

Stories about Mother have been told and retold in our family until they have taken on the quality of legends, stripped of context and detail, evoking in us, again and again, awe of her great heart and her unfailing ability to take charge of any situation.

Remember the time she shouted the cattle drover off our farm with fury reserved for those who threatened her family and language not to be repeated in the presence of children. The dealer had come with cash in his hand offering half the value of the animal he wanted. His only purpose on the Reserve, according to Mother, was to cheat the Indians, thinking they were too stupid to know his game.

Remember how she used to sit by the kitchen window early in the morning, rocking and weeping? What's troubling you, Mother?" we would ask, knowing already that she was weeping for one of her children, lost to some distant city or injuring himself and his family with alcohol. "He's a grown man. He has to take responsibility for his own life. Don't cry." She never did distance herself from our pain or our foolishness. Her compassion was like a spring refreshing her and renewing her vitality.

She had a special touch with children. Daughters, daughters-in-law and granddaughters learned from Mother how to bundle a newborn in a blanket cocoon so that he felt secure. We learned the lore of what babies like to eat and how to recognize and treat various complaints. We learned that songs sung to a restless child never fail to soothe. Well into her seventies Mother continued to baby-sit children left by young mothers who stopped to visit on their way to town. In later years she declined to watch toddlers, admitting that she couldn't keep up with them any longer, but she never ceased to enjoy looking after infants.

In her eighty-second year Mother had cancer diagnosed for a second time. Ten years earlier, surgery had stopped an invasion but this time it was out of the question. I had seen other relatives' lives eaten away by the dread disease and I was glad that there were so many of us to support one another and give whatever comfort we could to Mother in her last days. I didn't anticipate that Mother's dying would become another part of the legend.

For four weeks after the final diagnosis, Mother received a stream of visitors, mostly family: grandchildren and great grandchildren, nephews and nieces, more distant relations to whom she was also "Granny Pearl" and the few from her own generation who still survived. She inquired about specifics of their lives and called even the youngest by name. She knew that this was a farewell visit for many but there was nothing funereal about the procession. It was more like she was holding court as she used to do at the fall fair, sitting for hours on a bench in the bleachers while scores of younger people sought her out to pay their respects.

She reminisced about her life, the hard times and the happy times and it was clear that looking back she had

In Loving Memory

BY MARLENE BRANT CASTELLANO

BRANT, Pearl Antoinette Hill, dear wife of Hubert (Bert) Brant, died peacefully at Belleville General Hospital, October 9, 1979, in her 82nd year. Predeceased by her son Harold, she is survived by six sons, Reginald, Herbert, Elmer (Bud), Lloyd, Donald and Clare, four daughters, Gladys, Lorraine, Marlene, and Ardeth, and many grandchildren and great grandchildren. Funeral service and internment at All Saints Anglican Church, Tyendinaga Indian Reserve.



Hubert and Pearl Brant on their 60th wedding anniversary

few regrets. In one reflective conversation she said "I always believed I had it in me to BE somebody." My sister and I quickly responded: "Mother, you ARE somebody," but I had the distinct feeling that she needed no reassurance on that score. This woman, who never pushed her children to achieve and seldom praised us when we did, showed us again and again that anything we really wanted could be made to happen. I realized for the first time that it was Mother's faith in her own unbounded possibilities which was being lived out in each one of us. When she demolished the obstacles in our path she was doing it for herself as well as for us.

It was no wonder, then, that she derived such satisfaction from seeing the family circle complete in those final weeks, the individual struggles with alienation and addiction won, at least for the present.

She had no illusions that a family as large as ours could be entirely trouble-free at any given time, and she spoke with gentleness and insight about our marriage relationships and the sorrows that come with children and the good to be seen in even the most difficult of our members.

Mother knew without asking that we would care for Dad, already eighty-six years old and almost blind. We had long assumed that Dad would be the first to go but he outlived Mother for six listless months. Her concern was for our brother Bud, who had left the urban scene seven years before to take up the difficult role of unmarried son in his parents' household. We acknowledged the debt we owed for those years of care given and still being given. We promised to look out for Bud (in so far as his pride would permit).

The burden of physical care fell most heavily on my sister Lorraine, a registered nurse who knew best how to make Mother comfortable. Mother made no demands on the hospital staff, explaining to Lorraine "The nurses are so busy and I knew you would be coming." The seepage of blood from the lesion in her bowel was beyond her control and she apologized: "I hate to see you clean that smelly stuff." Lorraine's reply was: "I don't see why you should



feel bad. You did it for me." The notion of reversing roles with her daughter seemed to please her and she later repeated the apology for her doctor's benefit, adding cheerfully, "But I guess it's alright. I did the same for her."

One morning in the fourth week of Mother's confinement to hospital, when Lorraine arrived to take up her post, Mother greeted her with the report of a dream: "I was falling into a hole, kept from falling by holding tight to the rim, and when I woke up I was hanging onto the railing of the bed, saying 'Please, God, don't let me go yet!'"

That same day she made a decision: "Find the doctor. I'm not taking any more medicine and I want these tubes (for blood transfusion) taken out. Call the family home." Lorraine and my brother Clare

saw to it that her instructions were carried out, conveying to the medical staff that any other course of action was unthinkable. The attending physician moved her to a private room and we converged from various directions to share a round-the-clock vigil at her bedside.

Her vital signs were growing weaker and she drifted in and out of consciousness. Still, when she woke, her mind was clear and she made contact with whoever was present. Once, when I arrived, her granddaughter Lynn, who has the gift of a pure, melodic voice, was touching Mother's hand and softly singing gospel hymns while Mother appeared to doze. The aura of peace was so powerful in the room that I was sure I could see a soft light diffused in the dimness.

Five days after her decision to take charge of dying, having embraced each of her children for the last time, Mother opened her eyes, looked directly at the elder children gathered around her bed, and exclaimed: "Pampers! I never put you in Pampers!" And with that she was gone, stepping lightly through some unseen portal, no longer weighted down by tired flesh.

Ten years later, Mother is still a lively presence in the consciousness of her children. We tell one another the stories that never fail to move us to laughter or tears or a sense of wonder. She smiles at me from her picture on the bookcase, and her familiar words spring from my lips when I least expect them. Will my children go through life actually believing, as I seem to, that each generation has to choose its own legends. Those of us who are really lucky inherit legends which are hardy enough to entertain and inspire for a life time.



I wish to express appreciation to my sister Lorraine, who gave me a number of these stories (MBC).

(top) Pearl Brant, age 39, with children Marlene and Don (Ardeth in utero).

(bottom) Brant Family Reunion 1988 (left to right) Elmer (Bud), Don, Ardeth, Reg, Herb, Clare, Gladys, Lloyd, Lorraine and Marlene.