

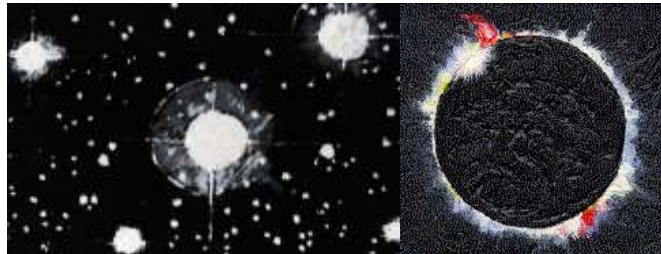
Islands One Summer
a memoir by Teri Eklund



What would it be like to grow up on an island, isolated from the world by the sea?

Stopping for the moment
Can only be done
When time is still.
It's the little things—
You see—
Coffee with a friend, the landscape,
An empty thought,
Empty time.

Stopping for the moment
Can only be done
When thoughts are cleared.
And then,
In the wake
(Observeth me)
I am alone
Yet,
Surrounded by the sea.



Chapter One: Summer Astronomy Class

In 1977, after my sophomore year at Portland State University, I took a summer course in observational astronomy. It involved several stargazing fieldtrips around Oregon and Washington

States. A lot of amazing things happened that enchanting summer. For one thing, learning the roadmap to the night sky and its marvelous features mesmerized me. For several years to follow I became a dedicated stargazer.

Many interesting people took this class. A few were middle-aged men with families but most were nerdy young men pursuing engineering degrees. One was Bazeer from Afghanistan. I had read the novel “Caravans” by my favorite author of the time, James Michener, and I found Bazeer’s descriptions of his country riveting. (This was two years before the Soviet invasion.) He was vastly intelligent and well-versed in global politics and science, but what intrigued me most was his effort to sleep only four hours one night then stay completely awake the following night to fit in as many hours as possible for reading and studying. I guess he was a foremost workaholic although he was a bit emaciated and scrawny.

I became friends with the only other woman taking the course except for the wives of the middle-aged men. Lori McDonald was my age and equally enthralled with stargazing. We spent time together during fieldtrips and halfway through the course we drove up to Vancouver, Canada and stayed at a B&B. As part of my anthropology studies, I wanted to attend a totem pole raising ceremony at the University of British Columbia that the Salish, Squamish, Tlingit, and Kwakiutl Nations were conducting. The indigenous peoples of the Pacific NW Coast have a unique custom of making totem poles. The meaning behind them is similar to the ancient Maya stela I saw during my travels in Mexico and Guatemala. In both cultural traditions, the monuments record lineages, deaths, births, legends, and spiritual matters.



Maya Stela and Pacific NW Totems

I took several pictures of the event with the Canon AE-1 I had purchased for my Photography 101 class. Over many years I enjoyed this SLR camera and its wide-angle lens, 50 to 200 zoom lens, polarizing filter, and six-star filter for spectacular sunsets and gleaming waterways. I loved my camera's ten-second delay feature which allowed me to jump into pictures. This was several years before digital cameras, smartphones, and selfies took over the world.



A native woman from the totem raising ceremony
Lori and I in Vancouver using my ten-second delay feature

Professor Walden taught the summer stargazing course and I adored his sense of humor and knowledge of astronomy. In turn, he seemed to appreciate my enthusiasm and the fact that I was a female veteran interested in astronomy. Walden was sixty and eager to retire in Bend, Oregon. Sadly, he never made his goal. About a year after this summer course, while I was taking his classes Astronomy 101 and Photography 202, the "Professor," as we called him, died of a sudden heart attack. Just like that! The news shocked me and I subsequently called Cassiopea, the constellation that resembles a "W," Waldon's Constellation.

By far the best thing that happened to me during this summer of stargazing was my relationship with Lars Radestam, a man as intelligent as Bazeer but, by far, not as scrawny. Lars was over six-foot tall, well-built, and handsome. He was also nineteen years my senior which hardly mattered to me. He came from Sweden and I have always been drawn to people from other countries and cultures. As a child I paged through my grandparents' Nat Geos and cut out pictures of people dressed in different costumes from different nations. As soon as I graduated from high school, I flew off to Europe for three months, then traveled to Mexico, and ended up joining the Army to live in Germany and get a European Out (ETS) which didn't happen as I relate in my memoir "The Trouble with Brass." My interest in other cultures is why I majored in anthropology and earned an MA in English to live and teach in different parts of the world.

During the many stargazing outings that summer, I was attracted to Lars and he seemed drawn to me. We first got to know each other after the evening sessions when most of the class gathered at Sam's Hof Brau, a tavern-like restaurant near campus that served tall pitchers of chilled beer and had pool tables and a buffet with roast beef, corned beef, German sausages, pumpernickel rolls, and sauerkraut. Lars and I were sure to sit at the same table. I learned that he had an engineering degree from the prestigious Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm and had come to the US to work for Boeing. A year before we met, his wife had left him and their four children and returned to Sweden. Lars then decided to quit working for a few years and pursue an advanced degree in microscopy, something that sounded state-of-the-art forty-five years ago. He like to joke that microscopes took him in the opposite direction of telescopes so he could cover all angles of the universe.

One of our late-night stargazing fieldtrips was to Larch Mountain an hour's drive beyond the night lights of Portland. On two occasions Lars brought along his four kids—Tom, the oldest,

his teenage daughter Sandra, and his younger boys Per and Charlie who were twelve and ten. I enjoyed interacting with Lars and his kids, sharing my newfound knowledge about the constellations and pointing out objects through my binoculars. Lars sometimes remarked how impressed he was with my understanding of the stars. He also suggested that I'd make an excellent mother. Little did I know that he seriously had me in mind for the job. Not long into the course, he directly told me he needed a mother for his kids and thought I was a perfect candidate. The notion flattered me although I wasn't considering motherhood at the time. My mind was directed toward earning a degree. Besides, only five years existed between me and Lars' eldest son and it seemed preposterous that I would somehow become his mother.

During class one evening, I asked Professor Walden when we were heading back to "Lars" Mountain (instead of Larch). The Professor burst out laughing over my Freudian slip. Obviously, Lars was beginning to consume my thoughts. Maybe right after this, Lars asked me to join him alone at Sam's Hof Brau. Over a beer and sandwich, he said something like, "I'm nearly 40 now and you might think I'm an old guy but I'd love to take you to a private beach along the river one night. We could build a bonfire, go swimming, and have a late picnic." He was referring to Sauvie Island on the Columbia River in North Portland. I knew the island well. It's one of the largest river islands in the US. As a small child my dad, his father, and my granddad's uncle Willie Logan used to fish for catfish along the slough on Sauvie Island while I played on the beach. I enjoyed jumping in the waves rolling ashore from the wakes of huge cargo ships passing through the channel on their way to the Port of Portland.

I agreed to the date because Lars charmed me and I really hadn't had a boyfriend since my days in the military a few years before and those guys were mostly unsophisticated misogynistic low lives who saw women soldiers as inferior sluts or lesbians. Lars wasn't

anything like them. He was a true gentleman from “the old country.” We had interesting conversations about his studies and knowledge of science, about Sweden and the Royal Swedish Academy, and he seemed genuinely impressed with my experiences in the Army.

In the darkness of late evening Lars took me to a secluded beach on Sauvie Island. No one else was in sight. He built a large fire and we ate pickled herring and new potatoes with sour cream and chives, the kind of food he enjoyed. I liked it too. It was a new and exotic cuisine for me. We drank a few cold beers while he taught me a Swedish song about a maiden who lived on an island outside of Stockholm. “*Mai po Malia, vakera Mai*” the lyrics went. That’s all I can remember, in Swedish. In English, the song is about the island fishermen who love watching Mai hop from the pier onto her boat and row from island to island collecting wild flowers, strawberries, and blueberries. The lyrics even mention the small blond hairs on her arms as part of her allure.

When Lars finished the song, he began undressing me without any warning. We made love by the bonfire then he took my hand and led me to the river to go skinny dipping. I spent the night at his home, in his small single bed, a cot really, but it was Swedish furniture. He lived in a duplex he owned on Rochester Street in North Portland near Roosevelt High School and the St. Johns Bridge, a landmark of Portland.

I asked Lars why he had been so presumptuous about making love to me and he said, “I couldn’t help it. The world revolves around the ‘P.’” It’s a phrase he would repeat many times to come.

On Memorial Day Weekend 1977 the first Star Wars movie premiered and became the largest box office smash I had ever seen. On our second date, Lars took me to the space-age film and we waited an hour in a line winding around the block. The movie enthralled Lars so much

that he couldn't wait to take his kids to see it. What impressed him most was the story reeling at the film's beginning: "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away . . ." Lars thought this was amazingly clever because all the previous space-age movies, books, and TV shows took place in the distant future.

The next week Lars and I took his youngest sons to see the movie, then he and I went a third time as if we couldn't get enough of seeing such a groundbreaking special effects action film. During the upcoming attractions, a young man sitting directly in front of me began smoking reefer. His smoke bothered me and I said, "Would you mind not smoking that?" The young man grew incensed and called me all sorts of degrading female names. Lars jumped to my defense and before I knew it, my large Swedish date and this pot smoking cad were in the aisle duking it out. The incident distressed me but after the ushers broke up the fight and made the pot smoker leave, Lars insisted we sit back down and enjoy the movie even though he had a fat lip.

Not long after this, on August 16, I was walking past a news kiosk on campus when the headline flashed out "Elvis is Dead!" Everyone was shocked that the King of Rock and Roll had suddenly died. Of what? We all wondered. A heart attack? Drug overdose? Lars was particularly dismayed by the unexpected death because Elvis Presley was only two years older than him. He thought that he too could suddenly die without cause. It later came out that Elvis, like Michael Jackson in years to come, had succumbed to a cocktail of substances that his body could no longer tolerate. Lars had nothing to fear. The most he ever did was drink coffee and have an occasional beer and the Swedish mulled wine called glogg.

That summer passed by and I continued dating Lars and often went to his home to visit him and his kids and his cousin Joan Mahoney who lived near Rochester Street with her two teenage sons and thirteen-year-old daughter Susie. Lars started inviting me to a weekly potluck

get-together at his house with Joan and her friends Charlene, Betty, and Barbara. They were ladies in their forties who smoked, wore copious makeup, and talked about the men they were dating. It was rather boring for me. At one of the first gatherings I attended, Joan had invited another friend over to meet Lars, her eligible bachelor cousin who knew how to treat a lady. This was before Joan understood that Lars and I were together. When I showed up and entered the dining room where these ladies were smoking at the table, Joan's new friend said, "And this must be the oldest daughter" meaning I was one of Lars' kids. "Oh, no," I remarked. "I'm his girlfriend!" At another gathering Lars invited his tenant living in the other part of the duplex. He was a rough looking, pocked faced man, younger than Lars, and he pulled me aside at the gathering and said, "I'd like to invite the youngest guest at this party out on a date." "I can't," I replied, trying to be polite. "Lars is my boyfriend." "Oh?" he said but I don't think he cared and he may have already known.

At PSU, when we weren't attending classes during the day, Lars and I would go to the Cheerful Tortoise for tocos or to Sam's Hof Brau which seemed to be our favorite hangout. My older boyfriend impressed me so much that I checked out Swedish language tapes from the library, copied them, and started learning phrases. Eventually, I surprised Lars by saying a few things in Swedish. He was amazed that I had made such an effort to learn his language and began teaching me more Swedish songs and phrases. One of the most interesting words he shared is "*fiong*" which means a man's erection. Lars suggested that Swedes use the phrase "that has fiong!" to describe something with power and class such as a Ferrari sports convertible.

I almost believed I could speak the dam language but was entirely a beginner. I even learned the song for the Swedish holiday Santa Lucia on December 13th. When the holiday arrived, Lars disregarded my attempt to sing the song because it wasn't the version he

traditionally used and his daughter Sandra was the focus of the day and the singer of the correct version.

Santa Lucia began early in the morning. Sandra dressed in a white gown with a red sash and wore a crown of burning candles as she served her family and guests saffron buns called lussekatt, cups of glogg, and raisins and almonds. I had never heard of the holiday tradition but it was a big event for Lars, his kids, and cousins.

After I'd known Lars for about three years and we had broken up but were still good friends, I invited a colleague from Portland Community College Ross Island Center where I was teaching ESL, to join me at the Radestam house for the early morning event. She had expressed an interest in the Swedish tradition and I loved sharing my involvement with other cultures. It's something I did more than once. For example, while working on my Master's degree in English, I was dating a man from India, Shiv Balakrishna, and became good friends with his roommates Arya Bhattacharjee and Cholan Muthukumarasami. I had met Shiv at a volleyball party on a farm with a group of hippie-like people. They were friends of another colleagues from PCC RIC. I thoroughly enjoyed dating Shiv and visiting him and his roommates and learning about India, a country I longed to explore. Cholan made fantastic South Indian dishes that I never missed out on if I had the opportunity. One evening Cholan invited me over for masala dosas and I brought along a colleague and her spouse to share in the culinary experience.

As it turned out, Lars later expressed that I was welcome to his Santa Lucia celebrations as long as I came alone and Cholan kindly suggested that I not show up with uninvited friends because he might not have enough food to go around. I don't know why I didn't prearrange with the hosts to bring along my guests. Maybe I feared they'd reject my request and something in me loved sharing the wonders of the international world.

After the summer course in stargazing, during my junior year, I took Professor Walden's courses in astronomy and photography (the year he passed away). I was entitled to a VA tutorial grant and arranged for Lars to tutor me in astronomy because of his background in science. Professor Walden signed off on the arrangement and Lars started teaching me concepts in mathematics, physics, and even microscopy. He was an engaging tutor which made him an excellent father as well. He promoted his kids and their interests (so unlike my parents) and shared with them the subjects he knew. Lars was a standup man determined to be a good parent and member of society. And a good boyfriend to me. There were times of conflict, however, because he was an "old country" traditional man set in his ways. At times, he grew impatient and agitated and this tended to bother me. For example, we had planned to go to Mt. Hood cross-country skiing for the day with his four kids. I came over to his house early in the morning and there was such commotion to the process of getting everyone ready, all coming from Lars, that I returned to my studio at PSU. Lars didn't seem to care because he was focused on getting everyone ready and I simply missed out on a day of skiing.

When I first began dating Lars, before we had made a firm commitment to each other, I also had my eye on a graduate student in anthropology. Scott was a husky blond with a beard and for some reason he appealed to me. I began hanging out with him in the anthropology lab. I thought he was an interesting prospect because of his graduate work in my chosen major. At the same time, I remember thinking in a practical way "Whatever will he do with an MA in Anth?" He didn't really fall all over me because he had a girlfriend. Still, he infatuated me while I was going out with Lars. I told my mother, in a giddy way, that I was in love with two men. That's as far as our conversation went because Mom and I never really discussed anything. We simply didn't click. She had met Lars a few times when I brought him along to a family gathering and

her only comment regarding Lars was, “What is he? A life-long student?” Her remark annoyed me but was typical of the relationship I had with my parents. They never said anything about the age difference between me and Lars. But then, all my life they rarely said anything to me about my life as I often complain in my other memoirs and my poetry collection “Family Secrets.”

One evening Scott invited me to swing by his campus apartment after my class. For some reason I had met with Lars first and carried along my text books so I could tell him that I was meeting with a classmate to study and couldn’t join him for a beer at the Cheerful Tortoise. When I showed up at Scott’s apartment with my text books, he figured out what I was doing (using them as a ruse). Scott turned out to be a slob and a jerk (purposely farting in bed, grabbing at my crotch when I was jogging by him on the track, and becoming smug and haughty because he knew I had a crush on him). My soirees and infatuation with Scott quickly ended.

Unfortunately, Lars also figured out my ruse with the text books and asked me what I had really been up to that evening. I confessed. He was angry and wondered if he should call it off with me but I explained that we hadn’t committed ourselves to each other. He eventually cooled down and I continued meeting Lars at the cafes near campus and going to the gatherings at his house with his cousin Joan Mahoney and her smoking lady friends.

Lars owned three classic cars—two 1960s two-door Cadillac Sevilles, one canary yellow, one off-white, and a forest green T-Bird convertible that he kept in his garage. He drove the Cadillacs which, in the late 70s, may not have been classics like they would be today. I don’t remember him ever driving the T-Bird. Maybe he was merely working on it.

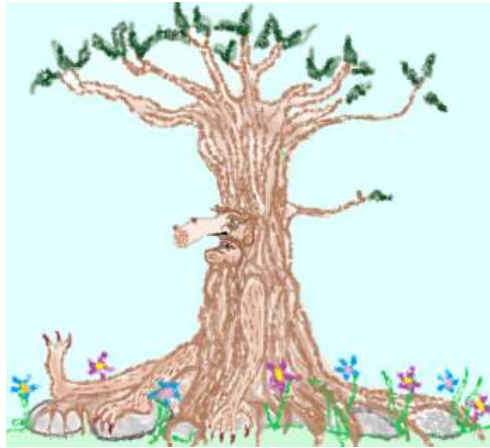
He also owned a Ford baby blue pickup with a large Security Camper on the bed. I thought the brand of his camper rather ironic after Lars told me that soon after he bought it, the oven exploded. The company fixed the camper and Lars actively used it on trips with his kids.

On a few occasions, I joined him and his youngest sons on weekend camping trips to lakes on Mount Hood, to Multnomah Falls, and to the Oregon Coast.



On one trip we camped at Ft. Stevens State Park near Astoria at the Columbia River Delta. We spent an afternoon picking blackberries on a hillside near our campsite. Lars had a good sense of humor that he frequently used with his kids. When Charlie, his youngest son, found a huge juicy berry he'd hold it up to show his dad. "That's a general," Lars would say only he pronounced general "heneral" and that always floored me. I loved his Swedish accent. "Look here," I started saying. "Another heneral." Lars spoke perfect English with uniquely Swedish pronunciation here and there.

In addition to his "dad joke" sense of humor, Lars liked telling stories about Swedish folklore and Viking history whenever something struck him. He often talked about fairies living in the forests along with ogres and trolls. His description of forest trolls blending into the trunks of trees inspired me to create paintings of trolls as part of tree trunks. I gave one each to Charlie and Per. After forty plus years, I doubt they still have them but it would be delightful if they did. Lars loved my artwork and went about telling troll stories as he examined my paintings.



During my undergraduate and graduate years, I lived in several different studios and rooms. After I returned home from the Army, just prior to Bicentennial Year, I lived with my parents in my old bedroom while I studied at Portland Community College, Sylvania Campus in the foothills of SW PDX near my parents' home on Maplecrest Drive.

I ended up buying an old red Galaxy 500 from a neighbor friend and drove that to my classes. My focus was on getting the basic requirements behind me, such as English and history. I also took French and courses in painting, calligraphy, sketching, art history, and commercial art. I wasn't sure where I was heading with my education and initially considered majoring in art. My parents probably thought this was the best area for me to pursue since I've always been artistic, although they never gave me any input or direction. At the time, all I really knew was that after a difficult tour in the military, I was determined to get an education on the GI Bill and make something of myself. I viewed my two years in the Army as a springboard into a great and successful life.

Near the end of my first year at PCC, I decided to attend a regular college before I lost interest in the whole endeavor. Community college felt uninspiring like high school, which was another tumultuous time in my life (see my memoir "Law School High"). I also thought that a career in art wouldn't offer me many substantial opportunities and I aimed to jump high off that

springboard. I transferred to Portland State University and majored in anthropology. Naturally, my parents didn't say anything to me about my decision but I learned from my sister that Mom had remarked that I was majoring in "something stupid like anthropology." This irritated me especially since no one else in my family had gone to college, not my siblings, parents, or anyone else in my family tree except for my mother's brother. My dear uncle Bill was a WWII veteran who used his own GI Bill shortly after Roosevelt signed it into law in 1944.

I never confronted Mom about her remark. I grew up in an indifferent and silent family and was used to this kind of behavior. Despite such negativity, I felt determined to become an anthropologist or an archaeologist, learn everything I could about my chosen field, and explore the many diverse cultures that exist and previously existed on this planet.

It's not that I think cultures, traditions, and customs are profoundly sacred institutions that should be protected and preserved at all costs. At the same time, I don't believe any group of people has the right to invade, conquer, destroy, or harm other cultures or proselytize their religion. People are entitled to their own beliefs just as I am entitled to mine (as long as those beliefs and ideologies aren't out to harm or hinder others).

Cultures, like most people, evolve and change on their own. In contrast to humans, however, cultures are fabrications like the artificial boundaries between nations or the constellations astronomers map out in the night sky. Unfortunately, people since the beginning of time cling to their cultural identities and this often creates hatred for those outside the culture. Worst of all are the beliefs in a hierarchy of people—of one gender, race, sect, or religion being superior to another one. Usually, women get the brunt of this harmful negativity. When we believe our human constructs to be reality, we become delusional because we are adhering to what's artificial. But I've digressed. Let me resume my story.

I enrolled at PSU and moved from my parents' home into an upstairs room at a shared Victorian house not far from campus in downtown Portland. It took me about half an hour to walk to my classes. I no longer had my red Galaxy 500 because, while I was attending PCC, Sylvania campus, I got a DWI. It wasn't really my fault and here's why. The teacher of my second semester French class hosted a French wine tasting party for her students. I went, sampled lots of wine, and became significantly under the influence. It grew late and I was making plans to continue partying with a classmate and his friends when the teacher ushered us out of her house like we were vagabond drunks. Here's the thing. I was still underage, not yet twenty-one, and this teacher should have been more responsible. Or, I should have held her responsible for what happened to me. I left her house in my Galaxy 500 and meticulously drove toward some nightspot to meet my friends. At an intersection on Barbur Boulevard I was evidently driving too slowly and too obviously impaired and a policeman pulled me over. He gave me a sobriety test—the walking kind—cuffed me and took me to the police station downtown. I had to leave the Galaxy at the side of Barbur Blvd and take a taxi from the precinct to my parents' house where I was living at the time. The next day, ironically, my dad had arranged for a friend of his to help give my old car a tune-up. I explained that my car had broken down and was at the side of the road. Dad helped me retrieve it and I don't recall if I ever got that tune-up but I never admitted to my parents what had happened. I suspect; however, they figured something out but as I so often say, we weren't a communicative family.

A court appointed attorney, a young man probably fresh from law school, helped me through the mess but I must have felt too insecure to tell him about the French class party. If I did, I don't understand why he didn't help me go after the French teacher. In truth, I probably didn't hold her accountable because of how I grew up. As a little girl, I learned to assume that I

was at fault for whatever was happening to me. This most likely came about because my older brother continuously bullied me and whenever I misbehaved or grew upset, my mom either used a switch on my bare bottom or threw water on me as punishment. When I finally learned to completely avoided my brother, my parents made me feel like I was somehow the strange one. As a child I may have learned to do things for myself, out of necessity, but that didn't include confronting injustices or seeing myself as worthy instead of as the cause of my difficult environment.

I carried this insecurity and guilt for many years until I understood that what had happened to me during childhood wasn't my fault. My parents and brother had traumatized me. I was a victim, not the culprit. I had to realize that the expression "you did it to yourself" doesn't apply to a small child and probably not even to most adults. A lot of factors in this world, especially childhood adversities, cause the counterproductive reactions many adults have and the careless decisions they make.

At my DWI trial, the judge sentenced me to community service, imposed a thousand-dollar fine, and suspended my license for two years. This forced me to sell my Galaxy back to Celeste, the neighbor friend I bought it from. I don't know what I said to my parents about giving up my car and I doubt they even asked.

After only a month in that Victorian house during my first semester at PSU, I tired of the situation. My housemates were using drugs and the young woman who owned the house failed to keep things functioning. Twice the toilet clogged up for a day or two which made my living arrangement too uncomfortable. Besides, I wanted to live closer to campus so I sought out housing through the university and was able to quickly get a studio in the Montgomery Building situated off the campus parkway. This seemed convenient except the unit offered only small

rooms, hotplates weren't allowed (although I used one anyway), and both male and female students lived in the building and shared the shower and bathrooms (formerly referred to as a co-ed unit). This created several problems.

Not long after I moved into my studio, some Nigerian man whom I had chatted with in the laundry room, learned my room number and pounded on my door and called my name at three AM for several mornings in a row. I had no phone to call campus security so I simply ignored him. Then, late one night, a man climbed a tree and entered the window into a woman's room on the floor beneath mine. He beat her to death. The news implied that her murder involved drugs, as if this mitigated the crime. The final straw for me, however, occurred while I was showering. I looked up and saw a man peering down at me over the stall. I reported the incident to the building super and said I wanted to immediately move out despite the lease. He acted like it was a mere common occurrence. "Oh, another peeping Tom? We get them all the time." But he allowed me out of my agreement.

With much dread I was about to move back in with my parents but a friend in biology class offered to rent me a room for fifty-dollars a month in the house she and her boyfriend shared. She lived off Sunset Highway on a direct route to PSU and suggested I ride back and forth with her. She went by the name Angel and her boyfriend, a lanky man who was also a veteran, went by the nickname Lizard. Angel was working on a pre-med curriculum and aspired to become an MD. But she seemed rather high-strung probably because she was under a lot of stress taking such challenging courses as chemistry, physics, and trigonometry.

I moved in with Angel, Lizard, and Angel's eight-year-old son and everything seemed to be working out fine. We even made a few gardens together on her acre of land and I brought over a chihuahua that my parents had but didn't seem to want. Angel and Lizard had two St. Bernards

they were breeding and I had to constantly watch out for my little dog's welfare until I finally returned "Ginger" to Mom and Dad.

One interesting thing that came from this situation occurred when my best friend Kathi and I were making plans to take a bus to San Diego during spring break. Lizard arranged for us to stay with a friend of his who lived near the beach. Lizard's friend Jack Dahaney was actually the father of his friend; he was about fifty-five, had a long grizzly beard, and was living in a dingy apartment on a pension from Honeywell where he had worked for many years. Because he had spent his leisure time sailing around San Diego and Northern Baja Mexico, his friends and family called him Moby Jack. He was truly an "old salt" and a prime character for the adventure novel I drafted ten years later. In "My Brave Inca Dove" Moby Jack is one of the first colorful characters my protagonist meets on her journey from Arizona to Tierra del Fuego.

Moby Jack took Kathi and I to Sea World, out on a harbor cruise, to the world-famous zoo, to Tiajuana, and to several beaches and restaurants. The old salt quickly made a pass at me and we had a sort of relationship for most of the week. His bed was a mattress sprawled on the floor with dirty sheets that he washed when I accepted his advances. He was a useless lover, however, because he was a stanch alcoholic. Everywhere we went he would begin shaking until he had a shot of alcohol. That aside, San Diego's beauty and atmosphere enchanted me so much that Moby Jack and I started talking about my transferring to San Diego State University where he had earned his engineering degree decades earlier.

After returning home, I actively considered everything I needed to do to make the move possible. All the while Moby Jack and I exchanged letters. He was hyped up about my staying in his apartment. I probably got the old guy's heart pumping. One problem I had about making the

move was that I wore braces at the time (this was the year before my summer astronomy course when I met Lars Radestam).



My parents provided my sister with braces but for some reason they couldn't afford to get them for me. They suggested that my teeth weren't that bad but I felt self-conscious about having two overlapping front teeth. Friends in high school made fun of my "crooked" teeth and while I was in the Army a boyfriend remarked that I looked like a canary. That did it. As soon as I returned home from the military, I arranged for braces through the same orthodontist my sister went to, Dr. Paicentini. I started out making the payments but after a few months I asked my parents to take over because they should have provided me with braces when I was an adolescent. Without saying much, they did.

I disliked the way the clerks at Paicentini's office treated me. I was twenty or twenty-one and they kept trying to consult with my parents on matters concerning my orthodontic work. I guess at the time it was unusual for a grown person to get braces. Oh well. I hated wearing them and felt self-conscious smiling but was glad to finally have my teeth straightened.

I told Dr. Paicentini about my intentions to move to San Diego and he became rather rude about my exiting his treatment. He said I'd have to find an orthodontist in San Diego but he didn't recommend one. After about a month, my enthusiasm for SDSU waned. Reality crept in and I realized that living in a relationship with Old Barnacle Bill was rather absurd. I sent a last letter to Moby Jack and gently explained that the move would be too difficult. He wrote back and said he understood. And that was that until I resurrected him in my adventure novel.

Not long after my trip to San Diego an incident occurred between Angel and me that caused me to abruptly move from her home. I had convinced her to take cultural anthropology with me as one of her electives in her rigorous pre-med coursework. I related that the content was interesting and easier than biochemistry. I also emphasized that my favorite professor taught the course. Professor Atherton was a tall, young, attractive man with a reddish beard. He was accessible whenever I had a question and helpful when I was planning my graduation trip to the British Islands.

While Angel and I were sitting in the auditorium waiting for Atherton to take the podium center stage, Angel suddenly grabbed my shoulders, shook me, and said, “You have a stupid major and don’t know what it’s like to take difficult courses that have meaning.” I gave her a long stare, shrugged from her grip, and moved to another seat. Later that day my dad helped me retrieve my things from Angel’s house and I moved back home without saying anything to Angel. I subsequently ran into her and she was cordial, probably realized she had been a psycho. I also encountered Lizard at a veteran’s place and he remarked, “Yeah, Angel gets carried away with her emotions sometimes.” In retrospect, I wonder if she ever made it into medical school. She wasn’t getting top grades and she was obviously unhinged. But I hope she did. It was her dream.

I stayed with my parents until I moved into a women-only unit called the Ondine. The fifteen-story building on SW 6th Avenue near Hall Street was the quickest student housing I could get into other than the Montgomery Building.



Mt. Hood and the Willamette River from my studio apartment in the Ondine

The Ondine didn't have a great reputation as one of the best "honor students only" units, but it was clean and adequate and a whole lot better than the Montgomery Building. My eighth-floor studio was designed for two roommates and had two single beds, two desks, two closets, and one vanity sink. Each studio shared a bathroom and kitchenette with the neighboring studio which is how I met Mona C.

Right off the bat, my Ondine neighbor informed me that her name was pronounced "Mona" as in Mono-nucleosis and not "Moan-a" (not that she put it this way.) We didn't hit it off as good friends because we had very different demeanors. Mona liked feeling stylish and had a rich Saudi boyfriend who lavished her with fine things. My boyfriend was Lars and Mona would make rather snide remarks about him and his visits to my studio. She thought he acted like he wanted to be a little kid and once she suggested I must be going through menopause because I had such an older boyfriend. Another time she claimed that Lars used her washcloth in our shared shower because it smelled like semen. Other than this, Mona and I got along okay and occasionally went jogging together around the nearby track. Mona had tried jogging alone at night and some guy started chasing her around the track which is why she asked me to go with her.

During my first year with Lars, I was still in braces while living at the Ondine. Paicentini wanted me to wear a retainer every night but when I spent the night with Lars, he understandably didn't like my wearing it. I soon quit using it altogether while hoping that the braces would suffice. It was such a relief when Paicentini finally removed them. Lars was pleased. His cousin Joan and her smoking lady friends made flattering remarks. And I felt much better about my smile. (On a side note, as I write this memoir forty-five years later, I admit that my teeth stayed

straight for maybe thirty years. Then they reverted to their natural crooked positions most likely because I had failed to wear that retainer thanks to Lars.)

One evening, perhaps a few months into my relationship with Lars, I was on my twin bed putting rollers in my long hair. The bed sat against the window that offered a view of the Willamette River and Mt. Hood. I dropped a roller between my bed and the window. As I reached to pick it up my head pressed against the glass and broke through.

I ran to the mirror over the vanity and panicked at the sight of a large gash across my nose. *Forget about straight teeth*, I remember thinking. *Now I'll have a permanently marred face.*

I frantically phoned Lars but he wasn't home so I relayed what had happened to Sandra. She said she'd try to find her dad. Then I called Kathi but she wasn't answering her phone so I called her parents Carl and Fran and they said they'd be right over. I'm not sure why I didn't call my parents except that I had never felt very close to them or maybe they were out of town. And I had no relationship with my siblings. That aside, I sat on my bed, held a towel to my bleeding nose, and waited for Fran and Carl to take me to the emergency room.

In very little time Kathi's parents arrived filled with concern probably because of my panicky call. They looked at my nose and Fran asked if I had taken any drugs. She probably couldn't believe I had been so stupid as to stick my head through the glass. Before I got very far into explaining my attempt to pick up a hair roller, the door burst open and Lars ran into the room saying, "Teri, where's Teri? Is she all right?"

Obviously, Sandra had gotten my message to her dad and he had dropped whatever he was doing to rescue me. His mere presence gave me a resurgence of hope. Lars took over my care, thanked Fran and Carl who later told me how impressed they had been with my dashing

and chivalrous boyfriend. In one of his Cadis, Lars drove me to the emergency room while I lay in the backseat with a towel over my poor nose. I had a scar that eventually faded into obscurity but over the years I often pointed it out and retold the story of how I had stuck my head through the window of my eighth-floor studio at the Ondine.

During my early college years at PSU, before I became an English teacher at PCC RIC, I had a series of work-study jobs through VA programs. The GI Bill paid for my tuition and housing but I needed extra money for food and entertainment. One of my first jobs was at the Montgomery Market, a co-op store at the bottom corner of the same co-ed unit where I encountered a peeping Tom in the shower. I didn't mind clerking at the front counter, stocking the inventory, and taking a handful of nuts from the bins to nibble on from time to time. My only memorable occurrence involved a creepy young man who approached me at the counter and asked if I wanted to buy some lettuce. I didn't understand him and kept asking if he was selling produce. He ignored my question and kept repeating, "Want to buy lettuce." I could see him growing agitated until he finally blurted out, "Do you want to cop a dime of marijuana?" I then told him to be on his way. He wouldn't leave and seemed personally angry at me so I said, "All right. Let me get some money from the back room." The stupid dude waited at the counter and I returned with a co-worker, a man who was certainly more imposing in appearance than me. He told the man to leave and not come back and that he had already called campus security. The man left and I doubt we really called security. Maybe we were afraid of future trouble from the creep having a vendetta against me personally, and sometimes I worked into the evenings and had to walk to the Ondine in the dark.

Another work study job I had, possibly after or simultaneously with my job at the Montgomery Market, was as a file clerk in the university's accounts receivable office. It was a

tedious job that Mona had previously had. She in fact arranged for me to meet the office manager and take over her position. The work study pay was on an honor system. I kept track of my hours and the manager checked off my roster and submitted it to the VA. At first, I was forthright about each hour I worked and the manager suggested she'd see to my getting a raise. Then I started padding the hours more and more to get through the program. Maybe I was lazy or suffered from ADHD. Don't know. Although the manager didn't confront me about it, she must have known I was padding my hours and she certainly didn't see to my getting that raise. I wasn't concerned because I couldn't stand the job and soon quit.

During the summers of my first two years at PSU, my father arranged for my job as a summer hire reading gas meters for the Northwest Natural Gas Company. My granddad Stanly had worked for the gas company back in the 30s and 40s and had arranged for his oldest sons to get jobs there as well. My father and his older brother Jack started out as meter readers. Uncle Jack worked his way into a supervisory position and my dad ended up as manager for the meter reading department.



I cut off the sleeves of my meter-reading shirt to get an even tan. In my belt is a can of mace to ward off the dogs and I'm holding a flashlight and punch cards ready to hit the day's route.

The first summer was great for me. I enjoyed the exercise in the sunshine and earned over nine-hundred dollars a month which was a lot of money back then. There were a few downsides, of course. A few times when I crossed someone's lawn or went into the wrong backyard looking for a meter, the homeowner would yell, "Get out of my yard!" "Oh, I'm looking for the gas

meter,” I’d reply. “Don’t use gas! Get out!” “Okay. Sorry.” One time I entered a backyard and two Great Danes chased me out the gate. Another time it was two St. Bernards. I don’t remember a dog ever actually biting me but there were several close calls especially with little dogs when the owner was standing there saying, “Oh, she doesn’t bite.” The owner’s words merely stirred the dog to protect and attack. Once I opened the crawlspace door to reach a meter and found an opossum with about eight joeys at her teats. She snarled at me and I told the house owner that I couldn’t get to his meter! I don’t know what he ended up doing because I didn’t have time to wait around. I probably had at least 100 meters to read on each route and because my license was suspended at this time, I had to take the bus which added at least an hour to each day.

I saw my dad every morning at the corporate office where I collected my punch cards for the day’s route. I would read the meter dials, a series of five or six analog clock-like gages (no digital readings back then) by tilting my head to the right for the first gage, marking down the number, then tilting my head to the left for the next gage and marking that number down and so on. Tedious by today’s standards, I know. But it worked back then. I usually carried at my belt a flashlight, can of mace, and a set of keys for each route to let me into the cellars or garages filled with dust and cobwebs. Once I dropped the set of keys and spent half the day retracing my steps to find them.

The gas company offered a forty-dollar bonus if I caught someone tilting their meter to steal gas. One day I discovered two such meters. There were no cellphones in those days. Only pay phones. I ran to a neighboring house and asked to use the lady’s phone to report the thefts. She hesitated as if she’d be doing something wrong to her neighbors or I was doing something wrong but she let me use her phone and I earned an extra eighty dollars that day.

My second summer reading gas meters turned out quite differently. First off, the company had decreased the monthly pay for its summer hires by three hundred dollars. This upset me and I considered not taking the job. But six hundred dollars a month was better than nothing and more than any work-study VA job. Besides, I didn't want to let my dad down since he had arranged for me to get the job in the first place. In a letter to the supervisor, I expressed my grievance about the deduction in pay. I even read it to Lars to get his opinion. The supervisor, Mr. Mayfield, an old white man in a grey suit and paisley tie, called me into his office and essentially explained that he couldn't change company policy. Then he pointed out a word I had misspelled in my letter and suggested that this wasn't setting a good precedent for future career opportunities. 1978 was before I had the use of a computer with spellchecking. I probably used a manual typewriter I had bought for my college term papers.

The dock in pay bothered me all summer and by August, I was ready to quit. I began to estimate some of the more difficult meters to reach in crawlspaces, cellars, or backyard sheds with locks. Of course, this was a "no, no" but I did it anyway and it showed on the monthly report. My readings were 20 percent off the mark. My dad must have known what I was doing but he never confronted me and I kept at it. Before Labor Day, when I had maybe two or three weeks remaining to serve out my agreement, I gave Mr. Mayfield my resignation letter. Lars and his two youngest sons were planning a trip to the San Juan Islands in the Puget Sound and to Vancouver Island in Canada. It was the only time they could go because the school year was about to start for Per and Charlie. I had to join them. Maybe I had even suggested the trip. In either case, this was perhaps the first of many times that I didn't let anything stop me from an opportunity to travel to an interesting and exotic place especially an island or archipelago. While

in Hong Kong, before I headed to Wuhan for my first teaching position at a foreign university, I wrote the following poem which seems to fit this recurring habit of mine.

I Had to Make a Date

In the hours of early morning,
I think about the day—
Of what to wear to look just right,
Of what I ought to say.

It really doesn't matter
Which gown which frock or pants,
And I take my disposition
As the subject to enhance.

The dawn is dead,
My hair is soiled
But I have to make a date,
In accordance with my reverence
I cannot show up late.

I take a scarf and wrap it
In a style to match my skull
And formulate facial facts
To fade away the null.

Who can say that I'm not pretty?
Immaculate is my name!
And I dash in new appearance
Endeavored to remain.

When I told my dad I was quitting I don't remember if he tried to discourage me. He did say that my gas company file would be stamped "Not for re-hire." I didn't care at the time because I had to make a date. A few years later, however, after I returned home from Asia, I needed a job and applied to read meters at the gas company. Sure enough, they wouldn't re-hire me.