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PARENTING PLUS
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MAKING ROUNDS

I have been writing *Parenting Plus* since February 2007. Sometimes I include personal details about my life. I strive for universal appeal but I never know for certain if I reach that goal. Although I try to make points to be helpful to parents and other community members that care about kids, sometimes I think what I make are “rounds” that are less hard-edged and softer than points.

My reflections in this month’s column don’t unfold in a straight line, rather in a crisscrossing, circular and spiraling pattern. I do not think that my memories are remarkable. They are made up of a combination of milestones, transitions and random, mundane associations. I am not sure if they will have universal appeal. I will leave that for you to decide.

I was born in Newark, New Jersey on May 14, 1951. In my early years I grew up in a second floor flat in the same neighborhood where author Philip Roth once lived. The best thing about where I lived was that there were stores around the corner. Among my favorites were a bakery, candy store, luncheonette and a burger joint with a pinball machine.

My grandfather Joe was a carpenter who emigrated from Russia. He lived with us for a few months. He lost an eye in an on-the-job accident. It was replaced with a glass eye that he removed from time to time to show to me. He once mistook a box of *Spic ‘n*

Span, a cleaning product, with a box of *Wheatena* oatmeal. The boxes were similar in size, rectangular shape and orange color. As a result of the mix-up, a pot of boiling water and cleaning powder overflowed and flooded the kitchen with soap suds.

My other grandfather Harry was a tavern owner who came to the U.S. from Poland. He had diabetes and two prosthetic legs that I once saw him take off and put on. I often wondered what fake parts I would have when I got older.

My aunt Rose, my dad's younger sister, told me a story about when my mom and dad first met. The two families planned a get together at my mom's house. I found out that my dad's family was worried because Grandpa Joe slurped his soup. Aunt Rose told me that, although they were poor, they did not want to appear to be low class. When the soup was served they held their breath waiting for Grandpa Harry to start. He slurped too. Everyone was relieved and, well, the rest is history.

We moved to a suburb of Newark called Maplewood when I was 10-years-old. It happened fast and without any warning. There was a moving truck one day and the next day my younger brother and I were sleeping in a new bedroom where we heard crickets outside the window. No one consulted me about moving. I left all of my friends behind and had to make new friends.

In the suburbs I rode my bike everywhere since there were no stores around the corner. My father, Izzy, took over the tavern after Grandpa Harry died. The tavern was called the P.O.N. which stands for the Pride of Newark. One day someone set the P.O.N. on fire. Some years later there were race riots in Newark. I did not see my dad that much in those days.

My mother, Evelyn, started her own business when I was in junior high school. I didn't understand. I later learned that it was to help pay the bills. She was an antiques dealer. In time she opened her own store. The sign on the store read: *Antique Evelyn*. That is what she was known by for the rest of her years.

My parents died in the 1990's after at least a decade of serious health problems. My father had multiple myeloma and my mother had heart disease. During my earlier childhood years my parents each smoked three packs of Camels every day. Sometimes they sent me to the store to buy them for twenty-five-cents a pack.

One day in the early 1990's, when her health was failing and she was living alone, my mother fell. She called me from a hospital in Newark. The call came at two-in-the-morning. She sounded groggy when she asked me to bring her a box of tooth powder. By this time I was living on Long Island. I drove to the hospital. Her face was bruised and swollen from the fall. She wanted the tooth powder to hold her dentures in place so that she would look good. I stayed with her for a little while and then drove home and went to work.

My father died in the same hospital where I was born. I slept in my dad's hospital room for several days before I watched him take his last breath on a late Sunday afternoon in May. And, then I drove back to Long Island, to a neighborhood where there are stores that I can walk to, just around the corner from where I live.