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The Book - The Trauma, The Writing and The Healing

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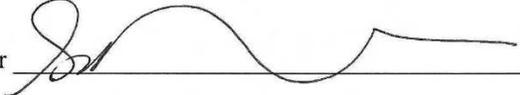
THE BOOK - A MEMOIR
THE TRAUMA, THE WRITING AND THE HEALING

Hillorie Sue McLarty

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
In Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements of the Degree
Master of Arts in English

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Approved by:

Mentor  Date 8-19-22

Reader  Date 8-19-22

Reader  Date 8-22-22

@ 2022

Hillorie Sue McLarty

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DEDICATION

To all of us who lived through trauma and survived, may this work be an instrument of hope.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To The Big Four,

Thank you for sharing your world with me and helping me to understand mine.

To Dr. Sarah Blomeley

You were the first voice I heard at Belmont University. It is so fitting that you are the person who has guided me through the final stages of my degree. I feel like we went through the Pandemic together and that is a bond that will last forever. Words cannot express the gratitude I have for your continual vision of what writing and reading can be. Thank you so much for your interest in my process and for guiding me through the amazing work that we have done to get to this point. Your empathy and wisdom will always inspire me.

To Dr. Gary McDowell,

Thank you for showing me how to hear the music in words. You have inspired me to stretch out in my writing and to never forget that rewriting is the key.

To Dr. Amy Hodges Hamilton,

Thank you so much for your empathy and your work with trauma that has inspired my research. I am in awe of and am inspired by the work you are doing.

To Virginia Watts and the Let's Write group,

You opened the heretofore locked doors of my soul and led me back to the writing that I have always loved. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to apply to graduate school.

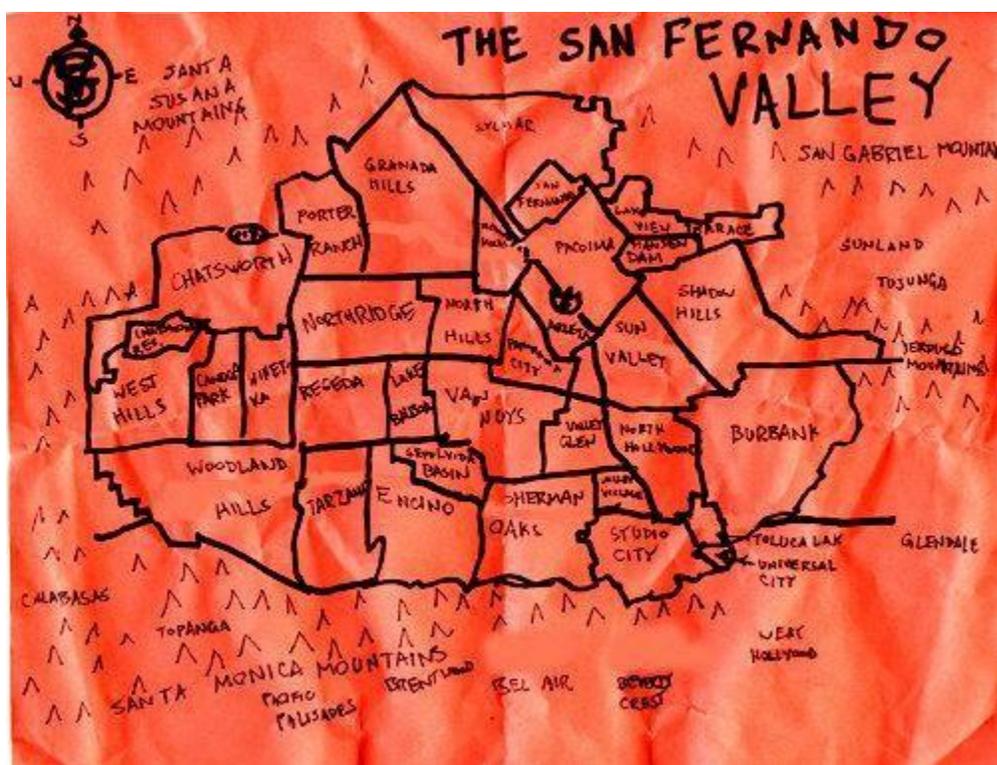
To John M,

Forever my muse and my most steadfast and loving fan

The Prologue	
Waking Up in the San Fernando Valley	6
The Book.....	14
The Epilogue	
Legacy Writing, Kintsugi, and The Healing Through Writing.....	63
The Critical Reflection	69
The Memoirs	71
The Trauma	76
The Writing	83
The Healing	85
Works Cited.....	87
Works Consulted.....	89

Prologue to The Book

Waking Up in the San Fernando Valley 1965



The San Fernando Valley is a suburban community outside of Los Angeles, home to Disney, Warner Bros., Universal and Republic Studios, which means a lot of my classmates' parents work in the television, motion picture or music business. My father is a tv and film composer and arranger, as well as a performing musician. He has his own Big Band, the Jack Stern Orchestra, and he plays in other big bands as well. I spend my early childhood thinking

that he did not have a job because he is home so much during the day. While my mother is yelling at me about my attitude, I pray he comes out of the den where he is writing and save me. Save me, please, I think, just make her stop yelling. But he is not and will not be my savior—he is just a man trying to live with my mom who has severe depression and borderline personality disorder.

He tells me that my mom is a borderline personality one day when we are both in the garage, gathering up toilet paper and paper towels to bring into the house, wiping off spider webs and dust. My goes to a psychiatrist who diagnoses my mother sight unseen and tells my father that my mother might come “undone” if she herself has therapy. The psychiatrist recommends against therapy for my mother. My father tells me plainly, “You know, I am sorry to say, but if it comes down to a choice between you and your mother, I choose her. I am her husband. You are young. You will find your way.”

I am crushed. There is no rescue coming from my father. I hold the toilet paper and paper towels as he closes the garage door.

My sister and I are four and a half years apart and do not hang out together. But occasionally we listen to Broadway shows on our turntable in our bedroom and I let her sing most of the parts: she is a much better singer and dancer than I. I let her play the Julie Andrews part in “Sound of Music,” the winner of the best picture Oscar in 1965. Those are the very fleeting moments of happiness at home, in our shared bedroom. But mostly, I am terrified of what will happen next.

My life is at school with my friends Judy, Pam, and Donna, the Big Four. They are my touchstone, my reason for being. They are the friends that my mom does not like. “She has shifty

eyes,” she would say and act like she knew something that she could not possibly know about these girls. She just makes it up in her head and believes it. She grounds me from my friends, so I tell her I am going somewhere with someone she approves of and then meet up with Judy, Pam, and Donna.



The Book begins in September 1965. I am sixteen. The authors of *The Book* are the Big Four: Judy, Pam, Donna, and me. Lyndon Johnson is President of the United States. We are devastated when John F. Kennedy dies, and we hate Lyndon Johnson for the Vietnam War, but we love him for the Civil Rights Act. The voting age is twenty-one and that seems like way too far off in the distance for us to even conceive of. But most of all I am trying to survive emotionally.

My mother loves “The Dick Van Dyke Show” and watches on the couch with my father and younger sister, Stephanie. Stephanie is thin and so cute and has straight hair, unlike my unruly curls. I wish I could be her. But of course, I cannot—I can only be my bumbling self. And my parents have to be themselves, not like Rob and Laura who get along so well and when they fight it’s in comical ways, and they would always make up in sweet ways. Instead, the screaming and shouting between my parents grows to a fever pitch at times and I just want the ringing in my ears to stop. Eventually I learn how to stop the screaming, just move away from it mentally—far away, far from that house in Van Nuys. I just float away, somewhere out there with the clouds where I comfort George Harrison and he likes that, and we become more than friends.

Sometimes my parents let me watch “The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson” and I imagine what it would be like in my own place, my own home where I can do whatever I want, go to bed when I want, date whoever I want and be friends with whoever I want. I feel grown up in a small part of my body when I stay up until 11:30pm. But I live here, in this tentatively explosive, cacophonous place and emotional reside, mostly, in the clouds, far away from the fighting.

With all the forward movement of pop culture, the U.S. is still fighting in Vietnam.

On September 18, 1965, the US fights the Battle of An Minh during Operation Gibraltar. This is just one of the bloody battles in this tiny country, so far away from us, even though the draft takes boys fresh from graduation from Van Nuys High School. They are boys we know, some since kindergarten, boys who eat lunch with us in the cafeteria. Some of them come back severely wounded—they lose legs and arms, and sometimes they are severely depressed and later we find out it was PTSD. Some we will never see in this life again.

It is uncharacteristically cool that September, high sixty's during the day. It makes it easy to wear the clothes I love to wear—black tights, short skirt, black turtleneck with a blue work shirt over the top. Perfect weather for that.



I hate waking up in the morning. Our house smells like whatever my mother had cooked for dinner the night before, like pot roast or fried chicken, mixed with dust that was a thick reminder that we rarely clean our house. We rarely vacuum and we rarely dust. The dust hangs in the air like the smog over the San Fernando Valley. We are used to it, that dust and stale cooking odor, mixed with the heady odor of my dad's pipe that he smokes while he writes music in the

den. My mom only makes us clean our room intermittently, usually because she is mad at us, and she knows that we hate cleaning as much as she does. But she herself never cleans consistently either.

Piles of clean clothes are next to piles of dirty clothes. It is never an easy thing to find something clean to wear even though my mom is always doing laundry.

My mom buys a lot of canned goods. She cuts coupons and buys things on sale like buy two, get one free. She grew up in the Great Depression where having food was a number one priority. She is in the habit of buying an overabundance of stuff. So even though we have run out of cupboard space, she keeps on buying, so there are bags of canned goods all over the floor in the kitchen, in the hallways, and the dining room. We walk around the bags, lined up on the rarely vacuumed green shag rug or the waxy build up linoleum in our kitchen.

I hope that my mom sleeps in every day and mostly she does. It is my dad that makes me toast and orange juice and sometimes the Postum that I am allowed to drink as a breakfast drink, like coffee. My dad is a musician, an artist with thick fingers that I fixate on whenever he plays the piano or trumpet. He only sleeps five hours a night and makes our breakfast dressed for tennis. After he puts the sweet butter on the toast that he hands to me on a napkin, he rides his bike over to the tennis courts and plays for an hour. Then he heads back home and write\s all day. He watches tennis on television any chance he gets and sits with a board on his lap where he puts music paper and writes arrangements for pop songs for his big band gigs.

My dad is calm in the mornings. He smells faintly of Old Spice and sweet butter. He only gets mad at me when he says I rile up my mom, and although I try to tell him that it is she who is riling me up, it never ends up being seen that way. I always lose.

My depression is on full tilt as I look in the mirror and comb my hair after my shower and think every dreadful thing about myself that I can conjure up: I am not pretty enough, thin enough, my hair sucks, and hey, there is that new zit.

I hang my clothes over the back of the wooden bedroom chair so that I can at least find something to wear. Both my sister's and my clothes are stuffed into the tiny closet which is an impenetrable mess. I dissociate every time I have to look in there. To this day, I feel sick to my stomach any place that is overloaded with stuff, like thrift stores, even the organized ones. I am allergic to too much stuff, I put on my black tights and there is another run in them, but the run makes it look as if I am a tough street kid, and I like that look. I gather my books together and hope that I finished my homework the night before. I just cannot remember. All I can remember is my mom watching tv and glaring at me during the commercials. She does not like my hair, my clothes, my friends, and most of all what she calls "my attitude." I stand up to her when she is being unfair. Just me saying the word "unfair" sends her into a rage and she storms out of the room.

There are only two ways out of this house, and they are both locked: the front door and the back door. I can't climb out the windows like Donna sometimes does at her house, It is impossible to get out of the windows as the screens are put on very tightly and you would have to break one to climb out of the window. I am stuck in this house unless given permission to leave. I am stuck on this street in Van Nuys with six houses on each side, neatly manicured lawns, and identical floor plans. I vow never to live in suburbia again, when I grow up, when I am finally eighteen.

I live for the weekend and being able to go out with the Big Four. I have to be home by midnight, but at least it is several hours of freedom from the mantelpiece stuffed with knick

knacks we bring home from trips to Disneyland, Jungle Land and Busch Gardens (undusted), overstuffed bookcases, vinyl albums that my dad plays on his Teac turntable, and the living room filled with too much and too large furniture.

Inside I sing “Help” by the Beatles—help I need somebody. Judy, Pam, and Donna are my anchors. Now I just need a boyfriend to complete the picture. I believe that just having a boy love me will make everything better. I have no idea, nor do I take into consideration how much work it takes to have a decent relationship with someone, let alone a growing relationship. Of course, if George Harrison loved me, it would be perfect from the beginning. And if I can just meet him, it will be perfect because in me he will recognize us as kindred, creative souls—would you please help me?

Meanwhile I dodge the typewriter and the books that my mom throws at me when she is angry. I am verbally grilled about the things I do wrong, continually, and in order of the occurrences since the beginning of my time out of her womb. She yells about the clothes that are missing (misplaced, under something, left at another friend’s house), the way that I look “ungrateful” and that basically I never listen to anything she says, and that I only do what my friends tell me to.

As I climb up the stairs of the public transportation bus to head to Van Nuys High School, I find it hard to fake a smile. I will be at school until 3 and then back home to the continual argument that my mother and I have had for all the sixteen years of my life.

My head rings like someone put a bucket over it and bangs on it with a spoon. I push back tears as I find a seat with my books and notebook in hand to ride the two miles to Van Nuys High School to start my academic day. Won’t you please please help me?

The Book

Started Sunday, September 12, 1965 – ended May 1966

I hereby swear, as a member of the Big 4, I will uphold and continue this book until the Bitter End, in the order of HDPJ, also known as JPDH

I'm sitting with Judy on her bedroom floor. It's Wednesday, after school, and both of her parents are at work. David, Judy's boyfriend, drove me here to be with her and he promises to pick me up and take me home in an hour.

I have my Navy P coat wrapped around my shoulders. It's wool and scratchy but I love it and it reminds me of the things that the people at Vito's wear. Ex-military gear is big in the hippy crowd, and I want to be a hippy so badly. I wear my pink paisley long sleeve shirt and gold wide wale corduroy pants, with moccasins, which we call Flying Shoes.

Judy and I are trading Beatle cards, the ones that come with the pink gum, just like the baseball cards that the boys trade. But this is Beatles, as we amass our personal collections of our favorite Beatle. I trade her any of my Paul McCartney cards for my beloved George Harrison cards.

"My love," I say, holding the George Harrison card she just traded me, with my eyes closed, in my most dramatic voice.

Judy laughs and hands me a photo cut out of a magazine. The young woman is blonde with her hair in a perfect flip. She is gorgeous.

"That's Patty Boyd," Judy informs me. "That's George Harrison's wife."

My eyes well with tears. I'm not ever going to be that cute blonde with the flip, wearing pink cashmere sweaters. I'm not the blonde beauty that shines when she walks down the hallways. I'm not the blonde cherished girl child for whom her parents buy a white '65 Mustang convertible. George Harrison is lost to me forever.

"Oh my god, no," I cry out. "I'm too messed up to have him anyway."

Judy's face changes. "You have to know that your messed up parts are your most interesting parts, don't you?"

I can't smile through the tears. "What does that mean?" I ask.

"It means that your flaws are beautiful," she assures me. "The flaws are what make you so very real. And give you soul."

In my most endearing, teenage way, I don't believe her, I see things being "bleak." I live my life in clumps, clumps of happiness, clumps of sadness. But mostly sadness.

I am dissociating most of the time, not even knowing what that means or how it works in the brain. All I know is that mostly everything is bleak, and I am not there, mostly.

I long to become a woman. But I want to dress like a guy. I do, however, have dresses that I wear occasionally, and skirts that I roll up at the waist to make them short. But I love to wear men's chambray blue shirts with pockets on the chest, and Levi's – 501's with the metal buttons instead of zippers. I am thin with dark, curly hair, and blue eyes. I long to be a writer, like F. Scott Fitzgerald or Sylvia Plath or even Bob Dylan. I am not sure why other people care about me. The splintered-off me looks at the young woman I am and wonders about why they care and ask "Why? Why do you care? Why do you bother?" I peer through a window glass onto the world and hope to catch a glimpse of the sun, not realizing that the sunshine is just on the other side of the pane. My eyes are tentative, not knowing what lurks behind every corner.

Van Nuys High is where I can escape a lot of the emotional turmoil I have at home and create my world with my friends in *The Book*. I can dissipate into silliness with my friends. I can laugh with them and write in *The Book* and for a few hours my daily fights with my mother about an entire array of topics fades into the background. My head hurts thinking about the fights: as I

fail to find things that are lost, why I don't get an A when I got a B, how my friends are no good, how I am no good, and basically that I am continually fucking up this family by even being born. I wish I hadn't been born many many times.

We don't talk about emotional trauma in the 60's. Parents routinely spank and punish their children severely. My mother is no exception. She has no idea that she is perpetrating chronic childhood abuse.

I am live in a home where I am intermittently terrorized, and it is the only parenting I know, so I dissociate—pull away from the situation mentally and emotionally.

I suffer the consequences by being “blue” much of the time.

Without the Big Four I might have died out completely: they are my community, the friends who read what I write and care about it. They are my lifeline of survival.

Dear Big 4,

I'm sitting here thinking... My feet hurt (I said that).

I love Jim W! I sure hope he can find his house, too. I told him, after he said he was going to throw some wild parties, to invite us, but on second thought I told him that we would crash it instead. Too bad Hillorie missed last Saturday night.

Last night Ed called and asked me out for Oct. 30 – because it's our anniversary. And he wanted to make sure that I could make it

Love, Donna

Donna is crushing on Jim W. We don't really know his last name, but we call him Jim W—W is for Weird. He says things like “cool” and “far out.” He is tall with black hair and piercing blue eyes.

Donna and I meet Jim W at Dupar's on Ventura Blvd. one day when we are getting coffee to go in Styrofoam cups. He says "hi," and we say "hi" right back. We may have giggled too. He invites us to come to Tortilla Flat. We love the name of his place. We jump into his car with him, no questions asked. Donna wants to sit in the front seat.

Jim W drives us up to his Spanish style apartment building in the hills of Studio City, a forties style apartment with a terracotta Spanish-style roof. The terracotta really stands out when the Jacaranda trees drop their beautiful blue flowers. Most grown-ups think that the Jacaranda flowers that fall are a pain, but we love them. We call them purple flowers and we celebrate them. We celebrate the Weird, the misunderstood, picked on, put down, yelled at, cursed out, the things that remind us of us because we are the misunderstood, picked on, put down, yelled at, and cursed out, and we celebrate each other. Jim W lives in an apartment with "Tortilla Flat" stenciled on his front door. We long to go inside Tortilla Flat, but Jim W has not invited us in, just to his front porch. "You ladies are way too young," he says with the whitest teeth and the cutest smile. "Come back in another five years."

And he closes the door on us, and we walk back the half mile to Ventura Blvd. This is what we mean by calling him Jim W. We just can't figure him out.

When we go out day tripping on the weekends, Donna always wants to cruise by Tortilla Flat. She says, "Just in case." Just in case Jim W lets us in. Just in case Jim W likes her.

Donna is the same height as me, 5'9". We always say that we look at each other eye to eye. Donna is the stable one in the Big Four, the one who studies for tests, brings coffee with milk in a thermos and cups for all of us. She has beautiful honey blonde hair with just that slight little wave. She can put her hair up or wear it down, with a hair band, or without. Her hair is honey perfection.

Donna loves me even though I really messed her hair up that time when she asked me to just give her a trim. I try to get the back straight, but she ends up with short hair, a Beatle cut, she says. She just laughs it off, but I feel terrible that I can do such a horrible thing to her, and she still wants to be my friend.

In 1966 Donna gets the first car of the Big Four, a VW bug, loud lime green color, and she names it Endurance. The first thing that Donna does is put JPDH in pink tape on both sides of Endurance. Endurance has become the official car of the Big Four. We each put twenty-five cents in a cup when we get into Endurance, a contribution for gas. Those twenty-five cents gets us pick up and drop off service as Donna drives us around the San Fernando Valley and Hollywood for the night. It is a great deal, as Donna says. And it is a great deal for Donna, too, as gas is twenty-five cents a gallon. Endurance always has a full tank.

Donna has no problem with money. She does housework for Auntie Ruth, her neighbor, and has since she was ten. With Auntie Ruth's guidance Donna \has perfected the finer arts of cleaning, laundry, and ironing. And she does it for her family, too, at her own house, for free.

Because she is working, Donna has a savings account. Her parents often borrow money from her. And pay it back, of course.

Donna is blessed to not be depressed. Ever. She is always upbeat. She is simply happy about most things, especially to have her braces off, finally, when she enters high school. She never mentions the unmanageable hair cut I gave her. And I never mention Jim W in front of Ed.

Dear Other 2-1+me

Hi: I'm supposed to be doing a math problem right now but I'm not. I don't understand so I'll wait until he explains it. He just explained.

A guy in Harmony told me about a place called Mother Neptune's which he said I would groove. We should go. Also, I want to go to Brave New World.

I just finished my homework, and the dumb teacher is shutting all the windows. It is hot in these bungalows. Even near the window.

I will continue later. The bell's going to ring. Love, Pam

I meet Pam when we are both three years old. Jerry, Pam's father, is a virtuoso violinist that my dad, Jack, a composer, and conductor, always hires for recording sessions. Somehow, they discover that their daughters are the same age, and we all meet in a park in Hollywood on one of those glorious not-too-hot Los Angeles days. Pam and I hit the swings, father, farther up. "Daddy, push me more," we say.

That is a fun day until Jerry accidentally slams Pam's little fingers in the car door as they are leaving the park, after he put her in the back seat of his car. Pam is crying and Jerry is pale, as they rush off to the ER.

I don't see Pam again for an awfully long time, until seventh grade. I recognize her right away at Van Nuys Junior High in 1963, fresh out of leaving her mother and stepfather's house, finally living with Jerry and her stepmother, Sylvia. She now lives within walking distance from me, and I find myself running over there any chance I get. Sometimes I am crying but Sylvia never asks me about specifics. She just fixes me a cup of tea with lots of honey and looks reassuringly at me, even though she is puzzled. Later she tells Pam, "I'm sorry Hillorie is so sad all of the time."

Pam is exotically beautiful, with green eyes. but she never likes the way she looks. She has a beautiful soprano singing voice, and people compare her to Joan Baez. She will sing at our high

school graduation, “He Shall Feed His Flock” from Handel’s “Messiah” The audience and the graduating class cry as it is so beautiful.

Pam, like me, has a horrible self-image. She hates the way she looks. She specifically hates her nose.

We lay on the floor in her bedroom. Our heads are propped up by pillows and our legs are covered with a cotton comforter. We play LPs on a turntable: Beatles, Dylan, and Joan Baez. while Pam stares herself down in a hand mirror.

“This just sucks,” she says, trying not to cry.

“Hey,” I say, “Boys just don’t deserve you, they really don’t. They’re all jerks anyway. Take it from me, I’ve known way too many of them.”

“But if I could have just one, just longer than a summer.”

Pam has had Glenn as a boyfriend for a summer but then he unceremoniously dumps her. He dumps her without saying anything. He just disappears from her life.

“I wish I looked like you,” Pam confesses. “You have it made.”

“Don’t ever wish to be me,” I caution. “I’m a disaster waiting to happen.”

We lay on the floor, listening to records, wrapped together in a flowered comforter. We are each other’s comforter. We own these records together. Since records cost \$3.98 we pool our money and buy them together. We sign our names on the back of the album covers: H. Stern and P. Reisler. We use gel pens and try to sign our names in cursive as beautifully as we can. We love these records. They are ours. We are each other’s. We are each other’s comforter against the unfairness of the world, of boys and of our parents’ senseless criticism.

It doesn't help Pam's self-image when one day Jerry points to her and says, "Look at the beautiful body I gave her and look what she did to herself." He tells Pam she is fat. He says this to her even though her weight is perfectly fine in high school. In truth, it is Jerry that is overweight.

Sylvia, Pam's stepmother, is Pam's unexpected gift from Jerry. Jerry had married Sylvia when Pam was five and Sylvia, not having any children of her own, loves Pam as if she was her own. Sylvia is generous and kind to Pam. Pam tells her everything, even about us, which we hate.

"You TOLD her???" (Fill in the blanks with a rebellious act that we want to keep secret.)

"Sheesh!"

Pam spends a lot of time with the horses at the Burbank stables. Jerry buys her a black and white Peugeot station wagon that she names Pigeon, the second official vehicle of the Big Four. Now we have two cars to drive us around. It cuts down on the time we spend hitchhiking.

Dear PDH,

Well, I am sitting in the music room (room 403) which is a bungalow on Vanowen, about 75 yards from Topanga Canyon. It is 7:28 am. I FEEL NOTHING ASIDE FROM NUMBNESS IN MY FINGERTIPS, TIGHTLY STUFFED SINUSES, AND A FAINT DESIRE FOR A CIGARETTE. It's the first day of the new semester, 1st period, and I'm already filling out book cards. Friday, when we ran for classes, I thought about the last time I ran for classes (in Van Nuys). When we all wore blue work shirts, flying shoes, pig tails, or something similar. I remember, vaguely, swinging on a tree, back by the Girls Gym locker room with Pam. I'll be free in 1 year, 63 days or if you like, 428 days. Last night the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan. I still love them. David says there's a new Stones LP coming out soon. I still don't have "December's Children." I love David. (what is your present advice).

Yesterday, after one year and one and a half months I saw Beatle Bob. That was all I needed. I've seen them all now. He really does nothing for me now (his hair still does). I don't have to wonder anymore – I don't care. They don't matter.

I go to the headshrinker today. I'm glad I'm going to this school this semester. It's groovy, getting out at 12:20. I'm not tired. It's 7:45 am now.

Do you have any idea what it's like to the Big One minus 3 in Canoga Park Social Surfer Society? Alas... It doesn't really matter. I can't tell you how much I love you. We'll meet again. Don't know when.

Love, Judy

I can't talk about why Judy is living in Canoga Park, in a foster home, without talking about how much Vito's means to us. We can't go there anymore after the incident with Carl and Judy. It's still a special destination, but now we just cruise by and don't go in. We drive by there, like a pilgrimage, and remember the year we spent trying to be hip.

Vito is a sculptor and a dancer who lives in an apartment on top of a three-story building with his wife Sioux and their baby boy Godot. Vito and his crew get to go to the Whisky and other Hollywood clubs for free because they dress in purple and fuchsia and dayglo green paisley and tie-die shirts and dresses. They dance wildly around the place, weaving in and out of the other dancers and make it come alive. I revere Vito so much. He is so wise. And so very cool. Vito is an artist. Aren't all artists wise?

The main floor of Vito's building is an antique/junk shop, filled with old cool clothes like old men's sport coats, dresses from the forties, paisley shirts, and pants, and lots of scarves. Sioux makes clothes out of the scarves: halter tops and A line dresses that flow when you move. These are great for dancing, and running around, all freaky like, on the dance floor, weaving in and out of the people who are dancing with a partner as they get tangled up in the freaky folks who are whirling around.

There are also old couches in the antique junk shop, along with old lamps and books. There are random fire extinguishers, sculptures, and paintings that the artists downstairs are trying to sell: freeform sculpture, and realistic ones, too, like dogs and chickens. There are paintings that look

like paint is splattered on the canvas. And there are also realistic paintings of sailboats, beaches, and trees, too. There are freeform sculptures and ones of men and women embracing, as well as pigs and horses. I suppose that Vito and Sioux sell these things to help make the rent.

Vito's art studio is in the basement of the building. Vito blasts loud jazz while people paint, sketch, and do clay sculpture. When we visit, we walk around the studio and watch these people who are real artists and who practice their art. They wear a lot of paisley and bright colors: pink, purple, bright blue. They have paint and clay on their clothes. No one looks like they care much about combing their hair. They only care about art. Vito validates my existence when he looks in my eyes and says, "Oh wow." He's really listening to what I am saying. I am not sure other adults do that.

In 1965 Judy finds herself in conflict too, like me. She conflicts with the way the world is, with her parents and with authority in general. She sees herself like a hero fighting bad guys.

Judy has a secret. She has broken the Big Four pact to only go to Vito's in pairs, for safety. One Saturday she goes to Vito's by herself, to see Beatle Bob. Even though Judy has David as a boyfriend, who also has a Beatle haircut (but not as perfect as Beatle Bob's). David is English with a groovy English accent and a Morris Minor. David loves Judy and drives her everywhere. Still, Judy crushes on Beatle Bob, even though Beatle Bob has a beautiful blonde girlfriend named Beverly.

This Saturday Judy hitchhikes to Vito's, to meet Beatle Bob, who tells her he'd be there. But the place is locked up tight when she gets there. She waits around at the gas station across the street, wearing jeans and a blue work shirt.

Eventually Beatle Bob shows up and they both go into Carl's apartment, upstairs from Vito's art studio, next door to Vito and Sioux's. Carl is the swarthy, older guy, about forty, who hangs out at Vito's and calls us all "baby." From him it is creepy.

Beatle Bob and Judy smoke a joint in Carl's apartment, but she says she only took one hit because she doesn't really know how to inhale it, so she just blows the smoke out quickly. Beatle Bob must have noticed this because he never gives her back the joint—he just smokes the rest of it himself. Soon after he is crashed out on the couch.

Carl comes home eventually, and rapes Judy. Only later, on the phone, Judy tells Pam that she'd had sex with Carl, implying that she'd wanted to. But she really didn't want to. In fact, she asks Carl to stop, begs him, and holds her legs together so he has some trouble getting her jeans off. But he is well practiced in getting girls' jeans off and the rape, all two minutes of it, happened.

Judy, not wanting to be seen as a victim, tells Pam simply that she and Carl had sex. Judy wants to be a hero, not a victim. She wants to conquer things and be like the heroes on tv, like the Cartwrights on "Bonanza." They never cry. They never act hurt. She wants to be like that.

Judy's dad, Andy, unbeknownst to Judy, is recording her telephone conversations with a tape recorder he installs in their garage. He records the conversation that Judy has with Pam about smoking pot with Beatle Bob and sex with Carl.

Andy and Winifred, Judy's father and mother, march Judy down to the Van Nuys police station, tape in hand, and give her over to the care of the LA County Child Welfare Services. Judy is declared incorrigible and can't go to school with us anymore. In the summer Judy moves to a foster home in Canoga Park and lives with Marie who takes her foster children to tent revival meetings. Judy now goes to Canoga Park High school until she is kicked out for wearing moccasins

to school. And for smoking weed. While she is living at Marie's, we drop The Book by her window and pick it up a week later, just so we can keep up to date with Judy.

I met Judy in 5th grade when we are both ten. I could not then and not now ever measure up to Judy's exuberance. She can still do a handstand and a cartwheel anytime she wants to.

When we are ten, we ride horses in Griffith Park together and ride bikes around our neighborhoods in Van Nuys. She can ride like the wind with her hair blowing and then when we get back her hair sits perfectly on her head. Not like me and the frizz. We both play trumpet in the elementary school orchestra.

On the day we graduate from sixth grade, on our way to Van Nuys Junior High school, we play a duet that my father writes for us. My hands are sweaty as Judy and I step onto the stage, and I don't remember playing the duet, but I know we did and my dad, in the front row, had tears in his eyes.

Dear Big 4 –

I'm sorry I'm taking up another page, but I want you guys to cool it. Please, for me – never again go near any kind of narcotic.

Please – I am busted. This time it's Las Palmas, that horrible juvenile detention center for the worst of the incorrigible among us, then who knows what? No more high school. You guys, my life is over now. There is nothing left for me. I don't get any more chances. My life is ruined now. It's all because of dope. Please listen to me. Don't get mixed up with dope. Please don't shrug this off. Sure, it's a great thing but it is not worth it. Please believe me. I love you – you must listen to me. There are so many busts going on right now. There are Narcos everywhere – plain clothes men. Everything. Please listen to me before it is too late for you, as it is now too late for me. It's not worth it. Please come above it because you are above it. It's no good. How can I make myself clear? Please stay away from dope. I love David and now right when everything was OK look what happened. That's what hurts the most. I've lost everything good I ever had. Please, don't just be more careful – stay away from drugs completely. You don't need

it. It's not worth it. Please remember I love you – but more important, do what I said. If you ever see David, just tell him I love him. Don't call him. Love Judy

Later, just when we thought we had lost Judy forever, after a summer and a semester in the Juvenile Justice System, Judy miraculously comes back to us at Van Nuys High School. She has failed the second half of 11th grade and can't graduate with us, but we are oh so happy to be with her again. Judy suffers, as I do, from the type of parenting that brings trauma. But we are part of The Big Four. We lean into the Book, write in The Book and we survive, because of the book

January 1966

Dear big 4-1

I just dropped my notebook which is par for the course.

It's weird reading back on these notes. How things have changed. Last September Dennis meant so much (at least I thought so), then it was Jerry, and now I couldn't care less. Now it's Larry – who will it be tomorrow or next month, or next year, or in the year 2000?

Nothing much is new except that I'm so happy to be getting away from my parents. I wrote a letter today to my grandparents for a car. My dad said I could. I should be getting the answer within a month. Pray for me. Love, Hillorie

Three Months Earlier

This is how I end up in a foster home just like Judy, but not exactly like her story. I run away.

My mother is in the other room when I leave that day. We are in a verbal catastrophe most of this Saturday. Like all our fights, it isn't about just one thing. I mean it is that one thing and then all the other things that I do wrong in my life. It is one sixteen-year argument that accumulates

momentum as it continues from year to year, the ongoing war between my mother and me. My mother asks me about my bathing suit, the red one that I just can't find. The truth is I can't find anything in my room, in this house. I am drowning in disorganization, and it is making my brain disorganized.

I sit on the red overstuffed chair, where my mother makes me sit when I am disrespectful to her. I am tense and fighting back tears. "It doesn't matter," I say, silently to myself at first, then aloud. These are the Big Four watchwords. "It doesn't matter."

In a moment I simply get up and walk out the front door. I don't even take my purse. I leave even though I'm waiting for Sam and Sue to pick me up to babysit for their twins, Alan, and Brian. I don't think. I just leave.

I run down the street to Van Nuys Boulevard and stick out my thumb. The Big Four practices at hitchhiking as a hobby, before we are old enough to drive and don't have cars yet. Later when we have cars, we hitchhike for fun.

A '57 Chevy with three boys with short hair and t-shirts pick me up and the driver says, "Where to?"

"Hollywood," I reply. "Hollywood and Highland."

The driver, a cute blonde with a black t shirt and black jeans laughs and said, "Baby, we can show you a good time, better than where you're going."

I gulp, grit my teeth, and say to myself, "Uh oh. Not this." I don't want to waste time on these boys. I am going to see someone special.

The black clad driver laughs again. "Just kidding, chick. You're safe with us."

The boys sing along to the car radio. The Four Tops' "I Can't Help Myself." And no, I can't help myself. But inside I cry out for Help—I need somebody. I truly don't even know what help I need until much later, until after, when I can see in my rearview all that is about to go down.

The boys are friendly enough, but I want to get to Hollywood and Highland for a reason, not drive around with them and listen to music.

I don't feel safe until the car stops and I jump out at Hollywood and Highland. And then I never feel safe again, not for decades.

My quickly formulated plan is to get to my then, what I think is my boyfriend, Jerry. I don't know his last name. He is older than I, about twenty. I like much older boys. It makes me feel much more grown up. Jerry is a smooth talker, tall, well built, black, handsome, and wears a blonde Beatle wig. He tells me he is from Ethiopia and is in Hollywood to, what else, be discovered as an actor. I don't know anything about him really, not his family, his country, or his past. All I know is his big, strong arms that hug me deliciously when I see him, and when he speaks to me on the telephone he calls me, "baby."

That's what makes me think he is my boyfriend, the telephone calls. He calls from the payphone in the courtyard of his sleazy Hollywood motel, The Tropicana. I've only seen him in person a handful of times, and those times were on Hollywood Blvd., when the Big Four had hitchhiked to Hollywood, and he is hanging out, trying to get discovered. When see each other, he puts his arm around me, and I know I am his. He never invites me to his place, but now I just show up at his door.

He opens the door a crack. I don't see his usual big smile. His face, at first calm, begins to change, first concern, then peels back to astonishment.

“Hey baby,” he says, trying to maintain his calm.

I melt.

“Come on in,” he says, tentatively, gesturing me inside.

I step over the threshold into a tiny smoke-filled, cheap motel room. The bedsheets are rumped. McDonald’s bags are strewn around. It smells like a trash can.

I want my voice to sound hopeful, but I am terrified.

I tell him I’d left home for good. And that I am here to be with him. Forever.

He takes it well. He smiles and then says, “Hey, I was just going out to get some cigarettes. Do you want anything from the store?”

“No,” I answer too quickly, not knowing what I’d want if I did want it. Right then all I want is to never go back to my parent’s house.

Jerry grabs his wallet and leaves. He doesn’t come back for the three days that I spend in his motel room. The first night I am a little upset that he isn’t back, but by the next night I realize what has happened. He just isn’t coming back while I was still there. My heart is broken. I’ve already cried so much I can’t cry anymore.

The room phone rings. It is the manager of the motel asking for Jerry. I say he isn’t there and then the manager asks, “How old are you?”

“Eighteen,” I reply, trying to sound mature, trying not to sound like who I was, a scared sixteen-year-old kid in a motel room in Hollywood by myself.

The next day I try to make my re-entry to my life by going to Donna's house. Her father, Don, is in the driveway, loading his viola into his car, as I walk up. He grabs me, hugs me, and says "Where were you? We were all so worried." His eyes are tearing up. He is ready to cry.

My father comes to pick me up and we don't speak on the way home. My mother does not speak to me when I enter the house. We never speak about where I'd been but the war that has been there all my life now becomes a cold war and takes on an even icier chill.

My mother isn't speaking to me at all. My father makes my breakfast in silence and Stephanie, my little sister, looks incredibly sad and afraid, like she's been crying. We are all sad.

My books feel too heavy to carry as I climb onto the bus for school. There are too many books, too many bags of canned food in my house and too many big words I don't know the meaning of, like depression and anxiety.

I am fighting the demons of childhood verbal and emotional abuse, the only way I know how.

My saving grace is that Sam and Sue had shown up to pick me up to babysit after I'd run that Saturday night. My mother, after looking for me in every room of the house, is astonished that I am not there. But Sam and Sue both work for the County of Los Angeles in the Juvenile division. They see these things every day. They are mandated reporters. They tell my mother if she does not seek help for me, they will report my parents to Child Protective Services.

That's how I end up in therapy at the National Council for Jewish Women on Fairfax Avenue with the first of many, many therapists, Dr. Caplan. She is strict with me. In those days, my dissociation manifests while I drift off in mid conversation, both when I am speaking and when someone else is speaking. I just go away. "Yeah, school was okay today except for geometry. I

just don't get..." And I drift off. Dr. Caplan notices this right away and when I drift, she snaps her fingers right in front of my face.

"Hillorie! Come back!"

It is shocking at first. Her finger snap makes me realize what I'm doing, what I have been doing all my life—drifting off from myself and others mid-stream, I don't know this is called dissociation and I am embarrassed that Dr. Caplan can see it. Even with her vigilant care, this dissociation doesn't go away. It is a trait stays with me for many years.

Three weeks into therapy, Dr. Caplan calls for a family conference. My mother, father, Dr. Caplan, and I sit at a round table. My mother rises out of her chair and yells, "It's her friends! They're the ones who are making her do these things!" She lifts the table and tries to throw it at me.

Dr. Caplan quickly takes me out of the conference room into the waiting room and goes back to talk with my parents for too long of a time.

"Mr. and Mrs. Stern, you are putting your daughter at risk."

My father puts his arm around my mother's shoulders, protecting her as always.

"Maybe you and I should discuss this matter alone, while my wife waits in the car," he offers.

"No," Dr. Caplan says. "She needs to hear this too."

From the waiting room, I can hear my mother's wail, as she breaks down into hysterical tears. I contemplate running away again, right then, but there is nowhere to run to anymore. I am frozen in my seat. I will not be running today.

The next session Dr. Caplan tells me I am moving out of my parents' house and that she has encouraged them to find a relative or friend I can stay with so that I can still go to Van Nuys High School, where the rest of the Big Four are. Her opinion is that it is important for me to maintain these close relationships and not go into a county or privately funded girl's home.

A month later I am living at Gwen and Ted's house, my cousins, I have a bedroom all my own. It is a beautiful, spotlessly clean, organized, ranch style house in Encino, an upscale neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley. I look forward to living with people who do not already hate me.

Dear Judy, Pam and Hillorie

Gee, that's getting a car the hard way Hillorie.

Judy was on some weird trip when she wrote her letter. It's all so true. She was so full of remorse when she wrote it.

I miss Ed. It's terrible to see someone every single day and then not at all for a week. I was listening to his albums yesterday – Dylan "Bringing it all Back Home," and Peter, Paul, and Mary "In Concert," which is a great album. He has all their albums.

Santa Monica Court, here I come. Just pray that I don't get my license pilfered by the cops. If a policeman does it, its legal. Remember that.

Smell is very important. Don't you think? One could almost identify a desolate coat, lying in nowhere, belonging to a nowhere man, if it smelled like he does. Clothes are also important. Sometimes even fun. Color is luscious, or however you spell it. Splash it everywhere, on everyone. It enhances, it detracts. It's suitable for anything. Everyone has their own. It attracts, it signifies, denotes, ends. It's living, dying, longitudinal, ephemeral. It will end this entropy too. And now – Donna

Dear Big 3-1

It's hard to follow three "good," stirring letters like that when there really isn't anything to say. I just heard my grade in Foods – C. But I guess that's all right because it's just an average class. I am depressed because of my dream about going back with Glenn. I realize it was just a feeling of security that he gave me, and I really don't want him back, but it would be nice to go out on a

date occasionally. My mom and I decided (mostly me) that I should go places and meet more guys and things and so I'm gonna – so Hillorie the next time you go to a party, let me know. Or any of you. I'd appreciate it very much. This summer I'm gonna go out of my way to be where there are some boys (the beach in the day, Hollywood until 9:30pm).

Glenn – I miss him. Who wants to hitch to El Monte with me so I can see him? Give me some advice someone!!

I guess I'll sign off now. Hillorie, I hope you get your car. Love and kisses, Pam

PS Judy I want my skirt back because I got in trouble from Mrs. B about this being so short.

Dear D, H and P – in alphabetical (not chronological) order. The last time I wrote in this book I was never going to see you guys again. Now I'm back in Van Nuys.

I hope you get your (our) car Hillorie. Hillorie, tell me more about where you're moving and all, who you're moving in with an all that. I mean, don't make a mistake or anything. Do you ever plan to go back to your parents? I hope you won't be too far away.

Have you seen or heard from Glenn since last summer Pam? I know what you mean by the security bit. But you must be careful of that situation, with all boys. I can't say that it's not security I love instead of David, although I do think it's him. I won't know for sure for a few years at least – things are going well with he and I now. Every misunderstanding has been straightened out. Things are better now than they ever were.

Hillorie has her mirror out across the room. I guess she's watching her cavities.

Pam, you may have your skirt back.

Well, I guess this is it (to be read in a deep, slow voice). It was sure nice writing to you guys. Hurry up and write back. I'm sure glad to be back with the Big 4 again. 357 ½ days to go. Hillorie and Pam have even less, and Donna doesn't have many problems. Love you, Judy

Dear Big 3-1

It's my turn. Lucky me. I wish I could think of something very important to expound on. Or even something unimportant. I'm not choosy. We're getting grades now. I'll get a C. I was quite surprised by this report card. I thought for sure I'd get an A in Student Store. I mean, what can you do to not get an A? But all of us in 4th period got B's.

Pam – I know how you feel. I want to meet someone too. But not someone to “go out with” because I have plenty of dates. I'm sick of that. I want someone to have a deep relationship with, like Judy and David and Donna and Ed. But it's weird. The guys I want don't want me and the guys that want me I don't want. What a horrible, depressing situation.

I am moving to a foster home in Encino. They are my cousins, Gwen, and Ted. It's a gorgeous house. They like a lot of cultural stuff, like the ballet and the symphony, which is fine, just if they don't force me into anything. But I'll still be going to Van Nuys because Mrs. Caplan says I should.

Man am I hungry. The bell's about to ring.

Write soon and let's keep The Book going. Love, Hillorie

I sit on the swing in the backyard, the one we had abandoned long ago. We hardly go into the backyard anymore—no more plastic swimming pools and my dad doesn't fire up the charcoal barbeque anymore. Our Kerry Blue Terrier, Kelly, has long ago passed away. My sister and I are teenagers, and my mom doesn't want to cook anymore really. She has my dad go to Kentucky Fried Chicken and she'd make a salad and we eat off that damn bucket of chicken every night until it is all eaten up.

I kiss the inside of my lower arm as I practice kissing and imagine what it will feel like to kiss George Harrison, or the boy that would eventually truly fall in love with me and take me away from all this mess.

I daydream about quitting school and how it could be: not having to get up in the morning, being able to eat popcorn for breakfast if I want to. I can smoke pot whenever I want to and listen to Dylan records all day. I can trip on acid without an ugly parental face looming in on me and I will be free.

I have no choice, really, but to go away in my mind. To stay is the end of me, the me that used to be. And even when I dissociate, a part of me is so sad, so non redeeming, so far from all I see in everyone else's life that I am stalled on the swing, stuck up in the air.

I am enrolled in Student Store at school, learning how to be a clerk in a store. It is my second semester there. I thought it'd be an easy A, but all they give are B's. If these teachers think that I'm going to be a clerk as a profession, they're wrong. I am going to be a writer. I am going to write about the Big Four and then we will make that movie, about our lives. This is after we get our pad. Tortilla Flat, I cannot wait.

Dear Pam, Judy, Hillorie and whoever else may read this. It is I! Lordess D. I hope you all understand that little (oh so minute) bit of wit. Oh woe, not to have a license! But it certainly would not be worth it to drive and be caught without it. Then I could get it suspended for a year. That would be awful.

My French teacher is clear on the other side of the room, but I can smell him clear over here! It comes in waves.

I just decided I'm gonna earn all A's for the 20 week. Gonna reach that highest star.

I, too, think the Big 4 ought to make a movie. How can we get discovered? We could always hang out at Aldo's all the time. All this talent is going to waste. It's too bad that everyone can't be discovered. Most everyone has done something which should be given recognition, but this is never to be! If everyone was recognized, who'd wait around to recognize anybody? Affection, Donna

Dear dear dear Big 4,

Yesterday I went to Wallach's Music City and listened to records.

Yes, I saw Glenn about four or five weeks ago and blew his mind as I was dressed up as a guy. It really blew his mind. Oh well, I'll say bye, Pam

O Cuatro Grando

Any recent development with Lee, Hillorie? I know this is well worn, and irritating to you, but you know better than to quit school, nasty knave. We are all aware that High School is a big hang up and has very little, if any beneficiary significance BUT College is kind of groovy, and what about – "What's going to become of you?" and all that. Luckily, you can't quit school, but you shouldn't even want to. You're a big girl and you should know better.

As for ACID, I can only say (sigh) “Oh well, that’s your life,” to be read wistfully. For what it’s worth, I disapprove. I hope a boy comes along soon that you can get close to and all, blow your mind, etc. etc., sermon, sermon.

Pam, I don’t quite understand about where you saw Glenn and what was going on. Do you want to find a guy to settle down with, or do you want to start going out with a whole bunch of guys? That’s fun. Until you start getting hung up with two guys on one night, and when you get sick of one of them and you can’t get rid of him. (Eventually and inevitably) you get hung up on one of them, and all the rest of them call you, but he doesn’t. But it’s like Hillorie says. The ones you like don’t like you and the ones you don’t like are madly in love with you.

It’s 365 days from something, 354 ½ (approximations, always approximations) from freedom.

It’s 6th period at last. Wow – so what. Sometimes going steady can be a hang up if your boyfriend works on Friday nights. I love David sooooo much.

David is outside, in the Morris, parked in front of the green house. I bet he’s hot. The usual place.

Oh, Pam, I’m glad your mom wasn’t mad at me. I want to so bad to have another chance, with everybody and everybody’s parents.

Nothing more to say, just use up the rest of the paper How do I love them (4 collective). Here’s the book Hillorie. Love, Judy

February 1966

Dear Big 4-1:

Looks like I didn’t get acid, but I guess it’s OK. It’s not that I really need it or anything. But I just dig it.

I do want to quit school and I really mean it. I’m so sick of it and it’s not worth it.

Also, I think I’ve been stood up for the second time. Right now, I’m watching the “Smothers Brothers Show.” It’s good. I’m tired. So, I think I’ll go to bed and sleep off my disappointments of the evening. I’ll continue at any given time.

It’s now 9:30pm, Sunday night. I’m listening to KVFM – they’re featuring Barbra Streisand. I love her.

My weekend turned out pretty good, after all. I have been really depressed and sad the past few weeks (more than usual) and I don’t feel that bad now. I didn’t go out with Fred on Friday night, but I did go to the Dodger game on Saturday night with Eric. After that we went to Bob’s Big Boy, the teenage fun spot of Van Nuys. Then we came to my house, sat out front in his car, and he stayed until 2:30am. We talked about about everything and we get along perfectly. We’re

gonna go out next Saturday night. I told him about my shrink, Mrs. Caplan and he said he got it. Love to you all, Hillorie

PS I'm at home and I'm sick (I'm not really) I'm just tired. I'm watching "Father Knows Best." What a joke. Whose father is really like that? Now I'm gonna watch "Ben Casey." I should start packing my stuff, but I just don't feel like it. I'm gonna move on Friday, after school. I'm excited and happy. I'm not afraid to be by myself just if I have someone to love. Guess I'll go and pack. Goodbye house. Love, Hillorie

I am moving out of my parent's house. I am moving to Gwen and Ted's. I am packing up my stuff, putting it in boxes that my dad got for me from the market. I throw in some books on top of clothes and shoes, no order. I have no order in my room. I am just wanting to be done, to be packed and moved. I want to cry but I can't. I want to speak but I don't know what to say

I am waiting, with boxes brimming over the top, for Friday, for my dad to drive me to my new home. For this, I should be happy. I am getting a room of my own. And a bathroom of my own. It's a bedroom off the kitchen, past the laundry room, on the other side of the house from Gwen and Ted's bedroom. I will have my own closet and there is slight twinkle here, a slight glimmer of hope. But I still don't feel much of anything.

On the plus side, I am going out with a lot of boys but the "one" just isn't there. Right now, I am crushing on Daniel, tall and blondish, kind of a surfer type, who works in a hardware store on Ventura Blvd. There are other boys, of course, but Daniel is the one name I am writing on all my notebook pages. I use the stick pens and watch the ink go down in the clear plastic tube. When the ink is finished with this pen Daniel will be madly in love with me. I like him a lot. He has money to sometimes get us some pot.

Daniel and I sit in his brand new '66 Dodge Dart and smoke a joint together on my street that is so quiet. No one is awake here, no one is coming home late here. Everyone is locked up

tight in their two bedroom and den houses that looks exactly like the house next door. Daniel and I laugh a lot and we see the world as absurd: I mean why would they make pot illegal when it really doesn't hurt anybody to smoke it? We hear that the boys in the Army even smoke it in Vietnam, and that you can get strong pot over there. Of course, they also get heroin over there. But we would never try heroin. We love the light, airy way that pot makes us feel. We would never go down that dark road of heroin.

Sometimes we make out in the small back seat of Daniel's '66 Dodge Dart where our legs don't fit and I let him touch my breasts, which makes me feel uncomfortable, but I let him do it because I want him to keep asking me out. He wants to put his hands down my underpants, but even though I am wet, I don't want to be. I am terrified of him touching me anywhere near my vagina and by the time that happens I tell him I have to go inside right away.

Sometimes we sit in his car and just talk, no sex, and I like that the best, but he is a boy, and they say boys always want sex. I do not want sex and I find myself always making excuses not to have it. The best excuse, of course, is to not get pregnant. I use that excuse a lot.

My Big Four see my problems about drugs and wanting to quit school every other day. They always lecture me in The Book. I squirm reading these parts. I don't like being called out. I do not see life as a choice, just clumps, clumps of adventure, clumps of rage, clumps of coming so close to happiness, but really, what is that?

April 1966

The Only Judy, Hillorie and Pam – known as the Big Four

Today I should get my license (drum roll).

Hillorie seems to be our biggest problem right now – either about going up on acid, quitting school and her parents. So, for one problem we'll have one solved – her parents. Hillorie I'll help you move Friday afternoon if you need me and if I'm allowed to help you.

I wish I could get up the nerve to cuss out your parents, though I suppose that it would be utterly immature.

Hillorie, I hope you stay away from acid or pot. Let me tell you, after I told Ed I had taken acid he chewed me out for it, and I was more shocked than I wanted to admit (it is hard to admit that you're wrong) when he told me the dangers of acid. Even one dose could leave a permanent mark on a person (mental illness, etc.) for a long time. If I had been aware of more facts about it, I never would have taken it. I do admit it's very groovy – it can send you on a wild trip if you have the right personality. I admit even more so I'm damned glad that nothing harmful happened to me. Believe me any kind of kick is not for people like us, or anyone with half a brain. We don't need kicks to create groovy sensations. Our minds are adequate. Our imaginations unbounding. You must agree.

It's coming, it's coming! Our 17th summer. Remember reading books all about it in the Van Nuys Junior High School library? 17th summer – I hope it is all that it's advertised to be.

Yes, we should all study nature more. Flowers! Dig the sky – look up to green hills and mountains, hazy purple, pink by the distance. Get married in the nude, outdoors, with some supreme being overwatching, smiling if it's possible, if He's possible? (All things are possible)

In your confidence, Donna

I must start out by asking Hillorie – who is Daniel? And answering everyone about boys – I want to go out with a lot of boys. My parents won't let me date single. I have to double date. I want to have a groovy relationship with a boy that wants to goof around like me, regress in Griffith Park or the country and hike and ride horses and be a little kid with me.

I'm not gonna expound on acid and quitting school because you already know my opinions. I'm glad one phase of the problem is solved – your parents.

Love and kisses, Pam

I lost my watch in gym. Oh, hello, just came back from the gym and found my watch under the heater.

In 25 minutes, school will be over (for the day). I'm glad you didn't go up on the weekend, Hillorie.

What Donna said was out of sight – about nature and all. Everything would be real like us. It would be wonderful. Let's grow plants in our pad. You guys don't have to recognize God, or you can – I hope you do. He's where it's at. He gives me good things, you know, miracles like flowers and oceans and David and things.

Yesterday we were driving home like always only we turned on the street before Victory and went into the Sight & Sound parking lot. He went in and came out with two 45's – "Groovy Kind of Love" and "When A Man Loves a Woman," and gave them to me, for no reason at all. How do you like that?

Pam, when you have more freedom, you'll have more dates. I can offer no solutions except go to a lot of parties.

Hillorie Hillorie Hillorie – I have found THE clue to the new direction.

This girl on our block said, "Blood is thicker than water" – then this other girl said, "Yeah like if you're having your period, or wetting your pants." (Just thought I'd add that)

Love, Judy

My bestest friends:

A good morning to you all (I wish it was one for me).

I wonder what else there is to write about. Right now, Daniel is breathing down my neck about having sex. I have decided to devote my life to Bob Dylan. It's a worthwhile cause.

Now it's 3rd period. I love this book so much. It's like a person to talk to but without the disadvantages. You guys probably don't know what it's like to be entirely and utterly alone with no one. Judy probably knows what I'm saying, although she doesn't feel it now. But for me there's NOTHING. Just emptiness and loneliness. I am just drained. I just want to lie down, die, and leave this screwed up world.

YOU LYING, CHEATING WORLD Even Batman can't help me.

Okay I'll tell you about Daniel. He's 19 – 6/1". Blondish hair. Brown eyes. Really great personality. Nice car (brand new Dodge Dart). Wears groovy clothes. He's understanding, kind, humorous and groovy to be with. But you can be sure that with my luck he won't be around for very long. It always works that way.

LOVE H

I ask Daniel to take me to the prom, but I get the feeling that if I don't let him get to 3rd base (that's the hand in the vagina, I think) that he might bail on me. I've almost got enough

money to buy a dress and I already have some low heels to wear. I am not too excited about school-sponsored things, but if Daniel takes me to the Prom, then I might be able to call him my boyfriend.

Gwen is so nice, and she helps me a lot. She helps me organize my closet, which is the first time I ever have done that. Blouses in one section, skirts in another and the few dresses I own are on the end. My dresser is for underwear, pants, shorts, and t-shirts. My closet is big enough to put all my shoes in order. I am becoming another person.

“Now you have a way to coordinate your outfits,” Gwen says with a big smile on her face. Her outfits are always coordinated, with matching earrings and necklaces. Even bracelets. I haven’t gotten that far yet. I have some jewelry that my parents gave me as a small child, but it is too babyish to wear charm bracelets or little rings with garnets (my birthstone) in them. In my jewelry box also is a necklace with a photo of me when I was born. I had a full head of curly hair, and I am looking out at the world with such an innocent look on my face. I wish I had that look now.

Gwen has me make dinner once a week. I can do my homework on the desk in my room and have plenty of time to make dinner. I am not much of a cook, but I can make Kraft Macaroni and Cheese and then I make a tossed salad with Italian dressing. Gwen always says, “My, this is a splendid dinner.” I only hear her out of the corner of my ear. I am not used to being complimented at home.

Gwen wears a cotton apron every night when she cooks, and she changes them every night. They are fuchsia, lime green and turquoise, mostly, bright, and cheery. Ted usually doesn’t come home until 7:30 so we eat late.

Gwen is so sweet and kind to me. I'm not used to this kind of treatment daily. I know she is trying to help me. She knows all about the running away, but she doesn't know about the pot or acid. If I told her about it, it might break her heart and I don't want to do that.

There is one slight problem in all of this, the nightly visits. I hear the click of the door latch in the middle of the night. It wakes me up. I can smell his soap before I can see his shadowy figure in the dark room.

"Are you awake?" he says.

I try to fake sleep, but he keeps on talking.

"You looked so pretty today. I love the way your hair smells, so clean."

Finally, I let him know that I'm awake. In my most timid voice I say, "Ted, is that you?"

He smiles that big toothy white tooth smile that I can see in the dimness. It's dark in my room but he has turned the hall light on, and it filters in underneath my door.

"I just wanted to help you sleep," he says as he slides his hands under the covers and fondles my breasts. I say nothing, but try to turn on my side, away from him. He touches me, not as a cousin, but as someone who wants something from me, with me, that I don't want with him.

"Have you ever had an orgasm?" he says as he slides his hands further under the covers, heading toward my vagina.

I kick. Why do I kick but not scream?

"Well, have you ever had one?" he persists.

"I don't know," I say, on the verge of tears.

He seems willing to give me one, but I don't want him near me. I can barely speak. I push his hands away and kick my feet. Every time I do find the words to ask him to leave, he just smiles that smile that he reserves for pictures of him with the rest of the cardiology staff of the hospital he works at. I am seventeen, confused, scared, and mortified. All at the same time.

I do not write about this in The Book. I do not tell any of the Big Four what is happening. It's as if I don't say it, it isn't happening.

Chere Grand Quatre

THIS IS THE MIDDLE OF THE BOOK

I'm going to Prom! I love it so much. I'm going to have white gloves, going past my elbows, green shoes to match and my mother has this shot furry coat I'm going to wear. It looks pretty good with the dress. Then I will also probably wear some pearls (as in "oyster" or something!) and a corsage, or maybe no pearls and either all my hair down or some up and some down. Ed wants it down.

Hillorie, I think Gwen is nice and the house is fabulous! I think everything will work out ok there – hope so.

Today Ed was over. We uncovered our pool at last. I asked him if he wanted to go swimming. Then he went in, and it was freezing. So, I was just sitting in the sun, and I told him I didn't want to go in and he got all mad and told me that I had said I would go in and then I wouldn't. So, he changed his clothes and left, saying there was nothing to do here. I asked him to play cards, so he comes up with, "I'll say yes I will and then you won't." And left. He gets that way sometimes. Maybe it's me. I'll just apologize. You know, keep peace in the family. Gosh, anyone is free to change their mind? If another party is gonna get so hung-up over it well, I just don't know. In ways he's very mature and in other ways well – he's 17. But I love all 17 years of him.

So, normally, Donna

Dear Friends:

My dog is all curled up here with me (on my bed), but it's all right if he's asleep. Now I'm on the "Ahhh – so give me a few minutes."

My dad just asked me what an existentialist was (to see if I knew) and when I told him about my philosophy on God, he said I was wrong and stupid. I give up.

I have to go take a bath and de-smell myself as I just got done playing various games of baseball on the street. I'll write more later. Love, Pam

Hi Team!

Okay. It's 2nd period. Tweet tweet (whistle) everybody out on the tennis court. It's 11:30. About four hours more of school.

I heard yesterday that the Trip may close because it's making a bad image for the Playboy Club. Just goes to show. They keep pushing us around and we keep losing battles, but we won't lose the war. Next thing we hear they'll close June Ellen's cause it's making a bad image for the Hamburger Hamlet. Just who do they think they are, those "adults?"

Hillorie your most recent addition to the book was most depressing. I know just how you're feeling. You'll never lose it completely. It's a feeling you're born with. It's the blues. You gotta face it. No matter how happy you get the blues will always be around. You could call it searching, because it's like when you know what you want, but you can't get it for some reason, then finally you either lose it complete or you get it, the thing you've been searching for, then you find out that it wasn't the thing you were looking for after all. Or you'll be disappointed and go off searching after that something new. People like that have a lot of soul even if they have nothing else.

Thank you, guys, for being my friends. It just goes to show that somebody does know you when you're down and out. "The Fugitive" is on tonight. Love, Judy

Well, here it is, another Wednesday come and going fast. I wish it were a year from now.

I want to ask you a question – all of you – do I look better with shorter or longer hair? I don't know what to do with it – it's much too overwhelming for me and I'm in quite a state of confusion.

The bell is about to toll. And I'm starved!

It is now 5th. I have been feeling quite weird lately. Sometimes happy (ecstatically) and sometimes sad (depressingly so).

Now I really don't know what to say. So, I'll bid farewell. Write soon. Love, Hillorie

I feel happy. Then I feel incredibly sad. It's like Judy says. I have the Blues. I must have been born with it. Sometimes I skip breakfast until lunch. Sometimes I devour two cinnamon rolls at the Nutrition break at school.

Donna always brings coffee in a thermos and enough cups of yogurt for all four of us. We sit on the grass in the quad and have our healthy low calorie yet nutritious snack.

"You shouldn't eat that crap," Donna says, looking at my cinnamon rolls. There are two of them and they are hot out of the oven with icing dripping over the sides.

"Bet you really want one, just admit it," I say, stuffing my face.

"Oh, go ahead," she says, only softly sarcastically, "you'll be complaining about your weight in about, oh, two days, after you eat that. That's how long it takes for that stuff to get onto your thighs."

"BS," I say, confidently. But inside, I am unsure. How long does it take for someone to wear the calories they consume? I have really no idea. I'll have to think about that. But I'd rather think about boys. I think I love a boy and then I can't stand to be around him.

At night I sit on my bed in my very own room and try to tune in the FM stations on my large transistor radio with the long antenna. They play Howlin' Wolf or Charlie Parker at night and I try to paint Princess Pink on my toes, but I mess up and take it all off.

As I drift off to sleep my last thought is, "Please, God, don't let him come in tonight."

I get ready for school and the last thing I do is spray Heaven Scent on my wrists and then spray it in the room and walk through it. Heaven Scent is apple blossom, bergamot, Lilly of the Valley, and Mandarin. It is also iris, jasmine, heliotrope, and red rose. And it is also amber,

musk, oakmoss, patchouli and sandalwood. There are so many scents mixed. I love it because it reminds me of the incense I love to burn. I don't want to seem like I am over the top on the scent, but I worry about my body odor and all the rest of the sweating that I do, sometimes even when it's not hot. I never feel clean.

One day Donna tells me, "Oh man, cool it on the Heaven Scent," as we walk down the hallway together. I'm sure everyone else can hear what she says. I am sure I have turned bright red in embarrassment. I can't respond. She has let me know I have tipped the perfume scale over to the other side of what's normal. I want to go home right then and die. Just die. Lie down on the bed and stop breathing, be taken away to wherever it is you go when you die. I cannot be sure about what they call heaven, but to me this life is living in hell. I run into the courtyard and leave Donna to walk to class alone. I go into the bathroom and try to wash the Heaven Scent off me. I wish I could just sit down and disappear. I don't have a note to get into class late, but I go anyway. I slink into my seat and try not to cry.

I guess Donna is still pissed about that horrible hair cut I gave her way back when.

There are somethings in this world, most, just little things, which lessen the impact of the hard times. Ways to let off steam and worry and fear, like this Book.

Pam, I think Saturday was the biggest bumner for you! All will pass. I'm glad I could cheer you up a little Saturday night.

Hillorie I'm glad you asked Daniel to the prom. It will be a blast, I'm sure. I hope Pam can come too.

But everyone is always so anxious about getting The Book that I always feel like a heel, keeping it over the weekend! So, I will wait till next time before I write what I was going to. Finished,
Donna

Hi –

Well, I'm in first period and I'm not feeling so well. I can't believe my dog, Jinja, is gone. We had to put him to sleep last night. It's KIND TO ANIMALS WEEK so I guess it's the best thing we could have done.

I only have 5 classes next semester.

I was just thinking that at times life is such a waste because so many things are so pointless like war, hate, death of helpless little animals and some people.

Bye, Pam

What's new? Sniff Ho Ho Ho – whoa who whoa. Answering your question, Hillorie, my own opinion, is that you look better with long hair... that's all.

I've been so depressed over the Vietnam war lately. David could be drafted any time after June (reclassification). But if he goes, I can only say what we all know by now. Life goes on.

Jinja is gone but life goes on.

Hillorie's parents are gone, but life goes on.

People owe me money, but life goes on.

David will go to Vietnam, but life will go on. Isn't that philosophical?

I can't wait til summer vacation. Are any of you going to summer school? I'm not unless I fail something.

Hillorie – you're full of soul.

I'm looking out the window and David just got here. Relief. I live in constant fear of him not making it someday. He hasn't failed me yet, but there's always a first time.

My mother had a trauma this morning because I told her to hurry up or I would be late. She got a red coloring in her face, raised her voice, and spoke harshly to me.

I'd like to say that I have great hopes for our generation. Have you even noticed that when one of us has an argument with one of them, they get very angry and flustered? While we remain (relatively) dignified, our voices calm, sarcastic, but dealing with them rationally? I hope that when this becomes "our" world we will still be this way, because this attitude when applied conscientiously could prevent armed wars in the future.

But it won't be just us. It will be the kids from ten to sixteen, entering the leadership of the world for whom we must take it upon ourselves to educate – their parents, our parents of the world can't be trusted to bring these kids up, with completely uncontaminated ideals of peace, freedom, and love.

Our generation is so lucky to have the words of Bob Dylan and so many like him. Well, those who try. But we must keep this movement going. We can't keep it for ourselves. I just hope things won't be like this when it's our world. I want to be proud of it. If I was an adult today, I'd be ashamed either that I had made it what it is today or that I hadn't done anything to stop it.

I guess I'll sign off. Pray for Peace. I love David. And I love the Big Four. Love, Judy

Dear Big 4-1

It's Wednesday and I'm here in gym now and we don't have to dress because the letter girls are all playing with each other. Or something.

Now it's Thursday. Lucky us – only one more day until the GLORIOUS WEEKEND. I can't wait. The whole week is so boring. The only good times are the weekends. Even they aren't so good sometimes.

I'm so sick of school it's pathetic. If I was 18 now, I'd quit sooner than anything. But I'll be 18 two or three weeks before graduation. What a waste to quit then. Oh well, guess I can't win.

I just had an argument with Mr. White about State Legislatures. He's quite intelligent and he presents himself very well. There are so many intelligent people but so few can express their ideas intelligently. Such a waste of good brain matter. O woe to the world that such value is lost.

“Peyton Place” is on tonight.

I am so hungry it's pathetic. It's horrible. I eat so damn much. I'm gonna gain so much weight then I'll be fat, and I'll never ever be able to go on a date ever again.

I wish I could think of something really inspiring to expound upon. You guys are so fluent. I can never seem to speak fluently or intelligently on a subject.

I'm mad that I have a babysitting job Saturday, but I do need the money.

Here I am again, the Student Store. An invigorating class. It appears each day is the same. The same places, people, and events.

Wonder how folk song club will turn out. I hope it'll be good even without Pam.

Now it's Friday, first period. Our Pam has come down with the measles. Maybe we'll all get them.

IF we do get them, we'll get them between the 16th and the 20th. Well, there goes the Prom. Just pray hard. Well, I guess I've rambled on enough. Happiness is having security. Security is having a Book to talk to. Love, Hillorie

Ted comes to my room several nights a week. Last night he didn't talk at all, just stuck his hands down the covers, kind of rough, like he was going to hurt me. I kicked and said, timidly, "Ted, why are you here?"

He didn't smile. "I'm going to teach you something," he promises. "You'll like it "

I kick and kick. Suddenly, he's gone. He leaves so quickly. Did he hear something on the other side of the house? Or is he just bored? I can never tell his mood. He is an adult, a doctor, a professional man who has the respect of so many people. I can't figure out why he is in my room every night and what he wants with me. I just wish he'd stop.

I talk a lot about being "blue," but I am not yet aware of actual the depths and breadths of what depression really is. I only know that some days I just don't want to get into the car and drive with Ted to school. He drives me every day, on his way to work, and I have to act like everything is normal. I don't want to see his big smile and meaty hands on the steering wheel, smelling of soap, playing the classical music station as he drives me from Encino, where the happy people live, to Van Nuys High School, where all my troubles are packed onto my shoulders, and I carry the weight around with me all day. I never measure up.

Does Gwen not know when Ted gets out of their bed and disappears for a while several nights a week? Gwen, with her beautifully innocent brown eyes, can she not see anything at all? Does she turn a blind eye to anything he does? Is that what marriage is? Not knowing what the other person does when they're away from you?

I will never get married. It's too much of a scam. I want to be free and have a groovy boyfriend who is sweet and kind and loves only me. We will live on a commune and plant

vegetables together and he will be true to me. We'll grow pot, too, so we will have all the pot we want for free. We won't have to have a piece of paper to make us love each other.

Gwent tells me she knew she wanted to marry Ted the day she met him.

"I looked up at him and I just knew," Gwen says, looking at me with her soft brown eyes that tell me that she trusts in everybody, and her sweet, sweet smile. "He is everything I ever wanted in a man."

Okay, so he's a doctor and saves people's lives, I'll give her that.

I don't say anything when she tells me how handsome he is and how much she loves him. I just cringe inside.

Gwen tells me I look pretty when I come out of my room to go to school. She says this every day. "My, what a pretty dress." Or in some cases, "what a pretty skirt." Or "My, doesn't your hair look cute that way." She is so kind to me and I am so ashamed that her husband comes into my room several times a week to fondle me. I stiffen up when she is nice. I wish I felt better. I wish I was happy to be in my own room with my own bathroom. And I can't tell anyone about Ted. No one. I don't even try to tell. Even as I write in The Book and it is a perfect place to tell, I cannot do it.

I have a tribe, a community, the Big Four, yet I stay silent because I am not ready to tell. I am just praying for Ted to stop.

Dear Judy, Hillorie and Pam type people –

I love your dress, Hillorie.

This weekend has been kind of a drag. Friday night was fun though at Hillorie s. Wish we all could come together. We played Spit.

But the rest of the weekend yech. As of today (Sunday) (May 8) (1966) (AD) Ed is very mad at me! He sure was last night after coming home. The wedding was small. I WENT out of sympathy. I hope they make it (together). But I doubt it. I wore black, although you're not supposed to at weddings, so naturally I did! I knew that I had planned to wear black because I didn't think it was that happy of an occasion. Something happened, I got slightly mad at Ed but he's so sensitive and has such a complex. He didn't pay much attention to me just some weird girl who was nice to him. I didn't mind too much the fact that he focused all his attention on someone else. I wish he would date other girls. It's just that I wish he would do it when I wasn't there. I think that it was in very poor taste. I don't know how he can be so mature in some ways and so immature in others. When we left the party, we were silent all the way home. I asked for a goodnight kiss, but he gave me a "goodbye" kiss, so he said. But he also once said he couldn't stay mad at me very long. Yet, I haven't heard from him today.

We must make a movie. Let's begin this summer. Write down ideas. Big 4 rules. Just, Donna

Dearest friends:

Here I am! Back in school (after 5 days in bed, it's good to be back). It's 6th period now. A guy just used my pen to sign an absence card. I hope I can't get in trouble. The guy behind me just said I couldn't so I'm only minus worried now.

Mr. Smith is expounding on how come it's so unfortunate that women live longer than men. Now it's time to get into insurance which is boring. Mr. Smith just got a note back from the office. I guess the guy is gonna get in trouble for that. I'm still worried. Mr. Smith doesn't trust anyone. If you bring back an absence card, he looks at it til it's worn through just by looking at it and then if it doesn't look legit, he sends a note. And sends the card to the attendance office to check. God! Back to insurance.

Well, now I'm in 3rd period and we're discussing a project. It's gonna be good but the teacher makes me sick. I have to go now. See you later. Love, Pam

May 1966

To The Four:

First, Hillorie, I love Marie, first because I think I love everyone I know well, the better you know people the easier it is to find out why they do the stupid, idiotic things they do, and feel sorry for their faults – and all that crap.

I'm now waiting in the doctor's office for David. Poor baby, he's so scared and so why am I shaking? Oh, when will David come out. I hope they don't hurt him... He's probably in there queering off with the Doctor like Holly & The Professor in *Candy*. Did you read that book?

I think we ought to wear purple berets. Then maybe they'll do a song and a comic strip about us.

I wish we could've seen Love last Saturday. Life goes on.

I hope Daniel calls you Hillorie. Do you have any other interests right now besides him? I really can't wait to get our pad, as always.

I didn't exactly understand why Ed was mad at you Donna, but I take it things are all right now. Why was the wedding sad? Maybe you and Ed can come over Saturday night or Sunday afternoon and David could bring the new Stones LP, and you could hear it, but that would be only if you'd bring "Bolero."

David still isn't out. I'm worried. What if he fainted? Poor Baby.

Oh well I have to stop writing now, so I can worry. If you never see me again it is because David is dead, and I have joined him.

Tyranny is dead. Love, Judy

PS Now I'm home. David was sick. I'm in an uptight mood and I think I'll go watch "Dr. Kildare." Love, Judy

Dear Big 4-1

Well, it's my turn again. I can't believe how this book makes the days go so much faster.

Yes, Judy, Daniel is my only interest right now. Unlike you Judy I am very bitter towards everyone. Sometimes I'm even bitter towards the Big 4, not because you've done anything to me, but because unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your attitude) you too are part of this big, ugly, lying, cheating, scrounging, world which at times can be groovy – almost groovy enough to make you forget all the shit. So, if I act mad at your or kind of annoyed, it's not you, it's me, if you know what I mean.

I just finished a government test. I'm sure I got a B on it, maybe even an A? Oh well. It doesn't matter.

Yes, let's make a date for this summer on a certain day. How about July 11? That is my 180 days to go birthday. I don't know what day of the week it's on, but if one of us has to work or

something, we'll have it at night or whenever it's possible for us to get out. So, remember – July 11 – don't make any other plans. The Big 4 has a date.

I can't wait for our pad! Judy if you haven't seen Tortilla Flat, you'll have to. It's groovy and if we can't get it there, we can always get another apartment in the same building. Just thinking about it makes me free already.

I hope Daniel calls this weekend. Pam, are you going to come over Saturday night? Judy you can come over too and bring David, Donna, and Ed if you want to. Gwen and Ted are going out though, so they won't get to talk to you, but it'll be fun.

I just don't have any money. I'd like to get some clothes at Orbach's but no money. That reminds me Pam, about your mom's pink mohair shift. Did she give it to someone else yet? If not, why don't you bring it Saturday night?

Well, I guess I'd better end now cause the bell's gonna ring in 5 minutes (or 3). Write soon and keep the book going. Daniel please call. Love, Hillorie

PS Only 12 pages to go. Who's gonna buy and start the next book? I think it should be Donna because she's the next in line.

I take a lot of showers. The bathroom door locks, so I can take all my underwear and clothes in with me and know that no one can get through that door. I take showers but I never feel clean.

I am drowning. I reach for The Book. I am floundering and wailing inside.

My mood is up and then I'm down. I am always singing or saying "Help, I need somebody." If only George Harrison would call. I wish Patty Boyd would leave him. I think I'm upset because of my weight. I think I'm upset because I don't have the clothes that I want to have.

My bedroom does not lock, unlike the bathroom door that does. I never know when Ted will come through my bedroom door on any given night.

Last night he seemed angry again. I hate it when people are mad at me.

“What’s wrong with you?” he says. His voice is strong, and I am afraid, but I know I can’t show him how afraid I am.

“I have my period,” I say.

He stops moving his hands for a moment, then gets up and stomps out of the room. Why is he mad at me?

No number of showers take away the creepy feeling that I get every night about sundown when I am at home. I prefer to be out with my friends, but there is dinner to be cooked and homework to do.

I light the incense in a blue ceramic incense burner that I keep on my dresser. I light the flame with a book of matches I get every time I’m at Charley Brown’s Steakhouse, where my dad likes to take me to dinner once a month. He asks me about school, and I say as little as possible. I want to talk about Folk Song Club and the work I am doing as the Feature Editor of the Van Nuys High School Mirror. But instead, I just answer his questions with “fine” and “okay” and I know he is trying to be there for me, but I am not here. I am so far away. I wish my dad would suddenly discover Tortilla Flat and realize that he can leave my mother and live there, in the cool part of Studio City, where the Jacarandas bloom. In my dream he makes Tortilla Flat our Pad, and I can move in with him. Then the Big 4 can move in too. Of course, we let him have his own room and we share the other bedroom. Or are there three bedrooms? I don’t know because we’ve never been invited inside. The promise of Tortilla Flat is its mystery. That’s what I love about incense. It’s got mysterious properties, as its smoke curls around upward. Frankincense, sandalwood, patchouli, and lavender are my favorites. I lay back on my pillow and

breathe in the heady smoke and wish I was eighteen and in love. I focus on my George Harrison poster. I wish my dad would take me away from here.

But sometimes I am even in a bad mood around the Big Four. Donna hurt my feelings in the Heaven Scent incident. And even though I know that Donna loves me, it hurts. Doesn't she know that I am just trying to be clean? What she doesn't know is that I do not want to smell like Ted's soap. I want to smell like myself. Or someone else. Just not like Ted.

To 3 of out from 1 of me

Okay, I'll buy the next one. Cohorts

I wonder how I feel about people in general. I'm not hostile towards people, even in my mind. Like one might towards parents. But the mature brat would sit and think and know that parents have to place certain restrictions and whether they're especially right or wrong, they can legally do it.

But on the other hand (if it could be said as such) I don't seriously love everybody. I forgive everybody for something they may have done more than I hate everybody.

You can LOVE/HATE some of the people some of the time. I wasn't really arguing with anyone or disagreeing. I've probably expressed the same feelings as everyone else. Maybe I can't understand your feelings (mainly Judy and Hillorie because I haven't been taken away from my home and parents). One thing can change a person's whole outlook of life, sometimes more than they would want to admit.

Judy reminds me of someone who was given a lot of intelligence, or a good brain (though I don't know by who) and can discuss a subject very maturely and then turn around to someone our age and act like an idiot! It's so odd, to sit here and watch this. Who needs drugs, or booze, or sex for a kick? I get the biggest kick out of people.

Ed and I go out just about every night. So tonight, my mom said that we couldn't. Probably for some dumb reason because I have to make dinner for her and my dad, or because I have a cold. Typical parental rationalizing. Rationalize. Rationalize. Rationalize. But as much as one might hate to one must admit that parents sometime have a point. Even though the kid may want to say no, he finds it easier to say that "Mommie said I couldn't" rather than "No I don't think it would be wise." See what I mean?

Last night I asked Ed to quit smoking again. I bring it up occasionally. So, we were talking, and I realized something. It was just a crutch, so I mentioned this to him, and he said that everyone has

a crutch, something they fall back on when times are hard. He said they would have to, or they go crazy.

Well, that's all for now – see you guys (how could I miss?) – Donna

Dearest Big 3

I am not depressed about anything at all. The only two things that keep me going are music and horses. My teacher now is giving me single string ear training and sight singing on guitar and that's keeping me busy, and riding is coming along well. I may be showing in two weeks. I'm very excited about that you can bet. I have my battle scars from last weekend. I fell (on my feet) but I scraped my arm on a tree coming down.

Tonight, my mom and I are going to see the Ice Capades. They're really supposed to be good. There's not too much to write about now so I'll think of something else in 4th or 5th.

But you'll get the Book today, Judy.

Love, Pam

Dearest best friends in the whole wide world:

I am listening to "Aftermath" right now. David gave it to me today. It's so groovy! Right now, "Lady Jane" is playing. Right before it is a song called "Stupid Girl" and if you haven't heard it, you'll have to. It's all about the big BS. Now "Under My Thumb" is playing and I love it. I love all the Stone's songs. Also, I love David so very much. I just can't help it. It was such a happy anniversary – our first anniversary.

I want to finish this before tomorrow afternoon because Hillorie says she wants it for Music History class.

I LOVE YOU BIG 4. I LOVE GOD (who gave me a "good brain"). I love my parents; can you believe it?

David wants me to record "Ballad in Plain D" at his school. (?) Large question mark indicating "He's gotta be kidding"

I heard "Ballad of a Thin Man" on the radio today.

We had a buffet in Foods today, but it was pronounced "Buffay."

Donna, I loved your pictures. They warmed my stomach. If you don't want to buy the next book (if you can't afford it or something) I'll get it.

Our day will come. I have 323 days to go. Hillorie and Pam have less.

Donna is happy.

Donna you were so right on your preceding parental philosophy, and I read it to my parents. You know why I think I love this book? I think it's because reading the letters from the 3 of you, to me, is like opening Christmas presents, then being able to try to contribute my share. I LOVE YOU SO.

Too bad about the prom Hillorie. Hang ups come and go. Jinja, being busted, losing someone, something you love, having everyone owe you money. So, LIFE GOES ON – and I'll always love you for what it's worth. Love, J

Dear Big 4 –

I'm here in Music History. After school I'm going to Ted's hospital to apply for a job which I hope so much I get because it's economic freedom and is the first step in true independence.

I love the Love album. I'll treasure it and keep it and honor it and always play "Softly To Me" with a tear in my eye. Of course, I listen to everything with a tear in my eye.

I have a crush on a guy in this school too. He's in B12 but I refuse to state his name. But he's neat – I like him, but I doubt anything will ever come from it – it's that type of thing.

The Prom doesn't bother me anymore.

I don't like Impressionism at all!

I like Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, Mick Jagger, and most of all Bob Dylan.

I wish I was at home (not my parents' home) so I could be listening to "Hey Joe."

I guess I should go now because there isn't much of this book left. Be sure to leave some room so that I can be the last one to finish. I predict that we finish it by Friday, the day of our big trip.

This Book holds a lot of memories for us. Let's all read it together on the lawn at lunch. How about it? Love, Hillorie

I am all set to go to the prom, and I try to call Daniel, who is taking me in my beautiful blue-green dress that reminds me of the water at Malibu when the sun is shining so bright in the sky and there is no plankton. I have matching long gloves and I luckily have enough money to buy a pair of shoes and have them dyed to match the dress.

Daniel's mother answers the phone and tells me he is not home. I leave a message for him to call me. The Prom is a week away. I leave three messages, one each day, Monday,

Tuesday, and Wednesday. He does not call back. I guess I am not going to Prom this Spring. I say to myself it doesn't matter. It's just like all the other stuff in my life that doesn't go well. It is part of what happens to me continually.

I will just find another boy to like. I will check him out and find out what he likes and when we go out, I'll be the girl he wants. Or I will find out I don't like kissing him on the first date and it is over.

I want a job so much. If I had one, and my own money I could get my own pad and do what I want to.

"Honey, I have arranged for an interview for you at the Hospital," says Gwen, radiantly. She genuinely wants to help me. Of course, the Hospital is the hospital that Ted works at. We call this the Hospital as if there are no other hospitals in the San Fernando Valley.

This is the last place I want to work. I am terrified that I will get the job. And I am terrified that if I don't get the job that Gwen will think I am a bigger loser than I am. I take the bus to the hospital and wait in the outer room of the Human Resources Department, filling out a job application. I have no prior experience.

A twenty-something young woman in a pleated skirt and white fuzzy sweater leads me into an area with a lot of typewriters and times my typing test.

"We'll be in touch," she says as she leads me out to the waiting area where the red Exit sign leads me back to the street and to the bus stop.

I never hear from them.

Yes! Up in the sky. It's a Byrd. It's a plane. It's SKY KING!

I used to watch him every morning, after the morning edition of "Our Miss Brooks," "Crusader Rabbit," "Rocky & Bullwinkle," "Roy Rogers" and would you believe "My Friend Flicka." So much for the days of my youth when I had time to get up and watch TV all morning (or did I ever?). There must've been some age when I was too young to do housework, but I can't recall when it was.

So much for Wednesday. In the words (or should be) of Barry M Goldwater, "Quit while you're ahead." Good grief. It's Donna. Hillorie grabbed my pen.

As we end this book, I am kinda sad because it's got a lot of memories. I've got a crush on a guy too Hillorie but all he cares about is my guitar. But I still dig him.

Judy I really appreciate the ride home. Thank you very much.

I think I am going nuts too. Donna, but that doesn't matter

It doesn't matter.

I'll say goodbye for how. This Pavane is beautiful. Love and kisses, Pam

Dear Friends:

This is my last time to write in this Book. Then we'll have a new Book, but this one has served us well, and will always be one of our greatest treasures, and we will hang it in our pad. Ah, our pad. Wow.

Hillorie, you get the pad as soon as you move out and I'll be ready any time after April 5th next year! Wow, our pad. It's been so long. Wall to wall mattresses. People coming to stay with us from all over the world.

I dig Mr. Ayers. He's got almost the right attitude for an adult. Of course, I guess if I wasn't a liberal, I wouldn't be able to stand him. He's got that kind of humor, where you have to believe as he does to appreciate it, and if you do, it can be very funny, but if you don't it can be disgusting.

I love the Stones and I will never believe that Mick stuffs his pants.

Oh well Hillorie and Pam, no ride home tomorrow. David has to go to the doctor. I wish there was early dismissal this week.

Folk Song Club today. Hillorie, thank you so much for the words to "Like a Rolling Stone."
Love, Judy

Dear Big 4,

Well, here it is, the very last page. I've just been reading over some of the older letters, and they make me sad, but not because I'd ever want to go back. It makes me sad that Judy isn't allowed to see me and Pam. And that Pam and I aren't allowed to see Judy and that Medgar Evers and Lee Harvey Oswald were killed.

It's so hard to end a Book like this. It is a masterpiece to me, so many emotions, ideas and opinions expressed. (I just read *I Am Not Ashamed* by Barbara Payton and she's a real mess—a Hollywood starlet that turned whore) – but she wrote poetry.

I am so tired. Tired of seeing hate and prejudice, phoniness, and people running around, like myself, trying to be happy in whatever way we can. I often (oh so often) wonder if it's all worth it. And I see all my friends and I don't want to die, though I know that someday everyone must. But I got nothing. Well, the time is coming to an end.

Goodbye Book – you've been good to me in many times of need. Goodbye friends. I will never see you at 11:12 am, May 19, 1966, again. I will never see this day again.

Goodbye to my life from September 1965 to May 1966

Hell to Juvenile Courts. Fuck the world.

I hate myself.

Love, Hillorie

I end The Book here. Here are the facts: I am in pain, and I have these great friends.

I am gullible like the frog in the story about the scorpion and the frog. The scorpion asks the frog to take him across the lake on his back, but the frog says, “No, if I let you ride on my back, you'll bite me, and your poison will kill me.”

“Oh no,” says the scorpion, in his most convincing voice. “I would never do that. We're friends and I would be forever grateful to you for the ride across the lake.”

The frog, so trusting, says, “Climb aboard.”

The frog swims across the lake with the scorpion on his back and right before they get to the shore, the scorpion bites him, pushing the deadly venom into the frog.

“Why did you do that?” asks the frog, in his dying last words.

“Because I’m a scorpion. That’s what we do.”

I am the gullible frog and I have lucked out with the Big Four as friends.

I have a scorpion named Ted on my back. He says that he wants to help me, but he tries to put his venom in me continually. I can’t tell the Big four about Ted’s nightly visits.

I want to wipe Ted’s visits out of my mind with long showers and lots of incense. I want to listen to music and go to concerts with the Big Four. I want to hang out in the Journalism Room at lunch and proofread the articles that will be part of the Van Nuys Mirror that week. I want to go to the typesetting of The Mirror on Thursday nights and set the type for The Mirror. I want to be in Folk Song Club on Wednesday at lunch and sing “Masters of War,” all the verses. I long for the day when I can be that long-awaited reward: an adult. It is only then, I think, that I can be free.

Epilogue to The Book: Kintsugi, The Healing Through Writing

The Book is the story of my sixteenth and seventeenth year, written by my best friends, The Big Four: myself, Pam, Judy, and Donna. These are part of my sophomore and senior years in high school. The verbal and physical abuse from my mother which led to my foster situation with my cousins that included sexual assaults were the highlights of that time. My trauma was revealed in my grief, my addiction to drugs and my wanting to crash and burn by leaving high school. This was my story back then.

As I began my study of writing as a way of healing, I discovered James Pennebaker's Legacy Writing in his book *Expressive Writing*. Pennebaker describes the act of rewriting one's story as a way to move forward to healing. This involves writing about and sharing one's story in retrospect, and then integrate one's trauma into a beautiful transformation by using the creative energy of writing. My re-reading, years later, of the letters of *The Book* has allowed me to discover myself, and some root causes of my unhappiness. Writing about it helped me to understand myself more and has allowed me to so integrate past, present, and future. I have been able to learn to cherish myself, not only for what I've been through, but for who I am becoming.

In the same way as Legacy Writing, the Japanese art of kintsugi, invented in the fifteenth century, is also part of transformation, a metaphor for reframing the hurts, wounds, and scars of the past.

Celine Santini, in *Kintsugi, Finding Strength in Imperfection* defines the lesson contained in the art of kintsugi as "... your scars, visible or invisible... proof that you've overcome your difficulties" (9).

Kintsugi, as an art, is a way of repairing ceramic pottery with precious metals, usually gold. It is a lesson in seeing the beauty in broken things, and, instead of throwing them away, repairing them. In kintsugi, the repaired piece is even more beautiful than it was before it was broken. The brokenness is not perceived as ugly: instead, it is perceived as beauty, great strength, and resilience. This is transformation from fractured to cherished. It is a choice to give something a second chance rather than tossing it out. And it is a choice to not hide the brokenness. Instead, the cracks will be emphasized with precious metal and will become part of the artistic and emotional experience.

Like Legacy Writers, Kintsugi Masters contemplate in depth how to fix the brokenness they encounter. They look at the brokenness deeply and conceive of how they can redeem it and make it whole again. This takes time: months, even years. Kintsugi Masters have shown the Legacy Writers that through patience and contemplation the negativity that has amassed in the brokenness can be rewritten in order to make the pieces whole again.

This is resilience. Our injuries have become something different, something beautiful. This leads the recreated, resilient life that is created in *Expressive Writing* as a beautiful piece to be shared with the world; to share its history and inspire others that transformation is possible.

This is what Judy meant that day when she told me that my flaws were the most interesting part of my personality. I did not understand it then, but I do now. My life path has been bumpy, but it has led me to this: to the kintsugi of my soul. The past has been recorded; now let the rewrite begin.

James Pennebaker in his book, *Expressive Writing* has given us some writing prompts for Legacy Writing. Three are explored here.

1. **Your rites of passage**

I became a woman only after I befriended, understood, and loved the troubled girl that I had been. I learned how to look at and then embrace the trauma that I went through, and even began to understand it. I often admired those who seemed to glide through life seamlessly, always on an upward trajectory. I now know that everyone experiences trauma of some kind. The brain does not know a “little” trauma from a “big” trauma. The parental modeling for dealing with trauma has a lot to do with how a person grows up and deals with their own trauma. I see now that the way the person has dealt (or not dealt) with their trauma is evidenced by their emotional state and their behavior. I have been in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous and heard the shares of people who on the outside looked like what I’d call “normal” and yet, they were in the rooms, trying to kick their drug habit. Their traumas led them to the rooms and there they shared their stories. I am in recovery from a 45-year drug addiction and continue to attend NA meetings to share my story because there might be just one person there that would hear it and say, “Hey, if she can do it, I can do it.” Because I learned to have compassion for myself, for what I’ve been through, I realized that I overcame an exceedingly difficult, verbally abusive relationship with my mother. I also survived a year of sexual abuse in my seventeenth year from a man who was my cousin, a doctor, and who everyone in my life revered. I began to understand why I did not speak up about it at that time and I have learned to forgive myself for not doing so. I have learned what triggers me and I have learned how to deal with it in healthier ways. I have learned to look at others with compassion as well and know that they, too may have had traumas, different from mine, some worse and

some easier. I have recovered from breast cancer, a double mastectomy and share my story with others that are on that cancer journey that can be so very terrifying, so that they can have hope and perhaps think, “If she can do it, I can do it.” I share my story in conversations and in my writing. Perhaps someone will hear me, or read what I wrote, and see that it reverberate in their own life. I am part of the healing crowd now, those who have gone through it and now can walk through it.

2. Your dreams attained

I always wanted to be a writer ever since I can remember. I wrote a novel for my undergraduate degree. I had a crippling drug habit for 45 years and did not do much writing, although in some of my boxes of old stuff that I managed to keep with me over the years, I have found random writing. It was not until I was diagnosed with breast cancer and in my time off work to do chemo that I had the opportunity to join a writer’s group in the park, which I participated in for ten years. It was not until I got clean in Narcotics Anonymous that I even conceived of going to graduate school and taking my writing seriously. In my studies I have learned the vocabulary to write about my past and to delve into the invaluable studies of the brain and how the brain deals with trauma. This has helped me understand what my own brain has endured. With that, I have found the serious writer inside of me and I can honestly say, I have something to say. That is a hard-won victory for me, to feel that my story is valuable. I hope to inspire others to write, even if they don’t want to do it professionally. If they only do it for personal reasons, it will be a way to free themselves from the demons of the past and make sense and understand the beauty of their lives. We all have a story to tell.

3. Things you looked forward to in the past and things you look forward to now

When I was young, all I wanted was to be older and to have my own place and my own life. I had no idea what real freedom was. I thought it was being away from all authority figures and being able to do the quantity of drugs I wanted to do. I became an expert in finding ways not to feel things. And I also became an expert in not remembering. The things I have run from are numerous. When I faced hard challenges, I just ran away. Sometimes I ran away physically. Sometimes I ran away emotionally. I developed a skill in not looking back and remembering. Finding the original notebooks of *The Book* helped me to remember so much in detail. The process of writing the narrative about my life has given me many memories back. Some of them I have pushed hard to release, but now, in writing about them, I have a picture of myself that is much different than the overwhelming guilt I've carried around for so awfully long. I have learned to love my parents who, with all their flaws, gave me this precious gift of life. I acknowledge that they did the best they could and were not evil. I forgive their mistakes. They couldn't help it. I thank them for taking me to the symphony, the opera, plays, the library, and making sure I got to school on time. Despite the verbal abuse, I received an underlying foundation of appreciation for the loftier pursuits in life. I thank Gwen and Ted (not their real names) for taking me in. I needed to get out of my parent's house, and they made that happen. I thank Gwen for being so kind, but I am also aware that she was blind to many things that we as humans should not be blind to. Looking at her this way, she has taught me not to be blind. And I have come to peace with Ted's sexual assaults. The biggest revelation is that I now know that my not talking about it was due to my

shame in believing that it was somehow my fault that the sexual assaults began and continued. I now know that it wasn't my fault. In Any Way. I now know there are people in the world who seem on the outside to be good people. They are accomplished in their professions and in many cases hold positions of power, but still are evil and we need to understand that these people can be the most dangerous. I now know we must speak up when evil occurs. I forgive my teenage self for not speaking up. At that time, speaking up was not part of my skill set. We were raised to believe that men were in charge of the world and that they made the rules We didn't speak up. I didn't know how to speak up then, but I do now. Today I look forward to immersing myself in the works of the scholars that have gone before me. I look forward to learning more about literature, history, poetry, psychology, neuropsychology, and pedagogy. I look forward to loving the people in my life openly and honestly, without hidden agendas, and without fear. I look forward to being able to honor those who are here for me and who help me along in my journey. I look forward to sharing my story and hearing yours.

Critical Reflection

I have an ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) score of five. The ACEs test, spearheaded by the Centers for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente in the mid-1990's was created to focus on how a traumatic childhood could adversely affect adult health, and is now used for psychological conditions as well. If you have a score of 5 you have answered five of the questions positively and have experienced emotional trauma in childhood. According to the Poole, et al article "Childhood Adversity and Adult Depression: The protective role of psychological resilience" explains that ACEs: "...measures childhood exposure to emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, emotional and physical neglect, and household dysfunction" (4). The "Childhood Adversity" article goes on to say that people with high ACEs scores have: "an increased prevalence of lifetime and recent depressive disorders in adulthood" (2). That describes most of my adult life as a radical hippie with a forty-five-year drug addiction.

My research into the craft and execution of writing memoir allowed me to learn the way to tell my story in depth and a more honest way. The memoirs that I have outlined in the Critical Reflection have influenced both my thinking and my writing. The book *The Art of Memoir* by Mary Karr helped me on a step-by-step basis to have the courage to tell my story.

My research on trauma (both childhood verbal abuse and childhood sexual abuse) and brain function revealed that, despite deep emotional pain, healing is possible for people affected by trauma. This resilience can be found through psychotherapy, psychotropic drugs and the mindfulness that is inherent in exercise, breathing practices and artistic expression. For me, my artistic expression is writing. Louise DeSalvo in *Writing as a Way of Healing* describes a pathway to resilience through writing: "As we write we become observers – an important component of developing resilience" (73). In 1965 I became a part of the Big Four, with Judy,

Pam, and Donna. We were sixteen about to turn seventeen. We began to write letters to each other in spiral notebooks and called it *The Book*. This project looks at a nine-month period from September 1965 to May 1966. By creating and writing *The Book* we unconsciously set ourselves on a path of healing our teenage angst through writing. We created the community of the Big Four and took oaths. We became a community of observers of our surroundings, of our relationships and of the period of history that we lived in. We became creators of our lives on the pages of *The Book* as we wanted to live. We wrote out our daydreams, hopes, plans, frustrations, joys, and sorrows and chronicled them in *The Book*. The letters appear in their original (edited) form and are woven together by my own personal memoir narrative.

The Memoirs

The genre of memoir has come to the forefront of literature during the last twenty years. These memoir writers have affected our academic work in the field of English. Memoir is important to academic studies as it integrates the emotional being and sense of self with the intellectual being: captured within the pages of a memoir are not only the events of a person's life but a look at how these events are processed. In this way, memoir is like watching a drowning person who has just learned to climb up the ladder to do a high dive. The following memoirs are written by those who used their personal trauma to narrate their memoirs.

Roxanne Gay's *Hunger* on the surface has her "hiding in plain sight" as she hid behind her weight and her overwhelming grief about her childhood sexual trauma. But Gay was never invisible, even in the depths of her trauma, secrets and hiding: her stature and girth made her a physical force to be reckoned with, along with her towering intelligence and the power of her feelings. She writes about her most private, innermost pain by working through it in her writing, and created a life of meaning for herself. Gay writes: "Here I am finally freeing myself to be vulnerable and terribly human. Here I am, reveling in that freedom. Here. See what I hunger for and what my truth has allowed me to create" (304). Gay's memoir explores self-punishment, denying ourselves, the instant gratification of overeating, and the sexual assault she endured as a young teen. Gay ate to numb herself from the pain of her traumas. And she dissociated in her relationships. In studies of the brain and how trauma works in the brain, the notion of numbing comes up repeatedly as a coping mechanism to deal with existential pain. And when numbing does not work, the next step is dissociation, the splitting from the conscious mind into a reality that looks not from the inside, but from the outside, as if it were another person. Gay, despite her numbing and dissociation, by writing her truth, has great healing in her life.

Lindy West's *Shrill* uses humor to discuss the pain of her trauma when she writes about overeating. She is candid about the process of discovering her own voice as well as about a lot of the gut-wrenching, embarrassing moments in her life. Her trauma came mostly from being overweight and the behavior she adapted to deal with that. She wrote about her core issues that permeated her psyche from the insecurity of her body image. She does this with humor, peppered with angst. West, through her journey into her trauma discovers that it's important to set boundaries, for boundaries are a symptom of mental health and well-being. Her message to us is that in life, we need to say "no" and mean it and stick by it to speak our truth. This is accompanied by her message that we are not our bodies, that our clothing size does not embellish or diminish our value intellectually, emotionally, or politically. This is the growth that she reveals in her memoir. West writes: "... the most important thing I do in my professional life today is delivering public, impermeable 'no's' and sticking to them" (258). West wrote her way out of numbing, by finding the vocabulary to write about the obstacles in her life with a great deal of humor. The ability to laugh at oneself, after one has lived with untreated trauma, is a hard-won place to be. A traumatized person rarely looks at their own trauma as humorous. West deftly looks at her own trauma and finds the humor to mend her broken heart.

Paul Kalanithi's book *When Breath Becomes Air* could also be called "The Courage to Live and the Courage to Die." He completed his book, not because he was done writing, but because he was dead. Yet Kalanithi's message is not death and despair: it is the strength, hope and love that it takes to live. Kalanithi wrote honoring the presence of his life as he faced death, and writes: "Have I proceeded beyond the present tense and into the past perfect?" (198). Kalanithi's writing voice courageously balances being present in his life along with the presence of his death, while at the same time reflecting on his past. For traumatized individuals, the past,

present and future blur together in an uncomfortable way. Yet to write his memoir, Kalanithi had to remain in the now, to be present while writing his memoir. The healing look that Kalanithi takes about his past, present and future is a pathway to understand how to heal a person's worst traumas, even in the face of imminent death. Kalanithi reminds us we are all in that tender, vulnerable place, between the very individual experiences of birth and death. What comes in between is our memoir.

Glennon Doyle's *Untamed* is "Inside Out after Outside In." Doyle uses what Mary Karr defines in *The Art of Memoir*, both "episodic memory – events or experiences, feelings, times, and places) ... and semantic memory (thoughts, concepts, facts, meanings, knowledge)" (6). Doyle's episodic memories are not sequential, but Doyle's powerful writing combined with her semantic interpretation of these events makes for a powerful story that is expertly woven together. In *Untamed*, Doyle's use of the metaphors of "caged" and "wild" throughout her memoir are a lens to look at her life and her metamorphosis and poses this question: "Sometimes I wondered if I was not the only one using her skin to contain herself. Maybe we are all fire wrapped in skin, trying to look cool" (46). Doyle describes the Exquisite Pain, the one that people with untreated trauma want to numb but is pervasive until it is dealt with it when she writes: "there is a type of pain in life that I want to feel. It is the inevitable, excruciating, necessary pain of losing beautiful things: trust, dreams, health, animals, relationships, people" (208). Doyle's pain, along with her insights of her personal, political, religious, gender status quo, mental illness, and addiction is touchingly told through the stories of her life. Doyle looks at her pain in ways that we can also feel it. She writes it out and then changes her life drastically, all within her memoir.

Jessmyn Ward in *Men We Reaped* put the squares of patchwork of her grief over multiple deaths together and creates the quilt of her life in her memoir. This quilt, made up of relationships, grief, and loss, weaves diverse time periods together as Ward made strides to make peace with the ghosts she lived with by revealing her secrets, her fears, her hurts, and her truth. Ward writes as if she is a caged parrot hearing her own scream: “Sometimes when that parrot screams, sounding its rage and grief” (8). Ward’s voice screams about grief for the young men who would not grow old and the grief about the racial trauma in her life. Ward’s choice of events weave a beautiful quilt that both she and the reader can wrap themselves up in. This led Ward to her healing, to see her life as beautiful, not as sad.

Memoir explores the wanting to understand the how’s and why’s of life’s events. In the genre of memoir, there is a map for healing a life’s journey, a way up the ladder of the high diving board. In Mary Karr’s *The Art of Memoir* she writes: “Truth works as a trip wire that permits the book to explode into being” (37). Memoirists often explode, right there on the page, as they look for a place to go, to land. Karr looks at the memoir process: “None of us can ever know the value of our lives, or how our separate and silent scribbling may add to the amenity of the world, if only by how radically it changes us, one by one” (218). Karr also lays out a plan for building a memoir:

- “1. Crisp memories
2. Stories and a passion to tell them
3. Some introductory information or data to get across
4. Self-discipline to work in scary blankness for some period of time” (190)

Karr's writing prompts are a template for creating a meaningful memoir. They are a roadmap to the type of writing that brings understanding; the understanding that language itself brings to the healing of old wounds. Karr explains: "In memoir the heart is the brain... [bringing with it] psychological self-awareness and faith in the power of truth... [and the] courage to reveal what you unearth" (151). When the heart takes over for the brain, processes the information and reveals it to the cerebral cortex, the resilient brain can heal.

The Trauma

The study of trauma is a vital part of understanding the importance of memoir. According to Dr. Bessel van der Koch in *The Body Keeps the Score*, “Trauma robs you of the feeling that you are in charge of yourself... self leadership” (205). Untreated trauma can make a person run from and run to subsequent traumatic events in life, not knowing the reasons why. Like Lindy West, “abused children are likely to grow up believing they are unlovable” (281). Like Glennon Doyle, “we lose the capacity to feel at home in our own skin and, by extension, the world” (307). Like Roxanne Gay, repeated destructive patterns become the norm for those with untreated trauma because, as Judith Herman writes in *Trauma and Recovery*: “... repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality” (96). People with untreated trauma believe all the things that their trauma tells them to believe. The trauma rules their lives until it is healed. The untreated trauma keeps otherwise intelligent people making the same mistakes repeatedly.

Along with trauma, van der Koch in *The Body Keeps The Score* writes about an additional concept that people with untreated trauma go through: Alexithymia. “Greek for not having words for feelings. Many traumatized children and adults simply cannot describe what they are feeling because they cannot identify what their physical sensations are” (100). This is the way that trauma affects the body through the brain.

Dr Bruce D. Perry in *What Happened To You* writes: “...traumatic exposure can produce lasting alterations in the endocrine, autonomic, and central nervous systems... [and makes] complex changes in the regulation of stress hormones” (59). The brain and the body begin to dysregulate, and this dysregulation disrupts emotional growth. The person with untreated trauma just has no words to express what they are feeling because they do not feel it. It is in this way that untreated trauma affects thinking abilities. The trauma becomes the person’s secret that

cannot be articulated. Untreated trauma thinking abilities, impaired by past traumatic events, are evidenced by a person's life choices. This becomes a traumatized person's personality.

James Pennebaker in *Opening Up by Writing it Down* explains untreated trauma and undisclosed secrets this way: "Secrets hurt our thinking abilities... [which are] likely to surface in forms of anxiety, ruminations, disturbing dreams, and other thought disturbances" (10). As a person continues in untreated trauma the personality adheres to its dysregulated functions and becomes the way the traumatized person lives their life.

Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* writes that: "Most abused children reach adulthood with their secrets intact" (110). Alexithymia, the disconnection between feelings and the ability to neither feel nor verbalize them takes over the traumatized person's life in every aspect, both personally and professionally. Secrets keep untreated trauma in an interior monologue of anxiety, fear, and insecurity. Van der Koch, in *The Body Keeps the Score* explains it this way: "As long as you keep your secrets and suppress information, you are fundamentally at war with yourself" (235). The war between untreated trauma and the pervasive human need to heal is the basis of the most profound memoirs.

Pennebaker, in *Opening Up by Writing it Out*, is closely aligned with van der Koch about secrets, stress and health: "Major secrets can be stressful... (and can affect our health, our immune function, the action of our heart and vascular systems, and even the biochemical workings of our brains and nervous system)" (1). People with untreated trauma are continually fighting a battle in their brains and bodies. Untreated trauma leaves a person at cross purposes with life. Cheryl Glenn in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* tells us that "... secrets are a means to prevent change, maintain the status-quo" (83). As with any change, identifying trauma and

helping it heal is not a painless process. Those who persevere to heal their trauma must relive it and expose it to process it and heal.

Childhood verbal abuse is one of the questions in the ACEs test and is a key factor in trauma. In Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, she explains: "Chronic childhood abuse takes place in a familial climate of pervasive terror, in which ordinary caretaking relationships have been profoundly interrupted [with] characteristic patterns of totalitarian control enforced by means of violence" (98). What happens if a person is traumatized in the first few years of life can stay with them in both the brain and the body if the trauma remains untreated. Herman further characterizes childhood abuse in this way:

"The child trapped in an abusive environment... must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness [that develops] an immature system of psychological defenses" (96)

An unstable and unpredictable home can have long term traumatic impact on a child. Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* describes this as: "... capricious enforcement of petty rules, intermittent rewards" (98). As the traumatized child moves into adulthood with the untreated trauma, the person's behavior and health issues become more complicated until and unless the trauma is treated. Instability and dysfunction are pervasive in the memoir genre. The most profound memoirists are working their way out of the most intensely personal traumatic events.

A conversation about trauma must also contain a look at the physical human brain. The brain is made up of three parts. This is called the triune brain, the three separate parts of the brain that do not always communicate with each other. These three parts of the brain are explained by Dr. Jamie Marich in *Trauma and the 12 Steps*:

“1. Brainstem [reptilian brain that impacts] instinctual survivor behaviors, muscle control, balance, breathing, and heartbeat... most associated with freeze response and dissociative experiences

2. Limbic brain [mammalian brain or heart brain containing ... the following sections]: amygdala, hypothalamus, and the nucleus accumbens (responsible for dopamine release) ... [this is the] source of emotions and instincts [and the] fight-or-flight response

3. Cerebral cortex [responsible for] executive functioning... higher-order thinking skills, reason, speech, and sapience (e.g., wisdom, calling upon experience)” (34-35).

The brainstem is often the first part of the brain to react in any situation. In extreme conditions, there is no initial contact with the cerebral cortex and the brainstem. This produces a very “reptilian” effect on a person’s behavior. The person is completely in the moment and does not think on a very deep level. Further, as Dr. Bruce Perry explains in *What Happened to You*: “there are no networks in the bottom part [of the brain] that think or tell time” (26). This creates a situation in which a person with untreated trauma may be triggered by past events in the present moment which leads them to react badly to an event in the future. They simply do not have the capacity in that moment to think more clearly than that after a lifetime of untreated trauma, numbing, emotional dysregulation, and dissociation.

The amygdala, a walnut-sized part of the limbic system is in the center of processing life events. Dr. Alice Brand, in an article entitled “Healing and the Brain” in Charles Anderson and Marian MacCurdy’s *Writing & Healing* defines the amygdala’s purpose this way:

“Events passing through the amygdala are rapidly learned and long-lasting... Once our emotional system learns something, we may never let it completely go. This means that in any given situation, fundamental feelings may be more immediate than intellect, however crucial both are for learning and remembering” (209).

Therefore, people with untreated trauma react in a dysregulated manner when they are triggered and tend to make the same mistakes repeatedly. It does not matter how intelligent they are, if they have untreated trauma they will react in an emotional manner, often emotionally dysregulated to the actual events to which they are reacting. Mortimer Mishkin and Tim Appenzeller, in “The Anatomy of Memory” give an interesting jumping-off place to understand why people with untreated trauma may behave in this way:

“... the evidence suggests the possibility that opiate-containing fibers run from the amygdala to the sensory systems, where they may serve a gatekeeping function by releasing opiates in response to emotional states generated in the hypothalamus. In that way, the amygdala may enable the emotions to influence what is perceived and learned. The amygdala’s reciprocal effect on the cortex may explain why emotionally charged events make a disproportionate impression” (88).

People with untreated trauma have emotional dysregulation: they are running primarily on basic brain function (reptilian) rather than rational thinking. Their cerebral cortex is at a loss to make sense of what they are doing, and, in most cases, the cerebral cortex is not even consulted. Sometimes the trauma is so pervasive, the person can literally “not think.” Dr. Jamie Marich in *Trauma and the 12 Steps* tells us: “For a person with unresolved trauma symptoms, the three brains are not optimally communicating with each other when the limbic brain gets triggered or activated” (36). This leads to some other potentially dangerous behaviors such as dissociation, which is very typical of someone who has suffered childhood verbal abuse. Dr. Bessel van der Koch in *The Body Keeps the Score* defines dissociation as: “the essence of trauma” (66). Van der Koch goes on to say:

“Dissociation [shows itself as] manifesting in feeling lost, overwhelmed, abandoned, and disconnected from the world and in seeing oneself as unloved, empty, helpless, trapped and weighted down... if you cannot tolerate what you know or feel what you feel, the only option is denial and dissociation” (123).

Dissociation is but one outcome of numbing, the quest to stop the inner turmoil. In an article by Mary Sue Moore entitled “Children’s Art and the Dissociative Brain” in Valerie Sinason’s *Trauma, Dissociation and Multiplicity*, she addresses the overwhelming fear that typically precedes a traumatized person’s dissociation: “When in extreme fear... it is not uncommon for individuals to have the experience of being removed from their own body, so that they feel nothing” (58). When numbing does not complete the task of taking away the pain, dissociation is the next step. This makes complete sense in the light of how dissociation works. Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* outlines the divide between numbing and dissociation this way: “Traumatized people who cannot spontaneously dissociate may attempt to produce

similar numbing effects by using alcohol or narcotics” (35). Numbing can take various forms, but dissociation is something that can stay in the brain as behavior for years. For the person with untreated trauma, they may not even realize they are dissociating until their attention is drawn to it. And even with the knowledge that they are dissociating, they may continue with this behavior in all their relationships. And as Moore points out, when dissociation is not immediate, traumatized individuals turn to addictive substances to distance themselves from their present reality. This addiction is not limited to alcohol and drugs. Addiction to any high – cutting, food, gambling, shopping, watching too much tv, and fixating on other people – can serve as a way for a person to numb.

The Writing As A Way of Healing

Alexithymia can overrun personality and leave a person with untreated trauma speechless. Cheryl Glenn in *Unspoken* puts words to this condition: “Any kind of stress can intensify paraphasia, the silencing of words” (11). As untreated trauma grows, the inability to communicate pain can become unbearable. A person with untreated trauma just does not have the words.

James Pennebaker has studied the healing power of writing on both the body and the brain. Pennebaker gives writing prompts to help people find the words they need to express their innermost traumas. In his *Opening Up by Writing it Down* he explains: “putting emotionally upsetting experiences into words can affect our thoughts, feelings, and physical health” (vii). In the last twenty years much research into this has become available to us and it reveals that vocabulary itself can be healing.

Healing through writing is in keeping with what van der Koch in *The Body Keeps the Score* means when he writes: “Discovering your Self in language is always an epiphany, even if finding the words to describe your inner reality can be an agonizing process” (236). This is in keeping with treating trauma not only with talking therapy and antidepressants, but with mindfulness involved in exercise, breath work and the arts. And in the case of memoir, it is the mindfulness of writing. Charles M. Anderson and Marian M. MacCurdy in *Writing & Healing* concur with van der Kolk’s views on language:

“As we manipulate the words on the page, as we articulate to ourselves, and to others the emotional truths of our pasts, we become agents for our own healing, and if those to whom we write receive what we have to say and respond to it

[then] we create a community that can accept, contest, gloss, inform, invent and help us discover, deepen, and change who we have become as a consequence of the trauma we have experienced” (7).

Language is key here, Alice Brand writes in her essay “Healing and the Brain” in Anderson & MacCurdy’s *Writing & Healing*: “healing, through language has evolved from the ability of the brain to modify thoughts, feelings, and behavior... In a word, thoughts change behavior” (217). Memoir writing, therefore, is a pathway for traumatized individuals to have a better understanding of what happened to them. This understanding can lead to both forgiveness and healing. Pennebaker in his *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressive Emotions* explains: “writing about thoughts and feelings of traumas... forces individuals to bring together the many facts of complicated events” (185). The very act of finding the vocabulary to identify and describe one’s trauma, along with weaving the events of one’s life together, even if it is nonsequential and out of chronological order, is a pathway to healing.

The Healing

Legacy Writing, the writing about one's life in retrospect, is a positive way of delving deeply into one's trauma and writing about it and is a vehicle in which an untreated traumatized person can rewrite their stories. Maya Angelou in *Letters To My Daughter* explains Legacy Writing perfectly: "You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them" (vii). We write our story, what happened to us, and then we rewrite our story by not limiting ourselves to repeat our past trauma. We move forward with our dreams and hopes and write about those as we progress in our lives.

James Pennebaker has spent years refining writing prompts to loosen a traumatized person's memories from their deep holes inside their psyche and to allow a person to look at their life with blessings, gratitude, and joy. Pennebaker outlines a way to get to that place in *Expressive Writing: Words That Heal*:

- “1. Your rites of passage
2. What an important experience taught you
3. How something changed your life
4. Your dreams attained
5. Your frustrated dreams
6. Your fondest memories
7. Things you looked forward to in the past and things you look forward to now
8. How you handle the differences between expectations, challenges, and frustrations
9. What makes you get up in the morning

10. What keeps you up at night
11. How you unwind or how you don't
12. What makes you silent
13. What five words you wish people would use when they describe you" (166).

Legacy Writing is what can keep a traumatized soul moving forward to healing, through words, through the persistent longing to know the truth about ourselves and the knowledge that our brains can heal, that they can be restored to health. By integrating our trauma with the creative energy that is unleashed in the act of writing, we learn to tell our story, secrets, and all, and then we learn to rewrite our story. Memoir can be a scary high dive, but it is a heroic journey to mental health. The plunge into the past is necessary to integrate past, present, and future.

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