

LET'S GET STONED

Some years ago -- about 1991 if I remember correctly, I made arrangements to fly from San Francisco to Detroit. My mom lived there; she was a widow and had lost her son, my brother Eddie due to lung cancer. She was quite lonely and I was her only surviving family member. We had made arrangements to do a driving trip from Detroit, Michigan up into Canada: we would return to her childhood home territory -- places and peoples of many visits to Canadian family members from my earliest memories.

Our first town to stop in was Lindsay, Ontario, population about 15,000. Mom directed me through some side streets and she pointed out a few homes: "That's where so-and-so used to live. And there's where we lived when I was a young girl." We came upon a river nearby and she asked me to stop. We got out and she said that she had many memories of that area: swimming (although I thought she was afraid of water), swinging on a tire attached to a tree branch... and having fun with contests like skipping rocks along the top of the water.

Such innocent days; such great times. Days when only the good memories survive. Days and memories before the great depression or at least before those sad times caused moves because there was no work and no money. Days before addiction and cancer and divorce in other family members. These are the good times and the memories that my dear mom held on to.

In fact -- it was common occurrence that every time my wife Dee and I went back to Detroit to visit mom -- we'd wind up driving someplace to revisit places and neighborhoods. And as we did so, we listened to an oft repeated tour of earlier times in the east side of Detroit. The 'flat' where mom and my dad lived before I was born. The second floor where mom worked in a dentist's office. The place called Belle Isle where the two young marrieds

would go with a blanket to sleep outside because it was too hot and humid to sleep in their apartment.

Mom used to be a melancholy person from time to time. I think she drank some to soothe the loneliness and re-enter the time machine that would take her back to happier days. We tried to coax mom to move close to us -- but she didn't want to give up her familiar east Detroit neighborhood. And so we drank some times worrying about my mother -- feeling guilty about separation and pain that we had been a part of by living our lives away from Detroit.

Mom passed away in 1994; she died from the effects of congestive heart failure. Other factors contributed.

The last intelligible conversation we had - mom wanted to know when I was going to return to the Church and the sacraments. I made a sort of smart aleck reply about good people and Protestants going to heaven. I was neither a good person nor a Protestant. She slumped into resigned quiet.

Mom used to skip stones; I used to skip stones, but I would like to be a stone - a rock for the Lord. Just as I found in these words by a former newspaper fellow:

" I am a stone in your hand, O Lord. Drop me not into the dirty street, nor hurl me into the abyss. Keep me close 'till you have need of me.

Roll me down the mountainsides of the world as a warning, so sinners may beware the avalanche of your anger, and may flee to the shelter of your forgiveness. Skim me over the waters, shallow and deep, to your heart's content so that all the ponds and pools and rivers and seas may become aware of you. Tap me against the millions of mystic windowpanes, so sleepyheads may be awakened to your love. Use me as a weapon against the wolves that eye your flocks.

I know not what sort of stone I am, granite or quartz or flint or common sandstone, nor whether I am round and flat or sharp and jagged. I know only that you, who make all stones, and have pressed rich veins of ore into some, and shining crystals into others, will harden me to your purposes and shape me to your ends. It is good to lie waiting, in your hands."

(The late journalist) Eddie Doherty from his book "I COVER GOD."

Blessings,

Deacon Tom