

Cold Water Chocolate Cake

Patricia Rinkenberger, Illinois

Mom saw herself as a scholar and was very proud that she beat out her competition for high school class valedictorian by .6 of a point! Even though her southern Iowa graduating class contained six students, her victory was hard fought and proved her self worth. We heard about it . . . a lot! A perfectionist, she prided herself in doing everything well. Later, that became problematic when she no longer had the energy to maintain her standards but until then she modeled doing every “... right, or don’t do it at all.”

Following graduation, she left the family farm and rented a room above a drug store in a neighboring town, working for \$6 a day. Once she had saved enough money to enter nursing school in Des Moines, she bargained that Grandpa would come through with the rest. It was a big gamble but her plan paid off. No one was prouder of his daughter, the nurse, after she achieved her goal.

When several of her friends went off to serve in WWII, her dad, who had entered the Army near the end of WWI, said it was no place for her. So, her first job as a nurse was in a county hospital in the same town where she had worked in the drug store. Because doctors were scarce, she found herself in challenging and often frightening situations, delivering babies, and stretched to do things beyond her comfort level, but she rose to the need.

One of her patients was a young farmer, in the hospital for the condition that excluded him from military service. The pretty nurse caught his eye but she was professional, and engaged! After a few days, he was released; she thought no more of him.

But that former patient was smitten and determined, as resolved as the object of his interest had been to become a nurse. Having decided to pursue her, he would clean up after a long day of farm work, drive to the hospital, and wait patiently in the parking lot for her to finish her shift. His persistence eventually paid off.

Decatur County Hospital in Leon, Iowa was the birth of their relationship. Her ties to that place, the staff, and yes, the food, were ingrained in her. A delicious Cold Water Chocolate Cake, the hospital cook’s recipe, was her connection to all of that and to her Iowa roots, something that grounded her, I suspect, after the move to Illinois when I was four months old. She baked it frequently and when in a hurry, with a broiled peanut butter topping. And yes, I was born in the same hospital!

The building that opened in 1932, where our family history commenced, has been replaced by a new state of the art structure, so different from the one our parents took us to see many times on our trips to Iowa to visit relatives. We would look at it from our car in the parking lot, then drive to the cemetery where some of our relatives, and now Mom’s parents, are buried. It sits on a hill overlooking the town where you can see the hospital where it all began.

