



On the day before the world shut down, we made a last run to our local bookstore. On the discount rack, I found a copy of James Beard, *The Theory and Practice of Cooking*. I read through the classic and made a few of the recipes over the next few months, but mostly I bought it because it was one of the books that was always on my Aunt Janice's shelf, in the family room off the galley kitchen, over the built-in, "L"-shaped white couches. The home was very modern for the time it was built, in the early 1960's, and was framed by an acre of green forested land.

As they say on HGTV shows, the kitchen really was the center of Janice's home, and we spent hours chatting while I sat on a bar stool on one side of the counter, and she prepared whatever delicacy was due for dinner. Janice was a "gourmet" cook, when that term had a more elite meaning than the current "foodie" label does today. Years later, when I innocently asked her if she had read some recent biography of Julia Child, she scoffed and said, "We KNOW Julia Child." She taught me how to skin a

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peach— by dunking it in hot water-- and I still make her delicious fruit pies every summer. I learned to make gazpacho and spaghetti alla carbonara and took handwritten notes in my journal so I would remember.

You entered the house through a side door, which lead to the mandatory mud room and then you were right there in the family room/kitchen. Walk past the cookbooks, and you reached the screened porch, off the formal living room. Even with the shade provided by the property, New England summers are hot and humid, and central air just wasn't a thing in the 1960's. When I visited, I would sleep in the second floor bedrooms with the windows open and a fan blasting. But the porch was almost always comfortable, shaded by massive evergreens. Walking out the sliding door from the living room, on the left would be a functional picnic table, set with orange or red placemats and heavy black stoneware when a meal was about to be served. On the right, was the Marimekko bedecked wicker furniture. Of course, Janice covered all the pillows herself.

Just as she had been an early adopter of Julia Childs, she was also an early adopter of Marimekko. The bright orange and yellow flowered designs of the fabric contrasted with the brown wicker and the green foliage visible through the screens. Even when the golden indoor/outdoor carpet got a little muggy damp to the barefoot touch, it was a livable, magical place.

The summer I was fifteen, I got to fly out from Seattle and spend my summer on the East Coast. Three weeks were in Manhattan, where my cousin, Zoey, Janice's oldest, and I, were spoiled with shows and shopping by our aging grandparents. Then we spent three weeks in the greens and oranges and reds of the Marimekko house. Zoey and I became close friends. The house became my second home.

The next summer, I was back in Seattle when Mom called and told me Zoey was dead. Was it a murder-suicide? Was it a double-suicide? The note she left her younger brother just said, "See you in

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fifty years.”She and her boyfriend were found in the forest. There’s no one left living who really knows the story. My grandfather and her other grandpa had to identify the bodies.

My mom and dad and my little sister were there coincidentally visiting in the house in the woods near Boston. I was sixteen and had just gotten my drivers’ license, and my brother and I had been deemed responsible enough to stay home in Seattle by ourselves for a week. That was the summer I was taking a Trig class at the UW. I was trying the wonderful “Mayo Clinic Diet” – the old one where you lived on grapefruit and hard-boiled eggs. I tried to comprehend an incomprehensible death.

My parents, of course, came home. The house in the woods was still standing. Aunt Janice took on the task of redoing the front entrance hall, the one to the front door no one ever used. She had it tiled in slate and had a small sitting area with bright orange and yellow cushions and lots of window light, windows through which you could see more of the green, ferns and trees.

When she died, many years later, we each gave loving talks about how we remembered her at her memorial. I foolishly described Janice as “a brick,” the family paradigm. Faulty image. She was a despairer who hid her pain in beauty, and, I guess, just got on with it. Maybe that makes her an artist? Or just a survivor. In those days we didn’t talk so much about trauma or its impact. Janice certainly never did.

My uncle is still living, in a home with dementia now. His bipolarity kicked in full steam after Zoey’s death, and he was never whole again. One of my cousin’s moved in to care for him when Janice died, and she now lives alone in the big house. It will be sold soon, and the new owners will tear it down to make way for a McMansion, I’ve been told. I haven’t been able to visit for several years anyway. My cousin has tried, but the house is falling down inside. I’m not brave enough to face the fading of the bright colors in person.