

## REMEMBRANCES OF MOM

Trying to capsule anyone's life certainly presents challenges: where to begin, and what stories do you include? Who do you mention (or perhaps, who gets left off the list).

These have been some of the questions swirling around in my mind for the past few days. And then it became very apparent --- Mom's life can best be summed-up by her family and friends (and she had a great many of each).

People ask me where I was born, and my usual answer is "Toronto", but then I quickly add that "my folks had the good sense to move to Victoria when I was only four." So that's where most of my family stories begin. My folks bought our home on Reynolds Road from our Uncle Doug and Auntie Bette. My cousins Mike, Barb and Ross had already laid the groundwork in the neighbourhood by establishing friendships with families that continue to last a lifetime. So the evolution of one family of Handels moving out and another family of Handels moving into the same house didn't seem to bother families like the Porters and the Ridouts. Matter of fact, they seem to have taken it very much in stride.

Family gatherings could be as simple as inviting friends over for a barbecue in the backyard, a Sunday trip to Elk Lake, visiting the petting zoo at Mattock's Farm, or climbing the Ridout's cherry trees (whether Uncle Cec and Auntie Rita were home or not). The folks always said the more cherries you picked each year made for a bigger and better crop next year. Besides, my folks couldn't bear to see the birds eat more cherries than they did.

Mom encouraged the kids to play outside as much as possible, and there were always places to play: whether it was across the street at a friend's house, at the park up the street, or on "the rocks" at the end of our road, Mom's advice was always the same, "When I call you to come home, you better not make me call you twice." She would stand on the front steps at bedtime and call our names. We would sometimes be a block away from home, but Mom's voice would carry throughout the neighbourhood. Man, could that woman bellow!

In 1963 the folks packed-up Debbie, Kent, Leah and myself and moved from Victoria to North Vancouver, returning to her hometown. And if having four kids wasn't enough, Todd came along to give Mom and Dad, literally, a handful of children.

For anyone that's ever been in our kitchen it's hard to imagine that seven people used to sit around that table at mealtime. But we did it --- even with the ever-present high chair.

Mom had a basic credo for mealtimes: you always ate what was served on your plate. Sometimes, if we didn't like what was served we could sit there for a very long time, and believe me, waxed beans and boiled potatoes don't taste great when they're cold.

And Mom always used to tell us not to say we didn't like anything new to eat until we had tried it. I realized later in life that she wasn't just talking about food, but she was talking about life lessons. "Don't say you can't do it until you've tried it --- at least once."

Now, most everybody would think that raising five children, and to some extent, keeping our dad in-line, would be enough of a career for anyone. But Mom had other ideas. Following a short stint at Purdy's Chocolates, she realized that running her own candy store was something that she might be good at. She spent countless days searching for the right location; first on Lower Lonsdale, and eventually on East 14<sup>th</sup> Street near Lions Gate Hospital. She chose the name and the colours for the décor. Every tiny detail had her personal touch, right down to her colourful aprons! Her shop was very much an extension of her personality: warm, friendly, homey and genuine.

Little did Mom realize that Calico Candies would spawn a second career, and endear her to many North Vancouverites as the "Candy Lady". She enjoyed nothing more than sitting outside her shop on a sunny day, holding court with friends and passing strangers. And there was always a spare chair to set a spell and have an ice cream cone.

While growing up, I always thought that the greatest thing in life was to have a **grandmother** that owned a candy store. It wasn't until I grew to be bigger than my Mom that it was way cooler to have a **mother** that owned a chocolate shop. Not only could I reach the boxes that were on the highest shelves, but I could hold them out of reach, and if it came down to it, putting Mom in a headlock and giving her a "noogie" usually did the trick.

When my sister Leah opened her clothing store called "Riding High" shortly after Calico Candies opened, Mom would call up Leah and ask "Are you having fun yet?" Leah looked upon Mom as her muse, and Mom's advice on business was "if you're not in it for a bit of fun, then get out of it!" Mom tried not to offer a lot of advice, but when she did it was usually honest, practical and, in some respect, homespun.

But when I think about Mom, one place above all others comes to mind. Kye Bay has been a part of her life for over forty years. Our family first vacationed at The Bay while we still lived in Victoria and that love affair continues right up to today. It truly is a magical place --- an idealic setting with enough sights, sounds and smells to last all of our lifetimes.

Whether it was for a family vacation, co-owners of Cathay Cottages (later Cathay Resort) with the other Handels, or the folks' second home, Kye Bay was always Mom's "home away from home."

Mom felt a sense of calm and belonging everytime she returned to Kye Bay. There was no more welcoming smell in the world than coming down the hill into The Bay when the tide was out, and the odor from the seaweed greeted you. "Home at last" she would say.

Kye Bay was Mom's sanctuary. Here she felt at peace with herself and her surroundings. Sometimes it might be a morning coffee looking out the upstairs window towards the water, or on warm afternoons sitting on the picnic table on the top deck waving and talking to folks as they pass by the house. In the evening she might wander down to the beach, or stroll down the road to the sand cliffs.

But I think her fondest passion at The Bay was watching the military planes take off and land from the top of the hill. During the summer especially she would schedule her trips to Kye Bay around the Canadian Snowbirds being based at CFB Comox. If The Snowbirds were in-town, so was Mom!

But in my opinion, Mom's greatest accomplishments are her five children and nine grandchildren. She always took pride in her family when talking with people. Being surrounded by youngsters kept her young.

There's a good feeling in knowing that I can go to any of my family's homes and know that the door is always unlocked, there's a beer in the fridge and an extra plate for dinner. These are things that our family takes for granted, but not all families are so fortunate. And for that I thank my parents.

Mom tried to instill values of honesty, integrity, loyalty and most of all family unity into each of us. The apples haven't fallen far from the tree, have they?

The finest compliment that I can pay my Dad and Mom is that they raised a diverse family of unique individuals. Whatever adversities we have had to deal with, we have done it as a family. The events of the past few days have brought an already tightly knit family even closer together, and we owe that, in no small measure, to our Mom.

Finally, last Monday afternoon, we lost a truly dear family friend. Mom was always a lady. I would like to think that Mike Ridout is escorting our Mom, and they are once again walking arm-in-arm into a better world.