

## A Life Revisited February 2009

The following are answers to life review questions—in the areas of Self, Family, Spirit and Career.

**SELF** As a child I was quiet and reserved. That is basically my personality even today. I was dependent and was encouraged to be. Mother was the boss and we were made to do what she said we should--with no questions.

I don't remember feeling particularly loved, but I didn't feel unloved, either. I'm told that my aunts and uncles adored me. I was the first grandchild in a very closed and close knit family. I wasn't unhappy. I had everything I needed. Though we were poor, I never thought of myself as that.

I was a daddy's girl. He seemed to love me unconditionally. But, when I'd complain about mother, he always told me she did 'whatever' for my best.

I never felt particularly attractive. I was skinny. It was easy for me to get my feelings hurt. I would call myself sensitive.

The painful aspect of my life at home during my teen years was seeing mother & dad fight. It frightened and embarrassed me.

The attribute I was most proud of was my ability to sing quite well. I had parts in high school operettas and Gig & I occasionally sang solos at church.

My first sense of an "adult identity" was in becoming a mother. It was something I was satisfied with and very proud of. I enjoyed being pregnant and had no big problems with any of them.

I had no particular "cause" outside my children & marriage. I was quite content with my life.

In my 30s & 40s, my life was quite secure. Ed made good money and I felt good about our move to Minneapolis and making a new life there. My children seemed happy and well adjusted. We lived well. At 36 I had my last baby.

My 40<sup>th</sup> decade was one of drastic change in every way. Arthur was killed when I was 40. And, my life changed in every direction. This decade was one of great pain and grief, but also one of great accomplishment. In my 40<sup>th</sup> decade Arthur was killed, my marriage deteriorated, my alcoholism peaked, and I started the bereaved parents group.

During this time I began to think of myself as an individual with individual thoughts and ideas. I became more independent and sure of myself than I had in past years. My participation in AA, counseling, recovering from my deep, distorted grief and founding the BP groups increased my confidence.

My energies were directed towards healing myself, both with alcoholism and my grief. I put much effort into school and the BP group.

P'Ann was my support through the early days of Arthur's death, then, in AA, the other women in the group became my supports. One of the teachers at FFCC was a great help to me and Rev. Giraud was the greatest help in "growing up".

It was hard to maintain a positive attitude during my 40s, but my will to resolve my grief and my natural desire to survive all my difficulties helped. My struggles during this decade were the greatest of any in my life. Continuing school and the founding of BP groups were the most satisfying parts of this decade. My participation in AA was the most significant in changing my independence and confidence in myself.

I stayed in my marriage while continuing my survival and growth during this decade. It wasn't until my 60s that I ended my marriage. I moved out of the house in June '81, but the divorce wasn't until January 1982.

Being out of my marriage was quite a different situation for me. I had been able to depend on Ed for almost everything (money, bills, etc.) but then I had to take care of these things myself. Emotionally, life was extremely difficult for me. I had never before been on my own.

Even though I struggled emotionally and physically, I continued to grow and move forward. I finished my undergraduate degree (BGS), then went to Columbia for Graduate School.

The most difficult experience of the 60<sup>th</sup> decade was Emily's death in August 1982. Besides my own grief, I had to see Dorothy suffer. Much of the time I felt helpless to help her, but in reality, I did.

Completing my MSW in '86 was the beginning of a new and exciting life for me. Stygar's accepting my proposal to provide bereavement follow up was actually the culmination of my dream of helping grieving people-- this fact, plus the continued growth of the BP groups.

Up into my 70<sup>th</sup> decade I have fairly well strengthened my independence. Financially, I am doing well. My 401-K ran out last October, but I'm doing well on my SS. The kids pay for my medicines and the car maintenance. I wish I could do it all myself, but I can't. This is better than the kids having to contribute money to me each month.

My thoughts about death are about the same—I don't want it to happen--, but I am more aware that I haven't an unlimited number of years left. The main thing is that I remain able to care for myself. If I can't I want my life to be over.

I am very healthy. My breathing isn't the best, but I am trying to keep exercising so I stay healthy. The biggest thing is to keep occupied. I can only do so much playing Solitaire and reading. I don't think my mental capacity is different. Maybe the kids would say different, but I really don't think so.

Overall, I am satisfied that I have done well in my life. My children are good and all seem to be accomplished and happy. My life changes through AA have been excellent. I recovered from my grief very well and have accomplished a tremendous amount with Stygar and working with BP. (Actually, there are 11 groups in the St. Louis area.) I am content with my life as it is today. I feel loved and cared for. I don't know how much more I could ask for.

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## CAREER

The first part time job I had was at Neisner's 5 & 10 store. It was in Wellston. To get there I had to take a bus, (we didn't have a car until later years.). I made 30 cents an hour. I was fifteen. I couldn't work at Woolworths, who paid 40 cents an hour because you were supposed to be sixteen to work. Neisner's didn't check ages.

I wanted to be a medical technologist. I had gotten a part time at, what was then called, DeLoge(?) Hosptial while I was attending ST. Louis University. That got me interested. Eventually I decided I didn't want to stay in school, so I started full time in the Hematology lab. I also worked in the blood bank. I got very good at getting into veins.

I really didn't have any favorite subjects in high school. I drifted through school, never really applying myself. I made average grades with little or no effort.

I really didn't have a "burning desire" towards any occupation. I sort of did what was in front of me to do.

I was referred to Dr. Bromberg's office by a nurse friend. I worked with his group until I was eight months pregnant with Bob. After that my "career" was that of mother.

I DID have a strong need to accomplish something. I believe that is why I had a large family. Having children was my way of accomplishing

something meaningful. I enjoyed every aspect of having my family. The fact that Ed made good money, made it easy to provide well for them.

My dad was a painter. He originally was a sign painter, but when the war started he went into defense work as a regular painter. Mother didn't work outside the home---not even during the war.

Actually, in her later years, mother was quite interested in politics, but never did anything with it except to distribute political literature house to house. I think she would have been quite good at politics.

It wasn't until after Arthur was killed that I had thoughts of doing anything other than being a wife & mother. I had taken classes from the fall after he was killed, but with no particular plans in mind. I took the classes because I gave me something "to take my mind off Arthur." The first class was an English class. Writing was the biggest part of it. I loved it. It was the beginning of my interest in writing.

Writing was very helpful to me in working with bereaved parents. I didn't know just how I was going to help bereaved parents, but later in the decade I learned of a group of bereaved parents meeting. I got involved but, because I started writing about the experiences we had, the non bereaved leader wanted me to quit. It was around this time I learned about TCF. I started that group and held the first meeting in December 1979. That's when I started writing the newsletter. After that my articles began appearing in other chapter newsletters. This gave me a great sense of accomplishment.

It was in my 40s that my life began a drastic change. Arthur had been killed, my alcoholism peaked, and my marriage began crumbling. All the while I continued my schooling. Finally, after Emily died, I finished my undergraduate degree. With that I obtained a certificate in writing from UMSL. Going to Columbia and getting my MSW completed my educational goal. I believed that an MSW would give me the training I'd need for counseling bereaved people.

Going away to college at 53 increased my feelings of independence, though I only was in Columbia for a year. Stygar's accepting my proposal to provide bereavement follow up was the beginning of a second career; one that was very fulfilling; one that I still do on a part time basis into my late 70s.

Throughout my 60s I took bereavement workshops regularly in order to maintain my certification in bereavement counseling. Now in my 70s I no longer am certified, but that's not a problem. Presently there aren't any rules or guidelines for bereavement counselors other than the ADC certification which I really don't need.

It has only during my middle 70s that I even thought about retirement. My work is not physically demanding. The only thing I did not like about working was the monthly telephone calls I had to make. But, now in my late 70s, I have given myself permission to work on a part time, as needed, basis.

As I have commented before, my financial situation isn't bad. I live on my SS with the help with the kids.

Being retired has given me too much time on my hands. I am trying to work on writing biographies for people. I have started with Chris' grandmother, Sally Baker. I'm hoping to get more people to write for, more to fill my time than make money.

Overall, I am quite satisfied with my life's work. I immensely enjoyed having my family, and immensely enjoyed my work with Stygars. But even with all this, I still need to fill my time with meaningful activities.

In looking back at my almost 78 years, the only changes I would have made were that Arthur wouldn't have been killed. Then, what would the second part of my life have been? I think that the real point is that I made good come out of bad. Arthur's death, I believe, actually cost him nothing. He is happy in heaven. I was the one who hurt and the one who had to make good come out of it.

My life today is one of contentment and a sense of accomplishment. I feel loved and cared for by my family. I feel respected by the people I have helped. I am happy and fulfilled. I don't think I could have asked for more.

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