg

Self-Portrait/Mother Series,
c.1985

Fourteen Ektacolor prints
20" × 20" each

Courtesy of Laurence Miller
Gallery, New York

Carrie Mae Weems

Coffee Pot, 1988

Gelatin silver print

14 1/2" × 14 1/2"

Courtesy of P•P•O•W,
New York

Hannah Wilke

Seura Chaya #1, 1978–89 *

Gelatin silver print with
watercolors

59" × 63"

Courtesy of The Jewish
Museum, New York

Hannah Wilke

Seura Chaya #2, 1978–89

Gelatin silver print with
watercolors

59" × 63"

Courtesy of Ronald Feldman
Fine Arts, Inc., New York

Jeffrey Wolin

My Father, 1986

Toned gelatin silver print
with ink

16" × 20"

Courtesy of Catherine
Edelman Gallery, Chicago

Jeffrey Wolin

My Mother, 1990

Toned gelatin silver print
with silver marker

20" × 24"

Courtesy of Catherine
Edelman Gallery, Chicago

*Not included in catalog

CREDITS

Excerpt from the *Daily Word*, published by the Unity School of Christianity,
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"Letters to Mom" by Julia Swale, originally published in *Adoption Stories*,
edited by Ann Fessler, Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Snug
Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, NY, 1991 pp. 32-35

Kathleen Kenyon p. 36

"On the Occasion of My Mother's Death" by Grace Noble Nettles,
originally published in *Corners* by Grace and Bea Nettles,
Inky Press Productions, Urbana, IL, 1988 p. 52

Adina Sabghir p. 56

Deborah Tharp p. 62

Introductory quote to "Life with Father" by Joseph Squier,
from *Myth and Sexuality* by Jamake Highwater, New American Library,
New York, NY, 1990 p. 68

Hannah Wilke p. 76



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Museum Services

Loris Nevelk
Critical Distance, 1987-89
 Projected slide installation
 four projectors with oblique
 units. Originally created for
 the Independent Curators
 Inc.'s traveling exhibition *The
 Project of Alternative New
 Installations*, curated by Nina
 Falckin.
 Courtesy of the artist

Adina Sahghar
Gifts Regarded From, 1990
 From the *Interlunar Series*
 Cotton velvet and lace, dress-
 maker Typex, Elctrolux
 pins
 18" x 40"
 Courtesy of the artist

Adina Sahghar
Life of the Mother, 1990
 From the *Interlunar Series*
 Elctrolux print, wood
 canvas, lace print
 48" x 138"
 Courtesy of the artist

Larry Sultan
Untitled (Shattered Paper), 1982
 From the *Shattered Paper*
 series
 Elctrolux print
 31" x 40"
 Courtesy of Janet Borden
 Gallery, New York

Larry Sultan
Untitled (Shattered Paper), 1982
 From the *Shattered Paper*
 series
 Elctrolux print
 31" x 40"
 Courtesy of Janet Borden
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Larry Sultan
Untitled (Shattered Paper), 1982
 From the *Shattered Paper*
 series
 Elctrolux print
 31" x 40"
 Courtesy of Janet Borden
 Gallery, New York

Deborah Sharp
Self-Portrait with Mother,
 1985
 Elctrolux print
 28" x 28"
 Courtesy of the artist

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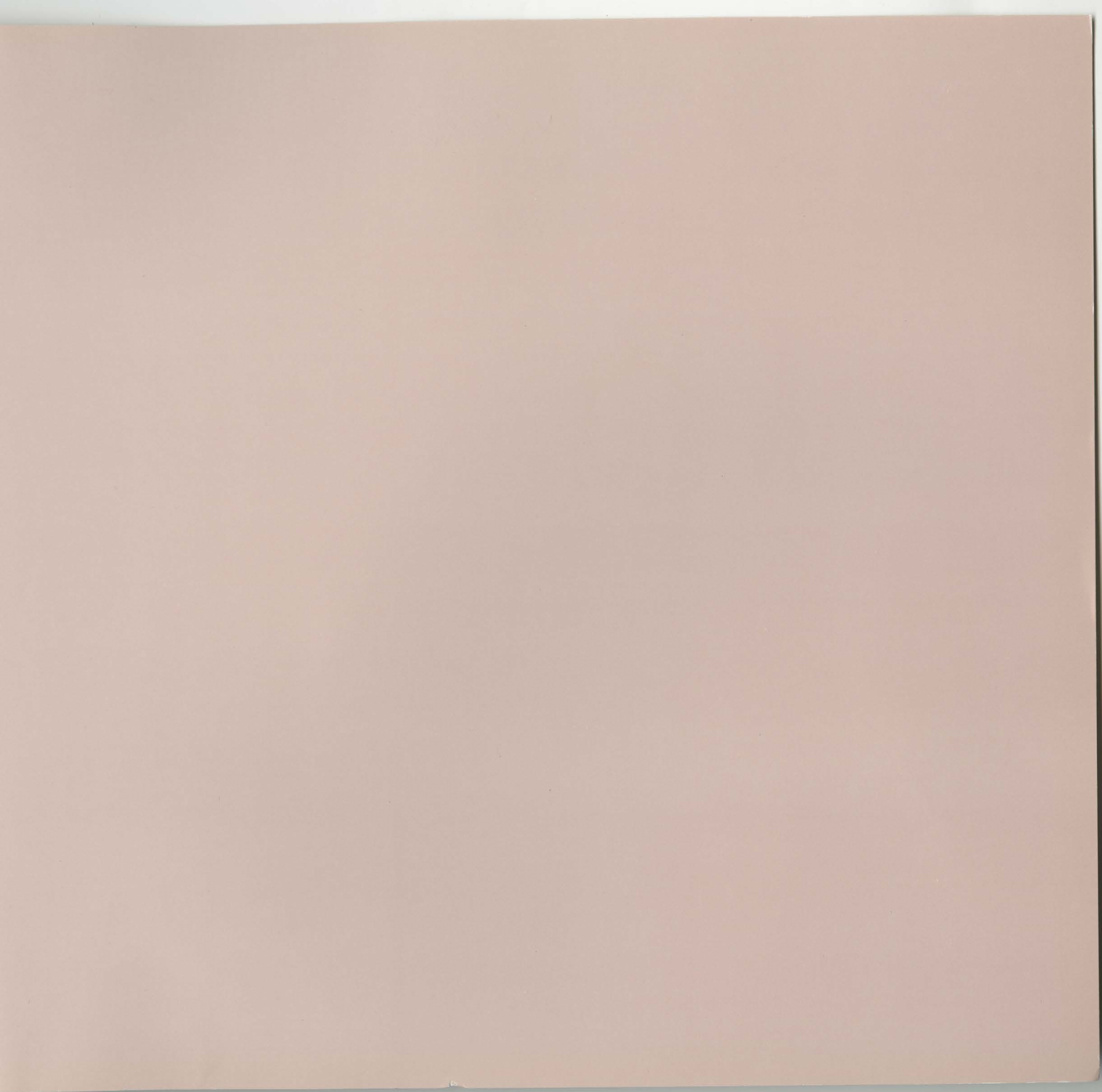
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