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Laura - enclosed also

your text + bio-biblio. Hope it (415) 655-4920  
to Photographers in Recollections looks as good as it

from Greta

is — and thanks again.  
G.

February 14, 1979

♡ Happy Valentine's Day

The book is almost completed; ingredients are on the editor's desk now and being cut to fit into a book of 208 pages.

The best printer is being sought and the schedule for publication is tight.

Publication date:

Museum opening: September 13, 1979

At the International Center of Photography  
1130 Fifth Avenue at 94th Street  
New York, NY  
Cornell Capa Director

I will write soon about the show. Plans are being made for the opening event. Do you have any suggestions? If you can come, how would you like it to be? I will send a letter of specific questions shortly, and must have all ideas by March 1st at the latest.

If you have any museums where you would like to have the show travel during 1980-81 please send me name and address and curator of photography (if you know it) Right Away. The International Exhibitions Foundation is making arrangements to travel the show. There are already a number of bookings.

If you haven't done so please send the release letter (to me) to Viking-Penguin c/o Barbara Burn 625 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10022

Every day counts now as the editor and designer (both of whom are young women who are very enthusiastic about Recollections!) help me shape the book to your expectations.

Call me collect if you have any questions.

Thank you for all your patience and cooperation.

Greta

PLEASE SEND ME A LIST  
of names + addresses  
for 9CP to have for  
invitations to the show  
BY MARCH 15 PLEASE!



Laura Gilpin

I don't recall exactly how I began in photography because it was so long ago but I know I ~~was~~ <sup>had</sup> given a Brownie as ~~early~~ <sup>a child</sup> as 1902; Recently I found something my father wrote in 1903 when I was twelve years old. He was down in old Mexico managing a mine over the Christmas holiday. In a letter home he wrote a parody on "T'was the Night Before Christmas". In it he described things that he imagined he saw under the Christmas tree -- a train for my brother and a developing tank for me. The tank was one of those funny machines in which you rolled the film under a red apron from one side into the other and then poured in developer. I can just picture it now. I don't know what ever happened to it.

I can also date a lot of life-long influences back to the year 190<sup>4</sup> when at age thirteen I was sent by my mother to visit her closest friend, my namesake Laura Perry, who was blind. She lived in St. Louis. We went to the World's Fair every other day and it was my job to describe exhibits to her. I think that the experience taught me a kind of observation that I would never have learned otherwise. I can also remember being very much fascinated by some Igorote natives from the Philippines who were there.

When I was fourteen my mother took my brother and me to New York where we had portraits made by Mrs. Gertrude Käsebier; they were very beautiful, especially the portrait of my 6 year old brother. Meeting Mrs. Kasebier had a great effect on me, certainly, because later when I ~~was a~~ <sup>wanted to study</sup> photography

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~~I wrote to her for advice and she was a great help to me.~~  
~~student she was a great help to me.~~

In 1908 I made my earliest (dated) autochrome. I had learned about the Lumiere Autochrome plate, the first single-plate color process, from a fellow in Colorado Springs. This process was invented in 1907 so it was brand new and I remember falling for it head over heels and making a great many plates. I don't know why I hit the exposure right, but I evidently developed that kind of sensitivity at that time. One of the problems with the autochrome was the delicacy of the emulsion. These plates were made in France, you know, and it was very easy to get a little break in the emulsion which would always make a green spot, so I've got a great many perfectly good ones but with green spots on them. I processed the earlier ones in a darkroom on the ranch where we lived then in the western part of Colorado. I was always fussing with photography as a youngster.

The San Francisco and San Diego fairs of 1915 were another transition, I guess. I went to California with a friend of my mother's who wanted somebody to accompany her. I recently found a whole envelope of negatives from the San Francisco Exposition which shows my first contact with sculpture. I think I photographed every piece of sculpture that was exhibited outside in the fairgrounds. There must <sup>have been</sup> be fifteen or twenty different subjects. I was so surprised at how much there was to see! That trip must have decided me to study photography seriously because on the advice of Gertrude Käsebier



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I went the following year to study at the Clarence H. White School in New York. ~~But first I had to earn enough money to go.~~

<sup>had been</sup> I ~~went into~~ the poultry business, raising turkeys, <sup>when we</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>lived on the western slope of Colorado.</sup> ~~earn what was necessary.~~ My mother <sup>always felt that I</sup> ~~was the one who always~~ <sup>should</sup> ~~wanted me to~~ be independent. She was a remarkable woman and she was all for my doing what I wanted to do. In 1916 for a girl to go off on her own was not the usual thing, but whatever I wanted to do she was for; she was right behind me. She was wonderful -- the more that I think of her the stronger I feel that.

While I was <sup>in New York</sup> at the ~~Clarence White school~~ I <sup>often went to</sup> ~~saw a great~~ <sup>visit</sup> ~~deal of Mrs. Käsebier, who gave me good criticism.~~ <sup>at the Clarence White School. I found Mr White</sup> ~~At the school Mr. White~~ was a marvelous teacher. Paul Anderson was the technical instructor, and that year Max Weber gave a course in the history of art and design which was a wonderful experience and then Mr. White himself brought it all together with weekly criticisms. He would give us problems to solve. I remember some <sup>of the</sup> ~~very interesting~~ students <sup>(There were about twenty of them)</sup> and I can tell from my old group photograph that there were more women than men at the school. I have always wondered what happened to them.

Mr. White  
/ certainly knew how to inspire everybody. I know it was because of him that I made those two night photographs in Central Park in the snow storm. The first view camera I had was a 6 1/2 by 8 1/2 and I remember lugging



it over into Central Park with one plate holder with two glass plates in it. One of the pictures has been seen by very few people. I have never shown it anywhere but I'm not parting with that one until I have made a duplicate of it.

The schooling in New York was wonderful, it was just what I most wanted to do and I soaked it up! Learning technique was different in those days. When I began photography at the Clarence White School we did not have light meters. It was a question of acquiring sensitivity of the eye on the ground glass while working under the focusing cloth. Really, photographic technique is nothing but plain common sense. Problem solving. I always go back to the first very simple principle -- that you expose for your shadows and develop for your highlights. That's what Ansel Adams has done with his zone system and everything is really just a refinement on the basic principle.

As I look back, I think that music helped me in learning photography. Music was a big part of my life growing up. I studied the violin, but I never got very far with it. So I let photography win! There's a great link, you know, between photography and music. One is continual sound and the other is continual tone. There you are -- there's the comparison! and it is true of so many other photographers. Ansel Adams was a concert pianist. Did you know Mr. White was a violinist?

I never liked to perform but I enjoyed being with musicians.

Before I went to New York, I spent a summer managing a chamber music group in Colorado Springs. In New York I landed right into the world of music again, because one of my roommates Brenda Putnam was a pianist. My first exhibition print was of a trio in which she played. Brenda's father was the Librarian of Congress. He bought a few of my prints for the Library collection. Later I was instrumental in his purchase of both the work of Gertrude Käsebier and Clarence White. I'm just pleased that I had sense enough to do that.

While I was in New York I did quite a little work for sculptors. I photographed all of Brenda's sculpture and I got jobs from other artists and I also did quite a little portrait work. New York was exciting but it wasn't the big open spaces for me, so I went back west.

I had the flu very badly during the 1918 epidemic. When I was well enough to get to work again I would send proofs to <sup>my</sup> Gertrude Käsebier or ~~send them~~ to my friend Brenda Putnam and she'd take them over to <sup>her</sup> Mrs. Käsebier. Then I'd get a letter from her criticizing them. As a result I'm the very proud owner of one copy of the magazine Camera Work (Number One) autographed by Mrs. Käsebier.

At the beginning of a trip to Europe in 1922 I found that one can learn a lot from accidents. The lens fell out of my Graflex into the water. I ordered a Pinkham & Smith soft focus lens which was sent over to me in England. The



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first time I used it I found that it had a flare. In order to use it I had to stop down. This taught me a lot about solving problems.

I have always loved the platinum printing process. It's the most beautiful image <sup>one</sup> ~~you~~ can get. It has the longest scale and <sup>one</sup> ~~you~~ can get the greatest degree of contrast.

It's not a difficult process; it just takes time. <sup>There has</sup> ~~You have~~ <sup>be</sup> ~~have~~ a contact negative; that's why other people don't use <sup>The process</sup> ~~it~~ much today, <sup>but it's being revived today.</sup>

The most unusual photographic work I've done was as the official photographer for Boeing Airplane Co. during World War II. It was work with lots of pressure and very strenuous. Among the photographs I took while there is one which illustrates the real problem-solving kind of photograph I had to make. I had to find a woman in the factory who was working in the wing section, who had a son in the Air Corp. So I hunted around and I found a woman who had not only one son but two sons who were aviators. So the idea was to have a photograph of her thinking about one of her sons. She brought me in some pictures of one of these boys so I made a lantern slide of it. And then I had to light her so that it threw her shadow onto the wing and then I could project the lantern slide image of the boy onto that so the rivets of the wing showed through that projected image. That was the most difficult technical problem I've ever had to solve.

100%

In 1945 after the war I wanted to do a book on the Rio Grande from source to mouth. I had the nerve to start on it two weeks before the war was over with gasoline still rationed. I started in Southern Colorado where I wouldn't need to travel very far. All of the landscape work was 8 by 10. I seldom made more than one negative simply because I didn't have enough film. That was the kind of training that the Boeing job had given me; you see that these things all relate to one another. I can always find something interesting in a subject and in the challenge of how best to solve it.

I have always been an independent photographer perhaps because I was alone so much in Colorado. I had to work things out for myself from the beginning. I come from a long line of Quaker ancestry and my whole belief is very simple. It is in how you behave and how you take what happens to you: those are the two main things in life.

What I have done has been very natural to me. Creative work is something you have to see and feel. I record the things I see. If you're busy and interested, life seems not to be complicated.

Being a woman photographer has never been a problem. The only thing that I can ever remember about was a very funny comment one day. I was doing architectural photographs for two architects in Denver on 16th or 17th Street downtown, photographing a bank across the street, and I had my 8 by 10 camera and I was under the focusing cloth. I heard a woman's



voice saying "that's it, girlie; show them how!" Personally, I can't see any difference for men or women; either you're a good photographer or you're not.

I really consider myself a landscape photographer more than anything else. For some years we lived on a ranch in Colorado and as my favorite subject in school was physical geography, I think I come by my love for landscape naturally.

My father was a friend of the great landscape photographer, William Henry Jackson. The first series that Jackson made on a western cattle ranch was on my father's ranch. He came out to the ranch many times over the years but I didn't meet him until 193<sup>3</sup>~~2~~. We had quite a talk and I remember him saying that when he was in the southwest he was interested in archeology and the landscape but not in the Indians.

It was in 1920 that I first came down to the Santa Fe area with my father. My first pictures of Shiprock I made on that trip. Later my friend Miss F<sup>r</sup><sub>A</sub>oster and I used to come down on our vacation every year for a month and we gradually explored a lot of the southwest. Our first trip was in 1930. At that time I was particularly interested in photographing archeology. Anyway I wanted to photograph the ruins Betatakin and Keet Seel as well as Mesa Verde. On that trip we had an adventure -- on a half a tank of gas we tried to travel seventy-two miles from Keyenta to Chinle. It didn't seem far and we didn't have much food with us. We got lost and to make a long story short, I had to leave

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Miss Forster with the car and I set out on foot for help. I walked ten and a half miles to a trading post. Upon return to the car with the trader's wife, there was Miss Forster playing gin rummy with a group of Navaho. Apparently they had come to try to help. One who spoke English told Miss Forster all about the country. At one point he said to her "here comes your friend. She's in Frasier's car" there wasn't a car in sight. It was still over the hill.

The next year when Miss Forster was offered a <sup>public health</sup> nursing job on the reservation, she took it. During the following years we camped pretty much all over the whole reservation, <sup>which gave me the opportunity to work very slowly in order to photograph it is the kind</sup> For a long time I didn't take pictures of the people. <sup>of photography which can't be done</sup> ~~do it~~ in a hurry. You have to be trusted. <sup>which is necessary</sup>

The Navaho project The Enduring Navaho was fifteen years in the making. I had no backing, I had no grant, or anything like that. It was just something that I had to do. Most of the work is from the 1950s when I had really decided to do the book. It was not an easy job. It took patience and more patience. But it was worth it. As things built up I had a loose-leaf dummy with prints in it to show people. All the Navaho wanted to look at all the pictures; somebody would find someone they knew in a print and that always opened a door. They don't forget, they just never forget you -- it's incredible. My involvement with the Navaho people has affected my own way of life, of course, <sup>as I came to understand their</sup> ~~It feels natural to me.~~ own philosophy.



I have always had an interest in book design. As you probably noticed in the Navaho book four is a very important number in Navaho culture. The four seasons, the four directions on the compass: everything is in fours. So I organized the Navaho book in four sections.

I am going to do this again in the book on Canyon de Chelly: the first section will be on the whole environment, all air shots which I hope will include the entire drainage of the Canyon. I have one to do in October when the cottonwoods have turned so I can get a touch of yellow in it. The second will be the Canyon, the landscape of the Canyon itself. The third will be the ruins and the history of man there, which are older than the Navaho culture. Man has a two thousand year history there. Lately I have been finding four or five generations living on one piece of land.

I'm planning to make one more flight and stay over there for a day, go up the Canyon to check on the locations of the people who live there now. I think I'll end with a story of three generations of a family on the day I recorded all of the them at a family reunion. The two older women of the family went down into the field and brought up arms full of corn which they roasted to make bread. All the preparations and the feast went on all afternoon. I never had such a day and I think that it will show the kind of beauty there is in the Navaho approach to community.

When I make a book I like to do the whole thing: The research, the writing, and the photographs. I never had any training whatsoever for writing and I certainly don't consider myself a writer, but the same principles are there that are in picture-making. Having something to say is the first important thing, then the problem is putting it down in an adequate design. When you are really involved in a subject and respect it, you should be able to find an appropriate way to express it.

I don't teach photography much. I don't think I'm a good teacher because I'm <sup>do not have the</sup> ~~not as~~ precise <sup>control that</sup> ~~as someone like~~ Ansel <sup>has</sup>. To me the important thing is to get the picture first. After you've worked a long time you develop a sense of light values on the ground glass when you're under the focusing cloth.

For me to get up and give a talk about photography always makes me laugh. In photographing I don't think in terms of trying to produce fine art but I know that the principles have to be there. Design is evidently a very instinctive and ingrained principle in my way of working. Lots of photographs that I've delivered were just jobs to do, problems to solve, like the advertising and architectural work I've done. But ones of my own caring -- such as my landscape photography and the study of the Navaho -- well, that's the work I want to keep.

Working a long time on a subject has advantages. I have photographed the southwestern landscape since I first stopped



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at the Grand Canyon in 1915 and I've photographed the Canyon de Chelly more than any other place. On one of ~~the~~<sup>my</sup> trips there ~~for my new book on the Canyon~~<sup>tried</sup> I ~~wanted~~ to find the exact spot where the great photograph by Edward Curtis was taken. (the one with the seven horsemen). I grew up under that print. It hung on our wall at the ranch for years. I'm sure that is why I ~~am now doing a book on~~<sup>have photographed so often in</sup> the Canyon.

Being  
/ eighty-seven it does give me a jolt if I stop and think about it, but I don't think about age. It just seems to me when I look back that I must have wasted an awful lot of time.