

Monday, August 23, 1993.

Dear family,

This is the kind of day made to stay home. It is wet and raining off and on. When I was a kid, this kind of a day was made to order for sitting on the attic stairs to listen to the rain spatter on the roof. There was no insulation up there. Even on a hot summer day the rain would cool the attic. It was a "neat" place to be alone. My siblings were not fascinated by this phenomenon. Sometimes I would read or maybe munch on apples. The neighbors across from us had an apple tree. The fruit was the early green apple and was bountiful. They did not like the Zielinski gang in their yard hence they would toss the apples in the outlawn or street. I never tired of eating them. I miss them. They are hard to find on the market these days. When they cut down that tree, (more bother than worth to them) I was in tears! Now that I am an adult, I have but memories----and glad of that. Anyway, this kind of day belongs to oneself. I have decided to put mine to use in writing long neglected letters.

Your father has already shared with you about our vacation in W. Virginia. It was a very rewarding experience for both of us. ~~Doing the white water rafting bit has been an ambition of mine for years.~~ Now that I have been to San Francisco, the Grand Canyon, and white water rafting (I would enjoy that again!) all that is left to complete my goals of "must see" before I die is Alaska. That is next year's BIG TREAT in the works. Pen and I had it in mind to go even without our guys, but the boys seem interested too. It will probably be another Elder Hostel trip. They seem very good with organizing these trips. We certainly were well pleased with the one to W. Virginia. Pen and Lou are taking their second one in October to Missouri and combine that with plans to see their Mike and Pam. We will house sit Tug for them. They are also considering a trip to New Orleans with this same group at Mardi Gras time next year. It is a great idea. Why not see all you can while your health is good and you are agile enough to enjoy the exciting time that goes with it. This group of people is unique! They are young in spirit, pretty hale, good sports and fun to be with. One couple there has been on 53 of these trips. We were told the record so far is in the 70s.

Dad mentioned the geology and ghost towns we had along with the rafting. He may have mentioned a field trip we had to an old coal mine. Bay City had been a coal mining area when I was a kid. Some of our neighbors worked in the mines. I can remember the workers coming home black, tired, wearing caps with lights atop them, and carrying empty lunch buckets. Payday (Fridays) there was a stop at the local bar to cash pay checks. They would walk the streets a bit tipsy and late for supper. I remember feeling very proud that I had never seen MY father drunk! The Poles seemed to be weekend drinkers. No doubt they needed to relax. The wives seemed to resent spending the money they needed for their families. But as Dad would say, "A man has to do what he has to do"---whatever that meant!

The reason for this tangent is to share with you how this particular trip (to the mine) brought me back to my childhood and the house on Van Buren. They had a display house of a coal miner's typical house. The house was built by management and rented to the miners. They also had company stores where you bought on credit (we had Lula's store a block away) which kept them in debt to the company. They used chits and got the family started in supplies. Thereafter you never seemed to work your way forward. It was like walking back into the past for me. The house was built with tongue and groove lumber walls and floors as ours had been. The old coal stove in the kitchen (in better condition than I remember), the basic cupboard, the crude sink with wooden waste boards, table and chairs (we had benches) completed the kitchen. One ceiling electric outlet serviced the whole room. I remember several cords to various lamps hanging from the ceiling in the livingroom. Like our house, you lived in the kitchen. Bedroom space was a premium and living space was used for bedrooms. I am sure my Dad's parents had to so that as the front part of the house was not added until Mom and Dad got married. They even had the outhouse and the laundry tub set up for Saturday baths. What was missing that I remember vividly was the blacking of the ceiling from the coal dust and smoke. This was a display model so it was neat though basic; I remember mess an disorder most of the time. It was a weird experience. Pen who was with me did not remember all that I did, but a lot rang a bell with her too. Besides nostalgia it was a deja vu for me.

Perhaps you can guess that this experience got me thinking of the events in my life that I have not shared with you. Now that I may have more time to devote to things I want to get done (before canning demands take over), I should reread what I have written to you, take notes, edit, and complete the saga of my life. We were still in Endwell when I left off so there is much to come. Even though most of the material is not new to you (and I feel less urgency to write), there are some reflections I would like to share with you now that we are all adults.

Lest I forget, your brother Tom is at Cornell and now has a new address. WRITE IT DOWN somewhere.

Tom Hamill (607) 272-0129
A-4 1895 East Shore Dr.
Lansing, N.Y. 14882

I didn't know there was a Lansing in New York! Must be near Ithica.

Since I made such a big deal about wanting to go white water rafting, I better share that experience with you. Like with horse riding, the hardest part is getting in/on! I fault our instructor. He was absolute zero telling us how to get in. Pen and I decided we wanted to be up front. I felt cool water in my face would be welcome on this hot day. Fortunately they told us to wear old shoes and old clothes. Since we were launched in the water rather than on land, you had to get into the water to board. An instructor with any sense would have advised the upfront people to get on first. Trying to get on this big balloon raft with everyone doing it at the same time was perhaps laughable were you watching but next to impossible (gracefully!) when you are up to your waist in water with feet looking for a firm grip upon slippery rocks. I slipped, lost my balance, and got wet to the chest. Lou and Dad had to help pull me in before I entered safely. We were the "sweep" raft which meant we were last among the 8-10 rafts floating down the river. If you were experienced and desired to, you would have your own duckie (a canoe like float for one) and go along with the crowd. Since we were last Carl (how will I ever forget his name!) gave us long tedious instruction on water safety and teaching us strokes. As sweep, we were responsible for the safety of those might get dumped by the rapids. Hanging back we did not move with any celerity and the harangue of how incompetent rafters can be, did not endear me with Carl. He, Carl, took himself very seriously and let us all know how responsible he was. He did a pretty good job of frightening me. We took practice strokes, did our turns etc. Trouble for me was, he was back in the boat and I was up front. Now I know my hearing is somewhat at fault, but land-a-goshun a fellow should speak up when you near rapids. Sometimes I missed what he said and strained to hear. I'd hear, "Lee! together now!" and "Let's work as a team all us!" Most of the ride was slow and boring. The water was calm and effortless. At times like these, he oared alone. Someone remarked anyone could do this. So he asked for volunteers. Lou did and took over. Carl took the paddle again when we came to the rapids. Most of what we went through was baby stuff but we did go through one called "surprise" that was a thrill. Carl was really shouting at us then and we worked well as a team. 4 of the duckie passengers got dumped. As sweep we were put to work picking up passengers. All the rafts helped with that many in the water but Carl was quick to point out why his instruction was so thorough. It was during the rowing in Surprise that I realized how venerable I was. I had it in mind do go the next day on more difficult rapids. When I realized how this exercise left my heart pounding, I could not in fairness go with others over more difficult falls and not do my share. I would dearly love to go as a passenger if I did not have to work so hard. It was great fun; it was a wonderful experience. Lou did and had a great time.

Surely you have already had enough high lights of our trip to satisfy your curiosity from Dad. I just wanted to share a couple of points of interest with you. This letter is already too long. Love and best wishes to you and yours.

As ever,

Mom

We hope your plans to be with us for Thanks giving with us materializes to reality. I'll pray the weather will be conducive to travel. I don't know what plans your aunt has, Terri, but we would sure like to invite her over. If she can't make it for Thanks giving, how about left-overs dinner (or else!) while you're here. I could write ^{her} you or invite her if you like if I had the address.

Lots of love, mom