

19th Storyworth: What is One Favorite Memory of Your Mother?

My mother, Mercedes Drout Holzer, became a Type 1 diabetic during her first pregnancy, with my sister Peggy, who was born a hydrocephalic, and died at age 7. I have no memory of ever even meeting her, as she died about when I was four, and had been in an institution for most of her life. I am sure that was a painful experience for my Mom. I cannot imagine having to go through such a sorrow as a parent.

But my Mom's diabetes would also have some other impacts, which ran the gamut from nuisance to comical, and some which were life long memories as a result. One was an episode at a Friendly's Restaurant. My Mom used to regularly eat a Giant Hershey's Chocolate Bar at a single seating, usually while watching TV, and adjust her insulin dose to compensate. I am sure there is not a single medico reading this who won't roll their eyes skyward to view such a comment, but she lived to age 72, a HUGE accomplishment for someone who had been a diabetic since age 17, with the technologies known at the time. So our family response was much more muted with such activities than might otherwise have been expected.

But the Friendly's incident was a cherished family "heirloom story", not least because it showed my Mother's whacky logic. She had taken some of we kids to get an ice cream. She ordered a banana split for herself, and stipulated the requisite hot fudge, sticky fruit syrups, and whipped cream toppings. But when it was brought to the table, it also contained chocolate sprinkles, the kind made by seemingly extruding heated chocolate bar through an Angel Hair Pasta die, then chopping them at about 1/4" long. Probably added no more than 100 calories to something which likely had ten thousand already in the dish. But she literally exploded on the waitress "I can't have sprinkles, I'm a diabetic". Nobody had a smartphone at the time or we'd have had video of half the kids snorting their ice creams out their sinuses.

The episode left such an impression that it prompted our including some sprinkles in her urn after her cremation when she passed years later. And was the subject of many family laughs over the years. There were other memories as well worthy of note, including that she was a "devout catholic", which might be an oxymoron for anyone familiar with the church and some of its less than saint-like behaviors over the years. She was known by close relatives and friends as "Mercy", so it was a source of snickers from the family when, at her funeral, the priest during prayers said "Lord have Mercy" and had a puzzled look because he didn't catch the irony. And coming from Irish stock, it was odd that she made so little effort to celebrate St Patrick's, even when we briefly lived in Syracuse, the home of Tipperary Hill and it's world famous and exclusive inverted traffic light road intersection.

The family historian, my older sister Barbara, was the first of us to establish her own business, that with her husband Mickey of supplying Fire Companies and the like with pretty much anything they used in their operations except the actual trucks themselves. So Barb was no mental midget when it came to things financial. As the eldest, she had also tried to advise our Mom on certain investments. And, while I had by the point it mattered obtained my MBA, in addition to being an academically prepared Mechanical Engineer, neither of those really had anything to do with my ability to make good financial decisions. So it was odd to both Barb and myself when our Mom insisted on asking my advice on the same subject Barb had already advised her on.

When our Mom decided to follow through only after obtaining my duplicative advice, Barb's comment was that "Mom can't decide anything without a penis", which was an oddly inaccurate descriptor given what we both knew she and my Dad had done so they could travel, which was to buy an underpowered and ill-equipped van to pull an Airstream trailer. You know; aerodynamic but the worst space utilization camping device on the market. All so they could be members of "The Airstream Club", which was not their strong suit at all.

That my Mom decided to make me her Executor instead of Barb might have at least benefitted us somewhat, although I suspect Barb would have found the same results as I, when I discovered she had stopped paying the premiums on a Mass Mutual Life Insurance Policy ten months before her death, which they honored after my paying the missed premiums, which resulted in two thousand dollars benefit for each of the five kids after meeting that few hundred dollar shortfall.

My mom was also big on visiting cemeteries, something I don't believe any of her kids has done since her passing. But she would drive for hours to the Bronx or Long Island to places I could likely not find even WITH a map, only to roast or freeze once she got there. It is not that I cannot respect such dedication; I do. Dawn Clark regularly visits and places flowers on her relatives' graves at the Veterans' Cemetery in Onondaga County, an activity I have never been able to explain but would never want to suggest she change either. I suppose it is something someone ought to do to honor at least those who served.

I would hope that MY passing would be better remembered by partying with friends and "bench racing" or talking about the changes which have taken place with others in the Porsche Club of America and it's CNY Region, which is the second oldest in the Club, itself the largest single marque (brand) car club in the world. My Mom somehow never really understood WHY that seemed to matter to me, but enough so that she had an artisan make a shell box which contained a model 911 Targa as a gift for me, which spent years hanging in my bathroom before I was divorced from Lynne, and which is now in the hands of Jessica, along with most of my PCA "swag", like detailed models and trophies from Porsche Parades. And, unfortunately, not all, nor even a few of my favorites, which included a beautiful Loons on Green Granite trophy from the only Parade held outside the USA, in Quebec Province near St Jovitte. That was lost to a thieving liar landlord for whom I had given much and lost even more in 2016 because of his laughable ethics, sadly. Milt Ebersole was a real piece of work with absolutely NO integrity.

But this is supposed to be about my Mom, who did have integrity, and was far better at keeping contact with cousins and siblings than me as well, which has not been helped by my divorce and its economic impact, nor the two years of pandemic due to Covid we're just starting to recover from. So maybe there are a few tricks she could still teach me, like letting SOME things go. Time for this one to do so ;-)

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