

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 <sup>DAD</sup> 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 coffecake.

Well, I have had my exercise for the day. It has taken me 2 hours thus far so that you know I am a slow learner. Dad is patient and kind but this time I figured most of the corrections without him and he seems pleased to be let off the hook. I will need him for helping with the mistakes I did not catch and to get this spaced and printed for the envelopes. I have many more tales for you if you are interested. I have hardly scratched the surface of what I would like to share with you. Better I tell you now before my wits leave me or I die---that is if you are at all interested. I don't want to bore you so let me know. Dad has been amassing material of his own and for sure it will be much more scholarly as that is who he is and I am me an entirely different person. Dad and I are so different and I know that I upset him a lot with my inability to measure up to his standards but I am me and I really don't want to change. I have been in this skin too long.

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

Always yours,

*MAM*

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 or 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!

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