

A stitch in time with Eileen Danison

The Ecobellis and Eisenhauers weren't the only Es to ease threads of vibrant colors and enduring textures into the tapestry of my life as it began to unfold following my family's move north in 1968.

The third "E" to enter my existence more than 40 years ago was an enchantingly effervescent and enterprising mother of 11 named Eileen.

A native of Ohio, Eileen was also in the process of putting down roots in Ballston Spa after her husband, Robert Danison, Sr., accepted a management position at General Electric's Waterford, NY plant.

My introduction to Eileen came through my new Ballston Spa High School classmate Celeste Harmon who invited me to tag along one afternoon as she stopped by the Danison home — which was then situated inside of a Victorian mansion at the corner of Malta Avenue and Chapman Street.

Despite the walls reverberating with the exuberant sounds of several sons who ranged from early elementary to college entrance age and a daughter not yet in kindergarten, Eileen put whatever she was doing aside to warmly welcome the two teenaged girls who had shown up on her doorstep.

If our arrival had come at inopportune time, Eileen didn't let on. Rather she graciously asked if we'd care to sit down at the kitchen table and share whatever it was Celeste had come to tell her.

The chaos surrounding us faded into the background as Eileen listened intently to Celeste as well as showing a sincere interest in how I was settling into my new milieu.

While my childless Aunt Elinor in Kingston and globe-trotting Aunt Caroline also had a knack for treating socially awkward adolescent females as sophisticated young ladies, Eileen was the first to serve me tea in a fine china cup with a matching saucer.

Though I had no way of knowing it at the time, some of Eileen's sons were destined to become best friends with some of my brothers. She was also destined to become the grandmother of one of my nieces and, therefore, a part of my life long into the future.

Because I resided outside of the USA from the summer of 1971 until the summer of 1989, I didn't have as many opportunities to enjoy afternoon tea parties with Eileen as I'd have liked to, but I was kept informed of her activities through the family grapevine as well as through clippings from a hometown newspaper that my mother would mail to me in Denmark and later in Canada.

It was through these communications I learned Eileen had become a mover and shaker in the community. In addition to co-founding a sewing boutique called The Country Mouse on Milton Avenue that later evolved into The Hook & Eye on Font Street with the now late Dottie Fulton, Eileen was helping to lay the foundation for what is now the Ballston Spa Business and Professional Association.



LOL: Lots of Laughter and Lots of Love have long been hallmarks of The Danison Clan as evidenced by these 1960s images of Eileen with husband Bob and their 11 children. From left to right are (top row) Joe, Steve, Tim, Bobby and Pete; (front row) Tracy, John, Bart, Tobin and Ned. That's sole sister Margaret Ann's kindergarten portrait at far left.

As per the accompanying vintage stories and photos, Eileen was a driving force behind festivals with bountiful booths and live entertainment along Front Street as well as contributing to the success of others events.

One that evokes especially fond memories necessitated that Eileen bake eight cakes to donate to an event that was designed to draw senior citizens residing in the then new Double Woods complex near the Stewart's on Church Avenue into Wiswall Park in the heart of the village.

To ensure the eight freshly baked and decorated cakes weren't devoured by the eight children who were then still residing at home, Eileen confesses she "waited until the coast was clear" before whipping up the batter and popping the baking tins in the oven.

In between minding the store and donating time and treasure to the growth of the village's business district, Eileen volunteered her sewing skills on behalf of a number of educational and cultural causes – including the creation of a quilt commemorating the nation's Bicentennial in 1976 that was later displayed inside Saratoga County's history museum at Brookside.

After moving back to Ballston Spa, I had the joy of interviewing Eileen for a feature about big families I'd been commissioned to research and write for a national periodical called *GRIT: American Life & Traditions*.

By now Eileen had been widowed and most of her offspring had left the nest, yet the sounds of youthful banter and laughter continued to fill the cozy cottage where she was beginning a new chapter in her life. Situated just a few doors away from the multi-tiered landmark where she'd raised her children, the home where "Grandma D" chose to spend her golden years overlooks a rustic ravine with a bubbling brook.

When The Whistling Kettle Victorian tea lounge opened across from Wiswall Park several years ago, I alternated between meeting clients there and at The Coffee Planet, an inviting Internet café around the corner. While seated at a booth or table inside of The Whistling Kettle, I'd occasionally spy Eileen nearby enjoying a spot of tea with ladies ranging from Silver Foxes to those resembling Alice In Wonderland.

I most recently had the pleasure of sitting down to sip tea out of a pretty china cup with a matching saucer at a kitchen table in Eileen's home when she was brimming with enthusiasm about a Christian fellowship outreach group she had initiated in 2011.

Concerned that some members of the St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church congregation didn't have opportunities to socialize with others in the parish family, Eileen put forth the idea of informal gatherings at an intimate dining establishment in the village. This faith in action initiative ultimately led to the starting of coffee hours on church grounds following select Sunday Masses.



PATRIOTIC GIFT—To add a colonial atmosphere to the occasion, students of Malta Avenue School dressed in costume for the presentation of their patriotic quilt to Brookside Museum. It was accepted by Kathy Jarvis, director. From the left are Wendy Schutt, Margaret Danison, teacher Audrey Hauprich, Laurie Fregeau, Jeffrey Stanford and Shirley Ann Davis.

5th graders create quilt, present it to Brookside museum

BY ELLEN H. QUA

BALLSTON SPA—Quilting an old fashion craft?

Not the way the Malta Avenue School 5th graders made their bicentennial quilt as a gift to Brookside Museum. It was formally accepted this week by Kathy Jarvis, museum director.

Rather than use the traditional needle and thread method of embroidering the block designs, the 1976 class of Audrey Hauprich used the ballpoint type of painting.

"It is called liquid embroidery," the teacher explained. "The paint comes in a tube which is pressed out at the end which has a ball point pen type applicator. This is wonderful for outlining the designs which are then filled in with various colored paints, she said. All the drawings were traced onto white muslin

squares to contrast with the red and blue calico squares for a patriotic effect."

Many projects have been conducted during the school year but it was the quilt which drew the most interest from a dozen girls and one boy, Jeffrey Stanford. It was started after the Easter holidays and completed in time to carry during the June 13 Saratoga County Bicentennial parade. The girls, dressed in colonial costumes, marched in that parade. The boys, including Stanford, also in costume made a full-scale model of the Liberty Bell on a float which followed the "quilting party."

Stanford interviewed briefly at Brookside said, "I don't care if I was the only boy who made a design. I like to draw so I made the American seal. The quilt will be here in Brookside for many years and will be nice to have it as a

bicentennial present from our class. All of us who made a design put our initials on it. See mine!" he said pointing to the quilt.

Margaret Danison, whose mother, Eileen Danison with Nancy Ferman, mother of Theresa Forman, helped in final joining of the quilt, pointed to three blocks she had contributed. "I made the quill pen and paper to sign the Declaration of Independence, the year '76 and the peace dove. I worked on mine at school and I brought it home to work on it over the weekend too. It was fun to do."

Others who worked on the quilt were Kristina Armer, Sharry Benedict, Shirley Ann Davis, Georgia DeMarsh, Laurie Fregeau, Christine Hefflin, Tammy Luse, Mary Beth Morgan, Wendy Schutt and Trudy Winslow.

On another recent occasion, I sampled finger foods with Eileen and her friend Jane McGinn at a special event inside of the Ecobelli's Tam O'Shanter.

Although the restaurant is no longer open for business, its doors were opened for a few hours on a Sunday afternoon in the Summer of 2012 so former patrons and staff could reminisce about the good times they had enjoyed there in a bygone era while also having co-authors Lora Lee and Tom Ecobelli sign copies of a cookbook titled *Laurina's Kitchen*.

"Ecobelli's was the place Bob and I used to sneak out to after the little ones were tucked into bed and left in a sitter's care (often an older sibling) on weekends," smiled Eileen. "That's how we got to know others in the community after moving up from Ohio in the 1960s. Some of those we met at Ecobelli's became lifelong friends."

While too humble to accept praise for her contributions to the business and professional community and the church that has been a cornerstone of her nearly half century in the village, the fact is that Eileen's innovations and interventions have provided many a proverbial "stitch in time."

Other early kindnesses, such as patiently teaching someone's young sister sewing basics such as threading a bobbin, brought Eileen added layers of joy many years later when the girl grew up to make her own gorgeous wedding gown. As one who has taken her faith seriously and herself lightly, Eileen has endeavored to mend broken hearts and reinforce the linings of tattered spirits almost as often as she has left those with whom she has interacted in stitches.

I am grateful to The Master Weaver for the threads that Eileen has woven into the tapestry of my life.



Jane McGinn and Eileen Danison were among the many friends and former patrons of Ecobelli's Tam O'Shanter who turned out for a 2012 reunion with Lora Lee and Tom Ecobelli. The siblings were but children when the Danisons moved to Ballston Spa in the 1960s.