

A Blended Family  
By Kathryn Cubalo

It came as no surprise that our mother was in love and had decided to marry a very nice man named Lee Busch. She was in her early fifties when our father was killed in an auto accident on the way to work. Alone for several years, she was acquainted with Lee at her workplace and his name came up in conversation more and more often. His wife had died shortly before our father, and he was left with three teenagers still at home. Much of their conversation involved how to best care for these girls.

Romance didn't happen at first, although the people who knew both of them were waiting for something to happen. Their workmates finally decided a work party might spark something, so they planned a Christmas outing near where my mother lived. She invited them for *Hors D'oeuvres* and looked up a recipe for punch. We later decided in looking at the ingredients that they must have all been a bit tipsy, but they had a fun party. Lee danced with Mother and that did the trick. He proposed that very night which was just before Christmas 1966. We first met Lee on New Year's Eve when we all went to a New Year's Eve party together at the Northwoods Bar. We (my brother and sister and I) were quite delighted to see our mother so happy and we liked Lee immediately.

We soon met the rest of his family, an older son Evan, a daughter Mary, married with a son, and the three girls in their teens, Barbara, Lee Ann, and Stephanie. They were the ages of our oldest two girls and my brother's oldest two girls. In the next two years, they had wonderful times together whenever we had family gatherings. They all liked to sing and I remember many occasions with Lynn at the piano, some guitars and tambourines, singing mostly Christian choruses.

Mother decided that winter that things wouldn't be rushed and a date for the wedding was set for June. Everyone was too happy, but life happens, and a cloud formed when my mother had a strong pain. She was diagnosed with breast cancer, and a few weeks before the wedding, she had surgery. We didn't know at the time the extent of her problem, but the wedding went on as planned.

I was the Maid-of-Honor, and I made dresses for my mother and myself. Hers was pink, her favorite color, and mine was green. It was supposed to be a small wedding, but everyone in our extended family wanted to come, so it was quite a festive occasion. One of my Dad's brother, Uncle Olaf, came through the receiving line and asked, "And, how are you?" To my dismay, I burst into tears.

I think my mother and Lee had one very good year before the cancer struck again. Our families had many good times together. We saw the courtship and marriage of Lee's son Evan to Dianne. Three of our girls graduated from high school the same year. There seems to be many celebrations.

Mother died February 2, 1969, one week after my grandmother's death. We also had two sick children that winter,<sup>1</sup> and I had to have surgery.

---

<sup>1</sup> HIO: I think there were three sick children. My daughter Annette was in UM Hospital at the time of Mother's death, having had surgery for a tubercular lymph node; Kathryn's son Michael got the nasty Asian flu while staying with me while Kathryn and her surgery; and John's son Johnny wound up in the hospital with pneumonia.

We tried to keep in touch with Lee and family and were fairly successful for awhile, but Lee only lived a few years longer.<sup>2</sup> Since then, we seldom see each other and keep in touch with Christmas cards. Some of the family came to our Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary. I think getting together just brings back the bad memories when we would rather remember the good times.

I will always be grateful to Lee for the care he gave my mother and to all of them for the love and affection they showed to her. She loved them, too, especially those girls. I think she felt angry that she had to leave before her job was finished.

2010

---

<sup>2</sup> HIO: He actually lived ten years longer, dying the year my son Dan, who was a baby when Mother died, was eleven.