

the stands. Although it was a brief reaction she thought I couldn't hear, it hurt; I remember it to this day. But then, I wasn't all that good at skating. I took piano lessons as well, and wasn't very good at that, either. My sister was great at it.

But for all my shyness, I was also gifted with a certain inner fire. I didn't let my fear of sticking out stop me. In fact, the pain my social awkwardness caused me made me acutely aware of other people who felt like outsiders. I did have friends, and I was so grateful to have them that I wanted to make sure other people had them, too. Whenever I noticed someone sitting alone, I'd seek her out and befriend her.

My teachers noticed my drive and initiative, and commented on it to my parents. In the sixth grade, to my astonishment, I was voted co-president of the student body. I remember the horror of getting up to give a speech in front of the students. My legs were shaking so badly, but I remained standing because I was determined to get through it. Years later, as an adult, I revisited my old grade school. I sat in the little seats, walked the halls, and visited the stage where I gave my first speech. In the intervening time, I had addressed audiences of thousands, yet when I stood in that spot, remembering, I could still feel that tremble in my legs all those years later.

After graduation and a little college, I married my high school sweetheart, whom I'd known since the age of twelve. Don DePorter was a charming up-and-coming hotel executive, and he and I both worked in my dad's hotel. I was nineteen.

Within a few short years, we had two wonderful children. When our kids were small, we lived in eastern Washington where the Columbia and Snake Rivers met, in a house that was near four others, and our five families became very close friends. We'd walk in and out of one another's houses at will. We'd often wake up to find our infant son wasn't in his crib—one of the neighbors would