



Christie Will's story of

Peggy



My mom, Margaret Veronica Cahill (known as Peggy to her friends), was from Dundas, Ontario. I'm not actually sure what year she was born, but the date was April 8th, making her a feisty Aries ram. It must have been in the mid 1950's. My grandparents were Catholic and third generation Irish Canadian. They took pride in their resilient relationship, and raised my mom to believe in commitment, marriage, and family. Thus, from the time of her first communion, she dreamt of her perfect marriage, and two beautiful daughters—that she couldn't wait to have.

Since her death, I've learned through distant family that my mom was the sweetest thing as a girl. They tell stories of her sassy smile, genuine laugh, and her carefree, conservative spirit. She was known for her honesty and compassion; she never smoked, drank, or messed with boys, and is remembered by her oldest friends as a striking brunette with a sense of humor that often got her in trouble with the nuns at her Catholic school. I'm tempted to jump ahead of myself here, but I'll try to take it slow and not miss any of the details that made my mom the angelic soul she was.

The Cahill house was this picturesque, yellow home with white trim along the top. It had a cement path from the sidewalk to the front porch, which was always swept in the fall, shoveled in the winter, and shining in the summer. Papa, Peg's dad Dale, was a small, handsome, athletic man. He loved his house, his yard and flowers, his rules, and especially my mom. Supposedly when boys in the neighborhood walked my mom home, Papa would keep a keen eye on their moves – making certain they didn't have any other ideas. My Grandma Kay (short for Katherine) would stand on the front porch, and wave for everyone to come in and have a snack. Papa would keep to his gardening, giving only a slight nod to acknowledge their hellos.

Grandma Kay and my mom and were as close as a mother and daughter could be. Grandma died when I was a toddler, and through the years following her death, I remember my mom crying on occasion mourning her mom. It's so distant to me now, but I'm quite certain it was my Grandma Kay who put the twinkle in my mom's eye, and the warmth in her heart.

Also part of the Cahill house was my mom's brother Mike. My uncle Mike was one of those stocky, Irish kids nobody wanted to mess with. Always getting into fights, he was my mom's bodyguard, whether she needed him or not. But she loved him, and was as close to him as any sister could be with her older brother.

And like all families, the Cahill house had its dark secrets. Papa enjoyed his drinks, and years later, after my mom's passing, he confided that he enjoyed them too much. Eventually he quit drinking alcohol all together, saying "it wasn't worth it". My mom never told me much about Papa's drinking, but I knew it was a dark memory. Clean and sober, he would still go down into the basement to smoke his cigars and watch Sunday afternoon football.

After high-school, mom began College to become a dental hygienist. After two years of study, and just months before graduation, she met my dad, John. Believing in 'love at first sight', she was certain he was the love of her life. She dropped out of school, got married, and then moved to Collingwood, Ontario to open a ski shop called "Squire John's Ski Shop". She had never been away from her family and friends before, so the move was a big one. She had no friends in this town, but my dad had an idea that the area needed a ski shop, and convinced her that life would be good in the 'country', and friends would come easily.

My sister, Katherine, was born in August, 1972, and I, Christine, was born four years later. And we were, without question, the light in my mom's world. She and my dad had a loving marriage, full of friends and

family as well business success. We were the family with the home and ‘the toys’ that family and friends were drawn to. Whether it was the pool, the sailboat, or the hot tub, my mom and dad were popular in their social circle for their possessions and generosity, as much as for their character.

My mom was a beautiful, loving mother, yet also very traditional compared to other women in this town. She didn’t know how to party like others in their social circle and, being a devoted wife, and responsible mother, must have seemed less important to my dad. He wanted ‘fun’, and the stress and resentment of a young family grew tiresome for him. Then my mother caught my father in an affair with a family friend and employee at our ski shop. As you can imagine, this betrayal was the beginning of the end for my mom. As I’ve grown older, I began researching the details of their separation. I learned that while my dad still loved my mom, he did not try to make the marriage work. She was stubborn to accept an apology, and he was too wrapped up in a carefree lifestyle to drop his ego. Maybe he assumed that she would never be able to forgive him fully, and life might be more interesting with a more open-minded partner. Regardless, they broke up.

My dad purchased a new home for my mom and us, and we moved across town from our impressive home (and ski shop) to a smaller two-story house. My dad and mom officially separated, and my father’s new lover moved into my mother’s spot soon after. I imagine this was a devastating time for my mom, but not once did I hear her speak ill of my dad, or his girlfriend; she was far too classy.

This transition was equally difficult for my sister and me. We tried to make sense of the new relationships in our lives, but a lingering sense of loneliness shadowed our new home, and something (or someone) always felt ‘missed’.

As time passed, my mom slowly realized that my dad was not coming back. I think she knew that he still loved her (as I remember he did), but my mom threw her insecurities into the bottle. Slow but sure, she drowned her sorrows in alcohol. And soon, a vicious cycle of alcoholic depression loomed over my mom, my sister and me. She tried to raise two young girls alone, but her addiction sat on her shoulder like the devil, and wouldn’t let go. We would go to see my dad every other weekend, and it seemed that those weekends made life even more difficult for her.

During the summer of my 10th year, when my sister and I were with my dad and his new family at our cottage, my dad got sick from a rare illness. He died that August. My dad: John Hendry Will.

With this devastation, my mom started drinking full-blown, and the dark legacy of the Cahill family grabbed hold of her. My mom, my sister, and I became severely depressed and eventually my sister and I moved out – to give my mom ‘some space’ as our family put it. This space turned into a month, then into a year, and then into four years. I moved around, living with family friends, ignoring my mom, and trying to make life normal. My mom, Peg, would quit drinking for a while (6 months was her longest), but no one told me it was okay to move back... and no one knew just how suicidal she had become without us. And I, her youngest daughter, was selfish, perplexed, and seeking everyone’s love and approval but hers. She kept her addiction, and our absence, a secret from her father and most of her friends in Dundas. Without her children or her husband, my mom’s world was black, and riddled with shame and insecurity.

Then, just before the summer of my 14th year, my best friend Melissa and I went to visit her. When she answered the door, my mom was dressed in nothing but a tee-shirt; she had forgotten to put on underwear. Even when I told her to go and change, she couldn’t comprehend what I was saying. I left that visit with a sense that she needed me, for reasons I couldn’t make into words, but could sense deeply.

And for the first time in many years, I needed her, too. I decided to move back with my mom, and prepared for what I would tell my guardians. I wanted to make her life complete again and heal her wounds.

During the weeks before my big move, I received a phone call that my mom had checked herself into our local hospital. Her friend explained that, while my mom was excited I was moving back in with her, with the delay, she had given up hope. When I arrived at the hospital, she was seated in a private room, and her skin and eyes looked yellow. But she was sober and smiling, and that was the best sight I could have asked for. I sat beside her, and we ate cheezies, drank orange soda, and made plans for our future. And we laughed. We laughed, and loved each other. My memory of that day is still clear in my mind, and the love still dances in my heart (on days when I need her most). The next day, while I was at school, she checked herself out, and then a few days later checked herself back in. I called my sister and told her that our mom was not well, and asked her to come to the hospital.

That afternoon at the hospital, we found my mom being held by three nurses, her skin shades of orange, and she was throwing up black. We searched the hospital for my mom's doctor, and after demanding he tell us his diagnosis (my sister and I were only 14 and 18 years old), he told us that she had less than 24 hours to live.

For the next 18 hours, I sat beside my mom chatting about her beautiful white teeth (she had a perfect smile), her nails, and about us... what could have been our future. We talked honestly about life. Later, Papa arrived with my step grandmother, and then my aunt Jeannie, my step-mom Helen, and my friends Melissa and Renee. My sister stood in the doorway confused and speechless, while Papa and I tried to relax my mom as she became more and more frantic.

Early the next morning she slipped into a coma. And later that day, the doctor asked my sister and me for permission to turn off the machines. He explained that her liver had failed, as well as her kidneys. Without much knowledge or consideration, we nodded our heads and allowed the fate that was presented for our mother. I often think about that day, the decision we agreed to, and the 'what if's' that can miraculously happen in life...

Margaret Veronica Cahill (known as Peggy or Peg to her friends) died on a day in August 1987... I don't recall the actual date.

And I, now in my mid 30's, am pregnant with my first child. I've learned that she is a girl, and will be born this spring 2011. Last night I dreamt about my mom. Her memory and soul lay heavy on my heart. But, as I've grown from girl into woman, the reality of life has become clearer, and I have tried to forgive myself. These dreams of my mom reinforce a new notion I've come to believe; that we are only in control (at the end of the day) of our own destiny. We all have our own unique journey, and as much as a loved one's journey might scare, confuse, or frustrate us, we cannot change it. We must treasure each precious moment, and remember that we only have the power to change ourselves.

It is my hope, that with this new life inside of me, a new pattern of living can begin. I will influence my daughter positively and to the best of my ability. I will shower her with love, compassion, and guidance. I will tell her stories of her grandmother, and shine light on the traits my mom would have wanted her granddaughter to know. I will protect her (when she needs it), and explore a new life where a family grows old together.

And I will continue to dream about my mom... of all that was, will be, and is within the soul that now lives within me.

My mother, my daughter, and me.