McKee Botanical Garden presentation "Papa and me"

Taking pleasure and making theatre of small things

Hi, I'm Karen Tripson and I'm grateful you are here today. Thank you for coming. It's wonderful to see all the familiar faces. I look forward to meeting everyone I don't know yet. I thank you for your generous contribution to the McKee Botanical Garden. All the ticket sales for this event support the fabulous work they do here.

I also want to thank the McKee organization for hosting me. It's special to be here because I have fond memories of parties and tours of the Garden when I was a child. Watching my grandfather, Waldo Sexton, in action in the Garden, I knew it was a big deal to him. I found it thrilling as a kid. I felt terror and excitement at being in a jungle where I might get lost with wild animals that might bite me or eat me. The royal palms and the hall of giants awed me. I loved all the pretty ladies in their dresses and swimsuits. They all seemed very glamorous and festive to me. I never heard anybody say if being a McKee beauty was a good job or not, or what it paid, but they made me believe they were having fun.

I am happy to have a chance to share personal memories about Papa that no one has ever heard before, except maybe my siblings. Like anyone who receives a lot of press, the same Waldo stories get told over and over. I want to add something new to the history of Waldo; a different point of view on a complex man – and how I came to write a book about entertaining, traveling, and midlife career anxiety.

When I entered the picture in the early 1950s, 12th Street between 43rd Avenue and Kings Highway was called Rosedale Road. Our mile was a single lane of white sand or more frequently mud puddles and it seemed far away from town. The road could rattle your teeth and give you quite a bounce in those days. Our side of the street was all cow pasture and groves with only our house and Waldo's house close together at the mid point and maybe three small rental houses. Our telephone number had four digits and there was no TV.

The night I was born, I think Waldo was about 67 years old. (My math skills are weak.) He was mid Atlantic on an ocean liner, returning from Europe and he sent me personally a telegram of enthusiastic congratulations on my arrival and about picking such great parents and grandparents. I treasured that welcome, read it many times imagining him writing it -- and it was the only telegram I ever received.

Waldo or Papa as we called him, lived next door at the end of the pink sidewalk that joined the two houses, with his wife Elsebeth, her mother, Louisa and her sister, Eva. The in-laws were relatively new houseguests from Chicago, one a 90-something year-old tired of running a boarding house and Eva a 60-something retired teacher. Elsebeth's age will remain a mystery because that's the way she liked it. I was extraordinarily lucky to arrive when all four were in residence, happy, relatively healthy and delighted to enjoy a new baby. Meanwhile next door my family already had two sophisticated older kids who had friends and went to school. I had the run of the place. Before I could walk, Eva would come get me from my crib and take me next door to visit everyone several times a day. As soon as I was able, I ran next door several times a day to see what was new with my friends, Papa, Nana, Grandma and E. There was always something exciting going on in the yard, upstairs or in the kitchen. E had taken me on as a student and had me reading long before I went to first grade. Every time I went through the screen door to the kitchen I got a treat. It truly

was a kid's candy shop due to Elsebeth's sweet tooth. The routine sweets menu included home-made cookies, usually Danish wedding cookies, store bought candy like jelly beans or M&M's; chocolates from California, macadamia nuts, poppycock, and peanut brittle. Some of these were available in jars or cookie cans by the kitchen door to help yourself, others were stored farther away or higher up so that you needed an invitation or assistance.

Q: Does anyone remember what kids ate in the 1950s?

A: Whatever was put in front of them. I don't recall anyone ever asking me what I wanted to eat.

My earliest memories of Papa and Nana are about eating at the breakfast porch table. They loved good food and took pleasure in meal times. I walked in the kitchen one day to find a crowd around the table for lunch even grandma was downstairs. They all watched me stare wide-eyed at a big platter with a long pink tongue on it. It seemed about 3 feet long to me.

"Do you know what it is Karen?"

"It looks a tongue, but whose is it?" They roared.

"Sit down and have some."

I was nervous but I sat down and had a bite with all eyes waiting for my verdict as I chewed cautiously. What did I think of tongue?

"Well, it feels like a tongue." That got another big laugh. I did not mind eating the tongue once I got past the texture. The flavor seemed bland to me. But the hot German potato salad that came with it was a big hit with me. That specific sweet and sour balance is still the standard for me in that style of potato salad. I have tried unsuccessfully to duplicate it. I have tried about a half dozen different vinegars and guess that whatever the brand was at Nana and Papa's, it isn't made anymore or has a different formula. It's a taste memory I treasure.

I only challenged the 1950's eating rule once. Papa had the kitchen to himself early in the morning, a nice time to visit alone and have breakfast.

One morning he said, "Today I'm going to make you a ladyfinger banana omelet."

My face cratered. He said, "What is wrong with you?"

"I don't like bananas."

He was incredulous looking down at little me from his height. "How could you not like bananas? That is ridiculous! Bananas are a great food and I grew these bananas."

Papa was not only tall but broad and at that time overweight. I knew I had done something really terrible by admitting this problem with bananas.

Papa was emphatic, "You haven't had ladyfinger bananas before. You will like the ladyfinger banana omelet."

He was wrong about that. But he cooked it, my little one egg omelet in a little pan with tiny banana slices in the center when the egg had almost set. They were the littlest bananas I had ever seen, but bigger than any women's finger I had seen. I watched him gently fold it in half. We sat down together and he watched every bite I ate. I agreed with him that his bananas were better than the ones next door, because they were sweeter and firmer, almost crisp. He was satisfied. I worried about the return of the ladyfinger bananas but he never made that omelet again for me. So we ate happily ever after together.

The food at Papa and Nanas was always great. Delicacies I loved which we never had at home included: Lamb chops and frog legs; ham loaf, not meat loaf, and homemade applesauce, which was one of the few things Nana prepared besides cookies. She was not a cook. She had a cook. By my time in the story, the cook came only at night and made the dinner. I ate dinner at home at 6:30 with my family, another rule of the 1950s.

Special occasions were all marked with special food. On Christmas morning we always had real maple syrup and maple sugar from Vermont for pancakes. The holiday meals at night with the whole family, about 20 people with all the uncles, aunts and cousins, would feature an enormous roast beef, ham or turkey. The most memorable turkey was one, which I watched beheaded by an axe in the back yard, literally running around without its head and then hanging upside down on the clothesline to drain. I was fascinated by it, not squeamish about it. Holidays always featured an after dinner theatrical production written and directed by me starring my younger cousins.

My favorite memories are alone with Papa, going to a project site or watching him work in his outdoor studio.

He worked in the open air in front of a large structure, bigger and taller than a garage, full of big boards and other artifacts that needed attention, with one side open to the yard where he worked on restoring wrought iron pieces, large and small. I brought a photo of him working to show you later. The walls were decorated with many treasures and near the entrance he had a collection in various sizes of what looked like giant toothbrushes with long wooden handles with wire bristles for removing rust and old paint from the wrought iron. I thought he looked like a cave man working with prehistoric tools on a monolithic task. He was sweaty and dirty, seldom had a shirt on but he always wore his Stetson. I would look at a black, rusty gate big enough to close a road and think this is going to take forever! He took his time and was careful. He was patient with the process. I enjoyed hanging out there, watching him work, and seeing him making progress every day. We chatted. I think he was enjoying himself. I always thought he had more fun than any of the other grown ups. You could see his pleasure in his work, eating and talking with people. I admired that. I wanted to have fun too when I grew up.

Papa had a great sense of humor. He laughed and he made me laugh. He was always a salesman, a showman and making theatre of small things.

One day when I was about four I was annoyed with the people next door and decided to run away and find some nice people to live with. I packed my suitcase and went across the pink sidewalk to tell Papa goodbye who was out working in his studio. He said, "Oh, sorry you're leaving. I'll miss you. Won't you need a hat and umbrella where you are going? We should take a photograph to remember you by. We'll put it in the living room and say, look, that's Karen, she used to live here with us."

He sprung into action getting props from I don't know where and soon there I was posing in front of the family station wagon in our garage with my new hat and umbrella ready to travel with a crowd to send me off just like when we went to the train station to send Papa and Nana off on trips. I felt full of anticipation. My traveling days had begun. I brought this photo today too.

Papa's construction projects that I participated in were the Turf Club and the Mountain.

Being around the house and yard made it easy for him to ask me if I wanted to go for a ride to wherever he was going. How could you say no to that? That was another unusual thing about the 1950s, I never asked anybody if I could go, I did what I wanted to do. Unbelievable today, but no one was particularly watching or worried about me. I had two houses and yards to roam in. So, I watched the Mountain rise up and the tile installed on the stairs. My favorite memory of the

Mountain is the day they poured the concrete for the thrones at the top of it. Papa was in his usual kaki pants and with an audience, sat in the wet concrete and smooshed his imprint into so it would be a perfect seat only for him. He was delighted with the feel of the wet concrete and grinning. Everyone laughed. Two regular helpers were there with brooms for sweeping up and he invited them into the picture to wave their brooms like palm frond fans for a pharaoh in the heat. It was hilarious, not only to me. It was documented with photos as most of his activities were. I never noticed who was taking the pictures, but I have one of the Mountain to show you.

The Turf Club project, occupied by the Sachenwan Palace Restaurant, had quite a large entourage of artists and workmen involved, with a great deal of revelry everyday.

By that I mean boisterous, noisy, lots of conversation and laughing. I don't recall any of their names. We all had a job and were busy. My job was painting the back of a door in the dining room on the left of the original entrance on 43rd Avenue. The goal was to make it look like a very old green door by putting lots of layers of different colors of paint on it. I worked on it every time I was there and Papa would give me tips on brush technique. He knew quite a bit about how to instantly age things. He didn't want anything to look new. I also posed for two murals. The one in the front hallway featured a dramatic campfire in the woods, a pot of gold and a mixed crowd of Indians, pirates, Papa and me eyeing the gold. The mural was a little scary to me with tension and danger in the negotiation. In one of the back rooms off to the right, covering a complete wall was a large pasture scene, very Florida, very Treasure Hammock Ranch and me milking a cow in the middle of it. Despite what you might think about my proximity to cows and a dairy that is the only cow I ever milked. In retrospect all this posing may have been Papa's sly angle on childcare, like taking kids fishing where they have to be quiet and sit still or the fish won't bite.

It was clear to me that Papa was the creative director, the center of attention and a participant in the group experience. I recall discussion about the placement of the old coins in the floor and what went where on the walls. He was thoughtful and deliberate, not haphazard. He thoroughly enjoyed the process and all the details. He was collaborative. It seemed to me everyone enjoyed working with him and wanted his attention.

My take away from my life with Waldo was to enjoy your work, pay attention to the details, have fun with people and eat good food.

I absorbed his aesthetic. I revere beautiful things. I love wrought iron, tile and wood. As an architect, and I like the "folk architect" description for his free form process, he built simple structures with rooms that were pleasant to be in with good proportions and sited well for the tropical breezes, heavy rain and views. He talked about proportions and believed that stairs had a perfect rise and tread depth. I think he built because he wanted to decorate. I'm with him on that. Decorating is fun, creative and tangible. Immediate results. Next to cooking, I like decorating. I am obsessed with my house. It's always in the process of being enhanced. His creativity to me was in seeing the beauty in an object and being able to give it a new life by using it in a new way or making it part of a new collection. He made brand new things out of old things. He understood the power of arrangements and contrasts in textures or colors. Let's pause for one moment to remember that the scenes I was observing, building a mountain from scratch because Vero didn't have one or building another unique structure that has had a long and useful life, all took place when he was in his 70s!

After he died when I was fourteen, I expanded my life by going to work in the Driftwood kitchen on Saturday and Sundays, 6 AM to 4 PM. I made a dollar an hour and was the richest kid I knew with the $20 paycheck. Beginning with running the dishwasher for some years and working my way up the line through salads and sandwiches to becoming the expediter, the assistant to M.L.

the chef. That job is about issuing the orders, coordinating the dishes of the order for pickup and garnishing. It's very good training for becoming organized. The Driftwood is where I really learned how to cook and be efficient. When M.L. called in sick one day, I volunteered to do his work to the amazement of the waitresses who were sure the day would a disaster, without M.L. and pancake batter, a critical part of the breakfast service. One of them came over on my side of the kitchen, which was not acceptable, and grabbed the almost empty pancake batter pot. What are we going to do?"

My 15 year-old self stood up to her 40-year old self and said, "I know how to make it." She said "How? There is no written recipe," I said, "I have watched him do it." She went back to her side but kept her eye on me as I lined up the ingredients and added them to the stainless steel pot without measuring cups or spoons, just the way M.L. did it. No one could tell a difference in my pancakes. The other feather in my chef hat was my fried chicken on Sundays when I stood in for M.L. Nana ate lunch there after church and was so proud of me for the fried chicken I made. These days changed my life. What I felt was the first taste of competency in an adult world, far away from the classroom or the library where I excelled, and it was exhilarating. I liked cooking.

My first front of the house experience was as a busboy at the Patio Restaurant the summer before my junior year abroad. I later worked part-time as a waitress and bartender while getting a degree in hotel and restaurant management at GSU. Then it turned out I had no talent for management so I completed a degree in English literature. Unfortunately there were no jobs in reading at that time, which I was really good at, so I had to find a job writing, my only skill other than cooking. I had numerous writing jobs over the years for all sorts of business, finance and marketing in New York City, but I missed the food world and had become a serious home cook, cookbook collector and restaurant junkie. I jumped back into food going to work for an outfit in Los Angeles called Food Fanatics, which offered food styling for TV cooking shows and books, big event catering and more. I thought maybe I'd like to be a caterer and was told by the boss, "If you do, don't ever accept a job for less than 2,000 people. There is just no money in the small gigs." Scratch the catering idea. That was my master's degree in the food business and then I got my Ph.D. at the Cooks Library, a bookstore also in LA. That might have been the most fun job I ever had. Everyone who walked through the door wanted to talk about things near and dear to me. I worked with food freaks and met so many rich and famous types, chefs and authors. There was no question I would have a book of my own, but first I worked on a lot of other people's books.

About my book

I wanted to write something I wanted to read -- about cooking and people my age, a husband that was a good guy and no sociopathic serial murders. I agree with Mary Oliver, "The world is full of sad stories but I don't want to tell one." I didn't want to write a memoir. My ah ha moment for The Cooking Class in KL occurred in Malaysia at the cooking class described in the book that really happened to me. The teacher, Rohani Jelani, is a real person, an entrepreneur similar to the woman I worked for at Food Fanatics, who agreed to let me use her name and recipes for the book. The moment was a cultural collision that was shocking and hilarious at the same time. She is a beautiful Chinese woman who always wears pearls and looks elegant in size 2 sleeveless dresses. Rohani began the class for two people by announcing she was 51 years old, divorced and her children were grown and gone. I almost had a seizure because she could have said she was 40! Why is she saying this? It hit me right then I had a book in this cultural canyon between Asia and America and between women who don't mind gray hair and women who lie about their age. The rest of the book is fiction that grew around it to support the level of food I wanted to emphasize. Whether you are an armchair cook, a vicarious eater through books or a

serious home chef, this book will keep all your senses on high alert. This is culinary fiction. There is food on almost every page. Besides that, the story is about entertaining, traveling, and midlife career worries.

The Cast of Characters

Amy: The cooking obsessed hostess is having a party because she loves to cook and have friends over.

Laurence: Retired Boeing engineer who declined the invitation to the party as he is busy trying to sort out old issues with his ex-friends, not make new ones.

Kevin: Amy's husband who doesn't enjoy parties, but is trying to be helpful.

Alan: Thrilled to have been laid off recently and is looking forward to dinner but more excited about his lunch date.

Ben: Electrical engineer focused on fixing a faulty product that's been outsourced and how to deal with Alexis bad humor.

Alexis: Ben's wife who is very frustrated about being unemployed and excited about going to the party.

I The Fears and Joys of Entertaining

Q: What are the most common fears? public speaking, spiders, flying and having parties might be the answers.

What are your worst fears of entertaining? What can wrong? Do you know anyone who has never given a party, or never will again? If you have had one party or dozens of parties, you have ideas about what might go wrong. The food, the guests, the plumbing, fire, flood, mishaps with knives, food poisoning, and more.

What compels people to give parties? Loving to cook is the reason for me. Having friends over is fun to me and excuse to try something new that takes about three days to cook. But I know pro-party givers who don't cook. They serve prepared food in pretty dishes. They do it for the human interaction. Giving a party is performance art. It is theatrical with a stage, players and director. There just isn't a script or rehearsal. You never know what is going to happen. You hope it will be fun and the food will be delicious. I've been to parties where neither of those happened.

Given my grandparents' and my parents' joy of entertaining, I can't resist any opportunity, large or small, to have company. I have learned the hard way over the years about many of the more common disasters that were completely -- or nothing to do with -- my fault. Needless to say, our hostess Amy in the Cooking Class in KL, runs into some obstacles on the day of her party.

Six characters tell this story about a party in Seattle.

The reader gets the inside scoop from the hosts' and the guests' point of view, what they think about the party, their jobs and everyone else.

Let me introduce you first to Amy, beloved of her husband, Kevin.

#1) "Amy was excited. They were having a party tonight with dear friends. She was cooking Malaysian recipes she had learned on vacation at a fabulous cooking class in KL. Her spreadsheet's completed column had lots of checks on it. What was left to do was very manageable this afternoon. Nothing was more fun than having company, except being invited to someone else's party, but that didn't last as long." LOC 263

Here's a little bit about the food:

#2) "The only things she was serving that weren't from Malaysia would be the appetizer and the dessert. Cold Dungeness crab with cocktails was her favorite thing to serve people she really liked. *Nothing says I love you like crab"*. She would put a little Pacific Rim spin on it with some fresh-pressed ginger juice for aroma and flavor in addition to the mayonnaise, lemon juice, sea salt and cayenne. ……. LOC 305

#3) Rendang: This was the stew of Malaysia, tender meat in a rich sauce that was hot, sweet, nuanced, and aromatic. What a crash course in Malaysian ingredients, flavors, and textures the menu was. Amy felt the confusing cacophony of tastes and smells floating around the night markets they had visited since arriving in Malaysia was coming into focus. While chopping the individual ingredients and processing the combinations for the herb pastes that seasoned each dish, her nose was aware of new experiences. When sautéing the pastes in hot oil, she detected more new smells. Now with the finished dish in front of her, when she leaned over to inhale the aroma before she took a bite to encourage the best communication between her mouth and her brain, she could identify the fresh turmeric, galangal, and lemongrass rising as one new powerful aroma above the chilies and shallots. That's why the spice paste was cooked until the oil separated. The heat had transformed the ingredients into something new.

We will all have a bite of chicken rendang and rojak salad when I am finished talking. But we are not going to have it with the famous rice of Malaysia.

At the cooking class Amy learns how to make "respected" rice to serve with the rendang.

#4) "Rohani had demonstrated how to rinse the rice gently, by hand, in a bowl of water, stirring it and removing it from the water one handful at a time to put in the rice cooker. It was a quiet exercise in being thankful to have the rice to eat. Did the rice taste different after being gently washed and handled? No, Amy didn't think so, but treating it respectfully made her feel different. Maybe that was the point. All food should be treated respectfully. She would try to remember this approach to handling ingredients when she got home."

Amy's husband Kevin is a tax attorney and a good traveler.

He loved the vacation too. He just doesn't share Amy's enthusiasm for having people over, particularly tonight as he doesn't think his vacation is of interest to anyone. In fact he has tried unsuccessfully to bargain her into canceling the party, offering an extravagant meal at a famous Seattle restaurant, or a red leather jacket. From his point of view you learn things about her she probably wouldn't tell you.

#5) "She spent hours on the spreadsheets with lists of ideas and recipe cross-references. Afterwards, she carefully recorded in the hostess notes column what recipes people liked, failures, suggestions for next time, and her opinion of the evening or the people. He had advised her it was dangerous to be so honest on a wireless network. They could be hacked. Guests gathered around the bar area where the laptop was always open might happen to view a document in error or in curiosity. He hoped no one ever got hold of those spreadsheets. No one needed to know how shocked she was at personal preferences different from her own.

"Oh, my god! They don't eat crab!"

"Thank god, we're never having them again."

"He's drinking again—gin and red wine."

"She brought an expensive bottle of wine!"

The planning that went into parties always astonished him. What was it about planning that was so intriguing to her? If only she would be so meticulous about her checkbook."

On the morning of the party she runs into one of her guests and he bluntly tells her he has forgotten about it, and he can't come because he's too busy at work.

On the evening of the party, one guest is missing and the doorbell keeps ringing. Old friends appear and it's quite a day in the life for all of them.

II Traveling to Exotic Locations

Not everybody loves traveling. The inconvenience or danger or differences from home aren't appealing. Fear of flying keeps some people at home. These days it's more like the dread of the airport security line and then being crammed into the plane that keeps people at home. Waldo left the farm and Indiana behind as a young man to be a traveling salesman in Florida. Nana had a grand tour of the west coast by train after college and thought nothing of taking her kids by herself to Chicago every summer to visit her family on the train or driving in her car. My parents love to travel. Since I packed my first bag at 4 years old I get that feeling of anticipation of the adventure whenever I look at a suitcase.

So I have a love for traveling but there are places I am afraid to travel to. I have no desire for example to go to the North or South Pole, or the mid-east.

Q: Where are you afraid to go?

Q: Who has been to Malaysia or SE Asia? Is anyone afraid to go for any reason?

I think an exotic location is appealing in a story telling that adds an element of danger or risk. In this novel, you will experience the highlights of traveling in Malaysia and living in Seattle, another sort of exotic destination.

If you have been anywhere in Asia, you know the culture shock is astonishing at first. Asia seems so different in every way from the life you know in America. The crowds, the architecture, the chaotic streets, the noise are all dramatically different.

A taxi ride can seem life threatening. Canoes with truck engines that are deafening go much faster than you'd like. Little motorcycles that sound like high-pitched sewing machines carry families of six including small children.

The Malaysian plane that disappeared recently may have made you look at a map of the area and recall the Straits of Malacca from history lessons. It is an important commercial route from China to India and from Europe to the Suez Canal, the Persian Gulf and East Asia. The scenery is lush and fertile, tropical jungle and mountains. The water in the straits and the Indian Ocean seem a special shade of blue. Many traders who sailed through the straits in the last few thousand years pronounced it worth taking and did. The richness of the culture and the cuisine is due to so many conquerors leaving their imprint.

Kevin tells one example of the pleasurable sensation of being shocked and confused by Asia. This excerpt is from Kevin's point of view:

#6) "…the ancient cultures of Malaysia melded with the European and Asian invasions into a shockingly flamboyant background that is charming and captivating…showed vibrant blue Portuguese tiles, multi-colored Indian mural in Hindu temples, dark geometric designs on mosques, red Chinese temples, pink Dutch forts and green British cricket fields. In between all the

astonishing religious edifices, traditional two and three story stucco buildings with worn red tile roofs, palm trees and shady patios indicated the tropical climate. As amazing as the Indian temples were, the Chinese temples competed for attention with equally outrageous roof ornaments that drew you into the entrance courtyard crowded with commerce and fire. Kevin felt the chaos of it all was Felliniesque. Vendors sold five-foot long red joss sticks, flowers and food items to use as offerings to the ancestors. Flames and black smoke poured out of big ceramic or metal ovens as people threw the joss sticks in to complete the ritual. Add the beating white wings of small birds around your face as they were sold and then released from cages. Watch where you walk as visitors often prostrated themselves on the floors indoor or outside in the fervor of the moment." LOC 4169

Whether you are an adventurer or prefer armchair traveling, my book will present Malaysia for you on the street, in the markets, in the temples. The colors are vivid on the buildings and on the plate. The Malaysian cities of Georgetown, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Melaka and Langkawi Island are on the itinerary. In the book, the characters Amy and Kevin are exhilarated with Malaysia, the country, the people and the cuisine.

#7) "One of his favorite photos that he wasn't going to show anyone (in fact, he had decided he wasn't showing any photos at the party tonight), was a small motorcycle …. Attached to the seat was a flat metal rack that might have held textbooks with a bungee cord but held instead two stacks of brown eggs on papier-mâché trays about one foot square that each held thirty eggs. With ten trays right behind the driver and seven trays behind that stack, Kevin did the math several times to be sure of what he was seeing. He was good at math. But he was still awed by the result. The driver was departing with nothing more than two pieces of ordinary white kitchen string to secure the cargo of 510 eggs to the rack. Kevin watched him drive away until the motorcycle rounded a corner and was out of his sight to see if any eggs jounced out onto the paved, but certainly not perfectly flat, street. He wished he had seen the stacking procedure. Weeks later, he still marveled about the egg driver. That was one small event in long days of unusual sights and sounds."

And then there is the action in Seattle! Have you seen any of the movies filmed in Seattle?

Sleepless, of course, American Heart, Singles, Touchy Feely, Fabulous Baker boys, Say anything, An Officer and a Gentleman. Many more are on the Seattle Film Office site. If you haven't seen any of these, the reason it is so popular is the scenery is good. Tons of water views, houseboats, snow covered mountains, forests, coast lines, islands and the Space Needle. Home of the world champion Seahawks, Boeing, Microsoft, Amazon, Starbucks, Fran's chocolates, Rainier Beer and lots of smaller high tech and bio-tech companies. Turn of the century houses stand next to urber modern architecture. Seattle takes its food, wine and craft beer very seriously. The neighborhoods are distinctive and have their own personality.

III Jobs and Careers:

It's not all party food and travel in this novel. There is a dark side to it and the intensity of life and death situations.

One theme running through this story is employment, or lack of it. All the characters express opinions about working, or not working and career choices. They are all approaching the milestone of age 60 with trepidation, except for Laurence, the retired engineer, who is 75. The ones that are employed are worried about how they are going to get through the next five or ten years. The unemployed are worried about ever working again. They have all weathered several stock market crashes, which have crushed their savings accounts -- and they are dealing with

modern problems of downsizing and outsourcing. Although most of them have done well professionally and are high earners, they are worried about how much retirement they will be able to afford. Ben, the electrical engineer is well aware his blunt personality may be his undoing, but he doesn't seem to be able to stop himself.

#8)"As usual, his boss thought Ben's view was not practical or pragmatic. Ben had jumped into the ring so often since they had started outsourcing the work to much less expensive production facilities his appearance in his boss's cubicle on Thursday was not welcome. This being not welcome all the time was becoming a new irritant to him.

One day soon he would appear at the manager's cubicle and the response would not be *Thanks for the input but this is the way we're doing it*, but *Thanks, security is on the way to help you put your stuff in a box and carry it to the door for you*.

Ben was beginning to look forward to the latter scenario. Unemployment benefits were pretty good if you'd been fired. He'd have time to work on some other projects he thought had merit, maybe do a startup with some buddies. The only reason not to do it was that he knew at his age, fifty-nine, he would never find another engineering job. If the startup failed, which was Plan B with his best buddies, the slide into a "paper or plastic" job at Safeway might be fast indeed. He had discussed the alternatives with Alexis so many times, he wasn't welcome at that portal either. I hate this job, but I'd better not lose it. I better stop complaining and get back to creating a magic solution." LOC 2469

This next passage comes from the retired engineer who tells the dark side of retirement and is very depressed about his situation.

#9) "It was ridiculous how much money young people made these days, Laurence thought. Yes, Google was a marvelous search engine. Yes, it was lightning fast. But how did that translate into so many new millionaire employees and billionaire founders? He did not understand the business model. The money involved was absurd. Aerospace engineers had lived the good life on $63,000 per year. The new Redmond engineer made $236,000 including stock options. How could it be? He felt sure none of what went on in the manufacturing plants and technology offices today were as brutal as the demise of engineering at Boeing.

Being in the aerospace industry had once been the highest status he could imagine. There was no work as challenging and exciting. Then things changed. What had once been the greatest career in the world was decimated. The company stopped designing new airplanes. There was no more problem solving, because they didn't invent anything new anymore. They stripped the pride out of the job. They stripped out all of the science and art. You might have had a job title that said aerospace engineer, but there wasn't any of that work to be done. How long could you sit at a desk doing menial tasks? It wore you down and made you angry. Engineers started quitting in droves. After the strike, he was too old to get another job and old enough to retire, so he retired. The end was ugly and sad. No one had remained friends."

From the women's point of view we have Amy and Alexis, who used to work together, when they had good jobs. They have a heart-to-heart about their job searches.

#10) "Do you really think you have the energy to start something new from scratch? It's a lot of hard work," Amy said, looking at Alexis. "I'm not sure I do."

"I have to! I can't do without my own money for ten more years. If I don't get some new cash flow going, I'll be the next one jumping off the bridge."

"I know what you mean. It's also frightening to think that whatever we've done so far is all that we're doing. Maybe that fear will motivate us."

Alexis nodded. "Desperation could be what's needed—or terror—middle-aged woman terror, to get us in high gear ready to ignore adversity, rejection, and young competitors. LOC 5257

One of my favorite comments I received from a reader in a book club discussion was, "I liked that the characters are worried, but not debilitated by it." YES! That's it exactly, that's my point. They can still have fun and do so at this party.

Taking pleasure in cooking, eating, working, and traveling are all part what I learned growing up in Vero Beach with Waldo at the helm.

And now you see clearly how those translate into my novel, The Cooking Class in Kuala Lumpur. I hope you enjoy it and that it will inspire you to have friends over and laugh about the troubles of this crowd in Seattle. I hope also that you, like me, will take inspiration from Waldo to stay engaged in whatever you enjoy no matter how old you are.

I am so happy to have had the opportunity to talk to you today

You've been such good listeners. We're going to give you a bite of Malaysian food now. Thank you for coming.

April 5, 2014