

MY FAMILY

Manilla

1950: I met a student nurse who was in training at the local hospital. She had absolutely no time for me because I pushed her off a sleigh into a snow bank and her date neglected to help her. I came to her rescue, and we were so far behind the sleigh, they had to stop and wait for us. That night at the party I learned her name was Mello, (Manilla) and she was plenty mad at me about pushing her into the snow bank and trying to kiss her while helping her out.

The party continued at the nurse trainee house and was going quite well until Mello and her girlfriend abruptly excused themselves, going to their room after announcing to the group what a perfect ass I had been. This kind of knocked the wind out of me, but not enough to apologize.

The next day Larry and I were cruising the hospital area because we suspected some of the nurses would be walking home between shifts after being on duty. It was our lucky day, as Mello and her girlfriend were about a hundred yards from their nurse's quarters and we asked them if we could give them a lift. After some persuasion, they agreed, with Mello getting in the car with Larry and Mae getting in with me. Mae was a farm girl



from southern Minnesota, and really thrilled we had picked them up while Mello was quite cool. We gave them a tour of the city, showing them the local college and also taking some pictures. Getting back in the car I nudged Mello into the front seat with me, and said we would like to take them out again. Their reply was that they would think about it. (Read Manilla's version of how they met!)

I found out Mello was on the house mother's list and she would not give her a pass to go out on a date for later than ten o'clock p.m. With this situation, we had very little time to become acquainted before it was time for her to return to Minneapolis where she would complete studies for the winter and spring quarters.

From this point on it was business as usual, knowing that motor trucks were the items in greatest demand for the winter months. Any units that could not be delivered from the factory within a few days would have to be picked up in Minneapolis. It was almost spring when it became necessary to pick up a unit from a zone distributor in Minneapolis, and with this information I notified the person of interest that I would be arriving at 8:00 P.M. by bus

Upon arrival I was very surprised to be met by a group including Mello, her mother, sister and her husband R.Z. After the usual greetings, I said that I needed to register at the hotel for a room for the night and the reply was that I would stay at their home. During dinner and into the evening the family was addressing each other by several different names and this had me very confused until I began to also play this game.

This was only the third date Mello and I had so we had their living room to ourselves for a couple of hours to discuss things of mutual interest. We decided she would drop me at the GM Regional Office on her way to the hospital. The next morning she and I had breakfast with her mother and then we went on our way.

Our next meeting was about eight weeks later when the local minister's son and I made a trip to St. Peter, MN to see Mello and a girl he knew that lived in the area. Roads were covered with ice and snow most of the way home after our long weekend and this made driving hazardous the entire journey. It became necessary to have some very important business to justify all these two hundred fifty mile trips. As luck would have it, a training class was being held in Golden Valley, MN, and I convinced the management that I should attend the class. Mello was home prior to my classes beginning, but it was necessary to drive her to St. Peter where she was still training at a mental hospital. This was about eighty miles away and enroute we had car trouble near Jordan, MN. It was necessary to put her on a bus. Luckily she did get back before bed check and the following morning I got a ride back to Minneapolis in time for my class while the car was being repaired.

Now an important decision had to be made! Return to Minneapolis, or see Mello who was forty miles in the opposite direction. I made a phone call to see if it were possible for her to get a pass. I was told she could not because she was late the previous night. I returned to Minneapolis and completed the necessary GM classes, then went back to work as usual.

The trips to Minneapolis were getting more serious, and we decided to tell her parents we wanted to get married. I had teased Mello that her parents probably would object having paid all her school expenses, and she informed me that all costs were paid from funds she had earned.

The summer came to an end and Mello had told her mother that we should have a meeting. That was on a Sunday afternoon before I would be returning home. Her parents, Ernie and Pauline, were to meet us when there weren't so many people present, which was seldom. Their kitchen seemed to be the best place with more privacy at the time. When we walked in they were waiting, and I told them I wanted to marry their daughter and was sure they didn't have to be told which one. Ernie, in one sentence said, "sure you make your bed and you will have to sleep in it - now about that shotgun." (This gun had been discussed during the summer. Her father wanted to buy a shotgun through a wholesale house I had access to.) Pauline almost fell apart after the statement like this, but was not surprised at this kind of humor from her husband of thirty-five years. The date was set for November 10, 1950, which was ten weeks away, and a church wedding was a must.

I approached Dad and advised him of my plans, but with the question - was I eligible for a salary, a commission, or both? It was agreed that I would receive two hundred dollars per month, 3% more on new equipment, and 6% more on used major items.

November 10th was now the definite date set for the wedding. We realized that in one year we had a total of twelve dates, but at the ages of twenty-four and twenty-five, we were sure we could be responsible.

Lowell and Manilla



On November ninth my brothers, Russ and Tim, drove to Minneapolis with me in a snowstorm so bad that it was necessary to take an alternate route away from the open prairie area to avoid being stranded. We checked into a well-known hotel in Minneapolis where Mom and Dad would meet us the next day before the ceremony. They arrived at the last minute and were at the ceremony along with the other family members.

It was considered bad luck for me to see the bride on our wedding day so I did abide by the rules. Rev. Knudson officiated at Mello's church, University Lutheran Church of Hope, with a reception following. Most of her relatives were there and our families met for the first time. Both mothers agreed that we should have waited, so all was off to a good start. Tim Bjella Jr. was best man, and Jean Meyer was maid of honor. Terry Tollefson and Betty Loberg bridesmaids and Art Tollefson and Russell Bjella ushers. Wedding was at 8:00 pm.



Many wedding gifts were left at the Meyers residence while we went to the Smokey Mountains on our honeymoon via Washington, D.C. and Brooklyn, NY to visit her sister and brother-in-law.

The first night we were in NY we stayed at a second rate hotel as we didn't have the address of the relatives in Brooklyn as they had only recently moved there. Our big mistake where we spent the night was leaving most of our clothes in the car. The next morning we found all our clothes had been stolen except what was in the trunk of the car. By noon the following day we were at the relative's home and stayed there for three days then we returned to Minnesota and our apartment for Thanksgiving Day. The apartment was only two blocks from my place of business. I was back to work the next day.

The evening we arrived back in town, four of my buddies paid us a social call, and insisted I go with them for a few drinks. Mello said for me to go, but I did decline. By now the weather was extremely cold and much snow had fallen, making it necessary to leave the car at the shop to keep it warm so it would start when needed.

The next several incidents will help one see life isn't always roses, and also as a young adult how things are coped with. An event had arisen making it necessary that I collect a delinquent account from a logger for equipment purchased. This guy lived about a hundred miles north of Bemidji in the Iron Range area, and the temperature was minus zero with an over abundance of snow. Mello did make the trip with me for the first hand experience of just what kind of business I was involved with. We arrived and heard the usual hard-time story I knew so well. No money for payment, but he did sign a combination check and promissory note. In the spring the customer did make payment.

Children, Grandchildren and Great-Grandchildren

In March 1951 we decided to move out to the farm outside of Bemidji, where I had lived for the first sixteen years of my life. This was not equipped with modern conveniences. We also found much deterioration, as it had been rented and little concern had been given to maintain upkeep or improvement. Our first job was painting the interior and making repairs to the things necessary for our living during the summer. Mello liked the rural area despite not having modern conveniences. We also learned from the local doctor that Mello was very much pregnant. This confirmed the fact that she did not have the flu, which we assumed was the problem for the past several weeks.



Manilla's family came to visit us several times during the summer and helped with improvements on the ole' farmhouse. Also, during the summer, a friend of mine was leaving town for a new job and insisted I buy a lot where he had begun building a house. We did purchase the property and Mello's brother offered to complete the structure for a price. (Off 15th Street in Bemidji.)

Grandma Pauline with 5 day old Paula 1951

I took off from work for two months to help him complete the job. After moving into our home in 1951, our first child, a daughter, Paula Kay, was born. She was extremely bright and always smiling; which of course was grandpa Tim's favorite thing. At the age of four and one half years she was knocking on doors saying she wanted to earn money



doing domestic work. In kindergarten Paula was always at the head of the class, and on parent/teacher visits we noted the door was marked "Paula's Class." She continued to excel through school being on the honor roll, and finally graduating from Deaconess Hospital with a degree as an RN. Paula's maternal grandfather, Ernie, arranged to purchase a good used car which was necessary when she got her first job. After two years she traveled to Europe with her Uncle

Ken and Aunt Ann and cousin John. Returning from this trip, she worked at various hospitals and at the age of twenty-seven married Dick Joerger, a teacher who lived near where she held her last job as a single lady.

The Joerger's lived in Fergus Falls where their family grew to two sons and one daughter. Dick eventually stopped teaching and received his master's degree. Afterwards he was hired as a salesman with the Harvester Co. and excelled until the company had financial problems. He decided to attend the University of Minnesota and obtain a doctor's degree. Paula worked in the Psychology department at the state hospital for two years while they were living in Fergus Falls.

After Dick's graduation he was accepted as a professor at the State University, Madison, WI. Two years later the family moved to Logan, Utah and to Logan State University where Dick could use his talents and expertise in his trained field, which was Agriculture. Paula was employed with Utah Health Service on a contract basis. Justin was the firstborn. At the age of six, while playing ball with his Grandpa Bjella, stated that he wasn't pitching fast enough, and that he was too old for the fast pitch. Justin and his brother, Dana grew up to be "sports nuts"; excelling in three major sports- football, baseball and tennis. Kaylen, their sister, was the perfect student and the envy of her older brothers. These three made a busy life for Dick and Paula.



On June 30, 1953 when our second child, Karmen entered this cruel world at a mere six pounds, and many of the family believed his days were numbered due to his weak condition. As it turned out, he remained small and frail through his first school years, but grew to be six feet, four inches tall. At last notification, he weighed in at 240 pounds. Karmen was active

in sports. A star basketball player he looked for fun anywhere it could be found. When a junior in high school, he and his younger brothers spent their weekends and summers working for their dad, doing everything from tending gas pumps, selling parts, delivering fuel, hauling tractors and equipment. Also included were such things as repairing and servicing the various machines that were sold.



Karmen's first car was one of the trade-ins taken on a new truck sale and he managed to have a minor accident while his mother and I were out of town. Our insurance company was very understanding and managed to keep us on a low rate. We had as many as four of the children driving vehicles most of the time.

The only major confrontation I had with Karmen was when he was a junior in high school. He purchased three bottles of vodka from the local mortician's son for three dollars each in lieu of a debt he owed Karmen. It was the 4th of July and he was a trombone player in the high school band. They went on a trip to Detroit Lakes for a performance. All went well until the return trip when Karmen introduced a bottle of vodka to his friends. When they were consuming the second bottle, the girls wanted their share. Karmen replied, "for nine dollars you can have the last bottle", which they bought. In due time some of the kids became sick and threw up on the bus. When he arrived home, I thought it a bit unusual that Karmen would go immediately to bed.

At 7:00 AM the following day, the high school principal was knocking on our door. He advised us that Karmen was not on the basketball team until the following year, which was six months away. Following this escapade, I asked Karmen why he didn't get sick like the others and he replied, "Gee dad, I've always heard you say to never drink on an empty stomach, so I filled up on hamburgers!"

Karmen did complete his senior year and enrolled at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, planning to get a degree as a male nurse. This was a two-year course, which he completed. Two years later he married his wife, Linda. Sometime later they moved to Bozeman, MT. and he entered the University of Montana, receiving his degree in Hospital Administration. His first job was in Heppner, OR, where they stayed for two years. While there, daughter Heather was born.

At the ripe old age of fifty, I was notified that we were about to have a grandchild, which was Heather. When she was three, it was she who monopolized the conversation until dinner was finished. Twenty-five years later she has completed her law degree. Erik, her big brother, was always the "big boy on the block." When he entered college he was six feet five inches tall. Linda and Karmen, the parents, have a right to be proud.

From Oregon, they moved to Clinton, Iowa for three years where their son Erik was born. From there they went to Illinois for two years and on to Onawa, Iowa for twelve years. While in Onawa, Heather and Erik, graduated from high school.

Karmen resigned from Onawa hospital and was employed by Iowa Health Service for a year, and after completing the assignment, he resigned that position and was employed by Muscatine General Hospital. He was appointed CEO of this health center and they purchased their fifth home there. Both children enrolled at Iowa State University.



Linda was our third child born in 1955. She was the girl that was always ready to have a party. When in the fourth grade, she and three of her friends were almost expelled from school for leaving the grounds for a stop at the deli two blocks away from the classroom on the noon hour. One of the parents, who was a professor at the local college, wanted Linda expelled for leading the group astray. There was no provision in the school rules for leaving the grounds so he dropped the charges.

Linda was very determined in most everything she took part in. Tennis was a challenge for her, along with school studies. She received marks like her sister and was always on the honor roll. She attended the same higher education institution as both her sisters and received her RN degree. She and her husband, Paul, graduated the same day. He as a DVM from the University of MN. Paul's



practice took him to California and the state of Washington. Their present home is in Washington where they raised their three children, Brent, Shelly and Brian. At the Kohr's residence in Northwest Washington State, just one mile south of Canadian border, there was never a dull moment. Brent and Shelly attended college in South California and South Texas. Brian, who graduated from Lynden High School was always action for Linda and Paul is now married and the father of three children, and living in CA.



Fourth in line is Scott, a 1956 model if ever there was one. Always in a race to keep up with his older brother. One morning he was complaining about his eggs for breakfast when Karmen mentioned that he would like them less if he knew where they came from.

When Scott reached the age of six there were now four walking the six blocks to the College Lab School which was affiliated with Bemidji State Teachers College. The school had a good record for having good teachers, and as a result, good students. Scott always excelled with his studies and also sports. He was an exceptional tennis player and later as a hockey player was always on the first team. Scott went away to college until he decided

that inside work did not agree with him. As a result, he came home and attended Bemidji State University for a year, until he found carpentry was his interest. This is where he excelled and worked at for about five years, ending up building several developments in an area where most teachers were trying to be carpenters during the summer.



The winters in Minnesota were extremely cold and during the early 1980's high interest rates, the building was tough. One of his spec homes burnt down and he moved his wife, Lee and three children to Lynden, WA, in the fall of 1985, then on to Everett in 1987. Their youngest son, Keith Douglas was born there in September of 1987. The construction company he joined appreciated his knowledge and he was hired to bid, start and complete jobs independently for eight successive years. He started his own company with his friend and business partner. He was now able to have two sons assist him on small jobs and learn the trade. All went well in within six years they were able to design and build a house and another 7 years after that.

All the children excelled in their school activities. The eldest son was a basketball star, and as captain brought their team to the state tournament his last year in high school. All three boys played basketball and Clint and Keith did cross country and track. Sharon, their sister, played basketball, volleyball, and twice broke the school record and 4 trips to the state meet in the high jump. Tim, the eldest, graduated from Washington State University; Clint and Sharon, from Seattle Pacific University. (Tim played basketball at Everett Community College until a bad back forced him into early retirement, and Clint did both track and cross country at SPU, and Sharon had a track

scholarship.) Keith graduated from Portland State University where he also did track and cross country for most of his college career, and he met and married star volleyball player Erica Jepsen.



Fifth in line was Heidi, who grew up ahead of everyone around that was her age. She was active in all sports events while in high school, but excelled, in tennis, adding a string of trophies to a window nearly overrunning with the trophies from the older siblings.

Beginning in the eighth grade she asked to go directly to the ninth, which was unusual. After a series of psychology tests the teaching staff agreed to a trial period. Heidi excelled to a point that she signed up with a special study group and she skipped the eleventh grade - going to the twelfth with plans to graduate. Our local high school would not accept the Fargo, N.D. high school credits – which was her special study group - and as, a result, she received a Fargo diploma at the age of fifteen. Within the year she married her husband, Bernie, continuing in school and received her RN degree.



Over a period of eight years they had three daughters and one son; Jessica, Jennifer, Lyndsey and Zach. They were all active in school athletic activities such as basketball, tennis and music. Jessica was the fast pitch star on second year at University of Minnesota - Grand Rapids team after completing her second year. Jennifer attended the University of North Dakota. She now has her private flying license. Lindsey graduated from Bemidji High School after competing in softball and tennis, as did her older sisters. Zack had special interests in hunting, fishing and trapping.

After fifteen years Heidi returned to school, receiving a degree as a Nurse Practitioner which gave her working hours of 8-5, five days per week. This allowed her more time with family and she and Bernie were able to compete in regional tennis tournaments, softball games and church activities.



Number six is Keith John, who is sixteen years younger than his oldest sister was the only sibling left at home while he finished at the Bemidji High. While in high school he was a star with his basketball team and they went to the state tournament – the first in 16 years. Being home, he had the opportunity to work in the local business and at the same it became necessary to help me. His friends in the local area didn't help his social life as the nights

became very short and interrupted much of his study time. Keith was very frugal and owned several nice cars. He received a scholarship due to good grades and went from Bemidji State University and got a BA degree.

Before completing school he was offered a position with a food processing company, working between Bemidji and Chicago until he and Stephanie were married. They moved to California for four years, and he took another position as manager, but resigned after a year and moved to Washington State to work with his brother in the construction business. There, they had a daughter, Jenna, in 2001 and then son T.J. (He and Stephanie were divorced in 2010.)

For the past twenty five years we, as grandparents, have had the enjoyment of our grandchildren who have been raised in God-fearing homes, and as a result, are growing to be excellent citizens, and a credit to their families.



Four Generations: Scott, Lowell, John, Tim 2010