

Carnegie Mellon University

From the Selected Works of Gloriana St. Clair

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Darla, Darla, Mo Marla, Marla Fe Fi Fo Farla,
Darla

Gloriana St. Clair



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Gloriana St. Clair, August 2014

More of my memoirs Trapped in the Outhouse

Yesterday, my sister announced that she is embarking on a new career as an Uber driver. In her more affluent days as a physician's wife, she envisioned herself as the friend who drove to the hospital, sat with two bottles of water and a long book waiting for the surgical outcome, and created an environment in which recovery was possible. Her new career will allow her to expand this ministry of caring to a broader set of receivers. Also central to her identity is her role as mother of Tyler Glen, Guy Easton, and Dominique Jesse. As a baby boomer, she shared many traits of her generation ... devotion to family, diffuse desires, and a carpe diem approach. She once remarked that when her male peers began to come home from Vietnam in body bags, our parents were glad they had daughters.

From her point of view, my status as the firstborn brought incalculable benefits. Yet, as the baby, she also enjoyed preferential treatment. I had taken the sweet, serious, scholarly, sanctimonious street leaving her the roles of rebel, carouser, and sorority girl. In recalling the Qu'Appelle valley incident, she noted her early delinquency and at age four, remembered being very short and very devious. She was especially cossetted because Dad's war spinal injury had led the doctors to question his ability to have more children. She spent eternity in his lap with mother on the arm of the chair laughing and hugging together. The war and Dad's resulting time in the hospital had robbed me, for he spent most of my lap time years fighting.

She wanted things that I knew were beyond our family means. She wanted a pony, a car for college, and store bought, rather than homemade, clothing. She did not get the pony, but she did get a red volkswagon because the government provided financial support for college for the postwar children of disabled veterans. That extra funding provided for a tri Delt sorority life at the University of Oklahoma where we shared a duplex for a semester after my husband died and I returned to pursue a Ph.D. in English. There she and one of her DDD sisters ate ice cream with their hands as an homage to the movie *Tom Jones*, formed long term friendships, drank, searched the university course catalog for majors that did not require a foreign language, and entertained parents on football weekends.

During that cohabitation semester, the praying hands family tradition arose from her innocent question about what she could draw on a get well card for her speech therapist with a broken hip. "A pair of praying hips," was my advice. The deluge of praying hands—coal, marble, wood, carved, glowing, salt, pepper, flowered, bookends, pens, pins, and sink stoppers continues. That instinct to care for others endures. For her children, she was the super mother, the dispenser of Kool aid and homemade cookies, the superior cook of meals shared for years with the neighbor boy, the advisor on medical problems, the hostess for parties, lunches, and galas, and the attentive and generous friend. Last Christmas, she shared our family meal with a threesome of long term friends who had expressed a desire to have a little turkey and dressing. Her work as an Uber driver may bring other visitors into future Louisiana style meals. She does know how to seize the moment of joy.

She envies my career and I envy her family, friends, and fun loving forays. She was definitely my mother's favorite in that she produced the coveted husband and grandchildren. Her faithless husband, who now has stickers over his face in family photos, had fooled even our father's sharply-honed bs detector. She had the advantage of a nuclear family growing in riches while I had the advantage of being the first grandchild with added years of the wellspring of family tutelage. In a continuing male dominated world, together we compensated for being the daughters in a truly heroic family.