

## Four Anecdotes about Mom

Anecdote #1: The fondest memory I have of Mom was her laugh. This was not the normal, “ha-ha” laughter that all of us are familiar with. This was something more hearty and heartfelt, a force more powerful than any outburst of delight imaginable. When she found something amusing it was awesome, awe-some, in the true, original sense of the word. It was like something deep, deep within her demanded escape. In a matter of seconds an audible magma worked its way up and erupted in cascades of sonorous lava that filled the space around her. And then there was the gasp, often two gasps, at times three gasps, each time with her head bobbing farther and farther backwards until the next eruption occurred, stronger than the first. Once she started laughing there was no stopping her; one aftershock took place after another until she would finally brace herself on a counter or fall back into a chair, thoroughly exhausted. When she thought something was funny, everyone knew about it. And I mean everybody!

Anecdote #2: Mom had no love for animals. Growing up I had only one pet—Chirp, a canary—and I only had Chirp because my grandmother love birds and she insisted that a growing boy needed to have some kind of pet. Chirp only lived for a year. Upon his passing Mom never let any animal into the house again.

That’s not entire true. When we moved to New Jersey Dad decided that our house (or, more precisely, our back yard) was large enough to be a home for rabbits and ducks. My mother barely tolerated the presence of these critters and wanted to have nothing to do with their upkeep. She was very happy when we took the two grown ducks—named Kell and Ogg by Steve—over to Strawbridge Lake in Moorestown to let them lead a life away from humans. I’m not sure whatever happened to the rabbit (we did NOT eat it!).

In the late 1990s I decided it was time to bring Mom and Dad into the Modern Age. Against the better judgment of all family members I bought them a turquoise iMac for Christmas. It came in a pretty large box, so I wrapped it in an oversized Hefty bag and placed it under the tree in such a manner that it would have to be the last gift opened. I insisted that Mom have the honor of opening the gift. With some degree of trepidation she pulled on the strings of the bag, becoming ever more anxious as the heavy box offered resistance. As she exerted herself bringing the unseen object closer to her, her anxiety increased. “What did you get me?” “What’s in this bag?” And then she thought of the unthinkable: “There’s a dog in this box! Did you get me a dog?” She was frightened that the animal was going to come charging out of the bag and bite her. Imagine her surprise, relief, and confusion when she discovered that it was a whole different kind of critter that was starting at her from within the bag: a computer!

Anecdote #3: I actually expected my ever-tinkering father to monopolize the iMac, much to the relief of my mother. The very opposite happened! My father avoided the machine; my mother gravitated toward it. Over the course of a few months the gravitational pull of the iMac proved too strong for my mother to resist. She would spend hours on it, populating her desktop with legions of empty folders, sending emails out to who knows whom, surfing the web in search of who knows what. Most amazing, though, was her

ability to crack the Apple code and find herself in the deepest, darkest corners of the operating-system architecture, places that astute Mac developers such as my youngest brother did not know existed. How she ever got there, no one ever found out. And she was innocent enough not to be able to explain how she got there. Yet this happened more than once!

Anecdote #4: In the late 60s and early 70s I was a shortwave radio enthusiast. Almost on a weekly basis I would receive QSL cards from stations around the world, including such stations as Radio Peking, Radio Moscow, GDR International, Radio Budapest, and, Voice of Cuba. Mom was fearful that my hobby was going to arouse the interest of the FBI and CIA; our family would be expatriated due to un-American or anti-American activity. It didn't help matters much that my Neil and Steve were becoming interested at the same time in ham radio. My father helped them erect a 40 foot antenna on the side of the house along Coventry Court.

Before long Mom's anxiety level reached alarming levels. Just about every afternoon she saw a Radio Rover van parked outside our house, near the antenna. She had no idea what a Radio Rover was, but she assumed it belonged to some governmental agency that was snooping in on our family activities. We never saw this van, nor did any of our neighbors. But Mom insisted it was there in the early afternoon, every afternoon. The more we poked fun at her for her "hallucination," the more anxious she became.

It wasn't until a year later that one of my brothers caught sight of the van as it turned the corner to leave our development. It wasn't a Radio Rover. It was a Rapid Rover! A semi-taxi, semi-limousine service that was taking one of our reclusive neighbors to her place of work. Mom never lived it down, but never resisted the temptation to poke fun at herself for her gullibility.