

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. Oatmeal, 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,

mom

Thank for the wonderful letter, Mark. your daughter is a jewel. We treasure seeing her when we can. You two are busy people; I can see that. Can't overdo!