

# IN THE GAME

THE HIGHS AND LOWS  
OF A TRAILBLAZING  
TRIAL LAWYER

PEGGY GARRITY



SHE WRITES PRESS

## **PROLOGUE**

*This will never be me*, I promise my thirteen-year-old self as I watch my mother. It is June 20, 1960. Mom is due to give birth to her ninth child, is perhaps even in the early stages of labor, and is packed for the hospital. Yet tonight she's dressed up and wearing bright red lipstick, hosting a smoky Jesuit cocktail party in the living room. My father, the funeral director in the Mississippi River hamlet of Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, has invited them to watch the televised Floyd Patterson–Ingemar Johansson heavyweight boxing championship on our flickering black-and-white television. Dad is serving this Roman-collar frat party smoked carp and oysters, cheese, and sausage, properly paired with Wisconsin beer and Irish whiskey.

When a priest jokes that the baby “should be named Floyd Ingemar,” the room erupts in laughter, including my mother. I cringe. In this profoundly personal moment, my mother has no privacy or respect in her own living room. Her life is not her own. Even her body seems not to be her own as this roomful of

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men freely jokes about what is going on inside of it. I am mortified at the changes taking place in my own adolescent body, and I wear heavy sweaters to camouflage the mounting evidence of sexuality that I believe will seal my own fate. My mother's participation in this spectacle confirms my worst suspicions. Women who play by the rules are doomed. What an injustice. I vow then not to let men, marriage, or motherhood take over my life.

I will become a nun.

I will never indulge men the way my mother does.

I will become a doctor, a medical missionary, and travel to faraway places.

Even after I hear my father, oldest brother, and the priests who teach at Campion, the boys' high school, ridicule the nuns as an inside joke, I still think the convent and life as a doctor and medical missionary is my way out.

Until I become pregnant and get married my senior year in college.

When this happens, I promise myself: I still will not surrender my commitment to equality, and my determination to have a professional life. Weighing my options, it dawns on me that perhaps my pursuit of justice should be more direct. And law school, unlike medical school, can be undertaken part-time and at night. So I take the LSAT. Diapers and legal briefs will soon become a way of life.

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Women trial lawyers were almost non-existent in 1975 when I started out—so, to get a toehold, I took just about any case that got me into court. I leapt at the counsel and mentoring offered by one of the partners in the firm from which I rented an office. Admission to this unofficial bar meant long hours in the color-

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ful pubs of the Los Angeles South Bay as, to my surprise, I was welcomed into the game.

Finally, I had escaped the entangled traps of culture and Catholicism that I had been so sure had ensnared my mother as I watched her, my father, and the priests in that living room all those years before. However, I would learn firsthand that the pursuit of justice would require me to spend time with people far worse than those priests, and in places much less inviting than the living room of my childhood.

In my first year of practice I successfully defended a flasher named Mr. Cummings (swear to God) in a lurid jury trial for the grand sum of \$300. A year later I brought a habeas corpus motion on behalf of would-be presidential assassin Sara Jane Moore, who was serving a life sentence at Terminal Island prison for trying to shoot President Gerald Ford. Twenty years later I represented actress Sondra Locke in a jury trial against Clint Eastwood. I was an adrenaline junkie, and living on the edge was my way of life. I used Chardonnay and martinis to soften the edge. For almost thirty years I rode the highs and lows of the sole practitioner and single mother. And then it all caught up with me.

When I was fifty-seven I nearly died from a ruptured diverticulum that caused sepsis and peritonitis, requiring emergency surgery and two weeks of delirium in ICU. On my first day of semi-consciousness in the hospital, I found myself floating on feelings of relief and surrender: relief from the unrelenting pressure of my life, and peaceful surrender to death if it came.

The law and motherhood had been my life and my love—had shaped my identity—for three decades. I had thrived on the intensity and excitement of going it alone, and even on the struggle for survival. Even when shingles and a destroyed immune system had disabled me seven years earlier, I had jumped right

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back into a life and litigation practice rife with conflict as soon as I was able. On that earlier occasion of illness, my doctor had counseled me to make serious changes in my life or the universe would make the change for me. It seemed he'd been right; the universe had apparently decided it was time to take over.

As I lay convalescing in my cozy beach house, a dolled-up, double-wide trailer in the Point Dume Club mobile home park overlooking the ocean in Malibu, I was riveted by television footage of the devastating tsunami that devoured a quarter of a million people along the Indian Ocean a few days after Christmas 2004. I identified with those who had been miraculously saved, strained up out of the deadly brew by random branches of palm trees that remained rooted. One man had saved his entire family by tying them to the tops of the trees.

As I watched the coverage, which showed huge elephants walking across downed pillars, as sure-footed and dainty as elite gymnasts in a beam routine, rescuing people from under piles of debris, it seemed to me that the Hindu elephant god Ganesh, the remover of obstacles, was manifest. These mysterious giants went about inspecting and reaching into the rubble without disturbing it or causing cave-ins, deftly using their trunks to locate and rescue trapped survivors. The powerful pachyderms had broken free of their chains and fled to higher ground as the tsunami headed for shore, then returned to help and go where humans and heavy machinery could not.

Two images of Ganesh had greeted me when I awoke in the hospital. A small bronze dancing Ganesh, a gift from my yoga teacher, stood atop a beautiful journal embossed with the elephant god's image, a gift from my daughter. Synchronicity was everywhere I looked.

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When my family gathered at my daughter Bronwyn's house for my birthday following my near-death-experience (NDE, as it is commonly called among us Baby Boomers), we sat around a candlelit dining room table that had once been my office conference table—the scene of, as my son Seamus gingerly put it, “a lot of legal pound downs.” We reminisced about the years of depositions, trials, research, client sessions, and hasty carry-out lunches and dinners to which the hefty chunk of wood had borne witness. My four children mused about the school assignments they'd completed at that table, occasionally typed by my secretaries Gloria and Karen, who were not infrequently conscripted into service as surrogate mothers. Their reminiscences reminded me of a favorite childhood book, which I must have read to them over a thousand bed times: *The Giving Tree*. This old burlled wood table, with so much of our history in it, was our version of the tree.



# PART ONE





## THE FUNERAL

### DIRECTOR'S DAUGHTER

As the third of ten kids in an Irish Catholic family I was a competitor: determined to be the best at everything I did, and to do everything.

My mother knew being a star was my ticket out—so, intent on sparing me a life of endless child-bearing, she pushed me to compete and win in whatever arena I was allowed, including swimming, diving, ice skating, piano, speech, math, and even hula hooping. One day, when I said I didn't want to compete in a ridiculous bicycle rodeo, she insisted, and sent me off with the admonition, "If you don't win, don't come home."

Mom had me competing in any event that would have me. Because most wouldn't. I might jump the hurdles faster than all the boys in the hours before a track meet, but when the actual event started I had to sit in the stands. I was not allowed to play baseball on a real team in the city ballpark, either, even though I hit farther and ran faster than most of the boys.

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In sixth grade my mother coached me to become the Crawford County spelling champion; immediately after that win, she started drilling me for the state finals. At the end of a long day, she would call out words from the dictionary from where she lay in bed, and I would chime back from the room I shared with my four younger sisters down the hall: “onomatopoeia: o-n-o-m-a-t-o-p-o-e-i-a; eleemosynary: e-l-e-e-m-o-s-y-n-a-r-y.”

I got through several rounds of competition at the state championship—and then, to my disbelief, misspelled a simple word (“destruction” somehow came out as “distruction”).

My mother dismissed my disastrous performance, blaming it on the pronouncer. “He was terrible! You spelled it just the way he pronounced it.” To my surprise, she suggested shopping was a better use of our time, and indulged me with the purchase of a new beach bag shaped and colored exactly like a watermelon and a matching towel, along with a huge hot fudge sundae. She didn’t seem to care that I hadn’t won, and set about to cheer me up by making the most of our trip to the state capitol. My mother just loved getting out of our small town and into the city—any city. My competitions gave her a way to get there.

I grew up on a foundation of unquestioning allegiance to, and love for, the Catholic Church. Starting in first grade at St. John’s four-room schoolhouse—sixty-four kids in two classes per room—and continuing through high school at St. Mary’s Academy for girls, I went to daily Mass and Communion. At a young age, I experienced a profound and emotional connection to the faith. Sundays, Holy Days, and funerals showcased a lavish Latin liturgy steeped in smoky incense and Gregorian chant. I loved being upstairs singing the dolorous Latin “*Mise re re Mei Deus . . .*” with the choir during funerals my dad handled. I felt like I was sort of his partner.

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The funeral business was full of sacred mystery, and we were taught to regard it with reverence. My sister Bridget and I were required to wear skirts if we were ever out in the evening, and all of us were reminded frequently that wherever we went in our town, we represented my dad and his business. Though my gender placed serious limitations on me, I participated in church in every way I could, from singing in the choir to helping the nuns dress the altar and lay out the priest's vestments in the sacristy. Occasionally I even got to place the unconsecrated hosts in the gold chalice that the priests would pray over and raise high above the altar at the Consecration during Mass. My proximity to these ancient rituals set the stage for a lifelong, numinous spirituality.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame taught grade school; there, we learned—"or else"—as we sat up straight in old wooden desks on runners. Discipline was delivered with a mere look, or, occasionally, a flying eraser or time on one's knees at the front of the room. Under the nuns' stern eyes we learned to read; memorized the Baltimore Catechism, the seven virtues, the eight beatitudes, the seven sacraments, and the Ten Commandments; and studied addition, subtraction, times tables, grammar rules, spelling words, and how to diagram sentences until we could do it in our sleep. We were quizzed and tested in history, geography, and science. Yet when it came time for serious religious instruction, it was the monsignor, not a nun, who appeared to hold forth on sin and its consequences.

Meanwhile, it was well known in the Catholic families around town that Father Scott, a local Jesuit priest regarded as a scientific genius, was a pedophile. He could be seen on any given afternoon riding his bike and stopping to "visit" at random houses where little girls lived. He pulled us onto his lap as he sat in our living room, right in front of our parents, and proceeded

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to slide his shaking hand up our shirts and, with his mouth quivering and perspiration beading on his upper lip, kiss us with an open mouth on the face and neck. It was as if the adults were blind to what Father Scott was doing; perhaps they couldn't imagine a priest was a pervert, or they were simply paralyzed by the authority of the Catholic Church. Regardless, this abuse went on for years, unchallenged and unreported, as he moved on to different families with little girls. We girls tried to defend ourselves by being vigilant and staying out of his reach. When we saw him pull his bike up in front of our house, or even riding nearby, my sister Bridget and I ran upstairs and hid in the back of our mother's closet until we knew he was gone. But in the adults' eyes, Jesuits—"jebbies," as my dad called them—were unimpeachable, the best of the best, real scholars and role models.

One evening at the dinner table, my eldest brother, then my idol, reported on his first day at Campion Jesuit High School. For the occasion, Tim was prominently seated to the right of our father, who sat at the head of the table. I had meticulously set the table to preempt my dad's looking around and finding the salt or pepper or bread or butter missing. At ten years old, I wanted everything to be perfect. And I was dying to be given the inside scoop on the high school academic adventure, one I was sure awaited me as well at St. Mary's Academy—the girls equivalent, I believed, to Campion.

Tim announced that the priests—the teachers now—had instructed the boys to "first of all, forget everything Sister Mary Kerosene ever taught you."

The knowing laughter and ridicule that my father and brother shared over this statement—a snickering insult that denigrated the nuns by ridiculing their church-given names—hit me right in the gut. I realized that I was not going to be included, ever, as an equal. All the teaching about the saints and

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sisters was a trick, a ruse, to get us girls to embrace our lesser status. We were presumed to be too dim to object. To be female was to be an outsider. So inconsequential were we that it never occurred to me, or them, that I might speak up and challenge them. The women who had dedicated their lives to teaching millions of Catholic kids around the world, whom we were taught to idolize, whose self-abnegation included giving up their names and assuming weird-sounding saint's names, were being openly ridiculed by a fourteen-year-old boy at the behest of the men of the Church. Without knowing how I might do it, I knew in that moment that I would have to fight to survive this place where a mere boy was taught that he was superior to a college-educated woman who had dedicated her life to the Church and the education of Catholic kids.

The betrayal and ridicule of that exchange between my dad and my eldest brother settled deep inside of me as I sat with the family around that long oval oak table under the uneven glare of the five-bulb brass chandelier. Just like the fried eggplant I hated and had stealthily slid onto a deeply hidden ledge under the table, I refused to swallow the misogyny I was witnessing. I would slip through their clutches by modeling the perfect Catholic girl, excelling at academics, piano, speech, math, and any and all competitions in which I was allowed, and earning money as a babysitter and a grossly underpaid nurses' aide. I would play the cards I was dealt and covertly construct a life as an independent female in a male-dominated world, somehow. I would have to play by their rules, but as the late Texas governor Ann Richards, channeling the dancer Ginger Rogers, said, I would have to do it "backward and in high heels."

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Even knowing that men ridiculed them behind their backs, the life of a nun, as far as I could see, was a good one—freer and happier than that of a married woman, certainly. I had many occasions to do surveillance on those nuns when I was sent with an empty basket from St. John's grade school to St. Mary's Academy's kitchen, just a few blocks away, to "get the lunch" prepared there for the nuns at our grade school. That kitchen always smelled wonderful, and it was filled with laughter and joking among the nuns working there.

I got an even better chance to imagine living the life of a nun one weekend when my sister, Bridget, and I stayed with a family friend who was a Dominican nun at a convent in River Forest, Illinois. Every night there were movies and popcorn and, again, lilting laughter. Some of the older nuns sipped sherry in the evening, just like my elderly never-married aunts. And they all took turns playing with a jumping toy grasshopper one of them bought for us, which they named "Hephzibah." Books were everywhere, and the place felt warm and homey.

At St. Mary's Academy High School, I took it all in as Sister Mary Linus, our principal, appeared to manage the men of the Church without their even realizing it.

The Monday following our spring dance my junior year, Sister Linus invited me into her office for one of our many chats. She proceeded to tell me, with a chuckle, that on the evening of our dance, Father Lucey, one of the younger priests, had insisted she post chaperones in the stairwell. She said she had humored him, saying, "If it will make you happy, Father, I will sit right here with my book." She seemed amused by Father Lucey's paranoia about teenage sexuality, and said that she hadn't pointed out to him that this was her, not his, turf; she'd just let him think that he had won.

Unbeknownst to Sister Linus, that same priest had assaulted me the preceding year. I had just turned sixteen, and

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Father Lucey had come to our front door when my parents weren't home and asked me if I wanted to drive his father's black Cadillac, which he had parked out in front. Of course I did! I had just gotten my driver's permit. We drove around for a while, and then he told me to pull the car into his father's driveway, which was across the street from my house and down a hill through a heavily wooded hospital yard. I was frightened (of what, I didn't know) so I scooted up the hill toward my house through the woods a few steps ahead of him. Suddenly, he grabbed me from behind with both hands tight around my waist. I couldn't understand what he was doing or why, but I was so scared I could hardly breathe. He laughed as I managed to wrench myself away and ran on ahead, blaming myself, wondering what I had done to make him do that.

I had been taught to believe priests were Christ-like and could do no wrong, even when their touch nauseated me. It had to be my fault. I ran away to my house, and he followed me right to the door, where my parents welcomed him in like a visiting dignitary, as they always welcomed the priests. Feeling physically ill and dirty, I went upstairs to my room and threw myself down on my bed. Downstairs I could hear him laughing and joking with my dad.

I had told no one about the priest's abuse, not even Sister Linus, whom I trusted more than anyone in the world. It didn't even dawn on me that I should. But looking back now, I believe she was onto him and his unholy interest in me.

On the night of the dance as I slow danced with my boyfriend, Tom (leaving the required "room for the Holy Ghost" between us), Father Lucey charged onto the dance floor, placed his hand on Tom's shoulder, and through gritted teeth ordered him, "Go back to Campion immediately." Campion, the old and renowned Jesuit boys' boarding school that my father had



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attended many years before, was about a mile away. As everyone else on the floor stopped and stared, Tom started out of the gym.

After shaking off my initial mortification, I decided to go with him right in front of Father Lucey and his sidekick, Father Burke, openly dismissing their authority. *You can't tell me what to do, I thought, and I will walk wherever I want with whomever I want. This is my school, not yours.*

Tom and I walked out of the gym and across the campus together. As we continued hand in hand down a very dark Beaumont Road toward Campion, we heard footsteps rapidly coming up behind us, so we crossed to the other side of the street. The sound of footsteps followed and got louder and closer, and then Father Burke stepped in front of us, blocking our path. He grabbed Tom by the arm and said, "You're coming with me."

Father Burke quickly led Tom away toward Campion, leaving me alone in the dark with the man who had assaulted me in a similar dark and isolated setting a year earlier.

Father Lucey put his arm around my shoulder and said, "And you are coming back with me."

At first I froze. Then I became determined to let him know he had no control over me, although I don't think I believed that myself. But I knew I had to get beyond his reach, and fast. I looked around and realized we were standing almost in front of my girlfriend Teddy's house, a Frank Lloyd Wright with three broad stairs leading from the covered driveway on the side of the house up to a wide stone-pillared porch and a front door I knew was never locked.

Determined not to let this loathsome priest see my fear, I said, "I'm staying here tonight, Father," as believably as I could, and dashed down the driveway, up the few stairs, and into the house, slamming both the screen door and the heavy wooden

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door behind me. Then I locked the door and waited for Teddy to come home from the dance. No one else seemed to be home.

On that Monday after the spring dance, when Sister Linus invited me into her office, she had much more to share with me than she normally did during our chats, and she took her time.

“Peggy, Father Lucey called me yesterday to tell me he had something serious he needed to tell me about you.”

My jaw must have dropped, because she quickly said, “Don’t worry. I told Father Lucey, ‘I know that girl. Don’t try to tell me anything about her.’”

As I started to tell her what had happened at the dance and afterwards, she stopped me and said, “You don’t need to tell me, Peggy.”

*My God, Sister Linus knows about him and his interest in me,* I realized, although I didn’t say anything more or ever tell her what had happened. As she said, I didn’t have to. It was as if whatever had happened was just detail—small stuff I could get lost in—and she wanted me to focus on the big picture instead. She was teaching me how to handle the men of the Church.

The word “stalking,” now a recognized legal offense, was then unknown to me, but I now know that this man stalked me throughout my high school years. Father Lucey popped up frequently in various places where I happened to be, from the bowling alley where we kids sometimes hung out to the hospital where I worked as a nurses’ aide, once walking up behind me and remarking with a laugh, “Nurses’ uniforms aren’t supposed to be so modest.”

I saw Sister Linus perform her Aikido-like moves on the priests repeatedly over the years, demonstrating the power of her silent strategy of appearing to accept their authoritarian moves and then neutralizing them. I could see that they had no real control over her, and decided they would have none over

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me either. With her guidance, I quit the *Campion* cheerleading squad, which featured five girls from St. Mary's Academy—selected by the priests—after two years.

When I tried out for the squad, I had no idea what I was getting into. It just seemed like fun. I was athletic and loved to do my version of a tumbling routine. But it was weird from the start. On several occasions, pictures of me spread-eagle in the air in the middle of a cheer or in some other uninhibited posture—taken by the boys on the school magazine and approved by the priests supervising them—were published in the magazine with suggestive captions like “*Agile Maggie Garrity stimulates student body with her rousing antics.*” After one photo of me and Tom, captioned “*Tom Harrington has things well in hand,*” appeared on the cover of the magazine, Sister Linus inquired of me, “Peggy, do you really need this?”—and for the first time it occurred to me that my involvement with *Campion* was neither the innocent activity I thought it was nor in my best interests. I was being used.

“Freedom is so important in life,” Sister Linus told me more than once—a sentiment that might seem, on its face at least, at odds with the very notion of being a nun. But Sister Linus was pursuing freedom in her own way, and was modeling it for us. She led her order for a time, unbowed by the institutional misogyny, and forged a life of courage and integrity within the Church. This took some imagination. And guts.

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My world in the 1950s and '60s was far removed from the idyllic television households of *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. My mother could be found most winter afternoons on the “davenport” in the living room for hours, shades drawn, a news-

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paper over her face. Nowadays that would be diagnosed as clinical depression. Then it was “napping.” Wisconsin winters lasted about nine months running, by my count, and it seemed she napped all winter, like a bear. She awoke like one, too.

My mother was happy on one afternoon each week: Wednesday, when she had her black hair and long red nails done by a tall, double-negative-spewing (e.g., “I didn’t have no more ammunition”) redhead named Danella, known more for her deer-hunting prowess than her salon skills. There was something to a woman having her hair done, it seemed. Mom was predictably happy only on those days at the “beauty parlor,” where she read movie magazines under the dryer and chatted and laughed with dead-eye Danella.

On those days, I’d pedal my blue bike the four blocks to downtown to try to catch Mom toward the end of her appointment, when she was in the salon, happy. She would sometimes give me money to get an ice cream at the nearby drugstore, and I would sprint with my ice cream sandwich back up the stairs to meet her. Then I’d ride my bike alongside her as she walked home, trying to think of things to talk about that would interest her. I would have done almost anything to make my mother happy, to keep her increasingly dark moods at bay. The best moments of my childhood have her with a smile at the center. But those smiles wouldn’t last. No matter how many races I won or A’s I achieved.

In my family, it was understood that God had given me gifts and expected a return on his investment. My performance was expected to be superior; so when I got straight A’s or won an athletic or academic competition, I was just breaking even. At my very first speed-skating competition—not more than seven years old, weighted down with heavy coat and snow pants like the near-sighted kid in *A Christmas Story*, blades on my hand-

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me-down black hockey skates scraping madly on the bumpy ice of the frozen Mississippi River—I propelled my body to the finish line past the other girls, then tried desperately to stop exactly at the finish line without breaking the tape, because I thought to win I had to get there first but not go a step farther. But I couldn't stop, and I went flying through the yellow tape, certain I had blown it. I was astounded and relieved when I was told I had won first place and was given the blue ribbon.

It would have taken much more than a blue ribbon to make my mother happy, though; I could tell that even then. Looking back, it's clear to me that she was overwhelmed and disappointed by her life in that small town. But I thought it had something to do with me.

In my house, dirty clothes were tossed over the upstairs banister and piled all the way to the first landing on the back stairs. We used to jump from the top of the stairs down into the clothes as sport, and we never got hurt . . . except when we were caught doing it. As we got older and Mom got more depressed, we kids were pretty much on our own, the older five of us roaming the big old Victorian house in small gangs as we fought for turf through hand-to-hand combat with clothes hangers and wadded-up dishtowels.

We were required to go to Confession and admit to infractions weekly, but no one dared confess or snitch to a parent on organized sibling crime, such as putting each other in the clothes dryer and turning it on, rolling each other down the several flights of stairs in a hamper, holding each other by the ankles over the upstairs banister railing and threatening to “drop you,” or even dropping a hammer on a sister's head from high atop a tree house. My piano practice on the old chipped clunker in the front hall was a hazardous activity, as shoes and spit routinely landed on my hands as I played. Our family was set up

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the way Catholics were supposed to be—outwardly modeling the idea of a big, happy family—and for the most part we were happy. Mom seemed especially happy in the first few weeks after she came home from a week in the hospital with a new baby. Things were not always so happy, however, and they got worse as the years went by.

My dad and mom fought, increasingly, over his drinking, and our dinner hour became unpredictable and dependent upon when Dad chose to leave whatever bar he was visiting that day. Sundays were the worst. I always took my mother's side, all the while determined that there was no way I was going to get trapped in a life like hers.

We kids had hard evidence that Mom had once been happy. That it was possible. Photos of her from those days showed a vibrant, beaming and beautiful woman, dressed in finely tailored suits and dresses in the style of the day. She wore a gardenia over her right ear, holding for a moment her thick, shoulder-length black hair. In the most intriguing of them she was alone on a sandy beach, barefoot, wearing khaki shorts and a long-sleeved white blouse with a Peter Pan collar and, of course, the gardenia. She was gazing at the spot a few feet away where she had written "I LOVE BOB" in the sand with a stick she still had in her lap. Looking at the photo, I recalled her telling us she'd gone to Clearwater, Florida, to work during the war. I struggled to reconcile the depressed woman in front of me with a young woman hopping a train, leaving Minnesota for the first time, and heading for Florida to work in a dentist's office.

In other pictures, a beautiful and happy baby sat smiling on a blanket beside Mom in the grass of what appeared to be a backyard. In yet others she was dressed in heels and elegant suits, silk blouses with shoulder pads, sometimes wearing a hat with a face net and gloves. If there were background music, it

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would have been the big band wartime favorite “Sentimental Journey.” There was not one in which she wore anything that said, “I’m a stay-at-home mom.”

She used to tell us, cryptically, that the rules were different during “The War.” If her smiling pictures were allowed to tell the story, one would think she’d actually preferred a world war to being at home with kids. But when the war ended, my father had returned and Mom’s duty as a Catholic mother had been set. The closest she would ever again get to practicing her profession as a dental hygienist would be ordering her ten kids to brush their teeth. Between 1943 and 1950, she had five children.

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Born in 1947, the third child in a brood that would grow to ten, I grew up in the hysterical Wisconsin of Senator Joe McCarthy, who ranted into the living room from the same television set that announced *Father Knows Best*. On our knobby knees at daily Mass before the school day began, we prayed for the pope (who was supposedly infallible), as well as Russia (which wanted to blow us to smithereens). I got the message that even though “Father knew best,” the whole world was pretty precarious and could come crashing down at any moment. But the perfect mother—on television, at least—would take even nuclear annihilation with equanimity, and always be perfectly dressed and coiffed.

My mother’s life was, of course, nothing like that. She rarely dressed up. Seemed to have little fun. As I sat on the floor with my siblings watching the family comedies, I realized I didn’t want to be like the television mothers either. They seemed just as trapped as Mom. There just had to be more out there for me.

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Perhaps I would find it in the real job I was expected to land as soon as I turned sixteen. Realizing that a place to go in the afternoons and a paycheck would offer respite from my mother's world, I eagerly dove into the job hunt. As long as I got a job doing something my dad considered more respectable than being a waitress (there went my hopes of becoming a cool car hop at the A&W), I was free to do what I liked.

From sophomore year until high school graduation, I worked as a nurses' aide at Memorial Hospital, dodging the sexually predatory hospital administrator while earning 75 cents per hour to pay for my tuition and uniforms at St. Mary's Academy. I loved the job from the first day. It was there I began thinking I might really be able to become a doctor. My Uncle Mike, my dad's younger brother, was on staff at the hospital, and he taught me about medicine up close, allowing me to observe in surgery, labor and delivery, and the emergency room, where he explained everything that was going on.

Like my mother, I loved babies, and the newborn nursery was my favorite assignment. On many days, especially when the hospital was short-staffed, I had the bulk of the responsibility for bathing, changing, and feeding the babies, taking them to their mothers for nursing, and taking care of the mothers as well. The busier I was, the more I liked it. Dr. Mike suggested I could have a great future as a professional, doing the important work of a doctor. Maybe I could combine it with becoming a nun, I thought, which would make it more acceptable.

When I told my parents, my dad's response—"A woman is no damn good as a doctor"—left me speechless. I felt as if I had been punched in the gut. Dad wasn't a mean man. On the contrary, he was considered throughout the town to be kind and generous. He wasn't trying to be cruel. He just believed, as most others did at that time, that women were of less value professionally than men.



## IN THE GAME

My dad's sexist remarks wounded me deeply and frequently, and if I complained he laughed it off. He told the world he was proud of me.

When it came time for college applications, my dad forbade my going to any college other than a Catholic women's college in the Midwest, even while making it clear I would have to pay for it myself. But when I went off to college, he didn't even inquire about what courses I was taking. Mom, on the other hand, secretly pushed me to major in something other than what she considered ordinary courses for girls. She urged me to major in chemistry when she learned that it was considered a good undergraduate preparation for medical school. Similarly, my Aunt Marg—my dad's never-married older sister and my mother's compatriot in subversion when it came to my future—pushed me on the sly to write to Bryn Mawr for an application. It was clear to me that whatever I might pursue I would have to go for under the radar and find a way to finance on my own. I was undaunted. I would find a way to become a doctor. Nuns, I could see, were committed to advanced education and to hospital work, and some were doctors.

In bed at night, as the house gently rocked with the 2 A.M. Minneapolis-to-Chicago train passing by a few blocks away, I would imagine myself dressed up in gloves, heels, and a stunning wide-brimmed felt hat with a feather on the side, like my tall, elegant, and educated Aunt Marg, and on the way to the city to glamorous work, maybe even as a doctor. Family lore was that as a young woman, Marg (after whom I was named Margaret Mary at baptism) had accepted a job as a translator for some governmental official in Mexico or Puerto Rico, and had gotten as far as Chicago with her newly purchased professional wardrobe before my grandfather called her back, saying he "needed her at home." Marg became a high school

## PEGGY GARRITY

Spanish teacher and vice principal instead of an international translator.

I promised myself I would never allow for that kind of male interference. I would wield the power in my life. And it was looking more and more like the convent was my best route to becoming a doctor and having a career.