

A Darned Good Woman

by Frederick Wickert

My Mom with her Mom

My Dad discovered my Mom when they were in college at Syracuse University. I don't know if Dad was impressed by her looks, or by her musical talent, or both. It was music that introduced them to each other and it was music that brought them together. (See A LOVE STORY.)

Mom was a concert pianist and pipe organist. She also had considerable talent in playing a harp. My dad sang. Both loved music. When Dad and Mom met, she had great plans for a future career in music and a concert tour of Europe was already in the works. She gave it all up for Dad.

Together they suffered through many tragedies and hard times. They survived poverty for a while. Then they suffered their first born being hit by a car at age three while in the care of a baby sitter. There was a triple skull fracture and a very long road to recovery. Helen, named after her mother, had to learn to walk and talk all over again. She had been right handed but after recovering from the accident, was left-handed. She had to have glasses and lost all of her teeth, requiring dentures from an early age.

The second daughter had asthma and all the complications that go with it. Then a son was born. At age twelve, he suffered Polio and paralysis of both legs. (See FOOTBALL ON MY MIND.) A third daughter came along. The Great Depression came along and with everyone else, they had to endure. Dad was having a problem with extreme high blood pressure. Taking the advice of his doctor, he resigned his tenured teaching job and they sought a new life.

Now, Mom was a society minded woman. She enjoyed her social life. She taught piano lessons, played the organ at church, and was frequently called upon to play for one organization or another at their meetings. She was not only highly respected in her community, but also revered. Her personality was one of graciousness and charm, and yes, even sweetness.

The sudden loss of that life and the moving to a farm life was difficult for her. Then World War II came along. There was no more social life. As with everyone, the war brought changes and sacrifices. She did have a job as organist at a church. Dad farmed it in the day and worked in a war factory at night. Eventually the strain on him brought about his first heart attack.

A frightened stray cat bit off the end of her finger. (See SMOKEY.) It was sewed back on but was sore for a very long time. This was not helpful for an organist/pianist to cope with.

Through it all, Mom remained stoic and strong, taking all of it in her stride. She always was concerned for and about her family. She did a lot of sewing and made many of the clothes for the family. She did without many things she could have had to give more to her family. Many times, when the family sat down for a meal she took a cut or a part that she knew nobody else wanted, pretending that she liked or wanted it. When Dad refused to provide the kids with money for something special, she gave them the money out of her piano teaching money. When in high school, many of my dates were financed that way.

There were many things that Mom didn't understand. She was never much of a housekeeper. It just wasn't one of her top priorities. She was very strong willed and could be stubborn sometimes, but many of us have that trait. She wasn't perfect, but none of us are.

Mom suffered with Diabetes, and during my high school years, she was seriously ill for some time with Rheumatic Fever. Her mother lived with us for many years and she took care of her. During that time we lost our home due to a fire but she persevered and continued to make a home for us all.

Randall Scutt, Web Master of the Conesville-Gilboa Town Website, (<http://conesville.bravehost.com/>) in the Residents Remember section posted the following:

"Helen Wickert was my piano teacher since I was the age of 5. Mrs. Wickert not only taught me an understanding and appreciation of music, but also manners, patience and respect. And 45 years later, I can

still picture her at my side, both chastising me and praising me, while her long-haired cat, Blue, sat on my other side. I looked forward to my weekly lessons, and practiced for hours to show Mrs. Wickert that I had perfected what she showed me the prior week. I especially loved the duets we played together. When I entered my teenage years and thought that I was perfect, occasionally I didn't practice my lessons, assuming that I could fake it at the next lesson. But as soon as I started to play, Mrs. Wickert knew that I had slacked off that week....and Blue looked at me and shook his head."

(Author's note: In the interest of accuracy, the cat was actually named Blulette and was a female.)

Her son went away to war. Then her husband died. She lost first her youngest daughter who was killed in a car accident, then later her oldest daughter to a brain aneurysm. Her mother passed away. Then with blood pressure and sugar out of control, nearly lost her life. Three years later, she lost her eyesight and was blind for the remainder of her life.

Throughout it all, she cared for her family and did the best she could to be there for them. I was indeed fortunate to be blessed with such a mother. Through all the hardships and tragedies, she never lost her faith in the Lord. Her bible was her constant companion and her faith a source of her strength.

My dad used to say, "Behind every successful man, is a good woman." He was a successful man, (See ONE HELL OF A MAN) and I can truthfully say, he had a darned good woman.

Happy Mother's Day Mom!