

Epilogue

Time and circumstance separate us from our early roots, and for most, life in the moment overshadows those early experiences, relegating them to the remotest corner of our mind. Our character is fomented from those early years, and without us realizing it, it influences our behavior and underlying actions throughout life. Once poor, you strive to ensure you never return to those austere times. Unknowingly, we harbor those early behaviors and emotions, candidly transferring them to the present day.

Growing up poor was a blessing in disguise. Looking back at my early years, I realize how essential those experiences were: learning to do without, never giving up, and living within our meager means with pride. I was happy to have a loving and caring mother, clothes on my back, and a warm bed to sleep in at night. We appreciated the littlest of things and admired those who succeeded in life, owned homes and cars. Envy wasn't in our vocabulary.

These blessings extended to adulthood. Mary and I appreciate and respect what we have. To this day, we meticulously take care of our homes, cars, and children, and we help others, knowing how hard life can be. A drive in the country or a trip to a local restaurant is still appreciated and enjoyed.

At her lowest point in life, my mother never begrudged her siblings or others for their successes; she celebrated them, bragging about her brothers' prestigious careers and her sisters' successful and happy marriages. Never once did I hear her ponder why most of her brothers and sisters had so much and she so little. Mother was a realist; she understood the mis-fortunes she suffered, was saddened by them, and never let them defeat her. The only person I recall her admonishing was her father, who was a person to stay far away from.

As I sit back and reflect on all of this from a comfortable vantage point at age seventy, I realize that fate and faith had much to do with getting to where we are today. Mary and I enjoy life with our adult children and grandchildren, and we savor our days together, yet we know that we are today who we were back then. No matter how big

a tree grows, the roots determine its destiny. We are guided and influenced by our roots each and every day and if you discard them, a part of you dies.

PEARLS

A thing of beauty,
Luster and glow.
Radiant, warm,
Surely you know.

Their shine,
In mountings of gold
Reflects the love
that I hold.

Accept this jewel
For these past twelve years,
Of cherished memories
Of life with you near.

I wrote this poem for Mary on our twelfth anniversary in 1981, and presented it to her with a white gold pearl ring.