

Sophie has written a few words about her Mom, my Oma, Anna Maria. It is a pleasure to read them on her behalf.

Mom was born in Kelheim Germany April 23, 1935.

She had three sisters and two brothers (one brother died close to birth and one at the age of 10 from Typhoid).

She lived through the war (WWII) and had a hard upbringing. Many times there was not enough food to eat.

She came to Canada on the M.S. Anna Salen in June 1953 with her twin sister (Emma). They arrived in Montreal and then came to Ottawa.

They could not speak English just German. They worked in a convent where the nuns taught them to speak English.

She later met and married Peter Rybak, (1956) who had arrived to Canada on the same ship although they did not meet until later. Coincidentally the man her twin sister married also arrived to Canada on the same ship.

Mother to 4 children (Garry, David, Stephen and Sophie) and Oma to 7 grandchildren (Katrina, Natalie, Gregory, Stephanie, Jessica, Christopher and Jordan) and a great Oma to Devun, Taylor, Anabella and Jaxson. She loved them all dearly.

In her younger days Mom was a pretty solid built lady. She has been known to grab one of Dad's drinking buddies by the shirt and pants and physically toss him out the door. You don't want to mess with Anna Maria when she tells you it is time to leave!

Mom worked hard raising her children and working outside the home.

She worked as a nurses aide at the Perley hospital from 1960 to 1984 when she suffered a back injury and could no longer work. She worked night shift for many years when the kids little. Dad worked day shift on construction. Once the kids went to school she would sleep. As we got older she was able to work the evening shift. The patients always loved being cared for by her. She was kind and provided excellent care, had a good sense of humour and made them laugh.

When I applied for my first part time job at the Perley at age 16 it was to work in housekeeping. The Director of nursing asked my mother if I would consider working as a nurses aide instead. They were so impressed with her that they were hoping this would be a case of like mother, like daughter.

Once in a while they would let mother and daughter work together. The patients loved that!

Growing up she was always welcoming to our friends. I'm not sure if it was due to her tough upbringing and not having much, but if any of our friends were having issues at home the door at the Rybak house was open and they were welcome to stay at our house.

There were many evenings where friends gathered at our home and played cards. There was always lots of food or snacks on the table when they came.

While she could be a lot of fun mom also could be the disciplinarian, and when needed the wooden spoon (Kochlöffel) would come out. Almost always for the boys! But I don't think she hit them that hard because when she left their bedrooms there would be a lot of laughter. I still kept that wooden spoon as a memento.

Mom was able to travel back to Germany twice over the years to visit family. The second time they went, I traveled with my parents and we went to Athens Greece for a week because her brother in law was Greek and had family there. She often recounted the costumed (Greek) soldiers and how they stomped their feet hard on the ground when they were walking in their wooden shoes. She had a wonderful time learning to Zorba dance and was very good at it. I at the time was 17 and being permitted to drink in Europe preferred the Ouzo to Zorba dancing.

In 1979 she survived having ovarian cancer. Most of the time when I am asked about family medical history and I say my mother had ovarian cancer, it is assumed that she died. It is almost unheard of to have survived it at that time. This goes to show how much of a fighter she was.

While she did play the violin and guitar at home in Germany, I don't recall her ever playing it here at home. She did keep that violin for many years though. Some of the grandchildren tried to learn to play it at school. Unfortunately it did eventually start falling apart from age.

She loved the old movies Dr. Zhivago was her favourite, but she also enjoyed the Sound of Music, Gone with the Wind, Lawrence of Arabia, Fiddler on the Roof and Casablanca to name a few. For some reason despite living through the war she also seemed drawn to war movies as well.

She enjoyed listening to German and other music including Dean Martin, Andy Williams, Englebert Humperdink to name a few.

Mom loved to dance (especially tango and waltz). When she and Dad did go out with friends to the Ukrainian or Oktoberfest dances, she often had to borrow other husbands as dance partners though because Dad had two left feet. He was not a good dancer, unless inebriated. And then he was just too silly so she couldn't dance much with him.

She really enjoyed Andre Rieu and was so excited to see his show live. I can still see her standing up and clapping and dancing at her seat. A lady sitting behind us asked me is she was my mother- I said yes- she said "she is really enjoying this concert! That is so lovely to see." I was so worried that she may fall because she was starting to have more balance issues and the seats at the Corel centre were so steep.

She had never been to the Arts centre until 2005 and thoroughly enjoyed attending several live theatre shows. It was so heart warming to see her clapping, laughing and thoroughly enjoying herself. I remember in particular when we were watching Spamalot and their was a scene where they were picking dead bodies up off the ground and all of the sudden one of the dead bodies jumped off the cart and started singing a song "I'm not dead yet...!" Mom was in absolute unadulterated hysterics. She recalled that particular play many times and would still laugh about it.

She became a widow in 2004. It was a difficult transition but she did carry on.

Although there were many times that Mom would get upset or have angry outbursts, time spent with family was always important to her.

She enjoyed playing board games with the grandchildren. She often got more excited than them when shouting "Sorry" and launching their piece off the board. Sometimes landing on the other side of the room. When she wasn't playing board games she taught some of the grandchildren how to crochet.

She was a good cook. She enjoyed having the grandchildren help in the kitchen. She made the BEST perogies (the secret to her dough was the sour cream); and also best cabbage rolls, and potato salad.

Her turkey gravy was awesome and she enjoyed when the grandchildren helped stuff the bird.

Lets not forget that great German meal of pork with knodel and sauerkraut. On one occasion when she was showing the grandchildren how to wring out the raw (grated) potato mash there was a mass explosion of that wet potato mixture that ended up covering the kitchen ceiling and window blinds. What a mess that was to clean up!

When she was still physically able mom loved to spend time at Carlingwood mall shopping. She loved to shop! She shopped so much she would loose track of what she had already bought. Sometimes she would have four pairs of the same pair of pants. She would buy the clothes and just toss them in the bags into the closet. Some of the clothes never even got worn.

She spent so much time at Carlingwood that most of the store employees knew her by name and many would always give her hugs. She was a big hugger! She loved to give them and loved to get them.

When she wasn't shopping she was having coffee and laughs with friends. They got hugs too!

She loved going to Carlingwood so much that she would entice the grandkids to go with her with the treat of the bus ride there and an ice cream from Laura Secord at the end if they behaved. Sometimes keeping them there so long that Dido would "go grocery shopping" at the Loblaw's to see if they were done.

When she started having frequent falls it was it was soon discovered that she had Huntington's Disease.

She was a very tough and strong lady who did not let Huntington's get her down, she still had a good disposition and just went along with it and did the best she could.

If she fell and she did not start bleeding she would say I'm okay and pick herself up. When more seriously injured I would patch her up and together get her up off the floor. There was always a new type of injury requiring some specialized bandage. We had quite the first aid kit!

Despite the numerous cuts, scrapes and broken bones and she would just carry on.

She was an extremely stubborn lady and would let nothing come between her and her cigarettes.

As her condition got worse and she could barely walk or hold a cigarette, she still managed to get herself to the porch and have a cigarette or two! The neighbours would ask –should your mother still be smoking? I would explain she has repeatedly been told she needs to give it up. And invited them to try to tell her the same.

I cared for her at home until December 2018, when she one day fell coming in from a smoke, dislocating her shoulder. After this fall, she was no longer able to use her walker to move around the home independently, which is when she moved into Embassy West Senior Living Retirement an assisted living facility.

In true fashion, when meeting with the staff at EWSL, while still in hospital recovering, she asked them she would have a balcony there. They said no and wondered why that was important. Why? Because she wanted to be able to have a smoke!

She was offered the nicotine patch in order to quit smoking but just quit cold turkey. She had already tried the patch and did not like it. When we tried the patch in the past to get her to quit smoking she asked – how many cigarettes can I have while using the patch?

Despite her initial reluctance, Mom was happy at Embassy West Senior Living. She was cared for by their own staff as well as the staff at Bayshore Home Health Care.

She felt safe and received excellent care and appreciated the time the staff spent with her and the hugs she would get from them.

She really missed those hugs that were taken from her because of the pandemic, and was getting really tired of COVID.

It was always heart warming to see staff drop in to say high even when they were not looking after her.

So many staff expressed their love for “Anna”.

She always appreciated everything staff did for her and said thank you every time . Even on her last day when she was struggling to breath or having trouble swallowing. She said thank you to everyone for everything they did for her.

Rest in Peace Mom! You were loved greatly.