

SELF PORTRAIT OF AN UNCOMMON WOMAN

(A WW2 SURVIVOR...)

by

DIANORA NICCOLINI

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Introduction

From an early childhood of very strict upbringing, to several years of war time hell, through an unhappy teenage period , I was miserable growing up! Consequently, I don't look back upon my youth with fondness. I didn't begin to enjoy living until I left home at 18. Since then, my life has been an emotional roller coaster ride with its many highs and many lows. What I love most about my life though, has been my freedom to live it as I chose. I've made many mistakes in the process, but I wouldn't have traded a moment of it. All of my experiences are threads in the fabric of the person I have become - a fine art photographer and a trend setter.

As I look back upon my life I wonder how it flew by so quickly. I wasted a lot of time on frivolity. By in large, though, I accomplished somethings of which I am proud. I established medical photography departments in 2 major NYC hospitals . And in the early 70's, I started one of the first professional organizations for women photographers in NYC. Later on I became the first President of The Professional Women Photographers, which is still in existence today. Finally, I helped to bring the male nude (in photography) out of the closet onto the gallery walls. Who would have known that my life's mission would be that of an initiator, a pioneer of sorts?

Because of my lack of freedom as a child and WW 2, growing up in Florence Italy was NOT a great time for me. However, being surrounded by great art was a wonderful experience that not only educated me about the finer things in life, but broadened my mind as well. The pursuit of creating art, in turn, became my quest. My dream has always been, not only to create great images, but to have them hanging in museums all over

the world. The latter is yet to be fulfilled..

Moving to NYC in the mid 50's at the age of 18, and living here ever since has given me a very open minded perspective on life as well as many opportunities. Visibility being the foremost. There is a saying that if you make it in NYC, you've made it in the world. I have received a fair amount of recognition but the climb has been very competitive and a slow process. I didn't take drugs so I never sought to hang out with Mapplethorpe, Warhol and other famous artists of the time. Secondly, the war left me with a phobia which has prevented me from taking elevators. So, it has been a struggle for me.

Although I had come to the city to be a painter, when I met Weege in the early 60's, I turned my attention to photography. I have been a photographer ever since. I started out being a medical photographer, then a commercial photographer, and finally a fine art photographer. For over a quarter of a century, I have concentrated on my fine art which includes my work on the nude as well as the experimental, multi media images which were influenced, in great measure, by weege's work in his latter years.

Living in the US, and especially in NYC, has given me so much freedom -The freedom to be ME! I am so very grateful to have lived almost 50 years in the greatest city in the world , the city that attracts the most talented people on the planet, the city that never sleeps!

Following is my story.

CHAPTER 1

Early Childhood

It was a pre-war year and it wasn't the best of times. It was a period of political unrest. It was an age of injustice and became the preamble to a season of despair. The year was 1936, the year of my birth.

My life began with opulence. I was born in Florence Italy to an American mother and a Florentine father from an old aristocratic family. From an outside perspective it looked like I had it all- wealth, status etc. But for me my childhood was a nightmare. I was the firstborn. Both of my parents were very young and I was expected to be the perfect child. My father was very severe. I suffered mercilessly at his hands. At the time it was not called physical abuse. It was called discipline. My mother tried to stop him and when she realized that she couldn't, she left him and took me back to the United States with her.

I was two years old then. One year later all hell broke loose. The second world war had broken out in Europe. Out of loyalty and a profound sense of responsibility, my mother decided to return to Italy with me to be with my father. My mother was young, intelligent, beautiful, a high achiever and a veritable romantic. She was popular among her peers and in college was voted to be the most likely to succeed.

She spent her junior year with Smith College in Florence, Italy, where she met and fell madly in love with my father. According to my mother(in her later years) as she reminisced her youth and her marriage, she was more in love with what my father represented - history, nobility, a chance to climb the social ladder and mingle with the nobles nobligeres. It was her way of rebelling against her comfortable upper-middle-class American upbringing.

She wanted to become more sophisticated and cosmopolitan. It was a time when upper-middle-class Americans envied European titles. Some tried to buy them, others married into them. My mother's father however was different. He did all he could to discourage her from continuing a romantic relationship with my father. He then convinced her to return home to finish her college education where he could keep an eye on her. He was dead set against the relationship. Because of the difference in culture, background, and nationality, he wanted to make sure that it ended before it became more serious. My mother had different ideas. She believed that she was madly in love, and I guess my parents wrote love letters to each other and continued their relationship in this way. Being the brilliant person that she was, my mother succeeded in finding a way to return to her beloved without her father's financial support. Upon graduating from Barnard, she received a full fellowship to continue her art history studies in Florence Italy.

My father, born a marquis from an old Florentine family, was a frail and sickly young man battling the demons of having lost his father in the first World War and having to deal with a frivolous and oversexed mother who scrupulously squandered most of his inheritance. Like most noblemen of his time and his position, marrying for money was his foremost goal. Though my father was a sickly young man he did find the time to date a lot of women and, being an Italian male, scoring with as many women as possible was his objective. Although in the back of his mind marrying for money was a constant thought. The Smith College girls had a reputation for being very loose. Thus a cat and mouse game evolved between the American students and young eligible noblemen.

My mother was not a typical Smith girl. She was very moral and the idea of sex outside of marriage was unthinkable. She did not do a lot of dating, instead fell madly in love with one of these first Italian males who

courted her. .and it was my father. It is not that she had never dated. She had been engaged to an American student who drowned. Then she dated a young Englishman whom she later found out(after World WarII) was the lead English spy in Italy. When my mother learned this information at the end of the war, she was flabbergasted. She said that this Englishman was a “stick it in the mud”, extremely boring, and seemed a bit stupid. That is why she didn't continue with the relationship. Life is strange isn't? Although my father's goal was to marry for money, he didn't! My mother's family was well-off but not as rich as the families of many of the women that my father dated. So why did he marry her?This is open to question. I presume that my father was awe struck by my mother's beauty, personality, loyalty and unwillingness to give in to his advances. He was typical of his generation. Men did not marry the women with whom they had sex outside of marriage. There was definitely a double standard being practiced at the time. There were the "good girls" and the" bad girls". My mother was a "good girl", a true straight arrow, one of a kind!

My mother returned to Florence Italy and married my father. On October 3, 1936 I was born. I don't have any recollections before I was 4 years old. I am told that being the firstborn, I was fawned over and mercilessly spoiled by my grandparents. My mother and father were very proud and wanted me to be the perfect child, whatever that means? I suspect it meant a toy-like child that never cries, misbehaves, or shits. I know that my mother did admit that she thought of me (when I was an infant) as an adorable doll. This illusion was shattered when she discovered me in the playpen all covered in shit. It was the servants' day off and my mother, I think, forgot to change me. At any rate I was gleefully playing with what I had created which shocked her and in disgust, my mother unceremoniously placed me and my creation under the faucet. I think this was our first misunderstanding and my first creative experience.

Although my father tells me that when I was a child he loved me very much and that we were very close, I have a hard time believing this. I have never felt close to my father. I don't think he and I ever bonded. What I do know is that corporal discipline, then, was an acceptable means with which to control unacceptable behavior in children.

"A child should be seen and not heard" was the standard of the time.

According to my mother I was a curious and willful child. Consequently I was physically disciplined often by my father and this discipline began early on when I was two years old. No one understood the terrible two's syndrome, then, least of all my very young parents. My father's reaction was to spank me into submission. My mother told me that when I was nearly two years old, one day she and my father decided to take me for a walk. I wanted to go in one direction and my father wanted to go in the other direction. Consequently I was spanked all the way. My father thought that he could break me as you break a horse. That didn't work. It just made me rebellious!

Another unpleasant experience which I remember quite vividly occurred when I was little a little over three years old. War had broken out in Europe and my father was inducted into the Italian army. Periodically he came home on leave. On one of these occasions I was put to bed for my afternoon nap. I didn't want to take a nap but my father insisted with the threat of a good spanking and so I reluctantly went to my room. As I was lying in bed sucking my thumb, I heard my parents go up stairs to the bedroom. It became very quiet downstairs. So, I decided that it was safe enough to leave my room. I went into the living room and discovered a bowl of fruit and so I indulged myself. I thought I was being quiet but unfortunately my father had heard me. He came running downstairs in a rage. I received a thrashing that I will never forget.

I was not a happy child. My mother told me, in later years, that I

rarely smiled as a child. I believe that! I was a miserable little rich girl. I have no fond memories of my childhood even though I had a privileged beginning. For the first three and three quarter years I was showered with attention and material wealth. I had a toy collection that was the envy of every one. From the best of German toys, to toys from around the world. My grandparents were world travelers and thus I had toys from every port and every sort. And yet, the only fun I remember having was playing with my luxurious doll house (which had running toilets) and imagining real adult people which I would gleefully flush down the toilet. I must have been a very angry little girl !

I don't recall having many playmates. I spent a lot of time by myself. I was not allowed to play with the servants' children and the only time I was allowed to play with other children was during infrequent visits to and from my parents' friends who had young offsprings. Not until my brother was born (I was almost 4 years old then) did I have someone more less my age around with whom to interact.. and these interactions were not always fun.

My brother, Niccolo, was born in 1940. The war in Europe was expanding. We were starting to feel the pinch. Food was beginning to be rationed. There was the black market of course, and my Italian grandmother made full use of it. Priceless family heirlooms were sold at a fraction of their value so that she could continue to live in the manner to which she was accustomed. My grandmother liked to give lavish parties to which she invited the military elite of all the armies.. Italian, German, English and American. She wanted to cover all bases, and she did this at the expense of the family fortune. My mother, on the other hand, tried to live simply. She did not like or respect my grandmother and consequently had very little to do with her.. even though we lived within walking distance(on the other side of the Arno river).My brother was a colicky baby who constantly cried. My mother tried

to breast feed him as she had with me but his violent reaction to it soon ended that. It became apparent that he was very allergic to mother's milk.

It was a difficult time for my mother. She was very young, far from home with a husband who was off to war fighting the allies - her people. Her loyalties were split. She loved my father and yet she loved her country. what a schizophrenic situation in which to be! I can only imagine her confusion, her anxiety. It must have been hell for her. Here she was in an enemy country with two young children and no way out. Her decision to return to Florence three years earlier had locked her into a nightmarish scenario which was to continue for another hellish five years. My mother and my brother and I were living alone now. Having discharged our help for lack of funds.

I was four years old and my brother was 6 months old when he swallowed a pin. One day when my mother was changing his diapers she left the room for few minutes and asked me to look after him. My brother was quietly lying in the bassinet. All of a sudden, the quiet of the moment was shattered by a terrible scream. What I didn't know, because I wasn't tall enough to see, was that he had taken an open safety pin and swallowed it. He was 6 months old then and I, his older sister, was only four! For the next year-and-a-half my brother was in and out of hospitals with one complication after another. You can imagine my feelings of guilt. I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders. Psychotherapy wasn't popular then. I was left to deal with my shame alone.

My mother was not very supportive since she felt I was responsible. She was very young and full of denial. The only way she could deal with her sense of guilt was to project it on to me. Therefore I was blamed for my brother's accident. Every time my brother went back into the hospital, I re-lived the nightmare. The feelings of guilt and injustice have left a searing scar on my psyche. I felt guilty because everybody told me that it

was my fault and I felt an injustice because I didn't understand what I could have done to prevent the accident. Consequently my relationship with my brother continues to this day to be difficult.

Although I was a child I feel very guilty about the way I treated him in the ensuing years. To say that it was sibling rivalry is to deny the hatred I must have felt for him. I say must have because I have no conscious awareness of hating him.. yet I treated him terribly at every given opportunity. I remember one particular instance of which I feel ashamed . My brother still remembers it as well. I must have been around 6 years old. It was a bright and sunny day. Not a cloud in the sky.It was a perfect Tuscan afternoon. My mother was entertaining one of her English friends who had brought two helium balloons. One for me and one for my brother. We were all on the veranda. My mother and her friend were drinking tea and absorbed in conversation. My brother and I were flying our balloons. All of a sudden mine flew away. Without a word I instantly grabbed my brother's and he ofcourse started screaming and sobbing uncontrollably. When my mother asked me what had happened, I told them my brother's balloon had flown away. I felt good about doing it then. I don't feel very good about it now.

Just as my brother's health improved mine diminished and I came down with rheumatic fever. I remember feeling sick a good deal of the time and having to stay in bed. However the memories of this period are not at all bad. I remember my mother reading fairy tales to me using one of her own children's books.I loved the illustrations. I didn't speak English then, so my mother translated the words into Italian as I looked at the pictures. To this day I love to see the art work of the early part of this century. I am particularly fond of the book illustrations by Parrish. I think his work reminds me of that period when my mother and I shared this time together and I had her undivided attention.

It was not long after this period that I began to have out of body

experiences (astral projections) . My earliest recollection is of an afternoon party that my mother and I attended. Of course she had to bring me along. It was proper for children to be seen and not heard. So, I had to be, not only polite, but quiet for hours. I couldn't move. I couldn't talk. Thus, I began to leave my body. I didn't go very far. I just went to the ceiling and floated around. It felt so liberating, it felt so good. That was the beginning of my out of body excursions which continued for several years. I left my body whenever I was bored and whenever I was scared. It became a very convenient tool.

I remember an amusing experience of this kind. I was attending the first grade in a nearby Catholic school. The nuns were very strict. There was no room for mistakes. One unfortunate day I had an accident. I wet my pants! The nun was nice enough not to embarrass me in front of my classmates. Instead she punished me (so she thought) after class. She had me kneel on one knee and and reflect on my mistake. she expected me to cry and ask for her forgiveness. What she didn't know was that as soon as I knelt, I left my body. I had no feeling of discomfort or pain. I was on the ceiling looking down at her as she kept questioning in amazement-" why are you not crying, what's wrong with you?". She finally gave up on me and left the room. That was one of many times that I found this ability, to astrally project, to be very convenient. There were to be many more other times I'd leave my body out of sheer terror. It was then (when the war in Europe personally touched my life) that I began to realize that we are not mere bodies but rather spiritual beings more or less trapped in a physical body in a physical world of chaos and disorder.

CHAPTER 2

The War breaks out in Europe

I was six years old when the tide of World War2 reached our shores. The lure of all the Renaissance art in Florence was more than the Germans and Allies could resist. Although Germany and Italy were fighting on the same side, their relationship was more lukewarm than a full-blown romance . I don't think the Italians really liked the Germans .They tolerated them because I think they feared them. At any rate, my earliest recollection was seeing a German battalion march right in front of the school, where my mother had retreated with my brother and me for protection. Everyone was terrified. Rumors of German atrocities were rampant. Everyone was glued to windows as we watched the Germans march by. The only sound heard was the sound of soldier's boots as they stomped the ground in awesome precision. It was a frightening experience. This was the beginning of a terrifying two and one-half years.

Shortly thereafter the bombings began every day -morning noon and night. Day after day, week after week, month after month - seven days a week. The stillness of air would be shattered with explosions of bombs. Some were frightfully near. The bombings were usually predictable. It was rumored that Americans bombed in the morning while the English bombed in the afternoon, before teatime, and the Germans bombed at night. Like clockwork, sirens would go off and the bombings would begin. The bombings at night were the most terrifying. They happened at different times of the night. Sometimes only once. Sometimes more than once. Consequently we were all light sleepers - always on the alert for the sound of sirens, but most of all the sound of planes. If we heard the planes, we knew they were near. Then we would all run out of our homes into open fields. It was much safer to

be away from buildings.

My brother and I were terrified, especially of the flares which preceded the bombings. The flares, numbering in the millions, lit up the area so that the pilots could see their targets. My brother and I were convinced that we were their targets. In desperation we would seek shelter under the low hanging branches of trees, hoping that the pilots wouldn't see us. It never occurred to me, then, that vipers (which are snakes) were rampant in the countryside. They were more of a threat! Thank God that we never had an encounter with one of these.

During the day we tried to go on with our business. I was usually in school, for at least part of the day. There were no shelters at the beginning of the war, and so when the air raid sirens sounded, we all left buildings and went into the surrounding fields and sought shelter in less conspicuous places. It was well known that buildings were not safe. There were so many bombings and so many buildings were destroyed that it is impossible to tell how many people died a slow terrible death being buried alive. It was a monumental task to even try to dig through the rubble of just one building. So no one even tried. Furthermore since the bombings were more or less continuous, everyone was preoccupied with their own survival. In order to prevent an epidemic of cholera and other diseases, the authorities poured lye over the bombed rubble of buildings. Decaying flesh posed a grave threat to the living. Furthermore, the odor was unbearable. Thus covering the rubble with lye became the most expedient solution.

Most of the time the air raid sirens sounded before the bombings. However there were exceptions. On several occasions there were unexpected bombings. It was on one of these occasions that a friend of mine and his mother were caught off guard and were buried alive. Fortunately the grandmother had been able to exit before the bombings, and upon her insistence and using her family's prestige as leverage, she was able to get

the authorities to dig up the building. They found my little friend very much alive. He had sought shelter under a table. His mother, too, was alive. She had sought shelter under a doorway. Both would have died a terrible death if it had not been for the grandmother's insistence. This experience left my little friend with terrible claustrophobia. He was terrified of being inside or near any building. The last time I saw him, he was walking down the middle of the street with his mother. I often wonder what happened to him. Did he ever overcome his terror? War leaves an indelible mark on the psyche.. especially when it wounds a child, physically or emotionally.

It wasn't just the bombings that concerned us. There was the threat of danger everywhere, all the time, especially as the war progressed.. and when the Allies landed, it really became mean. The Germans used every dirty trick that they could think of. Booby traps were common place. I was always warned not to touch anything because it could be a booby trap. A fine looking pencil, a toy, a shiny object, especially if found on the street, could and often was a booby trap.Countless people lost their limbs, eyes and lives this way..and many were children. Then, there were the mines. I guess it was the soldiers, not the civilians, who were the targets. Unfortunately, more often than not, innocent naive civilians became the victims.

I remember walking down the street with my mother. Half a block in front of us another mother and child were walking over a small bridge which passed over a little stream. Without warning, there was an explosion and the bridge blew up with the mother and child. My mother quickly covered my eyes as she grabbed me and took me back home. It turned out that the bridge had been mined! The mother was immediately killed. The child lingered on in a hospital for few days before he died as well. He had lost both legs as well as part of his abdomen. It could have been my mother and me. It wasn't thank God!

We had many more close calls before the end of the war. On

another occasion as my mother was taking me to school, we heard the whistle of a very close bomb as it hit the roof of the building directly in front of us. We froze dead in our tracks. As it turned out we were lucky once again. The whistle of a bomb is a terrifying sound because it indicates the bomb's close proximity. From the time the whistle is heard and the bomb explodes is a nanosecond. There is no time for escape.

Another bombing experience, that I vividly remember, occurred while in church. I don't remember the occasion. At any rate, I was in church with my classmates and nuns. All of a sudden we heard the whistle and a bomb hit the roof of the church. The ceiling began to fall on us. If it had not been for the buttresses beneath, which momentarily caught the ceiling, we would all have been buried. The buttresses allowed us enough time to run out of the church. Every one got out safely and then the ceiling collapsed. The nuns told us that it was a miracle. I believe it was a miracle.. one of many that I was to experience throughout the war.

As the war progressed, the need for a shelter became evident. Thus a decision was made to build one nearby. The nuns, who ran the school which I attended, volunteered their property - and the whole neighborhood, including my mother, volunteered their time and labor. I remember seeing the nuns, women from the neighborhood, old men, and my mother digging with shovels and picks. All the young men were at war and the equipment at hand was nothing more than gardening tools. It took a while and a lot of hard work before the shelter was completed.

We lived on top of a hill, one block from the school which was halfway up the hill. The city's water supply(a reservoir) was located in the valley below our house and the school. When the Germans threatened to bomb the reservoir, we all moved into the shelter and lived there for three weeks.

The shelter was a large underground excavation.It was very damp

and cold. The only light source was from a few flickering candles. There was no heat. The dirt floor was strewn with damp mattresses which had to be shared. There were not enough for everyone. Five children had to sleep on one mattress. It was very uncomfortable! I remember the smell of newly dug up earth which permeated everything- the blankets, our clothes, the mattresses. Everything smelled and felt like damp soil. On top of this, the fear and anxiety which the adults were trying to hide from us, the children, was felt by all.

I remember seeing the adults nervously pace back and forth at the entrance of the cave. We anxiously waited and waited. For three weeks we waited until we received news that the Germans had decided to contaminate the water supply with bacteria instead. What I didn't realize, then, was that if the Germans had bombed the reservoir, the flimsy shelters that my mother and neighbors had dug would probably have caved in with the reverberations of the bombs. Plus we were in danger of a direct hit as well. That is why the adults had been so nervous. Even though the contamination of water supply was a nuisance, we were able to cope with it. By boiling the water and dissolving a white pill in it (some kind of anti-bacterial agent), we were able to eventually drink the water.

In a spite of its unprofessional construction, we used the shelter frequently. Our area was no longer specifically targeted, but all buildings were. Thus the shelter became our oasis, our refuge from the frequent bombings. Every time the air raid siren sounded everyone in the neighborhood rushed into the shelter with their most valuable belongings. Of course most people brought money, jewelry, collectors' items of great value, their pets etc. On one occasion a neighbor came running into the shelter with pots and pans. She was a wealthy lady and so everyone was surprised that she had chosen pots and pans.. and so was she! As it turns out, she had been in the kitchen at the time the air raid siren sounded and in her panic she

grabbed the first things she saw - they were pots and pans. The humor of the situation made everyone laugh and for a moment we forgot the bombings.

Chapter 3

War reaches Florence

*"Open my heart
and you will see
carved upon it Italy"*

Browning

A large English population, mainly spinster women and old retirees, chose to remain in Florence during World War 2 never thinking that the war would envelope and decimate the city, as well as threaten their lives. When this realization dawned on them, they found themselves trapped in an enemy country. It became especially frightening when the Germans occupied Florence and began rounding up foreigners for "questioning". It was on one of these occasions that an English friend of my mother's was taken in by the authorities for ????. She was idealistic. A young, vibrant, and beautiful woman studying at the University of Florence with hopes and dreams of a better tomorrow. The authorities questioned her for two weeks. When she returned home, she looked like a zombie. She had aged 40 years and her hair had gone completely white. She became thoroughly withdrawn and never spoke about what had happened. Her vibrant youthful personality changed 360 degrees. The dreams and hopes of a great future were replaced by nightmares of two weeks of unimaginable horror. At the time I often wondered what had happened to her. I now suspect that she must have been gang raped. After all, isn't that what the occupation forces have always done to young attractive women?

My mother was briefly questioned on several occasions but was

not traumatized by her experience. I suspect that she was not targeted for the typical type of “questioning” reserved for attractive female foreigners because of her marriage to my father and because of my Italian grandmothers' smart decision to entertain the occupying forces - their generals and their staff. My mother bitterly criticized her mother-in-law for doing this never realizing that it probably saved her life, let alone her dignity and her sanity!

My mother's other English friends were older retirees and unattractive spinster ladies. I am sure they were investigated by the authorities as well, but without incidence. One of these ladies, whose concern for me and my brother overlooked common sense, decided to prepare me for a worst-case scenario. I guess she was trying to warn me that my mother's life was in danger .. and so she decided to tell me a story that was supposed to prepare me for my mother's possible death. What it did was to scare me so much that, for the duration of the war, I lived in constant fear of losing my mother. The story involved a young girl my age, her brother my brother's age, and a mother who was gravely ill. They lived in the mountains. Their closest neighbors were miles away and their father was away at war. They were literally snowed in because of a bad winter. The mother's condition worsened with each passing day. As the weeks progressed, she soon became bedridden. When she realized that there was no hope for recovery, she asked her daughter to take her out into the wood shed and leave her there. She realized that to die in the house would further traumatize the children. She then made her daughter promise never to look inside the woodshed and to patiently wait in the house with her brother where there was enough food, water, and warmth to last them through the remaining weeks of winter. She held her daughter tight and told her how much she loved her and how sorry she was to have to leave her and her brother but that some day they would be together again. She said - “ you are a big girl now. I trust you and I know

that you can handle this difficult situation. You have to be strong for your brother's sake. He is too young to understand. He will need your strength and love." The daughter did as she was told and as soon as the snow began to thaw, help arrived as the mother had promised.

To this day, the story still makes me weep. It played such havoc on my young psyche. I became obsessed with the possibility of my mother's death. I was totally dependent on her, not only for my own survival, but for her love and for the reassurance that everything was going to be just fine. There was no one else whom I loved and with whom I felt safe. My mother was my refuge, my rock of Gibraltar. To have this threatened was to have the foundation of my own life threatened.

Chapter 4

Teresa

I was lucky my mother survived. I often wonder how terrible it must be for children to lose their mother. The fact is that many children, during the war, not only lost their mothers but their whole families as well. Teresa was one of these children whose parents had been killed as spies. The fact is they were Jewish and had been hunted down as dogs and killed. These poor souls were trying to escape from the authorities who were probably trying to send them to Auschwitz or a similar hell. Calling them spies was simply a justification for murdering them. After all, this was Italy, a Catholic country that didn't appear to have an anti-Semitic policy. To kill them for being Jewish was unthinkable!

The Jewish couple, knowing that they would soon be caught, hid their daughter with the nuns at the school which I attended. Once the parents were caught, the authorities combed the countryside for the child. They wanted to question the young girl because they said that she was carrying secret documents. Everyone knew what that meant, and so a tremendous effort was mounted to save the girl. The authorities were closing in on the nuns and that was when the nuns contacted my mother. They convinced her that she would never be suspected. After all, why would an American citizen jeopardize her life to save a Jewish life? The nun's reasoning was right on target. The authorities never suspected my mother. Thus began our last year of the war.

My mother was not only a very brave woman but extremely cautious as well. Thus bringing Theresa to our house without causing suspicion, became a very carefully thought out project. No one could be trusted outside of my mother and the nuns. Not the neighbors, not our

relatives. No one! Therefore a plan was conceived that involved no one else.

The Nuns were known to visit people who were ill.

So, it was not unusual for them to bring food and blankets etc.. whatever supplies they had, they shared! Everyone knew that I was sickly.

Consequently, the announcement that my condition had gotten worse spread across the community. The phone lines were bugged and my mother and the nuns knew this. So they used the telephone to their own advantage.

My mother telephoned the nuns and asked them to bring her some medicine and other essentials. The nuns informed her that they had received more flour than they could use and offered her a bag of flour. The bag of flour became the way Teresa was brought to our house. She was so small and so emaciated that the flour bag became a very credible way to transport her. No one ever suspected anything .

My mother was horrified at the condition in which she found the little girl . Teresa was so terrified that she wouldn't speak. My mother hugged and tried to reassure her but the girl didn't respond. She was like a zombie! My mother thought the girl was a deaf mute. It was years later that she discovered that the young girl actually spoke 5 languages. Not only had this child been traumatized and psychologically damaged but her physical health was in jeopardy as well. It was feared that she might have tuberculosis. Fortunately for us, she didn't! To have her physically examined by a doctor was out of the question. It was just too risky. No one could be trusted! One never knew who and where the spies were. And so my mother became therapist, nurse, doctor and surrogate mother to this child who had lost so very much ..and no one wanted.

Although Teresa was only one year older than me, I never felt close to her. The only thing she ever gave me was lice and we were both too sick to ever play. So we never really bonded. In my mind, her presence jeopardized my mother's safety. I lived in constant dread that the

authorities would discover her and take my mother away. It was this very fear that kept my brother and me from revealing the truth. We guarded our secret with our lives!

I will never forget my lice experience. I don't know how I caught lice from Teresa. My mother and brother didn't. But I sure did! Maybe it was because I had a long hair. All I know is that one day my scalp started itching, I mean really itching! and when I scratched, I heard crackling sounds - they were the eggs! That was awful. The idea of having lice and their eggs in my hair was a disgusting experience for me. Fortunately, the nuns had a remedy. It was a topical application of a semi-solid looking solution in tri colors like vanilla Chocolate and strawberry icecream. It looked delicious but it smelled lousy. The odor was an overwhelmingly strong camphor smell. At any rate it worked like a miracle, instantly killing the lice and their eggs. Teresa and I were cured of lice! For me the lice were a short lived experience. Who knows how long Teresa had them? She had so many problems that the lice were the least of her miserable experiences.

I often wonder how terrible those years must have been for her. The murder of her parents, starvation, running, hiding - not knowing who to trust - are experiences beyond belief. For a child to suffer through such a nightmare is unthinkable. But suffer she did, and it took a terrible toll on her both emotionally and physically. She never was able to completely trust anyone. My mother catered to her every need desperately trying to make up for the horrors that young Teresa had experienced. But the damage to her psyche had been so extreme that the child wasn't able to completely trust even my mother who showered her with so much love and attention. Teresa never spoke or showed any emotions even when she had to have been experiencing extreme discomfort and pain. Every time she had a bowel movement she must have been in agony. Yet she didn't even whimper as her intestines had to be gently reinserted into her rectum each and every

time she defecated. Going to the bathroom probably wasn't her favorite thing to do. She was constantly constipated and only after an application of Caster oil was she able to defecate. I remember spending hours helping my mother nurse her through these awful experiences. My mother's dedication to help this young girl, not only to survive, but to heal continued until the war ended. Mother had become very attached to Teresa. At the end of the war, she wanted to legally adopt her. However was unable to do so because of the strenuous objections of the Jewish community which had suddenly resurfaced. The fact that my parents were Christians and Theresa was Jewish was their objection for not wanting my parents to legally adopt the girl. The courts agreed and it broke my mother's heart. She had risked her life and her children's well-being for this girl. For my part, I was not unhappy to see Theresa go. It was as if a huge load had been lifted off of my back. I guess my brother felt the same way. I don't know because we never spoke about Teresa again.

Chapter 5

Heroes and Heroines

To extol my parent's bravery is to give credit where credit is due. They were not alone however. There were many people whose bravery went unnoticed. And of course there were the cowards and evildoers as well. War changes people! It brings out the best in some, and the worst in others. While some people chose to risk their lives, even for strangers, others betrayed their families, friends, and neighbors for no apparent reason.. other than to get on the good side of the enemy. Then, there were the terrorists whose perverted sense of patriotism, coupled with their cowardice, put everyone at risk. It was a well-known fact that an act of terrorism against the Nazis was retaliated with unequal measure against poor innocent civilians. A case in point was when a bus load of German soldiers was blown up, the Nazis cordoned off 2 blocks in Florence and hence shot every one - men, women, and children. the terrorists were not among them. Like typical cowards, they got away. The Italians hated and feared terrorists more than they hated and feared the enemy. But because these zealots were a furtive group, no one ever knew who they were. Their acts of terrorism were usually negotiated by one or 2 partisans whose identities were never disclosed even after the war ended. They knew better! The world would never have praised or even condoned them. Their cowardly acts would have been justification for criminal prosecution.

The war was fought and won not only by the allied forces, but by an underground of exceptionally brave men and women who constantly put their lives at risk to save people. The French underground is the most famous because they were the largest and most effective. However, there were other groups, as well as individuals, throughout Europe who were continuously continuously risking their own lives to help others. Among these were nuns and priests. Although the Catholic Church never

officially took the position against the Nazis, for fear of retribution, they had a very successful underground system whose operations were covert in order to ensure success. It was this very system that helped save Teresa and my father.

At the beginning of the war, Italy had 2 armies - King Umberto's army and Mussolini's army. My father fought with the king's army. Although both armies fought against the allies, my father spent most of the war fighting in the mountains of Albania where he was a captain of an artillery battalion. I never quite understood who and why this battalion was fighting. All I know is that they spent most of their time buried under snow. While attempting to protect their mountain, they periodically exchanged gunfire with the enemy and blasted sites that were suspected to be their encampments. Around 1942 the King's army and the fascist army parted company. Shortly thereafter my father became a prisoner of war. He was arrested by the Nazis and taken to France, near Marseille, to a prisoner of war camp.. it was to be a temporary measure. His final destination was unknown. During this time terrible rumors began to surface regarding Nazi atrocities. It was then that my father decided to escape before it was too late.

Pretending that he had a terrible toothache, my father convinced his captors to take him to a local dentist. Two guards accompanied him. Deciding that they didn't want to hear his moaning and groaning anymore and figuring that my father was in so much pain and therefore no threat, they remained in the waiting room. Thus he went into the dentist's office unaccompanied. It was no accident. Apparently, my father had this all planned out. He should have received an academy award for his acting! As soon as he felt safe from the scrutiny of the guards, my father overpowered the old dentist. As it turned out, my dad was luckier than he could have imagined. The dentist, apparently, was a member of the French

underground! After giving my father the address and directions to a safe house, he tied up the old dentist to establish a credible alibi. After all, the guards had to be convinced of the dentist's innocence. Upon leaving unnoticed through a back door, my father followed the directions that he had been given and easily found the safe house. Fortunately, for my father, the escape went as planned without any difficulty. The safe house was in a town called Hyeres. It turned out to be the home of a local parish priest, and it was here that for one and a half years my father lived and worked with the French underground. It was here, as well, that he met and fell in love with another woman. She was a young, beautiful, idealistic girl who passionately hated the Nazis and their occupation of her country. She was a French patriot who was willing to sacrifice her life to free her people from Nazi occupation. Thus, she secretly worked as a courier for the French underground as well as being the official cook and housekeeper for the local priest.

Whether or not the Vatican was aware of this priest's anti-Nazi activities is a moot point because as I stated previously, the Catholic Church couldn't officially voice their opposition to German occupation and atrocities without inviting retaliation against the Vatican. And in order to survive the Catholic church had to appear to remain neutral. It was under this neutral appearance that the Catholic Church covertly aided the resistance forces. Churches often became the refuge for desperate people trying to escape from the Nazis, and my father's situation was not unusual. What was unusual was that he stayed in the same place for one and half years. Why? I guess because he had fallen in love with this young woman. You might say that he also got sucked in by the excitement of saving people in similar circumstances. It wasn't just an act of courage, but it was a Christian thing to do. My father was devoutly Catholic (Italian style). This explains the dichotomy between having an extramarital affair and risking one's life for

absolute strangers. By pretending to be a priest, my father did escape the scrutiny of the German occupation forces for a while. Only after his girlfriend was betrayed by a neighbor and arrested, was my father obliged to leave, and a decision was made to cross the Alps into Italy.

With false papers and two traveling companions, my father - with the help of the French underground - set out towards the Alps. They rested periodically at predetermined safe houses throughout the French countryside. It was a dangerous journey as my father soon found out. Traveling mostly at night and avoiding roads, they walked through the fields and overgrown paths so as not to be noticed. It was a slow and tiring journey. By the time they reached each safe house they were exhausted. It was at one of these houses that my father and his companions were almost arrested. If it had not been for their careful vigilance and cautious approach, they would not have noticed the German car parked in front of the Farm House. Apparently the Germans had discovered the safe house, arrested the people inside and were waiting for my father and his companions. Fortunately the house was close enough to the Alps that a decision was made to sleep in the fields during daytime hours and to continue at night until they reached their destination. Unfortunately for them, it rained all day and without shelter, they were wet, cold, and hungry. That night my father's companions decided that they couldn't continue with the journey and so he and they parted company. My father felt that he had come this far and was not going to quit. Thus, he made the decision to cross the Maritime Alps by himself. He never heard from his companions again. Did they survive the war? Who knows! They were probably caught and executed by the Nazi soldiers who had been waiting at the safe house.

It must have been an awesome moment when my father saw the mountains that loomed before him. Realizing that the enemy had probably mined the passes, he made the decision not to use them.

Instead, he climbed the mountains and avoided anything that appeared suspicious. How he did this is beyond comprehension, and how he survived is a miracle. Days later- cold, hungry and exhausted -he arrived in a small village in the Ligurian section on the Italian border. and immediately went to the local church. After a restful night and a hearty breakfast, he was given a few liras and departed. Robed in a Franciscan frock, my father boarded a train for Florence. To his shock, the train was loaded with German soldiers. Knowing that if he was captured out of uniform, it would be an immediate death sentence, he decided to sit with the soldiers in order not to be conspicuous . A few of them spoke Italian. Thus the trip up was spent conversing ,joking, and playing cards. When asked where he was going and why, he responded that he was visiting his dying mother. The trip was more or less uneventful until one of the soldiers asked my father to hear his confession.At this point my father, being devoutly Roman Catholic, was immobilized with the fear of God's wrath for pretending to be a priest and violating one of the blessed sacraments.For hearing the soldier's confession.. albeit a German soldier,was a major sin for someone other than a priest. However realizing that his refusal would cast suspicion,he decided to go along with the farce. fortunately the soldier was so grateful for being able to unload his sins, that he did not notice my father's obvious discomfort.. or if he did, he must have interpreted his reaction as being a priest's disapproval for his most grievous sins. Little did he know that my father wasn't listening to his sins, but rather was imploring God for his own forgiveness!

Because Italy was in a state of war, there was a curfew and all the telephone lines were tapped. Knowing this, upon arriving in Florence, my father decided not to telephone but walked directly to my grandmother's house since it was only a few blocks from the train station. Even though it was past midnight, making a telephone call would not only

have placed him in jeopardy, but his mother as well.

My grandmother was sound asleep when she was rudely awakened by the doorbell. Unwilling to open the door, for fear that it was the Secret Police, she did not respond right away. Several family friends had vanished in the night without a trace. This is how the secret police operated. Even though she had powerful friends on both sides of the political aisle, she knew that this was no guarantee! Knowing that it was impossible to escape, she decided to hide in a closet. But before doing this my grandmother instructed her maid to tell the secret police that the matron of the House was away on vacation. Thus with fear and trepidation of being caught in a lie, the maid opened the door fully expecting to see masked guards pointing a gun at her. To her surprise, a disheveled looking monk stood before her. My father was almost home at last!

The following morning my mother received a very strange telephone call from my grandmother who invited her for tea that afternoon to celebrate a special event. It was strange because my mother and grandmother rarely talked to or visited each other, and she couldn't imagine celebrating anything. After all, the war was raging in Florence. Bombs were dropping the left and right. Leaving the house and crossing the Arno river with two small children, was not my mother's idea of fun. Bridges were often targeted during air raids, and daylight bombings were a favorite time for the allied forces. It took my grandmother a great deal of time and clever verbal maneuverings to persuade my mother to go. Because the telephones were tapped, my grandmother had to be very careful not to alert the wrong people - namely the secret police. In addition, she not only had to persuade my mother to come, but to bring half a dozen nuns from the close by convent, with her. In order to do this, she told my mother that the celebration was in honor of the Cardinal who was her guest and was going to celebrate a special Mass for the family and a few friends. Knowing that my

mother was very friendly with the nuns in the nearby convent, she was able to persuade my mother to invite them and of course they were more than happy to oblige. It was a rare opportunity to be blessed with the presence of a cardinal of the church. It is important to remind the readers that my grandmother was a very social person. Being a Marchesa, she socialized with leading members of society, including the higher echelon of the church. Thus it was not that unusual that she would entertain a cardinal. What was unusual, in my mother's mind, was that she was inviting her and some of her friends. Being a religious person, my mother couldn't pass up the invitation. Also..mother had begun to suspect that there was more to the story than a Cardinal's visit.

We all arrived safely at my grandmother's house at the appointed time, fully expecting to meet a cardinal. Instead it was my father who greeted us. We were briefly stunned and when the realization sunk in that it wasn't a dream, we were overcome with sobbing emotion. My mother and father and held each other for what seemed an eternity. It was soon made clear to everyone that the nuns had been invited to be part of an elaborate plan, designed by my father and grandmother, to bring him safely back to our house that afternoon. Of course, no one other than my father and grandmother knew about this plan until our arrival. After being briefed, it was decided that we stay at my grandmother's house for a couple of hours in order not to cast suspicion. After all, the telephone invitation had stated a very different purpose which included a mass. Therefore, it was decided that we stay for at least 2 hours.

It is important to understand that my mother, being an American citizen, was under constant surveillance..especially because my father was an escaped prisoner of war. The obvious conclusion was that he would try to contact her and/ or return home. Taking every necessary precaution was a matter of life and death! My brother and I were made

perfectly aware of this real threat. We were so terrified that the authorities would arrest our mother, never to be seen again, that we swore that nothing and no one would ever get any information from us. That's how it was! My brother and I pretended that my father didn't exist from that moment on.

later that afternoon my father, dressed in a nun's habit, left with five of the nuns. Shortly thereafter, my mother, brother and I followed behind. The nun, whose habit my father was wearing, remained at my grandmother's house until the following day. The rest of us arrived at the convent that afternoon without attracting suspicion. My father stayed at the convent for a couple of weeks until a secret hiding area was built in our house where he and Teresa would hide in time of need.

Since the convent was down the hill from where we lived, my father under the cover of one night walked through the vinyard and olive grove that separated our properties and arrived home to remain for the duration of the war.

This was not a peaceful time. Florence was in a constant state of siege. Our house was under continuous scrutiny and we were visited on several occasions by the police who interrogated my mother, myself, and my brother about my father who was hiding right there behind a wall as they questioned us. It was a miracle that he and Teresa didn't sneeze. As far as my brother and I were concerned, my Father didn't exist. It was easy for us to lie. We were protecting our mother!

During the winter months, it became so cold that the joints of our fingers would bleed open. There was no heat in the buildings. coal, the traditional method of heating homes then, was not available. We didn't even have hot running water. My mother had to boil water so that we could soak our hands in its warmth. We were constantly cold. My mother tried to warm our beds at night by putting hot coals in a covered pot, then she placed the warm pot in each bed for a few minutes. This helped a lot!

We were also very hungry. There were days that we literally went without food. We shared it with our neighbors and they in turn shared theirs with us. This is how victims of war survive. Sharing is a lifeline!

The nuns were particularly generous. They grew most of their own food. Although it was barely enough for them and the children in their care, they shared the little that they had with their neighbors. The nuns had a few chickens, as well, that supplied them with eggs. Thus, I got to eat eggs on special occasions. I ate them raw. They were delicious! We rarely had meat. But to kill chickens would have been like killing the golden goose. Meat was so scarce that people began to eat their dogs, cats, and horses. I remember eating horsemeat. It had a sweet taste. I even ate a rabbit once. I remember watching a nun skin a rabbit that she had caught. I was mesmerized by the process. It was like taking a glove off. I can't believe that I am saying this since I am an animal lover- the rabbit was delicious! As hungry as I was, there was one thing I couldn't tolerate and that was fried pig's blood. I was very anemic and weak. The nuns, on occasion, were given pig entrails and blood by a local farmer. They, then, took the blood and mixed it with flour and then fried it. They gave it to me and other sickly children. It was the worst tasting thing you can imagine. As hard as I tried, I couldn't keep this mixture down..even though I was starving. I should have been grateful because there were days that we didn't have any food at all!

I remember a particular birthday. My mother had been given a little flour with which to bake a cake. There was no sugar, no baking soda - nothing but flour and water. The result was a hard and tasteless brick masquerading as a cake. But to tell you the truth, it was delicious! We hadn't eaten for days and we were hungry.

When the allied forces arrived and occupied our side of the Arno river, life got a little easier. Unfortunately, the Germans occupied the other side, and the battle raged on. Back and forth artillery fire

was a constant event. Dodging bombs and falling buildings, as well as avoiding booby traps, became our daily routine. In spite of this, we managed. The American G.I's were wonderful . They shared their rations with us. Hunger was no longer the pressing issue that we had experienced for so long. Our diet wasn't exactly the very best, but now we had food to eat. I remember eating so much peanut butter and spam that I got so sick to my stomach. My system was not accustomed to such rich foods.. and the candy bars- there were so many candy bars. Every G.I. that we met, gave us candy bars.

I remember 2 G.I's in particular. Ed was a doctor and Don was his driver. They spent a lot of time with us and Ed became one of my parent's best friends. I particularly loved Don who allowed me to sit on his lap while driving and taught me how to steer his jeep as we took spins around the block. My brother and I were constantly competing for Don's undivided attention. He was so easy going and full of fun. He seemed to love children and we in turn loved him. He didn't speak Italian and my brother and I didn't speak any English, but this didn't stop us from communicating and interacting with him. We did a lot of pointing and used body language as a substitute for verbal communication. He was a fun loving guy who made amusing faces and entertained us with magical tricks, as well as showering us with candy bars and chewing gum. We always looked forward to seeing him. To this day, I love jeeps, kakhis, and anything that reminds me of those wonderful G.I's.

Towards the very end of the war, as the bombings became less frequent, we began to lead more normal lives. Visiting friends, taking walks, going to a park, were now daily events. It was on a Sunday afternoon that my mother decided to treat us to something that we hadn't been able to do in years. That was to go on a merry-go-round. Since it was a beautiful day, the park was full of people. The merry-go-round was packed with children. Out of nowhere, a plane appeared and came straight towards

the merry-go-round strafing it with bullets as it passed over us. We all ran for our lives, hiding wherever we could find shelter. The plane disappeared and we all assumed that it must have been a German plane. After all, it was the Germans who were the enemy. It wasn't until many years later that my mother confided to me that it was an American plane. Apparently, not all the G.I's were great guys. It is easy to blame the Germans for the terrible atrocities of World War Two. After all, Hitler's policies were to blame. It is not so easy to understand why American soldiers would commit atrocities, but apparently some did. War brings out the best in some and the worst in others.

One of these soldiers was an Afro-American accused of raping an Italian woman. When the MP's tried to arrest him, they were unsuccessful. He was not only fully armed, but had taken a young Italian boy as a hostage, and his regiment refused to help the MP's. It is important to understand that the American forces were practicing segregation at the time. White soldiers and Black soldiers did not eat, sleep, or mingle with each other. In fact the regiments were geographically separated. Although they fought in the same army, they had little else in common. Trust, or the lack of it, was a big issue..and this incidence didn't help. The Black GI's didn't trust the white MP's and visa versa. Thus, there was a stand off. In order to avoid a full blown rebellion by the Black regiment, careful negotiations went on for days without progress. At this point the U.S. army, not knowing what to do, consulted with our friend Ed, who was a psychiatrist. His conclusion was that a non-military American woman was needed to do the negotiations instead of military personnel. The only American female civilian known to be living in Florence at that time, was my mother. Ed, appealing to her motherly instincts, convinced my mother to negotiate the release of the Italian boy and the surrender of the accused.

My mother had gone through so much during the war

that this mission did not seem to concern her. She did not fear for her safety and that's why, I guess, she took me along.

I remember walking hand in hand with her towards the Afro-American regiment which was stationed at the top of the hill. Walking behind us were dozens of fully armed MP's. In front of us were the tents and trucks of the Black regiment. I remember seeing clouds of smoke pouring out of the tents. The awful smell of kerosene was so extreme as to make me want to gag. I had never smelled kerosene before. I guess these soldiers used kerosene for everything including in lamps and stoves. To this day I don't know why. I don't think kerosene was widely used by the rest of the armed forces.

As we approached the tents, we were met by 2 Afro-American soldiers who politely asked my mother, in broken Italian, what she wanted. To their amazement and delight, she responded in English. I didn't speak any English at the time, but I could understand their body language and their smiles. They relaxed completely and even gave me a pat on the head. Eventually, the accused rapist and his young hostage were brought out and handed over to the MP's. Later that night I asked my mother what she had said. Her reply was that she had introduced herself as an American citizen who had spent the last 5 years of her life trapped in an enemy country with 2 young children living in constant terror with little hope of surviving the war ..and that it wasn't until the G.I's had landed, that she began to feel safe again. She thanked them for saving her life. She, then told them that she was proud to be an American and that they ought to be proud to be Americans as well. She reminded them of their loved ones back home and she appealed to their sense of honor. My mother was a very decent and honorable person typical of her generation. She had an extraordinary ability to make people feel comfortable and at ease. She was a highly principled person and a gifted communicator.

Chapter 6

The end of World War2 and a new beginning

Shortly after my mother's negotiation experience, the war came to an end in Europe. I don't remember much of this event other than the bombings ended and the Lira was worthless. I remember seeing people hawling barrels full of money to buy a loaf of bread, but that's about it. By this time, my out of body experiences were in full force. The war had taken a terrible toll on me. I didn't feel very safe in this world. I spent more time out of my body, floating above it, than in it. Anything and everything could and would propel me out of it - boring conversations, loud noises of course, or just sitting around. Being out of my body was the only time I felt completely safe. The end of the war did not make any difference. By this time, I had developed such a distrust of the world that I no longer felt secure anywhere. And so I don't have many memories of the last few weeks in Florence. Because my mother was six months into her pregnancy, a decision was made to leave as soon as possible and return to the U.S. with me and my brother, leaving my father behind to tie up loose ends.

The war was still raging with Japan. Few ships dared to sail the heavily mined seas, other than navy and hospital ships. Through our friend Ed, it was arranged that we leave on an American hospital ship which was soon to depart from Genova. I guess it was because my mother was a very pregnant American citizen with 2 sick children that we were allowed passage on a ship full of wounded G.I's. I am sure all sorts of rules were bent in order for this to happen. Thus, in the spring of 1945, we began the journey that was to change my life forever.

Our trip from Florence to Genova was gruelling. It took one full day to arrive. The trip was by truck, an American army

transport truck! It was so very uncomfortable that I still remember the excruciating ride. I don't think the truck had any springs or shock absorbers. I could feel every bump reverberating through every bone in my small, thin, and weak body. The streets had been so bombed that a pavement no longer existed. Instead, the ground was riddled with craters. The ride was long, bumpy, and terribly uncomfortable, to say the very least. Finally, we arrived at a Red Cross camp completely exhausted. It was there that we were to spend the night. When my mother discovered that our sleeping quarters were in the T.B. ward, she had a fit! Finally she succeeded in shaming the official in charge to allow us to spend the night in the officer's quarters instead. The next day we were driven to our final destination in a Red Cross car which drove us in comfort to the nearby port in Genova. There we boarded our ship. It was only then that I began to feel safe.

I clearly remember the ship. It was a spotless white ship with a very large red cross on it.

We were the very last to board. All the wounded soldiers had embarked the night before. Young Italian boys were swimming all around the ship begging for coins. The water was a dark green. I watched the boys' glistening bodies leap in and out of the water catching coins as the G.I.'s playfully threw them. It was a gloriously sunny day as the boat began to pull out of the harbor while a navy band played *ANCHORS AWAY*. I was so happy to leave. The realization that we were going to America had finally sunk in. The boat slowly made its way past the rock of Gibraltar, leaving the dark green waters of the Mediterranean sea, into the vast Atlantic. It took us 2 weeks to cross the ocean as we cautiously followed a mine sweeper.

We had boarded the ship with nothing but the clothes on our backs and one other change each. Everything had to be left behind. I did smuggle, however, a few pieces of shrapnel as a reminder. That was it! Strangely as it may seem, I didn't miss anything. I was happy to leave

it all behind.

That night we had the first real meal in years. I particularly remember my first sip of a cold glass of milk. It was chalky white, thick and delicious; not like the occasional highly diluted powdered milk, blue in color, which we had been drinking now and then throughout the last years of the war. This glass of milk, on our first night, was like nectar from the gods. The next day we had 3 full meals. I couldn't remember when that had last happened..and to have dessert with every meal as well, was beyond my wildest dreams.

At first, we were so preoccupied and delighted with our good fortune, we hardly noticed the wounded G.I's.,but as time progressed we couldn't help but notice. I particularly remember seeing the the mummy-like, completely bandaged, corpses without arms and legs, lying on the deck. I didn't realize they were human beings until I saw a nurse putting a cigarette in an opening which must have been the mouth. My mother had cautioned my brother and me to keep far away from these poor suffering souls so as not to bother them. We did as we were told and kept our distance. Not all the soldiers were as terribly wounded. One in particular, with an arm missing, befriended us. He spent a lot of time with my brother and me. It was this very soldier who taught me my very first words of English.

It was a beautiful night with a full moon. There was not a cloud in the sky. The sea was calm, and so we all went on deck after dinner. As we sat in contemplation taking in the beauty and wonder of this perfect evening, a star appeared. The one arm soldier took my hand and pointing to the star said: "twinkle , twinkle little star, how I wonder how you are...". He kept repeating these words until my brother and I joined in. These were my first words in English. I had no idea what these words meant. It wasn't until years later that I actually understood the full meaning of the poem.

Our trip was rather uneventful. The weather was terrific and the seas were calm. I didn't understand the terrible implication of following a mine sweeper. My mother never mentioned the awful possibility of the ship hitting a submerged mine. Fortunately, we didn't. My ignorance turned out to be my bliss. It was a time for healing. Two weeks later we landed in South Carolina. All I remember of this experience was seeing the dock with row upon row of ambulances. As we waited to disembark, we watched the terribly wounded being taken off the ship in stretchers and placed in the waiting ambulances. I was amazed that there had been so many wounded on board. We had not seen them before. Apparently they had been secured in another part of the ship. Then there were the strange ambulatory cases. Men and women making all sorts of involuntary and bizarre gestures, caught in a separate reality. The cases that shocked me the most were those pathetic souls who must have witnessed unbelievable horrors and who were mentally stuck in those terrible moments. Their minds were frozen in time and their screams still echo in my ears. War is hell!

We finally disembarked and boarded a train that was to take us north to our final destination. We were met in NYC by my maternal grandparents who drove us, in their brand new Packard, to their home on Long Island. The trip in this car was so comfortable. To this day, I have yet to experience such a comfortable ride. The memory of our awful ride from Florence to Genova was in sharp contrast to this ride.

It wasn't until we came to the U.S. and I was almost 9 years old, that I was finally able to live the normal life of a vibrant, healthy child. It was only then that I began to feel safe and fully alive. We moved in with my grandparents and lived there until my mother gave birth to my younger brother, Drew. My mother's parents lived comfortably. Although my grandfather was a teacher(he taught math at Stuyvesant high school), he supplemented his income with wise investments in the stock market.

Consequently, my grandparents' life style was very comfortable. They even had a live-in maid who loved children. She made me a raggedy ann doll which I dearly cherished for many years.

That summer my brother, Nicky, and I learned to speak English. That September we were enrolled in the nearby public school. Because my Florentine education had been frequently interrupted by the bombings and poor health, no one was sure in what grade I should be placed. I was almost nine years old at this point. My mother tried to reassure the principal that my reading, writing and math skills were at the 4th. grade level but he was concerned about my English comprehension. So it was decided that he interview me. I was so intimidated by the experience that when he asked me how many fingers I had, I popped right out of my body and I couldn't answer ..even though I knew the answer. Because of this, I was placed in the 2nd grade instead of the 4th. It was a humiliating experience. It was like being left behind, which in those days brought terrible shame. My out of body experiences had begun to cause me serious inconvenience. I didn't know how to stop myself from leaving my body at such inappropriate times. I had come to a point where I had no control over the situation. To top it all off, when Ed, our war time friend, came to visit us on Long Island, I overheard a conversation that my mother had with him. She apparently had been concerned about me. She could not understand my trance-like behavior which occurred when I left my body..and she did not have any interest or comprehension in the paranormal. It became very apparent that both my mother and Ed thought my behavior was not normal. However, Ed reassured her that I would grow out of it. The idea that I was doing something abnormal frightened me. I had always thought what I was doing was perfectly normal. It never occurred to me that other people weren't doing the same thing. As hard as I tried, I couldn't stop myself from leaving my body. It had become second nature to me. I felt so comfortable, secure, and free to be able to pop in and

out of my body. The problem was that I could no longer control or predict when and where this would happen. One day, in utter desperation, I knelt beside my bed and pleaded with God to stop me from astrally projecting. I begged with such passion and fervor that God must have heard. I never left my body again. I was now a normal child!

Although the war had ended and we were safe in America, it took my brother and me a very long time to fully accept that we were not going to be bombed again. Everytime we heard a fire siren or airplanes overhead, we would run for cover fully expecting bombs to explode all around us. Our psychic wounds were still raw. To top it all off, the kids at school made fun of us and called us fascist pigs. The fact that I was crosseyed and wore glasses, made me an even greater target. My brother would go home crying asking my mother-" Don't they know the war is over?". I, on the other hand, had had enough! I no longer wanted to be a victim. So, I fought back. To my mother's utter dismay, I became an absolute tomboy and beat up anyone who dared to taunt me. I didn't care if I got hurt in the process. Knowing that I no longer had to hide and could fight back, gave me such satisfaction that fear was not an issue. I particularly hated the older bullies who picked on my brother. I took them on with fierce determination. After I got finished with them, they left us alone. I quickly gained a reputation for my ability to defend myself and my brother. Only once did someone openly poke fun at me . I, of course, responded with a fight that left me with broken glasses, but to my satisfaction, the other kid fared far worse.

The relationship with my mother, by this time, had deteriorated considerably. She couldn't understand my rage. Everytime the school called her to report my schoolyard brawls, she was humiliated! Being the daughter of an educator, school to my mother was sacrosant. The teaching profession represented her highest ideals. The intellectual

development that education promised was regarded by my mother with the utmost esteem. To her, schools were learning institutions, not bar rooms for brawling. In her eyes, I had not only desecrated the grounds of this institution that she revered so highly, but had brought shame on the family name. I was summarily punished and threatened that if I continued to conduct myself in such an unlady-like fashion, I would be sent away to a very strict Catholic school in Canada. The threat of such banishment had its intended effect. I changed my behavior.

Shortly thereafter my mother accepted a teaching position in northern NY state, near Watertown. There we moved lock, stock and barrel to live with her great aunt, Jeannie, until my mother bought a house. It was a great house at the bottom of a hill. During the winter months, my brother and I built tunnels in the snow, toboggoned, had fierce snowball fights with neighborhood children, and experienced a typically normal, healthy childhood. It was a wonderful year. I was free at last.

I loved my mother's family. They were an interesting mix of educators, land owners, and farmers. They were the salt of the earth- unpretentious, kind, responsible people who cared about each other. They were Americans and proud of it! They loved their country, but above all, they loved their freedom..and so did I!

The war took a financial toll on my father's family. My dad had to remain in Florence to try to recover whatever he could. Most of his inherited income-producing properties had been ruined and left in shambles by the occupying forces. My father salvaged what he could and a year later, with the small amount of money he was able to take out of Italy, he came to live with us. He no longer was the ferocious tyrant of my memory. He had been humbled!

At age 11, I had an operation which straightened my

eyes. My life greatly improved after that. I no longer felt handicapped! I now was a regular American kid.

At age 12, shortly after my sister, Virginia's, birth, We moved to Panama where my father, utilizing his law degree, took a job with my mother's uncle. Uncle Max was a good business man with many properties. He had a home in the mountains, a home on the beach, and several homes and apartments in Panama City. We lived there for 3 years. Even though we lived in one of my uncle's homes in Panama City, I attended school in the Canal Zone. My mother used to give me bus fare, but instead of taking the bus to school, I would walk and experience fascinating places and people. One day, I met a San Blas Indian, dressed in her native attire, selling molas (hand embroidered place mats). With my 25 cents bus fare, I bought two. The San Blas Indians were a matriarchal society. This fascinated me! The women were in charge of the finances and family decisions. Wow..I loved the concept of women being in charge. I guess, this helped me to become the feminist that I am. On another walk to school, I discovered a little shop with a shrunken head visibly hanging in the window. The Darian Indians, another indigenous group in Panama, were head hunters. I thought it was interesting, So I bought it and took it home to the horror of my mother who immediately threw it out!

Even though I had some very interesting experiences, I hated Panama. It was boring. There were only 2 seasons - the dry and the wet. For 6 months of the year, it rained every day, I mean it rained cats and dogs! The sky would open up and empty itself with torrential fervor. Then, there were 6 months of sunshine, nothing but sunshine. Can you imagine being bored by beautiful days? Well, I was! Everyday was the same - boring, boring, boring. I guess this is when I realized that contrast is interesting and sameness is boring. I began to long for the four seasons. Three years later, we returned to the U.S.

I was very close to my mother. I loved her and felt safe around her. She was always there for us, nurturing us, comforting us, and encouraging us. On the other hand, I never really got close to my father. He was a strict disciplinarian and I don't think that he particularly liked my brothers and me. He rarely showed us any affection. A remarkable transformation occurred when my sister, Virginia, was born. All of a sudden my father demonstrated so much love for her - an amazing act - since I didn't know that he was capable of such feelings.

I spent my teenage years helping my mother raise my brothers and sister. I was the official baby sitter. My father never earned a lot of money and my mother was too proud to ask her family for financial aid. So, my parents fought all the time. Thus my teenage years were a struggle. I never really got to enjoy my adolescence. I was too busy studying, helping mom, and working part time.

Chapter 7

My Early 20's

ODE TO BALLET

*Oh sleek shimmering, swift glittering
gliding forms,
You who enkindle hearts desire,
Echo me themes muse inspired.*

*Oh joyous Junos, jubilant Jupiters-
Glittering, glistening jewels.
You Olympian dwellers in gilded castles,
Musical reflections, rhythmic shadows,*

*You who enthrall me into fantasy's bondage,
On bended knees I pay you homage.*

Dianora Niccolini 1960

I wanted to go to Smith College, but we couldn't afford it. So, I settled for Hunter College in New York City. My mother, also, decided to go back to school to get her Masters. We were both supposed to graduate in 1959. She did and I didn't. I didn't like Hunter College - I called it "the brain factory". It had an impersonal atmosphere, and so I dropped out after 2 years. I wanted to be an artist and I didn't see how a college degree would make any difference. My mother, of course, was concerned with financial security and wanted me to become a teacher. She never encouraged me to marry like most women at that time. I suspect the reason was she didn't want me to end up unhappily married as she was. When I dropped out of college my mother was devastated. She didn't speak to me for a couple of years. I had moved to NYC to be close to school and when I dropped out of college, I drifted from job to job, took a few courses at the Arts Students League and became an avid balletomane. All of my friends were artists and ballet dancers. I worked at dead end jobs during the day and hung out with my dancer friends at night. Ballet was all that I cared about. Then the Russian ballet came to NYC. I fell in love with the Bolshoi! I couldn't believe that the Russians, our most feared enemy, could produce such wonder. I got to know some of the Russian dancers, and to my amazement, found that they were no different than us.

It wasn't until I saw Ulanova dance in Romeo and Juliet that I experienced something so extraordinary that it touched my very soul. . She was a legend. One of the greatest ballerinas to have ever lived. At 49 years of age she was still performing. The (old) Met was sold out and the only available space, standing room only, was on a first come basis. Thus, 2 days

before she danced the role of Juliet, a line began to form. I was third on line. We ate and slept on line, and even fought to keep our place. People actually tried to push their way into the line. There was a riot and the police were called in to restore order. Finally, our effort paid out. I got to see the 49 year old legend, Ulanova, perform the role of the 14 year old Juliet. What a performance it was! Breathtaking doesn't begin to describe it. I was one big goose pimple throughout the performance. I really felt that I was in the presence of God. Not that I believed that Ulanova was God, but that she was in touch with and inspired by God. Her talent was so extraordinary that it had to be supernatural. Everyone in the audience seemed to feel this and was spellbound. At the end of the performance the audience broke out with applause that lasted for fifteen minutes. Apparently I wasn't the only one moved. The whole audience was in awe! For me it was a spiritual experience.

My passion, in my early twenties, was ballet. I ate, drank, and lived with dancers. At first I lived in a brownstone, on the west side of Manhattan, which I shared with a group of ballet dancers. I, then, moved to the eastside where I still live today. At the age of 25, I decided to focus on a career. I didn't want to teach, and I definitely didn't want to be a secretary. These were the only 2 career choices, at that time, that openly embraced women. I resented that. I wanted to be an artist! The question was - how could I support myself as an artist? I decided to become a commercial artist. What a nightmare that decision was! My first job was designing textiles. I almost went blind! I couldn't focus my eyes at the end of each day. After 3 months, I quit. Following that disaster, I took a job designing flowers. The head of the department(my boss) was a total dysfunctional control freak who always found fault with everyone's work. He was never satisfied! I wonder what his sex life was like? To make a long story short, I quit this job as well. By this time, my parents were thoroughly disgusted with me. My mother's scornful comment - "I can't believe that I produced a failure"-

completely turned me around. I decided to look for another career that could utilize my creativity. I chose photography.

Because I knew nothing about photography (I had never taken a photograph in my life), I decided to enroll in a photographic school, never realizing how difficult it would be for a woman to find a job. Upon graduation, I found out! This was a field that completely discriminated against women. It made me very angry and I became determined to become a photographer. After all this was America - the land of the free - where life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were a Constitutional promise to all. I was determined to find a job in the photographic field ! I pounded pavements for over 6 months suffering rejection upon rejection. Finally, I got a break! Cornell Medical College was looking for someone to clean up their

photographic darkroom and assist the assistant to the assistant photographer, as a lackey of course. I took the job! It was a bottom entry position and only paid \$45. a week. But, I was happy. I finally had a job working in the photographic field. During this time I met 2 people to whom I must give credit for helping me become a photographer. After leaving the "lackey" position, it was Don Wong in 1962 who gave me my first real medical photography job, as his assistant (at Manhattan Eye, Ear, and Throat hospital). This was the beginning of a 20 year career as a medical photographer. Then, I met Weege who inspired me to do fine art photography.

During that time, I not only became a full fledged medical photographer, I established 2 medical photography departments in which I became the chief photographer. One at Lenox Hill Hospital and the other at St. Clare's Hospital. Both in NYC. Although medical photography was

not exactly what I had in mind, I did get to do all kinds of photography. I not only got to be a still photographer but a surgical film maker as well. In the course of my 20 years as a medical photographer, I produced 20 surgical teaching films with some of the most famous surgeons in the world. Because these were small departments, I was able to experience all levels of photography - from studio to darkroom. It was a great learning opportunity! This was an invaluable experience that contributed to the work that I have continued to do and for which I have gained a modicum of success.

Chapter 9

Discovering my purpose

I AM

I am matter

I am energy

I am the infinite

I am the finite

I am galaxies

stars and planets

I am the earth

air

mountains valleys

forests deserts

oceans lakes
plants animals
I am man
I am woman

Asleep I am
hate distrust
envy corruption
brutality injustice
ignorance I am greed
I am the poor
the needy
the hurt
the angry
I am anguish and despair-
I am your tears!

Awake I am
faith hope
tolerance patience
kindness
I am forgiveness.
Awareness!
I am your Love
I AM.

I began to realize that by documenting unusual surgical procedures - accidents, and other human tragedies - I was significantly contributing to something that was important and personally meaningful. Thus, I began to focus on the larger picture; my place in the world. The quintessential questions - Who am I?, What is my purpose in life? Why was I born?- started to haunt me. I wanted to be an artist, but I also wanted to use my talents to contribute to the welfare of humanity, and the planet.

At 29 years old , I experienced a mini nervous breakdown. Being in so much mental pain, I realized I needed psychological help. I went to a psychiatrist for 5 years. My therapist helped a lot. She even encouraged me to take yoga classes. It was then that I began to reconnect with my spiritual self.

In the late 60's, with the advent of Swami Satchidananda's arrival in NYC and his weekly talks at the Universalist church, I began to really work on myself spiritually as well as psychologically. I attended seminars with Joseph Campbell, Allan Watts, Krishnamurti etc. I went on regular retreats with Swami Satchidananda, Baba Ram Das, Rabi Gelberman, and Brother David. It was a growing and inspiring time in my life. I discovered a human potential growth center, similar to California's Esalen Institute, called Awosting. It was nestled in the Catskill mountains, off the beaten track, near New Paltz, New York. I spent a lot of time there in the early seventies. Awosting was a wonderful experience. Some of the world's greatest minds gave workshops there. I tried to attend as many as possible. I learned about the benefits of wheat grass, bean sprouts, aerobic exercise - long before these became fashionable.

I loved the late 60's and early 70's. It was a wonderful period in time. People were committed to bringing about positive

changes - politically, environmentally and socially. I became involved in the Women's movement and in 1974, I organized one of the first photographic associations for women. Later on I became the first President of The Professional Women Photographers, an organization which is still in existence today.

Chapter 10

My involvement in the women's movement

In 1961 after I had graduated from the Germain school of photography, I tried to get a job, any job, in photography only to be told that there were no jobs for women in this industry.

A leading employment agency which specialized in photographic jobs went as far as to tell me to "give it up" because in the 20 years of their existence, they had never placed a woman. This made me very angry and more determined than ever. For the next 6 months I pounded the pavement of NYC streets leaving no stone unturned. Finally I landed a job in the photographic department of the Cornell Medical school. The job consisted of running errands, cleaning up and doing all the menial and servile work that the

male photographers refused to do. This was the beginning for me. I eventually was promoted to the darkroom and from there to the studio. I had to work very hard and be better than the men. I learned a bitter lesson which was that in this land of opportunity, women did not have the same choices as men. This was a terrible revelation! I believed in the freedom and opportunity that this democracy offered!!

It wasn't until I became involved with the women's movement that I realized that I could do something to help other women photographers.

In the early spring of 1974, I placed an ad in the back page of the Village Voice. It read "WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS! IT IS TIME WE JOIN TOGETHER".

That following week 18 women gathered in my apartment to discuss the organization of a group which we called: WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS OF NY (WPNY). Because of my strong belief in the democratic process and my political naivety, I lost control of the group. Consequently very little was accomplished in the course of its short life time of almost 2 years.

In 1975, BREADTH OF VISION, a UN sponsored International Women's Year exhibit, was shown at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), "The largest exhibit of its kind in US history."

I was fortunate to have had two of my photographs included. It was then that I met Danielle Hayes. That was the beginning of what would eventually

become PWP. What started out as a disorganized small group of women photographers whose work had been included in the FIT exhibit, evolved very quickly, under the guidance of Dannielle, to include others. The group continued to grow with monthly meetings held in Dannielle's apartment and culminated in the publication of her book. It was at this time that Dannielle decided to resign and Nickola Sargent Miller and I became co-chairwomen. We met monthly at Nickola's loft and named the group PWP. In 1980, when Nickola Sargent Miller resigned as co-chairwoman, I took over as chairwoman/ President.

As a professional photographer, I wanted not only to keep the professional women photographers in our group but to attract, as well, other professional women photographers. In order to do this I had to lift PWP from a camera club classification to a professional entity on the same league with the ASMP etc. By incorporating PWP as a not for profit organization, I had hoped to achieve this and believed that PWP would become a professional society that would gain the respect and recognition that I thought it deserved. I also wanted PWP to be in a position to receive tax deductible contributions that would not only support its growth, but would allow the organization to get involved with charitable works like offering free workshops and free

memberships to the underprivileged, etc.. My dream was to allow PWP to grow nationally and internationally with chapters all over the country just like the ASMP. In 1981 PWP became a not -for -profit organization.

During my tenure of 4 years, PWP became a viable and respected organization with a newspaper, a gallery, monthly meetings which continue to this day, The ME GENERATION exhibit, as well as other minor exhibits and finally an auction which raised a considerable amount of money. It was at this time that I began working on an anthology of women photographers (WOMEN OF VISION, 1982, Pub. Unicorn).

Needless to say, by 1984, I was burned out! It was then that I decided that it was time for me to step down. But, not before I had secured someone who had proven herself to be a very capable and responsible human being who would dedicate herself to the survival and continuation of PWP. The professional Women Photographers (PWP) is still in existence today!

Then the “Me Generation” occurred! It was the height of self-centeredness which subsequently paved the way for the “Greed Generation”. The 1980’s were not a happy time for me.

To top it all off, my mother suddenly died in 1981. I was not only mourning the loss of our nation’s soul, but the loss of my mother made life

almost unbearable. Jobs were hard to find. I saw the rise of homelessness and joblessness to be the direct result of corporate greed and the abuse of governmental power. Whatever happened to the Love Generation? What happened to the American dream to which so many aspired? and only few enjoy? I have been lucky in that I followed my dream. I never sold out! Fortunately for me I didn't have to. I only had myself to support.

Chapter 11

Establishing myself as a fine art photographer

My life as a photographer began in the early sixties. I landed my first job as a medical photographer almost at the same time that I met the world renowned photographer, Arthur Fellig. Weege, as he was called, was a lecherous but kindly old man constantly chasing young girls. I became the focus of his intent when I showed interest in his work. While I wanted to learn his photographic technique, he seemed to only want to get me into bed. Thus, a cat and mouse game ensued. This continued for several years until he realized that he was not going to succeed. During this time I learned a lot from Weege. We photographed the world trade fair in Queens together and he even allowed me to develop his film ..even after I had ruined a roll by developing it in Dektol (a paper developer). That was many, many years ago!

I am now a fine art photographer and considered by

many to be one of the female pioneers of the male nude in photography, a trend setter. Photographing the male nude now is commonplace, but a quarter of a century ago it was a different matter. It was not considered an art form but rather was relegated to homoerotic pornography. Homosexual men had always photographed their lovers (and other men willing to pose for them) since the onset of photography. Not too many women dared . If they did, few showed their work publicly. However, gay magazines were full of photographic images of sexy men. Thus, the male nude became stigmatized! Fine art galleries refused to exhibit male nude photographs until I had my male nude exhibit in 1975 at The Third Eye Gallery in NYC. Luckily it was reviewed in the Sunday New York Times by Gene Thornton. It was a favorable review! The male nude in photography was finally legitimized and accepted by the art community. The fact that I was a woman helped to de-stigmatize it . Robert Mapplethorpe surfaced several years later and his association with Sam Wagstaff, a very well respected collector of photography, really helped him a lot. He arranged a simultaneous exhibition of Mapplethorpe's photographs at the 3 most prestigious places in the NYC Art scene - The Robert Samuel gallery, the Miller gallery and the International Center of Photography. This propelled Mapplethorpe to a super star status. Unfortunately for me, his photographs looked very similar to mine. Coincidence? I don't think so! When I met Mapplethorpe in 1978, he knew who I was.

I had been exhibiting my male nudes and had received many favorable reviews in the 3 years that preceded his first male nude photographic exhibit in NYC. I continued to have photographic exhibits on an annual basis until after the publication of my second book in 1983 (**MEN IN FOCUS**) . By then, I was completely burned out. The death of my mother in 1981, the publication of my 2 books (**WOMEN OF VISION** in 1982, AND **MEN IN FOCUS** in 1983), establishing the Professional Women Photographers as

a viable and professional organization, and a major auction to generate money for PWP, completely wiped me out. By 1984, I decided to step down from my (unpaid) position as president of the Professional Women Photographers and decided to concentrate on making a living. By 1984, my career as a medical photographer had come to an end . It was then that I decided to go into a completely different direction.

I opened up a portrait studio on 32nd. St. in NYC. My bread and butter clientel consisted primarily of “would be” actors and models. Because my clients were very young and were struggling to pay their bills with part time jobs etc., I had to rely on volume in order to keep my prices low. I did very well until the stock market crash of 1987. This crash affected everyone including my clients who lost their jobs as waiters and part time workers! My business dried up almost overnight. Needless to say, I spent the last half of the 80’s and most of the 90’s trying to “keep my head above water”. Between 1984-1997, I had very little time and money to continue to exhibit my fine art photography. Consequently, the momentum that I had created for myself in the art world came to a near stand still.

My male nude photographs not only had influenced Mapplethorpe but probably paved the way for the scantily clad male models in commercial advertising and the Calvin Klein avante-guard brief ads of the 80’s. Commercial photographers like Bruce Weber, Herb Ritts, Nan Goldin, Greg Gorman and scores of other lesser known photographers entered the art scene in mass and began not only exhibiting, but publishing books of their male nudes.

Major anthologies, however continued to include my photographs throughout the 80’s and 90’s, and greeting cards as well as posters of my photographs of men were published and sold around the world. I am convinced that even though I did not exhibit my photographs on a regular basis for almost a decade, the publication of **MEN IN FOCUS** and the

reproduction of my photographs in books as well as the cards and posters, continued (and continues) to directly or indirectly influence photographers who photograph the male nude. Today everybody and anybody with a camera is photographing naked men. Cameras are so easy to use now that It is common place for every Tom Dick and Harry to consider himself(or herself) a photographer.

It wasn't until I met David Leddick in the mid ninety's, that my reputation as a female pioneer in photography of the male nude was re-established. David had seen my photographs in a few anthologies, and being a collector, wanted to purchase a few. He tracked me down, and bought a couple of photographs. That was my introduction to David Leddick. He subsequently decided to put together books of photographs of the male nude..and of course wanted to include me. THE MALE NUDE by David Leddick, and published by Taschen in 1998, was one of the most comprehensive historical surveys on the male nude ever published. 15 of my photographs were included, as well as on the cover of the book. He also included my photographs in the male nude books that followed until he and I collaborated on BIG FUN WITH BILLY. Having seen some photographs of the Billy doll that I had taken on Cape Cod, David went to the publisher and convinced him that a book of my photographs of the doll should be published. The publisher agreed as long as David wrote the humorous text which accompanies the photos.

I have much for which to thank David. He has been my knight in shining armor! He included my photos in all of his books. He championed my cause giving me credit where credit was due, and helping me wherever and whenever he could. He never asked for anything in return! David is one of the most generous and kind people I have ever met.

Early in 2007 I was contacted by another remarkable man who was, and is a serious collector of antiquities and

photographs. He not only collects but is respected for his knowledge of photographic history and is well known and admired within academic and museum circles. His name is William Knight Zewadski!

Mr. Zewadski had been following my photographic career for years and finally wanted to purchase a photograph. Since then, our relationship has flourished. He has taken it upon himself to insure my legacy by placing my photographs in museums.

To date (2011), Mr. Zewadski has placed my photographs in 13 museums around the country.

I am indebted to both David Leddick and William K. Zewadski without whose support and acknowledgement, my photographs would never have received the recognition that they have and would have been lost to history!

It is important for me to clarify why I have specialized on the male nude for over a quarter of a century. While it is true that I photograph and have photographed a myriad of different subjects, I somehow always return to photographing naked men. Why? There are 3 different reasons that come to mind.

The first is psychological. Because my father and I never bonded, my relationship with men has been dysfunctional, to say the very least. My father was a chauvanist of the first order! Growing up, I remember constantly hearing my father tell my mother that she should obey him because he was the master of the house. Of course my mother, being an American, refused to do so and constant battles for power ensued. This was such a turn off for me that I decided never to marry and never to have children. I loved my freedom too much to risk losing it in marriage.. and I never had a desire to raise a family. Consequently, I only dated men with

whom there was little or no emotional attachment. In photographing gorgeous naked men, I can safely look at young(21+) handsome naked hunks without getting involved... It is much more acceptable to be a voyer with a camera than one without it! The men who have posed for me tend to be exhibitionists of sorts..not the pathological kind, of course. So we have mutually benefited each other. Therefore they were comfortable posing for me and I was comfortable photographing them. Having been a medical photographer, I was accustomed to photographing naked bodies-both male and female. I never felt embarrassed. Because it was my job as a medical photographer, it became second nature to me.

My second reason for photographing naked men is artistic. Growing up in Florence (Italy), gave me a very different perspective on nudes than most Americans. The streets of Florence are filled with statues of both naked men, women..and even children (as cherubins etc.). The museums house most of the great art of the renaissance and Michaelangelo's work was my favorite! I loved his statues of men with their powerfully muscular bodies. It is no wonder, then, that I chose and still choose to photograph muscular men in their prime. I love to make them look like statues.

My third reason is political. I couldn't believe that exhibiting photographs of the male nude was a taboo. This was America, after all, the land of the free!! The sexual revolution had already happened. So what was the problem???? It was HOMOPHOBIA!!! I became determined to bring about change. After some photographs of the male nude were removed from a group exhibit at the 14th.street Y in NYC (early 70's), I decided to take this issue on. I was a member of a cooperative gallery called THE THIRD EYE. It was there that I had my first exhibit of the male nude.. and it was that exhibit that was favorably reviewed by Gene Thornton in the Sunday (Dec.7th.,1975) New York Times. This review, obviously not only influenced Mapplethorpe, but opened the floodgates for all who have subsequently

followed.

The Third Eye Gallery was a wonderful place to exhibit my work. It was a member run gallery with less than 10 of us. We were all young anti-establishment rebels, thus we exhibited work that no one else dared. Consequently it was a great opportunity for me. My first exhibit (EYE A WOMAN NAKED AM I) was in 1974. This is when I exhibited my female nudes. It was my second exhibit, the following year, in which I presented THE MALE NUDE. Because this subject matter was such a taboo, I decided to challenge the establishment. In so doing, I broke many photographic rules. For example, In order to make my models look timeless and impersonal, I often cropped off their heads. At the time, this was not considered an acceptable way to photograph people. I received much criticism for this. I also used a lot of close-ups including one's of the penis which I photographed in idyllic settings ie., next to tree trunks, in lake water etc. By using the above techniques and often placing my models in non threatening environments like nature, I seduced the viewer to look at the naked man.

Following is the press release(1975) which was sent to every newspaper and magazine on the market.

“The Male Nude is not only a photographic presentation, but most of all, a plea for awareness. In the 20th. century, the threshold of the Aquarian age, where everyone is so concerned about becoming more aware , more sensitive to the reality of oneself and others, it is appalling to find that we still hold on to archaic untruths and blatant double standards..such as the myth that the naked body is evil, dirty and therefore must be hidden, especially the male body. It is interesting to note, however, that this myth has been compromised in the art of painting. Long before the renaissance, painters and sculptors had been painting

and sculpting the naked female and male body unabashedly. Even cathedrals are blessed with such examples. In photography, however, the double standard not only remains, but is constantly reinforced by the proliferation of smut literature generously illustrated with pornographic photos of nudes that degrade the human body to a dehumanized level. This exploitive attitude has served one purpose only, and that is to reinforce the attitude that there is something inherently dangerous and/or evil with the naked body..especially the male's. That is why today when so many people are concerned with consciousness expansion and psychological breakthroughs, there is a dilemma. We still remain blind to the wonder and beauty of the human body in its naked natural form .

In my photographic studies of the male nude, I try to illustrate the subtle connections between the naked body and nature, the natural person and our universe. With pride and dignity, I invite one and all to look upon the body with total acceptance and reverence..for in its natural splendor it is the greatest work of art.”

A year after the male nude, I exhibited my experimental multi media work (photo and painting combos) which were hand made and NOT computer generated. The first I called **The Monster Series**. The second exhibit, was called **The Mona Lisa Recycled Series**. I then returned to exhibiting my men again solo and in group shows. The Male Nude In Photography exhibit at the Marcuse Pfeifer gallery (a major gallery) in 1978 included 5 of my male nude photos. This exhibit was very controversial and

created quite a furor in the art world. Odd..since my one woman exhibit in 1975 had received such positive acclaim. In spite of this, I continued to exhibit my male nudes and the reviews continued to be favorable. After the publication of my book, **Men In focus** (In the early 80's), I had several exhibits (in NYC, and Provincetown, Ma.) .

In the summer of 1984 or 1985 (I can't remember the exact year) I introduced the mermale (half male and half fish) in the Coney Island parade. A mermaid had always been featured in their parade.. but not the male counter part - until I introduced the mermale. Since then the organizers of the parade have included the mermale (which they now call the merman) in their annual parade. I continued to show my male nudes through various other venues throughout most of the 80's. In 1986 I had a slide show and exhibit at a popular NYC nightclub called the Limelight. In the late 80's, I was a guest on the Joe Franklin TV show.

Although I stopped having one-woman exhibits until 1997, my photographs continued to be included in group exhibitions throughout most of the 80's, and 90's. My images of the male nude also continued and still continue today to be published in major anthologies.

Chapter 12

Half a Century in Manhattan

In 1955, at the age of 18, I came to Manhattan right after I graduated from High School. I was enrolled in Hunter College and lived in a nearby Catholic girls' residential home at the insistence of my parents. There I met a ballet dancer who broke every rule and whose every other word was "shit". I had never heard that word spoken before. I was one of those "goody two shoes" who didn't swear or break rules - at home or elsewhere. I

loved this dancer's daring behavior. She was considered a bad influence and I was cautioned to stay away from her. Of course, the opposite happened.

My favorite music was classical. I also loved the Platters'..especially their song called "The Great Pretender" which I played incessantly. I and some of the other young residents of St. Mary's home for girls would listen to music for hours on end while drinking cheap wine. When we were not entertaining ourselves with games like "pin the tail on the donkey" or short sheeting each other's beds, we spent a lot of time looking into people's bedrooms with binoculars. Then one night we discovered that a producer lived across the street. Bingo! What a sex education that was!! I think he knew we were watching him because whenever he auditioned young pretty girls(he always seemed to be having sex with them), he made sure that we could see everything. We watched for hours!

The residential home had a curfew. So, we rarely went out during the week. It was on one of these nights that I went out on a date and missed the 11 o'clock curfew. The very next day, the nuns called my mother and told her that I was a slut and a bad influence on the other girls. So, I left and moved in with a bunch of ballet dancers whom I had previously met . I not only had hated the residential home, but I hated Hunter college as well. It had a cold and impersonal atmosphere. I wanted to be an artist and a poet. I didn't see how a college degree would help. So, it wasn't long after that I dropped out of college as well.

I moved into a brownstone on the corner of Riverside Drive and 78th. St. The rents were reasonable then. NYC had not yet become gentrified! One could always find an inexpensive room somewhere. Homelessness just didn't exist. There was the Bowery, of course, full of flop houses where drunkards congregated by choice, but rarely did people sleep on the street. It was a kinder gentler time.

By then I had become a real balletomane. I ate, drank and

slept ballet. I was surrounded by ballet dancers! Everyone in the building was a budding dancer studying ballet at the prestigious New York City ballet school on Broadway, not too far from where we lived.

I did attend the Art Student's League for a while. The teachers (when they came to class) were pushing their own style of painting. I remember a particular teacher telling me that I should NEVER use black in my paintings. I liked using black in my paintings! So, I dropped out. I didn't want the school to corrupt my style..whatever that was? That's when I painted all of the walls in my room with abstracts using lots of black paint. I even painted my jeans with bold black strokes.

One day as I was walking on Broadway, a man stopped me and offered me \$25.(\$300. in today's money) for my dirty painted jeans which I was wearing. I refused to sell them. In fact, I refused to sell my art work then. However, I did give my paintings away to very special friends. .

When I wasn't hanging out with my friends taking ballet classes or simply watching as my friends took various classes, I was working at jobs that I hated for a sufficient enough time so that I could collect unemployment and then resume painting, writing poetry, and ballet. This went on for a number of years. It seems that my only passion then, other than painting and poetry, was ballet!

When the Russian ballet, the Bolshoi, came to town. I was sick in bed with the flu. All of my friends had gone to the "Old" Metropolitan opera house to get tickets. Unfortunately it was sold out! So they decided to stand on line (which had just formed) for standing room only. That's when I got a desperate call from Beverly to beg me to bring some blankets as it was very cold on the street. Although I had 103 temperature, I agreed to do this. When I arrived I was swept away with the fervor and passion of the situation. Everyone decided that they would stay on line for the three days that preceded the first performance. It meant that they were going to sleep on

the cold sidewalk! After listening to the fantastic myths and legends that were circulating around regarding the Bolshoi..and especially Ulanova, their premier star, I decided that I would join my friends. Believe it or not I had completely forgotten how sick I was and I miraculously recovered! For 3 days and nights we held our ground taking turn sleeping and keeping watch. We kept ourselves warm by huddling together conserving our body heat and slept on newspapers. Hot chocolate and coffee were readily available from the automat across the street. We also had the use of their bathroom facilities since they were open around the clock. By the last day there were hundreds of people waiting on line for “standing room only”.That night I stood in the back of the “old Met” and saw Ulanova perform in Romeo and Juliet.

Soon after, I began to study the Russian language and dreamed of some day visiting Russia. The dream was soon shelved when the Cuban crisis emerged almost catapulting our 2 countries into a nuclear war.

When I first moved to Riverside Drive, I felt safe. It was not a high crime area then. During the hot summer months my friends and I often walked to the river(through the park that separated Riverside Drive from the Hudson). None of us had air conditioning . For those of us with rooms facing the river we were able to enjoy its cool breeze. For the rest of us the hot and sultry days of summer were uncomfortable. So, it was fun to get together on a hot summer night and walk to the river. With food and cheap wine we often had picnics on the shores of the Hudson and pretended that we were on a stage performing various ballets. So, we danced until the wee hours of the morning when it was cool enough to return to our hot rooms.

One day the unthinkable happened! Someone was found murdered right in front of our building. Our sense of security was then shattered. I no longer felt safe on Riverside drive. That’s when I moved to the east side. It was the early sixties.

Chapter 13

From Then to Now

WAR

*Fear despair and futility
Lunge at one another
In an angry sea
Foaming and twisting
Smashing into each
Other's white capped crests.*

*United they swell
With greed lust
And vengeance
Cloaked in brimming
Turbulence - screeching
Patriotism and righteousness.*

*Suddenly the roaring
Fury catapults*

And crashes...

Then -

An ominously shrowded

Calm floats gently

Down mournfully

Blanketing them.

Dianora Niccolini 1962

The early to mid sixties were not a very good time for me .. let alone the country. It was a time of turmoil! First there was the Cuban crisis, then President Kennedy's assassination and finally Robt. Kennedy's and Martin Luther King's assassinations. Although each and every one of these tragedies was more than one should bear in a lifetime..let alone a decade, the assassination that profoundly affected me the most, was Robt. Kennedy's.

I have always been politically oriented. At the age of 18, I became actively invoved with the Hungarian freedom fighters during their revolution by trying to get our government to overthrow the communists. I even joined a group called "Arms for Hungary"which I have since come to believe was a ruse by the communist government in Hungary to get the money that was intended for the freedom fighters. I was very naive. I had no idea of what a dangerous situation that was until one day I spoke up at a meeting and questioned how we were going to get the money to the freedom fighters without having it intercepted by the communists. Every one turned against me and accused me of being a communist spy. I barely got out of the meeting alive. I returned to my ballet passion swearing never to get involved in politics again. Several years later Robt. Kennedy re-awakened in me the fervor and passion that made me want to try to bring about positive change

in the world. By becoming actively involved in the political process, he made me believe that we could have it all - peace, justice and prosperity. I really believed then, as I still do now, that he would have been the greatest President ever. He was not only brilliant but compassionate as well. He truly cared about his fellow human Americans..especially the down trodden. His compassionate liberal ideology resonated in my heart! Ever since then I have been a liberal through and through and proud of it!

I used to be a Republican, believe it or not. I even voted for Nixon. I didn't like JFK. He looked too much like Alfred E. Newman from MAD magazine (which was popular at the time). I was young. What did I know!

It wasn't until Robt. Kennedy ran for office that I began to embrace the liberal ideology. It was the compassionate perspective of the Democratic party that changed my political affiliation. I couldn't then, as I can't now, forget the statue of liberty's inspirational inscription " Give me your poor, your hungry, your huddle masses..." This is the hope and promise of a better life, the American dream, that should be available to everyone.. including foreigners yearning to become American citizens. This is what I believe America stands for. I've always had a soft heart for the down trodden, for the poor, and the suffering. I felt that Robt. Kennedy shared these same values with me. He seemed to care for the poor and disenfranchised. I believe that his presidency would have created the promised land - where everybody had the same opportunities - to have life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. His assasination devastated me!

The Vietnam war was another issue that deeply disturbed me. Maybe it was because I had survived the second world war and lived through the Korean war only to realize the fruitlessness of war. Granted, the second world war had been inevitable. Hitler was hell bent on world domination and if he had not been stopped by the allies, he probably would have succeeded. But there is no question that war is hell! So many

innocent people died and suffered on all sides. The Korean war, on the other hand, was the result of America's anti communistic paranoia initiated by Senator McCarthy and like-minded hawks in Congress. And so, when we began sending troops to Vietnam, I became a pacifist and joined with the anti-vietnam protestors.

In the late sixties, the hippie generation came to pass. I really thought that heaven on earth would finally be realized. The uptight fearful mood of the 50's and early 60's was replaced with a desire to make this country a better..if not a kinder place for all its people. It was in the late 60's and early 70's that discrimination began to be challenged legally as well as socially. Age old taboos were replaced with openness and acceptance. It seemed that most people tried to love one another in spite of differences. This was a time for radical change .. but it was a time when people revolted to the established norm in a very peaceful way!

The sexual revolution evolved out of this openness and so did the women's movement. There was a lot of social growth in a very short period of time! For me it was an era for personal growth. It was the first time in my life that I can say that I was truly happy. I felt re-connected with my soul! I have the Personal Growth Movement (at Awosting) and psycho therapy, as well as Yoga and Eastern mysticism, to thank. I completely immersed myself in these traditions for approximately 5 years.

In 1974, feeling fully alive and regenerated, I began to focus on photography as an art form. Fine art photography has been my passion ever since.

Chapter 14
My Love Life

A Wish

*I wish I were
A wending wind -
For then,
So swiftly
Would I wishhhh..
To you.*

Dianora Niccolini 1969

Sadly, my life until recently has been a whirlwind of passion with constant crushes.. unrequited love, and multiple affairs.

Ever since I can remember, my sexual preference has been of a bi-sexual nature. My first puppy love, in the sixth grade, was an English boy who had blond hair, blue eyes and rosy cheeks. As a young teenager I had a crush on another blond, blue eyed boy in my homeroom class. I also had crushes on movie stars - both Elizabeth Taylor and Louis Jordan. In high school I fell in love with the most popular boy and the most popular girl in the school. All of the above were unrequited. Nobody knew! I was very shy

and kept my feelings to myself.

It wasn't until I moved to NYC and had the misfortune of being forced to have sex on a blind date that I became promiscuous. After that experience, I had a multitude of one night stands with a lot of men, but I was not in love with any of them. When I was 26 years old I fell madly in love with an eye doctor. He was gorgeous! I was so smitten with him that I actively pursued him by inviting him on weekends to go sailing on my father's boat. He always brought his male cousin along. It took me a long time to realize that his cousin was in fact his lover! When the truth finally dawned on me and I realized that this friendship would always be just a friendship, I began a romantic relationship with a female ballet dancer which lasted 2 years. Several years later, I fell in love with Jim who had pursued me for a long time. When I began to demonstrate my feelings for him, he dumped me. Licking my wounds, I stopped dating and was celibate for a while until I met a female photographer. Sarah and I had a brief but very intense romantic encounter which lasted only a few months. Unfortunately, we have lost touch.

Shortly thereafter I met another woman photographer with whom I had a short term affair. The romance turned into a great friendship and Stephanie and I have been friends ever since..just friends!

I've had a few more relationships that were not as intense and I still can remember their names!

There was Don, a medical photographer who hired me at a time when few women were hired to be photographers and with whom I worked for a number of years. And who can forget, Noah, a ballet aficionado who was not gay. Bob

lived in the village and used to cook wonderful meals for me. Then there was Aaron, a gifted artist- who was living in Soho(long before Soho became what it is today) in an abandoned building ..painting great art.I wonder where he is now? Has he sold out to corporate America for the lure of amassing wealth like so many artists of his generation?

Last but not least, I had a five year relationship with Rick, a male jazz musician with whom I have maintained an e-mail friendship. We had great sex!

I've been celibate now for many years. The prevalence of venereal diseases became a turn off for me. Now, that I am well past my prime, my hormones have calmed down. No more drama in my life. Thank God!

As far as marriage is concerned, I never had the desire to get married. I have always thought of "tying the knot" as a form of bondage. I loved my freedom too much to risk it in marriage. As for children, I have always thought that the world was over populated and I never wanted to contribute to this. Like the comic, Bill Mahr, I don't even like children!

Chapter15

My world view

I truly believe that there will always be war as long as intolerance, greed and its consequence- the unequal distribution of wealth, exists. Peace on Earth can be a reality only when we begin to love one another in the true sense of the word. That is.. in the practical application of its meaning. Love means respect, tolerance, compassion, forgiveness, selflessness, and charity. Love is all inclusive! It does not discriminate. Love does NOT hoard - Love shares! When we can look at each other as equals, only then will we be able to truly love one another. As long as we see each other as separate, foreign, different- fear, greed and prejudice will prevail. The later is the current state of affairs in today's world view. The rich and powerful somehow have convinced themselves that they are better, because they are priveleged and therefore different - thus more deserving than the poor, ignorant and weak. They have little or no regard for those who have less. Consequently they feel justified to manipulate and take advantage of them with impunity. The law of the jungle prevails! Under these circumstances there will never be peace. But, I am an optimist! I believe that we can have peace if everyone is treated with dignity and respect, has enough to eat, has equal access to medical care, and has affordable housing. We all have to take responsibility for this not only as individuals but collectively as well. In a Democracy it is relatively easy. By going out and voting, we can elect those candidates to office who will represent the best interest of the majority of the people, for example, instead of Big business.

We need to hold our elected officials responsible for lack of affordable medicine, lack of affordable housing and poverty! Therefore, Let there be peace on Earth and let it begin with each of us.

Chapter 16

Poems and other and unpublished writings

HUMANITY

(A ballad)

*I see humanity flowing
Like liquid possessed
I see humanity flowing
And flooding the earth.
I see babies growing
not learning yet growing
I see babies growing
I see humanity flowing
And flooding the earth.
I see people faceless grown
With mannequin reflectors sewn
I see people faceless grown
Sad and lonely growing flowing
And flooding the earth.
I hear misery crying
I see old and young dying*

*I hear misery crying
I see and hear humanity flowing
And flooding the earth.
I smell smoke of battles fought
Who won? Life lost!
I smell smoke of battles fought
I see, hear and smell humanity flowing
And flooding the earth.
I taste the blood of anguish
Despair and bondage vanquish
I taste the blood of anguish
I see hear smell and taste humanity
Flowing and flooding the earth.*

Dianora Niccolini1967

United

*U are you
And I am I -
Together
We are*

U n I t e d

DianoraNiccolini 1974

A DAYDREAM

*Quietly you walk
Through the shadows
Of my mind
Alone..
And I with empty
Longing linger
In anticipation
Of a shadowless together
Floating flying
Freely being
Bathing in the sunshine
Of our minds.*

Dianora Niccolini1973

RUNNING WILD

Rivers running

Running wild

Bubbling brooks

And heathered streams

Weathered stories

Tales of old

Tales of wisdom

Tales retold

Babies laughter

Myrthful glee

Withered faces

Faces see

Babbling voices

Gathering steam

Gushing rushing

Grandiose schemes

Thundering waters

Falling down

Madness coming

Coming now

Yonder see

The sea arise

Turn around

And close

Your eyes

See the turnip

Turn its nose

Round and round

There it goes

Madness running

Running guile

Gushing rushing

Cunning style

Rivers running

Running bile
Madness madness
Running wild.

Dianora Niccolini 1976

ABANDONED

Love
Like the tide
Flowed
In

Love
Like the tide
Ebbbed
out

I
Like the sand
Abandoned
Am

Dianora Niccolini 1975

ETERNAL BLISS

*Life's frenzied fist
Has smitten a blow
That has sent me reeling
To the abyss below.*

*My heart is heavy
My mind confused
The fruits of my labor
In profusion abused.*

*I can't see clearly
In this black abyss
Is it all real?
And do I exist?*

*Please take my hand
And guide my sight
Lead me upwards
Towards the light.*

*Take me away
Away from all this
End my despair
Eternal bliss.*

Dianora Niccolini 1978

FULLFILLMENT

Speak to me of love

And life will be worth living

Speak to me of challenge

And life shall be fullfilling.

Dianora Niccolini 1974

LIFE'S QUEST

We seek

And reach

Each to each

For love

Is peace

In love with

Unity.

PERHAPS.. ANOTHER DAY

*The world is a battlefield
Seeped in spewing blood
We are the damned
Fighting for what?
We know not.*

*Time is the tide that
Washes it all away.
Tomorrow - what then?
Perhaps.. another day.*

SLEEP

*Morpheus beckons and I follow
Out of this dungeon of constant sorrow
Into a world of make believe
Of people and places who don't deceive.*

*I snuggle and nestle against his side
To him all my cares I do confide
His comforting hand floats o'er my face
Peace at last.. I've found my place.*

*Then daybreak blatantly clamors forth
Rising in splendor with havoc it wrought
Flung at the mercy of one without heart
My love and I are torn apart.*

DEPRESSION

Darkness

Like a curtain

Falls

And I

Alone

Shakled

To its refrain

Remain

Restrained

And

So

Forlorn.

DESTINY

*Linger a smile
And stay a while
While we ponder
The forget-me-nots
Of our together
For never whenever
But ever forever
And always
I shall look upon
Our meeting
Tho' fleeting
Not as chance
For life's meaning
Is destiny
To be.*

CIVILIZATION

*We are monkeys draped in silken robe
Perched on gilded pedestals of old
Boasting of progress and civilization
Hissing at hints of realization
That we are mere animals, nothing more.*

*Hipocracy is rampant it's easy to see
The world is a jungle and we dangle from trees
Survival o' the fittest, our code of honor
The struggle goes on and time's our mourner.*

HOPING

My heart is

Laden with pangs

Of love in pain

Reverberating the

Dissonance of discontent

And yet,

My head is filled

With music of

Love envisioned

Harmoniously intertwined

In the symphony of time

And so,

Alienated by fantasies' torments

And caught between realities

Alone and confused

I stand huddled

In catatonic oblivion

Waiting...

Hoping for you.

Dianora Niccolini 1975

Thoughts

THE HUMAN SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

We are microscopic pieces of matter scattered in the universe trying desperately to find an identity. Some think it can be found through knowledge. Others feel it can be found by creating and contributing to the world. Then there are those who try to find it by searching within themselves. Finally there are the majority who believe they can find it by reproducing themselves thereby forming clusters - larger pieces of matter scattered in the universe who are, in spite of their size and numbers, still trying to find an identity.

WHAT IS NORMAL?

The norm is the process of adjustment to any and all situations. Therefore it is impossible to judge an adjustment as being normal or abnormal without thoroughly understanding the situation that provoked it. What might appear to be abnormal behavior may in fact be a very normal adjustment to an abnormal

situation. Life in its constant struggle for survival becomes a process of adjustment.

WHAT IS FORM?

The particular way of being that gives something its nature, the combination of qualities making that something what it is, this is life in its fullness, best expressed through the myriad forms found on our planet - both animate and inanimate.

Form is the language of the universe singing its praises. Its rejoicing is seen everywhere...in the flower and its petals, in the subtle folds of a garment, in the human body. Everywhere we see life expressing itself and rejoicing in its splendor.

Dianora niccolini

Published in WOMEN OF VISION, Unicorn pub.1982

IN RETROSPECT

The body writhes in pain
The soul weeps in sorrow
The heart labors in vain.
The years are gone.

And for all the time spent
I didn't even leave a dent
I have nought to do but lament.
The years are gone.

There was a time I thought
Great wonders I would perform
In truth I did nought but thought.
The years are gone.

And now I lay me down to rest
I had time but I failed the test.

The years are gone.

The body writhes in vain

The soul weeps in sorrow

The heart labors in vain..

The years are gone.

Dianora Niccolini 1959

OTHER THOUGHTS

The purpose of being is to live every moment with an ever increasing awareness in order to experience the wholeness of life.

When incarcerated by prejudice and intolerance it is human nature to resent the freedom of others.

Each person is a vast universe with unlimited potential. To be free is to be able to explore life's many paths, its infinite horizons.. and to pursue one's passion.

Trivia is the offspring of mediocrity.

Pettiness is the product of small and self-indulgent minds.

Greed is a very malignant and contagious disease.

Chapter 17

Conclusion

At 56 years of age, I returned to college and graduated several years later with a B.A., Magna Cum Laude. This was a tribute to my mother to whom education was extremely important. She would have been proud of me!

It took me a long time to understand that life is a gift worth living. When I finally did, I realized that those frightening experiences of my youth and the ups and downs of life in general prepared me to appreciate my existence on this planet. I have come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as an accident. We are where we are because this is where we need to be to learn the lessons afforded in every experience. And so, I am grateful for each experience - for my family, for my friends, and for my life. Above all, I am grateful to that Higher Intelligence that some call the Higher Self, the Universal Mind, and that I call God.

MEDITATION

Be

Still

and listen

For beneath the surface

Of life's ephemeral turmoils flows

The eternal stream of harmony and peace.

*Be
Still
And listen
For within the fractured
Moments that make up the structure
Of the day, there exists only
THIS MOMENT in the realm of time.*

*BE
Still
And listen
For beyond the temporal
Fragmentation of reality, there dwells
The eternal seed of cosmic unity.*

*BE
Still
And listen
And become full
With the breath of life, for within
Our awareness lies the very essence of
BEING.*

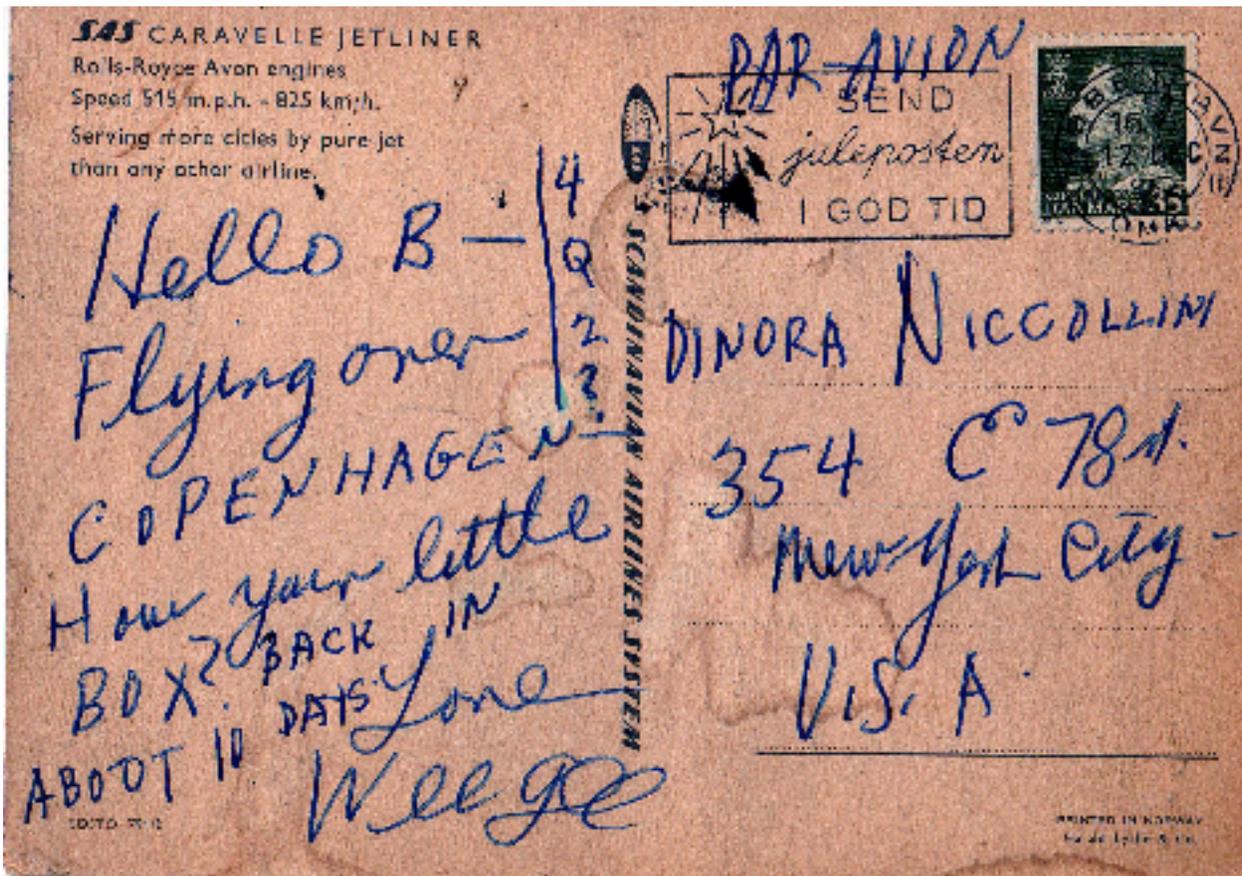
NAKED ARE WE

*As I look out to see
I know God IS
Looking back at me.
Through the eyes
Of every creature,
I see God as
God sees me.*

*Naked am I
Created that way.
God IS content,
As we should be.
All perfect beings
Naked are we,
Created on Earth
For eternity.*

Chapter 18

CARDS SENT TO ME BY WEEGE





AIR-MAIL

DIANORA
NICCOLLINI
354 E 78th St.
New York City -
U.S.A.

NATURAL COLOUR SERIES
PHOTO

GREETINGS
U.S.A.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GREETING CARD CO. LTD., LONDON

Hello dearie -

Pages from LONDON -

Next STOP - COPENHAGEN

(? FOR WHAT?) AMSTERDAM

ZORICH - HAMBURG

etc, 4.92 -

Love
W. Rogers
Get ready when I get back



Regards FROM RUSSIA
DEARIE - Weega



PAR AVION
Hello
DEARIE -

Shooting a film
in Russia, lets
make a DATE for
Feb 1964, when I
get back LOVE
Weegee

КУКЛЫ В НАРОДНЫХ КОСТЮМАХ
(Ярославская и Лодзинская области)
Автор хитов и композиций Р. Спасская
Скульптор Е. Баркова
Центры фото П. Игнатович

Chinese BINNER?



DIANO
NICCOLINI
354 E 78 st.
New York City
U.S.A.

Адрес: 40-1-1
Московский Телеграф № 2 - Московский район