

FOR OLIVE

Four score and ten years ago
On a fall Chicago morn
The Great Lakes shifted ever so slightly
When Olive Robbins was born
To Yebbo and Laurie and Sally – once three
Not clear yet a middle child she would be

On Illinois Road she grew
Mixed medley of memory
A dusty road trip in the Packard
The creases of a farm hand's neck
Golf lessons with the pro
Marks on the sidewalk
Hungry people at the back door
Highjinks with cousin Archie
French lessons *bien sur*
Taking guff from sister Sally
Bossing baby Lar was her chore

A forbidden tree climbed on Vinalhaven
Broken arm triumphant
A wild rescue made
The whirr of the rising helicopter
A piece of her heart Maine did claim
A reluctant debutante
Slowly becoming clear
This middle child
Her own path would steer

Train trips into Chicago
Fittings at Marshall Fields

Ice cream sundaes with cherries on top
A glimpse of another world
Blasted off to boarding school
Swept up in Virginia's green fields
Playing mustached men's roles on stage
Riding horses, breakneck speed

Vassar during wartime
A friend's fiancé lost
Olive off to Poland
What else had the war cost?
Empty shoes lined up and rubble
A small piece of her cut and lost

Landing clear on Beacon Hill
The call of change still strong
A tall George Pierce she found
Good head, good heart, no looking back
Her future it was bound

Kids came fast
They did back in those days
Lar, Nan and then Liz
Leaving Olive in quite a daze
Three moves on Upland Road
A good house finally found
Breakfast table preset
A koala bear's sweater knit
Wednesday waffle dinners with Corbett girls
In the city pool a perilous dip
A mother bathed in yellow safe light
In the basement darkroom, cool

The Sixties tossed and rumbled
The highs and lows seemed pure
Sweet tightrope wire of chaos
Of nothing could we be any longer sure
Rockers, hookey, pot and hair
In love and war all should be fair
Whipped cream parties and group showers
Camel cigarette, sometimes Kools
Tableside sloth and teenaged mirth
With mostly good humor Olive did endure

All the while
Her camera, her icon, her tool
Her way of showing how warped
And broken some of the old rules
To City Council meetings and football games
A war protest with Zoya
"Hell no" painted in red
No pity for the PTA moms
"Book 'em," the cops said.

Her own kids flown from the high school
She went back to take on the rest
Building fragile friends
And trust
No easy roses
Put to the test

To Maine each summer a retreat
A house in the shape of a shoe
An island hop to Marsh
Amenities were few
Tide bound ragged shores

Starlit nights
Open fields
Chilling healing waters
An unlikely whale
Fern, Bimbo and Manola
Upriver winter gale

The trawler captain took her on
Insurance risk and all
No teacakes and shuffleboard on this tour
Out to George's Bank one fall
Ocean blowing wild
She got her photo, green at the gills
Stubborn middle child

The Voices of the Wilderness
Called her to Iraq
Once again; no fear, no choice
There was no turning back
Another war, another place
The children keep smiling
Memories to unerase

North Main Street was her haunt
For the last twelve years or so
Time Out Pub and harbor walks
Out on Marsh the winds did blow
Peace and Justice, friends galore
Rockland -- the last home shore

Ninety years
A good long time
To live a life so true

No other way to play it out
A middle child knows this
Through and through

ANNE WHITNEY PIERCE

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