

Feel Good Stories

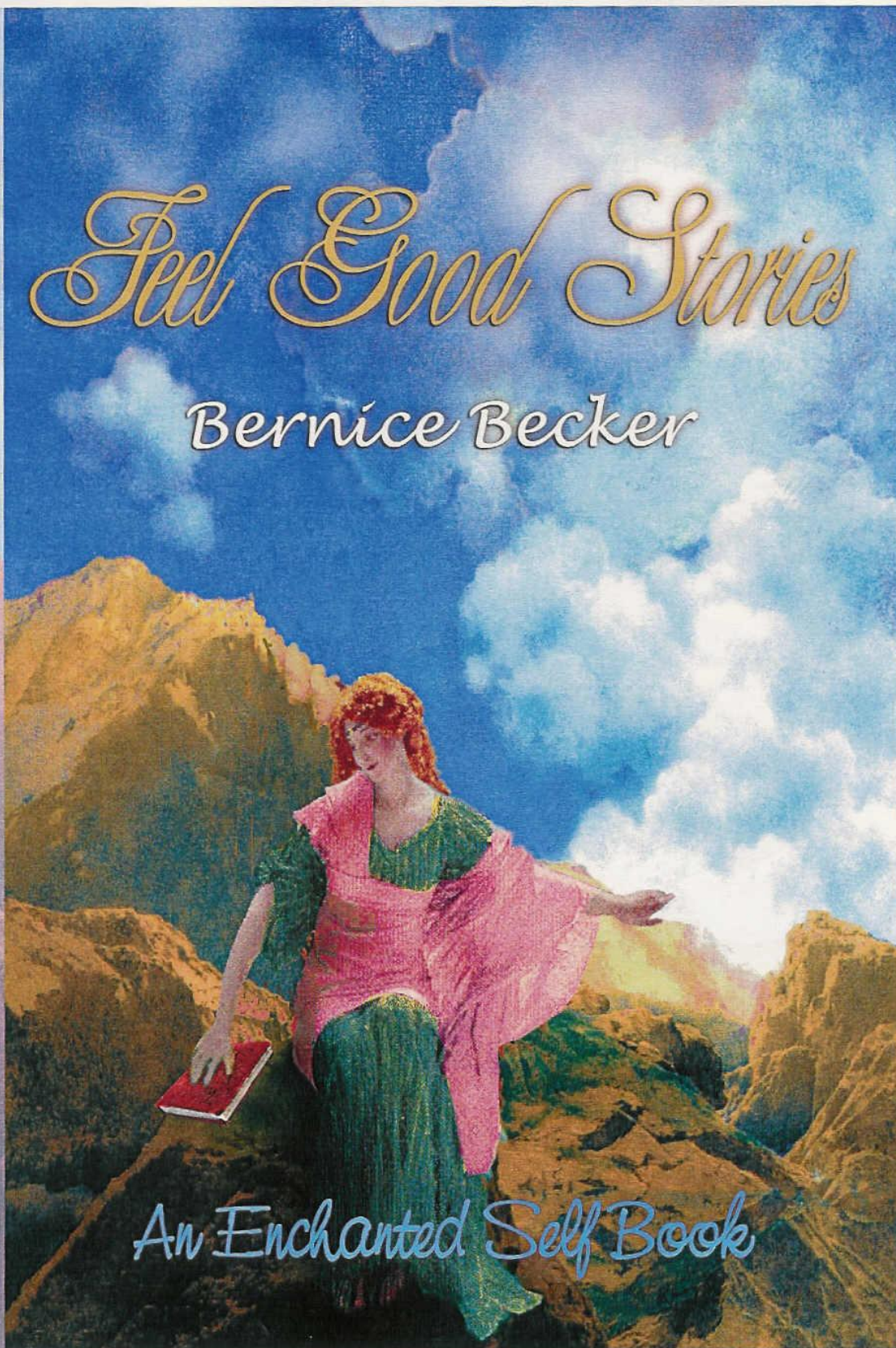
Feel Good Stories

Bernice Becker

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An Enchanted Self Book



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Barbara Becker Holstein

This book is an Enchanted Self Book. It is Volume 1 of The Wisdom and Wonder Collection for Women



A Bundle of Joy!



Waiting To Be Born

This is a pleasant place to be as I wait to be born. It seems such a long time that I am floating in my space. However, it is cozy with a soothing sensation, and I shouldn't complain.

I hear sounds around me. When my mother plays the piano, I am happy. "Greensleeves" is one of my favorites. When she sobs, I am sad. I hear my father, Dave, and my two brothers, Arnold and Howard, comforting her. They miss Mom's sister Althea and Dad's brother Nathan. They were such a happy couple (my mom's sister had married my dad's brother) who died so young because of the terrible flu epidemic that caused so much tragedy.

I often hear my mother telling friends that, even though their hearts are broken, she is glad to be carrying a baby whom the entire family hopes will be a girl—the first girl in the family.

I am sort of excited that I am a girl. I have to be a female for their sakes. I can't disappoint them. I'm looking forward to my birth and the words, "It's a girl."

I'm getting bigger and more active. There are complaints about my kicking. The water is leaking, and that worries me.

Uh-oh, what is going on? There is so much commotion. It is February 4th and Mother is in pain. She is upset because it is snowing heavily and she needs to get to the hospital. They have gotten a taxi and my father has called the police, who arranged for a cruiser to lead the way.

My brothers are home with a babysitter because they could not be left alone. We are moving along as best we can. We finally arrive at the hospital,

where I will come into the world. I'm excited but scared. This is a first for me. Mother and I are put into a wheelchair heading for the labor room.

As we move along, I hear screams and yelling. Oh, dear! That sounds bad! What am I in for?

It quiets down, and the nurse gets us ready for my delivery. For a couple of hours Mom carries on and even swears a little.

The doctor says, "Rose, calm down. You are doing well. Breathe out, and push as hard as you can."

I hope I don't land on the floor! Now I 'm sliding. Bless you, doctor. You caught me.

Finally, the words I'd been waiting for came, "It's a girl! She's so pretty with dark hair and fair skin."

I'm cleaned up and wrapped in soft bunting.

My father comes in. He has a look of joy and relief on his face and declares he will hang a flag out of the front window in honor of the sweetest, cutest baby ever born.

I am fed some sweet liquid, and my mother cuddles me closely and thanks God. Our cheeks touch. What a lovely feeling.

My parents are so grateful they have a healthy daughter who weighs eight pounds. They say I weigh more than my brothers did at birth. Does that mean I may be fat? I hope not.

For the next few days at the hospital, visitors keep coming to see me and I wonder what the word "Mazel Tov" means.

It's been decided my name will be Althea Bernice Silverman on the birth certificate, but Grandpa Watchmaker keeps calling me Shanya Maidel. I hope that means something nice.

Finally, I'm back home in a pretty outfit. My mom says I wear clothes well for a week-old baby. I think I will really care about clothes. I'm seeing better now.

People keep coming with gifts, and they say funny things like itchy itchy coo. That sounds silly.

My mother's family says I look like Rose. My father's family claims I look like Dave. Why can't I look like myself? So many things puzzle me. One good thing is I've discovered how to cry loud enough that I get quick attention. It always works. I know I've been accepted by this family who cares so much for me. Even my brothers are beginning to like me.

I feel safe and secure because it looks like they are planning to keep me, especially if I am as adorable as they seem to think. I'm sure lucky to be the first girl. As the third boy, I might not have made out as well.



Childhood



One Teacher Can Make a Difference



Our third grade class was listening to our teacher, Miss Pratt. She told us she was disappointed that we were not making the progress she had expected with multiplication tables one through nine. She explained that

we really understood the meaning of multiplication but that we had not spent enough time memorizing the tables. The rote method was necessary in this case.

I regretted that I had not put forth the amount of effort required. I had spent too much time playing with my friends instead of drilling myself. I had let down my teacher, who to me was the kindest, sweetest, and prettiest one I had ever known. This was my first experience with one who smiled much more than she scowled, laughed often, and never threatened any of us, yet she was able to "read" the children, control the class, and teach effectively. Miss Pratt put a lot of herself into her work. Every day near the close of school, she would read to us, or even better, tell us stories about when she was a little girl. Most importantly, she made us feel that she cared about us and that we were important.

Because of a serious car accident when I was three and a half years old, I had a scar below my nostril that was the result of a torn upper lip. Everything else had healed up without any aftereffects physically, but my emotions remained scarred. (Years later plastic surgery was performed that improved that condition.) Meanwhile, having been called Chief Running Nose and Scarface by many insensitive children, my confidence and self-esteem had suffered. Although my parents and relatives referred to me as pretty, I did not see myself that way. Focusing on my

scar, I could not appreciate any redeeming features. (As I grew older, I thanked God that I was alive with relatively little damage, and still do.)

At the end of one school day, I remained in my classroom, waiting for the arrival of my mother, who was coming to take me to an appointment close to the school. Miss Pratt sat at her desk with a fellow teacher and chatted.

I glanced at the clock and realized it was time for me to get ready to leave. I put on my matching brown wool coat and hat trimmed with beaver that even I realized was becoming. The teachers looked at my outfit and seemed to admire it. I was able to read their lips a little and my ears perked up to hear, "Who is she? She really is cute." My teacher's answer was, "I agree; Bernice is adorable."

Adorable! The word grabbed me. It jolted me. It was just about my favorite word. A delicious warmth enveloped me with a new sense of awareness. Teachers would not lie. Maybe it was true. I looked pretty. This was a revelation to me.

At that moment I made the decision to be the first child in my class to learn the assigned tables. Whatever it took, no matter how much time, I would succeed. No one was going to stop me. This time I believed in myself.

About one week later, Miss Pratt announced to the class that Bernice was the first one to learn the tables and she told us she was proud of me. She handed me my first diary, gold key and all. I thanked her enthusiastically. The class smiled and clapped. For the first time, I felt truly good about myself. I knew I had been motivated by Miss Pratt's remark. This might not have occurred if I had not overheard those kind words. What a difference one special teacher can make! Miss Pratt, you'll never know how much I've thought of you through the years. I tried my best to be a caring teacher like you were. I believe I was successful. My classes always loved the stories I told them about myself when I was young.

Thank you for being the kind of teacher you were. I hope you enjoyed the wonderful life you deserved.

Your Space

Reflections, memories, ideas, wisdom thoughts, glimpses into your world, favorite foods, treats, dreams. Perhaps you have remembered a favorite story from your early childhood! Jot it down here and don't forget to share it with others!

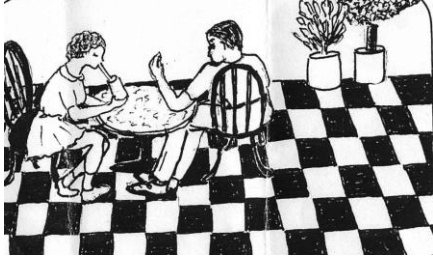
Go for it!



Growing Up



The Ice Cream Parlor



I've always enjoyed the ambiance of ice cream parlors. Not only are there delectable goodies to tempt the taste buds; the atmosphere is cheerful and tends to attract respectable customers. This makes it a place where you can feel relatively safe even in today's times.

I have a clear picture of Mr. Parker's Parlor from my past. It was white birch with a green-and-ivory awning over the doorway. Inside, it was spick-and-span, even its black-and-white tile floor. The marble-topped tables and black wrought iron chairs were offset by green potted plants and wallpaper that gave the illusion of the outside being brought in.

Beside the ice-cream concoctions, there were soft drinks, coffee, hot chocolate, and pastries that included muffins, Danish, and buttery cinnamon toast. There was always a fragrant aroma in the air. Near the front was a large counter for quick service and a small section for candies, including wonderful French gumdrops, creamy fudge, and assorted chocolates.

I walked alone along the avenues in Roxbury, feeling safe in those days. One day I was on my way to the library (at almost thirteen years old, I was an avid reader, which necessitated my going to the library twice a week). As I passed the ice cream parlor, it was teeming with young students from the area. It was a crisp, autumn day that brought color and a healthy glow to every face.

I noticed a tall, attractive boy looking at me and smiling. I turned around to make sure that he was looking at me and not at someone else. My self-esteem

needed a little boost. But, yes, I was the object of his friendly gaze. "Hello," the teenager said. "I'm James Brown, but you can call me Jamie."

"Hi," I answered. "I'm Bernice Silverman. You can call me Bernice." We both chuckled.

"Let's sit down at that table," my new acquaintance suggested. We spent about a half-hour talking. I told him I attended Theodore Roosevelt Junior High, and I learned that this was a freshman at Roxbury Memorial High School who was talking and looking into my eyes and reaching out his hand to touch mine. I was comfortable, content, and very much at ease.

"Hello, Bernice dear. How are you?"

The magic moment faded. I looked up to see my mother's close friend, Sophie Rudstein, smiling at us.

Oh, I thought, my secret is out. I'm in trouble. What a dummy I am not to realize someone who knows my mother might see me. I managed to be polite and make the proper introduction, but my heart wasn't in it.

As we walked to my home, I realized my palms were sweaty and my mouth was dry. I decided to have Jamie meet my mom and let her know the truth. When we reached my place, I told Jamie to please come upstairs with me. When my mom opened the door, I said, a little breathless, "This is Jamie, he's a smart boy and you don't need to worry."

Mom was surprised but said nothing to embarrass me, for which I was thankful. She talked with him and appeared pleased. Jamie passed the test, and an almost 13-year-old, nervous girl, who had "deceived" her mother, felt very lucky that things had worked out well.

After my friend left, I apologized for my behavior. My mother explained that, in this case, Jamie was an okay person, but sometimes one can be fooled, and

I must always be careful. She did praise us for choosing a public location with people around, and she added that Jamie could come to our house; it was not necessary to meet outside. I was not sure I deserved to be so pleased.

That was one of the most satisfying conversations I remember having with my mother. I felt good because she was able to see things from my point of view as well as her own. I liked Sophie Rudstein even more because she never did tell my mother that she'd seen me.

My friendship with my young man proved to be sweet and innocent. After we moved to Brookline six months later, I saw Jamie several more times before he moved to a different city. After that we lost touch. Sometimes I think I would like to contact him on the Internet, but that would be a problem since I do not have a computer.

Even today, whenever I have an opportunity to visit an ice cream parlor, it brings back the good times we shared, especially at Parker's Parlor, where we were surrounded by other young people who had hopes and dreams, as we did.



Smitten



I Stood My Ground

It was a beautiful August day at Lake Spoffard, New Hampshire, as I watched the stately Mrs. Watchmaker talking with other guests on the veranda of the spacious Spoffard Hotel.

This highly respected and admired senior citizen was my Grandmother Sara on my mother's side. She possessed charisma before most of us had ever heard of that beautiful word.

I was fortunate to be her guest for the week, sharing her room and spending some but not a lot of time with her. I, an eighteen-year-old graduate of Brookline High School, was very interested in the social possibilities around me. My grandma had the gift of talking with people, not down to or at them, and the knack of being a good listener. Her formal education was not much by measurement, but her bright mind, savvy, and ambition enabled her to become well informed, diplomatic, and ahead of her time. Literally not a beauty, she was beautiful in the eyes of countless beholders. As I observed her, it seemed as though she were holding court as she made her points in a lively discussion with young as well as elderly people.

My thoughts were interrupted when the tall, slim, and good-looking man in my life, seven years my senior, said, "Your grandmother is really something. I can't remember ever meeting anyone quite like her."

"Yes," I responded, "Many people feel that way. She is special."

I wondered if this fellow, who professed to be smitten with me, liked me or my grandma more. The truth probably was that he was a bit in love with both of us for different reasons.

This man was Harry Becker. Though he had some competition, he won my heart, and six months later we were engaged and were planning to be married one year from the day we met. I was attending a business school in Boston for a year. Harry, a high school guidance counselor in Hamden, CT, was furthering his education at Yale University in New Haven, where he resided. My immediate family and relatives all liked my choice, but there was a little concern because of my age.

Everything seemed to be running smoothly, when I got a call from my grandmother one evening. Her voice sounded rather serious when she stated, "Bernice, I'd like to talk to you about your plans. Could you come over tonight? Uncle Dave can bring you here."

A little surprised and a bit worried, I said, "Let me tell my parents; I'm sure it's okay."

When I spoke to them, my father did not question me, but my mother inquired, "What's the problem?"

I responded, "Who said there was a problem?"

My mother pushed the point. "Why would Grandma want you to come over now? There must be a problem."

I retorted somewhat angrily, "I'll go there and then I'll know the reason. Uncle Dave will be here in a few minutes. I must get ready."

My Uncle Dave and his younger brother, Cy, who were bachelors, lived with my grandmother. Uncle Dave, an outstanding lawyer, had become the patriarch of the family after the death of my grandfather.

As Uncle Dave drove the few miles between our homes, there was very little conversation, but that was of no concern to me. He possessed a brilliant mind, but he was spare of words and didn't care to engage in chitchat.

We arrived, and my grandma, looking regal in her burgundy velvet dressing gown, ushered me into the gracious living room. Uncle Dave went to his room so we could be alone. Cy was already in his room.

Grandma extended her hand to the plush sofa and said, "Sit down, dear, and relax. This won't take very long." My heart quickened its beat as I waited to hear why I had been summoned.

"Well, Bernice," she began, "You know we all think the world of Harry. He has so many fine qualities, but I worry about the fact that he is a teacher. You know how underpaid teachers are. He may always be poor. Are you prepared to struggle financially? You realize the money problems your parents have had. You are a lovely girl with opportunities; you don't need to go down that route in life." My head was buzzing as I tried to pull my thoughts together to reply in an effective way to help my cause.

Grandma, however, continued, "Uncle Cy remarked just the other day, 'If Harry ever earns more than one hundred dollars a week, I'll eat my hat.' Think about what I've been saying, dear. I'd like to hear about your feelings."

"Give me a minute to digest this," I responded.

After exploring my feelings for a brief time, with chills going through me and at the same time my head feeling hot, I was ready to speak. "Grandma, as I see it, what you said boils down to Harry is great, even poor, but he would be much better if he were from a wealthy family and was planning to be a doctor or a lawyer."

Grandma seemed to wince slightly.

I continued, "All my life I've heard about money—money and the problems of not having enough. That has bothered me. I've told myself I would want my prospective husband to be of good character, responsible, intelligent, and hopefully

good looking. But mostly I've wanted a husband who would be ambitious enough to be successful."

Grandma's kind grey eyes widened. I had her attention.

"Harry fits this description," I went on. "He plans to get both his masters and doctorate degrees so he can teach at college level. I don't think that would be a bad life for us." Then I added, "Who knows, years from now I might be working also. Maybe I'll take some college courses. Things change with time."

Grandma's face brightened as she called for Uncle Dave to come into the living room. She spoke with a lilt to her voice, "Dave, Bernice has explained her feelings in a way that makes me feel better about her future. Let me tell you some of her comments."

When she had finished, my uncle, looking more relaxed, turned to me, and stated in his succinct fashion, "Bernice, we have underestimated you. You are young, but you're wise for your years. We wish you the best."

I had come through this meeting with flying colors but realized there would be some hard times ahead. And we did have a few difficult years, but our struggles to achieve were rewarded.

Harry, with God's help as well as others', went to the top in the academic field. I, after a late start, attended college and then taught for thirty-two years as an elementary school teacher before retiring eight years ago. I am happy to say we made our families proud of us.

But, come to think of it, Uncle Cy never did keep his promise to eat his hat.

Your Space:

Falling in love, changes, criticisms, finding your way: tell your story (don't worry about the spelling or grammar). Remember, you are the heroine of the tale.



Marriage and All That Goes With It



An Embarrassing Moment

It was a beautiful day in February, with a bright blue sky and crisp clear air - the perfect day for my plans. They involved taking a train from Fairfield, Connecticut, to New York City by myself, for the first time. My husband, Harry, had arranged for our seven-year-old daughter, Barbara, and himself to spend a day with his family. They would love it, and it would give me a break that I very much needed. Harry would meet me at the train station on my return trip at 5:30 that evening.

It was important for me to have the time for myself. As a young mother raising a child, keeping house, entertaining, and attending college, my days were so filled that there was little time to pamper myself.

After breakfast, I dressed for the occasion. As I put my panties on, I realized that my waistband was loose, so I took a safety pin and tightened them. Then, donning a two-piece beige jersey outfit with simple pearls and black suede shoes, I felt well dressed. After a quick fix of my hair and the application of makeup, I was ready and raring to go.

This day would give me the opportunity to show off my new Persian lamb coat, a special "combination gift" that Harry had given me for my 30th birthday and our tenth wedding anniversary. We had been fortunate in that we had gotten a terrific deal from a furrier who was the friend of a dear relative. Persian lamb was the "in" fur in those days, and I admired the wide glossy curl that formed a subtle pattern. I felt like a million dollars whenever I wore it.

Seated comfortably on the train a little after eleven, I reveled in the idea of the luxury of a day on the town. Although I carried only enough money for a decent lunch and a couple of small purchases, at least I looked like a lady of means.

I was overwhelmed by the hugeness of the terminal and the bustling crowds when I arrived at Grand Central Station. With a little help, I found my way to Fifth Avenue and eventually to Lord and Taylor, where I had never been before. After being seated at a small table in their spacious restaurant, I watched a waitress place a small bowl of steaming liquid in front of me. What was it? It was too hot and too early to be a finger bowl. I felt a little like a country bumpkin. Then I noticed that other patrons were eating from similar bowls. Ah, it could be ingested!

A woman close by remarked to her friend, "The consommé is delicious." I had my answer and I enjoyed the heated broth.

My sandwich-and-coffee lunch finished, it was time for me to explore the shopping world of the rich and famous. I went to the ladies sportswear department, where I was eager to check prices, although I had no intention of purchasing anything from the pricey store. Maybe I would try on a few things just for fun.

To my surprise, there were no displays of clothing. Arrangements of comfortable chairs and round tables holding little silver dishes of bonbons were in evidence. The customers, both men and women, were simply stunning, with the look of class that comes from confidence, careful grooming, and well-lined pockets. The thought came to me later that perhaps a portion of these unusually attractive people were kept women and gigolos, not uncommon for that era, the early 1950's.

A smiling saleslady, elegantly dressed and beautifully coifed, came over and asked what I would be interested in seeing. I asked naively, "Where are the

clothes?" She informed me that they brought the clothes of one's choice to the customer.

How could I say, "Bring me a bargain?" I told the woman I was interested in a tailored ivory washable blouse.

What she showed me was lovely but much more expensive than I had imagined. My conscience began to bother me. I had come to the store under false pretenses, and now might be a good chance to make a quick getaway.

"These blouses are great, but not in my price range at this time. I'm a college student," I explained honestly. "Thank you so much." I put my coat on and started to walk briskly past the other customers.

To my dismay, I felt my safety pin giving way, and the panties sliding down around my ankles. Shame, humiliation, fear, and disgust flooded through me.

What should I do?

I still remember the wide-eyed glances, gasps, murmurs, giggles, and even a few restrained catcalls. I was literally caught with my panties down! I couldn't hide from the unwelcome captive audience, and I couldn't walk away without tripping over my feet.

My guardian angel must have been hovering over me, because I managed to rise to the occasion. With the coolness of a trained striptease, I stepped out of the panties, one foot at a time, and as gracefully as possible, lifted my panties from the floor and dropped them casually into my pocketbook.

Head held high, I walked to the nearest elevator, got in, and turned to look at the people behind me. I smiled and waved as though saying goodbye to friends, a gesture that helped me to maintain a semblance of composure.

I decided not to let this most embarrassing moment spoil my wonderful day. I would buy the underwear I needed, as the winter chill told me it was time to do. I would walk the ten blocks to Budget Heaven, where I would feel right at home.

As I strolled along, I rationalized that what had happened was not at all bad. No one had been hurt; it was only my pride that had suffered. The onlookers probably had enjoyed the entertainment. Considering the circumstances, I congratulated myself on having gotten out of the situation fairly well.

I chuckled to myself, "Many people have lost their shirts, but I now belong to a select group who have lost their panties. And, Bernice, you'd better wait until your fiftieth anniversary before you tell this story to Harry!"

Slenderella

It was during a parent-teacher conference in Westport, Connecticut, in the mid 1960's, when I became aware of a program that combined exercise with relaxation. The machines did the work for you. The name of the company was Slenderella, and it was located in Stamford, Conn., close to my Norwalk residence. Being lazy when it came to exercise, the so-called wonders of this new method appealed to me. I, among millions of other women, was constantly trying to win the battle of the bulge. I felt I was losing the fight. When an empathetic parent, Mrs. Connors, who also had a weight problem, realized I wanted to lose weight, she encouraged me to try Slenderella. She was happy she was doing so well since she had joined. She was my last appointment for the day, and I made sure we had adequate time to discuss her child's progress before we turned our attention to anything else.

Mrs. Connors had lost six pounds and twelve inches and was proud of her success so far. I told her I would look into the program as soon as I got through the Christmas and New Year orgy. Knowing the parties, cocktail hours, rich food and tempting goodies, it would be ludicrous for me to start a weight loss procedure before the holidays were behind us and New Year Resolutions were again made. The day before the start of the Christmas vacation, there were several gifts from the children. Westport was an affluent town and the gifts reflected that. I received a \$20.00 gift certificate to be applied to a Slenderella contract. Mrs. Cs generosity was appreciated and it helped me speed up my decision to make an appointment to check out the program Slenderella offered.

On a pleasant January day, I left my school at about 3:20 p.m. and arrived in Stamford by 3:45. When I entered the facilities I was greeted by a seemingly

charming, very thin young lady. She asked me some questions, and in turn I questioned her.

She explained that the first visit was free. Then there would be a brief overall presentation. Next, I would be weighed and measured. After that, a supervised use of the different machines would be an important part of the orientation.

I observed that all the employees were attractive, well groomed, and too thin. Even with the good-fitting clothes, it was obvious they were bordering on gaunt. It made me wonder what they ate or if they did eat. Their appearance would be apt to make potential customers feel heavier than they actually were. The woman asked me about my health, age, and goals. Following that was a presentation of the company goals. Finally, came the weighing and measuring. As this was being done, I mentioned that I thought the tape measure was too loose, but she told me that was the proper method. When it was completed my skinny instructor declared I had perfect measurements.

"How could that be?" I asked. "I'm too heavy. That's why I'm here." I couldn't bring myself to say fat, but she didn't mind using it.

She replied, "You have the best kind of body. We can do wonders for you. You are fat all over!" Translated, that meant I was a well-proportioned fatty.

I changed into appropriate clothing and was taken to a large room with several cubicles with curtains around them. I could hear voices, but did not see anyone except the attendants. I was told to lie down on a bed that had all kinds of rollers. These kept changing as different levers were moved. I had to turn from side to side, back to front, and front to back. It was slightly uncomfortable. Where did the relaxation come in? For me, maybe when it was over.

After fifteen minutes, I was told that I was ready for the lower back machine. I heard a woman protesting. She cried, "Oh, no, please not the back one."

I thought quickly and said, "I'm sorry, but I'll need a note from my doctor for that."

The last machine was for the derriere and thighs. I stood still, pressed a button, and tiny mechanical knobs did the work. I was shaken around like Jell-O. I said to myself, if you want to look good, you have to suffer a little.

Then, finally, I was brought to a skinny young thing who had a warm voice and smiling eyes. She explained that, with my problems, I would be smart to sign up for the deluxe special—\$200.00 for eighteen months.

I informed her that I was not that smart and I wanted something less deluxe.

She presented the Economy Package—\$150.00 for one year. No deal for me yet.

Then came the budget bargain—\$100 for 10 months.

I asked, "Do you have anything a little less? What's the bottom of the barrel?"

The pleasant voice became cool and her eyes cold. She looked every bit of her eighty-five pounds.

Finally, I signed up for eight months for seventy-five dollars. This would mean only fifty-five dollars out-of-pocket money, plus the gift certificate.

I had worked up an appetite by the time I left the building at a little past five. There was a wonderful aroma in the air. I thought I was about to salivate. Of all stores, I did not need the bakery next door. The products seemed to be of the best quality but the worst kind for food addicts. I purchased one dozen

heavenly brownies and fought my conscience the whole way home. My better self was the victor, and I consumed only one, a triumph for me.

For three weeks I attended the exercise center twice a week. I was weighed and measured each visit. After three weeks I had lost three and a half pounds and six inches, but the tape measure seemed tighter each time.

There was a steam room made available after the exercise part, but at first I shied away from it. One day when I was feeling adventuresome, I decided to give it a try. What did I have to lose? Only weight.

The towels we received were not adequate to cover oneself well. I entered the room with several other ladies, all of whom were clutching their towels. We were to remain in there for twenty minutes, until an attendant let us out. It seemed an eternity because it was hot and steamy and the heavy air made it difficult to breath. We all were thankful when the time was up.

An employee came to the door but could not open it. Another one tried to help but to no avail. We were a scared group of chubbies. The people outside shouted through the door that a handyman would get us out. That did not appeal to me, Busty Becker, with my hair limp, face all flushed, mascara dripping down my cheeks, and nudity barely covered by an undersized towel.

Well, the people were wrong. Along came two grinning men who appeared to be enjoying our ordeal. One looked vaguely familiar, but I dismissed that scary thought. As I tried to hide behind an extra-large gal, I considered putting my towel around my head so no one could recognize me, but I did not have the courage.

Finally the workmen were able to unhinge the door. As we were released from our sweatbox, I heard a voice say, "Hello, Mrs. Becker." I was shocked. T

Then I realized one of the men had taken care of our yard work the previous

summer. That had to be the peak of my embarrassment. Dignity had been dealt a hard blow.

The other ladies and I rushed to get dressed, and I was so unstrung that I even forgot about the brownies next door—the one favorable outcome of my deplorable day. I was not sure I would ever go back, but after thinking about it, I decided it would be in my best interest to do so. I had been careful of my intake of food and felt thinner and somewhat upbeat.

When I arrived at Slenderella more than a week after the unsettling experience, I walked to the entrance thinking, "You can do it. Keep your head high."

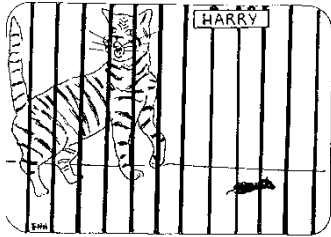
The door was locked.

Then I noticed a sign to the effect that Slenderella was closed by order of the Sheriff. As I stood there stunned, others arrived. We all were angry that we would be deprived of paid-for services. We felt sorry for each other as much as for ourselves.

I went home disheartened and disappointed. We could not get our money back, but I was more sorry about losing the support group I had become accustomed to. Also, I had begun to make progress and wanted it to continue.

About two weeks later, a Weight Watcher branch opened in Norwalk and thereby followed an interesting and rewarding period in my life—a story yet to be told.

How Could Timmie Disappear?



The Wednesday before Thanksgiving, I'm usually at the supermarket buying bags of food and then in the kitchen preparing for the holiday. But this Wednesday, I sat in my lounge chair sipping amaretto-flavored coffee.

The short, hectic workweek was over, and the shopping - some nuts, fruit, cheese, wine, and pecan pies - was done. Yes, Thanksgiving would be very different this year.

Instead of hosting the meal, we were going to be guests at the home of our married daughter Barbara, her husband, Russell, and our granddaughter, Jessica. It would be the first Thanksgiving for Jessica, who was just six months old. Russell's parents would be there, too.

Harry, my husband, and Diane, our ten-year-old daughter (now an excited young aunt), and I were planning to leave Thursday morning to arrive in Beverly, a northern suburb of Boston, by one o'clock. Since we were sleeping at our daughter's only one night, we didn't have to over-pack. Our only ordeal was to get Timmie, our cat, to the vet for boarding until our return on Friday.

I'm a cat lover. We'd had many cats through the years, and I had indulged them all. However, Timmie was the most demanding. He was also high-strung. Because we had recently moved to Westfield from Norwalk, Connecticut, this would be Timmie's first encounter with this animal hospital, and we were concerned about him.

After dinner Wednesday, Harry, Diane, and I managed to get our reluctant and angry pet into his traveling case. He hated to leave home because he knew we

were going away. Hoping to appease him, I put his favorite rubber half-chewed-up mouse and the food he liked in a bag.

For three miles, he snarled, talked, cried, growled, and meowed. I kept assuring him we loved him and would come back soon, but inside the animal hospital, Timmie grew frightened and became silent.

Check-in took only a few minutes—we had to leave our names and phone number and the number of a neighbor in case of emergency—but Timmie was so quiet that I feared he had passed out. We apologized once more for leaving him, and said our good-byes.

Thanksgiving Day was like a dream—good company, fabulous food, interesting conversation, and adorable Jessica, who behaved like a perfect lady and didn't overeat. (I wish I could say the same for the rest of us.) We all marveled at how much she'd grown. Even the friendly rivalry between Russell's mother and myself over who would hold the baby most amused us. (She won.) Friday, the day we had to leave to drive home, arrived all too soon.

Back in Westfield, we headed immediately to rescue Timmie. The woman at the desk looked through a large appointment book for what seemed like a very long time. Finally I asked, "What is taking so long?"

"I have no cat named Timmie," she said.

"That's impossible," I told her. "We checked him in on Wednesday evening."

"Are you sure Timmie is a cat and not a dog?" she asked.

We were flabbergasted.

"How could you ask such a crazy question?" Diane blurted out.

Agitated, the woman said, "Well, we do have a dog named Timmie who was also brought in Wednesday evening . . ."

"Look," I said. "I'm going to check every cage until we find our cat. He has to be here." But we saw no sign of him.

I had just started to panic when I heard a familiar howling, and the sound of a body being thrown against a cage door. Sure enough, there was Timmie, furious and frightened—and imprisoned for way too long.

"He must have heard us and recognized our smell," my husband said.

"Here's the problem," said Diane, pointing to the sign above Timmie's cage—which read HARRY in big, black letters.

Mystery solved.

We explained the mix-up to the woman at the desk. She looked as relieved as Timmie did as he leaped into his carrying case. We paid the fee and chuckled the whole way home.

When we got to our driveway, we let Harry—I mean Timmie—out. He ran to the bushes to hide—our punishment for having treated him so badly. Later we heard crying and scratching at the front door. When I opened it, he rushed in and went right to his bowl. I'd left him a peace offering: a cut-up chunk of white-meat turkey - his favorite.

He settled down to enjoy his repast. I could hear him purring. Then he paused, came over to me, and rubbed himself against my leg. I understood him perfectly.

"Thank you," he was saying. "And don't worry; I forgive you. After all, you are only human."

Your Space:

Memories, funny stories, moments to die for and to live for . . . It is your turn to write down your memories and then when you have a chance, to share them with others.