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A Change in Course

Meeting John

In January 1980, I moved to New York for work. While I was waiting to move into my new apartment, I stayed at my friend Nell's house. Nell and her husband, Stephen, were thrilled to host me. They were far too hospitable, but I appreciated their kindness—and their advice. They had been living in New York for years, so they knew the city like the back of their hand. Through them, I learned all the tips and tricks a girl from the Midwest would need to not only survive but also thrive in the Big Apple.

All day long, I had been busy packing, so I was in rough shape. Moving is a stress like no other, and I was emotionally and physically drained. All I wanted to do was take a shower and go to bed. I certainly wasn't in the mood to socialize. But Nell and Stephen insisted, saying there wasn't any food in the house, and it'd be good for me to go out with them and meet some new people.

So, I begrudgingly accompanied them, and that tiny decision changed the entire course of my life. Stephen had brought along his best friend, a handsome medical student named John. The two had attended the same Jewish sleep-away camp during their childhood summers and had grown extremely close.

To my shock, I instantly hit it off with John. I hadn't expected to feel this sort of chemistry with someone I'd just met, but John was different. We had the same sarcastic sense of humor, and I felt comfortable with him, as though we'd known each other for years. We just clicked, and after that, we were inseparable.

My Brilliant Grandmother, Nina

My grandmother, Nina, and my grandfather, Alva, had only two children: my mother, Shirley, and her younger sister, Aarion. But Grandma Nina came from a huge family. She had grown up with five brothers and four sisters—all older—and although her brothers had died before I was even born, I got to know two of her sisters—Mable and Stella—quite well. They lived in the same part of Boulder, Colorado, and they made a great effort to get to know me.

Even as a child, I loved spending time with my great-aunts, hearing their stories, and learning more about their fascinating lives. They became even more interesting to me as I grew up. Mable, for example, had traveled to every continent except for Antarctica, while Stella had started her own business—a popular salon in Boulder. My great-aunts were so different from each other, but each of them inspired me. Mable taught me how to be a conscientious citizen of the world, and Stella taught me the intrinsic value of hard work. I don't think I'd be where I am today without their unwavering support and guidance.

Nina, meanwhile, was every bit as fabulous as her sisters. In fact, she was one of my favorite people in the world. I looked up to her so much. She was a strong, brilliant woman who defied the expectations for women in her day and thrived in both her professional and personal lives. Despite growing up on a farm, Nina was well educated. In particular, she was a voracious reader, averaging five books a week. She was always intent on bettering herself; as a teenager, she had taught herself how to play piano, and in her twilight years, she studied Latin. I don't know what she was preparing herself for, but the pursuit brought her both joy and intellectual stimulation.

Later in life, after she left the farm and moved to Boulder, she was elected president of the Business and Professional Women of Boulder, which was a great honor—one she didn't take lightly. She was an influential person in Boulder and beyond,

and articles were written about her in every Colorado-based newspaper. She was a born leader—sweet and warm. At the same time, she was smart and straightforward. She had a kind heart, yes, but she wasn't a pushover. She always stood up for herself, and I admired her for both her spirit and her candor. From her, I learned how to advocate for not only myself but also those who can't speak up for themselves.

I loved her so much, and I miss her every day.



My grandmother, Nina, with my mother, Shirley

My Custom-Made Desk and My Loyal Study Mate, Lucy

When I was in graduate school in the late 1970s, it was still very much a boys' world, and all the drafting desks had been built for tall men. There I was, a four-foot-nine woman who could not possibly work at a desk built for a six-foot-tall man.

I really needed a desk better suited to my stature, since I was spending a minimum of eighty hours a week studying at the desk. And that was on top of the twenty hours a week I spent working at the desk. So, I ended up commissioning a drafting desk that fit my size. I made sure it could be transported from place to place in a bicycle box. Every day, I would work at my custom-made drafting desk, accompanied by my gigantic, eighty-eight-pound Dalmatian named Lucy.

Lucy was my favorite dog ever. I've had lots of dogs throughout my life, and I have a dog now, but Lucy's title as my all-time favorite has remained unchallenged. She was my loyal friend throughout graduate school, providing meaningful—and adorable—emotional support as I worked through the demanding program. I had a big green L.L. Bean dog bed I would put under my desk, and Lucy would sleep peacefully while I worked. And then, all day long, people would come up and ask if they could take her for a walk. Lucy, of course, loved the attention.

Indeed, Lucy was there for me during the highs and lows of graduate school. I genuinely don't know how I would've gotten through some of those weeks without her company. Every day, she reminded me of the inherent joy of living. She loved playing fetch, but I think it was more of a workout for me than it was for her! She also loved going for long walks, and I ended up enjoying these too, as they gave me the opportunity to clear my head and recenter myself.

Truly, Lucy gave me such wonderful memories that I still cherish today.



My favorite picture of me and Lucy

My custom-made desk gave me a lot of great memories too. With my first husband, I moved eleven times in fifteen years, and every time, whether we drove or flew, I would pack up my little desk in a bicycle box and take it with me—until, at some point, it vanished. I don't remember when it went missing or where it ended up, but somewhere along the way, amid all those moves, it got lost. Maybe we left it in storage somewhere or gave it to a friend; to this day, I don't know. But that desk had been special to me, one of the only special things I'd had in my life besides pets. I was devastated to have lost it, but the memories still endure.

Life at Vassar College

When I first arrived at Vassar College, part of me couldn't believe I was there. I had been dreaming about attending the school for so long that actually being there was a shock to the system; I had to pinch myself to make sure it wasn't all a dream!

For the first time in my life, I finally felt like I was on solid ground. I no longer had to work two or three jobs to stay afloat; instead, I could focus mainly on my education. I did have a part-time job on campus, but I loved it, so it didn't feel like work. At Vassar, I worked in the admissions office, and I led tours for prospective students and answered any questions they had about the college. Just as I had been at New College, I was truly happy at Vassar. I was in my element, and in every sense of the word, I was thriving.

My two years at Vassar were everything a college experience should be. I took courses I loved with professors I admired, and I made lifelong friendships. What an absolute dream! My professors helped me secure summer internships and connect with alumni who worked in my field. Through those experiences, I learned more about the sort of career I envisioned for myself, and I was able to adjust my courseload accordingly.

Somehow—and I don't really know how—I managed to balance my academic, social, and professional lives. These days, I can't imagine doing half the things I did in a single day at Vassar, but back then, I had endless energy, and I was determined to make the absolute most of my time in college. After all, I'd been told my college years would be the best ones of my life, and I think I have to agree.

I loved my life at Vassar, and I wouldn't change a thing about my experience there.



Me and some Vassar college friends demonstrating our support for the Equal Rights Amendment