

# CHAPTER 1

## EVERYONE HAS A STORY

*“It is only in adventure that some people succeed in knowing themselves—in finding themselves.”*

-- Andre Gide

Regardless of where one was born or raised, or the type of family dynamic they inherited, everyone has a story.

Naturally, the story begins when we are very young, but no one knows our deepest feelings—our hurts, our expectations, or our dreams—because we are just kids full of boundless energy, mischief, and careless abandon. Spending precious time thinking about what happened yesterday or what might be in our lunch box tomorrow, is a waste, right?

For me, it was quite different. Ever since childhood, I have been a thinker. By quietly studying the people surrounding my young life I was fascinated. My mind frequently wandered away from my own reality into the dangerously uncharted territory of comparing myself to others. I realized that everyone had their own stories, but they did not seem as concerned about the outcome as I was. They seemed to live in the moment, while I pondered the truth of their realities.

Trying to understand the behavior of others compared to my own behavior started to consume me. By meditating with this mentality, the most rewarding lesson I learned was that understanding my story was less important than my ultimate vocation of being able to help others to understand theirs. My only regret is that it took me so many years and experiences.

How many children really understand their emotional compass? During what stage of life does adulthood actually express emotional intelligence? It occurred to me that just because one's biological clock indicates "adulthood," it does not render him or her an expert at understanding people or life.

My story began early, as I mentioned above. At what stage of life did your story begin? When was your moment of deepest revelation?

My father, J. E. Crosby, bought our 160-acre mint farm in the little Michigan town of St. Johns (which is located about eighteen miles north of Lansing), when I was just two years old.

The town was an attractive place to raise a family. The storybook setting of a Midwestern "Mayberry" offered the classic environment where everyone knew your parents and grandparents so you did not have much measure for error. You had better be on your best behavior, or you could become common news.

Our simple lifestyle played out distinctly opposite of that which seemed to be ingrained in my DNA. I was an ambitious, sometimes-hopeless dreamer. What seemed like a life sentence in rural Michigan was growing up with the responsibility of having to do chores and feed the animals. I never thought for a minute that I would ever miss or reminisce about my chores. During the summer, when other kids were off having fun, my brother and I were on the farm with something to do all the time. As any farmer knows, when working the ground, the work is never done. You go from field to field, from spring to harvest and, in the fall, you plow it up to begin again. The bitterly cold winters brought drifting snow that required endless shoveling, and the sticky, hot summers brought a new set of challenges. Whatever the season, the

animals still needed to be fed twice a day, while the fields beckoned for attention until the last drops of energy drained from our tired bodies.

The work was hard, but life was simple. All I wanted to do was play baseball or softball. After all, I was sure I was going to be a professional baseball player, and all I needed to do was practice. I did not see the importance of farm work—or even school work—because grades and education were the least important items on my list of priorities. All I needed was an excellent batting average and the ability to horizontally stretch out in a full-speed, unobstructed sprint to dive for the catch of a hard-hit fly ball.

Every child needs an exceptional role model and my only non-family hero was Detroit Tiger number six, right fielder Al Kaline. The excitement of watching the Tigers fueled my ambition to be a ball-player. I loved the Tigers and even enjoyed following the Yankees and the White Sox. However, I did not feel the same hero reverence with the other players that I felt for Kaline. Watching him express his athletic ability in fielding, hitting, and pure teamwork was inspiring—but there was another attraction. He possessed a pleasantly understated charm—a recognizable substance of character as a gentlemen and true champion—both on and off the field. One of the aspects of “hero worship” is based upon the behavior of the “hero”.

How is behavior developed? It is apparent to anyone who has observed small children that very early in life, infants exhibit certain behavioral traits that appear to be inherited. During an individual's early years, future values imprinted through behavioral modeling. Permanent values are established based upon such environmental factors as family, friends, religion, education, and media. Social and monetary attitudes, coping behaviors, gender roles and prejudices all contribute to the developing value system.

During pre-teen years, “hero worship” is a very important value influence. The socialization process locks in

permanent values and creates the specific method used by each individual to achieve life's goals.

According to the work of Dr. Morris Massey, only a significant emotional event can modify these perceptions. (Ref. People Puzzle, Morris Massey Associates)<sup>2</sup>

# CHAPTER 2

## IN THE EARLY YEARS OF LIFE

*“In every dispute between parent and child, both cannot be right, but they may be, and usually are, both wrong. It is this situation, which gives family life its peculiar hysterical charm.”*

-- Isaac Rosenfeld

When you were a small child, how many times did someone tell you to change your behavior? *Be quiet! Don't do that! Straighten up!* Maybe it was the result of something you said, or something you did—a mere behavioral reaction to things going on around you. As you grew older, it seemed to happen more often, and finally you began to wonder “Is it me? What is wrong with me? I really did not mean it that way! Why am I such a mess? Is there any use to keep trying?”

For too many years, kids have suffered repercussions from feeling as if they were a mistake. Upon entering adulthood, they have found themselves still holding onto these negative feelings.

As a young boy, my dad was the victim of harsh, verbal criticism from his sick grandfather. Along with his illness, dad's grandfather had a very insensitive disposition, and was constantly admonishing my dad

to be silent. Because my grandparents had moved in to care for my great-grandfather, dad was now suffering along with his grandfather. Later on in his life, Dad shared the stories of some of those experiences with me.

The oldest of three boys, Dad was scolded so much by his grandfather that he was unable to just “be a kid” around the house. Consequently, he had conformed to being a quiet man who struggled within himself, uncomfortable to integrate with others. As I grew up and began to learn about Dad’s youthful experiences, I could not understand his quiet demeanor. What bothered me even more was that he did not talk with me about the usual “father/son stuff”, like hunting and fishing. Even so, Dad was a smart, mild-mannered man who was very hard on himself. Thinking about him and his reticence is, for me, another example of how we are all prisoners of our own minds.

I recall that, one Michigan morning, we were hit with a hard frost that ruined our entire soybean crop. The day before had been nothing short of bucolic, filled with the promise of a record year ahead. Who knew that the next day would bring total devastation—that our green fields would suddenly fade to brown? My poor father’s mood soon resembled the color of our failed crop. It was sad to see him in that state of decline.

Later that afternoon, coming home from school, I spotted our family’s ’57 Chevy parked along the windbreak of willow trees in one of our ruined fields. The door on the driver’s side was open wide. I saw what appeared to be the glowing overhead dome light, and I became full of fear. I had to get to the car as fast as I could. Not taking the time to hop on the tractor, I raced through the field on foot, filled with dread. Would I find that he had taken his own life?

My heart was pounding and, as I ran, my feet seemed unable to keep pace with my emotions.

# CHAPTER 3

## DO I REALLY KNOW MY FAMILY?

*“A hero is one who does what he can.”*

-- Romain Rolland

My grandfather, Bruno Mazzolini, was, quite simply, a thoughtful man. One of his true gifts in life was his ability to “think ahead” about the people he would be meeting on any given day. He was permanently prepared with an arsenal of items he took with him wherever he went. He always remembered the little things that made such a difference—a simple pack of Wrigley’s Juicy Fruit or Spearmint gum, a Hershey bar, or the soft drinks he routinely stowed in the back of his faded green 1946 Ford pickup truck. Grandpa Bruno was not only a “people magnet”—even animals could not forget him. (One of his rituals was a stop at the butcher shop for bones to give the pets he would meet along the way.) He, himself, was the only advertising “Bruno’s Wonder Bar” ever needed—he was a brand unto himself, and brought in all of the patrons that his bar needed.

He gave without an ulterior motive. His generosity was the fabric of who he was. His success was rooted in his charitable acts, and—somehow—he would always devise another business transaction to

make a little more money to replace what he gave away. Grandma Arge worked very hard alongside him with seldom a weekend off. She attributed their lack of finances to his lifestyle. Although he loved the 1946 Ford truck he drove around to give out his treats, by 1953, Bruno had purchased twenty-seven new Buicks from his friend, Smithie, who owned the local Buick dealership. Smithie's was, conveniently, within walking distance of Bruno's Wonder Bar.

When the local newspaper featured Bruno receiving the keys to his 1953 Golden Anniversary Sedan, his comment included Buick's own advertising slogan: "Naturally it is the greatest Buick in fifty years, because 'when better automobiles are built, Buick will build them.'"

Bruno bought cars as if they were his favorite cigars. I always wondered if it could have been the convenience of the car dealership—and the influence of alcohol—that prompted all these purchases. On one particular occasion, he bought a new 1950 two-tone Buick sedan, got drunk, and totaled the car before Grandma Arge ever knew they were the proud new owners of the car. He got a ride home that night and, when he woke up the next morning, he called Smithie to replace the wrecked car with an identical one. (For years, only a few of Grandpa's closest friends knew that he had owned two cars in less than twenty-four hours.)

Grandma Arge earned her reputation as a culinary master in our small town of St. Johns, Michigan. Although she was not formally trained, she had a gift for producing a gastronomical feast from the simplest of ingredients. Both she and Grandpa Bruno were chefs in their own rite—not unlike the fiercest competitors on the Food Network today. Of Italian heritage, they were also unquestionably Roman Catholic, which flavored our lives in more ways than their cooking ever could.

As a kindergartener, I could not understand why Church "royalty"—i.e., visiting priests, cardinals, and bishops from daily Mass—would eventually make their way to Grandma Arge's kitchen for lunch or dinner. I do not recall them ever sitting in our formal dining room;

rather, they congregated in our small kitchen like family from the “old country.” I, a “serious little Catholic” who loved God and had the deepest respect for the Church and its Holy Sacraments, found it so cool that I could sit at the table with these elite church leaders. It was like hosting a rock star. I am not sure whether it was Grandma Arge’s flavorful dishes, or Grandpa Bruno’s bartending skills—or both—that attracted them.

Frequently, Grandma would serve mounds of spaghetti paired with roast chicken, large bowls of garden salad, and freshly baked Italian bread. Each meal was a feast, with fascinating stories and loving fellowship. We each had a role in the hospitality department. Often, my job was to run down to the basement to fetch more wine, because Grandpa would keep their glasses filled with Chianti. As the conversation became happier, Grandma would get mad at Grandpa for serving too much *vino*. (In fact, on several occasions, as soon as our guests left, Grandpa received a scolding, with Grandma telling him that he was “going to Hell for getting these holy men drunk!”) These are wonderful memories and I sometimes ponder what stories of my amazing Grandma Arge and Grandpa Bruno might have filtered back to Italy.