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SOMETHING OTHER THAN I HAD PLANNED

by

KRISTY CARPENTER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
in Imaging Arts

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY
May 6, 2013

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SOMETHING OTHER THAN I HAD PLANNED

By Kristy Carpenter

B.A., Visual and Environmental Studies, Harvard University, 2010

M.F.A., Imaging Arts, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2013

ABSTRACT

Something Other Than I Had Planned is an extended portrait of my mother, exploring themes of representation, familial roles, the archive, and personal narrative. Curating existing images from our family archive as well as creating my own visual documentation, the series examines both the current life and past history of my mother in an attempt to understand her as an individual and our evolving relationship as mother and daughter. Rooted in research of historical representations and understandings of the mother figure, as well as photography's history as a tool for preserving and examining the past, I explore ideas around nostalgia, the family album, and mortality.

Mother, 2013

Artist Book, 58 pages, 28 images
Stab Binding, 8 x 10 inches

Judy, 2013

Artist Book, 58 pages, 28 images
Stab Binding, 8 x 10 inches

My Story, 2013

Artist Book, 24 pages
Stab Binding, 8 x 10 inches











Something Other Than I Had Planned

This work is an extended portrait of my mother. It functions as a tribute to her character. It is an examination of her life, and an attempt at understanding the place she holds within my life.

As the youngest child, I was close with Mom, largely because I was always around. I grew up in a world of adults, surrounded by older siblings to look up to and model my behavior after. Good at making myself unobtrusive, a shadow following my mother around, I was often privy to more than my share of family drama and gossip. Much I tuned out and the rest I quickly learned to keep to myself.

As I grew older, her sharing of information, frustrations, and worries became more intentional. Just as my mother was a sounding board for my high school life, I gradually became hers. When my father died, it was just the two of us left in that house. The rest of the family had their own lives and people to look after – we had each other. Even when I was away at school, we spoke almost daily, often about nothing, knowing the other was checking to see if we were okay.

Returning home from college, I realized that the time we spent together at home had changed too. My busy schedule of games, practices, and events was long past. I now found myself living according to her calendar, given a glimpse at the new life she had created for herself in my father's absence, in my absence. I saw aspects of her life in new ways, old enough now to observe and question instead of merely following along. Her generosity with her time and energy was humbling. I volunteered beside her and realized how many others she continued to take care of in her daily life. We talked about our views on life, family, and even now – religion and politics. We came to better understandings of each other, and even disagree. I brought her into my world of technology and she dragged me into hers, even as I dragged her around as an assistant for







Her living room was once where the men all gathered to watch the big fights, her father the first to own a color television. Our house is still the place everyone flocks, both family and friends. It's more unusual to drive in and find only our cars in the driveway.

She was the oldest child, with three younger brothers. She's spent a great deal of her childhood looking after them; I would argue most of it. It seems to be something that comes naturally to her. She's always there to play mother, to be that voice of reason, even when you don't really want to listen, but know you should anyways.





I have always loved to travel and with a family and a farm it wasn't easy but we started out slow, a day or two at a time and the time increased as we got older. We were a camping family. Went from pop-up camper, borrowed camper to 5th wheel. I never thought I would like camping but it gets into your blood...I loved it. The scenery and places were great but the best part was the people. We met such great people over the years. We formed a loose-knit group we camped with for over 25 years, and had a great time.







Mother

Kristy Carpenter









It took us three years, but we finally have raspberries again.



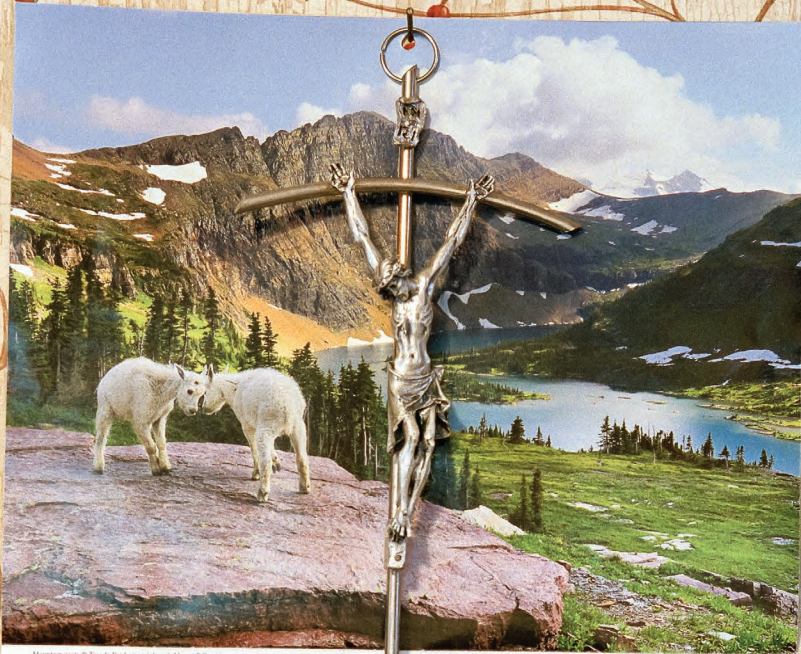






Mom is clearly Gus's favorite, even though he's my dog. She pretends to be annoyed when he follows her around, yet she buys him treats and lets him eat the cat food.





Mountain goats © Tom & Pat Leeson Library; Moose © Yvo Mountrich & John Farnham/Minister Pictures/istockphoto.com; Silver © AardMann.com/istockphoto.com



October 2011

We do not inherit the land from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.
 - Native American Proverb

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER 5 M T W T F S S 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	NOVEMBER 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30					1
2	3	4 ☾ First Quarter	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12 ☽ Full Moon	13	14	15 Yom Kippur
16	17 Columbus Day	18	19	20 First Day of Sukkot ☾ Last Quarter	21	22
23	24	25	26 Last Day of Sukkot ● New Moon	27	28	29
30	31 Halloween					

WILDLIFE OF THE WEST - The American West is home to a wonderful diversity of wildlife. Unfortunately, global warming is imposing dangerous threats, such as early snow melts, record wildfires and rising temperatures, on the magnificent animals that live there. To learn more about the effects of global warming on wildlife and their habitat, visit www.mfw.org/impactsonwildlife





When I asked why the cross was hanging there,
she told me because there was already a nail.







The day she went to the hospital was unsettling. She left her bed unmade that morning. It was strange to find it that way. I watch her more now. I know she notices.





My sisters talk about who will get grandma's ring. Mom worries about how things will get split up, especially the land. We talk about it sometimes. I know we need to, but I still don't like it.



THE OPRAH MAGAZINE
Oprah's Favorite Recipes
(Yep, She Really Cooks!)
The Tastiest Roast Chicken Known to Man
Make Your Life More Delicious!
O's First Ever Food Issue: Creamy, Crunchy, Sweet, and Savory Treats For Body and Spirit
Dr. Oz on the Power of 50 Beauty Products We Love
Spring Fashion Trends + Deals











She set them outside saying, "maybe the cats will eat them."









She gave me five dollars and sent me in town to buy whirligigs.













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Getting to know her this way, as a friend, not only as a mother, has been an amazing journey, and one that will continue. Photography has become the tool for visualizing my evolving understanding of her, my way of reflecting on the insights I've gained and recording my own responses to these. This wasn't the body of work I set out to create in the beginning. It has evolved into something more. This is a portrait of my mother, our changing relationship, and her new life, independent from the loss of my father. It speaks to her strength and resilience as she faces what we all must – change – as life continues to move on around us.











Judy

Kristy Carpenter





APR 1959





On paper she might not stand out. Judith Carpenter: though in all my life I have never once heard anyone – at least anyone not trying to sell her something over the phone – call her Judith. She was a Kibiloski from home, a saying I quite adore.

Her father was a tool and die maker, her mother a housewife. She was born in Detroit, Michigan, into a large Polish Catholic family that settled in Bronson, a small rural town, which now claims to be the *Gladiola Capitol of the World*, though I still don't know if that title is official in any way or just painted on the town signs. At times it seems to be in the middle of nowhere, but is actually located about halfway between Detroit and Chicago.



EXIT

HEALTH IS WEALTH

SMILES ARE HEALTHY FROWNS ARE NOT

ST MARY
ASSUMPTION
BRONSON
GRADE 7 & 8

A Book of
Fortitude

A Book of
Fortitude



DEC • 56





Raised in this town, she considered herself a city girl, if Bronson can be called a city. She moved a few times and never lived in the house I grew up thinking of as my grandparents' home.

She learned to play the piano when she was young and any time they had company over, she would play. She has fond memories of those parties, even though her father and alcohol were hardly a pleasant mix. To this day, she can't stand boxing of any kind.







Her living room was once where the men all gathered to watch the *big fights*, her father the first to own a color television. Our house is still the place everyone flocks, both family and friends. It's more unusual to drive in and find only our cars in the driveway.

She was the oldest child, with three younger brothers. She's spent a great deal of her childhood looking after them; I would argue most of it. It seems to be something that comes naturally to her. She's always there to play mother, to be that voice of reason, even when you don't really want to listen, but know you should anyway.







She looked after her brothers, and according to my Uncle Jim, saved his life. Soon after she graduated high school and married my father, she began looking after him and then her own children. She would later look after her mother when she suffered a breakdown, her father after grandma passed away, her aging mother-in-law, and eventually dad when he got sick. She's always been that person people rely on, the one who has the strength when others are struggling to find it in themselves.





Though she swore she would never marry a farmer, that's precisely what she did. Granted, the blame lies largely on my father as he was going to school to be a tool and die maker when they met. He grew up in the country and soon my mother found herself surrounded by barns and fields, far from paved streets. By the time I came around, she was an old pro, had helped raise all manner of animals, and could drive any piece of machinery around the farm.











She tried to draw the line – a very fine line – the animals, all of them, minus a hamster or two, stayed outside, boots were always left at the door, you never washed your hands in the kitchen sink, and she refused to collect or decorate her house with cows, roosters, or any other form of livestock. Now, looking out over the fields she tells me she wouldn't trade the view for anything and could never live in town with people so close.









While the country might seem to be a reprieve from the busy city life to some, her years on the farm were far from easy. They started out poor, with barely enough money to build the house. Grandpa gifted them the extra cinder blocks to make the living room just a little bit bigger. It was quickly full, with the first five kids running around.

Early on Dad worked at the Texaco Station in town, then they owned and ran it for a bit. After they let the station go, both ended up working at the Post Office as rural mail carriers. She'll tell you she took the job at first because they couldn't afford not to, Dad was farming and they needed insurance, so she went to work.











I don't ever remember her not working, always putting us, and others, first. She worked, volunteered at the school and for the church, was our 4-H club leader, Dad's farm hand, and she kept all of us on track. Somehow she managed to do it all – and she still does. Now she's retired, but her weekly calendar is busier than mine. She's still keeping all of us out of trouble, offering support, advice, or bail money when necessary. When dad passed, the farming stopped, but not the farm. It's still there and she's turned it into something new – it's hers now. Through everything, she has held strong; she is resilient.

She could be simply described as: Judy, widow of Ken, mother of seven, retired – but that would never be enough.











My Story

Judy Carpenter

I am the oldest child of a working class, middle-income family. I was born in Detroit and moved to a small town in Michigan where I still live. We knew all our neighbors and most of the people in the city. As kids we spent most of our waking hours - winter or summer, outside playing games and riding bikes.

I always loved music and took lessons on the piano from about the age of eight. For my 13th birthday my folks bought me a Conn organ and I played that for many years. I took it with me after I got married and kept it for years, playing it for my own enjoyment. I attended a Catholic grade school and high school, graduating at the top of the class. I attended college for one semester, got engaged and then got a job and quit school to pay for the wedding.

Growing up in the 50's and 60's was a great experience. It was the beginning of the "Rock and Roll" era and the hippy generation. Life was full of new things and exciting times. Landing on the moon, political assassinations, black freedom marches - a very historical time.

I met my husband when I was a junior in high school, we dated on and off until we got engaged, married and started a family. We ended up living on a farm and shortly after our third child we bought a business. I did the bookkeeping and he did the manual labor. After ten years, we had five children and survived by farming full time. I drove tractor, fed animals, raised a garden, baled hay and helped with all the usual farm things. The kids all pitched in from the time they were little. We raised grain and animals and there was always plenty to keep us busy. We had a pretty good life.

I volunteered in our church and local charities, ran the school lunch program for over a dozen years and took a part time job at the post office. The job eventually evolved into a full time position from which I retired in 2003. During the years I became a 4-H leader (my kids needed a club) and still hold that position.

I have always loved to travel and with a family and a farm it wasn't easy but we started out slow, a day or two at a time and the time increased as we got older. We were a camping family. Went from pop-up camper, borrowed camper to 5th wheel. I never thought I would like camping but it gets into your blood...I loved it. The scenery and places were great but the best part was the people. We met such great people over the years. We formed a loose-knit group we camped with for over 25 years, and had a great time.

When my husband passed away in 2006, I took traveling seriously, and went on a lot of trips. He never liked to fly so I made up for it. As a couple we had driven most everywhere, his favorite being Alaska, but I added cruises and international travel to my agenda. There are still places I want to see but I am slowing down a little and not going all the time.

I still volunteer a lot and spend time with my family. Most of them have always lived close and I have been able to get to know and enjoy my grandkids - they are all such a blessing. My two youngest daughters have brought me into the "techie" age. I am not very good at it but they keep me on track. My life has been something other than I had planned, but it has been a great life.





