

# Convicted at Six

A brief memoir

Pat Alvarado

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1. MEMOIRS I. Title.

Names have not been changed to protect the guilty.

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## Petunia, the flower not the pig!

Momma had nicknames for all of us. The boys were Chach, Jimbo and Judy Babe, and the girls were Petunia, Prunella and Penelope – in that order, the order of our gender birth. I was Petunia. Actually Penelope and Judy Babe were the last two, and six years separated them from the first group. By the time Penelope came along, we had a television set and a victrola so they did not listen to cartoons on the radio with the rest of us.

With no TV or record player, the radio was our rainy day entertainment and connection to the outside world. Such programs as *The Shadow*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Looney Tunes* molded and shaped our little minds into the paragons of intelligence that we are today. All of us would lie on the wooden floor in the glassed-in porch, weather permitting (that means it had to be raining, freezing cold or both, or else we had to play outside), and tune in to whatever program was on. Chach or Jimbo would twist the dial to line up the red bar to the station. That was usually the little boys' job. They were older than us – the little girls – so they knew about those complicated things.

As the music would build, we entered another

world – one of make believe and talking bunnies. My favorite, of course, was *Looney Tunes*, especially Bugs Bunny, whose practical wisdom has guided me through the trials and tribulations of grown-up hood.

It was a given that no one would speak during the programs, but on this particular day in question, my brother Jimbo broke that rule. We were listening to Porky Pig, trying to translate his mumbo jumbo accent when Petunia, his girl friend, came on. And that was it. Jimbo took the cue and from that moment on, I was Petunia the Pig!

"I am not a pig!" I shouted.

"Petunia Pig, Petunia Pig!" Jimbo mimicked.

"I'm not a pig!" I shouted back.

"You're a pig! You're a pig!"

Back and forth, back and forth until Momma came out of the kitchen and turned the radio off.

I cried and cried and cried. Pigs were not my thing. I did not like pigs. They smelled. They weren't dainty. They weren't feminine. Not that I was any of those things. I was four. It was the principle of the thing. I did not want to be a pig, pure and simple. Momma tried to console me. She said, "A petunia is a flower. You're a beautiful little petunia."

To no avail. Jimbo's refrain taunted and haunted me throughout my childhood. To this day, I still clarify that I am Petunia, the flower not the pig!