

WISE AND OTHERWISE

By Kent A. Stock



I will remember you
The year was 1940 my grandfather Honn went in for a routine surgery at a local hospital. He never came back home. He died on a frigidly cold January day from complications after the procedure.

His passing left my grandmother with two children at home along with their older sister who had two babies of her own. It was the Great Depression and times were already hard but they had now grown infinitely worse.

My mom was twelve and her younger brother Billy was six. Aunt Mimi was married to my other Uncle Bill and had two kids Connie and Kay. What on earth were they going to all do? Uncle Bill Hall had a job at Progress, right across the street from their house but, well, everything

else was up in the air. My grandmother Honn rolled up her sleeves, she opened a small restaurant and bakery in the basement of her home. War time came and my Uncle Bill went off to serve his country. The ladies made do. My grandmother operated the tiny diner and, several times a day she would take a cart full of pies, cakes, rolls, sandwiches along with coffee and drinks through the plant across the street. This was how they got by.

In 1942 a young man from McLean County was looking for work and landed a job at the factory across the street. He needed a place to stay, my grandmother needed the income so an agreement was made between the two families. The young man, Ralph, secured a safe and trustwor-

thy place to stay which satisfied his parents immensely and my mom's family had another source of income.

It was a win-win for everyone and the young man became more than a boarder but another sibling and a son to my grandmother. He worked hard but the stay would be short-lived as WWII called and the young Ralph was sent into the service in early 1943.

There were a couple letter exchanges and then the young man from the flat Illinois corn and bean fields was shipped overseas. He went to fight for our country in North Africa later that same year. It was a whirlwind tour without question. Communication ceased.

This handsome, friendly young man was a good soldier and he like thousands of others, was called upon to participate in the invasion of Italy. He gave his life for his country in the spring of 1944 during the Battle of Anzio.

My mom, aunt and uncle shared stories over the years about Ralph. His obituary says the details of his death were undetermined. It really didn't matter those specifics, because he was not coming back to America. He was not coming back to life in Saybrook, Illinois which was his hometown. He would not be coming back to visit his friends or his "family" in Arthur. He died in combat for our freedom.

My Uncle Bill, Uncle Billy, Uncle Herschel, Uncle Herman and many other family and friends that I know so very well went on to serve our country with distinction. I am so very proud of every one of them and every one of you reading this and I honored you, in my own way, on Veterans **Cont. on pg. 10**

Holding It All Together

by Amy McCollom



And Just Like That... I remember it well. The first cry she made, that I was impatiently waiting to hear from across the room as a team of doctors counted sponges and instruments and finished sewing my abdomen closed. Absolutely nothing about bringing this baby into the world had been normal.

She was 8 weeks early, yet a good 5 pounds. Stupid gestational diabetes, the only thing positive about the disease is that it acts as a growth hormone on the baby. Still, such a preemie as my sweet baby Portia had not developed the feeding skills she needed to survive outside the womb, so she was kept in the neonatal ICU nursery until she could eat well enough to survive. This took nearly a month. Leaving your newborn at the hospital makes you feel so helpless and lost.

Then things got better, and she came home. She was such a good baby. She never cried. Part of the reason was because with as many people living in our house, someone was always holding her. She didn't have to cry because she was constantly being fed, or rocked, or talked to. She should have been the most spoiled baby in the world. But she wasn't. She was and still is delightful to be around.

When Portia was 3, she began exhibiting unusual eye movements that concerned me. I had no idea the doctor was going to utter the word AUTISM at that appointment. That changed everything, I thought. I knew very little about autism. I had a lot to learn.

Portia grew and we realized how different she was. She loved to read, and was addicted to reading to the



point that when she ran out of books for her age, she read anything; she read the dictionary, garden books, cook books, all kinds of magazines. And she remembered everything she read.

At the age of 6, Portia was doing experiments in the bathroom on mosquito larvae which she grew by herself in a jar under the sink, (unbeknownst to the rest of the family). At 7 she could identify most any native plant, and the diseases that plagued them. And she grew even more interested in spiders, often catching them and examining them intently.

One time she came walking into my mom's house holding a small brown furry critter, petting it gently. She said softly, "Look what I found." She moved her hand to reveal an enormous hair-covered spider as big around as a teacup! Mom and my sister screamed and ordered her back outside with her catch, while her dad and I followed her out to get a closer look at this monster arachnid.

Her bugmania excitement is contagious, So is her smile.

Portia has always been the kind of kid who never wants to hurt anyone. She doesn't always understand when people are not like her in thoughts and actions, and that is sad. If the world was full of Portia's, it would be a very nice world.

So now, Portia is going to be graduating from high school on Friday. There were times on this journey to raise her that I feared she wouldn't make it to see graduation day. There were seizures, breakdowns, medications, therapies, testings, more therapies, tears, medical emergencies, friends and boyfriends, dances, school trips, and plenty of life lessons.

I KNOW it was just yesterday she was sitting on a pillow on the floor watching Charlotte's Web...And just like that...she is grown, signing up for classes at Parkland, and planning how to get her masters in entomology. I wish her the best, and pray that she follows the plans of God.

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