

The Write Touch

YOUR THOUGHTS, YOUR STYLE, OUR FINISHING TOUCH!

Mum

I had to hand it to Mum. She had what I can only describe as gumption. There she was, a wee Scots lass, immigrated to a new country with four kids and a husband doing his best to make a living for his family, but, truth be told, not really making ends meet. And one day, as I recall, she suddenly just up and announced, “Well, I’ll need to get a job, won’t I?” My Dad was old school; though he was having trouble stretching his salary, he wasn’t at all pleased with the thought of his wife going off to work instead of staying home keeping his house and family to rights, as he put it.

“What will you do, then? You without a fancy education and no experience, except in keepin’ a house?”

“Well, that’s my experience then, isn’t it? I know how to cook and clean, and take good care of wee ones. That’s what I’ll look for. You’ll see. Someone will be needin’ a woman just like me.”

And don’t you think she read the classified ads, and found herself a posting for a housekeeper, and told my dad the next day, “I’ll no be home tomorrow afternoon, so don’t be phonin’ looking for me.”

I remember sitting at the kitchen table, rolling my eyes at my brother and three sisters. “And you, Jack, you’re in charge after school, “she told me. “You make sure homework’s done, and your chores as well.”

So off she went to an interview at some fancy address in the city. At least, we all thought it must be fancy because she was to go to a “penthouse.” She came home the next day and said with quiet satisfaction, “I got the job. I’ll be startin’ on Monday, five afternoons a week.”

Five afternoons a week? Mum out of the house? Not there for us kids after school? I know that’s just about as common now as snow in winter, but then.....we were none of us happy about this disruption to our lives and routines.

Later, after we’d all gone off to bed, we heard Mum and Dad laughing in the kitchen. Well, he was laughing. She was shushing him and alternately laughing and rebuking him for having fun at her expense.

“A seventeen-year-old girl interviewed you? That was your fancy penthouse? You’re goin’ be takin’

your orders from her? Go on! Surely you're not seriously goin' back there?"

"I am," she told him, and "you'll see. I have a good feelin' about this."

Mum's "feelings" were legendary in our house. Her instincts rarely failed her, and her determination to take her housekeeping skills and turn them into money for her family proved to mark a turning point for us all.

It happened that the seventeen-year-old was the oldest child still at home in a family with four siblings; her mother was quite ill, and in fact was out of the country seeking some kind of cure for who knows what. But the Dad had charged the girl with taking care of the house and her two younger sisters while she was studying at university, and directed her to "hire someone" to help. The girl must have had good instincts herself, for she hired Mum, and there began our mother's new career.

She worked for that family for at least ten years. When the lady of the house returned home from hospital, Mum was there to help her along; it seemed her illness was more mental than physical, and there were long periods of stability. During those times, Mum became more than an employee. She was the woman's friend. Maybe, I'm thinking, her best friend. And she doted on those children. Years later, she referred to them as "my other girls." I'm not really so sure how my sisters felt about that.

But I know that fondness was reciprocated. Four decades later, the oldest girl rediscovered Mum, long after she'd retired, and renewed the acquaintance. She'd send her cards, and drive out to visit. Every Mother's Day, even when Mum was in a retirement home, and later in hospital, there would be flowers. And though we had the smallest possible remembrance service when Mum eventually passed away at the age of 93, some forty years after she'd decided to go off to work, those girls, her girls, were there to pay their respects, and to tell us how much they loved my courageous, practical mother.

