

March 25,2007

My dear young friend,

It is just a few weeks away from my 81<sup>st</sup> birthday, and I am pondering on the events which shaped my life. In 1928 my parents were living on a family farm in northern Iowa with my mother's four siblings., while awaiting the arrival of their third child. Unfortunately my mother died in childbirth, leaving the newborn baby boy, and two girls, aged three and me (the middle child). I was 19 months old.

My father, who was not a strong person, did not rally to the thought of raising three children. He disappeared, totally abandoning us with the four age 20 something siblings. My paternal grandparents took the baby boy, and my sister and I were left with the young people. They took on the responsibility with no previous experience in raising children, and they had problems of their own. Of the four, one girl and one boy were stone deaf. My sister and I were raised like puppies, with no discipline, no regular food habits, no bedtime, and no cleanliness training.

In the meantime, our aunt Elsie, who was our father's sister, found that she and her husband were not having any luck in producing a family, and decided to come to the farm and get my sister, who was her namesake. When she saw how close we were, and how badly we were in need of a family, she took us both, and the young aunts and uncles were most relieved to see us go. We were three and five years old.

In the year that was required before they could adopt us—they met many challenges. We were malnourished, unsociable, with no idea about basic cleanliness, and did not want to eat anything but sweets. In addition, our language included most any "cuss" word they had ever heard. With patience and love, discipline when most needed., we became a family

We learned to become clean, respectful, well mannered children. Occasionally when things got tense, my newly adopted mother would go to the trunk and take out the only clothes she had taken when she brought us home—two ragged, torn dresses that we had on that day. The one sad thing was that we never kept up with those young aunts and uncles who did their best at caring for us when we were left behind.. We had only occasional contact with our brother Charles, who was shunted around from the grandparents to other people during his childhood.

On a terrible Fourth of July day, when we were seven and nine we lost our beloved Daddy. At a family day with my foster father's family, Daddy froze a freezer of icecream for the picnic. He developed chest pains, and before the family could get any help, he died of a heart attack..

Consider the consternation of a thirty four year old widow, left suddenly with two adopted children, with no previous education past eighth grade, and no work experience. The bravery she showed was amazing to everyone. Fortunately she did have small

savings, a \$2500 life insurance policy, and two weeks salary from Daddy's linotype job at the local newspaper.. At that time you could go to beauty school with just an eighth grade education. We moved to Aberdeen, South Dakota., where there was a beauty school, and Daddy's sister Marion could rent us a small apartment, and watch over us while my Mother was in school.. She completed the course, we came back to Iowa and she passed the board exam in Des Moines.

Needless to say, we were almost out of money, but we started a beauty shop in a rented home in a small Northwestern Iowa town. The biggest trauma was having to buy the equipment on time payments, which was so traumatic to my Mother that it became our family secret..

I think the thing that shaped my life was acquiring parents who truly cared, and witnessing my Mother's courage in facing a challenge that was so awesome. I like to think that she was an amazing woman-way ahead of her time. Many of my decisions in life were molded on her teaching us that we all must be responsible for our choices, and to choose wisely, and to believe in ourselves..

Sincerely,



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