

The Life
of Rasma
Kortz

Table of Contents

1. Table of Contents
2. Dedication page
3. Recipe
4. Poems
5. Poems (continued)
6. Childhood
7. Childhood
8. Teen and young adult years
9. Family Traditions, Experiences, present life and reflections
10. Present Life and Reflections, Conclusion
11. Conclusion

Dedication Page

I thank my Grandma for helping me along the way with this project. I want to thank her for giving me such good stories and willingly answering all my questions. She is always happy and ready to give me more than what I need. I thank her for always being willing and happy to give.

Recipe

Latvian Bacon Rolls (Spekarausi)

½ cup warm water

2 tsps. sugar

2 envelopes dry yeast

2 cups whole milk, scalded

½ cup oil

2 Tbsps. sugar

2 tsps. salt

2 eggs, slightly beaten

½ cup sour cream

about 6 cups all-purpose flour

Poems

1.

Grandma
creative, compassionate
loving, planting, crafting
loves to bake things
Gram-cracker

2. This poem is for you, Grandma

for your detailed fingers
for your hardworking mind
for your love for your grandkids.
This poem is for you, Grandma
because you look for the good in life
you enjoy the outdoors
you love giving to others.
I love the way you...
are ready to serve
make delicious food
have a huge imagination.
I hope that you will...
know you are loved
continue to be happy
keep your heart young.
I also hope that you will always, always
remember who loves you.

3. Grandmas are for caring about the things in your life,
Grandmas are for handling things with no hints of strife.
Grandmas are for baking you cookies and cake,
Grandmas are for paying attention to things you make.
Grandmas are for helping you when no one else can,
Grandmas are for making you bacon in a pan.
Grandmas are for helping you with things you can't think of,
but most importantly...
Grandmas are for love.

Childhood

On June 30, 1947 in a cramped refugee camp, in Augustdorf, Germany¹, a baby girl was born. Her name was Rasma Pakalns (puh-kounds). She was born to Arturs Pakalns and Elza Iesalnieks (eye-seul-niecks). Rasma got her name because back then, it was a popular Latvian name for girls. Their family's original last name was Pakalnes, but it had no meaning. Her father then changed it to Pakalns when he got married which means "at the foot of the mountain". Rasma's dad was a Jack-of-all-Trades² and her mother earned money by cleaning houses. Her mother was the stricter of the two parents.

Rasma had three siblings named Vilnis, John, and Sarma. Sarma was only three when she died in the displaced person's camp of scarlet fever before Rasma was even born. Vilnis was born on March 25, 1940 and John on November 17, 1950. Rasma was born in a refugee camp because the family was forced to flee Latvia when the Russians invaded. The journey to America was very difficult, but it was worth it to Artus because the Russians were cruel people.

Growing up, Rasma's family ate typical Latvian food: lots of rye bread, oatmeal, a lot of pork, and her Grandmother fried really good chicken. They ate plain "meat-and-potatoes" type food and nothing ever came out of a box; it was all made from scratch.

For fun, the kids played with paper dolls, jump ropes, and big, fat-wheeled bikes to ride around the block. They never had anything new. It was all given to them by somebody. The best gift that Rasma remembers receiving as a child would have to be a porcelain or ceramic doll that she got. It had on a blue dress and was sitting on a stump. Her dad brought it home for her one day when she was five, and she still has it.

¹ Augustdorf, Germany is a municipality(city or town) in the district of North-Rhine-Westphalia. It has a population of about 10,000 people. It is in the district of Lippe and it is the Detmold region.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustdorf>

² A jack of all trades is a person who does many different types of work, but isn't necessarily an expert on any of them. They are also called "masters of none". These people do jobs such as painting, plumbing, constructoin, etc. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jack-of-all-trades>

Back then, girls had to wear dresses and skirts and blouses; even to school. Sometimes Rasma remembers wearing pants and shorts, but never to school.

Most summers for a vacation, the family would go to Nebraska. There, they would be able to visit Rasma's grandmother. They would also see Yellowstone National Park. Other vacations she remembers were Pikes Peak in Colorado, and Niagara Falls in Canada.

When she was younger, Rasma only knew her grandmother, who was also born in Latvia. She was a very soft-spoken lady and Rasma never saw her angry. She loved her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She loved singing and gardening.

As a child, Rasma remembers helping her older brother, Vilnis, with his paper route, but he was seven years older than her so they didn't usually do a lot together. On the other hand, she helped her younger brother with his English. When his friends from the neighborhood came over to play with him, John would run to Rasma and ask her what to say to them in English, since he didn't know how to speak it very well. It would usually be simple things like answering his friends questions or asking what they said to him.

Growing up, Rasma had many different homes, especially when they had to move to America. Her family lived in the displaced person's camp³, their sponsor's house, Kearney Nebraska, a farm in Perham Minnesota for three years, in a Grand Rapids apartment for four years, and another house in either 4th or 5th grade. The house she most remembers was the one in Grand Rapids. It was there that Latvian preachers came to their house to teach a Latvian church. It was on a busy street near downtown in a neighborhood with a lot of older houses.

Rasma's family was very different from everyone else in the neighborhood. They were foreigners who spoke a different language (Latvian) so no one could communicate

³ A displaced persons camp (or a DP camp) is a temporary facility for people who have to leave their real homes. Since there were so many refugees in need of DP camps, they were set up all over Germany, Austria, and Italy. These camps did not have a lot of money though, so people often got hurt and sick. <http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/ks3/survival-and-legacy/liberation-the-survivors/what-were-displaced-persons-camps/#.VVN6QCu-2dk>

with them very well. The thing that was similar though, was that they all had the same income level, so nobody was rich and nobody was poor.

TEENAGE YEARS/YOUNG ADULT

Rasma went to Central High School. The elementary school went from 1st to 6th grade and the big high school continued on through 12th grade. She was a pretty good student, but only when she wanted to be. The literature part of English, home economics, and woodshop were her favorite subjects, but she hated history and math. Rasma spent twelve years with the same friends named Loretta, Linda, and Gary. She also made friends with a few new kids named Pierre and Sandra. And of course, she had a favorite teacher. Her name was Mrs. Joy in the sixth grade. She had Reading Time and travel stories. Mrs. Joy was a no-nonsense teacher, so kids couldn't get away with anything, but she was also very interesting.

When she grew up, Rasma wanted to be a psychiatric nurse⁴, but later realised she just wanted to be a mom. She never went to college. Her highschool graduation in 1965, was in May or June with over three hundred kids, and it was very hot. Her first job was an underwriter at an insurance company. The bosses would give her policies, and she would write in premiums for commercial businesses. But, the job she had most of her life was a mom, a wife, and a grandma.

Rasma learned how to drive through drivers training in high school. She was in tenth grade and was sixteen years old. She never had her own car because back then, teens didn't have their own. Instead she used her dad's and brother's cars and then eventually, her husband's. (Rasma met her husband, Craig Kortz, at Wealthy Street Baptist Church and got married on April 15, 1966).

⁴ A psychiatric nurse is a nurse who cares for all kinds of people with mental illnesses and diseases such as bipolar disorder, depression, psychosis, and dementia. These people can also give patients therapy to help them recover or learn more. This is also called mental health nursing.
<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/psychiatric+nursing>

FAMILY TRADITIONS

Some of Rasma's most cherished family traditions are Christmas Eve and family get togethers. They always had/have family friends over during these celebrations and no one was ever greedy. When she was growing up, they received one or two gifts for Christmas, and there was always plenty of food. For meals, they had rye bread, sourdough, bacon rolls (spekarausi), pork, sauerkraut and other Latvian foods. Rasma remembers that every year, her grandpa would change the color of the lights on the big Christmas tree. At celebrations, they didn't eat a lot of sweets, but at birthdays, they would make Kringelis, which is a sweet, yellow, braided raisin bread.

EXPERIENCES

There were some big world events that happened during Rasma's childhood. She remembers Dwight Eisenhower being the President and then, that President John F. Kennedy was shot while she was in study hall at school. A new and important invention that she remembers was the Edsel car⁵. In her high school years, things were just starting to become computerized. She wanted a job at the telephone company and remembers that the computer to run the telephones took up an entire room! That is also something she said was different about today than back then: there were no televisions or electronics besides corded telephones.

PRESENT LIFE AND REFLECTIONS

Today, Rasma's favorite past times are knitting, crocheting, gardening, reading, quilting, and crafting. The thing that is most important to her now is her family. Her

⁵ The Edsel car was a new model developed by the Ford Motor Company. The production was between the years 1958 and 1960. But, the Edsel car never became a success and they stopped producing it.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edsel>

grandchildren are starting out in life, so she wants to be a good influence on them. Rasma also has some concerns for the future. She hopes that her grandkids grow up loving God, and that they will not be dependent on money but on what He has for them. She hopes that they become successful. Another thing that she wishes for years ahead, is for her daughter Becky (who is severely, mentally handicapped) to be taken care of. Lastly, she wants her country to be strong again.

There are some things that Rasma says stayed the same and others that have changed about herself throughout the years. She will always be a Latvian and will always love Latvian culture, but she enjoys all the modern conveniences. Another thing that has stayed the same, is that she loved God as a child, and still loves Him. Things that have changed about her are that she has learned to not collect things over the years and to be happy with less. She wishes that when she was younger she would have known that if you've got food, clothing and a place to live, you can be happy.

If Ramsa could go back to any age, it would probably be the early thirties. She would raise her kids differently by spending more time with them and have more one-on-ones with them. Her definition of a successful life is being in the will of God. The most difficult thing that has ever happened to her that she remembers, was losing two babies named Kevin and Samuel shortly after they were born.

Finally, if there was one thing that her children and grandchildren would remember about Rasma, it would be this; she had time for them.

CONCLUSION

This project has taught me a lot of things. I have learned things about my Grandma that I would've never thought to ask her otherwise. I learned what my Grandma wishes for her kids and grandchildren, what she thinks about life today, and her favorite memories.

From this project, there were just a couple things that I enjoyed. I liked the actual "asking the questions" part to my grandma to get the information for my paper. It was

interesting to hear the things she remembered and what her opinion was about certain questions. Another thing that I enjoyed was getting the artifacts together. I liked to see old things that my grandma had kept from a long time ago or collected throughout the years.

One last thing that I enjoyed about this project was that I was able to bring back memories for my Grandma. Since I was able to ask her questions about herself and her past, she could think about them and remember things that she had not thought about in a long time.