

## From Stan

### *Ma's Eulogy: Some Random Thoughts*

#### ***Polish heritage:***

My mom, Stella Butt, was born into a farm family in North Andover, Massachusetts in Feb 1912 as Stella Kalinowski. Her parents had both immigrated to the United States from Poland at the turn of the last century. She always celebrated her birthday, and we always had parties for her on Feb 10, but it wasn't until she applied for landed immigrant status to come here to Canada that she first saw her birth certificate, which listed her birthday as Feb 20. All we can figure is that since she was born in the middle of winter on a farm, her mother probably was not able to register her for 10 days, and thus her "official" birthday became the 20<sup>th</sup>... but we still partied on the 10<sup>th</sup>!

Stella outlived three husbands, but had only two children: my sister, Marion, and me. The two of us provided her with five grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and three great-great grandchildren.

#### ***Early life:***

She was the last of her generation in our family. She had a brother and sister that predeceased her plus 2 other siblings that had died – one in early childhood and one at birth. In addition, *her* mother once told me that she had had 8 other miscarriages. Life was tough in those days! Somehow my Mom said she always had fond memories of her father, although he had passed away of consumption when she was only three. I suspect it was the stories *her* mom had told her which formed her opinion. After her dad died, the family became quite poor, but living on the farm, they always had food to eat or trade.

For the first six years of her schooling, which took place partially during World War I, her mom sent her to Polish school, which she thoroughly hated. Since our family was apparently descended from minor nobility that lived in a part of Poland that was in those days a part of the Russian Empire, her family spoke a kind of "country" Polish or a cross between Polish & Russian that her teachers always made fun of. Luckily for her, she was allowed to go to public school in

junior high, but by then she was already working part time as a spinner in the woolen mills, and at the end of grade 9 she quit school in order to work full time in the mills to help support her family. She made \$12 for a 5 ½ day work week.

As many women in those days did, she married my father at 16. My sister, Marion, was born at the end of that same year. After giving birth, my ma worked for the next 10 years at a Leather Factory where she oiled & softened, seasoned & colored, and then sorted & chamfered skins that were eventually made into shoes. She was good at her job and made \$25-30 a week, even though it was during The Great Depression. Pork shoulder sold for 10¢ a pound in those days!

I was sort of an accident and didn't come along until 9 years later in Jan 1938. A year after that came World War II. During the War she worked for the General Electric Company, again doing men's work: assembling different parts for war machinery—and towards the end of the War, she was turning parts on a lathe which were to be used for the first jet engines. My mom was very strong in those days. The story goes that one time she lifted a car out of a ditch by herself!

After the War, she worked for many years in various shoe factories, employed as what was called a “fancy stitcher”. People doing this work were paid by the piece, and by working furiously, she managed to develop arthritis and carpal tunnel!

Some years later she worked for the Internal Revenue Service punching the rectangles in those early IBM cards which fed into computers, which were as big as a room. She disliked the job though because she didn't really want to help the tax people! At the same time she liked it because it taught her how to type, and from then on she always typed her letters to me.

Aside from the Polish school, about the only other thing she really hated in life was the body she was born into. She had a phobia, always thinking that she was the world's biggest woman. She tried

dieting a hundred times, but all to no avail—or least so in her mind. I always thought she was *big*—never fat, in fact, just like me!

She was always a straight shooter. Some people had a hard time with her because of it, but everyone knew what she was thinking, and she never spoke with a forked tongue. Most people loved that about her.

She was devastated when her daughter, my sister, Marion, died in 1980 after a long bout with cancer. Then after some years of enticement, she and her husband, Harry, finally decided to immigrate to Canada. They moved here in 1988 when she was 76 years old. A brave move indeed!

Life was good for the next 12 years, and when she and Harry were not busy with the Spruce Grove Seniors Club, they would be motoring all around Western Canada and the US. They both loved Nature.

Unfortunately she had a stroke at the end of November 1999, and she spent four months recovering at the Stony and Glenrose Hospitals. While she was in rehabilitation, her husband was interviewed by the health authorities, and it was decided my mom could have a place at George Hennig with my step dad serving as her caregiver. However, before she was released from the hospital, he fell, broke his hip and was diagnosed with bone cancer. He passed away before she was able to move into GHP at the very end March in the year 2000. Needless to say, she was not a happy camper. From that time on she considered herself to be like some of the crippled birds she found over the years that she had nursed back to health. In her case, though, she felt as though her wings had been clipped and that she would not fly again.

***On to happier stuff:***

My Mom had lots of activities that she really enjoyed. Many of them centered or were connected with family. She *loved* to cook, and nothing gave her more pleasure than having a cookout at her place for any and all of her relatives. It didn't matter what the food was:

steaks or chops, hotdogs or hamburgers, fresh fish or lobster plus all the fixings. She loved doing it, and we loved eating it.

From the time that Aileen & I first moved to the Edmonton area in 1966, my mom would come up from Maine, where the folks lived at that time, and take part in our many activities, including being here when our son, Keith, was born. Conversely, our kids spent quite a few summers in New Hampshire and Maine and even one winter in Florida where they joined their grandparents. It didn't matter where they were; the kids constantly had lots of fun by squirting their grandparents with the garden hose or short-sheeting their bed. The grandparents loved it too!

On her trips up here, my Mom came to know all of our friends, and thus when she and my step dad did decide to emigrate, she already had a circle of friends here. Those same friends are here with us today, and I want to especially thank Victor & Anita Hochdorfer, Guenther & Lore Breymann, and Len & Jean Webber for always including her in their get-togethers since she moved here, and also for coming here to George Hennig these past eight years to help entertain her and her game playing friends in the Home. They are real friends.

Aside from family, there were lots of things she liked to do. I tried to put them in the order that she loved them, but she loved them all. So in *no* particular order she liked to:

Go skidooning. She and Harry had two of the original 10 hp Skidoos. They raced all over the northern New England countryside, one time nearly getting decapitated by barbed wire and one time landing upside down in an ice covered brook!

Go fishing. My earliest memory of fishing is when I was three, and guess who took me? When I was young, we used to fish a lot. It wasn't until I was quite a bit older that I realized we were actually fishing for food in those tough wartime years. But even when she would come up here to visit us and after she moved here, she would

want to go fishing up at Beaver Lake near Lac La Biche...or any other place that I would take her.

Poor boy parties. My earliest memories include lots of parties where all the guests dressed up in their poorest work or farm clothes. I think it was to remind all her friends and relatives where they had all come from!

Burlesque. Of course burlesque in the old days meant comedy and vaudeville. But I've got to tell you that she did see Gypsy Rose Lee in person. I can guarantee that's something no one else in this room can say!

Music. She loved all forms of music. She loved to dance, especially the polka. She liked to sing—and I can remember when she & I would be la-la-la-ing to classical music, as we would wash the supper dishes together. Later I was able to regularly take her to the symphony, the ballet, musicals, and Stage West. She loved it all.

Travelling. When she still lived in the States, she and Harry would get into their old VW camper and then later a Toyota Chinook and drive all over the eastern US and Canada. After moving here, they would do pretty much the same thing, but staying in motels rather than campgrounds. She never had the urge to travel abroad, since she believed there was more than enough to see within Canada & US in one lifetime.

Hobbies. She was interested in all sorts of arts & crafts: needlepoint, crocheting, knitting, leather and metal tooling, making pictures or wreaths from nuts, pine cones or sea shells. She started painting at age 60 and became very good at it. I have displayed some of her painting and crafts around the room today.

She loved Nature shows on TV, and probably spent more time watching the Weather station than any one else in here.

She loved flowers and gardens, and she was very knowledgeable about them as well. She knew not only the common names of

flowers, but the Latin names as well. The botanists at the University were impressed with her knowledge, and the University now boasts a particular begonia which she bred from seed stock. When she was living in NH, she was the State Horticulture Chairman, and she traveled around showing slides of her flowers & gardens and giving lectures.

She loved jokes, especially those that just might be just slightly off color. From the time that she was rehabilitating in the Glenrose and heard the joke about “it could be worse”, that joke became her “theme song”, and it got her through a lot of rough days.

Playing cards and other board games. She was always ready and willing to sit down and play a game of anything. She protested loud and long whenever anyone would beat her, but she loved every minute of it! She only wished that more residents would come out after supper to play.

Talking with the “Girls” at George Hennig Place. She dearly loved all the workers here at the Home. She had a special place in her heart for all of [you] them. As for the cooks, she knew that the ladies in the kitchen tried their best...and tried their best for her. She loved the breakfasts and soups, and she felt particularly blessed when any of the women working in the kitchen would make a special meal and whisper that it was for her... with potato pancakes being at the top of the list.

She especially loved it when the girls would come into her room late at night, sit on her chair or bed and talk seriously about their own lives. It was great therapy for her as well, since it took her mind off her own problems while she felt she was serving a role as “Mother Confessor”. She had a special effect on people. She was rough, and some people were turned off by that, but you just had to scratch the surface to see how tender and loving she was.

***Her role with me:***

Although, in the early days, we scarcely had more than the shirts on our backs, my Ma always did the best she could for me. But more

important than any material things is the fact that she allowed me the freedom to grow and make decisions. She felt that it was her parental duty to teach her children to be independent. It was something I appreciated very much and tried to impart to my own children.

At the same time she gave me freedom, that freedom could not cross the lines of respectability. She believed in propriety...I did my high school in the early 50's—the James Dean era-- and I was the only boy in my class who was not allowed to wear jeans & t-shirts to school!

She strove to make me a perfectionist, and if I got 6 A's and 1 B on my report card, she would give me holy what for and would tell me that the next report better not have any B's on it. !

Even though I was a very good football player, she never once watched me play ball. She always felt that she would never be able to stand it if she saw me get hurt. Instead I had to stand by and watch while *she* fell and broke her wrist one time when the two of us were ice skating together.

When I decided to get married my mother was tickled pick. I think she thought I was hopeless, since I was already 26 at the time—late for those days!! The fact that Aileen came from another country and looked a little different than the rest of us was of no concern to her at all. My ma considered Aileen as one of her own, and loved her and bragged about her the same way that any mom would talk about her own children. After so many years, Aileen came to know my mom perhaps even better than her own mother. They became so close that once in a while people would ask if Aileen were her daughter rather than my being her son! I want to thank Aileen here and now for spending so many years of her life helping me to look after my mom rather than insisting we move away or take any of the other available options.

At the end, when she knew that she could no longer do any of the things she would like to, when she could no longer taste food, and when playing games seemed to lose its edge, she wanted to die to

give me the freedom to enjoy my remaining years in the same way that she had enjoyed hers.

This was a lady who lived through two World Wars, The Great Depression and Victory Gardens. She was my ma and my friend. She could be hard as nails on the surface, but at the same time she was often my confident and was the warmest and most affectionate woman I've ever known. And it is precisely that warmth and affection that I am going to miss most.

***In Conclusion:***

A few minutes ago I mentioned how much my mom loved the girls who worked in the Home. They always took care of her in a way that Aileen & I could not have possibly done in our own home. For that we are as grateful as my Mom. Shortly before she died, I told her that Aileen & I had come up with a suggestion to help thank the girls. She thought it was a wonderful idea. And at this time I would like to present Colleen with 20 tickets for a "Girl's' Night Out" over 2 consecutive Tuesdays for the next show at the Mayfield Dinner Theatre.

Aileen & I would also like to make a more substantial contribution to the Home for the wonderful love and care that was showered on my Mom for the past more than eight years. The final gift has not yet been decided, but we are hoping that this donation will be put to use in the Home to purchase an item or items that otherwise could not have been acquired.

To end the formal part of this afternoon's farewell to my Mom, I would like to sing a song for her that was her most recent favorite. I don't like to sing in public, but a week before she died, I promised I would sing it again for her. It's a Russian folk song describing the struggles of the peasants who worked as boatmen towing ships up the Volga River. This song represents the fact that my Mom's struggles are now over. I will always love her and miss her.

After the song is over and I have a chance to wipe my tears, Aileen & I would like to invite you to enjoy a light lunch and a few drinks to wish Stella a good send off. Be joyous....she is!

Stan/Butch

Friday, June 20, 2008