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Dedication

I dedicate this book to the teachers, physicians, and mental health professionals who helped my family and me overcome challenges and setbacks. Thank you for always going above and beyond the call of duty and for never giving up on us. I've changed names to preserve privacy but that does not mean I've forgotten your kindness and wisdom.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my children for inspiring me to explore places beyond my own experience. Your curiosity taught me to question everything, including current theory about ADHD. Without your zest for adventure, the concepts that underlie this book would never have been realized. No words can express my love and gratitude to you.

I also want to send a shout out to my writing group friends, especially Noelle Jane Myers, Karrie Merriman, and Denise Bowers. Your discussions on e-publishing and indie (independent) authoring were invaluable. Thanks also go to Bonnie Knight for the first read and Jamee Larson for editing the original manuscript. My writing buddy, Susan LeRoy Stewart gave insightful feedback on the final hard copy while Warren Lanning did meticulous line editing of the ebook version.

Finally, I'm grateful to cover artist Lisa Bennett for taking my father's black and white photo of me gazing into a fun house mirror and transforming it into a red-hot metaphor on the theory of novelty seeking.

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Introduction

When my children, Cindy and Eric, were diagnosed with ADHD in the early 1990s, few people viewed ADHD in a positive light. The go-to guide on ADHD, the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) classified ADHD as a "mental disorder."[1]

I accepted the pessimistic outlook at the time, but always had the sneaking suspicion that the diagnosis of mental disorder missed an important fact—that there were positive aspects to having ADHD. Although my children's hyperactive, impulsive, and distractible behavior created problems in school, outside of the classroom they were charming extraverts whose restless energy and exuberant curiosity challenged me to view the world differently.

I was a research assistant to evolutionary biologist, John Endler, at Princeton University in the 1970s, so my mind instinctively considered ADHD from the viewpoint of natural selection. Remember that natural selection occurs when a change (mutation) in the genetic code favors survival. My mind kept returning to this question: Would Cindy and Eric's

ADHD behavior have increased their chances of survival in prehistoric times?

Classic Darwinian evolution referred to anatomical traits, such as the human ability to walk upright on two feet, which offered benefits because the hands were free to complete tasks, for instance, wielding a heavy stick to ward off predators. Darwin also argued that "mental faculties" were subject to natural selection.

Writing in the journal, *Anthropology,* Simon Dein extended Darwin's theory, arguing that psychological traits common in ADHD—hyperactivity, impulsivity, and aggression—were assets to our ancestors 45,000 years ago. Hyperactivity and impulsivity enhanced strong muscle development and facilitated a quick response in fight or flight conditions. Aggression offered a first-strike, competitive edge. Finally, distractibility, an ADHD trait not mentioned by Dein, facilitated the continual scanning of the horizon for danger.[2]

Imagine the following scenario: two children were strolling near the river in prehistoric Africa when they encountered a large crocodile. The impulsive, quick responding, hyperactive child noticed the crocodile in his peripheral vision and fled to safety, but the thoughtful, slow moving child didn't notice the crocodile until it sprang into action and clamped powerful jaws around the child's leg. In a landscape teeming with brutal predators, quick thinking and fast reflexes provided advantages that allowed these individuals to survive long enough to reproduce and leave their genes in the population.

Medical lore has described children, most often boys, with impulsive and hyperactive behavior for over 100 years. The name has changed to reflect new theories about its cause. ADHD was known as "hyperkinetic disease" in the 1930s, but in the 1950s, was changed to "minimal brain

dysfunction." In 1994, the APA published *DSM-IV*, which utilized the current term, ADHD, and emphasized "attention deficits" as the cause. Virginia Douglas of McGill University first wrote about attention deficits in hyperactive children in 1972, identifying three differences in cognitive function: Attention (the ability to disregard distractions), inhibition (the ability to ignore impulses), and organization (the ability to prioritize information).[3] *DSM-IV* listed three subtypes of ADHD:

ADHD, primarily inattentive.

ADHD, primarily hyperactive/impulsive.

ADHD, primarily hyperactive/impulsive and inattentive combined.

Individuals with the inattentive subtype tend to be introverts, so their behavior elicits less censure than people with the hyperactive version. Individuals with the inattentive subtype also are prone to distraction, which may adversely affect their ability to finish school and work projects. Cindy and Eric have the 3rd subtype, so I focus on individuals with hyperactive, impulsive, and inattentive behavior in this book. Readers interested in the first subtype, primarily inattentive, also will find this book useful because these individuals encounter many of the same obstacles to success as hyperactives do.

Few published books viewed ADHD in a positive light when my children were diagnosed. A rare exception was Thom Hartmann's 1993 book, *Attention Deficit Disorder: A Different Perception,* which argued that since ADHD often was hereditary, the behaviors were a holdover from our hunter-gatherer days, when humans depended on hunting wild game for food. Although scientists agreed that ADHD was often hereditary, they rejected Hartmann's "hunter versus farmer" theory.[4] Nevertheless, I felt that Hartmann's hypoth-

esis had merit. To learn more about Hartmann's theory, see Chapter 3.

In the last fifteen years, scientists have begun to trace the genetic code of ADHD and have found, to their dismay, that Hartmann's theory might be correct. Several genes associated with dopamine, a neurochemical linked to feelings of pleasure and well-being, are believed to play a role in ADHD behavior. Research led by Nora Volkow suggests that people with ADHD have low levels of dopamine in the reward pathway of the brain, which may explain why these people need stronger and more frequent rewards for motivation.[5]

Another gene related to ADHD is the dopamine receptor, DRD4 7R, which scientists have nicknamed the "novelty seeking gene." Brain imaging studies show that people with this gene have unusually low levels of dopamine in the brain. To compensate, these individuals unconsciously seek new experiences, which increases dopamine levels. The brain quickly consumes dopamine, creating a craving for more dopamine, and a need for new experiences.[6]

Since the millennium two influential ADHD experts, Drs. Russell Barkley and Thomas Brown, have argued that ADHD is not caused by attention deficits, but instead, is caused by differences in executive function (EF). Executive function is the brain's control center and is responsible for organizing, planning, and prioritizing.[7]

Although the theory of attention deficits is considered outdated now, the APA has kept the same name. ADHD concepts are complex. Retaining the words "attention deficit" when this theory has been discounted creates confusion. Finding a new name to reflect current theory will increase understanding, but even more important, it offers a chance to eliminate the double whammy of stigma, the words "deficit" and "disorder" in the description of ADHD.

In keeping with the theories of executive function and adaptation due to natural selection, I propose a name that is neutral and non-biased—*executive function adaptation (EFA)*. I realize that changing the name will create challenges for educators, health care professionals, and insurance companies, but removing the prejudicial language associated with ADHD is in the best interest of people affected by it. Individuals with ADHD are prone to depression and substance abuse, so removing the stigma from the present name could improve their overall mental health.

To qualify for accommodations, these laws requires a diagnosis of ADHD from a recognized expert. Here's the rub: Individuals must accept the diagnosis of mental disorder to receive assistance.[8]

Other conditions often tag along with ADHD, such as different learning styles. When Cindy and Eric were diagnosed with learning disabilities, I worried that their school struggles—and low grades—would hurt their chances of finding rewarding jobs as adults. I didn't realize that measuring Cindy and Eric's eventual success in life by their grades failed to take into account other important traits, such as optimism, hard work, and persistence.

Although the main focus of this book deals with ADHD, embedded in the story is an examination of how early humans created collaborative relationships that underlie our beliefs in the importance of equal and fair partnerships. In ancient times, couples who shared resources and cooperated with each other were more likely to survive and pass their genes to succeeding generations, so these traits were adaptive. Individuals who did not cooperate were shunned from receiving resources, which decreased the likelihood that their genes were passed to succeeding generations.[9]

Equal partnerships were superseded by patriarchy, which

made women subservient to men for centuries. Male control over women began to ease in 1919 when the United States Congress passed the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote and elect officials who represented their interests. World War II brought another opportunity for women to prove they were equal to men when they were hired by defense industries, as portrayed by the iconic Rosie the Riveter posters during that period.

My mother, Colleen Arnau, grew up during these times, so she envisioned a different destiny for herself than women of previous generations. A single mom during the 1950s and 1960s when this was unusual, she earned a Bachelor of Science in chemistry from Florida State University in just three years. She was a first-grade teacher until I was ten, then became a technical writer for several Southern California government subcontractors in what became known as the space race.

I grew up in awe of my mother's intellectual talent, but by the time she hit 40, a genetic predisposition to depression left her emotionally fragile. Having lost both of her parents by age ten, she showed uncommon resilience in overcoming a grim childhood, but two accidents left her dependent on pain pills and unable to concentrate on her job, which led to a tragic end. Watching my mother self-destruct taught me the value of resilience, which is a synonym for adaptability, the ability to survive in a difficult environment.

The narrative in this memoir unfolds from two perspectives. First, I describe my experiences as a wife and mother managing two children who are diagnosed with ADHD in the 1990s. Second, I recall my experiences as a child growing up in the 1950s and 1960s before ADHD was understood or identified.

Believing that knowledge is power, I decide to learn

everything I can about ADHD. The more I study ADHD, the more I become convinced that I have it. In 2000, a doctor makes it official: I am diagnosed with ADHD.

My story begins on the night that my son is about to have emergency surgery to remove three thorns from his right eye. Eric is accident prone, so visits to the emergency room are nothing new; however, this night, a surgeon tells us that Eric has a 50/50 chance of losing the sight in his eye. Hearing this makes me realize that I *must* find a way to help Eric control his impulsive and self-destructive behavior. The consequences of failure are that unbearable.

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1950s 1960s 1970s 1990s 2010s

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Emergency Room Giggles

"Is this kid on Ritalin?" demands Dr. Bailey, the gray-haired physician who will soon be performing emergency eye surgery on my six-year-old son.

"No." Of course, I understand what he's implying—that Eric's behavior is out of control, and that Ritalin might help to calm him. Watching Eric turn cartwheels across the room, I notice the kaleidoscope of color as his brown hair, orange shirt, and blue jeans rotate in circular motion. Over and over he goes. It makes me dizzy watching him.

Eric is adopted, the child of a woman who couldn't resist drugs and alcohol when she was pregnant. The first year of his life, he screamed for 18 out of 24 hours. Chronic diarrhea stunted his growth. Even now, Eric's height and weight are beneath the normal growth curve.

Of course, when people meet Eric, they are unaware of the challenges that he experienced as a baby. All they see is a riot of tousled brown curls, dimples, and a wide smile. Eric is a charmer—he loves to talk and interact with people, who frequently compliment him on his exuberant enthusiasm for life. At the moment, Eric's exuberant enthusiasm is revving at

maximum RPM, a perpetual motion machine ratcheting out of control.

"I don't know how we're going to calm him down enough to get an IV in his arm to sedate him," says Dr. Bailey.

"He's not usually this wild," I reply, feeling defensive.

"Yes, he is," says my husband, Jerry, leaning against the doorframe. A science professor, he sometimes has a hard time understanding our hyperactive and impulsive son.

It's seven o'clock on a Friday evening, long past Dr. Bailey's normal office hours. We're standing in my son's newly assigned hospital room, waiting for the pediatrician to come and examine Eric before surgery.

Eric finishes his cartwheels. Arriving at the end of the wall, he jams his feet against the wall and completes a perfect back flip. His athletic grace never ceases to thrill me—especially since a pediatric neurologist once diagnosed him with cerebral palsy. I'd disagreed with the diagnosis, and time had proved me right.

Eric grins, and the dimples flash. He raises his arms in a triumphant salute, like a gymnast at a tournament, not seeming to realize this isn't the time or place for showmanship—that applause will not be given for tonight's performance. His chest heaves, and he pants slightly, but I knew better than to hope that exertion will slow him down. He pivots on his heels, his dirty white Ninja Turtle shoes squeaking on the beige linoleum floor in protest, then peers out the nearby window and remarks, "I see a parking lot with cars. I see a white truck. Do you think it has four-wheel drive?"

"I don't know—that's a Dad question," I reply, making my way towards him slowly. I'm hoping that he'll stand still long enough for me to catch him.

Eric looks to my husband for a response. Getting none, he

glances at me and immediately guesses my intent. With the speed of a Ninja Turtle, he darts towards a long rectangular table with wheels and slides under it. When he pops his head on the other side, he giggles and says, "I'm the gingerbread man, and you can't catch me."

"Eric, that's enough. No more emergency room giggles," booms my husband. "Come here immediately!"

The term "emergency room giggles" is a family joke that quit being funny long ago. When Eric gets the giggles, it means he's overexcited, which often leads to emergency room visits. Usually, this happens when Eric and his sister Cindy, who is 18 months older, are fighting. Last Saturday, Cindy shoved Eric against the outside wall of the garage. Tiny stones embedded in the garage's gray stucco carved a jagged red wound along Eric's cheek, requiring five stitches.

Eric ignores his father. He picks up a TV controller and pushes a button. Sound blares, and he giggles again.

"Thank you for giving me the controller, Eric," I say, crossing the room. He presses the "Off" button and slams the controller back on the table. Next, he hops onto the bed. Then he's bouncing, bouncing. The bed springs creak and groan as he jumps higher.

Dr. Bailey's bushy gray eyebrows furrow in a frown. He looks at me as if to say, "Do something to stop him." I glance at my husband and notice that his face is red. Suddenly, I'm glad that Dr. Bailey is there, since I know that Jerry won't yell at Eric in front of a stranger. Neither man moves, so I run over to the bed and try to grab Eric, but he's too quick. The bedsprings groan as he leaps onto the other bed located 10 feet away.

"Whoopee! I'm the gingerbread man, and you can't catch me."

"Eric, you have to stop," I say, finally catching him in my

arms. He squirms and tries to kick me, but I hold him tight. He pulls on my hair and pummels his fists against my face, but I just turn my head. I learned a long time ago that the emotional blows hurt more than the physical.

"Eric, stop that! You're going to hurt your mother," bellows my husband.

I walk over to a wooden rocking chair and sit down, saying, "Do you want your bumper?"

Eric stops squirming and looks at me suspiciously. Up close, I can see that the pupil of his right eye is completely red. "You brought my bumper?"

Eric's "bumper" is the pad that once lined the inside of his crib. The blue, red, and green trucks, so vivid and bright when he was a baby, are now faded and threadbare. The seam binding on the edge has disintegrated, and along with it, much of the stuffing. I've tried to talk him into throwing his bumper away for years, but he always protests so violently that I haven't dared. Instead, I cut the bumper into pieces, so I can "rotate my stock" and have a clean bumper always available. Offering Eric his bumper in a place other than home is unusual. The only time the bumper ever travels is when we go to Grandma's house.

"All you have to do to get your bumper is promise to sit quietly on my lap."

"I want my bumper."

"It's in my purse. Jerry—bring me my purse."

My husband hands me my purse. I pull the bumper out.

"Bumpie!" exclaims Eric.

While Eric cuddles his bumper, I rock him back and forth. I know that Eric has to be exhausted. He's been running on nervous energy all week. Whenever Eric is frustrated or in pain, he returns to that hyperactive, jittery behavior of his first year. I sensed all week that he was in terrible pain, but I

wasn't sure of the cause. Eric had his cheek stitched on Saturday, and injured his eye on Sunday, while playing in a neighbor's yard. Whenever I asked Eric what hurt, his answer was vague.

A man with rumpled brown hair enters the room. He looks young—in his twenties—but the slightly crooked Mickey Mouse tie has me wondering if he's the pediatrician.

Dr. Bailey greets him, then says to us, "This is Dr. Dunn. He's going to ask you a few questions while I prepare for surgery."

"Why are you wearing Mickey Mouse?" Eric says, pointing to Dr. Dunn's tie.

"Because I like Mickey Mouse."

"I like Teenage Ninja Turtles better."

"I'm not familiar with the Ninja Turtles. Are they new?"

"No, they're old—they're teenagers! And they're better than Mickey Mouse. He's for babies."

"Well, you're certainly not a baby," answers Dr. Dunn with a grin. "How old are you?"

"Six. I'm in kindergarten."

"Wow! That's great!"

"What's that?" Eric asks, pointing.

"It's a stethoscope. It helps me listen to your heart. Do you want to hear?"

"Sure."

Dr. Dunn unwraps the stethoscope from around his neck and shows Eric how to put the rubber ends of the stethoscope in his ears.

Eric grins when he hears a sound, and then says, "Now I want to hear your heart."

I'm impressed with the rapport that Dr. Dunn creates with Eric so quickly. Because Eric spent so much of his early life around physicians, he is usually suspicious of doctors.

The nurse picks up a child-sized green hospital gown from the gurney and walks over to us. “See what a nice shirt we have for you. Do you like to play dress-up?”

Eric loves to play dress-up, so he readily agrees to change his shirt. But when he observes me untying his shoes, he begins to wail. “Don’t touch my shoes.”

“You can keep your socks on,” I say, carrying him over to the gurney.

“I don’t want to go to bed.”

“It’s not a bed, it’s a gurney,” I reply. “See, it has wheels. In a few minutes, you’ll get to ride on the gurney.”

“I don’t want to ride.”

“I know you don’t, Honey. But you’re going to have to trust me and do what I say. Dr. Bailey needs to fix your eye, so it won’t hurt anymore. Here, hold onto your bumper.”

I know that Eric senses my anxiety about his upcoming surgery. He was in the room when Dr. Bailey told us that he’d have to operate immediately. Of course, Eric’s attention span is so short that I’m unsure how much he understands. Had Eric noticed the grave look on Dr. Bailey’s face when he warned us that there was a 50/50 chance that Eric would lose the sight in his eye? There was no time to get a second opinion. Besides, I’d already gotten a second opinion by telephone. I’d called an eye surgeon friend in Pittsburgh and asked if he’d do the surgery, but the friend said that flying to Pittsburgh would take too long. We shouldn’t delay the surgery by even a day. The rosebush thorns embedded in Eric’s eye must be removed tonight.

A nurse arrives with an IV pole on wheels. Eric glances at the plastic bag filled with liquid and guesses that a needle is attached to the contraption, and soon, that needle will be connected to him. He cries, “I don’t want a shot. I don’t like shots. Shots hurt.”

"Yes, but this is a special shot," says the nurse. "It has magical medicine that makes you feel sleepy."

"I don't want to sleep! I wanna go home."

"I'll be here when you wake up, Eric. I promise," I say in as soothing a voice as I can muster. Inside, my mind protests, *No! No! Don't touch my child*, but I don't want Eric to realize this. "The nurse is going to bring me a cot so I can sleep next to you. It'll be just like a motel."

"A motel with a hot tub?"

"No hot tub," I admit. "But Cindy won't be here."

Eric grins. He likes that idea.

The nurse breaks in, "I also have a sticker book for you. See, you get one sticker now and lots more stickers tomorrow."

I'd grown up in the 1950s before the "sticker craze," so I never understood their lure. The stickers distract Eric, allowing the nurse to stick an IV needle in his hand, so I don't complain.

By the time the nurse wheels Eric away, he's groggy from the IV solution. I follow the gurney out of the room, down a long corridor, and out of the pediatrics' ward. We stop at the elevator, where the nurse pushes the button.

The nurse glances at me as the doors slide open. "You need to say your good-byes here."

"Good-by Eric. I love you." The gurney rolls into the elevator. My mind captures that last glimpse of him, and records it like a photograph. For hours, I will mentally replay that final scene.

The elevator doors whisper shut. I stand staring at the shiny steel metal doors for a good while. The tears that I've been holding back all night are coming fast now. They dribble down my face and onto my pink and blue flowered shirt.

I know that things can go wrong in the operating room

and that people die in surgery unexpectedly. Eric was born addicted to drugs. How will his body react to anesthesia? Will Dr. Bailey find a way to save Eric's sight?

I turn and see that Jerry is standing just a few feet away. His brown eyes have an empty, lost look in them. Silently, we start back towards Eric's room.

I realize that I'm holding something in my left hand. I look down and notice that I'm clutching Eric's bumper. Funny, I can't remember him giving it to me. He must have handed it to me while the nurse was getting him ready for surgery, and I'd accepted it automatically, without thinking. When this happened, I can't say.

Although Cindy and Eric are adopted, their personalities are surprisingly like mine. We're exuberant novelty seekers, always on the hunt for new sources of stimulation. Jerry is the anomaly. He likes to be in control, so Jerry avoids unfamiliar situations whenever possible. When we met, our differences were part of the attraction. He excels in areas where I'm weak, while I excel in areas where he is weak and vice versa. Jerry is an introvert who provides stability and financial security while I'm an extravert who provides passion and optimism.

Lately, our differences have played out in less positive ways. Traits that we once found attractive are creating discord and distance between us. When Cindy and Eric act up, Jerry's need for control surfaces, so he blames them for their antics. It's hard for him to understand that Cindy and Eric have no control over their impulsive behavior. By nature, I'm outgoing and impetuous, so it's easy for me to understand that Cindy and Eric's behavior is not willful. Our different interpretations of the children's conduct have ratcheted up tensions between us.

I WISH I'd known back then that children with ADHD show a three-to-five-year delay in brain maturity over children without ADHD.[1] Telling Jerry to subtract three-to-five years from Cindy and Eric's chronological age might have helped him to understand their madcap actions. Unfortunately, this research was not started until after the 1990s.

I never realized how difficult parenting was until I became a parent myself. I've often wished that my mother was still alive, so that I could thank her for all that she did. She was a working single parent in the 1950s, when most middle-class women stayed at home and looked after the house and children. Daycare was hard to find and expensive in those days, so I was left alone at times. I never came to harm but I was less willing to tempt fate with my own children. Of course, I had the advantage of learning from my mother's mistakes.

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Damned Man

"Are we nearly there yet?" I ask, staring out the window of the car.

"Not even close," says my mother, keeping her eyes on the narrow, winding road. When the car behind us decides to pass, she mutters something uncomplimentary under her breath. "We just left Chattanooga. We have hours more driving until we reach Michigan."

"Why is everybody passing us? Why don't you drive faster?" I remark, looking down at the ravine far below where the Tennessee River has gouged a deep path into the mountain.

"Because this road is too narrow and windy. I don't want to have an accident."

A hairpin looms ahead, so my mother taps her foot lightly on the brake and turns the wheel sharply to the right. As we come around the bend, the road straightens. The car behind us honks and pulls into the oncoming lane to pass us. My mother veers to the right to give it as much room as possible.

"I don't understand why everyone is passing us. I'm going the speed limit," grumbles my mother.

We travel for several more miles until we reach a clearing with a lookout point to our right. I see several police cars in the parking lot and at least five of the cars that passed us waiting in line.

"The police are giving tickets for speeding," says my mother, triumph sounding in her voice. Although my mother sometimes flouts expectations for a woman in the 1950s, she is no risk taker when it comes to driving.

It's 1955, the summer before I enter kindergarten. My mother is driving us from our home in Atlanta, Georgia to visit my uncle B. J. and his wife, Peggy, in Ludington, Michigan. I love visiting my aunt and uncle—they're childless, so they always shower me with attention. My mother and her brother lost their parents as children, so the bond between them is unusually strong.

By the time we arrive in Ludington, it's dark and very late. I'm groggy with sleep, so my uncle carries me upstairs to bed. I awaken the next morning to the smell of bacon wafting through my bedroom. I follow the scent down to the kitchen where I find my mother, aunt and uncle eating breakfast. I sit down in an empty chair.

"Good morning," says my Aunt as she fills a glass with orange juice and sets it down in front of me. "Do you want grits with your bacon and eggs?"

"Yes, please," I say.

"Hurry up and eat," says my mother. "We've decided to visit the marina this morning."

I finish breakfast quickly, then head upstairs to change out of my pajamas. I put on red shorts and a white shirt with an elephant on it. Then I return to the kitchen where everyone is waiting for me.

Outside, it's a breezy, warm summer day. The sky overhead is blue and studded with white cotton candy clouds. As

we walk along the marina, my uncle suggests we take a boat ride on Lake Michigan. I'm thrilled about a boat ride but soon learn that the reality is less pleasant. The pitching and tossing of the boat makes me feel seasick. Of course, I'm not too sick to eat one of the local favorites afterwards—a vanilla ice cream cone dipped in molten chocolate.

Uncle B. J. and Aunt Peggy are teachers and need to prepare for upcoming September classes, so it's decided that my mother will take me to see the movie, *Lady and the Tramp*, which has just been released. While we wait in line to purchase tickets, I strike up a conversation with a family waiting behind us. Like my own children, Cindy and Eric, I'm curious about the world and enjoy talking to strangers.

Once we have our tickets, we step inside, where we are greeted by the smell of fresh popcorn. As we walk towards the concession stand, I beg for popcorn, but my mother says that it will ruin my appetite. I'm forced to settle for a roll of Charms' candy instead.

The theater lights are dim as we walk inside. Although I want to sit in the front, my mother prefers the back rows of seats. We settle into our chairs, then my mother turns to me and says, "Sandra, I have to go, but I'll be back soon. You sit here and *don't* talk to strangers and *don't* leave your seat."

"Where are you going?" I ask.

"I saw a dress I liked in a store nearby. I'm going back to look at it again, but I promise that I'll be back soon."

I pull on the blue string that opens the roll of Charms' candy, unperturbed at the prospect of her leaving me alone in a theater full of strangers.

"When is the movie going to start?" I ask, as I stick a green square-shaped Charms' into my mouth. I suck on the lozenge and savor the lime flavor as it melts.

"Very soon. Now you just sit here and don't go anywhere. When I come back, I expect to find you right here. Promise?"

"I promise."

Just then, the lights dim. The previews begin to roll on the screen and music blasts through the overhead speakers. My mother stands and tells me, "Now, sit here and watch the movie. I'll be back soon."

I'm enthralled by the giant screen in the dark room and that the movie is in color. The black and white images on our small TV screen back home seem pale in comparison. I'm watching the scene where Lady and Tramp are trying to remove Lady's muzzle when the movie suddenly stops playing. The overhead lights blaze on. I watch several theater ushers, clad in red, running down the aisles, announcing that we need to leave our seats and exit the theater.

I'm confused, wondering why the movie has ended. What happens to Lady, I wonder. Does she get the muzzle off? Does she ever return to her family?

"Why do we have to go?" complains a girl with pigtails in the row ahead of me. She echoes my sentiments exactly. Her mother pushes her along, telling her to follow the usher.

I remain in my seat as I watch the crowded theater empty.

"Little girl, you need to get out of your seat and exit the theater." One of the ushers, a teenage boy with slicked-back hair, is talking to me. "Where is your mother?"

"She's gone," I reply. "And she told me to stay right here and not to move."

"I'm sure that you'll find your mother out front. I have orders to evacuate the theater." The boy grabs my hand and pulls me to my feet.

"Mom said to wait right here," I protest.

"That's okay. I have orders to bring you out front."

Chaos greets us on the street outside. A fire engine noisily

idles at the curb and glistens in the summer sun like a shiny, red candy apple. I watch, enthralled, as several men dressed in black fireman's uniforms drag a heavy hose towards the theater's entrance. I'm fascinated by the strange sights and sounds. If I'd been a fearful or timid child, I might have been frightened by the confusion, but instead, I see the scene as an opportunity to learn. Curiosity overcomes any fear, propelling me to get a closer look at the fire truck. I try to break free of the usher, who is holding my hand. "Let go of me!"

"I can't let go of you until we find your mother. Do you see her?"

"No," I reply, casting a quick glance around the crowd of people, then turning my attention back to the fire truck. I'm much more interested in watching the firemen drag the heavy fire hose than finding my missing mother.

A stout man in a black suit walks over to us and demands, "What's going on? Why is this child by herself? Where is her mother?"

"Her mother isn't here, sir."

"Not here! Where is she? I'm sure we evacuated everyone. Why, I checked the ladies' room myself." The man looks at me and says, "I'm Mr. Edwards, the manager of this theater. What happened to your mother?"

"She left, but she'll be back soon," I assure him.

"Yes, but where did she go?"

I'm about to answer when I spy my mother on the sidewalk, running towards us. She has short, wavy blonde hair, blue-eyes, and is wearing a black and white gingham shirtwaist with shiny black buttons down the front. A tightly cinched black patent leather belt shows off her slim waist. I watch the full skirt of her dress dip and sway as she runs towards us.

"My goodness! Is the movie already over? I thought it

didn't end for another half hour," my mother exclaims, panting slightly.

Most men are captivated by my mother's youthful good looks, but the theater manager doesn't seem to notice her appearance at all. "I'm Mr. Baldwin, the manager of this theater. Where were you? Don't you know better than to leave your child unattended?"

"I was only gone for a few minutes," my mother replies, still breathless. "I had an emergency."

"So did we," responds Mr. Baldwin. "There was a fire in the projection room, and we were forced to evacuate the theater."

"I wondered what the sirens were all about," says my mother.

"You're lucky that your daughter is still here. Why, someone could have kidnapped her, and you would never known what happened to her."

"Sandra is very independent. She can take care of herself."

"She'll need to be with you for a mother."

As I listen to Mr. Baldwin scold my mother, I wonder why he seems angry with her. I idolize my mother and think that she can do no wrong.

Mr. Baldwin reaches in his pocket and pulls two blue tickets out, then hands them to my mother. "Since you didn't get to see the entire movie, here are two complimentary tickets."

My mother accepts the tickets, holding them in her right hand.

Mr. Baldwin still seems to be mad at my mother, adding, "I wish I knew your husband. Why, I'd tell him that you left your daughter alone."

"I don't have a husband," snaps my mother. "I don't need a damned man to tell me what to do."

"In that case, I'm warning you," Mr. Baldwin responds. "I'll call the police if I ever catch you leaving your child alone in my theater again."

"We don't need these tickets," my mother says, throwing the tickets on the ground and taking my hand. "Let's go, Sandra."

As we make our way along the street, I try to figure out why Mr. Baldwin is angry with my mother. Although this is the first time that I remember someone criticizing my mother's parenting skills, this will not be the last. It is only when I have my own children that I finally understand their complaints.

THE THEATER MANAGER, had no way of knowing that he struck a nerve when he said he wished he "knew her husband." Mr. Baldwin was implying that my mother was subservient to her husband, who would lecture her for leaving me alone in the theater. In truth, my father had not played an active role in our lives since they divorced when I was two. My father paid no money for my support, nor did he come to visit me.

My mother's parents both died by the time she was ten, so she was forced to move in with her grandfather, a fire and brimstone Baptist minister, and her step-grandmother. My mother's father was a chiropractor and could afford a car, a piano, and pretty clothes, even during the Depression, but her grandfather was wallowing in poverty. There was no money for the fashionable dresses that she was accustomed to wearing. Instead, she was forced to wear homemade, ill-fitting,

hand-me-downs. She hated those clothes so much that as an adult, she became a fashionista.

My mother also resented cooking on a wood stove in the sweltering Florida heat and picking produce like a common field hand on my grandfather's farm. I remember her saying more than once, "Cinderella had a better life than I when I was growing up."

I eventually came to understand that losing both parents as a child stunted my mother emotionally. Fortunately, I was unaware of my mother's tragic flaw—and my family's gloomy history—on that sun-dappled, summer day in Ludington.

3

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The Hunter Versus Farmer Theory

Thom Hartman described in his 2011 book, *The Thom Hartmann Reader*, what happened when Justin, his 13-year-old son, was diagnosed with ADHD. The doctor told Justin that ADHD was a serious mental disorder, so he should abandon the idea of studying his passion—science. The doctor advised Justin to pursue car mechanics instead.[1]

Hartmann rejected the doctor's advice and focused on researching ADHD in order to find positive ways to help his son succeed. One night Hartmann was reading an article in *Scientific American* that explained how the lives of our hunter-gatherer ancestors altered dramatically when farming was introduced 12,000 years ago. For over 50,000 years, humans wandered the globe in search of wild game, nuts, and berries, so their quick reflexes and hyperactive muscularity were assets. The transition to agriculture offered a more stable food source, so the nomadic lifestyle became less common, as permanent villages were established.

Hartmann reasoned that ADHD behavior was a holdover

from hunter-gatherer days, when hunting was the primary source of food. Although Hartmann's realization started as a metaphor, it eventually became a hypothesis, which he named "the hunter versus farmer theory."

In 1993, Hartmann published *Attention Deficit Disorder: A New Perception*, which explained his theory that ADHD behavior provided useful traits for our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Because Hartmann had no academic training or evidence to support his thesis, the scientific community dismissed it. As for Justin, the son who launched Hartmann's search for a better understanding of ADHD, he went on to earn a graduate degree in biological science.

Hartmann wasn't the first nonscientist to propose that our human ancestors were hunters. Robert Ardrey, a Hollywood screen and playwright, published several books on the topic, including his final book, *The Hunting Hypothesis*, which was released in 1976.[2] Ardrey argued that scientists were uncomfortable with the idea that man was a predator, so they proposed the scavenger hypothesis. Famed anthropologist Louis Leakey contended that man was too small to kill large game, so he scavenged leftover carrion killed by larger and more ferocious animals instead. Ardrey disputed the scavenger hypothesis, arguing that if humans were capable of stealing from ferocious animals, then they were capable of killing them also.

By the 1990s, support for the scavenger hypothesis was waning in favor of a new thesis, which argued that farmers were responsible for populating Europe and the rest of the world. Although there was no denying that early man lived by hunting, fans of the farmer theory reasoned that when agriculture was introduced, the original hunter-gatherers were replaced by multitudes of kindly and efficient farmers.

In 2018, researchers at the University College London and Natural History Museum released a facial reconstruction of "Cheddar Man" that was created from the DNA of a 10,000-year old skeleton found in a cave near Cheddar Gorge, England. Cheddar Man had blue eyes, dark skin, and brown curly hair, demonstrating that his DNA was consistent with the genetic profile of ancient hunter-gatherers found in Europe. Geneticists pointed out that Cheddar Man, like European hunter-gathers, was lactose intolerant[3] Lactose intolerance was common in hunter-gatherers, as the gene controlling the enzyme necessary for digesting lactose did not appear in humans until farming was introduced. Since 10% of today's population in England has DNA similar to Cheddar Man's, it seems that hunter-gatherers played an important role in settling England.

Recent genetic research of the dopamine receptor gene, DRD4, also supports Hartmann's hunter versus farmer theory. In the introduction, I mention that people with ADHD frequently carry this gene, which has several variations, known as alleles, that are linked to behavior. The 4R allele is known for calmness, but the 7R is known for hyperactivity and novelty seeking. Although this book is titled *Desperately Seeking Novelty*, it also could be called *Desperately Seeking Dopamine*, since the unconscious need to flood the brain with dopamine is believed to trigger novelty seeking behavior.[4]

Writing in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, Luke Matthews and Paul Butler argued that when hunger, thirst, and frigid temperatures threatened our ancestors, people with the novelty seeking gene were more likely to migrate and seek new lands. Genetic studies show that the novelty seeking gene is more common in nomadic societies than sedentary ones.[5]

Changes in climate also may have played a role in the exodus of humans out of Africa. A 2017 paper published by Jessica Tierney and colleagues reports that Africa experienced a prolonged drought and frigid temperatures 55,000 to 70,00 years ago, which transformed the once "green Sahara" into an arid brown desert, killing off many plants, animals, and humans alike. This period coincides with the time that humans left Africa.[6]

Imagine a clan of 25 hunter-gatherers have been living in Africa for millennia when the region is devastated by cold and drought. The group's two novelty seekers, let's call them Harry and Luke, urge everyone to seek new territory, but the members resist, knowing that Harry and Luke often act rashly. Days pass and several members die. Harry and Luke insist on leaving, and finally, the group agrees. They make their way across the parched savannah, noting that years of drought have withered the native grasses, leaving nothing but brittle, brown stalks. After days and days of walking, they come upon a river, where the group stops to drink and discuss what to do next.

Harry and Luke point to the lush green canopy of trees across the river and suggest crossing to the other side. The elders object, saying that the water is too turbulent. Luke can't contain his curiosity and hyperactive need for adventure, so he decides to cross anyway. Jumping in, Luke promptly falls on a slippery rock. Invigorated by the cold water and an opportunity to show off his courage, Luke rises and stands. When Harry sees that Luke is able to navigate the swift river currents without being swept downstream, he decides to follow. Eventually, both men reach the other side safely. When they call to the group to follow them, the others refuse. Harry and Luke decide to explore the area, returning

half an hour later with the exciting news that they have found a cave that is large enough to hold the entire group. Predators are a constant danger, especially at night, so the group realizes that having a protected place to sleep outweighs the risk involved with crossing the river.

Although the elders are annoyed with Harry and Luke for ignoring their advice and crossing the stream, the men's willingness to take risks benefits the group. A few days later, the group is saddened when Luke dies. The elders warned him against eating some berries because they could be poisonous, but once again, he didn't listen. Luke was nineteen when he died, but had already fathered 4 children, so his genes continued in the population.

An entire group of novelty seekers would risk extinction, but computer simulations performed by Jonathan Williams and Eric Taylor show that having a few risk takers provides benefits. Novelty seekers offer bold solutions that timid members might not consider—such as leaving a familiar habitat and crossing a swift moving river. Novelty seekers serve as canaries in the mine—their willingness to try the unfamiliar, such as Luke's eating the poisonous berries, keeps the rest of the group safe. Williams and Taylor found that when a group had a diversity of personality types, creative solutions were more likely to occur.[7]

Yale University geneticist Kenneth Kidd, who was part of the team that discovered the novelty seeking gene over 20 years ago, doubts that the DRD4 7R gene can affect behavior so drastically. He argues that genetic drift, the process where genes in a population are lost to *random* selection (instead of positive selection), is responsible for the different frequency levels of the DRD4 7R around the globe.[8] Other scientists counter that current world-wide novelty seeking gene

frequencies may not reflect rates in prehistoric times. Interestingly, a 2010 study led by Luciana Tovo-Rodrigues found that native Amerindian populations that have remained genetically isolated from other populations show high frequencies of the DRD4 7R gene.[9]

The hypothesis that the human brain has evolved over time in the same way that human anatomy has evolved is controversial. Critics argue that the human mind is a blank slate at birth, so human behavior is shaped by environment and social interaction, not biology. This is the age-old nature-versus-nurture argument. The opposing sides have created a turf war, instead of accepting that biology *and* environment often work together in forming human behavior.

Evolutionary psychologists tell us that humans have been hunter-gatherers for 99% of their time on earth. From an evolutionary perspective, 40,000 years is the blink of an eye. The brains that we use today adapted and evolved to solve the problems of our stone-age ancestors.[10] Knowing that present-day behavior reflects ancient conditions can help us to understand ourselves better. For instance, that scourge of modern society, aggression, seems embedded in our DNA, a holdover from our hunter days.

A 2011 statistical study from the Bureau of Justice reports that from 1980 to 2008, males committed 90% of the homicides. Research has linked testosterone to aggression, so biology seems to be a factor in the male homicide rate.[11] Environment—including attitudes towards the easy access to weapons—also play a factor. To say that only biology or only environment is responsible for male aggression seems shortsighted.

Denying our hunter ancestry comes with a price. We blame people for their actions without considering whether

these behaviors are embedded in human DNA. Although the hypothesis that ADHD is the result of natural selection is still debatable, it offers a new way to look at behavior in a less judgmental way. Hopefully, the realization that ADHD is not a mental disorder, but instead, is the result of positive selection, will foster tolerance and a more positive attitude.

4

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Wake-Up Call

The bed is hard and my nerves are jangly. I haven't slept a wink. But at least I'd gotten some rest on the hard cot that a nurse placed near Eric's hospital bed.

I'm waiting for Eric to return from intensive care. The surgery ended hours ago—and with happy results. Dr. Bailey said chances were good that Eric would keep the sight in his right eye. Jerry went home hours ago to correct papers. It's late April and the end of the semester, a busy time for a college professor.

I hear the low murmur of women's voices outside Eric's hospital room door. Two nurses wheel a gurney carrying Eric into the room. Another younger nurse trails behind, pushing an IV stand on wheels. The fluorescent light overhead flashes on and I sit up, blinking my eyes.

"Goodness, you startled me," says one of the nurses, stepping back in surprise.

"I'm sorry. How's Eric?"

"Just fine," says the nurse in front, a stocky woman with eyeglasses dangling from a chain around her neck. She's

wearing white shoes, baggy white pants, and a blue and red smock with teddy bears printed on it. Angling the cart alongside Eric's bed, she pulls the covers back. Then with one quick motion, the nurses lay Eric on the bed.

"He'll sleep for a while. There's an antihistamine in the IV solution to keep him sedated. You'd better get some sleep, too," the older nurse tells me as she tucks the covers around Eric and pulls up the bedrail.

Sleep sounds like a terrific idea, but I've never been able to fall asleep at the close of an eyelid. Although I'm exhausted from the anxiety of the past week, I'm also tense and worried. In that way, I'm like Eric. Whenever I'm in emotional or physical pain, my mind starts whirling like a gyroscope. Around and around it goes, exploring all possible directions. This habit saved me from harm several times. Losing both of my parents by the time I was nineteen forced me to fend for myself at an early age. I learned to anticipate trouble before it slapped me in the face.

When I first met Jerry, I was attracted to him because he came from a stable family. I was a latchkey kid in the '50s before the term was ever coined. Jerry's childhood had everything that mine lacked. His parents had been married for decades, and his family had owned and lived on the same farm since the 1920s. Eventually, I came to realize that the stability he'd grown-up with had not prepared him for pitfalls. Jerry was accustomed to everything going right in his life.

Jerry never anticipates trouble, which irritates me, since I feel that he is denying reality. Sometimes life does go wrong, but he will rarely admit it or take an action in response. This past week is a perfect example.

As soon as Eric came home screaming that he hurt his eye, I'd wanted to take Eric to the emergency room. But Jerry

said no, emergency room visits had a co-pay of $100. We couldn't afford another $100 so soon. "But Eric is in pain," I'd protested.

"He'll be fine. We can't go running to the emergency room every time Eric gets hurt." Jerry said, assuring me that Eric would be fine "by tomorrow."

Jerry's parents were frugal, and he'd embraced that mindset from them. His mother still used a white, round-shouldered refrigerator from the 1950s, a wood stove, and a ringer washing machine. His parents didn't just remember the Depression, they were still living it. Of course, my own mother was the opposite extreme. Financial hardships that she experienced when she lived at her grandparents made her feel that she must have the best, even if it meant that she had to charge things on credit cards and pay exorbitant interest rates.

In this case, I worried that Jerry was being penny-wise and pound-foolish. If Eric's eye became infected, he could lose the sight. The next day, Eric's eye was still red, so I took him to the ophthalmologist. After 20 minutes of trying to examine a wiggling, wriggling, and whimpering Eric, the ophthalmologist gave up. He prescribed eye drops and told me to return with Eric if his eye did not improve. A few days later, Eric was still complaining about his eye hurting. I wanted to return to the doctor, but Jerry insisted that this was unnecessary.

I felt that it was better to be safe than sorry. Although I disliked going against Jerry's wishes, I had taken Eric to a second ophthalmologist, who had managed to get Eric to sit still long enough to see that there were three thorns in his eye. If I'd listened to Jerry, Eric probably would have lost the sight in his right eye. That was a hard fact to forgive—especially for me, Eric's mother.

I glance at Eric, who lies under the white covers breathing

so quietly. Noticing an ugly metal chair parked along the wall, I drag it next to Eric's bed and sit down. I feel too jittery for sleep. I've spent the last several hours tossing and turning on the narrow cot, ruminating about how Eric is doing and when he'll return from intensive care. Although reading a book is my favorite way of relaxing, my nerves are too frazzled to focus on the words of a page.

I stare at the thick white bandage that swathes his right eye. White strips of tape cover the gauze, spreading outward like the rays of the sun. Eye surgery—just the idea of it sounded scary to me. The eye was such a delicate and vital organ. What kind of tools had Dr. Bailey used to remove the thorns, so tiny that they were undetectable to the naked eye?

Many times I'd longed for Eric to be quiet but the perpetual motion machine inside him never ceased. He was always tap-tapping and bang-banging—on tables, walls, anything that made a sound when it was rapped. Then there was the singing. When he was two, we moved into a house with the master bedroom located downstairs, far from his room. Worried that he might wake up and be afraid or need me, I'd installed the listening end of a baby intercom next to my side of the bed. After two nights of being kept awake with Eric's continual singing of *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, I put the baby monitor in the adjoining bathroom. I wanted to be a dutiful mother, but I also needed sleep. Unfortunately, Eric seemed to need less sleep than I did.

Eric was an explorer, constantly in search of new adventures. Born seemingly without an understanding of danger, Eric slipped out of the house one night and wandered into a raging snowstorm. We'd recently moved to the Midwest from Florida and he'd never seen snow before. He seemed unaware and unafraid of the dark and cold. Fortunately, I noticed he was gone, so I rounded up the neighborhood kids and offered

$5 to the first child who found Eric. A twelve-year-old-girl discovered Eric two blocks away before the police answered my 911 call. We were lucky he wandered north instead of south. The river was south of us and we might never have found him if he'd fallen into the water.

After that incident, we started locking Eric into his room at night. We lived in a huge, rambling old home that was built in the 1920s. Each door had a lock and a skeleton key to open it. I felt terrible about locking Eric in his room and worried about what would happen if we ever had a fire. How would he escape if his door was locked? But what alternative was there? I couldn't trust Eric to stay in his room all night. At least I had the baby monitor so I could hear if he needed me.

A monitor that records heart-beat and blood pressure is mounted on wheels and sits next to the bed. I gaze at the fluorescent green squiggles that move across the screen and feel reassured. They're tangible signs that Eric is alive. I find comfort in the steady beep beep of the monitor.

The room is chilly. I shiver, even though I'm wearing a flannel nightgown. Stretching my arm across the covers, I hold Eric's hand in mine. It feels limp and cold to touch. Standing up, I lean over and tuck both of his arms under the covers.

My daughter, Cindy, who's spending the night at a friend's house, is also adopted. Eighteen months older than Eric, she greatly resented Eric as a baby—and still does now. Both children were born of immigrant, Hispanic families who settled in Florida. Jerry was teaching at a university in Florida at the time. After several years of infertility treatments, we'd eventually adopted Cindy through a local attorney.

Cindy was an easy baby to care for; her naps were so regular that I'd managed to write a romance novel in my spare time. The novel, *Conquer the Memories*, was published

in 1987, the year that we adopted Eric. Having two young children put a stop to my writing career, although I now work as a first reader for the same company that published my book. As a first reader, I evaluated unsolicited manuscripts for publication. Every couple of weeks, I received a stack of manuscripts, which I would read and critique. Fortunately, I had just sent off six manuscripts a few days ago and had not received more manuscripts yet.

When we first adopted Eric, I hadn't realized that having a second child would put an end to my writing career. I soon learned. On the eleventh day of Eric's life and his second day with us, Jerry noticed that Eric quit breathing for several seconds. Eric spent the next week in the hospital undergoing tests. Some of the tests were painful, such as the sonogram, in which they inserted a long probe through his mouth to reach his stomach. Eric was diagnosed with possible sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). When he returned home, he had a bald spot on the top of his head where the nurses had shaved his hair to make a connection for the electrodes. He also was outfitted with an apnea monitor to record his breathing. Before checking Eric out of the hospital, Jerry and I were required to take a class in CPR, so that if Eric did stop breathing, we'd know how to resuscitate him.

We never had another episode where Eric stopped breathing, but there were many false alarms. Every time the monitor shrieked, I'd startle awake and go racing for Eric's room, wondering if this would be the terrifying moment when Eric would stop breathing and I would have to initiate artificial respiration. This fear haunted my dreams, which meant that I never slept soundly. I'd practiced on a doll in CPR class, but I worried that in the anxiety of the moment, I would panic and forget what to do. Fortunately, the alarms were all false—

caused by Eric's body moving and shifting the velcro strap fastened over his heart.

Eric was an active, agile baby who could roll over on his back at two months. A pediatric neurologist said Eric might be too agile and could have cerebral palsy. He wanted to start Eric on an intense program of physical therapy but I got a second opinion from another doctor, who disagreed. The best thing about the second doctor's diagnosis was that he disagreed with the SIDS diagnosis, which meant that we no longer had to keep Eric on the apnea monitor.

The second doctor was right on all counts. Eric didn't have cerebral palsy; in fact, he turned out to be a marvelous athlete. His first day on ice skates, Eric breezed across the ice like a professional. The only problem was Eric could never slow down enough to learn the finer points of the sport. He stayed in the beginning ice skating class for three years because he refused to participate in practice exercises or learn how to do a hockey stop.

Eric did not grow in my womb, but he grew in my heart. That first year, when Eric cried so much, I spent much of the time rocking him in my cane-backed rocking chair. With his tummy against my knees, I'd massage his neck and back, my fingers rubbing against his bare skin, trying to smooth out the tenseness and give him peace.

At times, Eric's continual crying and his refusal to sleep infuriated me. Then one day, I remembered my mother telling me that I never slept as a baby. I didn't cry like Eric did, but I did have vivid memories of hating nap times at preschool because I couldn't sleep. That realization brought understanding and created a bond between us as tight as superglue.

There were other ways that Eric and I were alike. I was an early talker and so was Eric. At his twelve-month check-up, I told the pediatrician that Eric was talking in phrases. The

doctor was assessing Eric's vital signs while Eric sat on the examining table. I could tell that the pediatrician didn't believe me until Eric suddenly announced, "Get down! Get down! Want get down!"

Eric has so much potential, but I worry that it won't be realized if he can't learn to calm down. Getting Eric through the current medical crisis with his eye will only solve part of the problem. The long-range concern is—what am I going to do about Eric? How am I going to keep him safe from himself?

I hear the pounding of footsteps and turn around.

"I'm just here to check Eric's vitals," says the nurse. I get up and walk away, giving the nurse room to do her work. I watch as she jots information on a piece of paper attached to a clipboard. When she finishes, she tells me, "You'd better get some rest. We'll need your help tomorrow when he awakens."

Eric doesn't awaken until the next evening, three hours after dinner. The kitchen is closed Saturday night, so I go downstairs and buy him food from the vending machines. Within 24 hours, Eric is back to his frantic ways. By this time, I have learned a valuable lesson—that there is one thing worse than a wild and crazy Eric—a quiet and still Eric.

Two days later, Dr. Bailey removes Eric's eye patch and pronounces him fit to return to school, saying, "His eye looks good, but I want to see him in another week." Dr. Bailey warns me that Eric's vision in his right eye will remain blurry for several weeks. When he's outside, he'll need to wear sunglasses to protect his injured eye from the bright sunlight. I'd gone shopping and managed to find an orange hat with a wide visor and a pair of sunglasses attached by a velcro strip. Eric loved the hat but was less enthusiastic about the sunglasses.

ALTHOUGH I'M overjoyed that Eric will retain the vision in his eye, I feel that Eric's surgery is a wake-up call. Eric's impulsive behavior could have blinded him.

I have long suspected that Eric has ADHD but have resisted the idea of having him diagnosed because I don't want to medicate him. Ritalin, the most commonly used medication, is an appetite depressant. Eric is small for his age, so I worry that taking Ritalin will stunt his growth.

Eric's accident and surgery force me to rethink this decision. Which is worse—the side-effects of taking Ritalin or Eric's impulsive, accident-prone behavior? I decide to visit the library and do some research on ADHD and Ritalin. I can't forget Dr. Bailey's question: "Is this kid on Ritalin?"

I'm reluctant to give Eric medication because I don't understand how the drug works. Since then, I have come to understand that ADHD symptoms are due to problems with the loading and reloading of two neurotransmitters, primarily dopamine, but, also norepinephrine. These neurotransmitters facilitate the brain's ability to communicate with itself. When neurotransmitter levels are low, the brain is unable to relay messages back and forth, so behavior is adversely affected. Stimulants, such as Ritalin and Adderall, improve the loading and reloading.[1]

I wonder how Jerry will react to the idea of medicating Eric. Jerry struggles to understand Eric, just like my mother struggled to understand me. Studious and quiet, they were every teacher's dream—unlike Eric and me. Thinking back, I remember a time when my own impulsive and hyperactive behavior caused problems—and aggravated my mother.

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Desperately Seeking Novelty

In 1956, the summer after I finish kindergarten, my mother packs our belongings in her gray Pontiac and we leave Atlanta, Georgia, for the glorious state of California. Although many memories of my early years are blurry, the summer we move to California remains clear. I distinctly remember singing along to Perry Como's *Hot Diggity Dog Diggity* on the car radio. I also recall visiting the Petrified Forest, Carlsbad Caverns, and the Grand Canyon. My mother majored in science in college, so she enjoys telling me how trees turned into stone and how a river carved the Grand Canyon, both processes that took millions of years.

Los Angeles is a change from Atlanta. The architecture of our motel is Spanish Mission, complete with a pink-stucco exterior and a red barrel-tiled roof. The building itself is long and sprawling, and landscaped with tropical palms and ferns. We stay in the motel for nearly a month before my mother finds an apartment.

We get up early that first morning in Los Angeles—at my insistence, of course. I've always had trouble getting and

staying asleep, especially in new or stressful situations. This morning is no exception. By seven a.m., I have the drapes pulled open and I'm peering outside the window. It was dark when we arrived last night, and I wasn't able to see.

"Sandra, close the curtain and go back to sleep," my mother grumbles, putting a pillow over her head to block out my chatter and the light streaming through the window.

"I'm hungry. I want breakfast."

"I'm tired. Go back to sleep." But it's no use. I run over to the bed and throw myself on her, then start to tickle her. I'm an only child with a forceful disposition.

I'm proud of my mother because she's young—only 28 at the time—and pretty. We're a team; it's us against the world. My father, a World War II veteran, separated from my mother when I was a baby, so I have no recollections of having a father at home. My friends have two parents, but I don't mind being different since my relationship with my mother is closer.

When we are both dressed in shorts and sleeveless tops, my mother grabs her purse and says, "Let's go!"

Once outside, my mother points to a dense green bush with pretty white flowers, and remarks, "This is an oleander and poisonous. Even touching it can make you sick. A cousin of mine nearly died from it." Although my mother majored in chemistry in college, she always said that her real love was botany.

Usually I love to hear tales from my mother's childhood in Vero Beach, Florida, but not today. I'm too excited about finally arriving in California. I barely glance at the bush as I skip along the white cement pavement. The new sights of Los Angeles, especially the tall palm trees that I have to crane my neck to see, completely fascinate me.

"Let's stop here," my mother says, gesturing towards a drugstore nearby. It has a blue and orange sign that I will later learn to read as, "Rexall."

Inside, the heavy aroma of fried bacon greets us. We sit at the counter, which has shiny chrome stools that swivel around. While my mother drinks her coffee, smokes a cigarette, and checks the newspaper ads for apartments and teaching positions, I swivel round and round on my stool. "Wheeeee," I exclaim.

"Sandra, stop that!"

I stop momentarily, but soon I'm swiveling, swiveling, again. I swivel so much that I get dizzy and start to giggle.

"Sandra, no more," my mother reminds me.

Breakfast arrives. I'm annoyed that the restaurant doesn't have my favorite, grits, but discover that hash browns are okay. I race through breakfast, finishing long before my mother. When a man in a navy-blue uniform comes and sits on the stool next to me, I say to him, "You're a policeman. Do you shoot bad guys?"

"Only when I have to," he replies, smiling.

"Can I see your gun?"

"I don't think that's a good idea," he remarks, but detaches a set of handcuffs dangling from his belt.

I try to put the handcuffs on, but my wrists are too small. I tell him, "Give me your hands."

He puts his hands together and holds them out. I try to open the handcuffs, but I can't. I say, "I need the key to open them."

"Sandra, that's enough," my mother interrupts. "Quit bothering the man."

"Oh, she's no bother. I have a niece who's just about the same age, but she's not as friendly with strangers," he replies.

"Sandra is friendly with *everyone*," my mother retorts.

"We just moved here from Atlanta. We saw the Grand Canyon and got to sleep in the car," I remark.

"That sounds like fun. I've never seen the Grand Canyon."

"We saw a mama deer and her fawn. I wanted to pet the baby, but mom said I had to stay in the car."

"That was smart of your mom. I'm glad you listened to her."

"What's your name?"

"Joe."

My mother asks Joe about apartments in the neighborhood. He responds and soon they're chatting like old friends. I'm accustomed to my attractive young mother talking to strange men in public places, so this does not surprise me at all. Growing bored with their conversation, I start swiveling around on my stool again.

"Sandra, I said no swiveling. Stop!"

I pause momentarily. But soon, I'm swiveling, swiveling.

"Say, I have an idea," declares Joe. He sticks his hand in his pants pocket and comes up with a silver dollar. "Why don't you take this and go buy yourself a comic book? There's a whole stand of them in the next aisle."

My mother protests about him giving me money, but I've already accepted the coin. I thank Joe, then hop off the stool and scamper away. Forgetting that I'm supposed to select a comic book, I return a few minutes later with a bar of chocolate and a package of hair barrettes. My mother reminds me that I'm supposed to select a comic book. I dash off again, this time returning with a doll. My mother, tired from the trip, says crossly, "Sandra, you're not listening. Now, go pick out a comic book and nothing more!"

"Here, I'll show you where they are," offers Joe. I follow him and select an Uncle Scrooge comic book.

Although the Uncle Scrooge comic has colorful pictures, I can't read, so the scenes showing Scrooge with bags of money don't hold my interest for long. Glancing at my mother, I see that she's deeply engaged in her conversation with Joe. I'm too young to understand the phrase "pick up," but I am familiar with my mother's habit of "making friends" with men she meets when we're out and about.

I hop off the stool and wander over to a man who's drinking his coffee. I ask him what his name is, and we strike up a conversation. Soon, I'm singing *I'm a Little Teapot* for him, body motions and all. An only child, I'm comfortable around adults. I like attention, and I don't mind performing to get it. When the man tells me that he has a dog waiting outside that looks just like Lassie, I follow him out of the store.

The dog, which is tied up to a parking meter, is bigger than me. Of course, I'm unafraid of him. I'm not an especially brave child; it just doesn't occur to me to be afraid.

I put my arms around the dog and hug him tightly. When he barks and licks my face, I giggle and say, "He's kissing me. Can he do any tricks?"

"Sure," the man replies, motioning for the dog to roll over.

By this time, my mother has noticed my disappearance. She searches the aisles, calling and calling, but can't find me. No one noticed me walk out of the drugstore.

"Maybe she stepped outside," Joe suggests.

And there my frantic mother finds me—on the sidewalk, sitting on my knees, and petting the dog. She leans over and yanks me by the wrist, saying in a tight voice, "Tell Joe goodbye. We have to go now."

At first, I can't figure out why she's so mad. After all, I haven't gone far—and I only wanted to see the dog. When we reach the motel, my mother scolds me about the dangers of wandering away with a stranger. It is just one of many lectures on my impulsive and problematic behavior that I will receive in my life.

MY CURIOSITY about seeing the dog, like my fascination with the fire truck in Chapter 2, are forms of novelty seeking. Psychiatrist Robert C. Cloninger, who developed the Temperament and Character Inventory in the 1990s, first coined the term novelty seeking, which he saw as a positive personality trait.[1] Since then, many scientists have adopted the phrase and published hundreds of articles on novelty seeking in disciplines that range from psychology, genetics, and biochemistry.

According to Cloninger, a common sub-trait of novelty seeking is self-transcendence, which refers to an individual's ability to focus on an external object in order to overcome negative thoughts. In my case, curiosity allows me to block any anxiety I might feel about being in new surroundings among strangers. From an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense. When ancestors faced hostile conditions, individuals who were curious and observant of their environment were less likely to feel fearful and overwhelmed, so they were more likely to survive. In this way, self-transcendence becomes an adaptation. For this book, I prefer to use the word "resilience" instead of self-transcendence.

Recalling these incidents makes me realize that Jerry is wrong when he insists that Cindy and Eric can control their impulsive behavior. *Perhaps* Jerry could control his impul-

sive behavior when he was a child, but I know I couldn't and neither can our children.

This insight brings up a startling thought. Is it possible that I have ADHD?

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A Disaster Waiting to Happen

School let out for the summer only three days ago and already I'm feeling stressed. When Jerry and I adopted Cindy and Eric, I hadn't realized that I was signing up as cruise director—that my biggest challenge as a parent would be to keep my children amused. Although I read several books about adoption at the time, I don't recall any of the books stating that adopted children may require more parental support because they tend to have more behavioral disorders, such as ADHD.

All I know is that Cindy and Eric keep me in a constant state of anxiety. If I don't provide them with positive ways of channeling their energy, they start poking, prodding, and hammering each other with one of them ending up injured. Over the years, I enroll them in numerous sports—ice skating, swimming, basketball, soccer, and gymnastics—anything that keeps them physically busy and not hurting one another.

The TV—mother's little helper—never keeps Cindy and Eric quiet for long. It requires them to sit still and be passive, two things they can't do. As novelty seekers, they need activ-

ities that appeal to their curiosity and allow them to participate and be physically active.

Today, we're visiting the library with a stop at Taco Time for lunch. Although reading books, like TV, isn't physically active enough to hold Cindy and Eric's attention for long, they love going to the library.

Our local library is a two-story red brick building and obviously designed by a man. Who else would put the children's department on the second floor, well out of hearing and sight from the ground floor adult section? The design makes it impossible for me to keep an eye on Cindy and Eric while browsing for my own books.

Over the years, I devise a strategy for visiting the library. Cindy and Eric always pick their books first. Then they sit quietly—in theory at least—in the adjoining reading room while I search for my books. If Cindy and Eric manage to behave themselves, I offer a reward, or positive reinforcement, as psychologists call it. Today's positive reinforcement is lunch at Taco Time.

"Now remember to walk quietly down the stairs," I say, as we exit the double doors of the second floor children's section. "No running, no pushing, and no yelling."

I'm nervous about how Cindy and Eric will behave on the stairs. The same misguided architect who planned the children's room upstairs also designed an open stairway leading down to the main floor. Any child descending the stairs can be seen and heard by the people in the reading room and check-out area. For parents with quiet and demure children, this layout presents no problem, but for my two, it's a disaster waiting to happen.

Cindy leads the way, her wavy black hair dancing as she bobs down the stairs. Although she is less active than Eric, no one would call her a quiet child. Cindy never walks; she runs;

she never takes a step; she jumps. And she loves to torment her brother. Even now, when she knows that I am watching from behind, she is unable to resist the impulse to stick out her left foot and trip her brother as he follows her down the stairs.

Eric neatly sidesteps Cindy's outstretched foot. He likes to play victim, but is as guilty as Cindy of causing trouble. Instead of moving away from Cindy, he leans over and pushes her in the back. She lurches forward as she grabs hold of the railing, managing just barely to stop herself from falling. The books she's been holding clatter to the ground.

From the stairs, I can see the entire reference section below. I cringe, afraid that the noise of the books falling on the stairs has disturbed someone. Fortunately, no one is staring back at us with an outraged, angry look.

Grabbing Eric by my left hand and Cindy by my right, I say, "Stop that!"

"She started it." replies Eric, trying to wiggle loose of my grasp.

"I don't care who started it," I whisper, hoping my voice doesn't disturb anyone downstairs. "You shouldn't have been following her so closely."

Cindy looks at me, her enormous brown eyes alight with mischief. Her eyelashes are thicker than mine are with mascara. She is an uncommonly beautiful child, perhaps too beautiful for her own good. I'm dreading the day when she becomes a teenager and boys begin noticing her.

"Sounds to me like you don't want to go to for tacos," I say softly.

For the moment, this reminder is enough to put Cindy back on track. She bends over and picks up her books, then saunters down the stairs.

When we reach the bottom, I tell them, "It's 11:30. I want

you to sit quietly and look at your books until 11:45. If you can stay out of trouble until then, we'll go to Taco Time for lunch."

"I wanna watch the fish," Cindy remarks, referring to the aquarium located under the stairs.

"You can after I get my books. Now Cindy, you sit over there, next to the book rack. Eric, I want you to sit over here, by the table."

Of course, they want to sit next to each other, which I learned a long time ago never works. Divide and conquer is my motto. If Cindy and Eric aren't sitting next to each other, they can't touch one another and start a fight.

I walk over to the card catalogue and start to pull out file boxes. I find several books that sound interesting in the card catalogue and write the information down. Then I glance in Cindy and Eric's direction to see what they are doing.

Neither is seated. I look over to the aquarium and find them, pushing and shoving one another. Clearly, it hasn't occurred to them that what they are doing is dangerous—that at any moment, one of them might bump the aquarium and send it crashing to the floor. Although novelty seeking has its positive aspects, it can lead to poor foresight and risk taking, which can be dangerous. Both Cindy and Eric have poor impulse control and lack good judgment, which makes them accident prone.

I race towards Eric and Cindy, my adrenalin pumping. Cindy has just launched Eric towards the aquarium, when I grab him by the arm and pull him back.

"Let's go home," I say, my voice sharp.

"I don't want to go home," Eric protests. "I want to go to Taco Time."

"Not today," I reply as I herd them towards the main desk, where we check-out our books and leave.

As I guide the car towards home, I think about what happened at the library. Where had I gone wrong? I'd used the same strategy for months with no trouble. Why did things go wrong today?

Well, they're more "hyper" today than usual. But why? That's easy—school let out last Thursday. It's June, and we live in the Midwest, a place where the summer days are long and the nights are short. Jerry believes that the kids should be allowed to stay up as late as they want, so they can sleep "'til the crack of noon." Unfortunately, Cindy and Eric aren't sleeping in late. They're staying up to watch Jay Leno with Jerry in the evening, and then they're getting up at 6 a.m. every morning. Cindy and Eric's circadian rhythm are totally disrupted. They're like overtired toddlers—cranky, fidgety, but too exhausted to admit it.

On the way home, Cindy and Eric wheedle and plead with me to change my mind. The worst thing about being a parent is giving up things that I want to do when they misbehave. All there is to eat at home is bologna sandwiches. I infinitely prefer tacos to boring bologna, but I know better than to give in.

As I steer the car towards home, I shudder to think of what could have happened if Cindy and Eric had knocked over the fish tank at the library. Why can't I turn my back for a few minutes without them getting into trouble? How am I going to keep them safe?

I suppose that turnabout is fair play. Although I wasn't accident prone like Cindy and Eric as a child, I was always in trouble for saying and doing the wrong things.

SINCE MY REALIZATION several weeks ago that I *might*

have ADHD, I have grown more positive that I do. All of my life I've felt that there was something fundamentally wrong with me. My mind was like a rotating Ferris wheel, spinning round and round and round. I was constantly moving, constantly speaking, unable to sleep at night or sit quietly in class.

School was an unhappy place for me at times, a place where I received scoldings, time-outs, and poor grades. Thinking back, I remember when my punishment led to surprisingly painful and unexpected result.

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The Garden of Eden

In the summer after first grade, we move into the Garden of Eden. Of course, I have never heard of the Garden of Eden since we only attend church occasionally, but still, I know that we have moved to a special place.

The house isn't much—just a one-bedroom cottage with a tiny kitchen and a living room/dining room combination. We barely have space for a rocking chair, couch, console TV, dinette set, and twin beds in the bedroom. The cottage is located several hundred feet behind the main house, where the owners, two retired schoolteachers by the name of Lind, live. The Linds taught biology, and over the years, planted their half-acre of land with numerous exotic bushes and fruit trees.

My only complaint about our new home is that the Linds won't let me build a tree house in one of their precious trees. Eventually, I talk them into letting me place a few boards in the crook of an avocado tree, which creates a perch, but pounding nails into the trees is forbidden. My perch is one of five avocado trees that compose a small grove at the back of the property. Since fallen leaves and fruit are never raked, but

are simply allowed to fall and accumulate, I have to be careful where I walk. I like the crackling sound of brown leaves crunching beneath my bare feet; however, I do not like the squishy feeling of rotten avocados oozing into the spaces between my toes. I soon learn that the only thing worse than stepping on an avocado is eating one. The avocado trees are great for climbing, but I never acquire a taste for the fruit until I am much older.

Our landlords encourage me to eat the fruit hanging on the trees. At different times of the year, I feast on apples, pomegranates, kumquats, guavas, apricots and plums. My favorite is an apple tree that the Linds grafted with four different varieties of apple.

My mother's favorite is a ginkgo tree, which she calls a living fossil. I can still picture her showing me how the ginkgo leaf, with its fan shape of veins, differs from the modern leaf, with its network shape of veins.

Growing up with my mother is always educational, which isn't surprising since she works as a first-grade teacher. Having been around teachers all of my life. I consider them friends, not authority figures. My familiar attitude creates trouble with my own teachers at times.

My second grade teacher, Mrs. Black, is one of those teachers. In most years, Mrs. Black may have been a patient teacher. But the year that I'm in the second grade, she's pregnant and impatient. In retrospect, it's understandable why she's impatient—she looks like she swallowed a volleyball. Standing on her feet all day when she is pregnant must be exhausting. Maybe that's why she's so obsessed with student behavior.

"Sandra—no talking—and quit fidgeting!" Mrs. Black calls to me. "I want to see you in your seat with your feet firmly planted on the ground."

Mrs. Black always assumes it's me talking. The problem is, Mrs. Black blames me even when I'm not talking. This seems unfair. I'm good at getting into trouble on my own. Why does she insist on blaming me when I haven't done anything wrong?

Mrs. Black even has a good citizenship chart that's located at the rear of the room near where I sit. Perhaps Mrs. Black thinks sitting me next to the citizenship roll will remind me to behave myself. Neatly printed in black marker is the name of each child in the class. Across the page at the top, is listed the date for each week in the school year. Mrs. Black calls her good citizenship program the "buddy system" since we're expected to report to her every time we see someone misbehave. A better name is the tattle system. Children receiving no reports of bad behavior for the week are awarded gold stars; children receiving one report are awarded red stars; children receiving two reports are awarded green stars. Children receiving three reports or more receive no stars. Instead, they receive a thick black smudge on the chart.

Only a few children manage to earn a continuous row of gold stars. Others have a mixture of red, green, and gold and an occasional black smudge. I have to be different. By the end of the year, a continuous black smudge marches along the row next to my name, broken by one lonely gold star. Of course, black marks aren't the only consequences for my talking out of turn. I also spend a lot of my recess time sitting on a bench far away from my classmates who are playing foursquare and tetherball.

I'm sitting on that bench one Friday, the 13th, reading a Nancy Drew book. I don't really mind being punished if I have a book to read, and *The Ghost of Blackwood Hall* is one of my favorites. Although my mother is a first grade teacher, she is not a reading snob. She gave me several Nancy Drew

books for Christmas, hoping to get me hooked on reading. I am now hopelessly addicted to Nancy Drew books. My mother doesn't care if the local library refuses to carry Nancy Drew books because they aren't "good" literature. If reading Nancy Drew makes me an avid reader, she will buy me Nancy Drew books and encourage me to read them.

I'm sitting there, reading my book quietly, when two boys playing tag hit the bench with a resounding thump! They run off, and I go back to reading when I feel a sharp stinging sensation on my right arm. Looking down, I see a black spider crawling across my arm. I scream, flick the spider off with my book, and it goes flying into the air, eventually landing upside down on the grass. The spider rights itself and scuttles away, but before it does, I see a red mark, like a red crayon fleck, on its belly.

A black widow spider! I recognize it immediately. There's a picture of a black widow spider in my mother's red, cloth-covered medical book. It has a full-page glossy illustration and the spider glistens in the picture like the spider I've just seen. I look back at my arm and notice a puncture wound and swelling around the bite mark. I can already feel twinges of pain radiating up my arm. I rise from the bench and run over to Mrs. Black, who is supervising my classmates on the playground.

"I've been bitten by a black widow spider!" I exclaim, holding out my arm.

Mrs. Black turns to me, annoyed that I have left the bench before recess is over. She says, "That's nonsense."

"It was a black widow—I know it was. Just look at my arm." I rotate my arm to show her the underside, where the skin, usually so pale, is now red and swollen.

"Children often say they've been bitten by a black spider, but it always turns out to be another kind of spider."

"I know what a black widow spider looks like. There's a picture of one in my mom's book." Even as a child I am assertive. When I know I'm right, I have a hard time keeping quiet about it. At home, my mother stresses the importance of thinking and speaking for myself. I can't understand why this trait isn't appreciated at school as well.

"Don't argue with me, Sandra," says Mrs. Black. She picks up a whistle dangling around her neck and shrills it, then turns to me. "Well, you've definitely been bitten by something. You'd better go to the office."

Since the school is too small to justify hiring a nurse, the principal's secretary, Mrs. Anstell, handles medical emergencies. She takes one look at my arm and exclaims, "Gracious child, what did you do to yourself?"

I explain that I have been bitten by a black widow spider. Mrs. Anstell, like Mrs. Black and the principal, Mr. Cheney, insist that I could not have been bitten by a black widow spider. It's like the story of the boy who cried wolf. Over the years, so many children have cried black widow spider and been wrong, that no one believes me. Besides, I'm a know-it-all and that irritates people. No one ever wants to encourage me into thinking that I'm right.

Mr. Cheney calls the school where my mother works, but it's impossible for her to come to the phone or leave her first grade class before the end of school. So I sit there. And sit there. Mrs. Anstell asks if I want to lie down, but I say no. I continue to read, willing myself to concentrate on Nancy's adventures instead of the pain in my right arm. By now, the muscles in my legs have begun to tense. They don't hurt; they just feel stiff. My head feels heavy.

"How is your arm, Sandra?"

It's Mr. Cheney. I wince as I twist my arm to show him. The swelling and redness around the bite mark is increasing

—my arm now is beginning to resemble a puffy red balloon.

Mr. Cheney frowns. "There's a definite bite mark and the swelling is increasing. Just to make sure, I think I'll go investigate that bench."

"It was a black widow," I reply. "After it bit me, it crawled into the long grass under the bench. I know what black widow spiders look like because there's a picture of one in my mom's book."

I return to my reading. I keep reading the same paragraph over and over, but it doesn't make any sense. The words on the page dance round and round, making me feel dizzy. My head feels too heavy to hold up.

I try to focus on Mrs. Anstell, who sits at her desk typing. The curious thing is, there are two of her. The two images float back and forth, then round and round in a clockwise motion. Now I know what my mother means by the expression "busy getting dizzy."

"I think I'd like to lie down now. I don't feel too good." I stagger over to a bench by the window and notice that the muscles in my legs have tightened, making it difficult to bend my knees.

Mrs. Anstell hands me a pillow and blanket. It feels good to lie down and close my eyes. My whole body feels as if it is floating. I try to tune out the throbbing pain in my arm and concentrate on something else. Anything else. My mind drifts until the sound of squeaking shoes on the linoleum floor jerks me out of my trance. I open my eyes and see Mr. Cheney. I say, "Did you find my spider?"

"I sure did. It was a black widow spider. There was a whole nest of them hiding in the grass under the bench," says Mr. Cheney, clutching something black in his right hand. He holds it out, and I see a weathered black billfold and the

squashed remains of a black spider. I can even see the spider's red crayon flex on its smashed abdomen.

My mother finally arrives and takes me to the doctor. I'm ill over the weekend but return to school on Monday as energetic and talkative as usual. My classmates feel so sorry for me that week that no one reports me for talking out of turn—which is why I received one gold star in a long line of black smudges on Mrs. Black's citizenship roll.

PUNISHING an over-active child by taking away recess has never made much sense to me. The hyperactive child needs an opportunity to run off excess energy through exercise and play more than the average child.

Mrs. Black, like my husband Jerry, seemed to feel that impulsive behavior can be managed by self-control and effort. After all, there would be no point in Mrs. Black reinforcing bad and good behavior with smudges and stars if students were unable to modify their conduct.

Research led by Nora Volkow indicates that people with ADHD have low levels of dopamine in the reward pathway of the brain, so they need stronger and more frequent rewards to motivate them.[1] For children with ADHD, expecting them to go an entire week without acting up, may be unrealistic. To keep children from giving up, offering daily rewards may be more effective. Researchers have also found that children with ADHD respond better to positive reinforcement than negative reinforcement.[2]

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Married with a Mess

I survey the dining room, wondering which of several Leaning Tower of Pisa clutter piles stacked high on the dining room table to tackle first. I consider dumping everything into boxes and carting them down to the basement; however, it has become a no man's land filled with miscellaneous junk. I don't dare move any papers downstairs until I find the missing checkbook.

I wonder how tidy people manage their clutter. Do they throw everything away that's not essential? Do they have secret rooms so crammed with clutter that opening the door reveals a veritable Pandora's box? Also, do tidy people ever lose *really* important items, such as their checkbook?

Last night Jerry had a conniption fit because the checkbook was not in the desk where it belonged. Before leaving this morning, he warned me that he would be "very unhappy" if I had not found it by the time he returned home. No kidding.

For the umpteenth time, I think back to the last time I saw the checkbook. I distinctly remember putting it in my purse at the grocery store, but after that, my mind draws a blank.

Cindy and Eric accompanied me, so there were lots of distractions. I should have put the checkbook back in the desk cubby as soon as I got home, but obviously had forgotten to do so.

Of course, the missing checkbook is only a symptom of a much larger problem—my mind is overloaded with a never-ending to-do list. Impulsively, I offered to host a book signing party for Michelle, a friend in my writing group, who had a book published recently. I imagined a casual meeting of a few friends, similar to the party given by a member for another writer whose book was published. Unfortunately, Michelle had a much grander vision in mind. When I discovered she had invited fifty people, my mind went into a mini-meltdown.

I'm sensitive about my messy house. The awful truth is, I'm unable to maintain my duties as a wife and housekeeper and keep up with my job as a freelance editor for several New York publishers at the same time. I can handle one of these tasks, but not both together. Instead, I focus my attention on my editing job until life intervenes and I'm forced to clean the house because we have company coming. Since many of the invited guests are strangers, I feel the house must be immaculate.

My untidiness has embarrassed me in the past. When we adopted Cindy, the social worker doing the home study arrived an hour early and found me still in my nightgown, frantically dumping stacks of mail, papers, and newspapers on the dining room table into a cardboard box. Last year, the local paper sent a reporter and photographer to the house to interview me for an article on my job as a freelance editor. I managed to get the downstairs looking reasonably tidy, but then, the photographer wanted to take my picture in my office, which was upstairs. I had to admit that it was a disaster zone. My desk and the shag green carpeting were so

strewn with papers and books that the photographer ended up taking my picture on the adjoining balcony.

Years ago, a next-door neighbor who dropped by frequently remarked that I was lucky to be married to a man who didn't "mind a mess." Although she considered herself a feminist, she blamed me, even though I worked as many hours as Jerry. There's an expectation in our society that women are responsible for housework. After all, cleanliness is next to godliness. Sloppy housekeeping isn't one of the Ten Commandments, but I know that a messy house is a sin.

If only Michelle had asked me to cook instead of host the party. I enjoy cooking because I can experiment with different ingredients and recipes from around the world. For me, cooking is a form of novelty seeking. Housework, on the other hand, is repetitious and boring. No matter how many times I make the beds and wash the dishes, there are always more beds to make and more dishes to clean the next day.

The book signing party is scheduled for Saturday afternoon, four days from today. Normally, this would be enough time to get the house in order; however, it's summer, so my champion mess makers and distracters, Cindy and Eric, are home from school. At the moment, they are at the pool. I pray that the weather remains sunny, so that the pool remains open for the week.

When Jerry and I first married, we lived in an apartment, so my housekeeping chores were minimal. As time progressed, we bought a large house and adopted two children, so the time I spent on housework increased exponentially. Since I also work, I feel it is fair to ask Jerry to help with dishes since I do all of the cooking. He adamantly refuses, claiming that when we married, he got a "package deal," which included me doing all of the cooking and housework.

Suddenly, I realize that my ruminations are wasting time. Back to work! I decide to tackle the mail, hoping to find the checkbook lurking beneath. Although I definitely have organizational challenges, Jerry is a packrat. He hates throwing anything away, so he leaves junk mail and discarded envelopes piled on the table. Unfortunately, he seems to feel that discarding junk mail is part of the "package deal."

I sigh and begin separating the mail. Deciding that I need boxes for sorting, I pivot on my heels and head downstairs to the basement.

As I round up boxes in the basement, I spy the washing machine, which reminds me that I forgot to put the clothes in the dryer yesterday. Walking over to it, I lift the lid and sniff. I don't smell mold; however, I decide to play it safe and wash the clothes again. Turning, I notice the laundry basket on top of the dryer and remember that I forgot to retrieve the clothes from the dryer last night. Since the clothes have been sitting in the bin, they're wrinkled. Jerry objects to wrinkled shirts, so I leave his shirts on the top of the washer. When the clothes in the washer are finished, I can add Jerry's shirts along with the wet clothes in the dryer. Hopefully, the wrinkles will magically disappear. The catch is that I will need to remove the clothes promptly, or I will end up with more wrinkled clothes. Although my success rate at retrieving clothes before the dryer stops is abysmal, I'm an optimist.

I toss the rest of the wrinkled clothes into the laundry basket and head upstairs to the living room, where I dump the laundry on the coffee table. I'm folding Eric's jeans when I glance into the dining room, and notice the piles of mail stacked on the floor. At last, I remember that I'm supposed to be looking for the checkbook.

Since I left the boxes for sorting downstairs, I head back to the basement, as a wave of panic comes over me. How will

I ever manage to clean and declutter the house for the party on Saturday? The living room and dining room still look like they've been tossed by hurricane Sandra. Worse, I haven't found the missing checkbook. Deciding that avoiding Jerry's wrath is more important than getting the house ready for the party, I go into crisis mode, searching frantically through clutter on the dining table. No checkbook.

Once again, I picture myself entering the house from the back door. We always use the rear entrance because it's close to the driveway and garage. When we came in, Cindy and Eric were ahead of me and having a shoving match over who would be the first to climb the stairs and reach the kitchen. Worried that someone would fall down the stairs during the tussle, I called for a time-out, ordering Cindy to go to the family room and Eric to sit on the stairs. Neither sat quietly, so I sent them to their rooms for longer timeouts, which meant that I had to follow them upstairs to ensure that they stayed in their rooms.

Where did I put my purse before going upstairs? I had a dim memory of dumping my purse on the counter in the kitchen. The counter was always piled high with toys, sports equipment, and Jerry's scientific journals, a cornucopia of crap and clutter.

Thinking that I might have absent-mindedly taken the checkbook out of my purse before going upstairs to referee the time-out, I decide to check the kitchen counter. As I sift through piles of assorted toys, artwork and sports equipment, I spy the missing bank statement. Deciding to leave the statement on the fireplace mantle where Jerry keeps unpaid bills, I head for the family room. As I place the bank statement on the mantle, I notice the checkbook nestled in a stack of bills waiting to be paid. Yay! Dinner will be peaceful tonight.

I think about further decluttering the kitchen counter, but

as my mother used to say, "nature abhors a vacuum." If I clear the counter today, there'll be a new pile tomorrow. Deciding that sorting the mail is a better use of my time, I return to the dining room. Now I can focus on removing clutter without feeling anxious about the missing checkbook.

MY BEHAVIOR that day is a classic example of an overwhelmed executive function, which has been compared to an orchestra performing without a conductor. Imagine one hundred professional musicians playing their instruments without a leader. Despite the musicians' extraordinary skill, the results will be cacophony without a conductor to organize, manage, and direct the orchestra.

Dr. Thomas Brown divides executive function into six categories, which I have put in my own words to show how executive function caused problems that day:[1]

Getting started: Since we eat in the kitchen, there is no pressing need to keep the dining room table clear unless guests are expected. Although doing a little house tidying every day would create less stress in the long run, I'm unable to motivate myself to do this.

Concentration: I become distracted when I have a long to-do list. In the time frame of a couple of hours, I look for the checkbook, start sorting the mail on the dining room table, got distracted when I go to the basement for boxes, and return upstairs to fold laundry. It is only when I see the pile of mail on the dining table that I remember that my most important task is to find the checkbook before Jerry returns home.

Motivation: I find housework boring, so I have trouble motivating myself to do tedious jobs.

Feelings: I become upset when Michelle invites strangers

to my house. My mind is so jumbled by stress that I lose the checkbook, which makes Jerry angry.

Recall: Without visual cues, I'm likely to forget what I'm doing and start a new chore. This happens twice—when I forgot that finding the checkbook was my primary task and when I forgot to take the clothes out of the dryer the previous night. In both cases, visual reminders put me back on track.

Self-control: I impulsively offer to hostess an author-signing party for Michelle even though I know that preparing the house for guests will create anxiety for me.

Of course, many people have instances when they procrastinate, forgot what they're doing, or speak impulsively. Behaving this way occasionally does not mean that they have ADHD. These behaviors can be thought of as a continuum—on one side is the person with occasional instances of distraction and impulsivity; on the other side is the person with ADHD and numerous instances of distraction and impulsivity. The person with occasional instances is able to manage the episodes and lives a satisfactory life; the person with ADHD and numerous instances is unable to manage the frequent episodes and lives a stressful life.

A lot of the stress that comes with ADHD stems from society's mistaken belief that people with ADHD can control their impulsive behavior. Since many executive functions are believed to be unconscious, and *not* an act of free will, this assumption seems arguable, at best. [2]

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Me and My Shadow

I tap my pencil lightly against my desk as I watch Mrs. Black return a recent assignment. She hands back everyone's paper except mine, then stops and gazes directly at me. *Uh-oh, I'm in trouble again*. I feel my face flush red. I turn my head away, unwilling to face my accuser.

"Students, I have one paper that I have decided to read to the class because it is exceptionally well-written—unless the author would like to read the letter herself. Sandra, would you prefer to do the honors and read the paper yourself?"

My faced is turned away, so I'm unable to see if Mrs. Black's body language confirms what I think I just heard. Did she really say that my paper was exceptionally well-written? Surely not. My heart thumping, I turn in my seat and look towards her. Mrs. Black has humiliated me so many times, that it seems impossible that she is praising me. To my surprise, I see that she is beaming.

"Would you like to read the letter yourself, Sandra?" Mrs. Black asks again.

A few days ago, she asked us to write a letter to a family member or friend, so I wrote a letter to my father in Georgia,

asking him to come visit us. Divorce is common nowadays, but in the 1950s, it is rare. I'm the only child in the class whose parents are divorced, so the idea of reading the letter to the class is embarrassing. My voice quivering, I say, "No, you can read it, er please."

I sit quietly in my chair as Mrs. Black reads my letter to the class. It feels wonderful to be the center of attention in a positive way. After she finishes reading, she hands it back. I am pleased to find that she has written at the top of the paper, "Excellent work! A+!"

After school, I ride my bike home with soaring spirits. The warm afternoon sun radiates against my skin, making my entire body feel as if it is glowing. Above me, the sky is cloudless and tinted Crayola sky blue. It's a glorious day to be alive.

When my mother arrives home that afternoon, I show her my letter and say, "Mom, Mrs. Black liked a letter I wrote so much that she read it to the class."

"That's terrific," my mother replies, as she sets her white purse on the dining room table and takes the letter out of my hands. She walks over to her pink rocking chair and sits down.

I watch my mother as she reads. I'm hoping that she will like the letter as much as Mrs. Black, but if she does, her face doesn't show it. After she finishes, she hands it back to me, saying nothing.

"Will you send the letter to my father? Maybe he can come for a visit."

My mother doesn't talk about my father much, but agrees to send my letter. Several weeks later I hear back from my father, saying that he will be coming for a visit in a few weeks. When he arrives in California, he talks to my mother

on the telephone and they set a date for me to meet him at a local park.

I can barely contain my excitement when the day finally dawns. My mother parks her gray Pontiac at the curb next to the park. Switching the engine off, she points to a man sitting at a picnic table. "There he is," she says. "Go say hi."

"Aren't you coming with me?" I ask, turning to look at her.

My mother picks up a book sitting on the seat cushion and says, "No, I'm going to sit here and read my book. Don't worry, I won't leave. I'll be right here all of the time you're visiting with your father."

"Why won't you come and meet him?" I ask.

"I prefer to read," my mother replies, opening her book.

As I climb out of the car and shut the door, I wonder why my mother prefers to stay in the car instead of joining us.

The man who is standing at the picnic table waves. I run over to him.

"Hi," he greets me.

"Hi," I reply, surprised by my sudden shyness. "Here's a card I made for you."

My father accepts the card, which is made of red construction paper. An arrow is attached to the front by a brass fastener. On the card, various activities are colored in crayon—one hug, two hugs, one kiss, two kisses, dance or sing. All my father has to do is spin the arrow and see where it lands. I'm supposed to respond with the corresponding activity. This seemed like a wonderful idea when I was creating the card, but now that I am expected to follow through, I feel strangely shy and tongue-twisted.

I have no memories of my father since my parents separated when I was a baby. Still, he isn't a complete stranger. In fact, looking at my father is a lot like looking in a mirror. He

has the same wavy brown hair and the gap between his two upper front teeth.

He takes great delight in playing the spinner game. Every time the arrow lands on kiss or two kisses, he eagerly demands his prize. Since having to kiss my father makes me feel uncomfortable, I jump up from the picnic table and say, "Swing me!"

I run over to the swings, pull off my sandals, then dunk my toes in the sand, which is warm by the afternoon sun. My father follows and offers to push me, adding, "I'll swing you as high as the sky!"

"Swing me to the moon," I reply.

It doesn't take long for me to overcome my shyness and enjoy spending time with my father. He teaches me to sing *Me and My Shadow*, which we are going to sing in a show. I'm not sure why we never perform our song.

One weekend, my father takes me to Tijuana, where we watch a jai li game. Another time he takes me to women's roller derby, where he seems to know *a lot* of the lady skaters who come over and greet us. I also remember a trip to the Long Beach Pike amusement park, where he snaps my picture in front of a distorted mirror.

For Halloween, my father gives me a pirate's costume. Although I have no desire to be a pirate, my ever-practical mother makes me wear the outfit anyway. I prefer to be someone feminine, such as Cinderella.

Despite my father's roller skating lady friends, he tells me that he wants to get back together with my mother. Although I'm only eight, I know that will *never* happen. When my father buys me a 45-rpm record that has *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer* on one side and *I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus* on the other side, I know that this is an unsubtle hint. I

figured out that Santa didn't exist in kindergarten, so I know that the Santa Claus in the song refers to "Daddy."

Christmas that year is like no Christmas before. My father buys me so many presents that there is no room to put all of them under the tree. I seem to remember 40 gifts in total, but perhaps this is an exaggeration. I don't remember all of the gifts, but I do remember a canvas tent, dart board, croquet set, and badminton set. Even though I'm only eight, I know that the number of gifts are excessive.

WHEN I ASKED my mother to send my letter, I was unaware that she had excellent reasons for preferring my father to remain in Georgia. Unfortunately, my mother was damned if she did send the letter and damned if she didn't. If she sent it, she was inviting trouble. If she didn't send it, then I would go through life thinking my father didn't care about me because he didn't answer. Worse, I might find out one day that she never sent my letter. She did send it, so she must have decided that meeting my father was in my best interest. This was a selfless act that only benefited me.

Although I was too young to wonder how my father paid for the gifts, my mother must have observed the numerous presents under the tree with a feeling of disquiet. She was careful about what she said about my father, but she knew from previous experience that when my father went on a spending spree, bad things followed.

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The Miracle Worker

I load platters into the dishwasher, grateful that this is the last load of dishes needing to be cleaned. Despite my misgivings, the book signing party was a success. I discovered that there was an advantage to having a lot of guests—with so many people to meet and greet, I didn't have time to feel awkward and shy. Although Cindy and Eric conspired to embarrass me by giving a tour of our "no man's land" basement, everyone on the tour was under the age of twelve, so I decided to ignore this incident. I had a more important challenge on the horizon—figuring out what to do about Eric's hyperactive behavior.

I have resisted the idea of medicating Eric for years, but his recent eye surgery has made me question the wisdom of this decision. I realize that the side-effects of Ritalin may be less harmful than Eric's numerous self-injuries. Current research supports this observation—children with ADHD are much more prone to accidents.[1]

Eric and Cindy's pediatrician recently retired, so I decide to book an appointment with Dr. Dunn, the pediatrician who we met when Eric had his eye surgery. I liked Dr. Dunn, but

equally important, Dr. Dunn saw the results of Eric's accident-prone behavior first-hand. I hope he will understand our dilemma.

The day for our appointment finally arrives. I've been looking forward to this appointment for weeks, but as Jerry and I sit in Dr. Dunn's office waiting for his arrival, my stomach is quivering.

The walls of Dr. Dunn's examination room are painted a pale gray. There is a built-in desk and a swivel chair on wheels tucked into one corner of the room. The only thing that gives the room personality is the border of Mickey Mouse wallpaper marching at chair-rail-level around the room.

Jerry and I sit on two straight-backed chairs parked next to Dr. Dunn's desk while Eric bops around the room like he is on a pogo stick. I tell myself that it is a good thing that Eric is in his usual frantic state today because it will make it easier for Dr. Dunn to make a diagnosis. In my ADHD research, I'd read that the strangeness of a doctor's office sometimes can inhibit a child's usual exuberance. Obviously, Eric isn't one of those children. His ADHD symptoms are embarrassingly obvious.

Jerry slouches in his chair, his right arm crossed over the left. He looks at his watch. Before today's appointment, we wrangled over what to do about Eric's hyperactive behavior. I explained to Jerry what I'd read in several books on ADHD —that Ritalin helped manage hyperactive behavior. Jerry hates the idea of drugging Eric as much as I do, but we feel we have no choice. How else can we prevent Eric from hurting himself? After all, we can't follow him for the rest of his life to protect him from harm. Besides, our track record in that regard is lousy. We'd both been at home when Eric nearly blinded himself in one eye.

Although both Jerry and I feel tense about the upcoming interview, Eric is as usual, happy and impulsive. He hops onto the doctor's chair and spins around in a circle, squealing gleefully, "Whee."

"That's the doctor's chair," I say. In a few quick motions, I'm up and pulling Eric off the chair, then carrying him to the examining table. "You belong up here, on the table."

Eric points to a long, triangular rip in the Mickey Mouse wallpaper right next to the table, and says, "What's this?"

"Someone tore the wallpaper."

"Did the doctor do it?"

"No"

"Who did it?"

"Perhaps one of his patients."

"You mean a kid?"

"Probably."

"That's bad," says Eric, shaking his head and running his fingers along the tear. "Did he get a time-out?"

I smile. Eric may be a high maintenance kid but his observations frequently make me laugh. "I don't know. What do you think?"

"I think he got a time-out. You'd be mad if I tore my jets," says Eric, referring to the wallpaper border of jet airplanes that lined his own bedroom.

"I wouldn't be happy."

Eric is like a butterfly, flitting from one object to another. He's always on the hunt for novelty. One moment he's studying the torn wallpaper; the next moment he's picking up Dr. Dunn's otoscope, which the doctor uses to examine the ears. Eric waves the otoscope around like it's a sparkler on the Fourth of July until Jerry, who is seated right next to the desk, reaches out and clamps a fist on his arm. The two just stare at one another until Jerry barks, "Put it down, now!"

"Why? Did it cost lots of money?" asks Eric.

"It doesn't matter how much it cost; it doesn't belong to you," I say. "If you don't put it back now, we won't order pizza tonight."

Once more I'm bribing Eric with food for good behavior. I wonder if rewarding him in this manner will have long-term negative effects as he grows older. Fortunately, Eric's current high level of activity burns off any excess calories he consumes.

I hear a sound and turn my head towards the door as Dr. Dunn strides into the room. Greeting us with a cheery, "Hi," he pulls the swivel chair out from his desk and sits down.

I smile and say, "Hi. You may remember Eric from a couple of months ago—you were on call the night that Eric had emergency eye surgery."

"Ah, yes," remarks Dr. Dunn, opening Eric's medical file.

"We're here to have Eric evaluated for ADHD," I add.

"We're hoping that you can find a way to straighten him out," says Jerry. "Eric is adopted and we don't know much about his family history. We suspect that his birth mother used alcohol and drugs when she was pregnant but there's no way to know for sure. When Eric was 10 days old, he stopped breathing for several seconds."

"What happened then?" replies Dr. Dunn, setting down his pen. He'd been writing notes on a piece of paper, but now he just listens.

"Eric spent a week in the hospital and came home with a machine to monitor his breathing."

"An apnea monitor," I offer.

Jerry continues: "All he did was cry—morning and night."

I break in. "He had chronic diarrhea and was not growing. Since his height and weight were beneath the growth curve,

the pediatrician diagnosed him with 'failure to thrive.' We took Eric to a pediatric gastroenterologist and a pediatric endocrinologist…"

"Who did a lot of tests," Jerry said. "But the results were all normal. The doctors decided that Eric wasn't growing because of the diarrhea. His body wasn't absorbing the nutrients that he needed to grow."

While Jerry talks, I hand Eric some Lego bricks in the hopes of keeping him occupied. Eric doesn't appear to be listening, but I worry that he might catch the negative drift of our conversation. I don't want Eric to feel that there is something wrong with him and that he is "bad." Throughout my life, my own impulsive behavior has been treated negatively by people around me. I don't want Eric to grow up to feeling that way about himself.

Just then, Eric picks up a red Lego brick and raps it against the wall. It isn't a loud noise but it's irritating just the same.

"Stop that!" Jerry booms.

Eric looks up. He stops momentarily. But soon he is rapping and tapping again.

"Eric!" Jerry snaps.

"Since that toy can't behave itself, it's going to have to go into time-out," I remark. Blaming the toy for the behavior instead of Eric is a trick I devised long ago to soften the hurt of negative feedback.

"It's mine!" says Eric.

Fortunately, I have brought a second line of defense. I pull out a Ninja Turtles coloring book and a box of crayons and show them to Eric. "Why don't we trade? I'll give you the crayons and coloring book and you give me the Lego toy."

"Okay."

Eric sits on the floor, his blue jean clad legs sprawled in front of him. He pulls out an orange crayon—his favorite color since he was a baby. For Halloween one year, I'd bought him orange pajamas with a toothy, leering jack-o-lantern on the top. He loved those pajamas so much that I ended up buying the same pumpkin pajamas in a succession of larger sizes over the years.

From an early age, Eric has shown a talent for art. He could draw better than I could by the time he was four—although admittedly, my skill at drawing is nil. I believe that everyone is given certain advantages and talents in life. The challenge is identifying them. Eric's advantages and talents are talking and drawing; mine are reading and writing (and talking); Jerry's advantages and talents are math, science, and a methodical mind.

We continue to talk. Dr. Dunn asks questions, which often are answered by Eric's own behavior. Does Eric have trouble sitting still? Yes, he's been jumping up and running around the room ever since we got here. Is he easily distracted? Well, he has to be continually reminded that he's supposed to be coloring. Does he interrupt and intrude on others? All the time, as you've probably noticed from his intrusions in our discussion. Does he have trouble waiting his turn? The only turn he understands is "my turn." Does he have trouble playing quietly? Absolutely, he's been singing the same song from *The Little Mermaid* since we arrived.

"I brought his last kindergarten report card," I remark when the talking lags. "It shows the progress he made over all four reporting periods. It demonstrates what we've been talking about. He was an early talker, so it's no surprise that he got straight ones in language development. But reading and math are another matter. Notice, he got straight twos in

'can name and identify letters' and 'can identify numbers.'" I pass the white tissue-thin piece of paper over to the doctor.

Dr. Dunn scans the contents. "Now let me see—how am I supposed to read this? What's the difference between a one and a two? Ah, here it is—a one means that 'the child has this skill.' A two means that 'the child needs more time to develop skills.'"

"The two items that worry me most are at the bottom of the sheet, 'exhibits self-control' and 'can listen attentively,'" I say. "My concern is that he'll never learn to recognize his letters or numbers if he can't exhibit self-control and learn to listen."

Dr. Dunn stares at the sheet of paper for a long moment, then says, "For most of the year, he did well with 'can get along with others,' but in the last quarter, he did not. Do you know why?"

"He's good at making friends but sometimes has trouble maintaining them. He gets into fights at school when his classmates tease him."

"What do the kids tease him about?"

"His size. He's the smallest kid in the class."

Dr. Dunn stands up and says, "Eric, why don't you climb up on the table and let me look at you?"

"Are you going to give me a shot?" says Eric, looking at Dr. Dunn suspiciously.

"Not now, I just want to listen to your lungs and heart."

"Will you let me listen to your heart?"

"Sure," replies Dr. Dunn.

Eric climbs onto the examination table. While Dr. Dunn listens to Eric's heart, Eric giggles. "That tickles."

Once the examination is completed, Dr. Dunn turns to us and remarks, "He seems like a healthy, happy kid."

"He is a happy kid," I reply. "For now, anyway. But I worry about his self-image. He gets teased a lot at school."

"How does he get along with his teachers?"

"There have been problems. When he was three, I had to pull him out of a preschool because the director insisted on keeping him with the infants because he wouldn't sit still. Here he was, potty-trained and speaking in sentences, and she insisted on keeping him with children in diapers. His kindergarten teacher this year is young and patient. She doesn't mind his high activity level, but even she voices concerns about how he'll do next year."

Back on the floor again, Eric has grown tired of coloring. Although he's pulls every color out of the box, he only manages to use two of them to color the page. Instead, he's using the crayons to rap, rap, rap on the tiled floor.

I continue. "My mother was a first grade teacher. She always used to say that first grade was the most important grade because children learn to read that year."

With lightning speed, Eric jumps up and cruises the room, looking for something new to divert his attention. Noticing a drawer underneath the examination table, he pulls it out. A look of gleeful delight crosses his face when the door makes a raucous, screeching sound as it slides in and out.

"Thank you for leaving the drawer alone," I say in a firm voice. Thanking him for stopping the behavior instead of scolding him for the behavior is another favorite trick of mine.

Eric stops—for a moment. But he soon forgets my instructions. Once again, he pushes and pulls on the drawer.

"Eric!" Jerry snaps. "Stop it."

Eric stops rattling the drawers, but can't resist the impulse to see what is inside. He rummages around and then pulls a blue piece of fabric out of the drawer. "What's this?"

I reply, "Something that doesn't belong to you. A hospital gown. You wore one like it when you were in the hospital."

"I don't like hospitals."

"Then put the gown back and close the drawer."

"He certainly acts hyperactive," says Dr. Dunn, smiling. I'm relieved that he seems to like Eric in spite of his antsy behavior.

"So what should we do?" I ask. "What are your recommendations?"

Dr. Dunn leans back in his chair. "Considering his early medical history, Eric is certainly at-risk for ADHD. I suggest we try him on a small dose of Ritalin twice a day, say five milligrams a day. I'll have you watch his behavior and see if you notice any improvements. But first, we'll need to run some blood tests to make sure his thyroid levels are normal." Dr. Dunn pauses, then says, "Eric, I want to explain something to you."

Although my arms still swaddle Eric, he no longer offers any resistance. Eric's body feels supple and relaxed. I let go tentatively and he stays in place.

Dr. Dunn leans forward and says. "Eric, your parents and I think you have something called ADHD. Now this isn't your fault. It doesn't mean you're bad or you're dumb. It just means that you sometimes have a hard time sitting still and paying attention. Now some kids find that if they take a pill, they can sit still longer. It's kinda like wearing glasses—some people don't see very well without them. You sometimes have trouble sitting still, which makes it hard for you to pay attention. So we want to find out if the medicine will help."

"Will I have to have a shot?"

"I won't lie to you, Eric. We will need to draw your blood for testing."

"Can I have pink medicine?" says Eric, who loves the

taste of liquid Amoxicillin, which he has taken in the past for ear infections

"No, this medicine comes in tablet form."

"Okay," he agrees. "Now can we go to Pizza Hut?"

"Yes," I said, giving Eric a hug. "But you'll need to put your crayons away first."

As we began to collect our things to leave, Dr. Dunn warns us about the side-effects of Ritalin: headaches, stomach upsets, loss of appetite, and sleeplessness. Rebound is another problem. When the medication wears off, Eric's hyperactivity might become more intense.

A few days later, we get the go-ahead from Dr. Dunn's nurse that we can start Eric on Ritalin. Although I thought that I'd grown accustomed to the idea of giving it to Eric, on the morning that I give him his first pale yellow pill, I feel terrible.

I wonder if the problem is with me and not Eric—if the real trouble is my poor parenting skills and lack of organization. Perhaps Eric patterns his behavior after my behavior. But no, I think, Eric's hyperactivity was evident during the first days that Eric lived with us.

The word miracle is overused, but that's the only word to describe how Ritalin affects Eric's behavior that first day. Within an hour of swallowing the first pill, I notice a change. My wild, unruly child can suddenly sit still and listen. Both Jerry and I notice a positive effect, but I'm curious about whether Eric is aware of the change. I want him to decide if the medicine works, not me. I remember tucking him into bed that night and asking Eric what he thinks about taking the medicine. I can still hear the wonder in his voice when he says, "You told me not to go to Catherine's house and I didn't go!" Obeying simple directions is nothing unusual for many six-year-olds, but for Eric this is rare, indeed.

I DIDN'T LEARN until months later how lucky we were to find Dr. Dunn, who was one of the few doctors in town willing to handle ADHD. Although brain scans indicate that ADHD is caused by decreased activity in the right frontal part of the brain, there are no medical tests to verify a diagnosis, so some physicians are reluctant to diagnose and treat ADHD. Instead, physicians make a clinical diagnosis based upon parental and teacher reports.

I was reluctant to start Eric on Ritalin for years because I worried that giving him a stimulant might increase his chances of substance abuse when he is older. We suspected that Eric's birth mother took drugs when she was pregnant, so I was afraid he might be more susceptible to drug addiction when he became older. At the time, there was little published research on the relationship between taking stimulants and substance abuse in later life, but a study published in 2008 found that children taking stimulants at a younger age were less likely to experience substance abuse problems as adults.[2]

The authors were unsure if their findings were due to the participants taking stimulants, or if an earlier referral for treatment and therapy decreased the rate of substance abuse. The authors also wondered if taking a stimulant at a young age might have improved brain function. No matter the cause, research suggests that giving stimulants to children does not increase their chances of becoming substance abusers. In fact, it seems to have the opposite effect. I just wish I'd known this back then.

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Amazing Disgrace

On Sunday mornings, my mother likes to sit in her pink upholstered rocking chair and read the newspaper. At some point, I always crawl up on her lap and listen while she reads the funnies to me. Invariably, I start this dialogue: "Who do you love?

"Why, you of course."

"Who do you hate?"

"No one."

"Not even your grandfather?"

"Not even my grandfather."

I am never quite sure that I believe her last answer. The stories that my mother tells of living with her grandfather are frequently sad. Her grandfather, a Bible banging Baptist minister, owned a citrus farm near Vero Beach, Florida, and my mother was expected to help. Since this was the Depression, they were "Florida cracker poor." In fact, my mother used to joke that when she was young, she was "po" not "poor." Apparently, really poor people, such as Florida crackers, don't know how to correctly pronounce the word "poor."

I grow up with no family members nearby, or even

pictures of family members, except for one photograph of my uncle B. J., with a dedication, "To Stinky." Although I see my father frequently when he first arrives in California, I see less and less of him as time passes.

One Sunday our landlords, the Linds, invite us to church and a potluck lunch. I'm excited about going and dress in my favorite lime green dress with the wide sailor collar. Mrs. Lind is the closest thing to a grandmother I've ever known. She does grandmotherly things like knit and bake yummy desserts.

I manage to behave myself through Sunday school, but during the service, I talk and squirm. At one point, my mother grabs my arm and murmurs in my ear, "You be quiet now or you're going to get a spanking."

After the service, we proceed to the cafeteria, where a long table laden with food awaits us. My mother associates cooking with life at her grandfather's, so she does as little cooking as possible. My eyes goggle when I see the piles of home-made food and I race over the table to get a better look.

I'm unaware that everyone else—even the children—is standing quietly, waiting for the pastor to give the blessing. I grab a paper plate and begin piling food upon it. Naturally, I pick mostly desserts. I'm oblivious to the crowd of people watching me, shocked by my rude behavior. My mother, who is standing nearby chatting with the Linds, suddenly realizes that people are staring as I help myself to the food. She strides over to me and grabs my arm, saying, "Sandra, you need to wait for the pastor to bless the food."

The people at the church we occasionally attend don't pray before a meal. I've never heard of such a thing. I look up and notice that everyone is staring at me. I'm puzzled by their behavior but obediently follow my mother back to where the Linds are standing.

One would think that I would now have the good sense to behave myself for the rest of the afternoon. And I did—according to my way of thinking. As we wait for the pastor to appear, an elderly lady comes over to Mrs. Lind and starts talking. I notice that she calls Mrs. Lind by her first name, "Bertha." My mother always calls her "Mrs. Lind" so hearing her called by her first name intrigues me.

"Bertha, I want to sit next to you," I say. After the pastor blesses the meal and it's time to eat, I'm right behind Mrs. Lind, plate in hand.

We sit down for supper at a long table. Every time Mrs. Lind tries to speak to her husband or the person across the table, I interrupt with "Bertha." I can feel my mother kicking me under the table, her sign that I should stop whatever I'm doing. But the novelty of the situation has excited me beyond the point of no return. I can't stop interrupting, can't stop calling Mrs. Lind, "Bertha."

At last, my mother stands up and says, "Sandra I want you to come with me." I follow her to ladies' rest room where my mother wallops my bottom. She doesn't spank me frequently, but that day she really wallops me.

The ride back in the car is strained. No one says a word. My mother is mortified at my behavior. The Linds are too polite to criticize me but I can tell that they're upset. I'm a people pleaser and desperately want the Linds to approve of me. I feel terrible that I have embarrassed and disappointed the Linds and my mother.

When we arrive home, my mother sits me down and tells me that it is considered rude for a child to call a woman of Mrs. Lind's age by her first name. I'm shocked. I call my friend Carol's grandparents by their first name. Why can't I call Mrs. Lind by her first name? Because Carol's grandparents like being called by their first name, my mother replies.

But Mrs. Lind prefers to be called by her last name. It's a sign of respect. It's polite.

Although I didn't understand rudeness at that age, I sure understood a swat to my butt.

I WAS ACCUSTOMED to my mother giving me "the look" or kicking me under the table as a way of reminding me to mind my manners, but that Sunday, I was oblivious to the signals. New situations excited me and sometimes triggered impulsive, outlandish behavior. No matter how hard I tried to control my actions, I was unable to prevent similar situations from occurring. Sadly, I still have a tendency to behave impulsively when I'm feeling stressed.

Behavior is a complex interaction of nature and nurture. Without doubt, environment played a role in my outlandish behavior that day. The early and untimely death of my mother's parents meant that I grew up without grandparents to teach me about boundaries and proper respect for elders. My mother, still bitter about the way she was treated by her fire and brimstone Baptist minister grandfather, rarely took me to church. I had no idea that I needed to wait for the pastor's blessing.

That said, my hyperactive and intrusive behavior was typical of ADHD. Despite my atrocious manners, my eagerness to try the food could be viewed as novelty seeking. In ancient times, individuals who were aggressive in their hunt for food and willing to try new ones, were less likely to starve to death, so these genes have continued for further generations. Unfortunately, in today's nuanced society, my behavior was considered rude and greedy.

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Back-to-School Night

Ritalin is an appetite depressant and since Eric is small for his age, Dr. Dunn doesn't want Eric taking Ritalin unless it is needed. After a week's trial in the summer to test its effectiveness, Eric stops taking Ritalin until a week before school starts in the fall.

I know he's far behind his classmates but I'm hopeful that his newfound ability to pay attention will help him catch up. If Eric is going to succeed in first grade, he needs to learn how to read. Almost everything children do in school is dependent on their ability to read.

I had trouble with reading in first grade also. I remembered the shame of being in the slowest reading group—and having my classmates stare and smirk as I groped to understand the words on the page. Fortunately, my mother was a first grade teacher, so the summer between first and second grade, she worked with me to improve my reading skills. By second grade, I'd caught up with my classmates. By third grade, I was the best reader in the class. Recalling my quick improvement, I'm hoping that Eric will do the same.

When back to school night rolls around several weeks later, Jerry and I leave the kids with a babysitter and drive to the school. I am excited to learn how Eric is doing. I've had several brief phone conversations with his teacher, Mrs. Sweet, to hear how he is doing on Ritalin. Her reports have been positive, but I'm hoping to get more details tonight.

The school is small, so there aren't enough classrooms to allow for two separate first and second grades. In years when first and second grade enrollment is high, the overflow of students is combined into a "split" classroom. One year, Cindy was a first grader in Mrs. Sweet's "split" first and second. The next year, Cindy was a second grader in her split classroom. Both years I was room mother and troop leader for the Brownies. My mother had to attend school functions as part of her job as a first grade teacher, so she refused to get involved with my school. I go to the opposite extreme.

Now it's Eric's turn to be a student in Mrs. Sweet's cozy and comfortable classroom. Cheerful pictures and posters splash color on the walls. A mobile of the solar system hangs from the ceiling. The desks are clustered in groups of four, with the fronts facing one another. I often felt isolated sitting at the back of the classroom, so I can see the advantage of Mrs. Sweet's grouping. Still, Cindy would much rather talk than do her work, so I used to worry about the distractions of this seating arrangement. Clustering desks encourages talking but also copying between neighbors, which is now considered a good thing and known as peer teaching.

Mrs. Sweet is chatting with parents when we enter the room. Glancing at us briefly, she smiles, then turns and continues talking. Youngish and pretty, she has short brown hair and warm brown eyes to match.

Jerry and I browse the room, looking for Eric's work

stapled on the wall. Noticing a group of pictures, I wander over and examine them. I see a picture of a Ninja Turtle that Eric has drawn. Although he struggles with recognizing letters and words, he's an excellent artist. I study the intricate details of Donitello's costume, shield, and sword, noticing that amidst the curlicues of his belt, Eric has printed a backwards letter "D."

Parents flow in and out of the classroom like a slowly moving river. They meander over to the bulletin board to examine the progress of the "Reading Train," an incentive program that awards colored paper trains for time spent reading at home. The children tape these trains in a line around the room, reminiscent of a wallpaper border. When the line of trains completes a circle, the class has a pizza party. My eyes follow the line of trains, looking for, and finding, Eric's name frequently. Although Eric can't read on his own yet, he loves having stories read to him.

Eric has attended morning preschool since he was one, so I've had plenty of opportunity to talk to teachers about him in the past. Some teachers are more tactful than others, but all have commented on his inability to sit still and listen at story time. At church, I've been afraid to leave him with the teacher at Sunday school, so I always volunteered to help teach. But lately, thanks to Ritalin, I'm able to attend church services without worrying about Eric's behavior in Sunday school. The odd thing about the medication is that it doesn't just calm Eric's restlessness—it changes his attitude towards life. He now seems more self-confident and happier.

Eric is bright and articulate. His strong verbal skills show that he's intelligent. If teachers graded on his oral language skills, he'd be an A student. He has an inquisitive mind and asks questions that show complex reasoning.

The parents ahead us of say good-by and move on. Now it's our time to talk. I ask how Eric is doing. Wonderfully, Mrs. Sweet says. He's such a hard worker. He's courteous, helpful, and a good listener.

"Is Eric showing progress with learning the alphabet?" I ask, pointing to the backwards "D" on Eric's art project.

"All students reverse their letters when they're learning to read but they soon learn the difference," Mrs. Sweet replies. "We just need to be patient and give Eric time. The important thing is that Eric is making progress and that he feels good about himself."

Remembering how bad I felt about myself in the second grade, I can't argue with this. Noticing other parents are waiting to speak with the teacher, we say good-bye to Mrs. Sweet, then head for Cindy's classroom, a relocatable which the students call, *The Little House on the Prairie*, in honor of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books that are the cornerstone of the third grade curriculum. I'm intrigued by the idea of basing the year's course work on a book series, but I'm concerned that Cindy won't be able to keep up with the reading. Although she easily mastered the code that translated sounds into the alphabet by the time she was in kindergarten, her reading speed and comprehension lag behind these days.

We pass through the halls, saying hello to parents who we haven't seen in months, then step outside the building. Then we follow a well-worn path that veers to the right. The stairs and door to Cindy's classroom are located about twenty feet away.

Inside are a dozen parents, sitting uneasily at the third grade desks. I utter a loud and enthusiastic hello to Jen, my Brownie co-leader. A woman standing next to the chalkboard turns and frowns. Mrs. Stern, I presume. Although I've seen her at school events, I've never actually spoken to her. She's

short and stout, and reminds me of a hen—the kind whose feathers are easily ruffled.

The desks are arranged in the classic style of my childhood—four long rows. I find Cindy's name at the back of the second row and glance at Jerry. He motions for me to sit down, indicating that he'll stand.

When the classroom is nearly full, Mrs. Stern steps forward. "Welcome back to school. My name is Mrs. Stern. I'm glad to see a lot of familiar faces here. As some of you already know, I've been teaching here for thirty years. I've taught older brothers and sisters of this year's students—and even a few of you parents."

I shift in my chair uneasily, noticing a poster with "classroom rules" that is given prominent display. There's a good citizenship roll next to the list with the name of each student neatly printed on it. Remembering Mrs. Black, and her citizenship roll, I feel a strong impulse to flee.

I realize that I'm not paying attention—that I've been thinking of my own childhood difficulties in school instead of Cindy's. What is it that Mrs. Stern has just said—that this is the worse class that she's taught in thirty years? Surely, she can't have said that.

"Never, in all my years of teaching, have I seen a class so poorly prepared for the third grade as this one. Most of your children can't read, can't spell, can't even do basic arithmetic. For years, I've centered all of my lessons around the *Little House on the Prairie* series. But this year, only a few students appear ready to read the books."

Cindy doesn't have the necessary skills to read the *Little House* books on her own, I think. I've been wondering and worrying about how she's going to keep up with this class for months. Apparently, Cindy isn't the only student lagging behind.

Mrs. Stern takes a deep breath and continues, "That's bad enough—but then there's the talking out of turn! I've never seen so many discipline problems in one class. No one raises his hand before speaking. No one listens when I talk. Behavior's been so bad that I've had to take away their recess."

I sit up straight, concerned about what I'm hearing. Taking away recess was a punishment I'd known as a child. And I'd hated it. I felt like saying something—didn't Mrs. Stern realize that children needed a chance to go outside and play? That physical exercise releases feel-good endorphins in the brain? I glance about, wishing someone would complain. Jerry, maybe? I try to make eye contact with him but he doesn't look my way. My gaze shifts, scanning the faces of the other parents. I see that Jen looks very upset—as she should be—since I knew that her daughter is still reading at a first grade level.

"I have to tell you that the past weeks have been stressful. I am trying to get your children caught up to third grade level but there's only one of me. Much of my time is spent disciplining instead of teaching." She stops momentarily and takes another gulp of air. "Which isn't to say that the children are bad. It's just that I spend so much time on behavior issues that I do not have a lot of time to work on learning fundamentals, such as reading and arithmetic."

I sit there, trying to assess what Mrs. Stern is saying. Is Cindy one of the behavior issues she is talking about? I know that Cindy can be impulsive, talkative, and downright difficult at times. She doesn't always pay attention. Even positive and patient Mrs. Sweet gave Cindy twos in citizenship.

Although Mrs. Stern never mentions Mrs. Sweet's name, she is criticizing her teaching methods nonetheless. Since Mrs. Sweet has only been at the school for two years, this is the first time that Mrs. Stern has come up against Mrs.

Sweet's students. Are Mrs. Stern's complaints simply a clashing of old teaching methods versus new? After all, Mrs. Sweet is young and energetic. She doesn't feel the need to control her classroom with an iron fist as more traditional teachers do.

Mrs. Sweet teaches with the whole language approach to reading. I don't know much about whole language theory, but I do know this: Cindy never brought work home that included weekly spelling tests or phonics drills. I remember voicing concerns about Cindy's poor reading and spelling skills to Mrs. Sweet, but she said not to worry—that good reading and spelling will come naturally. Teaching reading through phonics drills takes the fun out of learning.

I'm all in favor of making school fun. Who isn't? Why make kids miserable in school if they don't have to be? Still, I have misgivings. For preschool, Cindy attended a Montessori school where she learned how to recognize and write the letters of the alphabet. By kindergarten, her reading skills had progressed to the point that I remember her asking me why the words "cook" and "kitchen" started with different letters of the alphabet when the sound was the same. Why has Cindy made so little progress since then?

Mrs. Stern continues, "If any of you would like to speak to me privately about your child, I'd be glad to do so. And I apologize for this most unusual back-to-school night. I debated about what I should tell you tonight for days—and finally decided that it had to be the truth."

Mrs. Stern dismisses us a few minutes later. As my feet clatter down the wooden steps, I am grateful for one thing—that I haven't volunteered to be room mother this year.

While loading the dishwasher later that night, I wonder if the whole language curriculum is part of the problem. I know that Mrs. Sweet is committed to this approach and assume

that the theory has been tested and proved successful. Still, I have concerns.

YEARS LATER, I learn that my concerns about whole language were well-founded. The theory behind whole language was *not* tested. Its premise, that encouraging children to study the context of an unfamiliar word and guess at its meaning, has *not* proved successful. In 1987, the state of California adopted a whole language curriculum, rejecting phonics altogether. Seven years later, California students tied with Louisiana for last place in reading proficiency, so the state reinstated phonics instruction.[1]

Dr. Rebecca Treiman tells us that babies are natural born babblers and prefer to listen to spoken words instead of other sounds, so humans may be hard-wired for speech. She points out that Homo Sapiens have communicated with each other through sign and spoken language since the dawn of the species, but not so with written language.[2] Over time, incremental genetic changes in brain function improved our ability to speak, which facilitated cooperation and human survivability. Written language is processed in different parts of the brain and appeared much later, so evolution did not have time to prepare us to become natural readers and writers.[3]

The first written language, cuneiform, did not appear in Mesopotamia until 3,000 B.C., or 5,000 years ago. Writing has been independently invented only a handful of times due to the difficulty of encoding marks on a page (or clay tablet) into spoken words. The incremental steps of evolution needed more than 5,000 years to prepare us to become natural born readers and writers.[4]

The failure of the whole language curriculum suggests

that it is founded on an incorrect assumption. Spoken and written language are not similar artifacts. Considering the eons it took for humans to develop written language, it seems unreasonable to assume our children can intuitively understand how writing corresponds to speech. This expectation sets children up for failure. It's too bad this wasn't known back then.

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Cockeyed Optimist

The cottage that my mother and I share in Downey is located behind the main house and hidden in a grove of trees. To find our home, visitors must follow a flagstone path through dense undergrowth until they reach a grassy clearing where our small house stands. A lattice trellis encloses the front porch of the house, which is entwined with trailing honeysuckle.

One Saturday afternoon I'm sprawled on the couch and thoroughly engrossed in reading a Nancy Drew book. I'm oblivious to the heady, redolent smell of honeysuckle that wafts into the living room like a woman wearing too much perfume, nor do I hear the shuffling sound of footsteps on the gray flagstone floor outside.

Our cottage is so secluded that no one ever shows up at our door unexpectedly. And yet, that day I hear the rattling sound of someone knocking on our wooden screen door. Looking up, I'm surprised to see a policeman standing outside. I toss my book on the couch, then jump up and say, "Hi!"

"Hello," replies the policeman, who is wearing a dark

blue cap and dark blue uniform. “I need to speak to Colleen Ah…” he stops, obviously unsure of how to pronounce our last name, “Arnau.”

“It’s pronounced Arnau, like the Arno River in Italy. And don’t worry…no one can pronounce our last name correctly. I’ll go get my mom,” I say, heading to the back porch, where my mother is piling dirty clothes into a pink washing machine. When I tell her a policeman is at the front door, a startled, anxious look crosses her face. Leaving the laundry for later, my mother hurries towards the living room.

I’m bursting with curiosity to know why a policeman who can’t even pronounce our last name wants to speak to my mother. I watch as she greets the policeman and invites him inside. I’m about to plunk myself back on the couch, when my mother turns and looks at me, saying, “Sandra, you need to go outside and play. I’ll call you back when I’m finished talking to the police officer.”

I‘m shocked that my mother won’t let me sit and listen to her conversation. Several years ago, thieves stole my mother’s gray Pontiac and I had to sit at the police station and listen for hours while my mother answered questions and filled out papers. She hadn’t minded my listening then. Why was today different? Boundaries that most parents observe with their children were almost nonexistent between my mother and me, so when she sets one, I feel confused.

I decide to stay in the side yard, where I can observe the policeman’s departure. While I wait, I pick up one of the badminton rackets I received from my father last Christmas, and start batting a piece of tin foil around the yard. The feather birdies that came with the set are long gone, but I have found that a crumpled piece of tin foil scrunched into a ball makes a good substitute. I bat the tin foil around the yard

for a long time, all the while wondering what my mother and the policeman are talking about.

When the policeman leaves, I run inside and ask my mother what he wanted. My mother stands at the kitchen sink with her back to me, making it impossible for me to see her face, but I notice that her voice catches as says, "It doesn't concern you, Sandra."

When I continue to barrage my mother with questions, she turns to me and says, "Sandra, I'm not going to discuss it. Since you have so much free time on your hands, make yourself useful and set the table."

Weeks pass and I forget about the visit from the policeman. I'm too busy selling toffee covered peanuts to help pay for summer camp. The money I make is supposed to pay for horseback riding, which is not included in the camp fees. I end up selling so many toffee-covered peanuts that I'm able to pay for a second week of camp. My extraversion and curiosity about people make selling fun.

When my father first arrived in California, I saw him several times a month, but after the Christmas with too many presents, I hardly saw him at all. The last time I spoke to him was several months ago. I was playing in the yard with a friend one Saturday when my mother called me, saying that my father was on the telephone and wanted to speak with me.

"Hi," I say, holding the receiver in my right hand.

"Hi yourself. I was wondering if you want to go see the movie, *South Pacific* with me today."

"I'd love to come, but I have a friend over today," I reply, regret evident in my voice. We have the soundtrack to *South Pacific* and I listen to the music all of the time.

"How about another day?" I say.

"I'm going to be out of town for a while. I may even be

away for your birthday. But don't worry, I'll mail your present if I'm not in town."

"Okay," I say, disappointed that I won't be seeing him for my birthday. I say good-bye and set the black telephone receiver into its cradle, then return to playing with my friend.

For weeks, I rush home from school every afternoon in eager anticipation of my father's package. It never arrives. Months after the policeman's visit, my mother sits me down on the couch in the living room and tells me that my father is dead.

"What happened to him?" I ask, shocked by the news.

My mother's head is bowed, so I can't see the expression on her face, but her voice quivers. "He killed himself."

"He killed himself! Why?" I ask, stunned. Whenever I saw my father, he was always upbeat and outgoing.

"He was in jail. I guess he couldn't face the idea of spending more time in prison. He'd been in jail before. That's why you didn't see him for so many years. He was in jail." My mother lifts her face and gazes at me intently. I notice that the eyelids above her cornflower blue eyes are red and puffy; tears streak her cheeks.

I rise from the couch and cross the room, retrieving a box of tissues from the end table nearby. Sitting down again, I pull several tissues from the box and hand them to my mother. She dabs the tears on her face dry and continues, "I didn't know if I should lie or tell you the truth. I finally decided that I had to be honest. You'd find out some day."

"Why was he in jail?" I ask. Although I love reading about Nancy Drew's adventures in tracking down criminals, finding out that my own father was a crook comes as a nasty surprise.

"For forgery."

"What's forgery?"

"He signed his name on a check that wasn't his."

"What does that mean?"

"He stole some money," says my mother, looking away from me.

I feel my chest tighten as I try to make sense of my mother's words.

"Is that how he got the money for the Christmas presents?"

My mother sighs, "Yes."

"How did he die?"

"He hung himself with his belt," my mother replies, her voice cracking at the word "belt."

The idea that my father hung himself is so ghastly that I don't know what to say. Although I didn't know my father that well, I'm sad that I'll never see him again.

My mother takes my hands and grasps them tightly. "You must promise me that you will never ever tell anyone that your father died in prison. If people ask, tell them that your father died in a car accident. Do you promise?"

"Sure," I reply.

"This is important. Repeat after me…I will never ever tell anyone that my father died in jail and that he killed himself."

"I will never ever tell anyone that my father died in jail and that he killed himself," I repeat. For years, I tell the lie about my father dying in a car accident. I never reveal the truth until after my mother's death.

Learning that my father is dead makes me feel sad, so I head for the avocado grove and my tree perch. Nestled high on a branch where no one can see me, I watch the afternoon breeze gently ruffle the deep green leaves on the trees. Although I feel depressed today, I know that this mood will soon pass. I'm like Nellie, in the movie, *South Pacific,* who sings the song, *Cockeyed Optimist*.

The movie, *South Pacific*, reminds me of the last time I talked with my father, when he offered to take me to see the movie. Now I wish I'd said yes. Would we have sung *Cockeyed Optimist* on the drive home? We often sang while we were in the car.

When school ends several months later, my report card shows that my grades have taken a nosedive. Although I'm only ten, I understand that my father's death has adversely affected my concentration in school. No doubt, this is a response to the shock of losing him, but even more so, a reaction to my mother's intense melancholy after his death.

DURING AN ERA when men were expected to be the sole wage earner, my father never contributed any financial support, leaving my mother solely responsible for my care. Fortunately, she had a college degree, so she was able to find work as a teacher, which saved me from growing up in poverty.

My mother prided herself on her intelligence, so her disastrous choice of a spouse must have mortified her. Although she had numerous boyfriends over the years, she never expressed any interest in remarrying. Trusting herself to make a wise decision, much less trusting another man, was a hurdle she could not overcome.

Evolutionary psychologists would call my father a cheater, or free rider, someone who preferred to steal from others instead of contributing to the community. Society would devolve into anarchy if cheaters were allowed to run rampant, so laws and a criminal justice system were established to punish them.

While perusing a genealogical website, I came across my

father's name in the Georgia Register of Convicts. On January 24,1949, five months before my parent's marriage, my father was convicted of six counts of forgery and given probation. Then, on December 8, 1952, my father was convicted of sixty counts of forgery and was given a three-to five-year jail sentence. I found the sixty counts of forgery disturbing. He should have known that he could never get away with so many unlawful acts.

My father's criminal behavior makes me to wonder if he had ADHD. I remember him as a charming extravert who disconnected the speedometer on his car, so police could not tell that he was speeding. I didn't understand how this helped him escape detection at the time and still don't. His numerous forgery offenses suggest that he was an impulsive dare devil and lacked foresight and a moral compass. ADHD related behavior can offer benefits if wisely managed; however, differences in executive function can lead to anti-social behavior.

Prison studies show that inmates have a high rate of ADHD, ranging from 24% to 67%, depending on the population and the way ADHD was defined. [1]The frequency of adult ADHD in the general population is under 5 percent.[2]

If I'd been living in an inner-city ghetto when my father died, I'm sure that my father's death would have been much harder on me. I spent some unhappy times when we lived in Downey, but I don't remember the place with sadness. Instead, I think of the ginkgo tree and my perch in the avocado grove. I recall the taste of sour kumquats, pomegranates, guavas, and the four kinds of apples on the grafted apple tree. It really was a Garden of Eden that served to protect me from my parents' frailties.

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Blind Juggler

When we return from back to school night, Jerry heads for the family room to watch TV while I stay in the kitchen to clean the dishes left from dinner. As I load the dishwasher, I ponder what Mrs. Stern said. I'm shocked by the pessimistic tone of her comments and worry that they could have a negative effect on Cindy. Remembering how Mrs. Black lashed out at me, I fear that Mrs. Stern might lash out at my daughter. I know all too well that she can be hyperactive, impulsive, and distractible.

I have my conference with the teacher a few days after. Although Mrs. Stern assures me that Cindy isn't a problem, she complains about how fast Cindy talks. "Why, I can't understand half of the things she says."

"I sometimes have trouble understanding what Cindy is saying," I admit. "She does speak fast. She didn't start talking until she was three and mispronounced some of her words. For example, she said, 'Tubella' instead of Cinderella."

Mrs. Stern runs a stubby finger along the roll until she finds Cindy's name. "According to my records, she is failing in arithmetic and spelling."

"Really," I say, surprised. "Mrs. Sweet didn't give failing grades. I always wondered why not."

"We're not supposed to give students failing grades because they are considered bad for self-esteem. What nonsense! How can students learn and improve if teachers don't give them low grades? Why, I can tell you from decades of teaching that a bad grade is a much better motivator than constant praise."

"I've wondered the same thing," I say. "What message are we sending to children when we praise them for everything… including work that is not done well?"

"Exactly," replies Mrs. Stern.

"Why is Cindy failing? Is it because she doesn't understand the work? Do you think that she could have a learning disability?"

"Proper spelling wasn't emphasized in Cindy's previous class. Apparently, children are supposed to learn proper spelling through osmosis," says Mrs. Stern, scrunching her mouth into a grimace. "Unfortunately, I haven't had time to work with Cindy as I should. Most of my time is spent trying to manage several students with behavior problems.

"I'm concerned that the children aren't getting recess," I add. "The weather is nice here for such a short time. I think it's important that they go out and play. As a matter of fact, I'd be happy to come over after lunch and help you out…"

"We're not having recess until the children are caught up," Mrs. Stern snaps.

Which is never going to happen, I think. The problem with our small school is that there is no choice of teachers and no way to separate difficult children into different classrooms. Cindy will be in this "problem" class until she moves to middle school—and that won't happen for another four years.

As I walk home after my conference, I notice that the leaves on the tall elms that line the road are beginning to turn yellow. Fall is my favorite time of year, although I am dreading what follows—winter, which seems to last forever in the Midwest.

What should I do? How is Cindy going to succeed in a class that requires her to read a book that is beyond her reading ability—and that of many of her classmates? Mrs. Stern appears set in her ways—it seems unlikely that she will adapt her curriculum to her students' abilities.

When I dropped out of college decades ago, I vowed to never return. I reasoned that a college degree was unnecessary since I planned to write novels. Of course, this was a rationalization. Sitting in a classroom for long periods of time made me feel antsy, so I preferred to learn through experience. For example, I found sitting in French class and memorizing verb declensions boring, but taking a job as a nanny for a French family in Paris was fun.

Cindy and Eric have trouble sitting for long periods as I did, so I worry that they will experience similar problems. I know from personal experience that most teachers prefer students who are quiet and compliant—and Mrs. Stern seems to fall into that category.

I could transfer Cindy to another school, but then she'd have to adjust to a new teacher and a new set of students in the middle of the school year. Finally, I decide to ask Cindy what *she* thinks of transferring to another school and receive a surprisingly positive response. She's in favor of attending a new school. Of course, this shouldn't come as a surprise. Mrs. Stern seems overwhelmed and unable to deal with her class in a positive and proactive fashion.

I want Cindy to have a better attitude towards school than I had. So, I start calling the principals of other schools in the

district to see if I can get her into a different third grade class.

After many calls and refusals, I find a principal who is willing to accept Cindy. The class has only 16 students and a fulltime paraprofessional, so Cindy will have more teacher time. Within two weeks, Cindy is attending the new school.

Always the optimist, I look at the change in a positive way. Although I now have to drive Cindy to and from school every day, she's excited about her new class. I like her teacher, Mr. O'Brien, and so does Cindy. An extravert, she enjoys having new classmates.

I tell myself that I can relax. Eric is on Ritalin and doing well in school. Of course, he's being taught with the same methods as Cindy, but I put this thought out of my mind. I can only juggle a few problems at a time.

When it's time for parent teacher conferences, we decide to visit Eric's school first since it's the closest. Mrs. Sweet is glowing in her praise of Eric, stating that he's a model student and making good progress.

I say, "Eric still doesn't recognize all of the letters of the alphabet. I've tried working with him, but he really struggles."

"Eric is such a hard worker. He's doing really well. We just have to be patient," Mrs. Sweet assures me.

I'm not convinced. Perhaps it's my maternal instinct in overdrive, but I can't help feeling that Mrs. Sweet is being unrealistic. I wonder if he might have a learning disability and if his medication helps him to learn. Unfortunately, there are several parents behind us waiting to talk to Mrs. Sweet, so there's no time to discuss this further.

We hurry out of the building, collecting the kids from the playground on the way to the van. Once everyone is settled

and seatbelts are fastened, Jerry sets a course for Cindy's school.

We arrive at the school with adrenalin pumping. As we walk into Mr. O'Brien's classroom, I glance at the clock facing us. Conferences end in fifteen minutes. Several parents are already in line to talk to Mr. O'Brien, which gives us time to catch our breath. Finally, it's our turn. He smiles and asks us to sit down.

That's when the other shoe drops. Mr. O'Brien tells us that he thinks that Cindy might have ADHD—then hands us a questionnaire to fill out. He also suggests that we see a physician about having Cindy put on Ritalin.

As Jerry guides the van home, I notice his hands are clenched tightly on the steering wheel. He looks upset. I can't help feeling guilty. When Jerry and I first started dating, he said he wanted a big family with six children. Endometriosis prevented me from getting pregnant, so he enthusiastically agreed to adoption. He could have blamed me for my infertility and objected to raising "other people's children," but he never did. I will always love him for that.

I'm grateful to the birth mothers who gave up Cindy and Eric, so we could adopt them. I could not love them more if they had grown in my womb. Both adoptions were "closed," meaning that we never met the birth parents and were given little information about them.

The dearth of family history leaves me feeling like a blind juggler at times. I am always trying to guess the velocity and location of the balls, but since I can't see them, they are often out of my reach. If I do manage to catch one, I lose track of the other.

For example, we didn't know that Cindy had a high tolerance for pain until her eardrum burst and spilled fluid all over

her pillow. We didn't know the reason that Eric had chronic diarrhea and cried continually for the first year of his life, although his symptoms were typical of infants experiencing prenatal substance abuse. Still, it seemed unfair to blame Eric's birth mother when there was no way to know for sure. This left me wondering—were Cindy and Eric's behaviors common family traits due to heredity or was there another explanation?

Since Cindy and Eric were adopted within a few days of birth, I assumed that love and parental interaction would shape their interests and abilities. I thought that the way they were raised was the most important factor in their destiny.

NOWADAYS, I'm not so sure. Although both children were raised by a father who takes them outside to gaze at the planets as a bedtime ritual and is passionate about science, they seem only mildly interested in astronomy and science. Although both children were raised by a mother who reads to them and is passionate about language, they struggle with reading and writing.

Cindy, Eric, and I share certain personality traits, but there is no denying that in many ways, we are genetic strangers. Our brains do not process meaning and data in the same way. An affinity for puns and written language, which my mother and I share, seems to be missing in my children. I remember my mother telling me that her grandfather also was fond of puns. When served peas for dinner, he commented, "there is nothing like a good pea."

I'm determined to help my children succeed, but I can't help feeling that my job would be easier if I knew more about

their inherited strengths and weaknesses. As it is, I'm a blind juggler who is always reaching, always trying to catch those wayward, unseen balls. I live in fear that one day a ball will land on my head and knock me out.

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Roadmap

"It's time that you learn how to read a map," my mother says as she spreads a map of California on the dining room table. "I'm going to need a navigator tomorrow."

"That looks hard," I reply. Learning to read a map on the night before we leave for Sequoia National Park is the last thing I want to do. We spent the entire day washing clothes and packing for the trip.

"Think of yourself as Nancy Drew. The gold lines represent roads that lead to clues, which are towns that will help us find our way."

The words "Nancy Drew" and "clues" pique my attention and offer an incentive that my ten-year-old brain is unable to resist. I squint at the folded paper, which is crisscrossed with lines and tiny writing.

"Why is some of the map colored in green?"

"Good question." My mother picks up her cigarette from the ashtray, takes a deep whiff, then blows a plume of smoke into the air. "The green color designates National Forest areas. See the shaded areas in the green section?"

"Yes."

"The shaded area represents mountains."

"And the blue areas represent lakes?"

"Right."

My mother points to a line on the map, "We take the freeway through LA and continue driving for an hour or so. The town of Wheeler Ridge is our first clue. That's where we need to turn onto Interstate 99 that leads to Bakersfield. I need you to read the road signs and warn me when we get to Wheeler Ridge."

"Okay,"

My mother takes a red pencil and marks our route. "Once we reach Bakersfield, we need to turn onto another road, Highway 65. From there, you need to keep an eye for signs directing us to the park."

Once the map reading lesson is finished, my mother folds it neatly and sticks it into her large purse. That night, I'm so excited about the upcoming trip that I have trouble sleeping.

I'm unsure if my mother asked me keep track of our location on the map because she needed my help, or if she just wanted to give me something to do on the long drive. I *am* sure that using the metaphor of Nancy Drew searching for clues was genius. Pointing out highway signs became a game that made the long drive less tedious. It taught me to be observant.

We stop for lunch at McDonald's in Fresno where I have a burger, fries, and strawberry milk shake. When we finish our meal, my mother lights a cigarette and inhales deeply.

"I wish Cara could have come." I say. My mother had invited my best friend Cara.

My mother exhales a cloud of smoke, saying, "Me too."

"Why did her dad say no?"

My mother grimaces. "Because Cara's dad said it wasn't

safe for a single woman to go camping with just a couple of kids."

Like other adult criticisms of my mother's behavior, this makes no sense at the time. It never occurs to me that a single woman camping with a child might be vulnerable to predators, human or animal.

Of course, Cara's dad probably would have disapproved of her taking a correspondence course in technical writing also. My mother snapped out of her melancholy over my father's death by diverting her sadness to a new interest, learning to be a technical writer. For months, she sat at the dining table and pecked at the keys of her green Remington Rand typewriter. Peck, peck, peck. I thought she'd never stop. Her continual pecking reminded me of our white parakeet, who my mother named Al Bino (pun intended), and the bird's constant pecking at seed.

After ten years of teaching, my mother called it quits. She loved working with children, but she didn't like her classroom, a partitioned-off space in a corner of the cafeteria. Trying to teach when students were eating in the cafeteria was an impossible task.

She found district politics equally annoying. When the school board fired the superintendent, he set up his office in a broom closet and sued the district to get his job back. Nobody knew who was really in charge for months. At the end of the term, my mother terminated her contract with the school district and cashed out the $2,000 in her retirement fund. This money was all she had until she found a new position. Since she was seeking a position in a field dominated by men, she must have known that her chances of finding a job were slim.

My mother stubs out her cigarette and says, "We better get moving. If we don't, we'll be pitching the tent in the dark."

It's late afternoon when we arrive. Our campground is located in a flat stretch of land surrounded by towering trees.

I help my mother unload the car, then watch her struggle to light our Coleman stove.

"Why won't the damn thing light?" she says, then makes an oft-repeated joke. "I must not be using the right swear word."

Once the stove is lighted, she says "Would you look in the box of food and find the beef stew?"

"Sure."

At home, I wouldn't consider canned stew a treat but eating it at a picnic table in the middle of a sequoia forest adds unexpected flavor. When we finish our meal, my mother says, "Now help me put up the tent."

We struggle to raise the heavy canvas tent, which my father gave me for Christmas several years back. Although the tent was set up in the backyard for play purposes, we have never actually slept in it.

I struggle to fall asleep on the hard, rocky ground, but eventually doze off. I'm awakened the next morning when my mother pokes her head in the tent and says, "Get up sleepyhead. We had visitors last night!"

I crawl out of the tent and find my mother picking up trash around the campsite. Recognizing a chewed box that once contained blueberry pancake batter, I ask, "What happened?"

"The animals ate our food," says my mother as she picks up a chewed bread wrapper from the ground.

"What kind of animal?"

"The people in the next campsite said that it was probably a raccoon. If we don't want wildlife to get our food, we need to keep it in the trunk of the car at night."

"So what do we do for breakfast?"

"We're going to splurge and eat at the lodge. Later, we can go to the camp store and buy more food."

After breakfast, we stop at the nature center. I soon realize that even though we're on vacation, there is no way that my mother is going to let me leave the park without teaching me about the giant sequoias.

Taking my hand, she leads me to an exhibit of a giant cross-section of a tree. I can tell from the spring in her step that she is excited. She says, "Scientists can tell a tree's age by counting the rings. One ring equals one year. The width between the rings offers clues about the climate during these years. Rings that are far apart indicate ample rain, so the tree grew quickly. Rings that are close together indicate drought, so the tree grew less."

"Wow!" I say, staring at the giant wedge of what must have been a humongous tree.

My mother points to hundreds of concentric rings. "This tree was over two thousand years old when it died. That means it was alive during the time when the pharaohs ruled Egypt."

"I didn't know that trees lived so long," I reply, amazed at the tree's longevity.

After we leave the nature center, we amble over to see the General Sherman Tree, which the park brochure tells us may be the world's largest living tree. As I stand under the tree and crane my neck to see the top of the canopy, I say, "It's tree-mendous."

According to my mother, my "tree-mendous" comment was the high point of the trip. She was proud of my pun and repeated the story numerous times—far too many times.

On the drive back to our campground, the traffic moves slowly. Ahead of us, I see a mother bear and her three cubs walking along the road. A line of automobiles are parked to

the side of the road; their occupants are milling about and taking photographs. When I see that some people are walking up to the bears and offering them food, I grab the handle on my right to open the car door.

"We need to stay inside," says my mother, taking hold of my left arm.

"Why? Everyone else is getting out."

"It's not safe. Bears are wild animals and don't understand that these people mean no harm. If mama bear feels threatened, she could lash out. Trust me, you do not want to be clawed by an angry bear."

I slump into my seat. "It looks perfectly safe to me."

That night we attend a campfire talk held by park rangers and I learn that my mother was right. Visitors were supposed to stay in their cars when they encounter "bear jams." Furthermore, human food is not suitable for bears.

On the ride home back to the campground, I say, "Is bear jam a pun? I mean, Yogi Bear lives in *Jellystone Park* and he loves *jam*."

"It may be an unintentional pun. Some people don't appreciate the value of puns and make them accidentally."

"Why?"

"Can you think of any reasons yourself?"

I ponder this for a moment. "Because they don't get the joke?"

"Exactly. Very good, Sandra."

When we arrive back at the campground, I crawl into my sleeping bag without complaint. That night I'm so tired that I fall asleep without noticing the hard ground.

I'm sad to leave the park a few days later because I know that the one-on-one-time I've enjoyed with my mother will end. I don't remember her acting anxious that summer while she hunted for a job, but I do recall wondering if she would

actually get hired. Although I was only ten, I knew that technical writing was not considered a suitable job for a woman. Despite the odds against her, she was hired by Autonetics, a division of North American Aviation, which was located in Downey.

MY MOTHER MIGHT NEVER HAVE BEEN HIRED if not for the Russian launch of Sputnik in 1957. Worried that the Soviet Union might use Sputnik to initiate a nuclear attack on the U.S., Congress created the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and approved a barrage of spending for space research and development. This clash between two cold war giants became known as the "space race."[1]

Her resume from 1969 states that she began working at Autonetics, a subcontractor of the federal government, in October of 1960, where she had the following duties:

> Technical writing and editing of T.O.'s and utility manuals for the R & D phase of the SM-80 [Minuteman] Missile. Writing and editing these manuals required knowledge of electronics, computers, computer logic and inertial navigation and the ability to read blueprints and wiring diagrams. These manuals were written to military specifications governing electronic equipment.

My mother writes that she has an active "Secret" security clearance and is a widow with one minor child. My father's death offers one advantage—she no longer has to admit that she is divorced. This may have made it easier for her to attain a government security clearance. Respectable, white middle-

class women are expected to stay home and look after their husband and children during this era, but since she is a widow, she has an excuse for working.

Was my mother a risk-taking novelty seeker? Although not a physical risk taker (despite what Cara's dad said), she was a curiosity seeker. A knowledge omnivore, she was curious about everything, from politics, to science, to what made people tick. Her inquiring mind was a form of resilience. When ruminations about her father's death overwhelmed her as a child, she learned to shift her attention to succeeding in school, which allowed her to block out negative emotions. This was her creative way of adapting to a threatening environment.

My mother excelled in discipline and persistence—two traits not commonly found in people with ADHD. Proud of her success as a woman in a man's world, her superior attitude could be off-putting. Most women value personal relationships first, but not my mother. Having expended so much energy succeeding in school and the workplace meant that she had less time to develop friendships.

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Is ADHD Contagious?

Cindy and I sit in Dr. Dunn's examination room, waiting for the doctor to arrive. I watch as Cindy picks up a framed photograph of the doctor and his family sitting on the desk.

"Thank you for returning Dr. Dunn's photograph to his desk," I say, patting the seat next to me. I pull crayons and a coloring book out of my purse and add, "Come, sit down and color. Remember, if you want to go shopping for that new dress after we finish here, then you need to behave." Once again, I'm offering a reward for positive behavior.

Just then, I hear the rattle of the doorknob as the door swings open. Dr. Dunn greets us and walks into the room.

Cindy dumps the crayons and coloring book on my lap, springs out of her seat and dashes over to the picture sitting on the doctor's desk. Picking up the photograph, Cindy bombards Dr. Dunn with questions. He responds by pointing to each child in the photograph and giving names and ages.

"Which one is your favorite?" Cindy asks.

"I don't have a favorite," replies Dr. Dunn, as he gently

removes the photo from Cindy's hand and places it back on the desk. He motions for her to sit down and says, "What seems to be the problem today?"

"My brother!" Cindy replies emphatically. I laugh and notice that Dr. Dunn is trying not to smile.

"We're here for an ADHD evaluation," I respond, not wanting to get sidetracked with a discussion of Eric. I quickly describe the problems with Cindy's previous school and the decision to place her in a new school.

"What do you think of your new school?" Dr. Dunn inquires, addressing Cindy.

"I like it," says Cindy.

"She likes being the center of attention because she's a new student; however her teacher feels that her high activity levels and impulsivity may indicate that she has ADHD." I pull out the *Attention Deficit Disorders Evaluation Scale* from my purse and hand it to Dr. Dunn. "The teacher gave us this form to fill out. Mr. O'Brien filled out the second form, which is designed for teachers. The tests measure three things: if a child is inattentive, impulsive, and hyperactive."[1]

While Dr. Dunn studies the form, Cindy chews on her fingernail. She prefers to gnaw her right thumb, but it is nibbled to the quick, so she bites the nail on her index finger instead. In the hopes of distracting her, I hand back the crayons and coloring book. She opens the book and begins coloring.

Dr. Dunn studies the forms, then says, "It's impressive how close your results are to the teacher's. Although you do not always give the same response for certain questions, the overall results are very similar. I assume that you did not consult with Mr. O'Brien while you were completing the form?"

"We filled out the form independently of Mr. O'Brien," I reply.

"Then the similarity of the results seems significant."

"Mr. O'Brien also has requested that Cindy be tested for learning disabilities. We won't have the results of those tests for several weeks."

Cindy behaves nicely through the interview and the physical examination. I am about to commend her when Dr. Dunn breaks into my thoughts.

"I know that both Cindy and Eric are adopted," says Dr. Dunn. "What do you know about her family history?"

"Not much. According to the social worker, the couple came from Puerto Rico and Honduras."

"And how old was she when you adopted her?"

I start to answer, but Cindy beats me to it, replying, "Two days—they got me at the hospital. We have pictures of me in this little pink blanket!" Cindy looks at me. "Where are the pictures?"

"I don't have them," I admit.

"Mom! I told you to bring them. Sometimes you are so dumb!"

I look at her. "You are not allowed to speak to me in such a disrespectful way."

Cindy, suddenly realizing that calling me dumb might mean that she will not get to go shopping, says, "We are still going shopping!"

"We'll talk about it later."

"You *are* dumb. You can't punish me for telling the truth!"

"How would you like it if I called you dumb?" I counter. "Just because I'm an adult does not mean that you can't hurt my feelings. Besides, it is never okay to say hurtful things."

"We're still going shopping. You have to promise!"

"We'll talk about it later." I sound like a broken record, but experience has taught me that trying to reason with Cindy can make her more defiant.

"If you don't promise, I'm leaving. Right now!" As Cindy marches towards the door, I manage to grab her arm and hold her.

"You are not the boss of me!" Cindy insists, trying to break free from my grasp.

I decide to call Cindy's bluff. "Where are you planning on going? It's too far to walk home."

"Whatever!" says Cindy, apparently realizing that if she does leave, there is no place to go.

"Come sit down again," I tell her.

Cindy glares at me, but returns to her seat nevertheless.

I look at Dr. Dunn. "Although Cindy is often cheerful and cooperative, when she doesn't get her way, she can be downright difficult."

Dr. Dunn picks up his pen from the desk and writes on Cindy's chart. Then he looks up and says, "Her behavior certainly indicates that she has ADHD. Do you have any questions?"

"Yes." I pause, take a deep breath, then continue, "I've been doing a lot of ADHD research lately and I'm beginning to wonder if I have ADHD. Could Cindy and Eric have acquired their ADHD behavior from having me as a parent?"

"ADHD is often hereditary…"

"I realize that ADHD is not contagious like a cold," I say. "I know that they can't catch it from me. I'm just wondering if they are taking some of their behavior after me. I tend to be disorganized and impulsive also."

Dr. Dunn looks at me, his brown eyes steady and calm.

"You said that Cindy and Eric were very active babies. Correct?"

"Cindy was a very active, although not as hyperactive as Eric."

"If they were very active as infants it's likely that their behavior is mostly due to heredity."

"That's is reassuring," I say, letting out a sigh of relief. "Since I experienced some of the same problems as a child, their behavior is easier for me to understand. Early on, I realized that they needed structure and limits or they became unruly."

"Providing structure and limits will help Cindy and Eric manage their behavior," agrees the Doctor.

"I just wish I could get Eric to sleep more. Even as a baby he needed less sleep than me. Nowadays, he wakes up early and goes and awakens his sister, which makes her crabby, which has an overall effect of making all of us crabby."

"Having trouble sleeping is common in people with ADHD. Have you tried leaving a snack and something for him to do on the kitchen counter?"

"No, but I will. Thanks for the suggestion," I say, intrigued by Dr. Dunn's comment that insomnia is common in people with ADHD. The more I learn about ADHD, the more convinced I become that I have it. "Cindy never has trouble going to sleep. Her naps were so regular when she was a baby that I was able to write a book. In kindergarten, Cindy would come home and take a nap but Eric never took one."

Dr. Dunn leans back in his chair. "I want to run a blood test to make sure that Cindy's thyroid is functioning properly. Once we get the results back, I'll have the nurse call you. If the results are normal, you can come pick up Cindy's prescription at the front desk."

As stand to leave, I say, "While you're doing blood work,

will you check her for lead toxicity? When we first moved into the house, her bedroom had a lot of peeling paint. Since the house was built in 1925, she was probably exposed to lead-based paint."

"An excellent idea," says Dr. Dunn. "Symptoms from exposure to lead-based paint can be similar to symptoms from ADHD."

"Thank you so much!" I reply. After saying good-bye, we head for the lab. Since Cindy allows the nurse to draw blood without a whimper, I decide to take her to the mall despite her calling me "dumb."

The nurse calls the next day to say that Cindy's lab results are normal, including the test for lead toxicity. As I collect my purse and head for the car to go pick up Cindy's medication, I heave a sigh of relief. If Cindy responds to Ritalin as positively as Eric, then the turmoil that has roiled our family may finally subside.

FOR MANY YEARS, it was believed that ADHD primarily affected boys. In the last 20 years, researchers have come to realize that girls (and women) also experience ADHD, but their behaviors are different. Boys are more likely to show aggressive and disruptive symptoms, so they are referred to physicians frequently. Girls are less aggressive and more inattentive, so they are not referred to physicians as often. Although their inattention doesn't cause trouble in classrooms, these girls often struggle to keep up with schoolwork, which may lead to anxiety and depression. Robert Eme, a clinical psychologist, notes that impulsivity in girls is more often expressed through hyperverbal actions as opposed to the aggressive actions found in boys.[2]

Cindy was belligerent and defiant at times, but her behavior was never as disruptive as Eric's, so I didn't realize she had ADHD. Mrs. Sweet did report that Cindy talked a lot in class and had trouble completing her work, but I was unaware that these were classic signs of female ADHD.

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Family Portrait

"Hey Mom, let's get our picture taken with Frankenstein. Please, Mom!" I beg, twirling around in my new black and white dress. I'm proud of the frock because it comes from my mother's favorite dress shop. At twelve, I'm elated that I can wear adult clothing.

"No, Sandra. That would be too silly," my mother protests, shaking her head. Although it was her idea to visit the Buena Park Movieland Wax Museum, she is less eager to be photographed with the Boris Karloff lookalike of Frankenstein's monster.

"Oh, please, please," I cajole.

My mother glances at me and sees that I have that determined glint in my eye. She may be feeling guilty since she just told me that we'll be moving from Fullerton to Anaheim next month, which means I'll be starting junior high at a new school. This is the third time I've changed schools in two years.

"Okay," she relents. As she steps toward the Frankenstein

model, I hear the soft swish swish of her skirt rustling. A waft of Chanel Number 5 and cigarette smoke trails in her wake.

I crook my arm around Frankenstein, noting that the heavy wool jacket is scratchy against my bare forearm. Despite the recent opening of the wax museum, the coat smells musty, as if it sat in someone's attic for too long.

While we wait for our photo to develop, my mother and I tour the exhibits. I have little interest in the wax figures of silent screen legends, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, but I am fascinated by a scene from my favorite movie, *Gone With the Wind*, which includes Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh, resplendent in a green velvet dress supposedly made from the drapes in the living room at Tara. Several years ago, my mother took me to see *Gone With the Wind*, and I was totally enthralled with the movie because it brought to life the suffering of my Southern ancestors caused by the Civil War. Much of the movie takes place in Atlanta and I still have vivid memories of living in Atlanta.

By the time we finish looking at the exhibits, our photograph is ready. When my mother sees the picture, she jokes, "It's our family portrait!"

I cock my head to the side, wondering if she is implying that my father was a monster, just like Boris Karloff's portrayal of Frankenstein's monster. Knowing my mother's love of puns and double entendres, I decide that she probably is. Since his death three years ago, she has regaled me with many horror stories about my father.

As my mother steers her blue Ford Fairlane along Beach Boulevard towards home, I stare out the window. We moved to Fullerton less than a year ago, so I dread the whole process of packing and moving again. I ask, "Does our new apartment have a pool?"

"No, but it has a fireplace. And it's brand new."

"I want to stay here," I grumble.

Around the time that we move to Anaheim, Pete Seegar releases a song about houses that are boxes and made of ticky-tacky that all look the same. Seegar perfectly describes our new apartment complex. Our four-plex is one of over 20 identical apartment buildings that are spread over several blocks. It's easy to become disoriented when driving through the development because the buildings look the same, except for different paint colors and stone veneers on the façades.

Although having a fireplace is nice, I soon decide that the shag carpeting, which sheds like a Persian cat in the summer, is gross.

Around that time, my mother changes jobs. According to her resume, in January of 1962, she left Autonetics and began working for Nortronics, a subsidiary of Northrop Corporation. Her resume lists the following duties:

> Writing procurement specifications for type 3 modules of the Mark 412 Module Test Set for use in the Polaris Submarine. These specifications were written from rough engineering inputs and schematic diagrams and put into the required format for customer approval. Other writing included Periodic Evaluation, Programming Manual, and Preparation for Shipment and Storage.

I'm proud that my mother has the smarts to do a man's job, but I sometimes wish that her job took less of her time. She no longer has summers off. Since she's a woman doing a man's job, she feels compelled to impress her bosses with her hard work and productivity.

I also resent the time my mother spends with her boyfriend, Don. Previous boyfriends have been willing to let me tag along on dates occasionally, but in three years, I have

seen Don only once, when we had dinner at a restaurant. Spending evenings alone has become a common occurrence since mother started to date him. I suspect that she never came home some nights, although she insisted she arrived home after I was asleep and left the next morning before I was awake.

The stress of dealing with my mother's absenteeism and different schools didn't faze me when I was in elementary school, but when I entered the seventh grade at Fremont Junior High, my ability to adjust to change snapped, like a rubber band stretched too wide.

Suddenly, I'm expected to juggle seven different classes, with seven different teachers, and an entire school full of new classmates. The stress of having to absorb so many new sources of stimulation makes it hard for me to concentrate.

Math class is a disaster. As I sit at my desk and stare at the clock, I wonder why time always creeps by so slowly in math class. Below the clock is a neatly printed sign that reads, "Time is passing. Are you?"

As a matter of fact, I'm not passing. This is the era of *new math*, a curriculum that was so unsuccessful that it was discarded after a few years. [1]The rules of new math make no sense to me—they seem like someone's wild fantasy. Why do two negatives equal a positive? What are the differences between the commutative and associative principles? I stare at the chalkboard and try to understand the difference between the two, but I can't, which is strange since the rules of grammar and punctuation make perfect sense. Why am I so smart in one subject and dumb in another?

At twelve, I care more about being popular with the girls than being a star student. Sadly, my overtures of friendship have been ignored. I just can't pick up their lingo, which

seems to revolve around discussions of the TV show *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

Gym class is another challenge. At my old school, we talked about what we'd do in gym class when we had to undress. We were developing sexually and embarrassed about the whole process. The thought of undressing in a room full of strangers is daunting. We vowed to stick together, but at Fremont, there are no friends with who to stick together. I grow to dislike school and most of my classmates, who I call the "Free-monsters."

I change in a corner with my back to everyone. Once dressed, I face another ordeal—walking by the tangle of females who preen and primp at the mirror located next to the door. From my classmates' demure purses pop an arsenal of cosmetics—eye shadow in rainbow colors—black and brown mascara—blush and rouge. They apply these potions with brushes and foam pads on sticks. They also are expert in the fine art of brushing and ratting their hair until it stands a full three inches above their foreheads. The crowning glory is hairspray—applied so thickly that it shines like lacquer—and is sticky to the touch.

One girl douses herself with *Evening in Paris* perfume, which my mother calls "Night in a Pigpen." I am allergic to most of the perfumes—and the cloying smell of hairspray. When I walk by them standing at the mirror, I hold my breath and pray that the smell won't trigger a sneezing fit or an "epileptic sneezure," as I call it at home.

This world of makeup and hair ratting mystifies me. Although my mother dresses stylishly and considers herself too "chic" to wear Sears or Penney's clothing, the only makeup she wears is lipstick and powder "to keep my nose from getting shiny."

In gym, we learn how to bounce and jounce on the tram-

poline. By the third week of our gyrations, I manage to sprain my neck. Thus, I am given a stopwatch and told to time my classmates on various exercises. If a girl is unable to do the maneuver for a prescribed length of time, it is my job to make her repeat the exercise until she has. This gives me a wondrous feeling of power. When I walk past the gauntlet of girls stationed in front of the mirror next to the gym door, I feel less beaten down. Best of all, I no longer have to dress for gym.

When my neck improves, I discover a new malady—an injured knee that supposedly hurts when I walk. This ailment proves more useful than my injured neck because it excuses me from going to school.

I'm unsure how I do it, but somehow I manage to convince my mother and several prominent physicians that there is something terribly wrong with my knee. I point to it, claim that it is red and swollen, and they agree. I know there is nothing wrong with my knee but I am so unhappy at school that I am willing to lie to avoid it. I also enjoy the extra attention that I receive as an invalid—from my mother and the doctors.

The first doctor installs me in the hospital for an entire week of tests, then diagnoses me with gout. Since gout is a disease commonly found in old men, my mother disagrees with the diagnosis. She takes me to another specialist who sends me to another hospital for more tests. While there, my mother brings me flowers and books. The second doctor decides my problem is rheumatoid arthritis, but since there is nothing actually wrong with my knee, no medical tests ever confirm the diagnosis.

While the other girls show up at school in makeup and attend new math class, I stay at home in my pj's. My mother works and is gone during the day, but I'm good at enter-

taining myself. I read the Bronte sisters, study English history, work jigsaw puzzles, and teach myself how to type from a book. I'm still passionate about learning, I just don't want to do it at Fremont Junior High.

I also start babysitting for several families in the neighborhood. This scandalizes some of the neighbors, who tell my mother she should not allow me to babysit if I am not attending school.

A home teacher comes to our apartment and instructs me. She's an English teacher, so we skip math assignments and spend all of our time on reading and writing. As I stay home from school month after month, I grow more and more behind in math class. Eventually, I realize that I can never return to school. If I do, I know that my math teacher will flunk me.

IN THE LAST CHAPTER, I wrote that girls with ADHD may have trouble completing schoolwork and become anxious and depressed. My troubles at Fremont Junior High may be due to this problem. Thrust in a new school and knowing no one, I segued from one teacher and one classroom in elementary school to seven teachers and classrooms. This may have overwhelmed my executive function.

When I tried to make friends with the girls in my classes, I was rebuffed, perhaps because I talked too much and failed to listen. A recent study of girls with ADHD found that they had fewer friends and were more frequently the target of peer rejection and bullying, so my perception of being shunned may have been justified.[2] At the time, my mother was deeply involved with a boyfriend and away from home frequently, so my social isolation felt overwhelming.

Our stone age ancestors flourished because they were adept at managing the environment, so it should come as no surprise that modern humans become anxious when things happen that are beyond our control. Since I was unable to control my mother's emotional withdrawal and the problems I experienced at school, anxiety overcame reason. I gave up trying to adjust to my new school and made up excuses to stay home.

My avoidance behavior had one positive effect. My mother spent less time with her boyfriend and more time home with me. The negative effect of my behavior would haunt me for decades. Avoiding school undermined my academic success and ensured that I remained a dismal student despite a higher than average intelligence.

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When the Going Gets Tough

I stare at the phone sitting on my desk and command it to ring. No luck.

I hoped that Cindy's response to the medication would be as immediate and positive as Eric's, but after two weeks, neither Mr. O'Brien, Jerry, nor I, have noticed any improvement in her behavior. Dr. Dunn increased the dosage to 10 milligrams but once again, Cindy remained very active and showed little change.

Back to work, I remind myself, as I try to organize my thoughts, which are bouncing around in my head like ping pong balls in a bingo cage. I need to focus and finish critiquing this last manuscript, so I can mail the entire batch back to the editors in New York.

Brrring! The phone peals, shattering the morning quiet. I pick up the receiver and say, "Hello."

"This is Dr. Dunn."

"Thank you for calling," I say, taking a deep breath. "I'm worried about Cindy. I talked to Mr. O'Brien this morning and he says there is no improvement. She's still not

completing her work. The only change Jerry and I have noticed is that she seems a lot crankier."

"What do you mean by cranky?"

"She's much more defiant and much less compliant," I reply.

"Okay…" says Dr. Dunn, pausing momentarily. "I think we should increase her dosage to 15 milligrams."

"But how will this affect her mood?"

"Her mood should improve once we find the correct dosage. She's only been on the medication for a few weeks. We need to be patient."

"All right." I say.

"Call me in two weeks if Cindy shows no improvement."

I replace the receiver in its cradle. I'm unconvinced that increasing Cindy's dosage will improve matters, but I respect his judgment. I'm also very grateful that Dr. Dunn returns phone calls personally, instead of having his nurse relay messages.

I finish writing my critique and package the manuscripts to take to UPS. Next, I grab my keys and hurry outside to the car.

This time, there's a noticeable change in Cindy's behavior. She has trouble getting to sleep at night. The first night, Cindy comes into our bedroom numerous times, complaining and crying because she can't fall asleep.

I've always envied the ease with which Cindy can fall asleep. Even in kindergarten, Cindy would take a nap when she returned home from school. Her body seems to need more sleep than her brother Eric, who shares my own tendency towards insomnia.

The next morning, we're all bleary-eyed and cranky—except for Eric, who is just fine with only four hours of sleep. This goes on for three nights in a row, until the weekend

intervenes and Cindy doesn't take her medicine. For two blessed nights, her sleep schedule returns to normal.

When I hand Cindy her pill the next Monday morning, I feel guilty. Here I am, drugging my child and it is having an awful effect on her. I can't help thinking that I am a terrible parent for insisting that Cindy take her medicine.

Monday night we have a repeat of last week. Cindy comes into our bedroom numerous times, crying and complaining that she can't sleep. When I pick up her up at school on Tuesday afternoon, she looks as tired as I feel.

"Hi Sweetie," I say. "How did school go today?"

"Okay, I guess," she replies, stumbling as she climbs into the van.

That afternoon, Cindy is unrelenting in teasing her brother. I'm in the kitchen making dinner while they are in the family room next door playing Legos. When I hear a crash and Eric emits a loud wail, I run to the family room to see what has happened.

"She wrecked my castle," cries Eric, his face red.

"Put it back together for him," I order Cindy.

"No," says Cindy, picking up the remaining intact pieces of the castle and hurling them across the room.

Eric takes a step towards Cindy and pushes her with all of his might. Cindy barely manages to save herself from falling.

"That's it! You're both getting time-outs. Upstairs and in your rooms, *now*!"

Cindy often falls asleep while waiting for her time-out to end, but not today. Although aggression towards her brother is nothing new, Cindy seems much more irritable with the increased medication. I'm unsure of the cause—whether it's due to the higher dosage, a lack of sleep, or both.

By the time Jerry arrives home, I feel exhausted and over-

wrought. Every time I look at Cindy, I can't help feeling guilty and depressed.

That night, Cindy experiences another night of sleeplessness, which means we're up most of the night trying to settle her down. In the morning, I tell Jerry that I think we should tell Dr. Dunn that Ritalin is making Cindy's behavior worse. Jerry suggests that I talk to Mr. O'Brien before calling Dr. Dunn.

"Good idea," I say grabbing the car keys. Instead of dropping Cindy off at school, I accompany her to class, where I find Mr. O'Brien writing on the chalkboard. I hurry over to him and say, "Do you have a minute?"

When Mr. O'Brien turns and sees me, he says, "I'm glad you stopped by. I was going call you."

We wander over to a quiet corner of the classroom where we can talk privately. "How is Cindy doing?" I ask.

"She's not popping out of her seat every minute like she used to, but that's the only improvement. Otherwise, she seems gloomy and exhausted."

"The medication is giving her insomnia," I reply. "I'm tempted to call the doctor and suggest we quit giving Cindy Ritalin."

"I haven't noticed much of an improvement," agrees Mr. O'Brien.

"Thanks," I say, deciding to call Dr. Dunn as soon as I get home.

As I wait for Dr. Dunn to return my call, I worry that he will be upset that I want to stop giving Ritalin. In the past, doctors have resented my challenging their judgment. Will he be annoyed at us for giving up so quickly? After all, Cindy has been taking Ritalin for less than six weeks.

Fortunately, Dr. Dunn shows no resentment when I tell him that Jerry and I want to discontinue the medication. He

reassures me that all children are different and that Cindy's reaction to Ritalin is not unusual. He suggests that we switch Cindy to Pemoline (also called Cylert), which is another stimulant that affects the central nervous system. Dr. Dunn warns me that it may take several weeks to become effective. Unlike Ritalin, which shows immediate results, Pemoline needs to be taken for several weeks to show an effect.

"If Cindy is able to fall asleep at night, I'll see this as an improvement," I joke.

Cindy's early response to the new drug is positive. Mr. O'Brien reports that she is staying on task and getting her work done in class. Her handwriting improves. At home, Cindy seems more cheerful and less inclined to tease her brother. I breathe a sigh of relief, grateful that we have finally found a way to help Cindy succeed in school.

As weeks go by, I realize that my optimism about Cindy's positive response to Pemoline may have been premature. Although she is sleeping more, she seems tired and moody. She refuses to eat, even when I make her favorite foods. I decide to call Dr. Dunn.

Dr. Dunn suggests that we increase Cindy's dosage, but when I talk to Jerry that evening, he's against the increase. We decide to keep it as is. A week later Cindy comes down with the flu. Her recovery is slow. When she returns to school, she looks pale, depressed, and exhausted. She has lost so much weight that her clothing hangs loosely on her body, like hand-me-downs passed down from an older sister.

I'm relieved when the three-month medication check rolls around. We sit in the waiting room and wait for the nurse to call Cindy's name. After checking Cindy's weight and height, she leads us to Dr. Dunn's examination room.

A few minutes later, Dr. Dunn enters the room. He greets us and asks how Cindy's doing.

"You can see for yourself. The nurse weighed Cindy and she's lost over ten pounds in less than six months," I say.

"That's not good," says Dr. Dunn, opening Cindy's chart.

"When we talked on the phone last time, you suggested that we increase Cindy's medication, but Jerry and I decided not to do this." Once again, I'm worried that Dr. Dunn will be annoyed that we did not follow his advice. I add, "She came down with the flu a few days later. We tried to get in to see you, but you were completely booked."

"Some of Cindy's weight loss could be due to the flu," says Dr. Dunn, scanning the file. "But I agree—losing 10 pounds in six months is a problem. How has she been behaving?"

"She hardly eats. She complains a lot about feeling tired."

"Have you talked to her teacher? What does he say?"

"I talked with Mr. O'Brien yesterday. He said he's worried about her because she seems depressed."

Dr. Dunn leans back in his swivel chair and pauses, finally saying, "I think it's time to try a new medication."

"What medication do you recommend?" I ask. I'm in favor of discontinuing Pemoline, but the thought of a new medicine is daunting. I'm an optimist by nature, but after two bad experiences, I'm hesitant to try a third medicine.

"I think we should try Dexedrine. Hopefully, this will do the trick…" Dr. Dunn stops, noticing a look of distress on my face. "Have you concerns?"

"Is it unusual to have so many problems with medications? I mean, Eric had such a positive response…"

Dr. Dunn gives an understanding nod. "Finding the right medicine takes time. Every child is different. Eric had an unusually quick and positive response."

I accept the prescription form and stuff it in my purse. Once again, I feel guilty and conflicted. I want to do what is

best for Cindy, but I'm unsure about what is best. I also wonder what Jerry will say when I tell him that we will be giving Cindy a new medication.

I AM glad that Jerry and I went with our gut and did not increase Cindy's Pemoline dosage. In 2005, Abbott, the maker of Pemoline, withdrew the drug from the market because some patients experienced acute liver failure while taking the drug.[1]

Our experience with Pemoline underscores an important point—that parents know their children best. If parents feel that a drug is more harmful than helpful, they need to speak up. We were fortunate to find a pediatrician who was understanding and deferred to our wishes if we disagreed. I wish that all physicians had this attitude. Sadly, they do not.

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Evilution

I don't return to school until it restarts in the fall of 1963. Although I'm now an eighth grader, I find that I'm once again taking a class in new math. That's the bad news. The good news is that I have Mr. Miner for English.

I walk into Mr. Miner's class on the first day and find a chair next to the window. While waiting for class to start, I watch a man in a navy suit write a list of vocabulary words on the blackboard. I recognize most of the words, but a few are new. What the heck does "ablate" mean? I love words, so I'm excited at the prospect of learning new ones.

The bell rings and the man, who is tan, youngish, and sporting a crewcut, introduces himself as Mr. Miner. He moves with a wiry, athletic grace, which I will later learn is the result of teaching water skiing at the Salton Sea on weekends.

Mr. Miner hands out textbooks, then asks us to compose an essay about what we did over the summer. I write about a train ride I took on the Santa Fe Super Chief to visit my father's sister, Aunt Minnie, and her family in Osawatomie,

Kansas. At age thirteen, my mother deemed me old enough to travel by myself, from LA to Kansas, and back.

I enjoy writing the piece, but I'm horrified when I learn that we have to read our papers to the class. Mr. Miner commends my use of onomatopoeia to depict the train's rocking, back-and-forth motion, as it clatters and grinds along the track. He also likes my description of watching a nighttime thunderstorm from the rear observation car.

Mr. Miner teaches with a passionate urgency that keeps me poised on the edge of my seat. Topics that might be unbearably boring from another teacher, such as vocabulary lists, sentence diagrams, and Aristotle's plot structure, are fascinating when Mr. Miner discusses them.

I have a terrible crush on Mr. Miner, as does my classmate and new friend, Sara. Every day when school is finished, we hurry over to Mr. Miner's classroom, and offer to clean the blackboards—or any other chore he might have. Neither of us would dare show up alone, but we feel comfortable visiting him together. Afterwards, we often walk over to Sara's house, which is located a couple of blocks from school.

Sara is everything that I am not—a good student and a member of a conservative church-going family. We become best friends in spite of our differences (or perhaps because). Sara wishes for more freedom and less parental control while I wish for more guidance and parental engagement. Neither of us feels supported by our parents, so we support one another instead. Thanks to Sara, I no longer dread going to school. Having Mr. Miner as a teacher also makes school more enjoyable.

One afternoon, we're sitting on the couch in the family room at Sara's house, doing English homework. "I don't get it," I say, pointing to a sentence in my English book. "How do

we diagram this sentence: 'Yelling at the teacher is disrespectful?'"

"I think 'yelling' is a gerund, so it goes on that pedestal thingy in the subject box," replies Sara, chewing on her pen. She has blue eyes and straight brown hair, cut in a pageboy, which, thankfully, has no need of smelly hairspray to keep it in place. She also doesn't wear perfume, so I never worry about my allergies triggering an 'epileptic sneezure' when I'm around her.

"You're right! Thanks," I say, taking my pencil and writing on a lined sheet of paper. Although many of our classmates hate diagramming, Sara and I enjoy it.

We continue our homework, finally finishing. Next, I pull out my biology textbook and open it.

"I'm not doing my biology homework," Sara announces.

"Why not?" I ask, surprised. Usually, I want to quit doing homework long before Sara.

"Because we're studying *evilution*!"

I've never heard the term *evilution* before, but the emphasis on the word "evil" makes her meaning clear. I say, "We studied evolution a few weeks ago in my class. I thought it was interesting." Sara and I are taking the same biology course but we have different teachers.

"You think it's interesting that we were once monkeys?" replies Sara.

"We *evolved* from monkeys," I correct her. "And it happened a long, long time ago."

"No," says Sara, shaking her head vigorously. "We did not evolve from monkeys. God created us in his image. The Bible says so."

"It happened hundreds of thousands of years ago. Maybe even a million years ago. Long before the Bible was written."

"No!" says Sara. She ducks her head and her hair swings

forward, blocking my view of her face. “The earth is only 6,000 years old. We talked about it at church. The Bible says so.”

We don’t go to church, so I don’t know much about the Bible, but my mother has been taking me to science museums as far back as I can remember. All of the exhibits have stated the earth is millions of years old. I say, “That can’t be right. Do you remember me mentioning that we visited the La Brea Tar Pits last summer? Well, some of the animal fossils there are 40,000 years old.”

Although Southern California has many tourist sites that are hokey re-creations from history—Frontierland at Disneyland and the gold mines at Knott’s Berry Farm, come to mind—the La Brea Tar Pits are the real deal. Located in the Wilshire district of Los Angeles, the tar pits are the final resting place of numerous prehistoric animals that were trapped by naturally forming, gooey asphalt, long before we humans arrived on the scene.

“You’re wrong. And I don’t want to talk about it anymore,” says Sara, standing up from the couch. “I’m going to go help my mom in the kitchen.”

I remain in the den, ostensibly to finish my homework, but mostly to process what I’ve just heard. My mind is reeling. Some of my fondest childhood memories center around my mother taking me to places where natural history and scientific theory were explained. I remember my mother telling me that the Grand Canyon was formed millions of years ago. What Sara says doesn’t jibe with my mother—or what my biology teacher says.

When the doorbell chimes announcing my mother’s arrival to pick me up, I gather my books and dash for the front door. Usually I dawdle but today I’m anxious to leave.

I'm almost out the front door when I see Sara hurrying towards us. "I'll see you tomorrow at school," she says.

"Of course!" I answer automatically.

My mother and I walk to the car, which is parked in front of Sara's house. I wait until we're driving away when I ask, "How old is the earth?"

My mother waits as a car passes us to the left, then replies, "Well, the answer is controversial. No one knows for sure. There is no scientific way to accurately measure the age of the earth."

"Sara says that the earth is only 6,000 years old and that evolution is *evilution*. But that's not what my biology teacher says."

"My grandfather didn't believe in evolution," replies my mother as she steers the car onto the street. "He said that anything that contradicted the Bible was a sin."

"Wow. I didn't know that."

"A book came out a few years ago called *The Genesis Flood* that supposedly offered scientific proof that the earth is only 6,000 years old. The authors claimed that carbon dating of rocks is unreliable. They're wrong, of course. It's known as young earth creation theory. I imagine that the people at Sara's church subscribe to this theory."[1]

"What do I say to Sara? She got mad when I said that animals got stuck in the La Brea Tar Pits 40,000 years ago."

My mother taps against the steering wheel nervously, then says, "You're can't change beliefs founded in religious faith. I know—I tried with my grandfather. Since Sara's family attends a church that considers teaching evolution evil, you should probably avoid talking about evolution when you're around Sara."

As I stare out the car window, my mother signals that she's turning right. I'm happy to report that we're not headed

for the look-alike apartment complex. The previous summer, my mother bought a house—an impressive achievement for a woman in the 1960s. The new home is located so close to Disneyland that we can see the Matterhorn from our backyard. We replaced ticky-tacky with Disneyland kitsch. Fortunately, I did not have to switch schools since the house is in the same school district.

Although Sara and I continue to be best friends, a rift has come between us. I no longer feel that I can talk about biology class with her. Fortunately, we are much more interested in discussing Mr. Miner and certain boys in our classes.

MY EXPERIENCE with Sara tainted my viewpoint of religion for years. I mistakenly assumed that going to church entailed renouncing my belief in evolutionary theory. My mother could have explained that many people of faith also believe in evolution, but she never did. Perhaps her arguments with her grandfather about evolution made this topic a sensitive subject.

Choosing intellect over spirituality satisfied my mother's narcissistic need to feel superior, but it did not nourish her soul. When she rejected her grandfather's Christian faith, she did not replace it with another form of spirituality. Instead, she directed her energies to the study of science, which did not provide emotional and social support.

Eventually, I realize that it is possible to accept both spirituality and science. More important, I find that life offers opportunities that cannot be explained by logic or chance. The old adage about "God providing a window when he closes a door" is true.

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A House Divided

I drag the vacuum across the wall-to-wall, bordello red carpet and wish for the hundredth time that Jerry would allow me to pull up the carpeting and refinish the oak floors beneath. When we bought the house, I assumed the ugly red carpeting would be whisked away soon after we took possession of the house. After all, the appraiser wrote in her report that it had "pet stains and odors."

But no, Jerry is adamant. He will not allow me to pull up the carpeting, even though all of our friends agree with me. The carpet is nasty and should go. It's the red elephant in the room that no one finds attractive. Except Jerry.

I wonder if our disagreement about the red carpet is a proxy for my real complaint—that I'm no longer treated as an equal partner. Although I spend the most time at home and am responsible for cleaning the carpet, I'm not allowed to dispose of it. I've pointed out that hardwood floors are easier to keep clean, but he doesn't care. I can't help wondering that Jerry's refusal to let me get rid of the carpet, which ought be a trivial matter, is his way of flaunting his power over me.

I shove the vacuum into the hall closet, then close the door. Turning around, I survey the living and dining rooms. They look fit for company.

Tonight it's my turn to play hostess for a monthly sewing group that is made up of other faculty wives. All I have to do is provide coffee and a tidy living room and bathroom. Someone else brings dessert. Since I'm not getting any emotional support from Jerry these days, having women friends is critical for my well-being.

I head into the kitchen and check the clock. Jerry will be home any minute. Stepping over to the oven, I open the door. The aroma of spicy lasagna wafts towards me. Grabbing two potholders sitting on the counter, I pick up the dish of bubbling cheese, tomato sauce, and noodles and set it on the counter to cool.

Seeing Jerry's van pull up in the driveway, I dash down the backstairs and out the door. As Jerry emerges from the van, I see Cindy and Eric rollerblading down the driveway at break neck speed, racing to be first to welcome their father home.

Once we are all inside, I tell Cindy and Eric to wash their hands and sit down for dinner. A shoving match breaks out at the kitchen sink, so I order Eric to stand back and let his sister finish.

When we're seated at the table, I serve lasagna to each child. The kids continue their squirrelly behavior, giggling and kicking each other under the table. At one point, Eric accidentally kicks Jerry instead. As soon as it happens, we look at Jerry, worried about his response. Fortunately, Jerry's reproof is a mild, "Stop that!"

When dinner finishes, Eric and Cindy bound for the back door. I stop them, saying, "Before you go, you need to clear

off the kitchen counter. I have guests coming tonight, so I need the kitchen to look neat."

Eric starts to wail, but Cindy looks at her father. "We can clean up later, right?"

"You can do it later," agrees Jerry. "Go outside and have some fun."

Eric and Cindy scamper outside while Jerry moves towards the family room to watch the 5:30 news on TV. I grab Jerry by the arm and stop him. "Why did you let the kid's go outside without cleaning the counter first? You know I have guests coming tonight. We're supposed to support one another."

"You don't support me either," replies Jerry. "You're always nagging me about letting Eric stay up to watch Jay Leno at night."

"Eric shouldn't be staying up late on a school night. He gets headaches."

"The headaches are from Eric taking Ritalin, not from staying up late."

"That's not what Dr. Dunn says. Anyway, that's not the point. The point is that you should support me when I tell the kids to pick up their stuff on the counter."

"They're kids; they should be able to go out and play when the weather is nice."

"Kids need to learn responsibility. You shouldn't let Cindy avoid chores by appealing to you. That sets a bad precedent."

"Cleaning house is your job. You're the mom."

"Cleaning house is everyone's job," I reply, my voice rising. "And by the way, *you* also need to pick up your own stuff from the counter and put it away."

Jerry doesn't say anything as he pulls away from my grasp. Making no effort to clear his stuff from the counter, he

saunters towards the family room. I hear the sound from the TV blare as I load the dishwasher. While scraping baked-on residue from the lasagna dish, I wonder if Jerry is opposed to the kids removing their stuff from the counter because it means that *he* will have to remove his stuff also.

I feel sad as I wipe the table. Jerry's comment about me cleaning the house because I'm the mom rankles.

When we first married, Jerry made the coffee in the morning and occasionally served it to me in bed. We talked things over and made decisions together. He tried to please me and didn't insist on having his way all of the time.

Since I didn't start my marriage with Jerry having all the power, I'm unwilling to cede it at this late date. Jerry's refusal to take my wishes into account makes me feel exploited and disrespected. Marriage is supposed to be a partnership, not a dictatorship. I resent Jerry's lack of cooperation and fairness.

THE NEED for partners to treat one another with mutual respect may be embedded in our DNA. Evolutionary anthropologist Michael Tomasello has argued that creating collaborative and equal relationships increased human survivability. Sympathetic concern, which developed from parental care and the release of oxytocin in pregnant women, strengthened male and female bonding, increasing survival rates for offspring and the likelihood that their genes continue in future generations.[1]

Eventually, cooperation between partners evolved into kin selection. Members who supported child welfare among kin were more likely to have their relatives survive and pass familial genes to succeeding generations. For instance, when my mother and uncle went to live with their grandfather

after their parents' deaths, this was an example of kin selection.

Sadly (for women anyway), equal relationships among men and women ended with the installation of patriarchy. I'll discuss how this happened in further chapters.

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All (Wo)men Are Created Equal?

My mother and I sit on folding chairs at a long table in the cafeteria at Anaheim High School. A smell of bleach pervades the air, despite the fact that the kitchen hasn't been used in weeks. It's July and we're here to sign up for fall classes. I can hardly wait for school to begin because it means I will no longer be a Freemonster. Despite my friendship with Sara, I look back on my time in junior high as painful.

"So, what are your career plans? What are your interests?" asks Mrs. Neilson, my new high school counselor. She's heavy set with short brown hair and brown eyes. Her cat's eye glasses are studded with pearls, which match her pearl earrings, and the string of pearls around her chunky neck.

"I want to be a writer," I answer.

"That's a wonderful idea, but writing is not a stable occupation," Mrs. Neilson replies. "It's a hit or miss job."

"I decided to be a writer when I was ten," I say, unwilling to give up a dream I've cherished for so long. I look at my

mother. Her lips are pressed tightly together, as if she is afraid to say anything.

"Yes, but you need something else to fall back on. How about being a teacher?"

"No." I've known teachers all my life, so this profession strikes me as commonplace and boring.

"How about nursing? That's a good profession for a young lady."

I make a face. I've been working as a candy striper at a hospital this summer, loading test tubes of variously-colored urine into a centrifuge. Some of the samples are bloody, which is totally gross. I want nothing to do with a job that involves working with urine. I say, "If I can't be a writer, I want to be a lawyer."

Mrs. Neilson frowns as she readjusts her pearl-studded glasses. "The program for students interested in becoming lawyers requires taking a shop class. Girls aren't allowed to take shop."

"Why do I have to take shop class if I'm interested in studying law? Shop class has nothing to do with becoming a lawyer. That doesn't make sense."

Mrs. Neilson looks at my mother, silently asking her to step in and set me straight. My mother offers no help. Finally, Mrs. Neilson adds, "The legal profession is considered a male occupation, so shop is listed as a prerequisite."

"Well then, why can't girls take shop class?" I ask.

"The curriculum is set up for girls to take homemaking and boys to take shop."

"Why can't girls take shop?"

Mrs. Neilson fingers the pearls on her necklace nervously. "Because girls don't have the strength and motor skills to handle heavy and dangerous power tools. They might get hurt."

I realize that the counselor is uncomfortable and thinks I'm being impertinent, but my mother has shown me that women can do the same work as men. I say, "That doesn't make sense."

Mrs. Neilson clears her throat, then says, "Girls would create distractions."

"It's okay for girls to be a distraction in English class, but not in shop class?"

Mrs. Neilson glances at the cafeteria clock, as if willing it to speed up, so she can end our interview. "Allowing girls to take shop would create distractions and increase the rate of accidents. There are all of the dangerous power tools…"

My mother breaks in, "You have to admit that Sandra has excellent argumentative skills. I think she'd make a great lawyer."

"Oh!" says Mrs. Neilson, an idea brightening her face. "If Sandra like to argue, she can take a speech class!"

"That sounds fun," I say. I like the idea of taking a class where speech is actually encouraged.

"And typing. Why not be a secretary?" says Mrs. Neilson with a smile, relaxing now that she has found common ground. "Then you can work for lawyers."

"Why can't I be a lawyer?" I demand.

Mrs. Neilson licks her lips nervously. "The legal profession is not a good occupation for a woman. It requires going to law school and passing the bar exam. You'll have to quit your job when you get married, so studying law ends up being a waste of time and money. "

"Take the typing class," says my mother. I turn my head and notice that her pale blue eyes are as dark as the blue flame from her Zippo cigarette lighter. She doesn't have to tell me what she's thinking because her eyes only darken

when she's mad. "You'll need good typing skills for writing *or* practicing law."

Mrs. Neilson looks relieved when my mother steps in and forestalls the discussion. She probably assumes that my mother is like my friends' moms—a stay-at-home housewife. Although my family—just my mother and me—wouldn't cause much comment nowadays, back in the 1960s, we are decidedly odd. My mother is a radical—a feminist before the word is commonly used.

We say good-bye to Mrs. Neilson and exit the cafeteria. As soon as we're out of earshot, my mother says, "The nerve of that woman. She's supposed to help you choose classes for college, but instead, she insists that you take typing, so you can be a secretary. You don't need a college degree to be a typist."

"Why didn't you tell her that you are a technical writer—that would have shut her up," I say.

"What's the use?" my mother fumes. "Instead of listening to your goals and offering suggestions, she shuts you down. And she calls herself a guidance counselor. Unbelievable!"

"It's not her fault that pre-law students have to take shop—and that only boys can take shop," I say.

"No, but she doesn't have to discourage you from wanting to pursue the law. Who says a woman has to stop working when she gets married? For that matter, who says a woman has to get married at all?"

"Not you," I say, disappointed that my mother didn't challenge Mrs. Neilson. An introvert, my mother rarely asserts herself in front of strangers. She is the product of an era in which women are expected to comply and never complain about their role in society. This means that I am often the receiver of her complaints about unfair treatment.

Despite my mother's numerous boyfriends, she shows

little interest in getting married. Why should she? Unlike most women who work in the 1960s, she can afford to remain single because technical writing pays well.

ABOUT THAT TIME, my mother starts working for Astrodata Inc., located on Palais Road in Anaheim. Her resume lists the following duties:

> Writing technical manuals for digital, analog and telemetry equipment. These manuals were mainly of the commercial type, but some were written to customer and military specifications. Other writing included Acceptance Test Procedures, Specifications, Brochures and the Company Policy/Procedure Manual.

My mother works for Astrodata from 1963 through 1969, the longest time that she worked for any employer. Although she didn't make as much money as the male technical writers, she made a lot more money than most women during this era.

My mother enjoys the status and increased salary that comes with technical writing, but the job isolates her socially. She no longer "fits in" with the female secretaries, nor does she fit in with the male technical writers.

Around this time, my mother begins threatening to commit suicide. My mother had many women friends when she worked as a teacher, but nowadays, she leans on me for companionship.

HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS are no longer "mommy tracked" and

discouraged from pursuing professional fields, such as the law and medicine, but a 2017 study conducted by Pew Research found that 25% of the women polled made less money for the same work as men. Women also were less likely to be promoted to managerial positions.[1]

Before the introduction of "the pill" and reliable birth control, women often spent their younger years pregnant and caring for an increasing number of children. The division of labor by gender was understandable. Dependable contraception has made the patriarchal custom of favoring men for the best positions obsolete.

Although women were considered equal partners in hunter-gatherer tribes, they lost their status during the transition to agricultural communities, approximately 10,000 years ago. Hierarchical, patriarchal societies replaced egalitarian kinship groups.[2]

Justice is often portrayed as a blindfolded woman holding a scale, but it is only in the last century that women have received anything resembling equal rights. Little by little, women are regaining the equality they once knew in hunter-gatherer days.

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The Difficult Child

I'm cutting tomatoes and cucumbers for salad when Cindy saunters into the kitchen. She walks over to the counter and starts rummaging through a pile of clutter.

"What are you looking for?" I inquire, angling my body, so that I can watch her out of the corner of my eye. Things are perched precariously and I don't want the tottering pile of junk to come crashing to the floor like an avalanche.

"I'm looking for my Barbie," Cindy replies, as she continues to sift through school papers, sports equipment, and backpacks.

I rub the back of my neck, trying to ease the tightness in my shoulders, when I remember that I hid a book in the pile that I don't want Cindy to see. No, the book isn't the *Kama Sutra.*

As luck would have it, Cindy's picking through the debris dislodges the one item that I would prefer her *not* to see. As the book clatters onto the yellow linoleum, I pivot quickly, hoping to grab the book before she reaches it, but she is too quick.

Cindy cocks her head to the right, as she studies the cover.

She asks the question I'm dreading, "Why are you reading about a difficult child?"

I hesitate, wishing I'd left the book in the bedroom, far from my daughter's curious eyes. The book is Stanley Turecki's 1989 book, *The Difficult Child*[1]. I know I can't tell her the truth—that parenting her and her brother can be challenging.

"A friend suggested I read it." My reply is almost true. I've become much better acquainted with the reference librarian at our local library since I began researching ADHD.

That's not to say that Cindy hasn't shown great improvement in the past month since she began taking Dexedrine. Mr. O'Brien reports that she is completing *most* of her homework and her handwriting is more legible. She has gained four pounds, thanks to an increased appetite and a return to sleeping through the night.

Despite this progress, I can't help feeling gloomy. Medication may help Cindy manage her behavior in school, but by dinnertime, the effects have worn off. Cindy's ADHD behavior doesn't just reappear, it come back with a vengeance. This is known as rebound. Some doctors prescribe an evening dose of medication to counteract rebound, but since Dexedrine is an appetite depressant, and Cindy lost a lot of weight on Pemoline, this is not a viable option for Cindy.

Cindy returns to the family room while I check the pasta boiling merrily on the stove. I drain the noodles into a colander sitting in the sink, which is part of a cast-iron, white porcelain monstrosity that includes a drain board and metal cabinet doors under the sink. When we first toured the house, the realtor confessed that the 1920s sink and the 1960s Frigidaire Flair stove with burners that whisked out of sight like drawers in a dresser, were "the house's downfall" and the

reason it remained unsold for months. I reveled in the historical quirkiness of the kitchen while Jerry saw a chance to buy a home of distinction in a prestigious part of town at a rock bottom price.

"Dinner's ready," I call, as I heap red tomato sauce and Italian sausages into a serving bowl. I place the bowls of pasta and sauce on the table. Jerry is first to the table and quickly serves himself. Once Cindy and Eric are seated, I start ladling food on their plates. When I serve Cindy a helping of salad, she tries to grab the plate out of my hand.

"No salad!" says Cindy.

"You need to eat your salad, so you don't get scurvy," I say, picking up Eric's plate and putting salad on it.

"I don't want salad," Eric chimes in.

"You like ranch dressing," I say, picking up the bottle and pouring a large dollop on iceberg lettuce. Next, I lean over to pour dressing on Cindy's salad.

"I hate ranch," she says, placing her hand over her dish to stop me. The dressing is already flowing, so it spills over her knuckles. When Cindy flicks her hand back and forth, some of the dressing goes flying, landing on Jerry's shirt.

"Damn it, Sandra, now see what you've done." Jerry picks up his napkin and dabs at several spots on his shirt.

"I've done?" I say, annoyed that I'm being blamed. "All I did was try to pour salad dressing on Cindy's plate."

"And look what happened. It's your fault that we can't eat a meal in peace. Why can't you control your children?"

"My children!" I reply, my voice rising. "Marriage is a partnership. A fifty-fifty proposition. They're *our* children."

"Not when they behave like this," says Jerry, pushing his chair back and standing up. "I'm going to change my shirt."

With Jerry gone, Cindy decides to take her frustration out

on her brother by kicking him under the table, which wobbles at the slightest touch.

"Stop that, Cindy," I say.

Cindy accidentally hits a table leg, which sends the table rocking back and forth. Jerry's glass of lemonade tips and spills all over the table. I jump up and cross the room to retrieve paper towels from the dispenser located next to the sink. Unwinding several feet, I return to mop up the mess.

Jerry walks in and notices that his glass of lemonade is empty and that I am holding a mass of sodden paper towels in my right hand. Glaring at me, he says, "What happened? Why can't I leave the room for one minute without all hell breaking loose?"

"There's no use crying over spilled lemonade," I joke, trying to ease the tension. "Let me get you some more."

Although Cindy and Eric continue to tease one another through dinner, war doesn't break out until I serve rhubarb pie for dessert. Cindy can be picky about many foods, but rhubarb pie is a favorite. She gobbles her slice quickly, then notices her brother has finished only half of his pie. Leaning close to him, she grabs the remaining piece, then pops it in her mouth.

Eric begins to wail, while Cindy, her mouth as full as a chipmunk's, struggles to chew. I look to Jerry, wondering how he is reacting to this latest transgression.

"Go to your room, Cindy!" shouts Jerry, his face beet red.

Cindy stays seated as she struggles to swallow.

"Damn it, Cindy! I said go to your room!" thunders Jerry.

"That was a mean thing to do, Cindy. How would you feel if Eric stole your pie?" I say, walking over to the counter. I cut Eric a new piece and set the plate in front of him, saying. "I'm sorry Cindy took your pie. Here's a new piece."

"I don't want another piece," sobs Eric.

Cindy swallows the last of the purloined pie but makes no move to go to her room.

Jerry decides to take matters into his own hands and walks over to Cindy, forcibly removing her from her chair.

I lean over and give Eric a hug. "You don't have to eat your pie now. I'll put it on top of the fridge where Cindy can't reach it."

As I clear the table and load dishes into the dishwasher, I reflect that Turecki is right about one thing—marriages do experience stress when parents can't agree about how to handle behavior problems.

It's been said that women marry men like their fathers. Since I didn't have a father, I ended up marrying a man like my mother instead. My mother struggled with my behavior in the same way that Jerry struggled with Cindy and Eric's. My mother and Jerry were both reserved and academically oriented, so they were bewildered by unruly behavior.

I was a wild child, so I understand that Cindy and Eric are unable to control a lot of what they say and do. They might benefit from a calmer and more organized parent, but at least, I'm able to empathize with them. I also have the energy to keep up with them.

I'm determined that history will not repeat itself. I don't want my children to go through life feeling as if they are fundamentally flawed—and that the world views them as difficult and disordered.

TURECKI WRITES about the emotional and behavioral fit of a parent. Good *emotional fit* occurs when a parent enjoys the personality of a child, even though there may be some negative interactions. *Behavioral fit* refers to how a parent views

the child's actions. A parent who sees misbehavior as a deliberate effort to undermine his authority may feel that the child is taunting him and trying to make him angry. A power struggle often follows.

Geneticist Robert Plomin looks at behavior from another perspective, arguing that psychological problems, such as ADHD, should not be classified as diseases that people have or don't have. In fact, these behaviors shouldn't be called disorders at all, since these personality traits are due normal genes located on the extreme ends of the bell curve. Plomin adds that these behaviors are frequently polygenic, meaning that they are caused by multiple interacting genes. This explains why people with ADHD have a vast range of different symptoms.[2]

Although the American Psychiatry Association may have good intentions, its description of ADHD as an "attention deficit" and a "hyperactivity disorder" is outdated and creates a prejudicial effect. The words are neither neutral nor unbiased, so the description adds another burden to people who have ADHD.

The description of ADHD also misses an important point —that there are positive aspects to having ADHD. Yes, Cindy and Eric drive me nuts at times, but they are not *mother killers*, as Turecki describes in his book. Cindy and Eric's exuberance and restlessness ensure that time spent with them is often invigorating, fun, and *never* boring.

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Quarreling with Mr. Quarles

I squirm in my seat as I feel a dribble of sweat trickle down my body. Here it is, 8:30 a.m. and already I'm sweating like a bottle of iced Coca Cola on a hot day. My sleeveless wool dress, which looked and felt wonderful in the air-conditioned store, feels prickly against my skin. I long to scratch under my armpit, which feels raw and sore, but it is my first day of high school and I'm feeling inhibited.

School hasn't met in the Quonset hut for the preceding summer months, but I still smell chalk dust and sweat. The rickety building has no basement or foundation, so every time someone walks across the room, the whole building shakes. Hearing the clomping of footsteps on the outside stairs, my eyes shift to the door, hoping to find a familiar face. I already know that Sara isn't in this class because we'd compared schedules, but I'm hoping that one of the boys who I consider "cute" will be in my class. At fifteen, I am far more interested in boys than getting an education.

The bell rings announcing class. A man sitting at the desk in front of the classroom stands up, then walks over to a

podium. He's short, dark-haired, and not that much older than me, although he seems decades older since he's wearing a suit and tie.

"Good morning! My name is Mr. Quarles. Since I know that this is your first class in high school, I'd like to welcome you to Anaheim High. I hope all of you had a pleasant summer and are ready to work really hard in this class."

As Mr. Quarles talks, I study him, noticing the nervous way that he rocks the podium back and forth. His voice is a dull monotone, in keeping with his dull brown suit and tie.

He straightens the podium and lets go, saying, "We'll be reading American writers this year, starting with Nathaniel Hawthorne and ending with John Steinbeck."

That sounds promising. I'd read Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* over the summer and enjoyed it.

"Now the row of students by the door can come and collect their books," Mr. Quarles drones, pointing to a stack of books sitting on his desk. As students line up to receive their textbooks, Mr. Quarles adds, "I expect you to bring your textbooks to class every day and participate in class discussion. Be sure to keep up with your reading because pop quizzes will be given without notice. Homework will be dropped a grade level for every day that it is late. You're in high school now and I expect you to behave like adults."

I roll my eyes expressively at the girl sitting next to me as Mr. Quarles swivels his head. Whoops. He frowns and I know that he saw me making a face. Once the textbooks are passed out, Mr. Quarles returns to the podium, this time sitting on the top of his desk. He clears his throat several times and says, "Some of the American writers we'll be reading in this class are world-renowned. A few have even won the Nobel Prize, a great honor. Of course, none of you have ever heard of these authors. You don't even know what the Noble Prize is."

My uncle B. J., an English teacher, stayed with us over the summer while he was house and job hunting. His wife joined him about a month ago once their house was sold. After ten years of enduring the Midwestern deep freeze, they finally decided to move to California. Since my mom had to go to work each day, Uncle B. J. and I would talk about writers and books all day long. I know what American authors have won the Noble Prize and when.

"There's only one woman who has ever won the Noble Prize for literature. None of you know her name," says Mr. Quarles as he rocks the podium back and forth.

I resent Mr. Quarles's superior attitude. He is making assumptions about us—or at least me—that are unfounded. I wave my hand frantically, hoping to attract Mr. Quarles's attention but his eyes are fixed on the podium. Unable to resist the urge to speak, I blurt out, "Her name is Pearl Buck and she won the Noble prize in 1938. She wrote *The Good Earth* and *The Pearl*."

Mr. Quarles raises his head, looks in my direction, and says, "You're talking without permission. I don't allow that."

The whole class is staring at me. Those who don't know me, who come from a different junior high, are astonished that I have voluntarily spoken. Those who know me, who come from my junior high, are used to my outspokenness. I've been in high school for less than an hour and already, I'm living up to my junior high nickname, "Mighty Mouth." *So much for my promise to remain quiet in class.* I say, "I'm sorry. I did raise my hand but you were busy … er … playing with the podium."

Everyone laughs except Mr. Quarles, who scowls and demands, "What is your name?"

"Sandra Arnau."

Mr. Quarles scoots off his desk and walks over to me.

"You think you're so smart, don't you? Well, if you are, tell me what American won the Nobel Prize in 1954."

I remembered to pop my hand up, asking for permission to speak.

"Earnest Hemingway. But I prefer the work of John Steinbeck, who won the Nobel Prize in 1962."

Everyone is grinning except for Mr. Quarles, whose face is as red as Hester Prynne's scarlet letter. I know he is angry but am unsure why. At home, we often have literary arguments and no one ever gets mad.

"And why do you prefer Steinbeck to Hemingway, Miss Know-It-All?"

"Because Hemingway has only one thing to say and he says it again and again and again. It gets tedious."

"So you find Hemingway tedious, do you? Well, he just happens to be one of the great American writers."

Just then, the bell rang. Unfortunately, it rang too late to save me. Teachers are rarely neutral towards me—they either love me or hate me. My impulsive talking drives some teachers crazy, but I am passionate about reading and writing, so English teachers often like me. As I gather my books to leave, I realize that Mr. Quarles is going to be one of those teachers who hates me.

ALTHOUGH MY ELEMENTARY and junior high teachers sometimes had trouble with my outspoken, impulsive behavior, it became a bigger problem in high school. I was older and expected to behave in a more controlled and mature manner. Since ADHD was not yet identified or understood at the time, my behavior was considered deliberately rude and

disrespectful. Talking without permission and passing notes to my girlfriends—two of my favorite activities when I grew bored, disrupted class. I knew that some of my teachers considered me difficult, which underscored my concerns about how my own children were treated in school.

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Living in Interesting Times

I sit in Dr. Dunn's examination room watching as Cindy cruises the room, seeking stimulation to relieve her boredom. Picking up one of several photographs of Dr. Dunn's family, she studies it, saying, "This is a new picture. I haven't seen it before."

"Put Dr. Dunn's picture back where it belongs and come sit down. Unless you don't want to go to the park afterwards," I say, patting the seat next to me. Positive reinforcement works once again. Cindy makes a face, but nevertheless, sets the picture back in place and returns to her chair.

Not long after, the door opens. Dr. Dunn greets us as he enters the room, then heads for his chair and sits down.

"You have a new picture," says Cindy, jumping out of her chair. She leans over the desk and grabs the framed photograph of the doctor and his family wearing hiking gear.

"Yes, you're right. How smart of you to notice. The picture was taken last summer at Yellowstone."

"We went camping once. We had to sleep on the ground and use a "hole" potty." Cindy wrinkles her nose. "Hole potties stink."

I feel my face turn red and say, "Cindy prefers *flush* toilets.".

"So do I," says Dr. Dunn, grinning at Cindy. "So tell me, why are you here today?"

"I've been getting tummy aches," says Cindy, patting her stomach.

"That's too bad. When do you get your tummy aches?"

"I was bouncing on the Crawford's trampoline one time. I got another tummy ache when I was watching TV. And another time when I was riding my bike."

"Where does your tummy hurt?" asks Dunn.

"Right here," says Cindy pointing to a spot below her belly button.

I break in, "We took Cindy to the emergency room last weekend. The stomach aches don't last long—less than two hours. By the time the doctor saw her, she was no longer in pain. He couldn't find anything wrong."

"Why don't you jump up on the table and I'll examine you."

While Dr. Dunn examines Cindy, she regales him with a story of how Eric got in trouble for taking the scissors to a brand new pair of pants and turning them into shorts.

"You're a fine one to talk, Cindy," I say with a laugh. "If you're telling stories, why don't you tell Dr. Dunn about the time you decided to scratch your initials on the door of our new van?"

Of course, Cindy has no interest in telling *that* story. Instead, she tells Dr. Dunn about the hayride we'll be taking for Brownies.

Once the exam is complete, Dr. Dunn motions for Cindy to get down and they return to their seats. He says, "Everything looks normal. We'll run some tests to make sure, but she seems perfectly fine. Is there a certain time of day that the

symptoms usually occur? Is it more likely to occur after exercise or after she's eaten a big meal?"

"No, not really," I reply, smoothing my hair back into place. "I have noticed one commonality—the tummy aches always occur on weekends."

"What's going on during the weekends?"

Cindy answers promptly. "Dad yells all the time."

A startled look crosses the doctor's face. He glances at me. "Is that so?"

"Jerry's father is quite ill." I reply. "Jerry's having a hard time dealing with it. Cindy has always been Daddy's girl, but lately their relationship has been going through difficult times. Ever since Jerry's father become ill, he has had a tendency to blow up over small incidents."

"Have you tried to get him to talk about his feelings?" asks Dr. Dunn.

"I've tried, but Jerry's a scientist. He says he doesn't believe in feelings."

"What about counseling? Perhaps he would be more comfortable discussing matters with a professional?"

"Jerry would never agree to see a counselor. Most men wouldn't," I reply pointedly, looking at him.

Dr. Dunn leans back in his swivel chair and pauses, finally saying. "Raising two hyperactive children can be quite stressful. How would you feel about seeing a child psychologist?"

"I think that's a brilliant idea," I say.

"And your husband--do you think that he will be in favor of seeing a child psychologist?"

"I don't know about Jerry, but the kids and I will be delighted to see a child psychologist." In truth, I expect Jerry to be against seeing a child psychologist, but having Dr. Dunn

suggest it will help strengthen my position in insisting that we see one.

"I'll have my nurse write up a referral, so your insurance will cover the cost."

"Even better," I say.

"Also, since Cindy's stomach aches may be related to anxiety, I suggest that she take a small daily dose of imipramine, a mild antidepressant."

"Okay," I agree.

"We all experience stress at one time or another," says Dr. Dunn, turning his head to address Cindy. "Remember Cindy: Even though your dad yells at you, he still loves you."

"That's right," I say, touched by Dr. Dunn's comment. "Dad loves you, no matter what he says or does. He's not mad at you. He's mad at life in general. Getting mad is Dad's way of handling his feelings and releasing tension."

"I wish Dad wouldn't take it out on me," says Cindy.

"Since Cindy was a baby, her dad was her favorite parent. Eric prefers me," I say. "When we go out, it's like we're double-dating. Cindy pairs up with her Dad up while I go with Eric."

"My nurse will schedule you an appointment with the child psychologist. She'll give you a call with the time and date."

"Thank you so much!" I say.

As I steer the van towards home, I realize that Dr. Dunn's decision to put Cindy on an antidepressant because he thinks her stomach aches are due to anxiety, serve as a red flag, warning us that we need to seek help. Will Jerry agree to see the child psychologist? Will he become angry if I tell him that we are seeing the psychologist no matter what he says? I desperately need advice on how to end Cindy and Eric's

constant teasing and bickering, in order to alleviate Jerry's stress.

IT'S PROBABLY JUST AS WELL that I was unaware that parents who have a child with ADHD are almost twice as likely to divorce as couples who have a child without ADHD.[1] Of course, we had two children with ADHD, which probably increased our likelihood of divorce.

When we had disagreed years earlier, Jerry had insisted that "we needed to hang together." Nowadays, it seemed that he'd rather hang me.

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Chameleon

When I begin the eleventh grade, I find that once again, I'm stuck with Mr. Quarles for English class. Worse, I have Mr. Drudge for history.

I fidget in my chair, trying to absorb what Mr. Drudge is saying. It's a losing battle. I've had American history crammed down my throat since the third grade and figure that what I haven't learned by now, I probably don't need or want. I'm not un-American, I simply am more curious about places and times that occurred outside the United States and the last 300 years. I'm a novelty seeker, so I long to learn about faraway places and times long ago.

My desk sits at the back of the classroom. Although it's easier for me to pay attention when I sit in front, I have no desire to be in glancing distance of Mr. Drudge's protruding, evil eyes. I dislike him because he is boring, intolerant, and humorless. He's always talking about rum, Romanism, rebellion, and the evils of alcohol.

"Alcohol has never crossed my lips," Mr. Drudge often proclaims.

Mr. Drudge's tests are loaded with dates—and I'm not good at memorizing. For me, numbers are arbitrary and offer no meaning or context.

Every year, I begin school in September with a vow that I will concentrate and do better.

I actually read my textbook when the semester starts, but soon realize I'll never get an "A" on Mr. Drudge's exams since he emphasizes memorizing dates. He also prefers multiple choice questions and brags about laying "traps" that are designed to fool us into choosing the wrong response. I feel that his traps are more about his ego and less about learning. His tests don't determine our knowledge of a topic, they simply measure our ability to think as he does. Since I have no interest in becoming a clone of Mr. Drudge, I quit reading the text and paying attention to lectures. I'm passing the class, but only because of the numerous times that I've taken American history.

The horizontal and vertical rows of desks remind me of a chessboard. If I were a chess piece, I would want to be a bishop because I could move diagonally and capture Mr. Drudge—bishop takes king (Mr. Drudge). Checkmate.

The bell rings and I am free—for the rest of the day anyway. I tuck my binder and history book in the crook of my arm, then head for the door. Today is Tuesday, my favorite day of the week because chess club meets after school.

I exit the main building, cross the courtyard, then pass Mr. Quarles' Quonset hut. Chess Club is held in the next building, so I turn left and mount creaky, rickety stairs. Opening the door, I pause at the threshold and watch as two members, Danny and Howard, pelt one another with erasers stolen from the blackboard at the head of the room. Their clothing is heavily spattered in chalk, so the erasers must have been primed with chalk dust and ready for battle.

Chess club, sometimes derisively called "chest club" by outsiders, has only twelve members, so the faculty advisor, a math teacher, never shows up for meetings. The group is comprised of the school's "brains," students who excel in math and science. All are members of honor society—except for me, of course. I never once make honor society in high school.

Deciding I don't want to be spattered with chalk dust, I inch my way around the perimeter of the room and manage to stay out of the line of fire. I sit down and watch as more students file into the room. When Rex, the chess club president, arrives, he declares the chalk dust battle a draw, then orders everyone to sit down and listen. Standing at podium, he calls the meeting to order.

Rex is tall with curly brown hair and brown eyes. His idol is emotionless, logical Mr. Spock, the star of TV's hit, *Star Trek*. Rex brags about writing like a typewriter and says he is perfect. Although not the best chess player, he is the most dynamic. He seems to feel that his mission is to ensure that the boys do not fraternize too freely with the girls.

One member, Walter, is going steady with my friend from junior high, Sara. Walter attends less less frequently these days, which Rex seems to view as a dereliction of duty. Most of the boys in chess club are late bloomers—they haven't discovered girls yet.

The female members of the club have definitely discovered boys. Before I join the chess club, the groups' only female is Emma. At first, Emma and I avoid one another, instinctively realizing that we are rivals. But one day we start talking and discover that despite our differences—Emma is quiet, a straight-A student, and ostensibly studious and serious—we have a lot in common. We both love reading, especially Jane Austen. More important, Emma's reason for

joining the chess club is the same as mine—she likes the high ratio of males to females in the club.

Another way that Emma differs from me is her affinity for memorizing dates. She collects birthdates like some people collect stamps. On any given day, she will list all the people she's met who we're born on that date. Although Emma got an A in Mr. Drudge's history class (unlike yours truly) because she's good at memorizing dates, she dislikes him as much as I do.

The chess club competes against other high school chess clubs in the area, just like football and basketball teams. The five best players comprise the team, known as first board, second board, third board, etc. Since Emma and I didn't qualify for the team, we appoint ourselves cheerleaders, changing the words to traditional sports cheers. We sing, "Hey, hey, whadd'ya say, let's take that rook away," and "Down the row, down the row, umph! Let's go."

Of course, the boys on our team are used to our noisy cheers and silly behavior and have learned to tune us out. Teams from other schools are not as good at ignoring us—and usually fall apart within the first fifteen minutes. We are the chess club's secret weapon.

I'm the ringleader of the girls in the chess club, which eventually adds more female members, all friends of mine. In junior high, I struggled to make friends, but in high school, I have lots. Since my chess club friends also are in math and science club, I join these clubs, which is delightfully ironic since I'm currently failing my algebra class. I may not be a good student, but I'm outgoing and friendly. My exuberant enthusiasm is contagious.

None of the chess club members are athletic or play sports, but attending Anaheim High football games is manda-

tory—at least, for the boys. Emma and I also attend football games, although we spend more time watching the boys than the game.

I'm lucky that I click with a group who are academically oriented. They are good role models. When I beat my brainy friends at chess, which I do surprisingly often, I tell myself that my poor grades aren't a reflection of my intelligence. I'm just fortunate that my brainy friends are a year ahead of me in school. If they'd ever witnessed my absolute stupidity in algebra class, they would have ejected me from math club immediately.

I live in fear that my smart friends will learn that I'm terrible in math. Since I'm failing the class anyway, I decide to ditch it completely. Algebra is my first class of the day and my mother leaves for work before school starts, so I spend the extra time in the morning getting ready.

Instead of being rejected by my brainy friends, I become a chameleon, someone who is able to talk the talk, but unable to walk the walk. Getting along with a smart people comes easy for me, as I've practiced the art with my brilliant mother all my life.

SINCE THESE FRIENDSHIPS start with me feeling subservient, trouble usually follows. Unequal relationships, especially between men and women have existed since time began, but for me, they don't work in the long term. At some point, I always find I must assert my right to be an equal partner.

Although I don't seek out brainy people for friends deliberately, these are the people with who I find connection and

commonality. This leaves me feeling like I'm a fraud. I don't dare tell my friends about my failures in school because I'm afraid that they'll think less of me. School comes easy for them, so I assume that they won't understand my struggles. This leaves me feeling trapped. I'm forced to pretend to be something I'm not. That's an uncomfortable place to be.

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At Risk

"I don't see why the kids need to see a psychologist. It's seems like a waste of time and money," says Jerry later that night as he reads Dr. Dunn's referral letter.

"You can't deny that we're struggling to manage Cindy and Eric's behavior. I'm especially worried about Cindy and her stomach pains since Dr. Dunn believes they're stress related. How do you feel about Cindy taking an antidepressant?"

"I'm not happy about the idea, but I'm willing to try it," says Jerry. "But I still don't think we need to see a psychologist."

"I think we need to go since Dr. Dunn recommended it. After all, it won't cost a dime. Since we have a referral, the insurance will cover the cost."

"Okay," agrees Jerry.

"Our first appointment is scheduled for 3:30 on Friday. Will you come?"

Jerry scowls, then finally says, "Yeah, I'll come."

"Thanks. I really appreciate your support."

Dr. Allen, the child psychologist, is young, female, and

exuberant, so she's terrific at creating rapport with Cindy and Eric. They enjoy their one-on-on time with her because they get to talk about themselves and "what's bugging them" (as Dr. Allen says). Since Jerry has more or less abdicated helping me manage the children, it's great to have someone knowledgeable and supportive.

As spring arrives and the school year winds down, I worry about the lack of progress that Eric has made in recognizing the letters of the alphabet. At the beginning of school, I hoped that Eric's improved behavior on Ritalin would enable him to catch up with his classmates in reading and arithmetic. Unfortunately, this hasn't happened. Eric is still at the pre-reading stage. Despite Eric's improved behavior on Ritalin, the medication is not helping him to learn.

During the last month of school, I manage to pull Mrs. Sweet aside for a mini conference. When I voice my concerns about Eric's readiness for second grade next year, Mrs. Sweet suggests that Eric attend summer math and reading classes, and that we hire a tutor to work with him on reading over the summer.

"Should Eric be tested for learning disabilities?" I ask.

"No, that's not necessary," Mrs. Sweet assures me.

Mentally, I disagree, but say nothing. I can't forget that Mrs. Sweet missed the signs that Cindy has ADHD. Last semester we learned that Cindy has an auditory processing disorder (APD), which impedes her learning and qualifies her for special services through an IEP (Individualized Education Program). Since Mrs. Sweet failed to flag Cindy's ADHD and learning disability, I can't help wondering if she's missing Eric's also.

Later that night I talk to Jerry about Mrs. Sweet's suggestions. He approves of Eric attending summer school, but balks when I mention hiring a tutor. Realizing that Jerry

would object to hiring a tutor ahead of time, I already have my rebuttal. "How is Eric going to complete second grade work when he can't even read?"

"He'll do fine next year," Jerry reassures me. "Besides, we can't afford a tutor."

"If we don't visit your parents in August, we could afford one. With the cost of gas and motels, we always spend over $1,000. We could hire a tutor with the money we save."

"We are not canceling our trip to see my parents, damn it," says Jerry, his face turning red.

Realizing that Jerry won't budge, I consider my options. Money is always tight during the summer because Jerry is only paid for nine months of the year. In the summer, Jerry's only income is from teaching summer school, which pays a lot less.

When Jerry and I had first married, we had a 50-50 relationship. We discussed matters and came to decisions collaboratively. I would gladly give up a trip to visit his parents, but I'm not given a say. He believes that since he's the primary breadwinner, he should make all financial decisions.

I'm shopping for groceries the next week when I run into Donna, one of the teachers on Mrs. Sweet's tutor list, who I know from my faculty wives' sewing group. When I mention that I would love to have her tutor Eric, but Jerry says we can't afford it, she offers to make a deal. If I pull up the carpeting in her living and dining room, she'll tutor Eric for free.

Elated that I have found a way to help Eric without spending a dime, I expect that Jerry will be pleased. I'm stunned when Jerry becomes angry.

"I don't want Eric seeing a tutor this summer, damn it. Why can't you give the kid a break?"

"I don't understand. You said we couldn't afford a tutor," I say, surprised at his harsh response.

"That was just an excuse. Now I want you to call Donna and tell her we don't need a tutor after all."

"No. Mrs. Sweet recommended that Eric have a tutor. That's good enough reason for me."

Over the summer Jerry continues to blow up over trivial issues. He views my insistence on Eric seeing a tutor as an act of mutiny, while I feel I'm being the responsible parent and doing what's best for our son. In the past, I always deferred to Jerry, but since Eric's eye surgery, I do what I think is best.

At the end of the summer, I invite Donna over for a lunch. Cindy and Eric are at the pool with friends, so it's just the two of us. We chat politely through the meal, but once coffee is served, I can contain my curiosity no more. I say, "So tell me, how is Eric doing with his reading? Did he make good progress over the summer?"

Donna licks her lips, then pats them dry with her napkin. "Eric has shown some progress over the summer…"

Seeing her hesitancy, I decide to cut to the chase. "Is he ready for second grade?"

Donna pauses, looking decidedly uncomfortable. Sensing her uneasiness, I say, "Please be frank. I need to know the extent of his difficulties if I'm going to help him."

"Eric is articulate—his verbal ability is already beyond that of many second graders. You already know that. Unfortunately, his reading skills are not in line with his speaking skills."

"This doesn't surprise me," I say. "I'm afraid that he'll be lost in second grade."

"I think your concerns are well-founded," says Donna, picking up her napkin and pleating it into folds. "Although I

haven't tested him, it's obvious that he has significant challenges in learning to read."

I pick up my glass and take a drink of water, wishing that I'd served wine instead. "I asked Mrs. Sweet if he needed to be tested for learning disabilities and she said no."

Donna shakes her head indignantly. "That was wrong. She should have complied with your request for testing, especially since she recommended summer school and a reading tutor over the summer."

"What should I do? Mrs. Sweet is the only first grade teacher at the school. Enrollment doesn't justify having a split class next year. If I request that Eric spend another year in first grade, she's not going to agree. It would also be hard on Eric emotionally—he's expecting to be with his friends in second grade."

Donna sighs. "Mrs. Sweet may not realize the extent of Eric's challenges. I hate to say it, but the sad truth is that Eric is at-risk for never learning how to read."

I jerk my head back in surprise. "Wow! That sounds serious."

"It is serious."

I've been worried about Eric's reading progress, but Donna's assessment is worse than I feared. "What can I do to help Eric?"

"How do you feel about moving Eric to another school?"

I laugh, although there's nothing funny about the idea. "Cindy's already attending another school. Why not?"

"River Heights Elementary offers several first and second grade split classes. If you move Eric to River Heights, he could spend two years in the split, so it won't be so obvious that you're retaining him. Since his friends are at a different school, they won't know."

"It sounds like a good idea," I say. "But I don't know how

Jerry will feel about Eric changing schools. He thinks I worry too much."

"Tell Jerry that I have recommended the move."

"Jerry can be obstinate," I say, thinking that if she knew that Jerry was adamantly opposed to her tutoring Eric, she might feel differently. "I'm not sure that your recommendation would be enough to convince him."

"You could call your pediatrician to see if he supports the transfer—and get a letter of recommendation from him."

"That's a great idea. I also could call the child psychologist."

"You could even call the school to see if they are accepting transfers."

"I'll call our pediatrician first. If I can't get his support, Jerry will never go for it. Also, River Heights was recently honored with a 'Blue Ribbon School' award, so it may be difficult to get him in."

Donna stands up from the table. "I'll leave you to make your phone calls. Don't hesitate to call me if you have questions."

"I will," I say, walking Donna to the door. "Thanks for the suggestion!"

IN THE OLD DAYS, I would have called Jerry to get his feedback on the idea. In this instance, he's the last person I'll tell. If Jerry disliked the idea of Eric having a tutor, he's going to hate the idea of switching Eric's school. Hopefully, Dr. Dunn and Dr. Allen will be more amenable to the change.

I hate going behind Jerry's back but feel I must. Jerry's attitude towards Eric's difficulties in school reminds me of

my mother's. By refusing to acknowledge that I was having trouble in school, she avoided having to do anything to help.

Although denial is a common coping method, it doesn't work for me. Having no control over a stressful situation increases my anxiety. I find that the best way to manage my agitation is to be proactive and thoroughly study a problem. This process allows me to make an informed decision, which gives me a sense of calm and control.

When Bad Things Happen to Good People

"Sandra, can you come here for a second?"

It's Saturday morning and my mother is calling me from her bedroom. I sigh, tossing my book, *Green Mansions*, on the end table to my right. I love to read but I'm having a hard time wading through the book.

A couple of years ago my mother sold the house and moved us to a second floor apartment located a few blocks from Anaheim High School. The decor inside our two-bedroom, two-bath flat is typical 1960s: A beige and brown upholstered couch faces a long, low Spanish colonial coffee table and is flanked by two matching Spanish colonial end tables. Perched on a stereo cabinet across the room is a Lava Lamp with constantly changing, flame-orange convolutions; a swivel rocking chair covered in the same shade of flame-orange as the Lava Lamp sits next to it.

I walk into my mother's room and find her sitting up in bed. On a rainy Saturday last month, my mother fell on the stairs outside our second-floor apartment. A visit to the doctor and x-rays revealed that she had broken her tailbone. My mother always has had a tendency towards psychosomatic

illness (or hypochondria), but her recent accident intensifies this behavior. Not only does she miss work, a rarity, but she also expects me to do the shopping, cooking, cleaning, and laundry.

A haze of cigarette smoke hangs about my mother's bedroom like L.A. smog. She points to the night stand next to her bed and says, "Gee, I wish there was a cup of coffee sitting here." Since my mother is loath to admit she depends on me for anything, requests are often made indirectly. Instead of asking for something, she says, "Gee, I wish that 'such and such' was here."

Fortunately, my mother drinks instant coffee, so my trip to the kitchen to make her coffee is quick. When I return, I say, "We're getting low on instant coffee. I need to go shopping and pick up more."

My mother takes a sip of coffee, then sets her cup back on the nightstand next to her bed. "While you're out, you can refill my prescription. I also need for you to stop at the library and get me more books. Make sure that they aren't boring books this time."

"Okay." I'm tempted to reply that I never pick uninteresting books on purpose, but refrain from doing so. Starting a quarrel about whether I deliberately choose boring books is a waste of time. Although I sometimes make careless comments around people in general, my radar of what not to say around my mother is finely tuned.

I've only been driving my mother's white Dodge Dart for a few months, so an excuse to drive the car is always welcome. At the library, I look for newly released detective stories and grab the latest Rex Stout and Agatha Christie mysteries. Fortunately, I know what books she's already read because I've been reading the mystery stories that she borrows for years. After checking the books out, I leave the

library and drive to the pharmacy, only to learn that the prescription has not been refilled.

"I need to get the doctor's approval before refilling the prescription," the pharmacist tells me. "I can't do that until Monday, when the doctor's office reopens."

"Okay, thanks," I reply.

My next stop is the grocery store, where I load up my shopping cart with coffee and TV dinners. I also pick up chicken breasts and *Shake 'N Bake*. I'm not much of a cook, but there are a few easy dishes I know how to make.

When I return home, I peek into my mother's room to find that she is sleeping. I decide to call Emma to see if she can go to the movies tonight.

"Mom says I can go if I clean my room first," Emma tells me.

"That's great!"

"You wouldn't say that if you saw my room," Emma replies, sighing.

"It shouldn't take you that long to clean your room. Why don't you call me when you are finished?"

"Okay."

I hang up the phone and head for the kitchen, deciding to surprise my mother by making dinner. Grabbing a container of chicken breasts from the fridge, I pull away the plastic wrapping. Soon, I have *Shake 'N Bake* coated chicken breasts roasting in the oven, along with two baked potatoes.

I'm back to reading *Green Mansions* when my mother walks into the living room and says, "Something smells good!"

I fling my book on the couch and say, "I didn't realize that baked potatoes take longer to cook than the chicken, so the chicken may be a little overcooked."

"I'm sure it will be delicious."

We eat dinner at a round table next to the kitchen. As we're finishing, my mother says, "Where did you put my pills?"

"I didn't get them. The pharmacist said that he couldn't refill the prescription without the doctor's approval. He said you'll have to wait until Monday."

"But, I need the pills now," my mother says. "I'm in a lot of pain. I'll never make it to Monday. Why didn't you insist?"

I stand there, not knowing what to say. Finally, I say, "I didn't think it would have done any good."

"Give me the phone. I'll call the drug store."

I grab the phone sitting on the nightstand and hand it to her. Soon she's talking to the pharmacist, insisting that he give her a few pills so that she can last until Monday.

By the time that I return from the pharmacy, it is nearly six. I place the pill bottle on my mother's nightstand and ask, "Has Emma called?"

"No," she replies, picking up the bottle and opening it.

"We were thinking about going to a movie tonight," I venture.

"Tonight?" my mother says. "When I'm in so much pain?"

"I won't be gone that long."

"How can you even consider going when I'm feeling so badly? I'm shocked that you would even ask to go out tonight and leave me here alone."

Many evenings when I was younger, I stayed home by myself while my mother went out. I longed for her company. Now the tables have turned. She depends on me and I want to be out and on my own. "I'll just be gone a few hours…"

"Life is such a struggle. I don't know why I even bother to go on living when I have such a selfish daughter."

"All right," I relent. A few years ago, my mother started

threatening to kill herself. I'm not sure if she's serious or not, but I'm anxious to ward off this discussions before it gets started. "I'll call Emma and tell her I can't go."

The telephone rings while I'm walking to the living room to phone Emma.

"I just finished cleaning my room, so I can go," says Emma.

"Well, I can't. I have to stay home and babysit my mom. She says I'm selfish to even ask to leave when she is in so much pain."

"That's a drag," replies Emma.

Although we can't go to a movie, we spend an hour on the phone, talking and giggling until we hear a click as Emma's mother picks up the phone and attempts to dial. Discovering that we are on the line, she orders us off.

I return to the living room and pick up *Green Mansions* once again.

"Sandra," my mother calls. I jump up, happy for any distraction.

My mother is sitting up in bed, looking perkier than I have seen her all day. The pain medication has obviously taken effect. She says, "Do you want to play cards?"

"Sure," I say, climbing onto the end of her bed. Anything is better than reading my book.

When I win three games in a row, I realize that the pain medication is clouding my mother's thinking. She's much better at remembering what cards have been played than I am, so it's rare for me to win so many times in a row.

My mother throws her cards down on the bed. "That's enough for me."

"Okay," I reply. "I guess that means I have to go back to reading *Green Mansions*. Why did I have to get Mr. Quarles

this year again? If I had Mrs. Simpson, I'd be reading Jane Austen."

"I'm not familiar with *Green Mansions*. What's it about?"

I grimace. "The blurb on the book cover states that it's a romance of the tropical forest, but the hero is such a racist that the whole story is a turn-off."

"Goodness! A racist hero. I don't like the sound of that. Can I see the book?"

I hop up to fetch the book and return with a green, cloth covered book in hand. "Here's an example of the racism," I say, thumbing through the pages. "This is a direct quote:"

> It is hard for me to speak a good word for the Guayana savages; but I must now say that of them, that they did me no harm when I was at their mercy during this long journey, but they gave me shelter in the villages, and fed me when I was hungry, and helped me on my way when I could make no return. You must not, however, run away with the idea that there is any sweetness in their disposition, any humane or benevolent instincts such as are found among the civilized nations…[1]

I stop reading, then say, "The savages, as he calls them, save the man's life, but he isn't grateful. What a jerk!"

"When was the book written?"

I flip to the front of the book. "It says here that it was published in 1916."

"Well, the date makes the racism a little more forgivable. What does Mr. Quarles say about the book?"

"Mr. Quarles loves it and got mad at me because I said the hero is racist."

"Why?"

I roll my eyes. "He thinks he's so superior. And he treats

us like were inferior—like we're as bad as the savages in *Green Mansions*. I hated him last year. Why did I have to get stuck with him for a second year?"

My mother takes the book from my hand and begins to flip through the pages, stopping occasionally to read a few passages. Finally she says, "I moved to California to escape the racism in the South. This book supports that view, which is totally unacceptable. I'm going to call your counselor on Monday and insist that you be placed in another class."

"Can you do that? I've never heard of anyone changing classes in the middle of the year."

"It won't hurt to try," says my mother. "I'll call Mrs. Nielson on Monday."

"Thanks, Mom. You're the best!"

By Tuesday of the next week, I find myself sitting in Mrs. Osborne's class. Mr. Quarles has a hissy fit when he hears my mother requested my transfer. He tells Mrs. Nielson that I only want to change teachers because Sara is in the other class—not realizing that since Sara started going steady with Walter, we are no longer close. Mr. Quarles is unwilling to admit the truth—that his treatment of me was unfair and that the hero of his favorite book, *Green Mansions*, is a racist.

My mother rarely involves herself in my schooling, but she has strong feelings about racial equality. Having grown up with segregated bathrooms and schools in the South, this is a sensitive subject.

Of course, she has been waging her own battle for gender equality for years. Although she has excellent credit, Bank of America turned her down for a credit card because she was a single woman. Some prospective landlords refused to rent to her because she was a single woman with a child.

Prospective employers at Hughes Aircraft served the cruelest blow. She spent an entire week on interviews with

the editorial staff, only to be turned down for the position because technical writers were salaried. Company policy mandated that women could only be hired for jobs in which they punched a time clock. In the ten years my mother worked as a technical writer, she never met another woman in the position.

MY MOTHER WAS BETTER at handling her intellect than her emotions, so the slights and insults she received for being an unconventional woman eroded her emotional well-being. She was able to ignore these inequities when she was young and healthy but pain from her broken tailbone and a dependence on pain killers clouded her thinking and led to depression. It became harder for her to disregard the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (as Shakespeare described in Hamlet). Beneath the aura of stylish clothes and high-octane intellect, lurked a fragile girl still haunted by the early deaths of her parents and my father's suicide.

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The Worm Turns

I set the telephone back in its cradle with a feeling of elation. So far, so good. The principal at River Heights Elementary just told me that the school has open enrollment, so my request to transfer Eric into a primary class will be honored. To seal the deal, both Dr. Dunn and Dr. Allen have agreed to write letters of referral to the school district's director of special education services. Dr. Dunn also wrote a referral for Dr. Allen to test Eric for learning disabilities. She has promised a speedy return on the test results, so they'll be ready before school starts.

The only hitch is to get Jerry's approval for the transfer, but here, I expect trouble. Jerry is still annoyed with me for insisting that Eric have a tutor this summer. I worry that he'll pitch a fit when he learns I want to move Eric to another school.

I wait until the children are fast asleep that evening before I venture into the family room to talk with Jerry. He is watching the ten o'clock news, so I sit on the couch and wait for the weatherman to finish his spiel. When the station breaks for a commercial, Jerry mutes the sound.

I try to pitch my voice evenly, so Jerry doesn't detect my nervousness, as I say, "Donna had lunch with me today and we talked about Eric's reading progress. She said that she believes Eric may have a reading disability and that he's at-risk for never learning to read. She said he's not ready for second grade."

Jerry glances at me briefly, a look of annoyance on his face. "Mrs. Sweet says he's ready for second grade and she's his teacher."

"Mrs. Sweet recommended Donna tutor Eric this summer because she's a reading specialist. Mrs. Sweet is a lovely person, but she didn't realize that Cindy has ADHD and a learning disability. I don't feel I can trust Mrs. Sweet's judgement with Eric since it's obvious he's struggling."

"You worry too much. I wasn't a terrific reader in first grade but I did okay."

I continue, schooling calm into my voice. "Donna says that Eric should be tested for learning disabilities."

"Mrs. Sweet said Eric doesn't need testing," Jerry replies, crossing one arm over the other. "I wish that you would leave the poor kid alone."

I take a deep breath, then say, "Donna suggested that we transfer Eric to the first/second grade combination class at River Heights since they won't have one at Eric's present school next year. That way, he can repeat first grade without it being so obvious."

"Eric is not transferring to another school," replies Jerry, rising from the couch and turning to look at me. "It's bad enough that Cindy is attending another school."

Reminding myself to maintain an even, calm voice, I say, "I talked to Mr. Wheeler, the principal at the school and he says they have open enrollment. When I told him that our pediatrician and child psychologist were writing

letters to support the transfer, he said that he would approve it."

Jerry wags an angry finger at me. "I forbid you to move Eric to another school. You complain that I don't support you, but you went behind my back and set this up without talking to me first."

I can feel my stomach rolling like waves tossed on a stormy sea. "I knew you'd disagree, so I decided to ask the professionals their opinion. Both Dr. Dunn and Dr. Allen feel the transfer is in Eric's best interest, so I'm going to insist." I stand up and try to move around Jerry. Now that I've spoken my piece, I'm anxious to leave. "And one other thing—Dr. Dunn has arranged for Eric to be tested on Friday. Since we have a referral, the insurance will cover the cost."

"Wait a damn minute," says Jerry grabbing my arm. "You're not going anywhere until you listen to me. There's nothing wrong with Eric that some decent mothering won't fix. Mrs. Sweet said Eric is ready for second grade, so there's no reason to change schools. Capisci?"

"I realize that it's hard for you to understand Eric's difficulties since school came easy for you," I say. "Eric struggles in ways that you never experienced. It's easier for me to understand because I also had problems in school."

"Eric will learn to read just fine, damn it!"

"Your mother didn't do drugs when she was pregnant with you. Judging Eric by your own experiences in school is unfair."

"Let Eric be! You're imagining problems when there's nothing wrong with him. Mrs. Sweet said Eric was ready for second grade and she knows best."

I know that we're arguing in circles. At this point, I need Jerry's cooperation. I don't want Jerry calling the principal at River Heights and telling him that he's against Eric's transfer.

I say, "Why don't we make an agreement that the results of Eric's testing will decide whether he transfers to River Heights? If the results show he's ready for second grade work, he stays where he is. If the results show Eric is not ready, you agree to the transfer."

"I already said that I'm against Eric's testing. He's doesn't need to be tested."

"Well, if you're that certain you're right, you shouldn't mind having Eric tested. If you're right, you can have the satisfaction of saying, 'I told you so.'"

"All right," Jerry relents. "You'll do what you damn well want anyway."

"I'm trying to help Eric. I could really use your support, not your constant criticism."

When the test results come back the next week, my worst fears are realized. Eric scores one and one-half to two years below grade level in reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Of course, Jerry complains that I tricked him into agreeing to Eric's school transfer; I reply that no tricks were involved. I simply know our son better than he does.

The only remaining obstacle to transferring Eric to River Heights is Eric himself. I have not told him about the proposed move because I didn't want to needlessly upset him. He may be a novelty seeker and enjoy new experiences, but I know he will miss his friends in his old school. Since I resented my mother moving me from school-to-school without asking how I felt about it, I decide to let Eric choose whether he wants to change schools. If he's totally against the move, it means keeping Eric at his present school, but this is a risk I'll have to take.

Cindy is at the pool with a friend that afternoon, so I ask Eric if he'd like to go for ice cream. Naturally, he says yes.

Eric orders a hot fudge sundae while I decide to have a

chocolate covered cone. Once we're settled into a booth, I ask, "So, are you excited about school starting soon?"

"I like seeing my friends," says Eric, spooning ice cream and fudge into his mouth.

"What about school itself? Are you worried about keeping up with the class?"

Eric makes a face. "I don't want to talk about it."

"We need to talk about it. We got the results back from your testing and they show that you may have trouble keeping up. This doesn't mean you're dumb, it just means that you have a different learning style."

"I *am* dumb. I can't read."

"You're good at other things—like art and sports."

"I'm dumb. Todd told me so."

"I wasn't aware that Todd calls you dumb," I say, horrified to hear that a classmate has been teasing him.

"Lots of kids do. But Todd's the worst."

"How would you feel about going to another school? Donna thinks it might be a good idea for you to attend a school that has a first-second grade combination class. This will give you extra time to learn things that are difficult for you."

"Will I have to do hard math?"

"Not right away," I say.

"Then I want to go to the new school. Then Todd can't tease me for being dumb."

Although Jerry signs the papers for Eric's transfer, I sense a barely tethered rage lurking beneath the surface. In the recent past, he held all the power and I deferred to his demands, but now that I have the support of Dr. Dunn and Dr. Allen, the balance of power has shifted. Their willingness to write letters backing Eric's transfer gives me cover and the courage to stand up to Jerry.

Jerry resents the loss of authority in our marriage, but he knows he must tread carefully. Cindy and Eric see Dr. Allen regularly and can be counted on to report any disagreements to her. An uneasy truce ensues, but I know that it won't take much to set Jerry off. I pray that no new crisis presents itself.

THE SUBJECT of grade retention is controversial and hotly debated. An article posted on a Harvard Graduate School of Education website reported that children who were held back in Florida showed improvements in reading and math proficiency in later years.[1] Other studies have found that retained children were less likely to complete high school. Since these studies only reflected drop-out rates and did not look at other causes, such as family poverty, school proficiency, and the children's learning skills, the authors cautioned against assuming that grade retention was the cause for the students dropping out of school.[2]

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It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Dysfunction

My uncle B. J. defines the outdoors as a place where, "I walk from one air-conditioned building to another air-conditioned building." I can understand my uncle's reluctance to remain outdoors for any length of time since he and my Aunt Peggy live in Lancaster, California. Located in the Mojave Desert, Lancaster's temperature hits 90 degrees for at least four months a year. The landscape is a dreary array of brown and beige. Yes, I realize that there are occasional flowering cacti and desert shrubs to offer color, but still, I find the terrain monotonous.

Despite my dislike for dull, desert backdrops, I'm excited about visiting my uncle and aunt for Christmas. I've never experienced holidays with family, so I've been looking forward to it for weeks.

When we drive up to my uncle and aunt's tan and brown ranch home, I notice a green wreath on the front door. The yard is filled with puny, withered cacti and several drought resistant boulders (as my uncle jokingly describes them).

My aunt has decorated the house with garlands and red

bows that give a festive atmosphere. Blinking colored lights, glittering silver tinsel, and sparkling colored globes hang on a real Christmas tree, which suffuses the living room with a delightful piney smell. I find the real Christmas tree infinitely more appealing than the scrawny aluminum one with its monochromatic turquoise bulbs that resides in our living room back home.

For Christmas Eve dinner, I help my aunt in the kitchen. My aunt's cooking mostly consists of recipes found in Peg Bracken's *I Hate to Cook Book.* I spend much of the day reading and laughing at the jokes in Bracken's book. Although no one would call her recipes gourmet since they often involve a can of soup, they are an improvement on the TV dinners I eat at home, which come in foil trays.

While Aunt Peggy and I putter in the kitchen, my mother and uncle while away the day exchanging horror stories about growing up on their grandfather's farm. My uncle claims to be writing "the great American novel" on life at the farm and has been poking and prodding my mother all day in the hopes of rekindling memories that he can write about.

My aunt demonstrates how to carve radish roses for tomorrow's salad. I watch her make even cuts, then plop each radish in a bowl of ice water. My aunt is creative and has a flair for design. I never have to ask which presents she wrapped because her packages always look like they have been decorated for a photo-shoot in *Ladies' Home Journal*. My mother avoids domestic chores whenever possible but my aunt enjoys them. All my life I have longed for a mother who enjoys cooking and doing crafty things, so I feel a connection to Aunt Peggy that I've longed to experience with my mother.

For tonight's dinner, we prepare Bracken's Chicken Rice Roger. My aunt instructs me to carry the rectangular casserole dish to the table and set it down carefully. After I move away,

she leans over the table and lights the candles, then calls "dinner's ready."

I watch my uncle stumble out of his recliner chair, then weave his way unsteadily toward the table. Ever since his beloved German Shepherd, Rudy of the Valley, had to be put down for hip dysplasia, his consumption of alcohol has been out of control. About an hour ago, my Aunt refused to make him a vodka gimlet, saying that it would spoil his appetite. My mother has polished off her usual two martinis, but her walk to the dinner table is sedate and controlled.

The only thing I've eaten since morning is a couple of wobbly cut radishes that were too misshapen to serve for Christmas dinner, so I eat my chicken with gusto. "Yum, this is so good."

My mother takes a small bite, chews it, then says, "It has a foul taste."

"Mom, that's not a nice thing to say," I protest.

"All I said was that it had a foul taste. A chicken is a fowl," replies my mother, trying to keep an innocent expression on her face.

Having lived with my mother my entire life, I know her fondness for hiding critical comments behind jokes and puns. "That is not what you meant."

"I've never been that impressed with the *I Hate to Cook Book,"* my mother says. "The jokes are better than the recipes but that's not saying much."

"At least Aunt Peggy cooks," I remark. "You hardly ever cook dinner."

"You're welcome to cook anything you like," she replies.

Of course, my mother has never spent enough time in the kitchen to teach me how to cook, but I know better than to remind her of this fact. I remark, "I do cook, especially since your accident."

My aunt decides to change the conversation, and unknowingly steps on a landmine, asking me, "Have you decided what college you'll be going to when you finish high school?"

"Mom wants me to go to a junior college," I reply. "Which means Fullerton Junior College, also known as FJC. My friends call it high school with ashtrays because students are allowed to smoke."

"Sandra's grades aren't good enough to get her into any other college," my mother remarks. "She's lucky that FJC will take anyone with a high school diploma."

I put my fork down with a clatter. "It wouldn't matter if I had a straight A average. You've been telling me since I can remember that you won't pay for my college education. You want me to go to junior college because it's free."

"You don't have the academic ability for a four-year college," says my mother.

Uncle B. J. has been sitting at the table quietly, but he suddenly breaks in: "That's crap. Or have you forgotten that I teach English in a junior college? She has a hell of a lot more ability than many of my students. None of my students are as well read."

"Yes, Sandra is well read, but she failed algebra last year. No four-year college will accept a student who failed algebra. And she still manages to get a B in English."

"That's not fair," I protest. "You know that Mr. Quarles is a jerk. He gave me a B because he doesn't like me."

"I was always the teacher's pet. No teacher ever gave me a B. Besides, I didn't have to work hard to get an A."

"Why did Sandra fail algebra?" asks my aunt.

"Sandra's problem is that she's lazy and won't try," says my mother, making a face.

"Have you tried to help her?" my aunt inquires.

"I don't have time to help."

My mother has never shown much interest in helping me with my school work. Still, I know better than to say that.

"Well then, have you gotten her a tutor?"

"I never needed a tutor," replies my mother dismissively.

"There is nothing wrong with working hard for good grades," my aunt remarks. "It sounds as if you are trying to discourage her from trying."

"I'm not trying to discourage her, I'm being realistic. Paying for her college education would be a waste of money."

Aunt Peggy says, "If I'd been fortunate enough to have a child, I would have scrimped and saved, so that I could send her to the best college that I could afford. I also would have helped her with her algebra or found a tutor to help her."

"Why should I hire a tutor when she is too lazy to try?" my mother responds. "Sandra will never equal my success in school."

My uncle breaks in, "Why do you keep harping on your success in school? Her college plans have nothing to do with you. For God's sakes, Colleen, she's your daughter. You don't have to compete with her like you used to compete against me."

"There was no competition. I *always* got better grades."

"I forgot. No one is allowed to be smarter than you," says my uncle sarcastically.

"I didn't just get a scholarship to help pay for college, I finished my degree in three years and *still* managed to work several jobs. Sandra could have worked hard and earned a scholarship. There is nothing holding her back from doing what I did. She just doesn't have my gumption."

"You're just afraid that Sandra is smarter than you," taunts my uncle.

"Sandra is *not* smarter than me."

I feel myself sinking into my seat. This is the most ridiculous discussion I have ever heard. Of course, I know why uncle B. J. is needling my mother on the subject of I.Q. She's been lording it over him that she's smarter for years. He's getting back at her.

"Yes, Sandra is smarter," insists my uncle.

"Sandra's I.Q. is only in the 140 range. My I.Q. is in the 170 range."

"And how do you know this?"

"I tested her."

"And we're supposed to take your word?"

"Of course. You seem to forget that I taught school and administered tests to my own students."

My mother's cornflower blue eyes are starting to darken to a slate blue color, a sure sign that she's becoming angry. Feeling uncomfortable, I decide to change the subject to something I know that she will enjoy talking about. "Say, Mom. Did you tell them the story of what happened a couple of weeks ago when the Air Force showed up at work?"

"Why, no I haven't," says my mother, a smile brightening her face.

"Tell them. The story is hilarious."

My mother sets her fork on the table and begins, "I was sitting in my office recently when several men in Air Force uniforms came walking in, asking for C.M. Arnau. Since my boss doesn't want clients to know I'm a woman, I always write under the name of C.M. Arnau. Anyway, one of the men asked to speak to Mr. Arnau, so I stood up and offered to shake his hand, saying, "I'm Mrs. Arnau, but I write under the name C.M. Arnau."

"How did they take the news?" asks Aunt Peggy.

"They were shocked."

We manage to get through the rest of dinner and dessert without a quarrel. While opening presents the next morning, we have another awkward moment. Aunt Peggy gives my mother a set of apothecary jars that she sponge-painted gold and filled with cotton balls and Q-tips. Instead of thanking my aunt, my mother remarks, "So this is your artistic attempt, I take it?"

Seeing my mother shoot zingers at my aunt helps me to realize that her critical comments are not just directed at me. She seems unable to interact with anyone without putting them down.

YEARS LATER, an aunt gives me some of my mother's high school report cards and I discover that she never got a grade higher than a B in Latin. I don't know if she remembered her grades incorrectly or if she deliberately lied.

Although my mother has more than her fair share of good looks and intellectual ability, losing both of her parents by age ten creates an emotional void that widens as she ages. She fills the emptiness by putting people down and competing with everyone—especially her daughter. Instead of encouraging me to work hard to get into a good college, she brags about being so smart that she didn't have to work hard in school.

When I have my own children, I realize that my mother's disengaged parenting style has a lot to do with my struggles in school. Although she did call the school and request my transfer out of Mr. Quarles' class, that was the only time. She never offered to help me with my algebra homework, nor did she seek the assistance of a tutor. I knew I was on my own.

My mother set limits on the amount of time and resources

she was willing to devote to me. From an evolutionary perspective, this was shortsighted. Discouraging me from working hard, so I could get into the best college, undermined my self-confidence and drive to succeed. Instead of seeing me as an extension of herself, she viewed me as a competitor and left me to fend for myself.

Humans differ from other members of the animal kingdom in the amount of time and resources they devote to their offspring. They often put their children's needs for safety and nourishment above their own, which decreases their life expectancy but increases their children's survival rate, making it more likely that their genes will continue in future generations.[1]

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In Sickness and in Health

The sun hovers low on the horizon, sending a weak stream of light through my bedroom window. The interior is bathed in gloom and shadow, which reflects my feelings about my life. I know I should get out of bed and go start dinner, but my bones feel as if they are made of Jello. Watching the sunset through my bedroom window seems to be the only activity I can manage.

The new crisis I'd been dreading arrived on Saturday afternoon two weeks ago when a drunk driver T-boned the driver's side of my van. I escaped broken bones only because the seat of my Plymouth Voyager was located high off the ground. The nose of the other driver's black Firebird plowed underneath the seat instead of hitting me directly. Still, my car door was battered so badly that I had to crawl over the passenger's seat to exit the vehicle.

At first, the only ill-effect seemed to be a stiff neck and sore shoulders. But as time passed, I began to notice perplexing symptoms. A symphony of singing tree frogs has taken up permanent residence in my brain and serenades me night and day. Walking has become a challenge because the

floor has a tendency to drop and tilt beneath my feet, making me feel dizzy. The most worrisome change has been the drop in my energy level. Usually, I can count on my ADHD hyperdrive to power me through a myriad of activities. Since the accident, I have struggled to complete the simplest of tasks—such as making dinner.

When I complain about my symptoms to a psychologist friend, she tells me that I might have post-concussion syndrome and urges me to see a neurologist. But I didn't hit my head in the accident, I protest. That doesn't matter, says my friend. The force of the soft brain whipping back and forth in the hard skull creates the concussion. My friend assures me that my brain can heal itself, but it may take a year to do so.

A visit to a neurologist makes it official. I have post-concussion syndrome (PCS). She tells me that my singing tree frogs are a symptom of tinnitus, a side-effect of traumatic brain injury, as are my dizzy spells. It's not unusual for people suffering from PCS to feel tired and unable to complete easy tasks. While I'm grateful to know the cause of my symptoms, I'm heartbroken to learn that I won't be well enough to write for months.

Once again I try to summon the energy to get out of bed and go make dinner. My brain seems unable to activate the necessary signals to get my body moving.

Just then the overhead bedroom light flashes on. I look towards the door and see Jerry, his legs wide in an aggressive stance. His voice is harsh as he says, "When are you going to get off your fat lazy ass and make dinner? The kids are hungry."

I feel my heart start to race. This isn't the first time he's used this tone recently, but it still has the power to hurt me. "I'm sorry."

"Then show it. Get up. Your children need you."

"I know it's dinnertime," I say, as I pull back the covers. Since the accident, I have discovered that fear of Jerry's wrath can motivate me to do things that my injured brain can't. Apparently, my brain is not so damaged that it can still produce adrenalin. As I swing my legs around and lean down to put on my slippers, a wave of dizziness overtakes me. I pause, waiting for the sensations to end.

Jerry continues to stand at the door watching me. I can feel his anger and impatience from across the room. I stand and make my way towards him. When he sees that I'm up, he turns on his heels and heads back to the family room to watch TV with Cindy and Eric.

I lean against the hallway wall for balance as I make my way to the kitchen. Once there, I go to the sink and pick up a package of chicken breasts that has been defrosting since lunch. Pulling off the cellophane, I rinse the breasts under cold water, then place them in a glass pan and stick the chicken and some sweet potatoes into the oven.

The sink is loaded with dirty dishes, so I rinse plates and cups, then load them into the dishwasher. When a wave of dizziness engulfs me, I clutch the edge of the sink for balance. Once the spell ends, I turn and grab a kitchen chair from the table and pull it next to the sink. I sit down.

Jerry's refusal to help with household chores when I'm injured doesn't surprise me. I remember years ago returning home from the hospital after a hysterectomy to find that Jerry had not cleaned a single dish when I was away. He expected me to make dinner and clean the dishes on my first night home. No amount of pleading on my part would change his view. I was responsible for housework, no matter what. It seemed that when Jerry married me and vowed to "love me through sickness and health, until death do us

part," helping me when I was disabled wasn't part of the deal.

I rest my elbows against the edge of the porcelain sink and close my eyes. I long to return to bed, but Jerry will see this as a dereliction of duty, so I don't dare.

When I call everyone to dinner an hour later, Jerry takes one look at the food and says, "Baked chicken again? My God, since your accident, I only have half a wife."

Over the years, I have come to realize that Jerry's need for fancy cooking stems from his relationship with his cold and undemonstrative mother. Jerry's mother is an excellent cook, so he views food as a form of love.

I'm shaky from exhaustion by the time I return to bed at ten. Sleep has always been elusive for me, but since the accident, sleep has become my faithful companion and a welcome retreat from Jerry's anger. Instead of appreciating my efforts to make dinner and do basic housework, he is mad that I am no longer cooking gourmet meals.

I'm sound asleep when the light flashes on and I hear someone yelling at me, "Wake up, damn it! We need to talk!"

"Can't we do it tomorrow?" I ask groggily, sitting up in bed. I look at the bedside clock and see that it's after midnight.

Jerry is standing next to the bed, looming over me like a thunderstorm cloud. He says, "No, it can't wait until tomorrow. You know, it's bad enough that you're hurting us financially. The van you wrecked was paid for. Now we're stuck with monthly car payments to pay for the new car."

"The accident wasn't my fault," I reply, pulling the covers around me defensively. "The policeman said that since my car was on the right, the other driver should have yielded the way."

"My God, you're a basket case. I knew when I married

you that your parents were crazy, but I thought you were okay. Obviously, I was wrong. You're just like your parents."

"What do my parents have to do with my accident?" I ask, confused.

"If you weren't a basket case, you wouldn't have had the accident. "You would have noticed the other car and avoided it."

I know that there is a flaw in Jerry's argument, but my sleepy, addled brain can't summon the words to refute his argument. My mind goes blank. Finally, I say, "Accidents happen."

"Because you're just like your parents—mentally ill. If you had a healthy brain, you'd have recovered by now. I'd have a wife who cooked decent meals instead of half a wife."

"That's not what the doctor said."

"That's because you lied to the doctor—like you've lied to our friends. If they knew your parents were crazy, they'd know you for what you are—a lying basket case."

"That's not true. I told the doctor about my parents. I've also told my friends, just like I told you."

"So you have no sense of shame either. I guess I should be grateful that we adopted since it means that Cindy and Eric didn't inherit your family's mental illness."

"That's not fair. My accident has nothing to do with my parents. I'm sorry that I'm not feeling well enough to cook you gourmet meals. Maybe you should try cooking for a change." And with that, I roll over on my side and turn away from Jerry. I don't want to give him the satisfaction of seeing me cry. When Jerry continues to yell, I stuff my pillow over my head and act like I can't hear him. Jerry finally stops yelling and joins me in bed.

I remain as still as possible, afraid to move a muscle

because if I do, Jerry will know that I'm awake and he will continue his nasty tirade against me.

All of my life I have longed for family, but I end up with a man who cares more about his stomach and his bank account than he cares about me. Instead of offering support in a difficult time, he accuses me of being mentally ill. I wonder if it is in the children's best interest to grow up in a household with a father who refuses to help and calls his wife a basket case.

I'm dreading Thanksgiving, which is just a couple of weeks away. When I warned Jerry that I may not be able to cook a big holiday meal this year, he complained about having half a wife once again.

For years, I have tried to make Jerry happy, but have failed miserably. I wonder if it's time to give up and focus on making the kids and me happy instead.

CHILDREN GROWING up in two-parent households often have an evolutionary advantage. Besides the opportunity for increased financial stability, two parents mean that children have twice the chance for parental interaction and care. If one parent becomes ill, the other parent can take over until the disabled spouse recovers. In situations where the healthy parent refuses to help, the relationship may become unbalanced. The disabled spouse may question the wisdom of staying in a relationship with a partner who can't be trusted to carry the load in difficult times.

Cooperation is a vital part of human life. Parents tell children to share and play nicely. Other apes, such as chimpanzees, share and sometimes play nicely, but they lack a sense of morality and sympathetic concern for others. If

allowed free rein, chimpanzees will steal food, destroy property, and take advantage of smaller animals. Michael Tomasello of the Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology writes that humans are unique in their ability to change their behavior according to another individual's emotional and/or physical needs.[1]

Evolutionary psychologists call this fusion of cooperation, morality, and sympathetic concern *reciprocal altruism.* Family members are willing to to pick up the slack for another due to an unspoken expectation that the favor will be reciprocated at a later date.[2]

Marriage is an example of reciprocal altruism. A couple joins together and vows to look after one another through good times and bad. When I married Jerry, I was happy with the relationship because benefits and favors were evenly distributed. As time went by, Jerry expected me to provide more favors, while he retracted benefits.

Now that I'm injured, Jerry refuses to cooperate and show sympathetic concern. Instead, he complains about having half a wife. Jerry's lack of empathy and refusal to cooperate makes me question the wisdom of growing old with him.

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Sweet Victory

The cloying smell of formaldehyde hovers over the classroom like a toxic fume. Wiping a rivulet of sweat on my brow with the back of my hand, I stare at my three lab partners in disgust. They look green at the gills, vaguely reminiscent of the dead frog that I've just splayed and pinned to the dissection board.

"Come on, let's get to work," I say, glad that I haven't eaten this morning. My stomach is feeling decidedly squeamish. Just the idea of dissecting a frog is gross.

This isn't the first time that I've lamented flunking biology class last semester. Since I need the class to graduate, I'm retaking it in the summer, which is how I got stuck with three nervous Nellies for lab partners. Missy and Nora, who were too busy with cheerleading to take the class during the year, come from a rival high school. Another lab partner is Sherry, a girl from my own high school, who I know vaguely because she is the friend of a friend.

Of course, it serves me right. I flunked biology because I've been absent so much. My poor attendance record, which began in the seventh grade, has continued into high school.

Over the years, I've perfected elaborate excuses to avoid going to class. Usually, my head or my stomach hurt. My absences are so frequent that the dean of girls even calls my mother to complain, but she refused to admit that I was malingering. Of course, my mother is the queen of hypochondriacs. Over the years, I've become inured to her constant complaints.

I sigh loudly, trying to get Sherry's attention, then say, "Here's the dissection knife—you cut the skin."

Sherry shudders and backs away. "I can't. You do it."

"It's your turn to help. Come over here," I say, looking at Missy, a short blonde with a beehive hairdo and blue eye shadow that matches her eyes.

Missy looks away, ignoring me. I try to catch Nora's attention, but she is busily flipping through the pages of our textbook.

"You might find the book easier to read if it were right side up," I say sarcastically.

I think about complaining to the teacher, Mr. Shelly, but decide against it. He was on my case this morning for talking to Sherry. She started the conversation but I got in trouble. Anyways, snitching isn't cool.

I make an incision in the frog, and use forceps to carefully pull the skin back. I say in a loud voice in the hopes of attracting their attention, "Wow! It's just like peeling a banana."

My classmates continue to ignore me. Once I get over the gross-out factor, my novelty seeking gene kicks in and I find the assignment fascinating. I notice that the frog is female from the profusion of black eggs. After completing all the steps in the lab, I sit down and answer the questions.

I'm just finishing when Sherry appears, suddenly wanting to be my best friend.

"What answer did you get for the first question?"

"Why should I tell you? You wouldn't even help."

"I know," Sherry says. "I just couldn't help myself. It was too gross."

"All right," I say with a sigh. Talk about peer pressure. "Wait until I've finish answering the questions and you can see what I wrote."

Sherry copies my answers, then she passes the results over to Missy and Nora.

The next day Mr. Shelly returns our lab exercises. Sherry, Missy, and Nora all get As. I get a B.

This does not surprise me. Mr. Shelly's response is similar to that of Mrs. Brown's and Mr. Quarles' responses. Because they find my outspoken, hyperactive attitude intrusive and annoying, they go out of their way to punish me. Mrs. Brown gave me black marks on her citizenship roll. Without explanation and in the middle to the semester, Mr. Quarles changed from a letter grading system to decimals. The result? My papers always came back with a grade that was half a point below an A. Thus, I ended up with Bs in English. My final grade was a B+, but the computerized grading system didn't record plusses and minuses. Although it seemed unlikely at the time, I have wondered if Mr. Quarles changed his grading system to get back at me.

Fortunately, I have my sweet revenge on Mr. Quarles. At the end of the semester I try out for Kiwanis Bowl team, which Mr. Quarles advises. Patterned after the TV show, *College Bowl*, each high school chooses a four-member-team to compete against students in neighboring high schools. The objective of the competition is to determine which school's students can accurately answer questions on obscure topics in the quickest time.

By the end of tryouts, I have earned a spot on Mr. Quar-

les' Kiwanis Bowl team. Despite giving me Bs in English, he cannot deny me a place on his Kiwanis Bowl team. It seems that being a know-it-all outside of his classroom is sometimes okay.

Many of my friends from Chess Club graduate that June. As a parting gift, they elect me vice-president of the Chess Club and social chairman of Zeta Sigma, the school's science club. I'm also nominated to be an officer of math club, but I decline to run. I may be a chameleon, but I'm not a hypocrite.

THE GREGARIOUS NATURE of people with the hyperactive form of ADHD can be a positive force in some social situations. Unfortunately, traits that my nerdy friends find engaging annoys some of my teachers. Of course, when I was in high school, ADHD was not understood or identified.

Would I have been treated differently if teachers knew I had ADHD? Nowadays, K-12 teachers are trained to identify and help students who have disabilities, so it's likely that I would have been treated more fairly. Discriminating against students with special needs is against the law. That said, providing resources is expensive, so some schools opt to save money by denying services. The old adage, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease," holds true here. Children whose parents are willing to make a fuss are more likely to have their children tested and provided with accommodations.

As I grow older, I discover that teachers aren't the only people who have trouble with my conduct. Employers also find my behavior problematic. I can't count the number of times that I've been fired, sometimes on the first day.

My experiences are not unusual for individuals with the hyperactive form of ADHD. Studies show that these workers

are paid less, score lower on performance tests, and are more likely to be disciplined by a supervisor.[1]

Discovering that I have ADHD has allowed me to forgive myself for my disappointments and failures. Unfortunately, the world is not always as forgiving.

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Divide and Conquer

Jerry and I sink back into the plush upholstery of the living room sofa, grateful for a moment to sit back and relax. We're recovering from a hectic afternoon of picking a fresh Christmas tree from a local lot, hauling it home, and setting it up.

Jerry's drinking brandy while I sip a glass of nonalcoholic white wine. Since my car accident and head injury, the doctor has forbidden me to drink alcohol because it can delay brain healing. Life is full of ironies and here's the latest: I was nearly killed by a drunk driver and now I'm not allowed to drink alcohol. Not that I have any desire to do so. In the past, I sometimes used alcohol to manage anxiety, but the idea of drinking something that nearly killed me is repugnant.

I inhale the piney scent of the freshly cut Christmas tree and listen to Bing Crosby croon about the wonders of a white Christmas. I watch Cindy place a purple glass ornament on a branch, while Eric, standing nearby on his tippy-toes, fastens a wooden helicopter on a high branch.

I'm proud of my progress since my car accident two months ago. Although I still tire easily, I'm better able to

keep up with my household and chauffeuring duties. Jerry still complains about having "half a wife" because I'm not making gourmet meals, but fortunately, an invitation to dine with friends on Thanksgiving saved me from cooking an elaborate holiday meal. I'm also looking forward to Christmas because we are renting a cabin at a winter resort. Although Jerry's mood continues to be mercurial, I'm hoping that a change of scenery and time spent together as a family will help mend our fraying relationship. We've stayed at the cabin for Christmas before and always return home feeling rejuvenated.

My reverie is interrupted by Eric's tearful cries, "Give it back, Cindy! I had it first. Toto doesn't belong to you."

I look over to the Christmas tree and see that Cindy is holding something high above Eric's head. Rising from the couch, I cross the room, saying, "The Wizard of Oz ornaments belong to the family, not just you. Now give it back."

Cindy continues to stand and hold the ornament high above Eric's reach, a gleeful look on her face.

"Give it back now, Cindy. Or go to your room for a time out. Your choice," I order.

Cindy scowls, then looks across the room to her father, saying, "The Wizard of Oz ornaments are mine, right Dad?"

I turn, directing my gaze towards Jerry, hoping he won't undercut me.

"The Wizard of Oz ornaments belong to everyone," he says. "Give Toto back to Eric."

I heave a sigh of relief, grateful for Jerry's support, then return to my seat.

Once the tree is festooned with twinkling lights and ornaments, Jerry, Cindy, and Eric go to the family room to watch TV while I prepare dinner. The excitement of decorating the Christmas tree ratchets up Eric and Cindy's energy level, so

they are antsy until Jerry decides to take them cross-country skiing. When they return home, the kids are so tired from the exercise that they eat dinner without a quarrel, then hardly grumble when I suggest they go to bed at 9:00.

As I walk downstairs after tucking the kids in bed, I'm pleased at how much I've accomplished today. Yes, I'm tired, but it's a good tired because I know I'm getting better. When I reach the downstairs landing, I hear Jerry talking on the phone in the kitchen. Normally, I would tell him good-night, but decide against interrupting his conversation.

After brushing my teeth in the bathroom, I wander into the bedroom where I quickly change into a flannel night-gown. Crawling into bed, I'm soon asleep—until the over-head bedroom light flashes on and I hear Jerry say, "Wake up, Sandra. We need to talk."

"We can talk in the morning," I mumble sleepily, putting my pillow over my head to block out the light.

"I said wake up. We need to talk."

"I'm sleepy. Leave me alone," I say, as the pillow is ripped off my head. I sit up. "Why can't it wait until morning?"

"Because this is important," says Jerry, tossing my pillow on the bed. "I just talked to Mum. The doctor says Dad won't last until New Year's."

I heave a deep sigh, thoroughly awake now. "She's said that before."

"I know, but this time he's really sick. She wants me to come for Christmas."

"I don't want to go to your parents for Christmas. Besides, we already paid to stay at the cabin for Christmas."

"We'll have to cancel."

"I appreciate your concern for your father, but when we visited your parents last August, you promised we'd spend

Christmas at the cabin. Cindy and Eric are looking forward to it. We need time to bond together as a family."

Jerry sits down on the bed. He positions himself so close to me that I can feel the bedsprings sag from the weight of his body. "That's the other thing—Mum says that Dad is too sick to have everyone visit. She suggested that only Eric and I come."

"That's outrageous." I stare at Jerry in disbelief. "You can't be serious. I trust you told your mother that you would never agree to splitting up the family at Christmas."

"Actually, I think it's a good idea. If the weather's cold, the kids will be cooped up in the house with nothing to do. That would be hard on Dad. It'll be better if you and Cindy stay home and celebrate Christmas just the two of you."

"Better for your mother, yes," I mutter.

Jerry adds, "Tomorrow morning you need to call the resort and cancel our reservation, so they can refund our money."

"I haven't agreed to your visiting your mother for Christmas instead of staying at the cabin," I say, picking up my pillow. "I hope you change your mind after you've had a chance to sleep on this crazy idea." With that, I roll away from him and plop the pillow back on my head.

When I awaken the next morning, I remember last night's discussion and hope Jerry now realizes that separating the family at Christmas is a terrible idea. Since he's already out of bed and in the bathroom, I put on a robe and shuffle towards the kitchen to start the coffee. By the time everyone saunters into the kitchen, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee fills the room. I fill a cup for Jerry and myself, then sit down for breakfast.

I'm half-way through my coffee when Jerry remarks,

"Grandma called last night to say that Grandpa is not feeling well."

I try to catch Jerry's eye to warn him against mentioning last night's discussion, but he refuses to make eye contact, studying his toast instead. I say, "Jerry, please don't talk about last night's conversation until we have a chance to thoroughly discuss this matter…"

Jerry ignores me, saying, "I was talking to Grandma last night and she thought it would be fun to switch things around for Christmas this year. Eric and I will go to Grandma's for Christmas while Cindy and Mom will stay home for the holidays."

Cindy stares at her father, her mouth open in surprise. After a pause, she says. "You can't do that. You promised to take us to the cabin for Christmas."

Jerry spreads honey on his toast, seemingly unaware that the change of plans will not be well received. "Grandpa's not feeling well, so we have to change our plans."

Cindy makes a pouting face, then throws her half-eaten piece of toast on the floor. "You said we'd go to the cabin. You lied to us!"

"I did not lie," bellows Jerry, his face flushing red. "Pick up your toast and throw it in the garbage. Then go to your room."

"I don't have to," shouts Cindy. "You go to your room for lying. You promised we could go to the cabin."

Ever since Jerry mentioned that he and Eric would be going to Grandma's for Christmas instead of the cabin, Eric has been sobbing noisily. He wails, "I don't want to go to Grandma's. I want to go to the cabin."

Jerry glances at me, hoping I'll say something to defuse the situation, but I'm mad that he brought up the subject. I glare at him, saying nothing.

Meanwhile, Cindy has gotten out of her seat and is pummeling Jerry with her fists. "You're a liar. You said we could go to the cabin."

Jerry grabs Cindy's hands and holds them tightly. "Our plans have changed. Now go to your room!"

"I don't have to!" says Cindy while Eric continues to cry.

"Both of you, go to your room," says Jerry, standing. "If you don't go now, you're getting a spanking."

Cindy and Eric are both crying as they head upstairs. I retrieve Cindy's toast from the floor, then toss it in the garbage. Jerry returns to his chair and sits down to finish his breakfast.

"How does it feel to be the Grinch who stole Christmas?" I say.

Jerry glares at me. "You're the Grinch for setting the kids against me. I heard you talking to them this morning. You told them what to say. It's your fault they're mad."

I glance at him, surprised by his words. "You can't blame me for this. I didn't say a word to the kids before breakfast. *You* told them we weren't going to the cabin, not me."

Jerry pounds his fist on the table. "You've poisoned their minds against me. That's why they got so mad."

"They got mad because they felt you weren't respecting their feelings. Instead of explaining the situation and asking for their support and understanding, you announced the trip to the cabin was cancelled."

"Cindy and Eric know my Dad is ill. They're old enough to understand that visiting my dad comes first."

I take a sip of coffee and set my cup back down on the table. "Why don't we compromise? I'll take the kids to the cabin and you visit your parents."

"You know we don't have the money for both trips. The cabin is $500. Anyway, you're still recovering from your car

accident. You might get dizzy while you're driving and have another accident."

Jerry was right—I wasn't well enough to handle the long drive to the cabin. I say, "Ever since your father became ill, I feel that your mother has been using his illness to pull on the apron strings. This is the third time in a year that she's called to say that you must come home immediately."

"That's not fair. You know he has heart problems."

"Forgive me for being suspicious, but I can't help feeling that your father is going to have another miraculous recovery soon after your arrival."

"So, you resent my father for getting better?"

"I don't resent your father for getting better, but I do resent being manipulated."

Jerry waves a hand, dismissing me. "If you don't like the way things are, you can get out."

My body tenses as if to ward off a physical blow. "How dare you say such a thing! I'm your wife, not a servant you can fire on the spot."

"We'd be better off if you were gone. You hardly cook anymore. You're pretty much useless to us now."

Jerry's put-downs are nothing new, but his *my way or the highway* response is. Instead of apologizing and showing regret for breaking his promise, Jerry accuses me of poisoning Cindy and Eric's minds against him. He refuses to accept responsibility for his broken promise and blames me instead. Most annoying, he won't admit that I have just cause in mistrusting his mother's motives.

Jerry's mother has a history of excluding her daughters-in-law. His brother George has been married to Anna for over twenty-five years. Although they only live a few miles away, his mother has forbidden Anna from visiting the house, even though George is welcome to stop by whenever he wants.

HAVING LONGED for family all of my life, I thought I'd finally achieved my dream when I met Jerry. We were both living in Princeton, New Jersey, when we met, so we would frequently drive to his parent's farm in Canada and stay over the weekend. His family was cordial to me on those visits, but when Jerry announced we were getting married, his mother and sister objected and even tried to talk him out of it. They both refused to attend the wedding and didn't speak to us for a year.

I hoped that all was forgiven when Jerry's mother invited us for a visit. After she escorted me to a separate bedroom from Jerry's, I realized she hadn't. Although I wasn't excluded from the house as Anna was, Jerry's mother could prevent me from sleeping with her son. This was just one example of the many subtle (when Jerry was in in listening range) and not so subtle (when Jerry was out of listening range) ways that she had of expressing her disapproval of me.

I'm not sure why she was so against Jerry marrying me, but it might have been tribal. She was no novelty seeker, having grown up on a farm not far from where she was presently living. She seemed to have no interest in faraway people and places, and even told me that she "disliked foreigners." Since she was Canadian and I, American, that made me a foreigner to her.

When men feel angry or threatened, they often fight with fists. This makes sense from an evolutionary prospective. Men were the hunters and warriors, responsible for protecting their family and tribe. A quick and aggressive response was was more likely to keep everyone safe, so this behavior was adaptive.

Women were tasked with looking after their children and

keeping them safe. Since direct aggression was dangerous and might prove fatal, women became experts in practicing indirect aggression instead. Insisting that a married couple sleep in separate bedrooms is an example of indirect aggression. The goal of this subtle form of retaliation is to inflict pain on a recipient in a way that seems unintended and non-hurtful.[1] Jerry's mother said that since she had only had twin beds, she had to put us in separate bedrooms. When I suggested putting two twins in one room, she became annoyed and told me that the bedrooms were too small.

Critics may argue that I was overly critical of my mother-in-law's motives. That may be. But she'd been playing divide and conquer for years. It was hard to believe that this instance wasn't more of the same.

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Moving Out and Moving On

For as long as I can remember, my mother has insisted that after graduation from high school, I'll live at home and attend Fullerton Junior College (FJC). By the time I'm a senior in high school, my mother realizes the error of this plan. Teenagers are notoriously difficult, and no doubt, I am worse than most. Years of lax parenting have made me headstrong, so I rebel whenever she tries to set limits. The independence and outspokenness that my mother instilled in me as a child becomes untenable for her as I grow older.

One evening my refusal to do as I'm told upsets my mother so much that she calls the police to intervene.

An officer who doesn't look much older than me arrives at our apartment door. He says, "You called about a disturbance? What's the problem, ma'am?"

"My daughter is the problem!" says my mother, her blue eyes glaring at me. "She's rude. She talks back to me all of the time. I tell her to do her homework and she refuses. And…and she has terrible grades!"

"I'm sorry to hear that, ma'am. Does she take drugs? Does she hang out with hippies?"

"Certainly not!" my mother replies, looking insulted at the mention of drugs. "Sandra would never take drugs—and she does not hang out with hippies. Why, her friends are all straight A students. That's why I'm so upset. If her friends are so smart and have straight As, why can't she have straight As?"

"I understand your concern about her grades, ma'am, but there's no law against having bad grades. The police can't intervene unless your daughter breaks the law. I'm sorry, but I can't help you," he says, tipping his cap respectfully as he leaves.

The incident with the police makes my mother realize that our living together is no longer viable. Since junior colleges don't offer student housing, moving me into a dormitory is not an option. The alternative to my living at home is for me to lease an apartment, but my mother has no interest in covering the cost. Although I receive a monthly Social Security stipend as a result of my father's death as long as I'm in school, it's not enough to cover rent, much less living expenses. So my mother encourages me to get a job as a waitress and look for an apartment.

I'm hired as a counter girl (in charge of all things ice cream) at the Howard Johnson's across from Disneyland. I enjoy this job because it allows me to meet visitors from around the world who stop by the restaurant after visiting Disneyland. I take pride in making ice cream sundaes and even serve ice cream cones to musician Sergio Mendes and his band, Brasil 66.

My mother has taught me that it is better to be ten minutes early than five minutes late, so when she doesn't appear to drive me home from work one rainy evening, I

know something is wrong. Begging a ride from a co-worker, I arrive home to find no sign of my mother.

I'm just about to call the police when I hear my mother's key opening the lock on the front door. I rush towards her, saying, "What happened?"

My mother always takes pride in dressing impeccably, but at the moment, her clothing is plastered to her body in a wet, sodden mess. "I was driving along the freeway to pick you up when the car suddenly started hydroplaning. It skidded out of control and slammed into the center railing."

"How awful. Are you okay?"

"I'm not sure," replies my mother. "I'm probably still in shock."

"Why don't you take a hot shower and change into dry clothes? I'll go make you some instant coffee."

My mother's car is easily repaired, but her injuries—both physical and mental—are more worrisome. She complains about a new pain in her back and numbness in her right arm. Once again, I'm expected to handle all the housework and coddle her ills. If I don't do as she wishes, she starts talking about suicide.

Around this time, my girlfriend, Dianne, and I visit the Huntington Library in San Marino, then have lunch in Pasadena. Originally established as a winter resort for the wealthy in the 1880s, Pasadena is also the home of the California Institute of Technology (Caltech). Having grown up with the 1950s suburban sprawl of Anaheim, I fall in love with Pasadena's eclectic architecture, which includes ornately decorated Victorians, smaller, less elaborate craftsman bungalows, and Spanish haciendas with red barrel-tiled roofs, wrought-iron railings, and arched windows.

As I guide the car through a residential neighborhood, I notice "For Rent" signs posted in the yards of several grand

old mansions. The wealthy no longer flock to Pasadena as a winter resort, so some of oversized homes have been subdivided into apartments. What these apartments lack in modern and practical amenities, such as dishwashers and washer/dryers, they make up in charm.

I had planned to rent an apartment near FJC after graduation, but decide to move to Pasadena instead. I'm a novelty seeker, so I'm excited about the opportunity of living in a new town and meeting new people. Another advantage is the forty-five minute drive from my mother, who has been very needy since her second accident.

I'm ecstatic when I find an apartment in a magnificent Tudor mansion on El Molino Avenue. At eighteen, I don't care that it's on the third floor because the living room has a turret with curved glass windows. The rent is a whopping $65 a month.

I enroll at Pasadena City College, which is a two-year community college like FJC, but lacks the stigma of having the words "junior college" in its name. It doesn't take me long to discover that most of my classmates at PCC are graduates of local high schools, so they aren't looking for new acquaintances. At least, not with me. After a few awkward attempts at making friends, I realize this is junior high déjà vu. I can't pick up the lingo of my classmates at PCC.

I'm comfortable around people who are like my mother and my friends in the chess club—bookish, unconventional, and socially awkward. This seems to be a rare personality type at PCC. Fortunately, I don't have to go far to find people who fit my social needs. The Caltech campus is located just a mile away.

One Friday afternoon I'm walking across campus when I'm accosted by a young man in a paisley shirt, bell bottoms,

and sandals. When he offers to read my palm, I turn to study him, taking in the Fu Manchu mustache and long black hair.

Older people might view his shoulder length hair with disfavor because it is associated with Viet Nam war protestors and hippies. I'm nineteen and dressed in typical hippie attire —a long skirt and peasant blouse. I'm not put off by the young man's flowing locks, so I show him my right palm.

Taking my hand, he says, "I see a great future for you if you will follow me to a popcorn punt over at Caltech."

I laugh, retrieving my hand from his grasp. "I don't know much about reading palms but I'm sure that my palm does not contain the word 'Caltech.'"

"You're right. But I have found it's a great way to meet girls."

I gaze into the young man's aqua blue eyes and see intelligence and impish fun. "So, you're inviting me to a party at your dorm?"

"Caltech doesn't have dorms. We have residential houses. But yes, I'm inviting you to a party at Blacker House, where I live."

The young man tells me his name is Frank and has me follow him to his residential hall. PCC is a commuter college, so the campus has little night life. After class, students go home or to work. The guys at Blacker House always seem to be in the mood for partying.

Frank lives in Blacker House, one of the older Mediterranean style residences built in the 1930s. I park my car in the visitor lot and follow him along a red brick pathway that leads to an interior courtyard, then enter the building.

The deserted hallway (called an alley in Caltech slang) outside Frank's room is covered with black paper, making it as dark as a coal mine shaft. Frank flicks a switch and an ultra

violet light illuminates the black paper, revealing pictures painted in neon pink, orange, yellow, green and blue.

"Far out!" I exclaim.

Frank stashes my purse in his room and hands me a paint brush and several bottles of day-glo paint. "Have at it while I summon the trolls."

"I'm not good at drawing," I say.

"Then you'll fit right in." Frank returns to his room and turns on his stereo. Soon, Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* is playing at full blast. This appears to be a signal for inhabitants to open their closed doors.

Frank introduces me to his alley mates then heads to the kitchen to make popcorn. Most Caltech students (known as Techers or trolls) tend to be studious and introverted; however, Frank is an extravert. Since Caltech has no female undergraduates at the time, he has learned to be creative about meeting girls.

A few days later, Frank and I tour local thrift shops in search of an ice cream maker. Frank has never made ice cream before but it serves as a fun party activity. We also visit a sale at MGM studios, where Frank buys a three-cornered hat and coat that has epaulettes and gold braid. He enjoys parading around Pasadena dressed like Marlon Brando in *Mutiny on the Bounty* while I accompany him in an outfit straight out of *Alice in Wonderland* complete with frilled apron. Although Frank doesn't have ADHD, he is a non-conformist novelty seeker. We are kindred spirits in that way.

Meanwhile, my mother struggles with a new problem that hangs over her head like the sword of Damocles. Her employer, Astrodata, is laying-off people because government contracts are not being renewed. The company is considering filing for bankruptcy, so everyone in the building may be out of a job soon.

As the number of frantic telephone calls to me increase, I come to dread hearing my telephone ring. The sword of Damocles doesn't only hang over my mother; it also hangs over me.

IN AN EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY FAMILY, parents seek comfort from other adults, such as a spouse, family members, or friends. They do not demand emotional support from their children. Instead, the parents support their children. Lacking friends or appropriate forms of support, my mother turns to me instead.

This role reversal between parent and child is known as parentification. Children who experience parentification are more likely to have ADHD, high absenteeism in school, and poor grades.[1] From an evolutionary standpoint, parentification is a bad practice since it distracts children from developing academic strengths and focusing on their own needs.

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Don't Hang Up!

"I am calling to inform you that the service 'Dial One' is now available in your calling area," I say in my perkiest voice. "Dial One is a long-distance service that offers several different calling plans especially designed to save you money."

"I ain't interested in no long-distance service, lady. And I hate telemarketers. Now get off my phone!" The man's voice is raspy and impatient. We've been calling New Jersey all day and everyone is in a nasty mood.

"I know exactly how you feel about telemarketers," I reply, modulating a cheerful tone. "I tell all of my friends that I think God made me take this job to teach me tolerance and compassion. I have hung up on dozens of telemarketers in my day!" I wait, hoping my comment will make the man laugh. People who laugh at this remark are more likely to stay on the line long enough to hear my entire spiel.

"Good, then you'll understand why I'm hanging up on you now!" The line disconnects.

Pulling off my headset, I swing around in my chair and call to Liam, my 20-year-old-boss, who is at the end of the

row, logging sales on the big white board. "Can't we call someplace besides New Jersey? Everybody is crabby in New Jersey." Of course, I know the answer to that question. Only Jack, the call center's supervisor, is allowed to decide where we telephone. I refasten my headset and wait for the next call.

Several months ago, I decided to take Jerry's advice and "get out." Of course, I'd taken Cindy, and Eric with me, moving into a duplex a few blocks from Eric's school. Things went from bad to worse when Jerry returned from visiting his family at Christmas, perhaps because I'd been right. Jerry's father made another "miraculous" recovery and is doing much better.

When Jerry and I separated, I hoped to reset our relationship. I longed for the equal partnership that we enjoyed in the early years of our marriage. My hopes were dashed when Jerry hired a lawyer and sued me for custody of the children. Fortunately, Dr. Dunn and the child psychologist supported my request to handle Cindy and Eric's educational needs, so the judge awarded me custody during the school year. Jerry was given custody during the summer.

I knew that I'd have to take a job when Jerry and I split up. Since I didn't have a college degree, I was forced to accept a position as a telemarketer. I'd hated the job at first. For the first three days, I came home every night and griped to Eric and Cindy about the rude people I'd talked to that day. Eventually, I realized that I was setting a bad example for the kids by taking a defeatist attitude towards my work. Further, being unhappy was not going to help me make sales and earn bonuses. People said "yes" to telemarketers who, as Liam said, "had smiles in their voices."

I developed a new strategy. If someone said something rude, I'd be extra nice and patient. I tried to make the person at the other end of the phone laugh. Getting people to laugh

always increased my chances of making sales. It also made my job more fun.

Although telemarketing was a stopgap job, I loved chatting with people all over the country. I've had dozens of jobs in my life, but this was the one of the few where high energy and a tendency to talk too much was an asset.

The only cloud on the horizon is the impending spring flood. Winter in the Midwest has been brutal this year with months of sub-degree weather and eight blizzards that left so much snow that streets have become canyons with piles of snow towering on each side. Now the thaw has arrived, turning the nearby river into a lake that extends ten miles wide in some places.

I hoped for a mild spring, which would have allowed the snow to melt slowly into the ground. Instead, the region was slammed by an ice storm that toppled utility poles like dominoes and left the city scrambling to restore electricity. That was just two weeks ago.

I called this the winter of my discontent and discontented I certainly was. For weeks, I've been haunted by a vision of the river surging over city dikes with a force more powerful than man and all of his machines. I envisioned flood waters rushing down city streets, spreading to residential areas, and washing homes away.

When I told my friends about my premonition, they reminded me that the weather service had assured us our homes were safe. The river was predicted to crest at forty-nine feet, three feet below the dike levels. Although the town was prone to flooding, our area always had remained dry.

Through my headset, I hear a phone ring once, twice, three and four times. The computer on my desk dials numbers automatically, so I wait until I hear a woman's voice on the line saying, "Hello." I glance at the computer screen,

which tells me the telephone subscriber's name is Annette Brown.

"Hi! This is Sandra and I'm calling to inform you that the service 'Dial-One' is now available in your calling area," I say in a perky voice. "Dial-One is a long-distance service that offers several different calling plans especially designed to save you money."

"Are you offering money to switch my long-distance service? Six months ago AT&T sent me a check for fifty bucks when I switched," says the woman.

During the 1990s, AT&T, Sprint, and MCI were waging a price war. They routinely sent checks to consumers, which, once cashed, automatically changed their long distance company. I worked for a marketing company, which represented Dial One, a smaller company that hired us to increase sales. I realized early on that this job had no future since long distance companies couldn't afford to send checks forever, but it was the best paying job I could find.

"We don't offer checks to switch your service, but we do offer increased savings. How much do you spend on long distance calls every month?"

"I've got kids in college—it's usually over $100 a month."

"Great, we can definitely save you a bundle. Where do your kids go to college?"

I let the woman tell me about her children in college for several minutes, then tactfully return the discussion to her long distance usage. She's disappointed that we don't offer money to switch her service, but I point out that she'll probably be getting a letter from Sprint or MCI offering her money to switch her long distance carrier soon.

"That's a good point," says the woman. "Okay. Sign me up."

"Your long distance service will be switched from AT&T to Dial One. Now don't hang up. To receive savings, I need to switch you to a verifier who will ensure that you are being switched with your permission."

As the call transfers, I check the clock on the wall and see that it is 4:30, the end of the workday. I close and put away the black 3-ring binder that holds my long distance information, then grab my insulated lunch bag and head for the exit.

Cindy and Eric are now attending an after-school program at the YMCA. I pick them up, then make sure that their seat belts are fastened as I start the car. We're pulling out of the parking lot when Cindy, who is sitting next to me, asks, "So what's for dinner tonight?"

"Spanish rice," I reply.

"Not again!" Cindy protests.

"I want to go to the Taco Shop," says Eric from the backseat.

"Not tonight," I say. "Afterwards, you need to pack your stuff in the storage bins."

Cindy groans. "Why do we have to help you pack? We're not moving. Besides, everyone says that we're not going to have a flood."

"I visited city hall on my lunch break today," I say, stopping the car at the light. As I wait for green, I add, "According to the 100-year maps, the playground across the street from our apartment is in the flood zone."

"So what if the playground floods. That won't hurt us," Cindy protests.

"Remember that our home is at garden level. If the playground floods and pools, the water could seep in through the windows. Your stuff will remain dry if it's stored in waterproof containers."

"Dad says that you're acting crazy and paranoid," says

Eric from the backseat. "He says we aren't going to have a flood."

"We'll know more in a few days when the river crests. If I'm wrong, you can take satisfaction in telling me 'I told you so,'" I reply.

ALTHOUGH JERRY REMAINS angry at me after our divorce, some good comes from the split. He becomes a more engaged dad. In the past, he expected me to look after Cindy and Eric. Nowadays, he makes an effort to take them places and spend more time with them. Since I have Cindy and Eric during the school week, he has breathing space away from them.

Jerry continues to say nasty things about me to my friends and children, but I no longer have to hear it 24 hours a day, nor am I obliged to make him happy. If I want to pack our belongings in plastic containers, Jerry can't stop me. I'd prefer that Jerry not tell the kids that I'm crazy and paranoid, but at least, he's not saying it to my face and in my own house.

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Everything Changes but Stays the Same

I study the orange pumpkin and admire the inverted v-shaped eyebrows, considering whether I should increase their size to make it more obvious that this jack-o-lantern is supposed to be *Star Trek's* Mr. Spock. No, I decide to leave it as is. I'm especially proud of the Spock ears, which I fashioned from the mouth cutouts and attached to the side of the pumpkin with toothpicks.

I wonder if I should I include a photo of the Mr. Spock jack-o-lantern in my thank you note to Leonard Nimoy. I met the actor who played Spock last summer when he was on location while filming the TV series, *Mission Impossible.* Apparently, Caltech's Spanish architecture is a perfect backdrop for stories that have a Spanish setting, so the crew filmed an episode on campus.

I managed to wangle an invitation to lunch with the crew, then had an animated discussion with Mr. Nimoy on the possibilities of filming *Lord of the Rings*. Impulsively, I invited the actor to have dinner at Blacker House, Frank's residence at Caltech. To my surprise, he agreed, stipulating that I send a written invitation to his studio, Paramount

Pictures. One Saturday night several weeks ago, he showed up for dinner.

We ate in Blacker House's dining hall, a grand room with a lofty coffered ceiling and a wrought iron chandelier. Nimoy sat at the table reserved for Frank and his alley mates, which was known as "surly table." Entertainment consisted of a favorite dinner pastime—flipping butter patties so high that they stuck to the dark wood ceiling overhead.

Afterwards, we adjourned to the lounge, which was crowded with so many residents that there was standing room only. Since Mr. Spock embodied the logical scientific persona idealized by many Caltech students, Mr. Nimoy's visit was a big hit.

Just then, the telephone rings. As I cross the room to answer the call, my stomach muscles tighten. The sword of Damocles hanging over my mother fell last summer when she lost her job. Her employer, Astrodata, is filing for bankruptcy, so she will not be called back to work.

Although my mother is collecting unemployment, she receives less money than when she was working. Her spending always seems to exceed her income, so she has relied on credit cards to increase her buying power. Now she's having trouble making minimum payments.

In a telephone call last week, she said she could no longer afford her rent and wanted to move in with me. This was ironic since she relocated to a one-bedroom apartment as soon as I left home, no doubt to ensure I did not become a boomerang child. I told her that my apartment was too small for her stuff, but she insisted she was moving in with me anyway.

"Hello," I say in a tentative voice. When I hear Frank's voice on the line, I heave a sigh of relief.

"How soon is dinner?"

"I was just about to go peel potatoes. In about an hour." Although I wasn't much of a cook when I lived with my mother, I enjoy trying out recipes nowadays.

"Say, is it okay if Steve tags along?"

"Sure," I reply. "The more the merrier."

By the time Frank and Steve arrive, I've just finished mashing potatoes. I say, "Hi. Frank, will you do the honors and carve the roast?"

Frank plants a quick smooch on my lips, then pulls out a knife from the drawer and begins to slice the meat. He says, "The smell from this roast is giving me a serious case of the munchies."

"You always have the munchies," I say.

Steve is tall, blonde, and comes from Louisiana, so I like to tease him about eating Southern food. I say, "Welcome. If I knew you were coming I'd have made you grits."

"Blah, grits taste like yak shit," says Frank.

"How do you know about the taste of yak shit?" I reply.

We load our plates with food, then sit down at the dining room table. That's when Frank notices my Mr. Spock jack-o-lantern, which I placed in the center of the table. "Where did you get that?"

"I made it. It's supposed to be Mr. Spock," I say.

"Yeah, I figured that out. The ears are hard to miss."

"Wow, that's really cool," says Steve, who has a Southern drawl as thick as my mother's.

Frank and Steve are so impressed with my jack-o-lantern that they decide they want to carve one also. After dinner, they make a run to the grocery store, returning with two very fat pumpkins, which they set on the dining room table.

"Have fun," I say.

When Frank picks up a steak knife and begins carving the

mouth, I say, "Aren't you going to cut a hole in the top and pull out the guts first?"

"Should I?"

I roll my eyes and say, "I take it you've never carved a pumpkin before." Seeing Frank and Steve nod affirmatively, I say, "Here, let me show you. You guys spend way too much time studying."

I demonstrate how to cut a hole in the top, then point to the inside of the pumpkin. "Now you need to pull the innards out."

Steve peers into the opening, makes a face, then plunges his hand into the cavity. As he pulls out an orange stringy mess, he says, "This is the grossest thing I've ever done."

What had been a fun, creative endeavor for me becomes a competition for Frank and Steve. When Frank sees his friend draw an intricate design on his pumpkin with a pen, he decides that freehand is no longer good enough. Frank grabs a pencil and traces an even more detailed sketch.

As I watch the two turn a simple project into a battle, I realize that I shouldn't be surprised. Caltech is a highly selective school. They wouldn't have been admitted if they weren't skilled competitors. Because entering freshman are accustomed to receiving top grades in high school where there is less competition, Institute policy dictates that for the year, pass-fail marks are given instead of letter grades. This gives incoming students time to adjust to the increased competition and high academic standards of the college.

Growing up with a competitive mother taught me the pitfalls of competition in personal relationships. Watching Frank and Steve turn pumpkin carving into a contest makes me feel uncomfortable.

Of course, I already knew that Frank had a different attitude towards school. Last summer he took a couple of classes

with me at PCC, even though he knew that Caltech wouldn't accept the units for credit. I was touched by his willingness to join me at my school until I realized that I was now in competition with him for grades. Of course, I was a lackluster opponent. Frank aced our exams and had a perfect A average, while I managed to pull off a B in both classes.

Frank enjoys school and can't understand why I don't. Of course, I've never actually admitted to him that I dislike school. He doesn't know that I flunked algebra twice in high school and dropped the course recently because I was failing.

Frank has never asked me how I'd like to spend my time, but if he did, school would be at the bottom of my list. At the top would be writing fiction and traveling to places that I've read about. Novelty seeking is embedded in my DNA and my restless spirit craves new experiences.

I'm sure that travel is a the bottom of Frank's list. He's already thinking about where he'll go to graduate school. Spending another seven years sitting in a classroom suits Frank fine. The very idea makes me want to run screaming from the room.

By the time Frank and Steve finish carving their pumpkins, dusk is descending. The interior of my apartment is bathed in shadows, so I light the candles in the jack-o-lanterns and carry them over to a coffee table in the living room.

I feel mellow as I sit on the couch and gaze at the three glowing jack-o-lanterns, which cast flickering shadows on the walls. My tummy is full of mashed potatoes and roast pork, so all is right with the world.

Frank breaks the spell when he says, "My pumpkin is definitely the best, don't you think?"

ALTHOUGH ADHD BEHAVIOR can lead to trouble for people with ADHD, it can also offer benefits. If I had not impulsively invited Mr. Nimoy to dinner, I would have missed a lovely evening with a remarkable man whose sensitive depiction of the logical, scientific mind has resonated with fans for over 50 years. At the time, my mother was creating a lot of anxiety for me, so meeting him was a bright spot.

Evolutionary psychologists have a word for my fascination with highly educated men—hypergamy.[1] Of course, education wasn't as important in olden times, so status was considered more desirable back then.

Women only can have one child a year, so they tend to be choosy when they pick a mate. They prefer someone who is reliable and a hard worker. A wise woman avoids doing what my mother did—marry a charming con man. Her experience with my father taught me at an early age to be cautious in my relationships with men.

Women did not have access to education for decades, so men had a monopoly on the best jobs. This trend ended in 2014, when the number of women with a college education surpassed the number of men. Worldwide research shows that as women become more educated, the rate of hypergamy falls.[2]

My mother was a harbinger of this societal change. She never remarried because she didn't have to. Smart and educated, she was able to maintain a middle-class lifestyle without a husband.

What Doesn't Kill You

Daylight is breaking, painting the sky with a watercolor wash of pink, orange and blue. I sit in my red Mercury Sable, one of many cars waiting in line to get onto the Air Force Base. We're here for the same reason—all refugees seeking shelter from the flood.

Last evening my city lost its battle with the river. Nearly 90 percent of the residents are under mandatory evacuation. We're a town without a home, sleeping on cots, in schools and churches, and friend's homes *if* we're lucky enough to have friends who live well out of town.

A kiosk squats in the middle of the road leading to the base. Standing next to it is a young man wearing a camouflage cap and fatigues. When I drive forward and stop, he hands me a sheet of paper that reads, "Special Event Pass." Across the silhouette of a jet airplane, the words "Flood" are printed in red ink.

It all seems so unreal. Yesterday morning it seemed we were winning our battle with the river. Then came the afternoon when our hearts stood still. Water crumbled the dikes and roared over them, drowning our homes to the rooftops.

I no longer have a home, or at least a habitable home. Worse, I no longer have my children. Cindy and Eric live with me during the school week but they went to stay with Jerry two days ago. I thought that his two-story home would be safer from flooding than my garden level apartment.

Just yesterday I was helping at the city center downtown, in charge of sending some volunteers to sandbag central while others were transported to residential areas to build sandbag dikes. As I worked, I listened to a local radio station giving updates on the flood.

My job ended abruptly when the mayor interrupted the broadcast to say that a dike near the downtown had failed and all residents needed to evacuate the area immediately. The mayor warned, "If you don't get out, you could lose your life."

I spend the night at a friend's house, but at 4:00 a.m., the town's air raid sirens shrill, rousing us from our beds. A bit later a police car cruises by, its loudspeaker broadcasting that the neighborhood is under mandatory evacuation. My friends urge me to go on by myself since it will take them time to pack.

Despite the early hour, there are soldiers everywhere—beckoning me to go straight for several blocks—turn right, then turn left. They are all dressed in khaki colored uniforms that blend into the drab, barren landscape. Spring is late this year and the berm looks more like mud than grass; the trees have not started to bud yet.

I follow the road, passing numerous long, low shape buildings that hug the ground and emphasize the flatness of the prairie. A young man clad in camouflage directs me to turn left. Ahead, I see an expanse of black asphalt and numerous parked cars. I stop the Sable next to a gray cyclone fence and shut the engine off.

Climbing out of the car, I grab a pillow, comforter, and overnight bag. I follow the crowd heading towards a small door in a huge mustard colored building on my right. When I step inside, I realize that I'm standing in a jet hangar.

The hangar is cavernous, seemingly as tall as it is wide, and garishly lit by florescent lights. Orange and khaki colored cots crowd the hangar floor. I'm reminded of a scene from the movie, *Gone with the Wind*. Melanie is about to have her baby, so Scarlett goes looking for the doctor at the railroad yard. The doctor refuses to come, saying he is too busy. The camera angle shifts and the audience suddenly has a bird's eye view of the rail yard, which is crowded with rows upon rows of injured men lying on the ground. At least we're not dying, I think to myself.

A long table faces the entrance. Several women wearing Red Cross aprons sit and take information from incoming evacuees, who are lined up in queues. I walk over to the end of a line and stand. When I reach the front, a gray-haired woman takes my name and address, then hands me a card with a number on it.

"Be sure to keep this card," she advises. "You'll need to show it whenever you get food."

I thank her, then say, "Have the people from the high school shelter arrived here yet? My children were there last night with my ex-husband. I saw them on the ten o'clock news."

"People are arriving here all of the time from various shelters. I don't know if the people from the high school have been relocated here." The woman looks over my shoulder to the people behind me, hoping that I'll take the hint and move away.

"Could I look at your list of people staying here?" I ask.

"We don't have one list—we have many lists." She

glances at me and decides to take pity. "You can take a look if you'd like."

I scan the handwritten lists. The printing is hurried, cramped, and difficult to read. There are hundreds and hundreds of names written on numerous lists. I soon gave up.

"Thank you," I say, handing back the lists. She nods and turns her attention to the family behind me.

I walk away from the tables and look for a cot to call home. Standing in the middle of the hangar makes me feel exposed and vulnerable, so I search for a vacant spot along the wall. Unfortunately, the cots near the wall are already filled with families and groups of people. Finally giving up on the idea of privacy, I spread my leafy green comforter over an orange canvas cot and toss my pillow at the head. All the comforts of home. Sort of.

The cot creaks as it accepts the weight of my body. I stow my bag under the cot. It seems strange that after all of the weeks of fighting the river, the battle is over. At least, it's over for me.

An old man shuffles towards me. I wonder what part of town he lives in, and how he ended up in the hangar wearing a striped pajama top and plaid pants. The old man's sparse gray hair is matted, his gaunt cheeks peppered with several days of stubble. I see confusion in his faded blue eyes. I know that the magnitude of the disaster has not registered.

I can't blame the old man for feeling confused. Like most of the town, he probably believed the weather service's forecast that the dikes would keep the city safe.

I stand up, deciding to take a walk around the hangar. When I spy two soldiers sitting at a card table in a corner of the hangar, I walk over to them. One holds a microphone in his hand and periodically announces names, which are broadcast over a PA system.

When I reach the table, I ask the soldiers to call Cindy and Eric's names. “Do you know if the people who took shelter at the high school last night are here?”

"There are people housed all over the base, ma’am,” one soldier replies. "They come from shelters all over town."

My eyes scan the harsh, artificially lit interior, hoping to see the faces of my always exuberant children suddenly come racing towards me. I wait for over twenty minutes, then finally give up.

As I meander back to my cot, I hear the sound of the large, heavy hangar doors grinding open. Looking towards them, I see sunshine stream inside. Natural sunlight after the hours of florescent lights is a welcome sight.

I watch as Red Cross workers place food on long tables. Having nothing better to do, I decide to go and get something to eat. I pick up an orange and a granola bar. The Red Cross worker behind the table stops me.

"Only one for now. We have to ration our supplies."

I put the orange back, realizing that I’m too numb for hunger. The urge to eat is just an automatic response, embedded in my genes from my hunter-gatherer ancestors when food was not as plentiful as today.

On my way back to my cot, I spy Saturday's newspaper lying on a cot. Since no one’s reading it, I ask the man sitting nearby if I can borrow it.

"Help yourself," he replies. Like all of the men at the hangar, he looked like he hasn't shaved in days. Normal human amenities—such as washing clothes and hot showers—have been forbidden to city residents for days to prevent the pumping stations from overloading.

I sit on my cot and open the paper. The aerial photograph that stares back at me is sickening. I turn the picture sideways, trying to find my home, but dirty brown water has

obliterated familiar landmarks. A peninsula of land that once held hundreds of homes is gone—swallowed by the river. All that remains are rooftops and skeletal branches of trees protruding from the water.

Having seen the photographs, I return to the newspaper to its owner. There's no need to read the accompanying text because the pictures tell the story in sickening detail.

I sit on my cot and wonder what I can do to pass the time. Sleeping during the day and in the midst of so many people is unthinkable. I decide to ask the soldiers to page my children. Once again, no one answers my announcement.

I spend the day marking time. For me, this is the most difficult part about staying at the shelter. There's nothing to do but worry and stand in line. When night finally comes, I crawl under the covers and have a good (but silent) cry. I cry because I miss my children. I cry because so many people have lost their homes.

I need to grieve but find it impossible to do so in the hangar. It's too open, too exposed. The building's immense size magnifies my feeling of being helpless, small, and very much alone.

When I get up the next morning, I'm as tired and numb as I was last night. I feel gritty, greasy, and desperately in need of a shower. Although the pumping stations are fully functional on the air base, it uses city water. Since the water treatment plant was inundated by floodwaters last night, water is strictly rationed.

The Red Cross is serving breakfast, so I go and stand in line for an hour until I'm finally served. Afterwards, I wander over to a television positioned along one wall. Several rows of metal chairs face the TV. The local news anchor, who is unshaven and without make-up, describes a new crisis that is developing. A leaky gas line started a fire in the downtown

and it is spreading rapidly, threatening people who ignored the call to evacuate. With river water flooding the streets, the only way to reach these people is by boat. Stranded residents are instructed to hang a sheet in the window, so rescuers can find them.

Meanwhile, I wonder where Jerry has gone with the children. My mind keeps coming back to one place—his mother's farm. The thought of calling her and asking if she knows where Jerry and the kids are does not fill my heart with gladness. But the situation calls for desperate measures.

At breakfast this morning, I heard that AT&T was offering free long-distance to shelter residents. I mosey over to the AT&T phone bank and stand in line for an hour or so.

My heart is racing as I dial the phone number. Will Jerry's mother hang up on me when she hears my voice?

"Hello," she says.

"Hi. This is Sandra. I'm wondering if Jerry called you. I don't know if you heard, but most of our town is under mandatory evacuation."

"Yes, Jerry phoned me yesterday and said they are coming for a visit."

"That's great," I say, heaving a sigh of relief. I realize the wisdom of Jerry's decision. Grandma's farm is a two day's drive away. Cindy and Eric won't be exposed to the stress and heartbreak that is going on here. I certainly don't want Cindy and Eric staying at the hangar. I've been here only two days and I'm already going stir crazy.

"Tell Jerry I called and it's fine with me if the kids stay at your place for a while. At the moment, I'm living in an Air Force jet hangar with 3,000 people. They're rationing food and water. No one's had a shower in days."

"I'll tell Jerry," she says, hanging up.

There's a crowd of people around the TV, so I walk over

and stand, listening. I hear that all public school and university classes are cancelled for the semester. Since the city lacks water, phone and electrical services, the hospital was closed this morning and patients are being airlifted to other facilities.

This is momentous news, but the mayor's plea for residents to leave the area for several weeks is even more shocking. The mayor promises that the city will be rebuilt better than ever, but it will take several months to restore the city's infrastructure.

I look around. A young woman with stringy blond hair standing to my right has tears streaming down her face. Clutching two squirming toddlers, she is no doubt wondering what she's going to do with no place to live.

To my left, a gray-haired woman grabs her husband's arm, her lower lip quivering. He looks at her and says, "They can't keep us from our homes, damn it!"

"We can't live without water and power," says a man standing nearby. "Besides, most of the town is flooded."

The idea that they can't return to their homes (or find out if they still have a home) for weeks is hard to accept. They've depended upon their homes and neighborhoods for security all of their lives. Now their town is unlivable, and they feel lost.

Unexpectedly, I see the advantage of my dysfunctional childhood. For much of my life, I have resented the hand that fate dealt me. Growing up with a suicidal mother and no father was difficult. Sometimes, the loneliness was almost unbearable. Nevertheless, I survived—and was strengthened in the process.

Suddenly, I'm grateful for my life. I see my tribulations as blessings. Losing everything and starting over doesn't worry me. I've been forced to reinvent myself numerous times. The

future doesn't scare me because I know that what I faced in the past was worse.

I turn and walk back to my cot. A burden has lifted. Even if I lose everything in the flood, I've gained something far more valuable in the process—an appreciation of my resilience. Some residents may never recover from this disaster, but I won't be one of them. Losing my home to a flood is a minor event compared to losing my mother when I was nineteen.

RESILIENCE IS DEFINED as the ability to adapt to stressful circumstances. Having to play parent to my mother when I was growing up wasn't ideal, but it did force me to learn how to adjust to her changing moods and behavior. I was a child and needed her financial support. My survival depended on keeping her emotionally calm, so she did not follow through with her threat of suicide. Trying to keep my mother happy set me up for a lifetime of people pleasing behavior.

Researchers from the University of Minnesota found that adults with stressful and unpredictable childhoods performed worse at inhibition (blocking negative thoughts) but performed better at shifting (adapting to changing conditions) than adults with predictable childhoods. The authors concluded that exposure to stress at an early age shaped their thought processes in adaptive ways.[1]

Another study found that individuals who experience a lot of stress can become mentally unstable, but individuals who experience moderate stress can become emotionally more stable. In the later case, exposure to limited stress may create a psychological immune system, which can improve coping skills.[2] For example, I managed my anxiety about the

upcoming disaster by packing our belongings in waterproof containers and moving large items, like our furniture, to a friend's garage. These activities gave me a sense of control and helped me to deal with my stress.

I was attracted to Jerry initially because he came from a stable family. I assumed that he'd be better at handling life's inevitable mishaps than me, the offspring of a dysfunctional family. Eventually, I learned that Jerry's secure upbringing did not provided him with enough stressors to toughen him emotionally. When life fell apart, he struggled to put the pieces back together.

In the same way, some individuals disrupted by the flood struggled to put their lives back together. For instance, a janitor at a badly damaged school did not lose his home in the flood, but ended up committing suicide several months after the school was condemned. He could not bear the emotional anguish of saying good-bye to students and staff at a memorial ceremony the next day.

Although stressful events make me anxious, experience has taught me that the best way to manage my negative feelings is to analyze the challenges and find ways to overcome them. Instead of denying that the flood might be catastrophic, I made plans to guard against a worst-case scenario. When the flood turned out as bad as I anticipated, I was comforted by the knowledge that my foresight saved us from losing everything. This realization gave me confidence that I would be able to rise above the destruction of my home and town.

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Bridge Over Troubled Water

Traffic is moving slowly on the Pasadena Freeway, which is just as well. The radio is playing Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and I can't see the highway through the blur of my tears. I'm in no shape for driving, having just spent the day cleaning out my dead mother's apartment. Yes, my mother is dead. This is no time for euphemisms. She finally followed through with the threat that I'd heard since I was 13. My mother ended her life with an overdose of sleeping pills—or an "overdose barbiturate ingestion" as the coroner would describe it in the autopsy released six weeks after her death.

When I was a child, my mother was my bridge over troubled water, so listening to the song reminds me of my loss. Although an imperfect parent, she was the only person in the world who protected and kept me safe. Now she was gone, and I felt devastated.

She talked about killing herself so many times that I quit believing she was serious. I remember saying that she was always threatening suicide and that she would never actually

follow through. My mother replied that people who threatened *did* commit suicide.

At the time, it seemed that life would continue as it had for so many years—with me trying to support and please my mother, while she struggled to get by. I didn't know that one should *never* challenge a person who threatens suicide. All suicide threats should be taken seriously.

I also was unaware that recent changes in my mother's life made her more prone to suicide. After she lost her job in the spring of 1969, she spent months looking for a new one. She was hired by Ampex Corporation, but the company was located an hour's drive from Anaheim, so she was forced to move.

Adding to my mother's stress was my uncle B.J.'s recent divorce. After twenty years of marriage, Aunt Peggy decided that she could no longer tolerate his alcoholic behavior. My uncle's response was to go on a bender that nearly killed him. He was now battling type 2 diabetes and unable to work. I adored my uncle when I was younger, but as I grew older, I came to see him as a nasty drunk.

It's a beautiful February day, but I feel no joy as I navigate the car through South Pasadena. I glance at the clock on the dashboard, which reads 6:35. Frank should be in his room by now. I hit my right turn indicator, hear the click, click, click, then guide my car onto California Boulevard.

When I pull into the Caltech parking lot, there are no empty visitor spaces, so I park in the spot reserved for Nobel Prize winner, Dr. Murray Gell-Mann. He must be away frequently because it is always empty.

I follow the red brick pathway leading to Frank's residence house, cross the interior courtyard, then enter the building. I haven't slept since I learned of my mother's death three days ago,

so I'm beyond tired, but as I near Frank's room, my pace quickens. I'm like a horse returning from a long ride that suddenly sees the barn—I speed up as soon as I enter the hallway.

"I'm so glad you're here," I say, my voice quivering, as I stand in the doorway of Frank's room. "I've had the absolute worst day of my life."

Frank is doing his homework (called snaking in Caltech lingo). I see the red-covered text, *Feynman Lectures on Physics,* splayed open on his desk, along with several sheets of notebook paper that are crammed with line after line of his neatly penciled writing.

Frank glances at me, then turns his attention back to his work, not wanting to lose his train of thought. I wait and watch as he writes several more lines. Then he slams his book shut. I breathe a little easier, hoping that the closed book means that he's finished his homework and will devote his attention to me for the rest of the night.

"I'm sorry," Frank replies, rising to give me a hug. His strong arms encircle me, and for a moment, I feel safe. When he tries to kiss me, I turn my face away and pull back from him. I say, "Not now."

"Okay, why don't you sit down and tell me what happened," he replies, gesturing for me to sit in his chair.

"Where do I start?" I reply with a sigh, suddenly realizing that every bone in my body is screeching with pain from the ordeal of packing and moving boxes all day. I can't remember ever feeling this weary. "My mother is going to be cremated, but the funeral home insists that I still have to pay to have her embalmed *and* I have to pay for a coffin. The funeral service is scheduled for Saturday but since I've never been to a funeral service, I'm paying them to manage it. And by the way, you *are* coming to the funeral service…"

"Yeah, I'll come." The look on Frank's face tells me that

he wishes he could avoid the service, but he knows he's trapped. Damn right. There's no way he can refuse.

"Also, Arlene and Dorothy, co-workers of my mom at Astrodata, showed up to help me pack."

"That's great," Frank says, sitting on the bed next to his desk. He's obviously relieved that I didn't have to deal with packing up my mother's house by myself.

"I left them for an hour while I visited the funeral home. When I got back, Dorothy presented me with a box of things she'd put aside for herself. She took all of my mother's panties, which she was welcome too. She also packed my mother's Golden Nature Books, which she was not welcome to."

"So you told her you wanted to keep the books?"

"I didn't say a word. I'd just returned from planning my mother's funeral, so I was in no mood to argue about things." My voice cracks at the word *things* and I burst into tears. It seems all I do lately is cry.

Frank reaches out for my hand and clasps it tightly, saying, "I know you've had a difficult day, but you'll get over this."

"I'll never get over this."

"Next month you'll be upset about something else."

"No I won't," I say, as I feel the warmth of my tears slide down my face. "My mother was my entire family. You don't know what it's like to have only one close family member. Now I'm totally alone."

"You're not alone. You have me."

"I have you when you're not studying…and when you're not away for the holidays with your family in Chicago."

"We'll be married by Christmas next year, so you can come home with me."

"That will be nice."

Frank and I are young, so neither of us is prepared for the changes that my mother's suicide brings. The strain of my mother's death plays havoc on our relationship. I'm emotionally needy and require more time and attention than he's willing to give me. I have the unreasonable expectation that it's Frank's job to make me happy. Years later, I will realize how wrong this belief is, but that is decades in the future.

The state of California, in its bureaucratic wisdom, rules that since I am only 20, I'm not old enough to handle my legal affairs. Frank is a year older and has recently turned 21, so I have the court appoint Frank as executor of my mother's estate.

Uncle B. J. is still alive, so I could have asked him to be my guardian, but his belligerent drunkenness put my mother and Aunt Peggy through hell. There's no way that I want anything to do with him. I'm so anxious to avoid my uncle that within two months of my mother's death, I move to a different Pasadena address and have my phone changed to a new, unlisted number.

Frank attends the funeral service, but he refuses to stay up with me on the long, lonely nights when I'm unable to sleep. Insomnia has plagued me all of my life but it becomes worse after my mother's death. I refuse to consider taking sleeping pills since they were the cause of my mother's death.

Instead of falling asleep, my thoughts spin around in my head like a gyroscope, going from shock to denial. What tipped my mother over the edge? Did the pain pills she'd been taking since her last accident decrease her work efficiency? Her mood had been erratic lately. Any criticisms or suggestions for improvement from her employer would not have been well received.

I don't recall her mentioning that she was having trouble at work. Mostly, she talked about her unlikely new hobby,

astrology. Considering my mother's skepticism towards religion and anything that could not be scientifically proven, my mother's sudden interest in astrology astonished me. When we were at the Pickwick Bookshop a couple of months ago, she bought so many books on astrology that I had to help carry them to the car.

Did my own behavior increase my mother's anxiety and depression? Yes, absolutely. I was a pain in the neck to raise; however, most parents don't respond to the stress of raising a child by threatening suicide. If they had, the human race would have never made it out of the caves.

My mother's sudden suicide left me reeling in shock. I can't say that I've gotten over her death but I've learned to live with it. It took me years to consider her death in a less emotional manner.

ABRAHAM MASLOW'S Pyramid of Needs offers a structured way to consider the life events that precipitated my mother's decision to end her life.[1] Although Maslow presented his ideas in a pyramid graph of five rows, I use a linear model:

Physiological—Maslow places this requirement at the bottom of his pyramid because it is the most important. Humans need food, water, and air to survive. They also need a healthy body. My mother's two accidents were debilitating and left her in intense pain. She also was taking opiates that may have clouded her judgment.

Safety—My mother lost her job and unemployment did not cover her monthly expenses. She was so worried about finances that she wanted to move in with me.

Love and belonging—Losing her job meant losing her co-workers, so she became more demanding and clingy

towards me. She had to adjust to a new job at Ampex Corporation, which was located in an industrial section of Los Angeles. For someone who cherished trees, this was not an ideal location.

Esteem—Beginning a new job is always challenging. I don't know how well she was managing at work, but she was more interested in discussing astrology than her new employment. When I talked with her boss after her death, he seemed aware that she was having trouble adjusting to a new environment.

Self-actualization—Maslow puts this category at the top, indicating that it is the hardest to achieve. Considering my mother's shaky standing on the lower rows, it seems unlikely that she had reached this lofty spot. Her interest in astrology might be considered a form of self-actualization, but at the time, it seemed like a desperate effort to find meaning in her life.

Looking at my mother's life from the Maslow framework shows the stress my mother was experiencing. Although she showed remarkable resilience by earning a college degree and becoming a technical writer, she was young and healthy at those times.

Evolutionary psychologists have reimagined Maslow's Pyramid, agreeing with four of the original categories. physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem. Since self-actualization has nothing to do with reproduction and passing genes to the next generation, the authors have added three new categories: mate acquisition, mate retention, and parenting. The writers weren't concerned with an individual's health and happiness; instead, they focused on a person's ability to survive and produce offspring.[2] Although my mother had numerous boyfriends, she was not successful at mate retention. She did have a child, but did not always make choices

that ensured her offspring's success, preferring to spend her time and resources on herself.

Emile Durkheim first wrote about suicide as an altruistic act.[3] Although I was very sad about my mother's death, within a couple of months I realized that my life was less stressful. I no longer had to worry about receiving my mother's tearful, late night phone calls. I was very sorry that I would never speak to my mother again, but my mother's death made my life less tumultuous.

My mother's decision to end her life so abruptly meant that I had no chance to say, "I love you" or bid her a final good-bye. There was no closure. Holidays would always be tinged with sadness because she wasn't there to reminisce with me.

My main reservation in writing this memoir is that I am too critical of my mother. She wasn't a perfect parent, but she did her best under difficult circumstances. I had a better childhood than she had. Growing up, I was in awe of my mother's accomplishments. I still am. She was a remarkable woman who pushed the boundaries of what a women could do in the 1960s.

Frank was ready to settle down in one place but I wasn't, so we parted ways. I tried my mother's failed method of finding happiness—through new boyfriends. When new boyfriends left me feeling as lonely and unhappy as before, I tried traveling. I enjoyed seeing new places but came to understand that exotic locales were only distractions. I tried buying happiness through purchases, but once again, I was unable to relieve my feelings of loneliness and sadness. Eventually, I realized that happiness came from within and that no person, place, or thing could make me happy. Only I could make me happy.

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Make Way for Ducklings

"Don't get too close to mama and her ducklings. She's a wild animal, so she might feel that you're threatening her babies," I call to Eric, as I watch him throw bread to a mother mallard and her brood.

Eric pretends he doesn't hear me and inches closer, so I say, "If you can't leave the ducks alone, we'll have to go home. Your choice."

When he fails to heed my second warning, I stride over to him and take his arm, saying, "Time to go home."

Eric scrunches up his face and begins to wail, "I don't want to go home."

"Neither do I," agrees Cindy, who's been gathering pebbles along the sandy lake shore. The pockets of her pants are bulging with stones. "Make him take a time-out instead. I want to watch the ducks. They're way more interesting than TV."

"Good idea, Cindy," I say, as I continue to hold Eric's arm firmly. "Would you prefer to stand next to me and take a time-out instead?"

"I don't want a time-out," protests Eric whose sobs are

ramping up. Eric's mood has been volatile since his father handed the kids over last week.

Jerry is living in a college dormitory while he mucks out his moldy basement and waits for power to be restored to his home. Overland flooding covered much of the town, allowing filthy river sludge to seep through street level windows and inundate basements. Utility systems, often located in below ground areas, are unusable, so much of the city needs new electrical panels. For health and safety reasons, residents have been forbidden from moving back into homes until their dwellings are approved by a city inspector.

My apartment was located at garden level, so it was a total loss. Since hundreds of homes were destroyed by the flood, the chance of my finding affordable housing seemed unlikely.

When I telephoned my boss to tell him of my predicament, he offered to transfer me to a facility located two hours' drive away. I gratefully accepted since he also agreed to pay for my motel stay while I looked for permanent housing.

When I was staying in the jet hangar, I knew that I'd find a way to turn the loss of my apartment and town into a positive event. But even I, a compulsive optimist, couldn't have imagined that my next home would be the main floor of a charming Victorian overlooking a peaceful lake that was only two blocks from Cindy and Eric's school.

"Okay Eric, your time-out is over," I say. "Remember to make good decisions. Don't get too close to the ducks."

Instead of heading towards the ducks, Eric makes a beeline for his sister who is walking along the water's edge. As he approaches her, she turns and throws a pebble, which hits him on the chest.

For a moment, Eric just looks startled, unable to decide whether to cry in pain or retaliate. Finally deciding to strike

back, he leans down and picks up a clump of sandy mud and throws it, which splats over Cindy's sneakers. Naturally, she returns the favor by pelting him with pebbles.

"That's it!" I say. "Time to go home."

Eric and Cindy start to complain that they don't want to go home, but I am firm.

We are in sight of the house when Cindy says, "Mom, I just remembered. I need to bring markers to school tomorrow."

I sigh in frustration. Money is tight. Although we didn't lose everything in the flood like some people, I had to use a credit card to pay the movers. I also had to give our landlord a security deposit. I say, "I noticed this morning we are running low on milk. I bet we can find both items at the grocery store."

We pick up milk and markers and head for the checkout stand. Both kids are antsy, picking up gum, candy and other items, put there by wily store managers to lure shoppers—and parents of demanding children—into making impulse purchases. Eric tugs on my elbow and says, "I want candy."

"Absolutely not," I say.

When we get to the front of the line, I hand the clerk my items and several limp dollar bills. As I wait for my change, Eric starts chanting, "candy, candy, candy."

"I said no!" I reply emphatically.

Eric bursts into tears, which attracts the attention of several nearby customers, who stare at me as if I'm a negligent parent. Before the flood, Eric wouldn't have cried because I said no to candy, but lately, it doesn't take much to set him off.

I lean down and whisper to him, "I made lemon bars today. If you behave, you can have a lemon bar for dessert."

Eric stares at me with tear-soaked cheeks and says, "Okay."

The clerk hands me my change. As I pick up my bag of purchases, I notice a collection cup sitting on the counter that reads, "Help the flood victims."

Inwardly, I flinch at the term, flood victim. As we walk out of the store, I can't get the two words out of my head. My mind is on autopilot, escorting the kids to the car, making sure that their seatbelts are fastened, and starting the engine.

As I steer the Sable towards home, I wonder why I'm so bothered by the term, flood victim. Well, victims are passive. Was I passive in my behavior towards the flood? Actually, I wasn't. I worked hard to prepare for a worst case scenario. Although some of the plastic containers I left in my apartment leaked, all of the items in my friend's garage were safe.

Just last week I received a letter from the principal of the children's school stating that the flood had damaged the building so extensively that it had been condemned. He added an apology, saying that unfortunately, all student records were lost in the disaster.

Cindy and Eric both have IEPs, which qualifies them for special services under federal law. Without their IEPs, a new school would have to retest and reevaluate them for placement. The kids already are feeling stressed from experiencing a natural disaster. Having to be retested would have made matters worse.

When the mayor ordered my neighborhood to evacuate, I raced home and loaded plastic bins that contained essential items, such as Cindy and Eric's school records and family photos, into the backseat of my car. In spite of vile flood-mud reaching the upper kitchen cabinets in our apartment, the kids' school records were safe, thanks to my foresight.

I turn right onto the street that encircles the lake where we

live and once again marvel at our luck in finding this beautiful place. Our home town is a shambles, but here, life is peaceful and serene.

As I park the Sable in front of the house, I decide that I am *not* a flood victim. Call me a flood survivor instead.

OUR ANCIENT ANCESTORS had less control over their environment than we do, so their survival depended on their ability to adapt to changing conditions. Novelty seekers, individuals who thrived on new experiences, had an advantage in those days.

Cindy and Eric are novelty seekers, so the changes the flood brought may have been easier for them to adjust to than others. They are genetically disposed to enjoy new experiences. Both children were fidgety and restless after the disaster, but this behavior subsided in a few months. Eric was more emotional and complained about missing his dad and friends; however, he soon made new friends and loved taking walks along the lake and watching the wild life.

In a previous chapter, I argued that exposure to stress can create a psychological immune system, which can encourage coping skills. Although the wreck of our town created anxiety in all of us, we were able to start over in a new town. Instead of fixating on what we lost, we looked at what we've gained. It seemed that we had our ducks in a row.

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1950s 1960s 1970s 1990s 2010s

Epilogue

I'm on academic probation when I finally drop out of college in 1971 and head north to Berkeley, California. Emma, my friend from the chess club, lives there and I'm greatly in need of support and friendship.

I take a job as a waitress at the Oakland International Airport. Having decided to be "a writer when I grow up," I figure I don't need a college degree, which shows how young and naïve I am. It would be far easier to get a four-year-degree at Stanford than to make a living at writing.

Working at an airport is always a feast or famine business. During famine times, I wash tables and counters so often that I come to know where all the fake knotholes on the brown Formica are. That, or I stand and talk to the other waitresses.

One Monday, always a slow day with few flights scheduled, I'm standing around with nothing to do. I stick my hands in my pockets, feeling for heft, trying to calculate how much money I have. Few coins jingle—and confirm what I already know. I'll be lucky to make minimum wage today. The restaurant pays only half of my salary, the rest comes

from tips. Usually this works out to over minimum wage, but not today.

Nathan, my Israeli boss, saunters over and says, "Take your lunch now."

I write out a ticket for a BLT and clip it to the circular spindle where we hang our orders. When it's ready, I carry it to the break room.

The break room is windowless and dreary, lit by one long, fluorescent light that hangs from two chains attached to the ceiling. The smell of cigarette smoke and grease hovers like smog. There is a wobbly Formica-topped table and six functional but ugly gray folding chairs. I wolf down my sandwich and then pull a notebook from my pocket and start to write. At the time, I think my writing is clever, but now, it seems silly:

I am a joyful spirit
Immutable
Invincible
Incomprehensible.

At that moment, Caroline, one of the cooks, comes in and sits down. A blowsy blond with a slash of red lipstick, she reminds me of a middle-aged Joan Crawford. Digging a pack of Salem's out of her pocket, she taps it, then plucks out a cigarette. Inhaling deeply, she blows a plume of smoke into the air and says, "Hey, College Girl, if you're as interested in keeping your job as you are in writing down stuff in that book of yours, they wouldn't be fixing to fire you."

"Fire me!" I say, looking up from my book. I'd had trouble getting along with a cook at the last place I'd worked. During a bar rush when we were the only staff in the place, he'd put twelve of my orders up at the same time. By the time

I got them delivered, the food was cold. Several customers stiffed me. So I don't want to have to go looking for another job again. Waitress jobs are easy to find, but applying for them is a hassle. Besides, I won't be earning a paycheck when I'm looking for a job.

"Yeah, fire you."

"But why?"

"Because you don't know shit about waitressing. You act like a know-it-all, but your tickets are a mess, College Girl."

"In what way?" I ask, although I already know. When I was hired, I'd been handed a long list of proper abbreviations to use with the cooks. But I am no good at memorization, so I use my own system instead. It never occurred to me that this could cause trouble.

Caroline rolls her eyes and takes a deep drag from her cigarette. She blows a cloud of smoke into the air, saying, "If you studied the damn menu, I wouldn't have to tell you. But okay, here's an example—today you wrote cheeseburger as a 'CHAM' not a 'CB.' When I see the word 'CHAM' on the ticket, I'm likely to give you a "HAM" dinner instead. Which is why I messed up your order today. Now if Nathan sees me throwing away food 'cause you were using the wrong abbreviations, he's gonna fire your ass."

"But what can I do? I'm not good at memorizing things."

"But what can I do?" she mimics. "You're a College Girl. You've gotta be smarter than Thelma who can hardly read and had to memorize the menu. Take the damn menu home and study it. Make flashcards if you have to. And while you're at it, work on your handwriting. I'm surprised them professors of yours accept such godawful handwriting." Caroline looks at me as if she's expecting that I'll tell her to mind her own business. But my as-yet undiagnosed ADHD

has caused enough trouble in my life that I appreciate her advice.

I say, "You know, I never thought of flash cards. That's a good idea. Thanks for the suggestion. And by the way—" I hesitate. She looks at me but says nothing, continuing to puff on her cigarette. "I don't know why you're always calling me College Girl. Because I'm not."

"I call you College Girl because you've always got your head in a book. If you're not a College Girl, why are you always writing stuff down in that little black book of yours?"

I'm surprised that she's noticed. Caroline might talk like a truck driver and blow smoke like a dragon, but she sees things. I say, "Because I'm a writer—or at least I want to be a writer. My friend Louise says that I might as well go around telling people that I'm an aerial artiste. Until an editor buys some of my writing, I'm just putting on airs."

"Then I guess I'll have to call you 'Writer Girl.' Though that don't have as nice a ring to it."

That night I go home and study my abbreviations. I make flashcards. I write down abbreviations over and over again, on pages and pages of paper. In a way, it feels like cheating. I'm supposed to be intelligent—why do I have such a hard time memorizing facts?

When I show up at work the next shift, I can't wait to show Caroline that I've made use of her suggestions. My heart is bumping in my chest as wildly as a kid at Christmas when I put my first ticket on the spindle and twirl it around for Caroline.

By the time I pick up my order a few minutes later, Caroline has a new nickname for me. She calls, "Here you go, Waitress Girl."

Although my ADHD behavior annoys people at times, it also thrusts me into new opportunities. A couple days later,

I'm propelled into a new relationship that will drastically change the course of my life.

The restaurant has been busy all day and I have't had a moment to sit down or catch my breath. Instead of feeling tired from my work, I feel euphoric and energized—a state that runners call "the zone."

When a party of three is seated at my booth, I greet them exuberantly, asking if I can get them something to drink. A well-dressed red-headed woman of middle-age orders coffee; she is flanked by a young man and a young woman who both order Cokes. When I deliver the drinks, the young man, who has brown hair and a reddish-brown beard, says, "I ordered my coke without ice."

"So you did. If I had a brain, I'd be dangerous," I reply, quoting an expression of my mother's.

They burst out laughing. Now on a normal day, I can't say funny things and get people to laugh. On a day when I'm in "the zone," everything I say comes out funny. I smile back, then pick up the glass and disappear into the kitchen to refill it.

By the end of their meal, the trio and I have become friends. As I set the check face down on the table, the young girl says, "Where do you go to school?"

"Nowhere."

"But you don't belong here."

"Yes, I do. I need the money. You see, I'm a writer. Working here is my chance to study humanity."

Another laugh. The young man asks, "What do you write?"

"At the moment, I'm writing a children's story. But I'll be putting that aside for a while. I've applied for a job as a nanny in France and will be leaving the country soon."

At that moment, a bell rings. I look over to the kitchen and see my number is flashing. I excuse myself and dash off.

When I walk by their table later, I notice that the three-some has gone. Talking with them was fun. Meeting new people makes my sometimes frustrating job enjoyable.

I turn and almost run into the girl who'd been sitting at the table. She hands me a torn piece of paper and says, "My brother Arthur wants to write to you. He just accepted a job as an assistant professor at Princeton University. Here's his address. What's yours?"

I have never given my phone number or address to a customer. If *he* had asked for my address, I would have said no. But his *sister* asked me. I can't refuse. I pull out a piece of paper from the pocket of my uniform and write my address on it.

"Here you go," I say, handing it to her.

"Thanks," she replies.

As I watch her hurry off, I remember that on the other side of the paper are a list French sayings I'm trying to memorize. I know that I will never be a whiz at memorizing, but I'm learning tricks to compensate.

MY MOTHER COMMITTED suicide in February of 1970, a time of social upheaval for young people due to the war in Viet Nam and the drug culture. I could have followed the advice of guru Timothy Leary to "turn on, tune in, and drop out," but didn't, thanks to the stabilizing influence of friends and an inherent tendency to view life in an optimistic way.

In spite of the APA's negative labeling of ADHD, I've long suspected that it helped me to recover from my mother's suicide. Because I'm an extravert, a personality trait common

in individuals with hyperactive ADHD, I've always had friends to help in difficult times.

Research shows that extraversion and hyperactive ADHD (subtype 3) are linked by a common brain function—an individual's need to increase dopamine in the brain.[1] These overlapping conditions explain why so many hyperactives (Cindy and Eric included) are extraverts. Both types use external stimulation, such as social interaction and novelty seeking, to subconsciously increase brain dopamine levels.

My suspicion that ADHD helped me to overcome family trauma is supported by research, which reveals that extraversion offers a protective factor against depression. Extraverts have a strong need for social engagement and tend to be optimists. Although extraverts appear to mate more frequently than their opposite (introverts), their need for external stimulation invites risky behavior, so their lives may be cut short. From an evolutionary standpoint, the advantage of increased mating seems to counterbalance the disadvantage of a shorter life span.[2]

Tanja Sophie Schweitzer, a research fellow at Heidelberg University, writes that novelty seekers are always on the hunt for new stimulation and think in a lateral fashion. They tend to be nonconformists and excel at defocusing, a relaxed state of mind much like free association. Defocusing allows individuals to untangle preconceived ideas, which invites intuitive out-of-the box problem solving. Schweitzer thinks so highly of novelty seeking that she created a novelty generation model for her doctoral research.[3]

Novelty seeking has played an important role in my life. Although I wasn't good at memorizing French verb conjugations in school, I was intensely curious about the world. This inspired me to become a nanny in Paris, where I learned more

about speaking French through immersion than I ever did in a classroom.

Wanting to change the name for ADHD is an example of novelty seeking. My thought process tends to be disorganized and quirky, so I brainstorm and research through a wide lens. This ensures that I generate a lot of useless details, but sometimes, I come up with a truth hiding in plain sight. Calling ADHD a negative label is not a new idea, but my research suggests that no one has advocated changing the current name because it reflects a discarded theory.

For nearly two decades, researchers have been arguing that executive function is responsible for ADHD, not attention deficits. Nevertheless, the biased term has remained. Replacing it with a neutral one, such as, executive function adaptation (EFA), is long overdue.

Promoting a new name is risky because I'm bucking the system. I know that members of the APA and other professional organizations may disagree. After all, changing the name for ADHD will create a paperwork nightmare.

Opposing the name change due to difficulties in implementation is not an acceptable excuse. Many people with ADHD will welcome the new name because it focuses on positive aspects and minimizes negative aspects.

Having ADHD may have saved me from a terrible life. If I were shy and timid, I never would have invited Leonard Nimoy to dinner, become Arthur's pen pal, nor would I have dared to become a nanny in Paris. Critics may counter that extraversion and novelty seeking were my saving grace, not ADHD; however, without impulsivity and the supercharged drive of hyperactivity, these events might never have happened.

For those who wonder if I actually have ADHD, I was officially diagnosed in 2000. This realization allowed me to

forgive myself for my impulsive behavior as a child in school. When I decided to return to college, I assumed that as an adult, my behavior would no longer present problems. I soon learned that forgiving myself for my impulsive behavior did not always ensure that my professors forgave me.

Readers can follow my continuing adventure in parenting two children with ADHD in a sequel, *Positively Seeking Novelty: A Memoir About ADHD and Education.* The book also portrays my misadventures in going from college dropout to earning three university degrees (including a Ph.D.) in eleven years.

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