

**Some Letters from Mom**  
**written in the years 1992-1995**

(Letter No. 1)

April 24, 1992.

Dear family,

Time for another computer lesson. This time I had Dad watch me as I got started and then let him go on an errand. Hopefully I will not paint myself into a corner and not get out.

Part of my problem comes in forgetting what I have learned as it is too far between uses of the computer. If I did this everyday until I got it, I probably could get the hang of it and not be so dependent upon additional help. Either I should write a book or more letters to get the extra experience.

From time to time I have heard from you children that you would like to know more of my earlier years and that I should get it down on paper. How about my trying a little bit of that in this letter.

As the Lone Ranger used to say, "Let me take you back to the yesteryear" and fill you in with some of my adventures and mis-adventures. You will remember that I go back a very long way--- to the beginning of the twenties when the country was not sophisticated. I guess motorcars existed, but in my world, I was not aware of it. I was brought up without indoor plumbing and the only water supply to the house was a pump in the kitchen. It didn't seem odd. It was the way it was and we accepted without questioning. We had an outhouse in the farthest corner of the yard and the weekly bath was had in a round laundry tub which was set upon 2 chairs. Water was heated on an old wood-coal burning stove in the room and, of course, in the same water except for a small addition of fresh stuff from the kettle upon the stove. We all fought to be first and usually the girls went before the boys. You may remember that Dad had a big kitchen and it was more like a family room as most of the living went on within it--- even to the bathing. There was a door which led to the dining room so that when baths were taken the only privacy came with shutting the door. The girls would hold a towel for each other to protect our modesty. There were two outdoor entries so it was not too uncommon for someone to enter by these doors while you were at bath. One time an uncle came in and I remember to this day how embarrassed I was! Dad told me we were the very first in the block to get power and plumbing. The power was first although I do have some vague recollection of Mom heating an iron on the stove to iron shirts. Maybe we just could not afford an iron. I really don't know and that seems plausible. With 10 people to support on a butcher's wages you didn't go out and buy things even when you do need them. You make do with what you have.

Some of my earliest recollections have to do with Dad and the meat market. We had no refrigeration so that everyday meant you went to the store and butcher shop. Fortunately that was only 2 blocks away. Everyday I would be sent to the market for a pound of pork and a pound of beef. It was uncanny to me that Dad could be so accurate in judging weights. He would slice it, when it seemed like a pound he would put it on the scale and sure enough it would weigh the 16 ounces! So I would trot home and Mom would fix the meat the same way everyday---sauted with onions, water, salt and pepper. There were huge mounds of potatoes and cabbage. We seldom had a dessert except on Sunday when we were treated to cream pie and at Xmas and Easter Polish coffeecake.

Know that my love for each of you is sincere and deep.

Always yours,

*(Letter No. 2)*

*Next day, the 25th.*

Strike when the iron is hot! To keep the computer information in my mind, I figure practice will be an asset so-----

Back to the days of yore! The old homestead was a cold place in the winter and hot summers. In those early years we did not have storm windows, no insulation at all, a pot-bellied stove in the dining room which was supposed to keep the front part of the house warm. We did get a furnace put in when I was 5 or 6 in a room next to the kitchen and we aptly called it the "furnace room". It was also used as a pantry as in the earlier days we had very little cupboard space in the kitchen. There was also a trap door in the flooring which opened into our potato bin. Dad had fashioned some large box as a cool cellar and there we kept the 40 or so bushels of potatoes that were bought in the fall when they were cheap. Another commodity, coal, was stored in a bin in the garage. This was purchased a couple tons at a time for the lack of space and money. I remember waking very cold mornings long before Dad got up to build a fire and would cuddle next to the sister I slept with for shared warmth. No one had a bed to oneself as we had but 4 bedrooms. There were 2 double beds upstairs in each room (2 up there) and a double and a single in the room off the dining room. Mom and Dad had the front room off the living room. The oldest girl home got to sleep in the single bed. It would be so cold those mornings that you just had to stay in bed. It was too cold to sleep and I would conjure up stories of how it would be when I got rich and famous. How I would amass this wealth, I never determined--but it would happen. I loved these day dreams and they were a part of my life for a long time. Even now when I have problems sleeping (and not from cold!) my mind is active with plans of how am going to change things about the house of garden. I make myself very comfortable on my side, prop a pillow under one knee and dream away.

There is a story in connection with that potato bin that I will share with you. Dad had no basement beneath his house. There was crawl space and little else. The house was supported, of course, but basically there was nothing but earth below the main flooring. These are days before garbage collection and we would bury our refuse in the ground. In the winter it would be too cold so that a container was placed in the "basement" which of course would attract rats. If they could not get into the container, they would smell the potatoes and gnaw hole in the wood box and have their feasts. Dad used to nail tin around the bin but the rats found that no challenge at all. One of the things that I had to do was get the potatoes for meals. When the bin was full, it was easy. In the spring when the supply was low, it meant you had to crawl in and find the illusive potatoes. Some of the spuds would have rat bites in them so that I lived in fear that one or more rats were in the bin with me. I shiver just remembering those trying times. There were few chores I hated more than that one!

One of the fun things I remember about the cold house was that jack frost painted

our widows and made beautiful patterns and it was amusing to fancy shapes and forms. Sunday mornings we were given pennies (for church) and I would press them against the frost and make holes to see the outside world. In later years when the older kids got jobs, one of the first things gotten were storms for the windows and that was the end of the fun. Hang that the house was warmer---not warm, but warmer--- as the adventure was gone. The house didn't get some insulation until Don died and his insurance money covered the cost of insulation and new support posts.

The snaps you have seen of the old homestead do not show the house as it was when I was born. The porch to the side of the house was not there and a long narrow porch ran the length of the front of the house and down to the kitchen area. This porch provided us with sleeping places in the hottest weather. Without insulation the attic and upstairs was so hot you could not sleep so that we laid our blankets on the porch and slept there. The closed in porch was added some years after when oldest brother Pinky did well in business (repairing radios) and had the house painted (never had a coat before) and the porch added. It was years later that the siding was put over the paint. When I was little, we had no lawn---which was understandable. How can you keep a lawn alive with 10 kids and friends using the yard as a playground? Another of my chores was to sweep the earth (it was like cement with all the traffic) in the front yard on Saturday afternoon so that the yard was presentable for Sunday and people walking to Mass in front of our house. In later years (after Pinky put some class into our yard with paint and porch) we had a good lawn and Mom loved working in the garden. She took great pride in her work and had wonderful results. When we were old enough to take over the house (including the cooking), she spent most of her time outside working among her flowers. She had wonderful results with roses and they were her pride and joy. Surely I got my love for outside work from her. Dad did a lot of the spading late spring and then Mom took over.

Well, you know a lot about my environment and a lot less of who I am as a person. Sharing this kind of intimacy is difficult as I would be more inclined to skip over the parts unflattering to myself. I'll give this some thought and just perhaps may share some of that Lee/Mom with you. Time will tell. I thought I knew my Mom pretty well but I often wonder if I really knew her at all. As a mature adult (I hope and pray) I am concerned that perhaps I have been judgmental. Mom and Dad had tough lives and they did the best they could to raise us. Neither had an education beyond the 3rd grade and yet they nurtured us and we did fairly well in life. And look what is happening to their grandchildren and great grandchildren. From humble beginnings great oaks grow!

Will stop here. Love you much!

*(Letter No. 3)*

*Monday, May 11, 1992*

Dear family,

Thank you for the phone calls yesterday. I felt loved and supported; I am proud of each of you. Dad gave me the day off so it was a very relaxing day off as well. He was really proud of himself in the dinner he and Unk Lou set before us---Pen and me! They both grinned with satisfaction when we congratulated them on the efficiency, presentation, and taste of the meal. It was good! And yes, we no dummies, so next year we may get the

same treatment.

Your encouragement about recording my history encourages me to write on. Today I thought that I would write about the great depression and how it effected us. From birth on it seemed we were a depressed people as with Dad's small salary and so many children, we were always in want! The country was in the roaring twenties when I came along and supposedly everyone was on top of the world. I had 6 living siblings ahead of me so the house was already pretty full. It was nice being the 7th as I got close to my older brothers and sisters and yet have a lot of rapport with the younger ones too. I was sandwiches in between 2 brothers (Don and Dick) and there was 6 years difference between Gee and me. I got to do all the boy things! Sometimes I was used as a football (I got tackled a lot) and was used in the outfield in our baseball games. I was the family "tomboy" and had a hard time living down that idea. Many was the time I would hear from my parents and siblings that I was a tomboy and I got so that I was proud of it. Then I discovered the term as was used in a derogatory sense and I resented it very much. It is hard to deal bring that image up---not that I did not deserve that name. I really did do all the boy things and played with them a lot. You will remember that the railroad track was very close to where we lived and the area next to it was our playing field. By the middle of summer, the grass would be overgrown and that was the time to hide-and-seek and get mosquito bitten. I remember counting hundreds on my legs. We used smudge pots (a tin can filled with rags that you kept smoking) to deter the bugs. The fun thing was to put strings on the can so that you could make circles with it over your head and keep the rags smoking. The bugs found us anyway!

When the banks failed, we had no account to fret about and I don't remember that our neighborhood bank went out of business. In much later years when Mom got half of Don's insurance money, it was put into that bank and Mom had her first account. The loss of jobs among the Poles was extensive as with no buying productivity ceased too. Most Bay Citians were employed in the near coal mines, sugar beet industry, and some manufacturing of auto parts. When Dad lost his job, that was the end of meat in our diet every day. Now it was depression soup (a mixture of oatmeal, onions, water and salt and pepper). Mom did a lot of canning in the fall so that we had canned foods (whatever the boys could beg off the farmers just before they left the market on Saturday morning) and she made sauerkraut. We would have a barrel of it in the attic every winter. The boys and the old rusty wagon brought home many cabbages once the frost hit us. The market was about a mile and a half from where we lived. Don and Ernie were usually the beggars and brought many tomatoes back with them. Those were easy to get as the farmers could do little about saving ripe tomatoes. We had a pear tree and Mom canned wonderful pickled pears. Busia Janowicz had a plum tree and would share those with us and Mom would preserve those. And where did all that sugar come from you might ask? Well, that was one commodity that welfare gave us and Mom used it wisely. In the winter when the canning was over, we would take the allotted sugar and make judge!

Going on welfare was a shaming experience for our family! In those days there was no money given that I knew of but surplus food, some clothing, and even a mattress now and again if you had an overwhelming need. I remember Dad taking that trusty, rusty wagon to the fire station early Friday mornings to pick up the food. We could depend upon sugar, unbleached flour, sometimes peanut butter, canned beef from Argentina, and GRAPEFRUIT from Florida which was a treat for us.

We had to have some cash, of course, and most of this was earned by Mom who took in washings and ironings. We kids would take that wagon and fetch it. In the winter we used a sleigh and had to tie it down to prevent accidents. Sometimes this meant going a couple of miles each way and it was Don and I who did most of the transporting. I told you Al became a baker's helper and he earned a modest sum and we were allowed to buy yeast for a nickel with which to make our bread. The unemployed Dad did that as Mom was busy with the washings. One of the most pleasant memories of those days is coming home from school and finding the house filled with the fragrance of freshly baked bread! Never mind that this was unbleached flour (we now know that was healthier for us) as it smelled just wonderful. Fact is neighbors would appear at the door and want some too. We had no butter or oleo (could not afford same) so instead for a few pennies you could buy from the meat market fat-back from pigs and Mom would melt that down and what we then had was lard and bread. You flavored it up with a little salt and ate away. My Mom loved fat! No wonder she had a cholesterol problem and high blood pressure. Milk was too costly so that we were brought up on coffee. It was very cheap in those days--- a mere 39 cents for 3 pounds at the AP which again meant a 2 mile walk each way. As you may assume, I did a lot of walking and that is probably why I now have good bone structure and pretty good health.

And how did we keep warm? I'm hazy here but I do believe welfare gave us some coal but not enough to keep our drafty house warm. We are not proud of this, but we stole some from the trains that would pass near us. A few blocks to the east of us the train had to slow down to make a turn and the older boys would hop atop the coal cars and when they would get within blocks of our house, they would toss coal off as fast as they could. When the train would slow down, they hopped off and gathered their booty in burlap bags and carried them home. Sometimes eager neighbors got there before us and helped themselves. Things got so bad at times that the boys would hop a night train and go out early to pick it up. In desperate times you do desperate things to provide for your family. The begging and stealing stopped as soon as money started to flow into our house, of course. Being on welfare made us feel like thieves, too, and made us feel as last class citizens. It is awful to feel that dependent upon society. It is shame of the worst kind and you seemed to lose pride. To look people in the eyes was a hard thing to do. Lots of people were on welfare but because it was common it did not make it any easier so you pretended it was not so. Dad would cover the wagon with the surplus food, for example, to try to hide the fact.

Canning days will live with us always. When we got home from school in the fall we would find Mom busy with the canning. Often we were helpers; washing the jars, scalded the tomatoes for skinning (first washing them) and helping to pack them in 2 quart jars. These were the days prior to the present porch so that the screen door affixed was direct entry into the house. Thousands of flies affix themselves to the screen so that you had to shoo them away before you entered. This only meant fewer flies came in but loads made it in. We used a lot of Flytox and sticky paper to help control them but there was always a bunch that had to be swatted. I remember well Dad's evening job of waiting for the flies to settle down and then swat away at the ceiling. It took a long time as when he hit one, many would scatter and he would wait for a lull. My ears hear it now "bang! bang!" as I recall the event. When canning was being done, there was little time for anything else. It all tasted very good in the winter and we were happy we had the food.

Unlike the Little Red Hen who could find no helpers, there was no such thing as saying "not I" to Mom. We did as we were told! Once the canning season was over and the baking bread smell filled the house, we did have our rewards! Al used to bring left over bread to fill our bellies when canning was being done. The bleached flour bread tasted mighty good to us! With lard as the spread, however, something was missing and we ate less of it.

We worked hard with Mom those days and once in a while we got a nickel to spend. What a treat! This always was a Sunday treat. You could go to the corner drugstore and get a variety pack of candy. Some candy came 3 or 4 for a penny so a nickel went a long way---or you could get a Holloway sucker (a chocolate-caramel confection) which could last the afternoon if you nursed it along. That was usually my choice. Dick and I would take the confection in hand, follow the railroad track to the cemetery and water relatives graves. We often would water graves that looked uncared for and dry. (Maybe this has some bearing on why I am a path and creek cleaner to this day!) Then there was the long walk home again but it sure beat staying home and doing nothing.

Long about this time we almost lost our house to unpaid taxes. Where were we to get money? With no real source of income, what bank were there were not giving to poor risks---and we sure filled that definition. A lot of people were in the same boat so there were others with the same sad story. Those few with money cleaned up buying properties, holding them to resell when conditions improved. Ours was up on the "chopping block" (so to speak) and a placard was affixed to the house to be sold auction. We were so ashamed that somehow the notice got all splashed with mud so no one could see it. This was done to try to save face, of course, and we fooled no one but ourselves. I don't know how but somehow Busia Janowicz lent us the money to pay the darn taxes and we were years paying her back dollar by dollar. So there was a happy ending to that story.

Believe it or not, there is still more about the depression that I can share with you---if you are interested. I must be shattering your ideals (if you had any about me) as to what went on in my life. These early years were tough and there was no denying it. I can attest to things getting better and looking back, I can almost believe it all as truth---but not quite. It seems like it happened to someone else or that I dreamed it all. My life today is so different and I look to a happy ending---God willing. More another time.

Much love,

*(Letter No. 4)*

*Wednesday, May 20, 1992.*

Dear family,

Ready for another epistle? Es and I went to Bay City yesterday to visit Helen and also visited cousin of ours. She is a daughter of my Dad's half brother and 82. She gave me a lot of family history which I will save for a later time. I want to see my sister Edith and get from her what she remembers. She (this Alice) tells me there were 7 siblings with the first Mom and 3 with the second. The story told to me yesterday said that my Dad's mother was adopted into the family and when his wife died, he married her! She was like

40 years younger and the youngest (one below my Dad) was born when he was 74 years old! I was told that Dzia-dzia Z came over to America first with some of the older kids and when he had enough money saved, the second half of the family came over. I did get names and as soon as I'm relatively sure my information is correct, I'll send on the family tree. Get this! Those 7 first siblings had between 10 and 13 children each! No wonder there are so many Zielinskis in the phone book. The Polish apparently are a prolific lot!

Today I thought I would share with you some of my earliest memories in life. I do remember my first day in school but nothing before that and the only reason I remember that is because it had to do with my first lie. I had a new dress (probably the first in life as all the cast downs were worn by each of us) and I told my Mom the teacher said that it was the prettiest dress she had ever seen. She said absolutely nothing like that but when Mom asked how things went, I told that lie. It haunts me to this day. Why else would I remember?

Kindergarten I spent in the public school. We had crayons and paper and I was in my glory. We never had anything other than penny pencils and tablet paper at home---and not much of that. First and second grade I spent at St. Stan. You had to for preparing for communion. You were supposed to pay tuition (25 cents each marking period) or you did not get your report card. We did not have the money! I could not turn in my card for the next marking period. When the next report came out, I would sneak mine from the desk and pretend that I had just gotten it. Here I was a Z, the very last letter and I believed no one would notice! How humiliating! Was I surprised at the end of the school year when my name was called to give the final report and promotion to the next grade! Somebody up there loved me! Lucky for me I had books from my siblings or I would have been minus books, too. We had to supply pencil and paper and I was constantly borrowing from other children. Back to public school from then on where books and paper were free. Pencils you had to provide for yourself so I was borrowing again.

Are you shouting, "How poor were you?" Poor enough so that none of us had warm enough clothes, boots or mittens to wear in that cold. When shoes needed resoling, you put cardboard or newspaper in them. I remember my 4th grade teacher bought me a pair of shoes once---beautiful ones, not practical but very pretty in patent leather. Good ole Miss Green!

Mom had a poor understanding about a lot of things. We were supposed to read library books but she would not allow us to have cards. Finally I went behind her back and got one and hid the books. When you read a book, you gave a report aloud. I used to give the same book, the same part someone else did until one time the teacher said that she was tired of hearing the same part of the story and, of course, not knowing the book, I said words to the effect that I wouldn't remember any other part. That was when I defied my Mom and got the card. She said that I could not belong to scouts or girl reserves because they were not for Catholics. I don't know how my siblings managed to get around Mom as we all had the same rules. Mom got interested in the PTA and attended meetings so she must have learned that library cards and school activity was good for you so I did not have to sneak around anymore. I was an avid reader and frequented the library. In those days you could only take 4 books out and I went through those quickly. The library was a good mile and a half away and I devised a system; walk a block, skip a block, and run one. That got me there a lot quicker. Summer days, I would walk as a form of recreation. Most of the girls I went with then, had little interest in reading so that I usually did this alone.



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When I was in the 6th grade, I won a contest! We were studying teeth and the project had to do with writing a play, poem, or whatever. This was a city wide affair and I got 1st prize! I wrote a play about Mr. Tooth Decay and stressed the importance of brushing. For this I got a whole \$2 and one of it I was allowed to keep. I remember going to town and buying a dress-----yes, you could get one for a dollar in those days. The school was pretty proud and we had a special assembly in which I became aware that I was the big winner. Boy was I proud! For once I did not feel like a second class citizen. Best of all, the teachers took notice of me and gave me special things to do. My marks were good so that I often helped kids less endowed. I skipped the rest of 6th grade and was promoted to 7B (half year) and as a result I graduated in January instead of June when I finished high school. Math and grammar came very easily to me and that made a big difference in my attitude toward life. It is hard to live down being poor but you don't have to put pride in your pocket if others take notice and ask you for help. Boy, what an ego boost!

Two things I must share with you before I leave those early days. One had to do with making soap and the other with Edith's bribery to get me to go with her to the outside toilet at night. Edie got married when I was 10 so I must have been very young. Anyway she was afraid to go herself so she would tell me that if I went with her, she would tell me about Xmas and how we would have a big tree and presents. (Actually we didn't have that tree until Es got to work and boy! was that a celebration!) I fell for it every time. What child is not fascinated with Xmas? I loved hearing about it even if it didn't materialize. We had no light outside so we would crumple and twist a newspaper and light it when we got to the outhouse. This meant you had to do your business in a hurry or you soon were in the dark. I was rather fascinated by the dark and wanted all the story I could get. Edie would want to come in as soon as possible.

Mom made our soap. You may know that soap is made of lye and lard. We had a big copper kettle that used to heat our wash water atop the wood stove. For making soap, about one third of the kettle was filled with water, large chunks of fat were added and then when this melted down, a can of lye was added. The mixture was stirred with a large wooden paddle many times while this mess cooked. I don't know how long Mom cooked it, but it had to cool gradually and the soap would float to the top. When the stuff was solid, she would cut it in square, lift it out and put it in a box. There always was a liquid residue at the bottom that must have been poured down the outdoor toilet. With that much lye in the formula, I presume there was a caustic residue which had to be removed carefully. What better place than an outdoor, smelly toilet, eh? Mom made soap for many years. Dad having worked in the meat market, could have lots of discarded fat so it was a cheap way to do. It was laundry soap but we used it to wash ourselves and even brush our teeth. Who could afford tooth paste?

Been a few interruptions with this letter so I am not sure how coordinated I am in the text. Now it's time to get dinner so there will be more at a later time. Next I could go into junior and senior high school days. It was vastly different than you kids experienced, for sure!

Dad and I send our love,

(Letter No. 5)

Thursday, May 28, 1992.

Dear family,

Here I go again! You are making your mother very happy with the prospects of "coming home" for visits. Jim, Teri (at very long last and the very last of you to see our new home) and Mary all talk of a coming with their families---well, Mary has not committed John but she and Margo plan to be if they can find cheap transportation. Worry not, Teri, about your dogs and a kennel. It would be much too expensive but you may have to tether them. We have a big yard but it is only half fenced in and they may take to the woods on their own. We do have lots of places for them to stretch their legs for walks. We abound in play areas and woods. You and they will like it. We do have lakes so maybe they may even get a swim. We have a wild area of trees right in our own back yard---not huge, but the dogs should like that as it will be cool most parts of the day. Come and see! We have extra beds to set up so we can put up 8 people without crowding. Thank goodness for 2 bathrooms. For me, this is like looking forward to Xmas! 'Ye all come!

You children are receptive about hearing of my past. Pen and I talked about those days and she has no interest at all sharing that with her offspring. My recall is that you wanted to hear about the past and encouraged me to write on. Say "Uncle" when you have had enough! Dad is working on his bio, too, and maybe before too long, you'll get his sharing. You know your dad; it is being gone over and over so that it meets his specifications and won't let it go before then. As you know, he can share only who he is and likewise for me. I tend to be impulsive and go "with the flow" and share who I am. Dad did say to me yesterday that he thought perhaps the way I go at it is not bad. Once I write and send it on, there is no revision and it's gone!

To resume my story: during the greatest part of the depression, I was in junior and senior high school. By now I was used to doing without and it did not seem that big a deal. It helped to know that a lot of others were in the same boat, but as I said before, it did not take the sting away. I rationalized that had I the proper clothes, life would have been easier on me and that I would have been prettier. I had a very poor self image. I told myself that I was a really nice person (was and am!) but with beauty, I would register 2 on a scale of 10. Remorsefully, I never heard from my parents or siblings that I was special. We were treated as a group instead of individuals. With that many kids I now know that it must of been hard for my parents to do for us the things that had to be done and not concentrate on individuals. My parents had no pets; we were all treated alike. We had our own ways dealing with the situation. Mine was to hide my feelings from others so I talked very little. I became a listener and people liked that. Actually, I felt that I had very little to contribute that would be of any value to anyone. I still have a lot of that within me. Having you children want to know more about ME has been an ego boost! My mind is filled with the many times you, my family, would sit around the table eating and discussing subjects that I never felt I was contributing to. You were all so eager and willing to take over and so my sharing came with listening. You may not have noticed, but I did treat you as a family---but I did listen to your needs. You all had the same rules but there were times when I had to listen your needs. But, I digress; I am good at that as you well know.

Junior high (8 and 9th grades) was in a special building about a mile and a half from home. We always had our dinner at noon so we hurried home to the meal. Walking with

friends, the time passed pleasantly. I had some very good teachers and the subjects were interesting and I did well. I had a cooking class in the 8th grade that really turned me on to foods. I was making stuff that I had never heard of and brought my knowledge home with me. Mom, recognizing that I could cook, let me take over in the kitchen. Remember my telling you that I have been cooking since the 8th grade? This is how it all started. The noon meal (dinner) was prepared by Mom but suppers became my job. Most of the things that I made at school were not possible at home, but I did introduce new things. Es started with scalloped potatoes (prior to that it was always boiled---not even mashed) when she had the same class 7 years ahead of me. We even had a cake with frosting once in a while when Es baked. Al would bring home an egg or two when supplies were short as part of his salary. Ernie and Don worked summers in the beet fields and some of their reward came in eggs. These, in turn, were sold for cash so we did have real money---not a lot but cash to buy shoes for school and a few other things in need. Some summers the family was out in the beets fields---sort of, local migrant workers. We took the bus to the fields Monday morning carrying some food stuffs with us and stayed to Friday night when we would make the trip home. We lived in what to me was like a train caboose; bunk beds, a stove, outhouse, and a table with chairs. The oldest kids were home with Dad who sometimes found a weekend job at a meat market. Edith was then working at the knitting mill, Pinky was at radio school, and Al at the bakery. The rest of us were kept busy at the farm working the fields. Dick was probably the youngest at the time. We each had our jobs and we did them without question. When the beets were harvested, we (the family) got paid. That was not until October, so we would begin school after it had already started and it was heck catching up. This went on just a few years as the pay for the work did not give the profit we hoped for so that idea was abandoned.

Music (singing) and cooking were my favorite subjects in junior high as I learned to cook and sing and that filled a void in my life. Es had a couple years of piano lessons from one of the nuns. We had an old piano in the dining room that provided us with lots of family fun. After Sunday Mass and dinner, we would gather around the piano and sing. Mom had a wonderful alto voice and I remember being very proud of her at Mass on Sundays when she would sing harmony with the church music. At home we would go over old favorites and enjoy each other. We never seemed to tire of this ritual.

High school was another walking experience. Bay City had no school buses and we were too poor to take the city buses---anyway, there was no direct route to school. We walked and even went home for lunch. Don and Ernie were in high school just ahead of me and they played football very well and became school heroes. They were known as "The Zielinski Brothers" and both made the All Michigan Team---Ernie Capt. of it one year. I tell you this because with my brothers being so popular, I was sought out by girls who wanted to meet them. They would come to the house to see me, ha!ha! with a chance to see Ernie or Don. Both Ernie and Don were good students and there was the "Oh, you're Ernie and Dons's sister!" and then would expect me to do as well as they did. It was a hard role to fill!

It was in high school that Irene and I became good friends. She, too, was a walker and would come by my house everyday on the way to school. She had her earlier education at a catholic school so that I did not meet her until she started high school. Irene was almost as tall as I and we had rapport from the beginning. Her father worked at a Flint auto plant right through the depression so she had some spending money. When she

bought a candy bar, she would share it with me! Hey listen, don't laugh! When you had no money to spend and someone shared like Irene did, you are grateful and impressed. Irene was a person that I could talk with and we enjoyed doing things together. After high school we went our separate ways but we remained friends and still have a bond seldom found between two females. Irene was always the person she is today---direct, opinionated, a bit rude at times, but she is also honest, caring and very giving. Her father was a drinker (weekend only) and I was afraid of him so Irene spent more time with us than I did at her place. She liked my Mom and Dad and we got along better than most people.

Every high school student has to have money, of course. There were class dues to be paid for activity tickets to get into all the games the school played. With my brothers on the team, you can bet that I was at every one. Don played basketball as well as football so I went to all those games. You no doubt remember my telling you how I used to scrub floors for 15 cents an hour. I had a couple of people that I scrubbed for and for the school dances I would spend my time in the rest room to keep the girls from smoking. For this I would get 50 cents for the evening. Well I remember going home in the dark running most of the way because being alone in the dark was not my choice but a necessity. If my brothers were at the dance, they usually had dates so I was left high and dry. For the games, there usually was someone who wanted to go among my friends so I felt safe then. When Roosevelt came into office, he started the NRA and I got a job in the school office for which I was paid. That was like money from heaven! It was not a lot, but I could stop the out of school jobs.

In high school I took subjects which would get me into nursing school but when I finished, I had no money. My first job was at a doctor's house where I cooked and cleaned. Al got sick and I came home to help Mom. When he got better, Es found me a job at the knitting mill as a clipper and I stayed there until I went in training---a fore mentioned fact with moneys from Es, Charlie and Pinky.

Much love,

*(Letter No. 6)*

*Wednesday, June 3, 1992.*

Dear family,

We (Dad and I) are making the computer work these days. Now that Dad has been properly stimulated, (he heard from you that you really are eager to get his story) he is giving a lot of time to it. I was gone all morning so he could have written then and maybe did.

Tom has a new address and telephone number that he would like us to send you:

10 Bedford Village, Apt. C

Bedford, Ma. 01730

Phone: 617- 275-4943

Today I thought I had better give you a potpourri of things I missed about the early days before I tell you about nursing school. A lot of this may sound like fiction, but

believe me, it is all true.

Picture a little girl 5 or 6 who the world would take for a rag-a-muffin; already a tomboy, who was bent more on play than the assigned work load of cleaning table, getting potatoes, etc. She wore a very simple dark dress that had to be worn all week. Mom washed once each week and we did not have a lot of extra clothes. With this dress, I wore long black cotton stockings which covered the knees and were held there by black elastic garters. Often the elastic was tied together as it made a stronger bind than sewing. On my feet were buttoned over the ankle shoes which took a lot of time to put on and to take off. If I could get away with it, I used to go to bed with my shoes on. The gadget we used was hock-like and you needed some dexterity to use it. I was not very adapt at it so I would leave the shoes on my feet. When I got caught, this meant a trip to the kitchen and get over the chair for a spanking with Dad's strop! I thought it very unfair for my parents not to see the wisdom of keeping the shoes on my feet to save time in the morning! If I went to bed with my dress on too, that was a double spanking. My naive mind told me that since I wore the same clothes, what wrong was there in keeping them on? I was a mess! My hair was clipped to the middle of the ears so the cut would last longer. I felt unattractive! Why should I bother?! I would wash my face and hands---never the neck or arms until Saturday bath. Mom was so busy, I don't believe she even noticed. The teacher at school did and told me to wash my neck. How embarrassing! I did after that.

After one of these spankings, I always felt sorry for myself. My mind would be active with revenge! I would run away from home and never come back! They would miss me!! Who would do all the work then when I was not there? I told you about our first porch---the long narrow one. There was crawl space beneath and little else but after a spanking, I sometimes would hide there waiting for my family to miss me! They never did; so I would crawl out. No one was any wiser---not even I. I tried again and again to no avail. Poor me!

It seems that we were seldom spanked by Dad. Mom was home with us and with that strop! She never said, "Wait 'til Dad gets home!" although I do remember once when I got spanked by both parents and I don't remember why----perhaps something at school? If the teacher punished you at school, you got it at home too. I remember getting lots of spankings but for the life of me, I don't remember being that bad that I deserved it. How conveniently we forget.

Some things I remember from my youth are pleasant. We did things together. Games like hide and seek, baseball, dock-on-the-rock (similar Spud), and football required a gang. There were things we did as a family too. Mom had one she loved for us to participate in that required us to keep water in the mouth. The one who held the water the longest got a penny! It took a long time for me to catch on to the fact that when there was water in the mouth, she had it quiet! She was a great one in having us play "find the penny". One was hidden in the kitchen and we hunted a long time for it while she had peace in the rest of the house. For an uneducated person, my Mom turned out pretty smart! Cold Sunday afternoons we used to play going to Mass. Mom had an old sewing machine that had 6 take out drawers that we used for kneelers. Chairs became our pews. Ernie or Don put a dish towel over the shoulders and was the priest. We would go through the mock ritual and had squares of bread as hosts.

May and October the family said rosary together. In the early years it was done in Polish and Dad led us; later English took over the house and spoke "American" to fortify

the language in our home. I have some really beautiful memories of my Dad praying. Everyday he would get on his knees and pray aloud. He did it devoutly and with love for Our Lord. It seemed like a real conversation with Jesus. To this day I covet that ability of his to be on such wonderful terms with his God. We had Mary and we crowned her as we tried when you kids were little. One other thing about Church; when we went to confession, we had to go to our parents and tell them we were sorry for our bad behavior and would try to be better. I hated this ritual but now that I am an adult in an enlightened Catholic church, I realize what a beautiful concept that was! It is hard for me to admit that I have wronged someone and even harder to seek forgiveness but that is a beautiful way to look at it.

St. Stan always had a May procession in which the whole school would participate. A statue of Mary was hoisted and carried by the 8th grade boys and streamers were attached from her feet. For 25 cents you could carry one of the ribbons. You had to wear white and be very good. The rest of the school wore their Sunday best and sang songs of Mary in the procession. I coveted carrying a ribbon but never got to do it. The statue was carried into the church and a service was held. Most parish members would line the street to view this and we all seemed happy in the event. I do have a lot of very good memories of my Church but they are personal and I do not intend to force them unto you.

You may not be aware but Bay City and its environs was a popular beach area. Located on the Saginaw Bay as it is, it used to sport some pretty terrific beaches and people from miles around would frequent the place. When my older brothers were in their teens, beauty parades were a summer event and Miss Michigan was sometimes chosen in our area. There were floats and bands and a lot of hoopla! Pink and Al would have a hot dog concession and made extra money that way. From this we younger kids got the idea of having our own parade. We made banners, (Dad's meat market paper and shoe polish lettering) donned our bathing suits,---if we had one---and sat on wagons and paraded on the sidewalks making our own noise and music! I aimed big! Miss Detroit, no less. It was a fun thing to do. We spent hours preparing for the short blast of a block of parading. People looked and thought us crazy, of course! When our beaches got over run with algae and sea weed, the popularity faded. Dad and I went to check the beach so I could tell you more accurately about it, and found it hard to get there. They want \$3.75 to enter (we got in free in my early days) and it is still a good camp ground and picnic area. Swimming is only so-so!

When I was in my teens, the beach was the place to go! I loved swimming and even though I had to walk over 4 miles each way (we checked the mileage when we visited so I could be accurate in my estimation in telling you) it seemed a good way to spend the day. Either Dick or a school friend Dolores would go with me. We would pack a lunch, take the bus as far as it would go and walk the rest of the way. We were told not to hitch hike so we did not dare. Later years after Es and Charlie were married, they used to drive us after supper for an evening swim. When I was in junior high, there was a galvanized pool in the downtown Wenona Park. Tents (male and female) served as changing rooms and again Dick or Dolores would go with me just about everyday. This meant that I had to scrub the kitchen floor (wooden) on my knees with a brush and Felsnaphta before I could go for that swim. I had my towel and suit outside and left the pail on the porch to keep from tracking the newly washed floor. It was worth it for the swim.

Some of my other summer amusements came with making doll clothes. The cellu-

loid dolls (now worth a fortune if you are lucky enough to own one) were a dime then and though they had no moveable parts, we made dresses for them anyway. Some of the girls had dolls that had moveable arms and legs and that was desirable. Seeing how far you could walk the railroad track without falling off was a challenge we gave each other and I got pretty good at it. We had a couple of large trees in our outlawn area near the street that Don had fashioned a seating area which made an excellent reading place when you wanted peace and quiet. My tomboyishness paid off and I was able to climb right up and take over the seat when Don or Ernie were not using it.

Most neighbors had basements and boy! what a cool place that would be in the heat of summer to play house or even school. Trouble was that most of them did not want extra kids in the house and to be allowed in was a real privilege and we made the most of it. One neighbor had a summer kitchen and they ate all their meals there. Boy! did I envy them. On some of the hottest days, we had ice cream cones. Luckily the drug store on the corner had ice cream and we could get them home before they melted.

My back is tired; must have been at this longer than I thought. Dad is out taking some old folks shopping so it has been peaceful and I have been able to correct most of my mistakes without him. I do make loads of them. My large fingers hit 2 keys and that is not good! Looking forward to any news of your pending visits. It will work out so that all who can come will have a bed and plenty of food. Can't wait to see you. "Ye all come! We have a new sofa bed in the family room to make extra space and comfortable beds for all.

Much love,

*(Letter No. 7)*

*Tuesday, June 9, 1992.*

Dear family,

Teri has asked me to write of my parents and family life so I guess that I should get into that before I enter nursing school. Going into nursing really changed my life and I am eager to share that experience with you. But first things, first!

There is no such thing as "typical" parents and mine surely were different from those of my friends. There are some bonds that most parents have: love of their offspring, wanting the best for them, to be able to cloth and feed them, and wanting them to be a credit to them. How we fill those roles are different. With the lack of schooling in either of my parents, their common sense and learning in progress probably were their motivating forces. Sort of---on the job training where you got better with experience. Living through 2 big wars, the depression, and never having enough money to meet their needs comfortably made it difficult to have a care free life. They did not ask for a fortune; just enough money so they did not have to worry about food and bills. Most of their lives was spent in want and Mom especially had it tough. She was just beginning to see some comfort when she died at a young 66. Don's insurance money came and she began to know what it was like to have steady money coming in. Don opted to have half of his insurance in immedi-

ate cash (changes were made within the house to better it and make it more livable) and the rest in payments every month. I saw a change in my parents then as with less concerns, they did relax and enjoy life more. Mom's failing health did not get better, however, and that was a damper to all of us. Mom was a victim of Parkinson's disease, (Palsy to the lay man) had high blood pressure, and also tended to fear she had every disease that she heard of and saw in friends and neighbors.

We used to hear Mom and Dad argue a lot. This frightened us; we were very concerned their words would come to blows as it did with my oldest brothers Pinky and Al. You will remember I told you they drank and sometimes things got out control over small things. Dad had problems stopping them as he was a short man and Al was about 6 feet and Pink shorter but taller than Dad. Dad was a great one for putting his head close to the radio and then listened to one news cast after the other. Mom was offended and logically thought that he should give her some time. There is a Polish word for rehashing "bredzenie" that angered Dad when Mom used it when he listened to the news all the time. Mom would walk off and announce she was never coming back! Dad knew she would, but we kids were very frightened and grew fearful and anxious. Mom knew she had a weapon with us kids and so when we would displease her, she would take off with the same threat. We would plead with her on our knees but she would stalk off and be gone for what we took as hours! You can imagine the guilt we felt! From this experience I learned not to fight with your Dad with any of you were around. Your Dad had a similar experience with arguing in his home so that it was easy to agree not to fight in front of you children. We did pout and treat each other like strangers. I do not recommend either method to you. Since Marriage Encounter we have used successfully talking calmly through our different options and negotiating a common ground of understanding.

My Mom should have been an actress! She would have fake heart attacks in which she would make her entire body rigid and froth at the mouth. Even Dad took this act seriously and would move her arms in and out until they were supple. We kids would go flying to church to pray and come home hoping she was not dead. When we were all about her, she would say, "What happened?" like she had no memory of it at all. I was in training already when Pinky came to the realization that it was a hoax---a way to get attention from her family. After he accused her of same, she had no more of these attacks! He told me about it when I got back from Grand Rapids and sure enough, she was "magically" cured.

My Mom and Dad met at a dance hall. Dad played the fiddle, saw Mom there dancing with other fellows and decided to take her home. I have no idea how long a courtship it was but apparently it was love at first sight for Dad and he wanted this pretty blond for his wife and got her. One of these days I will take the 1 photo I have of their wedding and have it duplicated for each of you. Mom was really a very attractive young lady and I can understand Dad falling for her. When I knew Mom, she had already gained a lot of weight so I remember her as heavy set, hard working, and set in her ways. We had a lot of love for our parents and their sufferings became ours. We felt unity and protection even in the hardest times. In her soft moments, Mom would tell us not to worry about her relationship with Dad. She said that they fought but never went to bed angry with one another---- that they held hands. This was reassuring but the next argument seemed just as threatening to me.

When some money flowed into the house, (each child had to give half of his salary to



the family pot) Mom would play keno. This, I now understand, was her way in dealing with noisy children (she was away from them) and Dad's devotion to the radio. When money was hardest to come by, Mom and Dad played Pedro evenings and Mom was a very poor loser! I'm sure Dad played poorly just so she would win. That was his way of keeping the peace. Keno is a game like Lotto in which the card is covered with beans or cardboard squares as the numbers are called. All covered in a line, you had a keno and won a prize. In those days prizes were more modest; a basket of fruit or groceries. 25# of sugar, a certificate to some store or some home made cake or doughnuts. Kids were allowed to come so we would take turns going with her so she would not come home alone in the dark. Cards were 3 for 25 cents. We got to play 1 while Mom handled 5 or 6. She was pretty lucky though I'm sure no one really comes out a huge winner. It was cheap entertainment and she deserved it. She could find a game just about anywhere in the city and went frequently. Sometimes she had to take the bus and find a way home as the last bus was through running at 9.

When something was needed "downtown" and Mom went shopping, we would wait for her return with eagerness. She usually brought home a bag of peanuts or candy for us to share---not much, just a taste--- but I remember that well. Infrequently one of us was allowed to go with her. That indeed was special! You got a treat (cone likely) and got to carry packages. Looking back, this must of been her way to show us that we were "special". I don't remember a lot of hugging or kissing---though when Penny was born we claimed she was spoiled because she got a lot more attention than any of us and we resented it.

Dad, on the other hand, seemed to be warm and caring with us. I remember sitting on his lap and having him tell me stories. Often they were made up stories (remind you of anyone?) or tales of how things were when he was growing up. Sometimes he would tell stories of the Saints, how brave they were, and how they looked after us along with our guardian angels. He was a punster, too, but his logic had something missing. It may have been that transposing from Polish into English for us did not make as much sense. When Dad had any money and Mom had a birthday near, he always got her the same present---a pair of "gotki" (underwear) and we all had a good laugh about it. Dad seemed to have his own ideas about medical care and followed lore of the Polish for the most part. I remember having an acne or something that he was sure could be cured by taking the stem of his pipe and smearing that black stuff over my face! It nauseated me, of course, sometimes to the point of vomiting. Hey, who can afford doctors. I didn't see a dentist until I was in nursing school and then only because it was a requirement. I think he found 12 cavities.

This next item of thought is not about my parents, but I feel I must digress to get it in. I lived through the days of Prohibition and my sister Edith's husband made beer and had customers come to his house. He was also working at a factory an evening shift so that Edith did not feel safe with men coming in for their beer. We kids would take turn staying with her and when school started, Don went to live with her and go to school in that area. Adam made more money selling the beer than in salary at the plant so he gave the plant work up. Living in the country as they did, they didn't get caught. Our neighbors next to us did the same thing and got away with it, too. I had my first and last taste of beer. I hated it; thought it was very bitter.

There always seems to be more to tell in recalling past events. Mercy! I haven't yet

go myself into nursing school so there is still much to tell another time.

Much love,

*(Letter No. 8)*

*Wednesday, June 17, 1992.*

Dear family,

Next week at this time, Teri, Tom and a couple of dogs should be headed our way. I'm excited. They have not seen our new home and its environs. We hope to have a lot of fun together. Shortly after their arrival, we expect Jim, Pattie and their darlings. In July we look forward to having Mary, Doris and their families. Looks like an exciting summer ahead for us. We'll put out a good word to the weather man to keep these perfect days and nights coming.

Prior to writing these letters to you, my mind is usually focused on what I will share with you. Three years elapsed between high school and training. My first job was as housekeeper at Dr. Mosiers. Then on to that boring job as a clipper at Wolverine Knitting Mills. The way I kept my sanity there was to engage my mind in pleasant thoughts. The job really did not require concentration. I used to plan plots of stories that I would share with my sister Gee. No wonder Gee and I are so close! I could get her to do just about anything if I would tell her a story. I was 18-21 and Gee 7 years younger then. Dick married at 18, right after he graduated, Don was working at Dow and Ernie was at the U of M. Al was at a CC Camp (one of Roosevelt's work programs to get the youth into jobs.) He worked in the UP in forestry and stayed there a couple years. This time in my life I became very close to my younger sisters and we still have that enviable relationship.

God bless Gee! I just have to take time here to tell you about her. Gee was a lot like my Dad. She had such patience, wouldn't say a bad word about anyone, worked like a dog, was cooperative, and yet was a heck of a lot of fun. My most mischievous days really developed along with Gee and Penny as they were growing up. We girls moved upstairs. I fixed the room above the kitchen real cute, (I thought so!) got a double and single bed, dressing table (which Essie skirted for me) and painted the room pink and white. I put in a few touches of glamour; spreads alike, cute curtains etc. We (Gee, Pen and I) had our little haven of security with the money I earned at the mill. Gee and I used to spend hours up there playing double solitaire and sharing stories, hopes, and dreams. Pen was like a child of mine. I had more influence upon than Mom did but Mom abdicated the roll gladly. She had her garden and her keno and seemed quite content for us to take over the house.

We were living in a different kind of world then. Roosevelt's recovery program gave my Dad a job and his dignity returned. He worked on reconstruction of the new 22nd St. bridge. It was hard work and the winter was tough. He would put socks over his shoes and then galoshes in an attempt to keep his feet from freezing. This was all outdoor work, of course. It was a mile and a half walk for him but he did it with dignity and happy to be a contributor again. Don and I were contributing to the family fund so we were a lot better off financially. Just before I went into nursing, Don left for the service and Ernie gradu-

ated from college. Ernie married right after that and spent a year teaching before he joined the navy. Edith, Pinky, Dick, and Essie were already married so that the house was less crowded. Al was around for a time and then he went into the merchant marines so we gals were left alone until years later when Al returned.

It was Essie and Charlie who pushed me into nursing school. They borrowed the 200 dollars I needed for tuition and Pinky saw to it that I got shoes and uniforms and I left to Grand Rapids. The Bay City nuns gave me a ride there. Sr. David had a business meeting to attend. I was about 2 weeks late in starting. That was difficult as I missed orientation and a lot more. Mercy Central had 3 units but we all went to Grand Rapids for the first year of theory and probie practice. The only spot left in the dorm was among the Grand Rapids girls so I was isolated from the Bay City unit. Most of the local girls went home weekends. I had the whole floor to myself and enjoyed that time. I could study better, have time to write letters, and not have to fight for the bathroom. There were 10 of us sharing it. We had to design a schedule to fit our needs. We had to keep the place clean and be ready for inspection. Since I was not running home all the time, I was left with a lot of the cleaning on the weekends. I got sneaky! If they didn't make their beds, I would short-sheet them and sometimes they didn't know that until it was lights out time and they were to have been in bed. There were a lot of really tough rules for us as students. Some made no sense at all.

Nursing school gave me a new life! Other than when I worked for Dr. Mosier, I never was on my own. It was nice to have family support around me, but it could be (and often was) stifling to develop a personality uniquely my own. Mom had her way of handling girls (strict!) but relaxed with the boys. Guess I had some of Doris's "do it self"ness in me which I passed on to her. Also, I had to assume a lot of responsibility at home when I was not ready for it. I told you how Mom about abdicated her roles as housekeeper and tenderer of the "sheep" so I was left to guide Gee and Pen. The three of us kept the house together. As the oldest I had more responsibility than I should have had. In nursing school I looked only to my needs and found studying interesting but very taxing as well. Fortunately it was also my forte and I thought less of home and more of me. I wasn't in nursing school more than a few weeks when my family was asking me a lot of medical questions (by letter as I did not get home until Xmas) which were irritating. I did stay close to my family but I did get a good start on having a life of my own, too.

Again I must digress. The power went out and stayed off for 30 hours! We had a tornado! Dad was a lot more frightened than I, but it was scary. Most of Midland blanked out. High winds prior to the tornado took our power. Pen still had hers. Essie's was out 2 hours before. We ate out and then I decided to take my frozen food to Pen's freezer. We delivered the stuff and were just getting back into the car when the sirens started! We continued on home but we hardly got 2 blocks north when a huge tree blocked our path on Swede Av. Fortunately we know the city and were able to wend our way back home. The winds didn't last long but mighty trees fell, wires came down, and the temperature went down from 93 to 63 in about a half hour. There was not the down pour of rain that I would have expected but we did get some that we needed badly. Ashman, the street our church fronts on, was one of the hardest hit. Seems every yard had trees felled by the storm. What a mess!! Our neighbor just north of us had 2 fall in his yard but we escaped real damage----just dead branches that needed pruning anyway. Midland lost a lot of its beautiful trees. The power company has been working around the clock and we got ours back

last night at 10:15 pm. We just got our foods into Pen's freezer when her power went off too. Hers came on 8 a m the next day.

Our morning walk took us past a lot of damage. Many people are still without power---Es included. The stuff left in my freezer I did not trust and I dumped it. I expect 40 or 50 dollars worth of food went into the garbage. We have yet to find out how Jim and Pattie made out as they had the storm before us, We heard there was a lot of damage in that area. As we walked we saw many people cleaning up after the big mess. Everyone is sharing his experience and lamenting in some cases. But the one thing you see most is the cooperation among the Midlanders. All the utility companies are working around the clock and some helpers have been brought in from unaffected areas. There is still a lot of yellow tape around where wires are hanging down. People are very respectful of these warnings and are not adding to an already too busy community. Essie's son Jack works for the city sewer system and he worked through the night. Tom should have been here. One TV station camera got a funnel cloud and tornado on film and it was awesome---the sort of thing that makes Tom a chaser, I suppose. We saw some big storms in Florida. One hurricane that came close to us was a like experience. It will takes weeks for the debris to be cleared away. Our weather is very cool---in the low 60's today. Should be great for my peas as they enjoy growing in cool weather. We should have some ready when Teri and Tom get here.

Back to nursing and its effect upon my life. It amazes me when I reflect upon the learning of that first year. I didn't think it possible for the cranium to absorb so much material in such a short time. We had all the sciences, a course in foods and cooking, a lot of anatomy and physiology, professional ethics, nursing art classes and floor experience, and studies of drugs (dosage and reactions). Whew! Now my family could ask questions and I might find some answers for them. Going back to the unit school, we put our knowledge into more practical experience. The real big plus in Bay City was in having my very own room! Privacy at last for the very first time! There were plenty of shower stalls and tubs if you preferred a bath. Being close to home was nice, too. We got a day and a half off (not necessarily together) each week and it was nice to get away from institutional food. I know how much you kids like my dressing. You may have noticed I seldom eat it. Every (and mean every) Sunday we had roast beef and dressing for the main meal. They were teaching us to vary our diets for the patients. Wish they had practiced what they preached! I got very tired of that menu.

Guess I had better stop here. Es and Unk Chaz are coming to dinner. They are still without power. Yesterday Pen had us; she was the lucky one who had power. Today she is working---did I tell you she is back working one day each week?--and I'm cooking. Would you believe it will be stuffed pork chops? These are an inch thick and most desirable for stuffing. It is a bummer to be without electricity.

Much love,

(Letter No. 9)

July 8, 1992.

Dear family,

It's been more than 2 weeks since my last letter and I'm not sure how much I retained about using the computer. Here's how anyway! I know Dad has written so that you are well informed as to what went on in this household. I will not be redundant.

As the old serial format goes, "In the last episode, Lee was entering her second year of nursing school. She had just returned to her home unit in Bay City.---" The second world war was in full gear and we Americans at home were doing our level best to be supportive, understanding, and caring. With 2 brothers in the service, I was concerned for their safety. The news from overseas was anything but rosy. The government had a push on to recruit more nurses. They offered scholarships to nursing schools to replenish the supply. This was a salvation to me. I knew not where the second year of tuition would come from. Now I had found the way to continue. We were given street uniforms (what a waste of money!) and continued with business as usual. The uniforms did come in handy in Detroit as we were able to ride the busses, get into the Tiger games, and see concerts free. I spent 3 months in Detroit doing communicable disease nursing to meet graduation requirements.

Just have to digress (a pattern I seem to use a lot) and tell you of an experience I had which concerned the government and had me branded as a Communist! ME! We were required in 12th grade Civics class to write a paper on some form of government. Since I knew very little about Communism, I research it, documented my findings with a bibliography, and drew my own conclusions. I must have implied for some people making this form of government their own free choice, there should be no interference into that country's politics by any other nation. We were fighting along side the Russians in the war. My teacher was appalled! I was called into a secret office and was interrogated by an agent and my teacher as to my leanings as an American citizen. To say that I was amazed was putting it mildly. I explained it was an assignment that I took on with some interest and drew my own conclusions. I was given a C on the paper (it deserved an A) and things were never the same in Civics class with that teacher. I chalked it up to experience and thought not much of it for maybe 2 or 3 years when it came back to haunt me. There was an appeal in the newspaper for citizens to write letters to men in the service. Irene and I decided to send for a list so that we could do our patriotic duty. The list came and we started letters to the guys. Lo and behold! an agent appears at my door again and quizzed me about the whys and wherefore! Irene had no one come to her but my loyalty was questioned and it was recommended that I discontinue the practice! I was mad as a wet hen and felt like defying the agent. Letters were censored and if there was anything in those letters which were dangerous to America, they surely would have reason to question me. Heck they were nothing more than friendly letters to cheer the guys and wish them well. To heck with it, I decided. I would write my bothers more often and I had plenty to do anyway. When I joined the Cadet Nurses Corps I thought that experience would bar me from being a member but fortunately all was forgiven and no more questions have been asked of me. I have had no problems since I am happy to report.

The war made life pretty miserable. We had rationing of certain foods and products like shoes and clothes. Nylon was used in parachutes so rayon hose was what we had to

wear. It was awful stuff and snagged and ran very easily. We nurses had to wear white hose, of course, and keeping them supplied was a costly matter for us. The government gave us a \$20 allotment every month and boy! was that great. As a hospital unit we were not as limited in our food allotment as most people were but the cooks lacked imagination and we ate untasty and poorly presented foods. We did not hear the guns of the war but we had drills and black and brow outs frequently to keep us vigilant. The news on the radio was very depressing. Since I had brothers and friends in service, we were concerned and worried. My Mom's vivid imagination had my brothers killed several times when letters were long in getting to us. When we did hear of Don being missing in action, she was a basket case! We did not hear he died until the war was over and one of his buddies came to our house and told us. He flew the same flight with him and was taken prisoner. Don was killed outright when anti-aircraft fire zeroed in on the plane. Many of my high school graduating class died in the war. Everyone seemed to lose a family member or a loved one.

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We student nurses worked hard during the war. We had no interns in Bay City so that meant when an accident came in and you worked emergency room, a lot of time was wasted while we tried to reach a doctor. The doctors (older ones) were overworked and reluctant to come in. The ones we could get were not the cream of the crop but at least we got orders, stitched patients, treated wounds and sent them home or hospitalize them. I really disliked this part of my training and could never be an emergency nurse. Since there was such a shortage of medical personnel, we student nurses had to take on responsibilities we had no business or right to. It was common practice for a student to be in charge of a whole ward of patients for an evening shift. Understand the gravity of this when no interns are around to help you through the rough spots. Fortunately I never met up with a serious enough condition that caused me any real trouble.

My first 3 months upon my return to the Bay City unit I spent in surgery. Thank God the anatomy and physiology we learned in Grand Rapids was making sense when the body is opened and surgery was performed. We started with simple operations as tonsils and by 3 months, I was a pro scrubbing in for major surgery and really understanding what it was about. I moved from one department to another getting 3 months experience in all the services: pediatrics, public health (another non-favorite), orthopedics, medical diseases, OB and nursery care, and psychiatry and communicable disease affiliation in Kalamazoo and Detroit respectively. The food in both these places was excellent and the salt rising bread in Kalamazoo I covet to this day. It was very hard work. We often worked split shift (am and pm 4 to 5 hours each) and had classes all afternoon. We studied mostly on our days off to catch up. We did a couple of weeks of night work in each service, too, so you can see we had a very broad experience. You didn't dare take sick leave! Once I had a real bad cold. Sr. David gave me a whiskey hot toddy and insisted I come to work the next morning.

There were no TVs around so that we were saved from the horror and graphic pictures of the action. Dad's well trained ear was again glued to the radio and he kept abreast of the progress of the war with lots of interest. The news reels at the movies gave us some insight into the war horrors. We were a worried and very patriotic nation. We were singing songs with patriotic overtones and buying bonds to keep arms supplied to our boys. The factory workers were working overtime and weekends to help meet the ever increas-

ing demands. The movie industry was very busy putting out apropos themes of war films and making a lot of musicals to cheer us up. There are a lot of those around even today on cable TV. Dates were hard to find. As the song said, "they're either too young or too old; too bold or too grassy green. What good is in the army; what's here will never harm me!" Just everyone my age was in service and the F4s left around were not choice people. I did see service men in training in my senior year at Kalamazoo where I had my psychiatric affiliation experience. The guys were kept so busy and so were we that we just did not connect. Nursing is very taxing work and there is little energy left for dates. We saw a movie, went to a concert or a Tiger game (in Detroit) but mainly we had our noses to the grindstone.

When the war ended, I was in my last year of training. I intended to go into service myself when I finished but we were urged to stay. The guys were coming back and we were really needed at home. We had State Boards to pass to get our RN's and we were nervous Nellies about that. We studied together and apart and all of us passed! We had a progressive dinner in celebration. Graduation took place in Aug.'45 and all of us were looking forward to the event. Well, Pinky died in the plane crash and I missed the celebrating to attend a funeral and be a support to my parents. That was a great blow to me and I was a long time getting over that. Pinky had always been very kind and good to me. I missed him. Just 2 months prior to that we had word of Don's demise. It was a terrible year for Mom especially and all of us in general. Ernie came back without a scratch. We were grateful for that.

After graduation I stayed on at Mercy as a Clinical Instructor for the new students coming back from Grand Rapids. The head of Mercy Central, Sr. Mary Xavier, was aware of my interest in Psychiatric nursing and when she became aware there was a scholarship available in the field, she put in a good word for me. A year later, I was off to Washington. Tell you about that experience in the next letter.

Much love,

*(Letter No. 10)*

*Thursday, July 17, 1992.*

Dear family,

This will probably be the last chapter in my saga for a couple weeks or more. We expect Mary, followed by Doris, and later Mike and kin starting next week so I will be otherwise occupied. I do want to spend as much time with the family as I can; these are precious moments to me and Dad.

Thinking about the nerve I had in leaving for Washington without anything but a motel room reserved (no campus housing was available in the nurses quarters) sounds like a more daring Lee than the one I now am. The registration office said that the bulletin board had some residences posted for students and trusting God, I took off. I went by train to Chicago where Irene and I got together (she was in the WAVES then) for a few days. I had with me a footlocker very full, a suitcase, a type-writer, and my purse. How I hoped

to find a porter when I got to Chicago! God looked after me. I met a high school classmate, Josh, on the train. He was going back to college (medical school) so I had a friend aboard and we talked much of the trip. When I got to Chicago, there was no porter in sight and poor Josh carried that heavy footlocker out of that long terminal to the local train that Irene advised me to take to Great Lakes. He had a suitcase of his own besides. That was a tremendous thing for him to do. Josh died a few years after he became a doctor for just a few years and that was sad.

When I got to Great Lakes, I took a cab to where Irene told me to meet her. Irene and I had a wonderful time together! She knew the city, the eating places, and even had dates to escort us to a couple night clubs. It was reminiscent of days when we would go into Detroit, see a show and visit museums. Irene can be very resourceful and showed it in this visit.

I planned to go to Washington by plane (did not have tickets yet) and decided to take the train and get a good nights rest before my big adventure of finding a place to live. Besides Ohare was a long way off and the train more convenient. Irene helped me with my baggage and that helped a lot. I was assured there would be plenty of cabs at Union station. It was an overnight trip. I got a berth for the night. I sat in a coach next to a little lady and, of course, we talked. She had been visiting a relative in Chicago and was on her way back. She learned I was Polish and we had immediate rapport. I learned from her that she had a room and was willing to rent it to me for \$5 a week. She would allow me to use the kitchen to cook my meals as long as I cleaned up! Talk about a wonderful answer to my prayers! The campus was about 2 miles from the house but heck, I had no quarrel with that. My legs were used to walking. There were busses but I never used one.

They put me into an evening English class at first and then decided to fill up other classes and eliminate it so I was moved into a daytime class. In that class I met up with Josephine Paul who was unhappy with her living quarters. Mrs. Mike (my land lady) had a 3 bedroom home and was willing to let Jo have the other one. Jo was not Polish but since she came recommended through me, she accepted her. Jo was a lot of fun! She was a nurse in the service and decided on further study. She had a car and took me to see all the places of note in Washington, Baltimore, and even Mount Vernon. We took turns cooking and had a ball. We pooled our money in a kitty and at first \$5 bucks from each of us was enough. Mrs. Mike ate with us, too, but I don't remember that she did any of the cooking. She really enjoyed having us around. Her son Michael Michal-wicz taught one of your Dad's classes and was not liked by the students. Mrs. Mike was okay and we grew to love her. She did not have a wash machine so we did our own laundry by hand. She sent the linens out so that was a help.

Jo did not take studying very seriously. If it was a choice between study and a date, the date won out. Both of us worked a couple nights at a hospital and Jo found a lot of her dates right there among the interns. She would have me fix fried chicken and then claim it as her own! For dinner dates, she dined out with them; she did not reciprocate at Mrs. Mike's. Jo bored easily. When she did not have a date, she would make mischief on the phone. She was a great one for calling the Zoo and asking for Mr. Fox or better still, she would call one of the many dorms around Washington and carry on a long conversation with anyone who answered. She would concoct so story like: "I'm so lonely tonight and just have to hear a male voice. My guy is in---etc" Some this got to Mrs. Mike but she was wise enough to keep quiet. There was no malice in Jo. She just loved a good time.



Your father was in the same English class that Jo and I had. I really did not notice him at all. He faded into the background. Jo took note of him and kept referring to the handsome lad in the red sweater in our class. I got interested and wondered who he was. Sure enough, there he was, bright as a button, and quiet as a lamb. Jo had it in mind to have some fun with the guys in the class. They did have some evening classes. She found out which car belonged to whom, and set out on mischief of tying tin cans to the tail pipe (kicking them under, of course.) She would leave notes, wet paper, empty beer cans, whatever, to get attention. Some of her pranks, I helped with but mostly the idea came from Jo. We might have gone on undetected except for one party. We invited all the boys in our class to a party at the Hamills' house and did not tell him or his folks. Jo and I were the only girls (by design). We got a gallon of ice cream and conned some kid to take it to the house. Mom Hamill was more than a bit flustered! First the ice cream came and then all these people! The "host" was down in the basement working on something when we got there. He was genuinely surprised. We had to choose his house as he was the only local student. We had a wonderful time. Vinc played piano so we sang and danced. A lot of jokes were told and refreshments were served. From then on it was hard to fool any of them as to who were the mischief makers.

Jo had so many dates that she really was not interested in dating your Dad. He was too straight laced and CATHOLIC and she was not. Her interest was only in seeing a handsome guy and making note of him. I, however, was not quite through with him. "Helen Walker" would send him notes to meet him on the corner of F and G. "Helen" and Jim finally got together by her asking him to a Saddle Hawkins dance at the university. We talked on the phone a lot (he did that a lot then, too, as he does now) and finally had our first date. Being a Saddle Hawkins affair, I paid for the first date! I liked him because he was such a good person. I liked his being Catholic, that he didn't smoke or drink and that he was younger than I. This, of course, was to be a friendship. I felt very safe with him. I knew that I would not have his arms all over me. He was a fun kind of person. He liked the same things I did; picnics, walking, concerts etc. It was nice having someone to escort me on the bus or streetcar when we went to a concert or movie. My plans had been laid to go to Hawaii after graduation and my stint in Grand Rapids (had to teach there a year to meet the scholarship requirements) were over. I went on to school convinced that marriage would not be part of my life. I had looked and prayed for that right man but he did not come along. I was bent on fulfilling a useful life. Where better than in Hawaii! Hollywood glamorizing was painting a pretty picture for me and it was a lure I fell for hook, line, and sinker!

This new found freedom I enjoyed in Washington was unlike anything I had experienced! The college courses were tough and I had to study a lot. German was particularly hard for me and I almost flunked it! Your Dad insisted that we go to Glen Echo amusement park the night before the final so I did not cram. He argued that if you don't have it prior to the exam, one night's cramming isn't going to help. He's right, of course. My trusty typewriter came in handy for the many themes we had to put together for English class. It was a gift from my Dad just before I left for college. Since I had most of the nursing requirements under my belt, this degree was filling in my inadequacies in formal education as English, speech, botany and other science. Later I did take courses in teaching, psychiatry, psychology and had more advanced training in nursing at St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

Working and going to school was tough! I worked a couple nights a week and had class about 11 am and it was hard to rouse and be alert in class. Living in Washington with girls like Jo put a lot of spice into life. Another friend from Michigan called me and wondered about housing. I talked with Mrs. Mike and she said if Jo and I double up, Marie could have Jo's room. Jo being the sport she was, assented so now there were 4 of us living under the one roof. To say we made life interesting for Mrs. Mike was putting it mildly. We kept the house clean and did the cooking so she had a good deal with us. Mrs. Mike, Marie and I used to go to Mass on the streetcar together and after Mass, stop at a bakery and buy fresh baked buns for breakfast. Marie and I got together a month ago and shared some memories and we both remembered that with fondness. Marie was not up to pranks with us but she did go on date with some of your Dad's friends to picnics and such that we had. She was a war nurse, too, with lots of experience. She never was short of dates. Marie was a classic beauty and very much a lady. Your Dad would own up to believing that she is the prettiest woman he had seen. Marie is still a beauty and the very nicest kind of person. I could write volumes on what she has done and is still doing for other people.

There is much to tell about my Washington experiences but this letter is too lengthy already. I was called home to nurse my Mom half way through my studies and I really did not believe that I would be back. That part comes next time.

Love as always,

*(Letter No. 11)*

*Wednesday, August 12, 1992.*

Dear family,

It's been a busy time between my letters. Having so many of you home with us has been wonderful! We are so proud of you and your children. We are not through yet; Mike and the boys and Mark, Terri and Rosie are due our way soon too. I best take advantage of the free time while I can. Having had this rest from writing, I found that I missed the sharing I had done with you. Since I gather there is still interest among you for us continuing our stories, likely we will. Dad remains pretty busy. He is trying to make up for lost time in piano practice, (at it right now as I type) he did some tree trimming yesterday, and still manages time for driving Ed and Wanda when they want to go shopping. He'll be back to writing soon.

My first year at Cath. U. was about over when I last wrote. I came back to Bay City for the summer and worked at Mercy Hospital. I worked in surgery, the 3 to 11 shift and acted as supervisor. Most of the scheduled surgery takes place in the morning hours but we had plenty to do anyway. We did a lot of preparing and autoclaving bundles for the next day's schedule plus the emergency that was not planned.

It was while I was working in surgery that summer that I saw my first and only extra-uterine pregnancy and delivery. I can't imagine why the doctor did not recognize this as a pregnancy outside the uterus but he let that poor woman go through pain. She was not

dilating and finally x-rays were taken which showed the baby in the abdomen instead of the uterus. He did a C section at once but did not save the mother. The baby was a most gorgeous boy! His head was round and perfect (not having gone through the birth canal) and the rest of him was wonderfully shaped with all the parts. The husband was distraught, of course, and I did not find out how the doctor dealt with the situation. To be in surgery at a time like this is awesome! That was the only death I had seen in surgery and it was a heartbreaking one at that. I was very glad that the hospital supervisor came in to handle that one as I fear I would have lost my cool. That was the only time I felt I needed the extra help and advice. I have seen patients die but never like that! This is a million in one kind of a case and we were blessed to have the baby live. Nursing has provided me with a wealth of experiences and I would not have changed my career for any field. It surely came in handy in raising you children. There is no better preparation for motherhood.

It was during that summer that I realized that your Dad was an important part of my life. I missed our walks, talks, and just being together. We wrote frequently so we did keep in touch. We started to date that year in January and it took him until I was going home for the summer to give me a "goodbye" peck on the lips and make a quick exit. He had plenty of warning that I was not the kind of a girl who wanted a guy pawing her and he respected my wishes. We had an understanding (at least I understood) that this was friendship and nothing else. My Hawaii plans were still very much alive in my mind. I could admit to myself that he was a lot of fun to be with as long as that was the understanding, we could maintain the friendship.

All was not smooth sailing in our relationship, however. I remember coming off duty one night dog tired. It was such a beautiful night walking home that I felt a little revived and decided to write your Dad a letter. In those days we had 2 deliveries a day and often I would meet the mailman on route when I walked to work. If he had a letter for me, he would hand it over and I would read as I walked. I had a letter that day and decided to write back. I remember telling him how gorgeous and fragrant the night was and how the smells of the gardens seemed to follow me all the way home. The work of the day quickly tired me. I just put the letter in the envelope without proof reading it. BIG MISTAKE! A few days later I got the letter back with corrections made all through the letter! I was hurt--deeply hurt! I asked myself what kind of man is this that has no regard for the feelings of others? From the kind of parenting I had we had to put up with a lot that we did not condone or even like but considered the feelings of others. Accepting people as they were was part of my life and I expected the same in return. Did I really want that kind of person as a friend? I waited until the hurt was less before I wrote back and then it was a very careful cryptic note with politeness instead of warmth. After a time without mail from me, your Dad had to believe he made a mistake and "sort of" apologized. It was then that I got a better appreciation of what kind of person he was---that anything less than perfect is taboo. Hence the organized, less tolerant man was the one I was seeing---and writing to. He is that same man today; one I love but sometimes do not like because he can be cutting and less sensitive in his need to be right. I am sharing this very sensitive part of my life with you because I would like you all to be aware of how frail the human feelings are and how important our individuality is to each one of us. I am far from perfect and I don't expect others to be. I would desire for each of us to be more tolerant. For myself I know I do not desire to make so many mistakes yet I do and I feel deficient. I will never measure

up to Dad's, or my children's IQs and I have to live with that knowledge. Truth be known, I really would rather be who I am with my limited knowledge and tendency toward making mistakes than to be constantly on guard to present the best image and not be at home with who I am. I give myself a pat on the back for being the mother of 8 wonderful children. I have had a lot of influence upon your lives. Some things you change and others you will carry to your generation and beyond. That is profound! You are MY children; you came through my body and there is no way to change that. Know that I am very proud of being your mother and having brought you into this world.

When I went back to Washington, Gee was in her second year in training. She had the Cadet Corps to finance her expenses. With the monthly stipend she was better off than I had been. The second year in college was tough. Jo, Marie and I still lived with Mrs. Mike and had a wonderful time living together. My dating was confined to Saturday nights and sometimes Marie and I would take a movie in on Sunday afternoon if our study schedule permitted. We would have our leisure Sunday breakfast after Mass, study, have dinner and then maybe relax. It was at Mrs. Mike's that I came up with the "goober" rolls idea which we ate many Sunday mornings. 44 years later, they are still a family favorite. Marie tells me she learned a lot about cooking from me. How nice of her.

In the second semester of that year, I had news of Mom's failing health. Besides high blood pressure and cholesterol, Mom had a colloid goiter for years. For those who don't know, a colloid goiter is an enlargement of the thyroid gland in the neck. Under stress, there is pressure on the wind pipe and breathing becomes difficult. Mom was an excitable person anyway and with her other complications, she had a bad time. She also had Parkinson's disease which further complicated her life. She was taking medication for the tremors but that did not help much. With Gee in nursing school and Pen not yet out of high school, I was called for advice. Dad was not well either. He suffered with ulcers for many years and in many ways was sicker than Mom. My siblings were occupied with raising young children so that I felt it my duty to rally to the cause. I did not expect to come back to school so I packed all and flew home.

What a mess I came into! The house was filthy and my parents unwell. Dad was on a special diet for the ulcers which necessitated my getting up twice during the night to feed him. Mom was on complete bed rest so there was a lot of care involved with her too. It took about 3 months to get things rather stable when Mom passed out on me choking for lack of breath. We knew she would have to have surgery and have the goiter removed but we hoped to have Mom stable enough to enter the operation with less risk. We almost lost Mom then. We took her by ambulance to the hospital and surgery was done upon her thyroid. She had a thyroid crisis after it and I stayed with her throughout the night. Thanks be to God, she came through it the next morning and my patient got better. 10 more days and I had her home again. Dad was still ailing, of course. My time was taken up at home and I didn't even nurse at Mercy then. With proper diet and medication, Dad got better and Mom improved too. After 6 weeks or so both patients were up and about and life seemed stable enough for me return to Washington. Gee was back in Bay City having completed her time in Grand Rapids so though she could not live at home, she was there and Pen was getting more responsible as an 11th grader. I took the plunge and went back to school that fall.

My last year of the schooling at Washington came with some changes. Mrs. Mike gave up her house and moved to Nebraska to be with her oldest son. Marie and I had to

find other housing. Jo decided studying did not please her and went back to nursing full time and lived at the nurses quarters. Before we graduated, she went back to California to be with her ailing parents. Jo and I kept touch for many years every Xmas. She married 3 times. The first ended in divorce, the 2nd husband died, and as far as I know she is still married to the third. She has not written the last few years. This seems like an apropos place to stop in this letter. My adventures will continue another time.

Love you and yours very much,

*(Letter No. 12)*

*Sunday, August 23, 1992.*

Dear family,

Between family visitors should be a good time to squeeze in another letter. Mark, Terri, and Rosie are due in the sometime this weekend. Mike and the boys left yesterday and arrived safely in Columbus just before 4 pm. That was a long and brave trip to take with those active boys. We appreciate Mike bringing them to us. They are so handsome! But then so are all our grandchildren. Look who their grandparents are! Just kidding, of course. Midland fortunately has a lot of playgrounds for the kids to enjoy and Mike even took them to the lake (Sanford) twice to enjoy the water and play in the sand. They seemed to enjoy themselves.

We had a letter from Teri yesterday. She said she missed my letters in the long interim between them so that I am all fired up to continue with my saga in life. There is still much to tell; as I recall, I had not even finished college in my last installment.

Marie and I headed back without a roof over our heads. We knew the University had a bulletin board with available rooms for rent. We were not overly concerned. We needed cooking facilities and that made the search more difficult. We made a hit with the Falconis' who had a basement kitchen for us to use. God was looking after us again. The room was about the same distance as Mrs. Mike's and again on 13th St. but at the other end. The Falconis were an older couple and seemed to yelling at one another all the time. Your Dad was not too happy about coming there when we had dates or phoning. They were hard to understand and often spoke Italian mixed with English. They would be mad as heck if we left a light on in the basement (we would go there some evenings to make coffee and study) but when she made spaghetti, she would always send us down a big serving and even give us wine to go with it.

My last year of schooling was really interesting. I had subjects more in line with my field and I got experience in Psychiatric nursing at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. We got to do some very interesting projects as well as the nursing experience. To go to the hospital, we could not walk. One of my classmates had a car and we paid her and got there without much hassle. One of the projects had to do with planning a ward. Remembering how inconvenient most hospital wards are designed, mine had the nursing station and equipment in the center rather than a remote end of the floor. Instead of long corridors of

rooms, I had small halls arranged in a circle with the work desk readily available in the center to all. I was there long before my time! The newer hospitals do have that arrangement! Your Dad helped with putting the plans on paper. We were allowed to do that. Can you imagine your Dad doing anything illegal? I had those plans with me for years (a matter of pride) and finally got rid of them in our move from Florida.

We did a lot of case reading on that affiliation and that was interesting yet not pleasant work. The human mind is a very complex organ. I read through a lot of sordid behavior sometimes to the point of nausea. One of the facts that stuck with me through the years to this day is about 90 per cent of the addition cases I read through started with the "innocent" marijuana. It frightened me enough so that I determined I would never try it. What a waste of humanity when the mind goes! In my day some of the treatment was barbaric!--that is when they treated patients. A lot were left to vegetate. We used a lot of insulin and electric shock therapy which sent the patients into convulsions. This supposedly was done to rearrange the synapse into proper alignment to encourage rational thinking. I saw no improvement in behavior patterns in that department. More to my liking were the group therapy sessions. Through those and the sharing done there, I did see improvement in the quality of life. No wonder there are so many groups still around. It was through this experience that I decided the importance of being a listener. Just about everyone wants a listener---probably make a good living hiring oneself out to do just that. While I was working there, I had no time to nurse elsewhere so money got very tight and I had to watch every penny. They had a wonderful cafeteria but I made my own lunch to save money. I did very well that last year and got good marks so that I could graduate with honors even with that D in German.

In that year I also took a course in Marriage. I guess I had more hope for getting married now than I had in Bay City. Dating in Washington was a lot easier----even without the frequent dates with your Dad. Life was lively in spite of the extra loads at school. I learned a great deal in that class. One was the beautiful concept that the union of husband and wife was a sacrament and considered a gift as was the Eucharist. When sex takes on this connotation, I feel blessed to be partner in it. Your Dad asked me to take his ring on my birthday that year in 1949 and I found myself accepting. My how things changed in my views and attitudes! I was finished a year ahead of your Dad and it gave me the opportunity to go to Grand Rapids and work out that year of service required to fulfill the scholarship requirement.

Back at St. Mary's (Mercy Central School of Nursing) I was teaching mental health and hygiene. I also kept health record on all the students. I was Freshmen class advisor and I tried to be a friend to the students and treat them as I wished I had been treated. I had an opportunity for a gem of a job in a psychiatric hospital in Ann Arbor, St. Joseph's, but had to put that by the board in fulfilling my Grand Rapids obligation. My how I coveted taking that job! I taught there one year and came back to Mercy Bay City and got married.

Meanwhile on the home front in Bay City health was again failing in my parents. Dad really needed surgery on his ulcers as diet alone was not working very well. Mom had the morbid fear that if Dad had surgery, he would not come out alive. So he suffered the tortures of hell. Mom, meanwhile continued to have blood pressure problems and the Parkinson's disease was taking a firmer grip on her life. Gee was married and living in a home of her own. Pen was to enter nursing school that fall. So once again I was called to

duty. The handwriting was on the wall before your Dad and I were married and we talked about our future in Bay City or no future together at all. You know the answer. I really felt terrible about asking him to make such a huge sacrifice. There were no engineering jobs to be had in Bay City. He had such excellent grades in school that it seemed like such a terrible waste to not use his gifts.

Well intentioned family wanted me to have a big wedding, lots of bridesmaids,----the works. I wanted a simple ceremony in a suit or dress that I could use again. Well, I gave in to wearing white (I deserved it and your Dad was a virgin, too) but kept the wedding simple. Helen was my only attendant and we had a simple brunch after the wedding Mass for family and close friends. We honeymooned in the Michigan Upper peninsula and we were as green as the forest. I admit to you that we didn't do any "heavy petting" prior to our marriage so that we were really novices at this love making business. I'm not sure your Dad appreciates my being so candid with you, but the truth is not something one should be ashamed of. We had a marvelous time getting to know one another and learning together. Nursing does not teach you sex---just the consequences of the act itself. Perhaps we were too naive; we did do some things right! We had 8 wonderful children. With the concept that marriage was a sacrament and God was with us condoning our naivety, we grew in love and warmth. To this day we have retained the closeness and warmth given to one another.

Our first year of marriage was full of problems with my parents. Mom broke her hip that November and that was a long time healing. She started having mental problems. My guess is that she had a stroke, fell and broke the hip. Some well intentioned neighbors supported her home on that fracture, I called the ambulance and had her hospitalized. She had open surgery and pins were put into her hip along with traction. In this environment, she was confused and that compounded her mental instability. She got very noisy and since Gee had children and a home of her own to look after and I could not be with her night and day, the staff recommended I take her home (with hospital bed and traction) and nurse her there. This meant giving up my job as instructor at Mercy and I never got back to hospital work after that. I didn't realize that I was pregnant with Lee Ann at the time so life became very difficult. Your Dad saved my sanity! With proper diet and medication, Dad improved and he comforted Mom while I did the housekeeping. We had to move downstairs to the small bedroom next to the dining room and I had Mom in the dining room. Every other night she would keep us awake, playing with her traction and babbling. The hip was a long time healing and Mom's mental condition got worse. Thank God I had the training I needed to handle the situation. My siblings were not a great help as they were involved in their own families. Ernie would come over Sunday afternoon sometimes to give your Dad and me a chance to get out of the house. Es came from Midland when she could but the grind and the pregnancy were wearing me down.

At this point, I think I will rest. Rehashing this part of my life is pretty painful and I would like to procrastinate to another time.

Love you all. Been a wonderful summer for us with so many of you sharing yourselves and your children with us. We miss you so much and thankfully look forward to visits from more of you!

As always,

*(Letter No. 13)*

*Monday, Sept. 7, 1992.*

Dear family,

This has been a very interesting summer; it was filled with many visitors and lots to do. Mark, Terri, and Rosie left yesterday and now I have a short breather before our Sisters Reunion. We leave Sunday after Mass and will be back a couple of days before LA and Rick arrive. Time (summer) has flown around here! Already weatherwise we are into fall. Trees are turning fast this year. Most of the tomatoes are still green though we did have some red already. Rosie was enthusiastic about picking them off the vines.

With much more busyness ahead, I determined that another chapter of my life is apropos lest there be too long a time between letters. The church fall calendar is starting with its classes this week. We will be doing Isaiah in bible class. Soon it will be canning time (Penny has apples ready and I have sauced and pied some of those). With so much to do one just cannot get bored.

We were in the first phase of our marriage when I wrote last. Mom had broken her hip and had become an additional burden to me. I quit nursing and gave full attention to the patients at home. As luck would have it, I realized that I was pregnant with LA. Fortunately I had no problems with nausea but I admit to being very sleepy those afternoons of the first 3 months. It is a hard thing to take when the demands upon my time were so great. The fractured hip was easier to care for than the increasing amount of mental instability Mom was now showing. She became quite neurotic, fancied people were after her, heard voices and noises in her own world. I mentioned her sleep pattern. Every other night she would lay awake and make noise by pulling on her traction. No use telling her to stop; she was beyond taking orders. She would then sleep all day and I could not do much about that. Dad would help by trying to keep her awake in the afternoon so that we would get some sleep that night. In that mental state, she became incontinent and had a bladder infection so that she could not have a catheter. We did not have an automatic washer! Enough said; you get the picture. I was BUSY! All the psychiatric training in the world does not teach you to keep your own sanity while this goes on 24 hours a day everyday. That was the hardest year and a half of my life and I repeat that I could not have done it without the support (emotional) of your father. He would talk to me and take walks around the block to get way for just a few minutes. He did all the shopping, paid bills, and did what he could to make life easier for me.

Uneducated neighbors and friends did not come to the house to visit---even the relatives stayed away. My siblings came when they could which was not that often. I mentioned Es was in Midland, Edith in Pinconning, Gee in Jackson, and Pen in Grand Rapids training so that left my bro-thers in the city with me. They had busy lives and kids of their own. Ernie was coaching sports as well as teaching so he was busy evenings too. Time passed and eventually Mom's hip healed enough so that she was out of traction. She had a very bad limp but she did manage to get around. She got around too well and used to run off on me when I was not looking. She told neighbors that she was being kept prisoner and that they should call the police. Fortunately called me instead.

There were times when Mom seemed almost normal and that was encouraging and gave me hope. Then she would go off into a deeper delusion and it got so she would say her food was poisoned! Things really got to me and that may have been one reason LA



was born early. The work load, the stress, lack of sleep---whatever, anyway I went into labor and started bleeding. It was a difficult delivery (feet first) and LA was small. The doctor did not hold out much hope for her. You know, of course, she was in the hospital 2 and a half months before I brought her home. She just then turned 5# and was not even sucking a nipple yet. I was feeding her by dropper less than 2 hours apart.

While LA was in the hospital, I concentrated on Mom, got her a wheel chair and she seemed better. She loved Dad! He gave her the joy and attention due her. Watching my parents through this terrible ordeal, I learned a lot about what true love was all about. Those 2 went through hell together with the depression, raising children, sickness, doing without and making do. They fought and yelled at one another those early days of my childhood but they seemed to change when the money crunch was eased. As the kids married and the pressures eased up, Mom and Dad did things together---well they would walk, stop at neighbors and talk, and spend some time playing cards. Mom was a poor loser! Dad would play poorly so that she would win. Now that the chips were down and Mom needed his love and support, he was there for her. She got so that she didn't know anyone else (I was "that woman who keeps house here") but she would hold Dad's hand and know he loved her. She was sweet with LA, too. Getting dinner some evenings, I would put the baby in her lap in the wheelchair and she would coo over her and make her laugh. I must confess that I am crying at this moment in remembering this.

This was going to be hard I knew (I took time out to compose myself) but I did not expect to cry. I thought about not telling you all the details but that would not be truthful--especially to myself. You all could live without knowing about Mom, but I had to share it with you for ME!

In April of 1952, Mom made a feeble attempt to kill me. I was on my knees doing floors and she took a towel, got behind me and tried to choke me. She had little strength and I was not in real danger but Mom was no longer in control. I discussed this with her doctor and he recommended that she be institutionalized for my sanity. The pressure of 24 hours a day of tension was wearing me on me. Dad agreed and Mom was hospitalized in Traverse City. She wasn't there 2 weeks when she had a severe stroke and died. Had I known her life was soon to end, I would have kept her home to the end. What flak I got from Mom's siblings and relatives! Helen's Mom was the worst. She never came to see Mom or give me a rest but she laced me up and down for committing my mother to an institution! The lack of understanding really made me ill. LA was not yet a year old. I was emotionally and physically tired. Dad and my siblings understood. That was all I needed to know.

Just one more tender note in regard to this year in my life. St. Stanislaus has the custom of having the Angulus bells at noon and 6 pm. This is a reminder for those who pray for peace or whatever to say a few simple prayers. After those bells are rung, if someone is dead in the parish, they ring 3 additional bells to remind parishners to pray for the dead. I had never seen my Dad cry (it was not the thing to do!) but when those bells tolled for Mom, he sobbed! He needed a hug then. Oops! I'm tearing myself again.

This was also the year my brother Al died of ruptured ulcers leaving 4 children and his wife pregnant with another. Mom didn't realize the significance and was not able to go to the funeral home or Mass. It was a blessing as when Pinky and Don died, she was inconsolable.

Well, I'm relieved that part is written. It was difficult for me to share this with you.

First year of marriage normally is happy and fulfilling and I pray all of you had that blessed year. Your Dad and I have had a lot of happy years after Mom's death. I will go into happier days when you came into our lives the next time. Thanks for listening!

All my love,

*(Letter No. 14)*

*Oct. 2 to 4, 1992.*

Dear family,

Several weeks (busy ones!) have lapsed between letters. This week has been filled with something everyday and here it is Friday already. We spent from 9 to 1 at the Community Center in the second day of a drivers education course for seniors updating our skills and refreshing our knowledge of what to do on the road to be better and more informed drivers. It was time well spent. AARP provided the instructor and the text. Dad has been wanting to do this since we moved up here. Now it is done. Bible classes are in full swing and we managed a trip to see Helen who is now in Sterling in a nursing home--and very unhappy about it!

The saga continues. The last episode gave you a bird's eye view of our first year of marriage. (I do keep a copy for myself so that I can reread and try not to be redundant. It is also in my file in the computer so I can refer to it if I desire. Sage advice from your father.) That last letter was the hardest to write with many memories of a sad nature and they were hard to live through.

Your Dad should be filling in the gaps of his life at this time. Surely he will share that with you in his time. I have seen his format and he is using an entirely different approach. He is much more organized. You know he has been that way all his life and could be no other way. I go with the flow. You accept me as I am too. I mention this because he needs to tell you about his side of the details, his job changes, etc.

After Mom died, I had Lee Ann and Dad to care for. Dad's ulcers were bothering him a lot. Since Mom was not there to object to Dad having surgery, upon advice of his doctor Dad was scheduled for a gastrectomy. Fortunately Dad had Bay City's finest surgeon (advantage of having worked in the hospital and know he was tops!) He removed two thirds of his stomach---all the scar tissue---and had him up on the side of the bed by evening. That was just the start of early ambulation. In my training period we would keep the patients in bed a week before we tried to get them up. We kept mothers in the hospital for 10 days and they didn't get up until the 7th day. He had Dad eating soft foods the next day and within a week we had him home. Gee came in from Jackson to special Dad and I took care of her 2 children and Lee Ann while she was on duty. I was pregnant with Doris. I had no uniform to fit me. Dad made a remarkable recovery. He resumed eating foods that had been tabu to him for years. You probably remember Dad eating Polish sausage and eggs while he visited with us. He was enjoying real food and he was one happy man! Dad gained his strength quickly. He used to take Lee Ann out in the stroller when I got dinner. His friends would fill LA with candy taking away any appetite she would have for

a proper dinner. When I spoke to Dad about this, he would remark that he could not disappoint his friends who were trying to be kind. Dad was a special person; uneducated, but a thoroughly good person who loved his God very much.

If Dad missed Mom a lot after she died, he did not share that with us. He always hid his feelings so we were very sure how he felt. He did seem more relaxed. He welcomed the surgery. He suffered many years and had about enough. I had the feeling he believed Mom in her prognostication of his death if he went for the operation, but he suffered so much that death would have been a welcome release. Once Mom was out of the picture, we used to tease Dad about remarriage. There were women who would go out of their way to talk with him. Dad's attitude was that one woman in a lifetime was enough. My purpose in telling you this is to enlighten you of the change from havoc we had been living with to the very first peace any of us had experienced in a number of years. I was especially happy for Dad. He took up fiddling again. Many years before Mom had sold his fiddle without asking permission and Dad was deeply hurt. Mom used to call his fiddling "screeching" and had decided that she had enough. Somehow, somewhere he found the replacement you kids will remember. When Jack Batcke showed an interest (which he never developed) in the violin, Dad bought him one. In later years, Jim John got Dad's and took some interest. I think he finally got rid of it in his last move. You will remember Dad had little ability but got real pleasure for many years to his death making his own brand of music. Ernie tells me that Dad even played on his last birthday; he died a few weeks later. My Mom had a beautiful alto voice and sang in our church choir. So, there is a love for music in our family.

Once Lee Ann was out of the woods healthwise, we were a happy family. Your Dad got a better job with Austin engineers and made more money. We bought the food, paid the utilities but lived rent free. Hospital costs from LA's 2 and a half month stay at the hospital took the savings we had. Because she came so early, our insurance did not cover expenses so we were mighty glad to be free of major expenses. By the time Doris came along, we were a stable family with a future to look forward to. It bothered me a lot that your Dad was not doing the kind of work he had prepared for in college. Penny was in her last year of training when we decided that we could leave Bay City and think of ourselves for a change.

John Giorgis was the one who introduced Dad to the idea that GE would be interested in him. We took a vacation to Washington that summer of 1953 and on the return trip to Michigan, stopped in Schenectady to see John and Agnes. John arranged an interview with the higher ups, they liked your Dad, and he had a job offer. I waited until Penny was through with her training and would make her home with Dad. Your Dad went about 6 weeks earlier, lived John and Ag until he found a place for himself, and then searched for a flat for us to live in.

Perhaps you can understand our enthusiasm for starting our new life. Remember when you went off to college and how free you felt? It was like a breath of air in leaving a stifling room. Long had I waited for us to be a family on our own! Your Dad was marvelous about my staying in Michigan when I was needed. The sad part was that there were no engineering jobs in Bay City. I felt the lesser jobs he took were demeaning to him, but I never heard a complaint from him. To this day he finds some merit in having been a "peon" for that period when he worked at the power plant. I am not sure what he will tell you about this part of his life, but I want it on record that he was a real hero to me and the

Zielinskis. I know God is blessing him in many ways for his efforts.

The flat that Dad found for us in Schenectady was a large 2 bedroom upper part of an old house. It was furnished with old stuff, wall papered, and needed a lot of TLC. The things we had amassed in Michigan (crib, some furniture, etc) were coming but not in place. I had dare hope for better but Dad assured me that he looked at a lot of places and this was the best for what we could afford. LA was a bit over 2 and Doris about 6 months when we made the move. You can be assured there was a lot of cleaning (even wall paper) that had to be done before I felt it was more like a home should be. We had 2 flights of stairs; 1 in the front, the other to the back yard. I had an Easy Spin washer in the kitchen and hung outside. In the winter there was an attic above us that had clothes lines and I dried there. Birds somehow would get trapped up there so often I had the experience of dodging flying birds (who were as terrified as I was, I presume) and finding dead ones in their fatal attempt to get free. It made life interesting.

Perhaps I should have told you about the train ride to Schenectady; it was a harrowing one! Helen drove us (myself and the little ones) to Detroit to catch our train. We had a bedroom compartment. Two bunks but LA would not sleep in the upper so 3 of us crowded in the lower one together. Doris was good, but LA was cranky and irritable which in turn made her Mom cranky and irritable! It was an overnight train and supper was had before we left, thank God. I was breast feeding Doris so that feeding her was not a problem but LA just was the unhappiest baby I had ever seen. No amount of cajoling helped and we were a mess when we got to Schenectady. LA didn't remember her father. She treated him like a stranger. I had not been to Mass (it was Sunday when we arrived). I took off for Mass leaving the 2 with their father. LA cried the entire time. The lack of sleep might have been a contributing factor adding fuel to the fire. Meanwhile the landlady downstairs is tearing her hair and wondering if she made a mistake taking us as tenants. Rent was prepaid so we were safe. We all got to be good friends after a time but it took a while. Dee-dee (landlady) even came to see us in Scotia when we moved.

There was one incident in which Dee-dee came to my rescue and helped me save Doris' life. Before our furniture came I had to use our bed as a sleeping place for Doris. The bed had old fashioned springs and mattress along with the traditional headboard. Doris, ever the wiggle worm, only 6 months old, worked herself up on that bed and managed to wedge her head between the springs and the headboard. I tried in vain to free her so I yelled at the top of my voice help to Dee-dee. Fortunately she was home and came running. I put my full weight on the springs and made enough room for Dee-dee to snake Doris back out of the hole she was in. Another few minutes and she might have choked to death!

Enough for this letter? Whew! living that over was almost as scary as when it happened. My love to one and all.

*(Letter No. 15)*

*October 12-14, 1992.*

Dear family,

We (Dad and I) just got back from a walk that was unbelievably beautiful! This has been the most gorgeous fall that I can remember. I trudged out of the house tired to begin

with but once out in the cool fresh air, I was quickly refreshed in spirit. This is one of the reasons I came back to Michigan. Summer was cool and pleasant. What will the winter bring? With a renewed spirit and a cup of coffee at my elbow, I feel enough energy to continue with my life story.

As I recall, I was telling you about those first years that we were on our own at last. Living in a flat---especially with someone else's furniture---was depressing at times. Once some of our things arrived and the place got the care and attention it needed, we found life pretty comfortable. John and Aggie had Johnny by then so we had a lot in common. We saw them often and it was ideal to have ready made friends to share some meals and take rides together. John did not have a car yet so we would take them out Sundays for an afternoon drive. Johnny loved to sleep in the car. Lee Ann and Doris had other ideas but we had a good time anyway. We shared some picnics, sometimes Ag and I shopped together for clothing, and Dad and John got on famously and still do.

When the Giorgis's got a car, Dad taught Agnes to drive. She had never been on a bike and lacked confidence in steering and stopping. Dad would admit to Ag being his most difficult student to teach. You will recall he taught me and all of you. He also taught brother Al's wife when he died so that he has done a lot of teaching behind the wheel. Aunt Ag took the test 3 times before she passed!

There were few children in the neighborhood but Lee Ann was lucky as there was one little girl, Meg Cooper, her age and the two played together very well. Once I took it for granted that she was with her and put Doris down for a nap. Minutes later I went out searching for her and she could not be found. I screamed and asked neighbors if they had seen her and had all negative replies. Like with Doris and the bed episode, I was near panic! There was an alley behind our dwelling and we used it to get into the garage. There she was playing in a pile of sand oblivious of my concerns. She heard me but did not respond! Kids!

We must have been in the flat about a year and a half when I realized I was pregnant with Jim. We had a tiny room off the living room which opened to the porch. It was big enough for a crib, but little else. We were a bit strapped for room and a safe yard for the kids. It was then that we began looking for a house. Our landlady tolerated the children but the handwriting was on the wall for her to accept another one. She did not say that exactly but was edgy about the noise the children were making. She went to the horse races in Saratoga often, got home late, and desired to sleep in. With 2 active children up and about in the early morning, she no doubt would wake up cross. The house was not well insulated against noise so the patter of active feet did filter down to her. She did not try to dissuade us when we told her we were looking for a home.

Dee-dee and I did become good friends. She had a son who in a special school. He had an IQ of a moron at best. Phillip (the little guy) would report to me when he got home and would watch television until his dad came home from the post office. If the girls were napping, I would sometimes watch TV with him. Would you believe that we watched the Mac Carthy hearings! The TV was just a box to him and he watched anything. Dee-dee was fascinated with the hearings and had it on all the time she was home. When I hung a load of wash out, she would invite me to watch (if I had time and opportunity). She believed Mac Carthy hook, line and sinker and had all sorts of arguments to present in his favor. I kept quiet about my being labeled a "commie" in high school. I might have been invited to an early exit of the place. So that Mac Carthy area goes back to just before Jim

was born. We've come a long way since, eh?

Less than half way through the pregnancy, I had a problem. It may have been precipitated by my having carried heavy bags of groceries up the stairs; God only knows. I started bleeding pretty badly and started to labor. I was scared, of course. Bed rest, medication and lots of prayers saw me through the pregnancy in relative safety. There was some septicemia (blood poisoning) and I had a special no salt diet to put up with too. I tried very hard to be patient and good about this turn in events. With 2 active children to look after, no sisters about to help me, and a house to be moved into around Xmas time, it was rough going. It was then that we got our own television set to keep me and the kids quiet when Dad was at work. Sometimes Ag sent over a meal but she was in Scotia and we were in Schenectady. Long about moving time, I was doing much more than I should have and worked too much. We did get moved in before I started bleeding again and Jim needed to be born. He was about 3 weeks early. I did not go into active labor without being induced by drugs. I remember short bouts with labor and then they anesthetized me. I woke up finding a transfusion running and being told it was over and that I had a son. The Lord had been kind and gentle with me again! I felt stronger after Jim was born than with any other of you. It must have been extra good blood! They did caution me to be careful and I tried to be.

To this day I feel a special closeness to Jim. I can't explain it, but I feel through him I got my life back. I really thought I lost it in delivering Lee Ann! That was a truly painful delivery; such a small baby and so much pain! Jim seems like a gift in a very special way. I had prayed very hard when I almost lost him. Having held on to him, I knew God was really looking after me and him. Being my first son also may have some influence in this closeness that I feel to him. Please, none of you feel slighted. You are all very special to me and if I had to choose a favorite, I could not! I have been guilty of doubting the wisdom of having had so many of you so quickly. I would almost despair in the thought of being pregnant again and again. My own selfishness would cry out in unanswered pleas of how I was going to cope handling yet another child! My every waking moment was already full to the brim; how could I go on? The answer was always the same, alone I could not do it. God was always there for me, guiding me. You know what a terrific Dad you have; he was absolutely wonderful. I don't know how he stood me while I was pregnant! My temper was razor sharp and everything became a "big" issue. Instead of nausea and vomiting, I had this bad temper to control; it was not easy. How I worried for you kids! I felt like a cruel mother (Cinderella's step mother equal) and I was sure you all hated me with justification.

Bringing Jim home from the hospital was such a joy! We had our comfortable home now with a yard. Once my strength returned, I was back on a normal diet and life looked good to me. Jim had his problems keeping food down and often he had to be refed. I had to give up nursing him and resorted to a bottle. He was such a good baby and a very good little tyke when Mike and Mark came along. I remember feeling very guilty in ignoring some of his needs to tend to the younger two. My eyes fill with tears in remembering seeing Jim, crying in the playpen while I had Mike on one knee and Mark on the other. Lee Ann and Doris did a lot to try to be pals with you, Jim. They would try to interest you in toys and make you laugh. What you really needed was a huge hug from your Mom and she was too busy to give it to you. Mike and Mark came so quickly after Jim that I felt strongly that the bonding I really wanted to give to this special son of mine, was put on

hold. Jim has never made me feel that he felt slighted; it is my conscience that tells me that. You were all wonderful children in those busy years. I was proud and still am of every one of you. If there was sibling rivalry afloat, I was not ware of it until the youngest 3 had their squabbles.

Since this is a family history and I have no idea how your Dad is going to approach his health problems, (if at all?) I will share with you about his allergies the best that I can recall. I remember that he had some hay fever symptoms, (runny nose, itchy eyes) soon after we were married. It seemed to be a seasonal thing, spring to fall, with relatively calm winters. When we got to Scotia, the allergy symptoms started earlier and lasted longer. It became so annoying that I insisted he see a doctor. He was told then that the clearing of his throat was habitual and the doctor could not account for why. He has been prescribed drugs to ease him along during the worst parts of the year. The shots did not start until we got to Florida. He is taking something all the time now; less in the cold months but still some. He has been seeing a psychiatrist for over a year who seems to treat him with sedatives to calm his throat reflexes. There is improvement (slight) but the medicine seems to make him drowsy. You may have noticed that when his mind is occupied, his throat is very quiet. Likewise when he is relaxed or sleeping. He is at the piano now and nary a cough is coming forth. If I am to reach saint-hood, it will have to be through my decision to accept what is in him. I do complain but not often to him. As marriage encounter taught us, "the only one you can change is yourself" and I have tried to adjust. His skin cancers started early in our married life, too, and he had his first removed shortly after we moved to Scotia. You are aware that he has had dozens since then.

Seems I have jumped around this time. Next time I will share with you more about our family life and some of the joys and sorrows we shared as a family when you grew. I love very much. Doing this writing reminds me of what terrific kids you were and what a blessing you have been to your parents. Thanks!

*(Letter No. 16)*

*October 29---Nov. 1, 1992.*

Dear family,

Before getting into family history, let me go back a bit. When I decided to write these letters, I got a notebook and wrote down topics which I was going to share with you. In going back over them, I find that I have missed a few that may be of some interest to you. It would be more fitting to put them in now before I go into family raising.

When I was still a young tot, we had a wood-coal burning stove in the kitchen which served doubly as heat for that big room and for cooking. That stove carries a history with it. Most of our living was done in that room; it was warmest, had good smells (usually), and we went in and out that way. The stove was big and very black. At the far end of it, a reservoir of water was kept for dishes, washing, etc. It seemed to me that winters were colder then. We could not keep the fire going all night. Getting one going in the morning was a hassle. First the clinkers had to be removed, then new coal put on the bottom, lighter wood atop, and kerosine poured over it all. A match would ignite the flame with a scary boom! Often smoke would fill the kitchen; we had to open the door and frigid air would fill the room. Soot and smoke were everywhere---especially the ceiling and wall

near the stove. The wooden floor had to be scrubbed everyday. Track marks made bringing coal through the back door to the stove was commonplace and required constant attention. The whole kitchen (walls and ceiling) had to be done every few weeks. The scrubbing and washing was done by us, of course. Mom could be kept busy in cooking, breast feeding babies and doing the family wash and ironing.

The stove reservoir held about 20 gallons of water. Mom did a lot of baking Saturdays so that there was plenty of hot water for baths. You may now understand why we bathed once a week. There was a large kettle of water kept on the stove to supplement the supply, rinse dishes, and add to the bath water. The oven temperature varied with the heat it supplied. Sometimes the cake would come out with a big mound atop! Often it was charred. We just cut the top off and ate away. Mom knew nothing about frosting. Es brought that home from cooking school in the 8th grade. I learned the basics of cooking at school too. Mom knew how to cook, but had poor teaching ability so I learned few Polish recipes.

Would you believe that when gas stoves were available to us that Mom said they were unsafe and resisted them for years! We all cheered when we finally got one and life was easier. Gas made dirt, too, but not as much as coal. Long about the same time, our one source of water to the house (the kitchen pump) was changed and we finally had tap water. Because we had no basement, it was common for the water pipes to freeze and thanks to the old reservoir, we had water to heat to thaw the one pipe to the house. The sink was really old fashioned! We had a couple of shelves for dishes but no cupboard space. Under the back window, the sink stood and I believe that before we had our plumbing, waste water fell to the ground. I remember dirty stacked dishes to the left of that sink (maybe 2 feet by another 2 feet) and on the right cleaned dishes on a surface maybe 3 times as large. These surfaces were made of wood and were constantly wet. Some Saturday evenings I remember Dick and me scrubbing those surfaces hard and long. The next morning we had our reward in seeing beautiful white lumber instead of gray dirt.

We lived without a bathtub for many years. When the older kids had jobs, a furnace and tub were placed in the house---and a hot water tank! I remember a section in the "furnace room" wall being cut out to set the tub into place in what is now the bathroom. Prior to that it was a pantry. What luxury! I remember well that I felt handicapped when we only had one bathroom in Scotia, but it is not even close to what it felt to be without the facility at all.

There were 2 "neat" places for me to enjoy when I was a kid. One was the crawl space under the house; the other the attic. Because there were rats in the crawl space, I really felt like a daring person to go. I made noise as I crawled on my belly to the corners and "explored" to announce my presence. Mom did not appreciate my doing that as I always got very dirty. There is something about the smell earth and its dampness that appeals to me---even to this day. It does not repel me like the smell of gas or chemical fumes; I like it and would bottle it for myself if I knew how. Anyway, the odor must have been another reason for my being so happy when playing there. The last time I remember being down there was after we were married. My Dad was convinced that the door bell non-functioning was caused by a broken wire so that Dad and I traced the track one end of the house to another. I carried the light and he looked. As an adult it was a tight place to fit into. Dad and I had a shared experience there.

The attic was a place of refuge. There was no insulation and when it rained, it was a



heavenly place to be. I really enjoyed the sound of rain falling on the roof and the cooling off of the attic. It seemed like a form of magic! In the cooler months, the stairs were my favorite place to read. We usually had dill pickles by the barrel up there and I would munch away and read. Fall time we would have apples by the bushel and if we remembered to bring the cores down, we were encouraged to eat up. We kids liked playing hide and seek there. When Mom was away, (she hated the noise above her) we could bring our friends in and have a ball. There wasn't much up there; some boxes, lace curtain stretchers, some old gifts Mom and Dad got for the wedding, (I now covet the raised cake plate she had up there) the a fore mentioned pickle barrel and canned goodies which could stand the frost that sometimes did effect the attic. Most of the canned goods were kept in the closet off the middle bedroom on the first floor. One of the things that angered me was that my brothers (they slept upstairs) used empty canning jars as urinals and would forget to empty them! I did the cleaning up there and really hated entering the rooms as they would smell of urine. They would be punished (spanked) but the offense was repeated time and time again. Apparently going all the way downstairs was more punishment than the spankings. Mom was a great one for having you lay over a chair and then giving you some whacks over the buttocks for the punishment to fit the crime. (ho!ho!) Mom always said that it would hurt her more than me but I didn't understand that until I was the one punishing. Brother Don took an interest in taxidermy at one time and he stuffed an owl which he placed in the attic. I knew the darn thing was there yet every time I went up there, it scared me. Those eyes were life like even in death. Don was such an interesting brother to have around. He, like Ernie excelled in sports and participated in all of them---even to handball and skiing which Ernie never took to. Don was also interested in photography and had his own darkroom upstairs. He had some great work and I wish I knew what happened to all those pictures.

These chapters are many now and for me to reread all to be sure I am not repeating myself is more of a challenge than I care to undertake. So if I repeat myself, be understanding. Some of these things I tell you about today have been with me all my life and I must have wanted to share them with you. Therefore, I am not sure whether or not I told about a typical Xmas at our house. I believe I told you that we had no tree until Es was working. Edith kept promising one but was a dream never filled. Mom had a sister who was a nun. While she lived, she would send us wavers that we would share in the family Xmas Eve. It was the same bread that is used for hosts. The idea was to share what you have with others. A piece was given each of us; we in turn would divide that piece and share with our parents and siblings. The meal itself was simple because the celebration was to be the next morning. That morning we usually Polish sausage, eggs, and coffee cake. During the depression when Dad was out of work, we could not afford that. Oat-meal, bread and lard likely would be the menu. In better days, chicken would appear for dinner and Mom made excellent dumplings. During hard times we had spare ribs and sauerkraut and were glad to have meat at all. One year I remember eating at the Salvation Army and having deer meat and pumpkin pie. We never had presents but enjoyed a bag of peanuts and oranges that came through the welfare system. Actually we were not aware that present were given to one another. It was a day for Christ and that was present enough. I stand corrected about the gifts! The school PTA always had a box of Xmas candy (the size of a box of animals crackers) for us each year. We ate those very slowly so they would last longer.

One of the things I hated about Xmas was the Santa that came around and spanked the children for being bad all year. I have no idea who it was that did that and can understand even less why my parents would allow this to happen, but happen it did, year after year. He would carry a bag of coal and leave that instead of a gift. I felt very cheated. I worked hard to be good----especially before Xmas and it was always the same story. Alas! Poor me!

One more item before closing down for the day. My Mom needed to be understood. When life would get tough for her, she was moody and restless. I believe I told you she would take off on us and say she was not returning. It scared us as children but she achieved getting the attention she wanted. We were there for her, hugging her, and telling how important she was to our lives. We were there giving her the love she should have lavished upon us. It seemed like reverse rolls we were playing. Dad was great in most ways, but he did not understand his wife and her needs. We are all guilty of this kind of neglect. You have good marriages (I leave Tom and Mike out here) so please take time out and appreciate what you have. The advice is free; love one another, don't take each other for granted, and enjoy the gift God sets before you. As I age, I am aware life is short. I'm set to enjoy what is left of it. I love all of you. You do know that!

Sincerely,

*(Letter No. 17)*

*Tuesday, Nov. 10, 1992.*

Dear family,

The adventure of life continues! As I recall, Jim had been born, we were in our own home, and now we were 5 in number. For whatever reason, Jim had troubles keeping his food down. Often I had to feed him slowly and ended up not having enough milk and had to resort to the bottle. Too bad! Nursing a baby has a wonderful bonding effect and it does get you off your feet. When Mike came along, it was sometimes impossible to sit and bottle feed. That's when the propping of bottle learned in training, came in handy. When Mark came along, there was no way keeping up with demands. Washing and drying diapers alone was time consuming. Those were the days without automatic washer and dryer. Needles to say, that was only a small portion of the wash with so many beds to be changed, towels etc. The sick babies were a real bane in life! Half nights of sleep, trips to the doctor and towing other kids along, (where does one get a sitter in the middle of the day?) plus all the other chores of being a housewife and mother. Your Dad was a tremendous help but he had a family to support and a job to go to everyday. Weekends he was very good about getting up with you. Some of the tougher nights he was up, too, especially when 2 or more of you were sick at the same time. Remember the bunk beds? When the top bunker let go of his cookies, that usually went 2 bunks had to be changed. Soaking soiled linen in the middle of the night was not my favorite occupation.

You might well ask why I did it? Why have a large family under such extreme con-

ditions? Having been brought up with a conscience and fortifying the ideals of Catholicism in college, the only form of birth control I was about to use was rhythm. Having had irregular periods all my life, I was not always sure when I was ovulating. My spouse was not a demanding person for sex and to this day, I can't understand why 8 of you were born. I can understand Mike being so close to Jim. From the onset of that original bleeding until 6 weeks after Jim was born, there had to be complete abstinence and a healthy couple misses the intimacy that binds a marriage. The Church teaches us that marriage is a sacrament and that act of intimacy is a source of grace for us. Those wants have to be met just as food has to be supplied for nourishment for the baby. I'm sharing this part of me with you for you to better understand your mother. Each time I realized I was pregnant, I was scared stiff! How was I going to cope when my life was already full to the brim. Each day had only 24 hours! I knew I could not do it alone. Somehow God helped me cope. Putting the problem in His hands and having confidence that I could do it, the miracle was accomplished with each additional pregnancy.

Hopefully none of you feel that you were neglected in an essential way. Naturally I would have preferred to have more time to enjoy you in your formative years. As I recall those precious moments of you as infants and the time we did have---say at bath time---, I well up with pride and tears remembering the softness of your skin, the blowing bubbles on your tummies, those gorgeous buttocks, the giggles in your happiness, the pulling of the hair (sometimes painful!) when the face got too close, and most especially the hugs and kisses! I was painfully aware of what I missed in having Tom. With him I had time to be there for him. Mary and Teri said I spoiled him and perhaps they were right. You are all my babies but Tom being the youngest got the most attention from me. It does not make him better than any of you as a person. You are all terrific! You have no idea yet (until your kids are grown) what joy, satisfaction, and pride I feel in having borne you. Dad and I can stand tall and be proud of you children! We had your cooperation in formation of your character, maybe set up some road blocks you would preferred not to have in your life, tried to be examples and models as good citizens, and tried hard to be honest and loving with you. We never took you for granted even though at times you may have thought so. I hear rumors that you thought you had to go to college! Nonsense! We didn't push Lee Ann into something she could not handle. We are guilty of not discouraging you when you chose to go on. We tried to encourage you to carry your interest with you to college and supported you in your choice. Really, I am not looking to praise nor am I beating my breast saying I faulted. It took me a long time to realize I have a lot of self worth and I like the way it feels within me. Hope you are saying "Rah! Mom!"

Having gone through a lot of scripture study in the last 20-30 years, my Faith has been changed. When I was a kid, all we heard from the Church was hell, fire and damnation! I was scared into being good. Since Vatican II, the LOVE of God to his beings shows through to me very vividly and I find warmth and tremendous love for all Christians. Once we were told to believe only Catholics (good ones) went to heaven. I had my doubts about that. Now we have prayer and study groups together and share our Faith in a common bond of Christianity. The people are ahead of the formal Church and are leading the clergy to some new thinking. Birth control, married priests, homosexuality being just the tip of the iceberg. The Church as it is today is a viable, loving, educating, and exciting membership. Some parishes are more in tune than others but the old priest are dying off and new thinking has to enter into the picture for the Church to survive. I have no doubt

that it will. What I am trying to say is that I have a much more liberal attitude about rights if individuals and respect each and every one of us to make decisions suitable to our needs and consciences. Most young Catholic couples are using birth control; I know it and do not judge them. The divorced are being studied with a lot more compassion and are being welcomed back into the sacraments. I wish you children had been exposed to the Church of today; you may have changed your thinking about leaving its membership. I need my Church to sustain me; it does a good job. It supplied me with needed strength even in its "less enlightened years" and is a source of hope in my declining years. In light of today's teachings, I might have considered birth control as a way out for me but then, which of you wished you would not have been born? Since none of you has suffered sufficiently in hunger or want, God must have done well by me in giving each and everyone of you to me. The world gains by having you contribute. My reasoning makes me believe that I have absolutely nothing to apologize for in having all of you and a heck of a lot to be proud of. I congratulate us all. Glad we are on the planet together. Amen!

When I started this letter, I had no idea that I would go off on this tangent! My rational mind got me to thinking and remembering tough looks and hard feelings from neighbors in Scotia with each new pregnancy. They hinted strongly that I should be ashamed to bring so many children into the world to burden them with taxes etc. If all offspring were contributors as you children are, this would be a much better world. Again I say pride is what I feel and not remorse!

All this does not indicate that I may have chosen an easier path for myself. I remember telling you that I had plans to go to Hawaii after graduation and have an entirely different kind of life. After 17 years in Florida, I'm not convinced that Hawaii would have been a paradise on earth. "Like a shepherd He guides his flock; holding them close in his arms, leading them home!" Those words from one of my favorite hymns is apropos to my wants and needs through out my life.

Those first 10 years in NY were very busy. Looking back at them, they were also very productive and I had good health, ambition, and desire to do right by my family. We had some wonderful experiences together. Dzia-dzia and his summer visits, fun in the playgrounds and canals, picnics, looking for bunnies and lots you remember that I don't, I have been glancing at a red book you kids put together for Fathers' day one year that had some beautiful reminders in it. Mary titled it "I Remember Dad". You remembered "3 kids in a bath tub", "being carried to bed "dumb horse' way" "chezzy-wezzy stories", "daddy reading upside down and backwards", "the sprinkler hose", "shining shoes before getting allowance" "home made Halloween costumes" "hiding in the closet and yelling surprise!", "time for rosary!" and lots more. I remember a happy and productive family those first years. Sure there were 6 of you down with chicken pox at the same time and colds and middle ear infections came often but the happy memories are the ones I retain best.

With that happy note, I'll let you go. More another time. Dad picked up my autobio and started reading it today. I invited him to a long time ago. He says he's "impressed". I have read parts of his, too. He writes well and certainly with accuracy. I'm also "impressed" with what he sends you. You certainly should know your parents when all is said and done! We are sharing with you and opening up like never before. Thanks for

inviting us to get it down on paper. We learn that way!

Love you much,

*(Letter No. 18)*

*Monday, Nov. 16, 1992.*

Dear family,

It is snowing! The ground is still warm enough to melt the flakes as they fall but the sidewalks are slippery. In deference to a risky walk, I decided to share another chapter of my life with you.

My mind plays tricks with me. Since you children are now entering into the picture, I assume you know a lot about our life. Then reason takes over and though you may recall some things, they are not be in the perspective of parents. As a child I recall being punished (most always unjustly!) and remember nothing of the events that lead to the punishment. I will share with you what I remember of those Scotia days and you may add your own. Some of you claim to remember early in life. I don't. My mind picks up with kindergarten and there only bits and pieces.

When we moved into our first home on Holmes street, married life really began for me. Lee Ann and Doris were born elsewhere, but I was glad Jim was brought from the hospital "home"! At last there was little concern for waking or disturbing others when a child cried or got noisy. To this day I enjoy having space around the house and the privacy that comes with it. Isolation that comes with country living is a bit much; having neighbors near but not too close is quite another. Kids need playmates, school, church, doctors, and groceries near at hand. We had these in Scotia.

We were just settled into our house when Jim was born. It was fun being mistress and making decisions for a home. Until I was aware I was pregnant with Mike, I had the "ideal" family and would have coasted happily through life with that many in our group. I sewed dresses for the girls, did not feel too hurried in the tasks about the house, and felt at peace with the world. In spite of Jim spitting up his food, he was a good baby and slept well. I enjoyed that time with him. There is something special with mother and first son. Mike was a beautiful baby! He captured my heart at first glance! Now there were demands on my time. Life started getting very busy, was fulfilling, and gave me a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Somehow I found the strength when I needed it. Your Dad, as always, came through when I needed him most. When I was pregnant with Mark, I had a "talk" with God. I knew that unless I had help from Him, I would go bananas. I found that which I needed and even had 2 more of you in Scotia before we moved to Endwell.

Fortunately most of you understand in having your own children, the rewards of parenthood. Sure there were a lot of tough times; you remember going without sleep, suffering the pain of sick children, enduring to the scrapes (some pretty big ones at times) life puts in the process of growing up, the times you cry when you have to say "NO!" to requests they don't understand. It goes on and on. There are rewards when least expect them. I look at you children with pride in the realization of what you have done with your

lives. At first it was the papers you brought home from school, participation in school activities, finding school challenging and cooperating to get good marks. Those projects! Again the list goes on and on. Makes it all worth while!

There are a number of dear things to remember about Scotia days! Foremost in my mind is the pleasure in babies! You may remember a picture of Jesus with children all around Him. He has a couple on each knee and several gathered around. He has a warm and inviting look in the face. Having my group of babes about me and feeling the confidence and warmth you had in me, I can understand the love and compassion Our Lord feels for us. It is one the deepest feeling of love one feels in this life. It is no cliché; the more love you give, the more you get in return. Adoration is for God alone but the deep love and admiration I feel for your Dad and you children is like that--- deep and profound. It is having a bit of heaven on earth when I take time out to reflect upon the goodness of His love for us. I pray this does not make you uncomfortable---my talking of God as I do--but if I am to share who I am with you, Faith has to be included. Without God's help I know I would not have been able to cope. Be happy for me. I am.

A lot of memories flood my mind in regard to those days. The neighborhood had plenty of children and you paired off very easily. You probably remember the Lominis, Heaneys, Peers, Rogers, (the sign painter) Letterons, (with dog Dukey) and Graebes the best. When you got to school, other friends came into the picture; Paul Witkowski, (with the loud voice!) Diane Gionette, and the Dahlhauser clan. Of course there were the Barlows (who ended up with 14 children) and the Giorgis's kids who remained friends even when they moved. Dad and Unk John still have long phone conversations now and again. Then there was Paul Oiulette (?) across the street from us who had all the toys you boys coveted.<sup>1</sup>

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To remember also were: the crayon marks on the furnace in the basement, (still don't know the guilty party!) Saturday morning sneaks, computer paper atop the frig for drawing, Lee Ann lighting all the votive candles at church per instigation of Doris, crowning of Mary in May (and rosary), First Communion and Confirmations, eating grapes before they were ripe and subsequent belly aches, Mary's stomach pumping, Mike's bean in the nose, Doris severing a tendon in her leg, Doris scooting up and down stairs on her fanny when she had the cast, Sunday morning breakfast with the Giorgis's, baby sitting the Dahlhauser clan when she had another baby, enjoying fresh strawberries from Lomini's farm along with some other fresh goodies, romps in the woods and playgrounds, trips to the library, swimming at Collins Lake, (remember the water chestnuts! ouch!) picnics at Thatcher Park, Dzia-dzia's 6 week summer visits, all the canning and making of grape jelly that I did, the plays you put on in the garage, the birthday parties (one of Lee Ann's when it rained!) and that just scratches the surface. Tom being the youngest and not born yet certainly missed out on a lot of family living. He got his share in Endwell where our adventure in living continued.

Some of you must remember that long single driveway to the garage we had that housed our car. When we got our station wagon, Dad had to extend it to get the car in.

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1. As I recall things, the child was Jimmy Ovit. I could easily be wrong about the name and its spelling. His Jimmy Jet was indeed a great toy. It was a flight simulator long before kids had personal computers. — ed.

Shovelling that narrow drive was a pain. There was no place to put the snow in the section between the houses. We had snow filled winters in those years. We have snaps that show it. The large front porch was great for evening sitting and watching the rain. The attic was an interesting place but I don't remember you exploring it like I did when I was a kid and we had one. The stairs were sometimes used as time to cool off after being bad when you should have been sleeping. Normally the basement steps were used for time outs. I was glad you thought of the stairs as punishment. As a kid I would love to sit up stairs. We got the strop over the buttocks instead---I believe I told you. Mom did another awful thing. When she put us to nap and we did not cooperate, she would go to the bedroom window (the shades darkened the room), knock hard, and say that she was the " boogy" man come to get us! I learned a lot of what not to do from watching other parents.

You may remember the little sewing room off the dining room where there was room for a crib and little else. The baby slept there nights and daytime up in the parents room. Since Teri would soon need more than a crib, we realized a bigger house was a necessity. We looked at some houses with 4 bedrooms and 2 baths but they did not fit into our tight budget. Then came the hassle of what to do: add a wing on to the back part of the house or turn the attic into bedroom space. Would this old house support another floor? The stairway was so narrow that it would be impossible to get furniture up there without raising the roof---which already was too tall. Ask the guy who had to put the storm windows up and paint the peak! There was also a lot of dissatisfaction with the job at GE so your Dad began looking elsewhere for employment within GE to keep his benefits. God has always been there for us steering us right. We solved our problems by our move to Endwell. I was thrilled in our good fortune. Here we had a newer house with 6 bedrooms, 2 full baths, a family room, DISHWASHER, and a basement in a price we could afford. We did have anxious moments selling our house and ended up taking a loss rather than try to rent one and live in another.

We were sad to leave good friends. We knew that new ones can be found but there is that uncomfortable feeling in getting started. Next letter should deal with those progressive years. Most of you probably look upon Endwell with great affection and I do too. It was a great place to bring up a family. Hope you enjoyed reading about our Scotia days. I had in recalling them for you.

Love you!

*(Letter No. 19)*

*Tuesday, December 29, 1992.*

Dear Family,

We had a great Xmas! Hope yours was as pleasant. Tom being here and your phone calls made the day for me. Aunt Pen had the full crew and I was envious. Likely we will never have that pleasure again; we are too many in number and too scattered. Gift wise we did very well, too, and thank you very much. I said phone calls are enough and I meant that but thanks anyway. Pattie, I didn't get the wine glasses until yesterday! Some 2 day

delivery service! I know you sent them in plenty of time to get here for Xmas. I was beginning to think them lost. In this carefully wrapped box came a wonderful T shirt with all my grandchildren hand prints! It is just darling! I giggled and teared when I got the significance of the shirt. You must have gone through a lot to get that done, Pattie, and thank all of you for cooperating so that she got all the hands together on the shirt. What a cute idea. I am mad that it did not get here in time so that I could have worn it when the Schmidt clan was here for dinner Sunday. That would have been a cute way to brag about "my" grandchildren.

Life has been busy and very full since my last letter; it seems ages ago and checking back I see the last letter was in late November! Dad has been more diligent than I and says he is ready to send on another chapter. If I was as careful as he, I would be 20 years getting mine done. I'd be long gone by then and you would not get the full story. Being who I am, I'll go on extemporaneously as I have in the past. With you children now on the scene, (and probably remembering more clearly than I do with my addled brain) I could move on more quickly. Some of you have said you have been and still are interested for us to continue. This has been an experience for me. Most of my life I have concluded that people are not interested in who I am as a person; to find you children actually inquisitive about my past gives me an ego boost! Thanks! It may not be true but I have felt that for most of my life I have been taken for granted. In growing up I had the feeling that "Lee will do it" (whatever!) and she did because it was expected of her. I remember few thank yous. As a married person again my full time was for my husband and children. It wasn't until Marriage Encounter that I began to realize I had worth as a person. Our marriage, my needs, and then you children was the picking order.

Since I have started on this topic, I may as well go on. You are where I was in those years before ME. I see the same devotion of selflessness to your families as I had. You work your fingers to the bone, your whole attention is centered about the children and their needs. You seldom get out as a couple alone. I remember the first time I left Lee Ann and saw a movie. Pen was a nurse and the best sitter anyone could find, and yet I was miserable through the movie. I had the idea no one could take my place and I belonged home with her. What a "duppa!" (that's ass in Polish) If I knew then what I know now, I would have taken a lot more time to get to know my spouse, enjoy him while I was young with life to celebrate, and put you children last. Once I started to do that, I found I had a lot more energy, was a happier person, and jobs went smoothly. I then was content as a person, happier in my relationship with your father, and realized my being taken for granted was of my own making. In these later years you may have heard, "I'm worth it!" from me when good things came my way.

You are to know, too, that had we not started in ME to realize to the importance of OUR relationship, Dad and I would be married singles each doing his own thing even today. There is enough of that anyway. He has more free time to spend at the computer, reading, and doing his thing own while I am still "housewifing". We do go out as a couple, have things to talk about when we walk, enjoy bible study together etc. etc. We need space from each other too. My day and a half off every week came through a discussion we had. Dad is now helping to clear the table, put dishes in the washer, and get his own meals on the days I choose to be away. If I decide to stay in, I cook dinner and he cleans up. You know Dad's allergies are a constant irritation to me and I have had to learn to accept them. ME says the only person you can change is yourself and he is not about to.



So far none of the treatment (even psychiatry) has done much good. Were I to start over again, (and had the knowledge I now possess), I would spend less time in the kitchen and more time smelling the roses enjoying life. God has been good! My life has been pretty much my own since Tom went off to college. Your Dad and I have done some wonderful things together. Life has been full, pleasant, and rewarding. One of the things that turns us on is the freedom to travel. I have been to the Grand Canyon and San Francisco--- great longings of mine as may well remember. Seeing Alaska is a dream not yet fulfilled. It may happen when we go West again. Perhaps I will be the first Hamill to see Alaska instead of being the last as in seeing the West Coast.

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Seems I have been packing us off for Endwell a long time. This is the third attempt to get us moved! However---a few stones are left to be upturned! I don't remember telling you of the fenced in area we had in our back yard in Scotia. It was an area of maybe 12 by 14 feet. With 3 young boys under foot all the time, it was not easy to keep a watchful eye upon them. There had to be a place to put them while I dashed to the basement to get another load of clothes to hang out, answer the phone, or what have you. Mike especially hated to be put into that play area. I can picture him even now crying his eyes out, feet on the support boarding of the gate trying to scale it to venture out! Jim was a little smarter. He started digging out a trench under the gate (just like a dog!) as a means to escape. We would fill it in, pack the ground down, but like the gofer, he didn't give up. I remember 3 boys into the challenge and making it play time to get the opening back into crawling out shape. They succeeded! Dad gave up and pulled the darn thing down.

There was also a sandbox at the back end of our property. I had it placed way back so by the time you got to the house, you had less sand in your shoes and clothes. Once a week new sand was placed in the box; every week more sand spilled into the grass and carried into the house than the project was worth ---to me. You kids loved that sandbox and never seemed to tire playing there. There were roads, bridges made with sticks, and block houses. You were such an imaginative bunch of kids. When the sand was not replaced, you used what was left in the lawn but interest was soon dead.

You may remember, the long pulley clothes lines I had in the yard. We had them in Endwell too. The small back porch had a ledge about 8 inches wide 5 feet up from the frame. Those were the days before automatic washers and dryers. I would hang the clothes largest to smallest and send them down the line to dry. When I took them off, I would stack each kids clothes separately on that ledge, and then had you kids take them upstairs to your dresser space. When you would ask, "Mom, where is my underwear or whatever?" I had a ready response of, "Right where you put them, dear!" We had to have a system and cooperation to keep the busy household in semi-order.

Remember the busy jobs you had before you went to school, Doris and Lee Ann? I don't remember what LA had to do but Doris was assigned to dust mop the upstairs floors. We had beautiful wooden flooring that needed constant care and waxing. Kids will be kids and they grouse about "all the work they had to do" and parents have to keep in mind that they are teaching responsibility when they could do the work themselves in a short time. Anyway---at times like this I was reminded all over again of when I was a kid and had those same feelings with assigned tasks. "I would run away and then who would do all the work for the family after I am gone" rationalization took over. Don't get the idea she was the only griper! You all did it and probably remember as well as I do about my

youth. Keeping in mind how I resented all the responsibility I had to assume as a member of a large family, I know I bent over backwards trying not to heap too big a load upon any of you. If you don't believe that, you have no idea of what I went through as "the responsible one" in our family. Some of my siblings still have no idea that it was a position I had not chosen or even that I did all that much. Being taken for granted is not a desired nor healthy thing. My siblings did a lot for the family. I have shared with you that we all pitched in; it takes that to make a family. My family married early in life except for me and that automatically made me the oldest at home and the responsible one. I, for example, had to quit college and come home to nurse Mom when she fell ill. With God's grace I did go back.

Sorry! We have not picked you up at St. Joseph's school in our Ford station wagon yet for our adventure ride to Endwell. Mary and Teri are at the Lominis' being looked after while the final packing is being completed at 123 N. Holmes St. Will you wait with bated breath to the next letter? They used to leave us with a cliff-hanger in the chapter plays at the movies in the 30's to entice you to come back for the next installment. The ride to Endwell was something and you may be interested in my version of it. I will not rush through it now. Next time we will get there. I promise.

Much love,

*(Letter No. 20)*

*January 8,11,12, 1993.*

Dear family,

We're into a new year already. May God grace us all with a happy and productive one spent in good health. I see by my notes that come April 24th, I will have been at the saga of my life a whole year. There seems to be a more to share. For sake of brevity (already too late for that!) perhaps I should make it a goal to be through by April of this year. My count takes me to 45 written pages. Of course I did tend to digress from time to time so not all is about my life. Anyway, I remember stating something to the effect that you "may be waiting with bated breath" for the next episode. You would be dead if that were true. Much has happened between letters and it is almost 2 weeks since I last wrote. For one thing, Mary Batcke Masters's husband died and was buried in St. Augustine, Fl. Es was gone for over a week during Xmas and after. What a tough time to die for the family. My brother Al died just before Xmas; I can identify with bad feelings for Xmas for a few years after. Time passes all too quickly. I can hardly believe so much time has elapsed between letters.

So----let's say goodbye to Scotia. When the final package was hoisted aboard the moving van, there was still a house to clean for the next owner. I tried to clean the upstairs as it was emptied. The basement stuff was last to go so it was the last cleaned. We believed you would be picked up at school around noon, but it was mid-afternoon before the car was packed for our overnight stay at the motel in Endicott. We gathered Mary and Teri from the Lominis and headed toward for St. Joseph's school. It was not too difficult

saying goodbye to the house (I delighted in anticipation of a new house with 6 bedrooms etc.) but I knew I would miss the neighbors and friend we had made those 10 years in that area.

Maybe you remember this was another December move so that boots and winter gear had to be gathered from each classroom as you departed. I weny from one classroom to the other. This meant 5 set of classroom goodbyes to friends and teachers. I remember Mrs. McCarthy saying to me, "Why is it the good students leave and the problem children stay for-ever?" I could have hugged her! One by one you assembled into the car. Dad was there with the 2 youngest and settling each of you entered. You may not remember but the Ford wagon had the back seats facing each other. This meant boots and gathered school stuff crowded together became hard to handle! Seems waiting at school, the anticipation of things to come. no after school snack, and heaps of other dissatisfactions among you made that drive to Endwell the longest drive I could remember---to that time, that is. We were to have others equally trying as the years went on. Mrs. McCarthy's remark about "good children" seemed foreign to me. Could be that I was tired too from a hectic day of packing and cleaning. Patience was in short supply.

Being winter the days were short. Dusk had already fallen when we got to Endwell. However late it was, you HAD to see the house before we went to the motel. The truck was due in early morning. I remember a bunch of squealing little kids going from room to room making claims of possession. Long before we left Scotia I had planned who would be where but that made no difference. It did delight my heart to watch your enthusiasm and excitement! I knew I would have my way about the house arrangements so I let you dream away. Getting you back into the car was a job. Only the promise of food put some order into our leaving the house. We had 2 motel rooms; one for each sex and a door between. We ate that night at the motel in a private dining room. Thank God! My normally good eaters in choosing their own menus made lots of mistakes and there was a lot of dissatisfaction among you. The chosen sphagetti was not like mine, the chicken was different (of course!), the meat tasted salty---what have you!!! Even Teri who was normally a very good baby and had baby food was out of sorts, tired and irritable. Everything that could go wrong did and life seemed anything but worth living. When even dessert was unsatisfactory, that was it!! Early bedtime was in order and not fought. Anticipation of a new home tomorrow was all the incentive needed to get to bed for early rising. Doubling up in beds was a new and not welcome experience but we did make it through the night.

Breakfast the next morning was better---and again in the private dining room. Management probably would have insisted anyway from the prior experience. Even in the private dining room last night's dinner was an embarrassment to your parents.

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We had to be early at the house to open up for the movers. Again the flush of excitement was clearly in evidence. The wild enthusiasm for "helping" the movers was quickly squelched! New schools had to be assigned and entered. That took you out of the way. Mrs. Dean (then in the house the Stoklases later bought) came across the street and took Teri into her house for the day. What a wonderful thing for her to do. The crib was quickly found and moved there. Teri seemed quite content and had a good day. Mrs. Summers came over too and offered help. Mary made some trips with her father so I was left to do my thing with the movers.

No more bunk beds! It was a pleasure to have all the beds where I could get at the easily. No more banging my head changing sheets or kids falling from upper bunks. There was privacy. Your Dad especially had a thing about that. I had not known much in my life but he was brought up that way and wanted each of you to have a place of your own. He insisted upon a desk, bed, and private possessions that you did not have to share. 2 in some bedrooms gave a lot more privacy than 4 in one room. Lee Ann and Teri even had a room to themselves. Mark's room had a bed for Dzia-dzia when he was there.

Settling in was a busy time. Lee Ann had to go into Johnson City to school and had to take a city bus to get there. There was no room for her at Christ the King. That was quite brave of her and a lot of responsibility. It was probably a good half mile walk to the bus stop while the rest of you had to venture just up the street. She could have gone to Homer Brink but we wanted a Catholic education for all of you. We wanted to give you a solid understanding of your Faith that we lacked in our education. We were affirmed to any sacrifice to make that possible.

The furniture we owned was not quality stuff. A lot was mail order put together by your Dad. You will remember the sturdy boxes he made to house the blocks we amassed those years. I believe other things from that era of our lives are scattered among you. How dearly I coveted new furniture for our much newer house! It was a stretch in the budget just to get the house. I remember buying some cheap drapes from the Rogers (neighbors next to us) to fill the windows that would have otherwise gone without. They were a very poor fit and had to be pinned when closed to provide privacy at night. The living room was a sad sight! The one decent chair was a platform rocker that swiveled. You kids would use it as a merry-go-around. The replacement years later did not swivel! My Dad was sure you would kill yourselves on it. Sometimes it did tip over when the momentum was too much for it! Since we had no prior family room, we were short of furniture. The TV was located there. If memory serves me right, we got 3 molded plastic chairs and later a roll away bed. Dad's next raise got us drapes (that fit properly). A few years later we got new living room furniture and the old stuff went down stairs. When we started to replace, we bought quality and a lot is still with us today.

We had a very pretty view from our big living room window! You will recall we lived at the foot hills and could look across several miles up and unto the hills of Vestal. Fall and winter were especially pretty. This area was so beautiful! Driving those steep roads in the winter with snow falling was not a challenge I wanted but had to accept time after time. Our 100 by 150 foot corner lot meant we had a lot of snow to shovel. We had plenty of it those days; we all have memories of sore backs as we cleaned those walks. The two hills of our yard made grass cutting very difficult. We must have been there about 5 years before Mr. Stoklas gave us his old gasoline engine mower to make it easier on us. We all took turns at mowing, too.

Dad and I still marvel at how well you all adjusted to the new school and area. You made new friends rather quickly and seemed happy. Likely you still have a friend or two you hear from at Xmas. My guess would be that those 10 years in Endwell did a lot to form you into the people you are today and may even regard Endwell as "home". You surely did not look forward to leaving when we had to move to Florida.

There is still a lot to say about Endwell. It occurs to me that this is hardly my autobiography any more. It is more of a family history as I remember it. It may be interesting to compare what you believe to be true and what this parent understands. I find it very dif-

difficult to remember a lot of details. Right now it seems like I am painting a picture and I have the basic scenery all plotted out. Putting in the details to paint the essence is much more difficult. I want to be accurate but my memory fades and sometimes it is impossible to reconstruct. I guess I am not senile. In senility old memories seem to flood the mind and recent events are forgotten. Essentially you know all about me. Nothing hence forth is new material. I would like to share with you my feelings in the gradual emptying of the nest. Likely I'll be through before my self-imposed April deadline.

As always lots of love,

*(Letter No. 21)*

*Wednesday, January 20, 1993.*

Dearest family,

How do I begin to tell you about the pride and joy I feel for you, my family? Once the cat got out the bag about my injury, there was an overwhelming response of love from you. The phone calls, the flowers, your show of concern has deeply touched me. I feel very honored, privileged, and blessed to have you as my children. Doris said it this morning in my expressing surprise at such huge family concern, "You're our mother! There is only one of you in life!" Excuse me but I have taken my role as parent as a responsibility. It came with the promise of "I do" at the altar the day I was married. Raising you children became my whole life, For years you were priority over my husband in an attempt to be that "good" mother. Twenty-five years late, I learned in Marriage Encounter that to be that kind of a mother, I had to put my husband first. I remember thinking at the time, "What nonsense! The kids are in their formative years and demand full attention from me and their Dad." Other slogans, "The best thing you can do for your children is to love your spouse" "Love is a decision" (not a duty) became sense. Through our taking time out to dialogue we learned we were very special people. Having felt that I was taken for granted was of my own making. Little by little the layers of veneer peeled away and I found I liked the person I was and my marriage was really very special. I found more energy for doing what I had to do, I enjoyed my role as a wife and mother and had new enthusiasm for trying the different to make life interesting. When I was consumed (and that was what it really was!) in trying to be the perfect mother, there was room for little else. Once I assumed a more relaxed air about raising you, your response was edifying! You know me well enough to know that I did NOT let go of the reins, but in relaxing the cord, you responded in a positive way, too. I learned a lot about you and life in general those days in Florida.

Be thankful there was a change. As your interests widened and you took on your own personalities, you made decisions that we, your parents, did not go along with heartily. We had learned from our mistakes that there is no way preventing others from going through the same route; we knew you would learn (sometimes painfully as you are aware) and come out a better person for it. It is usually thus. Some folks make the same mistakes over and over again; I tend to believe (and seen in evidence) you are all mature enough to

have benefitted by your mistakes and been better for them. We parents like that! We feel some measure of success in the people you turned out to be.

Holy Toledo! There I go again in one of my tangents. I started this letter with the intent of showing you how much better I felt. If I am well enough to type, I certainly am on the mend; I am! In honesty I do feel a lot of hurt yet but the pain is tolerable now and I have lost the desire to be dead. In the acute phase I was ready---the Lord willing. There were times when I felt I could not take anymore; at one such time, I asked to taken to the hospital. Arriving there my blood pressure was 210/140--- indicating the kind of pain I was undergoing. You know my history of not being able to take most narcotics; they were hard pressed what to give me. They ended up giving me a muscle relaxant and another pain pill by mouth that gave me some blessed relief. The third dose of the medicine got me vomiting and that ended that dream. The most relief I feel comes from the use of heat and ibuprofine. Aspirin usually helps but due to the injury and bleeding into the tissues, it is better not to use it. My nemesis is the night time! I am used to sleeping on my right side; that is where 2 ribs are cracked and bruising very much in evidence. That is where the heat is applied. Pillows support the heating pad to keep it in place but the pressure is a lot to take. I take as much of this as I can and end up sitting on the sofa with my feet on the foot stool. This is not an easy way to get to sleep, but it sure beats coping pain. As I said, I am getting better. The bruising is getting better, the edema is reducing and I am more comfortable daytime. I am waiting for my first good night. The doctors say 4-6 weeks will see me through the worst of it.

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Tell you how it happened and then I will let go of the experience forever! I was at the desk (Dad's) proof reading a letter I had written to my sister Gee. I had a desire to get up for something, rolled the chair to the open area behind me and made a swift motion to lift myself from the chair. You will recall that Dad has 2 fill cabinets and a cover over them to provide him with extra work space. He stores a lot of stuff atop this desk. As I rose, I hit my right rib area on the very corner (two corners coming together at a sharp angle) and felt a great deal of pain. I blanked out a bit, feel on my knees, and after I got my breath back, realized I better get help. Dad was not home. I managed to pull myself back up to the chair, wheeled over to the desk and called Pen who just came in from a walk. She came right over, took me over to the Medi-Quik where they took Xrays and found the fractures. With history in pain medications, all they could do is give me something mild and recommend that if things got rough. go to the emergency room at the hospital. I took the pain until the next night. I told you about that. I have since seen Dr. Hood (follow up from my own physician) and together we came up with a medication (Esgic Plus) which is a muscle relaxant that makes it easier on me. The heat is still my greatest relief. I pray none of you ever have my idiosyncrancy to drugs. Needless to say, I pray the Lord does not give me a disease that is painful to end my life.

Let me thank you all for the beautiful flowers that been arriving at my door EVERY day. One man brought 4 of them to the door day by day and commented, "Do you still have room for these?" He didn't know I had others in the house. My living and dining rooms are beautifully adorned with fresh flowers. I do enjoy them; you know my weakness for them. Yet a bit of Grandma Hamill is within me and there is that "You shouldn't have spent all that on me!". Even though I know my worth (good ole ME!), you have needs and the money could have been used elsewhere. I understand Doris got the ball roll-

ing and I do appreciate your kindnesses. I feel loved, appreciated, and well attended to by you. Know how very special I feel to be your mother! I'm so proud of each and every one of you!

Before signing off (I do get tired!) I must tell you what a remarkable job your Dad has been doing to keep my off my feet and pitching in to do the work around here. My sisters have done a lot to help the food supply, but Jim is right in there doing what has to be done around the house and keep us feed. He does beds; he does laundry. He and Pen offered to clean house Friday. I hope to find professional help instead. Es is working on that for me. She has someone do hers---who may know someone etc. I would prefer to pay for those services. I don't anticipate doing any heavy housework anytime soon.

Again a great deal of love, appreciation.

*(Letter No. 22)*

*Monday, March 1, 1993.*

Dearest family,

It has been too long between letters again! It seems each day gets busier than the one before it. How this manages to be is a mystery as your Dad is helping with the housework (still doing evening dishes and the heavy work on Fridays). I did all that and more in my normal schedule and still found time to write. I will admit to reading in a lot of my free time. For years I had no time for books; now I read every free moment. I enjoy mysteries and have taken to reading a lot of John Lutz (a Pulitzer prize author) and find his way of solving problems very fascinating. He has a lot of profanity (seems to be the "thing" in literature these days) which I thoroughly dislike, but that is a price I pay for reading a good story. Your Dad has always been an avid reader and continues to be one. He came across a list of "Should be read books" in Heritage Magazine and tries very hard to get and read them. He just finished *Oliver Wiswell* by Kenneth Roberts (over 800 pages). He tells me it is a historical novel of the Revolutionary War period which he hugely enjoyed. There are some 42 books on this list which he intends to pare down one at a time. Compared to his reading, I guess I got junk but I like what I read.

We will be on the road again. Actually we are flying to Texas March 20th and returning the 29th. Late in April we intend driving to Columbia to be there for the arrival of Mary's son. We will leave Florida for a Thanksgiving or Xmas vacation. We are staying home this summer to be here when the weather is at its best and we can enjoy any visitors who may want to spend some time here. You are all welcome; just don't come at the same time. We can put up 8 without a hassle, however.

We are enjoying a cold and snowy winter like that of my youth here. One day we had a foot of snow (we shovelled 4 times and the blower came in very handy) and that was atop some we had already on the ground. The earlier snows I was in no condition to help; this last one I was ready to pitch in and I did. I enjoy this work. It gets me outdoors. The air feels fresh and clean. It is gorgeous when the snow is new and clean. As you probably remember of New York days, as soon as you got your drive and walkways done, the plow comes through. That happens a lot on Swede as it is one of the main arteries north and south. Since we moved here, there has been a lot of construction and the road gets used more often. This means they clean it first---which is nice yet the apron to the street needs

to be cleaned more often. Our walks are more of a challenge. That is good for us. Your father is a dedicated walker! He will go even I feel it is too slippery or cold. Properly attired, it is comfortable and enervating. We have had no January or February thaw. You should see the heaps of snow in the parking lots around town!

It was my intention to write more about our Endwell days. Somehow I managed to fill almost a page in "catch-up" material of news about home. Surely you are more interested in those earlier days. Since my brain is not as young and agile as it was when we lived in Endwell, there may be errors in what I recall and when. I will not try to be chronological or delve deeply. I will share what I remember best. With you children on the scene now these letters are like a sharing; talking over old times. In this case it is a monopoly! I have the floor. When you are raising 8 children, having the floor is novel. The demands of the children came first. Those were pre Marriage Encounter days and you children came first in our lives. We had within us college religion and a marriage course that stressed the prime reason for marriage was for procreation and education of our children into the Catholic faith. You should remember our dedication in providing you with a Catholic background. The schooling, family worship at home and church, the honesty and integrity we strived to teach, consideration for one another (yet with a healthy respect for each other in private rights with your own things), good and healthful meals, clean clothes, a warm house, attention to your individual needs (very hard with 8 on hand), doing things as a family, (wonderful vacations with the Schmidts among them) encouraging you to study hard, (hopefully without nagging) and nursing you through illness to mention just a few of the things we do as parents. Granted these are all positive things and we parents tend to forget the many mistakes we make along the way. Hopefully we left no permanent scars in the negative things in your lives. Now in rearing your own children you have an appreciation of some of the sacrifices you make in being parents. Love is a powerful force and we sure loved all of you---and still do. For the most part, I am pleased in myself as a parent. Living in today's world and starting over again likely I would do some things differently---but only through what I have learned through experience. For sure, I would take more time for myself to "smell the roses" and enjoy the better things in life while I was young. I have that opportunity now and I do take advantage. Yet--there is that guilt sting! I tell myself that I am worth it but deep within me there is doubt. Marriage Encounter did a lot for us in positive thinking and I do owe a lot to the organization. Yet when I had youngsters about me all the time, it seemed impossible not to put them first. Looking back at it now, I view myself as a martyr to the cause and that seems unhealthy in my present thinking.

Who knows what you would be if we were free thinking, easy going, relaxed parents in rearing you? We'll never know now. You have that opportunity in rearing your own. In 20 to 30 years from now how will you evaluate yourselves? Prayerfully it will not be with remorse and guilt that I sometimes feel. God knows I did the best I knew how yet gnawing guilt is there in my doubting. We make your own decisions in life. I think back at the number of you I had and wonder was that fair? Yet how could I decide which of you should not have life? As Essie once asked long before I was married, "What difference would it make if you never had life in the first place?" If you are not born, there is no need to speculate about life. She had 5 kids; she must have changed her mind.

What does all this have to do with my biography? My dears, this is who I am. It is very difficult to share my opinions with you. I do believe to truly understand who I am, I



need to share my understanding of life as I see it. Thinking back to my own parents I wish I had a better understanding of them as persons. I know only what they cared to show me and much of what I may have assumed could have been faulty. We tend to hide our feelings and reveal ourselves. You have to in life not to hurt the feelings of others. How wonderful it would be if I had better knowledge of my parents as kids that I could share with you! We children saw a lot of sadness and sacrifice and little joy in my parents. I would like to envision my mother as a child playing, having friends, schooling, etc. but I run a blank. You all should know who I am and was through my telling my story my way. I have had a wonderful life (and still am) and I want you to know it. Sure there were times when I would have dumped it all (I was ready with my recent rib fractures) but in bouncing back each time, there is value and life is good again. I have shared with you how I always loved to use my mind in making up stories to enjoy. Those cold mornings in bed as a kid were made an adventure with my mind enacting a happy day with a beautiful tree for Xmas---or what have you. I would enjoy knowing my Mom did likewise when she was a child. I cannot see her doing that! What a pity. I do remember Mom had a beautiful alto voice and she enjoyed singing. How lovely to have that memory.

We have had lunch and I am back but I seem to have lost the thread of what I hoped to share with you. Rereading (nice feature of the computer!) has not stimulated my brain. That happens in old age---I mean vivid recall is elusive. What is even harder to believe is that the far greater share of my life is behind me and not before me as it was when you children were growing up. There was such joy in watching you grow in mind and body! The sheer joy of realizing that we had a part in your formation as people of the future was ---is awesome! Life is still full and interesting for me. Living is an experience in itself. The last 20 years have been particularly rewarding. Not only have I been better educated in ways of Faith but also in the ways of the world. It is very upsetting in a way to realize the full impact of the nasty things that happen all over the world and in our own back yards, yet challenging and sometimes rewarding if we take the initiative to do something about them. We help financially, of course, but our church has support for Habitat and food for the hungry. I would like to get more involved in Habitat and we have talked about it but not done anything. Dad is so good in fixing things and I do a fair job of cleaning. These are areas in which much is help is needed.

My hit and miss attitude in writing has forgotten to include Tom into our world. He was the only one born to us while we lived in Endwell. Teri was but 6 months old when we moved and I thought she was the last in line. I was well into my 40's by then. Heck no! Into our lives came Tom. What I particularly wanted to tell in this letter was how proud we parents were about you, as a group, being so receptive to each addition to our family. Sure I know you had no say about it but a lot of families built up resentment among the children. I remember how livid Essie got when Mom was pregnant with Penny! She was a senior in high school and Mom was in bed the last 3 months due to a fall on the ice. Es was a January graduate. Pen's birthday is January 14th and to hear her tell it, the weight of the Zielinski world was on her shoulders. We were all helpers around the house but Es felt the burden was all hers. Heck she even played the second lead in their senior play and she had to take time out to learn her lines. I remember going over her lines with her. I remember so well bringing Tom home. Oldest to youngest sat on the sofa and held Tom in the lap! It seemed like an immediate bonding to me! I'm not saying there was no friction among you, but basically you were cohesive and loving family then

and I believe you still are. We are very proud of all of you!

Seems like my hope to finish my autobiography within a year of writing will not materialize. We are into March already and it will be a year in April since I started. You know what the rest of my life has been but you are not aware of how I felt with the emptying of the nest. It started in Endwell you will recall. Next time onward!

Love to one and all,

(Letter No. 23)

Wed/Thurs. Mar.17/18,1993.

Dear family,

Seems I have a few hours free this afternoon. Dad is off on an errand of mercy and I am not in the mood to be ironing. "Never do today what you can put off" is my motto. A couple of days hence we will be packing for our trip to Texas. I doubt that I will finish this letter before then but with the "save" system on the computer, these words should not be lost.

Essie's 80th birthday celebration was a success and truly a surprise to her. She believed her kids were taking her out but did not dream her friends and relatives would be there too. Chuck Jr. came from Europe (business and pleasure), Mary was in from Atlanta and Sue from Canada. She had 100% of her kids there. Mary has taken a full week off. We had her and parents over for dinner last night. Mary told us a lot about Don's illness, surgeries, and death. She is a very grieving widow. Wisely she is forcing herself to go to support groups and finds some solace among others in her situation.

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We had one of our coldest walks of the winter this morning! Will spring ever make it? Yesterday morning it was raining and warm. By afternoon we had another cold front and went down to zero before morning. Hope Texas has some warmth to offer us. Doris and I have yard work planned.

Before I get further involved in trivia, I had better get to the purpose of this letter---that of continuing our family history as I remember it. Last mentioned, I believe, was our move to Endwell. Those were pre Tom days and life took on new adventure in a new house and community. It seemed to me that though you children missed your friends, you all were very receptive to this change. The luxury of 2 full bathrooms and enough bedrooms so that no more than 2 slept in one bedroom (not 4!) was well received by all of us. We welcomed the beauty of the area! Living in a newer neighborhood was not hard to take either. Shopping was convenient and church near at hand too. The neighbors (especially the Summers) were tolerant of our large family and very friendly. Busing you children to school was no problem. We seemed like a congenial and happy group. Our large yard was an asset---most of the time. Cutting grass and shoveling snow was a hassle at times. There was enough room to garden, play games and even plant trees which I recall Doris and Mary (?---not sure who the second one was) grew from maple keys. That is as scratch as you can go. Dad had his bird/squirrel feeders in their branches and one attached

to the side window facing Winston. The new trees flourish! Remember? We had lots of trees and leaves to supply summer shade and fall leaves to gather and jump into. Raking them for refuse was no fun at all. The forecythia bushes that ran the length of the back yard on Winston were a rage of yellow in early spring! They grew like mad and were a pruning problems until winter. No doubt Jim will remember the rose hedge between us and the Fucks. Those were the wildest bushes I had ever seen! The pricklers were bountiful and branches grew fast and furious! I remember telling Jim early in the spring I would give him ten cents for every root he dug up before the growing season started. He did a great job and removed them all. After that I realized why the hedge---that hedge---had been placed there. Once the kids saw the hedge gone, our yard was used as a short cut to Homer Brink School!

You will likely recall adding bikes, (Dad in frequent repair of them) playing at Homer Brink playground SPUD (actually using ELEPHANT) to make the game last longer. walks with your father while I got BIG meals at Thanksgiving and Easter, swims in the CFJ pool for 10 cents each----and Doris's forever "40" as a guess at the temperature as we went by the bank thermometer in Johnson City, bathing 3 in a tub for many years even into Endwell days, (we called our bathrooms male and female facilities) the contests between you and your father in wringing out wash clothes after baths, the "dumb horse" rides to bed and the "Cheezy and Weezy" stories, Dad reading you stories and falling asleep on the job, (he also loved to amuse you reading books upside down and backwards). There were hot summer nights with the attic fan making an awful noise and a large fan in the window of the uppermost end of the house working hard to try to cool us down. Relief with the hose in the yard after supper (now that was cold water!) running through the sprinkler certainly is a cherished memory. There was amusement with the Frisbee on land and in water, picnics wherever we lived, (and some futile attempts at starting fires!) routine Saturday night supper of hot dogs or hamburgers and beans, flying kites early spring days, hiding Easter gifts (to replace the eggs that made such a mess---and Doris always pretending to be the last to find hers---. There were routine not such fun things too: shining shoes Saturday nights and showing them to Dad before you got your allowance (the boys scampering to Kent Drugs to buy baseball cards---and don't they wish they had them now!---) studying when you wished to watch television, getting ready for church and saying family rosary, ALL those hard assigned tasks as cleaning basement and garage, mowing and raking lawn, errands to run, and papers to deliver (later in life).

There are other rich memories; homemade Halloween costumes that really triggered the imagination, Mike and Mark diligently working on Space projects they entered into the school science program (and won!), making toy guns out of wood (we didn't allow toy guns or violence) and having your "gangs" and fights anyway, using cardboard boxes to slide down the grass, laughing together over the "Electric Company", "Rocky and Bull winkle", "Get Smart", "Road Runner" and others---mostly favored by you and Dad. Also remember vacation trips with check lists of things to find and license plates to locate. GE had an annual Xmas party and each of you brought home your first gift. Prior letters I remember sharing with you the Easter sacrifices you made and the excitement of Xmas.

Hopefully we have provided you with more pleasant memories than adverse ones. One good thing about aging is that we tend to remember the good we experienced and forget the rough spots. In recall, I tend to make light of those pitfalls and now believe I was fortunate to have a relatively easy life rearing you children. In recalling my childhood, I

remember hardship and suffering more than the good things in that part of my life. One thing I learned from my youth was the importance of family. We Zielinskis have stuck together all our lives and still do. Essie's recent party showed us again what a cohesive family we really are. Gee, Pen, and I got together, learned, and sang SISTERS putting some of our own words into it to show our affection for one another. We were well received. It was a fun occasion. I would like for you all to celebrate in happy memory too.

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When Tom was born into our family, we were then complete! After I got over the shock of being pregnant so late in life and had a safe delivery, he became a very welcome addition. I know you used to think I spoiled Tom. Heck he was the only child who got full attention and I had time to be a devoted (though not doting!) mother to the youngest offspring. Tom was fun and you all enjoyed him, too, though you didn't care to admit it at times. Even Tom grew up as we all do. He's pretty terrific! Right?

It was in Endwell that you grew up. I remember days when Christ the King got to be too small and a new church, Our Lady of Angels, was constructed. While the building was being erected, we had our Masses in the basement of St. Joseph's church. Often you boys were serving on the altar and your parents were very proud! You may remember one Sunday we had Fr. Bruce Ritter talk to us about his work with the homeless and kids on drugs. We started contributing way back then and still do. Though Fr. Ritter was questioned for his behavior a few years ago and a new administrator was appointed, we believe the idea of proving for these unfortunates is a good one and we continue to support them. Tom was an infant then and played with Lego so that we could go to Mass as a family. If I had a nickel for every time I was reminded that "you are the family who set in the pews with 8 children" I would be some richer! I was proud of my brood then and still am. We are a good family!

From Christ the King most of you went to Seton Catholic High School where again you did us proud. Lee Ann showed us she was quite an artist, Doris and Jim clearly indicated they were science people and very good students. Mike, a very good student, too, seemed more interested in sports and factual things. Your parents tried hard not to push you too hard and wanted you to develop your own interests. We were thinking toward your adulthood and being happy in what you were doing to make a living. I saw what EE did for your father and I wanted job satisfaction for you.

It was here that you developed friendships and close ties. I believe all of you were happy with your lives and friends. Not many of you wanted to move to Florida and leave all that behind.

My dream of getting into the "empty nest syndrome" has not materialized. It is coming and it was a very interesting time in my life. You get to know what stuff you are made of when the kids leave home. The next letter should start the process. As you see, I did finish this letter before leaving for Texas. It did take 2 days, however.

You know you and yours have our love and prayers.

(Letter No. 24)

Monday, April 12, 1993.

Dear family,

We had our Easter. Would you believe that it snowed while Dad was cooking our Spiedis for dinner! Saturday was a beautiful sunny day and pleasant. It snowed hard while we ate. The streets are fine but the grass is covered with snow this morning. Will spring ever come? My sisters and spouses, Helen, Dad and I didn't let that stop us from having a wonderful meal together. We had our happy Easter and hope you did too.

This cold snap gives me the opportunity to write more of the saga of the Hamill clan. Soon as the weather warms up, I want to get out in the garden. Lots to be done there before we venture DC way and greet the new member soon to be born. I can well imagine Mary is very uncomfortable right about now. Several of us know what it is like those last weeks.

It is now Monday, April 19th and we will be leaving Thursday for Mary's. Needless to say, I got little done in continued work of family history. Hopefully, I can get more this time around. Dad and I had our morning walk (in a drizzle) so I should be able to write without interruptions.

The Endwell years was a time for you children to form your characters and shape your lives. Those ten years were jammed packed with major decisions with a future in mind. For me it was the most interesting part of our lives together. There was a lot of work involved even with all those new things I had: an automatic washer, dryer, dishwasher and someone to iron those shirts you wore to school. My every moment was filled so that if I did manage a short rest, Tom would think I was sick and tell me to "Get up and get to work!" The apron with the six divisions for tissues I carried with me to Endwell. We had less colds there (no doubt the dishwasher helped) but Dad and I recall many sleepless nights with sick kids. At least without bunk beds changing sheets at 2 am was more easily accomplished. We still had our pinworm infestations when the whole family (Mom and Dad,too) took medicine and all beds had to be changed and the house vacuumed. Having a dryer cut down on the frequency of that ailment, too.

Those wide eyed, naive kids I had in Scotia grew in wisdom and stature. Each visit with the pediatrician for physicals had the same report--- a spurt of growth and he/she (Mike being an exception. He started his spurt in high school) is in the 95% group. I spent an awful lot of time in the pediatric offices! Often times I had to take others of you with me and it was a hassle to keep you amused in those long waits. As in Scotia, finding a sitter in the middle of the day was not easy. Rapid growth meant sizes changed frequently. Shoes were not an item I could pass on from one to the other. I recall Mark needing new shoes 2 weeks after the purchase of the prior ones! We only had the one car which made it unhandy for shopping and appointments. We had to look at every penny twice in our spending, but you never went hungry and always had clothes on your backs---maybe not the kind or as many as you wanted.

There were times in those years when I did wonder if I could hold on to my sanity! Having 8 of you around, 24 hours a day (summers), 7 days a week meant a lot of noise was constantly about. I believed the only time it was quiet was when you were eating or sleeping. TV (which you were not allowed a lot of) sometimes got your attention but even there differences were made to be known among you. I was not much for some of the pro-

grams you fancied (Batman, Get Smart to mention 2) but I clearly remember those programs putting your Dad into hysterics with you. So when it was time for school to begin, I was right ready to waken you with "Happy days are here again" which I know you resented. Basically you were good children with varied interests which occupied your time and paired you off with friends but there were inside squabbles that would set my teeth on edge and "go to your room----separate ones" tried to be the answer to the difference of opinions. It never was, of course!

In those years I learned a lot about you, your interests and your ability. In high school Lee Ann blossomed in an appreciation of art. Mrs Highland, teacher, recognized her talent and encouraged her to "express herself" in what she painted. I felt she had some of Grandma Hamill's ability in her. We considered art school after graduation. When LA learned school meant English, sciences, math etc. besides Art, she realized a college education was not for her and opted not to go. She has a fantastic sense about decor to this day. God has given her a lifetime talent. When she went on Retreat in high school, the Beatles mania left her and she went to prayer groups. She was the first to learn to drive and often had our VW to take her to services. She had to go over the Vestal highway and when she was late, I worried a lot. As I recall she worked as a motel maid and a department store in display before she went to Worcester.

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We knew Doris would have ability to tackle just about anything from the time she was a baby. She learned everything very quickly. Mentally she was sharp, physically strong and able, oozed with ability to entertain herself and LA creatively, and was a real "do it self girl". She was toilet trained at 9 months, hung on to breast feeding the longest of any of you (9 months), walked at 10 months, and the Xmas tree was in the playpen her first Xmas instead of her. The only feedback we got from her teachers was that they could not challenge her enough. She did very well in high school and definitely was college material. She was sought out to baby sit for others. She was liked, kind with the children, and reliable. She had rapport with people. I'm not sure she realized that as we did. She chose her friends well, enjoyed sports and high school debate. Doris also has ability in art. I especially become aware of that my last visit with her and her family.

Jim, like Doris, was bright from the very beginning. When I had problems holding on to him in pregnancy, I did not know what to expect. Early symptoms like I was having often produce an imperfect fetus. His early eating problems were a cause for worry for me. Until now, I have not shared this fear with anyone---even your Dad! God heard my prayers and more than compensated for his rocky start. From about 6 months on, he seemed to be very normal. He certainly was a good baby; slept well, was sick less than most of you, easy to amuse, very interested in just about everything. Once in school he was an avid learner. We recognized his potential early in life. His interest in astronomy and his choice in friendships indicated he was special in many ways.

Mike was a doll (I'm sure he hates hearing that!) as a baby. Lots of people mistook him for a girl. He was such a loving and open tot. From early beginning I fashioned Mike would be a diplomat later in life. Among those first 3 boys, Mike seemed to be the leader. At least it seemed that what Mike wanted to do swayed the other two to conform---not in a maligned way just through the power of suggestion. He certainly seemed like a leader to me when he and Mark were interested in the space program. Mike was the lad who was spelling and reading before he started school. He was doing his "thing" with calendar

dates early on in life, too. We had no complaints from any of his teachers. We knew he, too, was college material. Wonder whatever happened to that "beautiful" voice he had greeting our neighbors in Scotia with "O What a beautiful Morning!"?

Poor Mark coming so close to Jim and Mike had to fight for his position in the family. Like Mike, he was attractive at birth and when Mike was 2 and Mark one, people mistook them for twins. From the back even their mother could not tell them apart. Mark grew a lot faster than Mike and soon caught up to his height. Those who were exposed to Mark, loved him on sight! He had a winning personality early on in life. "My favorite" son (named Mark) gave the best hugs! He loved to be picked up and held. As a reward he would put his cute little arms around your neck and hug tight! Mark was well liked and had some interesting friends. He was a good student, too, but didn't seem to be interested in the sciences ---outside of space, that is. Later we realized writing would be his thing.

What can I say about our Mary!? She challenged me right from birth; first with septicemia she developed and later with pneumonia a few months later. Leaving her in the hospital left me with an empty feeling that haunts me to this day. I felt lost and abandoned--- a huge part of me was missing. When the doctor told me Mary was not coming home with me, I began to cry. Dr. Tepper looked me squarely in the face and retorted, "Do you want a live baby or not?" He was a good doctor with no bedside manner. Dad and I remember trips to the hospital to feed and love her. I remember telling her to get well soon and what a great time she would have meeting all of you. Once challenges started in Mary, she continued to assert herself many times many ways. I don't know why I had to spank her but I do remember her defiance and saying, "I will NOT cry!" And she didn't! I remember praying for forgiveness. I did feel like the worst mother in the world. Believe it! When I said in punishing, "This hurts me more than you", I really meant it. I do believe Mary and I have a close and good relationship. Actually she had a lot of me in her as a child.

Mary was 3 and a half when Teri came on the scene---that was the longest rest period I had between pregnancies. Our Palm Sunday baby was a welcome addition---though Mrs. Letteron told me I was crowding the universe with my offspring and I should be ashamed! Good thing she didn't know I had Tom after our move. That hurt! I recall that barb vividly. Again we had an attractive and good baby. I had more time to enjoy the babyhood of Teri. Mary was well out of diapers and on her mischievous own a lot of the time. Teri and Mary developed to be good companions for one another. Nice that I had arranged 2 girls, 3 boys, and 2 girls in that order. You know, of course, that the sex is determined by the male but I'll take credit for it. Here we had a potential of beauty and brains right off! What wonderful gifting to your parents!

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The caboose, Tom, born latest in my life could have been a mongoloid---or so they say of pregnancies in later life. Thank God that was not true. Tom is as gifted as any of you and head and shoulders over a lot of others born early to their mothers. I've had a lot of fun with Tom and Teri. It is not often that a busy mother has time to appreciate what a baby really is. With you in school, Teri and Tom were like a second family that I had time for. I truly loved having the time to fondle, nurture, and enjoy babies! I had (or took) time to be there for them. I had guilt feelings of neglecting the rest of you with the many demands upon me when you were babies, now came my chance to do some real mothering and I loved every minute. Had you all not turned out so well through what I term neglect,

I really could run myself down into a fit of depression over my life. Mothers who have but one or two have it made! I would not have given up the chance to have all of you---just to have 2. God and I know each of you has been a special gift to me. I gave you life and my rewards have been and will continue to be great the rest of my life.

Empty nest syndrome and moving on to Florida in my next letter. I look forward to sharing those feelings with you.

Lots of love,

*(Letter No. 25)*

*Monday, June 14, 1993.*

Dear family,

Checking through my files I see it is over a month since I did any work on my bio. We have been otherwise occupied (as you well know). This time I am more determined to put my actions into words. Having just had the opportunity of seeing you in your homes with your values at work, I am more than aware of how family life influences your children's growth mentally, emotionally, and psychologically. This fact heaps a burden upon the shoulders of the parents. Like you now, Endwell days were filled to the brim with decisions to be made. In Scotia you were all such babes but with the growth physically there came changes in attitudes, behavior, and leaps and bounds in mental growth. My children were smarter than I and that was frightening to me. Your Dad is a mental giant and could keep up with your progress (his font of knowledge still grows with his reading and interest. He is able to give answers to the Jeopardy questions that sometimes the contestants have missed.) Now that I have grown and after Marriage Encounter I have a newer appreciation of my self worth. In parenting I made mistakes but now I am ready to feel less guilty and go on with the rest of my life. I vividly remember times when I would lock myself in a bathroom and cry with remorse in being such a poor parent! Being the "worse mother in the world" was not a cliché with me; I took it to heart and grappled with it emotionally. One thing I remember doing that probably saved my senses was that once I had made a decision, right or wrong, I tried to stick with it. I knew from my psychiatric studies that being consistent was important to you and me.

God bless your Dad! All those pregnancies were hard on him too. I was edgy, tired so much of the time, uncomfortable, and down on myself for feeling as I did. I never blamed your Dad for "getting me pregnant" as his appetite for sex was not an overwhelming one. Actually he was very modest in his desires. I have heard remarks from others on their learning we had 8 children, "Boy! you must have had a good time!" Clods! Fact is that we had 8 of you. I confess to feeling sorry for myself in not being able to cope physically with all the demands upon me but my greatest concern was to challenge you with understanding when I felt inadequate myself. I caution all of you to be understanding of those less fortunate than you mentally. Not all people (even in the same family) have the same mental equity and feelings are so fragile. To this day I resent thoughtless people who think the world is measure up or down to their standards. God made room for all



kinds in this world. You know what a mess we have made of that perfect world! Maybe with the ball in the hands of a new generation, this will be a better place to live. I pray so!

Perhaps I am in such a reflective mood today because it is a nothing day outside. We tried for a walk and got rained out of it. Recently I read *TIM* by Colleen Mc Cullaugh (She is better known for *THE THORNBIRDS*) that I recommend to your reading list. It is a well written, sensitive story about a moron. It has been a long time since I have read anything which made me go back and think about the book's contents, make some judgments not necessarily the same as the author's and leave me feeling that I had read something worth the while. I recommended it to your Dad to read.

It was in Endwell that we started to empty our nest. First there was Lee Ann who went to Worcester after deciding college was not for her. Her leaving her secure home to venture elsewhere for new experiences was understandable but a shock. She was leaving us in chase of a group---or so I judged. Thank God it was Church affiliated and made sense to her if not to me. Her interest in Antioch was aroused at a high school retreat; it made a big difference in her spirituality; we parents long for that. I remember nights when she drove our trusty VW across the highway into Vestal for the prayer group meetings. Sometimes she would come back very late and I worried. It is never easy to let your children have the family car. You don't worry about how they drive (Dad taught you and was sure you were reliable or he would not have given permission to drive) but there is the "other" guy who may not be as wary. We were concerned with all of you at the wheel when your turns came. We consider all of you good drivers. As I recall LeeAnn was "lured" to Worcester by the kind of people who gave these retreats. Since they seemed to come from Worcester, she ventured there finding housing with a good family. She found a job using her decorating sense helping in display at a department store. She grew in wisdom and grace with the Fenners. We saw her back in the family fold after we moved to Florida.

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All of you children are special! Know that I love all of you. Lee Ann, Jim and Mary I feel especially blessed to have; they are the three that we "almost lost". When Lee Ann left home, I took it very badly. I knew as a parent that I had to let go to try her wings. Yet there is that great longing, the missing, and the concern of how she was coping without being there for her on demand. It helped to know she was safe with a good family but they were so crowded there that she had to sleep on a mattress on the floor. It concerned me that she was "imposing" upon a crowded home. Giving a few dollars into that family coffer was appreciated and they kept her on. As their family left the nest, LA eventually had a real bed. We visited her there and some of my anxiety was relieved but I never was satisfied until she came "home" to us. As our first child she has had our love the longest. She was always such an attractive child; you will remember our stories of being stopped by people to comment on her beauty. LA is still very beautiful to me. What really gives her personality (in my eyes) is her warmth for listening to others woes. She has a knack of listening without commenting negatively that sets her apart from other people I know who are "me first" in everything. LA and Rick are a very good match. She is aware of his goodness and never fails to let him know his worth. She has unknowingly taught me to be more appreciative of the good qualities within your father. We all need to be told we are worthy of being loved. He (Dad) expresses his thanks to me very often; I like hearing that I please him.

Now it is Doris's turn to be the first child in the family. As a second oldest there seems to be little prestige when you number so many. Mentally Doris has always been FIRST and that was hard for LA to take. I remember her (LA) struggling trying to learn material which came easily and quickly to Doris. It was hurtful; I knew it and shared those feelings in my experiences with you children. Think again if you assume that because you are the parent you know everything! Trying to deal fairly and individually with you children was likely the hardest role I had to play as a parent. I am indeed very fortunate to have the spouse that I have! Your Dad was long suited where I was short and somehow we dealt with your needs as they developed---- not perfectly but I can look back now and determine we did a fair job.

Anyway---when time came for Doris to leave the nest it was a lot easier to deal with that. Doris was a planner from way back, her feet seemed well founded to the ground, and when decision time came for college, we knew she was ready. She may not have believed in that as strongly as her parents. This does not indicate that there was not a huge void in our lives when she took off for Troy. Having the rest of you under foot took the edge off the pain but I felt a part of me was missing. Doris was someone I respected and she seemed to understand me better than most of you. Maybe I depended upon her because she was so reliable. She was sought out by others as a sitter and had a good sense of how to deal with situations as they arose. She had Dad's active brain and a lot of good sense (from me hopefully). Having done the daring thing of going off to college myself far way from home, I felt assured that if I could do it with my lack of moxie, she was much better prepared than I or so I judged.

We shared a lot of letters when the girls left. It was our way of keeping in touch. To me Lee Ann seemed as she always had been. Doris was awakening to a new environment, lots of different sets of values, studies which stimulated and challenged her, and a life she was not accustomed to. It must have been difficult for her coming from such a protected Catholic background. I feel sure all of you had this experience when you changed to college orientation. I have some treasure letters from Doris of that period. She shared with me her mixed feelings and coping as best she could. Campus athletics and ROTC did a lot for her in helping to adjust. Jim whom she met in ROTC really made the biggest change in her life. Doris, Jim and the children make us very proud!

Well, guys! you are next in line and I'll deal with that in another letter. I do have a lot to say about you----with love, of course!

We send our love,

*(Letter No. 26)*

*Monday, August 23, 1993.*

Dear family,

This is the kind of day made to stay home. It is wet and raining off and on. When I was a kid, this kind of a day was made to order for sitting on the attic stairs to listen to the rain spatter on the roof. There was no insulation up there. Even on a hot summer day the

rain would cool the attic. It was a "neat" place to be alone. My siblings were not fascinated by this phenomenon. Sometimes I would read or maybe munch on apples. The neighbors across from us had an apple tree. The fruit was the early green apple and was bountiful. They did not like the Zielinski gang in their yard hence they would toss the apples in the outlawn or street. I never tired of eating them. I miss them. They are hard to find on the market these days. When they cut down that tree, (more bother than worth to them) I was in tears! Now that I am an adult, I have but memories----and glad of that. Anyway, this kind of day belongs to oneself. I have decided to put mine to use in writing long neglected letters.

Your father has already shared with you about our vacation in W. Virginia. It was a very rewarding experience for both of us. Doing the white water rafting bit has been an ambition of mine for years. Now that I have been to San Francisco, the Grand Canyon, and white water rafting (I would enjoy that again!) all that is left to complete my goals of "must see" before I die is Alaska. That is next year's BIG TREAT in the works. Pen and I had it in mind to go even without our guys, but the boys seem interested too. It will probably be another Elder Hostel trip. They seem very good with organizing these trips. We certainly were well pleased with the one to W. Virginia. Pen and Lou are taking their second one in October to Missouri and combine that with plans to see their Mike and Pam. We will house sit Tug for them. They are also considering a trip to New Orleans with this same group at Mardi Gras time next year. It is a great idea. Why not see all you can while your health is good and you are agile enough to enjoy the exciting time that goes with it. This group of people is unique! They are young in spirit, pretty hale, good sports and fun to be with. One couple there has been on 53 of these trips. We were told the record so far is in the 70s.

Dad mentioned the geology and ghost towns we had along with the rafting. He may have mentioned a field trip we had to an old coal mine. Bay City had been a coal mining area when I was a kid. Some of our neighbors worked in the mines. I can remember the workers coming home black, tired, wearing caps with lights atop them, and carrying empty lunch buckets. Payday (Fridays) there was a stop at the local bar to cash pay checks. They would walk the streets a bit tipsy and late for supper. I remember feeling very proud that I had never seen MY father drunk! The Poles seemed to be weekend drinkers. No doubt they needed to relax. The wives seemed to resent spending the money they needed for their families. But as Dad would say, "A man has to do what he has to do"---whatever that meant!

The reason for this tangent is to share with you how this particular trip (to the mine) brought me back to my childhood and the house on Van Buren. They had a display house of a coal miner's typical house. The house was built by management and rented to the miners. They also had company stores where you bought on credit (we had Lula's store a block away) which kept them in debt to the company. They used chits and got the family started in supplies. Thereafter you never seemed to work your way forward. It was like walking back into the past for me. The house was built with tongue and groove lumber walls and floors as ours had been. The old coal stove in the kitchen (in better condition than I remember), the basic cupboard, the crude sink with wooden waste boards, table and chairs (we had benches) completed the kitchen. One ceiling electric outlet serviced the whole room. I remember several cords to various lamps hanging from the ceiling in the livingroom. Like our house, you lived in the kitchen. Bedroom space was a premium

and living space was used for bedrooms. I am sure my Dad's parents had to so that as the front part of the house was not added until Mom and Dad got married. They even had the outhouse and the laundry tub set up for Saturday baths. What was missing that I remember vividly was the blacking of the ceiling from the coal dust and smoke. This was a display model so it was neat though basic; I remember mess an disorder most of the time. It was a weird experience. Pen who was with me did not remember all that I did, but a lot rang a bell with her too. Besides nostalgia it was a *deja vu* for me.

Perhaps you can guess that this experience got me thinking of the events in my life that I have not shared with you. Now that I may have more time to devote to things I want to get done (before canning demands take over), I should reread what I have written to you, take notes, edit, and complete the saga of my life. We were still in Endwell when I left off so there is much to come. Even though most of the material is not new to you (and I feel less urgency to write), there are some reflections I would like to share with you now that we are all adults.

Lest I forget, your brother Tom is at Cornell and now has a new address. WRITE IT DOWN somewhere.

Tom Hamill (607) 272-0129  
A-4 1895 East Shore Dr.  
Lansing, N.Y. 14882

I didn't know there was a Lansing in New York! Must be near Ithica.

Since I made such a big deal about wanting to go white water rafting, I better share that experience with you. Like with horse riding, the hardest part is getting in/on! I fault our instructor. He was absolute zero telling us how to get in. Pen and I decided we wanted to be up front. I felt cool water in my face would be welcome on this hot day. Fortunately they told us to wear old shoes and old clothes. Since were launched in the water rather than on land, you had to get into the water to board. An instructor with any sense would have advised the upfront people to get on first. Trying to get on this big balloon raft with everyone doing it at the same time was perhaps laughable were you watching but next to impossible (gracefully!) when you are up to your waist in water with feet looking for a firm grip upon slippery rocks. I slipped, lost my balance, and got wet to the chest. Lou and Dad had to help pull me in before I entered safely. We were the "sweep" raft which meant we were last among the 8-10 rafts floating down the river. If you were experienced and desired to, you would have your own duckie (a canoe like float for one) and go along with the crowd. Since we were last Carl (how will I ever forget his name!) gave us long tedious instruction on water safety and teaching us strokes. As sweep, we were responsible for the safety of those might get dumped by the rapids. Hanging back we did not move with any celerity and the harangue of how incompetent rafters can be, did not endear me with Carl. He, Carl, took himself very seriously and let us all know how responsible he was. He did a pretty good job of frightening me. We took practice strokes, did our turns etc. Trouble for me was, he was back in the boat and I was up front. Now I know my hearing is somewhat at fault, but land-a-goshun a fellow should speak up when you near rapids. Sometimes I missed what he said and strained to hear. I'd hear, "Lee! together now!" and "Let's work as a team all us!" Most of the ride was slow and boring. The water was calm and effortless. At times like these, he oared alone. Someone remarked anyone could do this. So he asked for volunteers. Lou did and took over. Carl took the paddle again when we came to the rapids. Most of what we went through was baby stuff but we

did go through one called "surprise" that was a thrill. Carl was really shouting at us then and we worked well as a team. 4 of the duckie passengers got dumped. As sweep we were put to work picking up passengers. All the rafts helped with that many in the water but Carl was quick to point out why his instruction was so thorough. It was during the rowing in Surprise that I realized how venerable I was. I had it in mind to go the next day on more difficult rapids. When I realized how this exercise left my heart pounding, I could not in fairness go with others over more difficult falls and not do my share. I would dearly love to go as a passenger if I did not have to work so hard. It was great fun; it was a wonderful experience. Lou did and had a great time.

Surely you have already had enough high lights of our trip to satisfy your curiosity from Dad. I just wanted to share a couple of points of interest with you. This letter is already too long. Love and best wishes to you and yours.

As ever,

*(Letter No. 27)*

*May, 1994.*

Dear family,

Please consider this letter part of my autobiography. There was a lot of living done between my last chapter and this one but I am "putting the cart before the horse" again---hit and miss fashion. Know that I prayed, thought very carefully and often was consumed with how I am going to explain the very sensitive subject of my Faith to you. Since so many of you are no longer going to church, I have little idea of how you feel. We (I mostly) have avoided the subject for reasons very sensitive to us. Faith is a gift which we either accept or reject. Your Dad and I have chosen to accept it and are very happy in our choice.

You can't be aware of the changes we have seen in the Catholic church. The church I was born into is nothing like the one we embrace today. That was the church of "hellfire and damnation" which scared you into being good. In all fairness God's love was always there. It was veiled in sadness for how poorly we responded to Jesus's great sacrifice for us. Since Vatican II when Pope John advocated that we "open the doors to let the fresh air in" more and more emphasis is being placed on God's mercy, his GREAT love for us, and forgiveness. The Church has changed gradually. We are endowed with a free will. God did not make robots of us subject to submission but gives his love and understanding for us to come to him in our need. We come to Him freely with motivated returned love.

More and more we get the message, "WE ARE THE CHURCH" Catholic, Jew, Muslim, Protestant, whoever believes in God. We have different forms of worship, may approach our perfection in various ways but there is a loving God who sets us free. I believe we are put on this world to love one another and serve God through how we treat others. God is with us; we are made in His image and likeness. You may choose to deny that but only your complete rejection of his goodness and mercy will separate us from His love.

The Catholic church has not been an exemplary vehicle from which we built our

Faith. It has made many mistakes, been heathenistic with the wrong people in leadership, biased, lacked understanding of God's Word (true meaning of his message to us), and done lots of things the Church is ashamed of being and doing. His promise of LOVE has been there all along; it took a very long time for the message to get through. These mistakes were made by humans ("Catholics" among them) who had unrealistic and opportunistic ideas in mind. God's gift of our free will would not subject us to submission. We come to Him in LOVE for one another and respect from His great gift of life. We (Dad and I) try to live our lives accordingly. Unfortunately the Church is far from perfecting itself. Many churches have not been communicating this great love to us. Many of us are not taking advantage of the opportunities of bible study (your Dad and I have and feel vastly rewarded!) and many priests are "old church" who have little to offer today's world. Unfortunately the people are ahead of the clergy when it should be the other way around. We are fortunate at Blessed Sacrament. We have people and priests who are truly turned on to God's love. We work together as a team and great things are happening. We are fortunate to have a wise and progressive bishop (Untner) who is trying to show us and the world at large (he is a sought out person for lectures and enlightenmet) how great Our Lord's love really is.

Our priests today are servants of the people and encourage us to be one with them. Our pastor prefers we call him Jack instead of Fr. Johnson. At communion he is last to be served (and by a lay eucharist minister) instead of assuming the honorary first position. Our sermons are always directed to God's love and mercy for us. I could go on and on about the changes. It is my opinion that if the Church (assuming you have given it your attention and NOT prejudice) and really studied what it teaches does not provide you with the kind of life you can be proud of, your conscience should lead you to a better life. God will know that and understand.

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My maturity and personal growth has led me to support my church through thick and thin. Even with its flaws, I found peace, reconciliation, and joy. I wanted to share with you children what was so very important to me. With the Vatican council changes I was able to grow with the Church. It was not easy. There are still things in the Church that need revising and upgrading. Some day we will have women priests and more appreciation of God's love for us. We grow impatient in waiting trying to hasten the process. We pray for God's will be done yet the world is consumed with egotism that it has to be MY way! God will not tamper with our wills yet there is a subtle move for humanity toward good. For me it's the "darkest just before the dawn". As Dad and I walked Sunday we happened to go by a lot of churches. All the parking lots were full. The church near us is so crowded on Sundays (Assembly of God) that their huge parking lot is full and Swede takes the overflow. I can see many of us need that extra something in our lives.

You are probably wondering why I am sharing my Faith beliefs with you at this time. This is something I hoped to cover as a last segment of my story but a recent comment from one of you children has greatly disquieted me (and that is putting it mild!) I felt as a responsible parent I owed it to you (and especially to myself) to share this most meaningful part of my life with you. I don't want to die leaving you uninformed. I enjoy good health, thank you God. I expect to enjoy more years. Do me one favor. Keep this letter and when you hear of my death, read it over and have some understanding of who I was. It is more important to me that you do that than come to my funeral.

Know that it was not easy for me to see you children, one by one, leave the church for---whatever reason. You and your will have no doubt validated your own reasoning. Truthfully there hasn't been an experience in my life that has been more hurtful. In marriage I had hoped my children could accept the Faith with the life God had given them. I grieve for myself but what hurts the most is the loss I feel that God's graces (though they are still given to you because he loves you) are not understood and appreciated. You are all such wonderful children, full of God's goodness, live exemplary lives, and make wonderful parents. That consoles me and I know God looks upon you with favor. I expect all of us will go to heaven. God knows us better than we know ourselves. Abba (God the Father more affectionately as "daddy") is a loving parent and I believe he wants our happiness. I go to him in my needs and he responds to them. This letter (the fact that I am writing it) comes as an answer to many days of concern and prayer. To that well intentioned person I say thank you for sharing. Please hear me out with the same attention and thoughtfulness I gave your letter. I am pleased to acknowledge God as my King (he does not profess to be king in this world), my shepherd (I need direction even this late in life) and proud to be part of His branch of life. I understand God's love through how I feel for you, my children, and my fellow humans. I believe my compassion and understanding comes through the good God has given me.

Thank you for reading through my jumbled thoughts. I want to be a credit to my Maker and hopefully earn the respect of you children. I made many mistakes in my life but I have to believe trying to raise you as catho-lics has benefitted and not stifled your lives. You learned from your parents what honesty, charity, concern for others and what God's love means in our lives. I would like to believe I am passing on some of the greatness of the Church and not negativism to you. I deeply and most assuredly love you, your spouses, children, and yes, mankind for God's goodness is in all of us. I have to believe that none of us reject or find God's goodness repulsive. I try to live by the Beatitudes; I pray I succeed.

I leave you with the thought; Faith is a gift. For those who believe no explanation is necessary. For those who don't; no explanation is possible.

Much love and admiration.

*(Letter No. 28)*

*January 11-14, 1995.*

Dearest family,

While I was with Teri recently, we got to talking about my not having written about my life story in a very long time. She was particularly interested in your lives as children and wondered if I could elucidate on that part of our lives. Time does not improve my past memory (guess I am not senile yet!). With that thought in mind, I shall make an effort to illicit from my present memory what those early Endwell were like. You got it? This is another chapter to file away---if indeed you are keeping these pages. I must be allowed to share with you what I feel today about things that are now fading memories. In my

attempt to abstract what I can please allow me the luxury of telling it my way---would be errors and all. Your memories likely will differ with mine. The judgements I made then are not necessarily what I would do today. As a reasonably responsible parent, I went with the flow. I tried very hard in disciplining you to be consistent and fair. Again I say, I have made mistakes and I'm sorry if I had judged you wrong or treated you unfairly. Many of you are now facing difficulties with your children. You are probably doubting yourselves as I did. Vivid in my mind is the fact that after I had punished you I often worried that I had been unfair. God heard many pleas from me to be forgiven for such transgressions.

Teri being a mere babe when we moved to Endwell probably has no recall of setting up our home. The house being so much bigger than the one in Scotia seemed like paradise to us. Tired as we were when we arrived and with a hectic meal at the motel in our bellies, we had to see our house before we retired. Picture 6 eager children running about the empty house staking claims and exploring. Everything looked so new (never lived in a house as young as this!) and wonderful complete with dishwasher and lots of cupboard space. I was happiest of all; I could not believe our good fortune. Never mind that we would be living out of unpacked boxes for almost a month. I was determined to have a place for everything---and everything in its place. Your Dad was happiest to provide each of you with a space of your own. It was most important to him for each of you to have your own bed, desk, and drawers. Unlike myself who never knew what privacy meant, your Dad was a pusher for individuality. He still feels the need to be private---to study, pray or just to be alone. I adapted to that very well. Need for privacy likely is part of us even today.

Establishing you in a Catholic school was top priority with us. The reason for this was to give you a better understanding of our faith. Dad and I had so little Catholic education. We found ourselves lacking to be good examples. Sure we did as our parents did (at least I did!) go to church, pray the family rosary, and believed once a Catholic always a Catholic that there was no salvation outside the faith. We hoped with proper education religion would be more meaningful to you than it was to us. I did feel that we grew in understanding as you developed. We took interest in learning more, took classes, joined discussion groups, and prayed with more sincerity and purpose. Without this growth our Faith would be hallow to us---a something you did because it was the thing to do and not because it is special to us and life would not be complete without God's love surrounding us. We do know there is salvation outside the Catholic Church. God's love is there for each of us. Hence you were all sent to Catholic schools; I believe they gave you a good basic education. I appreciated the discipline the schools encouraged. I remember stating to you children that if you were punished in school and told me about it, you could expect more at home. Teri reminded me of a confrontation she had with one nun, told her story to me and that I called the nun and discussed the situation to a happy conclusion. It was good to hear that I listened and acted accordingly.

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It was very important to your parents to have me home when you kids came home from school. You may have gotten tired of graham crackers and milk (or an occasional lollipop) for an after school snack but I was there for you to bring home your papers and admire you for your efforts. I learned early in life that you don't say to your kindergarten child the picture they brought home from school was a tree when it was meant to be a flower. I found it more appropriate to say, "My how precious. Tell me about it!" (no hurt



feelings). One of the hardest things to learn was to let you unwind after school. The nuns were great in demanding discipline. Homework delayed until after dinner gave you the chance to play. As you got older it was harder to force homework be done before television could be enjoyed. I heard a lot of "I did it in school" (ye, prove it!), "there was none today" sometimes true on weekends) or "I need Dad's help"---not often from most of you. I tell you now (if I missed telling you before) that you were all very responsible in getting your work done without a hassle. I have to credit Lee Ann. She worked hard for her marks. I was smart enough not to push her too hard. The rest of you with your multi brains blessed with at birth seemed to have wisdom to use your gift without nagging. I believe you have some of Dad's persistence to do things right and be proud of what and who you are. Parenting in that regard was a lot easier than a lot of other parents experience. Thank you, children!

The noise level among you children, the bickering, the spills at table, the mischief among you, and the tattling were not easy to take. I have poor tolerance for noise. (Strange to say being brought up with 9 siblings.) I like my music soft and no noisy gatherings.

Children will have their squabbles and tell on each other. I understood that yet they were hard to live with. Sometimes we adults forget what it is like to be a child. That is not good. I envy Mark and Terri who do such an excellent job of playing imaginatively with Rosie. Daddy becomes prince, Mommie whatever is called for. Dad had his "Cheezie-Weezie" stories. Looking back I realize I spent a heck of a lot of time being cook, servant, housekeeper, and nurse. I have those precious moments of you as infants, bathing, nursing, and blowing bubbles on your tummies during diaper changes. I can hear the roar of laughter from you to this day! I pray I did more with you then tell stories and participate in yard and playground games. How sad that my memory is so alive with service and so lacking in compassion and warmth. it brings tears to my eyes as I write that. There is no going back. Today I would take time out to "smell the roses". You children are doing a better job at patenting than I did, thank God. Your Dad is one excellent grandfather. He thoroughly enjoys playing and being with them and they know it!

Next I would like to go into what I remember most about each you as you were growing up in Endwell. That will be left for when we get back from Yellowstone. We had great vacations in Elgin and Albuquerque over our recent holidays---facts which I am well aware that Dad has given you a very good account of---so I won't be redundant. I thank both families for their generous gifts and the wonderful times we shared together. We enjoyed talking to those we had not seen. We are indeed one great family. I am so proud to be your mother!

Have a wonderful 1995!

Love,

(Letter No. 29)

March 2, 1995

Dear family,

There is a lull between our trips. There is no better time to get to work on our family history. The cold weather we are experiencing reminds me of the long cold winter days we shared in Endwell. I remember days of spending a lot of time (it seemed like hours!) getting you children ready for the outdoors (boots, mittens, scarves, warm outer wear) only to have you return less than 5 minutes later begging to be let in. Being nurse-mother getting you kids out and in the fresh air seemed like an important part of seeing to you better health and welfare. Fresh air was very important. Mary/Doris (?) recalls how Dad and I insisted on having your windows open at night at least one finger! Today I'm hearing what a cruel parent I was for subjecting you to all the cold. Hey! I lived in at time when fresh air was treatment for tuberculosis. I wore a sweater on duty at Herman Keifer while I nursed the sick there. Whatever you think today kindly remember I really did what I believed was best for you children. Just as you today are trying to cope with the demands of your kids.

Surely most of you remember that one Sunday we all trudged to Mass in the snow (seemed like a foot) in blizzard conditions. The snow was too deep to go by car. We had to stop at Loblaws Supermarket to warm up before we tackled that hill to church. Practically no one was there but by gosh! the Hamills were! We find Church today such heroics is not called for. Actually Father told us at Mass that day we were unnecessarily brave. Taking you children to confession every month was another ritual that was a farce. I'm sure you all had a "grocery list" of I got angry, I was disobedient, sassed my elders etc. just as I did as a kid. You were in and out of the confessional in a flash and free outside the church before your parents. Today a couple times a year (Easter and Xmas) we have penitential services with absolution for the entire congregation. It is a much more meaningful and appropriate way to worship God. You can still go to confession (it is available) but unless you are a murdered or have done something equally dire, the Church believes the Eucharist is the Bread of Life and we need it. Today you see Father face to face and talk to him about any problems you might have. Actually that started to happen way back to the Endwell days.

Trying to treat each of you individually was difficult. When you are raising a large family, you have to have rules applicable to all. Food preferences were listened to but had to be ignored sometimes. If I catered to each of you, I would have gone stark raving mad! You had your birthday feast when you chose your own menus and we had Thanksgiving and Easter feasts that seemed to please everyone. Yup, it was a rule that you had to eat a little of everything (even lima beans, squash and liver) IF it was on the menu. A small serving (about 1 tablespoon) if it was an unfavorable food had to be eaten or there was no dessert. I recall some cellar stairs sitting as punishment for flak regarding this sensitive issue. Remember the cakes and ice cream we used to have?! Those were the days when Dad would eat huge pieces---especially chocolate with chocolate frosting. There were pies and brownies which everyone seemed to enjoy. As youngsters I don't recall any of you refusing dessert---but you did have to finish your plate to earn it. Okay! I did bribe you. What's a mother to do? Wasting food was another BIG NO NO! You have but to be brought up in a large family during a depression to understand the full impact of the

importance of not wasting ANYTHING. Once it is part of you it never leaves. To this day I can't leave lights on that are not necessary, use too much water even if it is plentiful in Michigan or spend money on anything frivolous. Since we are not in poverty anymore, I buy what I want and don't stint. Good food is on our table all the time and we are generous in sharing. It is a pleasant time of life; I do enjoy myself.

When you were really bad (my judgment not yours). I did spank you sometimes. I had qualms of conscience (God is going to get me for this! I remember thinking and feeling). It was a last resort kind of thing. I remembered too well the strop and getting over a chair for the punishment that I felt was unjust. That haunted me with you children. Being pregnant made me mean. I remember flares of temper that I had difficulty controlling. To this day I feel remorse for you kids and your

Dad having had this mean mother/wife. Tension is hard to live with as you can all attest to from your experiences in life. Being pregnant and having fussy kids did create a lot of tension in my life. Work was always there----no matter how tired you were. It had to be done.

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Your Dad never had to share duties at home when he was growing up (maybe cut the lawn when he was older) so when you were youngsters he believed parents should do all the work. He had grandparents living with him. What need did he have of lending a helping hand. Early on in marriage we had a talk about that. Small tasks were assigned to you. Remember having to shine your shoes before you got your allowance? Teaching responsibility is part of the parent-child relationship that I believed should be realized early in life. Facing facts is another area of teaching that does not come easily. How do you convince a child he is wrong---- to face his mistakes, takes his lumps, and go on from there? No one enjoys facing facts of inadequacy, If we are to develop into adulthood truly mature, childhood has to be the playground of experience. I wanted you to know that maturity did not happen when you reached a certain age but rather that it is developed gradually with responsibility, trust, solving problems when they were presented your way and be fairly confident in decisions you make. These were my goals for you. You did us proud! Some goofs were made on the road to adulthood but we thank God that as a family we have a lot to be proud for with few regrets. We all have our "should haves" that we would have handled differently with a second chance but for the most part we/you benefited by the mistakes.

A comment here about our large family. Remember going to Mass as a family (good ole Leggo came in handy to keep the youngest in line!)? I would meet people in the store and they would know me as "the mother with all those children and God bless you!" I did take a lot of flak, too. When I was pregnant for Teri (one example) Mrs. Letteron down the block in Scotia came right out and told me I should be ashamed bringing so many children into a crowded world. I wish I had had the courage to remark that the wrong people were over populating the world. We would not be in such a mess if responsible people were doing the reproducing. Maybe there would be more quality people among us. Work needs to be done among teenagers, the poor, and uneducated. You are all contributors to society. I am very proud to have borne each of you! You are all well educated and you can proudly point to yourselves for "working your way through". The little in money we gave you in no way paid for your education. Your intellect, ambition, working after school, and fortitude got you through. Amen!

You might well wonder why in the heck I am covering this aspect of my life with you. If I am to share honestly and completely, my hopes, dreams and realities are all part of me. Your mother is a complex configuration. Part of me lives in a dream world (even as yet!), another section wants you to see the practical nurse-mother, and yet another should show you my humanity and the vulnerability I still feel in my life. It should not come as any surprise to you that I do not prize myself as a scholar or particularly bright person. I do credit myself with a lot of common sense capable of making responsible decisions. My smartness can be challenged but don't mess with my integrity! You children are blessed. I see within you a lot of the good that comes from each of your parents. You have Dad's smart genes, his wholesomeness (especially in knowing and loving people), honesty, and his fondness for children. From me you have been gifted with a sense of imagination. love of adventure and a sense of humor. Dad has these gifts, too, but let me take credit for them as we experience a sense of adventure---not so much caution---in our life experiences.

Because you are who you are----our children---we have a certain bias toward you. You can and have done wrong but for the most part I wear rose colored glasses when I look at you. Now that so many of you are parents I wanted you to get a picture of yourselves in the frame I found myself in years ago. Are you finding yourselves in that picture? Do you, too, have your doubts as I did? You certainly must find yourselves overloaded and over charged! Dare I now share with you some of the misgivings I had about you as you were growing up?

Since Lee Ann is the oldest and she was my first challenge, may I recall with you some of the things that concerned me most? The first were related to her immature birth --- the visual (possible blindness) and feeding problems that kept me on a every two hour feeding by dropper schedule for several weeks before she gained enough strength to suck a nipple. I had two other patients (Mom and Dad) to care for as well. Life was tough. Your Dad helped me get through physically and emotionally. I believe I mentioned this part of my life in previous writing. Having had siblings (and nieces and nephews) plus nursing experience I had an advantage. Pen will admit that I was more of a mother to her than Mom was but it is not the same when you are dealing with your own flesh and blood. I remember feeling very responsible (almost to distraction) in Lee Ann's care and later with the rest of you. Babies are totally dependent upon you. I never experienced that before and I was overwhelmed. It was months before I would leave Lee Ann. I remember going to a movie for the first time since her birth and even with my student nurse sister in charge, I could not relax.

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As parents we become wrapped with self-importance. We believe no one else can fill your shoes! Got news for you if you believe that. Lots of people depend upon others to share the load. You working parents already know that substitutions are made all the time. Lots of kids are becoming aware there is a world beyond home and it is good! Children grow and leave the nest. The first day Lee Ann went off to school I was anxious. Even though I had more of you at home I found letting go was essential but hard to cope with. I cannot (nor desire to) speak for all mothers. I am writing my story and how I felt. All these decisions day after day to be dealt with in life! Hmmm! I'm derailed here. Better get back on track!

Back to raising Lee Ann. Her specialness warms my heart. Those first years were tough going. Growth and development were slow. I was apprehensive. She was always

an attractive child---one who could not be ignored when seen by people. I wrote before about how Dad used to take her out in the stroller when I would get dinner. Often she would come back with a chocolate face because friends would have to stop Dad and ogle his granddaughter. Appetite gone with the sweets she had getting wholesome food down became a problem. Lee Ann and the rest of you adapted very well to accepting food as it was presented to you. If you refused food it meant only one thing---you were sick! If you look back at your baby pictures, you all looked healthy---not fat but good size. All of you were cuddly cute. How did I get so blessed!

Lee Ann was the first to display temper tantrums. She was not yet two when she started trying to tell me she was boss. I remember her lying on the floor kicking her feet and hollering! Penny was there (day off or whatever) and was appalled when I picked her up, put her in the bedroom and told her to have at it and when she was done to let me know and I would let her out again. She was surprised! She screamed for a time, got quieter, sobbed a little more and then got quiet. Soon she was calling me. I asked her if she intended to behave and let her out. I learned way back then to be assertive. I had to be that way with all of you. To be consistent so that there were no surprises or changes in the norm seemed to work well in raising you. As you grew older your fits of temper took on other forms. Some of you held your breath. Worry not nurse-mother; we have to breathe. You live through it. There were all sorts of lame excuses for misbehavior. (I am generalizing here as with most of you had similar problems and I had the same solutions---usually. With variations what held for one held for all.)

It pleases and amazes me that children have the ability to amuse themselves so well. Lee Ann (and all of you) had the ability to do something creative with the simplest toys. The boxes the toys came in were as useful (and sometimes more so) than the objects within. A rope attached to a large box became a cart, building blocks became people within a house or school, making dresses for paper dolls provided Lee Ann and Doris with hours of pleasure. I'm still not clear as to what Lee Ann and Doris did in the early Saturday morning "sneaks". Lee Ann had a creative sense all her life. She enjoyed art, writing, and playing with her friends. I believe she was a follower more than a leader.

When you children were not yet teens, you were satisfied to play with neighbors and school friends. It was easy to keep a watchful eye upon you from the kitchen. I didn't worry about your straying (except in "hide and seek"). There was safety in numbers and you looked after each other in a sense. You had the ability to settle things among yourselves. I had few "tattle tales" to deal with or decisions to arbitrate. When I did have to intervene, likely you were sent to separate rooms. Later I learned to identify whose problem it was and let you settle quarrels among yourselves----but that was only when you were in your teens.

We were very fortunate to have good people around us. We felt very safe and secure gradually letting you go---first around the block, later to the store for me, and even to swim class afoot. Lee Ann was the first to take swimming lessons and did well. The local playgrounds, family picnics and rides did a lot to keep our family togetherness. It started with Lee Ann and kept on with the rest of you---with variations--- as to how to amuse and keep a family together. Your ever giving father always had time to take you places, read to you, set up the train set on Sunday, bathing you, helping with school work etc. Thinking back now I could do all things because I did not do it alone! Your Dad was always there with me helping, teaching, encouraging, providing---the list is endless. Mary just recently

asked me how I did it---raise so many of you. I remember saying to her that I didn't know. I just got my answer. Your Dad was there every stitch of the way. You are utilizing your mates the same as I did. You know you are not raising your family alone.

High school was a great testing ground for Lee Ann---and all of you. By that time maturity is trying to do its thing. The hormones are working, the mind is more set, challenges are greater, interests start to blossom, reality that a future alone is not that far way; it is decision time NO JOKE! Plus that high school curricula is tough. More time is needed at the books. Other interests like music and TV have to be side stepped to make room for the immediate demands of school.

Not even the astute parent really know her child. My Mom certainly did not know me as the person I really was. She was looking at me through her eyes and not seeing the Lee that housed a body. I don't pretend that I know any of you as you see yourselves. I intend just to cover my observations.

Lee Ann will be the first to admit that she is not at an intellectual par with her siblings. She has a lot of warmth and compassion that I judge is missing in some of my other offspring. Lee Ann is a people person (like her Dad) who values friendships and feels less a person when like warmth and compassion are not returned. Like her Mom she is a feeling person of some depth and is hurt easily. She is warm and compassionate but not always understood that way. When Lee Ann married Rick she found in him the right person to understand and love her for what she had to offer. They are really made for each other!

Schooling was difficult. What the rest of you Aced, Lee Ann in hard struggle would make a C. I quit giving dimes for A earned because I realized how unfair it was to Lee Ann who struggled to get a C! That individualism I wrote of early in the letter had to be dealt with fairness. We have our talents. They are diversified in each of us. That makes life interesting yet unfair to some of us who are not as gifted intellectually. God knows we aim higher but the brain just does not meet the expectations called for. I see myself in my daughter and I understand her feelings. Truth be known, I am happy with the person I am and Lee Ann is too. There is a lot to be proud in my life (I got wonderful children!) and a sense of humor that sustains me. Lee Ann has God's warmth within her and she makes me very proud.

She considered art school upon graduation but knew the math and sciences required to obtain a degree were beyond her scope of ability. You all know the way of life she chose. I am very proud of her and what she has done with her life. Lee Ann has a special place in my being---not only because she was the first but more so because she changed my life. God and I know that secret. I am not about to reveal it here.

Holy cow! This is a bit verbose! As I write my mind takes on memories and nuances I want to share with you. Likely you will read what interests you and skip ahead. Hopefully what I'm relating is of some interest to you. More the next time?!

Love as always,

*(Letter No. 30)**Monday, March 21 to Apr.4. '95*

Dearest family,

It's too wet to go walking. Might as well put this time into good use. One of these days I will get our family story out to the end. I keep thinking of new entries; heaven forbid this could go on as long as I live. By then my readers will be bored to death. I'm not at all assured we haven't already come to that point!

One more entry about Lee Ann. When she left Endwell and went to Worchester, Mass., that was one of the hardest separations I have had to take. You will remember that she was "gung-ho" about the Antioch retreat she made and was attracted to the group---especially one male that I don't even remember by name. Like I ventured off to Washington without a home, she was entering into uncertainty as I had. She had led a pretty sheltered life with us; I was not convinced she was making a wise decision. She had no prospect of a job. I have never shared my concerns with Lee Ann. She is hearing it now for the first time. I learned that to let the children grow parents have to let go. I was unhappy for months and even when she did find employment and settle in with the Fenner's, I was never sold on that idea. That first Xmas when she came home I had a strong feeling she wanted to stay. Yet I could not bring myself to make up her mind for her. As it turned out it was a real chance for growth within Lee Ann. When she needed to come home she did. I am very proud of her and admire her for fortitude.

As Es was our ground breaker for us to finish high school, Lee Ann led the way to give me a taste of what was coming in letting the rest of you leave the nest. It was easier with Doris. We felt she had her feet firmly planted on the ground---maybe a bit lofty and idealistic in her expectations--- but with vision, drive, and persistence. Doris was a leader among you. She had ability which she used wisely. From the time she had that accident with her foot I knew she could not be stopped. It was her idea to get up and down stairs (with a cast) by using her buttocks and arm muscles. She practically slid down in descent. She had eagerness to learn and seldom had to be prodded to do her home work. You all needed a "kick in the slats" to get you moving on some less pleasant necessities in life (like going to bed, little tasks that needed doing around the house, getting dressed before breakfast etc. etc.).

Doris wrote some touching letters from college. This brand new world she entered had challenges she could handle well (scholastically) but there was another dimension she was not quite ready to accept. Finding a diversity of people was different from the shelter of a Catholic high school and friends. I sensed the opening of those doors brought her to alien feelings in which she had no experience. The battle of conscience in adjusting to this new life is hard for all of us going through traumatic change. I could see the difference in her (gradual at first) when she was home for summers. This college girl who made her own decisions away from home was again part of a family that didn't quite understand her. There were times when she would venture off alone on a walk (probably to brood in feeling she was misunderstood) and not appreciate or understand that a concerned parent was home worrying where she was and what was happening to her. She was a college student who was responsible to herself; why should we worry! I saw similar changes in all of you as you left the nest. I don't mean to single Doris out. She laid the foundation of what to expect with the rest of you. I remember only too well the trauma I felt as her par-

ent. That was but a beginning of the shocks that came my way as life went on.

It came as a shock to me that in her last summer before marriage she opted to stay in Schenectady with the Van Laaks rather than to come home. The job opportunities weren't any better but she had had her fill of Bowmen's (my judgement). I can understand her enthusiasm to be near Jim but it did hurt my feelings. She didn't explain; she just did it.

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Having lived three quarters of a century I have had a lot of life experiences. Most of them have been rewarding; some were so painful I can't share them with you. Having lived most of my life I am keenly aware that I need to share who your mother is and what she feels. I say this in all of these letters. It is that important to me that you understand who I am and how I have lived my life. I think back to my Mom. I wish I understood her better. She died at 66 and before I was mature enough to understand how difficult it must have been for her to raise so many children under such adverse conditions. I hear a lot of "thank yous" from you. My Mom died not knowing how deeply I appreciate her love and concern. I know more about the sacrifices she made having my children. Your thoughtful roses this last birthday brought tears to my eyes. It was a special "thank you" I read loud and clear. My Mom will have to hear hers from heaven. I hear, "I love you, Mom." from each of you when you call. You are not remiss as I was. Bless you for not keeping me in the dark. Your actions show love, of course, but there is no substitute for saying the words.

Part of who I am is apparent in these letters. I write with abandon! My college English teacher would shudder at my style. I am scatter-brained. Is it my psychiatric experience speaking to me? Perhaps I feel so inferior to my husband and offspring that I must justify myself? There is a lot of truth in that statement!

Back to topic! Right now it is Doris. I failed to mention what a challenge she was to me. Other than by your father I was not used to being questioned or put on the spot with challenges. Doris was this different child who started the ball rolling. She wanted to know the why and wherefore for everything. "Because I said so" was no longer valid. I was wise enough to know that knowledge was what she was after but I felt rattled because my reasoning was not up to her expectations as a plausible answer. I expect she is getting something like that from Vincent right now. She is smarter than I and has reasonable answers for him. Cheri is more thoughtful. She is not as likely to challenge her mother. (My opinion only. I am fallible!) Doris has carried that inquiring mind with her throughout her life. She has a lot of her father in her.

Early on in life Doris learned to take special interests in things about her. She and Lee Ann developed a good sense of amusement never seeming to be at loss for things to do. While Lee Ann enjoyed the dolls and making dresses, Doris did some of that too but was more interested in doing things with her hands---as climbing trees and being "Batman"! The shows in our Scotia garage that collected pennies for charity were highly imaginative. There again leadership and planning was mostly on the part of Doris. Early on Doris was quite emphatic about NOT wanting dolls for Xmas. She was as likely to play with trains and trucks as they boys were. Though I used to make dresses for Lee Ann and Doris and dressed them as little girls, Doris somehow managed to do boy things in spite of the dress. She seemed to enjoy being a girl (even had skirts and dresses ready for college) but mentally she enjoyed the sciences and math which were more popular with the boys than girls. Science and math related subjects was preparation for college. Her first money earned went into a college fund.



Before going on to Jim there is one more thing about Doris which confused me. She seemed to be out of sink with the fact that she was a beautiful child and later woman. I can understand some of her awkwardness in accepting compliments (being tall and having been told I was a tomboy and homely damaged my psyche) but I was very careful not to plant any such ideas in her head. It was not just parental pride that led me to believe you all were beautiful children. We heard that all the time from others. Within the last 5 years while looking at my old pictures I realized that in my earlier years I was not bad looking at all! Your Dad had been telling me that for years; I did not believe him.

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When I almost lost Jim much too early in pregnancy, I knew right then and there I wanted this baby and prayed extra hard to retain him. It was almost impossible to stay off my feet with two active girls around but I kept as quiet as I could to keep that fetus. It gave your Dad an extra work load and no sexual satisfaction until 6 weeks after delivery. I was on a salt free diet (blood pressure got high) so that meant menu restrictions as well. That was not my favorite time in life but when Jim was born (seeming hale and healthy) concerns flew out the window and life was wonderful again. Well---Jim gave me feeding problems. He often had projectile emesis after feedings so small and frequent amounts of food were necessary. Jim was a dream baby in temperament and sleeping ability. We had just moved from Schenectady to Scotia and there was plenty to do establishing our new home. Lee Ann and Doris still took long afternoon naps. With Jim a good sleeper, too, I could put those hours into constructive work about our house.

To this day I recall vividly the joy babies brought to me! Jim was very responsive to affection (all of you were but I am talking about Jim now). He glowed with satisfaction for every kiss, hug, noisy blows on the tummy and gentle warm air into the ears. Hair pulling done by innocent hands and resulting giggles are precious memories. They made the difficulties seem small in comparison to the joy I experienced in you as babies.

Having three boys in close together served well in providing playmates but I felt Jim got the short end of the stick. The needs of the younger seemed more pressing. Since he was oldest he was last to be satisfied. I recall Jim's tears rolling down his cheeks waiting to be attended. Once I got the little guy into my arms, I had to squeeze tight. He was every bit as dear as the other two. Waiting seemed so unfair! I understand the dilemma of single mothers having a job to interfere as well as feeling guilty leaving children for others to oversee. I can also understand why parents today find one or two children the most they can handle. I feel guilty sometimes (even though I hear from you to not be concerned) that I was neglectful---that you did not get your fair share of attention. I know I did the best I could under given circumstances but there is always the nagging doubt---was it enough!? I could have injured your psyche, too! Oops!

Of the three boys Jim seemed to grow up already knowing things. (Sixth sense?) He grasped ideas very quickly, hung on to them and expended. Though he had normal child interests (he did not latch on to TV as the rest of you did however) it seemed that he was always ahead of himself. Your Dad is like that. Jim and Jim Sr. come up with unexpected answers. Watching Jeopardy sometimes your Dad answers questions he did not realize he knew. A lot comes from the enormous reading they do. Their aptitude fills me with admiration yet very aware of my lack of knowledge. It is humbling to have kids (and husband!) smarter than I. I had advantages of education my parents did not. In a sense I was "smarter" than they. My parents had a good grasp on life and a lot of common sense.

Life experience helps. I am not selling myself or my parents short. We too are contributors.

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As children none of you were saints. Jim had his moments! Foremost in my mind I remember "running away from home" with Mike and Danny Summers, putting shampoo in the fountain in downtown Endicott, and an early morning star gazing appointment with Jo Camfield that the police brought to my attention. They wanted to know if I knew where my son was at 4 am that morning! I had given Jim permission to go out at 6. He changed the time a bit! They brought him home in a police car! Fortunately it was still dark outside so the neighbors did not see him. Dad was away on a business trip at the time. I was embarrassed; Jim was a bit shaken himself. No doubt you have your own memories of collaboration with siblings in mischief most of which we still didn't know about (thank God!) and would prefer to leave it that way. When a child is too perfect, I worry! When he gets into too much trouble, I worry! Normal is somewhere in between and I like that. I'd classify you all as normal. Just keeping up with the demands of ordinary every day living provided me with enough to keep the adrenalin to curve my life with ups and downs. I needed no other stimulus to upset my apple cart!

When it come to job changing time, (again) and we were to depart for Florida. Jim was in his last year of high school. I was facing major problems with Mike not wanting to make this change. Life was pleasant for Mike. He had friends and resented being uprooted. Jim had the opportunity to finish at Seton. We could have arranged for him to stay with the Camfields but he opted to come with his family. I was (and still am!) very impressed with Jim's attitude toward his family. He has a special affection for being a Hamill and enjoys his family ties. I see him establishing these same roots of closeness within his own family. He is enjoying Ben and Sandra (Cassandra wants to be called Sandra now!) with joyful family attachment. Jim had much to gain by staying in Endwell. I remember Fr. Van Amburg calling us in Florida to announce that Jim had gotten the highest SAT scores in the Binghamton area and how he (Father) had wished that prestige could remain with Seton. Having moved to Florida, the school could not take the honor. The best Jim could do in Florida was to get the best Math award in his short stay there.

There is a lot to be said for mother-son relationships. Jim has made it very easy for me to remain close to him. I love reaching up to enfold in his embarrasses! Jim is a gentle and giving person. Lots more could be said but I have already been too verbose. Next time I will take on the next two in line.

Much love as always,