

Memories of the Pope and My Parents – April 8, 2005
Leslie Stockton

I woke up at 3:30 a.m. this morning to say goodbye and pray for our beloved Pope John Paul II in my pajamas in front of the television set. So many miles away, but it moved me as if I was right there in St. Peter's Square.

It seems like yesterday when I learned of the new "Polish Pope" in my high school classroom in 1978. I recall my father beaming with pride to learn the news the new Pope shared his Polish heritage. It was an exciting time in our Catholic faith. He was such a strong charismatic leader. He was born in 1920, the age of my parents plus (Dad 1919) and minus (Mom 1921) one year. We all could relate to him.

Pope John Paul had the city of Denver captivated when he celebrated World Youth Day in Denver in 1993. I just happened to be visiting Colorado that summer. There were no hotel rooms for miles and miles, so I spent the night in my car at a rest area. I didn't mind; it was exciting to know he was in the same town as I. He gave us hope young and old.

It was my Father's birthday in March of 2001. I had the honor of attending a Beatification Mass of the Martyrs of Spain at the Vatican celebrated by the Pope. I was struck by the Pope's determination and courage as he celebrated this beautiful outdoor Mass. Despite his frailty, he gave his energy to honor those beautiful souls. Despite his frailty, he kissed babies and made his way in the Pope Mobile throughout the crowd. If only my father was still with us ... he would have been so happy. It was one of the most exciting days of my life.

We prayed with a rosary blessed by Pope John Paul II at my mother's bedside when she had a tracheotomy before she died of encephalitis in 2002. We prayed for a miracle for her life, but God had other plans. Even the Pope's blessed rosary could not change God's will.

When Pope John Paul had a tracheotomy on my mother's birthday, February 24th, my heart was heavy. His courage was amazing; I was so proud of him for continuing to wave to the crowds after his surgery. What a GREAT man. But my heart could not bear the news of hearing the Pope had sepsis. My father died of sepsis 10 year ago. I was reliving my parents' mortality and losing another parent, our Holy Father. He will remain in my heart forever. As I think of my parents every day, so too will I think of Pope John Paul II every day and continue to live the lessons he taught us so very well.

May God Bless Pope John Paul II! May God Bless his successor!