

CHAPTER FOUR

CONSENSUS

There are many things that distinguished my family, but the thing that I think distinguished us the most is that we did things by consensus. This all developed from cleaning. My mother treated us equally, or tried to. Because there weren't any girls, because I was the only girl, effectively, my brothers also had to clean. My mother never had to clean anything. My mother cooked and sewed and did the wash, but we cleaned our house. Every week we cleaned it as if it were spring cleaning. In the living room we moved every piece of furniture into the middle of the room, we did all of the floors, we did all of the window sills, we did all of the windows.

We had a family consensus: Ralph, Jim, Sam, myself and Claude, five of us. One person would do the living room and the dining room, another one would do the kitchen, the downstairs bathroom and the back hallway, another one would do the two bedrooms, something like that. Each week, a different person would divide up the rooms. The person who made the bargain—who divided the rooms—was always left with the last choice, so you worked very hard to make these bargains come out even. I loved getting the living room and dining room, because I would put all of the furniture in the middle and then I would lie behind the sofa and read my book! That is, until my mother would come in and say, "What's going on in here!" And I'd say, "Well, I'm cleaning." That's how I did a lot of reading!

We were a little Mafia within our own family. Everything we did we agreed on, because we had to do all the work in the house. When you got to college you didn't have to clean because