

# PART I

It's Tuesday night and I walk into my first Al-Anon meeting. Ed has just gone into treatment for alcohol and I don't know what it means yet. I filed for divorce before Ed went into treatment. But when he called me from treatment he said, "I want to come home, and I don't know how I feel about my religion right now. Would you hold off on the divorce while I figure it out?" For some reason, I said yes.

My stomach flutters. My fear starts knotted and painful in my stomach. My breath is tight and short and my heart pounds. I hear it. There are eight women sitting at a table in the church basement. I see Betty. She smiles at me and says, "Come sit next to me, I'm glad you're here." Betty's husband Gail and my husband Ed became friends after high school. We all drank together.

I am thirty years old, and for the first time in my life I think maybe things can change for the better. Until this moment, I didn't know I had choices, that I could change what is happening in my life.

After the meeting starts and the other women share their stories, I want to share mine but don't know how to start. I stammer. Betty says, "It's ok, I have been where you are and the meetings will help." I feel a little bit better. My heart slows down and I start to breathe normally again, but I'm still scared. As the other women talk, I try to figure out where my fear comes from. I have felt it all my life. Perhaps, these meetings will help me understand. I recall life in my childhood

## UNDERCURRENT

family and how those events and people formed who I am. I don't trust anyone and haven't for a long time.

I start going to Al-Anon every week. I am hopeful for the first time in years.

## *Who I Am*

September 11,1943, Mom and Dad bring me home from North-western Hospital to our little house by Cedar Lake in Minneapolis. My birthday is September 4<sup>th</sup>. My mom got to pick the day because I was born by caesarean section. I don't know if it was an important date to her or just that she could have the surgery that day. My lungs didn't inflate, so they put me in an oxygen tent. Because of the c-section and my lungs, we stayed in the hospital for a about a week. There are four of us in my family: Mom, Dad, and my older sister Naomi. She is three and a half years old when I come home.

World War II has been going on for some time. Dad has left for the army. He is in the Special Services Entertainment Division because he plays the violin and can entertain the men. It's just Mom, Naomi and me. Grandma and Grandpa Supak, my mom's parents, live within walking distance, about a block and a half away. We spend a lot of time with them. When we are old enough to cross the street by ourselves, Mom says we can walk there anytime we want.



**Sisters**

I have funny, pointed eyebrows with ends that grow towards each other to make a point. My father has the same eyebrows and so does his mother. As I grow up I am very proud of them because I am the only grandchild who has them.

Our tiny home on a hill has chipped cement steps from the sidewalk to the path to our front door. There is a front porch and a little woods just on the other side of our small back yard. I live there until I am seven years old. My parents sleep in the sunroom, and Naomi and I share a bedroom. We have a small kitchen and a very dark basement. The basement has wooden steps with a railing that creaks and leads to a musty space filled with cobwebs and Mom's canned goods. I don't like going down there.

It's summer time and Mom takes us to Cedar Lake, which is small enough to see all the way around it. She stands me on the wood posts that hold the ropes for the swimming area, and I jump into the water. At nine months old I am fearless.

During nap time, I'd scoot my bottom to the end of the crib and put my legs straight up the end and sing the chorus of "Bell Bottom Trousers" word for word. I still remember the tune. I can't even talk. Sudie, our Japanese live in help, yells "Mrs. Ptashne, come see what your daughter is doing. I think we should take her to the radio stations and show her off." "Absolutely not," Mom says. Sudie is like part of our family, she takes care of Naomi and me and helps Mom with the house. When I am about one and a half or two years old Sudie goes away. I am too young to understand where she goes. It is not until I am much older that I understand why. Where is she? We never see her again. We never talk about it.

Dad has been home for some time and working for my Grandfather. He has brought home a television. I sit on the floor with my legs crossed, staring up at this brand new invention. It is a big old

wood box with a screen no more than ten inches square. Naomi and I get up bright and early to watch test patterns. Test patterns come on before any shows start. They are a pattern of lines that are on the screen to let us know the TV is working but no shows are on yet. We are so excited to have this and we watch because that's all that's on at that time. At night we watch the Lone Ranger, Howdy Dowdy, and Milton Berle. Mom and Dad watch with us.



**Sudie**

I am five years old. It's a beautiful summer day and Naomi and I play outside. There are two Doberman pincers that live across the street from us that are always tied up, each with a muzzle. Mom has told us not to go near them. Suddenly, Naomi runs up the porch stairs. I turn my head and look. The two dogs are charging across the yard at me. Their leashes are dragging and torn behind them. Their muzzles are off and are flapping on the sides of their faces. They are barking and growling loudly. I run up the stairs and pull on the porch door but it is locked. "Let me in!" I scream at my sister, safe on the other side. I cry and pound on the door. She lets me in just as they are almost upon me. When I get in, I run crying to find my mother. I can tell Naomi doesn't like me. I'm not sure why, but she plays tricks on me like locking me out of the porch. Is this when my fear starts?

I ride in a freight elevator with Mom and Dad. It has a creaky slat wood door that has to be pulled up and down manually so the elevator can move. We are on our way to the top floor of the Wyman