Too Young, Too Soon: *A Reflection on Mom and Dad*

My parents, Ted and Gail, began their marriage with humble beginnings ~~

My Father's family emigrated from Poland, then under Russian control, in 1911. They settled in West Virginia, a state with coal mining, a job that Dziadek (ju-kah), my Dad's Father, had in Poland. As new Americans, the Starosciak family worked hard, met many challenges, and eventually owned their home at 4604 Eoff St. in Wheeling, West Virginia..

Dad was born in 1916, five years after his family arrived on Ellis Island and settled in the Mountain State. Like his Father, Dad became a coal miner and worked in the mines of West Virginia at just fourteen years of age and, as a young man, lived with his family.

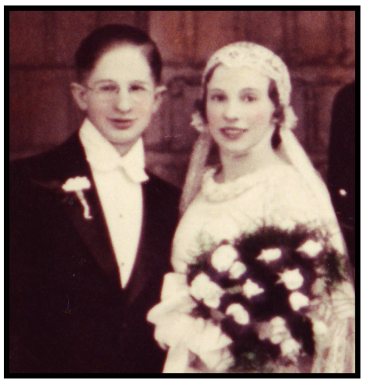
Eleanor Gail Lavy came into the world in 1919, in the shadow of World War I and amidst the ravages of the Spanish flu pandemic. As a child, she battled and survived rheumatic fever, which left her with lasting rheumatic heart disease.

As a teenager, my mother, Gail, worked for the Starosciaks and assisted Dad's mother, Babcia (bush-ah), with household chores. As the fourth of eight children in a poverty-stricken household, she hoped to leave her difficult childhood behind and find a new future when she met and married my Father.

One of Mom's amusing memories while working for Dad's family involved a goose the Starosciaks raised and fattened for Christmas dinner. The mischievous bird chased her around the yard and pecked her like a guard dog.

Mom was relieved when the holidays arrived and brought the goose's antics to an end.

Romance blossomed as Dad captivated Mom with his charm, lively personality, and dancing skills. Dad, a charismatic twenty-year-old, was equally smitten with this petite, brunette seventeen-year-old with enchanting sky-blue eyes. They married in 1936. *Too Young, Too Soon.*



After marrying, they planted their roots in Wheeling, West Virginia, the place they both called home since birth.

Despite her sometimes fragile health, Mom birthed nine children during her life and endured heart-wrenching losses, including the death of two of her children. Her life, spanning just fifty-nine years, was marked by resilience and sorrow. *Too Young, Too Soon.*

When Mom passed away in May 1980, it felt like I lost my anchor. Though I was thirty-six and had a family of my own, the void was profound. My six living siblings and I leaned on each other for support, but the absence of her love and presence was irreplaceable—*Too Young, Too Soon.*

Dad's life journey ended even earlier. Born in 1916, he succumbed to diabetic complications in 1961 at the young age of forty-five. *Too Young, Too Soon.* My bond with him was special, even though his presence was sporadic during childhood. One vivid memory with my Father stands out: I was six, galavanting through the streets of Detroit with my friends, as carefree as could be. Coming home dirty, happy, and barefoot, I found Dad shaving. He

serenaded me with a playful tune: "Put your shoes on, Susie. Don't you know you're in the city?" Moments like these, his songs, and the times I sat on his lap are cherished memories.

Dad's outgoing personality and charisma made him the life of the party. He had a gentlemanly and humorous way of captivating people from all walks of life—whether it was local barflies or high-class business owners. His blind-pig card gatherings were well-attended by the elite such as Detroit politicians. He was the life of the party, a snappy dresser with his rust-colored trousers, shiny shoes, and signature Hamburg hat.

Trivia: President Dwight Eisenhower broke tradition by wearing a Hamburg hat instead of a top hat at his inauguration. Wearing such a chapeau likely made Dad feel a bit presidential.

After my parents' divorce in 1952, Mom became the pillar of our family with five children to support. Between 1952 and 1959, our household grew with four more siblings. Mom had a soft spot for babies, but teenagers—well, that's a different story altogether—one for another time.

Though their lives were brief, Mom and Dad's legacy of love and cherished memories continues to shape our close-knit family.

Click links to see tributes of what would have been my parents' centennial birthdays:

- **Eleanor Gail Lavy** was born on January 19, 1919.
- **Theodore Aloysius Starosciak** was born on April 12, 1916.