

The Montana Frontier



One Woman's West

J O Y C E L I T Z

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PROLOGUE

What an elegant Thanksgiving feast Lillian cooked for two of her husband's visiting nephews in 1935 in Lewistown, Montana! Amazed, I watched a grandmother I hadn't seen before—an attractive, vivacious seventy-year-old woman, who lit an after-dinner cigarette and described a life and cities I couldn't even imagine. Because she didn't dwell in the past and seldom talked about her life before moving to Montana, relatives and close friends knew little about her beginnings.

When, years after she died in 1949, my father sent me a battered rusty trunk filled with her manuscripts, diaries, and scrapbooks, many of my questions about her were answered. These along with personal memories, family stories, and a bit of speculation helped me piece together her life story as truthfully as one can when telling another person's life. My father, Richard, who was her son, furnished many personal insights before he died in 1984.

After my article "Lillian's Montana Scene" appeared in *The Montana Historical Magazine*, 1974 summer edition, her old ranch neighbors were surprised. In 1978, Bob Lange of Lewistown wrote to Richard:

Her story fascinated me since it was about someone I knew so well, but knew so little about. . . . We got together quite a bit in their last years in Lewistown. . . . We drove out to Gilt Edge one Sunday afternoon and was that an interesting afternoon. There were a few tumbled down buildings then and they told about the town when they lived there, and showed us the spot where their little shack sat.

Although my brother, Dick, and I spent our early years with our grandparents, we didn't know any more about Lillian than Bob Lange did. She

mentioned her father occasionally, but it was years before we realized he was a top athlete of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a pedestrian named Edward Payson Weston. Once she described his walk from New York City to California in 1909 and how he followed it with a return trip the next year when he was seventy-one years old. We couldn't quite fathom anyone taking such a long hike.

Among her papers was her 1924 article about him in *Strength Magazine*. Her admiration was obvious, although I don't think she realized what a giant ego she was describing. Certainly, he was a big influence in her life. She admired his eccentric ways and tried to imitate him. She also said he encouraged her to pursue a career in a time when Victorian women were cautioned to be ladylike, shy, and retiring. He made sure she had a decent education, something she appreciated and often wrote about later—the need for women to be educated.

Lillian's professional life, from 1885 to 1930, was a pivotal era for women as more entered higher education and pioneered careers in journalism, social work, medicine, and teaching. There was Jane Addams, who led the way in social work. In 1889, she and Ellen Gates Starr established Hull House in a poor immigrant neighborhood in Chicago. In the late 1800s, Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell established the Woman's Medical College of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children. Anita Newcomb McGee, M.D., was the first woman appointed assistant surgeon general in the U.S. Army in 1898. Nellie Bly (Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman), who was the same age as Lillian, was an investigative reporter noted for her sensational exposés of social conditions in the late 1800s.

During this time when these women were gaining national recognition, Lillian was busy developing her own writing career. As I organized the contents of her trunk, I found two scrapbooks pasted full of her column, "Lillian's Letter," as well as clippings, greeting cards, and pictures of people in the news. The blue book is dated October 13, 1888, with "High Bridge" written in her large angular handwriting. The phrase "Noblesse Oblige" is penned in above her name, "Lillian Marie Weston." Perhaps she did feel a cut above the crowd if she defined the words according to *Webster's Dictionary*: "The obligation of honorable, generous, and responsible behavior associated with high rank or birth."

The gray scrapbook was started sometime after she married. Along with the usual interesting clippings and pictures, on the inside cover she glued a

draft of her request for a New York City minister to marry her and Frank Hazen in 1895. Pasted next to it is a letter from Frank's brother, John, who often visited them over the years. Lillian appeared to be very fond of him, and he never married.

She also saved her fiction manuscripts, most of which were never published. These reveal things Lillian probably never meant others to see. Many of her diaries were missing, because I knew she kept one for each year of her life. Only six were saved. Her manuscripts are undated unless they were published, and many of her nonfiction pieces were. Then each was labeled with the date of acceptance, amount received, and name of publication.

Along with her papers I found sepia-tinted photos of Lillian as a teenager, as a young woman in New York City, and as a young married woman with her husband and their children, pictures I had never seen before. Although she was sixty-three years old by the time I was born, as a child I could still see the beautiful blond woman she had been. Even in old age, she had nice legs, though her plump, five-foot-two figure had lost its graceful shape. Her face was kind, with large expressive gray eyes and a determined chin set below a sensitive mouth with a slight overbite.

She and my grandfather were a good-looking couple. He was a slender man only a few inches taller than she and had a handsome, stoic face with the high cheekbones suggesting an Indian ancestor, which, indeed, he did have. He was voted most handsome in his class of 1889 at Dartmouth. He was always kind to us, but silent. To this day, my brother and I agree we never got to know him, and we lived with them until we were teenagers.

As I read Lillian's writings, I was surprised to learn she had worked seriously toward a career as a concert pianist. She wrote of wonderful daydreams of fame and fortune, how she saw herself sitting at a grand piano playing the works of the great masters as no one had ever interpreted them before. In her fantasies, she heard the large brilliant audiences applauding her.

Nevertheless, somewhere along the way, Lillian abandoned her plans to become a pianist. Beginning in 1885, she worked in New York City as a freelance writer and roving reporter, producing a weekly column, "Lillian's Letter," for several newspapers, including the *New York Sunday Herald*, the *Richmond (Virginia) Star*, and western papers like *The Helena (Montana) Record*.

In one edition, the Montana editor wrote, "Our New York correspondent 'Lillian' is a young lady not yet twenty years of age. Her father has for a number of years been connected with the great dailies of the metropolis. Her

letters are being well received and favorably commented on. An enthusiastic miner in the Coeur d'Alene [Idaho] area has decided to name his new mine the 'Lillian.' As the mine is a rich one the honor will be doubly appreciated."

I could tell from Lillian's columns that she loved New York. She made her small-town readers see the city through her eyes. Her writings exuded energy and a spirit of adventure as they covered everything from the arts to the city's problems with the huge influx of immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century. She appeared to be everywhere, from riding the new toboggan in Fleetwood Park to sitting in the front row at Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in Madison Square Garden.

Her life, however, took a sharp turn after she married, one she didn't expect. She had been so careful in her choice of a husband, because she knew her life depended on marrying the right man. A century later, Phyllis Rose wrote the same premise in her book *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages*: "I believe that marriage, whether we see it as a psychological relationship or a political one, has determined the story of our lives more than we have generally acknowledged."

Even when Lillian began to realize her marriage was far from perfect and financial problems loomed, she chose to follow Frank wherever he might lead her, and by 1916, she found herself living on an isolated wheat-and-cattle ranch in central Montana. Nevertheless, according to her writings, she turned that disastrous move into another adventure.

Early in life, Lillian thought she wanted an upper-middle-class existence when she married, but would she have liked the humdrum, narrow life of a Victorian matron who spent her days on domestic chores and calling on friends? She was a pioneer at heart and craved excitement and change. Montana, in the raw late 1800s and early 1900s, was just that, an exciting place on the last American frontier. It sparked Lillian's creative energies, forced her to be strong, physically and mentally, and fed her adventurous soul.

— ONE —

The Pedestrian

*My father and my grandmother had a hand in developing
my rebellious, independent nature.*

“Weston’s Early Life”
Strength Magazine. June 15, 1924

Lillian grew up adoring her father, internalized most of his advice and opinions, and even inherited, or acquired, his charm. She resented the attitude of the rest of the Weston family, who considered his a low-class profession. They never accepted him as the great athlete he was, who played a major role in developing the long-distance walking matches of the late 1800s and early 1900s. She was proud of him and the fact that she was like him in many important ways: “His respectable relatives didn’t understand him; they regretted he did not embrace a dignified occupation like banking, or selling groceries, insurance or dry goods. . . . To make a man with my father’s erratic disposition lead a humdrum life would be like hitching a race horse to a plow.”

Even his father, but never his mother, and his maternal grandparents were ashamed of his being a pedestrian.

E. A. Southern, a leading Broadway actor of the 1800s, once said, “It was the theater’s loss when Edward Payson Weston became a Pedestrian rather than an actor.”

He was so right, because Payse was a real showman, a handsome charmer, dandy of the nineteenth-century sporting world. He was a little guy, five feet, eight inches tall, never weighing more than 140 pounds, and he always acted and dressed his part. He wore high gaiters (leather leggings), a smart hat, a black velvet tunic—his chest covered with his many sports medals—and carried a small swagger stick. He liked to look good and liked nice clothes but wore what he wanted even if it was out of style. Lillian took particular pride in the fact that he didn't let public opinion or fashion sway him.

It's not surprising Weston had an unusual approach to life. His mother, Marie Gaines Weston, was not the average Victorian lady. She was a delicate-looking nineteenth-century novelist, who often wrote under the name M. D. Gaines (a pseudonym Lillian later used in Montana). She was also active in the abolitionists' movement in Boston just before the Civil War along with John Greenleaf Whittier and other literary types. Most of her writings, like the novel *Kate Felton*, published in 1859 and now in the University of Virginia historical archives, were romantic stories, but they also took a strong stand against slavery.

This probably accounts for Lillian's unprejudiced attitude toward black people, an unusual one in the nineteenth century. Although she didn't judge a person by his or her skin color, she did have other biases. She despised liars and cruel people and displayed a haughty disdain for people with poor taste in clothes, furnishings, and entertainment choices. She said she disliked phonies, but interestingly enough, she herself was easily manipulated by a charming person, which is no surprise, considering her father was about as charming as a man could get.

Lillian's grandfather, Silas Weston, was an unsuccessful Boston businessman, a large man—six feet, four inches tall—who played the bass viol and wrote poetry. Ed was their only son, born on March 15, 1839, in Providence, Rhode Island. His later accomplishments are even more amazing, because he weighed only four and a half pounds at birth and wasn't expected to live. He was a semi-invalid by the time he was fifteen.

At that time, the family moved to Boston, where a family friend, who was a sports trainer, asked if he could work with the teenager to improve his health. He took Ed off coffee and put him on a strict diet of vegetables and milk. Then he urged him to take short walks each day.

Soon the walks lengthened and instead of being a chore, they became Weston's recreation.

In 1855, his newfound health gave him confidence and he got a job selling candy and papers on the Boston, Providence, and Stonington Railroad. The following year, he did the same work on the New York–Fall River Steamer. For six months in 1856, he was apprenticed to a jeweler, and then he joined a circus band as a drummer.

On this last job, he was struck by lightning and saw this as a warning to change his lifestyle, so he went home. Then Ed rambled about Boston, house to house and town to town, selling his mother's books.

Weston made his first long walk, about 478 miles by road, in 1861, when he was twenty-two years old. He wrote and self-published his version of the trek, called *The Pedestrian: Being a Correct Journal of "Incidents" on a Walk from the State House, Boston, Mass., to the U.S. Capitol, at Washington, D.C.* He bet a friend he would arrive in ten days in time to attend Abraham Lincoln's inauguration on March 4.

Several creditors delayed his start on February 22 for the matter of \$10 and \$25 debts owed. Then in Worcester, only a few miles down the road from Boston, another creditor, a hotel owner, had him arrested and jailed for nonpayment of \$50. At this point, a stranger stepped forward and signed a note for the debt so Weston could continue on his way. This was not a good beginning, and it was many miles before Weston regained his good humor.

Friends, Charles Foster and Abner Smith, followed him in a carriage, which Ed had rented for \$80. His sponsors, the Grover & Baker Sewing Machine Co. and the Rubber Clothing Co., stocked the carriage with five thousand packets containing brochures featuring his picture. Delivering these to houses along the road helped Ed pay his expenses but almost finished him off as he battled a blizzard most of the way.

A crowd met them at each town they passed through, and either a hotel, café, or private citizen served them free meals. When tired, Weston and his partners would accept the offer of a free bed, but he never slept more than two hours at a time. Then they would be on their way. In one town, a woman said she wanted Weston to deliver a kiss from her to President Lincoln. Weston said he would accept the kiss but wouldn't promise to deliver it to the president.

He didn't reach the Capitol until the afternoon of March 4, a half day over the ten days, and so missed the inauguration ceremony by a few hours.

Although Weston lost his bet, he went to the President's Ball but was too sleepy to enjoy it. Later, at a levee, a reception, he talked with President Lincoln, who offered to pay his train fare back to Boston. Weston refused, saying he wanted to make the walk back to improve his record. The Civil War, however, was beginning, and he decided the trip was too dangerous, so he took the train home.

Weston didn't plan to become a professional walker. The Washington, D.C., trek had been a bit of a lark, because by that time, walking was his hobby. After the war broke out in 1861, Weston went to work for the Federal Army, using his walking ability to deliver Boston and New York mail to the northern troops in Washington, D.C.

Because Ed was so popular with his fans, companies sought to use his name for advertising their wares, even such famous stores as Brooks Brothers of New York City, who furnished his disguise as a Susquehanna River rafter. The G. W. White Hat Company gave him a hat. At least Ed was well dressed as he dodged southern sympathizers, Confederate soldiers, and unfriendly dogs.

Later he said, "I have always been afraid of dogs, especially at night."

Once, when he found a bridge guarded, he had to walk ten miles upstream to find a boat to cross the river. Then a southern farmer stopped him and insisted Ed go to work for him, saying he was too young to be on the road alone. He offered Ed 25 cents a month and room and board. Weston soon slipped away.

On one trip, he stopped in Media, Pennsylvania, at a friend's house to sleep. The friend, not realizing Ed was on a secret mission, let everyone in town know his guest was the Pedestrian. All the citizens turned out the next morning to welcome him, and Weston left town traveling fast.

That time, he was almost to Washington, D.C., when he was arrested as a Confederate spy. He had walked seventy miles in less than twenty-four hours only to be thrown into a filthy Union guardhouse cell. After many hours of interrogation, he was fed and allowed to sleep under a table in the officers' quarters, and then the Union soldiers put him on a

train for Annapolis, where the New York and Massachusetts regiments were stationed.

Because Ed was small and boyish looking, this often saved his life when the Confederate army caught him between lines. He would pretend to be a local farm boy. Some more romantic newspaper accounts of his life said he was a spy, but Weston, being the flamboyant star-of-the-show type he was, probably started the rumor himself.

After the Civil War, he went to work for *The New York Herald*, first as a messenger boy and later as a police reporter. With no telephones and only horses for transportation, Weston's speedy walking ability really gave him an edge over reporters from rival papers. He would race to a story on foot and return copy to his editor, in some cases before rival reporters were even on the story's scene.

Two years after Lillian was born, her father's official walking career began on October 29, 1867, when he was twenty-eight years old. He accepted a challenge from a walking club in Maine to walk from Portland to Chicago—a distance of 1,326 miles—within thirty consecutive days (but never on Sunday because of a promise to his mother) for a \$10,000 purse. The “Yankee Clipper” beat the deadline by an hour and twenty minutes.

According to the nineteenth-century *Harper's Weekly*, “This walk makes Weston's name a household word, and really gives impetus to the pedestrian mania which has become so general.”

Back in New York City after setting this record, he was deluged with invitations to take part in country fairs, weekend walks, and lectures, and he organized walking exhibitions up and down the eastern seaboard. Usually a bevy of reporters and doctors followed him on his walks. The newspapermen liked to quote him, and the doctors liked to check his pulse and marvel at his physical condition.

When asked the secret of his walking success, he said, “I never was a fast walker—never tried to be.”

He was a deliberate, persistent, plugging walker who was able to keep going and going with an average speed of four and a half miles per hour. He always won with a steady, even gait and stamina that withstood great fatigue. Many surpassed his speed, but none could equal him for endurance.

Payse walked with his toes turned out in what he called his “flat-foot shuffle.” He was not the heel-and-toe walker of that era.

“Heel and toe will do for a time but it ruins the heel,” he told reporters.

A five-day match meant fifteen days of heavy workouts: five days of exercises, five of actual walking, and five of light road work to taper off. Sports enthusiasts followed his exploits with great interest, often wagering high stakes. His fans loved him and he never disappointed them.

Weston always rubbed his feet with whiskey after a long walk and never tarried with wet shoes and socks. He was sure wet feet caused the tonsillitis he was plagued with all his life, but even so, he never wore rubber footwear for rainy weather. He said they were bad for the feet.

His shoes and boots were made to order: “Walking boots ought always to be made of fine French calfskin.”

Although Ed Weston just about owned the walking sport, he didn’t make much money. Advertising was in its infancy and product endorsements not yet a part of marketing strategies, and so prize money was his only income from walking. Some years he made a lot of money, and others were lean. He walked because he liked to walk, but this meant the Weston family often struggled to make ends meet.

Lillian seldom criticized her father, but she did admit he had an expensive flaw. He saw himself as something of an entrepreneur destined to make millions with his many get-rich-quick schemes that often failed. The fact was, if he wanted to walk, he had to find other ways to support his family, and he was a natural gambler.

She always remembered her father’s favorite phrase and knew his bank account was low when he said, “I feel much encouraged.”

This precarious existence, “turkey one day and feathers the next,” as Lillian later described it, created an anxiety-charged atmosphere for his family. She sympathized as she watched her mother pinch pennies and wait for the riches that never came while her father squandered dollars on his many failed moneymaking schemes.

Unfortunately, one could not have found two more opposite personalities than Ed and his wife, Maria Fox Weston, who never understood her maverick husband or his mercurial personality. She was a conservative, genteel New Englander, a creature of habit, who clung to

her routine ways all her life while Ed never recognized her struggle for an ordered life.

Maria thought this even more important after Lillian, their first child, was born on October 13, 1865, in Medford, Massachusetts. Maude was born about two years later and Ellsworth, two years after that.

In 1924, *Strength Magazine* published Lillian's story about her father. She described him as a man of character with an honest free spirit, although an eccentric one, who "walks to his own rhythm."

Though her father believed in "old-fashioned" self-discipline, he didn't believe in restricting the small acts of one's daily existence. Routine bored him, and he was forever looking for change and excitement as he noisily condemned detail-oriented people. Weston never acknowledged the fact that Maria took care of the humdrum duties, duties someone had to perform, of running the Weston family's life, often more difficult in a foreign country.

Lillian also admitted in some of her writings that Weston was a bit of a tyrant in his home but always hastened to say he was outgoing and fun loving, never mean or physically abusive. It was, however, his opinion that his likes, his comforts, and his ideas came first before those of his wife and children. Lillian wrote he rarely did anything unless he liked to do it and would never learn a game or skill because it was popular. He had his own ideas on all subjects and paid little attention to other people's opinions.

He didn't adjust his life to suit anyone else, an attitude bound to sour a relationship. The Weston marriage was not a happy one. Lillian was well aware of how her mother struggled to maintain a stable home life for herself and her children as Ed came and went as he pleased, ate when and what he wanted, and slept when he was tired. It was not unusual for him to stay up all night and sleep all day. Although Weston considered walking the finest form of exercise, he would ride if he could when he wasn't making a walk.

In her 1924 article, Lillian also wrote that Weston insisted his family follow his health rules with him, most of which she followed all her life because she saw them as pure common sense. His appetite gauged the amount he ate. If he was hungry, he swallowed a good square meal; then, if possible, he threw himself down on the couch and took a nap, "just

like an anaconda,” her mother used to say. Lillian thought she had read anacondas lived a long life.

He didn’t eat pork but did eat beef, mutton, fish, and fowl—boiled, broiled, or roasted but never fried. He didn’t like canned foods. He liked pies and very rich cakes. He loaded his bread with butter and covered his food with pepper. Simple foods, including plenty of fruit and vegetables, were his diet. He didn’t eat exotic dishes with rich sauces and almost starved when he walked in France. He ate omelets twice a day for thirty days.

He drank two or three quarts of liquid each day: tea—cold or hot—lemonade, ginger beer, root beer, sweet cider. He didn’t smoke and only used whiskey for “medicinal” purposes, but he didn’t believe in total abstinence from alcohol. He liked wine and Bass ale or Guinness stout, but he didn’t like American beer or iced claret.

Lillian, however, did skip some of his health rules, like taking a cold bath each morning. She also thought his wearing a red flannel nightshirt to bed to prevent rheumatism was pure folklore. Even so, his lifestyle and mental approach to life and walking had a lot to do with his endurance. He often said, “The condition of the whole man is basic to good health.”

He told his family, “Relax when you relax and work hard when you work and don’t worry about keeping up with the Joneses.” And he practiced what he preached.

From Connecticut to London

Before I was out of my teens, I had crossed the ocean four times, studied in a French convent, lived in the Paris Latin Quarter, attended lectures at the College of France and Sorbonne, been a pupil in French national art schools.

Lillian's resumé, 1920

Weston won the jeweled Astley Belt with its \$2,500 prize money, the Heisman Trophy of long-distance walking, in 1879. The six-day contest took place in London's Agricultural Hall. It wasn't an easy win, and he almost lost it. He walked long and hard for four days and fell into bed on the fifth for what he thought was going to be a two-hour nap, but his coach let him sleep six hours. This put him thirteen miles behind his nearest competitor.

Then Weston jumped out of bed and walked 127 miles in twenty-four hours to set a new world record and became an overnight international celebrity. He walked the entire 550 miles in 141 hours and forty-four minutes. He had just celebrated his fortieth birthday.

His children missed this greatest triumph because they were living in Stamford, Connecticut, with Maria's parents. Between 1876 and 1884, Maria and Ed lived alone in England and France while Weston walked in various contests and for different causes.