

LAURA MAY ABRAHAM--Section from Olympia: Voices © 1988 S. Charak

Laura May Abraham described how she and her husband discovered the Olympia area from her home in Wisconsin. "Andrew and I lived in Hurley, in the deep, dark of the coldest winter. It was like the Arctic Circle. I was from San Diego. Land of barren hills and brown grass. Hurley was a radical shock for me, culturally and geographically. But we saw on CBS' "First Tuesday" about Evergreen. On national television, we saw people having seminars in the woods. We said, 'Wow! Olympia must be a neat place. Let's go there.' That's why we moved here. We knew not a soul, but the feeling that was implied in this network TV piece was that kind of, 'At the Evergreen State College, the president and the janitor danced together.' That kind of camaraderie. Going beyond what any traditional boundaries of formal education had been."

Laura May and Andrew Abraham came to Olympia in December of 1971. "We chose to travel in the hard part of the year, but we made it. We stayed at a motel the first night. The next day we went out to Evergreen and there was a gentleman who let us go through their housing files." They located a place to live with a woman who had a nine year old daughter and a rabbit farm on Oyster Bay Road, about ten miles northwest of Olympia. "She wanted to drive a cab in Seattle. She wanted someone to live there and breed rabbits and send her daughter to school and feed her. That's where Andrew and I wound up."

They found a place to live, but they didn't find what they expected. "In the streets of Olympia, we found a very square, ultra-conservative town. There was a lot of long hair in late sixties and the early seventies, right? There was no long hair to be seen in Olympia. That's an abstracted way of

making a judgment about the consciousness about a town, but really I think Evergreen was the advent of culture in Olympia." Laura May lowered her voice here. "I may be shot for saying so. But it was a conservative government town. I would never have been here if it weren't for Evergreen. It's a very beautiful town. I love it here. I love its proximity to the water and the mountains."

Laura May admits, "I would have never made it without what the school has brought to the area. The new people that moved here from all over the country really affected every part of the staid Olympia framework." The change didn't come about easily, however. "There was a lot of prejudice. A whole lot of prejudice. People were real protective of their old town ways. They resented New Yorkers. It seemed there were a lot of New Yorkers at the school in those days." Laura May had helped form a food cooperative. "I was battling the obstacles of the young, struggling Co-op, seemingly a band of freaks to most people.

A long time friend, Barbara Trabka, described the place as, "kind of the first Olympia Food Co-op. It was a little house on East 4th. It was just sort of a bunch of hippies that needed cheese."

Laura May said, "Really it was an honorable thing. People were getting their food. That's what it was about. We had a hard time. Let me put it this way. I always felt we were looked down upon. "

Laura May and Andrew had moved closer to town. "We lived out on the old Mud Bay Highway. We knew no one here. A guy ran out of gas in front of our house. Brock Sutherland, from an old Olympia family." Brock's father worked for *The Olympian*. That was how they began their connection with what was then the Olympia Food Co-op. "It was functioning then up on the end Bigelow Street. My friend Mary Lou Reslock got me involved, and we

started mopping floors and stuff. There were problems, and the location crumbled." The Co-op had less than a hundred members then. "We had searched diligently for a place to go. We moved to the corner of 5th and Jefferson." There's a lot on that corner now. "There was an old, funky, two story dilapidated green apartment building on the corner. There was a woman real estate agent who showed us this apartment building here. We asked if we could put a store here. She said, 'You could do anything here. You could sell babies out the back door.' I never forgot that." The real estate agent told them that the location was zoned so that they could put a shop there.

"We moved the food co-op to this little apartment. Within two weeks, there were plain-clothes detectives down there buying food and saying, 'Hey, you can't have a store here. This is zoned wholesale warehouse.' We went to City Hall in 1972. It was back in the days of hippies and dogs. Lots of hippies and lots of dogs. I went to City Hall to the Board of Adjustments meeting to try to get a variance. We lost. I had walked the boundaries of the interior of that wholesale and warehouse district. I had counted nineteen retail businesses, including Safeway. Of course, they were grandfathered in and we were new. Our tack was that the members really owned the food, and it was really just a point of exchange. It wasn't a retail store, even though the detective had come in and bought peanut butter."

They lost their argument. "There was an attorney who'd heard about us, and he offered his building on the west side, behind the car wash that's up there now. It was a huge cedar building with no power and no water. But he offered us this space. We managed to stave off the city until December of that year." By that time the Co-op had grown to some 300 members. "We used to buy fish from the Skokomish Indians early in the morning and come

back and clean them up in my yard on the west side, then take them and put them on ice in the bathtub and sell them to the members." Heat was provided by a pot bellied stove. "It was cozy. You could sit in the kitchen of this little apartment with your feet up near the stove. When we first started using it, the fire department came down--in full drag, as Mary Lou said--in uniform with the clanging bell, and told us we couldn't have a stove there. Capitol Plumbing and Heating phoned because we had a fire going in our place. In December of that year, on our last day, the water pipes broke in the floor, and the place flooded. We got the food out, and we took it to my house on the west side."

The next logical step was selling food out of her house. "We used to get a delivery at that time from Oroweat. Since they delivered at the Co-op down there, they delivered at my house. The city didn't know. They didn't pay attention to us at that point. We were out of the limelight. I was selling food. I had buckets of cashew butter in my kitchen. Oroweat delivered until the supervisor came on the route one day with the driver. The supervisor looked at the long chuck-holed driveway and this funky house with a bunch of hippies living in it. . . ." So much for bread delivery.

"Mary Lou and I organized the first neighborhood food buying at the house. I don't know how many neighborhoods ordered from us. We'd go up to Seattle and buy our stuff from different suppliers of organic and natural foods. The neighborhood clubs then came to my house to pick up their orders. We did that a couple of times over a couple of months. A big buying and distribution of food. Then we rented a duplex at the corner of Pear and 4th on the eastside. That was one of the first co-ops that people remember. That little duplex was so tiny. We painted it all in weird colors. We had a co-op there."

That Co-op closed eventually. In March of 1974, Laura May was approached by the owners of a restaurant called the Artichoke Mode (a place that's gone through a number of owner and name changes since then). "They said, 'Hey Laura, there's a grocery store for sale across the street.' I said, 'What do I want a grocery store for?'" Still, they looked at the store. "We looked in the windows. Boy it was a dive. It was a cigarette and beer stop. The drunks would stumble between Ben Moore's and the Angelus Hotel." Still, it was a functioning place. "Andrew had had the background of having been raised in that business. His mother has had a place in Hurley, close to the shore of Lake Superior, since 1940. I also was the manager of a food co-op, and that definitely had great value to me."

Andrew and Laura May were married in 1970. She was nineteen. "We had a beautiful wedding in San Diego. We went and took off cross country. Andrew told me later that my father had made him promise that I would never work in the bar. My father knew it was a family business, but he didn't want me to be in a bar. My family did not go to bars. "

Still, when they arrived in Hurley, Laura May went to work in the bar. "It was a family business, and Andrew's mother was the kind who would cook delicious dishes for her customers. The pipeline had gone through the town, and she had guys from Louisiana who would send her presents years later. She'd say, 'Oh, honey, you know, you're my favorite boy.' This is how she took care of people. She fed them. She made them feel very special. That's where I learned that. His mother provided me with my whole business training."

They looked in the window of this grocery. They found out there was a beer license there for sale. "Andrew knew the value of that. The business-- that grocery store with everything in it, and the beer license--cost \$4000. We applied for transfer and we opened on May 10, 1974. We had a grocery store."

Laura May was taken with the history of the place. "When we came in there, it looked essentially like it did in the 30's" She pointed to some photographs on the wall of her kitchen. "The same shelves on the wall. The same cabinets on the floor. The old post office there, where the safe was. I found old shellfish licenses from the 30's. I thought this was a really privileged position to be in, maintaining this old corner grocery store in the heart of this town."

She never planned to make changes at what was called the Rainbow Grocery. "This was like a natural extension of moving out of the co-op and into this thing, and I thought this was a good job. I could run it by myself, but I didn't. It was like a co-op in a real sense. A group of people worked there. Andrew and I lived in a farmhouse at the time. For the second time in our early marriage history, we wound up living with about four or five other guys. One guy was from a restaurant family.

"It was a place people ate out of. We also sold these great sandwiches. They were dynamite sandwiches. We made them with Gai's pumpernickel rolls. These really great rye rolls. We had a Tony's pizza oven. This is where I cooked my sandwiches. We would put fresh mushrooms and green pepper and sprouts and onion and any one of a variety of great cheeses. We had salami and stuff. Great carrot cake that Gai's bakery made. We had this bran bread that people still ask me for."

Andrew had other ideas for the Rainbow. "I give Andrew total credit. He created the vision of what that place was to become, and he executed that vision. The place was built from all corners of the universe. The place was an evolution.

"Andrew used to have a joke with me about how many rooms I could work in at once. First we had the grocery store, and I sold coffee beans, raw milk and cheeses, because there was no co-op. In February of '77 we closed the grocery store. I ranted and raved. There was too much sentiment in the grocery store for me. I cried and hollered. But I was convinced over time that the higher use of the corner was as a restaurant. We opened the dining room in March of '77. The dining room door was the main door, and it was walled off between the wall and the dining room at that time. The dining room had had an old post office in it, with a sliding wooden window that went up and down and an old safe, that I traded the Brotherhood<sup>1</sup> for that old coffee grinder that's down there. I think that's the same one that's in one of these old photographs from when the George family had the store. Immediately preceding the High brothers, who had it from 1934 to 1970. So we opened the dining room, and we had a real funky wide-open kitchen where the grocery had been. I worked in the dining room and I worked in the kitchen. Some friends from New York showed us how to make pizza. In July of that year, we opened the pizza kitchen."

As one section of the Rainbow Restaurant was being completed, Laura May worked in the other section. While the grocery was open, the restaurant was being built. While the restaurant was open, the bar was being built. "We finally opened the bar in October of 1979. It was a great place. Andrew had

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<sup>1</sup> A tavern located two blocks from the Rainbow.

worked day in and day out for a year to finish building the bar. He was a genius. We had no money. We built it twenty bucks at a time. Squeezing it out of the restaurant. Finally, in October 1979, we opened the door. The place packed up. We had great business in that bar. In '79 and '80 and '81, I had better business than I have had the last couple of years. The competition sprang up after that." A rejuvenated Ben Moore's opened up a half block down the street. Cracker's moved onto Fourth Avenue a few blocks east. "Business was good then. I couldn't keep up with it." In January of '82, Andrew and Laura May bought the Angelus Hotel upstairs of the Rainbow. "That was beyond any of my wildest imaginations. It took me a year to acknowledge what that was all about. Andrew worked in the restaurant. I ran the hotel." Their marriage ended, however. "Andrew left in July of '84. He left under emotional duress, and for the next year, I mourned his loss, because he had always been there. He always had a good word for me. He was always supportive of me. I could always call on him and say, 'This is falling apart. Can you do something about it? Can anything be done about the plumbing?' So he was really half of things. Now we marvel at the life of that kitchen, because it was all meant to be temporary. The six burner stove the restaurant uses was built out of an old kitchen table, and the range that Andrew dragged up from somewhere that didn't work and should have gone to dust. He put stuff together and made stuff work. Mrs. Davis of the Brown Derby sold us our pizza oven for seventy-five dollars, with about fifteen feet of copper pipe. Andrew made it work. The copper pipe alone was worth more than \$75."

Then there was the hotel. "I took over the hotel, without knowing what it was about, without knowing what I was really supposed to do there." Some-



how, she was running both the hotel, a series of apartments, really, and the restaurant.

It was a Friday in June. I stood outside the Rainbow Restaurant with Laura May Abraham. She waved to people in passing cars. She talked about the storytellers who would be performing that night. She was enthusiastic, as she usually was about something she believed in.

I asked her about Monday nights. Recently, Victory Music, a not-for-profit group, had begun holding open-mike nights, where musicians and performers from all around could come in and take the stage for twelve minutes apiece. "We don't get a big audience for it," she said, though lots of musicians have been showing up. She looked at the sky. "Summer must be slowing things down," she said.

A couple of weeks later. I stand in front of the Rainbow on the corner of Fourth and Columbia in downtown Olympia. Buses park on Columbia, pick up passengers, idle a while, then leave, making that left turn onto Fourth, heading east.

The Rainbow is on the bottom floor of a three story structure. Above it are the Angelus Apartments. Prominent about the structure are green, deep green stucco pillars. Green trim surrounds the windows.

The window displays include a Rainbow music flyer announcing who's playing this month. Then there's the neon signs. Stroh's in red. Henry's Draught below it. The "Henry's" in blue, and "Draught" in orange. A neon, circular sign announces Oly on tap. The fourth side gives equal time to Lowenbrau and Rainier.

The top of the restaurant outside, just below the apartment, above the green stucco, is done in maroon panels. The side door, just behind the stage (when you're on the stage), is green, at least the lower half is. The top half is made up of four window panes.

A few feet away, the front door is propped open, held in its position by a plant in a low, wide, ceramic pot.

The waitress says, "Be right back." She's older than others I have seen in years of eating here.

New menus are done in green, the deep green that matches the stucco outside. The interior is white. These menus look like a professional job, and they belie the image of the Rainbow as a Greener or hippie palace. A section of the inside contains a short history of the Rainbow. It tells us that the present owners bought the place in 1974. The floor came from the old Adams Bowling Alley which used to operate in a hotel. (About three blocks east of here, it's now a parking lot.) The restaurant opened in 1977. A matching smaller wine and beer menu sits on the table.

Laura May tells me more about the menu, "The previous one was designed by Mary Geraci who's been a cook here. She made pretty good chicken soup. She's presently in charge of graphics out at Evergreen.

"That menu we had for a long time had served its purpose. When Eppo (Jon Epstein) and Bob Meyer and I got together in January to talk about the new effort to facilitate the continuing and strengthening of the music at the Rainbow, it needed to be financed somehow. I needed a new menu for a variety of reasons. For the first time, I needed to do a separate nighttime menu. I'd never done that before."

The new menu took five months to complete. "Five months to get it on the table. Mary Geraci did all the graphics and typesetting on this one, too.

Graphics Communications, just on the other side of the Transit people next door to us on Columbia, printed it. That's a \$2000 menu. The printers ate their part of the bill. That was the only way I could have done. I paid the typesetter and paid the artist. But the printers ate Mimi's buffets every Wednesday and every Friday and they came in for lunch and raved about her International Buffets."

More about Eppo and Bob and Mimi later.

Two red carnations sit in a pure white vase on next to the menus and the unmatched salt and pepper shakers. A beige tablecloth covers the table. I sit in the "No Smoking" section which consists of the three tables on the platform. In the middle, on the wall next to the middle of the three tables, is a round, large mirror, three feet in diameter. Silver trim adorns the mirror, and silver lines run parallel along the bottom.

I tell Laura May that for a long time, one of the problems I had with eating at the Rainbow was being inundated by smoke. At a certain point she put up those no smoking tables, and it seemed the whole atmosphere changed.

"That was in conjunction with our new association with the Olympia Traditional Arts Council of Olympia, a non-profit corporation. With the advent of our association with Victory Music, which we began in March, the whole music flavor changed. We were the only licensed establishment with the Liquor Control Board of the State of Washington between Seattle and Vancouver who could allow minors in during entertainment. This was unique. We had been having entertainment, so when they changed the law, they let us allow children in the dining room.

"Victory Music is a family thing. That's how they want it. They lobbied heavily against smoking around the stage in consideration of artists. When Victory Music came in in March, we started restricting smoking and we did it in shows. During shows, we only had the back two tables and the bar for smoking."

Across from the no-smoking section is the stage. Three steps will take you to the top. On the stage at this moment, though not performing, are remnants of a buffet set-up on a table covered with a red tablecloth, whose border rises in center and dips down. Against the wall is an old, brown upright piano.

On the same wall that the piano leans on, though a few feet away from the stage, is an area used for art exhibits. This space is roughly fifteen feet by four feet. Photos, mostly portraits, are on display.

The view of Fourth Avenue is cars. Lots of cars. Their reflections can be seen in windows across the street, which reflects back to those sitting in here.

People sit at the tables near the windows, by the two open doors. Two fans sit above them. The place is warm, it's warm outside, but the one overhead fan that's on and the high ceilings provide some compensation for the heat.

A waitress brings around a plate with the dessert choices to the diners. A few people are here, a combination of state workers and Evergreeners, not a crowd, really. People sit lazily, talking quietly.

An illuminated board that's hung on the wall near the windows, informs us of the buffet. A gong sounds, signifying that a dish is ready.

There are two tables in the bar. These aren't your usual bar tables. They have wooden borders with tiny tiles imbedded in them. One person is at one of the tables, sipping his beer.

I once asked Laura May, "Did you see the place as something you could make a living at and be with friends?"

"It was definitely a good job for me. I was quite satisfied working there. Being a boss was always hard for me. I wasn't always a great boss. Many of my friends worked there over the years. It was a great place to work, but it was a hard place to work, too. I didn't really know what a restaurant was supposed to be like until Mimi came."

The inside wall has a brick foundation. Rainbow music listings sit in pocket on wall, with folded schedules inside. The notice for July 1987 describes the place as "A family Restaurant, with wonderful food and music in a quiet concert atmosphere. A mostly non-smoking environment."

Other posters are taped to the wall. The jukebox sits next to the window near the door. It's not your standard group of tunes that you'll find at Godfather's Pizza. You'll see some rock tunes, but they're mostly older ones like Lovin' Spoonful's "Did You Ever Have to Make Up Your Mind." Mostly, you'll see jazz, some country, and some soul. Songs like Aaron Neville's, "Tell It Like It Is," and War's "Why Can't We Be Friends." Also songs by Nat "King" Cole and Waylon Jennings.

A cool breeze inhabits the place. The stage is clear. Tables are set, fork and napkin on the left, spoon and knife on the right. Below them is white table setting.

At 11:00, the doors are unlocked. The special today, written on the illuminated board is the "Fruit Walnut Salad."

Laura May had allowed a group of people to use the Rainbow to shoot a movie earlier in the day. She shows me a script. A family walks in. They say hi, then they sit in back. A man and boy come in and inquire about someone. Laura May isn't sure she's seen the person, but she has idea. She tells them something.

Laura May takes a delivery of sprouts. She spends time talking and hugging friends who have come to say hello. She then walks outside to say hello to someone else.

A wooden sign is suspended from a chain above and to the left of the jukebox. "Welcome to the Rainbow Dining Room." You rarely notice it's there. But you know you're welcome, anyway.

The bar is about a third the size of the dining area. Behind the counter, taps stick out of a refrigerator door. Beer bottles are lined up on a shelf to the left. On a wall by the register is a large "Rainbow Restaurant" sign of clear plexiglass with blue lettering. In the center is a rainbow trout. The counter is a brick foundation, four feet high, topped with wood. On the edge of the counter, every four to six feet, is a napkin holder. An ashtray is to the right of these items, and a beer and wine menu is in front. Salt and pepper shakers are next to the menu. Behind the counter, below the bar glasses, is a rectangular space that allows seeing into kitchen. On the floor behind the bar are cases of bottled beer.

All lights are off in the dining room and the bar on this bright day. In the corner of the dining room, above the pay phone, just behind the stage is huge landscape of Mount St. Helen's. It's on loan from County Commissioner and good friend George Barner.

The menu board announces soups (Minestrone, Vegetable, Chili con Carne) and desserts (Orange Almond Brownie among them).

The photos of a week ago are gone. Drawings and sketches by students from the Olympia Waldorf School have taken their place.

By the wall, below the art work, are a row tables. The "chairs" against the wall are long green benches, well-cushioned, the same deep green as the stucco outside.

A door separates the kitchen from the back of the dining room. A coffee machine sits nearby. Glasses sit in rows. Silverware trays, menus, pans with ice and creamers and a dish with slices of lemon provide company.

Someone puts money in juke box. Two songs play, first a country tune, then something by the Drifters.

Laura May talks with Jon Epstein (Eppo), who handles the music at the Rainbow. "You want some lunch?" she asks him. They talk about handling the sound for an upcoming event.

"You look cheery," a friend says to Laura May. He had walked in and asked for a glass of water. He's about to speak before a group. Two other people walk in and ask if she's seen someone. She seems to know where people are. Someone else compliments her on the new menu. She brings me water.

I notice the two photos next to the refrigerator in the bar. Two very old photos from old grocery.

Laura May introduces me to the two people who are sitting at the bar. They talk about Evergreen. Meanwhile, a woman comes in. She needs to reach someone. Laura May directs her to the phone. She makes a call.

The juke box continues to play. A Hawaiian song, then Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth." Then "Curly Shuffle." Is this a reflection of the diversity of those who eat at the Rainbow? Possibly.

Customers enter in white shirts and ties and sit down. Laura May brings them water and menus. A few moments later, she takes their orders.

I enter the kitchen through the bar. Laura May introduces me to the employees. Mimi is the cook. Short and thin. Japanese, I think. She works quietly. Tim is the waiter. I've seen him here a lot. Bill is the dishwasher.

Food Handler's cards, issued by the county, are on display. Also appearing, a notice of "Acceptable Forms of Identification," noting what can be used legally for purchasing alcoholic beverages. Sheets listing the hours worked and phone numbers of employees are posted. On one door is a Burgermeister ad--an airbrush of a rainbow trout.

On the wall by the walk-in refrigerator is a copy of the "Food Program News" from the county health department. Next to it is a notice about hepatitis A and B.

Tim enters through the other door. He takes a swig of coffee, then moves back into dining room. He brings dishes in, and empties the leftover food into a bucket.

Laura May seems to have minimal back room contact. Apparently, she trusts her people.

Some months later, after she and Tim were both gone from the Rainbow, she talked about him. "Tim is a really feeling person. He identified with the personal attributes of the business. Tim worked because he loved me and he loved the place. He had a reason to do it at the time. He'd been there five years. People complimented me about him continually. I was honored about the way Tim represented the Rainbow."

Mimi's presence led to a change at the Rainbow. Laura May is effusive in her praise:



"We had been running the restaurant since 1977, and we had good food, really. It was fresh, uncomplicated food. There was no frying. We had sandwiches. We had pizza, we had spaghetti. We had calzones. We had these burritos. One was a spinach-onion burrito with a cheddar sauce. One was a chicken mushroom burrito with a cheddar sauce. One was an Italian sausage burrito with an Italian tomato sauce. There was another one, I can't remember it. There were four of them.

"When Mimi came, she showed me what a professional person is capable of. It blew my mind. Mimi is a registered chef with the American Culinary Institute. She studied in Italy and France. She came from Japan in '62. She married an American serviceman, and she came over and taught herself English from her children's kindergarten books. And she joined the U.S. Army, and through that, went through Europe, learning to cook, learning culinary art."

Laura May was the cook in the early years of the restaurant. She worked long hours in the kitchen. "I didn't work on the floor. Mimi came, she came to me. Mimi came to me, in March of (Laura May pauses to make sure she has this right) March of 1982. She complimented me. She said, 'You've got a lot of good things here, a lot of right things. She said, "I'd like to cook for you."' Actually, Laura May had met Mimi's husband George, before he met her. He had answered an Employment Security notice, and he showed her his registration with the American Culinary Institute. "He started working here, but he said, 'Really, I think you need to meet Mimi. Mimi could really help you. She could really run your kitchen for you.' I didn't know what he was talking about. Running the kitchen? I was uneducated in the industry of hospitality. Mimi came. She ran around the kitchen screaming, 'Where Lady? Where Lady?' speaking about me. She couldn't remember my name. She did

this when she needed to find something. People saw this little Japanese woman running around in the kitchen, not taking a breath, running, starting to create some food. Some marvelous salads. Pies. That began the legacy of Mimi's food at the Rainbow. She was it. She really put us on the map. She never complained." Even though, as Laura May admitted, the Rainbow does not have professional facilities.

"Mimi could easily make three to four times what she makes at the Rainbow, but she loves it because she has total control there in the kitchen. She can do what she wants, and she knows what to do. She can not only create the most exotic foods, but she can do it in a profitable way. She stays here for lots of reasons. She loves it."

A customer says to Laura May, "You're starting to roll into a full-scale thing."

"Hopefully," she says, though she isn't smiling. People walk in and chat with others at the table. She stops to chat with others.

Smaller food items, such as the soup are sent through that hole in the bar counter. A bell is rung. Laura May picks up plates of chili. "Thank you," she says to Mimi. She brings more water to her customer. She talks to another one.

Two people walk in. "Hello," Laura May says. They immediately look more comfortable. Two more men come in. They sit at the far end of the bar. Another customer sits at the bar table, eating chili, reading Machiavelli. Near him, on a pillar is a wooden coat/hat rack with five pegs. It's empty, except for a blue/gray Jansport pack.

Laura May talks with a customer. She pauses to answer the phone, then she talks to woman who's seated at counter. She then brings out a plate to diners. She removes another plate from their table.

Tim works the dining room. Laura May waits on the customers that sit at the bar and at the few front tables near the jukebox. She takes cash from one customer. Another one walks in. "Do you have my salad?" she asks.

The door from the bar to the kitchen is open. Bill can be seen washing dishes in the sink. He stacks clean plates. The outside doors are open. It's getting warmer inside.

A man waits patiently to pay--for a while. Then he turns around. Laura May walks behind the counter and takes his money.

More people enter. Laura May says, "Hi, Bill, I'll be right with you." Four more people walk in.

A woman sits, conversing, holding her keys, ready to leave. She continues talking with friends. She looks like she'd rather sit down again and continue the discussion.

Another person walks in, says hi, and hugs Laura May. A man, visiting from Anchorage, is introduced to one of Laura May's friends from Anchorage. They talk. One says, "I have to get to the airport. I arranged a ride through Laura's clearinghouse."

Somehow Laura May combines conversation, taking calls, arranging rides, all while she works. She picks up the sandwiches, says thank you, delivers them, then wipes off the table. Somehow, she never seems harried.

She's short. Long curly reddish-blond hair. She wears a necklace of large red beads. Green top. Different from the green motif of the place. Green pants that billow out at the legs, with elastic at the ankles.

"Nice new salads," Laura May says to someone.

"Oh you do?" the customer says. She orders a salad.

Laura May takes cash. "Thanks a lot." The gong sounds.

People eat from plates that have food that looks well thought out. The food never looks greasy. It never looks hurried.

Laura May explains to customer who's inquired, "We're still in bankruptcy. I'm still in bankruptcy. It's Chapter XI. It depends on how you're doing." She doesn't elaborate further, and the man doesn't ask.

She looks like she knows everyone. Whether the customers are such regulars that she knows them all, or whether she's that friendly, it doesn't matter. I've seen a variety of people come through the door. All of them seem to know her. All of them feel at home.

Lakefair Wednesday. There's a sign outside the Rainbow announcing free admission for music later that night. Still, like the rest of Olympia, there isn't much going on outside the immediate Lakefair area. Few people are sitting down inside the Rainbow.

Outside, just east, the Columbia Street Station is mobbed. Most benches are taken, occupied mostly by teen-agers or people with young children. Outside the bar window, passengers disembark from a bus.

Two weeks later. Mid afternoon. A few seats at the bar are occupied. A couple of tables, too. People seem to know each other. Someone Laura May knows, someone who's played music there before, leaves without paying. Laura May is miffed, but since she knows the person, she decides to take care of it some other time.

Inside the entrance, on the brick wall near the door, notices for the Olympia Film Society, Music in the Park, and a production of *Peter Pan*, are posted.

Laura May will play one of the pirates in the cast of *Peter Pan*. She has a rehearsal later. "I want to get out of this dress," she says. "I don't feel like a pirate."

Laura May asks me if I've ever heard of ACOA--Adult Children of Alcoholics--since she's going to a meeting later. She gives me some family history. Her father was in the service. Later, he went to school, and he buried himself away from the family for three years. Laura May started acting out. There was no alcoholism in her family, but she did gravitate toward alcoholic relationships.

She talks with Eppo about getting set up for tonight. Someone else brings out five mikes and puts them on the stage.

A man brings in equipment. He sets it up at the edge of the stage. He sharpens the restaurant knives. "Never a dull moment," he says. "My conversation is always sharp."

He talks about heavy metal music. "It's very angry music," he says.

Laura May says, "Maybe that's good."

The man holds up Laura May's scissors. "What's the last thing you cut besides yourself?"

Laura May responds, "A little worn, huh?" She unwinds a microphone cord. She waves to someone driving by and says, "How are ya doing." She removes an extension cord from inside the piano bench. The bench is the same color green as the tablecloths, the benches and the stucco outside. She plugs the cord into the wall. A light goes on. She opens a suitcase, and lifts a mixing board. She hooks a cable into the board, covers it with a scarf and

places it on a table, next to the phone, right below the Mount St. Helen's painting. "These songs from *Peter Pan* go through my head day and night," she says. She sets up monitor speakers. The "Peavey" label faces the audience.

The wall bulletin board announces, "Bill's Buffet Special." I don't ask what it is. People sit at tables, conversing, reading papers. A waitress cleans up a table. She takes carnations from other tables. She's getting ready for tonight.

The Citizen's Band is a popular attraction. Laura May plans to limit the number of people who can enter tonight. "They charge two dollars. I wish they'd charge more." The last times they've played, she tells me, people sat at all the tables and on the floor. She won't allow it this time. Ninety to one hundred patrons will be the limit.

Andy Bartels, a storyteller, will work the door for her tonight. He will also open the show.

A few minutes later, Laura May tells the waitress holding the carnations, "Bring out the chairs from the office." She gives further directions about tonight. Another waitress comes and moves "upstairs" tables, the no smoking section, away from the wall.

Two people sit at the bar, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. Two overhead fans in the restaurant turn. The doors are open. Together, this makes for a slight breeze. Laura May explains to someone, as we leave, "Tonight we have the Citizen's Band. They do political satire songs."

We walk down the street. Laura May talks with the owner of a juice bar that's just opened recently. He asks, "I knew Lakefair was slow for you, but what about Harbor Days?" These come up Labor Day weekend. Laura May

says, "It's a different consciousness. It'll bring people by that haven't been here before." The man smiles.

We walk to her old, white van, a two seater, which is parked in a lot across from the Old Creamery Building. A Peter Pan poster is taped to wall on the inside. There's a sign on the dashboard, written in black marker, "Make each moment count."

As we drive to her house, Laura May talks. She tells me that she was born and raised in San Diego. "It was a great place to grow up. On Sunday afternoons, we'd take drives and see the tomato groves and avocados. It was a great place.

"I left San Diego in 1969. I left southern California in 1970. I lived in a house in Redondo. Hermoso Beach. I met Andrew Abraham there. El Camino College. We got married in San Diego. I was 19; he was 29."

They traveled and ended up in Hurley, Wisconsin, Andrew's home town. Laura May describes it as, "five blocks long, ninety-seven bars and cat houses." She had traveled every summer when she was growing up. Now she found herself in a small town. She came to understand small towns, she says, but initially, she says, "I was devastated."

We reach her house. "I-5 keeps me constant company," she says. We hear the traffic. Trees and grass separate the house from the freeway. She lives on what could be described as the near Southeast section of town. It's a rural area, really, with few houses.

We look at her sprouting garden before we walk into the house. Lots of artwork and books fill the walls and shelves. She turns on the radio. KAOS, the Evergreen State College radio station. A jazz program. As if planned, I hear the announcer say, "Tonight at the Rainbow we have the Citizen's Band, Olympia's own political humor group." I spot a yellow postcard on wall near

front door, embedded between two pieces of art. The blue letters say, "I'm not a business." The magenta letters below it read, "I'm a people."

The announcer says, "There are things going on at the Rainbow during the week." Also, "We have a thriving jazz scene in Olympia."

This reminds me of the time Laura May called me when I was doing a show at KAOS. She'd thanked me for playing a Joan Armatrading record. This was years ago when Armatrading was a relative unknown. A little while later, she called again, complaining, wondering why I was playing rock and roll. She probably turned off the radio after that.

Laura May doesn't hear the radio announcements. She's in other room, changing clothes.

A jazz trio and voice plays on the radio. Laura May walks into the room, and she turns up the volume. She moves to the music, and she becomes one with it. She walks around. ". . . for today, you are born in my eyes. . ." Later, she tells me the singer is Diane Schurr, a resident of Washington.

Laura May is ready to leave. We get back into her van. Off Dayton Street and back onto Boulevard Road, heading north, then west. She says that she's having problems remembering the dance steps in the play.

We go next to the ACOA meeting being held at United Church near the Capitol. We enter a room with a long table. Laura May takes a place and begins chatting with others. A few minutes later, she asks, "Who's chairing the meeting." She's one of the first to say hello when people introduce themselves. She tells me later that she's been going to ACOA about a year. Before that, she went to Al-Anon for four years. "Through the meetings," she says, "I've learned a lot about living in the present."

When we finally sat down for a lengthy discussion, after she no longer owned the Rainbow, I asked her about what could be construed as a



contradiction: going to these meetings, and understanding the harmful effects of alcohol on many people's lives, while still serving alcohol in her restaurant.

"I had my own internal battle about that. I became educated about the disease of alcoholism in 1983. I had already been in alcoholic relationships for a couple of years. I really didn't understand that my helping these alcoholics in their drinking days, trying to make life easier for them, was not helping them. It was making it easier for them to continue drinking.

"When I really started to know what enabling was, that had a real strong part in the disease of alcoholism . . . The restaurant industry is rife with alcoholism. Half of my staff. One person who worked there twice. He left over incidents concerning liquor violations. Mimi is a dry alcoholic. She hasn't had a drink for a few years. She doesn't attend any programs, but she doesn't drink. Half of my staff. I considered, without having to confront them, or name them, or label them, them to have alcoholic tendencies and to drink alcoholically, at least at times. The thing that I didn't understand for a long time, was that I was contributing to that. So when I started to see were maintenance alcoholics, I had a problem. Finally I decided that if somebody was an alcoholic, it was none of my business. In my business, I didn't need to feel guilty because we never overserved." They had some problem customers. But, as she said, "We certainly don't serve anybody who was noticeably intoxicated. A lot of places in town did. We didn't. But I had to let that battle rest in me. I just couldn't feel responsible. Obviously, of course, I knew that if I didn't serve somebody because their parent was an alcoholic or they had blackouts sometimes, that if I didn't serve them because of my personal convictions, they'd go down the street. I've never served people just to make money off of them, at the expense of their health. I let them

make their decision and I made my decision, what was legally safe for me to do and morally responsible for myself."

She began going to Al-Anon meetings in August of 1983. She was in a relationship with someone who had undergone treatment for alcoholism. "I remember good friends who were sober alcoholics who asked me to come to meetings because they knew what I was doing. They knew what trouble there was, surrounding myself with people in pain, whose drinking I could not control. They asked me to come to meetings. I didn't understand what they were talking about. I didn't go"

A treatment center told her to go. "I thought I was perfectly normal. I thought that hauling people to bed at 2 A.M. that were two or three times my size was normal. I thought that being hollered at 2 A.M. was normal. My relationship began with my sobriety. That was when I first got into the program. Again, it wasn't because I needed to clean up anything in my life. It was because I was doing it for somebody else. I learned, of course, a lot differently."

After a short dinner, we get into the van again. We drive a few blocks, then we park in a lot across the street from the Johansen Ballet School, about six blocks from The Rainbow. Laura May tells me that the restaurant is listed for sale. "The place is not going to get easier, and I'm willing to acknowledge it. It's always been tough. It's been a real gift. Financially, I know I'm not the one to do it. I'm not the competitive one."

"People would come up to me and say, 'Laura, I really appreciate what you're doing.' It would be such an affirmation." But her voice sounds like she's had enough.

The Johansen's Ballet School is housed in a converted auto body shop. It's located on the same street that housed Laura May's food co-op. The brick walls inside remind me of the Rainbow entrance. People have gathered in the lobby. "Act one," someone calls out. Laura May talks to another pirate. He says, "Last night you were on my left, this way, so I had to come around." He demonstrates the difficulty of these movements. "If you're on my right, it's real easy to go like that." He pushes her gently, something he will have to do in the play.

We walk into practice room adjacent to the rehearsal room. We can hear the piano through the brick walls. Laura May practices her steps in front of mirror. Two others join her. Their hands rest on their hips, legs move left, then right. They sing as they practice. Above them, in an alcove to the left, is a bouquet of costumes. Some are in boxes, some are in plastic bags, suspended on hangers.

Laura May introduces me to a woman. "This is our esteemed Peter Pan." Peter Pan says, "She's so wonderful. I just slobber all over." As with the ACOA meeting, Laura May makes people feel good. She remembers everyone's name. She affirms them.

They work on the dance for "The Mysterious Lady," gliding over the black plastic that covers the wood floor. Pieces of blue and yellow, beige and white tape are stuck to the plastic. Some are lines of tape, some are X's.

The rehearsal continues in the next room.

Laura May suggests to others, "Let's do the whole shebang over again." They start. "Oh, shit, I haven't got that right yet," she says. She moves, with intense concentration, left, then right, then forward. She says, "Do we go down on 'tell me oh tell me your name?'" They run through it again. It looks good. One woman says, "We got it." Laura May, "I don't. Let's do it again."

She's hard on herself. But she encourages others. "That's it. That's it. That's it," she says. Her energy is immense, and it is contagious.

They repeat the song. "See what I meant is," Laura May says, "when he sings the song, we're supposed to have some action here."

She finds a tutu from the collection of clothes, and she puts it on over her red pants, black shoes, and a sleeveless shirt with a picture of Marilyn Monroe on it.

Someone says, "You'll never make it on the Lakefair float." Laura May says, "If I come out as a pirate wearing this, they'll send me home." She walks around for a moment then says, "I better get this thing off." They continue to go over steps while rehearsal goes on in the next room. Laura May insists they run through it again. Then we enter the rehearsal room, a collection of adults and children in jeans or skirts or tights. The room is painted light gray. Four black lines of tape run parallel along the length of the floor. The scene with Peter Pan and the children is being rehearsed. Laura May talks with someone.

The musical director yells, "Places." The director says, "This is the test rehearsal. If you do well, no rehearsal Sunday." The scene begins. Laura May stands at the piano with the other pirates. The director, Ruth Palmerlee, says, "I want to see your ugly faces." They actors repeat the scene. Laura May lurks pirately. The pirates then exit from the center stage. Laura May stands off to side. She leaves the room, then comes back in with rest of pirates.

Act Two, Scene Two begins. Laura May stands to the side. We listen. "I'll never grow up." Laura May says to someone, "This is a bunch of never, never land animals doing a trip."

Laura May moves out after that scene and blows her line. "Sorry, guys," she says. They repeat the scene. She then steps on someone's line. "Okay," she says.

They practice the Mysterious Lady scene, the one they had rehearsed in other room. Laura May becomes wiry and animated, with arms flailing. When the scene is over, she moves to the left side of room.

Act II concludes. Most of the actors move off to the side of the rectangular room, near the piano and the entrance.

Act III begins with Hook's spotlight. Laura May laughs and mimes during the song. Despite the picture of Marilyn on her shirt, she is a pirate. She's then pushed forward to "volunteer" to get the crocodile. She runs and slips overboard. "Dead," she stands off to side, leaning against another pirate who has met the same fate. While Pan sings, "I'm youth, I'm joy, I'm freedom." Laura May listens.

At the end of rehearsal, the director says, "Everybody sit down, and we'll get these notes over with quickly." Laura May sits cross-legged on a chair. There's discussion the lack of eye contact between characters. They review other aspects of the rehearsal. Pan asks, "You don't want me to peak yet?" The director replies, "Maybe a small peak."

The musical director asks for suggestions. Laura May says to him, "We need to rehearse the dances with you." He says, "Probably true."

Complaints are heard about the dialogue before "Mysterious Lady." Laura May says, "It sucks." But it's generally agreed that "Mysterious Lady," which had been practiced in the next room, is good.

The director nods her head. She says, "I almost hate to cancel Sunday morning practice. We need it." Laura May agrees. Most of the others do not. The director cancels practice.

The musical director talks about how he hesitates to criticize the cast because so many of them are volunteer. They are not getting paid for their work. Laura May encourages him to do so. He makes a few points, but he generally holds back. Maybe Laura May can take the criticism, process the information and apply it to her acting. But can the others?

After the rehearsal, we get back in her van and head back to the Rainbow six blocks away. We enter through the back door. A crowd stands by door. Another group stands outside. It's crowded; no one else is being allowed inside. A regular says to Laura May, "You do a great public service in Olympia. A lot of people will tell you."

I ask her about this, since she said something earlier about the comments she's received. "It's just that I've changed," she says, "I'm not chained to the comments like I used to be."

We had been standing outside. Now we walk back in. Some people are sitting on the floor. Laura May walks around and says hello to friends. We're just in time for intermission. We walk back outside, where people stand to have albums they've purchased signed by Citizen's Band members.

A few minutes later, we stand by the door closest to the stage, where a red upright bass rests. A person stands by door. One member of the group says, "It's 10:30. Should we start?" Someone else says, "No, sign my album."

A guy says to Laura May. "I want you to have my children."

Laura May scowls, "Sure. Sure."

He says, "I'll bring 'em by Tuesday."

She laughs. "Four bucks an hour."

Laura May takes a glass from someone standing outside, and she walks back inside. She takes a plates back to kitchen, then comes back into the

dining room to clear more tables. She takes another tray of glasses in back. Someone is washing dishes. Laura May grabs more glasses. She talks as she goes.

It's 10:40. The Master of Ceremonies, Andy Bartels, says, "I think we're ready." Laura May clasp pitchers and glasses and takes them into the kitchen. She then walks back into the dining room. She claps as she moves toward the door. Energy exudes from the place. A few young people stop in front of the windows for a moment.

Laura May walks up to people, talks, and receives and gives hugs. On the table next to her is a piece of paper inviting people to sign up for the mailing list. Citizen's Band albums are for sale next to list.

The menu board by the window lists ten different quiches. A waitress walks around, pouring water. People listen to music. Laura May steps outside.

Many vehicles are out on the street. Music blares from car speakers. People are yelling.

After the show ends, Laura May goes outside to talk to the group. Then she walks back in and onto stage, where she hasn't been since setting it up eight hours earlier. She exhorts people to settle their bills with the person who waited on them.

People begin exiting. The bar stools are empty. She says, "This is the kind of crowd that's hard to peel out of the door." They want to stay.

#### PETER PAN

The Washington Center for the Performing Arts. New, not glittery, but not just functional, either. Not extravagant, but it's comfortable.

I've brought three people with me to see the play--two girls, eleven and seven, and their mother. We enter about ten minutes before the play begins. We see many people we know. It's Olympia; you go anywhere socially, and you see someone you know.

The curtain is down, an orange blurred light in the shape of an X, shines on it. We wait. Outside our doors, and downstairs, too, programs and souvenirs are being sold.

I have to remember, the cast members are volunteers. Outside of the musical director, I don't know if anyone else is being paid. Certainly most of the actors aren't. Laura May isn't.

The play begins. The first act is great, but the play really slips into gear when Peter Pan, and later the children, begin to fly. "Oohs" and "Aahs" greet the flying, the reviews on a scale similar to the witnessing of fireworks. When Peter Pan starts flying, you're willing to forgive anything: finding parking, waiting to use the bathroom, waiting for refreshments, everything.

The troop of pirates enters from the lobby to begin the second act. Laura May is one of them, carrying the flag of skull and crossbones, baring her teeth, looking mean. She doesn't walk, she slithers.

It's interesting to note the differences between the rehearsal and the performance. How things have been worked out. How confident they all appear. It shows up in the song "Captain Hook." I'd seen them rehearsing this in the other room at Johansen's Ballet school. How many times did they get down. . . . "Who's the. . . Captain Hook, Captain Hook. . ." Laura May, on the galley, falls with the rest of them, like Moslems looking out toward Mecca.

We are entertained. But we also derive enjoyment because it's our neighbors. Most people know someone who's in the play. Katie knew one person. And did they like it?



Lindsay: "I enjoyed it when he was flying."

Katie: "I enjoyed the Captain. I liked his voice and the way he moved. I liked the voices during the tribal dance."

Lindsay was sure she wasn't going to have a good time. She was wrong.

*Peter Pan* exemplifies the community that is Olympia. "Regular" people performing (I know Jeff Kingsbury, who played the father and Captain Hook, is professional, but I also saw him at Garfield School last year, teaching theater to the students.), people coming out to see their neighbors. People leaving feeling good. One boy behind us kept saying, during the first act, "I want to talk to Peter Pan." Peter Pan was real.

#### A FEW DAYS LATER

I walk into the Rainbow about 5:45 P.M. Laura May is behind the counter, by the cash register, taking money from someone. She's finally beginning to recover from the weeks of rehearsal and the week's performances of Peter Pan. Still, "I'm feeling exhausted," she says as she rings up a sale. I don't tell her that I saw a listing in the *Olympian* want ads of her place for sale.

A man asks Laura May, "Can you put on a song for me?" He has trouble seeing the listing of songs on the juke box. He wants Merle Haggard.

Tomorrow, she tells me, she's filing for Chapter VII bankruptcy. "My creditors will understand that the only way to get money out of me is for someone to buy a functioning restaurant. My lawyer says he thinks he has someone who'll assume the debts. That means he may have a buyer." She would like to see Rainbow go on. Yet, she says, "If I come out of the Rainbow with nothing to show after thirteen years. . . I have my health." She also has tons of friends.

Chris Lunn from Victory Music enters. He begins setting up for Open Mike Night. He takes stools from the bar, and he lifts them up onto the stage. He walks into the back room, and he returns with a suitcase that contains sound mixing board. He gets microphones and mike stands and sets them up at the front of the stage.

About a dozen people are in the restaurant. The fans above keep people cool on this warm night. Musicians begin walking in. They sign up at the front table.

Chris sets up what is really a portable clothes dryer rack. He places "Victory Music" T-shirts on hangers on racks. He goes back to stage and uncoils wires, hooks mikes to mixing boards.

Laura May carries food to one table. She talks to one man who had been sitting at the bar but had moved to the dining room. "There you are," she says. He is sipping soup and drinking beer. "Do you still want your nachos?" He nods.

More than half the tables are now occupied. Each table has a carnation in a small, thin white vase. Two waitresses serve all the patrons.

The jukebox plays, "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," the most upbeat song I've ever heard played on the box at the Rainbow.

I sip, then pound on the vegetarian minestrone soup. Sublime, without being ridiculous. Rich without being sweet or fatty. A warm roll sits by its side, though not for long.

A little before seven, the lights dim. People talk quietly. A guy sitting in back strums his guitar without wanting to attract notice. He doesn't succeed. Without realizing it, he has become a backdrop for us. Mood music.

Chris Lunn speaks to us from the stage. "Victory Music is a non-profit organization. The Rainbow Restaurant is kind enough to donate its space to

Victory Music." He encourages people to be respectful of the musicians. "We use this as an alternative to the noisy bars."

The guy who had been sitting in back is now on stage. Waitresses move slowly and quietly. They take orders, look up, then leave the dining room.

The singer shares his chorus, "When fate comes to call, if I'm not around, I'm out on the Sound."

I play next. Chris sets up for me. He moves the mikes after each song adjusting them as needed. Though Chris had made a special plea at the beginning, I find that this crowd isn't any quieter or noisier than when the Citizen's Band was here. The place is congenial. Much of the crowd consists of people who will play or watch friends play. They give respect. I feel it as I play. I can feel people listening.

Laura May said, "My business was a sole proprietorship. I was never incorporated. And Andrew and I were involved jointly until November of '84, when our divorce was final. At that time, I started changing the liquor license into only my name. I was very much solely responsible."

The Rainbow has been sold.

"Tuesday night, the 25th of August., this new character in the story, J.R., stepped into the Rainbow for the first time. He was really taken with it. He sat me down and said, 'Wow, I can see that there's really a lot of love in this place. I'm real impressed. With you and with the place. With the food. With the music.' The next night, Wednesday, we signed the papers that began the process of what is a partially-conforming bulk sale. It's a ten day process. During that time, my creditors can object. What it really amounts to is that he buys my liability. He walks in, and I walk out. He has the business. And I'm out of debt. And that's what I get. That was Wednesday." Virginia

Painter from the *Olympian* had talked to her that day. The next day the article announcing the sale came out in the paper.

The headline in the *Olympian*, Thursday, August 27, 1987, page 1B, at the bottom read, "Sale of Rainbow Restaurant would end Olympia era." In the center of the article, there's a picture of Laura May with a quote, "She's been my baby, and I'm letting go of her."

Virginia Painter wrote that after a long financial struggle, Laura May announced she was selling the place to MJB Corporation of Lacey. The article went on to state how the Rainbow was the only place nearby where people could hear jazz and for musicians to play.

Painter mentioned the origins of the place, how it started as "a counter-culture grocery store" in the old Fourth Avenue Market in 1974.

Bob Meyer, local jazz drummer is quoted as to how the Rainbow was a place to learn to play jazz and "apply our art." How famous people came from all over to play.

Regulars are worried about how they will lose a cornerstone of their community. Laura May is quoted as saying, about the owners, "They want me to be there to manage, and they want it to be business as usual, with me at the helm. They want music to continue, and they've said they want me to be visible and they want to remain behind the scenes."

Painter gave Laura May the final word. "It's been hard to make the separation, but I've been doing it for a couple of years. She's been my baby, and I'm letting go of her. I feel like God has His hand in the middle of this, and I feel very safe and happy. But I also feel immensely sad."

I enter in the afternoon. Few people are present. Two people are at the bar. Fans help keep the place cool, despite the hot day outside. Laura May talks on the phone.

A few minutes later, we sit at a table and talk. The buyer would like her to stay on and manage the place. "He wants me to be the figurehead." She has her doubts about serving in that role. "I went out of business because I'm struggling. I want a break." She may not be speaking in past tense, but she's already thinking it.

Though there's a corporation in the background, Laura May's thoughts are directed at the chief owner. "He wants me to work for practically nothing." But, she insists, "I won't work for less than \$1500 a month. My smile is worth that much. I wish I had an agent to take care of it. I have this fear of being a corporate lackey. I could go out and get a waitress job and make that much right now."

She reflects. "I have some power here. I know what Mimi's about. Her talent is unsurpassed. She won't go if I don't. She's working for less than she could. But she wants to work here."

I ask Laura May, "Would you be willing to leave?"

"I could get a job anywhere." She mentions going down to San Diego to work for her father. "It's all about bottom lines and boundaries. I have to be willing to walk out the door. He won't want me to do that.

"People are sad but relieved. They think I'm going to be here. The first question they ask me is, 'Are they going to have music?'" That issue hasn't been resolved.

The new owner came in with his wife on Saturday night. "We had baroque. It was elegant. It added a vibration we haven't had. We were full."

Laura May's friends held a bash for her. "They rewarded me. According to Laura May, George Barner, County Commissioner and resident rock-and-roller said, "She's been in business longer than I've been in politics."

Laura May ends our discussion about the sale of the Rainbow. She then talks to woman who has purchased cassette at record shop down the street. They talk music.

I ate lunch at the Rainbow with a friend. It was a Friday, but because of the upcoming holiday weekend, the place was only about 2/3 full. My friend ordered quiche from among the three or four kinds offered. Again, I had soup and a roll.

The atmosphere was solid, the service great. Laura May put money in the juke box. Jazz came out. Later George Barner's "Louie, Louie," then Bob Wills' "Deep in the Heart of Texas." Laura May would talk to people. Then she would deliver food. Then she would talk to someone else. The place was smooth, relaxed. People were served quickly, but it was none of the manic nature of the restaurants at lunchtime in Olympia. The food required more thought than any urgency would allow.

9/11 Rainbow Short discussion 10:35 A.M.

I had spent time with Brooke Elgie. He asked me if I'd heard that Laura May was probably going to be leaving the Rainbow. I walked over there. Laura May had been out on a job interview. I waited for her to return.

It's business as usual. Or so it appears. Tim sets up the for Mexican Buffet. The tables set up on the stage. this is where people will go to get their meals.

Laura May walks in a few minutes later. She offers me water. We sit at a table. She tells me that there's one thing left in sale. This is the final assignment of assets and liabilities will go to the new guy. This is a bulk sale; no money will be changing hands. "We're waiting for the new guy to get the liquor license filed."

She admits, "I'm more willing to let go of this place than I thought. There's a weird part of me I can't ignore. There's a vengeance part of me that wants to walk out the door and let this place fall apart. I'm ashamed to admit it. I have a responsibility to customers, friends, not to mention my employees." About the new ownership, she tells me, "They really don't know what they're doing here. They need me. He knows I need this contract. I've been working here two weeks without a contract." The owners have offered her \$800 a month to manage the Rainbow. "I'm enumerating my skills, acknowledging myself for what I've learned here. It's over. This time it's really over. I'm not worried. I don't feel like I'm in a state of denial. He had ideas for strengthening the place, things like offering breakfast. Now I don't know what to say."

She thought those improvements needed to be made. The Rainbow had offered breakfast at one time, but facilities and business didn't warrant continuing it. Changes in the kitchen would allow it to happen. But she's not sure what will happen now.

#### ONE SATURDAY

Laura May is going to sing tonight. That's what brings a friend and me to the Rainbow. I haven't heard her sing before, except for the time at her house, when she sang along with Diane Schurr.

We sit at a table in the no smoking section. Laura May joins us. She tells us that the number one owner doesn't want to have anything to do with her. She hasn't seen him in a week, though she has talked with him. "The number two guy," she says, "who's kind of powerful, wants to keep me. They only want to pay me \$800 a month." It's not enough. "If I don't get the money, I walk. I have a sign at home, 'And God said, "Let go."'"

She leaves our table, and she climbs on the stage to move speakers around. She wears a long beige skirt, a red top, white stockings, and heels. She has her singing clothes on, but there's other work to do.

Over the course of the next two hours, the tables fill with people. Right now, only the stage is getting crowded. Vibes are wheeled in and lifted to stage. They are placed to the left (our right), in front of the piano. The guitarist is seated. Laura May and Tom Russell, whose group is playing, check mikes. Laura May brings out another mike. The bass player enters, carrying his instrument. Amps are moved, and he is set up on the back. The piano bench serves as stand for taping unit. Now the stage is full.

The music commences. "Welcome to the Rainbow on this beautiful Saturday night. We're the Tom Russell trio." I count four musicians on the stage. That's not counting Laura May, who's off doing something else. "Our special guest is Laura May Abraham. She'll be singing some songs with us later in the set." The quartet begins. Guitar, bass, woodwinds, vibes. They open with a bop tune. They move smoothly and easily. People sit still. They appreciate the music. Jon Epstein walks around and collects money for the cover charge. The waitresses tread quietly.

The next piece is "Putting on the Ritz." Laura May had been talking to people moments ago. Now, she's not in sight.



The guitarist is applauded as he finishes his solo. It's easy to see, both from watching and listening to the music, and from remembering the time I played here on open mike night, why musicians enjoy it. They know they will be heard and appreciated. They don't have to compete with drunks and noise.

Laura May stands in back. She's holding a water glass and a spiral notebook.

All tables are full, though there is some room. Laura May walks to the front, talks with patrons, then walks in back of restaurant, to the back tables. She says something to the people seated there. They move over. That done, she walks to the front and leads three women to the back, where they are seated. Laura May then walks to the front again, toward the door. She looks at the stage, smiling nervously.

The music has stopped. Tom says, "It gives me great pleasure to bring Laura May Abraham on stage." To warm applause, she carefully climbs the stairs. She worms her way through the wires. Tom says, "It's like spaghetti up here. All we need is the sauce."

She holds the mike high, as if it was an almost-empty glass of water. The group begin "A Night in Tunisia." She misses on the first verse. She pauses. "Let's do this over. This is tough, folks." They begin again. The band proceeds through some solos. Laura May scats it, does a good job, and scattered claps rise to full applause. This appears to put her at ease, though she still grasps mike with both hands. The song ends with a long sigh. She smiles. "I'd like to thank you for coming out these evening. We like the music that's been going on recently, both here and across the street." The 'across the street' is a reference to Barb's Soul Cuisine Restaurant.

The band had been pausing between numbers. Now Laura May pushes them into next song. As one ends, she's ready for another. She looks at the music on stand next to her, "What is this? Antonio Carlos Jobim?" The song begins. Her voice is more comfortable here.

Now she sings with the mike in her right hand, while she touches the cord with her left. When she's not singing, when musicians are soloing, she reverts back to holding the mike with both hands. She stamps her right foot. The end of the song, ". . . Dream a dreeeeaaammmmm." Her voice fades out.

#### A FEW DAYS LATER

I talk with Laura May on the phone. Apparently, seeing her sing will be the last time I see her as owner/operator of the Rainbow Restaurant. She tells me that things were going slow with the signing of the papers. She called her lawyer, who called owner number one and told him, "You have two hours to come and sign the papers." The papers were signed.

The next day, at 10:00 P.M., she was informed by the owners that she was no longer needed. "They didn't even want to pay me \$800 a month." She says she's done her share of grieving over it. "You can't leave a place like that without having some feelings." She's been going back to get her personal stuff and her files.

She is concerned about her employees, or former employees as she is now aware of calling them. Business is down. One reason is that the new owners, had not applied for a liquor license. Consequently, they haven't been serving beer or wine for the last week. "People are saying, 'If I can't have wine with dinner, I'll go to Ben Moore's.'" And they do. This means fewer tips. "They depend on the tips for their livelihood."

She has a chance to do something else. A friend, Barbara Trabka, has offered her an opportunity to sell real estate. She's never considered such a idea before. She has mixed feelings about real estate people. "But she's made me a generous offer. She's offered to put me through school for training. I have a following, and they acknowledge it." She feels pleased with this.

Laura May is going away for two weeks. She's put a mattress in the back of her truck. "I'm going to stay with one ex-employee who sells furniture near Bend, Oregon. I hear it's an oasis in the desert." She'll also spend some time with a friend in Portland who's a jazz singer.

A couple of weeks later, I see a sign in the window at the Rainbow, written on a paper place mat. It reads, "Beer and wine sales have resumed."

Sales have resumed maybe, but the place lacks atmosphere. Few patrons are present. Three people sit in the bar. Only a few tables are occupied.

I'm at the Rainbow to talk about Olympia with Wendy Stern. She's a friend of Beth Tribwell, another subject for the book, but Wendy has a Laura May story, too.

"We were both pitchers on a women's softball team." She recalls the arc with which Laura May could pitch. "You know how the ball is supposed to go down so that it makes it hard to hit." Well, Laura May had a knack for doing it.

I asked Laura May about this another time. She said, "In the early days of the restaurant, I played women's softball on an Evergreen team. I had never played ball in my life." She didn't even understand much about the game when they put her in as the pitcher. "I didn't understand all the possibilities. So I learned the game the first year I played it. I played again the second year, and I never experienced anything like that. It cost a lot

more to play ball in Olympia now, of course, but I mean, but there again, the Evergreen team was real fringy. In the Olympia league it was really pretty oddball. But we had so much fun. And we had great coaches." She had surprised herself. "I'd never been an athlete. I could run. I could run a mile pretty quickly in junior high. But I never went through any athletic training or did any cross country. I mean softball was a gentle game that people could play without having to be something already. Of course, I met a lot of really powerful athletic women who have continued their studies and their work in that area. So there were all levels of engagement there going on."

Wendy and I sit in the midst of what was once Laura May's Rainbow. She says, "Not only does she know everyone in the community even people she doesn't know, she's there with a pat on the shoulder. Not offensive. Just right." She looks around. "I don't know how this place is going to make it."

In reaction to a policy move by the new owners, the following notice appeared in the November Victory Music guide:

*Hi Folks: In mid-October John R. Strong & Steve Wellman new Rainbow Restaurant owner and manager discontinued music without giving any notice! This caught us with publicity out and no program. Victory does not do business in such a slipshod fashion and hope this did not put any of you out. Victory wishes to thank the audience, musicians, media for such wonderful support and thank the previous Rainbow owner Laura May and music mgr. Jon Eppo Epstein for inviting us in. Obviously, Victory & Eppo are looking for another place in the Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater area to do acoustic listening music. If you spot a 75-100 seat family restaurant or deli in your area that may be interested, even if the place is not yet open at night, give Victory a call 863-6617 or Eppo 866-9301. Again thanks for your support and keep attending local music functions!!!*

Barbara Trabka came to Olympia in 1972. Before that, she lived in Seattle. She had attended the Cornish School for the Arts. She went to Evergreen from 1972-1975. "I still pursue my art, though not as much as I want to." She did a series of portraits of Laura May and others around town. Barbara has had shows at Childhood's End Gallery for many years. Now she is the manager of South Sound Real Estate. She and her colleagues had been planning this venture for six years. They formed in August. We met at Capitol Lake Park on a sunny October afternoon.

Laura May has always been community minded, Barbara recalls. "A giving person who's really worked hard for what she believed in. She's got a big heart. Any thing that's a good cause with a reason, she backs. Benefits." Laura May has often employed people who were creative types just so they could make some money.

"If you're having a problem and she's heard about it, she'll help. She's got a variety of people she cares about and who care about her."

I mention that maybe Laura May didn't have the business skills to run a restaurant profitably. Barbara says, "She did stay in business for fourteen years, which is better than most people do. She owns a house. She owns a funky car. She's making a living.

"Most small businesses eke out a small living. The business people that seem to be doing well have a spouse or other means of support."

What about the prospect of Laura May coming to work for her? "We told her we'd put her through school and help her get her real estate license." This involves thirty hours of class, followed by a test. "You really have to be geared up for it. She has the qualities to be a real estate agent. Honest. Hard-working. Emotional. Ethical."

Barbara's office is run differently than the standard real estate enterprise. It's easy to see why this place would attract Laura May's interest. "At our office, you don't have to be the little guy behind the computer. She could do what she could do best. Most real estate offices have a broker who runs the business, and a secretary. Ours is going to eventually be mutually owned. We have a greater percentage of a back-up staff." She draws an analogy of a dentist. The dentist doesn't do all the work. Well, the broker doesn't do all the work. And in her office, the commission will be split.

Given Barbara's artistic background, how did she get into real estate? "I couldn't relate to anybody who could sell who didn't have white shoes, and white belt, zipping me out to Lacey." She wanted to sell to them. "Buying a house is such an emotional thing. Some people only buy one house in a lifetime." She had friends who felt like her. "My business is all referral."

And who would have more referrals than Laura May Abraham, who knows everyone in town and everything that goes on in Olympia?

#### AT LAURA MAY'S HOUSE

In the corner of the kitchen/dining room sits piles of Rainbow memorabilia. Chairs. Posters. A CO<sub>2</sub> gauge used for soft drinks. Boxes of business records that had been in loft.

On her kitchen walls are pictures of 4th and Columbia in the mid 1930's. A sign on the building says, "Room for Rent." In the living room are more photos, some of the actual grocery store that existed on the site.

In the hall, near the bathroom, is a painting, from face to breasts of my former wife, an artist who used to model for other artists. I told you Olympia was small.

On the kitchen wall, is a picture taken on August 27, by Carl Cook, a local radio personality Laura May's last day at the Rainbow. In it, she is standing, one foot on a chair, one on a desk. Mail and papers are all over. A real right brain desk. "The next day, I cleaned it. It would never be the same. The desk was the butt of all the staff jokes. It was the dough room, too." Laura May didn't mean money, either. "The dough mixer's in there," she says.

There's a portrait by Barbara Trabka hanging in the hall. On the bottom, handwritten in red pencil. "Laura May Abraham, a friend to everyone."

On the kitchen table, in a wooden bowl are copies of Organic Gardening. Beneath it is a copy of One Day at a Time in Al-Anon.

After we talk, Laura May walks into garden. She rummages through piles of what looks like straw. She pulls out potatoes of varying sizes, including one huge one, which she hands to me. "You take this. You're making soup." She goes into another section and pulls out some . . . well, it looks like weeds. She hands them to me. "This is rosemary. This is oregano."

We sit down in Laura May's kitchen.

"My identity was severely caught up in my work. I think I had a sense of duty and obligation about it. It was a labor of love. I got such an immediate reward out of working with people. I think I was supposed to be everything to all people. For many years, I didn't know you were supposed at ask for help." She tried to do it all herself, including the books. "I didn't got to an accountant except for once a year. Bad news, right. It was a few years into it, before I decided I needed to get expert help. And asking for help then was not as it is today, a very courageous fulfilling, and sensible thing to do. It was an act of failure, a measure of incompetence. Consequently, I got bogged down in taxes. I couldn't make reasonable decisions

about my work, because I had that value that I should be able to do it all by myself."

Laura May talks about a turning point. "One day, I woke up on my futon to the sound of beating wings. In my stupor, I thought, 'Angels.' I opened my eyes and here was this wild little bird circling. I've never seen a bird in my house. So I got up, and the little bird flew out of my room. I opened the back door. I went back to bed. I thought 'What does this mean?' I was taught to look at these animals as guides. I thought about the eagle in Indian mythology. When a native would see an eagle, it had to do with change. Because the eagle's element was air, and air is always shifting, never the same. An eagle is very powerful and safe in that element. Has acute vision from far off. I thought, 'This has to do with change.' And I'll be protected. It was the beating of angel wings I heard."

On Wednesday of that week, her Chapter XI protection was going to run out. "I had filed in June of '86. More than a year. I had known in April that I was unable to pull the business out of bankruptcy, other than selling to somebody who could take over the debt." That Monday she decided to file Chapter VII. Going from Chapter XI to Chapter VII would, she figured, give me 120 more days of protection. "I could still try to market the business. There was a flurry of interest, but no offers. But I was hoping that Barbara Trabka and I could sell the business. She was real hopeful, but she also said, 'You don't sell a business in two weeks.'"

Laura May paid the \$500 for Chapter VII bankruptcy. "I paid for that time--four more months. I bought it. Tuesday morning I filed it. Tuesday afternoon, my attorney called me. 'Laura, I have somebody who wishes to take you out of the remainder of your debt. All your secured debt.' This was kind of miraculous. My secured debt amounted to \$35,000. That, of course,



would have followed me all of the days of my life. If I had not been able to satisfy that debt, I would still owe it."

After the new owners came took over the Rainbow, Laura May worked there for three weeks, until September 15th. "Two days before my birthday," Laura May said. "He fired me. That morning. I was working a shift that day. Tim and I worked days."

That morning, Laura May drove out to Lacey to renew her driver's license. "I had turned down the wrong road in Lacey. A new road right next to the freeway that went through an old orchard. There were two stags standing in the road, right next to the freeway in Lacey. At 10:00 in the morning. I drove down very slowly. And they walked off to the orchard very slowly, just twenty-five feet off the road. They stood there and looked at me and looked at the grass. I just sat there and gazed at them. And this road is an exit from the freeway. These two deer just stood there and looked at me and nibbled, and finally I saw a car coming and I had to move on. I found my way to the Driver's license examination place, and I thought, 'Now what is this one about?' Here's these graceful, four-footed, fleet animals, who in all their grace can really cut through the underbrush. So what is that? Am I going to move out of some underbrush?" She found out about twelve hours later.

"I got fired that day. 10 o'clock at night. I just cried. Susan Johnson, my waitperson, held me. 'They're making me go. Susan, they're making me leave.'"

Laura May spent time with friends. Musicians who had played at the Rainbow many times. People like Bert Wilson and Nancy Curtis, and Tom Russell. "These people knew where it was at. They just loved me. They were there the whole time. And they gave. They believed it. All these people did it

for love. That's why it's so appropriate to me that I leave the place penniless. I'm broke. I'm on food stamps. It's good. It's okay. I have my house. I'm really very fortunate. And I have friends who are lending I can go to the Yucatan for twenty-five days."

Later that night, Laura May went back to the Rainbow with a friend. "We went up in the loft, which is the roof over the bar, and got down some old busted bar stools, dining room chair--I wanted broken chairs, and I wanted oak table tops that never got used. I wanted stuff like that. Charlie Lutz, her friend, who was cleaning up the Rainbow that night, and Tom Russell, the musician friend who accompanied her that night, loaded up the truck. "And they said, 'You know, we can start another Rainbow somewhere else.'"

I had to ask, "How do you feel about that idea? Starting another Rainbow?"

"I'm not ready for the actual physical manifestation of the idea. But the Rainbow was not destroyed. It lives on. It was happening down there. Now it's gone. Everybody tells me that the energy has dissipated from the place. That's why I'm so sad to see what's happening. When those guys took over they told me the things I wanted to hear. They told me they wanted to get a Class H liquor license, which would have put that place in competition with Ben Moore's and Cracker's and Carnegie's. It would have really strengthened . . . it would have made it sensible to have jazz. They wanted to put equipment in the kitchen and have breakfast, which people have been begging me for. We didn't have the facilities. So I was really happy about turning this functioning, intact business over to these guys. They could take it where I couldn't go. I felt real good about the work I'd done. That was my community center, too. But a lot of that is fallen now."

We sat in her house. But it's clear that the Rainbow was her home. "God knows that a lot of things needed to change about the Rainbow. My forte was with people. I was never a financier or a manager. I got it by for 13 1/2 years. When people used to say, 'Wow, Laura, you've really done a good job here,' I used to say, 'It's all done with mirrors.' I'd shuck it off. I couldn't deal with the credit that was due me. What I meant was that it was a real community effort. In a very real sense. It wasn't mine alone. It represented a lot of people's hands. I mean a lot of people built that place and kept it going."

Laura May is a community person. The Rainbow was a community she helped to create. And now she's gone, and for all purposes, the community is gone. What's next for her? She answered this in a roundabout way, by talking about her past.

She took a trip shortly after she was, what she called "fired" from the Rainbow. "I thought of that day and I think, 'Oh, wow! I got my walking papers.' It's just really something. It's kind of delightful. I enjoy the fact that I'm not there anymore. I actually had been emotionally and kind of spiritually preparing for separation for at least the last year. A least. If not two. I'm beginning to get a grip on the difference between me and my job. Beginning to know that even though Andrew's mother had had a club for forty-seven years and I admired her, that didn't necessarily have to be what I was going to do with my life. So, I took this trip to Oregon. I stayed with an ex-employee." She paused, then said, "Of course they're all ex-employees now. Friends of mine in Bend who had futons. In Portland I stayed with a jazz singer." Then she went to Hood River, Oregon and stayed with another friend who asked Laura May to accompany her to the Yucatan on a business trip.

"In the 2, 2 1/2 weeks that I spent on my own in Oregon, I really felt very free, unfettered, a child of God, protected, different. I didn't wake up worrying. I came to a kind of awareness that somehow I was going to return to my own spiritual quest, as though the Rainbow had been a deviation from it. In fact, it was part of it, in an instrumental way. Part of me that I left behind, with my goats, thirteen, fourteen years ago. I was having a great opportunity to pick that up and go forward and find out who I was going to be. "

She's still pondering the real estate offer. "Barbara Trabka and her partner Ben Bolender, who has been selling for nineteen or twenty years, want me to sell with them. It's something I would never have foreseen myself doing, but's an opportunity I'm not going to pass up. But if it works, I think I could get paid for the Rainbow. The Rainbow was a proving ground and I had lots of visibility, and it established trust. And now I could use it and go on to something in a very different way. I had seen myself in the healing arts. I wanted to get my massage license. I wanted to study in those areas and become a physical therapists or something. But I came to realize that wherever I go, I can be in the healing arts. Specifically, my own healing. Selling real estate doesn't have to be cartoon, like a used car salesman, a really limiting or crass or cruel thing. I can help people find homes, perhaps. I don't know. I want to pursue my music. I really want to sing. I've been singing, 'I'm in the Mood for Love,' like crazy lately. It's such a beautiful song. It's like I discover songs. I've discovered a song called 'Young and Foolish.' The richness of the songs is the way you sing it, the way you make it your own."

It seemed to me all these years that Laura May didn't possess a competitive streak. Did she think someone had to be competitive to operate a business and make money at it?

"I do think you need to be competitive. I don't necessarily think you have to be competitive against other people or other establishments in particular. I think people need to know what's happening in their industry, certainly, and the kind of problems that manifest themselves. But I think there needs to be a real self-motivated goal. Like I look at Jim and Debi Mead from the Urban Onion." The Urban Onion, formerly the Herb and Onion, is located in the old Olympian Hotel, across from Sylvester Park, a few blocks from the Rainbow. "They've had a business for a long time, longer than I have. They started with the Lunchbox over in the old Hotel Olympian, when the old dining room was intact. Beautiful place. Mahogany benches. Twice as big as the Urban Onion is now. Gorgeous. Debi and Jim have always impressed me as people who made a plan. Well, I never did that. I just kind of felt my way through. Things evolved. I never was goal-directed in that business at all. I never said, 'This is what I'm going to do in two years and this what I'm going to do in the next five years and this is what I'm going to do in the next six months.' Only in the last year was I that way at all. When I tried to put the menu together. When there were tasks at hand that needed to be executed. That's always been a tough one for me. In the sense of competition, the Rainbow has been unique." She said that she never felt competitive with the owners of Ben Moore's or Cracker's, even though, as she said, "We're competing for the same dollars. There's only so many people in Olympia and only so many people traveling through. But I really felt like we did something different. There is still no frying, you've never been able to get a french fry at the Rainbow. It's always been a thing unto itself. I've not

felt competitive. That's not something that I fostered in myself and certainly had I been, I might be in a different situation."

I went to a surprise party for a friend one night. Norma Epstein, Eppo's mother, was there and we talked about the Rainbow. She commented on how it was a shame that people didn't know how little the Rainbow actually cost. She said that community people could have raised the money to buy the place. \$35,000 sounded too cheap to her. If only people had known. . . .

"The key to life," Laura May said, as she pulled out a key. "I've been carrying this key to the Rainbow around my chain, I don't know if I should throw it into a ravine, or put it on my wall."

I recall a moment from the Peter Pan rehearsal. Laura May, as the pirate, had been "killed." She stood off to the side and watched the action in front of her. While Pan sang, "I'm youth, I'm joy, I'm freedom," Laura May listened. I couldn't help wondering if this was her theme. For that is her. Youth. Joy. Freedom. that is her image. That is Laura May's gift, to herself and to everyone she has touched.