



**THREE JEWS
WALKED INTO
A SHOPPING
CENTER...**

A Memoir by
Elizabeth Kraft Taylor

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Melvin Simon, Herb Simon, Fred Simon, Gerald Paul, Jerry Gershman, and Jewish men everywhere who give a shiksa a chance.

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PROLOGUE

I am writing this book for three reasons. The first is to honor and remember Melvin Simon. Going to a synagogue to hear his name read aloud once a year is not enough for me. My second reason is to show the honesty and ethical values that were the platform for the incredible success of the Simon organization. Finally, I share my personal story of determination and hope to make the point that we are all born with handicaps and blessings. Our job in life is to figure out which is which.

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ABOVE THE DRUGSTORE

I was awakened by flashing lights and a policeman saying, “It’s a little girl!” He lifted me from my bed, wrapped me in blankets, and carried me down the stairs.

In the parking lot, I saw police cars, a crowd of people and an ambulance. Those flashing red and white lights would become routine in my life, as would being taken to the police station to wait for someone to come and claim me. My mother had just jumped off a third floor porch, her first of many attempts to kill herself.

A big, black steamer trunk sat on our enclosed back porch. She made me get in it when my father was at work and one of her boyfriends was coming over. She was exciting, brilliant, funny, charming, even mesmerizing. She was not beautiful, not even pretty. With small, darting brown eyes and a nose way too big, she had only her super-sized personality and overt sexuality to

make her way through the world. She never touched me except to hit, and she liked to beat me with the telephone receiver. My mother was a promiscuous prescription drug addict and child abuser, and eventually addled her brain so badly that she had to be bathed and fed. At age forty-two, she was declared a recluse at the morgue where I identified her body.

When I was four years old, my parents and I lived above a drugstore called Finkleman's on the corner of Madison and Lotus on the far west side of Chicago. Next to the drugstore was a little grocery store—supplier of the mice and cockroaches that shared our apartment upstairs—a children's shoe store and a tavern. We got to our apartment at the rear by way of a gray, peeling wooden jungle of stairs and landings. The stairs rose out of a huge gravel parking lot that accommodated the patrons of all the stores on the block, including drunks from the tavern and a gang of teenage boys. No grass, no trees, just six huge, stinking garbage cans lined the walkway to the stairs.

After my mother's first attempt to kill herself, I came to understand that she didn't want to live, and she particularly didn't want to live with me. Her suicide attempts were varied and numerous so I became hyper vigilant. I couldn't tolerate music or noise in the house because I wanted to be able to hear what my mother was doing at all times.

She was in and out of Loretta Hospital's psychiatric ward where twice she had electroshock therapy. Mother's doctor decided a visit from me might bring her back to reality. Right after my fifth birthday, my father took me to the hospital, and since she had been gone for three weeks, I was excited about seeing her. We were taken behind locked metal doors with small slots for windows.

When they opened the door, I thought the room was empty.

Then I heard something growling in the corner. It was my mother on the floor, bound in a straitjacket, rocking and growling like an animal. Her black hair was matted and wild. The doctor took me to stand in front of her. I was terrified as the noises grew louder. My mother looked at me with horrible, crazy eyes and peed on the floor. I was so close to that little white bound-up animal, I vividly remember the smell and heat of her urine as the brilliant yellow stream pooled on the linoleum floor around her and ran to my black patent leather Mary Janes.

My father lived only for my mother. We all did. She had us convinced that nothing was more important than her and her pills. Every other Friday when my father got paid, I was kept home from school so I could meet him at work and collect his pay. Then I hurried back to Finkleman's to buy her first round of pills for the week. I ran up the stairs with the precious paper bag, the pills bouncing and clicking together all the way.

Through the many hospital stays, mental confinements, miscarriages and arrests, my mother had three more daughters. Laura and Ethel were increasingly abused and neglected as our mother's drug use worsened. Our beautiful baby sister Liane was the most physically impaired, dying of cancer at age thirty-six.