

Why so much Stuff in our Lives? By Lorelei Pepe

I love to shop. The biggest joy in shopping for me is buying new clothes as it was for my late Mom. Even when she passed at 93 she had a closet full of lovely new clothes. Mom had 3 sisters, so when she was younger she got all the hand-me-downs. I realized growing up and later in life why she loved new clothes and we both had a passion for this. My mom also started dressing me up in pretty dresses since I was a little girl as she adored buying new ones for me and she said buying boys clothing for my brothers was just plain boring and since I was the only girl I really benefitted. I agreed!

Mom and I would do our Saturday chores in our big house in Brooklyn in the morning and then head out to all the fashion stores in the afternoon. That was our ritual. We never came home empty-handed and I had a ball! When my father started to object, we would then leave our packages in the car trunk until he was asleep or out of the house. We were like two kids sneaking them in! This really filled a big void in my mom's life as did mine until I was much older.

I also think this impacted my mom the way it did as she grew up as a kid in the Depression era. My grandfather had a tailor shop and he lost it when it hit, so my grandma took in sewing from the neighbors to help make ends meet. I remember my grandpa was a fabulous tailor. When I started college, he made me a beautiful emerald green wool coat which I wore to school and church too. When I told my mom it was way too long, she protested but Grandma came to the rescue with her sewing skills and shortened it to my liking.

For many years, my grandparents suffered and struggled in their tiny 2 bedroom apartment that housed a family of 5. My mom had 2 sisters and she told me how they would sit and wait each day for their supper meal – mostly potato soup and carrots. You see, Grandpa took odd jobs and only could make the day's wages. Sometimes it was just leftover bones in a soup and bread, but Grandma could always stretch it. My mom said Grandpa was always tired and sad and at night she would watch him repair the holes in his shoes with newspaper so he could pound the pavement the next day.

My grandfather was a strong, proud Italian man and this nearly broke him, but he had great faith in God. When he came to America to Ellis Island, the first thing he did was learn English and then find a church. He converted from the Catholic faith to the Protestant faith also. He was way ahead of his time and did not agree with the practices of the Catholic church. He was a philosopher, a writer of stories, poetry songs and he even wrote a play. He raised all his kids in the Protestant faith and eventually Grandma converted too. Grandpa would faithfully read the Bible at night and said he did not need much stuff in his life, only God. They would pray at every meal, no matter how big or small.

Recently I started thinking about him and how he survived with so very little in life, but was a content man. As I get older, I am letting go of a lot of “stuff” I collected along the way. I realize it just clutters up my life and my thinking. I remember in my early twenties when I was working in the garment business how I struggled to keep my values intact and work in such a rough business. I was searching for my identity. Only when I lost my job and had time to reflect for many months, did I turn to the Bible for answers. I began to realize my identity and stuff was not in worldly things, but in God.

It was a long struggle and a journey well worth taking. The Bible became my self-help book and my guide to life. I would pour through the Old Testament reading the stories of broken people like myself and then in the New Testament discovered my Savior Jesus, my Redeemer and Friend. I began to understand what my grandfather knew already. People may let you down but Jesus won't if you trust and pray and believe in Him. I only felt bad I could not have discussed my faith with him as he passed 6 months after my grandmother when I was only 19. But sometimes actions speak louder than words.

I became a different person, more grounded and secure in myself and my identity. Jesus became my compass and He always points me in the right direction if I just let go and let Him handle it. Like letting go of all the “stuff” that clutters up my life. As long as He is number ONE, I cannot go wrong.

Proverbs 11:28 –

“He who trusts in His riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a tree”.