

Yamuna Devi: I was Joan Campanella, but don't ask me too much about her.

SR: [laughter] Well, maybe you can tell us at least a little about Joan – when she was born and what growing up was like for her.

YD: Ah, the birthday: May 19, 1942. I was born in Butte Montana.

Until age five, I lived in a log cabin on the outskirts of Butte with mother Mary Lee, Aunt Agnes, and my little sister, Janice Marie. While mom and Agnes worked day jobs, my sister and I stayed at our Italian grandmother's house. Activity at gram's was work centered -- gardening, laundry, fire-tending and cooking. With no live play friends in our down time, we created imaginary ones and spent time exploring the woods nearby. Our unknown father never returned from World War Two.

At age six, Aunt A. moved to San Francisco and we three moved to Klamath Falls, Oregon, to live with relatives: Aunt Edna and Uncle Dean. Again, mom worked full time. Edna owned and ran the Normadean Dance Studio, which became a second home for us kids. With seven days of ballet class each week, I showed promise, evidently enough to win summer scholarships, when I was only nine and ten. These allowed me to study under Harold Christensen at the San Francisco Ballet Company. It was assumed that after graduating high school, I would be join the famed SF corp de ballet. It never happened.

SR: I know you went to school in Oregon. How did that come about?

YD: When I was eleven, mom married Bob Oslund, a lawyer, and the family moved to Salem, Oregon. At that time, my mom stopped working, spending more time at home and golfing at the Salem Country Club. Two years later, Bob joined the firm Georgia-Pacific, and moved us to Lake Oswego, a Portland suburb. I stayed there until I graduated from Lake Oswego High School.

That fall, I attended University of Oregon in Eugene, but I dropped out in my freshman year. That's when I moved to Portland to live on my own. For two years, I worked a night job to pay rent and took pottery classes at Portland State College . . . and calligraphy classes with Lloyd Reynold, who was somewhat renowned at the time, at the Portland Art Museum.

I really got into the pottery stuff for while. Two years later, I further honed my skills by attending a summer workshop with Bauhaus-trained master-potter Marguerite Wildenhain at Pond Farm in Guerneville California.

SR: Sounds like that was going to be your career.

YD: Oh, yeah. At the sassy age of twenty-two, I became co-owner of "The Pot Shop" -- a pottery and calligraphy establishment on Upper Grant Avenue in San Francisco's then happening North Beach.