

# BEING MARRIED

I always wanted to be married. Not so much to marry, but to *be married*, a subtle difference. The desire to marry came later. I recently came upon evidence of this early sensibility in a ragged notebook that had my childlike sprawl spread over its pages. There were some embarrassing attempts at poetry ("*about the little girl from Tibet, whose eyes were brimming and cheeks were wet*"), probably inspired by knowing my father wrote poetry. Maybe something about a clean blank page with pale blue lines beckoned to me to put my mark on it.

My eye was caught by a page with two neatly drawn columns containing writing in my nine-year-old scrawl. Down each column were names describing the family of nine children I anticipated producing some day—though there is no husband in sight. This must have



presaged my early sense of myself as the married person, and mother, I would become some day! I now find it extraordinary that I imagined producing nine children in the space of fourteen years! The list was explicit—a boy and a girl alternating, with twins thrown in twice, making the timing of pregnancies a little more believable to me now.

Why so many children? I see now that I created a large family in order to exhaust my interest in the names available to me in my childlike awareness of my small world. In a day when Avery and Otis and Milo and Noah are now names of choice, the names on my list sound prosaic, but common in that conventional era.

Probably the names represented persons I had come to know and love—David and Eleanor and Rose and Shirley come to mind as having that connection. The list was headed by a boy who took the name of the unnamed father so essential to this production, and the oldest girl would be named after her mother. I have no idea why I failed to mention that the mother was me; I think the process of bearing children was very remote in my mind at the age of nine, and may have continued remote, since it was not something I ever did.

I paid great attention to balance of the sexes, alternating between boy and girl. Oddly, I also balanced temperaments, often associating these with hair color and complexion—dark or fair. Timothy Luke was fair of complexion, a sweet and serious child. His twin sister Ruth Elizabeth was also sweet and serious, but dark complected.

A healthy and romping son David Emmet, was joined with a happy twin Rose Eleanor who was dark. Peter Mark was dark, a strong athlete. His twin brother Walter Paul is "beautiful and thoughtful, someone who thinks sweet things, and is fair of complexion." The baby, Shirley Marieta (clearly named after someone I knew personally), I describe as "chubby, and always ready to help mama and daddy." She of course is of fair complexion. I don't need to be embarrassed by my childish notions about skin pigment and temperament. Although it is not totally consistent, it leaves room for appealing traits in all shades. Rather than those descriptives— "fair" and "dark"— feeling ominous, I am aware that it reflects my instinctive early preference for brunette beauty in women—like the young Liz Taylor with her horse. It bespoke vivacity and energy, more distinctly etched lines, along with veiled mystery.



Another surprise lay in wait for me. Upon further research, I came upon an unsettling discovery—another piece of very thin paper, clearly the original document because it contained an additional section that included a shocking drawing. On that page just four offspring were depicted, their names scrawled on each figure. It was the choice of names that puzzled me:

Demetrius Ananias, Hephzibah Athaliah, Ahab Judas, and Jezebel Delilah. What was I thinking?

Apparently I had a primitive sense of the possibility of good and evil being contained within oneself.

The existence of these detailed lists is in itself a curiosity, but the mere tabulation of the family line was apparently insufficient to satisfy this nine-year-old vision of her future, for I continued to write in order to describe the house I imagined that would accommodate this perfectly balanced group of doll-like caricatures.

*"Home of Dreams: Plenty of space. Lovely old-fashioned furniture, every convenience for children. Lovely yard and very large grounds. Trees, garden, brook, pine groves, nooks, playhouses, oaks to play in, orchard. Convenient places for children to play. Winding walk with beautiful flowers, handy garage with a comfortable well-built car of best kind to hold all the family."*

I pause here to note there is no mention of the husband who in this case would be essential to the production of this number of children in fourteen years, but also in providing a means of support for a substantial house and surrounding acreage. Not only trees and a garden, but an entire orchard and a brook. And what did the idea of “nooks” conjure up in my child’s mind?

I find the combination of a “winding walk with beautiful flowers” with the “handy garage with a comfortable well-built car of the best kind” intriguing. Would I rather walk or ride? As an adult who loves driving, I am impressed by my early interest in a car that was not only comfortable, but also well-built. The entire document in this little notebook is detailing a romantic vision, but it is loaded with practical concerns. I see the seeds of my own nature clearly in this early articulation of my imagined future.

I did not stop with descriptions of the surroundings. I went on to supply what might seem to be an obvious need to today’s matron—a maid! Where did I conceive of this solution in my growing up years during the Great Depression? I think something else was at work here, that, unaware, I was basing my concept of family life on a primitive half-formed business model that would become standard after the 1970s women’s movement. The family ties were not enough for me to support my unformed idea of family. I was not imagining village life with assorted aunts and uncles and cousins living nearby, and above all, grandparents deemed essential in agrarian America in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Yes, a maid would do nicely to emancipate me from tiresome tasks, but my description of her functions is where my nine-year-old self tips her hand. The maid is obviously necessary, but not for everything:

*“Maid to care for children. I will sew for them and see them often but sometimes when I am out or am washing, etc., the maid will care for them.*

Apparently sewing for children is a creative task that I must retain, though why I have reserved “washing” for myself defies understanding. In that era, doing the laundry was very complicated, requiring lots of water from a pump, heated on the stove in huge pots and emptied into a machine that could be plugged in to agitate the clothes, with roller wringers turned by hand for squeezing out excess soapy water and sending clothes into rinse water before wringing them again to hang on an outdoor line to dry. Yet something in me understands how I might prefer that clear task with definable results to tending to the unpredictable antics and challenges of nine children, however romping and healthy, sweet and serious they might be.

But the punch line comes at the end in a telling phrase:

*"However they come to me if they have a problem."*

There lies the prescient indicator of my future lifework: various forms of counseling, teaching and spiritual guidance. I determined that I could retain the essential status of married person and mother by becoming essential to this herd of humans I had brought into the world. I would be their problem solver. How fortunate that I never fulfilled my calling by actualizing this child vision of "being married" in the virtual realm with biological children, and preserved all that nine-year-old hubris for the lifework that I pursued in real life.