

Marija Lavrisa Eulogy

Is a person's personality developed more by nature or nurture?

In my mother's case, I believe that nurture played a large role. The tragedies she experienced in early life led her on a path to what she became. She was born in January 1922 as the oldest child in a family of 9 children. At eight years old, the Depression brought economic catastrophe with unemployment, hunger and despair. During this decade long episode, her mother died, so she went to work in the Zadruga, a co-op store in the village of Horjul. With her earnings she bought a bicycle to have lunch with the rest of the family, testifying to their closeness. Although they were poor, they never realized it. Then World War 2 arrived and the communist revolution that brought fear to the populace and death to anyone who opposed them. She fled with others in May 1945 to the Vetrinje fields in Austria to an uncertain future. Her brother Joze, was handed back to the communist enemies in Yugoslavia as a result of a secret deal between the British and communist officers, along with 12,000 of his "domobranci" Defenders of the Home brethren. The civilians turned toward the church for solace in prayer as they had in previous tragedies. These experiences formed her, just like iron is fashioned by the blacksmith in the fire of his forge.

Her experiences had to change for no one could withstand this for a lifetime. She met our father in their village when he visited the Zadruga, and in the Displaced Persons camp in Austria their relationship grew. Both emigrated to Canada when the government decided that single immigrants would add to the workforce and population. They married in Toronto in 1951 and raised a family of 6 children. My mother was focused on three things: faith, family and the Slovenian community.

When she was able, she attended Mass daily, even when the weather was terrible or after a fall on the way. She was a long-time member of the church choir, even occasionally singing solo in her soprano voice. The Zenska Liga, Catholic Women's League, benefited from her talents, ending in the position as Treasurer for the group. She never spoke ill of anyone. When we mentioned someone's failings to her, she would say: "Vsak je za nekaj, nobeden ni za vse." Everyone is good in some things; no one is good in everything. Mom was humble, living the Beatitude: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. She was very generous to charities as the income tax receipts would pour in at tax time, but with her meagre earnings, she never needed them. The care of God's creation of the earth was very important to her, as we always had a vegetable garden, composted scraps, repaired rather than replaced things and recycled glass before Toronto's recycling program.

Her moral compass was strong and sure, which she tried to pass on to us, her children. She loved her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and was thrilled when they came to visit. As other children of the Depression, she went without to support the family. When we were very young children and money was scarce, she would walk rather than take the streetcar so that we would have milk to drink. She was happiest when pregnant as she knew another family member would be brought into the world.

We were always involved with the Slovenian community as we lived next to the church. We attended Slovenian school on Saturdays, with the admonishment: "Vec jezikov znas, vec veljas". The more languages you know, the more valuable you are. With her encouragement we participated as altar servers, wolf cubs, boy scouts, venturers, rovers, brownies, girl guides, young and older adults at the many functions of the community. They include the church picnics where my dad obtained the ponies which we led for the children to ride, the many banquets and wedding receptions at the church hall and the Sunday celebrations on the Slovenian farm.

We would do well to adopt her outlook on life towards faith, family and community. After 101 years, we now say "Z Bogom". Go with God, and "Na svidenje". Until we meet again, in heaven!