

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 immediate 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,

*Mom*

*We hear Teri will be visiting the D. C. area after she visits here - with 2 dogs! Have fun. At least we have a big yard & a cool basement. We miss you! Wish you were here!*