

# Caroline Renon Fechner

## A Personal Impression

Here is a personal retrospective on my mother, Caroline Fechner, who passed away Jan 24, 2022. It's not quite the same perspective as my siblings might have, because I lived with my grandparents in the bottom story of a two-story home (for space reasons), while my parents and younger brother and sister lived on the upper floor.



My mother lived an eventful life, which began in a community of German farmers who lived in eastern Romania in 1928. By the standards of the day, they were quite prosperous. But her father Nicholas had grown up in the United States (St. Louis), and only moved back to Europe in 1919 because his parents could not adjust to life in the U.S. and wanted to go back to farm the land. Nick, my grandfather, knew what the Russians, advancing west in 1944 and 1945, would do to young girls like her. He made the decision to evacuate west to reach the American lines in Austria in 1945, leaving almost everything behind.



Through luck and Nick's language skills (English, German, Romanian, Hungarian) he convinced a US army officer, Major James Hardin, 6 months of translation services in exchange for passage into Germany, where Nick would be further employed by the US Army in Bavaria. There she met her lifelong partner Ulrich Fechner. Nick, wife Elisabeth and daughter Caroline moved to St. Louis in 1948, and Ulrich followed in 1950. They were married in 1951.

As I said, I was a bit of a stranger to my own family, moving away permanently in 1974 for graduate school. I only became reacquainted with my parents in the 1990's, and especially after 9/11. Not wishing to chance foreign travel, my parents began to visit me in the beautiful state of Michigan. I began a nightly weekday phone call ritual with my mother, which continued until a few years before her death.



My impression of her was that she was what you might call a beautiful soul. A beautiful soul is one who takes life as it comes, tackling problems as they come and enjoying the blessings as well. Such souls harbor no pretensions or unrealistic expectations, nor do they seek to change the world. They just want a good life with their family. She had few hobbies, but like her mother was a prolific prayer, although time for prayer declined as she passed middle age and eventually fell ill.

Her mother was a wizard in the kitchen, and Caroline cooked for many years using those recipes, which included elaborate cakes in the Hungarian tradition, everyday homemade bread, Easter bread ("Kranz kuchen"), paprikas, goulash, liver and onions, Wiener Schnitzel (port chops), and a variety of vegetable accompaniments that were often served in cream-based sauces. The recipes for some of this still survive.

I remember my mother as simultaneously independent in some of the challenges she overcame, as well as vulnerable. I only realized in 1985 that her biggest phobia was being alone. She had this, according to my father, since growing up on the farm. However, she hid that fear most of her life, and did some very courageous things,

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including leaving her homeland and travelling halfway around the world to America for a new life.



In our nightly talks she just told me about what was happening in her world and listening to what was happening in mine. I enjoyed sending her photo albums filled with pictures of our summer travels around Michigan, Wisconsin, Canada and the east coast.

A friend of mine commented after her passing "you mean that's the same woman I met while we were in college 50 years ago?" Indeed, she was. She and my dad Ulrich both

lived to age 93 (dad is 94 and still kicking). Caroline has a particularly long-lived ancestry. However, arthritis began handcuffing her so that by age 80 she was unable to make the cakes or bread she once did, or even manipulate utensils for eating meals. Then in 2012 her lower spine fractured, pressing against the sciatic nerve, causing great pain. Doctors rebuilt her back, but she found it hard to stand due to arthritis, and eventually was overwhelmed by constant lower body pain from the back injury.

I once asked her about what she thought her life would be like back when she was a girl growing up on the farm. She never answered, but what I really wondered was did she ever miss the life there. I concluded that though she may have left the farm with trepidation, her life turned out to be one that she really enjoyed. But I think a bit of the farm girl survived, that girl with the much simpler lifestyle who could just sit back gazing at the bountiful crops and realize life was good. The life she eventually lived was much more complex, but also much more rewarding than she could imagine.

As Christians, we are comforted by the "sure and certain hope" of being reunited with loved ones in the afterlife. The Greeks, an agrarian society, called their heaven "Elysium". The poet Hesiod described it as "they live untouched by sorrow in the Islands of the blessed along the shore of deep swirling ocean, happy heroes for whom the grain giving earth bears honey sweet fruit flourishing thrice a year". Others expected "flowers of gold blazing, with splendid trees on land and nurturing water".



I look forward to seeing my mother again in those Elysian fields, similar in many ways to the fertile farmland she enjoyed in her youth. I see her smiling face again, happy and joyful. She is perched in the fields of gold stretching as far as the eye can see, bathed by the nurturing warmth of the sun on her radiant cheeks. She is joyous, free from pain, happy and carefree. She is surrounded by the golden harvest of all those souls who loved her dearly. The soft breeze of salvation comforts her, as it does all of the righteous, as it extends to the

infinite horizon of a boundless paradise.

Until then, I will miss her dearly, every day for the rest of my life.

Walter Fechner  
Feb. 2, 2022