# ONE

# THE BIG DAY

I LIE MOTIONLESS under my soft, warm comforter. My head nestles into the thick, square eiderdown pillow and my back and shoulders melt into the mattress like butter on toast. Tapsi, my four-year-old dachshund, lies curled up between my feet. Cradling the covers with my legs, I take a deep, long breath. I feel content from head to toe. Today is a big day. Today is my twenty-first birthday. Today, unfettered life will begin.

The hypnotic tick-tock, tick-tock of the alarm clock on the small laminated table cuts through the silence. I sit up, forcing Tapsi to adjust her position. Inky darkness. Shivering in the sudden cold I strain to read the time: 5:45 a.m. Through the small bedroom window, I gaze outside. No stars. Droplets hit the windowpane. A typical November day in Berlin. I glance at the clock a second time. Only a few more minutes before I'll have to get ready for work.

Briefly, I relive the pleasant sensation of having luxuriated in soapsuds for a full forty minutes the evening before. My skin still tingles. I loofahed each limb with a vengeance so that my arms and legs would feel as fresh as the new chapter of my life that is about to begin. I even slept on nylon brush rollers, held in place by pesky pink plastic picks. No price was too high for the beauty I intended to flaunt today.

Today—my twenty-first birthday! The words still sound like a ceremony to me.

Retreating deeper under the warm comforter, I pull Tapsi into my arms and gently press her hot little body to my chest. Her soft heartbeats echo the ticking of the clock and tone down my excitement. Here at the gateway to adulthood I recall exactly at what point I began to pull away from my parents. It happened soon after I befriended Scotty, Marilyn, and Sharon Kelly, an American military family stationed in Germany. They introduced me to a different world, one that welcomed teen involvement in family decisions. Until then, my life had been mapped out by a series of unassailable rules and restrictions. When I began resisting my parents' authority, I triggered a conflict that paralleled in intensity the Cold War between East and West. While the infamous Berlin Wall restricted physical liberties, the walls my parents put up curtailed not only my physical, but also my emotional freedom. They proved to be ten times harder to topple than the stone Wall.

And so, for the past few years, I have been waiting impatiently to achieve adulthood so that I may break out of my quasi-jail and choose my friends and pursuits without having to ask permission. That time has come. Today is the first day. Eyes closed, my head snuggles into the down pillow as I dream of boundless freedoms ahead.

Suddenly, the six bare bulbs of my Sputnik ceiling fixture light up in a blaze. Startled, I squint toward the bedroom door where I see two shadowy silhouettes: my mother and my father. My slender, six-foot-something father's scrawny legs poke from his calf-length tan nightshirt. My petite mother, a foot shorter than he, is clad in a yellow batiste nightgown. She leans heavily on his arm as they lumber toward my bed. They probably have come to congratulate me on achieving adulthood. My mind spins with excitement and expectations of anticipated well wishes. After all, everything is going to change today!

Instead, my mother utters six unexpected words that turn my world upside down. Their echo still hangs in the air when my father flicks off the light, and my parents close the door behind them. Alone again in the darkness, it feels like a psychic earthquake has hit my universe. Unable to absorb the implications of my mother's startling statement, I crawl even deeper under the covers. Tucked away safely, I cradle Tapsi's little frame and allow the past twenty-one years to pass in front of me as if they were a single image.

# TWO

# THE PERFECT LITTLE GIRL

## After the War

WHEN MY MOTHER STEPPED into my aunt and uncle's pub, *Zum Kühlen Grund*, holding me, a newborn, in her arms, she consoled herself by saying, "I've lost almost everything in this war. This little bundle is mine. I won't let anyone take her away from me."

Ruins. Desolation. Despair. More than 2.5 billion cubic feet of rubble, the city's 4.4 million inhabitants of 1943 reduced to 2.3 million, two-thirds of them women—that was Berlin in 1945, the year I was born. Germany had capitulated in May, and the four Allies—Great Britain, France, the United States and the Soviet Union—had divided the country geographically according to the Potsdam Agreement of June 1945. Germany was now split into four occupation zones with Berlin in the middle of the Soviet zone. Since each power had wanted the capital to be within its jurisdiction, the four of them had compromised by dividing the city's 371 square miles into four occupation sectors.

Each of the powers was to govern its zone and sector individually but also jointly in matters that affected the country or the city as a whole. Decisions in shared responsibilities would have to be reached unanimously. For all of Germany, that supreme administrative authority was called the Allied Control Council. Its members were Marshal Georgy Zhukov representing the Soviet Union, Army General Dwight Eisenhower for the United States, Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery speaking for Great Britain, and Jean de Lattre de Tassigny for France. For Berlin, an administrative body was established that mirrored the Allied Control Council on a smaller scale. It was made up of Berlin's four Allied commandants and was called the Kommandatura, a term created by fusing Russian and German.

Ruins everywhere. More than one-half of the buildings in our district, Charlottenburg, were destroyed. Near the center of the city, word had it that only 604 of the 11,075 residential buildings were still standing. In some blocks, there was nothing left but piles of debris. The city looked like a moonscape with forlorn souls staggering through the wreckage, still looking for someone or something. The majority of Berliners had lost most of their belongings to bombing attacks during the war or to Russian lootings after the war. Food was rationed; allocations were meager. Bullet holes pockmarked walls and roofs. Sewers dumped directly into the city's waterways. Medicine was in short supply; electricity was available for only 2.5 hours each day with turn-on time uncertain. The water could not be consumed without boiling, but heating fuel was next to impossible to find. Due to their weakened state, ten thousand Berliners starved or froze to death or succumbed to typhoid, diphtheria, or other diseases.

To these conditions my mother returned home from the hospital in November 1945, as she recalled often. She had just left the Paulinenhaus, one of the few hospitals still in operation in our part of the city. Forty-three out of forty-four hospitals had been seriously damaged or destroyed in the British sector where we lived. Dysentery was killing sixty-five out of every one hundred babies born in the city.

Three months before I was born, my mother had received word that my father, declared missing in action since his deployment to France, was a prisoner of war in a British camp somewhere along the Rhine River in Germany. The husband she had believed to be dead was alive; but whether he was still whole, she did not know.

Because my parents' apartment in the central part of Charlottenburg had been leveled during a British air raid two years earlier, my mother and I now shared a small two-room apartment above the pub with her sister Michen; her niece Rita and her nephew Manfred, ages ten and eight; her stepmother Helene; and her oldest sister, Anni. The flat had a small kitchen but no bathroom. A toilet was located downstairs and served the seven of us plus the building's other eight tenants. In the winter, when the pipes froze, the water had to be turned off. Then, each tenant brought his own pail with water for flushing.

With the exception of my Aunt Michen and cousins, the rest of us were *ausgebombt*—bombed out of our residences. My aunt and uncle's apartment, like most quarters still standing, had been damaged during the war. Air raids had blown out the window glass, and flying shrapnel had ripped a hole into the roof. Most of my parents' belongings had gone up in flames in the bombing of their tenement building two years earlier. My mother counted precious little as her possessions. "*Wir hatten ja nichts*—we didn't have anything," was how she summed up the postwar years. When she, a married woman without children, was conscripted into the war effort, she gave her remaining few personal things to Tante Michen for safekeeping. But when my mother returned to Berlin in August, the Russians had beaten her to the city and taken what was left. All of the women living in the flat at the time the Soviets conquered the city—my two aunts, my grandmother, and my cousin—hid on the rooftop and watched them loot the building. The Russkies took whatever they could get their hands on. Hundreds of thousands of Berlin women were raped during the two months between the arrival of the Russian troops on May 2, 1945 and that of the Americans on July 3, 1945.

## My Aryan Name

"YOU CAN'T NAME THE GIRL UTA," the registrar informed my mother and Tante Michen in a straightforward manner, leafing through a hefty hardcover tome.

"But that's the name I picked," my mother replied, annoyed. "It goes with our surname—Umbach. What's wrong with Uta?"

"Uta isn't listed here. Apparently, it's not an Aryan name."

"An Aryan name? Why does it have to be an Aryan name? The war is over. The Nazis are gone."

"I know. But the list hasn't been replaced yet," the registrar said, pointing to the heavy volume. "It takes time. Until that happens, you can't name the girl Uta. There's nothing I can do."

Exasperated, my mother looked at my aunt. "What shall we do?" she muttered in frustration.

"How about 'Jutta'?" The registrar piped up, thumbing through the tome. "That's available. That's in the book. Jutta Umbach. How about that?"

After a moment of silence my mother capitulated. "All right, I guess Uta will have to be a Jutta."

"And put down 'Elke' as her middle name," my aunt added. "Elke is my choice. I'm the baby's godmother."

My mother and my aunt retold that story many times. I have always been bowled over by the notion that I, born after the war, owe my name to Hitler. The register of allowable names must have been abolished soon after I was baptized because Sonja, Lorena, Heike, and Yvonne, the names of my classmates, were not on the list either. They were born only a few months after me.

I have no recollection of this event or of the first eighteen months of my life that was spent in my aunt's apartment. But I heard the stories of those years so often that they became as familiar to me as if I recalled them from firsthand experience.

In a gorgeous cloud of white ruffles that my mother had hand stitched from the silk of a downed airman's parachute I was baptized Jutta Elke Umbach.

## Making Ends Meet

"ONLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN made up our household during the first six months of your life, because the men had not yet returned from the war," my mother said to me when I got older. In the first few months after the end of the war, the four adults, my mother, her two sisters, and her stepmother tackled all essential tasks. They covered the ceiling with sheets when the dormer windows leaked; they hauled mattresses before the glassless window openings to keep the elements at bay; and they collected the meager supply of firewood that warmed the flat, even though the wood-burning tiled stove was way too small to do an adequate job under the best of circumstances.

Cold, running water was available, but electricity was provided only during a random 2.5-hour period during any given day or night. "That's when we cooked, cleaned, and washed. Sometimes, we got up in the middle of the night. Our rations were meager. On a daily basis, each of us was allowed:

300 grams (10.5 oz.) doughy bread,

400 grams (14 oz.) mushy potatoes,

20 grams (0.7 oz.) meat,

7 grams (0.25 oz.) fat,

30 grams (1 oz.) miscellaneous food items (rolled oats, barley, or semolina), and

15 grams (3 teaspoons) sugar.”

My mother used to recite the list like a rosary.

“On top of that, our ration cards entitled us to a monthly allocation of:

100 grams (3.5 oz.) *Ersatzkaffee*—coffee substitute,

40 grams (less than 3 tablespoons) salt,

20 grams (less than 1.5 tablespoons) tea, and

25 grams (1.5 tablespoons) coffee beans.

Food allotments were subject to availability, of course. When the rations in our sector dropped to a mere 400 calories per person the month after you were born, we made *Hamsterfahrten*—hamster trips for food,” my mother said. It meant that the women strapped packs to their backs, climbed on board the train, and visited the nearby countryside. If lucky, they succeeded in bartering a few possessions for food and returned with their pouches full, much like a hamster.

“During that first spring and summer, I minced the leaves of the basswood tree in front of your aunt and uncle’s pub into my breast milk, so we could feed you kids something nutritious,” my mother recalled. “The leaves tasted like spinach. First, I made a bottle for you, and then I thickened my leftover milk with flour and added it to a watery soup for Rita and Manfred."

In April 1946, my father escaped from captivity and, without major injuries, returned to Berlin. Four months later in August, Onkel Kalle, in whose apartment we all lived, also returned from the war. He had been declared missing in action following combat in Russia. His wife, Tante Michen, had received no word for many months and assumed that he was killed, or captured and sent to a Siberian forced labor camp. Then one day, my uncle walked through the front door. He had been released along with a trainload of other prisoners. His unexpected appearance caused unbelievable joy, but also some awkwardness. In his absence, Tante Michen had tried to manage alone, with the occasional help of a new friend, Onkel Fritz.

Now we were nine people in two small rooms, and day-to-day life became even more problematic. Our small rations had to be augmented by purchases on the black market where, despite shortages, almost anything could be bought for a price. But since bank savings had been confiscated in the first few months after the war, there was little cash. Black market deals depended heavily on barter as long as one still had, or could acquire, something to exchange. Because the occupation currency had become nearly worthless, cigarettes became the unofficial currency; even cigarette butts had value.

Although a black market had existed in Berlin during the war, it did not blossom until Soviet troops entered the city. The reason was that the Russian government prohibited their soldiers from converting the occupation marks they were paid into take-home rubles. Consequently, soldiers spent all of their compensation on the spot. But first, they turned their military pay into something of value: mainly cigarettes, fountain pens, and watches.

And as soon as the American troops arrived in Berlin, the black market became a major economy. Unlike their Soviet counterparts, US servicemen were allowed to convert their pay into American dollars at the official rate of ten to one. They were allowed to send that money home but could do far better by first participating in the black market. For example, they might purchase a carton of American cigarettes for fifty cents at the PX and resell it on the black market for 1,500 occupation marks and convert those into 150 dollars. Servicemen caught on quickly, and soon half of all business transactions in the city now took place on the black market. Cigarettes were the currency.

My father decided that he needed to return to work as soon as possible so that he could earn either hard cash or objects worth trading. But he needed a camera to reenter the photography business. His *Leica*, if it had not been stolen already, remained hidden in the rain gutter of a farmhouse in Thuringia.

"After we got married and before your father had to report back to his military unit, he gave me his camera for safekeeping," my mother explained. "Later, I, too, was conscripted and took it with me to Thuringia. Toward the end of the war, just before the Russians reached our area, I hid it with the help of a local girl I had befriended. We concealed it in the rain gutter of her parents' home. But there were rumors that the Russians would demand that all valuables be turned in. It would have made it extremely dangerous for her family to hide a camera. People were shot for lesser crimes than that. Therefore, my girlfriend and I agreed that we would not tell her parents. There had been no opportunity to retrieve it before or after we fled from the advancing Russians."

By the summer of 1946, my father was desperate for work, and my parents decided to travel to Thuringia to look for his *Leica.* Overjoyed, they found it still tucked in its hiding place. I don't think the owners of the farmhouse were ever told that they had harbored an illegal object.

Still, it remained difficult for my father to reestablish his business. He needed a darkroom, an impossible quest in our already crammed situation. Pressure mounted for our family to find separate lodgings.

## Mutti

COMPLEX AND FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS, my mother, Mutti, displayed reserve as a rule, often to the point of timidity. But when enraged, she could demonstrate incredible nerve. Although I seldom saw those facets of her, I cobbled together much of her past not only from stories she shared, but also from fragments my father and aunts contributed.

She was the youngest of four sisters. Her father, Paul, spent sixty-five of the sixty-eight years that spanned his working career in the employ of Fürstenbrunn, a Berlin mineral water bottling company. Fifty years earlier, the firm had acquired the rights to a natural spring that had been discovered as far back as the 1600s when a German *Kurfürst*, a prince-elector, was said to have stumbled upon it during a hunting expedition. "Against strict order from our parents, we often snuck into the attic as children and played 'house' with the life-sized *Kurfürst* mannequins," my mother recalled.

In the early days of my grandfather's employment, Fürstenbrunn water was still delivered by horse-drawn carriage. Paul worked his way up from bottle filler in 1907 to stable master and coachman, and eventually to driver of the chief's private motorcar.

He met the love of his life at a company summer fest. Wladislawa Kempska, my grandmother, had left her native Poland together with a brother and sister for better job opportunities in neighboring Germany. The sisters moved to Berlin where Wladislawa soon found employment at the bottling plant. There she met Paul. Following a brief courtship, they married in 1909 and moved into a cottage on Fürstenbrunn grounds where my grandfather could be close to the horses in his care. Throughout his life, Opa talked about "Pfiff" and "Pfaff" and "Max" and "Moritz," his favorite four-legged companions.

In 1910, the couple's first little girl, Anni, arrived. A year later came Helene and then Maria. Once the little ones were born, my grandmother quit working at the plant. The young family kept dogs, cats, rabbits, and chickens and grew their own vegetables. By all accounts, Wladislawa was beautiful, energetic, and talented. "There wasn't anything our mother couldn't do. She sang, danced, cooked, and sewed all day," the sisters agreed.

In 1915, when the youngest daughter, Maria, was three years old, my grandmother was pregnant again, this time with my mother, Gertrud, Trudi for short. As the baby of the family, Trudi basked in love and attention. She was her mother's favorite. But when she was five, her eight-year-old sister Maria, or Michen as everyone called her, contracted polio, a viral disease for which there was no vaccine. Although my aunt eventually recovered, the infection permanently stunted her growth. She never reached five feet in height. During the most crucial time in Michen's life, Paul and Wladislawa heaped all of their attention onto their sick little daughter.

Seven years later, my grandmother died unexpectedly. Suddenly a single parent of four girls between the ages of twelve and seventeen, my grandfather felt the strain of raising his daughters alone. The three older girls were already in apprenticeships or worked full time, but my mother was still of school age. Since she had an hour-long walk to and from school along a deserted stretch of country road, Paul entrusted her care during the week to his sister, Anna, and her husband, Fritz, a postal carrier. His sister and her family lived within minutes of Trudi's school and had one son, Fritz Jr., who attended the same institution. A strong-willed, no-nonsense woman, my mother's aunt was a shopkeeper with a keen sense for business. She owned and operated a stationery and toy store.

"I felt completely abandoned," my mother said later. "Here I was, the only one of the four of us girls who had to live away from home during the week." After completing her education at age fourteen, she returned home for good. But by then her sisters, now seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen worked full time. Their interests and activities had changed, turning home into a different place for my mother.

Following graduation, Trudi also entered an apprenticeship program. Pay was minimal. Since her dream had been to become a hair stylist, she begged her father to allow her to apprentice in a stylish salon. It was customary for parents to compensate the business owner in return for training their progeny. The shop's reputation governed the cost. In her case, the figure exceeded my grandfather's modest resources, and he urged his daughter to consider a secretarial apprenticeship instead.

My mother reluctantly agreed and joined a small household appliance firm. Her initial duties were limited to filing and retrieving records. "I hated that job," she said. Following probation, she quit. Shocked, the business owner asked her what prompted her decision. "I wanted to hole-punch documents once in a while," she complained. The astonished man assured her that she could hole-punch in the future, but Trudi stuck to her plan and left the company.

Next, she started an apprenticeship with a fashionable shoe boutique, but the store declared bankruptcy soon thereafter. Eager for employment in a field that provided personal satisfaction, she asked her father to allow her to apprentice with a dressmaker. They located a skilled tailoress, willing to take on my mother for the customary three-year training program. Being detail-oriented, Trudi passed her exams with excellent grades, but lost all interest in the profession when she discovered that the monetary rewards associated with tailoring fell far short of those achievable in other lines of work. "Why should I settle for less than I could make selling shoes or dresses?" she told her father.

After thinking it over, my mother applied for a position as a sales clerk in an upscale boutique, a job akin to today's personal shopper. But because she had not apprenticed as a sales clerk, the shop insisted on a second apprenticeship. Instead of the standard three years, the firm agreed to a two-year stint. "I worked my way up to the head of the department and purchased, priced, and sold all of Matthiesen's skirts and blouses. And best of all, I was able to buy the most gorgeous, one-of-a-kind garments for myself—at a fraction of the retail price," she added.

Trudi was seventeen and had just finished her dressmaking apprenticeship when my grandfather remarried. His new wife, my mother's stepmother, did not have any children of her own. In each of the following years, one of my mother's sisters got married and moved away.

Having only one daughter left at home, Paul thoroughly spoiled his youngest girl. He was a man of impeccable taste and sometimes surprised her with the purchase of an entire outfit, complete with shoes, hat, and purse. But he also insisted that my mother hand him her entire pay envelope. It was a family tradition. My mother said, "I turned over my wages on the first of the month, and by the fifth, I had every penny back and then some. I owned underwear in every color of the rainbow."

"Working six days per week with an hour and a half commute by steam train each way left little time for leisure," my mother recalled. Still, being an attractive brunette with blue eyes, a stunning figure, and three older sisters, she made the acquaintance of many young suitors. She settled on Egon, a good-looking, well-educated pharmacist with flare. Although the couple contemplated marriage, they decided to wait until they could start their own household. Moving in with Egon's mother held no appeal for them. "*Jung und alt passen nicht zusammen*—Young and old don't fit together," they said.

When the war broke out in 1939, Egon was drafted. He was killed the following year. Trudi was twenty-five when he died. They had been going steady for six years. As more and more young men were sent off to war, age-appropriate matches became increasingly difficult. All of Trudi's sisters were already married. "Why am I always the unlucky one?" my mother began asking herself.

One day in 1942, three years into World War II, she met Karl at a café. He was on military leave. At first, he did not impress her favorably. He just wasn't Egon. Although Karl was tall and slender, he was not particularly athletic. His education did not match hers. He was a self-taught photographer. But there was a certain optimism and vitality about him that appealed to her. In short order, Karl won my mother's heart. However, when he asked my grandfather a year later for his daughter's hand in marriage, Paul cautioned his daughter, "Think carefully. Karl is ONLY a self-employed photographer. Will he be able to support a family?" My mother recoiled at that remark but proceeded with the wedding plans. After the nuptial, my father returned to his Army post, and my mother moved into his studio apartment.

A year later, my mother was conscripted into a German Air Force unit, stationed in the province of Thuringia, about one hundred fifty miles south of Berlin, not far from the Czech border. Her job was to help calculate the unit's provisions. She shared a room with four women in a first-class hotel that had been requisitioned by the military. My mother said she never openly defied orders but resisted in her own way. She often told a story about the time when the entire unit of young ladies was sent into the woods to collect mushrooms for dinner. She deliberately picked the poisonous ones. "I had to give two years of my life to the military. The least they could do in return was to feed me," she said. When her ploy did not get her out of mushroom gathering, she pretended to faint. From then on, she no longer had to participate in collecting her own dinner. Throughout her time in the military, my mother kept mostly to herself and did not form lasting friendships, she said.

When first the American, then Russian units moved into Thuringia during the final days of the war, she fled to Berlin with nothing more than a pack on her back. During those first two years of marriage, she had seen Karl for no more than a few days at a time.

I was already six months old when my father returned from the war. Once he was back in her life, my mother began to withdraw from family and friends. I had become her most prized possession. She often declared, "You are the only thing that belongs to me alone." As I grew up, she devoted her life to every detail of my physical well-being and worked hard at turning me into a small replica of herself.

It was difficult to please my mother. She was a perfectionist and expected the same from others. When she sewed, the inside of the garment looked as beautiful as the outside. She toiled endlessly at housework. If our home was not spic-and-span, all other activities were postponed. Her values were rigid. Those who did not share them were dropped from her circle. By the time I was old enough to register the world around me, she had already terminated her relationship with my grandfather because of his earlier intimation that my father was ONLY a photographer.

My mother spent long hours, hand sewing cute little outfits for me—dresses full of frills and flounces—and welcomed the approving looks and comments from family, friends, and strangers. Even before I reached school age, she curled my geometrically straight hair with curling tongs into *Schillerlocken*—ringlets. It was an onerous task that often led to tears; the tongs had to be heated on the kitchen stove and sometimes singed my hair and scalp. The final step involved tying a huge taffeta bow into my crown where it hovered like a propeller.

One summer afternoon when I was four or five, my mother, father, and I went for coffee and cake to the Strandbaude, an outdoor restaurant along the shore of the Groβ-Glienicker See in the district of Kladow. Behind his cupped hand, the proprietor whispered that he had something special to offer: whipped cream. Such luxury had not been seen since the beginning of the war. Overjoyed, my father ordered a portion for my mother and me to share. When our *Kuchen*—cake—arrived, it was topped with a small dollop of whipped cream. “Look what Pappi got for us! This is sooooo good,” my mother prompted me as she heaped some of the white stuff onto the tip of her spoon. Her whole face aglow, she steered the cream toward my lips.

I was not an adventurous eater. I sniffed everything before deciding whether or not is was suitable for consumption. That white stuff held no appeal for me. I sealed my lips and shook my head.

“Come on! Try it! You’ll like it, I promise,” my mother said.

My lips remained squeezed shut, and I stiffened my back with added resolve.

“Come on. Don’t be silly. Try it! It’s gooood!”

The dollop began to flatten visibly. Not wanting to let the delicacy go to waste, my mother took a couple of disheartened licks.

“See! Mutti likes it,” my father encouraged me. Other restaurant guests started to glance at us with interest. After all, whipped cream was quite a sensation. Several futile attempts later, my mother’s disappointment got the best of her. With a flick of her wrist, she slapped the entire spoonful smack into my face. As the cream spattered across my little visage, I let out a bloodcurdling shriek, causing every guest in the establishment to crane his neck in our direction. That was exactly what my mother had wanted to avoid.

My father laughed about it for years and never tired of telling the story. But my mother could never see the humor in it. “If I had eaten that cream without sharing it, the rest of the patrons would have said, ‘look at that woman. She’s eating all that whipped cream by herself without giving any to her little girl. What kind of a mother is she?’”

On rare occasions, my mother could also display unbelievable moxie. One day, as she often retold with satisfaction, my parents, along with my aunt and uncle, visited a neighborhood bar. I must have been about six and probably sound asleep at home. Dressed in a beautiful strapless aqua-colored evening gown, my mother drew admiring glances from a number of male guests. One man, in particular, did not seem to be able to avert his eyes. No words were exchanged between my mother and her apparent fan, but when her party left at the end of the evening, she was the last of the foursome to step into the street. Her silent admirer exited a few paces behind her.

All of a sudden, my mother stopped, turned on her heels, and looked the man straight in the eye. Then she pulled down the bodice of her dress, fully exposing her bare breasts. “There you go. That’s what you wanted to see, wasn’t it?” she glared.

If you enjoyed my story so far and would like to read more about the twists and turns of my life during this history-rich period, please consider purchasing my complete memoir from your local bookstore or the Internet, or order the eBook version.

And thank you for visiting my website.