

## That Summer in Banff

It is summertime, 1941, and I am in the back seat of our dark blue Mercury sedan. My dad likes a sedan because it has room for the whole family. This is the second Ford that my dad has bought. My dad likes Ford cars even though mom says Henry Ford doesn't like Jews. When we go somewhere in the car all four doors have to be properly shut before my dad will turn the key and start the motor.

We are on a family holiday, my two sisters, Lillian and Beatrice, and my mother and my father and me, I am there too, squished in the back seat between my sisters. It is early in the morning and we are starting out on today's trip. I am seven and my sisters are 24 and 22. My sister Lillian is already married. Her husband's name is Danny. He's my brother now. I've never had a brother before. He's fun. Danny can't come on this trip because he is in the Air Force. There is a war on and he is learning to be a pilot. He might come next week, for a couple of days. I know that there is a war on. My parents listen to the news on the radio all the time to find out what is happening in the war. Sometimes they change from one station to another and listen to the same news all over again on a different station. I have to be quiet during the news and wait until it's over before I can say anything. Mom and dad always look very serious when they listen to the war news. Mom has explained to me that when there is a war on things are sometimes frightening. But she says we are lucky here in Canada because the war is on the other side of the ocean and we are safer here than my Aunt Mary and Uncle Joe who live in England. Lots of people get hurt in a war. Our neighbours have family where the war is going on and they are very worried. They are afraid that something has happened to their family over there because they haven't had a letter from them for a long time.

My father is driving the car. My mother doesn't know how to drive, but my sister Lillian does. My father likes to get in the car and just drive. He is like an explorer. He likes it when we are all together. Then, he says, it's a real

holiday. My father has been saving up his gas coupons so we would have enough gas to go on this holiday. We can't have all the gas we want. Gas is rationed because of the war. My mother is the keeper of the maps, although sometimes she has trouble reading them, but she is very good at spotting where the picnic tables are so we can pull off the road and relax and have lunch in the shade.

My sisters always get to sit by the windows. Sometimes that makes me mad because I can't see out so well when I sit in the middle. But I'm not mad today. I like to be in the back seat with my sisters, just like I'm one of the big girls. I just feel very squirmy. I take off my new sandals and wiggle my toes. That feels good. I squirm around on my seat, rolling on my bum from one side to the other, and then I poke my sister Lillian in the ribs. "Lillian, can we sing some songs?" "Not yet, Sylvia. It's too early. My brain's not wide-awake yet and I can't remember the words. Besides, Beatrice is sleeping and we'd wake her up. We'll sing later." I look over at my sister Beatrice. She has red hair, not like me. Mine's brown. She has freckles, too. She doesn't like her freckles. The other thing she does not like is her knobby knees. She is sleeping. Her eyes are closed and her head is on the back of the seat. The sun is coming in the window and it makes her hair all fiery. I sigh and flip myself over onto my knees so I am facing backwards and can look out the back window. I like the mountains. They are like a place in my book of fairy tales where magic can happen. When we go for a drive on Sunday afternoon I see flat land. It is called prairie. The Rocky Mountains are very big. I bet they are the biggest in the world. Some mountains have trees part way up. The highest mountains have snow on top. It is very cold up there. The mountains have names like Tunnel Mountain and Castle Mountain and Sulphur Mountain and Mount Rundle. The road whizzes by behind us and there are pine trees on each side of the road. They are tall, like buildings and dark green. I watch for animals. This is a national park and there are lots of animals here because, my mother told me, in the national park no one is allowed to hurt the animals. Already this summer I have seen deer with white rumps under their tails and mountain sheep, some with big curly horns. They are called

Rocky Mountain sheep, because they live in the Rocky Mountains. But I am waiting to see a bear. I know there are bears in this park. We are here in Banff for two whole weeks, and I am sure I will see one. We are staying in a cabin so there is room for all five of us, my mother, my father, my two sisters and me. I have been to Banff before, but I have never stayed in a cabin before. Last time we stayed in a room in someone's house. There are lots of houses in Banff with signs that say "Approved Accommodations". Mother told me that these signs mean that they have nice rooms to rent to people who come to Banff.

Today we are going to a park called Yoho. I think that this is a funny name for a park. My mother packs us a picnic lunch in the tin picnic basket with the wooden handles. Today it is my favorite lunch today—sandwiches, salmon salad with lettuce on white bread and lemonade in our big green thermos. We never get sandwiches at home for lunch because my mother believes in a hot lunch. She says it's healthier. She is always talking about health. Maybe that's because when my sister Beatrice was little she had rheumatic fever and now she has something the matter with her heart. I think my mom worries too much. My father says my mother is just a worrier. Sometimes, like my mom, I worry about things too.

Everyday on this holiday we drive to see a different place. One day we went to Johnson's Canyon and walked a long way up the canyon. One day we went to the Columbia Ice Fields. It was very cold, even though its summer and we had to put on our coats and button them up to keep warm. There were huge pieces of ice right beside the road and we stopped the car and Daddy and I climbed up on one of the blocks of ice. I nearly got frozen feet. There was lots and lots of ice. In fact, that was nearly all you could see. My dad told me the ice is part of a glacier. He says a glacier is a big, big field of ice way up in the mountains where it is so cold all the time that the ice doesn't melt. Suddenly I feel someone pull my braid. She laughs. My sister Beatrice is awake. "What do you see out the window, Sylvia?" she says. "Nothing but lots of trees and the road and the mountains. I am looking for a bear, but I don't see any" I tell her.

My sister Beatrice taught me a song about bears yesterday. "Let's sing the bear song, Bea-Bea". I like to sing with my sisters. Its lots of fun. There is even a mountain near Banff named after us. It called the Three Sisters. That's us, Lillian, Beatrice and Sylvia. "Okay Sylvia, we'll sing the bear song. What do you say, Lillian?" Lillian doesn't say anything but she smiles and I know we are going to have a sing.

*The bear went over the mountain  
The bear went over the mountain,  
The bear went over the mountain,  
To see what he could see.  
And all that he could see,  
And all that he could see,  
Was the other side of the mountain,  
The other side of the mountain,  
The other side of the mountain,  
Was all that he could see.*

We sing the bear song several times and then we sing some other songs. One of them is a song that Carmen Miranda sings. Carmen Miranda is from Brazil and wears hats with lots of pretend fruit piled up on top. When she sings she wiggles her hips. I have listened to my sisters' sing it before and I know some of the words.

*We're on our way to somewhere  
The two of us and you.  
Who's going to be there?  
What will we see there?  
That will be the big surprise.  
There may be señoritas with dark and shining eyes.*

After awhile we all fall silent, lulled by the motion of the car and the increasing warmth of the sun shining in the windows. My mother is snoozing

now. The rest of us are looking out the windows at the scenery. We drive for quite a long time. My mother stirs and sits up straight. She picks up the map that has fallen from her lap and looks at it. "Bertha" my father says, "where is the turn onto the highway that leads to Yoho. Seems to me we should be making that turn soon." Mother looks at the map closely. "10 and 7 and 20 and 10" she says, "that makes 47 miles. It should be 47 miles from Banff."

"We've gone more than that, Bertha" my father says. He sounds a bit annoyed. "Why didn't you say something to me earlier?"

"I fell asleep, Sam" my mother answers.

"Well", my father says "we'll just keep going for a bit and see if we come to a road sign." My sister Lil asks Mom for the map. She looks at it carefully, turning the map around a bit. Then my sister says "Dad, I think we're on the wrong road. I do believe we're lost" and she laughs. That can't be, I think. I am with my family and they are all grownups so we can't get lost. I begin to worry. Dad drives on and everyone is quiet. "There are no road signs. The road is starting to climb. "Daddy, are we lost?" I ask. I am worried. "Lillian" my mother snaps, "You had to say something. Now you've got the child all worried." My mother turns to me and says, "We're not lost Sylvia. We just missed the turnoff. We'll find the right road soon." And we keep going. The climb is steeper now and the road is narrower. Hardly room for more than one car. If you look over the side of the road it is a long way down. "Mom, my ears feel funny, sort of plugged up", I say. "That's because we're climbing. Open your mouth and yawn and that will help, Sylvia." I open my mouth wide, but I'm not sleepy so I can't yawn. I am just worried. Nobody is very happy. Dad is annoyed with Mother and Mother is not happy with Lillian and I am scared and Beatrice whispers in my ear "Do you want to sing another song?" And we start to sing, but Dad says "Keep quiet, girls. I have to concentrate on the road." Now, for sure, nobody is happy. "Daddy, why aren't there any other cars on the road?" I ask. I am afraid that if there are no other cars on the road we are really lost and there will be no one to even help us find our way. "What will we do if we are lost, Mom?" I say. "How will we find the right road? What if we can't find it? How will we get

home?” “Don’t worry” my sister Lillian says, “We can all get out and walk.” But I know it is a long, long way to walk and we wouldn’t get home before dark. “Lillian, stop it,” my mother says. But my mind is racing and we are all walking in the dark and we have eaten all our sandwiches and we have no food and my feet hurt and there are animals in the park and.... But before I can imagine anything else, my dad says, “Look, there’s a road sign up ahead”. As we get closer he says, “Well, that’s a relief. We can turn here. The sign points that way to Yoho National Park. The gate is only 15 miles.” We all sigh a sigh and I am happy that we are not lost anymore and that we are all together on this holiday. Soon we will find a picnic table and have sandwiches for lunch—yum.

As I think about this trip I realize that this was a seminal trip for my seven-year-old self. We were all together as a family. For two whole weeks we did everything together and I was a part of it all, not just the baby in the family who was never old enough to join in. Everyone even listened to me and, I’m sure that I had a lot to say. These two weeks filled me up with contentment. I knew I belonged.

As I continue to reflect I realize that the feeling of belonging and being happy that I experienced on this trip led me to decide that maybe if I pretended to be an adult, if I behaved like an adult I would continue to have this wonderful feeling of being a part of it all.

So I began to pretend. Did it make a difference? Did I fool anyone? Perhaps only myself, but this pretense became an underlying part of my life. At seven what did I think I had to do to be an adult? In my eyes adults knew what to do and how to do most things. They didn’t have to ask lots of questions. So I stopped asking questions in case someone would find out I was not an adult. I pretended I knew how to do things when I really was not sure how.

My parents kept their feelings on a pretty even keel in our house. They simply focused on the routines of everyday life. It was a pattern that had taken them through immigration, WWI, the Great Depression and the 1930’s drought on the prairies. They were not demonstrative people. Occasionally they exchanged a routine hug or kiss. So for me behaving like an adult meant not

getting too angry or too sad or extra, extra happy. Adults decided themselves what was good for them. They were careful with money. They didn't play games, except for cards.

But pretending to be something I was not left me feeling pretty unsure of myself. I was afraid to take chances, or be passionate. I learned to play it safe and sit on the fence, not jump in the puddles or roll on the green grass. I learned to keep a tight rein on myself and I began to lose touch with how I really felt inside.



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