

Richard Medugno Diary Entries – December 1987 to January 1988

Wednesday 12/2/87

Boston

...I got a hold of my Auntie Dotty—she's in the hospital for tests. I spoke to her and David. She seemed very upset. I said I'd come by tomorrow afternoon to see her.

Thursday 12/3/87

Boston

...I got to my grandmother's in Somerville at noon just as my cousin Debbie was driving up with Grandpa. She came down from her new house in New Hampshire to take Grandpa to the Union Hall to pick up his Christmas bonus.

Nana said I looked like a Canadian after I kissed her cheek. She had a huge dinner for us of roast beef, potatoes, yams, and carrots. I couldn't believe the plateful of food she gave me.

I got a card with \$40 from my Auntie Mary and Uncle Charlie. She had a note on it, that it's been sitting there for months, waiting to be mailed. It was another nice surprise.

After a big bowl of ice cream, I left for a walk to Sullivan Station to take the T into Boston and Auntie Dotty's hospital. Nana was very concerned and she made sure that I knew to tell Dotty that "they were asking about her and that they love her." When I passed that along to my aunt, she couldn't avoid the retort of "they should have 30 years ago."

...She seems still unwilling to forgive all those who hurt her—yet she told me she's made amends to her sister, Auntie Mary—which is a nice step in the right direction—but I get ahead of myself.

I had a bit of trouble finding Brigham & Women's Hospital once I got off the Greenline at Longwood Ave. I finally asked some "medical" looking people who gave me directions. When I found my Auntie's room, I had to wait while Dotty spoke to a "mystery visitor." I met her "roommate" who I assumed was asked to leave their room while this guest was there. I sat with her in the lounge until a nurse said we could go in.

My Aunt has lost an awful lot of weight—maybe 50 or 60 lbs. Her wig didn't look that bad—but well, to quote King Lear, "It smells of mortality" to me.

I was with my Aunt for 3 hrs.—from 2:30 to 5:30 and it was difficult—but I saw it through because, well, it may be the last time I see her alive in this lifetime. She rambled on about all the negative things she told me on the phone last night. She did most of the talking and when I got a work in edgewise, she'd jump onto something else. Now, I sort of thought I might help

with some spiritual talk when just then Dr. Marc Antonio came in—she called him “Cleopatra” suing word association.

My Aunt is trying to run a shelter for the homeless from her bed—to top things off. While she was on the phone, I made a “homemade” get-well card for her. She said she liked it so that was good enough if my artwork wasn’t so good...

David arrived at 4:30 pm or so. Seemed to me that he’s aged some or let his gray hair grow longer. I found it difficult to leave though I really wanted to go. I finally kissed her goodbye and told them to take care of each other.

I got back to Nana’s at 6:30 pm. I had 2 roast beef sandwiches for dinner and some tea. Nana doesn’t think Dotty’s going to get better—so she’s aware of what’s going on.

I saw my cousin MaryAnn and her little Kevin. He’s cute in that toddler way. Auntie Mary wasn’t home so I said I’d send her a thank you/Xmas card...Nana & Grandpa gave me an Xmas card with \$20 enclosed. So my haul [gifts from relatives on this trip] was up to \$80 now.

Saturday 1/2/88

Boston

...I called my grandmother’s—she knew of Uncle Tom’s [sudden] death. My Mom called her and it was in the *Boston Globe* yesterday. I’m going over to her place for dinner tomorrow.

Sunday 1/3/88

Boston

I walked into my Nana & Grandpa’s as I’ve done hundreds of times. They look the same. I had a cup of tea and then went upstairs and visited with my Aunt Mary and Uncle Charlie.

Nana stuffed me with chicken, yams, potatoes, and green beans. My cousin Ronnie gave me a ride home [to Malden], after Nana gave me \$30. (“\$10 for spoons and \$20 to use for dinner with Brenda.”)

Wednesday 1/20/88

Toronto

My mother’s call at 7:30 a.m. didn’t wake me—but the quick realization that it was 4:30 a.m. in California clued me in—Auntie Dotty died last night in her sleep.

Of course, there was no surprise but the feelings of helplessness...Mom was pretty together. She said David called her. Rodney had just went back to school on Monday. Auntie Mary had visited her on Sunday. I didn’t know what to do—again can I afford it?—when are the services, etc.?

I called Air Canada while I ate cereal and found that the airfare was \$338.00—out of the question—but still, I made a reservation to fly out on Friday at 7:15 pm and return on Sunday evening, leaving Boston at 5:05 p.m....

At lunchtime, it occurred to me to try Encore Travel Agency to see if they could get me to Boston cheaper—and in fact, they could by backdating the purchase for a \$10 fee—and the round trip plus tax and the fee would be \$126.90—even cheaper than the last trip I took...

I called my Auntie Mary's in Boston as I didn't want to call Nana, nor David and Rodney. I spoke to my cousin Tommy and learned that Auntie Dotty is being waked on Friday night and Saturday afternoon and there will be a service that night before she's cremated.

My mom called back as she's flying out of San Diego at 9 pm with Paul. Auntie Peg and Tina & Beau Anthony are going, too. I'm worried about their affording it as much as they're worried about me affording it.

Auntie Mary called [me] as soon as I got off the phone with my mother. She told me how pleasant her visit with Auntie Dotty was on Sunday. She said she'd lost 20 lbs. in the last five weeks. Auntie Mary said Nana said after saying her rosary last night that she asked God to take her. She's broken down a few times but Grandpa's being very stoic...

Now, poor Auntie Dotty—I haven't mustered a tear yet—though I've had some heavy sighs and [have been] studying her picture from our wedding...The one I really worry about is Rodney, but I don't suppose he's mother would have left him if he needed her—and if he does, she'll be there.

Thursday 1/21/88
Toronto

...Now, I'm off to Boston one more time—as hard as it is for me to believe. After this, I'll need a long holiday from deaths.

Sunday 1/24/88
Boston

Back in my old room in Boston [Malden]. The sun is shining in on this cold winter morn. My Auntie Dotty is cremated by now and soon her ashes will be spread on Cape Cod.

Backtracking to Friday: I drove over to 17-19 Wigglesworth Street, Somerville, arriving before 9 a.m. Downstairs—Auntie Peggy and her girls were milling around the kitchen. Nana, of course, was organizing the food—Grandpa sat—they looked pretty good.

I went upstairs to Auntie Mary's. Mom looks good though she's gained a lot of weight. Paul's the same. Tina is thin and looks a lot like Marisa. And Beau Anthony—well, he's all that people have

said and more. He is the “best-natured” kid—he wasn’t afraid of me at all. He came right up to me—he was running around and jabbering and, of course, dancing. And he is an armful—you can’t hold him for very long.

I was there for an hour and a half—then I took Tina and Beau back to Malden. We stopped into Caldor’s on the way so she could buy a black dress...

Tina, Beau, and I rode to the funeral home in Cambridge with our cousins Mary Anne and Jean for the 2-4 p.m. viewing. I signed in and saw my aunt laid out. She didn’t look much worse than when I saw her in early December. I hugged David and later Rodney as I went down the line. Joan and her daughter Lisa were there in the line, too.

Lots of people made their way through the four rooms of the facility. I met neighbors and colleagues. Lisa told me that she (and Aunt Dotty, too) liked the homemade Christmas card (I’d sent). She also said [Auntie Dotty] showed everyone the “Get Well” card I made her. That was nice to hear.

I met the [physical] therapist who helped her get ready for my wedding—he hit it on the head when he said, “You were either put off by her or you found her endearing.” The truth is: she could be both...

After the afternoon viewing, we returned the way we came to Somerville. We had dinner upstairs—Jean made Italian.

At 6:30 p.m., we returned to Donahue’s Funeral Parlor. Auntie Dotty hadn’t gone anywhere. The chairs had been re-arranged for a service. The nieces and nephews were put into the third and fourth rows...

A lot of people crowded into the place. Lester Lee had his own seat—not with anyone. He spent some time at the casket, but he did not speak to anyone in the family. He looked quite a bit like David, only smaller and darker. I thought about introducing myself but what would be the point?

The service was quite beautiful...A black minister with great passion and sensitivity read from the Bible and led prayer and performed the service as it should be done. A black girl named Rhea sang acappella the beautiful words of Amazing Grace with a voice that caressed the tears out of your eyes. Two middle-aged white men eulogized my Aunt the way everyone should be praised in death. They talked about her character—good and bad, her accomplishments, and her priorities. They described her as a “rebel, organizer, an activist, a devoted mother.”

They described a Dotty (Welby) Lee that few in the family really knew of—the Head Start directorship, the Albany Street Shelter, the angry mother who helped institute the Citizens’ Review Board of the Cambridge P.D. I wish I had talked to her more about these things now. I wish I had praised her more—but I was family and we may all have been in that same room. I

was undeniable that she was some kind of human being—she will be missed but not soon forgotten. One of the gents—a high school teacher suggested they rename Central Square: Dotty Lee Square.

It took a long time for people to pay their last respects. As I knelt in front of her, I prayed.

I told Rodney to “make her proud” and “love doesn’t die.” I wonder if he’ll be able to recall a 100th of what was said to him in the past few days.

Nana and Grandpa did very well. Mom broke down at the end. At the afternoon viewing, she knelt with Dotty and Rodney and said to him, “She’s looking after Kevin now.” I finally got some tears as I watched the final respects—then I went outside and paced and watched people quietly disappear into the cool, clear Cambridge night with one less friend on the Christmas card list next December.

God Bless you, Dotty! See you in the next life.

We went over to Woodrow Wilson Court to a basement hall for a reception. More food! We didn’t stay long. I was lifting Beau Anthony around the whole day—in and out of cars and the snowsuit.

We returned to Somerville at 10 o’clock after saying goodbye to Rodney and David. I said I’d write them, and I asked for a copy of the eulogy.

After a little more time with Nana and Grandpa, I got a ride to Malden from Uncle Charlie.

[The next day] I drove to Somerville. Nana fed me like any other Sunday with Grandpa sitting across the table. Mom freed me at 2:15 from being force-fed. At 2:30, all hell broke loose as Beau & Tina came downstairs along with Tom, Mary Anne & Kevin. The boy began chasing the cat. Then Ronnie, Carrie, Ronnie Jr., and Timmy came in.

Pictures of Beau with Nana & Grandpa were taken and it was really funny to him—the baby—he loves the attention. After the photos, he began dancing around. Nana called him a “little pork chop.”

Then there were the teary goodbyes—Mom to her parents [was] the most emotional—in the hubbub I didn’t get to say goodbye to Tina & Beau as they had to rush to the airport.

Tuesday 3/15/88
Toronto

...I felt badly [about] not writing my grandparents, so I called them. Nana answered the phone. She was pleased to hear from me. We just chatted. She wants me to give souvenir spoons from Canada to Auntie Mary when she’s out at the [Michele & Bill’s] wedding [in San Diego]. She’s

obviously still mourning—she said, “Dotty suffered too long.” Then she talked about Beau...I said goodbye and “Happy St. Patrick’s Day!” She said, almost sadly, “It’s just another day.”