

*The Story of Carmen M. Fraga
Radjewski and her Husband
William P. Radjewski*

From Our Recollections and Life Stories

By Her Children

William M. Radjewski
Michelle L Radjewski Haar
David A. Radjewski
Melanie M. Radjewski
Thomas J. Radjewski

March, 2019

This book is dedicated to:

The grandchildren, future grandchildren and their children to come of William P. and
Carmen M. Radjewski.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
PART I:.....	2
Carmen Martha Fraga Radjewski	2
Chapter One: My Memories and Recollections; William M. Radjewski	4
Chapter Two: My Memories and Recollections; Michelle L Radjewski Haar.....	7
Chapter Three: My Memories and Recollections; David A. Radjewski	10
Epilogue/Conclusion.....	15
About the Author	16

Introduction

In the words of Grandpa & Grandma, Valeriano and Martina Fraga

"I tell everybody - no matter how much my wife and I, we suffer, what makes me so happy, to see all my family are in good shape. They ain't rich but they have good homes to live in, good families. We don't care for us, we suffer us, but we suffer for our family."

PART I:

Carmen Martha Fraga Radjewski

Our mother, Carmen was born on September 2nd (or maybe September 3) 1924 in North Branch, Michigan. We always had a debate within our family as to what was the correct day of her birth, either the 2nd or the 3rd of September. This debate had always been started by her because she said the birth records were not right. I suspect that she was born at home and by the time they got the birth recorded they weren't sure what the date was.

Carmen was the 7th of 12 children born of Valeriano and Martina and number 6 of the surviving children as the oldest Manuela had passed at 6 years old before the trek to America began. She was the classic middle child with a flair for the dramatic which was always near to the surface if not readily apparent. When Carmen was born the family was only in the United States for 5 years and the 4th child born of her parents upon their arrival. There is no doubt that the family was very poor and struggled deeply in their lives for their very survival. Mom often talked about her life and the challenges they faced as a family with very little income.

The moniker of the “greatest generation” for the people of their age group is appropriate and deserving. The turmoil's that the United States went thru for the period of 1920 to 1950 is beyond the comprehension of us who came afterwards and didn't have to endure any types of challenges that come even close in magnitude. Their family's hardships were several times over that of other everyday Americans. They dealt with prejudices and discrimination and out right being cheated and taken advantage of. Their parents came without knowing the language and because of this some attempted to take advantage of them. The formal schooling of her parents was minimal at best. But it is very clear that they were very intelligent people with good judgement, moral values and the grace of God with them. Their abilities to survive and prosper in a foreign environment are nothing but amazing. Mom always had pride in her parents, their history, the success of the family, the legacy of the “family story”, the emigration from Mexico and her parent's ability to succeed almost by the force of their will and the grace of God.

William Paul Radjewski

Our father, Bill, was born on April 21, 1920 in Detroit, Michigan. He was the 2nd surviving child of his family. One of 5 sons born of his parents. His brother Ralph died in 1918, one week short of his first birthday. I do not know the cause of his death but it was during the time of the Spanish flu epidemic that ravaged the United States and the world during this time.

Interestingly, the family name was spelled Radzjewski at the time. I never learned when or why it was changed. I suspect that the spelling was a challenge and at some point they decided to simplify it. My Dad's father John F. Radzjewski had a brother, Ed, who the family cottage and it was inherited from, was known as a last name of Rogers on Harsens Island where the cottage was located at.

The Story of Carmen and William P. Radjewski

The family stories of their early years were not of the desperate financial situations that my mother's family endured. Dad never spoke of those years. I recall in asking my Grandma Stella about the Depression years that I never received a detailed explanation about their lives. Our grandfather John was a tool maker by his trade and I believe that he maintained working throughout the great depression.

I know that dad left high school after 11th grade and never went any further. The reasons behind this I never learned. Dad joined the army during WWII and spent much of his time in Gaithersburg, MD in the only remaining horse mounted Calvary of the U.S. Army. Additionally, he was assigned to an intelligence gathering group that was seeking German spies on American soil. After the war Dad became a brick layer, a trade that he always had a personal connection with. His bricklaying tools were around in our garage on McCormick street for as long as I can recall. Unfortunately, back problems developed and he could no longer continue in this trade.

After this he became a security guard at Water Works park, the main water processing plant for the city of Detroit. In my very early memories I recall him coming home from work in his security uniform. He became an equipment operator for the water department, a job he had much pride in. he operated back hoes, bulldozers, road graders, cranes and other equipment.

Bill was proud of the work he did, he was a "workin man" and it ain't nothing to be ashamed of. He retired from the Water Department for the City of Detroit and became "snow birds". living 6months of the year in their summer home on Wixom Lake, in Edenville, MI, and the winter months at their winter home in a retirement community at Mulberry, FL.

As individuals and a married couple, they accomplished one heck of a lot!

They lived through the Great depression

Gave greatly of their selves for their country in World War II

Worked to build this country after the war

Always worked, always contributed

Raised a family of 5 and provided well for them

Traveled to Europe and Mexico several times

Built their retirement home by them selves

Had their winter snow bird home in Florida

A marriage of 61 years!

Chapter One: My Memories and Recollections; William M. Radjewski

The stories of hand me down clothes and homemade dresses, and shoes and play things were frequent. All of us kids would joke and kid her and my father about their unwillingness to throw any food away. Left overs would be recycled several times. It is amazing that mom and dad weren't ill or hospitalized for food poisoning. If we even tried to clean out their frig of what we thought was "old" food she would get very upset about it. The fact of growing up without and through the Great Depression was deeply ingrained in them both.

Carmen was the dreamer. She instilled in all her children a sense of striving and reaching for a better life. And I believe that we have it in our DNA from her, and I believe that this was passed in her DNA from her parents.

She had a flair for the dramatic, which was seen in her pictures as a high school majorette and others in late teens and early adult years. Carmen graduated from North Branch High School in 1943. Carmen continued to attend the annual North Branch H.S class reunions until they faded out due the passing of the classmates. The annual reunion was a special event for her and I recall attending the annual visit often.

She often talked about her vacations at the Jack and Jill Ranch on the west side of Michigan near Holland, the photographs of her in riding britches she keep lifelong. I believe. Many ways I think she thought she was playing the actresses of her era. Betty Grable, Olivia de Havalin, and even Elizabeth Taylor. I often think that she secretly aspired to this. This was in her early adult years before she was married.

After graduation from high school she moved to the city to join her sisters Ellen and Merce who were living in a small cottage at the back of the yard, next to where her future in laws lived. The house was rented from a grandmotherly woman they called Mama Rose. During the war years she worked at the Packard Motor plant at Conner's and Mack Avenue, in administration.

After the war she went to beauty school and received her cosmetology license. She always encouraged us kids to try new things, to never shy away from challenges in life, to spread our wings, try what was different. Mom planted a seed of aspiration early on in each of us as children, to be risk takers and to strive for whatever we wanted in life. In this, she differed greatly from my dad who was risk adverse in all things.

She was an adventurer and never sat still for long. In the summers we often went to Metro Beach metro park, and Holiday beach and Point Pelee in Canada. Boblo Island amusement park was a frequent destination as was the Detroit Zoo and Belle Isle.

The Story of Carmen and William P. Radjewski

She had an extreme streak of independence, an early supporter of the women's lib movement. Many of my cousins were enthralled with her "progressive" thinking for her age and thought it was courageous of her. This was true, always the contrarian from the status quo.

She was a classic middle child, always clamoring for the attention and respect the older and younger sibling got. My mother always cheered for the underdog be it in politics, sports, life in general. These were the ones in life's activities who had the "odds" against them. I think that she related and believed that her life was one of being the same underdog as what she saw in others struggles. This is where her political philosophy came in.

Yet, she was a dichotomy in this thinking as she really aspired to the traipsing's of the wealthy.

She did hair in our basement for many years and had a fairly successful beauty salon business going, later became a real estate agent. I got from her a healthy amount of ambition that I would always strive for more and better. I recall when I was very young she worked at a hair salon in Grosse Pointe called Marie Byrd's. She had a fairly robust clientele group that included millionaires. I believe that Carmen worked there at Marie Byrd's up until Michelle was born. Mom was quite far into the pregnancy (maybe the 8th month) and had fallen down some stairs on a Saturday at the beauty salon. Dad and I had to rush to her from home to take her to the ER. Nothing serious happen because of the fall and Michelle was born quite healthy a few weeks later.

One of her clients was a Mrs. Morrison who was a member of Buhl family by birth, they were "old money" of Detroit society in that era. I believe that they were the builders and owners of the Penobscot building in down town Detroit. Mrs. Morrison was a jet setter of that era with homes also in New York City and Miami, FL. Mom kept her as a client even after she had left the salon in Grosse Pointe. For many years she would get a call that Mrs. Morrison would like Carmen to do her hair for the Christmas holidays at her a home, which was a huge Lake Shore Drive gated estate on Lake Ste Claire.

I recall going with my Mom once when she went to do Mrs. Morrison's hair. I was young, I am guessing around 9 or 10 years old and she made sure that I wore my best clothes. The mansion was very large, inside a gated compound of a landscaped lawn and a large circular drive. When we arrived at the mansion she introduced me to Mrs. Morrison, I went with one of the staff members who toured me throughout the home. I remember a bowling alley in the basement and an indoor pool that really impressed me, I had never dreamed that a home could be so large as to have its own bowling alley and pool!

She would always get a very special Christmas gift from Mrs. Morrison. One year she got a small decorative Christmas tree, about 24 inches tall, that came from Paris. The tree we decorated with about 2 dozen miniature bottles filled with the best colognes and perfumes from Paris, France. Mom cherished this gift for the rest of her life. I remember her getting several \$100.00 bills for the work. In context to 2019 costs this was probably what my dad was getting for 40 hours in 1962.

The Story of Carmen and William P. Radjewski

When I was about ten or eleven after my dad's father passed, they always called him "Pa", John Radjewski. Mom was bound and determined that Grandma Stella, who the family called "Ma", would learn how to drive. Grandpa John had a shiny Packard that he had always babied in taking care of, it sparkled. Grandma had never learned how to drive a car and she was extremely apprehensive about learning. Driving was not that common for women of my grandmother's generation.

But my mother, Carmen, always the rebel saw no reason why her mother in law couldn't or shouldn't start driving now at 70 years old. Mom would take her on driving lessons on weekends at the cottage on Harsens Island. I myself, learned how to drive on the island when my cousin Kenny let me drive his car with him instructing me. The island had less traffic than the city and a certain amount of independence and freedom from the norms and mores from the city.

While Grandma Stella's driving lessons were a challenge each time Mom would take her out to drive, Grandma was very nervous of the unknown and the new. Well the lessons came to an abrupt halt when grandma ran the car into some roadside barriers. The damage was minor to the car but the recriminations about why it happened was a major blow up. According to grandma it was all mother's fault, that she was insisting on teaching her to drive when she never really wanted to. And Grandma Stella would never attempt to learn how to drive again and that was all there was to it. Looking back the episode was actually quite comical.

Carmen was never ever one to sit still for long, much to the chagrin of my dad. One of her sayings was "variety is the spice of life". She would go around the house singing the song Doris Day made famous in 1956, "Que Sera, Sera", when I was young and frequently throughout her life. The lyrics suited her life and attitude about life very well. I could say that it was almost a motto for her life.

*"Que será, será,
Whatever will be, will be
The future's not ours to see
Que será, será
What will be, will be"*

She took up painting shortly after her and Dad retired and became snow birds wintering in Mulberry, FL each year. She joined a group of others who were learning how to paint and draw from another resident in the community who was a retired art teacher. Her claim to fame from this was that she made each of her children a painting of her parent's Norman Road homestead with images of her mother and father looking down upon it. I have this painting of hers hanging in my master bedroom. At varying times Carmen took up bowling and golf. And once appeared on the TV show "Bowling for Dollars". For Carmen there was always a new challenge to conquer, a new goal to achieve, a new obstacle to overcome. Nothing was impossible.

Mom always felt that her and her sisters, the “girls” didn’t get the recognition they deserved from her parents. Which was very true. Being an immigrant Mexican family they both had the patriarchal approach with them of traditional Mexican society. The man was the head and the boys got recognition. That was the way it was, I believe that this ingrained her motivation to succeed.

By their son William M. Radjewski, March 11, 2019

Chapter Two: My Memories and Recollections; Michelle L Radjewski Haar

I have read my brother Bill’s story of our mom, Carmen. He tells of her early life and her personality, which I believe he is pretty darn accurate. I never thought of her as the typical middle child, but yes, that she was. I will share some of my memories of her.

When I think of Carmen and Bill, I sometimes wonder how they ever got together. They were married June 17, 1950. They met when my mother was living on Cooper street in Detroit. Bill was back from the service, living at his parents’ house on the same street. He was pretty handsome, and she was very pretty. The story goes that she was coming home from work, and had to pass by him and a few of his pals. Although she may have felt intimidated walking by these guys, she wasn’t going to let them see it, so she just held her head up high, and just strutted on by. I don’t know how she strutted, maybe it was more just walking, but that’s the gist of the story. I believe they actually met at one of the dances they all used to go to.

Why I wonder how they got together is because I don’t think my dad quite knew what he was getting into. I believe he was pretty old-fashioned, and had probably expected to have a quiet and typical 1950’s wife. Well, that he did not get, but in the end he probably wouldn’t have been happy with that kind of wife. Sometimes they were like oil and water, she was his Lucy to his Desi. Although in their case she was the hot-blooded Mexican. But I know they loved each other, and had a great chemistry together.

My dad worked for the city of Detroit, and my mother was more or less a stay at home mom.

But she did have her own little beauty salon in our basement, so although she was always there, she still had her business. I used to love to sit on the stairs and listen to all the ladies talk and gossip. Sometimes I’d get to help by taking the rollers out of their hair. It amazed me how different they looked when they left. I think she was the only mother I knew that worked, but I never thought of her as a working mom, because she was home, and always made time for us.

I remember many days of her taking us to Metro Beach, and Holiday Beach in Canada, also going to Boblo, and Belle Isle. She would drive my dad to work so she could have the car

The Story of Carmen and William P. Radjewski

for the day, pack us up, and off we'd go for some kind of adventure. Just had to make sure we were home in time to pick him up, and have dinner on the table.

I don't know about my siblings, but I know sometimes she would take just me somewhere. I remember she took me downtown to see *Gone With the Wind*. We went to lunch at Hudson's.

At least I think it was just her and me. She also took me with her once to the mansion on Lakeshore Drive when she went to do Mrs. Morrison's hair. She always took us to Hudson's or to Eastland to see Santa.

Carmen loved music. We had a record player in our living room, and during the day, especially in the summer, it seemed like there was always a record on. She loved Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin. But she especially loved Trini Lopez, and Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass. She also loved contemporary music too, and we would play my brother Bill's 45 s too.

On the nights that Bill had to work overtime, usually because of a water main break, we would order pizza, and have pop. And we would all dance in the living room. I love music myself, and also listen to it almost all day long, I'm sure that's where my love for it came from. In their late forties, or early fifties, Bill joined the Moose Club, and they started going every Friday and Saturday evening. They took dance lessons, and soon they were the best dancers I had ever seen. They really loved going to the Moose. They had a group of friends and they would dress up and meet them, and just have a great time. My dad told me that those are some of his best memories. There were a few times that he had to work late, and even if he didn't get home until 9:00 or later, he'd come home get dressed up, and off to the Moose they went. Carmen always was very fashion conscience, and liked to dress well, but after they started dancing, Bill also became a clothes horse. He had so many suits that they were running out of room to hang all their clothes. By the time they started going to the Moose though, we were all growing up and

moving out, so they could take over our closets. We had a lot of family weddings, and when they got up to dance I would just watch in awe. They were a sight to see. I think their favorite song was *Spanish Eyes* by Al Martino. But it could have the whole Fraga family's favorite song. My mother and all my aunts and uncles were very proud of their Mexican heritage, and would celebrate it in any way.

It's funny that of all the aunts and uncle, there is only one who married another Mexican, Aunt Frances. My dad was Polish and German. He called Carmen his Mexican spitfire.

Carmen was a woman ahead of her time. As many of our cousins said, she was a woman's libber before the term was even invented. She was a housewife in the 1950's and 60's, and being a housewife was the least of her favorite things to do. I wouldn't say our house was a mess, but it wasn't spic n span. It drove me crazy, so I somehow just started being the house cleaner. But she just was very busy, and always had other things that she'd rather be doing.

The Story of Carmen and William P. Radjewski

She seemed to always have some cause that was important to her. I remember one winter when she had heard of a family that had fallen on hard times. We went and bought a few bags of groceries and took them to their house. After John F Kennedy was assassinated, she organized a rummage sale on our front yard so we could raise money for a library to be built in his honor.

I had never even heard of a rummage sale, but it was a success, and I really enjoyed it.

She was very opinionated and always spoke her mind. She was very up on current events, and politically was a liberal Democrat, and proud of it. She made friends with a few women who were also early women libbers, and they used to get together and talk about the world, and their lives. I loved listening to them.

She was into playing sports, when very few women were at that time. She bowled, and she and I went many times. I used to laugh every time she took her turn, she had a very unique approach. She would have her ball in her hands, then as she started, she would lift her right knee up like she was going to start marching, and at the same time take her ball and kind of make an arc in front of her before she drew it back. It was her own style, and it seemed to work, because she was a pretty good bowler.

She also played golf, which was another thing we would do together once in awhile. I still like to bowl, and play golf. I'm lucky I have several girlfriends who also play, and I look back on the days playing with my mom with much joy.

As we all grew up, and became parents, Carmen and Bill became Grandparents. They found much joy in their grandchildren, and those kids sure loved them. When I still lived close to them, I found myself stopping by with Julie, and then Stacey several times a week. They came to many school functions, dance recitals, hockey, and baseball games whenever they could.

Sometimes they would pick them up, and take them to their place outside of Midland for a week. There are many stories of them baking with grandma, going through her jewelry, playing dress up. They, along with their cousins would put on performances, and grandma and grandpa would watch and applaud. Grandpa would ride his lawn tractor around with one of them on his lap. I am soon to be a grandmother, and I have thought about this a lot. I think sometimes people are better grandparents than parents. What I mean is that when you are the parent, you are not only responsible for raising your kids, but you are also working, taking care of a home, and everything else. You just can't give your kids undivided attention, as much as you want to. But when you're the grandparent, that is what you do, because you don't have to do anything else. When my parents were at my house, it was all about the kids. I hope I will be as good of a grandparent as they were.

By Michelle L Radjewski Haar

February 21, 2019

Chapter Three: My Memories and Recollections; David A. Radjewski

Life Lessons and Values Taught to Me.

The story I'd like to share about mom and dad is about the significant life lessons that I learned from them. We do not get to choose our parents, but if we did, I would choose the very ones I had, and I would not change a thing about how I was raised. I wouldn't be the person I am today if were not for the values and lessons I learned from my mom and dad. Values I treasure the most such as honesty, integrity, commitment, treating people fairly and not being afraid to work hard are the things I learned from my parents.

I know a lot people whose mom and dad were interested in making a fast buck and taking advantage of other people. Not my mom and dad. Mom and dad were salt of the earth. They were honest and hard-working, they had high integrity and they had an inner compass directing them towards doing what was right and steering them away from what was wrong.

You should never judge people because of their race or background.

I never heard my parents utter I single word of bigotry, hate or prejudice towards other people based on their background or race. They both had strong convictions about social justice and fairness. I never heard either of them say the "N" word, even though we lived in a racially charged time and era. Mom always said that she believed that people should be judged on who they are and what they do and not because of their skin color or background. I never heard Dad say these words, but I know without a shadow of a doubt that he believed this too.

I recall some of my childhood friends sharing their bigotry towards Blacks and others; views that they got from their parents. And I remember even as a child when I heard these words I felt uncomfortable and offended. I was astonished that my friends' parents would say such ugly words and spew this bigotry in front of their children. My parents never used those kinds of words, nor did they try to put those thoughts and ideas into their children. I love my mom and dad for this beautiful quality, and I am happy and proud that they passed this quality on to me and by extension their grandchildren.

You can do anything you set your mind to.

One thing my mom always said and believed is that you can do and become anything you set your mind to. I heard her say this many, many times. I first recall her sharing these words of wisdom when I was very young. She would be talking to her lady friends in her hair salon that she had in our basement and I would sit on the stairs and ease drop in on their conversations.

She had many wonderful friends and customers and they would have some very deep philosophical discussions about life, religion, and social causes. I would listen in and I remember being so impressed on how insightful Mom was about life. I asked her if she truly believed that a person can do anything they set they set their mind to. I was around seven or eight years old and I just could not imagine that was possible. I thought how your life turned

out was mainly due to chance, luck and circumstance. And I remember her telling me she wholeheartedly she believed this to be true.

In fact, I would suggest that she lived her life by these words, and when I became wise enough later in life I did too.

A great example of her putting those words into action was her determination to become real estate agent. Today it is very common to see women real estate agents but back in the early 70's not so. She did not let that stop her, she put her mind to it, studied hard and successfully completed her exam and became a very good real estate agent. She helped many people in our family buy and sell their homes, including Mary and me. I think all of us are very proud of her for what she accomplished and the example she set.

Do not be afraid of hard work.

Dad was one of the hardest working individuals I have ever known. He left for work before the rest of us got up for school in the morning. I do not know what time he left for work, but I think it was around 6:00 AM every morning. What I do remember is that Mom was always up each morning seeing him off. She made him breakfast and packed his lunch each day before he left for work. I will always remember his lunch box and thermos that Mom packed for him every day.

I cannot remember my Dad ever missing a day of work. Whereas I am sure he had, I really do not remember that ever happening.

I marvel at what he had done and accomplished through his hard work. He had all his kids in Catholic school, we never missed a meal, and we went on vacations every summer. At the time I took all these things for granted. But when I met Mary and shared stories about some of the places we visited and went on vacation, she was in awe. She never did any of those things or went to those places when she was young. I came to realize we were very lucky to have a such a hard-working man as our Father.

Anyone who knows me will tell you I have a reputation for working hard too; just like my Dad. I have never shirked away from work. But I cannot claim I have ever worked as hard as he did, and I thank my Dad for the lessons he taught me; Life gives back to you what you what you are willing to put into it. Work first, rewards come later. He never looked for a hand out. He worked for everything he got and accomplished in his life.

It doesn't matter what you chose to do, as long as you chose to do it well.

My mom always said it didn't matter to her whether her kids became millionaires or janitors. She used to say that "as long as you do what you chose to do, and you do it the best that you can" she would be proud. When I first heard her say these words, I really did not understand what she meant. Why wouldn't she want their children to be super successful and wealthy? How could she be happy to see her kid grow up to be a janitor? This didn't make sense to me. It wasn't until much later that I truly understood how wise she was and what she meant.

When I was young I didn't understand that success should not be measured by how much you've accumulated or obtained but rather it is a measurement of how much self-esteem, self-confidence, and peace of mind you have. True success is leading with love, having love, and loving others. I think my Mom knew this and when she would say "It doesn't matter what you chose to do, as long as you chose to do it well". I think she was saying that true happiness comes from being happy with oneself and being happy with who you are. Mom was very wise indeed.

Don't be afraid to try.

My Dad could fix everything. We never had a repairman come to our house to fix anything. Dad was not afraid to take things apart to try to fix it himself. This may have been more for cost saving reasons than for anything else. Nevertheless, when it came repairing washing machines, replacing toilets, putting new brakes on the car, or even building a house my Dad could do it all.

I can remember being five-year-old sitting on the driveway right next him fetching a wrench or some other tool as he was putting new brakes on the car. I recall being so proud when he built our new porch on McCormick Street. My friends' dads couldn't do this. I remember helping him put paneling in our basement and our upstairs' bedroom.

Even when our TV would go out, he wasn't afraid of trying to fix it. We would go up to Olsen's Electronics Store (I think it was on either Gratiot or Van Dyke) with a handful of vacuum tubes and put them in a testing machine to find which tube was bad. And sure enough he would figure which tube was defective and he would buy a new one and replace it. I just remember thinking; he can fix anything!

Until the day he was no longer healthy enough to build and fix things I loved helping Dad with these projects. We built decks and sheds together at their up-north house. We hung drywall together. We did auto repairs together. He helped me when I remodeled our cottage with replacing the roof and redoing the interior.

Mary says that she believes that I can fix anything. Even though this isn't true I let her believe it. But the key is, I love fixing and building things. There is no doubt in my mind I got this from my Dad. And more often than not, when I am in the middle of building or fixing something my mind drifts and I find myself thinking about him.

Don't be afraid to learn new things and embrace life

Mom was a lifelong learner. Whether if it was to learn a new skill, a new philosophy, or new sport she wasn't afraid to try

Back in the 70s Mom was telling us about a book she had read called *Your Erroneous Zones* (written by Wayne Dyer). She told us that we live our lives based on how we've been programmed. She said, if things are not going as you want in your life, you can reprogram yourself.

At the time I remember Dad and I just rolling our eyes and thinking ‘there she goes again’. Back then we really didn’t grasp or understand what she was trying to tell us. But years later when I was having some difficulties in my life, I read the book, and it hit me like a ton of bricks, “Wow, Mom really knew what she was talking about. Why didn’t I listen to her?” I’m listening now! From that day forward I committed myself to learn as much as could about self-development and building self-confidence. I truly believe this was a huge turning point in my life. Thank you, Mom!

Dad enjoyed having a good time and I think he liked showing Mom off. He liked to dress well and looked spectacular in the suits and ties that he wore. He liked doing things with mom. It never really occurred to me until I was older and married myself how much they did together, especially after Dad retired.

They golfed together in Florida. They were very close to Aunt Merce and Uncle Joe who drove down to visit them. They also had a circle of good friends they were close with who they played cards and shuffle board with. Although I never asked him, I think the happiest period in my Dad’s life was right after he retired and they were spending their winters in Florida and enjoying activities together and with their friends they met there.

Mom had many wonderful friends as well. She was on bowling and golf leagues. I really never had an interest in either sport until Mom took me with her to bowl and golf. Today I enjoy both and I think about her whenever I bowl or golf. Mom knew that life was precious and should be shared with your friends and family. I think bowling and golfing were her outlets to keep those connections strong with her friends and to enjoy herself.

Marriage and commitment

I think my mom and dad’s relationship with each other can be best characterized as being a counter-balance for each other. I think dad looked at mom as always having her head in the clouds and needing to be brought back reality from time to time. And mom looked at dad as needing to stretch and grow, and her role was to prod and poke him to do so. When you look back and reflect on their marriage from that perspective, they were meant for each other.

They did things together and accomplished so much that when you look back on it all, it’s astounding. They traveled to Mexico and Europe. They did ballroom dancing. They built their dream house in Gladwin Michigan. They had their winter home Florida. And they loved and helped their family.

I know a lot of people may say Mom and Dad had a rocky relationship. And in fact, they were well known for the many arguments that they had. But in the end, I know my Dad was very proud of my Mom and loved her very much. (As he did all of his children). And I know that my Mom truly respected and loved my Dad and appreciated him getting up early every day and working hard all his life to provide for his family.

Being a good parent and good son.

Everyone has a choice on how they chose to remember their parents. You can either dwell on everything they did wrong or you can choose to be grateful for everything they did to nurture you and help you.

There was a time in my life that I resented how I thought I was being treated by my parents, especially by mom. I remember feeling there was a double-standard in our family and that somehow I was expected to live and behave at a different level than I perceived that my siblings were. When I was nineteen, I particularly remember an incident one morning after working the midnight shift at Great Scott!! Supermarket. After working all night long all I wanted to do was get home and go to bed.

I wasn't in bed for more than an hour when mom comes marching up the stairs, wakes me up and tells me to get out of bed and go find a job or go find somewhere else to live. I thought she was nuts! I just worked all night long! I have had a steady job since I was 14 years old working at Stahl's market. What the heck was she talking about? Go get a job? I had a job!

Of course, an argument happened next. From my perspective I paid room and board, I had my own car; that I paid for. I was dating Mary, so I was hardly home eating their food. What hell could the issue be? I wasn't costing them anything, not one penny!

Then she said something to me that I will never forget. "You are wasting your time working at these super markets. You are meant to do something better and more important than that. You need to get out there and find out what it is. But working at Great Scott!! is a dead end for you."

Wow!

At the time I was angry. I remember packing all of my clothes and driving to Mary's mom's house and telling Mary what happened and I was moving out. Of course, Mary calmed me down and reaffirmed that I couldn't live there.

It took me a while to sort out what was happening, and I finally concluded that mom was right. She wasn't calling me a failure; she was telling me she believed in me. And for that I will be forever grateful. I am not claiming that I am some huge success, but I am proud of my life and how things have turned out for me.

As I said at the beginning of this story, we do not get to choose our parents, but if we did, I would choose the ones I had, and I would not change a single thing about how I was raised.

I am very grateful for my parents, Carmen and Bill, I would not be the person I am, the husband I am, the father I am and the grandfather and great-grandfather I am if were not for the lessons I learned from Mom and Dad.

Thank you Mom and Dad, Love ya both and always will

Your son, David – March 16. 2019