

Chapter Seven



My Early Life

After living in Canada for almost two years and having settled down to life in our own home, I realised just how lonely and bored I was. My husband had his work, the children had school and hobbies and their friends, and I felt quite lost. I did not have a career I could fall back on.

In England I had been quite lazy in school and my mom was of the opinion if you don't want to do something at school don't do it. I took the easy way out and instead of listening to my dad who tried to encourage me as much as possible; I decided it was OK to be lazy. I had big dreams though. One day I was going to be a famous dress designer. I would spend most of my lesson time doodling on pieces of paper designing beautiful gowns and dreaming of when I would be rich and famous. I was often interrupted by the teacher's ruler banging on my desk and waking me up. I realized that once again, I had not heard the lesson. I was then sent to the headmaster's office and given a stern talking to. Afterwards, I promised to try harder and do my best to concentrate.

One of my biggest challenges was math. I hated adding up, never learned my *times table*, and just did not want to learn. Once again my mom said there was no point, and I took the easy way out. I also had lots of time off school. Sometimes it was because of my health, but mostly it was because Mom needed me at home. To this day I have no idea what was wrong with her. I think she may have experienced panic attacks, as I did when I was an adult, but she never told anyone about them. I also think that she had challenges with her

nervous disposition that had never been identified because she would not go to the doctor for check ups.

My mom's childhood had been harsh. She was one of ten children, her father's first wife died leaving behind two small children. He married my grandmother and they had eight more children. My mom, her step-sister and her step-brother were responsible for looking after the younger children. Even in those days, the house they lived in was classed as a slum and consisted of two rooms upstairs, two downstairs and an outside toilet. Conditions were not good and Mom once told me she could not wait to get away and live her own life. Her step-brother and step-sister had already left home so my mom was counting the days until she could escape too.

Mom joined the WRAF as soon as she was old enough. She told me she only just got accepted because of her height. Like me, she was quite short and needed to be at least five foot tall. I think she stretched as tall as she could in order to reach the magic height. I do not know much about Mom's life in the WRAF. Sadly we did not talk much as a family and that is something I regret from the bottom of my heart now both my parents are dead.

If there is one thing I have learned from my own experience is to talk to my own children about my past. Encourage them to ask questions now before it is too late so they too do not have my regrets. Saying that I knew it was a different time and a different way of life for me, so having regrets is something I try to learn from and don't dwell on.

After Mom left the WRAF, she met my dad and they got married. He had come to Mom's city for work because he came from a shipbuilding community and there was no work for him there. As far as I can remember it was never a happy marriage, but that is just my memory. I could be wrong.

When Mom wanted me to stay a home because of one of her *turns*, she was in bed. Apart from making her cups of tea and being shouted at, I felt I was of no use to her and could not help her. I got so behind at school the teachers suggested I stay back a year to catch up with my studies. But I wanted to stay with my friends and move up with them, so my mom insisted that I not be held back. I remember I had to take dressmaking in my final year at school and I hated sewing. For one long year I tried to make a dress. At the end of the year the dress was still in pieces. I think even the teachers thought I was a lost cause. It is quite funny though; wanting to be a dress designer and not liking sewing.

I excelled in some subjects though; subjects I liked and enjoyed and had an interest in. I liked English and history, and I loved art, but I hated physical education (PE). I was terribly shy of getting undressed in front of the other girls so would bring notes from my mom explaining why I could not take PE that day. In the end, my teacher gave up trying to persuade me to join in. I never learned to swim either and that is the main reason I made sure my children had swimming lessons as soon as they could stand up.

I know I lost out when I was at school. I now know that it had a lot to do with me, but it partly my parents and that the teachers tried, but they “hit a brick wall.” I tell my children about my experience at school and encourage them to be different, but if they make the same decisions then they should not regret them, but work with the choices they made.

I managed to pass some exams in my last year of school. I was, and still am, very proud of this fact. I realised even then that I may have been able to do better, but it was too late now. I had to persuade my mom to let me stay at school an extra year to do my exams, because she wanted me to leave school at sixteen, like my older sister. My sister got a job at the ice cream parlour which was part of the ice skating rink Mom worked. Mom was in charge of catering and loved her job. In fact when she unexpectedly got pregnant with my brother, she suggested that Dad stay at home and

raise the baby because she did not want to give up the work she loved. Mom was one of those super women who managed to keep the house sparkling clean, cook like a chef, and still work at a full time job. Dad seemed quite happy with the situation and always worked close to home to be near my mom.

I decided I would learn shorthand and typing at school, and get a job in an office when I left. I became a very good touch-typist, but did not enjoy shorthand. I still managed to get work as a secretary in a big office as soon as I left school. In those days typewriters were manual and we had none of the easy options computers give us today. My inexperience showed when I was interviewed for my one and only job, as I was very nervous. I think I was lucky the manager was busy and left the interview to his secretary. It was obvious we liked each other from the first moment we met. We are good friends to this day and she is my eldest son's godmother. I was given the job as a Dictaphone Typist and I enjoyed my job, partly because I could leave it at the end of the day, and, yes, partly because I found it easy. I stayed at the job for eight years until I had my first baby.

Everyone I worked with became close friends and very much like an extended family to me. Saying that, working with a group of women had its challenges. Most of the women in my office smoked cigarettes and I did not. At that time no one thought much about the harmful effects of second-hand smoke. I would open a window to get fresh air and a few of the women who smoked would complain it was cold with the window open. I told them that if they wanted to kill themselves with the smoke they could, but I did not see why I should suffer the atmosphere and smell of smoke. At times I would be quite unpopular for speaking up for myself, even though I knew the other non-smokers welcomed the fresh air. Being unpopular never lasted for long so I could live with it for a few days!

If you feel your health is at risk for whatever reason, speak up, speak loudly and stick up for your rights. You only have one life. Make it a healthy one.

I was now more confident than I was at school and realised I had an easy wit and charm that people liked. My personality was not as outgoing as it is today; I was still quite shy, but I worked hard to defeat my shyness. This was the time of the Beatles, the first boutiques, and Mary Quant. I became a slave to fashion. I bought my first car, a second hand Mini and, to this day, it is my favourite car. I wore mini skirts and even bought a cowbell in the time of Flower Power. I'm not sure why, but at the time it seemed a good idea.

I met my husband at work, not because he worked in my office, but because he was an electrical contractor and was fixing some lights in our office. I had not intended to fall in love with him and settle down, but I was very young and it just happened. We discussed important things like whether we wanted children and wanting to own our own home, so in the beginning there was definitely communication in our marriage.

I stayed at my office job for eight years and left because I was expecting our first child. I have many happy memories of working there and stayed friends with many of the people I worked with.

Apart from looking after friends' children on the odd occasion, I never went back to work after having my first child. My husband and I decided that even though money would be tight for us, neither of us wanted our child to be looked after by anyone else but me. If I was not around, my husband would take care of our child.

We knew we wanted more than one and planned each pregnancy like a military operation. When our first child, a boy, was two years old, we decided it was time to try for another baby. We were extremely lucky to be fertile and able to conceive straight away. We

loved being parents so much we decided we would like at least four children... maybe more.

After our second son was born, we settled into life as parents of two very special little boys. When our third son was born, we knew we wanted another child and would be quite happy to have another baby boy to make our family complete. Many people thought we were just trying for another baby to make sure we had a girl, but this was not so. In fact I think wanted another boy all the more to prove them wrong. As long as our children were healthy that is what counted; not the sex of the child. When our third son was two years old, the same as with the previous babies, I became pregnant with our fourth baby. We made sure we explained to our sons that we loved them very much, that they were individuals in their own right, and that their new brother or sister would also love them very much.

We encouraged our boys to take up hobbies such as judo, swimming and Cub Scouts and this helped them learn how to socialize and also offered lots of fun times for them. This also meant that even though their parents might be busy at times with the new baby, the boys would not notice quite as much because they led busy lives of their own and did not rely on us to entertain them.

My fourth and last pregnancy was the worst. If it had been my first I would not have wanted any more children. I was constantly throwing up, had no energy and just wanted to sleep most of the time. My doctor blamed this on the fact that I already had three children and a husband, and I was an older mother-to-be!

As I approached my eighth month of my pregnancy, it was discovered from my blood work that I was dangerously anaemic. I needed iron injections and bed rest for the remainder of my pregnancy. Evidently, because I had never been able to take iron tablets in the past and everything had been fine, my doctor had not thought this might be a problem in the future. It was very hard at this time because my husband had to go to work. My family and my husband's family had never really been there to look after the

children for us, but we had some wonderful friends who helped us out.

My fourth baby was due late October or early November. As the anniversary of my mom's death drew closer, she had now been dead for almost 3 years; I convinced myself that my baby would be born on the same date Mom died. I was terrified of this happening. In any event, I had a false labour on that date. I went into hospital, begged the nurses not to let my baby be born on this date, and was sent home very embarrassed at having caused a lot of trouble and work for people.

"It is not more surprising to be born twice than once; everything in nature is resurrection."

– *Voltaire*

I had a terrible superstition that my new baby would be the reincarnation of my mother. My other concern was that something might be wrong with our baby, because it had been such a difficult pregnancy. I had been warned I might need a blood transfusion after the birth and my husband was concerned about the tainted blood scandal. Unfortunately, there was no way we could feel safe until after our baby was born.

Our first child was born two weeks late on a Friday, but did not have to be induced. My subsequent children were all two weeks late, had to be induced and were all born on a Friday.

"Fridays child is loving and giving"

– *Author unknown*

Our fourth baby was born on Friday, November 6th, a baby girl and she was just perfect. All her toes and fingers were there and she was, to us, a gorgeous baby. We were very excited for our baby

daughter to meet her new brothers and also for her brothers not to feel left out or jealous by this new being in their lives. Before I had gone into hospital for the birth, I had bought presents for each of our sons, and these presents were supposed to be presents from their new baby sister or brother. When my sons came to see their sister with my husband, they were all excited about seeing her and saying “thank you” to her for their presents. My eldest son was now eight years old, my second son was five and our third son was almost three. The boys all cuddled their new baby sister and went home knowing that we would be coming home the next day and we could all be one big happy family.

Before our baby could leave the hospital she had to have a complete check up. It was discovered that our baby daughter had a condition which we call the *clicky hip syndrome*. It means that one of her hips has not fitted into the joint properly, but normally does not mean long-term problems. Obviously we were concerned and a bit upset, but the doctor’s news was good. If our baby wore a brace on top of terry diapers twenty-four hours a day for twelve weeks, this condition should fix itself. I thanked God that this was the only thing wrong with our new baby.

When we got home we made sure her brothers did not feel left out and still got plenty of our time. They accepted their new sister from the beginning and I knew this was one of the happiest times of my life. I felt complete for once in my life, surrounded by my family. I did not realise that before my baby girl was much older, I would be faced with the challenge of panic attacks.

“Anxiety is fear of one’s self.”
– *Wilhelm Stekel (Austrian psychoanalyst, 1868-1940)*

Being A Mom

Last year I cried for most of Mothers Day, not because I was upset. They were tears of joy and tears of love when I read the messages my husband and children wrote in my Mothers Day cards. Let me share some of those lovely messages. Here are some of the special words I read today that once again made me realise how loved and appreciated I am: -

“I promise to listen to you and try to understand your feelings – even when they are different from mine...”

“No matter what I’ve done, whether I lost or won, you’ve always been there, and you will always be my mom. I love you so much and you’re always No.1”

“We should do stuff like this every day of the year because you really do deserve it! I couldn’t wish for a better Mom than you. Thank you for everything – and when I am a Mom I hope I can be at least half as good a Mom as you”

Top 10 *Momisms*²

Quotes you have heard from your mom and are probably using yourself!

You've heard your mom say them hundreds of times, and you are now saying them. You know what we're talking about – those lines all moms seem to have handy when they need the kids to obey. It's hard to pick just ten, but here are my top picks with a few extras thrown in.

² Author unknown. EverythingHolidays.com.
<http://www.everythingmothersday.com/>, 2005

A Life Like Mine

- Why? Because I said so, that's why!
- I'm going to give you until the count of three!
- It's all fun and games until someone gets hurt.
- "I don't know" is NOT an answer.
- I would never have talked to my mother like that.
- I'm not running a taxi service.
- If everyone jumped off a cliff would you do it too?
- Someday your face will freeze like that.
- It hurts me more than it hurts you.
- I love you.
- Money doesn't grow on trees.
- Were you born in a barn? Shut the door.
- Go ask your Dad.
- I'm not talking just to hear my own voice.
- I hope someday when you have kids they're be just like you, then you'll know.
- Bob, Sue, Joe, Fido... whatever your name is...