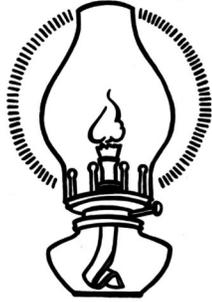


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Nicole Welk-Joerger
Leila A. McNeill
Zoe Bommarito
Kristen Connor

Edited by
Leila A. McNeill
& Anna Reser

**Technological
Memoir.**

The Halter and the Crop.

Nicole Welk-Joerger

Growing up on a farm, the fact I was a girl did not ever seem to define my work with animals. In the barn, my parents assigned tasks between my younger brother and me based on our age and physical capabilities rather than our gender. Mine was by no means a gender neutral upbringing--I was often forced to wear my grandmother's hand-made dresses. I was given the doll for Christmas when my brother got the toy tractor--but these differences didn't translate once we were in the barn. Working with animals was a democratizing force, and the cows didn't care who was a boy or girl. My brother and I got crapped on, kicked at, and nudged by them the same way. We were both just "kids" on the dairy farm.

As farm kids, we were further acclimated to agriculture through our regional 4-H program. There wasn't enough interest in my hometown to justify a local program, so my parents had to drive us almost one hour away to our county Farm and Home Center so we could attend the monthly meetings. Through 4-H, I learned how to connect with animals in ways that were different from my everyday interactions in the barn, particularly through the use of formal showman tools. I learned how to use hair clippers to groom cattle and leather show halters to lead them in a ring for formal competitions. When I wanted to raise pigs, I learned how to use crops (or, "bats") to move them at the fairs. These objects became associated with special events and happy memories. They symbolized staying overnight at the fairgrounds, wearing white show outfits, and being rewarded for my care of animals through trophies and ribbons. I looked forward to show season every year that showcased and rewarded our family's work on the farm.

Though my hometown was very rural, not everyone had parents so dedicated to 4-H. Many of my peers didn't even grow up around farm animals. I only knew of three other students in my grade familiar with showing animals. So when my middle-school language enrichment class was assigned a public speaking exercise to talk about our interests, I knew immediately that I wanted to talk about 4-H.

During my presentation, I remember getting blank stares from my classmates when I pulled my leather show halter out of the paper grocery bag. I tried to articulate what it meant to lead my cow backward in a show ring. I described how the chain on the halter helped me alert her to my body language and the careful, meditative nature of this relationship. But the enthusiasm I radiated into

Technological Memoir

Edited By Leila A. McNeill and Anna Reser

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the room did not bounce back. Panicked, I shifted my focus to my purple pig crop. I remember desperately wanting to bond with my peers using these things that illustrated my passion for animals. I wondered, what was creating the disconnect?

A nervous tension began to fill in the room. Murmurs from two male classmates started to derail my attention. They whispered with a mischievous, high-pitched hiss that pierced my ears. I tried to ignore it and continue with a demonstration. I explained that pigs were harder to show because of their ability to run and move at will during competitions. They required swift movements from their showman that were closer to the ground. As I bent my knees to illustrate the proper stance for leading a pig, there was an eruption of laughter. My eyes burned. I grasped the crop a bit tighter. The pressure kept the tears that welled up from leaving my eyes, and I looked to the teacher to bail me out of the confusing situation. Why was this funny? What was I doing to make this so funny?

The teacher quickly pulled the boys who instigated the outburst from the classroom. After scolding them, she returned to the room praising my work and asking me to sit. My presentation shut down as quickly as it started. Stunned and sad, I gathered my tools and returned to my seat. The boys continued to stare and sneer at me. Confused and embarrassed, I hid my head in my arms on the desk.

After class, the teacher pulled me aside and explained that my 4-H equipment was not “school appropriate,” and this was why my classmates reacted the way they did. She was incredibly vague and her face twisted with discomfort as she suggested, “You’re not in trouble, but you should talk to your parents about it.” I never did. It was only when I retold the embarrassing story three years later that a high school friend elucidated, “Nicole, I’ve seen that crop before. It looks like a sex toy. No wonder they laughed at you!” My heart dropped.

That same year, my eighth year showing animals, I swapped my crop out for a wooden cane to lead my pigs. I couldn't look at the crop the same way again. The memories I had using it, that warm feeling and my connection to the animals, were corrupted by that awkward middle school moment. With the leather of the crop and the chains of the halter, pubescent boys had transformed me and my farming interests into sexual objects. After my friend's revelation, I needed to distance myself from that moment. I became more reserved, and I even began to abhor farming a little. I felt everything I appreciated about it had been twisted into something I couldn't relate to or even completely understand at that time in my life.

When I reflect on the experience I often wonder if my brother would have received the same sneers and stares. Perhaps the halter and the crop were doomed to be misinterpreted as related to sexual bondage. But more likely, this sexualized reading of the scene emerged because of my gender compounded by my naïve excitement during that presentation. It was a crucial moment in my young life when I realized that my gender could change the very meaning of material. As a farm girl, the way I handled certain tools would never be just about the animals, the farm, or the work I did. There would always be room for comments on my appearance, my sexuality, and my intellectual and physical capacity to perform the same labor as the farm boys. The classroom was not as democratic as the barn.

During college, I found that crop while helping my parents move off my childhood farm. I laughed when the memory rushed back to me. It took time to realize that the day I was confused for a middle school dominatrix was a comment on my strength, not weakness. I was brave to put myself and my interests out there with such enthusiasm. The misinterpretation made by my classmates was about something bigger than me. Gender is a helpful lens for understanding that embarrassing moment, but it was time that helped me transform the pain I felt into something more productive. It is something that makes me proud to have been not only a farm kid, but a farm girl.



The Luxury of Liberation.

Zoe Bommarito

Come summertime, my family and I were animals, and the wilderness was our habitat: the bright bonfire with spooky stories, a lake beating the shore in the distance, and the stars above—too many to possibly count. Sunny days were filled with fishing trips on my papa's boat. Family legends of the walleye that got away consumed our minds every time we passed the lake. By the time I was ten, I understood how to set up a tent. By sixteen, I had visited numerous National Parks, and sleeping under the stars had become my refuge. My family **did** not go on many exotic vacations, but they eagerly awaited the weekends that we spent avoiding poison ivy and coating on layers of sunscreen and bug spray.

When I was a preteen, my parents sent me to a residential YMCA camp on a beautiful lake. Each year, I waited in anticipation for July to come when I would spend hours catching up with my camp sisters by the bonfire. It was a magical place away from the noise, one where I could do anything I wanted—swim, fish, sing, dance, and listen to the frogs and crickets as I drifted off to sleep. These moments in my girlhood made me feel strong and confident. Under layers of dirt, sweat, and lake-water was a girl who could take on the world, no matter what obstacles stood before her.

Each year, mom bought me the essentials, like bathing suits and hiking shoes, but also luxury items, like portable fans and ground-lounge chairs. She had grown up outside, so she was excited to give her children everything they needed to have the same experiences. After that big pre-camp shopping trip, I was ready to embark on an outdoor adventure.

When I was eighteen, the same camp I attended as a child hired me as a counselor for the summer. Working with seventh and eighth grade girls reminded me of the sweetness, heartbreak, and excitement that came with growing up in such a special place. There's something about a still summer night and the twinkling stars above that empowers young women. I spent two months laughing, crying, and chasing dainty penny-toads with the girls in Crockett cabin. It was the best but also the most difficult summer of my life as I **began** to realize my liberating outdoor experiences were not inclusive of all young women.

As a camp counselor, I gained a better understanding of the value—and the costs—of outdoor recreation. While some girls like me came to camp decked

out with a new sleeping bag, flip flops, and copious amounts of sunscreen, other girls could barely afford to come to camp. The YMCA provided scholarships to families in need, but that did not necessarily mean their children had all they needed for camp once they were there. Some kids arrived without jackets, proper footwear, sunscreen, and bathing suits. While I was a fish that could barely be convinced to come out of the lake, other girls had never swam or even seen a lake. While I had spent days fishing each summer, many girls could not afford even a pole. Some girls in my cabin had never spent a week outside of their city block. The life that shaped me as a young woman was not available to every girl. How had I never realized this privilege?

I thought about all of the outdoor experiences I had been given—and the costs associated. Maybe a girl has access to nature, but what about the equipment necessary to confidently adventure into the outdoors? The experiences that had been so empowering for me had the opposite effect on others that couldn't afford the same luxury outdoor recreation experiences that I had. Some girls came without rain jackets, so they endured stormy days in uncomfortable wet clothes and shoes. And while adventuring requires gear for safety, it also demands a sense of solidarity among the group. The girls who came without the brand new gear compared themselves critically to those who did; insecurity and an awareness of the group's inequality held them back from fully benefiting from their outdoor experience.

After my sophomore year of college, I seized the opportunity to work for a National Park Service in Northern Michigan for a summer. I designed and implemented education programs that provided all outdoor equipment needed for immersion into the wilderness, totally free of cost to students. Those girls who may not have access to the necessary gear would be on a level playing field as others who did. They would confidently be able to embark on this wilderness experience. I remember the excitement and determination as we boarded the boat to a small island in Lake Michigan, packs brimming with sleeping pads, flashlights, and enough instant oatmeal to feed a small army. Our time on the island was filled with inspiration as we hiked up sand dunes, identified wildflowers, and performed endless tick checks.

Although I remember our adventures fondly, the trip did not necessarily achieve our mission. Hoping that the program would reach underserved communities, I was disappointed that the kids on the trip were not our intended audience. They weren't the girls at camp that had never seen a lake. These students had come from families similar to mine and had spent a great deal of time camping as children. Wilderness experiences are costly—between backpacks and water filters, it's not every day that a child might get this experience for free.

Girls who have the opportunity to adventure outdoors are likely to continue embarking on similar experiences in adulthood. Outdoor recreation has been proven to enhance physical and mental health, facilitate higher self-esteem, and in my experience, provide women with an overall sense of strength and liberation. But when these experiences are too costly, young girls from low-income communities do not have access to recreation, and they are less likely to seek out these opportunities when they are older. They don't just miss out on a girlhood adventure in the woods because they don't have hiking boots; they miss out on a whole realm of outdoor experiences and the benefits they provide.

The titanium marshmallow roasting set always seemed a bit unnecessary to me anyway. At five years old, I would much rather fetch a dead branch from the woods and use a pocket knife to carve out a sharp tip—perfect for roasting marshmallows. Nevertheless, my siblings and I grudgingly used these luxury tools when it became too dark to hunt for our own. I appreciate the gear that has facilitated my recreational experiences throughout my life, but I also understand that my girlhood spent outdoors occurred because my family could afford it.

Though I am no longer a child, the great outdoors is still my refuge. While I struggled with my mental health throughout college, hiking, bird watching, and fishing was, and still is, therapy unlike any other. Moonlit nights spent in my worn hiking boots have inspired line after line of poetry. Bonfires are still spent searching for the perfect marshmallow stick, and the confidence I received from outdoor recreation in girlhood has blossomed into a dynamic passion. And it is through this passion that I understand the need for outdoor recreation to become more inclusive of low-income communities. Gear should be more accessible and inexpensive, and nature nearer. Scholarships and programs that bring girls of all backgrounds to the woods, lakes, and starry nights are critical. Girlhood is an essential time for empowerment and liberation, and the great outdoors are a phenomenal place for achieving just that.



Living With the Thing.

Kristen Connor

My favorite song from childhood wasn't even from my own childhood. My father was 6 years old at the time The Beatles' "Help!" came out in 1965, and I can see him now in my grandparent's living room turning up the knob on the radio to catch a soundbite of the international hit. Often after dinner, he would pop open the plastic cover of the CD-ROM and slide the disc into the stereo while me and my brother would wait for the click click click processing sound before swaying to the saccharine tunes.

I tried to decipher what the poses of the white men in blue coats on the album cover might look like in motion. Were they spelling out H-E-L-P as in Y-M-C-A? It took nearly 20 years and a traumatic ski injury for me to remember that, on the cover, John, Paul, George, and Ringo were skiing. They were skiing in Obertauern, Austria shooting a film to accompany the album. This is where I learned to ski. And it is also where I shattered my tibial plateau, one of the most important load-bearing parts of the human body.

Since the injury, my memories of Obertauern have become a series of fractal images ever tessellating in new formations like a twisting kaleidoscope. Men in red coming, inflating a splint around my leg. My knees rebounding after landing my first ski jump on the bunny slope. The poma lift pulling my light girl body into the air for a gleeful aerial ascent up the hill. The view of my parents' worried faces out the back of the emergency skidoo. Now, a scream that shook the valley as the men pulled the ski boot from my mangled leg. Heads turned, black out. The triage clinic, an X-ray showing a bad fracture, and the promise of morphine.

I woke up in a hospital with an "external fixation," 4 metal bars jutting out of my thigh and shin bones to keep my leg immobilized while the swelling went down. The details of my first surgery were lost in translation, and I didn't know that I would wake up to my skin black and blue, and puckered around metal. During a second surgery, the surgeons removed the bars and drilled a plate with seven large screws into my tibia and shin at various angles. When I first saw the X-ray, I stared, silently terrified of The Thing in my leg and the doctors' refusal to give an Estimated Time of Walking.

The Thing brought into being a new time-space. I returned to life in San Francisco on crutches, unable to bend or put weight on my leg and injecting myself daily with anti-clotting drugs. I learned to live with the techno-metal. But

as a self-styled independent woman raised on lyrics like The Beatles' "When I was younger I never needed anybody's help in any way," and Destiny's Child's "The shoes on my feet / I've bought it ... 'Cause I depend on me," I was determined to make use of Silicon Valley's finest apps to ensure that I wasn't a burden to anyone. I used Instacart, Good Eggs, and Google Shopping for groceries; TaskRabbit for miscellaneous chores; and Uber and Lyft to get around. I went back to work at a tech start-up, joined my friends for nights out, and made sure that the struggle with physical therapy looked easy. I joked about how The Thing made me a walking barometer, forecasting the weather before it arrived with the appropriate amount of throbbing.

Despite my doctor's guarantee of an able-bodied future and having a corner at the local bar where I drank with my friend Claire, I kept getting thinner, and my knee didn't heal. Amazon orders of craft supplies and books couldn't satisfy my boredom, and working from Skype and TalkDesk 3 days a week produced a shrunken feeling, which was worsened by my recurring dreams of ski falling, hospitals, and screaming pain. Strangers—usually men—would offer to give me rides or carry bags, and, in those moments, I was grateful. They wanted to be the prince-charming to my damsel-in-distress, but only because the invisible Thing residing deep in my flesh and bones was made visible by crutches and a knee brace. My young white female body held up by technological apparatuses, both inside and outside, became an object of pity and salvation, and often for instrumental purposes, I let the chivalry happen.

What if my injury were less visible? What if I were less visible? What kind of crooked "feminism" did I think I was living?

My desire to live independently with The Thing propagated a highly individualistic, capitalistic, and techno-utopian ideal of the "independent woman" that bolstered a bourgeois San Francisco sensibility that in other times I would have rejected. iPhone apps can't fill the holes where humans should be. The Thing and all of its attendant technologies brought into relief the fundamental incompatibility between my feminist ideals and my reliance on my phone. Rather than seek out relationships and bring people into community with me, if even for a moment, I let these technologies make me forget that we can, we should, and we must demand reasonable things from other people: emotional support, the physical contact of a hug, or help up the hills of San Francisco.

As I slowly came to this realization over the 5 months I spent hobbling around, it became easier to reach out. I grew comfortable asking people on the beach to give me a ride up the road, engaged my formerly stranger-neighbors in meaningful conversations, and learned to tell my friends how I was feeling and

what I needed from them. Most of the time, they were happy to help because caring for other people is part of what it means to practice being human.

I don't listen to "Help!" much anymore. The Thing brought into an existence a social reality in which I could no longer believe that Lennon was ever independent in the way he imagined he was, nor aspire to be the kind of "independent woman" I sang about as a Girl Power kid in the 90s and 00s. Now, I dream of a society in which we don't have to ask for empathy, and one way to get there is to engage in the difficult labor of questioning whether supposedly "liberating" technologies are in fact disrupting our ability to relate. Apps to "improve our lives" cannot by themselves be the answer. They might be useful (I never stopped using Lyft's accessible vehicles to get around), but it is only through changing and fostering human relationships that our societies might be improved.



B for my Mom.

Leila A. McNeill

On Christmas Day 2015, I spent the afternoon holed up in my old bedroom of my parents' house, which now serves as a place to store things that are no longer useful but we can't bear to part with because they are packed full of nostalgia. Among the remnants of my teen self, surrounded by the walls I once painted bright red, are board games, VHS tapes of family trips and holidays, Disney sing-a-longs, and recorded TV shows with commercials ripped from live TV, and a bookshelf full of my mom's vinyl collection. My mom said I could have as many of her records as I wanted, so after a family Christmas breakfast, I sat on the floor in my pajamas for hours, carefully going through each record.

I sorted hundreds of records into three piles, "keep," "leave," and "maybe." As I went through each one, the "keep" pile grew bigger and bigger, as I loaded it up with records of music that I don't even like. Each record felt like a connection to my mother, not as my mom but as the woman she was before I was even a future she seriously entertained. Each record provided a glimpse of her womanhood that has always been—to me—obscured by her motherhood. As I sorted through her records, I began to place my mom in a history that I was yet to be a part of, and to piece together the life of a woman that I both knew and didn't know.

Based on their various states of wear, I can try figure out what records she listened to the most and why. The cover of "Tapestry" by Carole King barely holds the record between its disintegrating ends. When I play it, I imagine my mother, with her long black hair falling in thick curtains around her face and a cigarette held between her slender fingers, nodding along with "A Natural Woman." Was she thinking of my dad? The purple outline on Janis Joplin's "Pearl" has turned to gray and white from being dragged on and off a shelf. When Joplin's bluesy wailing plays, I can easily picture my mom adopting Joplin's tough, sexy swagger. Did she know that she too is both of those things?

As wide-ranging as my mom's collection is she seemed particularly attracted to certain artists. With her nearly complete collection of Beatles vinyl, I can tell that in the battle of "Stones or Beatles" she clearly took a side. Alongside numerous records of Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley there is Crosby, Stills, and Nash (and Young). Though different in genre and style, I can hear the thread of protest and social justice from a particular moment in time that brings them to rest on the same shelf. From Disraeli Gears to Cream to solo, Eric Clapton constantly

appears, and so it seems that Leila (Layla) was always going to be my name.

Going through her records, I saw my mom not as the parent who made me do my homework or who wouldn't let me stay out late, but as a woman. More than even old photos of my mom, the records, both their physicality and the music etched into their plastic, show me a more complete picture of a woman with a complex inner life full of passions and secrets and experiences. As a feminist, I've always believed that women should not be defined by their roles as wives and mothers, but I had been conferring upon my mom the same limiting and dangerous views about women that I fight against. For the first time, sitting in that room with silly red walls, I was able to see my mom as the woman she was, and I realized that motherhood is only one part of the woman she has become. Most of the objects in that room are a conduit to my family's collective past, an archive of shared memories that we created together. But the records contain tiny portraits of my mom's past, which was a making all of her own. Her wish for me to inherit them is like giving me permission to glance at some of the untold parts of who she is.

When people ask me to defend my love for vinyl, I cannot give an answer that satisfies them. It doesn't have anything to do with fidelity because quite honestly some of the sound quality is shit, and it certainly doesn't have anything to do with reliable means of music storage. The love I have for vinyl is now impossible to disentangle from my relationship with my mom, and that cannot pass any purity test an audiophile demands of me. When I buy vinyl now, I find myself filling in parts of the collection that she started. I haunt local record stores looking for more Janis and others. It's become a way that I silently nurture our relationship; for all our differences, this an act of her past and my present that we have shared. Some records, if you listen from beginning to end, tell a story, but the story this collection tells is one that only me and my mom can hear.



The Bus.

Leila A. McNeill

My dad's '73 Volkswagen Bus was sky blue with a white top. It was old and a little creaky. The top was a bit rusty, and the side door was difficult to slide shut. One of the bench seats was missing in the back, so we often sat on the floor without seatbelts. This was by no means a nice ride, but it was something that no one else seemed to have. It was uniquely ours.

Like most kids, I compared myself to my friends and others who went to school, and also like most kids, I measured my worth based on my observations. We were never poor or went hungry, but my things tended to be a bit more frayed and worn than everyone else's. Now I am ashamed to say that I was often embarrassed of the things my family did have. But the bus was not one of them.

I spent a lot of my childhood in that bus. My mom didn't drive it, so any time I was in the bus, my dad was too. It was and still is an object that in my memory is inextricably connected to my dad. On Friday nights, my dad drove me, my brother, and our friends, wrapped in towels and dripping wet, home after a night of swimming at the pool where he was a part-time lifeguard. He drove my brother and me to sports games and to after game pizza celebrations and commiserations with our teammates. When it was just me and my brother riding in the back, we dropped pebbles and whatever we could get our hands on down the holes where the bench should have been.

The Volkswagen Bus, also called the Type 2 Microbus, first appeared in the US in 1950. Though out of production since December 31, 2013, the Volkswagen bus remains an easily recognizable icon of 1960s counterculture. It appeared on the cover of Bob Dylan's 1963 album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, and The Who put it into song in "Magic Bus" on their 1970 album *Live at Leeds*. Some of the same stereotypical features of the bus carried over into the 21st century. In the 2006 film *Little Miss Sunshine*, the yellow VW Bus was just as much of a quirky dysfunctional character as everyone else in the story. And Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens) recaptured some of the artist hippie undertones from the sixties on the album cover to *Roadsinger* in 2009.

But these are only a few examples of how the bus has manifested in more recent popular culture. There are, for example, literally dozens of album covers that feature the bus. Through its various permutations, the bus has become a stand-in for acid trips, flower power, and free love— a material embodiment of a stereotype that is detached from any real culture or history.

The bus spans decades of political turmoil and social justice activism, and it is that part of the bus' history with which I connect my dad, though this hasn't always been the case. He was staunchly anti-imperialist and anti-racist and sought political reform through on-the-ground organizing. But as a kid, I had only a vague impression of the history that my dad had been a part when he was younger. Without knowing it, I was viewing my dad and his experiences through a simplistic stereotype because I valued its edginess over something real. After all, growing up in red state Texas, a dad like mine was, much like the bus, something that no one else had.

Not until I was a teenager did I start to understand the enormity and complexity of this history, and my dad's part in it, which I had once romanticized in my head. Organizing is hard and often thankless work. The wait to see results of the work is long and mostly indefinite. Progressive social and political change is built upon learning how systems of oppression operate and the history of these systems. In learning this, my dad started to emerge to me as a fully realized person.

My dad sold the bus before I became a teenager, but as both a physical artifact and as a memory, the bus is now an instrument through which I can make sense of parts of my relationship with my dad—and in turn, myself. He was my first introduction to Marx and leftist politics in my teen years, and the first time I heard the phrase “social justice,” it came from him. As an older straight white man, he has always been an example that being “from a different time” is not an excuse to perpetuate injustice.

“Changing minds is so hard, and you still might never do it,” he told me many years ago, not to discourage me from trying but to prepare me lest I feel like giving up. I think about the weight of those words and their meaning often. Like when I started social justice work full time three years ago, and again after the 2016 election. I was reminded of them as I marched in the Women's March in DC, and yet again when I watched the worst of this country clash with the best of it in Charlottesville, Virginia. I also think about the bus, which has become the ballast of perspective that allows me to situate the present in a larger cultural and political history— an indication that our seemingly extraordinary present moment is not without precedent. The bus is a material reminder that history, both my own personal history and a collective cultural history, can provide a way forward.

