

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 programs 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.

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!

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,

Mom

Am taking a frozen turkey with me to Mary & John's. Hope to cook it for Sunday Apr. 25th. Like to have you all join us. Have cranberry sauce, too! See you soon!