

Remembrance of My Mother

By Maria Lisowski

My mother devoted her life to teaching and inspiring young people at the Polish school in Los Angeles and summer camps to love Poland and to be proud of their rich and glorious heritage. These passions extended to her immediate family as well, but her legacy went far deeper and left a great and lasting impact that will remain with us forever.

All of her inspiration came from her deep faith and belief that God will always provide in the end. No matter how difficult her trials, from losing much of her family during WWII, to personal challenges throughout her life, her faith never wavered and God's will was never challenged.

Traditions and observances that had been engrained in my mother during her childhood became the framework for how she organized her life and became a part of who she was. Holidays, celebrations, and graduations were never missed and if cooking wasn't exactly her forte, she surely made up for it with her enthusiasm and generosity.

To my mother, family always came first. If any one of us needed comfort and support, she would not hesitate to drop whatever she was doing to be available in any way she could. She was our most reliable babysitter and our own children's favorite playmate when they were little. She was always available to join any of us at a moment's notice for an impromptu dinner, concert, or outing. Some of our most cherished memories of her were vacations spent together in Poland, Hawaii, Alaska, and Mexico.

There was never anyone more who valued the importance of friendship. I was always amazed at her far-reaching contacts and sheer number of friends

she had gathered along the way. Much time was spent, especially during the holidays, writing copious letters to people she had maintained relationships with throughout the years as well as those she most recently met. Each letter was always very personal and masterfully written. Friendships were to be treasured and her loyalties ran very deep. One of her biggest regrets this year was not being able to return all of her Christmas greetings because of her illness.

My mother believed that everyone had their own purpose in life and she most certainly had hers. She found a voice with the Polish community through her many years as a teacher at the Polish School, summer camps, her involvement with the Senior Club, and numerous organizations. It was her mission to teach new generations to be proud of their heritage, to be a living reminder of all of the hardships that her generation had endured in the past and to keep those memories vivid and alive. To give expression to these feelings she was a gifted writer and orator. Her poetry captured the feelings and sentiments of her peers who had similar experiences dealing with the loss of their homeland and adjusting to a new life. Many of you present have vivid images of her standing behind a podium, reciting one her signature verses or occupying my spot as she bade farewell to yet another friend.

What made my mother an effective teacher was her enthusiasm and gift of storytelling. She could take a mundane happening and spin it into a delightful story that was always fresh and exciting. She was not adverse to exaggeration, hyperbole, or even a little gossip which only added color to her many tales. An insignificant trip to the store could be made to sound like the most wonderful adventure. I grew up enthralled by stories of her childhood, experiences during the war, and people she had met. Her stories would rarely repeat and her capacity for recall was quite extraordinary. They were always said with a great deal of enthusiasm, humor, and often a twist of irony.

My mother would never take herself too seriously, even though often times she would give that impression. She had little patience with those who did and would not hesitate to bring someone down a few notches. Just ask her

grandchildren. Often times her comments could be quite outrageous and irreverent but anyone who knew her well knew that she could easily be persuaded to change her mind. Much time was not spent thinking about the opinions of others and she could just as easily forgive and forget.

One of my mother's favorite expressions to my children was the old adage to look at a cup as half full and look at the bright side of life. She would always say that if you don't like what you see, then create your own reality. My mother had a certain toughness and resiliency and approached life with a can-do attitude. She created her life as an immigrant and found purpose and meaning and the support of friends throughout her journey. Even as she was nearing her end, the inevitable question was always asked by her various caregivers – Are you depressed? And her answer would always be no, followed by a smile on her face.

For as long as she could, she was fully engaged and found fulfillment in doing what she enjoyed most, teaching, and being active and involved. I will always remember her directing the children to sing one of her favorite songs, "Kamien na Kamieniu" for one last time during her tribute luncheon, while her strong and powerful voice was already starting to sound strained because of her illness. To her, every day was an opportunity for a new lesson to be learned. Her quick-wit and humor were infectious and she always made an impression on everyone she met.

Mama and Babcia will be missed forever. We have all been shaped by the powerful imprints she has left on all of our lives and her passing leaves a void too large to ever be filled. Her stories and memories will continue to live on in all of those who knew her.

You will always be in our hearts