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MY NAME IS LOLA

by Lola Rozsa,
as told to and written by Susie Sparks

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Two Cars in Every Garage

Well, on second thought, maybe we *did* have time to smell a few roses. I found out I was pregnant again the winter of 1953.

The little house on the prairie was no longer going to be big enough for us, so I went house-hunting. Actually, I didn't need to hunt at all. I knew *exactly* where I wanted to be. And that was right back in the neighbourhood with all the friends we had left in 1950.

Don and Mary Harvie were selling their house on the corner of 10th Street and Council Way, just two blocks or so from our former Shell house. Ruthie could go to junior high at Rideau Park and Sidney could start first grade at Elbow Park. I would again be close enough to the church to make it to evening choir practice and to the morning meetings of the women's fellowship. Wo-Shi-Lo (abbreviated from Work-Shine-Love) had just been organized by the American women of Grace Church who all lived in the Mount Royal/Elbow Park enclave, and it was really thriving, so I was eager to be even more active in the life of the church. The friendships I made in Wo-Shi-Lo with Gerry Brinkerhoff and Jean Dunlap during the early '50s, after we all arrived in Calgary from points south, have lasted to this day. And besides all that, I loved any chance I could get to take part in the musicals being produced at the American Woman's Club. This house was situated at the epicentre of my social life.

Just as an aside, Don Harvie's father, Eric, was the lawyer who presciently bought the mineral rights from the British Dominions Land Settlement Company, which had owned the former CPR property in central Alberta where the phenomenal Leduc discovery was made. He invested the great fortune that fell into *his* lap in the priceless collection that has made the Glenbow Museum the world-class museum and art gallery that it is today. And, following his example, Don and Mary have also been enormously generous to Calgary.

Anyway, they had outgrown their house too, so it came onto the market at the perfect time and we grabbed it. It wasn't a pretentious house in any way – really just a lovely little four-bedroom bungalow, but the minute we moved in I announced that the only way Ted would get me out of there would be feet-first. I loved it from that moment on. And so did Ted.

There was a green apple tree in the backyard, and I picked apples every fall to make pies and applesauce and baked apples. Our neighbours, Beryl and Leon Libin, started calling Ted the happy hooker because he invented a coat hanger contraption that could snag the apples from the top branches, but they didn't want to discourage him because they were getting some of that harvest simply because we couldn't possibly eat it all. In trade, though, they gave us jars and jars of delicious home-made kosher dills.

I realize now that not many of our granddaughters still do that sort of thing. Canning and pickling and preserving seem to be skills of the past, and if apple trees are still being planted, they're usually the ornamental variety that doesn't bear edible fruit. I suppose it's simply a matter of available time. When we were raising young families, most of us didn't work outside our homes. And besides, there was no such thing as prepared food in those days, so there was both the necessity and the time to spend on canning and cooking.

Those were also the days of the rumpus room, long before the family room was invented. The rumpus room was always in the basement, primarily because it was intended to be the children's

playroom. Most often, it was an unfinished concrete dungeon with a washing machine in one corner and maybe a utility sink, but Wilf and Ted decided they could decorate ours, so they painted western scenes on all the walls to brighten it up for the kids.

Ruthie and Sidney were both in school by this time so I had the luxury of waiting through this pregnancy in relative leisure. These were the halcyon days before TV, so evenings were spent together as a family. We always had music playing on the record player. Broadway show tunes, jazz, classical, it really didn't matter. The kids and I sang and danced to it all. We had finally acclimated to the winters and knew better how to take them in stride, so the weather no longer got in the way of having a good time. Ted had bought us skis the winter before, so he and the kids went to Sunshine whenever possible, and I took them to all their activities at the church. Ted was able to be in town much of the time now that Frontier was booming along, so I had the chance to fix big Sunday dinners after church just the way Mama always did. We never found a table that would seat thirty, but I was always happy to accommodate who ever happened to show up, and I loved hosting the crew parties and hearing all their stories and watching their kids grow up. All of my children still say this was the best of times, when we were all together in this big extended family.

By spring, though, I was glad to get outside again and see about digging in a few flower beds close to the house. However, there was a little cotoneaster hedge around the front yard that became an issue. I'd always suspected that Ted was a touch obsessive and I'm afraid he proved me right that first summer. Mowing the lawn on a weekly basis was never enough. He'd do it twice week; first east-west, then north-south, and occasionally a third time diagonally. But that hedge had to be manicured, too. *No* one else was allowed to touch it. *THE HEDGE* belonged to him. Every weekend he'd throw on the ratty old grease-spattered coveralls he wore out in the field and, armed with hedge clippers and a carpenter's level, he'd confront his masterpiece. Seriously, he actually used a level.

The problem was, the house sat on kind of a treacherous corner. If you took it too fast there was good chance you could run into Ted's hedge, and, believe me, you didn't want to do that. He took an inordinate amount of pride in it, so we all learned to treat it with great respect.

Gossip got back to me that some woman driving through the neighbourhood saw grease-spattered Ted working on the hedge and stopped to question him about whether he'd consider taking care of her yard, too. She reportedly asked, "What do these people pay you?"

"Oh," said Ted, "this guy doesn't pay much. But once in a while he lets me sleep with his wife."

Needless to say, from that point forward, I tried to encourage him to play more golf on the weekends. He had first joined the Calgary Golf and Country Club and, about a year later, he joined the Earl Grey Golf Club, but several of the Earl Grey members were talking seriously about building a new course out at Canyon Meadows – waaay out south of the city – and Ted was intrigued by the idea. At that point, he was playing within a couple of strokes of par and he liked the idea of building a course that could meet championship specifications. So, on those long summer evenings, we'd drive out in the country to walk the fairways, pick out the rocks and the dandelions, and plant the trees. Eventually, he was on the first board of directors with Glen Watson and Sam Moss and, together with Otto Anderson, their first golf pro and course designer, they helped build the Canyon Meadows Clubhouse.

Then, at about the same time Ted decided that if the guys out in the field couldn't play in the Oilmen's Tournaments he'd help assemble a draw for a Doodlebug Tournament. (I love that name! Back in the day when diviners roamed the frontier offering to find water for the farmers and ranchers, they called their magical divining rods 'doodlebugs.' The name stuck, and, forever after, anyone looking for whatever might reside in the subsurface geology became known as a doodlebug.)

The kids like to say that Ted's priorities were family, work, and golf, but not necessarily in that order. I was never willing to pin him down on that list, but I certainly conceded that golf was as essential to him as the air he breathed. That summer he was, of course, signed up to play the first Doodlebug at Banff Springs, but there was serious doubt whether I'd be able to go along simply because, by the first of September, I was definitely great with child. However, Nannie and my sister Lillian were visiting at the time and Lillian checked me over and declared that, from her perspective as a nurse, I was safe for travel. So we left the kids with Nannie in Calgary, and off we went for a grown-ups' weekend at the Banff Springs Hotel.

While Ted played golf, Lillian and I walked the hiking paths around the golf course and found a bench to rest on by the river at Bow Falls. We knew that Marilyn Monroe and Robert Mitchum were in the area somewhere because they were filming *River of No Return*, and there was lots of activity going on with cameras and people busily doing whatever it is that filmmakers do. And suddenly, without any warning, there were Marilyn and her co-star dragging themselves out of the river right in front of us, both soaked to their skins. Their minions came running with blankets and off they all scurried to the warmth of their nearby trailer.

Now I can't say this for sure because I didn't actually see them go over Bow Falls, and frankly I can't imagine that any Hollywood lawyer would ever be crazy enough to let those two mega-stars do their own stunts, but it sure looked to us as though they had. They got by us so fast that I barely had time to recognize either of them so, when we went to dinner later that night and saw them huddled over a little table in a dark corner of the dining room, it was abundantly clear that I would have to apologize for my prior rudeness.

Much to Ted's embarrassment, I got up from our table and made my way over to Marilyn and Robert, held out my hand and said, "Hello, my name is Lola and I want to welcome you to Canada." Marilyn was very sweet and she patted my belly and said she hoped

I'd have a beautiful baby girl. Her dinner companion never so much as looked up from his plate.

Golf in those days was a sport for men. To be fair, most women realized it would take four or five hours out of the day and childcare was hard to come by, so there wasn't a big demand coming from younger women. But if there were women who *did* play golf, they most certainly weren't welcome to play in any of the tournaments. Harriet Watson, Glen's wife, had been a champion lady golfer in Oklahoma, and, when they moved to Calgary and joined Canyon Meadows, she started teaching some of us to play. But what the tournament organizers did in the '50s was find a few of the wives who could dream up some kind of entertainment for the women as well as plan the evening banquets and dances. It was *years* before they'd even consider scheduling a parallel tournament for the wives.

From my perspective now, I can hardly believe how conservative and staid we were in those days. None of us thought to object to being excluded from the tournaments. I'm pretty sure we thought we were incredibly lucky to be permitted to tag along to applaud the men.

In fact, we were *all* pretty fortunate in those days. President Hoover had promised a chicken in every pot in the '40s. In the '50s, Prime Minister St. Laurent could very well have promised two cars in every garage. The general sentiment was that, if government would stay out of the way, the demands of the marketplace would make sure we could *all* prosper.

The United States was still providing the overwhelming bulk of Canada's imported goods, but by the early '50s we were exporting twice as much to the States as we had before the war, and the demands of the post-war American military/industrial complex fuelled that growth. In ten years, American investment in Canada would represent fully three-quarters of all foreign investment, and most of that investment was in manufacturing, oil, and mining and smelting.

And yes, there was a dark side to that imbalance. American culture flooded into Canada right along with American currency. Few

Canadians were objecting in 1953, but it was an issue that would grow with time, and the American presence in Calgary walked a fine line between identities. On the one hand, we were ex-pats making our living in Canada but, during the '50s, all of us assumed we'd be headed back to the States any day, so we walked that line with one foot in each country. Every time any of us returned from trips home to visit our extended families, we hoarded the U.S. cash we brought back, so if any of us had an emergency we could pool our stashes of American currency for whoever needed it. We registered our Canadian-born babies with the American Consulate to ensure they had dual citizenship, and we flocked to the 4th of July parties they hosted ever year. In fact, I've been to so many of those 4th of July picnics, they've started seating me up front so I can schmooze the visiting dignitaries.

Eisenhower, the war hero, was elected president of the United States in 1952, and Louis St. Laurent was still prime minister of Canada so it was as if everyone in North America had agreed that all we needed during that post-war decade was a sane and sober father figure to keep the ship on course and out of the squalls. The Korean War ended that year, thankfully. The Cold War was heating up, but in 1953 we weren't really aware of what was going on. At the beginning, there was just a vaguely defined anxiety about what the Communists might do if they got hold of the nuclear technology that had been unleashed at the end of World War II. The difference in the early '50s was that we didn't have non-stop news coverage the way we do now. We were tired of the news. The further it stayed away, the more grateful we were to just get on with our lives and raise our families.

For those of us who were stay-at-home mothers, and most of us were, it was an era when child-rearing was a full-time job. Dr. Spock told us to relax, that we knew more than we thought we did. If the baby was crying, he was probably either hungry or wet, and, if neither, he likely just wanted some cuddling, so I suspect that we were all more heavily invested in our children in those days. By

that time, penicillin and vaccinations had made most of the really terrifying diseases of childhood a thing of the past, so when the polio epidemic flared up in 1953 our anxiety about the unknown made us hyper-vigilant. That September, at the height of the epidemic, schools were closed, swimming pools were shut down, and we quarantined our children within the perimeters of our own backyards. In truth, the incidence of polio in Alberta was only about 1,500 cases, but one in ten died and others were left permanently disabled or encased in iron lungs. Actual numbers meant nothing; no one was willing to expose her child to possible contagion.

Within two years, Jonas Salk developed a vaccine that literally wiped polio from the face of the earth. Science could do that. Nothing was impossible.

1950 was obviously a very different decade for many reasons. The advances in science and technology were funded by the prosperity resulting from all the wartime manufacturing. So, science and technology, combined with the huge demand for post-war production and new housing, made the '50s the decade of consumerism.

That decade belonged to the young people. Those who survived the war years took advantage of free tuitions to get them started on careers of their choosing and they moved into the cities to prosper. No one was interested in the past. New homes weren't the cozy little cottages of our parents; what most of us wanted was sleek and modern. We were looking to the future. Ironically, we were setting ourselves up for a rude awakening in the next decade but, in Canada at least, we were pretty well insulated during the 1950s.

I suspect we were just as politically conservative as our Canadian neighbours, but we were considerably less formal. In Calgary, the ex-pat wives learned that you 'dressed' for dinner and if you left the house, winter or summer, you wore gloves and a hat. Hemlines were pegged at mid-calf. I knew older women who had been friends for years who called one another by their married names, as in 'Mrs. Jones' and 'Mrs. Smith.' Worse, there were specific social rules about who poured at afternoon tea parties and what end of the table she

poured from. The society editor from the *Calgary Herald* had two columns assigned to cover every female event in town, and she referred to the women as ‘Mrs. Robert Jones’ or ‘Mrs. Stanley Smith.’ We women apparently had no names of our own. And there was a particularly officious young woman who wrote a column specifically directed at teenage girls where she harped at them endlessly about the expected rules of deportment.

Oh yes, I’m willing to concede that I was expected to follow Preacher’s rules, but truly, this was different. This seemed to be a holdover from the old British class hierarchy, which had far less to do with morality than with keeping everyone in her rightful place. And I hasten to say that it didn’t last all that long, but it was definitely there when we arrived and all of us commented on it.

Maybe, though, it was because the royalists were so thrilled about the coronation of Elizabeth II that year that they led the push to whip us all into a frenzy about the etiquette and protocol that was expected for an event of this magnitude. I certainly didn’t expect an invitation, but eight thousand people were invited to the event from all over the colonies, including several people from Calgary. Those that went had a chance to buy the chairs that had been reserved for them in Westminster Abbey and ship them home. They were quite a keepsake.

I don’t want to sound blasé because the kids and I had been in Texas when King George VI died and I watched the funeral procession on TV with great interest, so I knew the coronation was going to be a grand spectacle. It would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the ancient pageantry of the English aristocracy at its best, and it was very exciting to hear all about the planning for it. It was the one time I was really sorry that TV hadn’t yet made it to Calgary because I would have loved to watch the whole thing, but I’m afraid we all had to settle for newspaper photos.

However, as exciting as all that pomp and pageantry was, it couldn’t compare to the *best* event of 1953. On September 12, our

daughter Mary Lillian was born. And just as Marilyn Monroe had predicted, she was indeed a beautiful little girl.

However, the doctor whisked her away before I could even count her fingers and toes to check her over thoroughly. With this pregnancy I found out why I had had the previous miscarriages. I was Rh negative. Ted was Rh positive. Because of this incompatibility of blood types, the babies weren't able to survive because they unfortunately inherited Ted's blood type. And because of the blood exchange through the placenta, my antibodies were recognizing the different blood types of the babies so they were attacking them as a foreign substance. Despite the army of Estes kin who surrounded me with each pregnancy, no amount of tender love and care could overcome what my own body was doing to the babies *in utero*.

When she was born, Mary Lil hadn't had to fight this process because our blood types were compatible. And fortunately, by this time, medical science had figured out what was happening, so the doctors were able to ensure no incompatibility could occur. By the time they handed her back to me, she was pink and glowing with health. Unfortunately though, I had some post-partum difficulties, which ultimately resulted in a medical pronouncement that this should be our last child.

Mary Lil was a beautiful, happy baby. Her older sister was soon to be twelve; her big brother was six. Frontier Geophysical was thriving. Life was very, very good for the Rozsa family.