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"Love Rocks!"

I'm a Capricorn. As children, Capricorns are intense, very wise and highly emotional. We're known to be older as children and get younger as adults. I was a Capricorn through and through—intense, dramatic, imaginative, emotional. I read at an early age and as a result was always tossing out vocabulary words well beyond my years.

Because I was reading at such a young age, my imagination was huge! There were no limits where my mind could take me. I was forever taking the characters in books, humanizing them, working myself into their stories—even writing letters to them. I was a child that lived completely in fantasy and I loved it!

My parents encouraged my dramatic flair—I would say, "Hey Dad, I'm going to go and join the monks in Katmandu, okay?" And he would say, "Sounds great, Cara." I was funny too—always being the comedian. My mother had been an actor and singer years ago, and I seemed to embrace that dramatic flair of expression. A constant, loving force in my life, my mother also encouraged me to express myself. She is a great laughter and so much fun to tell crazy stories or jokes to and enjoys our shared laughter. My sister was 4 ½ years younger and absolutely perfect, it was no secret that my father favored her, so I had to make an impression in another way. Making people laugh, being light and silly was who I was on the outside. But on the inside I was a thoughtful, sensitive, caring little girl longing for that male role model to love me.

As a child I was looking for that ultimate grandfather figure and it was out of my love for a book called the "Diary of Anne Frank" that I found him. After reading this book, I was compelled to write to Otto Frank (just as I had always written to the other "characters" in books) and tell him all the things that were going on inside my head. The words just flowed onto the paper and I sealed the letter, mailed it off and waited. Would the father of this famous lost child who lived on the other side of the world really write to 12-year-old me? It took 6 months, but Otto did write back and so began a relationship that would span nearly 20 years (until Otto's death). Finally I had the grandfather I always wanted!

While I had to look far for this grandfather figure, the true light of my life was right there in my own home. My grandmother, Gizella, lived with us growing up and she was everything to me. Beautiful, dramatic, funny—I would watch and listen to her as she read to me in her thick, Hungarian accent. The strange sounds from that faraway world of Budapest, dancing on her lips—I adored her. Our home was vibrant with the scent of her

make your mark

lavender-honey home-made creams that she slathered on her elegantly high cheekbones, ski-jump nose (that I would always trace with my fingers) and flawless features. Everyday the kitchen was bubbling with paprikas and tortes and poppyseed cakes that she would make. Her cooking techniques were a pinch of this and dollop of that—everything was intuitive and designed to taste and look perfect—and they always were. When she wasn't cooking she was crocheting or knitting or embroidering masterpieces that she would rip-out and start over again if there was even a tiny blip wrong with them. For a child whose parents always worked, having Grandma home was the foundation that both my sister and I so needed and loved. We cherished her.

There were a few things that really influenced, shaped me as a child. Hard, jarring memories that have each stayed with me today. As a young child, I was hospitalized with what they thought was leukemia. I was placed in a section of the hospital reserved for only the sickest children—the ones that would probably never recover. I was surrounded by death and dying—kind of hard to live in a fantasy world there. Since I couldn't cope that way, I needed another outlet for my own fear so I would get out of bed, and go around and talk to the kids, make them laugh. I remember the nurses kept yelling at me to get back in bed, but I was compelled to do this. Needless to say I got yelled at a lot. In the end, I didn't have leukemia and went home healthy—I didn't die like the others even though I was convinced I would. To this day, the smell of clean sheets sends me back to that place—I go through a lot of perfume trying to erase the “hospital” out of my sheets.

When I was ten years old my family and I went on a cross-country trip. We stopped in a little town in the South. It was the mid 1950s and I saw a sign that said “Colored Water.” I thought wow! I want some of that! As I walked over, the gas station attendant told that fountain was for “colored people” and my fountain was over there. I was shocked. Was this really the world we lived in? I had to find a way to speak to the world. Out of my frustration and anger came a poem “Be Friends.” The experience was my first inkling that the world was not the way it seemed to be.

This uneasiness with the world was creeping into my fantasy world and changing me. Causing me to question, seek answers, guidance. That's where my head was when I wrote Otto a particularly impassioned letter. I had lost hope and questioned all that was going on in the world (the assassinations of President John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy, the Vietnam War, my own meaning in the world) and Otto answered with practical thoughts that gave me the perspective I craved. When I finally got to meet Otto and his second wife, Fritzi (who was also like a grandmother to me), I was around 32-years-old and traveled to Basel, Switzerland all alone. Otto and Fritzi met me at the train station and welcomed me into their home. Was I really here with Otto after all these years? Then he took me into his office, opened a closet door and took out a box and handed it to me. “These are your letters, Cara.” He had saved them all! This was the epitome of validation I will still never forget. And when I looked back at the closet I noticed there were many other boxes there. Children like me from all over the world had written to Otto, too. Otto had lost his daughters but became a father to children all over the world. We were all Otto's children—a concept that would come back to life later in a documentary now in progress.

During those years of writing to Otto I started and then gave up my dream of becoming a dancer. I had the talent, but not the discipline. My writing was a continuum—I was a freelance writer for many well-known clients when I got married and had two beautiful little boys—Ethan and Jesse. I always knew I would



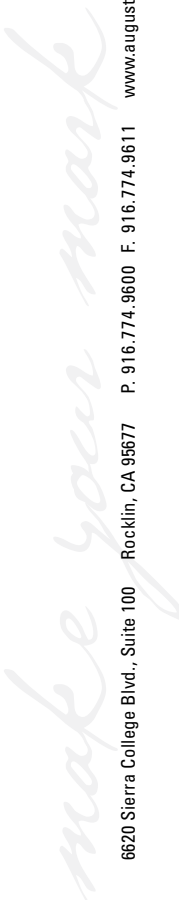
have boys and the three of us were wonderful together. These little boys allowed me to stay firmly in my fantasy world—Peter Pan had nothing on me! I never grew up—the boys and I played all day long. Theatre productions, dancing, music, art, hiking, afternoons in the park, it was all such a blast! At one point I thought it would be great if we all learned an instrument and we did! We formed our own string quartet and my boys nicknamed me “Mother Plucker.” I was a horrid viola player, but was having fun in spite of my lack of performance skills! For my boys, I created the childhood I always wanted. Today both of my sons are in the creative industry—one is a producer and the other is an actor. Being Peter Pan made for a wonderful life for awhile, but in the end it cost me many grown-up issues and my marriage.

My love for animals has also been a huge factor in my life. For many years, I was a volunteer elephant keeper at the Los Angeles Zoo. (I also worked with the entire grouping of animals from reptiles to birds, hoof stock, apes, monkeys, and especially the elephants.) The matriarch elephant, Gita, was like a soul-spirit, leaning into me, her huge gentle eyes staring into my soul, giving me strength, especially during a particularly tumultuous time of my life. Though all animals are precious to me, the elephant is my totem—especially because of Gita, who like elephants, I will never forget. The experience taught me that there is actually great therapy in shoveling huge piles of poop into wheelbarrows and dumping them into a dumpster—the act was cleansing for us all! And in the end we celebrated a “clean barn” something we don’t get to do in our lives. This everyday task was a life changing experience for me. I was more grounded and happier because of it.

The tumultuous time in my life was due to my divorce from my husband of more than 23 years. How do you suddenly go from being Peter Pan to Wendy? I was in my late forties and as they say in Peter Pan, “All children but one must grow up.” I was catapulted into reality and I was devastated. I fled to Monterey from Los Angeles and went straight to my friend, Cappie (a “Mommy and Me” kindred spirit from our Lamaze days) who saved my life. I had to get a job, learn about finances—basically learn how to be a grown-up. Cappie and my six animals helped me through it all. This wonderful friend restored my faith in women and my many jobs restored my faith in myself. I worked at a million of them—from banquet server to polishing silver in an antique store, to published author and speaker and freelance writer for many varied advertising agencies and clients, to finally becoming a marketing manager at a Carmel fashion store, where I created “The Fountain of Woof”—a dog-drinking fountain for the four-legged shoppers. This was a place where my talents were making a difference—my work put The Plaza on the map! I wasn’t sure about finding love again, but it was a martial arts teacher that helped me manifest the kind of man I was seeking—one who was “steady like a rock.” Interesting because I had always collected heart-shaped rocks or painted hearts on rocks and give them as gifts—they are my “love rocks.” In fact, everyone at Augustine has one!

I met Pete while he was walking his dog, Krissy, and passed my front door. He’d lived down the street from me for a few years and yet we’d never met. I was on a date, but thought that the man with the dog was much more interesting. Our first date was a simple walk by the ocean. Oh and did I mention that his last name is Granat (granite)? A man steady like a rock...

My journey to Rocklin (hmmm...more rocks...) began when Pete said he wanted to move closer to his teenage son. For me to come here meant choosing between the people and the place that had saved me and Pete. It was a hard decision, but I realized how much Pete meant to me—he was worth the leap of faith.



Then I found Augustine. Being here has really helped me embrace who I am today. Here I get the youthful spirit with the amazing team, but the Wendy in me that I've learned to love lets me focus on the woman that I've become and give that perspective back to the beautiful people I work with. Here I get to be Peter Pan and Wendy and I love it! This is the best job I've ever had—it enriches me both personally and professionally each and every day.

Today Pete and I are engaged. I am the grandmother to a sweet little boy that takes my breath away. I have two beautiful “daughters,” and I am so grateful to see my sons living lives where they are truly happy. I am close with my parents and my sister, my niece and her baby, and see them as much as I can. And, of course, Adam, Pete's son and soon to be mine—along with his extended family. These people, along with my dear, dear friends and my Augustine family are my “rocks” centering me, loving me, and in all of this life “experience” I've learned that in the end you CAN have the best of both worlds—it's all in the message, the words, the way you express yourself. As Peter Pan said, “I'm youth, I'm joy, I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg.”

