

Linda Monnahan Peterson

My Greatest Teacher

My greatest teacher stood less than five feet tall and weighed ninety pounds soaking wet. A blue-eyed redhead, although she had little more than an eighth-grade education, my mother was one of the best, if not *the* best teacher I ever had.

With her lack of education, she never lost the hunger for learning. She grabbed at every opportunity to read and learn

Born at the beginning of the twentieth century, she was the ninth and youngest child of poor immigrant parents. Through circumstances, not all of her own making, she saw the home she knew, shattered by her father's institutionalization and the infighting of her older siblings.

Married as a teenager, she knew hardship and learned how to make her way with very few resources. With the deaths of her second, third, and fourth children, she quickly learned the pain of loss, only to have this experience threatened to be repeated when I was born with hydrocephalus.

This followed my dad's serious work injury and his bout with alcoholism. As each of us children came along, she taught each one of us the importance of faith, responsibility and the need for us to love each other. Though she and Dad were not churchgoers, she taught us to pray and saw that we were a part of church life.

When each of my older siblings reached an appropriate age, they were taught their part in making our large family function. Cooking, cleaning, gardening, canning,

as well as child care were all part of her curriculum.

Then there was music. She and Dad loved music, mostly classic tunes. But it didn't matter the genre. Whenever the family boarded the car to go somewhere, it was practically powered by our voices as we all sang at the top of our lungs.

By example, she taught perseverance. When, at the age of forty-seven, and herself in ill health, she and we lost my dad to his final heart attack after another severe accident, and several other serious illnesses.

While valiantly attempting to make our budget stretch to meet our needs, she also sewed most of the clothes we girls wore.

My mother: the perfect example of life and how to play the hand you're dealt.