

FRIEDA AND BELLE FLIGELMAN A Frontier-City Girlhood in the 1890s

edited by Susan Leaphart

Belle Winestone and Frieda Fligelman.

What is it that compels me to spend all of the hours left over in my day writing about the two of them?

What is that one inalienable quality that distinguishes them from the others?

Is it their age? Their charm? Their intellect? Their Jewishness?

Surely both are women who have been defined by any one or all of these characteristics. But there is another, more significant quality inherent in them both. An unusual independence so blatantly reflected in Frieda is repeated, more subtly, in Belle.

Beyond the assumption that this vein of independence was rare in the time during which Frieda and Belle were most dynamic, the quality itself, as found within them, is unique. Although their work, in sociology and in journalism, necessarily associated them with politics, suffrage, and equal rights, the independence of the Fligelmans was not founded in a specific cause nor in a popular conviction. This independence was merely an extension of themselves. It was without pretense, without sophistication. It was to be as much a part of them in the 1890s as it would be throughout their lives.

They spent their childhood years in Helena, Montana—in the 90s a town that called itself the "Queen City of the Rockies." Like many other western towns, it was born of the gold boom. But unlike so many of the others, Helena became more than just a gold camp. It survived both the boom and the bust. It became a city, and was *said* to be the richest city per capita in the United States before the Panic of '93.

Helena, as a city on the frontier, was rich in dollars, in culture, in society. Despite its mountain isolation, it gleaned tastes not only from the East and the South but even more easily from the West—from San Francisco and from Denver. There was a certain style to be found among its mansions of stone and brick and among those landmarks that later became symbols of the city—St. Helena's Cathedral, the old Fire Tower and the Broadwater Hotel and Natatorium. It drew the attention and the appearance of illustrious political figures,



Frieda Fligelman on her second birthday, January 2, 1892, in a portrait by the Morton Sisters studio, Helena.



Belle Fligelman at age three, March 25, 1894; E.D. Keller portrait

Photos courtesy of Belle Fligelman Winestone

wealthy business entrepreneurs, and actors and actresses of national renown. It was a city whose complexion reflected external influences, but one that modified those influences to suit its western setting. It became a city of singular charm.

It was here that Belle and Frieda's father, Herman Fligelman, established himself prosperously as a merchant. A Romanian by birth, Mr. Fligelman emigrated to the United States and gradually moved westward. By 1888, he had reached Helena, where he and two other gentlemen entered into a partnership and opened the New York Dry Goods Store. Two years later, he and his young Romanian wife, Minnie Weinzweig, began to raise a family. Their first child, Frieda, was born on January 2, 1890. The following year, Herman Fligelman lost his wife, shortly after the birth of their second daughter, Belle.

For Frieda and Belle, their earliest years were spent among aunts and uncles who cared for them under the watchful eye of their widowed father. In August 1894, Mr. Fligelman married a German lady named Ghetty Vogelbaum. Together they raised their small family—Herman Fligelman as the benevolent father and his wife as the strict disciplinarian.

"Mother would be horrified if she could see how I keep house today!" exclaims Belle. I glance around the living room. A low, sunken couch rests against the south wall where a small fireplace once had been. Atop its back lie several piles of books, varying in size and content. Papers and letters are scattered across the couch and onto the floor beside it. The entire room is wonderfully embroidered by bookshelves. The chairs are filled with clippings and articles. And in certain spots, the small tables, upon which so many more books rest, seem to have disappeared, giving to the books the appearance of being suspended by invisible threads.

I look across the years—the space between us—and absently take note of Belle. How she looks. What she says. How she says it. She reminds me that once she was five feet tall but now she is only 4'10½" and 95 pounds because during the last ten years or so, she has begun to "subside." Her white hair is fastened in a loose knot at the back of her neck, decorated with a sprig of green, as is her habit. "I always thought it would be wonderful to look like a tree," she smiles.

It is said that her smile is her own invention and exceeds the possibility of duplication. It is not the movement of her mouth that makes the smile. Rather, it is the raising of her cheeks, the unmeasured dance of crows' feet that coaxes from her eyes a certain light no photograph has captured. It is a smile that is difficult not to return.

The habit that has become our remembering draws me back to a time when Helena was the "Queen City of the Rockies," when Belle and Frieda were children. Through these conversations their precepts and their boundaries have become my own. The mood of the 1890s washes over me and I feel, for these hours, like a frozen figure in a photograph, as if I am, like time, suspended.

Leaphart: Belle, is there any one place in Helena that stands out in your mind as a place of historical significance?

Winestine: Historical significance? I don't know. But when Frieda and I were good all week long in summer, Mother would take us to Hepperdeizel's to buy what she called "good" candy.¹ My, was that a fairyland if ever there was!

Mrs. Hepperdeizel was so sparkling, crinkly clean in her starched pink and white-striped shirtwaist and white collar. She stood in back of the counter in her brilliantly laundered clothes and sold the less expensive candy. Like what we used to call "buttercups." They were little squares. . . that looked like satin on the outside. Only they were candy. And they were stuffed with something that must have been ground up nuts and ooh, good. Then there was taffy and butterscotch—the less expensive candies.

But the elegant candies were on the other side of the store. Mr. Hepperdeizel was in charge of that. Paper boxes that looked like satin—elegant boxes. You picked out the candy you wanted, piece by piece, and

1. Hepperdeizel's confectionary was located at 7 North Main.

he would pack it. I don't remember what you paid for it in those days, but they made all the candy themselves.

Then, at the back of the store, there were three broad steps the whole width of the store. You went up on a higher level. There were lanes of fake palm trees and a little fountain in the middle, as I remember. You felt sure you were in fairyland. There were maybe eight or ten marble-topped tables and four ice cream chairs around each one. Chairs with backs that curled around in a heavy wire pattern. They had napkins, too, that looked like chiffon but were paper. You got your ice cream sodas up there. Ice cream sodas were two for twenty-five cents. Downstairs you bought two tickets for a quarter and then you paid a ticket for your soda when you got it.

Frieda and I wore white kid gloves which we didn't fall on because they would get dirty if we fell down. And if we fell down we must remember to fall on our elbows instead of on our hands so that we wouldn't spoil our gloves. We walked very carefully. And you could smell this delicious butter and sugar smell as you came up the Gulch, a half a block away. Oh, my.

Leaphart: The old Broadwater Hotel, did your family spend much time there?²

Winestine: Frieda and I loved to go swimming out at the old Broadwater Natatorium. I couldn't swim, but oh, what bathing suits we wore! They had very full skirts that bubbled up with the water. They came down to one's knees, possibly an inch below. And under the skirts there were big, voluminous bloomers. The skirts and top were all one and usually had a big sailor collar. They looked very decent in those days. And we wore long stockings. We didn't wear what we called our "corset waists" to hitch the stockings, so the stockings had to be pinned to our bloomers to keep them up. It was a lot of trouble.

We would go in. There was a big counter by the side of the door where they would rent you a bathing suit if you didn't have one of your own and then they would rent you a dressing room. Each dressing room had its own door. You went in and closed the door—usually one family to a room. Our mother would undress in the same room. (Oh, the boys would be in a room with their fathers. It was very correct!)

Then, we all came out together in our bathing suits. We would go down the stone stairs very gingerly, feeling the water until we would get used to it. I remember my mother had the idea that you should never stay in the water more than twenty minutes or I don't know what would happen. Some terrible thing. I think it would kind of do something that would put you out. I'm just not sure.

Leaphart: You've talked a little bit about swimming when you were a child. Were there other sports or games you played?

Winestine: We used to slide in winter on our sleds from the foot of Mount Helena on Lawrence Street down practically to Main Street. But on Benton Avenue, the streetcar would go across and I don't know how our parents ever trusted to nature that we wouldn't get run over. We were very lucky.

It was a wonderful trip. Some had toboggans. We had a sled with curled runners. Later on we could afford a Flexible Flyer. They were very high style. Usually the boys just flopped down on their stomachs but the girls sat up—very rarely one on a sled—more often two or three on a sled. And there were always two or three smart-aleck boys. . . (you pulled the sled by a rope to take it up the hill) and these boys would stand near the middle of the road and as you came sliding down, they'd throw the end of the rope in front of you so it would make the sled slew around. It wasn't dangerous, but it was terribly annoying. And it broke that triumphant feeling of one grand swoop down the road!

When we played we just wore our regular school dresses. We used to wear a lot of petticoats and fancy embroidered muslin knee pants over long underwear.

Then a flannel petticoat embroidered and scalloped. Then a white skirt, which was a muslin petticoat with a waist. And finally, a dress on top of that. And if a petticoat showed one speck of one quarter of an inch under the dress—that was disgraceful! You had to be very carefully covered up!

But we used to do what was called "skinning the cat" on a bar in the neighbor's backyard. You stood in front of an iron bar, held on to it, gave a jump and threw yourself around the bar. And, of course, our petticoats would show while we were doing this because we'd practically land upside down. So, we could do that only with the girls around.

Leaphart: When it was too cold to play outdoors or the darkness wouldn't allow it, what did you and Frieda do indoors, at home?

Winestine: I can remember evenings at home. Frieda always read very good classic things. But we read the Elsie Dinsmore books and of course, the Alcott books. I remember when I first started to school, the teacher gave us the idea that we could go to the public library. We used to go there quite often and bring home books. And I remember, I think it was the Elsie Dinsmore books that we cried over and Mother said she didn't want us to cry over books. That we would have to get different kinds of books. Don't get books that you cry over. But we kept on bringing home the Elsie books, and she would hide them from us.

I always remember our bookcases at home, when we were children, were filled with Dickens, Scott, Victor Hugo, Shakespeare, books of history, political philosophy, ancient world geography, Ingersoll, Thomas Paine and Mark Twain.

In the evenings, we had gaslight in the house. I remember when we were on Dearborn Avenue we had kerosene lamps at night. Mother would mend stockings on one side of the lamp, in their bedroom, and my father would sit on a chair on the other side, with Frieda and me, and read aloud to us. I can remember his reading aloud *Alice in Wonderland*, singing "Soup of the Day, Beautiful Soup," giving it all he had. *Les Miserables*, with tears running down his lean cheeks while he read where the bishop told Jean Valjean and the police officer that the silver candlesticks were not stolen from him. No, they were a gift from him to Jean Valjean. *Black Beauty*, *King Lear* and that terrible Regan. All books he felt we ought to read.

Leaphart: Do you attribute some of your intellectual curiosity to your father?

Winestine: Yes. Oh, yes. I think I must have told you that my father always had a big, unabridged dictionary available at the dining room table and whenever anything came up at mealtime where we

2. The Broadwater Hotel and Natatorium, 1¼ miles west of Helena, was built by banker and entrepreneur Charles A. Broadwater, opened late in 1889 and continued as a health spa until the 1920s. After two decades as a dancing and gambling establishment, it closed in 1941.

had a question, we were immediately sent to the dictionary to look up the word that we were in doubt about.

If there were an incident we were in doubt about, we had the encyclopedia handy and we had to look it up immediately before we'd forget about it.

I can remember Frieda and I used to have a habit of saying "I could murder you for that." "I'll murder you for that." I think it was generally said among all the school children at that particular time, I don't know. But my father once said, "Do you know what it means to murder? Do you know what you're saying?" He explained very carefully that we wouldn't murder each other and that we shouldn't say that we would.

We used to say to each other, "I told you a million times." My father said, "Do you know how much a million is?" He said, "If you counted one hundred, just counting it as if you were counting clock ticks; if you counted one hundred every minute it would take you seventeen days to count to a million." It was quite startling to us and we never exaggerated in that particular fashion again.

Leaphart: Did your mother participate in these discussions as well?

Winestine: No. She was the one most interested in keeping a house properly done. Once a week the ceilings were dusted with a long-handled feather duster. And every day, every room in the house was carefully dusted and swept. Then, there was one special day a week when each room had its own, what we called, "thorough" cleaning. It was really quite something.

We had live-in help. They did a good deal of the cooking as well. They didn't eat with the family. They waited on the table. But we were always very friendly. I remember when I was about eight years old, we had a maid who told Frieda and me that we should never sleep on our left side. Always sleep on your right side because your heart is on your left side. You would crush it in your sleep if you slept on your left side and it would kill you. So, we always thought very seriously before we went to sleep.

Leaphart: Did you ever, as a child, have to take lessons in music or elocution or in dancing?

Winestine: Not elocution. But piano. And we took dancing lessons. It wasn't "have to." We loved doing it. The Sulgrove Dancing Academy was a great Saturday afternoon affair in those days.³ Mr. and Mrs. Sulgrove taught dancing to the children. I don't know if Mr. Sulgrove played the piano while Mrs. Sulgrove taught the dancing but it was something like that because there was a piano being played. I must have been about eight years old when I started taking dancing lessons. There were easily twenty or more children in class. We learned the two-step and the

waltz. Those were the main dances. Then, we learned the square dances, the lancers, and for special occasions we danced the minuet. Oh, and the polka!

The boys had to wear a white glove. They didn't have to wear two gloves as I remember but each boy had to have his hand in the small of the girl's back and lest he get her dress soiled, he would have a white glove on always. And the other hand went straight out and kind of sawed the air as you went around.

Leaphart: Were there other kinds of things to be done on a Saturday afternoon, aside from spending it in the Sulgrove Dancing Academy or in Hepperdiezel's?

Winestine: Frieda and I went to matinees at the Ming Opera House. They were nice performances always. We saw people who were through performing in New York, as the cast would tour the country after that. Frieda and I always sat in the balcony. It seems to me that the balcony seats cost about 25¢, but it might have been a little more than that. We went maybe twice or three times a year. I remember we saw Little Lord Fauntleroy. Was that impressive!

I remember Lillian Russell came here. I didn't see her but Mother and Father went. She was the great actress of the nation in those days. Lillian Russell was really quite something.

The Ming Opera House had wonderful things. The manager was Mr. Miner.⁴ And his wife, Mrs. Miner, was the social arbiter of Helena, really. They weren't the top social family but they were the authority on what was correct. I can remember when some woman was invited out to dinner one night and she called Mrs. Miner. "The dinner is tomorrow night and I'm not sure what I ought to wear. Should I wear a fancy afternoon dress or should I wear an evening dress?" Mrs. Miner simply said, "After six, black lace." Why that should stick in my mind, I don't know. I was just a child at the time. But I can always remember our family talking it over.

Mr. and Mrs. Miner always had box seats on the second floor of the theater because, after all, he was the manager. When they went one night (in those days everyone had opera glasses), all the opera glasses were focused on the Miner box because Mrs. Miner had a very fancy brooch affixed to her chest. Not to her dress. She had a very low-cut dress on and on her chest was this beautiful, great big brooch. Everybody was trying to figure out what made it stay there. They knew it couldn't be pinned to her skin! Apparently it was affixed with court plaster. Everyone was terribly interested. The phones were busy ringing the next day—everyone calling everybody else to see if they knew how this brooch had been attached.

Leaphart: Did you play together with friends on some of those Saturday afternoons?

Winestine: I think I told you we had a little club. Genevieve Walsh, Marie Stadler and Frieda and I had

3. Mrs. Leslie Sulgrove's Academy of Dancing was located at 10 North Park.

a little club.⁵ Genevieve's mother, who was also a lawyer and was in her husband's law office, had little pins made for each member with the Latin, "*multum in parvo*"—much in little. She carefully translated it for us and told us what it meant. We wore those buttons but as far as I know we didn't do anything at all except play.

However, when we went to Genevieve's to play, they had a wonderful attic with lots of old magazines. I can remember it was the first time I had ever heard of the *Literary Digest*. It was a magazine that came out once a month. We would read those magazines with considerable effort but with a great deal of respect for ourselves for doing it. We felt we were being quite intellectual.

I remember, too, the Walshes had a clothes chute in their home. We used to put the kitten in a Kodak box and lower it down to the laundry from the second floor. I think we enjoyed it more than the cat did.

Leaphart: It is my misfortune that I cannot ask Frieda about her own recollections of her childhood in Helena. I have an idea that her memories would have been very definitive. Unequivocal remembrances.

Winestine: Frieda always had a mind of her own. She was very, very opinionated and reasonably so.

I can remember, or did I tell you about when Bryan and McKinley ran for president?⁶ We went to play with Marie Stadler, who lived across from my aunt on Lawrence Street. She had the most wonderful backyard with a kind of a merry-go-round affair that her father had built for her. And a playhouse and a marvelous barn. They used to let me down with a rope around me, from the hayloft into the trough below where the horses ate. I was the only one small enough to go through where the hay came down. We used to play there all the time.

I remember when Bryan ran against McKinley, Bryan being a Democrat and McKinley being a Republican. We were all for Bryan—the children of the neighborhood—because the Bryan Headquarters gave out wonderful silver pencils. Bryan's slogan had something to do with the price of silver.

Frieda must have been seven and I must have been six. All of the children were about that age. And the day after the election, McKinley was elected and the children were so excited! Their fathers had told them about the news and that we had a new President. So, somebody got the idea that we would have a parade in the backyard. There must have been about six or seven of us. And we had our parade.

But, Frieda would not join the parade. She said, "Why should I change when I am for Bryan? Why

should I say I am for McKinley just because he got elected? I've been for Bryan and I am for Bryan." And she wouldn't join the parade.

She was an idealist, really. I don't know what she thought Bryan was going to do for the country. I think she felt somehow we were betraying him and his gift of silver pencils by marching for McKinley.

I think the neighborhood was always a little reticent about Frieda. She was much more strong-minded and knowing than the rest. She was always very positive.

We wanted very much to have a bicycle. We hadn't a bicycle in the family yet. My uncle in Butte gave us a tricycle. And Frieda was terribly upset. She would not demean herself to use a thing like that when what she wanted was a bicycle. I think she felt it was quite beneath her dignity to have a childish toy. I was only about seven so I got on the tricycle seat and used it quite a lot. But Frieda wouldn't go near it.

We used to take our bath at home in the same tub together. In those days you didn't let the water run all day and all night. We had a large tin tub with a kind of a slide on one end. We would soap it well and make it very slippery then sit down on it and slide into the water. It was marvelous.

We had linoleum in the bathroom which Mama always called oil cloth. Mama told us we were getting water on the floor when we were splashing in the bathtub and that we should try not to get any water on the oil cloth. When she went out of the room, Frieda said to me, "She calls it oil cloth, but it is really petroleum."

I was so impressed.

And I remember once we cut each other's hair. We were waiting to go downtown with Aunt Jessie and just as we were ready to start, company came to call.⁷ Frieda and I went out in the backyard to play while the company was there. It must have been Frieda's idea—I'm sure I wouldn't have been that original. I think it must have been Frieda who said, "Why don't we cut each other's hair?" Because it used to be an awful nuisance. It had to be brushed and combed every day and there were snarls and it hurt to comb them out. It was very long and very thick. We wore it in curls in those days. We had each cut about half our curls. I would cut one of Frieda's and she would cut one of mine, and then I'd cut one of hers and she'd cut one of mine. It was about half cut when my aunt came out and said it was time to go downtown. She saw us and there was nothing to do but take us to the barber and have it cut. She had it cut short like a boy's. . .

4. George A. Miner, for decades the city ticket agent for the Northern Pacific Railroad, was also manager of the Helena Theatre, formerly Ming's Opera House, from 1905 to 1914.

5. Marie Stadler was the daughter of pioneer stockgrower Louis Stadler; Genevieve Walsh the daughter of lawyers Elinor and Thomas (later Senator) Walsh.

6. The 1896 Presidential election, between William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan, in which the latter supported the silver monetary standard.

7. Jessie Fligelman Fichman, Herman's sister, and her husband David moved to Helena from Marysville, where they had operated a store, to care for Belle and Frieda in the years between their mother's death and their father's remarriage.

Leaphart: Frieda seemed to possess a great assurance and belief in her convictions. Did she hold fast to certain principles?

Winestine: Yes. Frieda was the one who said that instead of going to finishing school, we were going to college. All the other girls that we knew in Helena went to finishing school. And were they finished! They came back knowing how to be Ladies. They could play the piano and they knew how to sit down without crossing their knees. They made Ladies out of the crudest of us. And our parents were very anxious that we should go, too. A finishing school was attended after high school and instead of college. No Lady would go to college. That was a little crude.

Frieda said if our parents wouldn't send us anywhere except to a finishing school, then she would earn the money and go where she wanted to go. So, she went to the Courthouse, I remember, and tried to get a summer job teaching in a country school. She had one year left to go to high school and she was through school at sixteen so . . . She was one for skipping a lot of classes. Frieda was the bright one of the family. They never understood why she could bring home reports with all A's while mine were all B's and C's. Once in a while I'd get an A but then I'd lapse again. They couldn't understand what was the matter with me. But I got through. I never failed. But I scraped along. I was really too busy to listen very much. Thinking about what things I could do.

Anyway, Frieda was fifteen. And they said they couldn't give her a job at fifteen—it was against the law. And she came home and she threw herself on her bed and cried. I remember. When our parents saw how terribly she wanted to go, they were willing to send her. And, of course, when she went, I would be the one to go too. I always did what Frieda had planned to be done.

Leaphart: Did you and Frieda ever plan any childhood pranks and become angry with your parents, as children often do, and threaten to run away from home?

Winestine: No. I can't remember ever thinking about running away from home. But I do remember once Mother had a letter there on the table that looked as though it came from the reform school or something, saying, "yes," they would take Frieda and me. Frieda and I were just aghast. We couldn't believe she'd do such a thing. I don't know if we had told a fib or whether we'd torn our clothes too much. I mean, whatever we did, it wasn't anything criminal. We must have needed too much punishment for some trivial offense but it scared the wits out of us and we behaved very well for, I think, a whole week after that. I do remember a sudden resolution to try not to deserve anything like that again.

Leaphart: Do you recall if as a child there were certain routines to your day which would now be con-

sidered a bit uncommon but were then simply taken for granted?

Winestine: In our very early days, Father used to have to go back to the store after dinner. The stores were kept open until ten o'clock at night. I can remember when they finally decided that all the stores in Helena would close at eight o'clock. And then, the great time when the stores would close at six and no stores would be open in the evening.

We used to have wonderful people calling at the house in the morning. The Chinese vegetable man from the valley. He grew his own vegetables and would come each morning with an open wagon full of these brightly colored vegetables. He'd stop at the back door and all the housewives would come out to the alley to pick out what vegetables they wanted for the day.

There was a Chinese laundryman who came and called for the laundry every week. And on the Chinese New Year, the Chinese people—both the vegetable man and the laundry man—would bring to the house a beautifully-embroidered silk Chinese handkerchief—a great big one, just lovely. They celebrated their New Year's by giving gifts to their "clients" rather than by receiving gifts from them, which, after I grew up, struck me as an interesting difference in us.

Leaphart: What exactly was the attitude toward the Chinese, as you perceived it, in the late 1890s and the early 1900s?

Winestine: The white people felt very superior to the Chinese. I realize now with a great sense of guilt that we used to sing these songs:

Ching Chong Chinaman, sitting on a rail
Along came a monkey and bit off his tail.

It never dawned on us what the words meant. I don't think we were even aware of any meaning—that we were even singing about a person. It was just a rhythm we'd learned from the children at school. When I learned we were actually singing about the Chinese, I felt just terrible.

It never occurred to me when all the children were saying "nigger" that that was a very bad thing to say. Once I learned that it wasn't the thing to say—that it was just the same as other people's calling us "sheeny"—I stopped saying it. But we just didn't realize that it wasn't a respectful name.

Leaphart: Do you have any memories that you feel may be peculiar to you, given the fact that you grew up as a Jewish child in Helena?

Winestine: Well, we used to go to Sabbath school. It wasn't Sunday school because it was on Saturday morning. And I can remember once in our Sabbath school class we had the lesson about Abraham smashing his father's idols and saying you mustn't worship idols. I remember we came home and Frieda

and I were quite impressed and I said to Frieda, "If he smashed his father's idols and nothing happened to him, why do we have to believe the way our father believes? How do I know what he says is right? How do I know that there's a God? Supposing I just smash my father's idols." Frieda said, "Don't say that out loud." She was so sure I was going to wake up dead the next morning. But I didn't.

There were many things that we were not allowed to do on the Sabbath, including sewing on our doll clothes. Mother took a nap for about fifteen minutes every afternoon and while she took her nap, Frieda and I got out our sewing and sewed like anything! When we heard her stirring in the other room, we would quickly put the things away and pretend we hadn't done anything. Mother would come in. I remember one day, and I think it must have happened several times because I remember this so clearly. . . She said, "Children, you've been sewing." "No, we haven't." (We didn't see the scraps we had left on the floor.) "Yes, you have. God has written it on your forehead." And we began to think that maybe we weren't the last word.

Then, I remember it was in the sixth grade, in Central School, that I was chased up Lawrence Street by some boys who called me names because I was Jewish. . . . And what they called Jews, I never knew why. They called them "sheeny." That was a word we never would have said out loud because it was the worst thing that could be said as far as we were concerned.

There were three boys. It was winter. They were throwing snowballs at me and chasing me. And I was running as fast as I could. We had to climb a rugged, rocky hill to get up to the Central School. And they chased me up the hill. I remember I was crying and I rushed into the schoolroom. It was after lunch and the afternoon session was about to begin. The teacher came in and said to me, "What's the matter?"

"The boys are calling me names."

"What boys?"

I told her who the boys were.

"What did they call you?"

Well, I couldn't bring myself to say that word out loud.

"I can't tell you," I said.

"If you don't tell me, I can't do anything about it."

"Well, I can't tell you. I can't say that word."

"Go then. Take your seat. School will begin in a few minutes."

School began and the whole thing blew over, but it was a horrible experience while it lasted.

Leaphart: Belle, in the interest of history, is there any single event that you remember witnessing as a child that was a major part of Helena's history?

Winestine: I can remember the fireworks when Helena was made the capital. Seeing the parade going

down Lawrence Street.⁸ I was about three and a half years old and Frieda must have been four and a half. My father and my uncle were out in the front yard, where we were staying with my aunt. Father had just married for the second time.

This was at night and we were allowed to stay up and see it. I remember our new stepmother had a headache and was taking Bromo-Seltzer. It spilt onto the floor. There were little, tiny bits, like crystals, only they were white, like sugar. Frieda and I began picking them up off the floor and eating them. They would kind of effervesce, exploding on your tongue, and it was a great experience for Frieda and me! You can't imagine!

Out in the front yard, Uncle Dave held me and Father held Frieda on his shoulders. It was pitch dark. The parade came down the street, past the house with torches flaring and music playing. I can remember all those fancy carriages going by, with important political people sitting in them. And fireworks and cheering! It was very exciting.

Leaphart: As we've talked, you've mentioned the names of several prominent families in Helena's history. Many of them you remember because their children were friends of yours. Are there others you remember for separate reasons—strictly childhood reasons?

Winestine: I must have told you about the Ming sisters. In winter they used to pass our house. They were dressed in krimmer jackets that came down just below the hip and flared out. They used to walk quite spritely back and forth. We never knew them to talk to anybody. They were sisters of the Ming family who owned the Ming Opera House. They must have been, maybe thirty-five or so, but they seemed like old ladies to me. Well, not old really. But anybody over fifteen was grown up in those days. I don't think they worked—I don't know what they did but we used to watch them go by and it was quite a sight to see them passing.

And I remember Mrs. [Charles A.] Broadwater and her sister used to go abroad quite often. And one year, they went to Paris. Our store used to carry these elegant trefousse gloves and they stocked up on gloves because no lady would ever be seen out downtown, marketing without gloves on. But when they got to Paris they discovered they had forgotten to bring that box of gloves. They only had the one or two pair that they had worn on the way. They wrote back from Paris to Helena to send them a half a dozen pair of

8. 3500 people participated in a torchlight parade on November 12, 1894, celebrating Helena's selection as capital of the five-year-old state of Montana.

9. Herman Gans, who lived at 416 North Ewing, was vice president of Broadwater's Montana National Bank as well as partner in Gans & Klein, advertised as "clothing and men's furnishings."

trefousse gloves that they could have gotten right there in Paris with no trouble at all! My father always remembered that.

It was a funny thing, I remember, with Mother, when company came and she wasn't ready to see them. In those days, callers came very formally and you owed people calls and you had to pay back calls. You had engraved calling cards and if you were leaving town you bent the corner of the card when you left it, which showed you were going to be away for some reason.

When Mother didn't want to see company, she always told either the maid, or Frieda and me, if we were opening the door, to say, "Mama's not home." And we were taught otherwise to speak the truth so carefully. But this was always something we had to

say, "Mama's not home," when we knew she was upstairs.

And I remember going over and calling on Dorothy Gans one afternoon. The Ganses were very elegant Jewish people.⁹ They lived in what later became the priests' house on Ewing Street. And when her doorbell rang while we were there and Mrs. Gans didn't want to see company, she told the maid, "Just tell them I'm indisposed."

And what a beautiful word! We had never heard the word before. "She's indisposed." And at least, they didn't have to tell a lie and say she wasn't home. Heaven knows she wasn't indisposed either, but then, it was a much more elegant way of putting it. That stayed with me all the years. I was so impressed with it, I remember.

So goes this spectrum of memories. One recollection unleashes another, then another. Our reminiscing has now given way to drinking iced tea and eating the candied orange rinds for which Belle is famous. Not until afterwards, on the walk home, will my sense of drifting be reclaimed by definition. The sound of cars, of dogs, of children playing summer games reduces the reality of Belle's childhood. Yet there is a sweetness that lingers in this night, marked by lilacs and a look at life before I ever chanced to trace these footsteps home.

In January of 1978, Frieda died. Perhaps best known for her keen intellectual curiosity, Frieda made her most prestigious accomplishments through her devotion to the development of "social linguistics." She was a pioneer in the field of the sociology of language. She possessed a great fascination for the sounds and expressions that communicated meaning to unlettered peoples. She studied internationally, in Germany, in France and in Palestine. She took several years of graduate work at Columbia and at City College in New York and later studied at Berkeley. Despite her devotion to her work, year after year, her papers and studies were refused for lack of proper form, for lack of space or money, for lack of interest. It was not until the 1970s that Frieda, at 83, first began to be publicly recognized for her contributions to sociology. That recognition, though appreciated, could not assuage her disappointment at the denial of her doctoral thesis at Columbia. It was this doctorate, she believed, that would have resulted in her acquiring colleagues, credibility, and an audience.

The author of over 1200 poems, Frieda was also a woman of unique sensitivity who, through her writing, displayed a most unusual insight to human nature.

Belle's lampshade made of publishers' rejection letters suggests a struggle similar to Frieda's—to gain recognition in her own field. At 91, she is still pursuing that which is most dear to her. Published in the *Inter-American Magazine*, *Coronet*, *Frontier and Midland*, the *Atlantic*, and in *Montana the Magazine of Western History*, she has never lost the delight she finds in the written word.

In 1914, she worked as the first woman news reporter for the *Helena Independent*. She edited the *Montana Progressive* in 1915, leaving it in 1916 to serve as secretary to Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin. This uncommon background provided Belle with a certain political acumen. She has continued in her life as a lobbyist, a political candidate and for what seems to be forever, as an active member of the League of Women Voters. Yet, in all the hours of our pasting together pieces of the past, Belle's other interests have revealed themselves as well, in the way of a poet, a playwright, a mother, a wife, and a popular public speaker. There is something pleasantly engaging about someone who openly shares with you axioms only she could design. "I think people who don't like garlic have a lot to learn about life." Or, "I didn't know that you had to have a reason to be right."

Frieda and Belle. Theirs was a history I did not seek but rather one that fell from conversation and came about in spite of itself. In a certain sense, they, like some favorite legend, have moved through time untouched and curiously unaware of their precious immunity. ❧

SUSAN LEAPHART, a student at University of Montana Law School, Missoula, has extracted the above interview with Belle Fligelman Winestine from extensive ones conducted in the course of preparing a book-length biography of Mrs. Winestine. Ms. Leaphart published the edited reminiscence of her grandfather, C. W. Leaphart, on his 1905 bicycle tour of Yellowstone National Park in our Autumn 1981 issue.