

These stories are from Melinda (Torrence/Fodor) Charest. These questions were prompts from the online service Storyworth," and compiled by Melinda during the year 2023.

# Are you still friends with any of your classmates from grade school?



I had several friends from school contact me, the latest was my orchestra mate, Maria Scalisi. I played violin and she played cello. Many an evening we walked home from school together, her dragging that cello! I lived about 3 blocks away from school and she lived about 7, but we would walk it together. Her dad got tuberculosis when we were in the 3rd grade and had to be sent to a sanatorium for some time. So recently, she found Uncle Ron's family page and emailed me. I don't remember if I messaged her back and I need to find the letter! I would love to send her a picture of all my lovelies!

Another friend who has contacted me was my friend from first to sixth grade, Carole Starr. She lived two blocks away and had a pool and a much older sister, so she was like an only child and we

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spent every day in that pool during the summer. In the winter we would go ice skating at the reservoir about a mile away, and sometimes we ventured to the second reservoir 2 miles away. When we were moving away, I gave her this little metal play sewing machine, that I don't even remember giving her, but she found me about 15 years ago, same way, through Ron's page, and shared her testimony with me. She still had that sewing machine, and had become a Christian, some of it based on our family always going to church, and she really admired that. Her parents were atheists, so she didn't know anything about God except what we talked about. When she was in her 40's, she had a brain aneurism and almost died. She attributed that to God and became a believer after that.

Another friend I had was in fifth and sixth grade. Debbie Walukewicz. Somehow my mom knew her grandma, can't remember how, and found out her mom was dying of cancer and encouraged me to be friends with her. We got to be pretty good friends. When we moved away, after 8th grade, I was starting to get in trouble already with smoking, etc., and also she was, I ran away to Long Island and went to her house. We wound up running away together for one night and then I wound up going back home. After that I think my mom and her grandma both decided we were bad company. I was able to find her twice after that, the last time she had moved to Iowa and was married to a

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much older man who had children almost her age. They had a few children together and I really considered moving there to her town, but chickened out at the last minute. I have tried to find her, but don't know her last name and haven't been able to.

And the only other friend I have talked to is of course, Kathy, my best getting in trouble together friend! Her parents never really seemed to mind her adventures, but I was always in trouble! We are still friends and have kept in touch. She is still in the same town, and the same property as when we were teenagers!

# Are you the same person you were as an adolescent, or very different?



**T**hank you Lord, I am very different. In some ways. I was a very rebellious teenager and had a horrible attitude and a potty mouth. I smoked like a fiend. Honesty was not considered the best policy. And then God began to change my attitude and my perspective on life! I remember when He began to talk to me about smoking.... He let me know if I persisted in smoking, I wouldn't live to see my children grow up. Considering I have asthma, that wasn't the wisest choice. I also think my and John's smoking contributed to Terry's asthma, which I have a lot of regret over. But while God was convincing me to quit, it seemed every time I looked around, there was someone smoking, and it seemed the most ridiculous thing to see someone with this thing hanging out of their mouth! It took many months of this before I could finally do it. My adolescent years were like a big hole to

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me and I am so grateful God took me out of that miry pit and set my feet on His rock..

# At what times in your life were you the happiest, and why?



I have so many fun memories when we lived in Lawndale. I know Abbie wasn't here yet, and that would have been the icing on the cake for us all! We were going to a great church, had a wonderful home school group with good friends who loved our family. We could walk anywhere we needed to go, including Chuck e Cheese! I was using a really interesting curriculum for school and it had all these fun projects. I know there were many bumps there also, but there were many positives.

# Describe one of your most memorable birthdays.



I know the question says one, but I have three I'd like to mention. The first was when I was 8 and my Omi got me a purple Royce 26" bicycle! Was the most amazing thing ever!

The other was when Laszlo and I don't know if it was Beth, Melissa, or Abbie planned this very elaborate surprise birthday party for me, which even involved turning back all the clocks a few hours to through me off. I thought we were having an unbirthday for Melissa! Hahaha!

And the third was when Abbie planned a surprise birthday for me at Mimi's Cafe! Was so much fun!

# Do you have any particularly vivid memories of your grandparents?



I have a lot of great memories of my grandmother, my Omi. We went to my grandparents' house most every Sunday and sometimes during the week, whenever my mom could get there. She was very close to her mom. My grandmother was an amazing cook, and made the best chocolate chip and butterscotch chip cookies. She was a great baker also, and made this cake called bienstich, which means "bee sting" in english. I've tried to find the recipe but it doesn't quite match my memories. She would make lamb for Easter and one year she made a cake decorated as a lamb in memory of Jesus. Ron and I got to spend each alone a week with her during the summer. When it was my turn she asked me what I wanted her to make for dinner, and my favorite was eggplant. I didn't realize it was



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actually eggplant parmigiana, so she cut the eggplant in slices and fried it and served it that way. I didn't know what was wrong about it, but it was not what I was expecting, so she wound up calling my mom and getting her recipe! She could sew anything, and made me the most gorgeous dress, it was royal blue satin with pink flower all along the hem and collar. I remember wearing it for Easter and getting chocolate all over it. One year she made me, my mom, and her all matching dresses for Easter . I believe I still have mine in my trunk. She sent me postcards from wherever she went, and one year she went to florida and brought back an alligator head purse, which I still have. My grandparents had a garage in the back and between the garage and house was the driveway with an arbor covered in concord grape vines. In the summer, there would be squished grapes all over the driveway and we would sit out there sometimes when we would visit. My grandfather had a little garden next to the garage with his rain barrel, but the only thing I remember him growing was carrots, and I would get to pull them out of the ground and eat them.

One time my grandmother took me to radio city music hall to see a show. First there was a show with poodles doing all kinds of tricks, then there was a movie, and afterward we went to the famous Horn and Hardart restaurant, going shopping in "Jew town", wherever that was in NY somewhere, and then home

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again.

The last memory I had of my grandmother was a very sad one. They were going to Florida for vacation. She loved Florida. I had had 2 dreams where my grandmother was killed two nights in a row, and when they came for dinner I wanted to warn her, but I was scared that no one would listen to a kid, so I didn't say anything. That night I had another dream, and the next night she got hit by a car in VA and died instantly. Of course I blamed myself, and then I blamed God because why would he give those dreams to a little kid? It was many years later a friend suggested maybe he was trying to warn me so I wouldn't be unprepared. That thought was like balm to my soul!!

I have some vivid memories of my grandfather also, some good and some not good! He was an amazing carpenter and loved to fish, and he built me a kid size doll house in my back yard with real glass windows and a bell. The envy of the neighborhood! He also made me a little pink cradle which I still have, needing some repair. Because my dad was Catholic, we had fish every Friday, and my grandfather sat on our back porch many an afternoon cleaning fish, and kept us well stocked! My favorites were these fish he called blowfish, and sometimes he would catch eels. He would bring smoked eel every once in a while and they were so delicious!

# Has anyone ever rescued you, figuratively or literally?



**W**hen I was 8, we went to visit my grandfather and some of my mom's family friends, at a place in the Catskills. It used to be a very important vacation area before people could fly wherever they wanted. Now most of the places are abandoned or torn down, like Catskill Game farm. Anyway, Jeffrey was a baby, and we had rented a room at the resort. My parents needed to go to town, so they took Ron and Howard, and for some reason my mom thought it was a good idea to leave me babysitting Jeffrey, who was asleep. No sooner did they leave than I decided to prove to my brother and dad I was no baby and was quite capable of rowing on the little lake by myself. So off I go, my brother asleep in his playpen. Well, needless to say, I was not capable of rowing by myself and I got stuck in the middle of the lake. One arm was stronger than the other, so I just kept going around in circles! Lo

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and behold, there comes my parents driving over the little bridge and there I am , very mortified. So my dad had to get another rowboat and row out to rescue me. Of course, by this time, Jeffrey was awake and screaming his head off, so I was in double trouble!

# Have you ever given or been the recipient of a random act of kindness?



I have been the recipient of many random acts of kindness over the years. Many involve being rescued on the side of the road with a flat tire or other car problem, no surprises there!! But the biggest act of kindness would have been when Renee was a baby I accumulated a lot of parking tickets while on maternity leave. I lived on a one-way street and one day a week I had to have my car moved by a certain time in the morning. Never a problem when I went to work every morning, but when I was on maternity leave I didn't get up early enough and I began to accumulate these tickets. So when I went to court I owed a huge amount of money, which I didn't have, and told the judge that. I thought I was going to have to go to jail, but the judge told me to wait on the side of the courtroom. After about a half hr the bailiff came to me and said someone had paid my fine and I was free to

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go. I was very shocked to say the least! Looking back, I'm sure the judge dismissed the tickets rather than have to hear my sob story LOL! At the time though I really believed it was a miracle!

# Have you ever won anything?



**W**hen Renee and Melissa were doing puppetry we went to a puppetry class being held at our church. There was a drawing for a puppet and I won that, surprisingly.

# How did you choose your children's names?



Well, choosing a name is a big responsibility! When I had Terry, his dad and I decided if it was a boy, he would decide the name and if it was a girl, I would decide the name. Of course, we both agreed to the names anyway. So Terry was named after his grandfather and dad, and Renee was my idea. It was a toss up between Desiree or Renee and obviously Renee won. (Her middle name is my grandmother and mother's name, which I was very upset my mom didn't also name me that name.) Melissa got to decide her own name (and birthdate so she can't change it now to Halloween), and kept Melissa, but changed her middle name to be named after her big sister, Renee Marie. I had nothing to do with that name, but it was always funny to me that we came up with two Jeffreys and two Renees in my family! Elizabeth was a name partly from God, who told her dad in a dream it was a girl and her name was Beth, when I was pregnant and he was convinced she was gonna be a boy! Beth sounded too short, so I



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picked Elizabeth and Rose because I love roses. Especially ones with a beautiful smell! Steven is named after his uncle, Ishtvan, who supposedly couldn't have children, and Abigail is another God name, after me having a dream when I was pregnant that her name was gonna be Abigail, and then two people saying we should name the baby Abigail if it was a girl! So Abigail it was to be! Her middle name, Margaret, is her grandmother's name.

# How did you feel when your first child was born?



**W**hen Terry was born, I was so excited and happy! I was too young to be terrified! I was so proud of him and had all these really cute outfits and several of my friends and sister-in-law also had babies the same time, so we had a lot of fun showing off all their new antics and comparing notes about how much they ate, burped, pooped, slept (or didn't sleep!) My nephew, Michael, was eating a whole banana and cereal mushed up in his bottle at 10 days old, and woke up when she flushed the toilet. That was crazy! My friend Kathy's daughter had the most hair I'd ever seen on a baby, and it was red red. But Terry was sleeping through the night at a very young age and was so mellow! My claim to the best baby, hands down!

# How did you get your first job?



**M**y very first job was cleaning house for this lady, who lived all alone, and I know she cleaned before I got there. My mom met her somewhere and got me the job. I believe I made \$6 a day. I also cleaned house for a neighbor for a short time. I got a job helping with 5 kids one summer. The family came up from NY for the summer and the dad worked in the city, only coming up for weekends. The mom had a 6 yr old, 5 yr old, 4 yr old, and twins, 2. She really needed help! My next job was working at a fast food place where I learned to do soft serve ice cream cones. That was a lot of fun! The next job I had was working for a furrier. I helped sew there and also got to try on fur coats once in a while. Most of these jobs I got myself by answering ads in the paper, which I guess doesn't happen anymore.

I know this isn't part of the question, but the weirdest interview I ever went on was in McMinnville, when I applied for a job at

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Stewart's Drug Store. Mr. Stewart was an elder at the Central Church of Christ, so naturally his interview consisted of where I went to church and what my religious beliefs were!

# How is life different today compared to when you were a child?



Just saw a post, goes like this:

What part of no don't you understand?

I don't care who started it!

Money doesn't grow on trees!

Your face is gonna freeze like that! (I heard that a lot from my dad!)

Because I said so, that's why!

Brought back a lot of memories! Without a doubt the biggest difference is the lack of electronics we had then! Our tv was a black and white still utilizing tubes. We had radio and record players. 8 tracks came out when I was in high school. Somewhere along there we got cassette tape players. Our tv watching would consist of something in the evening with family; maybe there

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would be a good movie on weekends. Saturday night was a disney animal show and and animal adventure show. There was a show called Lost in Space, and then Star Trek came into existence. Rod Serlings Twilight Zone was a good show. Gilligan's Island, Hogan's Heroes, and of course, Saturday morning cartoons. Sunday the only thing I remember coming on in the morning was "Davey and Goliath", a really cheesy animation of a boy named Davey and his dog Goliath, mostly character lessons. We would watch that to get out of my mom's hair while she got ready for church. I don't know anyone who didn't go to some type of religious service, mostly either Catholic or Jewish. We were the minority of Protestants in my neighborhood.

Most of our moms were quick to throw us outside a good part of the day. At one point there were 30 kids on my block and we would be outside most of the days during summer and after school. Everyone had a bike and roller skates. Those were the big things to do after school. The school playground was open all the time, even on weekends, so we could go there. My mom thought nothing of me riding my bike to the store or library 3 blocks away. We didn't have cell phones to call home in case of trouble. Or Mom to call if we were gone too long. No one worried about kidnappings, etc. Was not a thing. Seatbelts in cars were not standard equipment and car seats for babies were not invented yet. Moms kept the baby on their laps or in a bassinet

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somewhere. Going to the drive-ins was much more fun because we could fall asleep in the back of the station wagon before Dad's boring movie was over!

Families were different. Most everyone I knew had a mom and dad living in the home, and mom was home during the day. My mom had a part time job a few evenings a week for a short time when I grew up, but it didn't last very long. Kids walked themselves to school if they lived close enough (within a mile and a half). It was very rare to have parents drop off kids. Maybe if it was raining, moms would walk to school with umbrellas, but most families had one car, and usually dad had it! I had a few neighbors who's dad took the train to work, and so their mom had a car. School was entirely different then. Teachers and parents worked together when children were misbehaving. I remember getting an eraser thrown at me by my fifth grade science teacher because I kept talking during class. I didn't even tell my parents, It was my fault and I knew it!! The paddle was still a thing, administered by the school principle, and I know of some boys that were paddled on a fairly regular basis. Things did start to change by the time I went to jr high. The hippie movement was by now in full swing and all the Vietnam war protests were happening. I didn't really know too much about it until maybe 10th grade I started to pay more attention. The draft ended before Uncle Ron graduated, but it was still a thing to

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enlist in the military. College was not something everyone felt they had to do, and it was by no means as expensive as it is now. There was a vocational school attached to most high schools where guys could get certified in mechanics or other trades; girls could take nursing or cosmetology. Girls had to wear dresses or skirts to school until I was in the fourth grade when the “ban” was lifted! Boys had to take general shop and girls had to take home economics where we learned to make lasagna. When I was in ninth grade the first girls were allowed in shop class and the first boys were allowed in home economics. Ron and I were the first in those classes. I remember learning about the combustion engine, which somehow all the boys already knew everything about, and Uncle Ron made an orange meringue pie!

Medical care was different as I remember. A lot of people just paid as they went. A lot of companies didn't offer health insurance, and that was considered a very valuable perk. We had health insurance, I'm not sure what it was like, but my mom had to file the paperwork to get reimbursed. Medical expenses were paid out of pocket. When I had Terry the c-section was \$1000. Imagine that!



# If you could choose any talents to have, what would they be?



If I could choose any talents, I might pick the ability to make people laugh. That's a very important talent, because laughter is good medicine! I would love to have the talent of being able to see something and draw it. I had friends in high school who were amazing artists, and would just sit there and draw things conjured up in their minds. One girl I knew was such an amazing artist, but now owns a bar near where Woodstock was. Lol! Who would have thought!

# If you could do it over, would you join the military?



**W**hen Terry was two, I contemplated joining the Navy. Uncle Ron was already a Navy man and we were very close. He really wanted me to join and we discussed it at length. I could have stayed with him in San Diego, and because I had office skills, once out of bootcamp I would have already had placement as skilled office people were in demand (so Uncle Ron informed me!) He even had a female friend who would keep Terry for the six weeks while I was in boot camp. But I chickened out because I couldn't bare to leave Terry for that long and not see him. He probably would have been so spoiled and not missed me!! I know Uncle Ron was very disappointed in my decision and maybe discolored our relationship after that, I'm not sure. I regret it in some ways, the lifetime benefits would have been great, as Ron benefitted a lot with medical insurance, pension, VA school and

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home benefits, but on the other hand I wouldn't have had the rest of my children and that outweighs all the other possibilities!

# Little House in the Big Woods series



A girl's classic set of books...I've read each one at least once as a kid! There are so many great traditional family values written into these stories. I am hoping on our trip out west we get to stop at the museum in boring Nebraska (I think it is!) I realize how soft we are in our culture whenever I read stories about pioneers ! How did any of them make it across rivers and mountains where there were no roads, no phones, no help of any kind except God. I don't believe there is any accounting of how many people actually died on their way to the great unknown. I've read all these stories of how along the trail were found all kinds of family heirlooms such as pianos; and living in a covered wagon for months on end, only to wind up living in a dusty, musty sod house at the end of the trail! All these biographies have shaped my way of thinking, that there was a way to cross over that river and climb those mountains, not giving up because there was no where to give up to. When I was in college I took a womens

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history class, which wasn't really about history of women's achievements, but a very politically correct class. However, there were some good stories in those books about pioneer women who weren't daunted by their circumstances, one story where the family was all alone for miles on the prairie, and the husband had to go about a week's journey to get wood for the winter. After he left, she went into labor. She had no choice but to get a fire going for her and the toddler, put some food and toys next to him on the floor, and prepare herself to have the baby alone on the prairie!

# Tell me about one of the best days you can remember.



**B**y far, the best days of my life were the days my children were born. Even though, with every one of them, when I was in labor I always changed my mind and didn't want to go through with it, by the time I saw them I was so excited and instantly in love! Its so awesome how God works that all out...trying to get sleep and all the life changes a baby brings, but because of how beautiful that little baby is and how much love I felt, it becomes so special and important. When I had you guys, things were a lot different. Hospitals still had some barbaric methods of delivering babies, although not nearly as bad as when my mom had her babies. They were still tying mom's hands down and I don't believe there were epidurals yet, it was never mentioned. My mom did mention when she had Jeff she was knocked out and didn't know she had a baby for 8 hrs. I had 2 c-sections, and when I was

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pregnant with Renee there was something that really bothered me about my dr. Nothing I could pinpoint, and since I had already had one c-section, I had to have another. By the end of the pregnancy I was having nightmares about this doctor being drunk doing the surgery! Even though I was only beginning to walk with the Lord through Al-anon, I was really praying! Lo and behold, a few days before the scheduled delivery, the hospital called to let me know the dr had to make an emergency trip back to India, and they were scheduling another doctor. He turned out to be an amazing doctor, with great bedside manner. My first experience being stapled! The other difference then was nursing. It was still not really an accepted practice and I couldn't hardly even have my baby til she was about 5 days old. The one good thing that came out of the hippie movement was home births!

# Was there a story or fairytale that scared you as a child?



**W**hen I was a kid I read all the fairy tales I could find, Grimms' brothers, Hans Christian Anderson, all of them, but they never scared me. What did scare me were all the stories my brother would tell me from his little paperback books about UFO's and aliens, all the pictures that were in there of burnt fields and cows missing, unexplained events. I never told anyone how terrified I was because my brother was the coolest person ever and I didn't want him to think I was a sissy! But alone in my room at night...I was so afraid there were aliens that had snuck into my room and were hiding under my bed, which was a big double bed, plenty of room for them to hide under! So in order to protect myself I would take all my dolls and stuffed animals, and line them up on either side of me and I would sleep in the middle of the bed. In my child reasoning, I figured if they were gonna



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steal me, they would grab my dolls first, giving me a chance to get away and save myself! Unbeknownst to me, my mom would come in and see me with all my dolls. She thought it was the most adorable thing ever that I loved my dolls so much!!! Somewhere I have a picture of me with my baseball cap on and all my dolls on both side of me.

# What advice do you wish you had taken from your parents?



**T**he biggest piece of advice I wished I had taken was to save sex for marriage. What I wished my mom would have told me was the why, however, she didn't really know the repercussions because she waited. I think no matter what we tell ourselves in the "enlightened" age, there's a sense of shame deep in our soul, maybe we all have a "jiminy cricket" inside!

# What advice would you give your great grandchildren?



**T**o my wonderful grandchildren, great grandchildren and great great grandchildren: There are several things I learned along the way, some is advice from my mom such as “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” That took me awhile to fully understand, but it became invaluable advice. The other advice she gave me was to never get close to a stranger’s car, and that advice probably saved me on at least one occasion. Some advice from my dad I thought was especially valuable was to never stop learning. He graduated from college after he was 65, so he took his own advice, and I hope to follow in his footsteps!

Some advice from me: definitely listen to your parents’ advice, they’ve lived longer than you and have probably made all kinds of mistakes, and are now hoping you don’t have to repeat them.

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And besides, the Bible says if you honor your parents, you will live a long and good life in the the land God is giving you. His promise.

Some other advice I have is to think of the love in your heart as a basket of flowers. If you give those flowers away to just anyone who doesn't deserve them, when you finally meet the one person who God has for you, there will be no flowers left. God has that someone special; please wait for that person to give your heart away. You have been prayed for for a long time, and are very special.

# What are some childhood memories of your father?



**M**y dad was one of my inspirations in my life. He was not by any means a perfect person. He had his issues and addictions in life that impacted our family negatively, that's part of life, and I would have to say the positive far outweighed the negative in my relationship with my dad. One of my earliest memories was of him tickling me and me dancing a waltz or something standing on his feet. We had a much different relationship than that of my brothers and dad. When he was in high school one of his aspirations was to become a priest. After he got drafted, that changed. He also wanted to be a teacher, but his dad passed away when he was 18, probably just as he was graduating, and then he went to war which was a huge dream changer in his life. He had to help take care of his mom, who still had several younger children at home, and was forced to give up his dream of college. He went to a trade school to be a tool and die man, and that's where he stayed til he retired.

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So he tried to teach us about the things he was passionate about, which was history, music, learning. He worked two jobs most of my growing up years so we could afford to be in a neighborhood with a great school. Any vacations or trips we took were either around visiting family/family friends (mostly out in the country somewhere - that would have probably been mostly my moms) and historic sites or museums. We went to so many battlefields as a kid, and a glass blowing factory, a chocolate factory; we vacationed on a farm and got to see wheat being harvested and cows being milked. He finally graduated with his AS degree from an ag school, where every year they had an open house. Its no fun being sneezed on by a cow I'll have you know, but they had the best ice cream there!

One year we were supposed to go Christmas shopping for my mom and brothers' gifts, just me and my dad. I wound up with a stomach flu the day before, but nothing was gonna stop me from going shopping with my dad. He bought me an imported european chocolate bar and that cured my stomach flu! Lol. We got my mom one of those hair dryers you sit under, and my brothers a fort with knights and stuff. One of my best memories.

And he took us to all the museums he could go to, and looked at every single exhibit and read every single note there was! Hahaha! It's genetic!

# What are some choices you made about how to raise me?



**T**he first real serious choice I made was to move away from NY. Terry was the only one of you this involved, and it was one of the best choices I ever made I think! I didn't want you being raised around your relatives on your dad's side of the family, and after seeing where many wound up, it was a good decision. It was a very sad day for my mom when I left though, and I don't think she could really understand.

Another choice I made about all of you was to make sure you knew about Jesus, because He saved my life. After that decision came the decision to homeschool. There are probably many holes in your educations, but none of them are holes you can't as adults figure out. Maybe in the pursuit of following God, I was too strict in a lot of ways, so those might be not great choices!

# What are some of your family traditions?



**W**e had a lot of family traditions growing up. Every Sunday possible, we went into Queens to go to my grandparents' house for dinner. My grandmother was a phenomenal cook and I adored her. Another tradition we had was getting to pick our favorite meal for our birthdays. Uncle Howard would always pick Rhode Island Chop Suey and my favorite was Eggplant Parmagiana. My grandmother was also a wonderful seamstress and she would make all of our Easter outfits. The last year she was alive, she made all 3 of us matching dresses. Easter was special because we got new clothes, new shoes and a hat. We wore hats to church then! And the easter baskets full of chocolate! One year I decided I was gonna try to hatch out my easter eggs! I was so disappointed to find out it would never hatch! Looking back, I bet my mom was hysterically laughing over that! Thanksgiving was always wonderful, except for the boiling rutabagas that I don't remember anyone every eating at



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Thanksgiving. We had tons of them left over! Fish or eggs on Fridays because my dad was Catholic. Church on Sunday. We didn't have a set tradition for Christmas, but we did for putting up the tree. We would go get the tree with my dad, and he would fix the tree in the stand, put the lights on (which had to be set a certain way because the bulbs would get hot and if it wasn't done correctly could set the tree on fire), and he would hang the tinsel, which was strands of aluminum foil. Those are the most memorable traditions.

# What are some of your special talents?



**A**rt has always been very special to me. I wouldn't say I'm especially talented in art, but I have always found it very engaging and when I'm finished with my project, very satisfying. I'm usually amazed at when I step back and see that's a product of my own hands. I also think I'm good at organizing things and fitting a lot of things into small amounts of space, finding room in every nook and cranny possible! I also have a knack for getting in trouble LOL

# What did you learn from your parents?



**M**y parents were both products of the Great Depression, and both part of the Greatest Generation. Their parents scrimped and scrimped to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table, especially my dad's dad who had 9 children. From what I know about my dad's dad, he seemed to be a very colorful person. He was a hotel chef somewhere in Quebec and when he married my grandmother, she wanted to live in a warmer climate. So they moved to Rhode Island, Woonsocket to be exact. He had two restaurants and they owned a home, and he lost everything during the depression, including the home, which was never lived in by anyone after that. But while he had the restaurant, my dad would work there whenever he was needed. Every year my grandparents would keep a hog in a certain spot in their yard, and it would be fed scraps from the restaurant. In the fall they would butcher it and my dad would have to stand under the hog and catch the blood drippings so my grandfather could make

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sausage and sell to the restaurant. I guess the things I learned from my parents would have to be the things they learned from their parents and gave to me, which I hope some of it I've given to you all.

When my grandfather lost the restaurants, he was forced to go get a job as a cook for a lumber camp in Maine. He took my oldest aunt to help him and off they went, I'm not sure for how long he was gone. My grandmother had 8 remaining children to care for by herself, although she had a lot of family in the area. Her faith was very important to her, and from the description I've been given, she was almost a saint. When my grandfather had the still going they were living the good life, until she found out about it. She forced him to destroy it, didn't matter to her how much income they would lose!

My mom's mom, my Omi, was a marvelous seamstress. She had quite a few brothers, and a stepmom she didn't get along with well, so she came to America when she was 17 or so. She was a governess for some cousins in Manhattan, and that's where she met my grandfather who was a merchant marine from Germany turned illegal immigrant. They had an apartment right off Central Park, where my mom was born. My grandmother was very thrifty and had a savings where she put a down payment on a house in So Ozone Park, Queens. They rented out the upstairs to help pay bills; at some point my grandfather and his brother

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inherited an ice cream parlor from an uncle and ran that for awhile, but they had a disagreement and sold it. I'm not sure what he did after that, but during the depression he would pick up furniture the night before trash collection, repair and sell it. During the war, he got extra gas rations because of his livelihood. During the depression my grandmother sewed women's bras and corsets in her basement and got paid by the piece. She was also a religious person, and every Sunday she and my mom would take the bus and off to church they went!

All this to say what I learned from my parents were the virtues passed down to them, such as the value of hard work and not quitting because things seemed difficult. I learned the importance of having family and good friends to be there in bad times. They tried to teach me good character qualities, only I was very stubborn and had to learn a lot of life lessons the hard way, and now that I'm older I can really appreciate all the sacrifices they and their parents made to give me a good life.

# What do you admire most about your mother?



**M**y mom was such a fun-loving person. She was everything I wasn't! Outgoing, loved to dance, always seemed to having everything matching! In public, she carried herself in a very dignified manner. I remember her talking about all the fun things she did before she was married, and how all her clothes were matching, down to her shoes and underwear! My favorite clothes were my jeans! Everything matches jeans! Haha! She never realized what a talent she had for interior decorating and construction projects until after my parents divorced. She did the flooring upstairs, with the help of Jeffrey is my understanding, and really had a knack for painting. My mom also loved to play the piano. That piano was something she saved for as an adult and paid for her own lessons. I remember her playing late at night when everyone was asleep.

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Both my mom and grandmother were excellent seamstresses. I don't know if I already told this story, but when my mom was 8, she decided she was old enough to use her mom's sewing machine, even though her mom had told her not to touch it. So, she started to sew and got the sewing machine needle through her thumb. My grandmother didn't drive, so in order to get to the dr., my grandmother unscrewed the needle from the machine still through my mom's thumb, wrapped it in a towel and the two of them set off to the dr on the bus! Now that was a painful lesson I'm sure!

# What do you consider one of your greatest achievements in life?



**M**y best achievement is having and raising my family and watching them become amazing adults, generous and loving toward one another I remember watching Terry and Summer having Livvie, thinking how kind and gentle he was towards Summer, Thinking “there’s a paycheck!” Being at graduations and weddings and parties my kids have planned for each other. My family is so colorful!



# What famous or important people have you encountered in real life?



One of my clients from New Orleans invited me on their family trip to Hawaii, which in itself was amazing, and we flew first class, stayed at a resort for 10 days, and I got to eat bagels and lox with fresh lychees and pineapple every day. But his brother had met and married Dan Quayle's daughter, and their family was also staying at the resort. In case you don't remember, Dan Quayle was vice president under George Bush, and became famous for his part in a spelling bee where he corrected someone for spelling potato potato and if I remember correctly, said it was spelled potatoe, which can also be correct. The media hammered him for that and he is still remembered only for that moment. Anyway, his family had a villa on the tip of the beach at the resort we were staying at, I guess it was a family villa, and we took a golf cart over to it one evening. We just sat at

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their picnic table chatting. They were just like any other family, sipping cold drinks and talking about grandchildren and golfing, etc. I pretended I wasn't awed by sitting there!

# What have been some of your life's greatest surprises?



**H**ahaha! I would say the greatest surprise is winding up in Tennessee! When God said to go to Tennessee I thought he was joking! Being from New York, the South was a very verboten place. All I had heard about the South was lynchings of people from the North. And no one in the South had shoes, running water or toilets! Surely God was not serious! But yes, he was very serious! And I would never go back!

# What inventions have had the biggest impact on your day-to-day life?



This is a very humorous question because of how many changes inventions have made in such a short span. The most impactful invention would have to be computers, electronics, etc. Without electronics, I wouldn't have been able to complete some of the online courses I've taken, or looked up information whenever I don't know, or be in touch with people from the past. We would have had no way to find one another again. Its been a great way to schedule things quickly with others, i.e., cell phones and getting plane tickets quickly, just getting plane tickets without a travel agent! Almost every system is controlled by computers, from the release of water at the water department to traffic cameras at major intersections.

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Of course, there are the negatives of electronic devices, the biggest being the lack of real relationships my descendents will likely have because of social media, and other online situations. Its a real problem when families sit down to dinner together, each with their devices, and before we know it, we're all on our phones!

# What is one of the bravest things you've ever done, and what was the outcome?



**T**his question I've been pondering for awhile. I would have to say I've never done anything I've felt "brave" doing, but many things I've been terrified to do and had to do anyway. Brave and trusting God, I think, have to go hand in hand. When Terry was 2 or 3 weeks old I was given an opportunity to pray with a Baptist preacher to ask Jesus into my life. There was no fireworks moment, but he did begin to change me slowly, because I'm very stubborn. He began to show me how foolhardy my lifestyle was and how detrimental to my baby. He used my dad to get me away from where I was into a new environment to be able to start over and make better choices. Starting over took courage. Of course my dad was there, and it was still very scary, not knowing anyone else. California provided me with some good

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opportunities to get job training and a free college education. Another very brave thing was driving on the freeway in California! Lol!

# What is one of your earliest childhood memories?



We are all told babies don't remember things; however, I remember when I got my tonsils removed. I was almost 2, and how I know is because my mom said so! I remember being in the hospital and I was a terrible patient even then. There were 2 nurses whom I thought was mother and daughter (because I was little and assumed because one was old and one was young this must be the case!), and I intensely disliked the younger nurse for some odd reason. I was in a crib with a tent over it, and when she came I would curl all the way up under the tent where she couldn't reach me! She was then forced to get the other nurse! For awhile I was really confused about this memory because I thought I was there on my birthday. My parents brought tons of gifts that i could play with in bed, but when I got home it was right before halloween. I was very disappointed because I



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couldn't go out, but my mom let me help her hand out candy. Then the next week WAS my birthday and I got more presents!

The other thing I remember about the hospital was the food was terrible! It was some kind of oatmeal egg applesauce combination! Babies know!!! Lol

# What is one of your favorite children's stories?



I probably read half the school library by the time I got out of 6th grade, but my favorites were probably the Little House series. I loved biographies and read all the Childcraft books. I would go sit in the mimosa tree in front of my house and read. It was very shaded and I didn't think anyone could see me up there. Hans Christian Anderson was also a favorite, as well as Grimm brothers, although they were very spooky, Aesops fables made an imprint on me, and we had the whole series of Robert Maxwell's the Bible stories, that now you will maybe see a volume in the doctors offices. I'm very grateful to my dad for giving us all a love of reading and my memories of my dad often involved being at the library. By the way, the library I grew up loving to read has now been converted to "The Library" a bar!

# What is one of your favorite memories of your mother?



**M**y mother, to me, was such a beautiful, dignified woman. I don't remember any specific favorite memory except watching her brush her hair, or her cooking dinner. She loves her high heels! We would walk to town, a mile and a half, with her pushing this beautiful black and chrome baby buggy, and her in her heels and lipstick! One time Ron and I were playing catch through the garage window and we got bored with just a ball, so we started throwing whatever else was available to each other. I was about 3 or so, and one of us picked up a rusty snowshovel plate without a handle and threw it through the window. Of course I didn't catch it and it hit me on the bridge of my nose! My mom couldn't stand blood and had to put pressure on it it was bleeding a lot. We had no car available so my neighbor drove us to the ER where I got stitches. Another thing about my mom

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was she loved walking so we walked a lot! But always in at least a little heel! Even her bedroom slippers had a heel!

# What is one of your favorite trips that you've taken? What made it great?



One of my favorite epoch trips would have been our move to Tennessee! It was planned at length but nothing could have prepared us for all the events that happened along the way! Such as both vehicles breaking down multiple times causing the trip to be six days instead of three! We got to experience the saguaro cactus in Arizona, a full moon over the desert making those cacti look like very tall men praising God! We got to put pennies on the train track to see them squashed, All the unknowns in life! Another epoch trip was driving to Montana through Salt Lake City into Yellowstone, Mount Rushmore, Custers last stand, and I wanted to keep going but my passengers wanted to go home! Israel was a great adventure also, as well as Hungary. All the unknowns, the new experiences and traveling together made it

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so memorable!

# What is one of your go-to stories, one you like telling over and over?



**M**y favorite go-to story would have to be the one about Beth crawling into Terry's room and eating his entire bug collection! If you could have seen her face as she came crawling out of his room with his jerusalem beetle hanging out of her mouth! Maybe I shouldn't be telling this story for posterity. I'm quite positive it was not and still is not a fun memory for either of them! But Terry, you did ask!

To be fair, Steven crawled into Terry's room and ate Terry's model cement, and when I called 911 because I didn't know if he'd eaten any, they sent a hook and ladder fire truck, an ambulance and the fire marshall!

I'm sure I have other stories that I've told you guys over and over again...how about when Mikey tried to dose us with a can of

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water or paint over the door, or booby trap all the doors. Steven tying all the kitchen chairs together....you guys have definitely kept me in stitches through the years!



# What is some of the best advice your mother ever gave you?



**T**here are two things I remember my mom always saying, the first was about never getting into cars with strangers. It probably saved my life when I was about 12. We walked over a mile to the middle school (uphill both ways, lol); I was late for school and no one was around still walking. This car started following me and when I was passing by an industrial park, he cut me off. He asked me if I wanted a ride to school. Because my mom had drummed that into me to never take a ride from strangers, I did not accept. I could see into the car just enough to know how wise she was!

The second thing I remember my mom always saying was “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Makes tons of sense to me and the older I get the more it makes sense. I’ve I had remembered that when I stepped over Beth’s baby gate

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instead of opening it, I wouldn't have broken my arm!

# What is the best gift you ever received?



**T**he very best gifts I ever received are, naturally, my children! However, I have received some very cool gifts over the years. When I was 3 my mom gave me a birthstone ring, and as I grew she would take it to the jeweler and have it enlarged. He stretched it so much it finally cracked! I recently got it fixed so it's good as new, but it is definitely too small for me now! The other very best gift I got was my bicycle when I was 8. It was a lavender Royce bike. My star possession, a gift from my grandmother. Usually the gifts were from my grandfather, and that's what made this so special was that it was from my favorite person in the world! Every spring I would polish all the chrome. I spent many hours riding around!

# What is the farthest you have ever traveled?



I've only gotten to go to two places out of the country so far, and the farthest would have to be Israel with Abbie. It was really a wonderful trip! I thoroughly enjoyed hanging out with my baby and I'm so glad Terry and Summer got to go this year. Being there and seeing all the ancient things we only read about made it more real. We got to see where the samaritans lived and drove past where the Battle of the Macabees was fought. We walked down the street Yeshua walked on and went to the Mount of Olives. We saw what is believed to be King David's tomb, but the most important thing was meeting the people who were willing to throw everything away, including their lives, for Israel. Even the plane ride was an adventure. We flew on El Al and the orthodox jews got up to get their tallits and go to the back of the plane twice to pray. And of course, before we left I took Abbie to see Phantom of the Opera. I had promised I would take her to a Broadway show for her 18th, and that was it!

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Because of where we were staying in the Land, there were Israeli soldiers everywhere, even around playgrounds. We got to see first hand how things really are there, and it was very eye opening! We also got to go to Shiloh, where the area around the tabernacle was being excavated. It was believed they had found the sight of Ole Eli's home which was outside where the tabernacle was believed to be. And olives, figs, pomegranites were being grown everywhere! I couldn't pick enough! Artifacts were no big deal in some of the areas we went because there were so many broken pieces of pottery.

# What is your best advice when it comes to raising children?



**D**ads, make sure you love your wife and let your children know how valuable she is to you; you set the tone for the whole family. You have a lot of power. How you wield that power will determine future generations of your family!

Trust your instincts. God gave them to you for a reason!

Don't let your children intimidate you! You are still bigger than them, even though they might yell or cry loudly!

All those old-fashioned values and character traits are so important for your child's future. Don't let society and today's culture sway you from that. And you know what's best for your child, not the teacher, or our culture, and especially not their friends.

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Everyone needs to have a job. We need to feel connected and its very important for children to feel needed in their family. So put them to work! That's a part of our society that has crumbled. We've been told its child abuse to have our children work. Such a lie! We all had jobs when I was growing up. We learn the value of money, a good work ethic, and how good it feels to have the job finished well!

# What simple pleasures of life do you truly enjoy?



**N**ice, long, very hot, undisturbed shower has got to be my all time favorite! But there are others, like sitting by a cozy campfire, when it's quiet and peaceful. Holding my grandbabies or great grandbabies is a very enjoyable time! Sometimes listening to some good cello music is perfect, especially if I'm trying to really concentrate on some project! Having a cup of tea with a friend or family is another thing I enjoy.

Finishing a project, looking back at it and just admiring it for awhile is always fun also! When I finished my kitchen up on the mountain, I remember just sitting at the table for about half hr at two in the morning, just looking around in amazement that it was actually finished!



# What stories have you been told about yourself as a baby?



**M**y mom told me I was a very quiet baby and she could easily forget I was there. Howard and I were both very quiet babies, content to play in our playpen, which was a big wooden affair. The bottom would pull up in two, and the playpen would fold on hinges to be carried. When I was just crawling, my brother Ron, who is almost 2 years older than I and was walking and was a holy terror, according to Mom, would climb into the playpen to play with me. One day, my mom was in the kitchen and I came crawling in. She couldn't figure out how I kept getting out until she hid to see what was going on and my brother would climb in, and lift one of the bottom halves for me so I could crawl out! Another story I remember her telling was about my carnivorous habits. She would always put us outside in the playpen, and in the back yard around the fence were these hemlock bushes full of

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japanese beetles. They were falling in the playpen and I ate several. My mom freaked out and called the doctor. He just laughed and called me a little cannibal! He was a great doctor and I have fond memories of him. He was a very smart doctor and had the nurse do all the dirty work, and I disliked her intensely!

# What things do you think you cannot live without?



**I** couldn't possibly live without hot showers! And my pillow and warm socks! Cold feet are horrible! When I first became a Christian, I told God I was willing to do whatever he asked, just please don't send me somewhere I can't get a hot shower! So far so good....

# Which historical figure do you admire the most? Why?



Since I love history this is a very difficult question to narrow down. There are so many historical figures I admire! Abraham Lincoln is one of my favorites. He loved our country and he and his family gave up a lot for him to be the president over the time of the Civil War! I know there's a lot of controversy over his decisions, and I chose to believe the decisions were made for altruistic reasons. I also love and admire Corrie tenBoom. She saw a wrong being committed and was willing to sacrifice her life to follow God's leading. Her sister and other family members were just as heroic, and gave their lives also, and Betsy, even living in the pit of hell in the concentration camp, was always able to see God's hand in the situation. I'm sure she was despondent, but according to Corrie, she never let anyone but God see that.

# Who are the best cooks in your family?



**I**n my family are wonderful cooks of different skill sets! My grandfather on my dad's side was a chef and I heard he had great skills especially his Canadian meat pies, and I got to try my uncle George's which was really delicious. I guess it was a tradition at Christmas in their family. My Aunt Rita made the best and fanciest pancakes. She could make whatever shape we wanted! My grandmother on my mom's side and my mom were wonderful cooks, and my grandmother made the best ever chocolate chip cookies! Several of my sons-in-law are wonderful grill masters. I would rather eat their steaks than eat out anytime. Of course, I think I am the best cook overall! Lol!

# Who are the funniest people in your family?



I know Terry will try to say its him, nope, I am the funniest. Terry might have good comedic timing and poetry, but I will risk Embarrassment, personal bodily harm, and self-incrimination if the joke is good enough. For example one time I knew I had a good spanking coming, I thought to myself they must tell us in advance because they want us to prepare to defend ourselves, therefore I put at least 10 pairs of panties on. So my mom came in and did her best. I played my part hooping and hollering pouring the guilt on thick until she left. As Soon as she left the room I presented my layered panty covered bottom to my sisters And begin spanking myself to show how it didn't hurt. My older sister Melissa who would have never dared to be so bold as I, loved watching my crazy antics as she rolled with laughter. The more she laughed the more I pranced on until All of a sudden her laughter died a little and she gave me the big eyeballs straight into my eyes like a warning. I said “ ha ha mom such a weakling

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her spankings don't even hurt I can do whatever I want now I know the trick“ then suddenly from somewhere behind me I heard “is that right“ Yep mom has been standing behind me for a few minutes now as I turned around slowly in fear I couldn't help but notice she was smiling, she probably wasn't meaning to but I'm sure the ridiculousness of the situation she was observing it made it unavoidable. Needless to say my spankings from then on were bare bottom but even that almost became a little bit of a joke. So anybody that can turn a form of punishment into an inside joke is pretty dang funny.

Hahaha! Renee's response says everything! There are way too many comedians in our family! But in all honesty Renee, Terry could say the most ridiculous things to Omie and she thought he was hysterical! I would just look at him aghast at how disrespectful he was and she would just be laughing! You all have made my life very fun at different times! Mikey is pretty funny also! You guys eating my watermelon was very funny, or when Mikey tried to booby trap things! You are all so fun to be with!

# Who had the most positive influence on you as a child?



**T**here were several adults in my life as a child who had positive influences on me. First would have to be my parents, who made sure we went to church, got a good education, etc, etc. Then would have to be my Omi, who I knew loved me very much. Some of the other adult influences would have been my choir director, who was a music student and taught our church choir part time. I adored him! He taught us proper diction in singing and we actually went to a choir competition, which was very exciting! He tried to encourage me to sing more boldly, and I actually tried out for a solo place in the junior high chorus, but failed by a note! When he graduated college and got a full time job somewhere I couldn't believe he would actually leave our perfect 5-people choir! But leave he did.



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Another influential person was my fourth grade teacher, Miss Buzzetta. She was the most energetic teacher I'd ever seen. It was her first year teaching, and her last, as she got married the end of the year. She took our class, with the fifth grade class, on a train and subway to NYC. We went to China town, Little Italy, the museum of Natural History to see the moon rock, and probably more, without losing a single child! For Christmas she made every student a little pillow with their name embroidered on it. I still have mine somewhere. I had a few other influential teachers in high school. One was my art teacher, and the other was the assistant principal, who probably kept me from going to reform school, another story though!

I also have to give a shout out to my second girl scout leader. My first gs leader couldn't really go anywhere fun with us, but the second one loved the outdoors. I was always getting teased by Uncle Ron who was an eagle scout and went camping in 3 feet of snow, so I was eternally grateful to her for taking us camping in the winter and teaching us lots of outdoor skills.

# Who is the wisest person you've known? What have you learned from them?



**T**here was a lady I met in Al-Anon named Betty. She was definitely eccentric, and acknowledged being addicted to almost everything: alcohol, drugs, sugar, coffee, people, food, etc. But she was very wise and not afraid to let me know if she saw something I was doing not going in God's direction. She used to say all the time, "Every man is my teacher; either I learn what to do or what not to do." I have probably met many people throughout my life that have given me wisdom, and also many who have taught me along the way.

# Who is your favorite fictional character? Cartoon or otherwise.



**M**y all-time favorite fictional character would still be Hadassah from Voice in the Wind. She is the perfect person, has poise, determination, faith, loyalty, and perseverance in the face of insurmountable challenges! And tons of intrigue and romance! Don't ever miscalculate the importance of a good romance!