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The Power of Places

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THE POWER OF PLACES

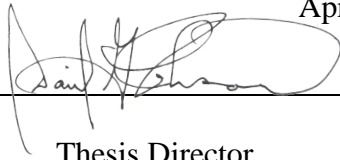
Sophie Lasher

A Senior Honors Thesis Project submitted to the Honors Program in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree

Bachelor of Arts

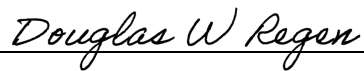
Belmont University Honors Program

April 19, 2022



Date 4/19/2022

Thesis Director



Date 04/18/2022

Committee Member



Date April 17, 2022

Committee Member

Accepted for the Honors Council and Honors Program:



Date 4/21/22

Dr. Bonnie Smith Whitehouse

The Honors Program

The Power Of Places

Sophie Lasher

Honors Thesis 2021-2022

My senior project is an art exhibition entitled *The Power of Places* that explores the places that have shaped me and how they have done so through photography-centered multimedia collages, cyanotypes, and physical artifacts. This theme was born from the intensity of the emotional tie that forms between person and place, between heart and home. I believe we are a collection of the places that have shaped us. These places hold our stories, our memories, and everything that makes us who we are; we don't notice it happening, but these locations become ingrained in our lives. I believe we are the product of the places that make us. Memories are written into us by the hand of their homes. This is how we connect to our surroundings- every place holds our stories, and when we visit those places, we don't only see a landscape, but everything that place means to us. We've all heard the saying "if these walls could talk." This project is my way of speaking what they would say, describing everything they've seen. This series was meant to illustrate the way a place becomes an integral part of who we are.

Somewhere along the way, this project became about grief and loss. Originally, I was planning on focusing on ten places that were impactful to me, but as I moved through my exploration of what each place meant to me, I found that some places just didn't trigger much within me anymore. Some places meant a lot to me at certain points in my life, but the connection just wasn't timeless; the tie had gotten weaker as time passed. There were also some places that mean a lot to me but not for any particular reason. For example, my aunt and uncle's backyard has always been a place of great solace for me. I never really had much of a yard and I

found it extremely peaceful to sit out in the grass and look up at the sky. However, I didn't have many specific memories in that location – no ties to anything concrete, just a general feeling of wonderment. Another example is Clearwater, Florida. I didn't grow up taking exciting or new vacations, but this was the first place I went to that was new and exciting when I was 15. But, when I went back to visit and take photos for this project, I realized it was kind of a one-time feeling. Going back was nice, it was Florida after all, but there was no emotional tie now that the thrill of being brand new was gone.

The common thread between the places I was actually finding myself emotionally attached to was that they were the places that were taken away from me too soon, before I was ready. Places that I had no say in leaving. Places I never got to say goodbye to. This experience became my chance to get closure. I've used the creation of these pieces to preserve the places that are no longer mine, to keep their memories and their stories safe.

The three places I wound up with were the house I grew up in, the house my grandma lived in when I was growing up, and the lakehouse that belonged to my mom's family. None of these places are a part of my life anymore and I never got to say goodbye to any of them prior to this project. Over the course of creating this work, I was able to return to each of these places to shoot a roll of film and collect things from the yard to make cyanotypes with. This was an emotional and cathartic process, and I'm glad I'll have these pieces to hold onto as the memories of the places themselves fade.

Another reason I chose these three places is that it makes the piece a complete autobiography. One is a house that built my mom, another is a house that built my dad, and the last is the house that built me. Through these pieces, I can show where I came from through the lens of place.

Pipsissewa, my first place, is the name of the lake cabin where my mom's family spent the summers growing up. Pipsi, as we call her, is one of two lake cabins I grew up going to, the other called Reflections. Reflections is the home my great-grandfather Dale Walcott built and the home where my mom's family grew up spending their summers, but Pipsissewa is where I stayed growing up. When we visited for a week every summer, my grandparents and aunt would stay in Reflections, but my immediate family and I would stay at Pipsi. Simply put, Reflections is the real family tie, but Pipsi is my personal tie, so I chose to use Pipsi as *the place*.

Pipsissewa is house number 21 on Shadow Lake Road, and it was my refuge. There was no wifi, no tv, no cell service unless you walk a mile up the road, no connection to the outside world. It was glorious. I've always felt at peace in nature, and this was where I could immerse myself in the outdoors with no distractions. The lake was freezing in Vermont, even in August, but we swam until our lips turned blue. There were cobwebs in the cupboards and the stairs were so steep I couldn't get up and down them the one summer I was sixteen and had a broken foot, but there, it didn't matter. When we stayed at Pipsi, I was inspired and I was at peace. I felt connected to myself and the world around me.

Without technological distractions, Pipsissewa was also a place of connection and forging family ties. We all made meals together, read out on the porch together, and played cards from dawn to dusk every day together. There's nowhere else to go, so we were stuck together whether we liked it or not. My dad and brother hated it at Shadow Lake, but I always loved it. In some ways, I understood what they didn't like; everything was old and dirty, the showers and sinks ran lake water, and they didn't love all of the family we stayed with. I felt the same way, but for some reason, the magic of Shadow Lake took over and it didn't matter anymore.

As I grew up and got closer to my mom, I realized Shadow Lake was also a tie to her. I was the only other person in our family who understood her connection to nature and the way she felt when we were there. Our love for life at the lake and its history and simplicity brought us together.

When my grandparents died, the house was up for grabs among my mom and her siblings. I'm not entirely sure how this unfolded, but somehow one of my uncles wound up getting both houses and completely shutting out my mom and the rest of her siblings. It was devastating for them, and for me, to lose such an important place. We are no longer allowed to visit or stay in the cabins we grew up going to. Even getting there over the summer to take a few photos evoked a whole line of family drama. Losing this special location was tragic for all of us, so I wanted to preserve it and my connection to it through this project.

Billingsgate Row represents my dad's side of the story. This is the house he grew up in and the house my grandparents lived in until I was 15 or 16. When I was little, my grandma was my best friend; I was always excited to spend the night at grandma's house. We would gossip about all of the kids in my first grade class (she was a substitute teacher and knew them all) and eat Wockenfuss chocolates while we watched Deal or No Deal. Sounds like a little bit of a weird thing for a six year old to look forward to, but I absolutely loved it.

My grandparents also took care of my brother in this house when he was a baby and my parents had gone back to work. Every weekday for five years, my brother stayed with my grandma and grandpa; this is where they were when they found out my parents (and me, in utero) had been in a life-threatening car accident. My brother basically grew up at this house, and that connection only strengthens my own.

My dad's whole family stayed in the Columbia, MD area, so we always spent Sunday

afternoons and evenings at this house to have dinner and spend time together. We celebrated so many birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays together at this house. We grieved at this house when my great-grandma passed away. We grew together and we grew apart at this house. It was my family's home base and our place to come together in times of celebration and in times of tragedy. No matter what, Sunday night, we were there.

Whitewasher Way was home to my idyllic childhood, pre-divorce. I could say so much about this house, but when it comes down to it, this was home to all of my firsts. This is where I was brought home from the hospital and where I brought my first boyfriend home from high school. My family moved into this house a few months before I was born and moved out when I was 17 – my entire childhood happened here. My very best friend, with whom I was attached at the hip, lived in the house behind mine. The street was full of kids my exact age and the surrounding streets were home to all of my best friends. The elementary school was a three minute walk away; I could walk all the way there without my parents losing sight of me. It was honestly all a kid could ever ask for.

However, this is also where my dad slept in the basement for years, where my mom took off her wedding rings, and where my parents separated and eventually divorced. I was nine or ten years old when my dad moved out. Then, my dad moved back in and my mom moved out. Then, my mom moved again, and one more time after that. Eventually, the time came for my dad to move out. We were on our way home from Belmont preview day when my dad told me we had to move out of the house. He had wanted to stay until I finished high school, but we couldn't afford it anymore. So, it was time to move away from my only constant home, my childhood memories, and all of my best friends. Whitewasher Way will always be home to the most formative years of my life and I miss it every day.

After I narrowed the scope of my project from ten semi-meaningful places to the three most meaningful places, I realized I wasn't left with very much. This is where the cyanotypes and physical artifacts came into play. I had never made a cyanotype before, but they really spoke to me as a means of preservation. I loved the idea of using plants that came from the actual locations- it's like drying out flowers in books and keeping them forever. I have pieces of these places preserved in the form of cyanotypes even though they are places I can no longer go to. The cyanotypes are the most pure and literal preservation, but each one has meaning hidden in its configuration.

One cyanotype piece takes the shape of a bull's eye (fig 1); this represents the generations that were present in my grandma's old house. I was close to my great-grandmother, who is represented by the largest, outside ring. The next circle represents my grandparents, then my dad, then me. Like these circles, generations build on top of each other; we stand on the shoulders of the ones who came before us. The cyanotypes are stuck on a white background, just like the wallpaper that was in the kitchen: white with blue flowers. There are prints of buttercups like we picked in the meadow down the road, pampas grass that grew out front, ivy that climbed the house, and leaves from the front yard.

The lakehouse cyanotype (fig 2) is configured in the shape of the waves the water makes as it laps at the shore. There are six wave shapes to represent the six members of my mom's family: her parents, her three siblings, and herself. This one is on a more rustic, splintered wood to match the ambience of the cabin. There are prints of the actual Pipsissewa plant, the ferns that littered the yard, rocks and sand from the beach, and other plants found near the houses.

The last cyanotype (fig 3) represents my childhood home. It's in the shape of a four by four grid to represent my parents, my brother, and myself. This one is tacked up on a sleek wood

(which the house was full of) and is configured like the message board that hung above the desk in the kitchen. These prints are of items collected from the space between my house and my best friend Sophia's house where we spent all of our time when we were kids and teens.

Where the cyanotypes are literal and the collages are figurative, the physical artifacts serve as a bridge between the two. Some of the artifacts are literal and some represent stories and family ties that were present in their respective places. For example, the lakehouse artifacts (fig 4) include a book my grandmother wrote about the neighborhood, but also a rock the kids used to dive for and some of the bells my grandmother collected. In the collection of artifacts for my grandma's house (fig 5), there's a book my grandpa edited, my great grandmother's bracelet, my grandma's elephant collection, and a pair of shoes my dad wore as a baby. In the collection from my childhood home (fig 6) is a set of baby clothes (mine and my brother's), baby blankets, and the glass that was smashed at my parents' wedding in an engraved acrylic box. Each of these items has a story, and each story is connected to either a person I associate with the place, or the place itself.

The collages tell the stories of each place. Every little sketch, every little line, means something to me. At the beginning, the collages were just going to include new photos I took of each place over the summer, but that was too literal and didn't tell much of a story. Instead, I spent months digging through the archive and finding memories and stories. The collages show that even though these places aren't mine anymore, even though some of the people in them are gone, their stories are still very much alive.

A common motif throughout the collages is plants; each place is connected to certain plants in my head. Some of these plants grew outside, some hung inside, and some are symbolic. For example, in the Shadow Lake collage (fig 7), Pipsissewa is the cabin's namesake and ferns

grew everywhere. In the Whitewasher collage (fig 8), there are tulips and daffodils that grew out front, but also a daisy to represent the birth flower of April, the month my brother and I were both born. The Billingsgate collage (fig 9) shows the petunias that hung from the rail of the deck as well as the forsythia that we saw on our walks through the neighborhood.

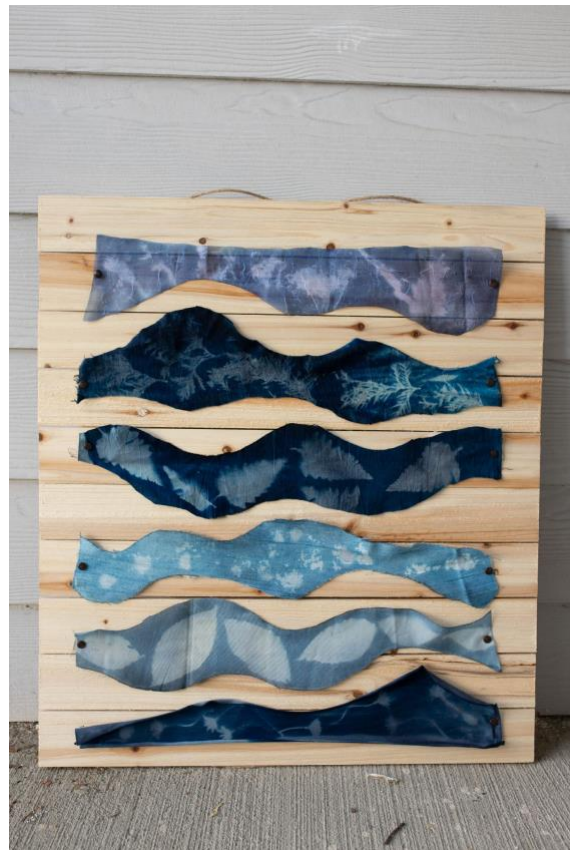
There are stories embedded in every little sketch on every collage. These collages are the “if these walls could talk” moment. There are songs we sang, common quips, and plenty of friendly faces. Each collage shows that these places were thoroughly lived in and loved in.

In short, the cyanotypes connect to the literal place, the artifacts connect to specific memories from each place, and the collages tell the story of each place. I originally wanted to put the collages inside the faces of self-portraits to show that these places have made me who I am, but I realized I didn’t need to add that layer in order for the viewer to make that connection. I think it’s obvious these places meant a lot to me, as I’ve been working on telling their stories for over a year. There was a lot of talk early on in this project about making sure things don’t get too literal – I think taking out the self-portraits was a big step in staying conceptual.

As I worked on this project, I told someone I wanted the collages to feel like listening to Taylor Swift’s “All Too Well” (10 minute version, Taylor’s version, obviously). In this song (and many of her others), she cites details that are specific to her situation, details that nobody else would have in their own stories. These details *should* alienate her story and make it less relatable, but instead, it leads us to find our own details in our own stories. The words I wrote are specific to my experiences, but I want them to inspire the viewer to think about common phrases from their places, from their memories. The plants I drew probably don’t mean anything to anyone else, but certain plants might. I don’t think I need to share the story behind every single one of my details, because the important thing is that they remind you of your own.

This project became my goodbye to these places, a way to memorialize them forever. Through this work, I realized that I am deeply afraid of loss; that's what draws me to photography. The photograph is a way to keep our memories alive; the photograph transcends time. As I begin to build my own photography business, my slogan is "let's make this moment last forever," because that's what photography is all about to me. Feelings are fleeting, memories are ephemeral, but photographs are permanent, something solid we can hold close when everything else slips away. Without this project, or if it had gone the way I had originally planned, I would have never realized that, to me, photography is permanence. In a world where loss and grief are inevitable, photography can keep our places, our loved ones, our stories, alive a little longer.

Appendix









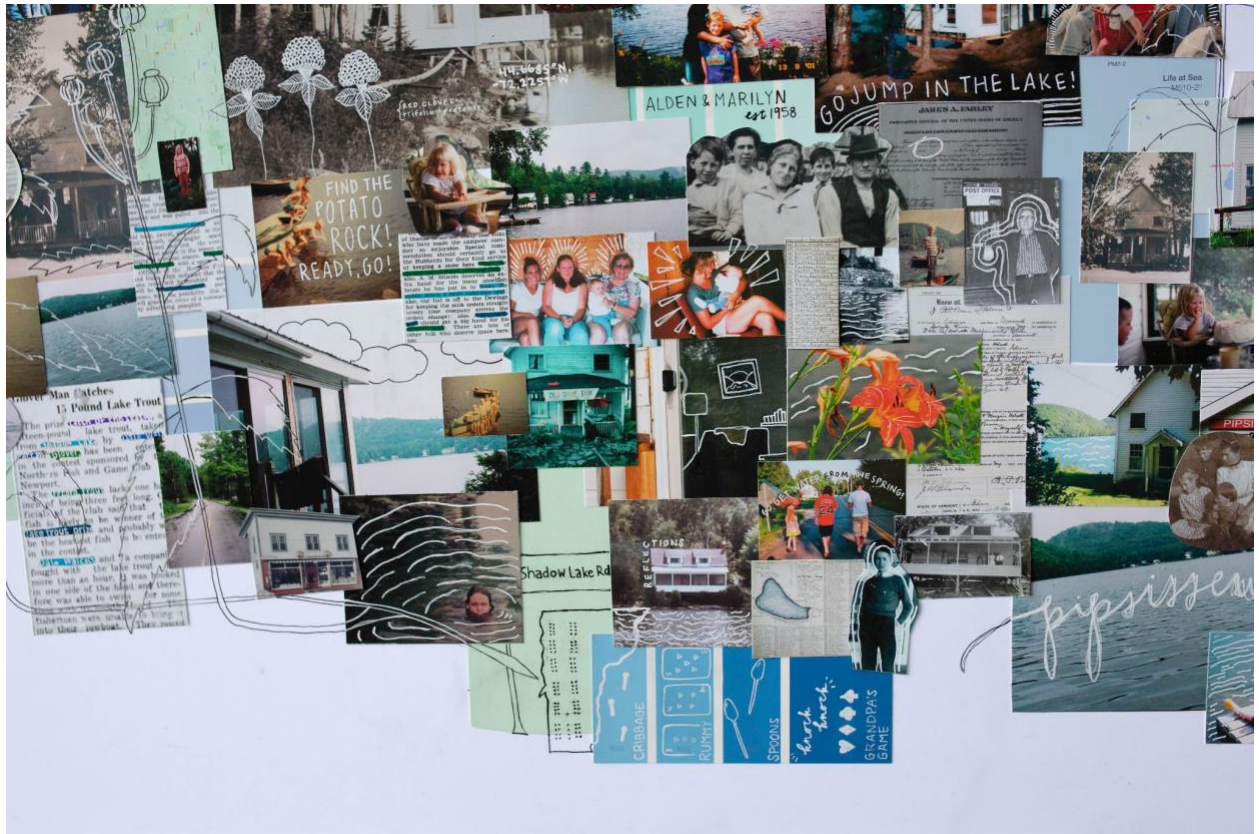


Additional Detail Shots













10326



When celebrating a special day
"the big plans" but not "the
"because it is so close."
"because" were used a "long
of your celebration because it gives you
from your friends.
but you have made your
the "big day" is a very
moment of a year."
the old wonderful memories
and shared you all with
individuals to be thank
and to get around. In the
and they were with you
the love, they



MAGGIE DOG



The birthday
Wife



The Birthday Wife



DAFFODIL
MARCH 15, 2015





10326

Columbia, Maryland

MICHELLE 30g

MCMXLIV MCMXCIV MM

2003

WHITEWASHER

1964
1994
2000

born as a boy brother
2000

SOPHIE'S 1st
TRIM 6-19-01
182 mins

410-740-4995

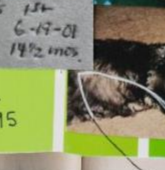
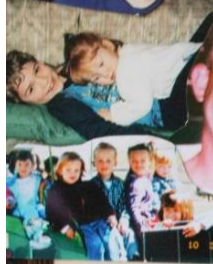
SOPHIE
Alicia
Rebecca
Stephanie
Jesse
Sophie
Michelle
Jeffrey
Michelle

SO
SO
HA
HA

Columbia, Maryland



Congratulations!
My Name: Te Lash Room:
Sex: F My Birthday: 1/16/02 Time: 07:28
Birth Weight: 7 lb. 8 oz. Length: 22 1/2 Head: 13 1/2 Chest:
Mother's Doctor: Richard's
My Doctor: CMC



7/23 '01
Well, we've got some catching up to do. Ben's actually the one who was at 2000 feet or so on Wright's walking. Daddy & Ben are back in Daddy at work - you seem to be getting hooked up the plane.
Quite a bit has happened since first Ben's arrival yesterday. I found a message I wrote close to three years ago saying we were thinking about another child & Ben would be almost 3 by the time it was born. The best part was Ben was one, three years later and Ben would be just shy of six when you arrive. So here you are, a wonderful, precious child. Daddy & I went through it all to get where we are today.

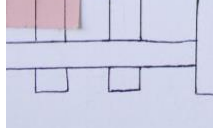
1964
1994
2000



SOPHIE
Alison
Rebecca
Stephanie
Morgan
Michelle
Julianne
Johanna

410-740-4995

SOPHIE ROSE,
SOPHIE ROSE,
HAS TEN FINGERS,
HASTEN TOES ♡





FRUITINA
[scribble]

October 31

Dear Love,
Honey, you, again—Charlie gave us the message of the season this morning—mumukshu will be in town soon. I like a victory dance to the high heaven. He likes you in summer shirt sleeves. It feels like I'm in a gentle breeze and I can feel the sun on my face. But the breeze here goes strong, it blows into my face, and I can feel the sun on my face. I'm in a gentle breeze and I can feel the sun on my face. I'm in a gentle breeze and I can feel the sun on my face.

Walking now in a noisy corridor, the door is open and I walked the other way. I'm in a gentle breeze and I can feel the sun on my face. I'm in a gentle breeze and I can feel the sun on my face. I'm in a gentle breeze and I can feel the sun on my face.

I promise that by the time you get this you will be well into heaven and will have much to report. I am alone, I am alone, I am alone. I am alone, I am alone, I am alone. I am alone, I am alone, I am alone.

Not all
to see
brother
father
but all

There is a
small
thing
about
you
that I've
never
before
—my
mind
is
filled
with
you
and
I
want
to
share
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I'm about that, my year is ending. I'm about that, my year is ending. I'm about that, my year is ending. I'm about that, my year is ending. I'm about that, my year is ending.

of course, there is the election. I'm about that, my year is ending. I'm about that, my year is ending. I'm about that, my year is ending. I'm about that, my year is ending.

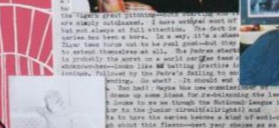
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Chief & Toots

Miss Coburger is in her 80th year at Weequahic High and is employed in the office of Roskitch, Kronisch, & Mandell, Mr. Lasher, High



...and to think that the right time for the party was not to be in a significant sense. The party was not to be in a significant sense. The party was not to be in a significant sense. The party was not to be in a significant sense.



10923



Reva Co Engage

EST 196

BILLINGS GATE

happy
birth
year

happy
birth
year

happy
birth
year

happy
birth
year



1963-3
Porcelain Peach
PP14-17
1972



1972

...on the evening scene, but clear to look, Peter got a...
...1970 while at Laurel the other day and while you...
...were in the 11th grade, he also did some business...
...with Billie Ann Traylor and the pretty well.



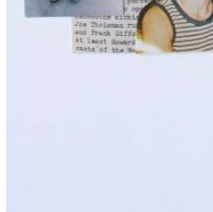
Chief & Toots
Miss Coburger is in the senior bar at Weequahic High and is employed in the law of Roskein, Kronisch, Felzen Mandell, Mr. Lasher High



...of their daughter Lawrence M. Lasher, son of Walter Heineman of Bo and Abe Lasher of Avenue wedding is planned. Miss Coburger is in her senior at Weequahic High School and is employed in the law of Roskein, Kronisch, Felzen Mandell, Mr. Lasher, a graduate of Weequahic High School University, is a graduate school at Maryland.

Reva Coburger Engaged to Wed

...to be very happy...
...to be very happy...
...to be very happy...



1

and Papa to examine
ling tickets and comments on your derby party
I card (other with's here also mentioned it with
Miss) Carl collecting tickets and getting also
outdoors. Don'ts ever-legal and without air to
at the door of the portable toilet resident in
air. Each in Little Brown Girl - real good
filler based on Mr. Lasher's book - strength of the film
our performance had.

to have, Peter did
to other and whose you
also the one business
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Miss Cabinger is in her
year at Weopah High Se
and is employed in the law of
of Rosen, Kronish, Felten
& Mandell. Mr. Lasher, a
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to Lawrence M. Lasher, son of
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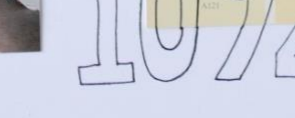
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of Bergen



SIT BY THE FIREPLACE

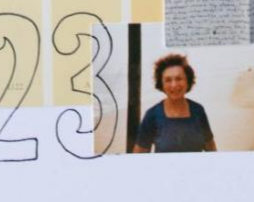
and Papa to examine
ling tickets and comments on your derby party
I card (other with's here also mentioned it with
Miss) Carl collecting tickets and getting also
outdoors. Don'ts ever-legal and without air to
at the door of the portable toilet resident in
air. Each in Little Brown Girl - real good
filler based on Mr. Lasher's book - strength of the film
our performance had.

to have, Peter did
to other and whose you
also the one business
party will.

Miss Cabinger is in her
year at Weopah High Se
and is employed in the law of
of Rosen, Kronish, Felten
& Mandell. Mr. Lasher, a
of Weopah High ar
University, is
graduate school at
of Maryland.

of Stecher St. announce the en-
gagement of their daughter Reva
to Lawrence M. Lasher, son of
of Bergen

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