

A “White Christmas” Memory

When I was about ten years old, my Mother suffered a very serious attack of depression. I can remember her lying on the couch, unable to get up, crying and complaining of a bad pain in her stomach. After several days, our doctor made a house call and Mom was taken to the hospital. I didn't understand it then, but it was a mental hospital, Toledo State Hospital for the mentally ill. My sister, Alice, acted as the stand-in mother and my father would visit my mother once a week in Toledo, a fifty mile drive. He said she was improving and that I could visit her right before Christmas.

When we arrived at Toledo State, as it was called, we parked the car and made a long walk over snow covered sidewalks to the building where my mother was a patient. After checking in at the desk, we were taken to a large glass enclosed atrium to see Mom. She was sitting in a chair with a blanket over her lap, and when she saw me, held out her arms and beckoned me to come to her. She threw her arms around me and started to cry. In the background, Bing Crosby was singing “I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas.” I was so glad to see Mom, but she was different. She seemed more like a child than my Mom and she continued to cry and tell me how much she loved and missed me...and that she would be coming home soon. She held me so close that I wished she would let go of me. It seemed embarrassing as if the hug was going on

too long. But I didn't fight her embrace. I remember that moment as if it were yesterday...Mom hugging me...and Bing Crosby singing... and me wishing that this Christmas would be "just like the ones we used to know."

After several months, Mom returned home in much better spirits...and was the Mom I had always remembered. Unfortunately, Mom had recurring bouts with depression through out her life, was given many shock treatments both at Toledo State and later in the Harding Sanitarium in Columbus. Near the end of her life, as she was dying from cancer, an attending physician said that he had reviewed her case, her x-rays, and that she had had a severe case of gall stones though out her life that had not been diagnosed. He said, without knowing her mental history, "An undiagnosed problem like that could drive a person crazy." Her depression problems always started with those stomach pains. All those times we were told that her stomach problems were in her head must have created many of her deep depressions...to overcome the pain.

Through out my Mother's life, Christmas always seemed like her hardest moments. When we would be shopping, and hear "White Christmas," she would get tears in her eyes, or start to cry. Consequently, I have always felt the same way about that Christmas song. I can't hear it played, especially if sung by Bing, without getting tears in my eyes and thinking about the time my Mother "hugged me forever." Mom has been gone a long time (1972) but I

wish she was still around to give me a hug. She was a great Mother, I could not have asked for a better one. If I could hug her now, I might not let her go.

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