



Betsey and the Burbank Y

When my dad left I was 13, and a “daddy’s girl”: we were so much alike, why had he left me? The year before my English class debated the “pros and cons” of divorce. Remember the good old days when things were right or wrong and there was no in between? Dad left me, so he must not love me anymore. And it was wrong that he “made” my mom cry for a year.

But I didn’t care about her. Not at 13. Who would I take to the “Father-Daughter Box Social”?

Thank God for the YMCA. Some friends in the Jr. Hi -Y club asked me to join. I can’t even remember what we did at our meetings, but during that year I learned that I can talk too much, and not everybody thought I was funny. Much as that hurt, the lesson was hugely important in my development. And there were other lessons; about service, especially.

The Y Director saw a sadness in me I could not articulate and I felt her concern. She told me she recognized my leadership qualities. So I started hanging out at the Y rather than go home. One night, after my mom and I got into an argument, I ran out the door and 3 miles to Y. I was so angry, so confused: I had been trying to tell her I loved her and she didn’t think I meant it....because I yelled. But we didn’t show affection or say things like that out loud in our family. So I yelled it and ran.

But at the Y I got hugs. And encouragement. And learned to tell someone that they meant something to me.

So I volunteered to be the student rep. on the building campaign committee. And that was my first foray into public speaking – still a love of mine.

And then I was asked to be a Counselor at summer camp, even though I had never been to camp. Amid the hikes and campfire I listened to girls work through their hurt (whatever may have caused it.) By the end of the summer, I had been asked to work at another camp as well, had earned my brown rag, sang a solo at chapel under the trees, and had been asked by a camper to tie her first (blue) rag at her ceremony

That summer I learned to think beyond myself and my little world.

And I pledged to “take Y camp back to Burbank” with me when summer ended. I didn’t know then that “the Y” would stay with me long past that school year. Closeness, support, reverence for life, gratitude for everything....I can no longer recall the Y’s slogan, but know it is more articulate than I can be. Still that’s OK; I recall my Tri-Y club lesson and rely on actions instead of words.