

Marina Florian
Essay – Potpourri
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La Donna*

She was a vision – her dark brown hair perfectly coiffed, wearing a pressed linen dress embroidered with her initials. She was the daughter of an Italian count who had been the Counsel General of Chicago and an Italian-American mother whose family had found success in the import fruit business. She was my mother.

And, as one of her four children and the only girl, I constantly felt her absence. She was usually not at home when we came home from school and at night she was preoccupied with following-up on her day and conversations with my father. We always had a formal dinner together as a family, but discussions on topics like table manners often dampened the evening.

For, in her effort to “fit in” with Chicago WASP society, my mother strove to raise us as “perfect children” and used discipline as her form of mothering us. She never seemed to have enough time for us. Instead she focused her tremendous energy on raising money for charitable organizations. After her “baptism” as the president of the Chicago Junior League, she proceeded to become the president of the women’s board for Passavant Hospital, the Chicago Symphony, the Chicago Historical Society and others. Who’s Who of American Women regularly contacted her for updates on her accomplishments.

We did go on family trips for spring break and had summer sojourns, and those times were memorable as we bonded and spent time together as a family. All in all, it was a good upbringing, though I always felt I was missing something.

Today, I saw a woman in the locker room at my gym in Boulder and she was walking briskly with her daughter to the pool, hand in hand. They seemed close and had a common purpose, even if it was just to get to a swim lesson on time. It struck a chord for me and I felt how I still long for an intimate relationship with the woman who was my mother. How lovely it would have been to walk hand in hand with her – anywhere – just to feel that we were together, friends, a team.

I wonder how, now at age 66, I still mourn this lost relationship. I wish that I could repair the feeling of loss in some way. I have had close women friends over the years, though none have mended this wound. It is hard to get over our childhood issues, and this is mine.

I sometimes think that if only I had a daughter, perhaps, I could have healed this wound. Yet, as I think back, I see that I was too busy, too engaged in my profession to even have a child. Also, I was afraid I would repeat the pattern, that I might possibly become a cool, undemonstrative mother who envisioned her “job” as a tough disciplinarian.

I do now have a wonderful life. I am also aware that past demons may appear out of the blue, in particular, when I see a mother and daughter walking hand in hand.

*Italian for “The Woman”