

# Mary

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Dear Pat,

I know you are uncomfortable about turning 60 and maybe I will feel that way in less than 2 years from now, but still we had to celebrate you for many, many reasons, but mostly because you are the hub, the core, the heart of our family.

You have always kept us all together, you have always been the one that each of us goes to when we need to talk about something special going on in our lives or when we want to find out what's going on in the family.

Very recently, I met a few more of your co-workers and one of them said to me "We just love Pat" and I replied, "Everybody loves Pat". You are a legend in your own time. You are one of a kind. Many of us would love to emulate all that you do but we can't, so instead, we just sit back and enjoy you, admire you, laugh with you and love you to pieces.

There are so many memories that I have of growing up with you and I would like to share just some of them with you now - and I'd like to get them down on paper before I totally lose my memory.

Although many family members remember this story as if they were there, because it's been told over and over again at family gatherings, I remember it well because I was there. That infamous time that we were late for school and were running down the block when I came to a screeching halt and told you that I forgot something and had to go back home. You tried hard to stop me from going back. You even offered to tell the nuns at St. Pete's that I had done my homework and you tore it up. You were so mad that you couldn't stop me. At the end of the day, you were determined to find out what was so important. We all know that when you are determined about anything, you don't give up and so it goes - I caved in and told you that I ran out of the house without my underwear. I was horrified when I found out that even Uncle Roger knew about "it" and then it seemed that the whole world knew. It took me years before I saw any humor in this story, and in fact, I remember the outbreak of laughter and shock on dad's face when I told the story myself at mom & dad's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

I remember...

...how frustrated mom got with me because I turned down an invitation to a birthday party from some girl in my class at school because she did not invite you and I refused to go without you.

...playing in the sand dunes in Port Washington and coming home from school that way one day after it had been raining hard. We sunk so deep in the mud that we thought we were sinking in quick sand, just like we saw on all those cow-boy shows on TV. When we got home, we snuck in through the basement to clean off the mud and hide the tell-tale signs.



PAT, JEAN MARY SIM

...all the fun we had riding bikes, roller skating with a key around our neck, playing 'kick the can' and swimming at Bar Beach.

...having our own silly little contest to keep from getting bored in church - whoever touched the most fur coats won - so as outwardly zealous women walked down the aisle, we thrust our hand out for a touch of mink.

... the time you thought you had "dibs" on the shower to get all the sand out of your bathing suit after we came back from the beach. But I had hopped into the shower first, innocently enough, using one of the 3 doors to that bathroom. How you thought

it was all yours, I never understood. But you were so enraged that you climbed out on the roof from the bedroom and climbed into the bathroom and pounced on me while I was lathering up the shampoo in my hair. I was traumatized for years after that, never closing my eyes in the shower and learning to live with the sting of soap in my eyes.

...collecting medals and wearing about 20 of them on a chain around our necks. Weren't we the stylish ones - charm bracelets before their time.

## I remember...

... how you walked into the kitchen one day and poured a glass of milk on Chrissy Urban's hair on one of the very few days when I was "being friends" with her. When I asked you why you did that, you just shrugged and said "I just felt like it". I don't remember what we told mom when Chrissy's mother came to our house to talk to mom about us, as she often did.

...making a blanket of tin foil and a concoction of baby oil and iodine so we could soak up more sun and get a really cool tan. You always looked gorgeous in your tan. All I ever got was a sunburn that hurt followed by peeling skin that looked anything but gorgeous.

...how stylish you always were and how well you wore so many different looks. When mini-skirts came out in the 60's, you wore the first to wear one to a family gathering and I remember thinking how brave you were. That was one of many things I learned from you – it has to do with attitude and how you wear things and not about what you are wearing.

...and I tried to lean on that new knowledge when you gave me one of many, very, very short hair cuts - but I never conquered that sense of attitude well enough.

...the time you made dinner for all the kids when mom and dad went out to celebrate their anniversary. You cooked and I set the table and we both enforced the "clean plate" rule before anyone could go out and play after dinner. Then, I remember sitting down to eat and running up to you and telling you how bad it tasted and we couldn't force anyone to eat this stuff. It was too late for most of them – the plates were clean. Even then, as now, you have a way of turning all events into humorous ones, and so we walked over to the neighbor's yard, the Protzman's house, and dumped the rest of this memorable meal into their outdoor pond to feed their gold fish. The Gordon clan survived the meal. I'm not sure about the gold fish.

... how you asked me to eat your sandwich for lunch and you would watch me eat and enjoy it in some way I never understood but it was your way to avoid gaining weight. And at that time, I wished I could gain weight because mom never let me wear a "sheath" dress because I was too skinny – it was double crinolines for me.

... how we used to promise to teach Jean some tribal Indian language if she would make our beds and clean our room. Sometimes we just spoke gibberish and other times we spoke in Pig Latin but it all sounded the same to Jean. Appyhay Irthdaybay, atpay.



... how you used a black magic marker to write in size 7 or 8 on your size 10 sneakers so anyone who saw them in the gym or outside your locker would be fooled by the sign and think that they are not as big as they look.

...feeling so sad that I had to go to a different high school than you went to. I was drafted by Mercy Academy after doing well on a test. It felt like I was being penalized and lost my right to choose, which was to be with you and go to St. Mary's in Manhasset. I missed being with you so much during those first two years of high school.

...two years later, when we moved to Bellport and we were going to the same school again, I thought I had a chance to be your buddy again. You were very popular and I was very shy. You tried to make me more "cool" by teaching me how to smoke. I don't think I would have followed anyone else down that path. I felt like I was going to choke to death but I did it because I wanted us to be best friends again.

...the time we were babysitting and we thought there were robbers parked outside our house. We woke up Gramp and equipped ourselves with kitchen weapons and stood behind the door for quite some time, ready to assault the intruders. Lucky for all of us that we recognized mom and dad when they walked through the door.

...how you kept me up all night and deprived me of sleep until I finally agreed that I would not go to nursing school. It was never my idea to go anyway so I don't know why I held out for so long, other than knowing how much trouble I would be in when mom found out I had no

plans for my life after high school and spent the summer loafing.

...and years later, when I told Brian that same story about how I gave up my career in nursing so I could get some sleep, and he was skeptical. For a long time, he thought it was just another story exaggerated in true Gordon fashion. And then one day, he came home from a high school introductory class in psychology, and never again questioned what I would do when deprived of sleep. Since then, he has added deprivation of coffee to that list.

... when you went off to Brussels and sent word back that you were staying. I planned my first trip to Europe so I could come visit you. As is your way, you treated me to everything. You filled your refrigerator with strawberries because you knew I liked them so much. You took me to fine restaurants and had me try "steak au poivre" for the first time. When I started choking on the pepper corns, you swapped your meal with mine. You took care of me then, as you do now.

## I remember...

...when I went through a divorce and you were there to help me get through it. And you held a yard sale so I could start off fresh. How would you know those Lionel trains you sold for \$50 were collector items. To this day, Mike thinks I sold his trains to get even with him.

...having an operation and being confined to bed for almost 2 months. You insisted that I stay in your house, with my two children, who were 6 and 9 years old at the time. You waited on me and you took care of Brian and Keith as if they were your own children, as is always your way. You kept my spirits up when I was feeling low and had no strength. Of all the things you have done for me in my lifetime, and it has been many, this is the one that brings tears to my eyes every single time I think about it. I feel I could never repay you just this one time in my life when you took care of me.

...the stories you wrote and how we all encouraged you to publish them and how I wish you will do that someday. You have the uncanny ability to take any event and turn it into a hilarious story.

...all the laughs, playing card games with mom to get out of doing the dishes, peeling potatoes by the 5 pound bag, going to the beach with Father Ed and Father Hurley, falling in love with Bob Gavin, who is now a priest.

...the time we went down the Delaware River Gap with Kate and Vin. You dived into the rapids to save Kate, who was so terrified by the whole experience that she threw her oar into the river in protest – a feeble attempt to avoid going down the rapids. And then you carried her back by foot through several miles of snake infested woods while Vin and I got to enjoy the ride through the rapids twice over.

...the time I was going out on a date, probably my first date, and mom told me I had to be home by 11pm. And I said that I would rather not go out if I had to worry about getting home at a certain time. Mom was trying to break me of my shyness, an ailment you never suffered from, and so she backed off and just asked that I come home at a reasonable time. And when I got home that night, several minutes after you, I was able to go straight to bed after kissing mom good night, and you were detained at the bottom of the stairs, standing there, getting scolded for missing your curfew.

...how you are an ace at finding dresses for all of us to wear at special events. There was the time you took me to Nita Ideas and that is where I bought my first 'wedding outfit'. You did not hide your disappointment when I bought a dress at the first shop and our spree ended too quickly for you. But you had your way days later when you found something better and indeed you did.

I put away my first purchase and saved it for another occasion and wore that gorgeous Victorian gown that you made Michele try on even though she was clearly shopping for a bridal gown of a different style.

...there may be no end to the dress stories as we have all benefited from your expertise. There are few people that don't know the story of how you saved the day for me when you found a gown for me to wear as the mother of the groom, at Brian's wedding. I lost count of

how many gowns I tried on, bought, tried on again, and returned them to the store, even those flown in from California. You were in Connecticut for a fitting for Melissa's wedding. As always, you take our problems, make them your own, and solve them. You called me up and told me you found a gown that was made for me. And so, I made the 3 hour trip that same day, and you were right – it was a perfect fit.

...you were a super mom to Melissa and Jay and they are proof of that. Yet, you were there for everyone with your boundless energy – for the moves from one house to another, cooking for all the family parties, painting tired looking walls, remembering everyone's birthday and anniversary and making us laugh so hard, the tears would roll down our faces.

...how you took care of mom and dad, all the sleepless nights, all the research to make sure they got the best medical care possible, how you kept them laughing when times were tough, how much love you gave them and gave all of us.

...how we laughed so hard in the hearse on the way to the church because you had so much trouble pronouncing the word "cacophony" yet you refused to take it out of mom's eulogy. We were sure the driver thought we were the most insensitive of children but we knew mom would be proud of us, being Irish the way we are.

Mom and Dad must be looking down on you now, feeling very proud and relieved that one person could continue what they started and hold us all together. You have strength and ability to nurture that matches moms' and a generosity and gift of humor that matches dads'. And you have so much more that is all your own. I can't imagine what my life would have been without you there all the time. I am so lucky to be your sister. I love you dearly.

My wish for your birthday is that you know how loved you are and that your days are filled with the happiness that you bring to everyone you touch.

Mary

