

Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

# **Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin**

a memoir based on a true story

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## Prologue

### North End, Boston, 1974

I WAITED outside 121 Salem Street, averting my eyes from the lambs dangling in the window of Paesanti's Meat Market across the street. I busied myself with something inside my purse, but what I was really doing was waiting for someone to come out, although it didn't matter who because I didn't know anybody who lived there anymore.

I glanced around nervously, as I'd been doing these last couple of weeks. An old Italian woman was perusing the fruit stand at Rinaldi's, her bright purchases in sharp contrast to her black dress and heavy veil. Three old men strolled past, towels strewn across their broad shoulders, chattering away in dialects of Rome, Naples and Sicily as they headed for the public baths. Boys in short trousers and checkered caps played marbles on the manhole cover outside the Brook Farm Egg Company.

But still, no Chum. It'd been three weeks since my pooch had disappeared. Then, just my luck, Lennie the Cat came strutting out of Racupero Anna Tailors, looking all full of himself in his new pin-striped suit. Oh, great. All I needed now was to be spotted by the lovesick gangster.

A young mother exited 121 Salem St., her arms wrapped around a plastic laundry basket. I scurried in before the door sucked shut behind her and climbed the five flights to my old apartment. The 5<sup>th</sup> floor was completely vacant except for my bicycle and backpack, stashed outside Apartment #13.

I might be homeless, but at least I wasn't hall-less.

I snuggled into my flannel bag and tried to read but with the overhead bulb burned out, *Jaws* was just a blur. I tried to sleep but with another two hours before sunset, that was just a waste of time.

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Well, okay, this was my punishment, I thought. I'd gone off in pursuit of earthly pleasures and now God had smited me Big Time. And this wasn't just some divine little slap-on-the-wrist warning smite, either.

Nope. This was a Full-Scale, Zero-Tolerance, Holy Shit Comeuppance.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Five Years of Foreplay – Let the Games Begin**

### **January 20 to May 19, 1972**

*\*Vietnam: 55,000 American troops dead; Anti-war protests continue \*In Other News: “Bloody Sunday” marks the deadliest day in Ireland’s “The Troubles” \*On TV: Me and the Chimp; Sanford and Son \*At the Movies: Cabaret; The Godfather \*On the Radio: Don McLean’s “American Pie;” Neil Young’s “Heart of Gold;” America’s “A Horse With No Name”*

### **Phoenix, Arizona**

I WAS BORN a teetotaling virgin.

Okay, let’s face it, we all were.

The difference is I was expected to stay that way until the day I married the piano player at church—whoever that happened to be at the moment—and toasted my nuptials with sparkling cider alongside my parents and 350 of their closest right-wing, fundamentalist Christian friends.

For my Bible-thumping patriarch, there was good and there was evil—and everything in between was evil. Still, Dad’s world was fairly easy to navigate once you got the hang of it. Republicans were good, Democrats were bad. Baptists were good, Catholics were bad. Mormons were *really, really* bad. Sex outside of marriage was unthinkable—except if you happened to be the Virgin Mary, which Dad had no need to remind me I was not.

Teenage angst was strictly forbidden in our household. While my schoolmates were busy sassing back, shooting off guns in the desert, skipping classes and doing wheelies out behind Pedro’s Restaurant, I was tucked away in my travel poster-lined lilac bedroom watching *The Dick Van Dyke Show* on a 13” black & white TV I bought for myself.

School was for education. Church for everything else.

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Yet even in this insulated world, I was expected to be the best of the best, a beacon of light so that dazzling strangers would stop me on the street and say they wanted what I had. This would be my cue to whip out my Bible and save their sorry butts. I don't recall such an inquiry ever having been made, but I memorized John 3:16 just in case.

I didn't want to go to college. Heck, I didn't want to go to grammar or high school either but look how that turned out. And then when I finally graduated Sunnyslope High in 1967, my parents made me go to college, a move I still believe borders on child abuse.

The first rung on my ladder of higher education was Glendale Community College. My thinking was (a) I wouldn't have to work for years paying off something I didn't want to do in the first place, and (b) I wouldn't have to drive very far to skip classes.

The next year, when all my friends transferred to Arizona State University, I did too. My social life there centered around Campus Crusade for Christ—an organization even more formidable than the 8<sup>th</sup> Century Crusaders for which it was named.

Not into annoying proselytizing myself, I proceeded to use CCC as my own personal dating service. Almost immediately, I was ticking through boyfriends with Olympic speed. The problem was that all the guys were Good Christian Boys who'd never *think* of having premarital sex. Actually, they thought about it quite a bit, the problem was every time they started feeling funny downstairs, they'd pop the question.

I can't tell you how many times a premature marriage proposal put the kibosh on a perfectly good romance. Sadly, should a girl nix a guy's generous offer to support her "‘til death they do part" in exchange for a lifetime of nooky, he'd be off to the next girl. Nothing personal. That's just the way things are in the no-sex-before-marriage world.

The pressure only ratcheted up as the years clicked by, leaving coeds to watch the marriage pool being drained by a quarter each June, leaving them swimming in a tank full of half-dead fish.

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Each Spring, “Take me!” “Choose me!” could be heard ricocheting from the Language & Literature Building to the Student Union and back again. Life-long unions were sealed with a third-date kiss, chapels booked months in advance and couples lucky if they could squeeze in a bit of pre-marital counseling before graduation day.

Like most girls, I envisioned myself in a white puffy dress, dodging rice and toasters as I glided down the aisle. In the Born-Again World, it didn’t much matter who you married since everyone was taught the same things and therefore believed the same things. In fact, the only real decision was whether you wanted your kids to have brown hair or blonde.

But not me. I still believed in *The One*. My very own Prince Charming who God had created just for me. The boy whose job it was to love me.

As for finding *The One*, well, that was the conundrum. My first thought went to low hanging fruit. As it turned out, a real prince of my exact age already existed in the world—Charles, Prince of Wales. As for meeting him, that might be as easy as loitering around Hyde Park, enduring all the self-righteous pontificating until he wandered by in his bowler hat.

Still, what if Prince Charles wasn't *my* Prince Charming? He wasn't, after all, all that cute. What if our kids came out with those big ole Dumbo ears? And so, wise beyond my years, I relegated marrying Prince Charles to Plan B. Plan A remained smooching my way through college and marrying the very best kisser.

It wasn’t long before I acquired a reputation as a kisser-and-not-marry-er. Abandoning the scorched earth of Campus Crusade, I searched out other Christian organizations on campus. I quit Student Mob—short for “Mobilization”—after finding the boys there irredeemably dorky. I lasted a bit longer at *Faith Rests*, quitting only after they flunked my homework assignment of writing a 10-page summary of the Old Testament and expected me to spend the entire weekend rewriting it.

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By the second semester of my senior year, I'd taken every cushy course ASU had to offer. I hadn't seen my guidance counselor since my sophomore year when I'd showed up every other week to change my major. Back then, Mr. Todd told me to come back when my natural talents had shown me my true course in life.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "C'mon in."

"You look surprised," I said, entering.

"Actually, I am. I figured you'd have dropped out by now."

"With my parents, not an option. Anyway, I made a list of my classes and I wanna know what else I need in order to graduate."

I handed over my list: Physical Education. Coed Water Safety. Intro to Sociology. Personal & Social Adjustment. Survey of Musical Theater. Synchronized Swimming. Creative Writing. Composition. Prose. Clothing Construction. Clothing *Selection*. Geography of Europe. Family Relationships. Mass Communications. Magazine Writing. Advertising. And my personal favorite, Introduction to Extreme Anal Behavior.

"What? No Trampoline 101?" asked Mr. Todd.

"They got that?"

"Kidding."

"Oh, look! You got an A."

"Really? Where?"

"Again, kidding."

Mr. Todd didn't say anything for a long while. "*Hmm*," he said at last. "*Hmm*, "*Hmm*."

"What?"

"Well, here's the skinny, kiddo. College ain't like high school. You can't just hotdog it for four years and get to graduate. In college, you gotta actually major in something."

“I thought you might just bundle this into a major. Lemme know what I need to fill in the blanks.”

“Except, these courses have nothing in common except they’re all introductory. You need 30 hours in the same field in order to graduate.”

*This wasn’t good. Not good at all. My parents had been forking over \$69 in tuition every semester since community college. They expected me to graduate.*

So, how do I get outta here?”

Mr. Todd and I stared at each other for what seemed like another three and a half years.

“Well,” he said at last, “I guess you just quit.”

*Gee. You could’ve mentioned that sooner.*

**EXITING COLLEGE** with no degree and no husband ticked off my frugal parents no end. And not just because they’d waisted \$276 in tuition, but because there were no grandchildren in their foreseeable future.

Thankfully, I was able to present them with an alternative almost as enticing as the prospect of procreating—fulfilling my destiny as a world-famous Creative Writer.

Except I didn’t really want to be a Creative Writer. What I wanted to be was a Creative Live-er. And although more than a few famous authors had managed both, I had no intention of ending up like those rummies, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Luckily, I had another mentor, fictional though she might be. Maisie Ravier was a fast-talking, curly-haired, ruffles-and-frills burlesque dancer portrayed by Ann Sothern in ten Depression-era films. Like me, Maisie was a teetotaling virgin. Unlike me, it had nothing to do with her parents and everything to do with the equally formidable Hayes Motion Picture Code.



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Maisie's show biz career never lasted longer than the first few minutes in any one film. From then on, the showgirl with a heart of gold would find herself stranded in some exotic locale, taking one half-baked job after another, finding true love as easily as she found funds to finance her travels.

In one film, she was a barker at a Wyoming midway shooting gallery where she fell in love with a cowboy named Slim. In another, her stowaway butt got booted off a steamboat in the Congo where she proceeded to save her doctor-beau from local "savages" with the aid of her sequined skirt and a conveniently timed thunderstorm. In another, the bubble-bath model helped her cute cop boyfriend nab the scallywags who'd made off with her jewelry.

I could go on and on. Maisie certainly did.

But what I liked most about her movies was that each was complete, with no reference to the true love that came before. No matter how perfect her "Happily Ever After," by the next film, she'd have acquired an endearing case of romantic amnesia, never pining for the Robert Young, George Murphy or Red Skelton she'd left behind. Always, effortlessly, finding another handsome/adorable/hunky/cute new boyfriend to take his place.

*This was so me.*

Or rather, who I aspired to be.

All my romances would be terribly meaningful as long as they lasted. And when it was time to move on, there'd be no pining, no looking back, just a moment tucked away like a gem in a jewelry box. And then another boyfriend in another town down the road.

*Faysie-Maisie.*

*I liked that.*

## **Chapter 2**

### **My Boyfriend's Back & There's Gonna Be Laundry**

**May 20-31, 1972**

*\*Vietnam: Nixon says bombing won't stop until POWs released \*In Other News: George Wallace paralyzed in assassination attempt \*On TV: All in the Family; The Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour; Mary Tyler Moore \*On the Radio: Roberta Flack's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face"*

#### **Los Gatos, California**

CONVINCING MY PARENTS I had to leave Phoenix in order to fulfill my destiny as a Creative Writer wasn't all that difficult. Even they had to admit that although I was wildly talented, nobody was creative enough to find anything to write about in Phoenix. And so, they waved me off to Northern California to room with my best friend from my camp counseling days in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

By the time I arrived, Cherie had rented us an apartment in Los Gatos, arguably the jewel in a vast suburban wasteland where shopping center-centric cities like Sunnyvale, Cupertino, Campbell, Santa Clara and San Jose all melted together without personality or distinction.

Our converted two-car garage apartment was separated from a main house by an interior wall and there lived a 60ish couple. And if their knock-out, drag-down fights sounded like they were coming from the next room, it was because they literally were. More than once, I expected them to come crashing through the wall.

Cherie and I had the same quirky sense of humor, love of life, fundamentalist Christian upbringing, and of course, teetotaling virgin ways. Like me, Cherie was independently poor and consequentially thin. Unlike me, she had alabaster skin, pale blonde hippie-hair and Twiggy's untuned lankiness.

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Whereas I was “blessed” with Esther Williams curves and Cat Ballou hair that looked like it’d been styled in a wind tunnel.

And since no family is complete without pets, we adopted a collie mix, Chum, and a black and white kitty we called, “Telephone,” because it cracked us up to go outside and yell her name.

Cherie graduated with a degree in Art History which qualified her for a secretarial job in a law firm. Well, good for her because she could both type and spell.

Meanwhile, I found work at Cupertino High School as a “Cafeteria Supervisor” which paid an astounding \$5 per hour, three times the minimum wage. Sadly, I only worked an hour a day, my sole duty making sure the kids put their trays away after lunch. Still, I took my job seriously, even chasing the little jerks out the door and across campus, only to return to find their evil cohorts had left me with a room full of dirty dishes.

And even though my \$100 monthly income easily covered my half of our \$70 rent, I took an afternoon job driving a Good Humor ice cream truck.

My commissions ranged from \$12 to \$17 per day depending upon the neighborhood and weather. Most days I drew the far-flung route of Milpitas, a town so devoid of residents, it left me wondering if the Rapture had happened and I was the only one not taken.

Five months of Northern California and I was ready to move on. It wasn’t that I didn’t like Los Gatos. What was not to like? Within a 100-mile radius was the beach at Santa Cruz, the aquarium at Monterey, the gingerbread houses of Carmel, the Gold Country in the Sierra Nevada’s, the cable cars chugging over the hills of San Francisco, the wineries of Sonoma, the tubing at Russian River and the oysters of Bodega Bay. But if Northern California was this terrific, I thought, what must the rest of the country be like?

New Orleans!

Florida!

Appalachia!

New England!

It took almost nothing to convince Cherie to come along on “My Grand Adventure.”

And then, just as we were packing to leave, everything changed.

**“GET UP;”** said Cherie, “I sold the bed.”

I rolled over onto the shag carpet and a couple of guys yanked up the mattress and walked it out the door. I tried going back to sleep but Chum kept licking the lotion off my legs, so good luck with that.

You still want that old Underwood?” Cherie asked, nudging me with her toe. I knew she’d try something like this. Which was why I was using it for a pillow.

“We get to keep one thing, remember?”

“*Harrumph*. I’ve never even seen you type,” said Cherie, flouncing off. I found it amusing that Cherie never actually *harrumphed*, she just said the word instead.

“You’ll see me type in Phoenix!” I called after her.

“And then I’ll never see you type again!”

I turned over and went back to sleep. The dream always began the same.

## **Pearly Gates, Heaven**

*I peered through the ornate gate at the empty mansions lining the deserted golden streets. There was nobody inside. Not a sign of life.*

*Not so, for the two lines waiting to get in. There was one sign that said, “Long Line,” and next to it another reading, “Express Line.” Both stretched back as far as the eye could see. Neither seemed to be moving.*

*In the Express Line were the rosy-cheeked virgins. Brides and grooms nuzzling each other's noses like Eskimos. Young parents cooing at their infants. Gray-haired grandparents gazing lovingly into each other's eyes. Secretaries with tee-shirts that bragged, "I married my boss!" And the Twelve Disciples who'd you'd think would've gotten into Heaven by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, at least.*

*In the Long Line were the unwed mothers with their squawking babies. Lesbians with bad haircuts. Long-hairs passing stubby hand-rolled reefers. Teenage boys guzzling Schlitz out of paper sacks. Flappers fresh from Prohibition. Society dames who'd dropped dead mid-martini at the Copacabana. Freight-hopping hobos clutching their tin cups and tattered blankets. And, of course, Hitler.*

*"Excuse me!" I said to the pretty blonde angel, the spitting image of Glenda the Good Witch. She was holding a clipboard, had a Bic pen behind her ear and a wingspan so wide she had to turn sideways to walk. "Can you tell me which line I should be in?"*

*Celeste gave me a long, hard look. She made a swirly motion and I dutifully twirled. She eyed my backpack with a scowl that turned to disgust when her eyes dropped to the third finger of my left hand, ringless as it were. Celeste gave me a hairy eyeball the likes of which I'd never seen on Planet Earth. And by the time I died, I'd seen a lot of hairy eyeballs.*

*"Back of the Long Line," said the angel, walking away.*

## **Los Gatos, California**

BY THE TIME I meandered out to our dwindling garage sale, Cherie was splayed out on an aluminum lawn chair, her shorts hiked up on her painfully rosy thighs, her eyes laser-beamed into Irving Wallace's *The Word*.

"I'm hungry," I said.

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“My. Body. Does. Not. Require. Food,” said Cherie in her annoying robot-voice.

“I’m not like you. I faint.”

“Taco Bell?” she sighed.

As if we ever ate anywhere else.

We dragged the rest of our stuff out to the driveway, plopped a big “FREE!” sign on top and took off for the home of the 6-item, 19¢ menu.

We returned to find a large malamute behind our screen door.

“There’s a dog in our apartment,” I whispered.

“What’s a dog doing in our apartment?” she whispered back.

“Looks like Perfect’s dog.”

“What would Perfect’s dog be doing in our apartment?”

“Should we call the fuzz?”

“And say what? There’s a dog in our apartment?”

We entered to find not only Micah in our apartment, but “Perfect” as well.

My old college crush was lounging on his overstuffed backpack, all Marlboro Manish in his straight-legged jeans and denim jacket, munching his way through our grocery sack of cherries meant to last a week. Micah and Chum were crouching and pouncing, slobbering as they tugged at each other’s ears while Telephone was on top of the refrigerator, screeching her little lungs out.

Cherie and I hadn’t seen Perfect since we’d hitchhiked 225 miles to surprise him a couple of months before. (Sure, we both had cars. What we didn’t have was money for gas.)

For months, my roommate had been waxing poetic about Lake Tahoe, a body of water so undefinably blue it could be described as cobalt, turquoise, aquamarine, indigo or sapphire, depending upon the weather. Of a lake so cold skiers had to wear wetsuits. and snowy slopes so sunny, folks

whooshed down them in shorts and tee-shirts. There were casinos where free cocktails were served at the slot machines and practically famous folk singers warbled at faux-Swiss chalets.

It took Cherie and me eleven hours and seventeen rides to get to South Lake Tahoe, which as it turns out is nowhere near North Lake Tahoe. It took another hour for Perfect to drive over icy roads to come fetch us, and another hour to haul us back to his cabin in the woods.

We poured Telephone out of her pillowcase and she shot up onto the refrigerator where she stayed all weekend, screeching as a smitten Micah panted at her from below.

Cherie took one look at Perfect's Jesus hair, Dr. Zhivago mustache, Sundance Kid smile and Rhett Butler dimples and did some panting of her own.

"Perfect," she purred.

"Told'ja."

When I returned from changing into my red-and-white striped flannel onesie, Perfect had stripped down to a tee-shirt and boxer shorts and Cherie into her oversized San Jose State tee-shirt.

I scanned the room.

One bed. One couch. One floor.

One him. One her. One me.

Perfect would get the bed, of course.

*Aha! I had this!*

I leapt onto the sofa, flashing my pal a triumphant grin. Then to my horror, Cherie vaulted directly onto the bed and shot me a triumphant grin of her own.

Perfect climbed in beside Cherie and turned off the light.

*Gee willikers. Never saw that coming.*

"**I SAW HIM** first," I hissed as we laid out our sleeping bags on the dirt-colored shag carpet that first night Perfect came to live with us.

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“Bummer for you,” said Cherie, “since ‘first dibs’ is not a covenant I feel compelled to honor, given it’s not in Leviticus, let alone any other obscure Old Testament tome.”

I wasn’t surprised. I hadn’t learned much in college but one thing I knew. There was no honor among bridesmaids.

The next morning, Cherie schlepped off to work out her two weeks’ notice, a compulsion I did not share since (a) Cupertino High had let out for the summer, and (b) as it turns out, quitting the ice cream business requires no notice whatsoever.

Every day, Perfect and I went out exploring. The first day, we hiked to the Garden of Eden, a clothing-optional hippie swimming hole deep in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The next day, we picnicked at the old covered bridge in Felton, hiked the narrow gauge railroad tracks through the redwoods and waded through the holed boulder at Natural Bridges State Park. Another day, we glided in a gondola over the Santa Cruz Boardwalk, swayed to the street musicians outside the old Cooper House and rode our bikes down to Capitola’s creek-side cottages and pastel Venetian bungalows lined lagoon.

Every day, we’d talk and talk and talk. About how the FBI had bugged John Lennon’s phone. How the Chicago Seven’s convictions were being overturned. About the spate of skyjackings ever since D.B. Cooper had become a national folk hero for parachuting into the Oregon wilderness with \$200,000 in ransom money. And all the while, Perfect’s dazzling dimples dancing like the flawed human condition was the most hilarious thing on earth.

Evenings would find Cherie and me flirting outrageously behind each other’s backs while Perfect remained as unreadable as 4-point italic type. He could be into either of us or neither of us, it was impossible to tell.

Nighttime was the worst. Our sleeping arrangement became three little soldiers—girl, boy, girl—in a smart row, each of us careful not to bend a leg or arm that might inadvertently touch another.



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Every night I'd wait for Cherie's gentle breath of sleep, then expand and contract my chest in a silent dog-whistle which proved so faint even Micah and Chum slept through it.

**ONE DAY** I came home to find Perfect nowhere in sight. His van was there. Micah was there, leaping and pouncing, slobbering all over Chum, but as for Perfect, he was MIA.

I was searching for our grocery bag of cherries when an old friend called from Phoenix.

"Yeah, I'm seeing a guy," I said, scanning the apartment for cherries.

*Okay, not at the moment.*

.....

"Well, I don't know if you'd call him my boyfriend *exactly*. We *are* living together. Okay, not *living*-living together, but sleeping together. Okay, not *sleeping*-sleeping together, not shackin' up or anything, but—"

I walked around, pulling the long curly phone cord behind me, searching for cherries.

.....

"Yeah, well, the hiccup's my cruddy roommate. She's bonkers over him too. But I got a plan. I'm gonna whisk him away on a freight train to Canada. It'll be like *It Happened One Night*, except with hobos."

Right about then, it occurred to me just how odd it was for Micah to be there. And Perfect's van to be there. And for Perfect *not* to be there.

I pulled the pink princess phone over to the screen door and peered out. Yup, his van was there, alright. The cord trailed behind me to the bathroom. I yanked back the shower curtain and peered into the tub. No Perfect.

And still no cherries.

That's when I saw the accordion doors to our wall-kitchen pulled shut. That was odd. Cherie and I never closed those doors. But he couldn't be in there. The entire kitchen—stove, fridge, cabinets, countertop—were shoved up against one wall. With the door shut, there wasn't even room to stand.

“Later-scater,” I whispered, hanging up.

I tiptoed over and slowly pulled open the folding doors. And there was Perfect. Sitting on the countertop. Boots in the sink. Munching away on our nearly depleted bag of cherries.

“Processing,” he grinned.

## **Eugene, Oregon**

“PARDON ME,” I said to Ethel, our gum-smacking waitress. “Where are we?”

“The It'll Do Diner, hon. Folgers?”

“Please. But what country?”

“Uh, America?”

“The *continent* of America? Or the *United States* of America?”

Perfect slid the menu across the Formica table and pointed out the Eugene, Oregon address. We'd come two hundred miles in thirteen hours, meaning our freight train had been galloping toward Canada at the breakneck speed of 15 miles per hour.

*And to think I was worried we'd overshoot.*

In the restroom freshening up, I saw what Ethel and Perfect had been too kind to mention.

*Eeeekkkk!!!!*

I'd pictured my appearance something akin to Perfect's, looking dapper in his fur-lined denim jacket, straight-legged Levi's and hiking boots with one dramatic stripe of black soot looking like it'd been applied by Way Bandy. But *nooo*. Instead, I looked like I'd stumbled out of Pompeii in 79 AD. Or more accurately, been dug up 2,000 years later.

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It was no wonder. It had been one heck of a trip. With no trains running through Los Gatos, our plan had been to hitch to San Francisco and catch a freight from there. Happily, we'd caught a 300 mile ride all the way to Mount Shasta. And while I'd arrived at the freight yard looking mighty fine—what with my woofy curls spilling out of my Ali-McGraw woolen cap onto my red checkered lumber jacket—after a night of slamming through freight yards, kept awake by the screeching of the metal wheels on tracks, the tree limbs scraping against the boxcar like ghosts clawing to get in, the whistle blasting at every roadway crossing and the stench of diesel fuel as we thundered through the tunnels, by the time we stumbled out of the boxcar at dawn, I look like I'd aged seven years.

In doggie-years.

Now what they don't tell you—and by “they” I mean the authors of the bestselling freight-hopping guidebooks—is to go potty before vaulting into the first boxcar you see. And that's because while a freight train may indeed reach speeds up to 100 miles-per-hour, it's normally up-and-down within the same four inches. And if you're sharing a sleeping bag with a guy you haven't even made out with, this isn't something you necessarily want to share. And yet, share you must, lest you might soon be sharing something else.

Another thing the hotshot authors don't tell you is that urine does not evaporate when the temperature drops below freezing. Nor that there will be none of those helpful signs like at the Amtrak station. Nor that when you finally disembark, you will have absolutely no idea where you are and will have to tromp across a sooty, snowy field to find out.

By the time I arrived back from my cold-water cleanup, Perfect had learned there were no northbound trains scheduled to leave before 6 p.m. Even more distressing, it was illegal to hitchhike in Washington state.

“Luckily,” said Perfect, “lounging beside the roadside is legal as long as you keep your thumb in your mittens.”

Which was okay with me since I had no intention of taking my thumbs out of my mittens until the summer solstice.

And so, ended our Freight Train Boogie blues.

## **Canadian Border**

CHECKING OUT CANADA didn't take long. Rebuffed by the Mounties always on the lookout for draft dodgers, we had no choice but to find a cheap motel and try again the next day with a different set of Mounties.

We tarried just long enough at Peace Arch Park to grab a postcard for Jack Easley—a random stranger plucked from the Blaine, Washington phone book the night before—before heading back to Los Gatos.

Our first ride was in a converted milk truck heading down Interstate 5 all the way to Los Angeles, leaving us off at Patterson, just 80 miles across the mountains from Los Gatos. Our driver was Matt, a 22-year-old recently divorced guy tooling around America in hopes of healing his broken heart.

Matt continued to pick up every long-haired hippie along the roadway until the truck was packed tighter than a Mexican jail cell. South of Portland, Matt stopped for one last thumb-bum. And so, with the addition of “Moonbeam,” a 15-year-old waif with chopped yellow hair, Daisy Duke shorts and a fake fur-lined parka, Matt's broken heart was broken no more.

Perfect and I snuggled together on the long sleeping bench, averting our eyes from the near-naked hippies writhing on the floor below.

“I may never have sex again,” I groaned.

“You've had sex?”

“Well, no. But now, I never will.”

It was past midnight when we rolled across the California boarder. I'd drifted into a sort of half-slumber, soothed by the lullaby of hushed voices and the soft rumble of the engine when I suddenly

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felt myself falling. Like I was in an earthquake in the sky. No, like in a dryer with a bunch of pots and pans. And then—*bam!*—I landed in a pile of wriggling snakes. Snakes with elbows.

It was only when the milk truck came to a stop that I realized the screeching had been it scraping the asphalt as it swirled in circles down the highway.

“Faybo!”

“Here!”

Perfect reached down through a jumble of backpacks and body parts—thankfully all still attached—and yanked me out of the human stew. Gagging on the stench of gasoline mixed with the sweet smell of weed, we crawled toward the lone shaft of light streaming from the driver’s door. Perfect pushed me up and out, I landed on the wheel and shot directly onto the freeway. He was right there, dragging me to safety.

One by one, hippies dropped onto the shoulder of the road beside me. Good Samaritans stopped, directed traffic around the crash site, brought us water and blankets, even located Matt 200 yards back, unconscious but alive.

But where was Perfect?

And then I saw him. Cross-legged on the top of the truck, his bandana tied bandit-style across his mouth, reaching down and pulling out stunned hippies, one by one.

In the ambulance to Chico, we learned the cause of the crash. Matt was standing up, teaching Moonbeam to drive when he lost control of the truck. As for the little runaway, she’d caught the first ride out of there, never waiting to see if any of us had lived or died.

## **Chapter 3**

### **See Ya**

**June 1 - 14, 1972**

*\*Vietnam: Navy Seals rescue 2 POWs \*At the Movies: Butterflies are Free \*On the Radio: Sammy Davis Jr.'s "The Candy Man"*

### **Los Gatos, California**

I CRAMMED all Cherie's and my things—whites and darks, jeans and undies—into an industrial-sized washer while Perfect shook and sorted every garment, read every label and placed every color-coordinated pile into its own machine. An hour later, I was sitting on a cardboard box of wrinkly clothes waiting while he slid wire inserts into his straight-legged Levis so they'd have a crease down the front.

I am so not making this up.

I couldn't believe this guy. We were leaving first thing in the morning and Perfect had missed every opportunity to jump my bones. Not back at the Winchester Mystery House where we'd found ourselves alone on the Staircase to Nowhere. Not in the frigid boxcar, smushed together tighter than Siamese twins. Not even in the cheap motel room in Blaine, Washington when he insisted we go halvesies.

And then there was his most egregiously missed opportunity, that very morning when we'd hiked up to a secluded eucalyptus grove in the Stanford Hills. And there in that most romantic of settings—with a view of the Farallon Islands to the west, Mount Diablo to the east, San Francisco the north and San Jose to the South—my long tan legs stretched out to catch the sun, my peasant blouse pulled down on my shoulders, my eyelashes batting wildly behind my Jackie O sunglasses and Jungle Red toenail polish glinting off my wriggling toes—what does the guy do?

Nothing.

Nada.

Not a thing.

And then, halfway down the hillside, in an open meadow of what looked like golden pillows from afar but were actually quite prickly yellow reeds, Perfect tossed down his silver space blanket and proceeded to pounce. I had but a nanosecond to enjoy the moment when that scene in *From Here to Eternity* flashed before my eyes—you know, the one where Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr are necking in the surf and it looks like so much fun except you just know she's going to be washing the sand out of her privates for, well, an eternity.

But then I thought of something Deb obviously had not. If we could see from here to eternity—or in this case, the Town & Country Village in Palo Alto—then everyone in the Town & Country Village could see us as well. Along with any random hiker/peeping Tom who happened by.

“Uh—”

“Hmm?”

“The nice, secluded glen wouldn't do?”

It wasn't meant to be a deal-breaker. I wasn't asking him to stop. I was just negotiating the venue.

“**SEE YA,**” was the extent of Perfect's tearful farewell. He waved us off, staying behind to hand over the keys to the landlord before taking off to a remote island off British Columbia where he was spending the summer helping a friend build a cabin.

Cherie was as glad as I was to be driving our own cars as far as Phoenix where we'd leave my old Rambler station wagon, Bessie, with my parents and continue on in her Honda Z. Had the previous night's showdown happened a few days earlier, we might have called off the trip altogether. But, thankfully, when 7 a.m. arrived, we just got up and went.

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

The hoopla all began innocently enough. Perfect and I arrived back from the laundromat to find Cherie cross-legged on the floor, swaying gently to “Brandy (You’re a Fine Girl)” on her transistor radio. As soon as Perfect went out to change his oil, she produced a bottle of Southern Comfort left by the previous tenant, wiped its neck, took a swig and passed it to me. A half hour later, with our inhibitions as loose as our lips, we finally addressed the elephant outside swabbing bird poo off his windshield.

I’m a little fuzzy on how the whole thing came down because there was a lot of Southern Comfort involved, but I do remember us fussing about who Perfect loved most. I recall him coming in to find us knee high in laundry and three sheets to the wind. Cherie insisting he choose between us—which was ridiculous because we were all headed out the next morning and we might not ever see him again.

I remember Cherie disappearing into the bathroom. Her returning in her bra and panties, swaying seductively in the dim light of the doorway like she was in a budget production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

I remember her careening around boxes. Grabbing her keys. The screeching of the Z as she backed into busy Los Gatos Almaden Road.

Cherie was gone an awfully long time, leaving Perfect and me to lay side by side in the darkness, my thoroughly fuzzy self throbbing with excitement, but too scared to make a move lest Cherie return at any moment. And she could be quite stealth when she wanted to be.

And then, Perfect inching closer. Feeling his breath on my face. A thin shaft of light spreading across the floor. The quiet squish of feet on carpeting, the whoosh of my roommate sinking down onto her usual spot beside Perfect. Or rather where Perfect should have been.

He and I remained uncomfortably stacked until Cherie’s eventual rhythmic breath of sleep. Only then did he quietly, gently, roll back into place. And me thinking—Goodnight, sweet prince. Or more likely, goodbye.



## Los Gatos to Phoenix

IT WAS seventeen hours from the Bay Area to Phoenix if you took the most traveled route, Highway 101 to Los Angeles and then Interstate 10 on into Phoenix.

Leaving first thing in the morning would land one smack in the kind of traffic which turned Los Angeles into a linear parking lot during the commute hour. And it was no picnic from there on either, given the two-lane road into Phoenix meandered 20 miles out of its way to pass through Wickenburg before joining up with stop-and-go traffic through Sun City, Surprise, Peoria, and Glendale.

And so, Cherie and I'd decided to skirt Los Angeles altogether, follow Route 66 to the Colorado River, then dip down to join I-10 into Phoenix.

All day long, we hop-scotched down Highway 101, stopping only for gas and postcards for Jack Easley, my new pen pal plucked from the Blaine, Washington telephone book.

Our singular glimpse of the ocean came at Pismo Beach before turning east for the torturous climb over the Sierra Madres. Dipping down into the desolate Cuyama Valley, we traversed 80 miles of scrubby wasteland before reaching the 40-mile mountain pass known as The Grapevine.

Our uphill climb was a series of frustrating attempts at passing one slow-moving truck after another without the engine power to do so until we crested the hill, reveling in the *whee!!!* as we tumbled down the other side, only to be shot down by a killjoy of a state trooper with a radar gun.

From Gorman, we took Highway 138 through the high desert beneath a setting sun in shades of saffron, tangerine and flamingo. Once the world melted into blackness, there were no towns, hence no streetlights. No farms, hence no house lights. No moon, no nothing, not even a danged UFO. Just fifty miles of florescent strip lighting our way a hundred feet at a time.

Lulled by the road's monotony, I realized I'd lost sight of Cherie's taillights. I raced to catch up, only to have them disappear at the next dip in the road. Bessie's speedometer rose from 50 to 80 as my parents' old Rambler shuddered in protest.

“She must be going a hundred miles an hour,” I muttered to Chum’s little puppy dog head asleep in my lap.

Now with Perfect a thing of the past, I longed for Cherie and I to be best friends again. Boyfriends come and go, I told myself, girlfriends are forever.

It took fifteen minutes to catch up to “Cherie.” Except it wasn’t Cherie. It wasn’t even a Honda. I passed the coupe and sped up to the next set of taillights.

Still not Cherie.

I zoomed up to the next set.

Again, not Cherie.

*Dadgummit!* She couldn’t be *that* mad. Ticked off enough to ditch me? Pissed enough to drive all the way to Phoenix alone? Irked enough to hide until I passed on by, turn around and head back to California?

I spent 40 minutes ripping through the warm night, chasing one set of taillights after another. Finally, I came to a “T” in the road, a spot so desolate the only sign of life was the one that read Mojave was 20 miles to the north and Lancaster 5 miles to the south.

*Really, Cherie? Really?*

Why wasn’t she waiting for me here? We’d agreed to stop for the night in Lancaster, but how could I find her in a town neither of us had ever been?

I pulled over and let Chum out to pee. I was fishing Telephone from under the seat when a pair of headlights sliced through the Rambler. A car screeched up, spewing gravel and turning the cat into a ballistic furry windmill.

“Son of a motherless goat!” Cherie screamed, slapping Bessie’s hood.

“You must’ve been going 100 miles an hour!”

## **Phoenix, Arizona**

“YOUR MAIL’S in the kitchen,” said Mom. “Oh, and some guy called.”

“Harry?”

“Nope. There on the table.”

I found the name and number on a page torn from the inspirational calendar Mom kept by the phone. On it was Perfect’s name along with a 7-digit telephone number.

“Mom? The area code?”

“Didn’t say—602?”

It couldn’t be. Area code 602 spanned the entire state of Arizona. The last time I’d seen Perfect was in 408, headed north into area codes unknown.

*Vintage Perfect. Had to be mysterious.*

I dialed the 7-digit number and Perfect answered.

“Faybulous!”

“You’re in Phoenix?”

“Dropping off some stuff at my folk’s. I didn’t say? Oh, well, it was a bit nutsola there at the end. Anyway, just called to say ‘hi.’”

“Uh, okay, hi.”

“Well then—see ya!”

And then, he hung up.

*You gotta be friggin’ kidding me.*

So, what now? Knowing Perfect, he’d just show up at my parents’ house. Maybe today, maybe tomorrow. Certainly, without calling first. Meaning I couldn’t go anywhere. I’d have to sit by the phone and wait. I didn’t even bother telling Cherie. She was still smarting from the whole showdown lallapaloosa. And, knowing Perfect, he might not come around at all.

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

Two days came and went without so much as a phone call from The See-Ya Jerk. By Day #3, I'd about lost my marbles. Cherie and I were friends again, so that was good. And I dutifully put in some time at the typewriter so my parents remained convinced I was still on track to becoming a World Famous Creative Writer. Still, Cherie and I were leaving for Kansas City in two days and Perfect didn't even know that.

Like he even cared.

Oh, I know! He's waiting for me to make a move. Of course, he is. After all, if he showed up here, there'd be the problem of Cherie. It was up to me to make this happen.

I came up with a plan. Six a.m., I shook Cherie awake, saying I was going for a bike ride and asking if she wanted to come along. "Get lost," she mumbled, turned over and going back to sleep.

*Yahoo!*

Now, all I had to do was pedal down Dunlap Avenue past short, squat Sunnyslope Mountain with its Superman-shaped "S" whitewashed each year by incoming freshman, up Central Avenue to Glendale, follow Lincoln Drive through the yellow and orange African violets blanketing Squaw Peak, past Barry Goldwater's house on the hill, then on into Perfect's Arcadia neighborhood.

No big deal, just as long as I got there by 9 a.m. before the temperature hit 100+ degrees. Perfect would open the door and there I'd be, all tan and buff and *thin* given a very flattering case of dehydration which would've sucked every bit of water weight from my body.

**KNOCK. KNOCK.**

Ding-dong.

*Pant, pant.*

"Oh, Lordy." Perfect was staring at me like I'd just stumbled out of Donner Pass without having a big breakfast of friend first. His mother gave me a glass of ice water and made me lie down on the couch. She wanted to call an ambulance, but Perfect said I'd probably be okay. I pretended I *was*

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

okay; blathering on, feeling my words fall out of my mouth like a broken kaleidoscope, then giggling and trying again with no more success.

I awoke to find Perfect and his mother off in the kitchen quibbling about whether I was too young to be considered eccentric or might still pass for quirky. When I hauled myself into the bathroom, I saw what they saw, a sopping mess of lanky, sweat-soaked hair framing a beet-red, mascara-streaked face. I washed, went back out, breathed in the cool air conditioning and fell back asleep on the couch.

It must have been 3 o'clock when Perfect hauled me and my bike back to Sunnyslope. Dad led me past a startled Cherie into my lilac room where I slept the rest of the day and most of the night.

The next morning, Telephone took one look at Cherie's Honda Z, clawed her way out of my arms and raced back into the house where she hid herself so expertly the Gestapo couldn't have found her. When Mom suggested the cat come live with them—as had all my pets since college—Cherie and I happily agreed.

And then, we were off on the start of Our Grand Adventure.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Been There, Born There**

#### **June 15 - August 1972**

*\*Vietnam: Photos published of “Hanoi Jane” & South Vietnamese children running from napalm*

*\*Watergate: “White House Plumbers” break into DNC’s headquarters \*In Other News: Billy Graham’s Texas rally draws 75,000; Pilots strike for better security; U.S. median income is \$10,285 \*At the Movies: Deep Throat; Deliverance \*On the Radio: Gilbert O’Sullivan’s “Alone Again (Naturally)”*

#### **Kansas City, Missouri**

EVEN BEFORE Cherie and I left Los Gatos, we determined there were three things we needed to make ourselves happy in every place we stayed.

Apartments. Jobs. Boyfriends.

We called it The Holy Trilogy.

#### **Place to Live**

MY 83-YEAR-OLD grandmother still lived alone in my childhood home, high on the hill overlooking the old airport in Kansas City, Missouri.

Hawthorne Circle was a cul-de-sac of five houses with zero backyard fences to restrict kids and dogs roaming between them. My family moved there in 1950, the year after the house and I were both born. Like most families post-World War II, my parents lived with their parents until they could afford a home of their own.

Gram’s house was designed by Mom, adding to the legend there was nothing my mother couldn’t do. The simple 3-bedroom, 2-bath floor plan had a glass porch overlooking the street, and a built-in china cabinet to display Gram’s collection of hand-painted plates, mother of pearl tea sets, Haviland china and sterling silver decanters.

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

My parents had been begging Gram to come live with them for years, but she preferred to remain in her own home with her soap opera families.

As a kid, I watched the soaps with her. For years I thought this was one long program where the characters came and went throughout the day. Thanks to her, I was so hooked on daytime dramas that I set up a voice recorder to tape *The Guiding Light*, *Love of Life* and *Search for Tomorrow* when my college classes conflicted with their time slots.

No less addicted by summer, Gram wrote me long letters when I worked as a camp counselor, chronicling the slow-moving, blow-by-blow action, logging each character's questionable decision and/or disturbing behavior. Her letters were a great source of amusement to my fellow counselors who'd invariably gather around as I read them aloud.

Visiting Gram brought back all my childhood memories. My fourth birthday when I made a construction paper crown and wore it next door to "Aunt Casey's" to announce, "Bet'cha don't know why I'm wearing this crown!" The old lady across "the big street" who had no grandchildren of her own so she bought toys so the neighborhood kids would come play at her house. The field where my daddy helped me catch fireflies and put them in Mason jars with holes punched in the lids. And where he watched and clapped as I rolled down the long grassy hill toward the creek.

We got the first Chum dog toward the end of her life and not in the usual way. Dad was working at Sears and sold a refrigerator to a man who'd stopped paying. With his commission in jeopardy, Pops went to collect. Seeing the man's dire circumstances, Dad offered to make his payments in exchange for the old collie dog leashed in the back yard. And with that, Chum became a treasured member of our family.

Chum was twelve when we got her, which made her 84 in doggie years. I was four, which made me 28 in doggie years. That made Chum kind of like my doggy-grandma. And like any good grandma, I had only to hold onto her collar for her to lead me home when Mom whistled each evening at dusk.

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

My best friend, Kathy, lived on the cul-de-sac down the hill. We got in all manner of trouble together, for which everyone invariably blamed me. Like the time I was teaching her how to make flaming crepe suzettes and her mother's kitchen curtains spontaneously caught fire.

*Now really, how was that my fault?*

Or the time we were in Gram's basement, cutting out Betsy McCall paper dolls and I decided it would be *even more fun* to paint the cement floor white. And then, just at the very moment, the can fell over and paint went everywhere, Gram stuck her head down and hollered, "Girls! Don't touch the paint!"

The only fly in my childhood ointment was my brother, Daniel, who was quietly, behind the scenes, trying to kill me.

My parents had prayed to have a boy and then a girl, reasoning that the older brother would look after his treasured little sister. Their prayers were answered when Danny was born first, and then me, two and a half years later. Guess God didn't stick around long enough to hear Part 2, because the only looking-after my brother ever did was over his shoulder to make sure nobody was watching while he was trying to snuff out my tiny little life.

Danny had always been the prince in his kingdom ever since Mom almost lost him when she was six months pregnant. Dr. Stipe came over to confirm the baby was still there, but since Mom had flushed the blood down the toilet, he couldn't be sure there hadn't been a twin.

Despite Mom's being on bed rest, Danny arrived three months early, weighing in at 3 ½ pounds, so small in fact, that Dad could hold him in the palm of his hand. From then on, everyone, most especially Grandma, considered Danny a Gift from God.

That worked just great for Danny. That is until I came along and *ruined everything*. The exact opposite of my fragile older brother, I showed no signs of exiting the womb until I could be fitted for



my prom dress. By the time I was finally coaxed out six weeks past Mom's due date, I weighed 9 pounds 3 oz.

Born at home, 3:15 on a Sunday morning—forever after referred to as “in time for Sunday school”—I got there before Dr. Stipe did. Our beloved family doctor's first words were, “Oh, look! This time you've got a little girl!”

Gram's first words were, “Look, Jerry, she's got a dimple!”

Danny's first words were, “Let's frow that baby out the winder!”

Actually, he didn't say that until a little bit later. According to my plush pink baby book, Danny was “thrilled” to know his baby sister, “for whom he had been impatiently waiting,” was here. “He immediately went and got his bottle and a pair of outgrown socks,” Mom wrote, “and gave them to the baby, along with a big kiss.”

Before the week was out, Dad's eight brothers and sisters, my cousins in tow, arrived to check me out. As legend has it, I awoke to find the entire clan gathered around my crib. I studied each face in turn, then gave a mighty sigh, put my head down and went to sleep.

My mother carefully chronicled every adorable “first” in my baby book. How at five months, I wasn't crawling but rolling over to my destination. How I'd swat away Daddy's newspaper so I could sit on his lap. How I'd walk on my tippy toes, “as if she can hardly reach the ground.” About how my teeth came in, one by one, all over my mouth. How I wanted to quit kindergarten after a week because they hadn't taught me to read yet.

But, alas, my life wasn't as idyllic as my baby book would suggest. My big brother was, after all, trying to kill me.

From the time Danny had lips and I had ears, he'd been lying to me. For a while I believed everything he said, but eventually I caught on that everything that came out of his mouth was a big fat lie. Once my big brother had properly set me up, then came the payoff. Mom and Dad were at work,

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

Grandma was—I don't know where—and Grandpa was supposed to be watching us. Danny and I were playing in the back yard on a new swing set that had not yet been cemented into the ground. My brother was swinging, and I was watching the poles slide up and down into their holes.

“Hey, Dummy!” called Danny.

“Uh-huh?”

“If you stick your big toe under that, it'll cut it off.”

“Will not!”

“Will to!”

“Will not!”

“Will to!”

So, I did, and it did.

My screams summoned Grandpa who grabbed my severed toe and called Dr. Stipe who met us at the hospital and sewed it back on. Forever after, Mom referred to it as my \$40 toe.

Daniel got in trouble for telling me the truth, so naturally he went back to lying since he'd never gotten punished for that, not even once.

And so, it all began again. Fib after fib. Lie after lie. Danny kept it up until I was once again lulled back into the assurance that everything my big brother said was the opposite of being true.

Then came Easter Sunday. Danny and I were standing at the back of our station wagon waiting for our parents to stop talking to every single person they'd ever met in their lives, along with a bunch of people they hadn't. I was all dressed up in my frilly pink dress and what Mom called my “Margaret O'Brien” straw bonnet, looking mighty cute, I might add. Danny and I were chatting nicely for once, when my brother said—

“Hey, Dummy.”

“Uh-huh?”

“If you stick your face in that exhaust pipe, it’ll turn it black.”

“Will not!”

“Will too!”

“Will not!”

“Will too!”

So, I did, and it did.

After that, Daniel was barred from telling me the truth for an entire week.

The funny thing was however naughty my brother was, I always felt like Grandma loved him more than me. I think it was because everyone had spent so many hours praying for him to live while I came out practically a toddler. But the even funnier thing was that even though I knew Gram loved Danny best, I still loved her more than almost everyone else in the world put together.

I was nine when my dad’s insurance company transferred him to St. Paul, Minnesota. The giant ponds in “The Land of 10,000 Lakes” had barely frozen over before Dad developed a severe case of rheumatoid arthritis, reducing his 6’3” hulk to that of a cripple. My mother watched in anguish as Pops withered away, his hands and feet becoming as gnarled as tree roots. The day he couldn’t get out of the bathtub was the day she flew into her usual take-charge manner, hauling him off to Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

The doctors were stumped. Aside from him being in the right age group, forty to sixty, Dad didn’t fit into any of the other high-risk categories. He wasn’t a woman. He had no family history of the disease. He didn’t smoke, wasn’t obese, had never been exposed to toxins like asbestos.

So, why now? What had caused this robust man to suddenly waste away? It might be the climate, the docs agreed. After all, Minnesota was even more humid than Kansas City, if that were possible. The driest places on Earth, they agreed, were Phoenix, Arizona and Cairo, Egypt. I was out voted three to one and so our family moved to Phoenix when I was in the 5th grade.

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

We'd barely driven over the state line when Dad's joints began to move again. By the time we got to Phoenix, he was visibly better. My parents fell in love with the state, as did my brother and I since it was notably void of snow, mud and mosquitoes.

**I MOVED INTO** the bedroom across from Gram's, the one with the glass porch overlooking the street. Fifteen years earlier, my grandpa had died there, after spending three years in a coma while Gram spoon-fed him, changed his bed pan and held back his tongue during the epileptic seizures he failed to mention until after they were married.

Cherie took the front bedroom, the one where Mrs. Nadeau died. The old lady had heard what a kind-hearted soul my grandma was and came a'knockin' with the offer to leave Gram all her money if she'd take care of her until she died. What she failed to mention was that she'd live long past when her money ran out, all the while ringing her little silver bell for Gram to come shoo away the flying chimpanzees in the trees outside her window.

Before that, Cherie's room was occupied by my 102-year-old great grandfather, "Poppie," who suffered a fall at 99 and came to lie in bed three years there before he died. And before that, Gram's sister, Dode, who passed away there in 1952.

It wasn't what you'd call a lucky room.

But there was life in that house as well. My family moved there during the post-World War II housing shortage. Gram's younger brother, my "Uncle Jim," came along with Poppie when they closed up the farm, and with no rooms left, slept on a cot in the dining room. And then, there were Grandpa's three free-loading, free-spending, free-wheeling sisters who crashed there between husbands. I have no idea where everyone slept, or how many of them were there at once, but I do know Gram had someone in bed, sick or dying, for over two decades.

Gram liked living alone, even though it was becoming challenging. Having never learned to drive, once a week she'd call the same cab driver who'd drive her down Briarcliff Road to the grocery store,

wait while she shopped, then help her haul her bags up the thirty stone steps to the house. Naturally, Cherie and I took over those duties for the summer.

Grandma grew up on a farm, milking cows and churning butter, but her 83 years of healthy living changed the day we arrived home with McDonald's 25¢ hamburgers. Gram was so excited she gave us \$2 and told us to buy as many as we could so she could freeze them and pop one in the oven whenever she was hungry.

Now, that's a shut-in.

## **Jobs**

WITH OUR HOUSING situation so easily solved, Cherie and I tackled the employment front. Cherie took an assignment from Manpower, working as a secretary. As for me, I gravitated toward "people-person" jobs, which I thought I liked at the time but found out later I hated.

My dream had always been to work at Macy's, the downtown department store where my mother had been Assistant to the Silver Buyer when I was a little girl. Truthfully, I'd had warm and fuzzy feelings about Macy's ever since I got married there at the age of five, a sacrificial bride in a Tom Thumb wedding put on to promote the Silver Department.

In fact, Mom had choreographed a similar event two years earlier for her friend's engagement party. Back then, Danny had been the groom, I was the flower girl and my hunky, handsome 4-year-old neighbor, Vernon, was the ring-bearer. But at seven, my brother was too old to be getting married again, so this time he played preacher. Kathy was a bridesmaid, and I was the bride.

My second bridesmaid was the most beautiful little girl in the entire kingdom—a dark-haired, ivory skinned, pint-sized version of Snow White. This exquisite creature was someone I'd never have chosen to stand beside since she was a thousand times prettier than I was. In fact, in the real world, Vernon would have been marrying Snow White instead of me, but since it was my mama who was the casting director, good luck with that.

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

Grandma made our dresses out of soft, muted hues of satin, identical except for their color. Kathy got to wear a pretty pink and Snow White was decked out in a lovely light blue which complemented her long, dark, fat Scarlett O'Hara ringlets. As for mine, it was a boring beige, perhaps an early premonition I'd never qualify to wear white on my grownup wedding day. Preacher Danny wore a white choir gown and the Men's Department found a tiny tuxedo for Vernon while the Flower Department contributed his carnation boutonnière.

Mom had everything planned out except for the part where Kathy and I were jumping on some old bed springs the day before and I busted my lip wide open. Dr. Stipe stitched me up, but still I cried and cried because how could I get married the next day with a big fat lip? Mom said to just keep my veil down and nobody would notice.

So, there I was, my preacher-brother making faces at me as I slow-walked down the aisle while my rosebud-throwing flower girl stole the show and Kathy smiling fondly even as Vernon proceeded to make googly-eyes at Snow White—which I found particularly annoying since the girl had no personality to speak of, primarily because with her looks she didn't need one. But all that was about to change. Because in just moments, “Miss Penny-Pincher” would kiss “Mr. Moneybags” so magnificently that he'd forget all about Snow White's doe-eyes and Bambi lashes and decide he just might want to make this for real.

“I now pronounce you man and wife,” said my preacher-brother. And with that, I grabbed Vernon and smacked him upside the lips right through the veil I'd been instructed not to lift.

Needless to say, the marriage didn't work out.

**WHEN I WENT** to work at Macy's, I was kind of hoping to be made Assistant to the Buyer like my mom, or at least some other lofty position where I could flounce about in the perfect lighting and thinning mirrors and live the glamorous fashionista life for which I was born.

But *nooo*.

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

Instead, I was stuck in a windowless stockroom on the 6th floor filing an index card for every deadbeat who'd ever stiffed Macy's out of a set of Jacks. I didn't even get to make nasty phone calls er nuthin'.

My initial plan had been to bike to work each morning given it was only six miles from Grandma's house, down long, steep Briarcliff Road, through North Kansas City, past the old airport and over the heavily trafficked bridge into downtown. By Day 2, I'd traded that dream for a 20-minute bus ride and a half hour lingering over a cup of Folgers at the Katz counter, waiting for Macy's to open.

Given I only worked Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, I went looking for a second job.

**“STUDENTS,”** read the ad in the *Kansas City Star*.

*“Yes, There's Still Time! Summer Employment.*

*Must be 19 or over.*

*Jobs available for enthusiastic young people.*

*Salary \$105.”*

I attended a 30-minute presentation explaining how to “give” a family a set of encyclopedias for free and then charge them \$488 when they weren't looking.

Here's how that worked. Yes, the set was “free,” but the customer was obligated to buy a \$48 update each year for a decade. We were to emphasize this was the dealer's cost and the company didn't make a dime.

When the presenter asked for questions, I inquired what would happen if too many events happened in a single year to fit into just one volume.

I don't remember the answer to that.

Second question: If the company was selling the books at cost, where were they getting the \$105 to pay me?

“Any other questions?” asked the presenter.

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

I raced through the questionnaire, checking off boxes willy-nilly. In the comment box, I scribbled down some random thoughts. I handed in my paper and was *this close* to making a clean getaway when I was told to sit down and wait for my interview.

*Big hairy gulp.*

Ten minutes later the company president was reading my comments, filled with words like, “shyster,” “hoodwink,” “wheeler-dealer,” and “scam.” Words I’d just recently been so proud to write. He then spent a good half hour telling me (a) how wrong I was, (b) how too honest I was, and (c) how poor I would be my whole life if I kept this up.

“So, then,” he said. “When can you start?”

Aghast, I asked if he really wanted someone who wrote something like that working for his company.

“With the proper training, of course.”

### **THE AD READ:**

*“Good Morning!*

*We are looking for young energetic, enthusiastic, hard-working,  
reliable, responsible, team-oriented people*

*to join our family for full and part-time positions.*

*Become a waiter or waitress, or assistant waiter or waitress, or  
hostess or cook at KC’s most unique, happy, enjoyable, busy family  
restaurant. Come see us at the one and only Washington Street  
Station. 900 Washington. Have a nice day.”*

The building had once been a powerhouse for the Kansas City Cable Railway Company before the structure met its fiery demise in 1901. In keeping with the railway theme, the waitstaff all wore striped overalls and engineer’s caps as we scurried about in the turn-of-the-century town created in the rebuilt



cavernous space. The menu featured eleven combinations created by swapping pastas and sauces, plus an unlimited salad bar and hot crusty bread, along with spumoni—all for \$2.95. Patrons could eat in a cable car, or in Grandma’s Garden, or her front porch, or the Governor’s Mansion. They could sip cocktails in the Barber Shop or be serenaded while dining in a bedstead booth in the Brass Bed Cocktail Lounge.

One night I was serving a party of eight. Everything was going fine until dessert. The problem was the large round cardboard container of spumoni I’d been fighting all evening was still frozen solid in the center and sloppy-soft around the edges. I scooped up the mushy parts first, mining the last four dishes from the unforgiving slab in the center. Arriving back, I slid the bowls onto the table, their contents ranging from melting mountains of pastel to tiny turds of pink and green.

“Excuse me,” said the dad. “How come some people get a lot of ice cream and others get so little?”

“Well, sir,” I said, “sometimes, that’s just the way life is.”

Anywhere else, I might have been fired. At Washington Street Station, I got a big tip.

**EVEN WITH CHERIE’S** fulltime job and my two part-times, we needed more, more, more money to move to New Orleans in the fall. And thankfully, the 1972 Presidential election provided us with just such an opportunity.

On July 13th, the Democratic nominee, George McGovern, announced Missouri Senator Thomas Eagleton as his running mate. It didn’t take long for the national press to uncover what many locals already knew. A decade earlier, Eagleton had been hospitalized for nervous exhaustion, even receiving electric shock treatments. McGovern pledged to keep Eagleton on the ticket, but *The Kansas City Star* still wanted to know what readers thought. Should Eagleton bow out? Should McGovern dump him?

For three nights, Cherie and I took turns at Gram's black boxy phone, dialing registered voters to see what they thought. And then, the study was never even printed because on July 25th, less than two weeks after the brouhaha began, Senator Eagleton bowed out of the race.

### **Boyfriends**

Place to Live. Check.

Job(s) Check.

Boyfriends—*hmm*.

Okay, I already had a boyfriend, but he was in Washington State, sawing his little heart out, now wasn't he? To his credit, Perfect had been writing faithfully all summer, keeping me more informed about the progress of his friend's log cabin than the trajectory of our so-called romance.

*Fayster,*

*Now at Island. Just incredible. Sea and lush green. Cliff looking out at sunset and moon over water. Very nicey. Poured piling bases for deck & stairway up the rocks. Otherwise, lots of work & very busy. People waiting on me now.*

*What the hell are you doing? Your dummy postcard said nothing. Running. Bye. Hello to the appropriate companions.*

I spent hours analyzing his enigmatic musings, eking out as much passion as I could. It took a lot of Creative Reading.

The problem was I didn't have a boyfriend in the entire 816 area code. And it was a really big area code. Plus, I didn't even need that great of a boyfriend either, since I'd obviously dump him should Perfect miraculously show up. Besides, given I was only going to be in Kansas City for a few months, if I dawdled, our first date might also be our last.

## Journey of a Teetotaling Virgin by Fay Faron

Efficient as usual, Cherie hooked up with a law clerk at her Manpower job. As for me, I started dating my Macy's coworker, Vince, a grad student, living with his parents in their upscale Tudor-style home on a manicured street protected not only by a gate, but a security guard.

Shortly after we met, Vince quit Macy's declaring it was only a matter of time before we'd all be replaced by computers. It turned out to be a good move since TWA paid \$3.10 an hour, almost twice the minimum wage, plus you could buy \$98 passes to Rome, London and Paris.

"That young man is going places," said Gram when she heard about TWA's full health and dental coverage. But what she liked best about Vince was that he had red hair and freckles, just like her. Meaning our children would have red hair and freckles, just like her.

But, of course, Vince had a Major Flaw.

The concept of the Major Flaw is fairly simple. Every guy is perfect except for one thing you just can't get around. It might be that, like Perfect, he lives 1,800 miles away. Or, like my foreign exchange high school crush, he doesn't speak English. Or, like Robert Redford, he's already married. He might like boys more than girls. Or boys just as much as girls. Or is an inch shorter than you, dooming you to never wear heels, not just on your wedding day but for the rest of your life. All these qualify as Major Flaws. Basically, a Major Flaw is that one thing that cannot be ignored in an otherwise perfect guy. It's the deal-breaker.

Vince's Major Flaw was that he was mafia. Okay, maybe not *Mafia*-mafia, but mafia as defined by Gram, meaning he was Italian. Thankfully, she didn't know Vince was Italian because his red hair and freckles threw her off.

As for me, I had no idea all Italians were in the Mafia until Grandma told me. In fact, I clearly remember the day when she met me at the door with "terrible news."

"What is it, Gram? Has Chum run away? Did Mom die? Is a tornado touching down in the living room?"

“Some Italians have moved next door.”

“I know, Gram. But what’s the terrible news?”

“Some Italians have moved next door!”

To give Gram her due, Kansas City did have a pretty impressive gangster history. Political corruption. Racketeering. Illegal gambling. Bootlegging. Shady real estate deals. Power plays between rival families with names like Binaggio, Civella, Spero, Bonadonna and Cammisano. One godfather hopscoching over another until they got machine-gunned down or went to prison for tax evasion.

The most hated mob boss of my parent’s generation was Thomas Pendergast, a Democrat (natch) who controlled city government from 1925 to 1939. One of his proteges was Harry S. Truman who went from bankrupt haberdasher, to judge, to senator and finally to U.S. president. In fact, it was this decades-long marriage of local mafia and city government that turned Dad from a lifelong donkey into an eternal elephant.

One night, Vince took me to dinner in North Kansas City, the compact little town wedged between Gram’s house and the real Kansas City across the river. As soon as we parked, a freak storm came out of nowhere. Ninety mile per hour. winds raged for over an hour, rocking Vince’s 1965 Mustang convertible like a sea saw. We huddled together as a nearby warehouse thundered into collapse. So fast moving was this storm, it eluded the weathermen’s radar. There wasn’t even a warning blast because those were reserved for tornados, which this was not.

The next day, *The Kansas City Star* reported that fierce winds and high rain pockets had cut a mile and a half swath, six miles long, through the area. Houses flooded, mobile homes crumbled, a bridge got washed away and everyone within a 75-mile radius was without power for eighteen hours.

Which only goes to show that when God doesn’t want you dating an Italian, He’s not much concerned about collateral damage.

## **Filley, Missouri**

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WITH SUMMER ENDING, there was one place I wanted to visit before moving on. Our old family farm in South Missouri.

My grandmother was born in a tiny town called Filley, midway between El Dorado Springs and Stockton. Some of my favorite childhood memories involved visiting there before Uncle Jim and Poppie came to Grandma's house in Kansas City to die. The white farmhouse with the green gabled roof was a simple two-story structure, four rooms stacked atop four others. Given these rooms were used for various purposes, they didn't have names like, "living room" and "bedroom." Instead, they were called "the east room," or "the north room," depending upon their location. The house had no electricity and our water came from a bucket which, when lowered deep into the earth, came back with the coldest, tastiest liquid on the planet. There was an outhouse down by the "crik," a big iron bell used to call "the hands" in from the field, and a black cauldron that'd turned many a pig into lard.

Invariably Kathy would come with us since anytime my family went somewhere, she'd come, just as I'd be invited whenever her family went somewhere. We slept upstairs in Uncle Jim's room, our shared twin bed crammed under the eaves, causing us to hit our heads every time we turned over.

Kathy and I spent a lot of time on the front porch swing, playing hand-clapping games and finding animals in the clouds. Afternoons, we'd go down to the chicken coop, taking care to skedaddle before Uncle Jim came to wring one of their necks for dinner. After that, we'd accompany him out past the crik to call the cows in for their dinner.

"Comjer!" Uncle Jim would bellow. "Comjer!"

One day I asked Uncle Jim which cow was Comjer, figuring this must be his favorite since it was the only cow he ever called. As it turns out, Uncle Jim was yelling, "Come Jer!" as in, "Come, Jersey cow." Still, I thought Comjer was a fine name for a cow and vowed if I ever got one, I was going to name it Comjer.

By the time Cherie and I visited Filley, the house had been vacant for two decades. In the meantime, itinerant hippies had moved in and then out again when the rooms they'd defecated in became unlivable, even for them. There were sticky cobwebs, scurrying spiders, and roaches darting across the floor. Without electricity or running water, there was no relief from the suffocating Missouri heat.

Admittedly, I'd had visions of Cherie and me staying there awhile, perhaps growing our own vegetables and living off the land, just as my ancestors had done a hundred years before. In my girlish delusion, I even thought Perfect might even come live with us because, hey, look how well that turned out the first time. I sent him pictures of the house and barn, asking what he thought it would take to make it livable. This is what I got back.

*"Faybo,*

*The structures appear sound. Not that they wouldn't require work, but all uninhabited farmhouses have sagging roofs (at least porch roofs.) Both house & barn appear well-supported.*

*External conditions are less promising. The sky is horrendously gray, though typical. Note the thick white, indicating no storm, nor rain, nor even a possibility of a breath of air stirring. Only a thick wet air which requires a human to develop gills in order to survive.*

*Further, the vegetation is brown—very good country for planting and then developing one's religious inclinations in daily entreats for rain, which never arrives in time because God never intended man should live in such country.*

*Likelihood of survival in 94-degree weather with a relative humidity of 87%...*

\* *Vegetation: 18%*

\* *Livestock: (cattle, chickens, etc.) 9% - But only if the well is in working order.*

- \* *Wildlife (quail, pheasant, etc.): 90% - but only through migration to more habitable regions.*
- \* *Insects (mosquitoes, fleas, wasps, chiggers, etc.): 99.7%.*
- \* *Humans: .028%.”*

And just in case there was any misunderstanding that he might be enticed into my hair-brained scheme, Perfect added—

*“While it is true God provides sanctuary for all his creatures, He assumes the most intelligent of them will keep themselves the hell out of the domains of others. Clearly the mosquito is king in south Missouri.*