

## **ESTHER CHRISMAN: REFLECTIONS ON OUR MOM**

*Kalispell, MT, August 7, 2016*

*Allen Chrisman*

First of all, on behalf of the entire family, let me thank you all for coming. We really appreciate it. Mom would appreciate it also, especially the coffee, cake and cookies.

It is too simplistic to say our Mom was an incredible woman. The circle of friends, her importance to relatives, and her connection to her extended family are testimony to that.

As the youngest of five sisters, Mom was full of mischief, but was able to get away with things her older sisters couldn't. She was very close to her sisters and her parents. The loss of her sister Sigvarda and her Mother early in her adult life was a very significant impact. A little known fact that we discovered that she never shared with us was that she was a Cheerleader at Leland High School.

Baird and Esther were married in 1948. I was born in 1952, Kari was born in 1954, and Bruce came to live with us in 1962.

### **What we remember about Mom:**

#### **As children:**

- Having her break the yardstick over us for some good reason. (Don't worry, it was only once and it was a defective yardstick.)
- We had horses on the small farm at the edge of Meredosia, and we learned to ride there. What we didn't realize until many years later was that every time we went out to ride, Mom would stand at the window with the field glasses to watch that we were safe.
- At the cabin she would take us berry picking. When was the last time you had strawberry jam made from wild strawberries? Do you realize how many strawberries that takes?

#### **As teen-agers:**

- Her emphasis on scholarship, appearance and conduct
- The required thankyou notes for all gifts,
- The chores that had to be done before dinner.

- The special dinners with adult guests. We had to be on our best behavior, we had to dress up, and we had to have engaging conversation with grown-ups.
- Sunday dinners with Granny, Uncle Bug, Aunts and Uncles and cousins and friends who dropped by. Mom made everyone welcome, and there was always room at the table for one more. For holiday meals, she sought out and invited folks who had no other place to go. She was thoughtful and generous.

### **After we left home:**

- The trips back home or to the cabin when we could – Mom cooking our favorite foods, the delight both Mom and Dad had with Bruce and Del bringing grandkids Rachel and Erik to Meredosia on Sundays. Rousing cribbage games at the cabin.
- Since Mom encouraged us all to create our own family Christmas traditions at our own homes, the packages that came at Christmas were a special treat. Our parents' generosity was so obvious in so many ways.

Mom never learned to cook as a child. She said that after four older sisters, her mother was not interested in letting Mom ruin good food learning to cook. Food was scarce during the Depression. Consequently, Mom did not know how to cook when she got married. What a surprise Dad had when he came home for lunch the first time. Mom had prepared a beautiful tuna salad. And how surprised she was when he informed her that he didn't eat tuna! She was an excellent cook as you all know. She kept a mental list of what was in the root cellar at the cabin, and was able to pull together a grand meal for unexpected company on short notice. If there wasn't quite enough, it was FHB. As Bruce and Cousin Joe knew, that meant Family Hold Back, there might not be enough to go around.

She was an excellent pie baker, although I kept telling her she needed more practice. I asked her to bake a huckleberry pie for the North Fork Bake Sale in early July. She did, although the crust came out soggy. I stopped by the next day to pick up the pie to take up the road, and she had gotten up early and baked a peach pie for me to take since the soggy crust huckleberry pie did not meet her standards. Larry may have gotten the Peach pie, but we did enjoy that soggy crust huckleberry pie!!

As a good Norwegian (you know you can tell a Norwegian, you just can't tell them much) she did enjoy her coffee. The coffee pot was always on, and some of her recipes actually specified "coffee time" when the batter or dough needed to rest and she needed a cup of coffee.

She so enjoyed treats – chocolate and candy and dessert and ice cream, huckleberry bear claws and banana splits, dinners out at JAGZ, even hot dogs from Costco. She enjoyed Granny’s fried chicken, and deep fried morel mushrooms were a special treat. She really enjoyed the Norwegian treats –Krum kaka, rosettes, spritz cookies, and lefse. Charlotte learned to make incredible lefse that Mom really enjoyed. Fortunately, Mom tended toward kipper snacks and sardines instead of lutefisk.

She was an outstanding storyteller – and could keep conversation going on even if you had a plane to catch. She had true curiosity – she attended several Senior Universities at the Community College. She was interested in people. She remembered and cared about all the people she met. As Kari pointed out, she could tell stories that painted such vivid pictures that we aren’t truly sure if they were her memories or ours.

She was spunky and feisty. She was never afraid to speak her mind. She often became righteously indignant at some unfairness or perceived slight to family members. She was deeply interested in politics and national affairs, she had an opinion and you were entitled to it. She often said one of her prayers was “Dear Lord, please keep one hand on my shoulder, and the other hand over my mouth.”

She believed in handwritten thank you notes for gifts, and Bread and Butter notes for hospitality. She fretted over the Thankyou notes she owed others. Her grandchildren learned quickly that Grandma did expect a thank you for her gifts, but at the same time pretty much any transgression could at least be partially mitigated by a sincere hand written note. And for major transgressions, any family member could expect the mandatory “Come to Jesus speech.” Sorry, Pastor.

She loved to sit at her table in the living room looking out the front window, playing solitaire and listening to the news on the radio. She kept a close eye on the neighbors, and if anything out of the ordinary occurred, she could create a backstory that was plausible.

And she was a worrier about those she loved. She worried about her kids, she worried about grandkids, great grandkids, nieces and nephews and friends where ever they were. Photos of family and friends from everywhere lined the front of her cabinets in her kitchen. She looked up the weather in cities where they lived each

day in the newspaper. She worried when tornadoes or floods or fires broke out near where she had friends or family.

She loved her garden and flowers. She loved the birds at the feeder and the hummingbirds at the Bergamot. It was important to her that everything be presentable, both inside and out, for whomever dropped by.

She always wanted the perfect present for everyone. The present had to be exactly what they wanted, perfect in color, size, model and brand. And of course, it had to be a complete surprise. One Christmas she decided to send bacon to a friend who Mom knew ate bacon every morning. So Charlotte was asked to pick up a big pack of Costco bacon (Mom was frugal in certain areas), put it in a shipping box, find a source for dry ice, and FedEx it to our friends in Jacksonville Illinois. Jacksonville, Illinois is as close to the Hog capital of the world as you can get. As Charlotte later told Mom, "That was about the stupidest thing I have ever heard of." Obviously there was no way Costco bacon from Kalispell could compare with what was available in the local stores in Illinois. You know what? Mom agreed with her and laughed. But it didn't stop her from trying to find the perfect gift.

Over the past few years Mom's ability to do things diminished, and she struggled constantly with the frustration of needing others to do her work. She became crabby when we couldn't do it the way she had it in her mind. Kari and I joked that this was our weight loss program – with Mom routinely taking big bites out of our backside. She realized and said often, however, that she knew that 'when she was crabby it was because she was unhappy with herself.' We knew that as well, and we see it in ourselves also.

As you all know, Kari provided incredible care and assistance to Mom over the past several years. An outstanding patient advocate, Kari would attend each Doctor visit and make sure things were on track. Kari would bring over meals and spend much of each day with Mom making sure she could continue to live independently. Kari was one of the reasons Mom lived as long as she did and as well as she did, and Kari and I made a great team along with all the folks who took care of Esther. The main reason Mom lived so long was because she enjoyed life and she was going to live it to the fullest.

We all were lucky to have Mom, and I know she appreciated what everyone did for her.

In closing, I think Mom would want you to:

- Listen to each other, love each other, respect each other, and be kind to each other;
- To do the best that you can;
- To continue to improve your mind at every opportunity;
- To take care of other people;
- To keep your nose clean and keep it to the grindstone;
- And to do the right thing even if no one is looking.

Thank you all for coming, and thank you for your love and friendship with our Mom.