

Eulogy for Marion Jablonski

composed by Monica, her daughter

Marion Margaret Fellenz Jablonski was raised on a farm just north of Port Washington on Highway KW (the "Middle Road"). She was her parents' eldest daughter, and second of four kids. She was, by her own account, a very responsible child and along with her older brother Jerry, took on farm responsibilities at a young age. She wrote and self-published a children's book entitled 'Grandma J's Farm Stories' about some of her best memories on the farm. Mom learned to cook and can and clean from her mother, Mildred.

Mom was very proud of the fact that she attended a one-room school from age four to eighth grade. She told of how she followed her brother Jerry to school and even though she was too young, the teacher let her come to school since it was obvious young Marion wanted to learn. Mom was an avid reader her entire life, and she also became an accomplished and published writer.

Mom had aspirations beyond the farm and after high school she pursued a college education in Milwaukee at Marquette University (MU). She put herself through MU by waitressing during the summer at Smith Brothers in Port Washington. Her parents said "why are you going to college? You're just going to get married anyway." Her response was "because I want to make a better life for my children." Mom earned her degree in three years and double majored in English and Sociology. She was also a sorority member for a brief time (which she told me she hated).

After graduation, she met and married our dad, Louis Sebastian Jablonski, a young professor of economics at MU. She went on a double date and Dad was her friend's date. Soon the two began meeting for lunch since Mom worked downtown near MU. They married at St. Mary's church in Port Washington on a bitterly cold January 29th 1948.

Mom shared a few stories of their early married life, one being how my dad declared he ate only two vegetables – carrots and peas. Mom said "I'm cooking, you'll eat what I cook." Dad soon learned to eat all kinds of vegetables and to appreciate Mom's great cooking. The other story involves a wedding present, an extremely ugly teapot. Mom and Dad were opening their gifts together. Dad produced the teapot, held it up and asked Mom, "Look at this thing. Do you like it?" Mom said, "No." Dad said, "Should we keep it?" As Mom was formulating a tactful answer, she said Dad all of a sudden deliberately dropped the teapot, shattering it on the floor. Dad gasped with extreme insincerity and exclaimed dryly, "Oops."

Their first house was in Elm Grove, Wisconsin. When the babies started to arrive and the cribs started stacking up, they moved to an old farmhouse on the northwest side of Milwaukee. That was in 1955. Dad died in 1984 and Mom finally sold the house a few years ago.

Mom dedicated her life to her husband and children. With their limited resources they managed to keep us fed and clothed. Mom cooked for 12 every day, three times a day. Being the last of the ten, when I began kindergarten, Mom started working at Christ King school as the secretary part time. When I entered first grade at Christ King Mom began working there full time. It seemed to me she never stopped moving except to take as many naps as possible, even if all she could spare was five minutes.

Mom touched so many hearts in all the various jobs she held over the years. After Christ King, then Holy Assumption grade school. After Dad died she was hired as the Office Manager in the Marquette University Psychology Dept. All that practice planning meals and organizing won her the job at MU. Professor Tony Kuchan hired her precisely because of her experience at home. She was particularly proud of that fact. When she retired from MU she worked part time in one the secretarial pool at Mount Mary University. She traveled, she joined a book club, a writing club, she wrote poetry, she spent time with friends. She volunteered at a hospice. And she napped at least 2-3 times a day.

When I volunteered to write this eulogy, I asked my brothers and sisters and various others as well to share some of their memories and thoughts about Mom. I had originally planned to incorporate their thoughts in a general way, but what was sent to me was perfect. With minimal editing, here is what was shared:

Mary - daughter:

Mom had a phrase she would use to stop an errant child in their tracks – “Hold it Bucko!”

Chris – daughter:

When I was a pre-schooler, I spent much of my day with [Mom]. We bathed and dressed our babies every day; she, my [baby] sister Jan, and I, my little doll. We made cookies and dusted furniture. Once I broke two glass milk bottles trying to help her by carrying them to the kitchen. I felt terrible and expected big trouble. But when she saw what I had done, she just quietly sopped the white puddle on the carpet. I remember not wanting to go to kindergarten because I wanted to stay home with her. She was my first best friend.

Lou (aka Bill) – son:

Here is an excerpt from a letter Bill wrote to Mom in 1979, after the birth of Day, his first child and Mom's first grandchild: *Mom was at the birth of my child – the only person besides the midwives (and Monica and I) present. We asked her for some obvious reasons – her 10 kids, her kindness and common sense, cool head. And some less obvious – I know I felt more secure with my mom there; her presence made our home more a home, completed and ready for Day's [birth].*

James (aka Jim) – son:

*I remember Mom driving me from Mitchell Field to 8447 one time and her radio was playing a classic rock and roll song. “That’s a new ShaNaNa song!” she exclaimed. “I like them.” I mentioned that I thought it first hit the air waves back in the 50’s. She replied, “I miss the 50’s”. I mused that I did too. “No” she said, “I *MISSED* the 50’s. I was pregnant and tired through the 50’s!” I smiled and thanked her. Then we turned up the music!*

I remember feeling so privileged when mom would let me help her with folding laundry and she even taught me how to iron handkerchiefs. (Really – people did that back then!) She let me convince her that if I helped, she’d have a bit more time to rest, or type one of her stories. I liked hanging out with her. With my newly discovered powers of persuasion, I tried to convince her that she need not iron all the bed sheets with that giant “mangle” ironing machine that would occasionally burn her. Mom is one of the great mothers. I am so glad we got to be her kids.

Judith – daughter:

Mom and I were both English majors and enjoyed sharing readerly thoughts. I recall how much we enjoyed my singing her to sleep while playing my guitar. I thought it was neat that she was so proud of preparing meals where the colors of the various foods complemented each other. After watching (and helping) her put up all those jars of grape jam & jelly as a kid, I felt such confidence to try canning for the first time only several years ago.

Monica – daughter:

I remember her putting on her lipstick when I was 3 or 4. She knew I expected a kiss on the lips afterwards so I could have lipstick on too.

When I had Max, my first child, Mom was the first person to come see me from my family. She was not someone given to exclamations of high emotion. Nevertheless, she came flying into my hospital room, with a joyous look on her face and exclaimed "Monica! I don't know what I feel yet but I'm so excited that my daughter had a baby!"

Gabe – grandson:

I'd like to contribute the feeling of admiration I have for her, in particular the grace and calm she blessed us with. I reckon every memory I have of her includes a lovely display of ease and confidence. She gave all of her grandchildren the most powerful of gifts. An example in kindness and patience, and how when they are paired any work can be done.

Monica Host – daughter in law:

What I cherish most is your mom's willingness to continue her relationship with me after Bill and I divorced. It was certainly the tie of being a grandmother but it was also allowing our friendship to continue and grow. Marion helped me learn that family knows only the bounds that we put into place.

Marion was also so pragmatic- matter-of-fact both with understanding a situation and the consequences. In responding to something I said I was regretting- she simply said.... "Well that's done now." So clear that it is what we do now that is important. Not what you did.

Scott – son in law:

What I remember most is how welcoming she was when I was new to your family. She was like a sheltered island in a turbulent sea. She always had time to sit and converse with me, talking and listening too. I don't remember what we talked about but I was always glad to sit with her for awhile at her house.

Bob – son in law:

To many of us, Marion and her personal and family history represent the very best qualities of Wisconsin, the one that some traditionalists are trying to get back to and that most everyone points to as evidence that pragmatic, kind, decent people with faith, optimism and a solid education can continue to learn, grow, and help others. To her core, Marion lived and embodied this kind of Wisconsin life:

She and Louie raised a family of 10, each of her kids capable and creative, each serving the community and the world in their own way -- and, as she liked to joke, "None of them are in prison!"

She relished the best parts of Wisconsin, from attending State Fair, Irish Fest, and Indian Summer, to enjoying a family picnic and camping at Mauthe Lake, to making a frozen custard run to Gilles in a blizzard, to taking writing courses and auditing college courses at MU as a senior alumna -- still learning, as always -- to walking quietly into the back of the room during a Packers party at her house and saying in a meek voice, "Kill them!"

John Horgan – friend:

Loved coming over for Christmas dinner and presents. Always received a tupperware of baked products and treats...lifeblood for the starving graduate student!

Maureen Stone – friend, wife of John Horgan:

The word that comes to mind for me is Welcome. Your Mom welcomed everyone to her table. There was always enough (especially dessert!) for everyone who showed up. Over the years your Mom welcomed John and me and wanted to know what was going on in our lives.

The other lasting impression I have of your mom is the day Paul died. Witnessing her grief will always be with me. The fact she carried on in spite of losing two of her children speaks to her strength.

Anna Claire – friend:

The personhood of Marion, from my perspective, was her total devotion to being a loving mother and wife. She also had a brilliant mind and love for humanity. But next to those things was the commonality that she and I shared and that is in being writers. She was the best friend I ever had.

To conclude this eulogy, here is a short poem that Mom once read to daughter Chris, as a little girl.

The Night Will Never Stay

by Eleanor Farjeon

The night will never stay
The night will still go by,
Though with a million stars
you pin it to the sky,
Though you bind it with the blowing wind
And buckle it with the moon,
The night will slip away
Like sorrow or a tune.