He had been visiting that evening. His shirt was soaked in blood, and he had gone into shock. My father had attacked him with the baseball bat, then with the Swiss Army knife he always carried in his pocket. The stabbings, in the stomach, were multiple. It took the Peekskill Hospital's ER doctors the better part of the night to stanch the bleeding. Getting the blood out of the house took longer. It was everywhere: on floors, walls, the landing, the stairs, the kitchen, the front hall. The living room looked like a scene out of *Carrie*, which, as it happened, had just come out that fall. When the house went on the market a year later, my mother and I were still trying to scrub stains from the carpet.

The night of his break-in, my father was treated for a superficial cut on the forehead and delivered to the county jail. He was released before morning. The next afternoon, he rang the bell of our next-door neighbor, wearing a slightly soiled head bandage, trussed up, as my mother put it later, "like the Spirit of '76." He was intent on purveying his side of the story: he'd entered the house to "save" his family from a trespasser. My father's side prevailed, at least in the public forum. Two local newspapers (including one that my mother had begun writing for) ran items characterizing the night's drama as a husband's attempt to expel an intruder. The court reduced the charges to a misdemeanor and levied a small fine.

In the subsequent divorce trial, my father claimed to be the "wronged" husband. The judge acceded to my father's request to pay no alimony and a mere $50 a week for the support of two children. My father also succeeded in having a paragraph inserted into the divorce decree that presented him as the injured party: by withdrawing her affections in the last months of their marriage, my mother had "endangered the defendant's physical well being" and "caused the defendant to receive medical treatment and become ill."

"*I have had enough of impersonating a macho aggressive man that I have never been inside*," my father had written me. As I confronted, nearly four decades and nine time zones away, my father's new self, it was hard for me to purge that image of the violent man from her new persona. Was I supposed to believe the one had been erased by the other, as handily as the divorce decree recast my father as the "endangered" victim? Could a new identity not only [redacted] predecessor?

As I came of age in postwar America, the search for identity was assuming Holy Grail status, particularly for middle-class Americans seeking purchase in the new suburban sprawl. By the '70s, "finding yourself" was the vaunted magic key, the portal to psychic well-being. In my own suburban town in Westchester County, it sometimes felt as if everyone I knew, myself included, was seeking guidance from books with titles like *Quest for Identity*, *Self-Actualization*, *Be the Person You Were Meant to Be*. Our teen center sponsored "encounter groups" where high schoolers could uncover their inner selfhood; local counseling services offered therapy sessions to "get in touch" with "the real you"; mothers in our neighborhood held consciousness-raising meetings to locate the "true" woman trapped inside the housedress. Liberating the repressed self was the ne plus ultra of the newly hatched women's movement, as it was the clarion call for so many identity movements to follow. To fail in that quest was to suffer an "identity crisis," the term of art minted by the reigning psychologist of the era, Erik Erikson.

But who is the person you "were meant to be"? Is *who you are* what you make of yourself, the self you fashion into being, or is it determined by your inheritance and all its fateful forces, genetic, familial, ethnic, religious, cultural, historical? In other words: is identity what you choose, or what you can't escape?

If someone were to ask me to declare my identity, I'd say that, along with such ordinaries as nationality and profession, I am a woman

and I am a Jew. Yet when I look deeper into either of these labels, I begin to doubt the grounds on which I can make the claim. I am a woman who has managed to bypass most of the rituals of traditional femininity. I didn't have children. I didn't yearn for maternity; my "biological clock" never alarmed me. I didn't marry until well into middle age—and the wedding, to my boyfriend of twenty years, was a spur-of-the-moment affair at City Hall. I lack most domestic habits—I am an indifferent cook, rarely garden, never sew. I took up knitting for a while, though only after reading a feminist crafts book called *Stitch 'n Bitch*.

I am a Jew who knows next to nothing of Jewish law, ritual, prayers. At Passover seders, I mouth the first few words of the kiddush—with furtive peeks at the Haggadah's phonetic rendition and only the dimmest sense of the meaning. I never attended Hebrew school; I wasn't bat mitzvahed. We never belonged to the one synagogue in Yorktown Heights, which, anyway, was so loosey-goosey Reform it might as well have been Unitarian. I'm not, technically speaking, even Jewish. My mother is Jewish only on her father's side, a lack of matrilineage that renders me gentile to all but the most liberal wing of the rabbinate.

So if my allegiance to these identities isn't fused in observance and ritual, what is its source?

I am a Jew who grew up in a neighborhood populated with anti-Semites. I am a woman whose girlhood was steeped in the sexist stereotypes of early '60s America. My sense of *who I am*, to the degree that I can locate its coordinates, seems to derive from a quality of resistance, a refusal to back down. If it's threatened, I'll assert it. My "identity" has quickened in those very places where it has been most under siege.

My neighborhood in Yorktown Heights was staunchly Catholic, mostly second-generation Irish and Italian, families who were one step out of the Bronx and eager to pull up the drawbridge against any other ethnicities or religions—in particular, blacks and

Jews. In the mid-'60s, when a petition circulated to block a black family from buying a home on the street, my mother squared off against the petitioners. The family eventually bought the house; my mother remained the neighborhood pariah. Soon after we arrived, a boy down the street welcomed me by hurling rocks while yelling, "You're a kike!" How he knew was a mystery: we'd shown no signs, and wouldn't. My father made sure we aggressively celebrated Christmas and Easter and sent out holiday cards with Christian images (The Little Drummer Boy, Little Jesus in the Manger . . .). His eagerness to pass only reinforced my sense of grievance and, perversely, my commitment to an identity I barely understood. You could say that my Jewishness was bred by my father's silence.

And my womanhood bred by my mother's despair. When she gave up her job in the city (as an editor of a life-insurance periodical) and moved to the suburbs, my father awarded her the various accessories to go with her newly domesticated state: a dust mop, a housedress, hot rollers, a bouffant wig (with Styrofoam head stand, on which the hairpiece was left to languish), and a box of stationery printed with a new name that heralded the erasure of hers, "Mrs. Steven C. Faludi." No doubt I learned some of my anti-nesting tendencies from my mother in this time. My father, for his part, was eager to present himself as a model of postwar American manhood, with wife and children as supporting cast, along with the convertible sports car (and before that, a Lincoln Continental), the saws and drills in the basement, the barbeque grill, the cigar boxes and pipe on the mantel, and the oversized armchair with a headrest in the living room that we all understood to be "his." The chair was his throne, proof of his dominion and dominance over his quarter-acre crabgrass demesne. We were careful not to sit in it.

When I was in grade school, my father bought me a tabletop weaving loom. After a halfhearted effort that produced a couple of uneven fabric coasters and one miniature scarf, I took the loom off