

**A Collage
of Life Stories**

Lifescapes

Georgia Westbrook

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by Georgia Westbrook

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they were seeking people with broad educational backgrounds. I was happy to remain on campus. When I complained of difficulty in trying to combine work with increasing family responsibilities I was advised to “quit your job if you can’t handle it.”

The marriage was clearly in trouble. I urged that we seek counseling, but was advised that “intelligent people solve their own problems.” I argued that if, after twenty years they are unable to solve their problems they most assuredly needed help.

The marriage ended.

supplemented his income with jobs in the Scheduling Office and in the office of the Dean of the College of Agriculture.

This was the beginning of what I came to call the holding pattern. I was often lonely. There was neither time nor money for anything but my husband's education and who could quarrel with such a worthwhile goal?

Two years at the University of Arizona followed. My husband was anxious to get ahead and worked long hours. Who could quarrel with ambition? He was frequently gone for weeks or months at a time. When I pleaded for more time for the family, I was asked if I expected him to support us pumping gas, or why hadn't I married someone with an eight to five job?

I became quite competent at handling all things related to family and home. And animals, too. When a horse required surgery, I

assisted the vet . My husband was out of town. When the horse kicked the dog and broke his nose, my husband was at a mining convention in Seattle.

I read *Sisterhood is Powerful* and could not relate to that. I had a hardworking husband, three lovely daughters, a nice home and the good life was in reach after all these years struggling to attain it. I could not understand my discontent.

I received my BA degree in 1973, and my husband jokingly told people it had only taken me twenty years to get it. I had also developed a serious periodontal problem, the result, in retrospect of twenty years of gritting my teeth. And of being female in a male dominated society and in a twenty year holding pattern.

I did not see myself as having marketable skills, but applied for and got a job at the library, where

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Story of a Marriage



The way we were.

The Story of a Marriage

I'd considered going to art school, but after a single session with a school counselor, decided to go into retailing. With a friend I visited a school in New York City and another, Harcum Junior College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. We decided on the latter and became commuters for two years to this women's college and to Philadelphia where we got our work

experience.

One of our instructors, a formidable woman, frequently advised, "if you're not smart enough to do anything else you might as well get married."

My high school friends were married and had started their families. My college friends were engaged to be married. I was not under family pressure to marry.

My husband was a Marine Corps veteran of the Korean war. He became a geologist on the G. I. Bill at Penn State. I worked and

The Collage

well mannered were uncharacteristically giggly. I was embarrassed by their behavior and became even more flustered. It seems the fiftyish professor, my friends date, had previously attempted to date my twentyish daughter through considerable subterfuge. Her response had been to ask if he knew her mother who worked on campus and was probably his age.

Laurie moved into her first house just days before Thanksgiving. She had to work but the turkey was in the oven. She called. Would I bring the feeding table for her sister's baby. Other calls followed. Would I bring the folding chairs, wine glasses. I had a 240Z at the time and it was pretty well loaded. A final call—would I bring the vacuum cleaner? Thanks, Mom!

We were a family of five with three children born and raised twenty five miles from Philadelphia. My sister and brother were younger.

Following high school graduation I studied retail merchandising, acquired an AA degree, and worked in that field for three years until I married. My husband was discharged from the Marine Corps following service in Korea. We moved to Penn State where he began as a freshman and I worked on campus until our first daughter Susan was born. Four years later we moved to Tucson where he received an MS degree and our second daughter Jenifer was born. Our lives were nomadic — We lived in Ari-

zona, northern California and Nevada. A third daughter Laurie was born.

While the girls were in school I took classes in art, anthropology and counseling and fulfilled the requirements for BA and MA degrees at UNR. I worked in the library for twenty years until my retirement six years ago.

Two of my daughters and two of my grandchildren live in Reno. A third daughter and her son live in Hermosa Beach. I enjoy spending time with all of them. I continue my interest in art, relationships with friends, going to Aquacise with my friend Lois and walking my dog Mollie.

Our Family



Bertie, circa. 1945.

Bertie

I'm not sure how we came to call my mother "Bertie", but believe it probably began with my brother Terry and his friends who hung out at our house or on our front porch. There is no doubt of its being a term of affection. A later generation, my



Daddy, circa. 1945.

brother's daughters, called her "grammy pajammy" because at the end of the day she got into her pajamas.

My father was eleven years her senior, a southerner of propriety and a storyteller. He followed an older brother to Pennsylvania. He told us often that while sitting on the porch of the boarding house where he

Remember the Time

We've had some unforgettable Thanksgivings. One year we'd invited some international students to share our meal. We'd used a new electric knife to carve the turkey. Midway through dinner, my daughter Susan had to go to Washoe Med to have the sliver of a turkey bone removed from her throat.

Another time daughter Jenny had a boyfriend flying in from Houston and wanted the family to have Thanksgiving in her first apartment.

My home at the time had electric heat and was very cold when I got home from work. I frequently built a fire as soon as I got home and changed clothes in front of the fireplace. There was a knock at the door and a uniformed policeman asked to use the phone. Clothes

were draped over the chair - skirt, blouse, bra and panty hose.

I was contributing to the dinner and food preparations were underway. Items to be taken to Jenny's the next day were spread on the kitchen counter. A gag hostess gift of Maalox along side. The officer observed the scene, noted the Maalox among the other items, suppressed a grin as I stammered explanations and apologies. He made some comment about my getting ready for the holiday and wished us a happy Thanksgiving.

Still another time my daughter Laurie invited a young policeman to come for Thanksgiving dinner. He was on duty and could only come on his dinner break. I planned accordingly since timing was so important. The oven was being difficult and I was flustered. A friend asked if she could bring a date. Certainly. Two of my daughters who were usually

in the backseat began to shout and shove each other. My admonitions to stop were ignored. On impulse, I turned the volume on the radio full blast. The combatants became silent. A small voice asked “why did you do that?” My reply: “I didn’t want to listen to that fighting.” We continued on our way very quietly.

My favorite photograph is on the previous page: the three of them—Cameron holding the smaller ones one in front and one behind him.

Now a big strong guy, there was a time when he was a very little guy afraid of my kachina. Hopi children learn to fear Mudhead—he frightens them to fear punishment if they misbehave. We’ve had lots of good times—summers at Wildwaters and arguing politics. When Caitlin was very small she was so excited about the snow she pulled on her boots and ran out into the yard—no clothes—just boots. Now we see her off at the airport, clothed, but the suit-

case is packed quickly and off she goes. She keeps track of anything which might call for a celebration at Baskin Robbins “BR” – school performances, braces off, Grammy’s new car. We make art in Georgia’s Art Room which has a sign on the door which she made to surprise me. She was disappointed when Aunt Laurie didn’t bring her horse to Show and Tell, but brought photographs instead.

Sean crawled into my bed, just after I’d gotten into it and said, “congratulations, you’re not snoring.” Once in pre-school when they were studying American artists he introduced me to the class as his grammy named Georgia whose favorite artist was Georgia O’Keefe. After class his mother made sandwiches for us and he complained about mustard on his. Her immediate response was “lick it off,” and he did and proceeded to eat the sandwich. I think that will always be my favorite Sean story.



Denise Westbrook Bach and Matt Bach.



Georgia and Terry Westbrook, circa 1997.

lived, he'd seen her walking across an open field and said "that's the girl I'm going to marry." He called her "Baby". It was not a marriage without problems but it was a real love affair.

Bertie played with us and he'd say with a smile, "you'll always be a kid." Bertie was ahead of her time in many ways. She exercised daily to—I remember the name still—Victor Lindlar's radio broadcast. We kids would join her in these workouts and romp around the living room.

She was about 35 when she learned to ride a bike borrowed from one of us. She was one of the first women I knew who drove a

car. Daddy made sure the tank was full and the car clean when she wanted to borrow it. She was also one of the first women I knew who wrote checks. I was the only child in my classes who paid for school pictures, field trips and the Weekly Reader by check. I was embarrassed. I thought it meant we didn't have any money.

I remember dinner table discussions of racial inequality. During her last visit with me, we watched the political conventions in 1988. There were many black delegates. There were tears in her eyes as she said, "I didn't think I'd live to see this." That was the last year of her life.

Caitlin.



Sean.



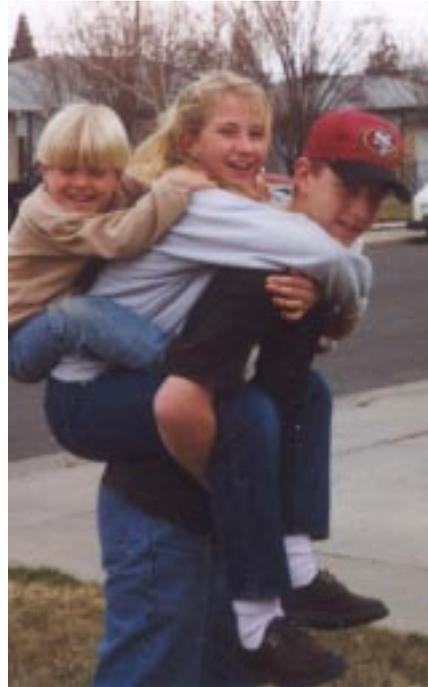
Cameron.

Grandchildren

My granddaughter Caitlin was about two and her brother Cameron about four when we began going on adventures. Caitlin couldn't quite say adventures so she shortened the word to "ventures."

Some of our favorite "ventures" were the drive thru car wash, the outdoor elevator at the Nugget and the shuttle train at Circus Circus. We also went to the art museum, to the park to feed the ducks, to the Oxbow Nature Walk and to Baskin Robbins for ice cream.

We were on the freeway in route to one of these "ventures" when the munchkins



Left to right: Sean, Caitlin, Cameron.



Two quilts I've made.





*Grandmother
Westbrook*



Grandfather Westbrook

Grandparents

I don't remember my paternal grandfather and my southern grandmother lived 800 miles away. It was a trip we took infrequently.

Her name was Willow and she wore long cotton dresses and sunbonnets. She wore her hair in a bun on the top of her head and black wire rimmed "granny glasses" like those worn in the sixties. There was always

a willow switch tucked in her apron ready to swat an errant child although I never saw her do it. She let me help make biscuits and churn butter. My dad tried unsuccessfully to get her to fly to Pennsylvania to visit us. Her response, "Dennis, when I get that close to Heaven I'm going all the way."

My maternal grandmother was a semi-invalid and I have sketchy memories of her. She made a trip



Laurie



Daughters



Jenifer.



*Grandmother and
Grandfather David*



Churning butter

to Switzerland the country from which her family had come, when she was seventeen years old. She returned with an engraved watch with delicately painted flowers on the face. The watch was a gift from a young man and I regret that I have no further details. However, we do have the watch.

My recollections of my maternal grandfather were that his origins were Welsh. He had white hair and a

matching mustache. He took me walking when I was very small and we picked grapes as we walked. He assured me that it was ok to swallow the seeds.

At some time in his life he was a glass-blower. I was fascinated when he fell asleep in his rocking chair and his cheeks would puff out like Dizzy Gillespie.

He lived with us for a time after my grandmother's death. He loved movies and would take me to them often.



Georgia and Dick

My Cousin Dick

We were very close. Our mothers were sisters and we were their first born – about five months apart. Our first experience with being away from home over night were summer visits in each others homes which were about ten miles apart. We dug holes in the side yard in an attempt to see China. We also sat on the front steps with our arms in slings we had made. We hoped to elicit sympathy

from people walking by. I'm sure they were going along with this, but at the time we thought we were fooling them and thought this was great fun.

Our families visited often and unannounced. One Saturday I was dressed and ready to go to a birthday party with a gift in hand. My favorite cousin arrived so I didn't want to go. Despite my parents coaxing, I refused to go. Dick, however, was persuaded and went to the party and took the gift. He also had birthday cake and I did not.

Daughters

All of my daughters are special and they each came into the world in a special way.

Susan broke up her father's birthday party. After the guests left, we saw the doctor and he advised going to the hospital ten miles away. Susan decided to wait another day.

Jenifer on the other hand was a four pound "preemie" in a hurry. She was born within minutes of our arrival at the hospital. Tucson Medical center was a

cluster of buildings and we made two stops before being directed to the right one. She was born while her dad was parking the car.

Laurie came close to being born in a taxi. Her dad was in Ely and we were in northern California. I called for a cab and asked him to pick up the baby sitter on his way and to wait for me. He was a very nervous driver who alternately looked in the mirror and turned around to ask me if I was OK.

Laurie and Shana.



Susan and daughter Caitlin.



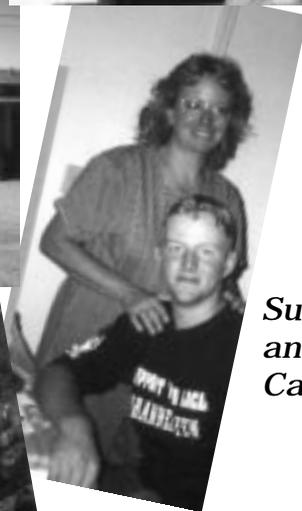
Aunt Laurie and Sean on Byshka.



Jenny and son Sean.



Susan and son Cameron.



The Lindbergh Kidnapping

Charles Lindbergh was an American hero. He was the first to fly across the Atlantic Ocean from New York to Paris in a single engine plane. His only child, a twenty month old boy, was kidnapped. The “crime of the century” occurred in 1932, two years after I was born. The trial began in 1935 and Bruno Hauptman was executed in 1936. Adults were talking about it during this time and I overheard parts of these conversations. I must have been about five when I asked my mother if we were rich. She assured me that we were not. To a small child, this was wonderful news. I was safe! I did not have to worry about being kidnapped.

A Fox Terrier Named Tricky

Tricky didn't do any tricks, but was named by a hopeful girl, approximately eight years old—me. I also hoped Tricky would have puppies. My parents wanted to have her spayed.

We were going on vacation and would board Tricky at the veterinarians. Arrangements were made to have her spayed as soon as we left town so that she would be completely recovered and without telltale scars when we returned. Something happened. The vet didn't do the surgery until the day before. Tricky's entire un-

derbelly was shaved and stitched with catgut in a huge criss-crossed pattern like a boot lace.

I was betrayed. Someone, I don't know who, suggested that Tricky had had her appendix removed.

We often walked to nearby tennis courts to watch tennis. Boys at the courts asked where was my dog. I told them she'd had her appendix out. They laughed uncontrollably and thereafter greeted me with "hey Georgia, how's your dog that had her appendix out?"



Tram to Orphan Mine at Grand Canyon.

Grand Canyon

My husband was a geologist. His first job after receiving his MS degree was at Grand Canyon. We lived in a trailer with our two small daughters just outside the mine yard and close to the canyon rim. The men worked twelve days on and two off, traditional in the mining industry. We would go to Flagstaff fifty miles away to do our grocery shopping and go to the dentist. There was just one stop sign on the way.

The Orphan Mine was one of the highest grade uranium mines in the world.

Access to it was by ore bucket (much like a ski lift) to the adit 1500 feet below the canyon rim. Late one afternoon close to quitting time, in borrowed hardhat and too-large boots called "diggers" I perched on the edge of the ore bucket and made the trip. It was dark underground and very wet. Negotiating ladders and sloshing along wet surfaces was difficult.

The men walked off shift. It is bad luck to have a woman underground.

Pearl Harbor

December 7th, 1941 was a quiet Sunday afternoon for our family, undistinguished from other Sunday afternoons. We were all in the living room-my parents, younger sister and brother. I don't remember specifically what we were doing, probably reading the Sunday papers while listening to the radio. When the program was interrupted to announce the attack on Pearl Harbor it didn't get my attention until I realized my father was crying and we heard him say, "we are at war." This was serious.

I knew there was a war in Europe, and while my parents followed the news closely in the papers and radio broadcasts we children did not. I read or heard that Europeans were eating their dogs. That was something I could relate to because we had a pet dog and the realization of such horror was

probably the end of my childhood innocence.

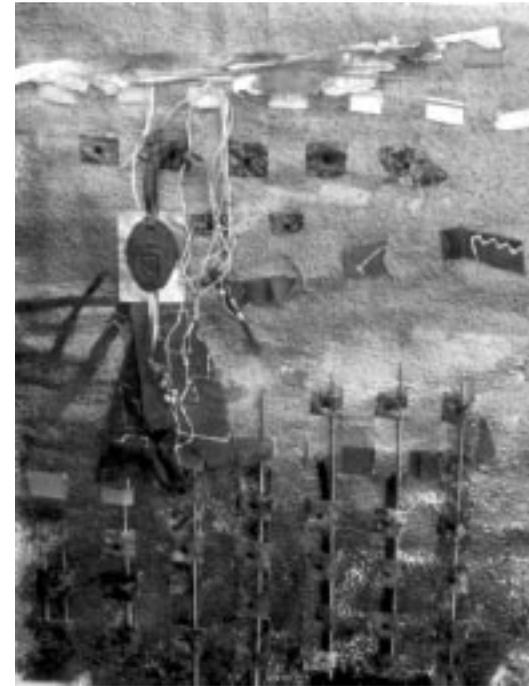
The impact on me as a child was gradual and I am uncertain of the chronology of events. Our parent's lives were changed and we children were drawn in as their lives changed, but to a much lesser degree.

My father worked in the defense industry. He was a tool and die maker in a spring manufacturing business. He also supervised some of the production employees and often went back at night to get things set up for them for the following day. His hours were long.

My mother was a hospital volunteer and became an airplane spotter. There were flash cards or books with diagrams of planes for her to learn to identify and we children would test her on them. She also became an air raid warden and when the sirens sounded all lights were turned off and out the door she went wearing her

helmet and flashlight in hand. I was left in charge of my sister and brother. I was terrified in the dark and to this day am uncomfortable in total darkness.

Gasoline was rationed and used primarily for transportation to work. Our local weekend trips to visit with family and friends were limited. We kids collected cans for the war effort. Oleo-margarine was new to us. It was a butter substitute that looked like Crisco. We kids took turns kneading a red-dish color tablet until it dissolved and the stuff turned yellow. The results were lumpy and didn't look or taste like butter.



*Woven
Watercolors.*

