

Family of Seven Was Tight-Knit

BY THE TIME I was 6, my mother had given birth to five of us kids.

First there were Marty and me; then came Susie, Neil and Laura (and, even later, Paul). Large families were “in” in the 1950s and '60s, when I was growing up. My parents were Catholic, so that also had a lot to do with it.

Dad was a good provider; he worked as a door-to-door milkman. He got up early every morning to drive to the creamery where his milk truck was waiting, having been loaded the night before.

Mom got up with Dad and made him breakfast. Then she had a cup of coffee until the kids got up.

My parents made a home for us with rules and lots of love. We didn't have lots of money or fancy cars. We lived in the large old farmhouse where my grandfather had been born. It was in the middle of a cornfield in Fridley, Minnesota.

I never had a playmate or friend outside of home—only my sisters and brothers. We played upstairs in our rooms or outside under the huge oak tree in our yard.

The door to our house was always open, and the coffeepot was plugged in from morning till night for a welcoming cup of hot coffee. I'm sure Mom really craved having some adult conversation.

She baked every day, and there were always at least five children's outfits to wash daily. We didn't have disposable diapers, either. Then there was the housework: bedding to wash, floors to scrub, bathroom fixtures to clean, carpets to sweep and dusting.

All this was in addition to feeding us and making sure we kids didn't

kill each other. Mom must have been exhausted when Dad came home. I think it was then that Dad came up with his label for us: The Feared Five.

We didn't get asked out to dinner much. Who had room for seven extra place settings? We also didn't go out much because we had only one car, and Dad took it to work.

The Feared Five didn't scare everyone, but when it was important, we stuck together. We had to, because that is who we had—each other.

Once, there was some building going on by the church near our house, and Marty noticed that there was some scrap lumber that was going to be thrown away. So we dragged it home and built a double-decked tree fort. Somehow, we got a fireman's pole to slide down. We even had a telephone system with cans and string. One end was in the tree, and the other end was in Marty's room across the yard in the house.

With a fort comes territory. We wanted to declare it ours with old cans of paint we found, but we could not decide on what to say. "KIDS ONLY," "NO GROWN-UPS ALLOWED" or "CHRISTENSON KIDS" were some of our choices.

That night, we went out to dinner with our parents because it was their anniversary. They wanted to bring us with them because we were a big part of their marriage.

We got dressed in our best clothes and went to a nice restaurant in Anoka. It had a water fountain with pennies in the water.

We minded our manners, used our "inside" voices and didn't have even one argument.

After we had anniversary cake for dessert and placed our napkins

on the table and excused ourselves, Mom and Dad were so surprised that Dad said, “I can’t believe that this is the Feared Five!”

The next day, we knew what to paint on the side of our fort.

One by one, we painted, “THE FEARED FIVE. KEEP OUT!”

Today, Mom and Dad are back in Minnesota after having retired to California. They love having kids and grandchildren close by...and the coffeepot is still on.

—Ellen Hansen, Coon Rapids, Minnesota