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Pet Reader Newsletter #5

At 91, my Mother (“Nonnie” – Italian for Grandmother) lives in Connecticut, where I was born and raised. Until a few weeks ago, she lived in the two-story colonial my family bought when I was a sophomore in high school. I and my grown children have been begging her for years to come and live with us but she would not leave “the house Daddy bought for me”. After she almost burned down the kitchen and fell and broke her hip a few years ago, my aunt Margaret (who the family calls “Dolly”) and I insisted that she have a companion come in daily and do the housekeeping and cooking and take Nonnie out shopping. She grudgingly agreed.

Aunt Dolly, now 82, took on my mother’s care as she had for their older sister Rose, who passed away a couple of years ago at 91. Until the day she died, my Aunt Rose and my Mother talked to each other several times a day. With my aunt Yolanda, the baby of the family, “The Valente girls”, as they were known since they were young women, were the beautiful, fashionable daughters of Italian immigrant parents. They had two brothers, Louis and Sal, who are also now deceased. They were each other’s lifelong best friends.

Aunt Dolly called me last month to say my mother had fallen again and broken her pelvis. She had been taken to the hospital and then to a convalescent home in Manchester. A few days later, she was transferred back to the hospital because she had become violent and was to be evaluated in the Psyche ward. My 91 year old, 80 pound mother was in the Psyche ward. It was inconceivable. She wouldn’t eat, she wouldn’t take her medicines, she wouldn’t even drink water. I made arrangements to leave for Connecticut. Chrissy went with me, and her brother Patrick and his seven-year old daughter, Trillian, who Nonnie had never seen, flew in from Salt Lake City. Patrick’s wife Tina and their son, Joey (named after my father), would stay behind. My son Peter and his wife, Beth, would drive down from New Hampshire.

We all stayed in my parents’ house in Wethersfield. We could only see Nonnie for two hours a day and only two of us at a time. On one visit, we got special permission to take her out of the ward into the reception area so we could all see her at once and she could meet Trillian. We brought old and new photos, her rosary, and a warm sweater. “Patty,” Nonnie said in a moment of lucidity, “You have no idea what this means to me. Sometimes I get so lonely.” She looked at the photos and tried to identify the people in them. “Who is this?” She asked. “It’s me, Nonnie,” said Peter, who was kneeling at her feet. She looked at him. “You need a haircut.” She said. “Chrissy, are you married yet?”

After the boys left for home, Chrissy and I had one extra day with Nonnie. It was Sunday and this frail woman who didn’t know what year it was or even who we were most of the

time somehow knew it was Sunday. "I have to get dressed and go to Mass," she said, very agitated. "You've already gone," I lied. "This morning." This exchange repeated itself over and over for the next couple of hours.

She was praying out loud, over and over and singing a nonsense rhyme. We prayed and sang along. I massaged her cold feet. Chrissy did Reike on her to make her journey easier. We knew she could never again go back to "the house Daddy bought for me". By then she had stopped asking to. When she slept, her lips were constantly moving talking to people others could not see. She called out for her Mama and thanked Jesus for taking care of her.

It was hard to see her like this, strapped in bed so she couldn't fall out, unable to move. I asked the nurse if we should stay a few days longer. Nonnie had taken some water for us. She had seemed less agitated when we were there. The nurse said no, at this point it wouldn't really make any difference.

Aunt Dolly had asked us to go through the house, to take what we wanted and to try to get the house in some semblance of order in anticipation of selling it. It was a lot of work going through those 7 rooms, 2 baths, cellar and garage. On one night Patrick and Chrissy stayed up until 5 A.M. working. We collected 30 trash bags of trash for the garbage men. My parents saved everything. There were boxes of greeting cards I had sent them over the years, empty date books from the fifties, 40 year old sheets still in their wrappers, so much stuff. We packed and shipped 5 big boxes to my house. All I wanted was my father's baby and little boy photos with his family, my mother's portrait (taken when she was about 20 years old) the "good" china and silver, which we had used on hundreds of holidays and which were filled with good memories, my Mother's hope chest, and the photo albums and loose photos we found all around the house. We went through the oldest photos with Aunt Dolly and Chrissy recorded the stories she told us about them.

But the real treasure for me was the box of 50 love letters my parents sent each other between 1932 and 1934 that I found in Nonnie's hope chest. In those days, if a man wanted to court a lady, he had to ask the permission of her parents first, especially in immigrant families like mine. My grandfather wouldn't hear of my father seeing my mother because he was divorced and because he was a musician. So they wrote letters to each other for two years and sent them in care of the department store they both worked at. Imagine, not even telephone calls between them for two years! Once, when my grandfather met my Father on the street in Hartford, he actually decked him! After those two years, my parents eloped and sent a telegram to my grandparents telling them they were married. "Please forgive us. We are married. Be happy for us." Aunt Dolly said she was the one who received the letter and she didn't know what to do with it. Should she give it to her parents? Should she just quietly lose it? Finally, she gave it to my grandfather who read it, said nothing, went into the bathroom and cried. Later he would tell my father, "You have taken the most beautiful flower in my garden."

Over the next 60-70 years, the Valente family accepted my father for my mother's sake, but I think he always felt like an outsider. His own Italian immigrant parents and siblings had had it rough. My grandfather Presta had died young and my father had had to leave

school and work at any job he could get to help support the family that never really got along with each other. It was a sharp contrast to my mother's close-knit family. I think the seeds of my Dad's emotional illness were planted in his mother's house. As he got older, the fits of rage got worse and by the time I came along 12 years after my parents married, my Mother and I never knew when something would set him off. I thought all kids lived like that. My mother chose to cope by ignoring the rages. I grew up terrified to be alone with my father. You just never knew what would set him off. And he never apologized. I had to apologize for "making him mad". When he had a heart attack in 1980, I found an Italian psychiatrist and told my father it was part of his treatment. I knew my father hated himself for his rages and that only made things worse. Maybe if he saw a therapist, he might get a handle on it.

When we were sitting on the porch after he came home from the hospital, I asked him how he liked the doctor. "Patty," he said, "It was great. I told him all about my childhood and everything. He was easy to talk to." I was elated. Why had no one else done this simple thing for him all those years? "So, when are you going to see him again?" I asked. My father shook his head. "I'm not." "Why not?" "Your mother won't let me. She doesn't want anyone to know I saw a psychiatrist."

I wasn't surprised, but I was deeply disappointed. There was nothing more I could do. Secrets were rife in the immigrant families. Stu told me in his German/Italian family there was a German word for it: Zugnicht (literally "tell not"). Everything was a big secret. I wasn't told I was adopted until I was nineteen, and then it was the family gynecologist who said, "You're Joe's adopted daughter, aren't you?"

I went home that day and asked my father if it was true. My mother wasn't home. He said, "When you know a baby is going to be born and you go to the hospital every day for a week to see her before they let her go home ~ I don't call that adopting." Secrets. The doctor who had arranged for the adoption had told my parents, "What she doesn't know won't hurt her." He was wrong.

When my son Patrick grew up to be the image of his grandfather, I began to suspect my Dad was my biological father. I didn't want to believe that because that would mean I could get those rages, too. Actually, when my boys were very little, I heard myself screaming at them the same horrid things my father had screamed at me and I never did that again. Children learn what they live. I was determined my children would not learn what I had lived.

I learned little from the state of Connecticut twenty years ago. The records showed my biological mother was an Italian girl who had a husband in the war and a daughter. She had had a one-night stand and didn't even know the name of the man. I didn't believe that one for a minute. I knew she was hiding something even then. I asked every family member who might know but no one seemed to have any answers about my biological paternity. Secrets. A lot of things fit, none the least being my love of music (I was a coloratura soprano with a music scholarship). My father had been a professional musician in a band called The Vagabonds. He was my biggest fan, always in the audience for recitals and concerts.

A few years ago, my father became very ill which was to be his last illness and Chrissy and I went to Connecticut. He had cancer and was in and out of lucidity. I took advantage of a lucid moment to thank him for being my father. "No," he said. "Thank you for being my daughter." It remains my most cherished memory of him.

I have struggled to forgive my father and never quite made it. I've seen him a couple of times since he passed and he has told me he is sorry for the things he did and he hoped I could forgive him. Intellectually, I did. Emotionally, I still struggled. The secrets, the memories, the pain, were very strong.

I was finally able to forgive my father in Connecticut this last time. Reading those love letters and seeing all those photos introduced me to the father I only caught glimpses of in all those years. He was a man who loved deeply – both my mother and me. You can see it in the photos and read it in the letters. He was a person who suffered from an emotional disease that these days would have sent him to a therapist early enough in life to have changed all those years of pain. He and my mother wanted a child so badly that they explored options that were completely unconventional then but now are common.

I met my parents this year in Connecticut. I have the truth and it has, indeed, set me free from a prison of pain. Before I left last month, my Dad told me he is always with my Mom and that there is a huge room full of people waiting to see her again when she does make her transition. On that day, I know I'll be happy and excited for her. She will be reunited with the love of her life, whom she loved for better, for worse, and without condition.



Joe and Josephone Presta, my parents, in 1934 when they eloped.



My Uncle Edward on the right and my Dad on the left, about 1910 or 11. Poor little immigrant raggamuffins. The picture would make a good poster for sending poor kids to camp: "Only a dollar a week sends these boys to camp."



These were my aunt Rose and my mother, otherwise known as "The Valente girls" about 1930. Can you tell that my uncle Sal was a furrier?" My Aunt Rose is on the left and my mom is on the right.



This is my bad-boy Dad in one of his formal poses with the band. What a hottie!



This is my aunt Rose and her husband John. I'm putting it here because I think it's a cool photo. My uncle John was a photographer and film developer.



My Mom and me in 1946. What a cutie! and I wasn't bad either.



This is my son Patrick and his family when Patrick was my father's age (see band photo). Spooky, eh?



My Aunt Yolanda, my Mom, my aunt Dolly, and my Dad, at the beach in Connecticut, early 1930s.



This is my aunt Margaret (Dolly) and my Uncle Sal in 1940something. My Uncle Sal was in the Marines. My Uncle Louis was in the Army. I wrote the story for a supplement on D-Day I wrote while I was a reporter. If anyone wants to read it, let me know. It's quite a story. Uncle Sal was supposed to be home taking care of the family but he enlisted without my Uncle Louis's knowledge and then they met on the same South Pacific island.

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Faith is not believing. Faith is knowing.
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Stu and I are proud to announce the two newest members of our family have arrived. Molly and Squeak are 7-week-old kittens rescued by my client and friend Nina Bacon when they were 2 ½ weeks old. We think they have some Siamese or Persian but we're not sure what else is in these adorable packages. Many, many blessings to Nina, who is the best dog trainer in California, for rescuing these six babies abandoned outside the spay/neutering clinic near her home in Oxnard. Without their mother, these kittens would have died within hours. Nina still has two babies to find a home for and is currently also foster mothering a beautiful white cat who is used to going in and out of the house. If anyone in the area is interested, please let me know and I'll give Nina your phone number. If there was any doubt that Gandhi and Sam were in our new kittens, it

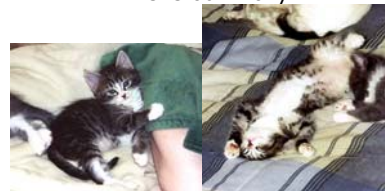
was dispelled yesterday when we brought them home and they started doing Gandhi and Sam things like when Squeak jumped up on our bed at bedtime and made himself at home on Stu's feet, just where Sam settled every night. Thank God for the Nina's and Bruce's (Nina's husband) of the world.



This is our Scungeli - nickname Squeek



This is our Molly



This is Missy and Jazz, 7 weeks, two lovely ladies who need a good home.

God Bless us, every one.

Appearances for December

There are no fairs in December.

I'll be on KRUZ 103.3 on Thursday December 18 between 8:30 and 10 a.m.
I'll be appearing at Rusty's Pet Store's holiday bash on the 14th doing readings all day. Santa will be available for photos with your pets, too!
Squeak and Molly are looking forward to telling Santa Claws what they want for Christmas. It should be a fun day for all.

"Earth laughs in flowers" – Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Universal Laws Part II

Law #3

The Law of Attraction and Repulsion

You've heard me hammer this one into your heads over and over. It's because this basic law is, as far as I am concerned, the meaning of life. Once you master it, you can have anything you want in life and it costs you nothing but effort. Energy is always available for creating anything, but what we experience will be what we truly believe in and focus our attention on. This law is the reason rich people get richer and poor people get poorer. **THEY BOTH EXPECT TO.** This law acts like a vacuum to pull in the energy necessary to fill the forms we create

with our beliefs and thoughts. It repels the energy that does not fit the form created by our thoughts, beliefs and attention. Abraham Lincoln said it best when he said, "I believe we all get just what we expect to get in life. Anything is possible, but only what we believe in will be our experience.

Law #4

Giving and receiving are two sides of the same coin.

You can't have one without the other. Since we now know that everything is energy and readily available for forming into whatever we want, we can see that anything and everything is being offered to us. We don't accept it because we have not understood the nature of energy and how it works. Now you do. Why in the world would you choose to not use it?

I will continue with the final three laws in my next newsletter.

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"All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think, we become." - Buddha

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I had the good fortune of spending two afternoons at a stable where some of my clients board their horses, chatting with these beautiful animals and providing information their humans needed to enable them to make work and play with them even better. I am grateful for the horse owners who allowed me to talk with Bobbie and Evita, two beautiful chestnut best girl friends who were looking forward to the weekend horse show as if it were a girls' day out. I spoke with Bobbie first, and while we were walking to Evita's paddock, Bobbie ran to where her friend was standing and began telling her what we'd talked about. I guess Bobbie must have told Evita I was OK because when I stepped in the paddock, Evita came to me, tucked her head under my arm, closed her eyes, and nuzzled me. Then there was Chronos, the huge black (former) stallion who all the girls had a crush on (he kept reminding me he was a champion, working the word "champion" in 16 times in our conversation), and all the others. I'm looking forward to seeing them all again soon.

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"If you think you can, you can. If you think you can't, you're right."
- Mary Kay Ash

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It's time to order your Christmas Gift Certificates! It's hard to find a more unique or fun gift than a pet reading. (or a people reading). Gift certificates are available in hour (\$75.00), half hour (\$40.00) or 15 minute (\$25.00) and come with a paper certificate and envelope you can put under the tree. To order, go to the website and click on the size you want like a regular reading and indicate it's a gift certificate. Leave your number and I'll call you about it.

Please don't forget to spay or neuter!

Please adopt from a shelter or pound! (Don't forget Nina still has a kitten and adult cat who need homes!)

Saving your newspaper and bringing it to a shelter or pound is a great way to recycle. They use it to insulate cages. Keep a pet warm!

Also, you can make food donations by clipping the weekly pet food coupons in your newspaper. Take them to a supermarket that doubles coupons and buy the smallest size. These are inexpensive and appreciated donations.

Much love to all,
Patricia

