

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 childrens' 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 Cullough (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 judgements 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.

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 treasured 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,

Mom

Delighted to hear all about your new place! It sounds HEAVEN!
my kids sure know how to enjoy life. we're happy for you.

No news yet about Terri's uncle? It must be hard on the family.
Hugs + kisses all around.