

CHAPTER TWO: SLEEP WITH YOUR GRANDMOTHER

Contributed by Hariette Surovell

Â SERIAL! VALENTINE DAY SPECIAL TO THE CORPSE!

Â WE CONTINUE SERIAL PUBLICATION OF HARIETTE
Â SUROVELL'S MEMOIRS! WHAT A LIFE!

CHAPTER TWO:Â SLEEP WITH YOUR GRANDMOTHER

Sweet sixteen and I hadn't even had my first multiple orgasm, yet I found myself a nationally-acclaimed "sexpert", with my opinions on teenage sexual habits and needs for sex education and contraception being sought out by Dr. Mary Steichen Calderone and John D. Rockefeller III.

I didn't even know who Edward Steichen was, or that Dr. Mary was his daughter, yet I guest-lectured with her at a SIECUS (Sex Information and Education Council U.S.) convention.Â It was held in the summer, and we took our meals together.Â Sitting outside at a picnic table, we learned that the entrÃ©e was fish.

"I never eat seafood in the summer!" the elegant, patrician, silver-haired world-renowned doctor/former acclaimed stage actress/National Women's Hall of Fame member exclaimed gaily.Â "It is simply swarming with staphylococcus!"

I love that phrase--it should become part of the lexicon. Unlike my ex-husband, Robert, perpetually on the look-out for the meaning of life, I never experience existential dilemmas.Â The way I see it, things are either simply swarming with staphylococcus, or they're not.

After my father, Abe Surovell, died on June 4th, 1971, I missed my opportunity to take the required high school Driver's Education class held that month.Â I read poetry in my recently renovated purple bedroom, with its lavender-flowered wallpaper.Â Abe had helped me design it, enthusing, "It's going to be a real showplace!"Â Â In July, my mother, Ada, my oldest brother Fred and I took a trip to CA, running away from the fog of our grief, hoping it would dissipate. We reasoned that if we put physical distance between ourselves and The House of Abe, filled as it was with memories of both his morose presence, and of our own guilt over the many ways in which we had failed him, we would skip over to the next stage of grieving.

We stayed with the Goldsteins, who had moved from Queens to Los Angeles years before.Â They were one of dozens of leftist families my parents had maintained a friendship with since the 1940's.Â I had never felt comfortable in their listless, gray aura'ed, humorless presence.Â Even the little boy they adopted, about my age, was too whiny to happily play with. Unbeknownst to Ada, the left coast lifestyle had turned the Goldsteins' interests away from political prisoners and towards heir own personal pleasures.Â Dad Bill, a history professor, had been fired from an East Coast university for his political beliefs.Â He and wife Gloria were also still worried that McCarthyism would re-surface, and that their FBI files would empower the government to declare them unfit parents and send their son back to an orphanage or into the childless home of rabid Republicans. The Goldstein parents had become politically apathetic and their son, a movie-star handsome blonde California surfer-teen.Â He was still complaining, only now three Surovells were the subject of his discontent.

"Can't you tell them to stop talking about stupid idiot politics already?!" I heard him...and heard him.Â "Who cares about their dumb-ass politics?Â Everything is politics this, politics that with them. Make them shut up or kick them out!"

In retrospect, I can't blame any of the trio.Â All obsessions are tedious.Â I was a real pain-in-the-ass proselytizer when I became a vegetarian, learned about astrology, got certified as a graphologist.

With us playing the role of squatters, and our hosts real estate magnates, eviction proceeded swiftly.Â The rest of the trip was a blur of motel rooms, coffee shops, white blaring sunshine and empty beaches. Here and there we went sightlessly sight-seeing--blind people at a museum.

Karl was in college, but we weren't sure of Leon's location. A year before Abe's death, he had joined a 12-member anarchist group, Hammer and Steel.Â In true anarchist form, they published encyclopedic manifestoes in illegible type, read only by themselves.Â The group's leader is now, predictably, a professor of business, who travels the world giving lucrative, all-expense-paid speeches and seminars on the virtues of capitalism (and stiffing his ex-wife on her child support/alimony payments).Â But in 1970, he decreed that Leon (draft lottery number: 352) should enlist in the Army to "learn guerilla war tactics for the upcoming American revolution."Â My parents tried to dissuade Leon with logic, pleas, groveling, outright hysteria, and finally, a letter from our congressman offering a "compassionate re-assignment", but Leon joined up and shipped out.

Leon's conversion to anarchism was also predictable.Â Red-diaper families are usually Jewish, usually comprised of two or three children.Â One child will grow up towing the party line (for the Surovells, that would be Karl and Frederick), one develops distaste for its conformity, rigid thinking and dogma, or possesses an artistic sensibility, or both (me) and the

other becomes a Trotskyite, Maoist, Weatherman, anarchist...whatever.Â Our closest friends' youngest daughter earned a scholarship to an Ivy League college, dropped out after the first term to become a Maoist, found employment at the post office, and developed debilitating, disabling Karpal-Tunnel Syndrome from her gig writing missing zip codes on envelopes by hand.Â Â

My uncle from Oregon, my mother's brother, had delivered the funeral oratory.Â Leon had gotten a pass to come home from the jungles of Long Binh.Â Afterwards, he disappeared...no phone number, no address.Â Not even his twin could locate him.Â He became a semi-ghost, joining Abe's ghost-plagued ghost.

Grief-stricken though I was, I resented it when my uncle intoned, "Abe had three stalwart sons and one blooming daughter."

Blooming?Â You bet I was blooming.Â I never went through a little bud-sprouting, training-bra stage.Â One day I woke up with 36DD's, a fact which was noted loudly and often by my twin brothers...and, as you'll read later, almost every other male in the Greater Metropolitan Area.Â Nonetheless, who draws attention to his niece's knockers at her father's funeral?Â And, wasn't I also stalwart?

Along with my huge tits, I had acquired a full-blast libido.Â These hormones had kicked in with a vengeance two years previously.Â With all the treachery a teenager can possess, I deemed the glorious emotional healing of Camp Thoreau passÂ© by the time I defected to the sophisticated Camp Abelard, another left-wing summer camp, this one filled with cutting-edge energy.Â I was fourteen years old, and had recently dispensed with my virginity.Â Freud himself might develop permanent shpilkas to discover that a neighborhood gypsy lady known as "Mom" rented out rooms in Dara Gardens by the hour (where the big event had occurred.)Â In these cubicles, the underaged could partake of the illegal. Mom, a toothless old hag had snarled, "Make sure you take them bloody sheets off afterwards, this ain't no hotel I'm running here."Â Others may have been traumatized, but I was relieved, perceiving virginity as something to be dispensed with as expeditiously as possible.Â Did I mention that after being wrongly accused of stealing Abe's copy of "120 Days of Sodom" I naturally went looking for it?

Camp Abelard was owned by Victor Fink, father of pop star Janis Fink, alias Janis Ian, whose first hit single was "Society's Child."Â Fame, fortune, wealth had not improved Janis' gloomy disposition and leaky pus-filled complexion.Â She did, however, have friends with the best weed connections in New York City.Â Singer/songwriter Janey Schram, tall, awkward, talented, visited often.Â Was it she who gave me the pipeful of hash laced with DMT to smoke?Â Then we went riding in a car...it wasn't a convertible, and yet it was, and the wind swooshed all around me.Â I looked up at a starless sky.Â Could it really be thus, out in the country?Â I turned my gaze upwards again, and this time, the heavens were choking with trillions of twinklers.Â The third time I looked, a single pink star hung from a string inches above my head.Â I reached up to touch it and...

Camp Thoreau embodied peace, friendship, community, warmth, security.Â From the moment I set my duffel bag down on my bunk at Abelard, I ascertained that priorities among campers and staffers were sex, drugs and rock and roll. I was officially in "work camp", which meant that we were supposed to spend part of each day constructively building something...wooden, I forget what, because within two days, any pretense to actual work had been abandoned by both campers, counselors and Victor Fink.Â He once punished me for disobeying curfew, showing up at my tent at 4 a.m. For an entire week, I was forbidden to smoke pot with the counselors on the porch of the main house.

The campers were more, well, bourgeois at Abelard.Â There were no Black kids sponsored by unions.Â One of my bunkmates, a willowy strawberry blonde, was a Park Avenue resident with divorced parents and a parade of stepfathers. Random items of our underwear, missing in the weekly wash, eventually surfaced in her trunk--she was a bona fide klepto, sent home in disgrace.Â Her crazy mother, about whose numerous seduction attempts I had heard numerous times, showed up unannounced at Abe's office at Black Rock at lunchtime.Â He did the gentlemanly thing and took her out, where she ran up his limited expense account to \$200 (it was a mostly liquid lunch.)

This wasn't the first time that a mother of a friend of mine tried to seduce bald, eyeglass wearing, mustachioed family man Abe.Â Marcy Silverman, my best friend from the repressive, racist, prison-like high school I had transferred out of, had a meshugenah mother who also phoned Abe, offering up her sexual favors. In those days, the phrase "dysfunctional families" hadn't been invented, nor was there much consciousness of child abuse.Â During my seven years in elementary school, only one of my classmates had even had divorced parents.Â This was considered to be such a stigma that when she gave a slumber party, parents hesitated to send their daughters to what surely must have been a den of iniquity, a virtual whorehouse.

In 1965, divorcee Alice Crimmins' two children, Missy and Edward, were found strangled to death in vacant lots, the first of which was located almost exactly one mile from my house. It was one of the very first such scandals, the kind we now read about daily, and Alice was consistently portrayed in the newspapers as having been a bad mother, even before her conviction.Â The evidence?Â She worked as a cocktail waitress, and when her marriage went south, and her husband neglected her, she stepped-out.Â To quote Tru Tv, one of these boyfriends, was "a fifty-two-year old wealthy building contractor who sported a pencil thin mustache and was given to silk suits and a diamond pinky ring." Even more

indicting: Alice was a redhead!

Dysfunction and abuse surrounded me. Ada and I often wonder, with the hindsight of retrospect, about our next-door neighbor April, a strange-looking light-toffee colored foster child whose eyes focused in two directions at once, giving her a kind of E.T. appearance. She was capable of conversing only about a single topic: monsters. "Oh, there was a monster last night, yes there was, there it was, it was even bigger than the other one, yes it was, it was, come find it for me!" she begged, grabbing my hand. She died at nine, supposedly of a disease, but now Ada and I are convinced that she was actually killed by her foster mother, Zoysia, an ebony-skinned school cafeteria worker (more victims?) from South Carolina, whose boyfriend also died of a heart attack (induced?). Her German Shepherd was chained to a tree 24/7/265, in gusting winds, hurricanes and blizzards. I can still hear his howls in my nightmares. Ada tried to reason with Zoysia, whose on-cue response was, "Beasts belong outside." So Ada ended up constantly phoning the ineffectual ASPCA. The dog also ended up dead.

Marcy Silverman's house was so dysfunctional, I hated to visit even for a few minutes. Her father, who had divorced Miriam and re-married, had a brand-new daughter and a sexy young wife. He evinced zero concern for his first two daughters. Marcy, the eldest, was brilliant, gorgeous, sharp-tongued, quick-witted, athletic, adventurous, a superstar student--genetically-perfect, a girl most fathers would worship. Her younger sister was the opposite--passive, mediocre, gawky, plain, frightened and nervous, but nonetheless his daughter--a sweet girl, not blessed, but trying to live up to her perfect older sister. Every time I visited, Miriam stood on the staircase shouting, or breaking down in crying jags, begging Marcy to give her advice, tell her how to live, what to do. "Marcy, Marcy, don't go out yet, I need you to get money from him, I called him 15X this week and he just hangs up on me, the cocksucker! Call him, go over there, figure out something fast!" Marcy's missions to obtain child support payments were always unsuccessful. It wasn't as if Mr. Silverman didn't have the funds. Marcy and I once spent a week in his pricey Fire Island summer home. The furnishings were modern minimalist chic, which matched his aloof demeanor. The weather was hot, he was icy--displeased when we arrived and moderately elated when we left.

During my last semester in the artsy alternative high school, I still majored in cutting classes. This was an art form I had perfected in junior high school. I calculated that I attended the equivalent of three months out of the required ten in eighth grade. Back then, age 12, I would check into homeroom, sign in, be noticed and then...leave the premises. Free at last, I would take the subway, either alone or with friends, to Greenwich Village, to hang out in Washington Square Park. We also panhandled. I made serious coin, too, standing at the intersection of MacDougal and Eighth Street, shaking my coffee cup. My friends and I overheard a beautiful blond hippie named Brent saying, "Can you help me pay for my grandmother's abortion?" We thought that was hysterically funny, really cool, even though we didn't know what the word "abortion" meant (and unaware of how weirdly prophetic that expression would become.) I bought a button to clip onto my pea-coat that read "Kumquats make you horny." I didn't know what "horny" meant, either, but I knew it was funny. People truly were filled with peace and love vibes in the late 60's, and I was drawn to the East Coast epi-center of the hippie movement as if by magnetic force. Strangers gave away money, food, joints, tabs of acid, invitations to "Be-Ins" and "Love-Ins." When they told each other that they loved them, they meant it. Everyone was sending out good vibes, careful of their karma. My hippie friends and I hung out in the cafes and head shops of MacDougal and Bleecker Street, saw the Dylan documentary "Don't Look Back" at the Eighth Street Playhouse Cinema, heard folk and rock and roll music live at Kenny's Castaways, the Village Vanguard, the Caf@ Wha, met the musicians in Matt Umanov's Guitar Shop. I watched Jim Morrison whip it out at Hunter College, rocked out to Steppenwolf at the Fillmore East, danced at The Dom on St. Mark's Place. We were eclectic--one day jonesing for the sausage, onion and pepper subs that were MacDougal Street specialties, and the next drinking Mu-Tea at Souen.

My parents didn't know about any of these escapades. When I entered high school, they attempted to set down a number of rules and regulations. Even these were incredibly permissive. It wasn't that Abe and Ada were completely distracted by Abe's illness and Leon's determination to enlist in the Army. I knew intuitively, and I also deviously ascertained, that since I was nine years younger than Fred, Abe and Ada were too tired and burned-out to deal with the demands of imposing discipline on one last rebellious teenager. This was a bonus I exploited constantly. No matter what rule my parents made, I defied it. Whatever the boundary, I pushed against it. I even felt that I was entitled to freedom, having spent all those years of my childhood in a state of paralyzing anxiety. Then, there was the fact that my parents knew that no matter how I acted out, I was extremely responsible. This is what I told the gynecologists at the Mt. Sinai Hospital Adolescent Health Center who wanted to give me birth control pills, Ovral-21's. I argued that they would cause breast cancer. "But they have been tested on women in Puerto Rico for 20 years," the doctors insisted (caveat: they were recently discovered to cause breast cancer.) I got my diaphragm and spermicide, sensing at 15 that one couldn't have too much barrier in one's birth control method. Sometimes I even used it in conjunction with condoms. The doctors were so impressed that a teenager could insert a diaphragm and spermicide appropriately that they asked me to become a peer-group counselor. I accepted their offer, and spent many afternoons among completely clueless teenagers who used feminine hygiene products as contraceptive methods.

Back in eighth grade, the dean had tried to stop me from cutting classes, but my grades were too good for him to have any real leverage. Much as I had always hated gym, never feeling competitive about sports (whereas sex was an egalitarian sport everyone could compete in, one which earned me A+ every time), the real insult came when the boys were assigned to "Shop" and the girls "Sewing." Sewing?! I was offended to my very core. I knew how to sew on a

button and trim a hem. It wasn't that I wanted to take Shop, either, not being mechanically-adept. The bureaucracy wouldn't let me just drop the class, so, when I deigned to show up, I refused to learn how to thread a sewing machine. A year later, "Home Economics", with its generic recipes for unhealthy meals made from canned and processed foods was equally insulting to my feminist spirit.

In high school, however, the guidance counselor had appraised me shrewdly.

"Have you ever seen the results of your IQ tests, Ms. Surovell?" he inquired, appealing directly to my intellect...and to my sibling rivalry. Leon once scored above 160 on an IQ test and had lorded this over the rest of us for perpetuity. I recalled taking those yearly tests, but the results, the magic number, was always kept top secret. The guidance counselor showed me every year's test result, the score always either exactly the same number, or one digit off. "You're in the top 2 % of the population...you owe it to yourself to go to an Ivy League college."

So I started attending all my classes. It was a druggie high school, which eventually, inevitably became a typical dangerous, violent urban hell-hole, with students murdered for being street gang members. Back then, many of the more than 3,000 students dropped acid before class on a daily basis. I never understood the appeal-tripping in school? Once someone brought in 200 Quaaludes to sell. Within hours, there were so many kids falling down in the hallways that the overworked school nurse notified the local hospital to send in a team of paramedics.

If we received lectures on the evils of drugs, I've forgotten all of them, or maybe I was stoned when I heard them. I know we didn't learn any shocking, discouraging facts in "Hygiene", an all-girls class taught by a sweet old marm who belonged in a one-room schoolhouse in a rural locale and the previous century. Hygiene made Home Economics seem hip. The teacher talked about menstruation. What was there to say? Tampax didn't hit the market until 1974, so we used old-fashioned style Kotex, with its little flaps to be inserted into a "sanitary belt." Still, it always made for a good excuse to be ostensibly sent home from school, to cut class. I just told the school nurse, "I'm having a really heavy period, these cramps are making me dizzy," and soon I'd be on the subway headed for West Fourth Street. I wouldn't have expected this old marm to tackle Sex Ed, but then she showed us the movie.

It was set in the '50's, with the suburban main characters wearing flared skirts, cashmere sweaters and saddle shoes. Plot details are contained in the documents I've attached.

That movie really pissed me off. It was more degrading, more outdated and more offensive than Sewing and Home Economics combined. In every way, it was irrelevant to the students my urban high school, with a population in the thousands, and it was filled with mis-information, scare tactics (the sexual version of red-baiting?) and creepy, fake values-- good girls who didn't want sex, and who only prostituted themselves in order to placate their horny boyfriends, and lower-class girls who may have actually have been prostitutes. I knew what high school teenagers needed...sex education, birth control information and birth control devices. I knew because this is what I needed, as did almost everyone my age. I had friends and classmates who had gotten pregnant. A few of them ruined their lives and kept their babies. Others had multiple abortions. At the Mt. Sinai Adolescent Clinic, all kinds of girls from all kinds of backgrounds told me in detail about the mistakes they had made, the miscalculations about when and how they could or couldn't get pregnant. "You can't get pregnant if you douche with Kool-Aid!" was typical.

It was crucial for us to learn about the dangers of venereal disease, but not that way. Why not a recently-made movie informing us that sexually-transmitted diseases were rampant and could have permanent consequences, but that they could be prevented by use of condoms and treated with antibiotics? This one was factually inaccurate...people don't usually break out into full-body rashes days after contracting an S.T.D.

Finally, I baited the hygiene teacher, who was myopic enough, or perhaps so clueless, that she was totally obtuse about the pregnant students who had dropped out of her class.

"What advice would you give to a sexually-active girl about contraception?" I asked her, while we were discussing Sally's dilemma.

"Sleep with your grandmother!" she replied, smiling, attempting to be flip about the most serious issue possible, or maybe she was projecting...something. She wasn't motherly, she was grandmotherly.

Marcy had heard about a city-wide feminist group, The New York High School Women's Liberation Society, and we attended meetings. The sisters there weren't focused enough on sex education. So we defected and formed a splinter group, The High School Women's Coalition, whose main priority was getting sex education into the high school curriculum, preferably in those "hygiene" classes. I was elected President. We were the Bristol Palins of 1971, convinced as she is that, for teenagers, "Abstinence is not realistic," except that we came to our conclusions without becoming teenage mothers ourselves. Learning that the New York City Board of Education had weekly meetings in Brooklyn, we attended every one, making ourselves heard, storming in in lady-like crowds, interrupting their dry budget analyses and demanding to be heard. Eventually, the bureaucrats invited us to a private meeting, where they served us tea and cookies and took our suggestions seriously.

Everything that happened next I wrote about in a speech Planned Parenthood asked me to make before John D. Rockefeller III's Presidential Commission on Population Control and the American Future. Jane E. Brody, the Science Editor of the New York Times, introduced herself afterwards. The next day, she had put the speech on the Op Ed page, and I got a hefty check in the mail. Someone had titled it, "Most Girls Just Pray". Hey Jane, thanks! Sisterhood is powerful. I've attached a copy of this Op Ed piece and also Brody's article about my testimony. No need to be redundant about all the things that happened after we had that confab with the Board of Ed. A caveat: The Times printed a retraction the next day, saying that my piece should have read, "Irresponsibility does not cause this, it is ignorance."

Most Jewish mothers would have kvelled. But then, most of them aren't Ada, whose priorities are, um, unique. She is still so politically active in her 80's that she risks her life every week to stand in a traffic circle, holding up a banner saying, "Jewish and Palestinian Women United."

On October 1, 1971, she became hysterical.

"Someone will read this, find out where you live, and come here and rape you!" She insisted that I hand over all my fan mail to the police officer stationed in my high school (gee, that cop was cute...big blue eyes and jet-black hair. I guess they assigned him to that "beat" after that Quaalude catastrophe.)

"Man, she's a lulu, isn't she?" was one adult's response.

After my Op Ed piece appeared, publishers called. Henrietta Schlanger, a cool, visionary lady, whose husband had left Farrar, Strauss to form Octagon Books invited me to write articles, along with Jamaica Kincaid, for "Ingenu Magazine." She was either the founder, or executive-editor, or both, and when the magazine went under, she co-authored a book, "Everything a Girl Needs to be Beautifully-Healthy." Veteran publisher Sam Grafton recruited me to be an on-the-ground reporter for "Youth Report," which was bought by social workers, teachers...anyone working or aspiring to work with youths (my high school guidance counselor?). I interviewed students about whatever subject Sam sent my way--my first reporter gig. Sam would return to reap major karma decades later. He and his wife Edith spoiled me, inviting me over for elaborate Jewish-style brunches, where Edith was shocked, "I can't believe that you have never eaten whitefish!" (Not when it's simply swarming...). I was hired as an official consultant for Herman Engel's Texture Films documentary, "About Sex." Herman and his wife Sonya Friedman became two of my dearest friends, confidantes, soulmates, with Herman being my beloved father figure. I must attend hundreds of their European-style dinner parties in their West Village floor-through over the years, where every guest was an artist, writer, filmmaker, photographer, or Grace Paley. Herman and Sonya made it a tradition for me to always read my short stories to the group. Psychologist/Syracuse University Professor/Sex Educator professor Sol Gordon had me contribute to his pamphlets and sex-ed comic book line. I did some t.v. shows alone, wined and dined by the producers beforehand. Then Marcy and I were asked to appear on the Phil Donahue Show. We flew out to Dayton, Ohio, where it was taped. In our hotel room before the show, we smoked a few pipefuls of potent hash, and went on the air stoned and wearing matching red-leather micro-miniskirts. That footage exists in some vault somewhere. I'll just bet Phil wanted to educate us two little cock-teasers about sex.

Then were the SIECUS conventions.

Ingenu Magazine let me pick my topics.

"How about a piece about poetry?" I asked Henrietta Schlanger.

My aim in writing this was solely to seduce Galway Kinnell. I had a mad, passionate (schoolgirl?) crush on him. He was very gracious about doing the interview in his home, but I didn't succeed. I may have felt oh so grown-up, and I may have been head of a group whose members called themselves "high school women", but legally speaking, and, really, in every other way, I was 16 years old.

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look for CHAPTER THREE to see what HS makes of the 60s & what they make of her!

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