A Time of Tribulation and Thanks

Category: Holidays
written by Ronna L. Edelstein | November 30, 2017

Ma always made the most delicious Thanksgivings: turkey with stuffing; mounds of mashed potatoes dotted with bright green peas; a Jell-O mold containing pineapple and cranberry sauce; cole slaw and candied yams. Her holiday dinners were culinary feasts—meals that stretched the elastic waistband of my pants but still left room for me to nibble on leftovers later in the evening. Thanksgiving with my parents, maternal grandmother, and two children was the perfect holiday—until the year it wasn't.

Just as we were about to sit down at the table, Ma excused herself and went to the bathroom. One minute later, her screams resonated throughout the apartment. I dashed in to discover blood splattered on the ceiling, the floor, the shower curtain, and Ma. Ma, sitting on the toilet lid, stared at me with bewilderment. "What is happening?" she asked.

It turns out that one of Ma's thick varicose veins in her leg had burst. Ma felt no pain, but she looked pale and seemed to be losing her ability to remain upright. I held her, and Dad called 911. Great Grandma tried to calm my young children, but with little success. They knew their grandmother as an energetic woman who never tired playing with them, so they were scared.

Two hours later, Dad brought Ma home from the emergency room. Thick bandages were wrapped around her leg; the affected vein was beginning to ache as the Novocain wore off from where the physician had stitched. But Ma, not one to allow a major hemorrhage deter her, insisted we all sit down at the table to enjoy a belated feast.

That moment caused changes in Ma's life. She had to wear pressurized stockings—very hard for her arthritic fingers to put on and take off. She, who avoided doctors whenever possible, had to have weekly appointments with a vascular surgeon to reduce the size of her veins. Worst of all, Ma had to cut back on her hours of work at a children's store; the specialist warned her that standing on her feet day after day would cause more vein ruptures. Realizing she was not invulnerable to medical problems diminished her.

And that moment changed me. I now saw Ma—and, by association, Grandma and Dad—as mortals who would not always be there for me. I promised myself to make every day Thanksgiving—one of gratitude for the family I had.

Ronna Edelstein
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania