

HEARTBREAK

I had the most heartbreaking experience of my life, in December, 1964, when my Mom unexpectedly -- at least to me -- died. My father called me in the afternoon while I was working in the Marquette Library and told me the devastating news. I still remember his exact words. In a calm voice he said, "Kenny, you have to come home." Then breaking into tears and crying he said, "Mommy died." She was only 48 years of age and all of the terrible ravages of her illnesses, the stresses and the alcohol all combined to kill her.

Q: Oh boy.

QUINN: It was very, very traumatic. I had just seen her at Thanksgiving. The drive back to Dubuque was interminable.

Q: Oh yes.

QUINN: Her death broke apart our family. My father and my two sisters soon moved to New York where he could have the support of his two sisters and their families. They were life savers to my sisters Pat and Kathy, but the trauma left them affected all their lives. Both sides of our family came to Dubuque from New York for the funeral. I was so moved when the student body of St. Columbkille's Grade School filled the church for the funeral Mass. I broke down crying out loud and was comforted by my girlfriend.

This was followed just a few months later by a romantic break up. I had fallen in love with a young woman named Kathy Griffin who went to Clarke College in Dubuque. We had met in the middle of my senior year at the Mock Republican Convention on the Loras Campus. I was Chair of the Massachusetts Delegation and she was a member of the delegation. I noticed her when she was wearing one of those straw hats often seen at political conventions [at least in those days] and asked her out. There was an amazing mutual attraction and we were soon deeply in love.

I particularly recall when she visited me at the Peter Cooper Playground. We were sitting in the swings when she said, "I told my parents we were thinking about June." I remember being startled and then feeling something akin to panic at the prospect of being married at such a young age.

Kathy was in her senior year while I was at Marquette, and we were continuing to talk about getting married when she graduated. But her parents didn't like me, or more accurately didn't think I was good enough for their daughter. They were from Glenview, a well-off suburb of Chicago, and I was a town kid from Dubuque who drove up in a rusted out car. I wasn't the guy

they imagined would marry their daughter. They were thinking it would be some preppy guy from Notre Dame whose future would be in the business world. So her parents, especially her father, who was a prominent Chicago business executive, really worked on breaking us up, and they succeeded. It happened a month or so after my Mom died, so it was sort of a double whammy.

On top of that, I had money problems. While the scholarship money paid my tuition, I had to get a loan from a bank to pay my bills and that money ran out quickly. Soon I was back to working three jobs in Milwaukee. I worked at the A.O. Smith auto plant on the assembly line taking off pieces of auto frames. I loaded papers and drove trucks at The Milwaukee Journal and Sentinel [the same paper I delivered house to house in La Crosse 12 years earlier]. I would go to the printing plant on Saturday night and load papers, the Sunday edition, and then hop in the truck and drive out to Green Bay or Racine or whatever route I was assigned, delivering the newspapers to the distributors. In addition, I worked in the university library on campus, earning money towards paying my tuition.