

## Long-Distance Feedback

Just yesterday, I received valuable long-distance feedback from an extended family member about my essays. Why didn't you write about Grandma? You wrote about Grandpa and Pop, but not about Grandma. You knew her pretty well, didn't you? But I did not write about my other grandmother either, I countered. Yes, but you mentioned her name. You didn't even mention Grandma's name. At least you could have talked about how she prayed the Rosary. Well, I pleaded, in volume two, which will be published next month, I do write some about Grandma; in fact, she shows up in two essays. Even more feedback was offered. You wrote so much about your dad, I didn't know you were that close to him. Why didn't you write more about your mother? And so forth.

These questions and comments, coming from some extended family members of my childhood, are as understandable as they are frustrating. Why did I write such and such? Why did I not mention so and so? These are difficult questions for me to answer; in fact, I am not sure there are any answers.

Let me begin by saying I did not write these essays to document my family history, either for my own immediate family or for the family from my childhood days. In my first manuscript, *Easy Essays*, I wrote 46 essays; six deal with family, and of those, four relate to my father, one to my mother, and the other is about my grandfathers. The rest of the essays deal with homeless people, Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement, Catholic religious monastic life, the pilgrimage, and a handful of miscellaneous topics.

It wasn't until I began writing in a serious manner that I realized my father had such an impact on my childhood, and as has already been noted, it shows through in four of the essays. Like my long-distance family member, I, too, would have thought my mother would be more prominent in these essays, but she is not.

I found that writing about my mother was difficult, even troublesome. For one thing, she would not appreciate it. She would be nervous and uneasy. She would worry about it. With a reproving frown on her face and giving a harrumph! with her shoulders, she would say, It's no one else's business, I don't care what people think! She reminds me of a person who insists so

much and so often that she doesn't care about what others say or think about her, it is obvious that she cares a great deal about what is said and what people do think. This is exactly the reason, I believe, why my mother so often counseled her nieces and many other young women who came to her for advice – move away from your relatives!

I found her feelings in this regard to be an emotional hurdle for me, probably not insurmountable but difficult nonetheless. In my only essay about her so far, I simply retold a story she told me. The fact that she has been deceased now for almost eight years doesn't make it any easier or give me more leeway to write about her.

In the final analysis, I have come to believe that my Easy Essays are not about the topics I choose to write about; rather, the essays are about me – who I am, what I have observed, what I have done, who I met, where I walked, what I think . . . Admittedly, this is pretty thin material – and likely boring or worse – yet who cares? On the other hand, much to my surprise, there have been many periods in my life when others with whom I worked did care about some of these things, and perhaps they still do.

Time is running out, I can only write about what I know, what I have experienced, and what I want to convey to others. This is the raw material at my disposal, and I use it. Yes, there are some essays I choose not to write, some are too personal, perhaps too painful to put into words. Others are about loved ones whose privacy I choose not to invade.

I appreciate the feedback that has been generated by my essays. It is not overwhelming, to be sure, but it is helpful and sometimes even affirming.