



The summer I was fourteen, our family took a week's vacation, drove our green Ford station wagon from Oregon down to Southern California.

Each child got to choose one thing we'd do or go to. One brother picked Disneyland, another, who loved whales, Marineland. My wish was to look for Deborah Kerr's house. I couldn't come that near where she lived and not want to try. Surprisingly, my family agreed.

In a used book store I'd once found an article about her house in an old Photoplay magazine. Of course there was no address, but I did know she lived in Pacific Palisades, overlooking the ocean. I had no idea whether it would actually be possible to find it, but that was a place to begin.



And so one day we drove slowly along the westernmost streets of Pacific Palisades where high walls lined the sidewalks, hiding wide yards, the air thick with eucalyptus, I, comparing roof lines, when I could see them, with my magazine photo. I was beginning to think we wouldn't find it, when we rolled slowly by a gate where a black Scottie dog sat looking out between the wrought iron bars. Deborah Kerr had Scotties! I looked at the roof line. It matched!

Dad parked the car a ways on, and we walked back. It seemed it couldn't be! But when Mom and I peered over the wall into the yard beside her house, there was her children's playhouse where they had posed with their mother; there was her swimming pool!



This truly was Deborah Kerr's house!
It felt ...
exactly like ...
finding fairyland.

There was no one about. For a while I just looked, just stood there. Then I took a few pictures with my Brownie camera, to prove to myself it had not just been a dream; I had been here on this holy ground.



A door opened, voices. We moved away. A woman's voice -- I will never know if it was hers -- said something about a "garage", accenting the first syllable in the British way. And then -- the gates opened, and a car came out with a man in it. I didn't recognize him, though I took only the briefest glimpse. We were trying hard to look as if we just happened to be there,

a mom and dad, a teenage girl, three little brothers, paused on the sidewalk.

Then he was gone, silence returned.
...And the gate stayed open.

And yes, I did.

...After some moments spent considering, I came a little ways inside, maybe ten steps on the red brick driveway, and knelt.

I took up four eucalyptus leaves that lay there, took a few deep breaths, and reverently backed away.



We left, grateful not to have been seen,
not to have caused offense when none was meant.

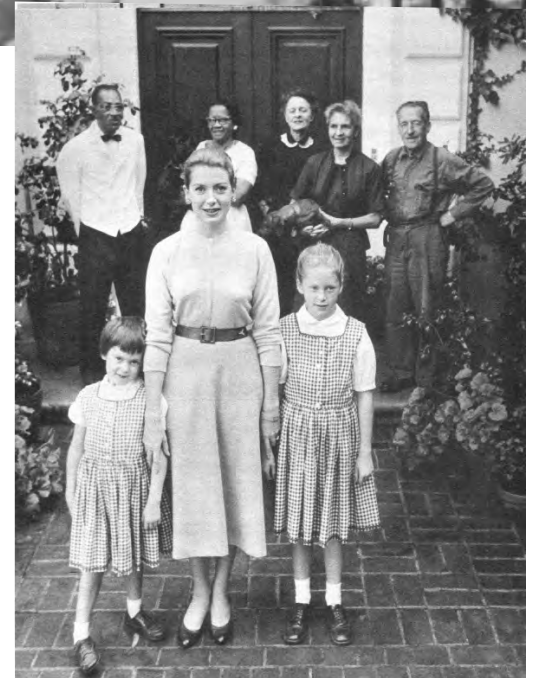
When I brought the leaves home, my grandmother, Pearl,
suggested I dip them in paraffin if I wanted them to keep
their color, which I did. I have them to this day, possibly the
only leaves in the world still their original hues from 1955.



Perhaps it was a sign that the Universe is not quite pleased
when mortals try to photograph magic: when I developed
the pictures I found the edge of my film had torn and wound
in front, so there were dark loops on some of the photos.
But some came out, including one of the stone gatepost
marked 15040. The street we had been on was Corona
Del Mar. I wrote the address in my book, but not with her
name, so no one but me could ever know whose it was.
I sent the “Mrs. Anna” doll to that address, and one or
two letters. Later, in the eighties, when my Deborah Carr
reached 15040 on her odometer, I stopped and took a pic-
ture. And when I have some reason and ability to be gener-

ous to my friends, I’ve given little grants known as
“Life-as-Art Supply Grants” from “The Deborah Kerr
Appreciation Society”, the amount, just to pick a number,
some decimal division of 15040.

Nowadays, I think to myself, what my family and I did
might be considered “stalking”. Nowadays I would
certainly know better. We all have heard horror stories
of fans who’ve obtruded into the lives of the famous,
claiming them as parent, or even bent on murder.
And we all know what it is to guard our privacy these days.
The world has lost its innocence. Or maybe it never had it.
I’ve read since of Greta Garbo’s once being frightened
by finding a fan on her grounds.
And in a way, I knew it was wrong even then -- that is,
I knew Deborah probably wouldn’t like it, if she knew.
...But, I also thought, if she knew everything, if she truly
knew what she meant to me, perhaps she would forgive.
And understand why when the gates of Heaven opened
I went in.
I can’t say even now I wish I hadn’t done it.
I’m glad I was still almost a child who is
allowed some things grownups are not.
And though I am nearly 60 now, there will always be, for me,
in depths of air bearing scent and susurrus from eucalyptus
trees, a sense of cosmic rightness, of the impossibly good
come true.



from
movie magazines
of the time