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Parental Influences

Written by Gail Walter

When people think about the seventies they don't generally think about parents, and yet we all had them. In some shape or form!

I was born to a pair myself. And they were an inextricable part of my memories about those years. I came from a conventional family, in some ways. My dad devoted himself to his work as an international journalist and my mother concentrated on bringing up what she thought of as three budding "Shirley Temples".

We had two prevailing planes of reality in our family. Our intellectual, political and hypothetical world and ...the real one. My father hobnobbed with some great intellectual minds and, in the seventies, these minds were almost all radically liberal. My father liked to hold forth eloquently at raucous dinner parties about freedom for everyone. All the

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dinner parties about freedom for everyone, ALL the oppressed.

He also liked to have his whisky brought to him by my mum as he reclined on his lazy boy after a long hard day. We had this maidenly routine in our house. My father would work until around 7pm at night. When he was ready to come home he would call his women folk who would then rush around restoring the home to his royal requirements. The chair just so, the roast on the go and the whisky poured over just the right number of ice cubes at just the right time so the ice wouldn't melt.

When the sweep of his headlights illuminated the front windows we would hasten to the front hallway and assume an attitude of waiting. As he came through the door we'd all line up for the kiss on the forehead that meant "King Dad" was home.

My mom cooked like a chef and served us food for every one of life's challenges. She threw herself into mothering and cooking with a creative gusto that went part of the way towards easing her frustration at not being a writer herself. She was enticed by women's liberation but afraid of the responsibility of looking after herself.

We girls, growing up in the seventies, were necessarily a product of this domestic climate. My dad offered us the glamour of the world of international journalists that gathered around our dining table for long, lively, wine-soaked debates about life, the universe and everything while my mother got down and boogied with us in the children's lounge.

She was as excited as we were by the music and fashions of the time -- she made my purple lycra catsuit, she permed my hair. When my dad brought Bob Marley back from a visit to London it was my mom that couldn't keep still when she heard the Rasta beat.

My mom should have been a journalist herself. She had a passionate enthusiasm for the vibrant world developing around her. She read voraciously, cooked for dozens of hungry intellectuals and danced right through the decade with her daughters as if SHE was a child of the seventies.

The first time I brought my friend Susan home for a sleep over my mom and dad were having a dinner party. I was nervous about revealing the true nature of my origins and hoped my unruly parents would control themselves and make a good impression.

Susan came from a family where order was revered. I found it

quite enchanting. Everything seemed to happen as and when it should. By comparison my family was all over the place. Way more exotic, way more dangerous.

Tonight, this night, I wanted them to emulate the Steele's. I wanted them to be so normal that Susan would come back for another sleep over some time soon. I probably shouldn't have invited her over when my parents were having a dinner party.

There was this game my parent's and their friends liked to play. They all knew their wines and, being journalists and writers, were accustomed to opining at length about them.

"The Game" was a lighthearted excuse to show off their grasp on all things grapey. Each guest took a turn with the blindfold. The challenge was whether they could tell the difference between the humble house wine and the revered vintages of the day. What was always fun was that it turned out that they couldn't. All that was necessary for this inebriated enlightenment was a commitment to copious wine tasting.

I was just starting to feel that they weren't going to do anything silly when the wine tasting mysteriously evolved into spontaneous disrobing and the luminous vision of mature naked bodies cavorting in the pool.

I never thought she'd come back. I mean, my parents were intimidating with clothes on. Without clothes, well, they were just plain shocking.

I needn't have worried. The only arguments Susan and I had after that were because she always wanted to sleep over at my house. She said it was exciting and unpredictable. What did she mean?

