

WHERE DOGS DWELL

If you pursue justice you will achieve it
and put it on like a festal gown.
Birds consort with their kind,
justice comes home to those who practice it.

—*Ecclesiasticus 27: 8-10*

DEDICATED to the women and men worldwide
who strive for social justice and human rights.



Gabriola, BC Canada V0R 1X4

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Where Dogs Dwell

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WHERE DOGS DWELL

A nun's solidarity as a nurse midwife
in South America in the
turbulent 1970s and '80s



*This memoir is a true story.
Some locations and individuals' names
have been changed to respect their privacy.*



Kathleen Ann Kelly

Facing page: *This is a photo of a wool hand-embroidered tapestry made by an Aymara Peruvian woman in the Andes. After having enjoyed it for many years I donated it to the Immigration Center in Fort MacMurray (Northern Alberta). It hangs on the wall for all to love and admire.*

PART I

1972



“Though we travel the world over
to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us
or we will find it not.”

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Chapter One

FROM ENGLAND TO PERÚ

A voice echoed through the nurses' residence in Manchester, England. "Sister Kathleen, there's a call for you on the lobby payphone."

Who's phoning me this late in the evening?

From my sitting position in bed, I removed the heavy nursing books from my lap to the dresser before running down the three flights of concrete stairs. In the autumn semi-darkness of the lobby, I picked up the dangling receiver. "Hello, Sister Kathleen speaking."

Through heartrending sobs came the audible words. "I can't go."

It took me several seconds to recognize Sister Ursula's voice. "What do you mean, you can't go? What's wrong?"

"I failed my medical examination." A long pause. "My chest x-ray showed a shadow in the lower lobe of my right lung." She blew her nose before continuing. "They'll take a biopsy later this week."

"Bloody Hell." This wasn't a typical expression for me to use but student nurses said it many times a day. Whenever a nurse

said this in front of me, she'd say, "Sorry, Sister." I offered no apology for my visceral response. "This is shocking news, Sister Ursula. How are you feeling?"

"I tire easily but otherwise I'm okay. I wouldn't have known anything was the matter if they hadn't of done the chest x-ray as part of my application for a visa."

"You're young and with treatment you'll heal quickly. Then you'll be able to go to Perú."

I was lying. We both knew she'd never work in the Peruvian Andes at an altitude of 3,400 metres.

Being more realistic and truthful than I, Sister Ursula said, "No, I won't be able to serve God in Perú. He must have other plans for me."

"Perhaps you're right," I mumbled. "He must have other plans for you."

We remained silent for what seemed a very long time. Sister Ursula broke the silence with a question. "Kathleen, would you go to Perú in my place if Mother General agrees? It'd be a consolation to me if you were the sister to replace me. I know you volunteered and Mother General denied your request."

"That's right. Before the volunteers' meeting she told me I was too young. After the meeting she said, 'You are only 25 years of age. You don't have a professional career or perpetual vows or previous missionary experience.' These are her non-negotiable prerequisites."

"Yes, I remember the stipulations. However, since I can't go, she may have to compromise. I'll be devastated if the sister who replaces me isn't yearning to go. You and I have dreamed about being a missionary sister in Perú." She was choking back tears. "It's no longer a reality for me but I want it for you. Would it be okay with you, Sister Kathleen, if I suggest to Mother General that you be my replacement?"

“Okay, you may ask but you know that I’m not a full member of the congregation.”

“Yes, I’m aware of this. What you may not know is that Sister Mariana has suggested an experimental community, sisters and laity living together, for the Peruvian mission. We’re too small a congregation to spare four sisters. Two lay female teachers have volunteered to go with her. The three of them are prepared to leave within the fortnight.”

“Really? How did Mother General respond to this arrangement?”

“Sister Mariana was told that she had to have another sister with her besides the two teachers. That’s why I think Mother General may very well let you be my replacement.”

“I don’t know why I’m attracted to South America; I just am. Perhaps in another lifetime I was Peruvian! Thanks for putting my name forward. I’ll keep you in my prayers for the biopsy next week. God willing, Mother General will accept your proposal. Good night and God bless.”



THE PERUVIAN MISSION OF THE 1970s came in response to Pope John XXIII’s plea in the Second Vatican Council to every religious congregation to open a mission in South America.

Within the week, Mother General phoned. “Sister Kathleen, do you still want to go to Perú?”

“Yes, Mother, I’m eager to nurse in Perú.” *I’ll nurse in the mountains and villages where there are no doctors or hospitals to attend to the sick and dying. I’ll bring them comfort and healing.*

“You may replace Sister Ursula in opening the new Peruvian mission,” Mother said in her English accent. “Please don’t share this until I’ve announced it to the sisters.”

“Thank you, Mother.” I was ecstatic. I phoned Sister Ursula. “I’m going to be a missionary sister in Perú!”

“Oh, Kathleen, I’m happy for you. What’s the plan now?”

“I can’t go right away but I’ll graduate as a British registered nurse in early November. The following week I’ll fly to Montreal to pronounce Perpetual Vows in my sister Bonnie’s parish. My mother will come from Kenya.”

“Sounds great. I’ll be with you in spirit, Kathleen. When will you leave for Perú?”

“In the early new year. I’ll spend Christmas with Mum and the family. And Hogmanay with the sisters in Upstate New York. I’ll leave from New York City for Lima in January.”

“We’ll miss you. Remember to write to us from Perú. In English!” Sister Ursula joked.

“For sure. I’ll miss all of you as well. Sister Ursula, I’m grateful to you for opening the door to Perú for me. Your spirit will be with me as I live and work amongst the Peruvian people. ¡Adios, mi amiga!”

“Adios.”

Sister Mariana packed, and obtained a Peruvian visa, all within two weeks. She seemed indifferent as to whether another sister would be in the experiment community or not. A delay wasn’t in her agenda. She was a first-generation Hispanic-American residing in England, and anticipated the celebration of her thirtieth birthday in South America.

After it was announced that I had been chosen to go to Perú, Sister Mariana phoned and said, “Hey, Sister Kathleen, I hear you’re replacing Sister Ursula and will be my companion for the new mission. The two teachers and I will leave London for Lima in two days. See you in Perú. *Chou por ahora.*”

“Chou.” *Is this how she communicates? Doesn’t she want to*

know when I'll arrive in Perú? Or how I feel about being Sister Ursula's replacement?

Everything went as planned. I arrived in Montreal and had a reunion with my mother and siblings. The next day the regional superior, Mother Isabel, arrived by train from Upstate New York with Sister Carmen and Sister Barbara to preside at my perpetual vow ceremony. It was wonderful to have them with me.

Mother Isabel said, "Sister Kathleen, enjoy this time with your mother and family. We'll look forward to having you with us for New Year's."

"Thank you, Mother."

Shortly after I brought in the new year with the sisters, plans began to change.

Mother Isabel's deep-set brown eyes shone with authority. "You don't know Sister Mariana like I know her. Have you heard from her since she left England?"

"No."

"Do you know if she arrived in Perú?"

"No." *It's true. I don't know Sister Mariana well. I do know she's artsy and has a free-spirited side which Mother Isabel doesn't seem to appreciate.*

"I'm not booking your flight until you've heard from her," Mother Isabel informed me.

I was in Limbo. Even though I defended Sister Mariana to the sisters, a mouth full of canker sores and restless nights told me I resented Sister Mariana's lack of communication. Throughout this unsettling situation my guitar was my companion and comfort. I snuggled her against my breast. Her strings plucked my heart cords as sadly as the ballads I sang.

It was Sister Carmen who helped me out of this predicament. She attended teacher's training college and mentioned to a sister in a different congregation, "Mother Isabel won't book a flight to

Lima for Sister Kathleen until she hears from Sister Mariana who may or may not be in Perú.”

The sister said, “We’ve a convent in Callao. Callao is the port city in Lima. Our sisters there could meet Sister Kathleen at the airport. She may live in our convent until she connects with Sister Mariana.”

“Oh, this is great news. I think Mother Isabel will feel better about booking a flight to Lima for Sister Kathleen knowing your sisters will meet her.”

“It’ll be easier for Sister Mariana to contact Sister Kathleen if she’s in Lima than if she’s in the United States.”

“Makes sense. Thanks for your help.”

Chapter Two

FROM PERÚ TO CHILE

The Miami-to-Lima plane waited on the tarmac. Aboard the aircraft I weaved my way through the dimly-lit aisle past sleepy passengers until I found seat 26A. I agonized. *Did the baggage handlers have time to unload the two-hour late New York plane and re-load this plane?* The overwhelming thought of losing my Yamaha guitar was too much for me to bear. I was alone without the support of my family, friends or community. My tongue tasted the warm salty tears of fear and abandonment. I leaned my head against the hard porthole glass. Sleep provided a brief escape from the emotional pain of separation from my loved ones and my guitar.

The bright sunshine woke me and I squinted at the stewardess.

“Buenos dias, Hermana. Desea desayuno?” (Would you like breakfast?)

“Sí, por favor.”

“Y café?”

“Sí, por favor.”

The intrusive nightmare returned as the stewardess’s voice faded. *Where is my guitar? Why didn’t I bring it on the airplane*

with me? Why did I carelessly hand it over to the care of baggage handlers? The barrage of self-accusing questions ceased with the announcement:

“Seats in the upright position. Store handbags under the seat in front of you. Prepare for landing.”

The joy I imagined I’d feel on arrival in Lima, was over-shadowed by the nightmare. This was compounded at the Aduana (Customs) window when the officer stamped my Canadian passport and waved me forward to the exit doors. I frowned and extended my hand to receive my passport but another officer came and ushered me through the exit doors. Two sisters in pale-blue veils and matching dresses smiled.

“Bienvenida a Perú, Hermana Catalina.”

“I’m Sister Hyacinth and this is Sister Raymond.”

“The Customs Officer didn’t return my passport.”

Sister Hyacinth said, “Asi es la vida aca.” (That’s life here.)

“We’ll go to the immigration office in three days,” Sister Raymond assured me. “They’ll fingerprint your ten fingers and return your passport.”

Fighting back tears I said, “Besides not having my passport I don’t have my suitcase or guitar.”

“Sister Kathleen, it’ll be fine. It’s not unusual for baggage not to arrive on the same flight as the passenger. Your suitcase and guitar will be on the later flight from Miami this afternoon and be delivered to the convent. Now let’s get you to our convent where you can freshen up and have a nap.”

“Thank you, Sister Raymond.”

She was correct. After a siesta, I awoke to find my suitcase and guitar alongside the dresser in my room. In a strange way, this reunion with my guitar was symbolic of being reunited with my biological and religious families. It gave me a sense of security

in this otherwise unfamiliar environment of people, language and culture.

I was in the country three weeks before Sister Mariana phoned. “Hola, Catalina. Bienvenida a Perú. Que tal?” Her voice thrilled my heart until she said, “Today I enrolled you in the international language school. It’s situated in a beautiful area of Lima. It is a four-month course. Classes start next week.”

My heart plummeted. “In England we agreed I’d learn Spanish while living with you and the two teachers in the Andes.”

“Yes, but the girls think it’d be better for you to learn Spanish in the Lima language school.”

Before I could ask, ‘Where will I live? How can I communicate with you?’ Sister Mariana cut short our conversation. “Bye for now. I’ve got to go. Talk to you soon. Chou.”

“Chou.”

My hand put the phone into its holder in slow motion. The dreams and enthusiasm I had for this new experimental community left me. I was limp as a puppet with loose strings. I shared the unwelcomed news with Sister Hyacinth and Sister Raymond.

“Sister Kathleen, know you’re not alone,” Sister Raymond said. “Together we’ll make this strange situation a positive one. I’ll go with you to the school. They’ll arrange for you to board with a family nearby.”

“Most of us really loved being in the language school,” Sister Hyacinth comforted me. “I hope it’ll be a good experience for you.”

“Thanks for your support and encouragement.”

Classes were on weekdays between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. and from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Lunch was taken quickly to afford us volleyball enthusiasts time for a game between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. The Peruvian teachers slapped the ball with such force it had us ‘gringos’ leaping, often landing face first on the court turf.

By the third week of language school, sisters, priests, peace corps volunteers and business workers were united as friends.

In one game, between volleyball slams I spotted Sister Mariana accompanied by a lanky bearded male leaning against the fence. She introduced me to Padre Miguel, her Argentinian priest friend.

“Hola, Catalina. Bienvenida a Perú,” he said cheerfully.

“Hola, Padre Miguel.”

“Padre Miguel has invited us to form a new experiment community with him in Santiago, Chile,” Sister Mariana said excitedly. “The four of us will leave tomorrow. You’ll remain here to complete language school, but we’ll look forward to you joining us in a few months.”

I’m sure my eyebrows arched. I know my mouth opened in a hollow circle. Shocked. “Have you asked permission from Mother General in England to change missions from Perú to Chile?”

She laughed at my naivety and fired back, “I’ll inform her once we’re set up in Santiago.” She left with a lit cigarette held between her shaky fingers.

Sister Mariana wore no veil or other distinguishing religious symbol. Nor did Padre Miguel wear a clerical garb. He dressed in jeans and a bright flowered shirt. *I must look conservative to them in my modified habit: a blue skirt, blouse, veil and small crucifix on a chain around my neck. I need to appear less n-u-n-n-y. It’ll be hard enough for me to fit into their experimental community after four months of separation without me arriving dressed like a nun.* To regain perspective, I played Debbie Reynolds’s song *Que Sera, Sera* on my guitar. In singing the words I found the courage to persevere in my dream to immerse myself in South America.

When I finished language school, alone and unaware of the political situation in Chile, I took the long bus ride to Santiago. Like Sister Mariana I didn’t ask permission of Mother General to leave Perú for Chile. *If I tell her, she’ll tell me to return to England. I’m*

not going to lose this opportunity of being a missionary sister in South America. We travelled on the dusty highway and from the bus window I saw cotton pickers in the fields and groups of straw houses alongside the fields.

The bus made meal stops every eight hours. The restaurants consisted of high concrete roofs over spacious patios with wooden tables. The menu was fish, rice, salad and a gaseosa (soft drink). The first time I asked, “Por favor, donde esta el bano?” and the fellow pointed outside behind the restaurant, I had my first culture shock. The bathroom was a hole in the ground between two concrete-shaped feet behind a tin wall with an unlatched door. Not easy to target the hole wearing slacks. I soon learned that Chilean women squatted with ease in their wide bright colourful skirts. I whacked away flies as they hovered above the wet ground. *Remember, these flies in their tireless frenzy to survive are playing a ping-pong game between the restaurant and this outhouse. Don't eat or drink no matter what.*

As the bus pulled off the highway for the last restaurant stop on the morning of the fourth day, a male passenger spoke to me in English with a Chilean accent. “Hermana, this is a clean restaurant. They've the best fresh fish sandwich you'll ever taste. Come with me.”

The thought of eating a fish sandwich at five in the morning nauseated me, but a sister couldn't show disdain. After all, didn't Jesus eat fish with his apostles? *Hmm*, I had to trust. And to my surprise the fresh fish sandwich was scrumptious.

Sister Mariana, the teachers Selma and Leah, and Padre Miguel met me at the bus depot. We took the local transit. “Los pueblos jovenes are impoverished areas on the outskirts of the city centre,” Sister Mariana said. “They're hidden from tourists' view. In the pueblos jovenes people get their drinking water from taps strapped to wooden posts.”

“Are you telling me we live in a pueblo joven?”

“Yes. We’ve built a small wooden house on a corner plot,” said Sister Mariana. “It’s simple but better than the locals’ houses of dirt floors and mud walls.”

Indeed, they’ve built a simple wooden house; no exaggeration! I sure hope Padre Miguel knows more about his priesthood than he does about building. The wall separating my bedroom from the teachers’ bedroom consisted of crude wooden 2-inch by 6-inch planks stacked horizontally on edge. The planks were warped concave or convex, leaving obvious gaps. My bed consisted of three untreated 2x6 planks supported by two 2x4s screwed to the wall. A mildewed sleeping bag and a thin pillow lay on top. No mattress. I marvelled at the starkness. *I guess this is how the vow of poverty is lived as a missionary.*

MY FIRST CHILEAN PATIENT

Sister Mariana asked, “Kathleen, would you please speak with this mother about her children’s rash?” before she exited the room. Paola, the 28-year-old mother had five children ranging in age from 8 years to 10 months.

“All my children have this rash,” she said. “I could only bring Santitos, Pablito and Marisol with me. The oldest girl, Sarita, is minding el pequinito.” I remembered learning in language school that Chileans use the diminutive colloquially: ‘ito’ for masculine and ‘ita’ for feminine words.

Earlier in the week a lady had asked me, “Donde vive, Usted?” (Where do you live?)

I understood the question and answered, “Yo vivo en la casa en la esquina,” (I live in the house on the corner) as I pointed to it.

She said in a drawn-out voice, “Aw... en la caw si ta en la es skin ita.”

I smiled. But inside I screamed *that’s what I said in proper Spanish.*

Paola stroked her four-year-old Santitos’ head as he snuggled against her oozing breasts while Marisol, the six-year-old,

stood shyly behind her mother's chair. Paola's wide colourful woollen skirt and shawl prevented me from observing Marisol's more severe skin condition. *Is this a form of 'machismo' in South American culture? Favoritism of the son, indifference to the daughter?*

Initially, I thought the skin rash was due to not thoroughly rinsing bed linen and clothes. I had watched women hand-rubbing clothes in soapy cold water and rinsing them in an adjacent basin with slightly less soapy water. I knew water was precious and its use restricted by the city from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Neighbours monitored each other. If someone took too much water from the common tap, he or she was scolded by the rest of the neighbours. Paola nodded affirmatively to soap being the possible culprit for the skin condition.

"Instead of washing a bundle of clothes, wash a few at a time," I said. "This way the rinsing water won't be as soapy. I'll get some ointment from the pharmacy to relieve the itching and bring it to your house."

Paola left encouraged after giving me a strong hug. I was happy. *I treated my first Chilean patient. It's rewarding and all I imagined it to be. The joy of showing compassion and care to God's less fortunate.* At 26 years of age, I thought physical poverty, "the poor," represented misery in all its forms. Years later, after having lived with the physically poor, I came to realize they're rich in loving one another, sharing and in cultural values. This realization helped me to shift from materially helping the physically poor to standing with them in their fight for equality and human rights.

When I reached Paola's mud-walled house with the jar of ointment, her two hairless dogs bounded snarling toward me. My heart pounded, my arms were covered in goose bumps, and my tongue cleaved to my jaw (Psalm 137:6). Sarita ordered the dogs to lie down at a distance. I entered the dark windowless house

which had stamped earth for flooring. After the cultural hugs were exchanged, I sat on an unstable wooden chair in my white lab coat and asked Paola if the dogs were permitted inside.

“Only at night,” she said. “Sometimes they sleep with my children.”

The culprit isn't soap. It's scabies. Dogs with mange transfer their skin disease to people, mostly children, as scabies. With as much sensitivity as possible I explained, “Paola, maybe the dog's mange is causing the children's skin condition. Perhaps it would be better if the dogs didn't sleep with the children.”

Paola was attentive to my medical advice but remained silent. Her warm smile faded, indicating a subtle shift in our trusting patient-nurse relationship. *She's probably worried the skin condition can't be treated since it's not the soap causing the skin rash.*

“Paola, don't worry. I'll bring you some different ointment. The new ointment will clear this skin condition for your children.”

Again, she listened but made no comment. I left the house thinking Paola's silence was due to embarrassment. As a sister I was supposed to console not increase worries. From a spiritual perspective I had failed to alleviate Paola's pain. *Jesus console Paola. Help me to show compassion as well as offer medical knowledge.*

The next day, Paola came to our corner house and said to Sister Mariana, “Sister Kathleen offended me. She suggested the dogs shouldn't sleep with my children.”

Sister Mariana apologized. “I'll talk with Sister Kathleen. She's new and doesn't know the culture.”

After Paola left Sister Mariana called to me, “Kathleen, you can't impose your Western medical training on these locals. The dogs sleep with children to keep them warm at night. June is the beginning of winter in the Southern Hemisphere. The nights will get colder until late October.”

“Sister Mariana, I told her the truth and was gentle in saying *maybe* when I knew for certain the cause of the skin condition. If this isn’t treated there’ll be health complications for her children.”

“Yes, I understand. I’ll talk with her. But until you learn the culture and are more fluent in street Spanish, it’ll be difficult for you to treat the locals.”

Sister Mariana’s analysis of the situation felt cruel and tears streamed down my face. The exhilaration of the day before was gone. I felt deflated and humiliated.

As a result, I volunteered in the local hospital in order to learn medical terminology, medical ethics and cultural sensitivity. The female surgical unit consisted of six metal military beds with no privacy drapes separating them. Head Nurse Amelia, along with her husband, who was head surgeon, permitted me to work on their unit.

One day I assisted Nurse Amelia’s husband in a sternal marrow puncture. I was shocked to see how he laughed and talked with another surgeon who was doing a lumbar puncture in the corner bed. Assuming he was distracted I reminded him, “You haven’t given the patient a local anaesthetic.”

He smiled. “I’ll cause her more pain by giving her a local anaesthetic. Watch. I’ll be in and out before an anaesthetic could have effect.”

Eyes widen above my cloth surgical mask as I witnessed his professional speed and accuracy. He was correct. My patient appeared more stunned than in pain. As if she had been stung by a wasp.

On another occasion I watched as Chilean nurses and doctors saved a hepatically comatose female patient. “To keep the three-way tube inserted in her trachea at an angle, I’ll tie a string to this empty coke bottle and fling it over a bed screen,” Nurse Amelia said. “I’ll maintain pressure at 0.5mmHg to keep the rubber

bubble at the end of the tube inflated. This pressure will prevent further bleeding.”

When the patient was stabilized Nurse Amelia explained, “We couldn’t insert crushed ice in the bubble as it’d melt too fast.”

The hospital wasn’t air conditioned. Chilean doctors and nurses had invented an alternative method to save this patient’s life. She gained consciousness in a few hours and wanted supper.

Prior to discharge, the doctor sat on the edge of this elderly patient’s bed. “Señora, you have to stop drinking. It nearly killed you this time.”

Standing on the opposite side of the bed I wondered how many times there had been before this time. The elderly woman leaned forward, took the doctor’s hand in hers, and with a twinkle in her beautiful deep brown eyes assured him, “¡No tomo mucho!” (I don’t drink much.)

Her charming manner caused both the doctor and I to laugh. He knew that there wasn’t any point in lecturing her. Wiser to show her love and acceptance. *This is cultural sensitivity in action. Chilean doctors have a human-medical relationship with their patients.* In that moment I understood my un-attached approach to treating a patient needed to change. I needed to form a friendship before treating a patient and maintain it during and after treatment if I wanted to work successfully in South America.

Chapter Four

CHILE

In July 1972 protesters lit bonfires on the main streets of Santiago and food was rationed. I witnessed the demonstrations as I commuted by micro bus daily to and from the hospital. Sometimes the protests were violent and prevented my getting home after work. Because there were no phones in the pueblo joven, I couldn't let Sister Mariana know that I was safe. She had to wait and see if I turned up. Not returning home after work became the norm.

“Who are the protesters? Why are they protesting?” I asked Sister Mariana.

“The wealthy right-wing conservatives raised the price of food. President Salvador Allende and his Marxist government have put a freeze on food prices and on property ownership. The landlords closed all shops in retaliation.”

I waited patiently in the street lineup with my ration coupon for cuatro pancitos (four bread buns). When it was my turn I handed the server my coupon and he gave me the buns. As I turned to go home, I saw a mother with a toddler on her back and three youngsters holding her skirt. “Señora, here,” I said, “take these four bread buns for your children.”

As I neared the corner, I heard a raised voice coming from our house. Inside, Selma's hands were flapping in pace with her flapping tongue as she admonished Sister Mariana, "You gave away our oil ration, Sister Mariana. You had no right to do this."

She'll scream when she hears I gave the bread ration away as well. I was right. When I tried to explain why I'd given away our bread, she was furious. She turned her anger on me. "YOU, Catalina, can give away YOUR ration but YOU have **no right** to give away MY ration."

I shared a glance with Sister Mariana. She smiled. *I think Sister Mariana and I are more alike than I realized.*

This wasn't the only time Selma admonished us. She ground eggshells into powder and expected us to consume a teaspoonful with our mug of tea, explaining, "You need a daily intake of calcium and there's no milk or cheese now that food is rationed."

I'll die before I put crushed eggshells into my mouth. I know where they've come from!



THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER SHOWED A cartoon of two Chilean women in a food lineup. The caption below the cartoon read "En que cola vive Usted?" (In what lineup do you live?) The point was not only how much time we spent in obtaining daily food rations, but what were our various needs. Initially, kiosks remained open to sell cigarettes, soft drinks and sweets, but then the sign NO HAY CIGARILLOS hung on closed shutters. Eventually every sign read NO HAY and everyone knew there was nothing of anything to buy.

In the midst of this turmoil my cousin, Charlotte, came to visit me overnight on her South American tour. I went to the airport to meet her. At the arrival door, she smiled broadly, revealing

deep-set dimples. We excitedly hugged until her body stiffened in my arms.

“Why are these armed soldiers in the airport? I thought you had a democratically-elected Marxist president who is a physician; not a soldier.”

I whispered, “We’ll talk later.”

The soldiers wore green berets on their egg-shaped heads with a pencil-width of brown hair showing between their berets and ears. They all wore dark-rimmed sunglasses to appear identical. Such uniformity shouted **together we are a formidable force**. In full combat gear they guarded escalators, baggage carousals, exit doors and washrooms.

“Charlotte, I’m glad you have your backpack and handbag with you.”

“I travel lightly.”

I whisked her to the exit doors before we drew the attention of either the soldiers or the airport personnel. In the warm Chilean sunshine Charlotte relaxed. We pushed away the thick hands of unofficial chauffeurs attempting to grab Char’s backpack through the open taxi door. Our official chauffeur was clean shaven, smelled of lavender aftershave, and said, “Wheel... cum... where you go?”

“Gracias, Hotel del Plaza, por favor.”

The taxi pulled into dense traffic but our chauffeur was unperurbed by diesel wafting through the open windows or by the incessant honking of horns. He weaved his way effortlessly between automobiles and micros with passengers hanging from the open doors, clinging to one another, sandaled feet on the lowest step, balancing like trapeze artists.

Char squeezed my forearm. “Does anyone ever fall from these micros?”

I shook my head from side to side with closed eyes. *She doesn’t*

need to know I hang from the micro's open door on my daily commute to and from the hospital.

“Hotel del Plaza... here.”

Our driver leaned back to receive the fare and hopefully a tip in American dollars. I didn't disappoint him. The hotel porter opened the back door, pulled the backpack onto a trolley, sending metal-on-metal screeches into the atmosphere. He pushed the wobbly trolley into the hotel entrance and waited for Charlotte and I to enter, hand raised for a tip. I noticed his diminished height and his Down Syndrome facial features. We smiled. I placed an American bill in the palm of his short chubby hand. He left to unload the next taxi.

In Charlotte's hotel room we hugged again. “You need to sleep and I need to do my afternoon shift at the hospital. I'll return later. Perhaps we'll go for a walk in the park before supper.”

“That'd be great, I need to move. I've been sitting all day.”

“Sleep well, see you later.”

When I returned, I found Charlotte in a fetal position in bed, shivering. “What's the matter, Char? Are you sick?”

“No. I was woken by loud shouting in the street. There were bonfires below the window and people throwing telephone books from the hotel onto the fires. Then soldiers dressed in military combat arrived throwing cans which exploded causing a horrible smell and cloudy air and people ran in all directions.” Tears of anger and fear crept from Charlotte's narrowed eyes. “How can you live here?” she asked.

Saddened, I said, “Unfortunately, Char, you've arrived at a terrible time. This is one of Chile's worst political moments. It's over for today. Get dressed and we'll go for a walk.”

It astounds me now to realize how immune I had become to the violence. Obviously, I had developed a survival technique.

In the lobby doorway Char said, “Will this doorman know if I could buy cigarettes in the hotel?”

“I’ll ask him.”

He said, “If you would dine in the hotel this evening, perhaps I could bring you some cigarettes.”

Once outside I said, “This is supporting black market, Char. Are you aware of this?”

She glared. “Right now, I need a cigarette.”

After our walk, we sat in the hotel dining room at a table with an overhanging white tablecloth, a votive candle, and a long-stemmed rose in a slim vase. The waiter leaned forward, slyly dropping a carton of cigarettes in Charlotte’s lap from beneath his arm towel as he poured red wine into her glass. She slipped him some money and he wiped the neck of the bottle before slowly retreating. *What a shrewd black marketeer.*

Due to the curfew, I stayed the night with Charlotte. In the morning we hugged and whispered our goodbyes. She left the hotel for the airport and I went to the hospital as usual.

Except nothing **that day** in the hospital was as usual.

A SNAPSHOT MEMORY

The front-page headline read **PARO NACIONAL**. A complete shutdown for twenty-four hours organized by the Left Wing. This followed President Salvador Allende's powerful speech on December 5, 1972 when he condemned EEUU (the USA) and called them 'Imperialists'. I didn't comprehend the significance of these words. Nor did I connect them with Nurse Amelia's absence. It felt uncanny and intimidating in the hospital without my translator and colleagues. My spiritual voice assured me. *It's okay, Kathleen, you can show compassion and empathy without a fluency in Spanish.* I focused on my patients and completed my shift.

The next day Nurse Amelia and staff were in the hospital when I arrived.

"Good morning, Nurse Amelia."

She ignored me and completed patients' rounds with the surgeons. Normally Amelia translated if she thought I didn't understand what the patient said. Today she offered no translations. For the rest of the morning, she stayed in her office. *Perhaps Amelia has a migraine, or a bad menstrual period.* At lunch hour Amelia went to the cafeteria without me.

When I placed my tray on her table, she and her two nurse friends took their trays to another table leaving me alone. I froze.

After lunch I stood in Amelia's office doorway. "Why did the three of you walk away when I came to the table?"

She answered in rapid Spanish.

Confused, I asked, "Why are you speaking to me in Spanish when I can't understand what you're saying?"

She spoke louder and more aggressively.

"Why are you treating me this way?" I asked, my voice quivering. "Tell me, Amelia, what's wrong?"

She walked defiantly towards me. When she was inches in front of my face, she shouted in English, "WHO ARE YOU?"

"You know who I am. I'm a sister, a British trained nurse, and I'm Canadian."

She roared, "YOU ARE C.I.A."

This is a snapshot memory for me. Examples of snapshot memories in our time: JFK's killing, Princess Diana's fatal car accident, Nine-Eleven. A person will always remember exactly where they were when these events occurred. I know I was in Amelia's office doorway when I first heard the designation C.I.A.

"You're a right-wing supporter like all Catholics," Amelia continued.

"I'm not political, Nurse Amelia. I don't support any wing."

"Why did you work yesterday?"

"Because I'm a nurse and there were patients who needed help."

She grunted, "Basta!" through clinched jaws, neck veins bulging and fanned-out fingers in front of her face. She stomped across the floor tiles to her metal desk. "VAYA DE AQUI." (GET OUT OF HERE!)

I stood immobilized in the doorway with the initials C.I.A. hanging in the air until my shaking legs carried me down the wide

smooth grey concrete stairs onto the crowded street of protesters. Sweat rolled from my armpits over the ribs of my trembling body. My hair was damp with perspiration. Derogatory slogans crackled from loudspeakers on the back of pick-up trucks. *“Foreigners out of Chile... forty-eight hours.”*

I was petrified and feared for my life. *It doesn't matter that I'm Canadian. I'm white. In their eyes I'm North American and therefore the enemy.* It was too dangerous for me as a redheaded blue-eyed gringa to remain on the streets. I looked for somewhere to hide. Before I could find a place, I was shoved by a passerby and tumbled down a slope to land behind a toppled billboard. To this day, I have no idea how I made it home to our experimental community. I don't know if I returned the same day or several days later.

The next memory I have is of Sister Mariana, Padre Miguel, Selma, Leah and myself sitting round the wooden table staring silently into the darkness, listening to the loudspeakers' repeated slogan: *“Foreigners out of the country... forty-eight hours”* until the early hours of the morning. We huddled in blankets, discussing plans over a bottle of Chilean wine. Who would stay? Who would leave? What were our options?

“We've decided that it'd be best for you to leave Chile, Catalina,” Padre Miguel said. “You're politically naive, lack fluent Spanish, and appear North American.” *Yeah, as opposed to your Hispanic/Argentinian features.* “We four are going underground. We will make our way to my home in Argentina.”

“Let me stay with you,” I begged.

“Catalina,” Sister Mariana said in a calm voice. “I don't want you to have a nervous breakdown when President Allende's government is overthrown. President Nixon, as others before him, is plotting to instigate a coup to overthrow President Allende's government. When Allende nationalized the copper industry it

escalated their determination to oust him. It was for this reason Nurse Amelia accused you of being C.I.A. The Central Intelligence Agency provides information to the United States government about politics in non-American countries. That's why you must leave." I stared at her in disbelief. "It'll be a brutal time in Chile when the overthrow happens," she continued. "We hope we'll be in Argentina when it does."

Leah offered me more wine. I nodded.

Sister Mariana continued, "You're 26 years of age and have a future. I want you to leave tomorrow evening for your own safety, Kathleen. Miguel and I will accompany you in a taxi onto the airport grounds. The taxi driver is a friend of ours. He'll drop you at the airport and bring us home."

The decision was made. I was a threat to the group's survival.

Armed soldiers lined roads leading to the airport and thronged inside. They hurried us foreigners through customs barely checking our passports. It was evident they wanted us out of Chile NOW. My body shook. My eyes were so wide open I thought they'd never close again. My mouth was dry. In the boarding terminal washroom, abdominal cramps provoked a two-way sensation of wanting to vomit and to empty my bowel. Standing with my foot on the ceramic toilet bowl, I could do neither. I wailed loudly. *I've longed to be in South America. I don't want to live anywhere but here.* Between sobs I heard: "Foreigners board the plane to Miami, Florida. AHORA."

I sank into the window seat and moaned again. *I've longed to be in South America. I don't want to live anywhere but here.*

We took off and fifteen minutes later touched down in Lima's Jorge Chavez airport en route to Miami, where my cousin Charlotte boarded the aircraft.

"Oh, Kathleen, I'm so relieved to see you." She sat beside me and held me in her arms.

As the airplane lifted upwards, I stared at the South American soil disappearing beneath night clouds. With a broken heart I made a vow, *I'll return to South America and when I do, I'll have a strong political stance. I'll never again be expelled because I don't understand the political situation or am naïve about oppression. I'll be a religious advocate for the poor against corrupt politics no matter whether the corrupt politics are internal or external.*

Inside Miami airport, on the down escalator we had a panoramic view of passengers returning from somewhere or waiting to leave. I saw flamboyantly-dressed men and women in large straw hats, Bermuda shorts, brightly-coloured shirts. The shirts were unbuttoned due to expanded girth. The people spoke and laughed loudly. I was ashamed to be white and of the same culture.

My cousin Paulette, Charlotte's sister, and her husband, Eric, met us in the arrivals lounge. They knew nothing of the rations in Chile nor of the over-throw of Allende's government. The realities of Miami and Chile were bi-polar, yet only six flying hours apart.

"Let's go to a restaurant before heading home," suggested Eric. "You girls must be dying to have all-American food."

The plates around us contained as much food as would feed a Chilean family. I literally couldn't eat on seeing the abundance. When Eric noticed I hadn't touched anything on my plate he cheerfully said, "We'll ask for a doggie bag." My face must have shown horror. He explained, "Kathleen, it's a polite way of saying we'll barbeque this food tomorrow."

When Eric asked, "What do you love about the South American culture?" I passionately replied, "I met *real* people."

He laughed. "Are we not real people, Kathleen?"

"NO. The people there are *real*."

I was unfamiliar then with Carl Jung's description of the persona (the false self). How people often hide behind a mask that

gives them the appearance of who they think they ought to be. In Chile, people lived without a mask and intuitively I knew the difference.

I had had my own experience in Chile of living without a mask. I was baking and my apron had flour on it and my sleeves were rolled up but I had to go to the kiosk for an egg.

Initially I was frustrated with the inconvenience of having to change my clothes before leaving the house. Then I realized *I can walk to the kiosk without removing my apron or rolling down my sleeves. I can go as I am without anyone looking sideways at me.* It was liberating. The reality was I was baking. I didn't have to remove the apron, roll down my sleeves, comb my hair or pretend. Pretend what? That I wasn't baking? I learned that in poverty there's no pretense. The wealth of poverty is the freedom to be *real*.

PART II

TEN YEARS EARLIER



Chapter Six

The Funeral

Relatives and friends paused in front of my father's photo. Some tearful, some pensive, yet together in grief, they processed into the dimly-lit funeral parlour. They offered condolences to my mother, to my three siblings, and to me before edging their way to the coffin. Aunt Miriam stared wide-eyed at her brother in the mahogany satin-lined box. She gazed at Ted's dead white face against his silvery black hair. She cried and giggled behind her gloved hand. Bewildered.

Aunt Miriam approached Mother. I overheard their hushed conversation. "Ona, I tell you, Ted is better dressed now than he was in life."

Leona, my mother, raised her eyebrows and rolled her eyes. "Yes, that's because he's laid out in a friend's suit."

"What?" Aunt Miriam blurted out.

My mother, embarrassed by some guests' raised eyebrows, guided her into an alcove. "Ted and I had an invitation to a wedding next week. Ted told his friend, Ken, that he wouldn't go because he didn't have a suit. Ken offered him a loan of his dressy suit. That's Ken's suit you're seeing Ted in over there."

Aunt Miriam snorted.

Mother continued, “I was in such a state when the undertaker came with the body bag, I didn’t notice he had Ken’s suit over his arm. I focused on my poor Ted being stuffed....”

Aunt Miriam doubled over with laughter. “Ona, stop it... my sides are going to burst.”

But the memory brought a fresh bout of sobbing for my mother. I watched Aunt Miriam and Mother rock back and forth in a tearful embrace.

When the parlour was empty, I stood beside my father’s coffin. I remembered how he’d sing the Irish ballad *I’ll Take You Home Again, Kathleen* when I was a little girl. “One day, Kathleen, you and I will go to Ireland,” he’d tell me. At four years of age, I didn’t know how far Ireland was from Montreal. It didn’t matter. My father was a dreamer. I understood the importance wasn’t the dream but the ability to dream.

My mother was a realist. She’d say, “Ted, why are you telling this child your pipedreams? We don’t have two cents to rub together.” *Why does she always have to ruin our time together with her words?*

Alone in the funeral parlour with Dad I heard, “*Live our dream, Kathleen, go to Ireland.*”

“I will.” I promised.

Lost in the imagery of Ireland’s green fields and wind blowing my hair I felt a gentle caress. Turning, I buried my wet face in my best friend Isaac’s chest.

“Kathleen, let’s go to White’s.” White’s was the teen hangout restaurant two blocks from the funeral parlour.

“Yeah, let’s go. I need to get out of here. And I need to tell you something.”

“What?”

“Just wait.”

We walked the two blocks hand in hand. It felt good to hold Isaac's hand. It was soft and warm. I felt like a normal teenager again. In the funeral parlour, the old people had all been dressed in black. Their solemn faces depressed me. In the restaurant Isaac and I squeezed into a corner booth. From the window we watched the low sun set between the houses and city traffic.

"So, what do you want to tell me, Kathleen?"

"My mother is moving the family after the burial," I said. "My father signed the rental agreement, not my mother. With Dad gone the rental agreement is no longer valid."

"Are you going to end up on the street?"

"No. We're moving to Ville St. Laurent where I'll go to a private school with my cousins."

Isaac raised his head from sipping soft ice cream through a straw. "I hope you won't become a snob! Can we still be friends?"

"Of course, we'll always be friends, Isaac. Let's get back to the funeral parlour before my mother notices I left."

"Yeah, okay."

My mother was readying herself to leave with some relatives. I left with them. Within a week, we had a funeral, a burial and moved. There was no time to grieve. Grief went underground. It didn't resurface for three decades, until I was forty-two years old. My coping strategy at fifteen for dealing with my father's fatal heart attack was to immerse myself in school activities and teenage life.

The principal in the new school, Mother Aloysius, glanced at my failed eighth-grade report card. "Oh, dear!" she said as she lowered the card onto the table behind her. Then she smiled. "Kathleen, I'm placing you in ninth grade on a three-month trial. If your grades are good, you'll remain in ninth grade. If they aren't, you'll repeat grade eight. Are you in agreement?"

"Yes," I said. *I can't believe that she's doing this for me.*