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GOING NUDE

I doubt that I came into this world a brat, but I became one at a young age. Some people opine that we are born with a particular temperament; others declare personality is acquired. For me, it's a complex concoction of nature-nurture plus experience that has shaped who I was, and whom I have become.

"Don't ever try to feed this baby on a schedule. She'll never let you get away with it," the nurse advised my mother upon leaving the hospital with me as a newborn. As a child, when my mother told me, "There are some things boys can do that girls can't," I grew defiant, feisty, questioned authority, back-sassed and otherwise challenged, or resented, anyone who tried to lord it over me.

And try they did. For much of my life I have encountered people, mostly males, who have attempted to diminish me, make me smaller than I am. Now, looking down the slope to my not-so-far-away but not imminent demise, some acquaintances valorize my intelligence and accomplishments. My reality resides suspended in the murky abyss between insignificance and glory.

As I eke out truth, I wonder what I would have become if my intelligence had been nurtured from the beginning instead of being reared to fulfill traditional female functions. When I was a teenager in the 1950s, my father advised, "Every great man has a woman behind him, and that's your ideal role . . . but get a teaching certificate, just in case."

In case of what, that I'd fail to land a husband? That if I succeeded in that, but he died or left me, I could support myself? I wasn't interested in becoming a schoolteacher. I yearned for something more challenging, something that would continue to provoke me throughout my life to become stronger and better than I was the day before. So I resisted. Replete with resentment, I fought back, but for just what, I was unable to discern as my ignorance of other options kept getting in my way. I therefore followed my