

Keepers

by Mary Fogarty

Recently my son, Paul, reminded me of the gift we share by having family and friends that matter.

I know that my Mom and Dad were keepers. They grew up during WWII and the Great Depression. They compared their marriage to a team of horses wrapped in a harness pulling together to work three and four jobs weekly to survive. My parents saved every penny so the banks didn't own them, their home or their car. They always lived within their means. That meant for Christmas and birthdays, instead of toys, my two sisters and I received needed clothes, shoes and supplies for school. Mom and Dad believed if you didn't really need things but just wanted them, then you could survive without it.

Material things held less importance than a good neighbor, a faithful husband or a man and woman who kept their word. They understood even before Gandhi said it, that "There are enough resources to meet everyone's needs but not everyone's greed."

Mom raised her three girls working as a cook at a local veteran's lodge and a clerk in a bakery shop. Dad worked in a paper mill, as a bartender for a local hotel chain and catered his bartending skills at parties for the rich.

More than anything, Mom and Dad cared for their children with a 'tough love' that forced us to think and do for ourselves. We grew up taking care of each other while Mom and Dad worked. But always, no matter what time of the night they came home, they'd wake us, hug us, and let us know they loved us.

Our best times came when visiting Uncle Charley's farm. From Uncle Charlie I learned the importance of growing your own garden, and raising cows to put milk and meat on the table. Uncle Charley loved to plow his fields and I liked riding on the tractor with him.

I learned to value Grandma and Grandpa and the stories they told about the old country, Poland. They talked a lot about reasons they came to America. Grandma told me in broken English, "I not want marry zee Polish pig, want to start better life in country far away." Like so many immigrants that came to this country, everyone sought the freedom that allowed him or her to own their farms, till their own soil and raise their six sons on the religion they believed in.

I appreciate the hard work ethic and dogged persistence and courage that made me who I am today. Mom, Dad, Grandma and Grandpa are gone but they left a lavish legacy. I still have family left in a son, two sisters, two grandchildren and many surrogate children, plus a number of friends who are keepers. All show up like stars shining in their own light. For the partnerships I now surround myself with, I am a rich and gifted lady.

Thank you, Paul, for reminding me of all the KEEPERS in my life, especially you.

With love,
from the MOM