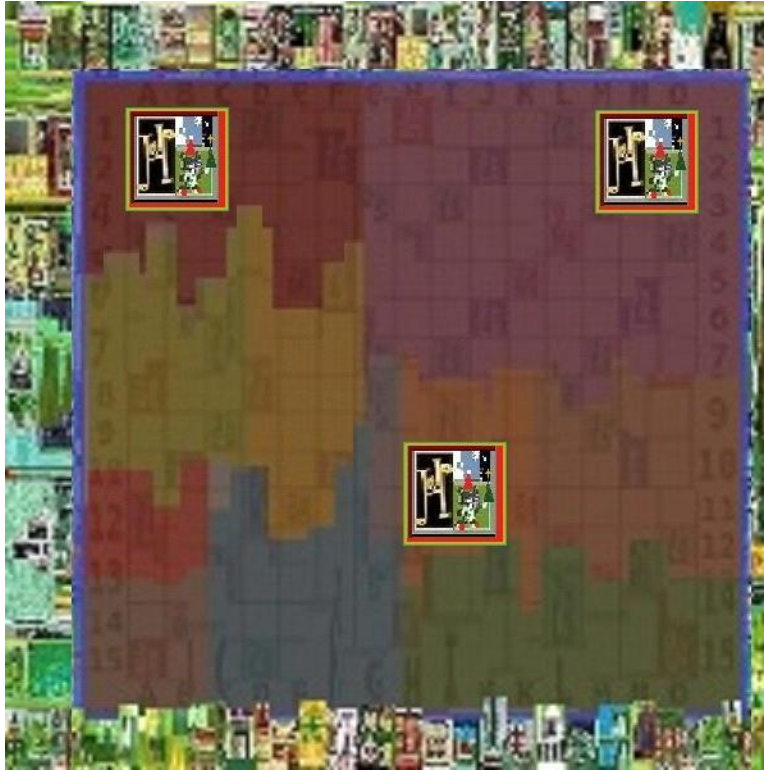

Digital graphic: "Scrabble Time"



Eleanor's Kitchen

by Jeannette Harris, Jonesborough TN

***** ROUGH DRAFT *****

an expository expansion from Chameleon Manhattan! at
<http://acountryrag.org/anecmanh.html#m>

WORK-IN-PROGRESS....

Digital graphic: "The Alcove Kitchen"



Eleanor's Kitchen

by Jeannette Harris, Jonesborough TN

I. New York City 1960s

Way way back in a very different place still called Manhattan, New York State, in a very different country still called the United States of America, Gus Forrest insisted excitedly that I meet Eleanor Darnton, an obviously highly and affectionately valued friend of his. They had met through the city's Alcoholics Anonymous get-togethers and

working seminars, as had many other luminaries of the 50s and 60s and earlier. Those must have been glittering, though time-tarnished, assemblages from the individuals I met and others I just heard of from active participants. Membership was sacredly secret for personal and professional reasons. I was sworn as a friend not to divulge garrulously names and details I might learn in intimate conversation. I've now forgotten eye-popping appellations dropped of outstanding contemporaries involved in that select organization regularly and necessarily. Like herself, Eleanor's closest associates were somewhat iconoclastic leftist-to-radical liberal intellectuals politically and socially and well-accomplished in their diverse private to public occupations from everyday show biz to reclusive literati personnas. The profoundly revelatory procedures of AA group maintenance recovery created and demanded a cohesively close network of inter-supportive kindred spirits.

During our very frequent week-to-week-to-month-to-year visitations, we drank from the *de rigueur* bottomless-seeming cups of instant coffee while seated at her large tapestry-covered dining table overlooking sky and midtown Madison Avenue, her to my kattycorner left, with the inevitable Scrabble board and pieces between us, swapping stories and opinions and observations and facts and theories and pleasures and conundrums from our present to past generationally-gapped perspectives and experiences.

At her enthusiastic bidding and explicatory intro I learned about everything from the fruit kumquat, which she named her calico

(something else new, in breed, to me) plump and friendly cat, to loaned paperback books by the delightful and then-obscure novelist Joyce Carey to sidestreet antique corner cinemas showing classic foreign films to the fine intricacies of individually-designed crewel needlecraft samplers to homemade clove-studded orange hanging closet potpourris to the awesomely overwhelming Sunday New York Times from nearby sidewalk stands.

Eleanor was small of stature with the expected post middle-age spread and with facial features that indicated character and keen alertness. She had intimately personal and detailed likes and dislikes, and sparing gossip, of public personalities whose lives and selves I'd only expected to read distantly about. It was all thrilling in a warmly humane and informatively low-key sort of way.

Following an awkwardly prolonged work hiatus as a free-lance writer, Eleanor secured a sizeable project and contract -- about which she was personally unenthused but dutifully timely in research and authorship professionalism -- for a booklet on the history and structural actuality of a local landmark. Her long-held and rent-controlled third-story walkup, three-room high-ceilinged apartment in a prestigiously safe and conveniently interesting city brick building cost \$65 a month, I believe.

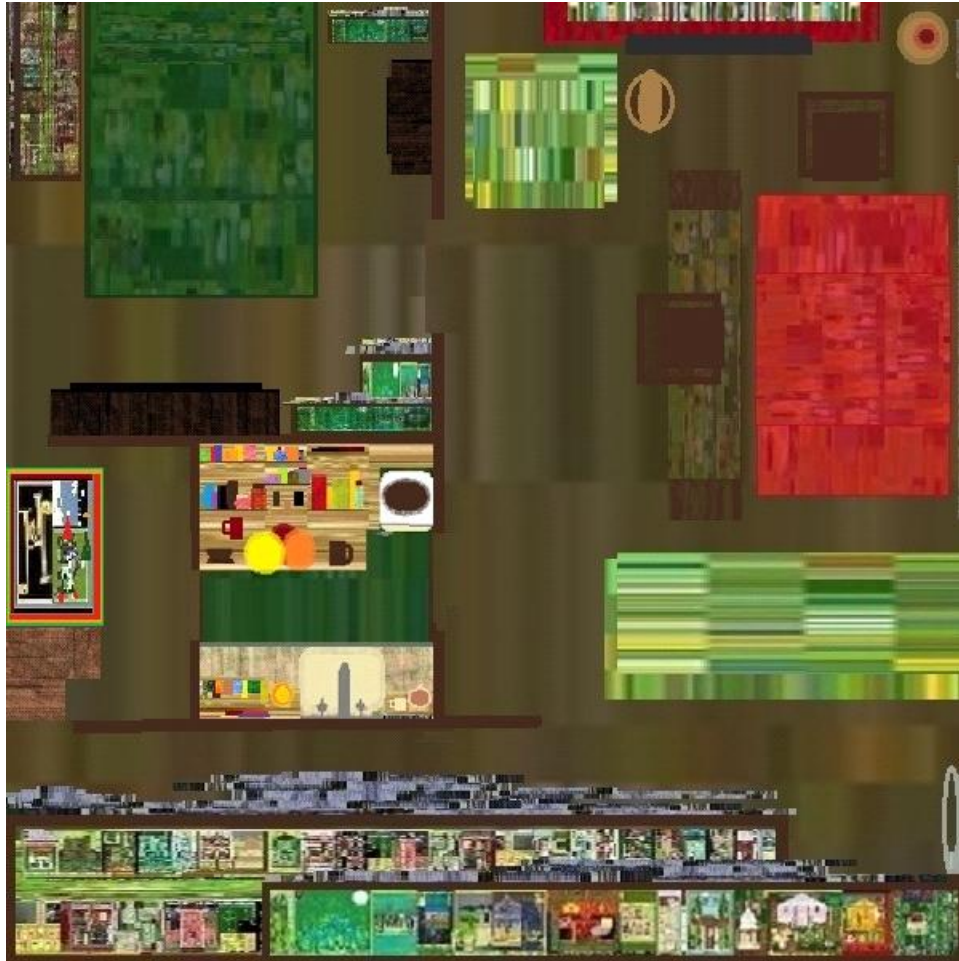
I routinely fixed our coffee and washed up a few dishes in Eleanor's miniscule walkthrough alcove kitchen where she fixed on occasion soups and stews while I brought cheese danishes from the deli for us to munch over our Scrabble blocks amidst piles of newspapers, magazines, literary journals... and more books.

Over the livingroom mantelpiece hung a framed print of a Van Gogh landscape which she related her son loyally preferred in shadings and texture to the museum-ensconced original he viewed later as an adult. She was normally proud of Robert (<http://history.fas.harvard.edu/people/faculty/darnton.php>), the older son matriculating in Britain as a Rhodes Scholar and of his younger brother, Johnny (<http://johndarnton.com/AboutJohn.html>), studying in foreign lands also way out at the University of Wisconsin -- both of whom she'd raised solely as a single working parent, widowed of a overseas-based NYT war correspondent.

Perhaps in a way similar to returning wartime soldiers who seldom recount candidly their harrowingly traumatic experiences in convivial conversation, Eleanor never related stories to me of her active alcoholic, pre-recovery years. I understood, though, the unbreachably supreme imperative of their avoiding, purposefully or accidentally, any form of raw alcohol consumption from our mutual friend, Gus, who'd narrowly escaped death or worse before arriving at the deciding crux of crisis. We spoke of the now and tomorrow, only of the past very generally and objectively -- all being historian afficiandos.

The AA approach to alcoholism was that it is a physiologically-inherited predisposition like hemophilia or diabetes that must, for healthy recovery in all dimensions adversely affected, be rigorously controlled through dedicatedly deliberate will-power within reconstructed behavioral strategies, assimilated informational field knowledge, and transformed psychological attitudes amidst deeply and strongly intimate bonds of like-afflicted mutual supporter-sufferant-recoverees. The presenting symptoms of critical alcoholism were held to be: inability to function professionally self-supportingly and other relational dysfunctions in wholesome and happy survivability; financially dissonant imbalance for everyday responsible needs and reasonable wants -- all subsumed to the overwhelming carnal passion for the next drink or drunk, an explosively exponential increment to craving without exerciseable restraint the next french fry or jelly donut or soda pop -- and widespread disarray, disease and disability following frustration, or satisfaction, of acquisitive consumption.

Digital graphic: "Madison Avenue Apartment"



Thanks to Eleanor's recommendations of an upscale employment agency that secured exceptionally generous and benign placement for me with an internationally renowned and successful advertising corporation, headquartered conveniently in midtown, and of Gramercy Park's wondrously affordable and safely comfortable Hotel for Working Women which provided daily housekeeping and tastily nutritious major meals, my spendable funds for urban adventures and discoveries were amply adequate for the bountiful buffet of city pleasures beckoning to be tested and tasted by the classically curious. At her suggestion also we dined delightfully at the Carnegie's restaurant cafe, enjoyed special exhibits of the Guggenheim, Metropolitan and MOMA museums,

browsed little neighborhood shops, and feasted on major bookstores. Her funds were stretched by intermittently fragile contract writing projects, so most of our on-the-town entertainments were of the free and inexpensive salutary surprise superlatives in which the city then reveled gloriously if somewhat quietly and secretively. Eleanor shared the secrets also of wise caution a lone woman must know and follow to enjoy, safely unaccosted, sidewalk and public transportation enticements and I managed well by attending to them, including walking the sidestreets from her apartment to my own near Gracie Mansion in the wee morning hours of vacant streets and darkly narrow alleys. Taxi transport was cheap and ubiquitous; effective strategies of winning the competition for a passengerless one were traded like gemstone beads amongst victoriously mobile city natives like Eleanor and, within and a few quick-study months, me and my assortedly-aspiring roommates.

Raised in the classic traditional styles of artistic expression and representation, I didn't initially like the works of Picasso whose experiential perspective and techniques of introspection she conveyed empathetically and enthusiastically. The same is true of a few post-modern musical composers whose discordantly alien creations I learned to appreciate, if not personally like. Eleanor held Impressionist painters and Existentialist writers in affectionately high regard and I acquired an extensive personal library of both.

Digital graphic: "Jello of Memory"



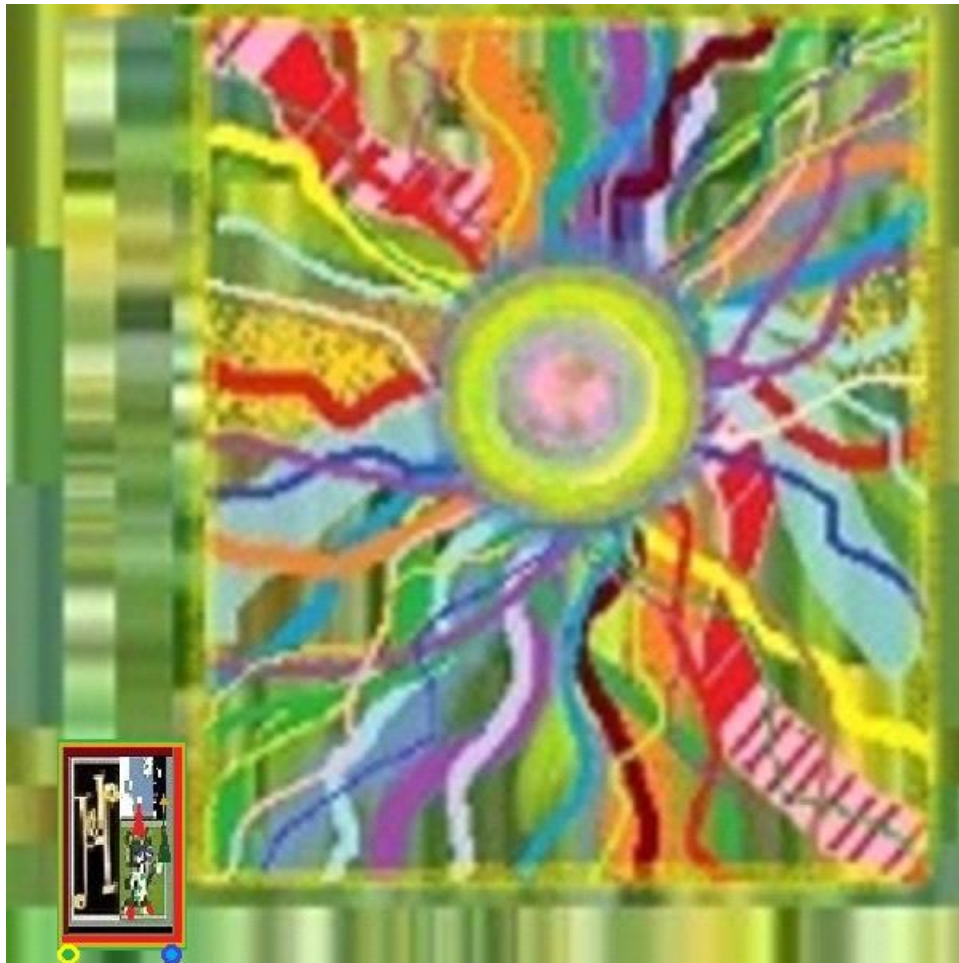
She preferred Camus and Gide, for their positive humanism, to Sartre, whom I believe she found too negatively objective about the human condition, and she disliked vividly anything veering toward nihilistic cynicism. She liked Miro, Gauguin, Degas, Rodin, Monet, and Van Gogh, but was cautiously noncommittal about my favorite of the time, Toulouse-Lautrec. Maybe it was the absinthe that "turned her off." She enjoyed nearby Central Park and delighted proudly in the city's patchwork of smaller neighborhood parks. Eleanor insisted New York City was not a humongously indigestible and unapproachable stew but rather contiguous, warmly-related neighboring blocks like the smaller countries of Europe cozied onto their continent, and we walked the streets for her to pinpoint samples. She indicated the lower east side

spot where Greta Garbo was rumored and believed to live out an obscurely ordinary lifestyle with the cooperation of retiscently protective residential neighbors.

[to be continued]

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Digital graphic: "Intersection"



II. Eleanor Elsewhere 1960s

Later, setting up temporary homes and relationships from mountain to coast in small to tiny to larger towns of North Carolina with my first husband, an itinerant traveling salesman at that time, Eleanor and I exchanged regularly frequent long letters expounding on activities, thoughts and observations, studies and directions, reviews and recommendations, opinions and questionings -- as was ordinary and accustomed then amidst close friends and relatives, especially those of any literary persuasion or acumen. She enjoined me somewhat urgently to become more involved and active in the uncomfortably unfamiliar territories and cultures of our southern perambulations as I'd retreated to an intense "brown study" in historical novels of other places and personages more real, and dear, to me than those materialized transiently nearby.

Visiting my good friend, advisor and protective mentor living years later in a spaciouly sunlit suburban Connecticut garage apartment was like finding a mallard nesting in a pine tree. To me, Eleanor was the quintessential, knowledgeably sophisticated, and humanistically savvy New Yorker. It hurts now to recall the syndrome of uterine cancer that stymied inevitably her intrinsic call to be involved and lively with world

to personal developments, material to theoretical, interactional and informed, global to neighborhood.

Following some marital disorientations in employment disruption that led to a brief return of our South Florida working residence, Eleanor and I resumed correspondence between Johnson City Tennessee northward. When she wrote sharing news of the mortality sweeping inexorably toward her, I determined on one last visitation together. Finding it difficult to continue correspondence, I knew with a sinking heart that Eleanor had left this earthly sphere when her letters to me stopped.

III. Footnotes

Eleanor Choate Darnton

January 01, 1907 New York - May 01, 1968 Westport, Fairfield County, Connecticut

Women's Editor, NYT

freelance writer

independent book author

tutor

"... Eleanor Darnton (known as Tootie), herself a brilliant and innovative journalist.... As the Darnton family's life without father spirals downward, as Tootie loses job after job, as they move to ever smaller and more squalid houses...." -- *A Journalist Investigates a Father Lost at*

War By SUSAN CHEEVER

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/books/review/book-review-almost-a-family-by-john-darnton.html?pagewanted=all>)

The Children Grew The Story of How One Mother Brought Up Her Two Young Sons Without A Father _____ by _____ Eleanor _____ Choate _____ Darnton _____ (1954)

[http://www.amazon.com/s?ie=UTF8&field-author=Eleanor%20Choate%20Darnton&page=1&rh=n%3A283155%2Cp_27%3AEleanor%20Choate%20Darnton]

"... While working at the Philadelphia Public Ledger, she [Ann Hark] met Byron Darnton, whom she married. Darnton was a World War I veteran, having served with the Red Arrow Division of the Michigan National Guard, which was the first to enter Germany at Alsace in 1918. They honeymooned in a tent on what is now referred to as the state gamelands, adjacent to Mt. Gretna. Darnton accepted a job with the New York Post in 1925, moved to the Associated Press in 1930 and finally, the New York Times in 1934. Ann and Byron's divorce was final in 1930; Darnton married Eleanor Choate in 1938, with whom he had two sons, Robert and John. In 1942, he was killed in a bombing in New Guinea working as a war correspondent...." -- *Ann Hark: A Woman Before Her Time* by Kathy Snively, chair of the Lebanon County Commission for Women

"... My brother, Bob, and I were raised by our mother. Our father, Byron Darnton, a war correspondent for The New York Times, was killed off the coast of New Guinea in October 1942. At the time, Bob was 3 and I was 11 months. Neither of us has any memory of him. Our mother, Eleanor Darnton, wrote a book about raising two boys alone; she began with a description of my brother watching, face against the glass, as "the big, uniformed figure" walked away...." -- *In the Name of the Father* By JOHN DARNTON (at <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/16/magazine/16lives.html>)

Eleanor's Kitchen reader reviews: "love Eleanor...."more,more,more"..... "I wanted to go visit!!"

IV. Illustrations

Digital graphic: "Scrabble Time"

Digital graphic: "The Alcove Kitchen"

Digital graphic: "Madison Avenue Apartment"

Digital graphic: "Jello of Memory"

Digital graphic: "Intersection"

[to be continued, 2058 words, 1/5/14]

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c. Jeannette Harris, ACRInc, Jonesborough TN, January 2014.