

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mother, Bertha Pernisek Damp. She had few earthly possessions and little support in life, yet she lived it proudly, instilling desire and hope in her children. She did without and sacrificed much so her children had the necessities in life and the ability to pursue opportunities.

Her children always came first. She made sure we had a meticulously clean home, food on the table, encouragement, and love. My mother's spirit shines brightly to this day in the hearts of her children. It seems that today's focus on self-realization and gratification are the norm instead of what one must do and sacrifice for the greater good and the family. It's too easy today to throw in the towel and move on or out.



Bertha Constance Pernisek, 1932

The Beginning

My father, Harold Wilfred Damp, son of Wilfred Harold Damp and Florence (Clemson) Damp, was born July 29, 1909. He was a strapping six feet, three inches tall with a powerful build and overflowing, thick dark-brown hair. Mild mannered and soft spoken, he wore glasses and often sported a wide-brim hat. He suffered several ministrokes in his thirties; there was little help for hypertension in those days. Later in life he topped the scales at over three hundred pounds.



Dad in 1932

He married Bertha Constance Pernisek on June 19, 1936, in the midst of the Great Depression. Born December 30, 1914, Bertha was a petite, attractive young woman from Finleyville, Pennsylvania, and the dominant force in our family.

Bertha, a kind and loving wife and mother, faced many trials and tribulations. She suffered considerably as a child, as she and her sister Stella had polio at a very young age. Even though she recovered, my mother's left leg was slightly shorter than her right; she suffered from the aftereffects of the disease throughout her life. She also endured severe migraine headaches that debilitated her for days on end.



Mother, 1934

Mother was straightforward; you always knew where she stood. Her facial expressions conveyed her true feelings without a word said. Stern yet loving, she preferred order in all things, keeping her home neat and tidy, the clothes washed, and the sheets ironed. As kids, we loved climbing into bed on cold winter nights between warm, ironed sheets. You didn't cross Mother, as disobedience wasn't tolerated. But if we needed anything, she provided it as best she could.



Mother at age 7, second grade, 1921

She had beautiful shoulder-length ash-brown hair with a touch of red that she meticulously put up in bobby pins every night. She used henna rinse to cover what little gray hair she had. The only makeup she wore was red lipstick and powder, combined with a nightly Pond's cream facial. Throughout her life her slender, 5'3" frame topped the scales at 120 pounds. She knew how to be frugal and pinch pennies; she did this her entire life. During troubled times, of which there were many, she suffered from bouts of depression.

Her father, Mathew Pernisek, born January 24, 1883, in what is now Podborst, Slovenia, immigrated to America with my grandmother, Ursula (Pelko) Pernisek, his arranged bride. They arrived at Ellis Island in New York Harbor on May 14, 1906, on the ship *La Bretagne*. Grandmother was born April 19, 1884, in Novo Mesto, Slovenia. Neither spoke English well, and conversations between them and their ten children were always in Slovenian. My mother was multi-lingual, speaking and writing to her parents in their native tongue.

Mother and her five sisters were forced to quit school after sixth grade; their father sent them off to work throughout Pittsburgh, a trolley ride away at the time.

The four boys—William, Albert, Matthew, and Harold—were allowed to finish school, and Harold, the youngest, went to college after World War II under the GI Bill. Times surely

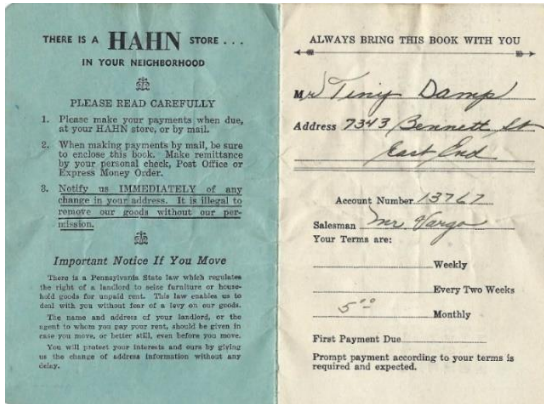
were different then. Women had just earned the right to vote, yet there were still overwhelming obstacles ahead of them, especially for the less fortunate.

At the age of thirteen, my mother worked as a maid for a Jewish couple in Pittsburgh. She earned two dollars a week plus room and board. Grandfather collected all but twenty-five cents of her wages every payday. She worked five days a week, cleaning, washing clothes, ironing, and other general household chores! All of her sisters—Sally; Matilda; the twins, Paulene and Annetta; and Stella—shared this fate. On one occasion, Aunt Tillie (Matilda) refused to send her wages home. Grandfather showed up on her doorstep, confiscated her earnings, and put the fear of God in her. This was life in the 1920s before the Great Depression.

The few stories I remember about my mother's early life depicted poverty and just getting by. My grandfather worked in the coal mines, and with ten kids, there wasn't much to go around. They survived the best way they could. My mother recalled all of the children walking the train tracks to pick up pieces of coal for their stove after a trainload of coal passed by. Aunt Stella watched Grandma cut off the heads of chickens and the headless bodies continuing to run around the yard. They made their own clothes, grew and canned most of their food, had no indoor plumbing, and had only the heat from a coal-burning stove to comfort them in the winter. Times were tough, and today's youth would wither under the conditions they tolerated.

In her early twenties Mother was working at a local grocery store where she met my father through a mutual acquaintance.

My father's friends and coworkers called him Tiny! He was a big man in all respects. He spent quality time with the kids, helped out at home as best he could, cooked dinner every Sunday to give his wife a break, and the kids loved and adored him. He was good-hearted and kind, and even with his infirmities, he delivered furniture for the Hahn's store throughout the Pittsburgh area.



Dad's 1944 layaway book—"Tiny" Damp

Father quit school at an early age. Alice, his sister, said he would do anything to cut classes. His first job was delivering ice to homes before the advent of refrigerators. In 1936, when he married my mother, he worked at the Duquesne Bakery in Wilkinsburg.



Grandma Damp, Aunt Alice, Dad, and Mom, 1936

I knew little of my father's side of the family until much later in life. My grandfather, Wilfred Harold Damp, died in 1936, and my grandmother remarried. We were estranged from the Damp side of the family after Grandfather's death. Grandfather was a chauffeur prior to being drafted, and he fought overseas during World War I. He returned from the war and was hospitalized for extended periods before his death.

Growing up, Aunt Alice Burns, Father's sister, was the only family member we knew from Father's side. My great-grandparents, John and Alice (Woodingstall) Damp, were from the Isle of Wight in England. They had twenty-three children before immigrating to America in the early 1900s. John came first with the older boys, and Alice followed a year later with the rest of the children and some of the grandchildren.

My great-grandfather was a coach driver for Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting at the Osborne House in East Cowes, England. Shortly after the queen died in 1901, he lost his job. I had very little contact with the Damps other than Uncle Chuck Warren, Aunt Sally's husband, who was also my cousin on my father's side, and Harry Damp, my cousin, who I met while serving in the military.



Alice (Woodingstall) Damp

John Damp