

Introspection

By Gloria Lee

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My Sister's Doll

My sister and I used to play with our dolls and play house almost all the time. Mom had given us old purses and her empty perfume bottles to play with. We used the purses for all kinds of things. We would use them for suitcases for the dolls and we used them as a baby carriage.

We had a small table and chairs in our bedroom that we played on and sometimes we would pack up our babies and push our two little chairs together and pretend we were in the car and going to the store or someplace. We would get our shopping done, go home to put things away and then fix dinner with our dish sets. We had some pieces of material that Mom had given us to play with and we cut some of it up for food. Afterward we would clean up the dinner mess and put the babies to bed. We had a lot of fun.

Our parents, at one time, used to run a little restaurant in town and they worked nights so they had to sleep during the day. We used to have to be very quiet while they slept. One day we were playing house like we always did and we decided to put our babies in our purses and go for a walk. Well my sister couldn't get her baby in the purse, so I said I would help her. Well these dolls were held together with a rubber band inside the hollow body. The rubber band held the dolls head, arms and legs together to the body. Well, when I tried to put the leg in the purse I guess I pulled on it too hard and the doll fell all apart. My sister started to cry, her heart broken over her doll falling apart, and went running into my Mom and Dad's room and all she could say was "Gloria!, Gloria!" It scared them so bad that they thought something had happened to me. They both jumped out of bed and came running into our bedroom. I was so scared that I was going to get scolded, or worse a spanking, for breaking her doll. But instead when they realized I was all right, they comforted my sister and Daddy found another big rubber band and put the doll back together again. My sister was all smiles then and Daddy was our hero.

Poor Mom and Dad told us to play quietly so they could go back to sleep and to be more careful with the dolls. They suggested that maybe we not put the dolls in the purses anymore 'cause they don't really fit anyway.

So we continued to play and we didn't put the dolls in the purses after that. We just wrapped them in their blankets and carried them.

My Uncle Jimmy

Uncle Jimmy was like a big brother to my sister and I when we were little. He would take us with him sometimes just for a ride in his car. And then the war started! He and my other uncles went into the service. Uncle Jimmy went in the Army, Uncle Tommy went into the Navy and Uncle Johnny went into the Marines. I remember the family being upset because they were going off to war. But, there wasn't anything anyone could do about it. We just prayed for their safe return.

Uncle Jimmy wrote us letters while he was away. He always called us his two little "pinups." We thought that was so neat, like we were really special. So we would sit down and write him letters too so he would know we missed him at home.

Then one day they all came home. We had a great time being all together again and listening to their tales of the war. It was scary too, listening to some of the things they had seen and done.

Uncle Jimmy was always the one who would take us to the river or take us for rides through the country. He would sometimes go through a stop sign out on an old country road and there was no traffic. And we would say something and he would tell us he would stop twice the next time, and then we would laugh. The next stop sign we came to he would stop and then start up again and stop again and say "I told ya I would stop twice next time," and we would giggle at him. Sometimes he would make the car jerk a lot like something was going wrong with it. And then he would laugh and off we would go again.

After we became teenagers he and his girlfriend would take us to the school dances, then pick us up and take us for a milkshake and bring us home. It was so fun.

The time came when he went off to marry his girlfriend in Brooklyn, New York. We missed him a lot when he left. Our big brother had grown up and left home, so we had to go on without him. But we knew he was happy and that is what counted most.

The next time I saw him I was married and was pregnant with my first son. They were home for a visit for my Grandparents 50th wedding anniversary. The whole family was there. It had been several years since the whole family had been together, so it was a fun time and time to do a lot of catching up on what was happening in our lives.

One summer many years later Uncle Jimmy and his family came to San Luis Obispo where I was living at the time. They called me one morning after my husband had left for work and told me they were in town for the day and were going to the beach and wanted me and the kids to go with them. So, we packed up a lunch and off we went. We had so much fun. All our kids got along great and they all had a great time. It was fun to be with them and to talk and catch up on our lives. My kids had such a good time and they talked about that trip to the beach for many years after.

One time in a letter to Uncle Jimmy I mentioned the fun times we had as kids when he used to pick us up and take us all over and the times he stopped twice at a stop sign. He was surprised that I remembered those times. How can you ever forget the fun times you had as a kid with someone you love? Those times are the very special memories that keep you alive in the golden years. I have a lot of special memories. I have a lot of bad memories too, but the good ones out last and out number the bad ones. The happy times are the ones that keep you going and active.



The Family Fishing Trip

Just about every Sunday when I was a little girl we would get up early and go fishing. I used to love to go on these little trips we went on. There was one place in particular we used to go to in Mendota, California, a short ways out of Fresno. There was a winding road with scattered farmhouses and cattle and horses. There were fields of alfalfa and the smell of it when it was fresh cut and laying there waiting to be bailed was awful to me. From the time I could see it and smell it I got sick. My poor Dad would have to stop for me to get out and be sick. Sometimes I would have to stop three or four times. I couldn't wait for us to hurry up and get there. Sometimes it would take me a half hour or so to get over the sick feeling and then I was fine. I was ready to start the day.

Daddy would make us a fishing pole from a tree branch and put a piece of string on it and a hook. We were so excited about having our own fishing pole that we couldn't wait to put it in the water to see if we could catch a fish or two.

After Daddy got us all fixed up, then he would get his and Mom's poles ready. Then there was the wait. Sometimes I got tired of waiting for the dumb fish to bit. And I would keep asking my Dad, "When are the fish going to come?" He would say, "Pretty soon now."

The place where we stopped was sometimes like an island. There was an old rickety wood bridge there. Sometimes the water in the river would be way out and we would have to walk a little way from the road. But there was a big old tree where we always set up for our day. It seemed very big and made a lot of shade all day long. We would sit on the riverbank and wait for the fish. After awhile we would get bored and go off and play.

One day Mom showed us how to catch butterflies and dragonflies. One day she caught one that managed to bite her. Then we were afraid to try to catch them, so we stuck to catching butterflies. They didn't bite.

One time while we were there an old truck went over the rickety old bridge and it shook so bad that we could hear birds making all kinds of racket. We went over to see what was happening. The birds had made a nest under the bridge and when the truck went over it the shaking of the bridge knocked the nest into the river. There wasn't much you could do for them, so we had to leave them alone.

Another time when we were fishing a fish nibbled so hard on my sister's pole that it went into the river. My Daddy jumped into the river to get it but couldn't. He finally said it must have been a big one who just took off with the pole. Dad didn't bring any other clothes so he had to stay in his wet ones.

When we were a little older we got to have a dog and when we went fishing again we took the dog with us. It was a different, bigger lake with not too much shade. The dog was having so much fun running all over the place and kept trying to get in the water. Mom and Dad kept keeping him from going in. Then while they weren't watching he fell in off the bank. Dad reached down to get him and his pants ripped out in the back. He was upset about that. Now he had to be concerned about making sure not to let anyone get in back of him. What was even worse was that he decided we needed to get gas before we headed home. This meant getting out of the car where there was a lot of people around. But he did it, and all was well. We were kind of glad when we all got home safe and sound.

Later that evening, when we had all had our showers and dinner and were sitting around the living room listening to the radio, the phone rang. We heard Daddy saying we had been just across the river from them.

When he got off the phone, he looked shocked and said that his cousins had all been out that same day fishing, only they were across the lake from us. They had the whole family of brothers, sisters and all their little kids out there. They had brought a boat to fish from. A bunch of them had gotten in the boat and I don't really remember what had happened but the boat turned over. There was one of the cousin's and his seven year old son who couldn't swim in the boat. I guess they didn't have life jackets either. The hard part for them all was that the cousins who were on shore and saw the boat go over couldn't even help. They had little children with them that were too little to leave alone on the riverbank. They were afraid that they would try to jump in with their Daddy thinking they could follow.

There was another group of people nearby and two sailors came over to help. They jumped in to try to get the boy and his dad, but they were so afraid that they hung on to the sailors and because of the weight and the fighting to hold on they all drowned, the boy and his dad and the two sailors. It was such a tragedy that it really shook the whole family.

I can only imagine what it must have been like to have to stand still and watch your brother, a nephew and two sailors drown and not be able to have helped. The wife was there and kept trying to throw them a rope with no success. She not only saw her husband but her son too, drown right in front of her eyes.

I know that it stayed with me for a long time. I was about six or seven years old I think, and you know I don't remember us going fishing after that.

A Letter of Memories to Mom

Sometimes I wish we could turn back the clock of time and go back to when we were all close and had dreams. I remember how I always idolized you when I was little. How I hung on your every word and thoughts and wanted to do everything and anything I could to please you. I remember once when I told you about a girl named Shirley and that you and Daddy knew her parents. She was telling us how she was mad at her mom and wasn't talking to her. This had been going on for two days! I was so shocked and couldn't even imagine not talking to you for two days let alone being mad at you too. I remember one morning early you were up fixing our lunches and you looked in the bedroom at us. You didn't know I was awake and I tried to pretend I was mad at you and stuck my tongue out at you just to see what it would feel like. I felt so bad that I cried for several days after that and was so sorry that I did it. That was just done out of curiosity. I didn't forget about that for a long time.

Isn't it funny how we remember these little things? I remember once, I think, in 2nd grade, my teacher kept me after school one day to go over my math. I had a hard time with subtraction and she was helping me to understand it better. She gave me a note that she had written to you and Dad in regard to my problem in math. She also said something about my being always so neat and clean but that I had been braiding my hair in class. She felt you should know this. I was so petrified I tore the note up on the way home from school and threw it in the wind over the field we had to cross going home. Joyce was with me and I told her to promise she wouldn't tell. What's so funny is that I wasn't afraid of the note because of my problems with math. I was afraid of what you would say about braiding my hair! You were so particular about our hair and to know that I was braiding it would just throw you into a tailspin. Of course, the teacher found out that I didn't bring you the note and the result was not good. She talked to others in the class and I knew it and I was scared. I didn't know what was going to happen but I soon found out. The teacher called me into the room while the others were at recess and told me she found out I had not taken the note home and that she had called my parents and told them about the note she sent home. I believe she spanked my hands with the ruler and then sent me down to the principal's office and I got a spanking with the paddle from him. But of course that wasn't all. I knew I was going to be in real big trouble when I got home. You and Daddy were waiting for me and you were both upset with me. I got another spanking and sent to bed without my dinner. I was crushed. I cried for a long time that night. I never did that stunt again.

An Exciting Evening

Many years ago, David asked me to go see the show at the MGM. I had been to the casino but had never been to a headliner show there. I had heard about the show "Hello, Hollywood, Hello" and was so excited that I was going to get to go see it.

I was floating on a cloud and full of butterflies inside. I felt that my heart would burst out of my chest. I was not hard to please and so this was like an adventure to go to heaven.

I started worrying, like most of us do. What was I going to wear to this great occasion? Did I even have anything good enough to wear? Did I have the shoes, the jewelry and the right handbag? Oh God, would my hair turn out okay? I knew if I didn't calm down I would make myself a real mess. I calmly went to my closet and looked to see what I had to wear. I looked thru my things and I found this blue dress that I had forgotten was in there. My Mom had given me the dress and I had kept it for special occasions. It had been a long time since I had worn it. So, now I had a dress and that, of course, would go with my tan strapped heels. I found a handbag that would do. Now my outfit was complete. What a relief. I could relax now until the night we were going.

The night had arrived and I was excited and nervous while I got ready. I thought my insides would explode with excitement. It was almost like being Cinderella with my imaginary Fairy Godmother helping me to dress for the special night ahead.

When David arrived I was shaking all over and I hoped I looked okay to him. Well, with the look on his face and in his eyes, I knew I would do. What a wonderful feeling. He was dressed in a blue suit and he looked very handsome. We were used to seeing each other in our work attire on the job, which were jeans, sweat shirts and t-shirts. This was a real change for both of us. He helped me with my coat and we were on our way.

When we got to the car he opened the door for me. I wasn't sure how to act. I leaned over to unlock his door as he reached for the handle. We were off to the show.

When we got there again he opened the door for me and held my arm as we went up the stairs to the front door. We walked over to the headliner room to stand in line to be seated. Being in

this atmosphere, to me at that time, was like being in Hollywood in a way. To be seeing people in show business and to see this kind of show, was like nothing I had known before.

When we were seated I couldn't believe what good seats we had. We had such a good view of the stage. The seats were set in layers like a stadium. You wouldn't have someone's head in your way during the show. It looked like the colors were mostly in red velvet. I just couldn't wait to see the show.

When the lights dimmed and the voice came over the microphone to announce the show, my stomach did a flip and my heart started beating faster. It doesn't take much to please me. Anything that is out of the ordinary for me is a new experience in my life.

When the show started I couldn't believe the costumes and the music, and when these little platforms came down from the ceiling I was in awe. It still is hard for me to put in words the effect all of this had on me. I felt like I was in wonderland for sure! I loved it all and hated to think about it ending. Of course, it did end, and we had to wade thru the crowd when it was over.

We went to get something to eat and talked about the show. It was just something I knew I would never forget. We got a program from the show and David had written a poem on it to me. I treasured it for years. Finally after many years and my marriage to my Daniel I tossed it out because I felt it was time to let go of a memory that no longer fit in my life today.

My Daniel's Surprise

My husband Daniel surprised me one weekend. At that time we didn't have a car. He told me on Friday that we were going to rent a car for the weekend and that he had a surprise for me, but he wasn't going to tell me about it. He would show me when the time came.

Saturday he said we were going out for some fun and wanted me to get dressed up for a fun evening. But he still wouldn't tell me where we were going to go. My curiosity was about to kill me. I had to be ready by 4:00 pm.

We went into get dressed up. He wore his brown pants and neat tan corduroy jacket. He looked so handsome. (He still seems like my knight in shining armor. He has shown me so many simple ways to have fun and that has such special meaning. I love that about him. He likes surprising me too.)

We were off to an unknown destination. I knew it was in the mountains once we got started, but still couldn't figure out where, unless it was Tahoe. So instead of trying to figure out where I just sat back and enjoyed the scenery. It is always so pretty in the mountains to me. And the different seasons change the look. It always looks like a new place. The trees were shiny looking in the late afternoon sun and the sky was blue thru the trees. There were a few scattered puffy clouds floating by.

As we got further up the road I realized Danny was starting to slow down and then turned in at The Christmas Tree restaurant. We had talked about going there someday when we could afford it. Well by golly here we were!

The menu was full of so many delicious choices. It was hard to decide what to have. Everything sounded so delicious and the aromas we could smell made you want to order everything on the menu. We finally made a choice and put in our order. It was quiet with soft light in the restaurant. It was in rustic décor. There was a huge fireplace made of big stone, there was a small fire burning in it. It made the room seem so warm and cozy, like home, even a little romantic for me and my honey.

We were seated at a table by the window and we could see out across the mountains and down in the valley. After dark you could see little scattered lights that seemed like little stars shining all over. We held hands across the table like two love sick teenagers. It was so neat. There was a candle on each of the tables which made it seem romantic for each table.

We ate our dinner and loved each bite. We decided to have dessert too and then were too full. This was a special night so we lived it up. What is a big night out for dinner without an obscene dessert? We were there for quite a while eating and then listened to their small band for a short time.

We decided we were getting too uncomfortable in our dress-up clothes. It was time to go home and change into our fat clothes and flop in our comfy chairs and watch television for the rest of the evening.

We still talk about that night and how much fun we had.

My Little Purple Man

My little purple man is a favorite of mine

He can make you smile at any time

With his little purple antennas

Green face, ears and hands

His eyes look of surprise

Like maybe he just got a prize

His big white teeth and smile

Reminds me of the song

All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth

His little red harness claims

His name is Astro Sniks

The purple shoes seem to be so big

But they balance him to stand up straight

My little purple man is a favorite of mine

Gift from hubby back in time

My First Major Decision

In May 1968, I made my very first major decision – to divorce my husband. I had married with the idea it would be forever and then discovered that there were too many things I could not live with any longer. My husband had been abusive for many years and I finally made up my mind that I could not or would not live with it any more.

When I told him that the next time he hit me it was over I thought he might consider trying to control himself. About two nights later I was doing a number painting of the last supper that I had always wanted to do. I was about half way done with it. I was working on the large coffee table we had. I got up to go to the kitchen for something and he shoved the table into my knees so hard I doubled over and it spilled all my little open paint jars across the painting. When I could get myself up I turned to him and told him to pack his suitcases. He just sat there and laughed. I went straight to the closet and pulled down the suitcases and he caught me across the back of the head and I saw stars. When I again could straighten myself up I took the suitcases to the bedroom and started to pack his clothes.

He then went into the kitchen cupboard and pulled down the gallon bottle of gin and started drinking it like it was water. Then he went into the bathroom and took out the bottle of aspirin. I got scared. I heard him go out the front door and I followed him into the garage and he was in his truck glove compartment talking to himself “where are those dam bullets.” He ran back up the stairs and into the dining room closet and took out his rifle. I managed to get it away from him and threw it under the bed. I got scared and started for the phone and he pulled the cord from the wall. I went for the stairway and decided to go across the street to the neighbors. He thought I was going to use the phone downstairs.

The neighbors suggested calling the police. When they got there he was a mess. They couldn't tell how many pills he took, if any. The police called the ambulance. I had to ride with him to the hospital. I walked out of the house with no purse and no keys. It seemed forever before we reached the hospital. They got him into emergency and I was left to sit in the waiting room. I asked the police if they would take me back home and they said I would have to fill out papers and such and then maybe I could call a neighbor. I felt like an abandoned kid left on the street to fend for myself. When I was told I could go I did call the neighbor that had helped me.

The next day I was told they were going to send him to the mental institution because he was still threatening to finish the job. He was kept there for a 3 day observation. I went to see him and he was terrible to me. He thought I had committed him there. He raised hell and I was told by the doctors not to come back to see him unless he called me. That was fine with me.

After the 3 days were up he was told he had to stay another week for more observation because of his behavior and actions. He threw an orange at the doctor so he was put in a lock down unit. A well-known psychologist was called in on the case. I was to go up to have a session with John, my husband. The doctor asked me lot of questions first. He asked me if I would like him to help me to tell my husband I wanted a divorce. I said, "Yes please." He called my husband in, asked him some questions. He lead up to my telling John I wanted a divorce. John was very calm and said "I been expecting it." The doctor talked to me again and told me to stick to my decision. Because he knew I would leave him again eventually but couldn't guarantee what condition I would be in.

I have never forgotten this doctor. He was blind and had the neatest guide dog at his side. He told me he couldn't see me but he felt that he didn't understand how anyone could even think of hurting me. You seem like a very good person and do not deserve this kind of treatment. I thanked him for his help and left his office feeling a lot calmer and more confident that I was doing the right thing.

When John walked me to the door he said in a loud cocky voice, "well so-long slut, see ya around." And I smiled at him and said, "Thank you very much, you just helped make this much easier for me." I turned and walked away. I got to the truck and I rolled down all the windows and turned the radio on loud and hit the freeway and headed home. I had no idea what would come next or what I was going to do. I had made no plans at all before this decision was made. Little did I know what was in store for me now.

December 17, 2004

Dear Mom –

I pray that I have found it in my heart to forgive all the hurts we may have caused thru our lives. Forgiveness is releasing all injuries if I am to grow spiritually. It has taken me a long time to be able to do this. I have realized that resentments only chain me to the past. I need to get past what used to be. It no longer fits me or my life today.

I miss you a lot Mom. I have times that I wish we could sit down and have a gab session like we used to do many years ago. How I used to love it. I used to feel that I was so lucky to be able to sit and talk with you. Sometimes we would get the giggles like two little girls or maybe as teenagers do about nothing.

I have learned so much from you and I wonder if you ever really understood that. I know I told you that many times.

I idolized you, when I was a little girl. I wanted to be just like you till we had some differences which caused a wall between us. And, for some reason, I could not seem to let that wall fall away. No matter how hard I tried.

When Daddy died you scared me at first because I felt we might lose you too. But then you snapped out of it and were doing so good. You were a super strong person and became a part of the living again. You went to school so you could go to work. You started to meet people and have a little fun.

You showed me that you can overcome anything that happens to you in life. It has helped me so many times in my life. You used to tell us when we were kids that you can make your life what ever you want. You can chose to be a miserable sad and negative person or you can be a happy and fun person and be positive about everything. I've always tried to apply that to my life. I didn't always succeed, but I kept trying.

When you finally retired because of your physical problems, you slid backward and became a recluse and didn't seem to want to do anything. You found fault with every one. All men were alike and only after you for your body or your money. No one told you that you needed to get married again. But it wouldn't have hurt you to just have some fun. I used to wish I could do something or say something that would be like words of magic to make you feel better. But nothing worked. I used to feel so helpless and that it was hopeless to try to help you. You wouldn't accept anything from me. I tried to share some of the things I did. But you thought I was foolish and wasting my money. I can only say that all the things I did get into were ways to make my life better. I didn't want to end up like you. After many prayers and lots of effort, I did finally learn to accept you just as you were. That did make life much easier.

My divorce was a relief for me mentally, spiritually, and physically. It was very hard to manage everything all alone. I have finally realized that what I did for myself was a real gift to me. God and I did it together. I had no other help at all and I got a lot of criticism. No one knows what it is to walk in my shoes. So until you have walked in my shoes don't criticize me. At least I kept putting one foot in front of the other. I have walked, run and crawled up a big

mountain and I finally reached the top. It is beautiful up here seeing all the reflections of what has gone by.

I think I was angry at you when you gave up on life. You were gone from here long before your body gave up. I felt cheated that you left me and wouldn't let me enjoy you. That you wouldn't come to my home for a visit and share part of my life now, that is so different from what you saw before when I was unhappy. I see others taking their Moms around with them to go eat or shop or to a movie. I find myself almost in tears sometimes because I can't do that with you. I am crying now just writing this. I didn't think this would still affect me, but it does.

I know that you are happier where you are now. You and Daddy are together and happier than you probably ever were here. There is no more pain and discontent. For that I am very grateful for both of you. 'Till we meet again, I want both of you to know I love you more than I can ever put in words.

Your loving daughter – Gloria

Lifescapes