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Barbra

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chatty and candid'

NEW YORK TIMES

'Exhilarating'

VANITY FAIR

'A story bursting with life'

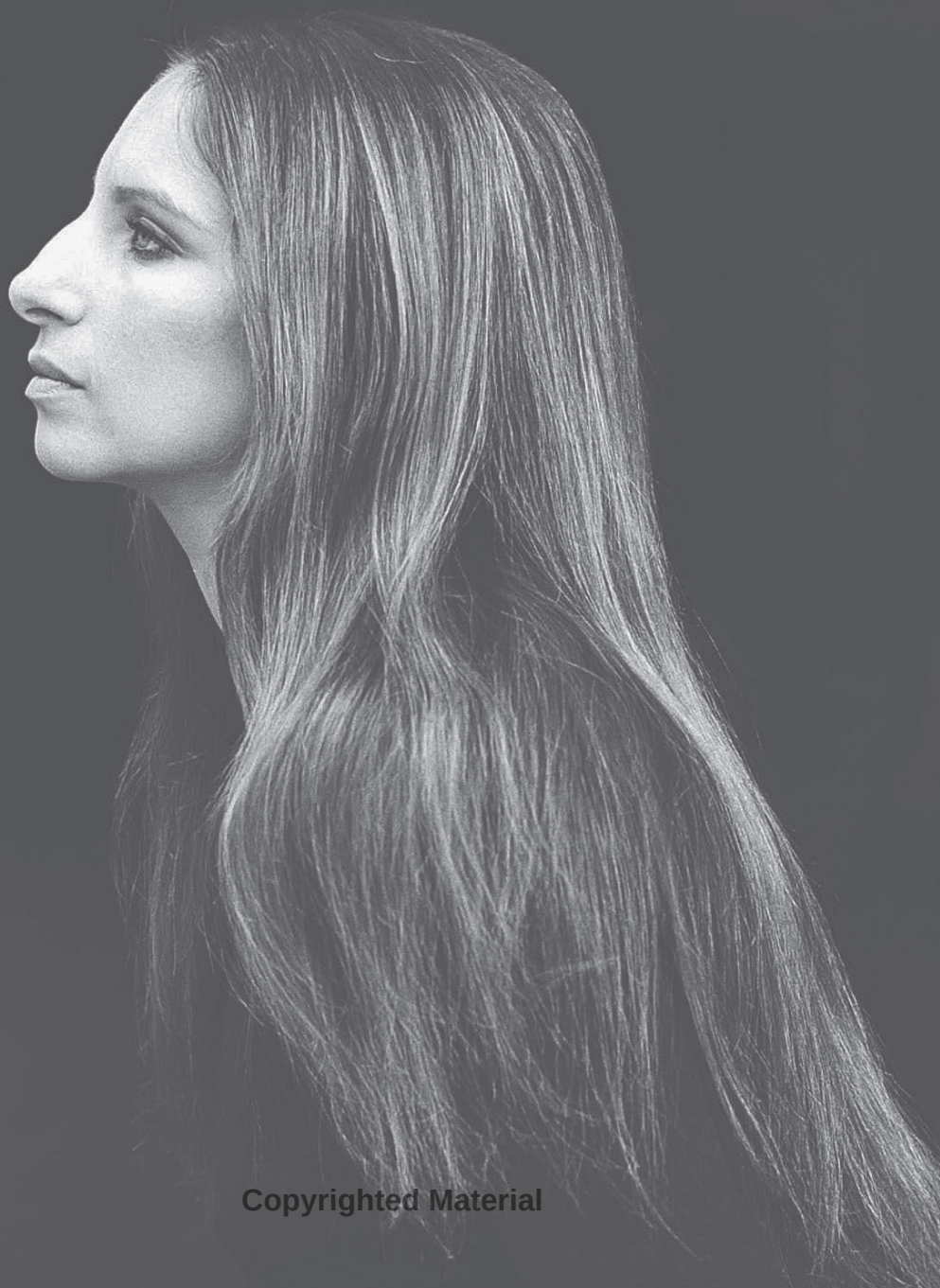
GUARDIAN

Barbra Streisand



PENGUIN BOOKS
MY NAME IS BARBRA

Barbra Streisand is an American singer, actress, director and producer and one of the most iconic figures in music and film, the only recording artist in history to have earned #1 albums over six consecutive decades. She has received the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award, the Kennedy Center Honor, the National Medal of Arts, France's Légion d'Honneur, and America's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She founded The Barbra Streisand Women's Heart Center at Cedars-Sinai, helping to raise awareness and push for more research into women's heart disease, the leading cause of death among women. Through the Streisand Foundation, which she established in 1986, she has supported national organizations working on preservation of the environment, voter education, the protection of civil liberties and civil rights, women's issues, and nuclear disarmament. In 2021 she launched the Barbra Streisand Institute at UCLA, a forward-thinking institution dedicated to finding solutions to the most vital social issues.



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MY
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BARBRA STREISAND



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This book is dedicated to the father I never knew . . .
and the mother I did.

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MY
NAME
IS
BARBRA

Prologue

An “amiable anteater”?
That’s how I was described at nineteen in one of my first reviews as a professional actress. I was in *I Can Get It for You Wholesale*, playing a lovelorn secretary, and I could see the comparison . . . sort of.

Over the next year, I was also called “a sour persimmon,” “a furious hamster,” “a myopic gazelle,” and “a seasick ferret.”

Yikes. Was I really that odd-looking?

Only a year later, when I was in my second Broadway show, *Funny Girl*, my face was exactly the same, but now I was being compared to “an ancient oracle,” “Nefertiti,” and “a Babylonian queen.” I must say I loved *those* descriptions. Apparently I also had a “Pharaonic profile and scarab eyes.” I think that was supposed to be a compliment, though I have to admit one of those eyes does look cross-eyed at times . . . and it seems like the Pharaoh also had a big schnoz. People kept telling me, “Get it fixed.” (I bet no one said that to *him*.)

Sometimes it felt like my nose got more press than I did. In the cover story in *Time* magazine, the writer said, “This nose is a shrine.” (Sounds good!) Then he went on, “The face it divides is long and sad, and the look in repose is the essence of hound.” (Not so good.)

So which is it? Am I a Babylonian queen or a basset hound?

Probably both (depending on the angle).

I wish I could say none of this affected me, but it did. Even after all these years, I’m still hurt by the insults and can’t quite believe the praise. I guess when you

become famous, you become public property. You're an object to be examined, photographed, analyzed, dissected . . . and half the time I don't recognize the person they portray. I've never gotten used to it, and I try to avoid reading anything about myself.

But sometimes I'll just pick up a magazine in the dentist's office, for example. (I happen to like going to the dentist, because I love how my teeth feel after they're cleaned. It's also an hour of peace with no phone calls.) Once when I was waiting, I saw a story about Neil Diamond, who was a grade ahead of me at Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn. Actually it was about his brother, who'd invented some crazy bathtub that had a stereo system and all sorts of electronic gadgets (perfect . . . for getting electrocuted). And it's not cheap . . . fourteen thousand dollars! I'm thinking, *Who would ever buy such a thing?* And then I read that I'm one of his customers! I didn't even know my friend Neil had a brother, and now I'm being used to sell his bathtub?!

That's irritating, but other stories cut deep. One night, my dear friend Andrzej Bartkowiak, a brilliant cinematographer who did two films and a documentary with me, came over for dinner. (Actually, he was cooking, because I'm a hazard in the kitchen. I can burn water.)

Andrzej had been to see his friend earlier (a medical doctor, by the way) and happened to mention that he was having dinner with me. The doctor said, "I hear she's a bitch."

"What?" said Andrzej. "What are you talking about?"

"She's impossible to work with."

"That's ridiculous. Have you ever worked with her?"

"No."

"Well, I have . . . three times . . . and she's wonderful to work with. In fact, she's a very nice person."

"No, she isn't. She's a bitch. *I read it in a magazine!*"

That's the power of the printed word.

And there was no hope of changing this man's mind. He chose to believe some writer who had never met me, rather than the person who really knows me. That upsets me deeply. Why couldn't he accept the truth?

For forty years, publishers have been asking me to write my autobiography. But I kept turning them down, because I prefer to live in the present rather than dwell on the past. And the fact is, I'm scared that after six decades of people

making up stories about me, I'm going to tell the truth, and nobody is going to believe it.

Recently, my husband, Jim, and I were driving home from a movie and stopped at the supermarket because I suddenly had a craving for coffee ice cream. We walked into the market holding hands, and a man came up behind us and said, in a loud voice, "I'm so happy to see you back together!"

Back together? When were we apart? Did my husband move out and I somehow failed to notice?

You see, I like facts. I have great respect for facts, and the idea of just making something up really bothers me.

So I finally said yes to writing this book, after dancing around the idea for ages. I actually wrote the first chapter back in the 1990s, in longhand with an erasable pen . . . and then lost it. Now I wish I knew how to type, because once I started again it took another ten years, since I still have other commitments, like making records, and besides, I get really bored with myself. I'm trying to recall things that happened a long time ago. (Thank God for the journals I've kept, which have been invaluable.) And then sometimes I realize that I haven't been remembering the full story and have to dig deeper, no matter where it leads . . .

I wanted to be an actress ever since I was a child . . . maybe from the moment I was taken to my first movie, and stood up on the seat so I could see the screen. Still, it's amazing that my dream came true, and I'm very grateful to all the people who helped me along the way.

They say that success changes a person, but I think it actually makes you more of who you really are.

Frankly, I think I'm rather ordinary. I just happened to be born with a good voice, and then I guess there was something about my looks, my personality, whatever talent I had that intrigued people (or annoyed them). I know I ask a lot of questions. I have a lot of opinions, and I say what I think . . . and sometimes that gets me into a lot of trouble.

I'm not a very social person. I don't like to get dressed up and go out. I'd rather stay home with my husband and my dogs. Sometimes we'll invite family and friends over for dinner and a movie, or to play games like Rummikub, backgammon, or hearts. (I also play every night on my phone in the dark before I go to sleep, to clear my head of all the stress of the day.) I love painting with my son, Jason (he's much better than I am) . . . I can spend hours taking

photographs in my garden . . . and because I don't go out much, I forget who I am to the outside world.

Which reminds me of something. Recently I was going to the dentist (to get my teeth cleaned again), and while I was waiting for the elevator, I noticed this woman staring at me. So I moved away, but she didn't stop. I thought, *Why is she still staring? Did I spill something on myself?*

And then I realized, Oh yeah . . . I'm what's her name.

I think it's time to dispel the myths about that creature.

And that's why I'm writing this book . . . because I feel an obligation to the people who are truly interested in my work, and the process behind the work, and perhaps the person behind the process.

So, here goes . . .





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Pulaski Street

There's one thing that's very hard for me to deal with, and that's lying. Maybe that's because I was lied to as a child.

One day when I was eight years old, my mother came to visit me at a Jewish summer camp in the Catskills where she had sent me for a few weeks. I didn't like that camp. They had lousy potatoes (probably from a can) that tasted fake. I'd subtly slide them off my plate and throw them under the table, all the way down to the other end so no one would know I was the culprit. The only thing to look forward to was Friday night, when you could get a great piece of kosher cake . . . yellow cake with dark chocolate icing that I've been searching for ever since . . .

I was a very forceful child. I held on to my mother as soon as she arrived and refused to let her go until she reluctantly agreed to take me home with her. Quickly, I packed up my clothes and shoved whatever didn't fit . . . like my American Indian robe and the art projects I had made . . . into a cardboard box I found. Then we walked together to a car . . . and there was a man I'd never seen before sitting behind the wheel. I don't remember him saying one word to me during the whole trip back. Guess he was angry that it wasn't only him and my mom going home.

My mother didn't tell me that this man, Louis Kind, was going to be my new stepfather and that she was pregnant with my sister.

Lying by omission counts as lying too.

We didn't go to the only home I knew . . . my grandparents' apartment on Pulaski Street in Williamsburg. Instead, we pulled up to a tall brick building (one of many that all looked alike) on Newkirk Avenue in Flatbush, part of a big public housing project called the Vanderveer Estates (a very fancy name for

a not-so-fancy place). We had apartment 4G, and I remember being very impressed that there was an elevator. I thought we were rich now. The rent was \$105 a month, much higher than the \$40 on Pulaski Street.

Louis Kind didn't sleep there that first night. I slept in the bed with my mother as usual and woke up the next morning with clicks in my ears when I swallowed.

I don't know to this day if it was a new extra awareness of my inner body or a physiological thing. But I do know that I was shocked by the abrupt change in our circumstances. Who was this man? Decades later, I finally asked my mother why she hadn't sat me down and explained that she was planning to marry him and she was going to have a baby.

"Well, you never asked," she said.

"But Mom, I was only eight!"

I never knew my father. There are no photographs of him holding me as a baby. That was very disappointing. I always wondered, How could that be? Why didn't my mother ever take a picture of the two of us?

And when I was older and asked her why she had never talked to me about my father, she said, "I didn't want you to miss him."

I never understood my mother's logic.

My father, Emanuel Streisand, was a very special man . . . a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of City College in New York, an athlete, and a teacher who devoted his life to education. He developed an innovative curriculum teaching English to juvenile offenders at the Elmira Reformatory, where he was assistant superintendent of schools. He later taught English at a vocational high school in Brooklyn while simultaneously working toward his PhD, taking courses at Cornell University, Hunter College, and then Teachers College at Columbia University. He was brought up in an Orthodox Jewish home, and you're not supposed to ride in any vehicle after sundown on Friday. The Sabbath is a day of rest. So if he had stayed late at Teachers College on Friday night, he would walk home all the way from West 120th Street to Brooklyn.

My father loved kids. To earn extra money during the summer of 1943, he took a job as head counselor at a camp in the Catskills. One morning in August, he was showing an inspector around in the hot sun when he developed a terrible

headache. (He had a history of migraines.) That night he had a seizure. My mother and a friend tried to hold him still (little did they know that would hurt rather than help). The next morning an ambulance took him to a small local hospital, where a doctor gave him a shot of morphine, and he stopped breathing.

My mother always told me and my brother, Sheldon, that he died of a cerebral hemorrhage, and for many years we thought that could be a congenital defect. No one connected the headaches and seizures to a previous car accident, in which he had hit his head. They didn't have MRIs back then to determine what was going on inside the brain. Much later, I tracked down a copy of his death certificate, which said he died of respiratory failure, probably brought on by the morphine, which I also learned should not have been administered under the circumstances.

My father was only thirty-five years old. Suddenly Diana Rosen Streisand was a widow at thirty-four, with two small children . . . Shelly was nine, and I was fifteen months. Years later, my mother told me that for months after my father died, I would still climb up on the window ledge to wait for him to come home. In some ways, I'm still waiting.

With my father gone, my mother couldn't afford to stay in our apartment, and we moved in with her parents. My grandpa Louis Rosen and my grandmother Esther had a small one-bedroom apartment that now had to accommodate five people. They slept in what must have originally been the living room. We had the bedroom, where I shared the bed with my mother, and Shelly slept on a fold-out cot next to us. There was a small, cold kitchen that I was hardly ever in, but I do remember the smell of cinnamon cookies my grandmother baked for Hanukkah once a year. So we all basically lived in the dining room, which was furnished with a rectangular mahogany table, a credenza against one wall, a secretary on the other, and an old-fashioned wooden radio. We had no TV. We would sit and watch the radio.

I used to crawl under the dining table and play. It felt safe there. And I liked to turn the metal crank that made the leaves come apart. My earliest memory is of looking up from under that table . . . I must have been about three years old . . . and listening to a conversation between my mother and her sister. I realized that my mother was talking about one thing while her sister was talking about another. I could feel the miscommunication, but I didn't have the language to tell them.

I think that was the first time I realized how easy it is for people to misunderstand each other.

I liked being an observer . . . out of sight but still able to watch what was going on. I would often scoot under the table when one of my mother's suitors came to pick her up for a date. I never wanted her to go out. I was terrified she would never come back. I saw one guy named Saul kiss her and I thought he was hurting her, even though she was laughing. I remember the color of his teeth . . . brownish. To this day, it's the first thing I notice about a man, and it's one of the reasons I married Jim Brolin. He has great teeth.

I thought most men were weird . . . except my grandfather. When I was about five, he would take me to an Orthodox *shul* (Yiddish for synagogue), and I would sit next to him with the other men, while the women sat elsewhere. I could follow the Hebrew because I went to a yeshiva, where they taught us how to read the words, but I didn't know what they meant. You read Hebrew from right to left (this is probably why I can write backward), and it still feels comfortable, sometimes, reading magazines from back to front (which makes it seem as if I'm reading faster). I felt like a big girl, sitting beside the men. (Maybe that's why it was so easy, all those years later, to imagine myself as Yentl.)

I loved my grandpa, even though he once washed my mouth out with red Lifebuoy soap when I said a bad word. But I knew he loved me. I would sit on his lap and cut the hairs out of his ears. That's *real* intimacy.

His affection saved me. My view of men was that they either abandoned you or were mean to you. My stepfather was rude to my mother. My brother picked me up from school, but we were too far apart in age for him to want a little sister tagging along. My uncle Harry scared me. He used to take out his false teeth and make noises like a monster. My grandfather gave me a taste of what a good man could be.

I was not an easy child. I didn't want to eat (which is hard to believe). My mother was always trying to force food on me. She gave me tonics and cod-liver oil because she was convinced I was sickly. Plus, I was basically bald until the age of two. But I had lots of energy. Once I managed to climb up on a dresser and get hold of my grandfather's razor and nearly cut off my bottom lip trying to shave as I had watched him do. My grandmother had asthma and couldn't chase after me. She called me *fabrent*, which means "on fire" in Yiddish. So Tobey Borookow, a neighbor in the same building, took care of me after school while my mother was working.

I adored Tobey. She was the neighborhood “knitting lady.” We would sit together, and she would tell me all the gossip while I held up my hands so she could wind strands of wool around them, making her skeins. I didn’t have a doll, but I would fill a hot-water bottle as a substitute and pretend. Tobey knitted a little pink wool sweater and hat for it . . . maybe that’s why I love the color pink . . . and I swear it felt more like a real baby than some cold doll.

Even now, when I see children with their dolls and little stoves and things, I want to play with them too.

I love the color burgundy . . . probably because Tobey also made me a burgundy sweater with wooden buttons. It was the only thing that set me apart from the other kids at the first camp I was sent to, the summer I had just turned seven. It was a health camp for kids, and I was anemic, so the fresh air was supposed to be good for me. But I was used to the hot, steamy air in Brooklyn, with everybody leaning out their windows because there was no air-conditioning. The country air was so fresh it hurt my lungs (and with all those trees, I actually developed an allergy, which later turned into asthma).

I hated that health camp. The first thing they did was dump me into a disinfectant bath and comb through my hair for lice. Then they handed me a starched blue linen uniform, with scratchy bloomers (probably why I dislike the color royal blue to this day). I was so homesick, and the tears would well up every afternoon when we were put down for a nap. (I never took naps after I turned three!) When one kid noticed and started to make fun of me, I insisted, “I’m not crying. I just have a loose tear duct.”

I was much happier and healthier as soon as I got back to Brooklyn (I could breathe again!). I remember sitting on my bed in my grandmother’s apartment, wearing my same old red-plaid shirt. But I felt different. Was I the same skinny marink who had left only a couple of weeks ago? My mother was happy that I had gained a pound or two. I used to like to look at my reflection in hubcaps, because they made me appear fatter.

The neighborhood was teeming with kids. We played in the streets, running back to the curb when a car came along. One of our favorite games was skelly. You flicked your bottle cap into numbered squares drawn in chalk on the asphalt, and then you hopped on one foot to pick it up. (It’s a Jewish version of hopscotch.)

I got good marks at the Yeshiva of Brooklyn in everything except conduct, in which I inevitably got a D. I was so impatient and I never learned manners.

When the teacher asked a question, I'd shoot up my hand, and if she didn't call on me, I'd blurt out the answer anyway. It must have been around Hanukkah when one teacher told us that we shouldn't say the word "Christmas" or cross our fingers. Something about that just didn't make sense to me, and as soon as she walked out of the room, I kept repeating "Christmas! Christmas! Christmas!" And prayed to God that He wouldn't strike me dead.

I had two best friends. One was Joanne Micelli, a Catholic girl who went to St. John's Academy. I found the Catholics fascinating . . . the nuns, the priests, the outfits. When I saw a priest, I'd say, "Hello, Father," like Joanne did. I thought she was so lucky to have a real father, as well as a man named "Father" who seemed to love her too. And I was very impressed with the beauty of her church. The yeshiva was dinky in comparison.

My other best friend was Roslyn Arenstein, who was an atheist like her parents. We three girls used to sit on her fire escape (we'd drape an old army blanket over the railing to make a tent) and have very serious philosophical discussions. One day I said, "Look, Roz, I'm going to prove to you that there is a God." A man was walking down the street, and I said, "See that man? I'm going to pray that he steps off the curb." I prayed hard, with all my might, and sure enough he stepped off the curb and crossed the street. I had two thoughts at that moment. One: *Whew, that was lucky!* And two: *There is a God, and I just got Him to do what I wanted by praying.*

I guess that's when I began to believe in the power of the will.

I've always had a very strong will. When I came down with chicken pox, my mother put me in bed, since I had a fever, but I didn't stay there. I just put on my bright green hat and coat and climbed out the window to go and play with the other kids (luckily we were on the first floor) until my mother dragged me back inside.

I often told my mother what to do. I remember one time when she and her date (he was a butcher) were going to an Eddie Cantor movie and decided to take me along. I must have been about six. Since I was known as the girl on the block with no father, I did not want to be seen leaving the building with a strange man. So I told her, "I'm not going with you unless he goes down to the corner first and waits for us there." I still can recall looking up when we left to see if any of the neighbors were at their windows. And sure enough, there was Myrna, a big girl who used to bully me, watching us. I thought, *Oh no. I'll bet she's putting me together with that guy. I hope not!* God forbid, because she would tell everyone.

I was also known as the girl on the block with a good voice. I used to like to sing in the lobby of our building. The ceilings were high, so there was a nice echo, and I loved to run my hand down the cold brass banister. Sometimes I'd sit on the stoop with the other girls, and we'd harmonize to songs from the *Hit Parade*. My mother had a beautiful voice, operatic, and her father, I was told, used to sing in shul when the cantor was ill.

Tobey had a son named Irving. Since he was a boy and he was my friend, I called him my boyfriend, even though he once hit me over the head with his plastic gun. We played together every afternoon while Tobey looked after me. They had a tiny television with a big magnifying glass in front of the screen, and we loved to watch Laurel and Hardy. But when Irving heard his father come in the front door, he would turn to me and say, "My father's here. You have to go home now."

That hurt my feelings, and must have set me back years.

Mr. Borookow's name was Abe, and I can still to this day remember his particular smell. It sure wasn't aftershave.

I wonder if people who have fathers know how lucky they are. My brother had the benefit of a father's love and concern for the first nine years of his life . . . someone who took him to museums, bookstores, parades. Our father read books to him and bought him a radio. He introduced Shelly to drawing and painting, which became an important part of his life.

As a child, you really need someone to love you in order to give you a sense of self-worth . . . that you are seen and taken seriously . . . that your feelings count.

Now I suddenly had a stepfather who seemed to resent my brother and me. Lou Kind already had three kids that he didn't live with, and I doubt he wanted more. Once he appeared on the scene, everything was different. In our new apartment, I slept on a daybed in the hallway. My brother had the little bedroom. And my mother was in the big bedroom with this strange man.

The next thing I knew I had a baby sister, Roslyn. When I found out that babies take nine months to appear, I counted back nine months from my sister's birth and tried to get my mother to acknowledge what she had done on that date. I had heard about sex (an older girl filled me in, standing in the stairwell at school), but I couldn't quite believe it. And my mother did not take this opportunity to enlighten me.

I loved my little sister from the first moment I saw her. She was so beautiful . . . blond curly hair, green eyes. I would stare at her for hours, fascinated by her every move, every twitch of an eye. A living doll!

I hated my stepfather. I didn't like the way he mistreated my mother. And he never spoke to me. I remember riding in his Pontiac with the slanted back and watching him light a cigarette . . . Pall Mall. I liked the smell of the first strike of his match. Then he would exhale a perfect stream of smoke.

One day we took Roz Arenstein for a ride. We were both sitting in the back and I was talking, as usual. My stepfather turned around abruptly and said to me, "Why can't you be like your friend—quiet!"

Not long after that, my mother happened to mention that Lou was color-blind. So the next time we got in the car, I was worried . . . afraid that he couldn't tell the difference between the red and green lights. So I would announce the colors, trying to be subtle. "What a pretty RED light that is!"

No wonder he hated me.

Lou never asked me how I was or how school was going. He didn't see me. He wasn't interested in me. I could never get his approval or his affection, no matter what I did. One day I decided to try to make him like me. When he came home from his used-car lot, I called him "Dad" instead of Lou, which stuck in my throat. I had his slippers waiting for him, and when he sat down to watch his wrestling matches on TV, I crawled on my belly under his line of sight so as not to block his view. But it didn't work. He didn't treat me any better.

I think that's when I unconsciously decided that I would never lower myself for any man.

The other big transition in my life was a new school. After three years at the Yeshiva of Brooklyn, I was now going to start fourth grade at a public school, P.S. 89. The only time I had ever been in a public school was when the yeshiva put on some sort of program and rented the auditorium at P.S. 25, because the yeshiva didn't have a stage. That's where that first picture was taken of me singing, with my eyes closed, head back . . . nothing much has changed.

I remember being so scared that the nurse at P.S. 89, who gave every child a quick physical, could somehow "see" the clicks in my ears, and I wouldn't be allowed to go to school. I felt like an alien.

I was already different . . . odd . . . too skinny . . . and my mom would buy clothes for me three sizes too big, which didn't help. She bought my dresses in

the Junior department, and then she'd sew three big hems and let one out each year. So I would be walking around in the same clothes forever.

In a way, I was like a wild child, a kind of animal, because I had no knowledge of social graces. I remember my friend Maxine Edelstein, who lived on the same floor. Every night at 6:00 p.m. her entire family would sit down at the table and have dinner. Once they invited me to stay, and there was such a warm feeling in that room. My family rarely had a meal together. I didn't know about napkins on your lap. I used to sit with one knee up on the chair. Or I would eat standing up over a pot in the tiny, narrow kitchen. When my brother got home, he'd do the same thing.

I had so little discipline. There was no routine and no rules. My mother never said you have to be home at 6:00 p.m. or whenever. I remember stealing a few of my stepfather's cigarettes and smoking in front of the mirror, pretending I was doing a Pall Mall commercial. I was sneaking up to the roof to smoke when I was ten and gave it up by the time I was twelve. I actually had to teach my mother how to smoke. I told her, "You look funny. Hold the cigarette like this."

Somehow I persuaded my mother to let me go to Miss March's dancing school, which was nearby, because I wanted to be a ballerina. I bought pink satin toe shoes and sewed pink satin ribbons on them. Every day after school, I put them on and walked around the apartment. I paid for those shoes myself with the money I earned showing people to their seats in Choy's Chinese restaurant. I also filled takeout orders. "*Si pic qvot*" . . . small spare ribs. "*Som teu*" . . . three egg rolls. I loved the musicality of the Chinese language. Said with a different tone, a word meant something else.

Muriel Choy became my second surrogate mother, Tobey being the first.

I loved Muriel. I could ask her any question, and she would explain things to me . . . things my mother never mentioned, like sex and cooking. I can still taste her delicious *lap cheong* (Chinese sausage), Chinese cabbage, and steamed chicken, and I still look for those fat, dry egg rolls that they served in the restaurant and that hardly anyone makes anymore. (A few years ago we finally found a place in Los Angeles that sells them. Jim and I sometimes eat three at a time.)

I also used to babysit for Muriel's children when she was working with her husband at the restaurant. One night when I was eleven, I was coming down from their apartment and rang my doorbell for what seemed like ten to fifteen minutes. No one answered, although I knew my mother and Lou were home. I

went back up to Muriel's and got the spare key I kept there. I opened our front door, walked through the living room, and then opened their bedroom door. The two of them were physically intertwined, and it was as if I were invisible. I backed out, kind of in shock, and the incident was never mentioned.

After that, I vowed never to be invisible again.

There are moments in childhood that are so important to who you are going to become. They mold your life forever.

I couldn't rely on my mother. I remember one particular episode, when I was about seven. She was taking me to the movies for a treat, and we were walking down the street and she was smiling to herself . . . she would smile a lot to herself. Suddenly she stopped.

I said, "Mom, what's the matter?"

She said, "We're not going. I changed my mind."

I was so disappointed, and to this day I desperately want people to keep their word. It is so important to do something you say you're going to do. It's one of the Four Agreements in the book of the same name by Don Miguel Ruiz: "Be impeccable with your word."

I couldn't confide in my mother, even about my ear noises. After the first night when I told her about the clicks, she gave me a hot-water bottle to sleep on and never asked about them again. But they didn't go away, and one morning when I was in the sixth grade I woke up with something new. All these sounds . . . "pings" and "pongs," like musical fireworks . . . were going off in my head. That was really scary. Then the pings settled into a high-pitched ringing. I was so afraid that I didn't tell anyone. I tied a scarf around my head, hoping to shut the noises out, but it actually seemed to push them farther in. Nothing helped.

I never went to a doctor then. Years later I found out that this ringing in the ears is called tinnitus, and it has something to do with the connection between the inner ear and the brain. Various doctors have examined me over the years, but they can't do anything because there is apparently nothing to fix. Tinnitus is a condition without a known cause or a cure. It's a mystery.

Some guru once told me, "This is very special. You're on another level, a whole other plane, and you're hearing the sound of the universe."

"I don't think so," I said.

When people tell me, "I'm just like you," I'm tempted to respond, "Do you have a constant ringing in your ears?" It's enough to drive you crazy. And it used to make me very grumpy, but now I've learned to live with it. That's probably one reason why I need to keep busy all the time. I have to take my mind off it, to try to distract myself from the ringing.

I long for silence.

The ear noises were this terrible secret that I held inside and tried to manage on my own. I didn't expect any help from my mother anymore.

One day when I was twelve my brother's fiancée, Ellen, came to our apartment to meet the family . . . one of the few times we ever had a guest. Rozzie wanted ice cream after dinner and Lou gave Shelly some money and told him to buy enough for everyone. Then he looked at me and said, "But don't get any for *her*."

And then he said something that hurt my feelings. I couldn't remember the words, so years later I asked Ellen, and she said, "It was incredibly cruel. He called you ugly."

I must have blocked that out. I do remember that he made me feel awful, while my mother said nothing and just kept clearing the table. I went into the little bedroom (which I inherited after Shelly moved out), lay down on the single bed, and I remember having an out-of-body experience, where I was up on the ceiling looking down at myself lying there . . . numb.

I thought, *Why does he want to hurt me? Am I so unlovable?*

I lived a lot in my own head. After I read a booklet about the nine symptoms of cancer, I decided I had every one of them. But I never discussed my worries with my mother. When I got a chest cold, all she said was, "It's your fault. You went out without your sweater." Then she'd slather me with a mustard plaster (hot water mixed with Colman's Mustard Powder in between two torn pieces of sheet). When I had a sore throat, she'd wrap a thick sock around me like a collar and fasten it with a safety pin. "What if the pin opens?" I asked. "Then I'd really have a sore throat!"

My mother took care of me to the best of her ability, but she wasn't sympathetic like mothers in the movies. I remember being petrified when I woke up after a tonsillectomy when I was six . . . and she wasn't there. The last thing I had seen was this big rubber thing coming down over my face, delivering ether. I felt as if I were falling into a black hole. Circles were spiraling in my mind,

accompanied by a strange droning sound like a drill. I fell asleep to the muffled voice of the doctor.

When I opened my eyes, I wondered, Was I still in this world? I was alone in the room. My mother wasn't there like she had promised. It turned out that she was walking around the block, probably nervous herself. She didn't understand how important it was for her to be physically present at moments like this.

So I kept everything inside, especially my fears. Once when I was about nine, I had this heaviness in my chest, and it wouldn't go away. One of the buildings in the project had a doctor's office on the ground floor, and I finally built up my courage . . . it took about a week . . . to ring the bell. And he wasn't in. But guess what? The simple fact that I dared to go see a doctor on my own took away my symptoms. In other words, the heaviness just disappeared.

That was my first psychosomatic illness.

Internalizing all these emotions can't have been healthy. And I was not naturally happy with life. I remember thinking, *This can't be it.*

Around the same time, I remember a gang of girls forming a circle around me in front of our apartment house. They were making fun of me. Was it something I was wearing? (I did have that scarf around my head.) What did I do to make them angry?

I escaped, crying, and ran upstairs to get Shelly to defend me. He refused to come down, saying, "Fight your own battles." I was sure my father would have helped me, but now I realized nobody was going to protect me. In hindsight, I guess that's when I began to build up a wall, my own shield, around myself.

Years later I realized that when my father died, I didn't lose only him. My mother left me emotionally as well. I can't blame her for that. She was suddenly a widow with two kids to support. I asked her once, when I was an adult, why she never hugged me or showed me any affection or said words like "I love you."

"I didn't have time," she replied. "And my parents never said those words to me, but I knew they loved me." She just assumed I knew how she felt. But I didn't.

Another one of the Four Agreements in Ruiz's book is "Never assume."

T W O

Why Couldn't I Play the Part?



I was fourteen when I took my first independent steps into Manhattan, landing on Fiftieth Street and Broadway from the IRT. My friend Anita Sussman and I were going to see a Broadway show . . . another first for me. Manhattan was a whole new world. When we climbed up the subway steps into the sunshine, I couldn't believe how open and wide everything seemed compared to Newkirk and Nostrand, the narrow streets surrounding the projects. And there were so many cars. You couldn't play skelly in Manhattan. You'd get run over.

Marquees were everywhere, displaying the names of various shows. The possibilities seemed endless.

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We had tickets for *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Our seats were in the back of the

balcony at the Cort Theatre, and I remember they cost \$1.89. (Or was it \$1.98?) The actors were far away, but we could see the whole sweep of the stage. I've realized, in retrospect, that there's something to be said for the bird's-eye view. Now that I can afford the expensive seats, I'm not sure they're really better. If you're too close, you can see the makeup, the sweat. It destroys the illusion.

I was mesmerized by the play. I remember thinking to myself, *Anne is fourteen; I'm fourteen. She's Jewish; I'm Jewish. Why couldn't I play the part?* I felt I could do it just as well as Susan Strasberg . . . especially since Anne had difficulties with her mother. She was convinced her mother didn't understand her. I could definitely relate to that.

From then on Anita and I would go to see Broadway plays practically every Saturday. I wanted to see serious dramas. I wasn't particularly interested in musicals. We saw Paul Muni in *Inherit the Wind*. I still love that play. It's about creationism versus evolution, religion versus science. Thank God reason and truth won out. Eva Le Gallienne and Irene Worth in *Mary Stuart* were also thrilling to watch. Here were two powerful actresses, both playing heads of state. I loved that.

I wanted to be a serious actress too.

When I think back, I did my first acting job when I was about nine. One day I said something my mother didn't like, and she slapped me across the ear. I thought, *I'm going to pay her back for that . . . give her a little aggravation.* So the next time she spoke to me, I pretended not to hear her. I acted like a little deaf girl, and it worked. She believed me and said, "Barbara! Answer me!" and I just kept saying, "What? What? Did you say something?" I completely scared her.

Most of the acting I saw was on TV. By that time we had our own set. (That was the one good thing about Lou Kind. He bought a Zenith television.) I would park myself in front of the screen and watch Milton Berle and Ed Sullivan. I also liked game shows where the host asked a question and you had to guess the answer, like *The \$64,000 Question*. My favorite cousin Lowell and I used to play together and we invented a show of our own, which we called *Crack the Safe*.

First, we'd open the telephone book and randomly pick a name. Then I would call that person up, pretending to be the announcer on a radio quiz show, and ask, "Do you listen to our program *Crack the Safe* on WNIT?" (I'd make up the call letters.) People were excited to get a phone call from a radio program and

usually said, "Oh yes! I listen all the time!" Then I'd explain the rules of the game. If they could identify five songs, they would win a cash prize. Lowell's job was picking out a 45 rpm and putting it on the turntable, while I held the receiver close by. "Do you recognize that tune?" If they answered correctly, we'd go on to the next song. "But first," I'd tell them, "we have to take a break for a commercial from our sponsor . . . Fab laundry detergent. Do you use Fab?"

"Yes!" they always said. "Fab is my favorite!" One lady was so enthusiastic she added, "It's bubbling away in the machine right now! As a matter of fact, it's overflowing on my floor." At this point, I'd usually have to shush Lowell, who'd be giggling in the background. We couldn't believe how gullible people were. Then I'd completely change my voice and act out all the parts of the commercial.

Other kids might have stopped there, but not us. If the person managed to guess all five songs, we'd take down his or her address. Then Lowell and I would go to McCrory's, the local five-and-dime, buy some fake money, enclose it in an envelope, and drop it in the mail.

I loved the five-and-dime. There were so many items that were not very expensive . . . combs, bobby pins, lipsticks. But I also had another method of getting what I needed, which I'm not too proud of. Sometimes I would steal things.

This was not as simple as random shoplifting. I was a very logical girl and I had my own system. It was all based on something I had noticed . . . people often discarded their receipts on the floor. I would look for them and pick them up. Most things were a dollar then, and the tax was three cents. So I would take an item that cost \$1.03, something small like a lipstick or a compact that was relatively easy to slip into my bag. Then I'd head straight to the refund window . . . my heart beating fast . . . where I'd turn in the item with the receipt, collect the cash, and then use the money to buy something I really wanted.

I don't want you to think that this was fun. I was always nervous. It was a strange combination of excitement and fear. But the refunds were a good way to supplement the money I made as a cashier at the Chinese restaurant . . . I was paid a dollar an hour for working there, and fifty cents an hour for babysitting. Every bit came in handy, because as soon as I started earning money my mother said I had to buy my own clothes.

I remember one particular outfit that I loved . . . a skirt and top made of cot-

ton printed with tiny pink-and-white checks, with lace trim. Then I bought shoes to match, low-cut pink flats that showed a bit of my toes. But then I also liked the more masculine, sporty look of the plaid shirt I wore at camp, with pants.

One day, I picked up a pair of Bermuda shorts at A&S (that's Abraham & Straus, Brooklyn's best department store). They were a classic blue-and-green plaid. I had just pulled them on in the dressing room to see if they were the right size, and then it occurred to me . . . I could let my skirt fall back down and just walk out, still wearing the shorts.

It was so easy. I must have brought in a couple of other things to try on, and I handed those back to the salesperson, thinking, *Oh my God, she doesn't know I still have the shorts on.* Nobody could see them under my skirt . . . or could they? I felt my heart pounding.

I can't remember whether it was on that same day that I took a pair of yellow socks. (I was getting carried away by my talent.) I already had a paper bag because I had bought something else, and as I was going down a crowded escalator, I just dropped the socks into it. Then I stopped to look at something on the first floor that caught my eye. Suddenly I heard a woman say, "I saw you put those socks in your bag."

Did I hear right? Or was this my guilty conscience? I quickly moved to the next counter, but she followed me. I was so petrified that I couldn't look up. I never saw her face. Deliberately I set the bag down and walked out of the store. And that was the end of my criminal career. I never stole anything again. I liked testing boundaries but I couldn't stand the humiliation and shame that I felt at that moment. Imagine what it would be like if I were ever truly caught and dragged into a manager's office!

Now if I go to a hotel and I like a little doodad such as a tiny dish that holds mustard or something, I always ask if I can buy it.

Lou Kind moved out when I was thirteen, which meant I never had to watch another wrestling match. I was happy he left. (I couldn't tell whether my mother was happy or sad about it because she never discussed it.) I hated the condescension in his voice when he spoke to her. Without him, the atmosphere inside

the apartment became a lot calmer. My best memory of that time is lying on my bed, reading movie magazines and eating Breyer's coffee ice cream. It came in a square box, divided into sections like Neapolitan, except it was coffee on each side with a slab of cherry vanilla in the middle . . . with whole pieces of cherry. I would eat that first and save my favorite flavor, coffee, for last. I wanted that to be the taste that lingered in my mouth. (I used to eat a pint of coffee ice cream whenever I could and still stay skinny as a rail. Why couldn't that be true now?)

Shelly and Ellen got married, and for their honeymoon they were going to Europe on the SS *Constitution*. Some of the family came to see them off. I was dazzled by the huge ship and the thought of crossing the ocean to see the world. People on board were drinking champagne and laughing and talking in a beautiful, wood-paneled room. Meanwhile, I was practically ill, wanting so desperately to go with them. My mother said, "Shelly, give her five dollars." But my brother ignored her. (Years later, when I reminded him of this, he sent me a five-dollar bill, framed.) I couldn't believe that he was sailing away and I had to go back to our gloomy apartment.

The movies were my escape. Right next to my high school, Erasmus Hall on Flatbush Avenue, was the Astor Theatre. It showed foreign films by directors like Akira Kurosawa and Jules Dassin, and though their names meant nothing to me at the time, I loved their work in *Rashomon* and *Never on Sunday*. I didn't mind the subtitles, or the fact that the films were all in black and white. I think that was the beginning of my love for monochromatic images.

Although I was also seduced by the bright, saturated colors at the Loew's Kings, where they showed big Hollywood musicals in Technicolor. I remember Howard Keel and Kathryn Grayson in *Kiss Me Kate*. I thought she was beautiful, with her high, vibrating voice.

The Loew's Kings was one of those extravagant movie palaces with red-velvet seats, an exotic painted and gilded ceiling, and Mello-Rolls . . . the best ice cream cones . . . flat on top with the ice cream packed inside, all the way down to the bottom of the cone. I've never seen anything like it before or since. Very practical. Fewer drips. And the candy! My usual was two packages of peanut M&M's and a box of Good & Plenty, with soft black licorice inside the hard pink or white cylindrical shells. It was like eating jewelry.

That's where I saw Marlon Brando for the first time in *Guys and Dolls*. My friend Barbara Sankel had already shown me a photograph of him. I thought, *Eh, he's okay*. And then I watched him on-screen and fell in love. I thought, *Oh my God, who is this creature? What a face! Those eyes . . . those lips . . . those teeth!* I wanted to be in the movies just to kiss Marlon Brando!

Guys and Dolls was the only movie that I ever sat through twice in one afternoon. I had come in halfway through some other film. In those days, they had double features, but I rarely watched both movies from beginning to end. I didn't realize that theaters had schedules and you were supposed to come in when a movie started. I would just walk in whenever I felt like it, and then stay after the second feature to see the beginning of the first.

I can't even remember what the other film that day was because *Guys and Dolls* blew everything else out of my head. I was riveted to the screen. After it ended, I had to sit through the whole other movie, bursting with impatience (another two Mello-Rolls helped). I was so entranced with Marlon Brando that I couldn't wait to see him again.

I liked love stories, like *Anna Karenina* with Greta Garbo. I used to imagine myself as the heroine, living another life. When I saw *The King and I*, I wanted to be Anna, the devoted teacher, not Deborah Kerr. I wanted to wear those hoop skirts and live in Siam.

Later, I realized that in the stories I loved the most, the characters don't end up together . . . which is interesting, since we all think we want a happy ending. And yet it's the tragedy, the loss, the missed opportunity that really resonates and stays in our minds and hearts forever. *Anna Karenina* ends sadly . . . which allowed me to cry. I never cried easily. But in a movie theater I could let my tears flow.

Anna Karenina was also the first classic novel I ever read. I went straight from Nancy Drew to Tolstoy. I was completely taken with Anna, dying for love. After all, isn't passion what we all want in our lives?

I loved the world of make-believe. It was so much more vivid and alive than anything I was experiencing. Walking out of the dark theater into the harsh light of reality left me so depressed. I was hit with the smell of the street . . . the garbage . . . the dirt. My mother didn't want me to go to the movies because she said I was always grouchy for a couple of days afterward.

I didn't like reality. I was a misfit in high school, never completely comfortable in those halls even though I got high marks and was a member of the Arista Society, which required an above-90 average. I always cared about my grades. I was a diligent pupil who turned in each homework assignment on time and in excruciating detail. I still have a paper I wrote as a freshman, entitled "My Thirteen Years" . . . complete with a "13" made out of construction paper on the cover, a table of contents, and family photographs. Here's an excerpt to give you an idea of the contents:

"An exciting moment in my life took place in the auditorium of Public School 89 on June 24, 1955 at 9:15 a.m. It was my graduation. I remember feeling very funny walking across the platform to receive my diploma. I could hear the click of my heels, and I thought my slip was showing. I remember feeling strange when I was walking down the steps to my seat. I felt as if all eyes were upon me." (It was not a feeling I enjoyed, then or now. This is why to this day I hate attending awards shows or being on the red carpet.)

"I liked my teachers, but somehow I was glad to leave." (Yes, that's still me. When I'm done with something, I'm *done*.) "This past summer I went to the beach about three times a week. Nothing out of the ordinary occurred."

Not the most promising material, I know . . . but I already had my plans for the future. "Ever since I can remember I've been interested in dramatics. Once in a while I take out my poetry books and my *Theatre Arts* magazines and act out the plays. I've recently heard of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, in which they include vocal lessons in their course. I am going to look into the matter further." I go on to declare, "Now that I am an Erasmian I hope to be able to participate and contribute to any extracurricular activities" and "I will try to perform all of my duties to the utmost of my ability. That ends the story of my life. All I can say is I will try to get the full benefit out of what I can, and I will try to make my life as pleasant as possible, for myself, and for those with whom I come in contact."

Not a bad goal . . . I was definitely earnest, as you can see. But I didn't look like the other honor students I hung around with. They wore brown oxford shoes with laces and thick glasses. I had streaked hair, which I did myself. I would take a piece of cotton, soak it in hydrogen peroxide straight from the bottle, and bleach strands of my hair. Then, when I got tired of that look, I bought Noreen

henna rinse at Woolworth's and tried to get rid of the bleached part. What I didn't know was that inside each capsule were tiny little crystals in different colors, so chunks of hair turned red, green, and blue. I looked like a London punk rocker . . . way ahead of that time . . . although it was a complete accident.

I also liked to play around with makeup. I used to take my mother's dark purple lipstick and mix it with zinc oxide (which I used to treat blemishes) to make an unusual magenta color. Borrowing her lipstick was nothing new. When I was two, she caught me just as I was about to fall off her dresser, where I had been happily smearing lipstick all over my face. My brother had a talent for art, and I used his blue watercolor pencils to make eye shadow. I may have overdone it at times. When I received the Spanish medal for having the highest mark in the class (99), the teacher, Mrs. Thomas (pronounced *Tomath* with that Castilian *lithp*), handed it to me and said, "You don't have to wear blue on your eyes to get an award."

Bobby Fischer, the chess prodigy, was also a student at Erasmus. I can still see him sitting alone in the cafeteria, wearing a brown leather cap with earmuffs and thick brown corduroy pants. And he was laughing to himself. That's what intrigued me. He looked like some sort of deranged pilot from a 1940s movie. One day I got up the courage to go over and say hello, but he wasn't very friendly. He was more interested in the *Mad* magazine he was reading. That was the last time I approached him. He was another loner, like me.

After Irving Borookow (I broke up with him when I was seven), I never even had a date all through high school, except once with a boy who was Spanish . . . tall and quite good-looking. I don't remember his name but I remember his face, and what I was wearing . . . a navy-blue dress with a white collar and cuffs. I might have talked too much, since he never asked me out again.

And that was it for youthful romance. Once, Ira Trachtenberg, a shy blond boy who also lived in the projects, wanted to take me to Manhattan to see *A Star Is Born* with Judy Garland. But I was afraid he'd get beaten up, and then how would I get home to Brooklyn?

Besides, I liked Joey Bauman better. He was a tough guy. He could protect me. I have a great picture of the two of us. I'm sitting on his bike, and I don't look too bad. Kind of cute, as opposed to my lousy graduation picture from middle school, with the worst 1950s hairstyle.

My best friend as a teenager was Barbara Sulman, who also lived in the projects. Years later, when I was shooting *The Prince of Tides* in New York, she left a note in my trailer on the street. I was so happy to hear from her and called to invite her back to visit. She looked exactly the same as she did at thirteen, only taller. We used to tell each other our dreams. I wanted to be a famous actress, and she wanted to be a secretary and have two kids and a husband. Both of us got our wish.

Barbara and I used to go to Brighton Beach together, Bay 2, spread out a towel, and lie in the sun. We'd slather ourselves in baby oil, with a few drops of iodine in the bottle to make our tans even darker. When I got home, I couldn't wait to pull off my bathing suit, still gritty with sand, and take a shower. Then I could look at the contrast between the white, unexposed skin and the skin that was in the sun to see how tan I was. It was almost a competition. We would meet after our showers to compare our tans.

I did a lot of things on my own. I was always very independent. That probably happens when you have a parent who works. You learn how to fend for yourself.

I didn't cook but I liked to bake . . . I was always looking to replicate that yellow cake I loved at the Bais Yaakov summer camp . . . Fischer's cupcakes came the closest. And then I had other favorites. Ebinger's, the German bakery around the corner from our building, had the best chocolate blackout cake. Schenley's, the Jewish bakery, was where I'd go to buy a Charlotte Russe for a treat, just because it looked so pretty with that cherry on top. And then there was the Jewish "appetizing" store, Besterman's, for sour green tomatoes, lox and bagels, and smoked butterfish, a flat little fish with shiny gold skin that tasted great. On the corner was a drugstore called Cookie's, with round seats that twirled at the lunch counter. And then catty-corner to Cookie's was a little Italian candy store where you could get licorice in red and green and brown, as well as black. They served Cokes straight from the soda fountain spigot and made great egg creams too. I don't know why they're called egg creams. There's no egg in them, only milk, Fox's U-Bet chocolate syrup, and seltzer. My mother always tried to give me malteds to fatten me up, but I never liked them. Too thick.

Because she was busy with my little sister, I went to many other places alone, like the dentist . . . Dr. Norman Greystone, across the street. He told me I had

fifteen cavities, and I was convinced he was trying to make money by drilling holes in my teeth . . . although I'll admit I did eat a lot of sweets.

I was fourteen when he pointed to my canines (the ones that are pointy) and explained that they were still my baby teeth. Most kids lose those by the time they're ten or eleven, but mine hadn't fallen out, so he wanted to pull four teeth, two on either side, to make room for my adult teeth to grow in. I was horrified. "No way," I said. I didn't want to have huge holes on each side of my mouth. I told him I'd allow him to pull out one tooth on each side, hoping Mother Nature would take care of the rest. (I don't remember even asking my mother if I could do this. I had made up my mind.)

And then Dr. Greystone sent me to an orthodontist because he saw that one front tooth was starting to grow in behind the baby tooth, so I needed braces. Great. I was already insecure about my looks, and the last thing I needed was braces. When the orthodontist told me he wanted to put all these wires on my teeth, I said, "I'm sorry, but you'll have to somehow put them behind my teeth, so they don't show." Apparently he could hide the wires on the top teeth but not the bottom, so I told him to forget about those. That's why my bottom teeth are still crooked.

By the way, it took two years for the new teeth to come down. This is why people thought I was so serious. I never smiled for that entire time. It was too embarrassing. And laughing was out of the question. Maybe it would have been faster if I had let Dr. Greystone do what he wanted. But I was thinking ahead. How could I go onstage with braces and two large gaps in my mouth?

You see, I had big plans. That same year I pretended to be older so I could get into the summer apprentice program at Malden Bridge Playhouse in up-state New York. (By the time I went, I had turned fifteen, which I thought was grown-up enough.)

I used to read a paper called *Show Business* that was sold on newsstands in Manhattan, and that must have been where I learned about Malden Bridge. I can still see the guy who ran it, John Hale. He was a tall, thin string bean who looked like John Waters. I'm not even sure I had to audition, and the competition wasn't stiff, because if you had \$150, you got in. It's funny when I think of it now. You actually had to pay for the privilege of doing all the dirty work in the theater. In any event, I didn't have \$150, and neither did my mother. When I asked if I could go, she said no. To her it must have sounded as if I wanted to

join the circus, and she was appalled. But I was determined. I reminded her that my grandfather had left me \$500 when he died, and I said, "I want some of it to go to summer stock."

My mother and I did not have the typical mother-daughter relationship. I always had a certain power over her. Or maybe I was so relentless that I wore her down.

She gave me the money.

Things were looking up! I went to Malden Bridge with my best friend from Erasmus, Susan Dworkowitz, who also wanted to be an actress (and had already picked her stage name, Susan Lanell). She was a tiny girl who used to put white pancake makeup on her face. With her red lipstick and black hair in a pixie cut, she looked like a little porcelain doll. Imagine her next to me, with my home-made magenta lipstick and blue eye shadow. The two of us must have been quite a pair.

The playhouse had something like a ten-week season, and the first play opened in June, but we apprentices didn't get to go onstage until July. The play was *Teahouse of the August Moon*, and we both had walk-on parts. Susan seemed perfectly cast. I wasn't, but that didn't bother me. I was so excited to finally be onstage . . . a professional stage with a real theater company! Susan and I had bought Max Factor theatrical makeup kits, and I still remember the thrill of opening up each cylindrical stick and breathing in the smell of the greasepaint.

I was worried about the gaps in my teeth, so I used to take Aspergum, which was lighter than regular gum and closer to the color of my teeth, and mold it into the shape of a tooth and stick it in my spaces. You can guess what happened next. More than once, right in the middle of a performance, one of my Aspergum teeth fell out, and I had to quickly swallow it.

My favorite time was when we knocked down the set at the end of each week, to repaint the flats for the next show. As we all worked into the wee hours of the morning, delicious Campbell's tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches would appear. Nothing better! I think I also discovered peanut butter and jelly, on soft white bread, while I was there. I was used to bologna and Velveeta cheese.

In the fifth play, I got a part with actual lines . . . Elsa in *Desk Set*. I was perched on a desk and had to play this flirtatious character. I didn't know how to be flirtatious. When you grow up without a father, I don't think you relate

quite as easily to men. You don't develop your femininity in response to his masculinity. What do little girls do to get attention from their daddy? They cuddle up to him when they want a new toy or a new dress. They kiss him and say, "I love you." They learn how to manipulate. I had no idea how to manipulate men or even react to them, since I had had no relationship with my stepfather. Instinctively, I must have used a part of myself that I didn't even know existed to play this role.

So I was completely surprised when I read my first review in the local newspaper: "Barbara Streisand turns in a fine performance as the office vamp—Down boys!"

Wow. "Down boys!" Was he kidding? Did this reviewer really think I was sexy? I was so amazed . . . and proud. It was the first time anyone had ever referred to me as attractive in any way.

At the end of the season, the apprentices got to put on their own show as a reward for spending most of the summer backstage, unseen. The play was *Picnic*, and I was cast as Millie, the heroine's kid sister. I had seen the movie starring William Holden and Kim Novak, with Susan Strasberg as Millie. (There she was again.) And I got another good review: "As the homely sister, Barbara Streisand is transformed from a tomboy to a pretty girl, aware of her powers, in a wholly believable transition."

That critic was prescient. "Homely" to "pretty" . . . that basically describes the template for my whole career.

And that was it. My path was set. What a glorious summer! I could hardly bear to go back to high school. I decided to double up on my math and science courses so I could graduate six months early and get started! But in order to do that, I needed permission. The principal, Mrs. Cameron, called my mother in for a conference to ask why I wasn't applying to college with a 93 average. My mother wasn't convinced that college was so important. Her highest ambition for me was to learn how to type so I could work as a secretary in the school system and get paid vacations. (That's why I grew my nails so long . . . so I'd never have to type.)

In English class that year, the books I chose to report on were by Stanislavsky. I read *My Life in Art*, his autobiography, and *An Actor Prepares*, the first book of a trilogy that explained his theories about acting, and continued with *Building a Character* and then *Creating a Role*. I wrote a paper on Shakespeare's son-

nets. I remember taking the subway all the way up to the Heckscher Theatre on Fifth Avenue and 104th Street to see George C. Scott in *Richard III* on a very cold and snowy night. I loved Shakespeare.

So had my father, as I discovered when I finally got to look through his books. After he died, my mother had tied them all up and put them down in the basement at Pulaski Street. Years later I retrieved them, and now they're my treasures . . . all the plays of Shakespeare and works by Charles Dickens and Mark Twain. You can see where I scribbled, as a child, in some of the copies. He must have been reading them while I was close by. I still have his copy of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* on my bedside table. It's a charming book, summarizing the stories for children. Who knows? Maybe he had bought it to read to me.

Erasmus did not offer acting classes, but I did hear about a Radio Club that met somewhere outside of school. I auditioned with a speech from George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. It's the scene where she's in front of the tribunal, pleading for her life, and she talks about the voices she hears in her head. I had learned from reading Stanislavsky that you should always try to find something in yourself that relates to a character in order to play it successfully. I certainly heard things in *my* head, so I could be completely truthful when I said Joan's lines. Acting is believing . . . that was the title of another book I read back then. It was one of my favorites.

There was another line from the play that caught my eye. It comes when Joan is weary from all the tribunal's questions and in despair because they refuse to believe her answers. She says, "It is an old saying that he who tells too much truth is sure to be hanged."

That hit me like a revelation, and I've never forgotten it. I've always believed in telling the truth, but it's gotten me into trouble over the years.

I remember steaming open the letter from the club, addressed to my mother, to find out if I had gotten in. And I had. But I can't recall if I actually ended up going. I always enjoyed the challenge of getting into something like that, but once I was accepted, I often lost interest. Maybe I went once, and the reality didn't live up to my fantasy . . . or maybe it was too far away.

I was also accepted into the Choral Club at Erasmus. I thought Mr. DePietto, the head of the music department, was very handsome, but he didn't pay any attention to me. Nobody in high school was particularly impressed with my

voice, and neither was I. My mother, on the other hand, thought she had a very good voice . . . and she really did. She would sing at the drop of a hat, at bar mitzvahs and other family gatherings. But she never did anything with her talent. When she was seventeen, she and a girlfriend signed up to sing in the Metropolitan Opera Chorus, but they only went to one rehearsal, got home late, “and worried our parents,” as she told a reporter decades later. “So both of us girls gave it up and put it out of our minds.”

Even though she had dropped her own musical ambitions, did she retain some for me? . . . because she took me into the city to audition for MGM when I was nine. How did that come about? Were they looking for young talent and just put an ad in the paper? Was it my mother’s idea, or did I have to persuade her? I’m not sure. I do remember telling everyone on the playground, as I was doing my tricks on the slide, that I was going to MGM . . . I loved the lion that roared at the beginning of all their movies . . . and that I would probably be famous soon. Little did I know that an audition was not the same as getting a job. When my mother and I arrived, we were greeted by Dudley Wilkinson, a distinguished white-haired man who was the head of talent. He shook my hand, and then I was shown into a glass booth . . . very strange, because I couldn’t hear anything from outside, except when they spoke to me through a loudspeaker. I sang “Have You Heard?” by my favorite singer back then, Joni James. I doubt I had any accompaniment. And I don’t think I ever heard from them again.

When I was twelve, I also auditioned for a TV show called *Startime Kids*. I think they actually wanted me for that one, but before I could be on the show, I had to attend their classes. I may have gone a few times, but the classes were early on Saturday morning, and it was too much of a schlep for me and my mom to get there. She didn’t want me to continue, and I don’t think I was that unhappy to stop.

We went up to the Catskills for a week the summer I was thirteen, where my mother met a piano player who told her about a studio where you could make your own record. She was thrilled by the idea and decided to do it. And I thought, *Great, I’ll make a record too.*

My mother and I picked out our songs and went to the Nola Studios on December 29, 1955, to record them. My mother sang “One Kiss” in a light operetta style. Quite beautiful . . . better than Jeanette MacDonald, I thought. But she could hardly get a chorus in edgewise because the piano player kept launching

into endless, elaborate refrains. I was just a teenager and what did I know . . . it just felt wrong. As soon as he started that with me, I said, "No, no, can you just play a shorter interlude?"

I sang two songs that day. One was "Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart" and the other was "You'll Never Know," a song I really liked, with music by Harry Warren and lyrics by Mack Gordon . . . a serious song. I was not all that comfortable with up-tempo pieces. The piano player and I had figured out where he was going to play, and where I was going to sing. But then, on the last few notes, something came out of my mouth that completely surprised me. Instead of singing the melody as it was written and as we had planned, very simply: "You'll never know what you don't . . . know . . . now . . ." I sang three totally different notes. Higher, with a jazzier rhythm, and with an odd minor note at the end.

I thought, *Holy mackerel! Where did that come from? Is this what they call inspiration?* I didn't know that a musician might call it improvisation . . . and it means riffing on the melody. It was only years later, when I was sitting in acting class, that I realized that this kind of thing is exactly what we were all trying to achieve . . . to be completely in the moment . . . without preconceptions . . . so that we could react with pure spontaneity.

I started going to acting classes in Manhattan when I was fourteen. My first teacher was William Hickey, who was a member of the Herbert Berghof Studio in Greenwich Village, founded by Berghof and his wife, Uta Hagen. I must have read about it in *Show Business*. But I didn't stay with Hickey long. Frankly, I couldn't understand what he was talking about half the time. I remember doing a scene for him from *The Glass Menagerie*. I thought I did a decent job with Laura, especially her limp . . . I seemed to gravitate to characters with a flaw. Then he asked my partner and me to do it again. But before we got very far, he stopped me and asked, "Don't you remember your blocking?"

"What's blocking?" I had never heard the term before. After he explained that each actor was supposed to repeat his movements, I said, "You mean you have to move in exactly the same way, to the same spots? Why?"

I questioned everything. I must have been very annoying to have around.

I went back to *Show Business*, and that's probably where I saw an ad for the Cherry Lane Theatre. So I just went there one day and asked if I could work for nothing and learn. At the time they were doing a production of Sean O'Casey's

Purple Dust that had already been running for quite a while. Anita Miller was playing the part of Avril, and I would watch her intently as I worked backstage several evenings after school and on weekends.

On the first résumé I ever wrote, when I was sixteen, I called myself the assistant stage manager, but that was an exaggeration. I did manage to learn a lot about lighting and sound while I was there, but I had no real title. I also claimed that I was the understudy for Avril, which is partly true. I did learn the part, but nobody had asked me to. I loved speaking with an Irish accent. I'd come into the theater and greet the stagehands, "Top o' the mornin' to you, boys!"

Again, annoying to be around.

Anita and I became good friends. We would talk about acting, and she knew that I was looking for another class. Her husband, Allan Miller, happened to be a teacher, so she told him about me. Apparently he wasn't interested in encouraging a fifteen-year-old to go into the theater. He thought I was too young and that the business was too hard, but that didn't stop me.

One night Anita invited me to have dinner at their apartment. She was a great cook, and made delicious peas with sugar and breadcrumbs . . . I can still taste them. As we were eating, I told Allan how much I wanted to be an actress, and he agreed to take me on. Years later he explained that what he found himself responding to, almost against his will, was my aching desire. I was "so raw, so primitive, so open" that he capitulated. He offered to let me come to his classes in exchange for babysitting their young son, Gregory, who was a sweetheart. I basically fell in love with the whole family.

Meeting Anita and Allan was the beginning of my real education. Their apartment was filled with books. I was particularly interested in contemporary plays, and on their shelves I found works by Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Lillian Hellman. Allan had a brother, and one night when we were babysitting together he pulled out a record and put it on the player. It was Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, and I thought, *My God, what's that?* I had never been exposed to anything like it. I wanted to hear more classical music. I listened to Stravinsky's Violin Concerto, still one of my favorites . . . Respighi's *Pines of Rome* . . . Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. With most music, after I've listened to it once I don't need to hear it again, but these are pieces I never get tired of . . . along

with Ralph Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending* and Maria Callas singing Puccini's arias. I bought the records for myself when I found them on sale.

I was like a sponge at this time, drinking everything in.

Meanwhile, I was attending as many of Allan's classes as I could. I thought they were far more interesting than anything that was going on in high school. More and more, it seemed as if my real life was taking place elsewhere . . . at the Cherry Lane Theatre and in acting class and at home with the Millers. They were like my surrogate parents. I only went back to Brooklyn to sleep, change clothes, and go to school. Sometimes on weekends I would go home with Anita after the show and sleep over on their couch.

Acting class was where I felt creative. I remember one particular exercise, when Allan told us to pick an inanimate object and give it life. I chose to be a chocolate chip. First I imagined I was put into a hunk of dough along with my fellow chips, being kneaded and shaped into a cookie . . . pushed around. Then I was placed inside a hot oven. Oh, the agony of it! I began to melt. That was painful. Then suddenly I was taken out into the cold air and, for a moment, I was relieved . . . the cool air soothed my hot body. But I didn't realize I would quickly become stiff and solid . . . misshapen . . . paralyzed. I couldn't move. Here I was, stuck on a tray with other cookies, waiting to be eaten . . . Aaargh!!!!

I think it was one of my best pieces of work.

The first significant scene I did was from Tennessee Williams's *The Rose Tattoo*. I was playing a young girl who is intensely attracted to a boy but is so sexually inexperienced that she doesn't know quite what to do.

Frankly, I was just as inexperienced as the character, and I had no idea how to approach the scene. At first I thought I would pretend that I was on fire and he was ice, but that image turned out to be too painful. It hurt when I touched him, and that wasn't the effect I wanted.

Allan advised me to pick an intention . . . to decide what I was trying to do in the scene. I decided that my character wanted to touch him and wanted him to touch her. But being a virgin, I didn't think she would approach him in an overtly sexual manner. Instead, she would try to explore his body in more innocent ways to get that feeling of contact.

My partner and I began the scene. I think I may have tried to entwine my fingers with his. At one point I found myself standing on his feet . . . like a

little girl dancing with her dad. At another moment I pretended I was blind, and while he was talking I was touching his face . . . his eyes, his nose, his cheeks . . . just exploring what it felt like to touch a man's skin . . . the stubble of his beard. I didn't have a boyfriend, and it was all foreign to me.

I remember closing my eyes so I could concentrate on touch alone . . . to make the feelings more intense. It was completely awkward, but I felt it was right for this girl. I had no idea what I was going to do next, and neither did my partner. I think I even jumped on his back at one point. By the end of the scene, he was red as a beet.

I was very surprised when the class started applauding.

Allan told me it was one of the sexiest scenes he had ever watched. And I wasn't even trying to be sexy!

I had no qualms about taking on the most daunting roles. I even tackled Medea. I did her monologue from an adaptation by Jean Anouilh: "Why was I born maimed? Why have you made me a girl? Why these breasts, this weakness, this open wound in the middle of myself?" I was fifteen, and she was a married woman with two children, but I totally related to her. She was exploring what it means to be a woman. I think I did a pretty good job, considering.

One guy who saw that asked me to do a scene with him for his Actors Studio audition. You have to understand that the Actors Studio was the equivalent of Mount Olympus for actors, and Lee Strasberg was its resident god. I was excited to do the audition. We prepared a scene from *Dino*, a television play by Reginald Rose. My classmate didn't get in, but I got a letter saying that they were impressed with my work and asking me to come back and audition on my own. I could hardly believe it. That letter became one of my most prized possessions. I asked Anita to audition with me, and we decided to do a scene from N. Richard Nash's *The Young and Fair*. I was so nervous that I cried through the whole thing. It was over the top, out of control.

Weeks later I got a letter telling me I was not accepted but encouraging me to try again, when I was older. I think their policy was not to take anyone under the age of eighteen.

So, they didn't want me enough to make an exception?

Okay. Maybe I didn't want *them*. But the Actors Studio stayed in my mind, precisely because I hadn't succeeded. It remained a challenge, and I was still

intrigued by the thought of working with the famous Strasberg, the father of Susan. (There she was again!)

I used to write letters to Lee Strasberg as I rode back and forth on the subway to Brooklyn. I wanted to share my observations on acting. I had noticed something. There was a guy in Allan's class who wasn't particularly talented and had no charisma whatsoever. But when he did a simple relaxation exercise where you just sit in a chair, and without much movement test different parts of your body for tension, he suddenly became interesting. A tiny twitch of the eyebrow . . . a flick of a finger . . . an intake of breath all seemed fascinating. The simple mystery of being human and not doing much else kept me glued to him.

That exercise showed me the power of simplicity. I wrote to Strasberg that I'd discovered "the something in nothing." People who were self-indulgent and loved to vomit out their feelings were missing the point of what the Method was all about.

I also wrote Strasberg that when you have the privilege of being up on a stage, raised above the audience, you owe them something more . . . something truthful. It seemed to me that truth has an energy that touches people.

In one letter I actually wrote, "I hear you're a starfucker" (probably referring to his relationship with Marilyn Monroe). Can you imagine? Years later, when I did a scene for him at the Actors Studio in Los Angeles, I read some of these letters out loud to him. (I didn't mention that one.) I had never actually mailed any of them. But it was still extremely satisfying to write to someone I respected and articulate my own thoughts.

The summer after my junior year, Anita and Allan were invited to do a play at the Clinton Playhouse up in Connecticut, and they asked me if I wanted to go with them. While they were both acting, I would babysit. That sounded better than being stuck in Brooklyn. Even though I didn't get to be onstage, I hung around the theater and became friends with the actors. Along with Allan, the other leading man in *A Hatful of Rain* was a young actor who was doing summer stock for the first time. His name was Warren Beatty, and he asked me to cue him on his lines. If that was a come-on, I missed it entirely. He also played the piano. I was impressed. We used to eat together occasionally and talk about life. He was twenty-one, tall with movie-star looks, and women were already falling at his feet. I was sixteen.

Warren has told the story of how we met and says that he did in fact make a pass at me, but I turned him down. (Trust me, that didn't faze him. He quickly went on to someone else.) My mother had totally terrified me about sex. She made it sound as if kissing was dangerous until you were married. I wasn't even supposed to hold hands . . . she told me you could get a disease!

In any event, Warren and I became friends for life. He had star quality then and he still has it now. And every time we get together we reminisce about those days.

Back at school in September, I had just four more months to get through before I could get my diploma. But I had one last obstacle to overcome. At Erasmus you couldn't graduate until you had passed a swimming test. And that was a real nightmare for me because I was afraid of the water. I think it started when I was seven . . . I had tried to swim at that health camp and wound up underwater. A nice older girl, Marie, had to rescue me. Then, one Sunday when the Borookows took me with them to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, I was walking along the edge of the pond and I fell in. The water wasn't deep, but I panicked. Tobey was very comforting. She wrapped me up in her coat and we went home in their car . . . a fabulous black car with a flat top, like the one in *It Happened One Night*. And she let me walk around in her red leather high heels while my clothes dried out.

It was actually my mother who instilled this fear in me. She never went into the water, but just stood at the edge and let it lap around her feet. Like hand-holding, it was dangerous, according to her. She told me, "Don't go into the water because you'll drown." Even when I went into the shallow water at Brighton Beach, I clutched on to my inner tube for dear life.

So here I was at sixteen, sitting for what seemed like forever on the slippery edge of the Erasmus pool . . . the whole place reeking of chlorine. Where had all those good grades gotten me? I still had to get across this damn pool.

I decided that I was going to swim, even if it killed me. I think I closed my eyes and sort of fell into the water . . . and somehow splashed and paddled my way across.

I graduated from Erasmus Hall on January 26, 1959. I had been looking forward to this day for so long, but when it came, it was anticlimactic. I was more thrilled to be cast in what I considered my first professional production in Manhattan, a play called *Driftwood* (after I had spotted the casting call in

Show Business). It wasn't exactly Broadway, more like off-off-off-Broadway . . . actually in the playwright's loft, with a few folding chairs for seats, and you had to climb up five rickety flights of stairs to get there. And it wasn't all that professional, come to think of it, since no one got paid. But it was a real part. I was finally done with high school . . . and on my way.

THREE

This Night Could Change My Life



Clearly *Driftwood* was not going to be my path to stardom. I played the leader of a gang of thieves . . . a woman named Lorna, with a mysterious past. (How mysterious could I have been at sixteen?) I remember eating an egg salad sandwich before the first performance and promptly throwing it up because I was so nervous. Joan Molinsky, who later changed her name to Joan Rivers, was also in the cast. I thought she was funny . . . although the play wasn't a comedy . . . and so lucky to be from a wealthy family on Long Island. Not only did she have a father, but he was also a doctor! Wow!

The play didn't last long, but I was undaunted. I had already found a real job in the want ads and that meant I could commit to an apartment in Manhattan with my pal Susan Dworkowitz, aka Lanell.

It was a tiny third-floor walk-up at 339 West Forty-Eighth Street between Eighth and Ninth avenues that cost \$100 a month (\$50 each), but to me it was heaven. Actually, its only asset was the fact that it was right next to my acting class at Curt Conway's Theatre Studio, where Allan taught. That meant I could save on the subway fare!

For the first time in my life, I had something to decorate. I went down to one of those cheap carpet stores on lower Fifth Avenue and bought a fake Persian rug for \$39.95. We couldn't afford a couch. All I had brought were two round-backed chairs in one of my least favorite colors, turquoise, taken from my mother's apartment, and an old chest of drawers we found at one of the local thrift shops on Ninth Avenue. And I bought a fish tank. I thought fish were great, and they were something to look at . . . to watch them move . . . like a fire, since I had no fireplace.

I also had no art. In the antiques shops on Second Avenue, I found gilded frames for almost nothing. They might have a few chips and scratches, but I thought that added to their beauty. I hung them up on the walls, just framing empty space.

My job was at Michael Press, a printing company just a few blocks away from my new apartment. I was hired as a file clerk, stuffing and licking envelopes . . . God, that glue tasted terrible. I thought, *Why am I putting this into my mouth?* So I took a glass of water and dampened the flap with a wet finger. Now that I think of it, I should have bought a brush. The guy who invented that little sponge-bottle thing must have made a fortune. It made so much sense.

I also answered the telephone when the switchboard operator went to lunch. I would try all these different voices, pretending to be French, Italian, and British, just to entertain myself. And who knew when I might need to play a character with an accent?

My life was simple then. I made fifty-five dollars a week, forty-five after taxes, and as soon as I got paid I'd cash the check at Seamen's Bank for Savings (they gave you a gift when you opened an account, so our drinking glasses said "Seamen's Bank for Savings"). That was my first and most important bank account. I always knew the balance down to the penny and was so proud when I managed to save anything.

I'd take my forty-five dollars home and divvy it up into different envelopes marked "Rent," "Gas and Electricity," "Phone," "Laundry," "Subway," and "Food"

(that got the biggest chunk). I loved to eat at the Automat. I'd put in my five cents and open the little glass door and pull out a sandwich, a piece of pie, maybe a bowl of soup. Their sweet potatoes were great, but then I got sick on their sliced lamb and didn't eat lamb for years. I also liked going to the deli. Not the Jewish delis. They gave you too much meat. I couldn't get my mouth around those sandwiches. I would go to the Gentile ones and order my favorite . . . a roast pork sandwich with mayonnaise on soft white bread. Delicious.

Everything was an adventure, even doing the laundry. When I lived in the projects, the washing machines were in a deserted, creepy basement with pipes running all over the place, and I was afraid to go down there. Now Susan and I stuffed our dirty clothes in pillowcases and schlepped them over to the laundromat between Ninth and Tenth avenues.

I loved the feeling of clean sheets but I never could figure out how to make a bed. Even in camp, when they showed us how to make hospital corners, I had trouble remembering how to do it. Susan didn't care one way or the other, so neither one of us ever made the bed properly. Interesting how it's the simplest things that bother you. I have a vivid memory of standing in the doorway of the bedroom, looking at the rumpled sheets, and thinking, *I have to become famous just so I can get somebody else to make my bed.*

I was reading a book around that time that left a deep impression on me, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* by George Bernard Shaw. I thought it was going to be about Ibsen's plays, but it was more of a philosophical look at the concepts behind them and how they're expressed in different personality types. For years I've said there was a line in it that really spoke to me: "Thought transcends matter."

But recently when I ordered a copy of the book and looked through it again, page by page, I couldn't find that line. How could that be? I had to search out other editions just to make sure, but it wasn't in any of them.

Then where did I read it?

Or did I just make it up, out of my own mind?

Well, wherever it came from, it's an amazing concept. Because if thought can transcend matter, that meant if I could think something, want something, maybe I could make it happen. I knew that the mind was very powerful, even as a child. Look how I made that man cross the street! (Sort of.)

Imagine that . . . Just a thought, very quiet, could change things. Maybe imagination could create reality. Maybe I could imagine being an actress, and actually become one. Even though my mother kept saying, “Don’t get your hopes up.”

I knew I didn’t look like those other girls in the movies. I’m not sure if she actually told me, “You’re not pretty enough to be a movie star.” But I knew that was what she meant. My mother was very pretty, with a nice little nose and blue eyes. She fit the picture. I didn’t.

But I held on to that idea: “Thought transcends matter.”

I would hurry home from work to go to acting class, or meet another student to rehearse a scene in the evening. Allan was teaching four different classes, and he says I showed up for all of them. But I was also curious about other teachers. I wanted to make sure I wasn’t missing anything. At one point I signed up for classes with Eli Rill, who was also part of the Actors Studio. But since I didn’t want to hurt Allan’s feelings, I made up another name . . . Angelina Scarangella. I picked it out of the phone book. I thought it sounded so beautiful, and I used it for years, whenever I wanted to be incognito. At Mount Sinai Hospital, where I gave birth to my son, Jason, I was listed as Angelina Scarangella. And to this day, whenever I do a concert tour, the name on my dressing-room door is Angelina Scarangella. (Now that I’ve told you, I guess I’ll have to come up with something else.)

I tried a few classes with Rill, but I didn’t really relate to him. I was more comfortable with Allan, who had me working on a scene from Christopher Fry’s *A Phoenix Too Frequent*. I was a servant girl in ancient Rome, stuck in a tomb with my mistress, because we were both renouncing the world so we could join her dead husband (don’t ask). And then a handsome soldier shows up. I was supposed to be pining for this guy, but I wasn’t particularly attracted to the actor. So, remembering that you should always be real and honest, I put a piece of chocolate cake in the wings. I could look over his shoulder and see the cake and at least be attracted to that!

Cis Corman was playing my mistress, and this was the beginning of our life-long friendship. She told me she had already noticed me because I wore a rust-and-brown plaid coat (bought at Loehmann’s, the discount clothing store) and would stand in the back of the class, eating cottage cheese out of the container.

I was definitely not the most social creature. But she liked how I questioned everything. I really wanted to understand. And if I didn't, I kept asking. I was still blurting things out, just as I did when I was six years old at the yeshiva.

I used to go over to Cis's apartment to rehearse. That's how we became buddies. She was thirty-two years old, twice my age, with a doctor for a husband . . . the ultimate goal (according to my mother). Dr. Harvey Corman was a distinguished psychiatrist, and they had four children, the oldest not much younger than me. So Cis was at a completely different stage of life. Now that I think back, I realize I often had these kinds of intense relationships with older women. I suppose it's obvious. I was looking for a mother. But I also think we just recognized something in each other. Cis was very alive, eager to go places and do things. She was always available to me, and that was amazing. Sometimes we'd talk three times a day.

I'd call and say, "Guess what just happened?"

She'd laugh at my stories, and then I'd laugh at myself, and we'd both crack up all over again. We were perfect for each other . . . even though her friends wondered what she was doing with a person half her age.

Cis and Harvey became another set of surrogate parents. They lived in one of those great old rambling apartments on the Upper West Side, with ten rooms. I loved to hang out in their kitchen. The refrigerator was always full and everything in there was so neat and orderly, unlike my mother's. All the food looked so tempting . . . smoked salmon, potato salad, and sliced fruit, fresh and ready to eat under Saran Wrap. And they always had ice cream.

The scene we were working on in Allan's class was going to be part of a showcase . . . an opportunity for all the students to invite guests to come see them perform. Harvey was very supportive, and of course he was there, full of compliments for both of us after the show. He was so considerate of his wife and genuinely interested in me . . . such a change from Lou Kind.

I looked around for my mother. Actually, I was kind of embarrassed to perform in front of her. She was so against me being an actress that it made me feel weird to know she was in the audience watching me. I dreaded what she might say. And sure enough, she didn't disappoint me.

"Mom, what did you think?"

She frowned and said, "Your arms are too skinny."

That was it. She had nothing to say about the performance. She didn't con-

gratulate me or comment on my acting. It was as if she hadn't even seen me perform. What did I have to do to get her attention and approval?

No wonder I wanted to become an actress. It was a way to escape myself and live in someone else's world.

Dustin Hoffman was also studying acting at the Theatre Studio and working as the janitor there, in exchange for classes. He was kind of cute, in a funny-looking way, and he was seeing a friend of mine from acting class, Elaine Sobel. She wore glasses but was very pretty, like a girl in a 1950s movie who takes off her glasses and lets down her hair and voilà! When Dustin got a part in an off-Broadway play years later, that was big news . . . the janitor from Curt Conway got an acting job!

In those days, I spent a lot of time at the Forty-Second Street library. I wanted to look up all the plays that great actresses like Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse had done. I read *L'Aiglon*, which is the story of Napoleon's son and was written by Edmond Rostand for Bernhardt. She was fifty-six years old at the time and had no qualms about playing a twenty-year-old boy. She took on Hamlet as well, and played the fourteen-year-old Juliet at the age of seventy-four. The woman was fearless. She was also brilliant in more conventional romantic roles, such as Marguerite in *La Dame aux Camélias* by Dumas fils, which Duse played as well. Years later, when I was sitting in on some of Lee Strasberg's classes, I saw films of them both. Duse was so stunningly simple compared to Bernhardt, whose style was more florid. It almost felt like overacting to me. But I still related to Sarah, because she was Jewish . . . well, half Jewish. And how about the fact that her initials are the same as mine, only backward?

I've talked to so many people who say their parents took them to the theater and gave them great books to read, to fire up all those synapses in the brain. And I felt envious. I know my father would have done that for me. I needed to catch up, and that gave me the initiative to see and do as much as I could in this incredible city, with all its cultural riches. I had this deep thirst for knowledge, and I was like an open vessel, waiting to be filled.

Susan and I had a great time exploring New York. I remember going to see José Greco dance the flamenco and Ravi Shankar play the sitar. We dreamed about going off on a freighter together to see the world. You could do that back then, and it didn't cost much.

Susan was going to acting classes as well, and one night Allan and Anita were

going to see her in a showcase, while I babysat. I was convinced they'd think she was brilliant and then start to like her more than me. Would they let me go and take her in? Then I'd be abandoned again. So I was very nervous . . . like a defendant on trial, waiting for the verdict.

Finally they returned, and I practically pounced on them at the door.

"How was the play?"

"Okay," said Allan.

"What did you think of Susan?"

"She was okay."

I wanted more details. Turns out they thought she was fine, but they weren't raving about her performance. And I was relieved, and a bit ashamed at my relief, because I wanted Susan to be good. I just didn't want her to be better than me.

Someone had told me that if you posed for the students at the Institute of Photography they gave you free headshots. So I did it. And the people at Michael Press printed out 8 x 10 glossies for me. Then, after I had worked there for about nine months, I was let go. I remember starting to cry when they told me, and they quickly assured me that it was not because of my work. The company was downsizing. Then somebody explained how to sign up for unemployment, and I cheered up. It was incredible. I got almost as much money as I had taken home while I was working, and I didn't even have to work! Except I had to stand in line every week to get my check and tell them about all the jobs I had tried for and of course I had to make some up, because I was not trying to get another job as a file clerk. I wanted to be an actress.

Eventually I got caught. I had told them that I went over to CBS to apply for a job, which was the truth . . . but it was for a part in some TV show rather than a secretarial job. And they checked up on it and I was found out. My punishment was that I would have to stand in line each week, as if I were going to get my check. But they were not going to give me any money for five weeks. They cut off the payments. I thought, *Forget this. I can't waste my time. I've got to find some other way to make money.*

I picked up a few stray jobs, like ushering in the theater. I only did it a few times . . . once on New Year's Eve, because of course I didn't have a date. But at

least I got to see the show and I got paid \$4.15 an hour. You had to wear a black dress and put on this huge white collar, and I would hide my face because I was pretty sure I would be famous some day and didn't want anybody remembering that I had shown them to their seats.

I also modeled for several drawing classes at the Art Students League. None of that nude stuff. I was too shy for that. But I was happy to sit there for a few hours fully dressed and get paid for it. The guy who hired me said my face was "interesting." I didn't know I had an interesting face. What did that mean? Odd? Different? Beautiful? Intriguing? It sounded good. It seemed positive. Although when you don't know what to say about something, you usually call it "interesting."

At least it wasn't derogatory.

Once an older man asked if I could come model for him in his apartment. I thought, *Uh-oh*. (My mother had trained me well.) Then I thought, *I might as well give it a try*. But when he opened the door, I suddenly changed my mind. I was scared to be alone with him, so I turned around and went home. That was the end of my modeling career.

And I wasn't getting any work as an actress. I was told that you have to make the rounds, which meant that you spent the whole day going from one casting agent's office to another, knocking on doors and asking if they had a job. I didn't know how to sell myself. What was I supposed to say? "You better sign me up. I'm terrific!"

They wouldn't even let me read. How could they tell anything about your talent if they wouldn't even let you read? I couldn't beg these people for a job. It was so degrading. My pride was more important to me. I thought, *If this is what it's like, maybe I should be a hat designer . . . or a manicurist*. I told everyone who turned me away, "You know, I'm not coming back here again. You'll be sorry!"

I remember going to David Susskind's office for a walk-on part as a beatnik in one of his television shows. The character's name was April, and I was born in April, so I thought, *Well, that's a good sign. Maybe I'll get the part*. I was wearing black tights and a trench coat, which was how I normally dressed, so I already looked like a beatnik. The casting director was a woman named Faye Lee. She looked up from her papers and said, "I need to see your work."

"My work?" I didn't understand the logic of that. "Why do you need to see

my work? This is a walk-on. I have no lines. Just look at me. Either I look right for the part or I don't."

"I still need to see your work."

"But how can you see my work if I can't get work because people like you won't hire me until they see my work?"

She stared at me as if I had just poured a glass of water on the floor, and showed me to the door.

Put it this way, I lasted two days making rounds.

So I decided to try to get into Lee Strasberg's private classes. (Forget the fact that I had already tried the Actors Studio. Why not go straight to the top?) Usually you have to write a letter and wait about six months to a year for an interview. But I was impatient. Who has time to wait a year? I've always been one for instant gratification, which probably has something to do with my father. Subconsciously, I'm thinking about how his life was cut short, and that I have to get it all in . . . fast.

I called Strasberg's office and his secretary answered. I happened to be reading a book of plays by Tennessee Williams so I had those cadences in my head. All of a sudden, in my telephone-operator mode, I started speaking with a Southern accent. I gave her this whole shpiel about how I wanted to be an actress but my parents were going to force me to come home if I didn't get into Mr. Strasberg's class. When she asked me where home was, I glanced down at the book and said, "Uh . . . uh . . . Tennessee." She bought it . . . I couldn't believe it! . . . and set up an appointment for me to see Mr. Strasberg the next day.

I remember exactly what I wore . . . an olive-green dress with an Empire waist that I had bought in a thrift shop, and olive-green Pappagallo shoes with a little bow in front and a curved heel. I loved them . . . very eighteenth century. I always felt I should have lived in another era.

I managed to be on time (not my strong suit) and was ushered into his office . . . a beautiful, book-lined room, dark, with creaky wooden floors. Here I was, finally face-to-face with Lee Strasberg . . . the most famous acting teacher on the planet.

He was someone who had probably always looked old, even when he was young, and he spoke very quietly. He had an odd vocal tic . . . he kept doing this nasal snort as he talked, which was a little distracting. He reminded me of my uncle Irving.

I sat down, and he asked me, "Who are your favorite actors?"

I knew exactly what he wanted me to say, and what any other eager young actor would say to curry favor with the master. The right answers were Kim Stanley and Marlon Brando. But something got into me . . . I always had a mischievous streak.

"Rita Hayworth and Gregory Peck."

I was hoping he'd understand that I ultimately wanted to be in the movies (not realizing he wasn't a mind reader).

He was silent. We stared at each other. Then he said, "So you want to study with me?"

I told him the truth.

"Well, I know you're the best. You basically invented the Method, along with Stanislavsky, and I want to be a great actress, so why wouldn't I come to you, the master? But here's the thing. I really don't have the money to take your classes. I already have a scholarship at another acting school with Allan Miller, who studied with you and teaches your Method. And I'm actually quite happy there."

That was an interesting moment for me. I wasn't intimidated at all. I realized I actually didn't *need* anything from him. It was just that I had so much respect for his knowledge. I've always wanted to learn.

"So I guess I really just wanted to meet you and talk to you about life . . . and music . . . and art."

He looked at me as if I were nuts. Needless to say, I didn't get in.

I thought about it afterward. Didn't he find me interesting?

Guess not.

I saw a notice about a play called *The Insect Comedy* and went to the audition at the Jan Hus Playhouse, part of a community center at a church on East Seventy-Fourth Street. The play was written by two Czech brothers, Josef and Karel Čapek, back in 1921, and it was this weird, surreal piece about insects acting like humans, and of course you were supposed to draw all kinds of parallels. I played a butterfly in the first act and a moth in the second. Terry Leong did the costumes, and he took a sketch I drew of a blouse with long, wide sleeves, like a butterfly's wings, and made it out of lavender silk for me.

And that's where I met Barry Dennen, who was also in the cast (and spelling his name Barré at the time). I was drawn to him. He was smart. He spoke

French. He was twenty-two years old and quite knowledgeable about all sorts of things. He even knew how to cook, which was a huge plus for me. He lived in a studio apartment on West Ninth Street in Greenwich Village in a building with a canopy and a doorman, so I was impressed. To a girl from the projects, this was the Ritz!

Barry had a vast collection of old records from the 1930s and '40s, and he played all this great music for me . . . Lee Wiley singing "I've Got Five Dollars," Ruth Etting singing "Love Me or Leave Me," Helen Morgan singing "Why Was I Born?"

Barry came into my life at exactly the right time, with exactly the right music. Now, how unlikely is that?

I was about to go off in a new direction, even though I didn't know it quite yet.

I really responded to these songs, in a way that I never did to the latest hits on the radio. I wanted to know more about them, so I looked them up and found out they all came from Broadway shows. Maybe that's why I liked them . . . because they were sung by a character and came out of a story. The song was not just a song. The play gave it more context and meaning.

I remember listening to Lee Wiley sing "Stormy Weather" and thinking, *Who wrote that song?* It's so dramatic. I found out it was Harold Arlen, and when I looked him up I realized he had composed all these songs I had heard at the movies and loved, like "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" from *The Wizard of Oz* and "The Man That Got Away" from *A Star Is Born*.

I thought, *This man is a genius*. His music seemed to capture all the angst I felt inside. It had real emotional substance because, as I again discovered, so much of it was also written for Broadway shows.

I wanted to go to the source, so I tracked down cast albums from those shows . . . like Arlen's 1954 *House of Flowers*, based on a short story by Truman Capote. Here was this Jewish composer, the son of a cantor, writing the most extraordinary musical set in Haiti. Arlen and his fellow songwriters, George and Ira Gershwin, knew how to find those minor notes that touch the heart and seem to come from deep within, out of pain and sadness . . . like the dark, haunting melodies that were the essence of Hebraic music, gospel, and the blues.

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I always related to music like that, and there was one particular song on that album that really touched me . . . "A Sleepin' Bee." I liked it because it was a

song you could act. It told a story. Emotionally, you could go from A to B to C, and that intrigued me.

And it's not as if I was getting much of a chance to act onstage. *The Insect Comedy* lasted only three nights. (I guess no one wanted to see a play about two beetles debating capitalism.) After it closed, I couldn't find another acting job. I must have read in *Show Business* that they were looking for a girl to play the part of Liesl in the touring company of *The Sound of Music*. So I sent a picture and résumé to Eddie Blum, who was the head of casting for Rodgers and Hammerstein. Months later, when I had already forgotten about it, I got a call from Blum.

"I want to meet the girl who had the nerve to send out such a terrible picture," he said. Looking back on it now, I have to admit he was right. I was wearing a plain white cotton dress that used to belong to Anita and staring straight ahead . . . no smile . . . no personality. I didn't know that you were supposed to smile. I had fallen out of the habit . . . for two years I had been keeping my mouth shut so that people wouldn't see the gaps in my teeth.

I was always told, "You're so serious." And it's true. I usually kept to myself and just did my work. I didn't have much fun. I didn't know *how* to have fun. My family never had fun . . . we didn't go on outings . . . we never went anywhere.

I stood in front of Eddie and sang "A Sleepin' Bee" for him. Obviously I didn't fit the part of a young, blond Austrian girl. I suppose I looked too Jewish, which hadn't occurred to me. But Eddie was impressed, I guess, because he told me I was a really good singer and that I needed a really good pianist, and he found one for me . . . Peter Daniels, who was wonderful. (He, too, came into my life just when I needed him.) We worked together for many years after that.

Meanwhile, Susan did set off on that freighter. I chickened out at the last moment. I think part of me wanted to go with her and see the world, and the other part wanted to stay put. It felt as if things were beginning to happen for me . . . nothing so concrete as an actual job . . . but the thought that Eddie Blum was interested in me was enough to keep me afloat.

And then something went wrong on Susan's freighter after a few days out at sea, and it had to turn around and come back to port. I thought, *Whoa, it's lucky I didn't go*. I was upset for her . . . she ran out of money and had to move back home. But I admired her initiative . . . she was an adventurer.

I advertised for another roommate, but the girl who moved in came onto me, which scared the hell out of me. I moved out in a hurry, leaving her my fish tank and all my furniture, and my mother's silverware, which she wasn't happy about.

I went back to Brooklyn, where my mother and Rozzie were living in the same project but in another building. I had my own room with a closet, which was a big improvement over our former apartment, and a Victrola. (I know it's called a record player, but it will always be a Victrola to me. I still say "icebox" instead of "refrigerator" sometimes.) Over and over again, I would play these jazz records . . . Ornette Coleman, Stan Getz, Miles Davis . . . that I found in a Greenwich Village record store, along with records by Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith. In the supermarket they had albums on sale for \$1.98, and that's where I bought Billie Holiday's *Lady in Satin* and Johnny Mathis's *Good Night, Dear Lord*. He was my favorite male singer, ever since I saw him on *The Ed Sullivan Show* when I was fifteen. He was mesmerizing, with those dark, soulful eyes and that tremulous, expressive voice. I remember thinking, *Oh my God. Isn't he the greatest?* And he could hold notes forever . . . that must have inspired me subconsciously.

I was discovering more and more classical music. I would stand there and conduct Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* in front of the bathroom mirror, with tears streaming down my face. The story was so romantic, and the music was so beautiful. The orchestra would come to a crescendo, and suddenly I'd hear a clanking noise. Was that the radiator or a new sound in my ears? (My ear noises hadn't stopped.)

I didn't stay long in my mother's apartment. I liked my independence, and moving back home felt like a step backward. Besides, it was too inconvenient to commute to acting classes back and forth from Brooklyn. I had nowhere to go in the middle of the day.

Then Barry invited me to stay with him. There were two daybeds on either side of his studio, and I took one of them.

Let me set the record straight. Barry and I were never lovers. We were close friends. I thought he was probably gay, but then he told me he had a son, so I figured he was bisexual. At moments, there might have been some sort of sexual tension between us. But it was all very confusing. I was still so inexperienced that I didn't know what was going on. Was it Barry, or would that feeling have

happened with anybody? Maybe it was just my own hormones acting up. Anyway, to explain why we were living together, we told people we were cousins.

Barry was one of the first men to pay attention to me. I didn't think much of myself, although I knew I had a decent voice and some talent as an actress. I thought I was good as Joan of Arc, really good as Medea, and brilliant as a chocolate chip. Allan made me feel I could act, and Eddie Blum told me I could sing. I had never taken singing all that seriously, but I needed a job. And nobody was interested in a teenage Medea.

Barry liked my voice, too, and he had a professional Ampex tape recorder. We made a tape of me singing "A Sleepin' Bee" and "A Taste of Honey," with him accompanying me on his guitar, and mailed it off to some important agent, who promptly lost it and sent me back an empty tape months later with a note: "Sorry. Here's a replacement."

It was Barry who told me about a club across the street called the Lion, where they had a talent contest every week. (The prize was fifty dollars, but it was the free dinner that really tempted me.) I was sitting with Cis and Harvey in their kitchen when I told them that I was going to enter this contest.

Cis asked, "What are you going to do there?"

"I'm going to sing."

"Barbara," she said, "I've known you for two years and I've never even heard you hum."

"Well," I said almost defensively, "I *can* sing."

"Okay, sing a song for us."

"I can't. I'd be too embarrassed."

"Please, just sing anything."

"Okay, but I can't look at you."

So I turned to face the wall and sang "A Sleepin' Bee." When I turned around, they both had tears running down their cheeks. I was shocked and very pleased.

Cis, Harvey, and Barry all came with me to the Lion on the night of the contest in June 1960. I was so naïve . . . I didn't even realize it was a gay bar until I noticed that Cis and I were the only women in the whole place. I told Burke McHugh, the manager of the club, that I was born in Smyrna, Turkey, because I thought that sounded interesting. I didn't want people to typecast me and have a preconceived notion of who I was just because I was born in Brooklyn.

So he introduced me as Barbara Streisand from Smyrna but he didn't pronounce Smyrna properly. He said, "Smerna." So I spoke up (just like in the yeshiva, again): "No, *Smearrrrrna*, with a rolled *r*."

I remember standing beside the piano player. (I hadn't discovered stools yet. But in fact there was no room for a stool . . . there wasn't even a stage.) I could see the audience, who were sitting at little tables and eating dinner so close I could have picked up a fork and grabbed a bite. That was a little disconcerting.

I was singing "A Sleepin' Bee" for the first time in front of all these people (even a small crowd was intimidating).

I closed my eyes (probably to shut out all those strangers looking at me) and began the song very quietly. But then, on the last line, "When my one true love, I has found," I found myself going for the octave on the word "love" . . . holding the high note and then taking a moment to really feel the emotion . . . before I finished the rest of the song.

For a minute the whole room was silent. Then everyone burst into applause.

I was startled, but it felt good. The audience was shouting for more, so I began the only other song I had prepared, "When Sunny Gets Blue," which I first heard on a Johnny Mathis album. And the applause at the end wouldn't stop.

I won the contest, which meant I was invited to compete again the next week, and also perform for the crowd a couple of nights a week. And I could have all the London broil I could eat . . . my favorite from their menu.

So I had to learn more songs, and rehearsed at the home of a piano player named Peter Howard. He was a funny little guy with thick glasses and no sense of humor. And he had a little dog named Gus, who would come into the room, look at me, then stand erect on his two hind legs and pant. I thought, *Well, at least he's attracted to me.*

And then I kept winning. For the second contest, I remember singing "Lullaby of Birdland" in honor of my uncle Larry, who loved that song and had sadly died of a heart attack at forty-four. He and his wife, Muriel, were always kind to me. She was very pretty, with beautiful white teeth and long red nails. Those nails made quite an impression on me as a child, and I think that's what made me want them too.

That night I was wearing my mother's Japanese silk pajama top that my uncle Harry had brought home for her from World War II. I wore it backward, with the buttons in back, so it looked more like a blouse.

Then I did something I'd never done in my life, before or since. Suddenly I found myself walking through the tables as I was singing. I don't know what got into me (I guess I was happy). It was one of those moments, like in the recording studio when I was thirteen . . . an inspiration that came out of nowhere . . . totally unplanned and unconscious. And then I never sang that song again!

My limited repertoire also included "Long Ago and Far Away" by Jerome Kern, with lyrics by Ira Gershwin, and "I've Got Five Dollars" (thank you, Lee) by Richard Rodgers, with lyrics by Lorenz Hart. I never sang those again, either, after the Lion. (Maybe I should take another look at them.)

Burke thought I was really good and arranged an audition for me at the Bon Soir, a more sophisticated supper club over on Eighth Street. I thought, *Boy, if I'm going to do this for real and sing every night, maybe I better learn some technique so I won't get hoarse.* Someone suggested a vocal coach. She was an exotic older woman named Joyce, probably in her fifties. That seemed positively ancient to me then. She looked like someone out of an old photograph album, and she taught out of her dark, musty, cluttered apartment on West Fifty-Fourth Street, surrounded by fringed pillows and Persian carpets (the real ones). It was the kind of place where you would expect to see cats.

I walked in and got straight to the point. "So, what's this singing thing you teach?"

She stared (and probably dropped any idea she might have had of going into an esoteric discussion about the mechanics of singing) and just asked me to sing something for her. I had only gotten through the first line, "When a bee lies sleeping," when she stopped me.

"No no no no no. Your pronunciation is all wrong. The vowels must be shorter in order to make a proper tone." She started talking about the roof of the mouth and how you get a better sound when the mouth forms an oval and you drop your jaw. (Huh?) "When a *beb* lies sleeping," she sang.

"But the word is *bee*."

"Dear, this is singing, not talking."

"Why can't I sing like I speak? When I say the word 'bee,' my mouth widens naturally, and now you're telling me I have to make an oval shape?"

"That's right! Put your lips together like this and say *beb*."

"But that looks funny. And it sounds funny. No one says *beb*. The word is BEE!"

That was my first and last singing lesson. What she was suggesting felt all wrong to me. I knew I had to do it my way . . . what came naturally to me.

Anyway, I was an actress first, not a singer.

Right before I auditioned at the Bon Soir, I have a vivid memory of walking down the street and thinking, *This night could change my life*. It was like a premonition. I was wearing a simple black dress with one of my favorite thrift-shop finds . . . an antique black Persian vest embroidered with silver thread.

The Bon Soir was a typical Greenwich Village nightclub . . . small, dark, and you had to walk down a flight of stairs to get in. In fact, it was so dark that the waiters carried little flashlights. The Three Flames, a jazz trio led by Tiger Haynes on guitar, was the resident band. And Larry Storch was the headliner that night. After his show, Jimmy Daniels, the emcee, announced that they had a little surprise, and I came out onto the stage . . . a *real* stage, because this was a real nightclub.

It was the first time I felt a spotlight on my face, and it was warm and comforting. And thanks to my new friend, the light, I didn't have to see the faces of the audience, because suddenly everything was black out there. I could concentrate on what I was doing as an actress with the song I had chosen . . . putting myself in the place of this young girl looking for love. I tuned out the sound of glasses clinking and started to sing, "When a bee lies sleepin' in the palm of your hand . . ."

It was easy to relate to that girl. She's met someone she might want to belong to, and when he seems to want her, she's happy. But she's still wondering if he's what he appears to be. When I hit that high note on "my one true lo-OOOVE" near the end and held it, I could hear some people clapping. And when I finished, the applause went on and on.

Whoa! That was exhilarating. I had to take a few bows, which was kind of awkward. I think I put my palms together and dipped my head, like some sort of Tibetan monk. I never really knew how to bow or what to do during the applause. I still don't. Applause makes me self-conscious. So I usually go right into the next number. I think I sang two more songs . . . I can't remember what they were . . . but I'll never forget what happened afterward. I stepped off the stage, and Larry Storch grabbed me by the arm and said, "Kid, you're gonna be a star!" Like in the movies! I was stunned. Was this really happening to me?

Then Tiger Haynes's girlfriend, a very short woman named Bea, came over to me and said, "Little girl, you got dollar signs written all over you."

Suddenly a new world opened up. I was eighteen years old and I had a contract to sing at the Bon Soir. I was hired for a two-week engagement, at \$125 a week (\$108 after taxes), beginning in September.

It felt so odd. I had never even been in a nightclub until I sang in one. What was I doing here? I was supposed to be onstage, playing Juliet. But I needed a job and I couldn't get one as an actress. So I might as well sing . . .

But September was a couple of months away, and now that my run at the Lion was over I needed to work. My brother, Shelly, got me a temporary job at the Ben Sackheim advertising agency, where he worked. I know he was trying to help, but I could tell he was embarrassed by me. I still dressed like a beatnik, and he made me walk in front of him on the street. I often had runs in my stockings, and he told me to change them. But I couldn't see them if they were in the back, so they didn't bother me.

So there I was, back in an office, answering the switchboard again. I put on my best secretarial voice. "Good morning. Ben Sackheim Agency." And then I'd try to connect whoever it was to the right person. But sometimes I got flummoxed with too many calls and would connect an ad man who wanted lunch to a client instead of the deli, and he'd end up asking the Chrysler rep for a pastrami sandwich.

This was the summer I met Bob Schulenberg, an old friend of Barry's who had recently moved to New York from Los Angeles. He was an artist who walked around with a sketch pad, and whenever we were together, he would draw me and made me look pretty good, so I thought he was talented. We got on immediately.

I had already been told by several people that I should get a nose job and cap my teeth. I thought, *Isn't my talent enough?* A nose job would hurt and be expensive. Besides, how could I trust anyone to do exactly what I wanted and no more? I liked the bump on my nose, but should I consider a minor adjustment . . . just straighten it slightly at the bottom and take a tiny bit off the tip?

No. It was too much of a risk. And who knew what it might do to my voice? Once a doctor told me I had a deviated septum . . . maybe that's why I sound the way I do. Besides, I liked long noses . . . the Italian actress Silvana Mangano had one, and everyone seemed to think she was beautiful.

Bob had no problem with my nose and thought my face was very interesting, just like the man at the Art Students League. He saw me with the eye of an artist, and I learned something from the way he drew me. I could see the shadows he made under my cheekbones and in the crease above the eye with his drawing pencils. I thought, *Let me try that with makeup*. So I used my eye pencils, eye shadow, and foundation to create the same effect.

One night, he glued on false lashes to define my eyes and make them look larger. Frankly, I thought they actually hid my eyes. Besides, they were uncomfortable, and I could never get them on properly. Instead, I drew black eyeliner past the outside corner of each eye, to elongate them . . . like the faces on the Egyptian mummies I had seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (The Egyptian collection was my favorite part. I used to feel at home there, like I belonged. Is there such a thing as reincarnation?)

Just as I was more comfortable with music from another era, I felt the same way about clothes. My whole wardrobe was straight out of the thrift shops. I couldn't believe the beautiful clothes you could find there . . . velvet dresses from the 1920s (silk velvet, which has a totally different feeling from the velvet they use now, which is partially synthetic) . . . an elegant turn-of-the-century coat made of Battenberg lace . . . a printed taffeta bed jacket. The quality and craftsmanship were so much better than anything I had ever seen in Abraham & Straus. And everything was so inexpensive! They also had a pair of wonderful Edwardian shoes with beads embroidered onto the leather. (Can you imagine?)

Someone must have loved all these things, because they had been so well cared for. They stood the test of time. I never thought twice about wearing them, even though they were secondhand. I figured that the people who owned them were wealthy, so therefore their hand-me-downs were clean. Going to the thrift shops was like a treasure hunt, and I still have most of my finds today. They're like old friends from the past.

In August I was liberated from the switchboard when I got an acting job, and I think everyone at the ad agency was relieved when I left (my brother most of all). Lonny Chapman, who taught at my acting school, asked if I wanted to be in a summer-stock production of *The Boy Friend*, although I found out later it was only because another girl had dropped out. Even so, I happily went up to the Cecilwood Theatre in Fishkill, New York. It was my first musical, and I

played Hortense . . . pronounced “Or-tahnse” . . . the French maid, so all that fooling around with accents came in handy. And whenever I wasn’t onstage, I was planning my show for the Bon Soir.

Harold Arlen’s *House of Flowers* had given me a good start, but I wanted to explore all sorts of possibilities. So I listened to as many Broadway cast albums as I could find. I gravitated to those songs because they had a story behind the lyric that I could hang on to as an actress. And if I thought of each song as a miniature three-act play with a beginning, a middle, and an end, singing suddenly became more interesting to me. I could use all the techniques I had learned in acting class . . . concentration . . . personal identification with the words . . . using a sense memory to bring up an emotion.

I was searching for songs that spoke to me, and I needed to see the sheet music to look at the lyrics. Someone told me that publishers give sheet music for free to professional singers, but I knew they wouldn’t recognize my name. So I asked my mother to call and pretend she was Vaughn Monroe’s secretary (he was popular at the time). She’d say, “Mr. Monroe is thinking about singing such-and-such song,” and lo and behold, they sent the sheet music right over!

It was the perfect illustration of something Goethe said, which I’ve always loved: “At the moment of commitment, the entire universe conspires to assist you.” And I had committed to giving this singing thing a try.

The Bon Soir was part of the nightclub circuit, and the entertainment was the draw. That meant there’d be a notice in the papers, maybe a sign outside. That’s when I started thinking about my name.

I never really liked the name Barbara. When I was a kid, playing secretaries with a friend, I called myself Sydney. I liked men’s names . . . Sydney Streisand . . . that had a nice alliteration. Samantha was my other favorite name (I eventually used it for my dear dog).

And then there was the question of Streisand. Various people, like casting agents, were always suggesting I change it. They wanted something simpler . . . Barbara Strand or Sands . . . but that felt phony. Plus, how would my old friends know it was me, once I became famous?

Then it occurred to me that I could just take out that middle *a* in Barbara. Now I’d be Barbra . . . that was different and unique. I liked the way it looked too . . . and down deep I would still be the same Barbara Joan Streisand, if you see what I mean.

Because I couldn't change Streisand, even though everybody has always mispronounced it. They say "Stryzand" or "Stryzin," but why are they saying a *z* if there's no *z* there? You'd think people would see "sand" and pronounce it with a soft *s*, like sand on the beach . . . but they don't. Maybe I should have changed the spelling to "Strysand" with a *y*, but I didn't like the look of that. So I just figured I'd keep it as it always was.

On opening night at the Bon Soir, September 9, 1960, I was third on the bill, after the Three Flames and a comedy act by two guys named Tony and Eddie. Phyllis Diller was the headliner, so she would be the last to perform. Peter Daniels was playing for me by now, and I think my first song was Fats Waller's "Keepin' Out of Mischief Now" . . . a mischievous song, witty and provocative. I switched tempos when I felt like it and played with the melody. And the band would chime in: "Oh, yeah!" It was fun to sing.

I remember exactly what I wore that first night . . . another one of my thrift-shop treasures . . . a high-necked, long-sleeved top from the turn of the century. The black-velvet bodice was boned, so it had a beautiful shape . . . and it laced up in the back. How smart! You could tie it as tight as you liked or loosen it, depending on what you ate for dinner. And it was embroidered with the most beautiful cut-steel beads that would glint in the spotlight (later I noticed more than a few had fallen on the floor). Who knew that one day I'd be wearing clothes from the same period in *Hello, Dolly!* But to me, at this moment, it wasn't a costume. It was a work of art, and I wanted to share it with the audience. I had my friend Terry Leong make me a short black-velvet skirt to go with it. So I was juxtaposing the contemporary with the antique, to give it a modern twist. Then, to finish off the look, I wore a pair of antique ivory satin shoes with a square black buckle in front, made of more cut-steel beads in the shape of a butterfly.

My set list that night also included "A Sleepin' Bee," "I Want to Be Bad," "When Sunny Gets Blue," "Lover, Come Back to Me," and "Nobody's Heart Belongs to Me." I tried to put them together in a way that flowed musically, lyrically, and emotionally. I was always conscious of not wanting to bore the audience, not to mention myself. I wanted the evening to have rhythm and pace, so I might move from a quiet, pensive ballad to a more up-tempo piece. And since I had

picked songs that fed me as an actress, I could sense the audience being pulled along with me. It was a new and heady feeling, to realize I could change their mood along with mine.

I'd been trying to figure out what I could do that would be unexpected. And then it came to me. In a sophisticated club like this, wouldn't it be fun to sing a children's song? Something completely offbeat and silly.

Barry suggested "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" I looked at the words, which I had never paid any attention to before, and thought, *I can do something with this*. The wolf was after three poor little pigs, and my heart went out to them. I happen to love pigs. They've got those funny flat noses, and they're very smart. (I collect all sorts of little pig tchotchkes. Too many.)

I launched into the song that night with all the tra-la-las and huffs and puffs, and when I was finished, the audience roared with laughter. I walked off the stage while they were still clapping and went into the narrow dressing room (more like a closet) I shared with Phyllis Diller, who told me that every hair on her body stood up as soon as I hit my first notes.

When I took off my antique shoes (too precious to wear on the street), I was shocked. Even though they were fifty years old, they had been practically pristine when I put them on. But now the leather inside was burned almost black, just from the heat of my body. (I kept them anyway even though I could never wear them again.)

The show was over.

I was starving. Bob and Barry took me to the Pam Pam, our usual spot. It was open twenty-four hours a day, and they served the best baked potato, very well done so it was crispy on the outside and soft inside, just the way I like it. And they had a great medium-rare hamburger. The guys were in a mood to celebrate, but I immediately asked them for notes. I wanted to know what I could do to improve my performance.

On the second night, I wore a gorgeous Victorian combing jacket, made of fine white cotton trimmed with ribbon and lace. It was the kind of thing Victorian ladies would put on over a nightgown or a dress while they were brushing their hair, to protect their clothes. The original ribbon was frayed, so I had threaded a new pink satin ribbon through the lace to match a pair of pink satin shoes from the 1920s. They had the most charming buckles, with a bit of the pink satin gathered up inside them like a rose. My mother was in the

audience that night, and after the show she asked me why I was singing in my underwear.

Her comment on my performance this time was, “Your voice isn’t strong enough. You should drink a guggle-muggle.” That was a horrible concoction she used to make for me with warm chocolate milk and a raw egg, to fatten me up.

Luckily, the reviews didn’t agree with her.

“A startlingly young, stylish and vibrant-voiced gamin named Barbra Streisand is one of the pleasures of a club called the Bon Soir.”

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

“The Bon Soir has swung into the new nightclub season with the find of the year. She is Barbra Streisand, a Brooklynite whose voice and poise belie her scant eighteen years.”

—NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

“She’s never had a singing lesson in her life, doesn’t know how to walk, dress, or take a bow, but she projects well enough to close her act with a straight rendition of ‘Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf’ and bring down the house.”

—DOROTHY KILGALLEN

That was great, but the good stuff went right by me, and I focused on the bad. In fact, I didn’t even remember any of those compliments from the critics until recently, when I looked in an old scrapbook my mother kept. (It’s coming in very handy now.) At the time, all I registered was that some of the reviewers mentioned my vintage clothes as if they were a gimmick.

What? I thought those clothes were beautiful, and frankly, they were all I could afford. But I didn’t want them to be distracting. Phyllis Diller was so sweet about it and said I needed a proper evening dress to sing in. She took me

shopping and bought me an expensive cocktail dress. But I didn't know who I was in an outfit like that. It felt wrong on me.

How could I tell her? She had been so kind, and I was worried about hurting her feelings. But if I wasn't going to wear it, she'd certainly notice, so I had to explain. I asked her if she'd mind if I returned the dress and used the money to buy fabric and have something made. She understood completely. What a relief!

Meanwhile, my two-week booking was extended again and again until it turned into eleven weeks. I was enjoying myself. Peter Daniels knew just how to follow me on the piano. Tiger Haynes and Averill Pollard (who played bass) still laughed at my jokes, and I loved how they called me "Baby." By now I had begun to improvise, chatting with the audience between songs, and they were laughing too. I was using reality . . . letting the audience in on what I was thinking and feeling. This was a discovery. After years of being told I was "too serious," I finally thought, *Oh, maybe I am funny. Great. I can use this too.*

One night, I came on to do my first song and forgot that I still had gum in my mouth. So I stuck it on the microphone stand, and it got a big laugh. Then sometimes I would repeat that, when I felt like being funny.

I wasn't scared to sing in front of people anymore. It was only later, when I became more successful, that I got more and more frightened. I had nothing to lose when I was young.

FOUR

The Bon Soir



I was starting to develop a following. I heard that people were apparently coming to the Bon Soir just to see me. Frankly, I found this hard to believe, but the club was full every night. The only reason I left in November was that another singer, Felicia Sanders, had already been booked. Tiger Haynes told me that she had sung with the big bands back in the 1940s, and when she did a certain song, a tear would run down her cheek on exactly the same note every night. *Wow*, I thought, *how does she do that?*

Why would you want to?

It was so different from the way I worked. I'm not the kind of performer who can cry on cue. First of all, I never knew where or even *if* the emotion was going to come in any particular song. Each night I tried to sing it as if I were singing it for the first time. I phrased it differently or hit different notes, depending on my mood.

It's amazing how much notice I got singing in this little club. There was even a mention in *Variety*: "Cameo-faced chantoosie Barbra Streisand . . . has a warm and sharp set of pipes." "Cameo-faced" . . . I think that was a compliment. And I acquired an agent, Irvin Arthur. He worked with Joe Glaser's agency, the Associated Booking Corporation. Joe had represented Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong, so that sounded good to me. Now Irvin would be my agent for clubs. I liked Irvin. He had had polio as a child and walked with a cane.

Irvin recommended me to Ted Rozar, who came in to see me one night and introduced himself backstage as "the only Gentile manager in the business." That got my attention . . . at least he had a sense of humor. He took me out for dinner to a fancy restaurant with red-velvet chairs and white tablecloths. That was new. My idea of a restaurant was one of those Irish places on Eighth Avenue with dark leather booths and good corned beef and cabbage. Or I'd go to the Greek place for egg-and-lemon soup and spanakopita.

Those red-velvet chairs sealed the deal for me. I thought, *I might as well sign with him . . . at least he'll pay for some of my meals.*

So now I had two professionals working for me, and what did they come up with?

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. For months. It was disturbing to be out of a job again. I couldn't believe I had no other offers.

Finally Irvin got me a booking at the Caucus Club in Detroit, opening on March 2. I packed my bags as if I were going off into the wilderness . . . who knew if they had a decent drugstore in Detroit? And I got on the train. I had never been anywhere, except the Catskills and my great-aunt Gussie's place in Connecticut for a few days when I was about five. I have a picture of me with the two dogs on the property . . . Jeff and Snuffy. People didn't have dogs where I came from, in those small Brooklyn apartments.

And now I was going to a strange city all by myself, where I would be living in a hotel! It was thrilling, even though the Hotel Wolverine in downtown Detroit wasn't exactly luxurious. But I had my own bed and my own bathroom and my own closet and my own dresser. I'd never had a dresser before . . . not to mention a bathroom that I didn't have to share with other people.

The Caucus Club was supposed to be Detroit's equivalent of New York's '21' Club . . . where I had never been, so I had no idea if it was true (it wasn't), and it was more of a restaurant than a nightclub. Everything was à la carte, and a

hamburger cost \$2.20, which I thought was ridiculously high. The room where I sang wasn't really designed for entertaining. There was a column in the middle, and I would sit on a stool in front of the piano and lean one way for one song . . . and then on the next song lean the other way, so each side of the room got to see me.

My wardrobe may not have been quite up to local standards. I owned three dresses, which made life simple. It didn't take much time to figure out what to wear. (Kind of like now, where I basically wear the same loose black top and pants every day.) One of them was a long woolen knit, like a tube, that I would roll up from the bottom or down from the top, to make it look a little different from night to night, or even song to song.

But my major problem was the piano player. There was no money to bring Peter Daniels with me from New York, so I had to work with the club's regular pianist. This guy looked at me strangely. We had no rapport, and he was surprised that I knew so few songs. But since I was expected to do several shows a night and I don't like to bore myself, I needed a few more. So once again I turned to my favorite composer, Harold Arlen, and found "Right as the Rain" and "I Had Myself a True Love." Then we added "Lorelei," by the Gershwins. But it was like pulling teeth to get him to come up with an interesting arrangement. He wasn't inventive, like Peter.

Peter and I just understood each other musically, and he could play chords that spoke to my soul and resonated deep within me. I've always gravitated toward music with an edge . . . notes next to each other that don't normally go together, so you get a rub. It's the kind of dissonance you hear in Bartók's Violin Concerto no. 1 (which I also bought at the supermarket) and Mahler's Symphony no. 10, another of my favorites.

But this guy's chords were conventional . . . ordinary . . . dull. Maybe he had had too pleasant a childhood. There was no angst in the way he played. The depth was missing. He didn't hear what I was hearing, and I couldn't explain it to him since I couldn't read music . . . and still can't. I don't know how to describe a chord in musical terms. I just hear the notes in my head. I can't name them. But that didn't matter to Peter. He'd play various combinations until we found the right one.

I'd say, "That's it! That's the chord, but it's missing one note."

And then I'd sing that note.

And when he put it into the chord, I'd say, "That's it! That's what I hear."

And then I'd ask, "What is that note?" And he'd explain, "It's an E with a flatted fifth. You always seem to want to hear the ninth or the eleventh . . . the odd note . . . instead of the typical notes in a conventional chord."

Whatever. I still don't understand it. Luckily, Peter did.

The piano player in Detroit also didn't want to play the charts that Peter had written. Either his ego was too big . . . or too small. Probably he didn't know a good thing when he heard it. The one nice thing he did was put me into a cat food commercial (an experience I used for Esther Hoffman when we made *A Star Is Born*). I still get a check every year for about fourteen dollars (at least I'll never go hungry again).

In those days I was always late. I'd dash into the club three minutes before I had to be on, drop my coat, and run onstage. But once I was on, I could think very, very clearly. I felt calmer onstage than in real life. Onstage, I was in control. When I'm performing, I'm not rushed. I could take my time, and the audience just had to adjust to my pace.

Les Gruber, the owner of the club, had told me that it would be nice if I sat down and talked to the customers. He wanted me to be friendly, even though schmoozing with strangers wasn't my thing. I had never done that at the Lion or the Bon Soir. If someone wanted to talk to me, they had to come backstage. But there was no backstage at the Caucus Club. I'm not even sure there was a dressing room.

It's funny, me spending all this time in a nightclub, because it's not somewhere I would normally be. I don't drink and I wasn't very sociable. If some man offered to buy me a drink, I would say, "I'd prefer a baked potato," and that often put an end to the conversation. Still, I managed to make many good friends there, like Bernie Moray, who ran Robinson's Furniture Company, and Dick Sloan, who owned a chain of movie theaters. It seemed a lot of business was transacted over plates of Dover sole at the club, and these guys were regulars. They were older . . . well, in their late thirties, which seemed old to me. Bernie was married and so was Dick, I think. They just happened to be kind and supportive, along with another couple, Bobby and Marilyn Sosnick. Those four were like family to me, and the Sosnicks invited me to their house for dinner many times. Between sets, I also hung out with Neil Wolfe, who played piano in the cocktail lounge. He was a very sweet guy with thick, wavy hair who was madly in love with a

blond girl who looked like Kim Novak, and he talked about her constantly. He was really nice to me, and we became fast friends.

I also met a very elegant lady named Doris Fisher, who wore beautiful clothes and had a splendid apartment. But what impressed me most was that she had written the song "Put the Blame on Mame," sung by Rita Hayworth in the movie *Gilda*.

Once I had my songs down, I had a lot of free time. I can't recall much about Detroit's cultural sites, but I do remember the racetrack. I would bet two dollars . . . just picking a horse by instinct. I knew nothing about horses, but I often won! So I'd get six dollars for the two dollars. At least I was making a profit! You could also rent a horse in the park on Belle Isle, and that's where I learned how to ride. Put it this way . . . I learned how to sit on a horse while it walked around slowly, occasionally nibbling a few leaves off a tree. It was nice to be a bit closer to the sky.

I was just settling into Detroit when I had to leave unexpectedly. Ted Rozar also had Orson Bean as a client, and Orson was going to be guest-hosting *The Jack Paar Show* and agreed to have me on. That's how I made my first television appearance on April 5, 1961. It was also my first plane ride . . . I had to fly from Detroit to New York because there was no time to take the train. And I was terrified because of my ear noises. Would my eardrums pop? Would blood pour out? Would I be deaf for the rest of my life?

I took the chance and survived that flight. Actually I enjoyed it, because the coach section had terrific food on those little plastic trays. (I've always liked miniatures.)

I was clothed for my appearance by the Robinson Furniture Company, as I announced on the show. Bernie had given me a tour of the showroom, where I noticed a couch upholstered in some lovely burgundy damask and said, "This would make a great dress." So he gave me some of the fabric. (Actually, it was the same color as the drapes in my dining room now, also made out of burgundy damask. Some things never change.) I mailed Bernie's fabric to New York, along with a sketch, and Terry Leong made it for me. He already had my measurements. And I bought a beautiful pair of satin shoes from this fabulous store called Fiorentina and had them dyed to match. They cost forty dollars . . . a huge splurge for me.

On the night before the show, I slept at my brother's house on Long Island

because he asked me to. His wife, Ellen, was about to give birth, and he wanted me to come with him to the hospital the next morning, where she was scheduled to have a C-section. But everything got too hectic, and I couldn't sit beside him and wait for my niece, Erica, to be born because I had to pick up my shoes and get to the studio for a rehearsal.

When I walked into the store, who should be sitting in a chair trying on some shoes but that Faye woman, the casting agent who had shown me the door when I went to audition for a TV walk-on.

"What are *you* doing here?" she asked when she noticed me, clearly surprised to see me in this exclusive shop.

"Well, I'm on *The Jack Paar Show* tonight and I'm picking up my shoes. What are *you* doing here?"

It was an extremely satisfying moment.

I don't even think I was nervous that night. I was just singing my song, "A Sleepin' Bee," which I'd already done a hundred times before. And I felt wonderful in my upholstery-fabric dress and those elegant Fiorentina shoes. I was five foot five and weighed 110 pounds . . . still very skinny. I used to take a couple of scarves and stuff one on each side of my underwear to fill out my hips. Not in back. I already had a big tush. Then I changed into a simple black sheath for my second number, "When the Sun Comes Out." The audience was still applauding when Orson waved me over to join him and the other guests.

I was overjoyed that night . . . genuinely excited . . . and that's the truth. Phyllis Diller was also on the show, and that made me feel very comfortable. Bernie and Dick had sent flowers to my dressing room, and I got to thank them on air. I knew they were watching. It was thrilling. I sat down, gushing about all the cameras and the lights because I was completely fascinated by them . . . so this is how they put on a TV show. I was sitting under the hot lights, but my hands were cold, as I said to Orson, and Phyllis gave me her gloves to warm them.

When I flew back to Detroit, Les Gruber gave me a bonus because he was so pleased at the free publicity for his restaurant on national TV. And he extended my run.

After eight weeks in Detroit, I took the train to St. Louis, where I was booked into the Crystal Palace, a nightclub owned by Jay Landesman, who was willing to take a chance on young talent. His wife, Fran, was a lyricist, and she showed

me one of her songs, "Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most." Of course spring to me means allergies. But this song had a haunting melody and a lovely lyric, and it became part of my repertoire. I liked the Landesmans and their nightclub, which was the fanciest I had ever been in . . . stained-glass windows, antique chandeliers, red-velvet upholstery. They put me up in an apartment right above the club with beautiful old wood, marble sinks, and a tiled fireplace. I never wanted to leave.

I was the opening act for the Smothers Brothers and another comedian, Marc London. I used to stand in the back after I had sung my songs and watch Dick and Tommy work. I thought Tommy was very funny, acting like a six-year-old to his straight-man older brother. I really identified with that kind of innocence. The child was still so much a part of me. I found myself attracted to his talent . . . he knew how to get the laughs . . . and he was sort of cute in a WASPy way with that close-cropped blond hair and pale skin.

I was experimenting with a new, contemporary song . . . "Soon It's Gonna Rain" from *The Fantasticks*, another show I had tried out for and didn't get. It was an offbeat musical, and the character who sang the song was sixteen. At the time I thought, *I'm sixteen and I'm offbeat. Why didn't I get that job?*

I remember seeing it at the Sullivan Street Playhouse and being impressed with the simple, sparse set . . . a wooden platform, a quarter moon painted on a circle of cardboard that reversed to become the sun. All the focus was on the story. And the accompaniment to the songs was just a harp and a piano . . . what a wonderful combination. (Many years later the producer, Lore Noto, told me, "I can't believe we didn't hire you.")

In the show, "Soon It's Gonna Rain" was a simple, innocent song sung by two young people who are falling in love and looking forward to the rain so they can go inside and be together. But I interpreted it in very personal terms. I identified with that girl. In the beginning, she's shy . . . tentative . . . but when the rain comes, I chose to have the music build . . . the drums roll . . . as her emotions build. It's her sexual awakening. Then, instead of ending where the song ends, I went back to the beginning and sang the first two lines with new knowledge and a feeling of joy and pride, as if she's at last become a woman. And the song ends on a high note . . . like a release. She got her wish and experienced love or sex, whatever you want to believe.

When I try to describe it, the process sounds so analytical, but it's really more intuitive. I was just in touch with my feelings and tapping into the part of me that related to the lyrics of the song.

Sometimes it seemed very strange to be standing in a nightclub singing all these songs about love when I knew so little about it.

In May I went back to New York and back to the Bon Soir, where they wanted me again for a month's engagement. This time I was opening for the comedian Phil Leeds, and Renée Taylor was the headliner. I thought she was very funny. One night she lost a cap from a tooth . . . it flew right out onto the stage. That made me laugh, which was not very nice of me.

But that's the kind of thing that gets me, when for a moment a person's dignity is undone . . . there's a crack in the façade, and you see straight to the vulnerability we all share. We're all pretending to be so civilized, so in control, but we're not.

Otherwise, it's not easy to make me laugh. I don't think most things are funny. My husband will tell a joke and everybody around the table laughs, except me. I'll say, "What's funny about that?" And sit there, trying to analyze it. Then, when something in a TV show or a movie is genuinely funny, I'll say, flatly, "That's funny."

I take comedy very seriously.

One night I had just finished my set and was heading for the dressing room . . . if you can call it that, since there was barely any room to get dressed, or undressed. I was sharing it with Renée. She was getting ready to go on and I had just closed the door behind me when I heard a knock. It was a man, and I stepped outside to talk to him. He immediately began to compliment me, saying, "I got chills as soon as you started singing."

"I'm not a singer, really," I told him. "I'm an actress, and I'm only doing this because no one will hire me to act."

"If you're as good an actress as you are a singer, then there's no stopping you. I just saw you do comedy, drama. You made me laugh, you made me cry. I think you have a big career ahead of you . . . records, television, theater, movies."

"I've always wanted to be a movie star," I admitted.

"Well, Barbra, I have the feeling you're going to win every award in this business, first time out of the box . . . the Grammy, the Emmy, the Tony, the Oscar."

How amazing . . . it was as if this man I had just met was validating all my dreams.

He asked if I had anyone to represent me, and when I said that I already had a manager, he didn't push it. Instead he was very sweet and polite. He simply handed me his business card and said that if I ever needed anything, any help in any way, to please give him a call.

That's how I met Marty Erlichman, who had come to the club to see his friend Phil Leeds. But as soon as he heard me sing he forgot about Phil and came straight backstage to find me. He ended up missing Phil's act entirely.

I felt comfortable with Marty from that first moment. He was like a guy from my old neighborhood . . . dark hair, glasses, kind face, a bit chubby. Turns out he grew up near me in Brooklyn. We spoke the same language.

It felt good to be back in New York, except for one small inconvenience . . . I had no apartment, since I was no longer living with Barry. It started to go wrong when he went home to California to see his parents. On the night he was scheduled to return, I had bought all his favorite things at the deli and set out a feast to surprise him. But he didn't show up. I was worried. Had his plane crashed? And then he didn't appear the next night . . . or the next . . . and no phone call.

Eventually, after about a week, he nonchalantly walked in the door. I was furious. Turns out he had just decided to stay longer but couldn't be bothered to call and let me know. Apparently his parents weren't aware that I was sharing his apartment, and he didn't want the number to show up on their bill. Come on . . . was he that intimidated by his parents? Couldn't he have found some way to get in touch with me? His story didn't make sense.

And then I came home early one night, and ran into a strange guy with a towel wrapped around his waist coming out of the bathroom. That was a shock, and I remember thinking, *Oh my God, I shouldn't be here.* Barry had never brought anyone home before . . . how could he, with me living there? Of course he was gay, and he had a whole other life that didn't include me. Somehow I had thought that since we got along so well, we could just continue with our roommate arrangement. But now I realized I was in the way.

I turned around and walked out the door. I called my friend Elaine Sobel from the street and went straight to her apartment.

I was upset, which in hindsight seems unfair, since I had no claim on Barry.

We weren't romantically involved . . . we had never even kissed. Still, I guess I felt rejected. Maybe it took me back to that moment as a child, watching Laurel and Hardy with my friend Irving, when suddenly his father walked in and I had to leave.

I wanted a relationship like the ones I saw in the movies, built on mutual love and respect and kindness. And I realized I was not helping myself by living with someone who could not really be a partner. I wanted more.

Barry and I remained friends, but later, after he refused to return some tapes of me singing, I just put him out of my life. I can do that with people who disappoint me. It's not one of my finest qualities. I can build a wall and shut them out.

But at this point, he was one of the few men I knew, and I didn't understand any of them. Eddie Blum, the casting director for Rodgers and Hammerstein, was someone I considered a friend. I'll always be grateful to him for encouraging me. Once he invited me up to his country house for a weekend, and I met his petite blond wife and his daughter. It was fun to sit beside him and drive his Caterpillar tractor through the fields. Lee J. Cobb was his neighbor, and that impressed me . . . I had been a big admirer of his talent ever since I had seen him in *On the Waterfront*. I really liked Eddie, until he came to see me in Detroit and made a pass at me. What? He was old enough to be my father!

One last thing about Barry. I'll always be grateful to him for believing in me when I was a teenager. But in 1997, he wrote a book about me and made up this crazy love affair between us (maybe he thought he needed to spice up our friendship to sell more copies). I was so hurt I couldn't even read it.

It's odd, to say the least, to hear about various men who claim to have been my first lover . . . especially when I have no idea who they are. Listen, I know I've forgotten a few things, but this isn't one of them!

It wasn't Barry, and it certainly wasn't some guy in my acting class who apparently talks about our nonexistent romance in several of the unauthorized biographies that have been written about me. I've never read these books because I can't stand the lies. But some people I know have read them, and things get back to me, like what this guy said. And I was dumbfounded. I can't even imagine who he might be. I don't remember his name, so I called Allan Miller, who was teaching the class, and he doesn't remember him either! Trust me, I wish there had been some handsome, talented student who was interested in me . . . and who interested *me*.

The idea that someone could make up a story about a romance with me . . . well, it's disgusting. It feels like such a profound invasion of my life. And then the story gets perpetuated in book after book, because the people who write them just keep recycling the same made-up junk.

Here's the truth. I was eighteen when I had my first love affair . . . although to call it a love affair seems like a stretch of the imagination. This man and I had a few interesting evenings together. On a night with a full moon, he handed me a cigarette, and I took a puff and went weak in the knees. I thought it was him. Turns out it was marijuana, which I had never smoked before (and rarely after). One thing led to another . . . I'm not going to go into details. Use your imagination.

The next day when we ran into each other he just said "Hi" and kept going, as if nothing had ever happened between us. So that was that. Not exactly *From Here to Eternity*. Once again, I felt unseen.

God, I hated him for not being kinder. But it started my wheels spinning. Some nights I felt like a cat in heat . . . my body ached for him . . . feelings I had never experienced before. At least it gave me some more material to work with when I did *The Jack Paar Show* for the second time, on May 22. Orson Bean was guest-hosting again and invited me back. When I sang about wanting someone, for the first time I actually understood it.

After the taping, I stood in Cis's kitchen and dialed my aunt Anna's number on the wall phone. The show was airing in a few hours and I wanted to make sure she watched it. There's a song in *Yentl* that begins with the line: "There are moments you remember all your life," and this was one of them. Someone answered the phone and I was told that my beloved aunt had died, in my uncle Harry's arms. She had come home from the hospital after a routine hysterectomy and developed an embolism.

It felt like every time I went on TV, something happened to the people I loved. The first time, my niece Erica was born. And now, my favorite aunt was gone. I was heartbroken. She was the mother of two boys, Lowell and Harvey, and she was always eager for me to visit. I think she appreciated having a girl around. She loved me, and I loved her. We spent a lot of time together. I enjoyed sleeping over at her apartment on Eastern Parkway. Sometimes we would push the furniture aside and Lowell and I would dance to Tito Puente records. Harvey would dance with my mother. I love that Latin music . . . the samba and the

mambo. Lowell and I practiced together and danced for the family at his bar mitzvah. He and his father were into baseball, and Harvey was into decorating. He would pick out fabrics for his mom. When I was six or seven, I called him a girl. He didn't speak to me for two years.

What did I know? But I was clearly picking up on something. Later Harvey came out as gay, but people didn't acknowledge feelings like that back then. I just thought it was neat that he could explain the difference between linen and velvet.

I'm not the most positive person to begin with. It's always easy for me to look on the dark side of things, and with my grief over Aunt Anna's death I began to feel frustrated with my life. It felt like I was biding my time at the Bon Soir until somebody would hire me to act. But then I'd tell myself things weren't so bad. I was earning a living. And every night was the equivalent of acting in a show. Sometimes I would stand onstage and do a relaxation exercise, like we did in class, starting with my toes and moving up to my arms and my fingers . . . directing my mind to each part of my body, sensing it and relaxing each part, one by one. I'm sure the audience had no idea what was going on.

Week to week I kept honing my performance. I was told that nobody opened with a ballad, which of course made me want to do it even more. I could close my eyes and go into my own space, moving inward rather than outward.

When I watched other performers, some of them seemed odd to me. They were so eager to please the audience, telling them how great they were, saying things like, "I only feel alive when I'm onstage." Really? They seemed so needy . . . reaching out and asking the audience to love them. It made me squirm.

Even though deep down, I might have been more needy than they were.

I just didn't believe you should show it. That didn't feel right to me. It was undignified. I didn't want to have to ask to be loved. That was too embarrassing. For me, the secret is not to reach out. That's futile. Instead you have to reach in. And I discovered that the more I turned inward the more the audience was drawn to me.

That's the power of thought. It not only transcends matter, it also communicates . . . if it's truthful. In other words, you can't fake emotion. Everything has to come from a place of truth, deep within yourself. And then other people will respond and identify with you.

Sometimes, if I wasn't feeling anything, I just had to accept that. And then I would be still, and concentrate. When I first sang "Cry Me a River," I used one

of the exercises we did in class . . . evoking an emotional memory by recreating someone's face. I would think of that young man in the moonlight, handing me a cigarette. And it made me angry but from a real place. Eventually I could go straight to those emotions as soon as I began the song. My response to the music became almost Pavlovian.

Meanwhile, I still had no place of my own to sleep. Elaine offered me her couch, but Dustin Hoffman was still courting her and I didn't want to impose on them. For a while I took a room at the Hotel Earle, because it was conveniently around the corner from the Bon Soir. All the furniture was sprayed with speckled paint so you didn't notice the dirt. I remember Stanley Beck came up to my room one time. We first met in summer stock at Malden Bridge, where he directed me in *Picnic*. He was the leading man of the company, and the leading lady was Emily Cobb. (Years later I was happy to get her a small part in *The Way We Were*, handing out antiwar leaflets at a table across from the Plaza.)

Stanley and I reconnected when I went to see Jean Genet's *The Balcony* at Circle in the Square downtown, and there he was, onstage. He was a very masculine guy, kind of good-looking, and we had a few casual dates. But I was so nervous when he came to my room that I had to ask him to leave. I said I felt sick, because I wasn't ready to be physical with him. You see, I do remember the men in my life, because they were so few and far between when I was young!

A week after my Bon Soir engagement ended, I appeared as a guest on a local TV show, *PM East*, thanks to the producer, Mert Koplín, who had seen me at the club. Mert was a warm, lovely man, unlike the host, Mike Wallace, who was kind of cold and distant. He definitely did not have the typical TV host's genial personality. In fact, Mike was mean . . . which worked for him later when he was hammering questions at interview subjects on *60 Minutes*. But it was a real stretch when he tried to be charming and draw out a guest on *PM East*.

I was the one who pulled him aside before the show and said, "Listen, I don't just sing. I can talk." I showed him my key ring and said, "Why don't you ask me about all my keys?" So when I sat down with him, he said, "I have here your worldly possessions" and held up my wallet and my key ring.

"Where'd you get them?" I replied, playing along with the bit.

"And ten keys. What are all these keys to, Barbra? What do they open? You have ten pads here in New York?"

"No, not ten. I have six."

Well, six may have been a slight exaggeration, but I did have a regular circuit of places where I could camp out on the folding aluminum cot I bought for \$12.95 at Whelan's Drug Store and carried around with me. My cousin Harvey had an apartment on West Eighteenth Street, which I could use during the week, since he was only there on weekends. Then on Fridays I would move to Peter Daniels's rehearsal studio on Eighth Avenue, which was empty except for a piano. But it was spooky to come in there late at night. The building was deserted and more than a bit grim.

Mike tried to make a joke of it. "So you sort of sleep all around town?"

I sleep around town but I don't sleep *around*, I explained. "You have to make the distinction."

In fact, one of the keys belonged to Don Softness, *PM East's* press agent, who also became mine. When he heard that I had no apartment, he offered me the keys to his office, where there was a comfortable couch I could curl up on. The only condition was that I had to be out by 8:30 a.m., before his employees arrived. Little did I know that he would appear early one morning and make a pass at me. Even though I thought he was attractive, with short-cropped gray hair, I gave him back his key.

Meanwhile, I was looking for a job again. In acting class I had bonded with Rick Edelstein when we did a scene together from *The Petrified Forest*. I liked Rick. He seemed more mature than the other guys, because he was already married with four children. At night he worked as a waiter at the Village Vanguard, a well-known jazz club, and he took me there to audition for the owner, Max Gordon. Miles Davis happened to be playing there at the time, and Rick arranged for his guys to back me up. But Max Gordon didn't get me.

Just as I was running out of money, I got a job in Canada, at the Town N' Country restaurant up in Winnipeg. I don't think the Canadian audiences got me either. Especially when I would do songs they had never heard of, like "Come to the Supermarket in Old Peking."

After that, I was booked for a return engagement at the Caucus Club. That was great, but they only wanted to pay me \$150 a week (same as before), and I had gotten \$175 at the Bon Soir. I thought they should match that and throw in some food as well. After all, it was a restaurant. But Ted Rozar couldn't get Les Gruber to budge. I was already annoyed with Ted, and now he couldn't get me a raise.

That's when I pulled out the card I had saved from Marty Erlichman and called him. Marty said, "I'll take care of it," and immediately got on a plane to Detroit. He negotiated a new deal with Les Gruber, and suddenly I was making \$200 a week, and dinners were included. I was impressed. I only found out later that even Marty couldn't get them to raise my salary, so he threw in the extra \$50 a week out of his own pocket. And it's not as if he had money to burn. Marty's office at the time was a phone booth on Fifty-Third Street and a roll of dimes.

Nevertheless he stayed in Detroit, watching over me. Ted had never done that. I could see that Marty offered a whole new level of commitment. Suddenly I had a protector for the first time in my life. I wanted Marty to be my manager, which meant that somehow I had to get out of my contract with Ted.

Frankly, I don't think Ted was all that upset at the thought of losing me. But it's very human . . . you may not be interested in something, but as soon as someone else wants it, you want it too. Marty asked him what it would take to buy me out of my contract, and Ted threw out a figure . . . five thousand dollars. Meanwhile, I had stored some boxes of antique clothing in his office, and he was holding them hostage until this was settled.

While we were in Detroit, Marty became friendly with Bobby Sosnick, who was still coming to the club almost every night. They used to sit together and drink martinis. When Bobby found out that we were trying to pay off Ted and that Marty was working out of a phone booth, he handed Marty a check for ten thousand dollars, telling him to spend five thousand on me and five thousand to open up an office. He considered it an investment in my career.

Now all this was very interesting to me. How many people get to find out exactly what their price is on the open market?

I have to say, I was the tiniest bit disappointed when Marty managed to bargain Ted down from \$5,000 to \$1,250 and then to \$750. Really? Was that all I was worth?

I think Marty and I got a bargain.

At least it meant Marty didn't need Bobby's check after all, which was good, because he didn't want to sell a piece of me, and I didn't want that either. Although there was one small problem. Marty didn't have the \$750. I had forgotten this until Marty told the story at a birthday party I gave for him in 2014.

I asked, "Where did you get the money?"

He said, "Someone loaned it to me."

“Who?”

“It was you!”

Remember, I had been saving money since I opened that bank account when I was sixteen.

So, I retrieved my cartons of clothes, and that was the end of my relationship with Ted, although I was still working with Irvin Arthur. One day I went to his office, and he told me that Enrico Banducci, the owner of the hungry i club in San Francisco, was sitting in the next room, but he couldn't convince Enrico to hire me.

I decided I had to change his mind. But it's not in my nature to barge in somewhere and sell myself. The only way I could do it was if I pretended to be a whole other character. I marched in and told Enrico that he was going to be very sorry if he didn't hire me. “You'll be begging me for a contract, because I'm going to be a big star. And you could have had me early on.” I did this whole number, totally scared to death. I think I even sat in his lap, which is totally unlike me . . . must have been a moment of inspiration. And I got the job! I was really proud of myself for convincing him.

Meanwhile, I was still auditioning for acting jobs. When I was singing at the Lion, I had met an agent named Jeff Hunter, who was one of the very first people to support me. He thought I had talent and was particularly impressed with what I did with my hands when I sang. Years later, he told me, “No one has ever used them as well as you do.” He promised to look out for me, and if anything came up that he thought I was right for, he'd let me know. And he followed through . . . he sent me to audition for an off-Broadway production, *Another Evening with Harry Stoones*. It was written by a young guy named Jeff Harris and it was a comedy revue, with blackout sketches and some songs, which Jeff also wrote. There were eight of us in the cast, including Diana Sands, who had starred in *A Raisin in the Sun* on Broadway, and Dom DeLuise, who was just starting out. I was listed last in the program.

The whole experience was lots of fun. I got to play different characters and sing several songs . . . one was about the perils of New Jersey. I sang it in a black 1940s dress, with 1940s platform shoes. Then there was a droll comic song called “Value,” in which I got to explain why I'm in love with a guy named Harold Mengert.

Copyrighted Material

Who was it that said, “Satire is what closes on Saturday night”? (I just looked it up. It was George S. Kaufman.) Well, we proved him right. We opened and

closed on Saturday night, October 21, 1961, after weeks of rehearsal, nine previews, and one performance.

But Jeff Hunter came to that opening night and was impressed. He sent me out to audition for another production that definitely changed my life. I will always be grateful, and indebted, to him.

I Can Get It for You Wholesale was a major Broadway show, written by Jerome Weidman, with music and lyrics by Harold Rome. Arthur Laurents, who wrote the book for *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*, was directing. The producer was David Merrick. They were all Broadway royalty, and I thought there wasn't much of a chance that they'd want to hire me.

That's my negativity, which I inherited from my mother. She always told me, "Don't count on anything good, because then God will snatch it away." And I probably used that negativity to protect myself.

I came in to audition in November. Since the play took place in the 1930s, I was wearing my 1930s coat, to put me in a period mood. It's made of karakul, the smooth honey-colored fleece of a lamb, trimmed around the collar and the hem with matching fox fur (this was before PETA). I bought it in a thrift shop for ten dollars and thought it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. What made it so special was that the inside was just as lovely as the outside . . . the lining was embroidered with colorful baskets of flowers, done in chenille threads, with a little pocket made of ruched silk. Somebody had to really care in order to go to all that effort for something hardly anyone would see. I loved that idea, and I still have that coat. (The lining fabric has fallen apart, but the chenille flowers are still intact.)

Someone announced my name, and I stepped out onto the bare stage at the St. James Theatre, still wearing my coat, so everybody else could appreciate it. But of course whoever was announcing my name mispronounced it, so I had to correct it. As I was explaining this, I was setting down my shopping bag. I always carried some food . . . unsalted pretzels, Oreos (but I have to remove that white guck in the middle), almonds . . . because you never know when you'll want a snack. I think that idea came from my mother. Maybe it's part of the collective unconscious of European Jews, because what if a pogrom came and you had to get across the border fast? You have to have a little something to eat until you get to the next country.

I shaded my eyes and looked out into the dark theater, but I couldn't make out any faces. "Hello! Is anyone out there? What would you like me to do?"

A voice replied. "Can you sing?"

I thought to myself, *If I couldn't sing, would I be standing here?* But I said, "I think I can sing. People tell me I can sing. What would you like to hear?"

Nobody answered quickly enough, so I said, "Do you want something fast or slow?" I was like the guy behind the counter in the deli. Order your sandwich, already! Pastrami or corned beef?

Someone said, "Anything you like."

"Well, this is a comedy, right?" I said. "So I'll do a comedy song."

I pulled my sheet music out of my shopping bag and headed over to the piano, not noticing that the pages, which were all attached and folded up like an accordion, were unfurling behind me into a long, twenty-foot tail. Actually, I was only pretending not to notice because I had done it deliberately. I knew I could be funny, and I thought I should show them. I heard some snickers from the audience, so it seemed to be working.

I told the accompanist, "Play the one on top," and launched into "Value":

Call me a boob, call me a schlemiel.

Call me a brain with a missing wheel.

Call me what you will, but nonetheless I'm still in love with Harold Mengert

And it's not because he has a car. Arnie Fleischer has a car.

But a car is just a car . . .

The man who was talking to me . . . who turned out to be Arthur Laurents . . . was laughing, and then he asked, "Do you have a ballad?"

"Oh yeah, I have several." I turned back to the accompanist and asked him to play "Have I Stayed Too Long at the Fair?" It was a song from another obscure show, and I loved it because it was about yearning, about wanting somebody to care, and I completely related to that.

Jerome Weidman was there that day, and later he described what happened next in a magazine article. I wish I could write so poetically. All I can say is I stood on that stage and went into my own inner world, forgetting anyone else was there.

"Softly, in a voice as true as a plumb line and pure as the soap that floats, with the quiet authority of someone who had seen the inevitable, as simply and directly and movingly as Homer telling about the death of Hector, she told the haunting story of a girl who had stayed 'too long at the fair.' It was a song, of course, and a good one. But emerging through the voice and personality of this strange child, it became more than that. We were hearing music and words, but we were experiencing what one gets only from great art: a moment of revealed truth."

—JEROME WEIDMAN

There was silence after I finished the song. Then they asked me to sing another, and another.

I could hear them talking among themselves, and then Arthur stood up and asked if I could come back in a few hours.

"Why do I have to come back?" I asked. "You didn't like what you just heard?"

I think Arthur laughed and explained that David Merrick would be there later, and they wanted him to hear me.

"No. I can't come back," I told him. "I have to go to the hairdresser."

I could practically hear their shock. I was well aware that nobody would ever say no to a request to come back for another audition. And I was aware that what I had just said was funny. But it was also the truth.

"I'm opening tonight at the Blue Angel and I have to get my hair done. Hey, all of you should come!"

"Can't you come back after your appointment?" Arthur asked.

I called out to Marty, who was sitting in the back of the theater, "Marty, do I have time?"

I can just imagine him holding his head in his hands. "Yes!" he said vehemently. "Yes, you have time!"

The Blue Angel was a supper club on East Fifty-Second Street that was a step up from the Bon Soir, because it was uptown. Marty had persuaded Max Gor-