

***The COACH* by Eileen McKenna**

As a child my family lived across the street from a park, St. Mary's Park to be exact. It became our green space. In summer, it was a place to roller skate, picnic on a hill under shade trees, play with friends, or wait for the good humor ice cream man. In winter, it was great to sleigh ride on dead man's hill on my Father's back screaming wildly. The one rule was to be home in time for supper, which was always five o'clock.

To the park again, this time with my Irish immigrant parents, Mary and Paddy. My parents would chat with their friends while we ran around and got to be with my Aunt Sheila and Uncle Tim who also immigrated from Ireland. They lived on the other side of the park. Life was wonder filled.

I am one of three girls, very close in age who have always played together (one more reluctantly than the other). Nevertheless, we loved each other fiercely and always kept an eye out for one another. A love that has supported us through the years, and continues to be a source of support as challenges come and go.

Well about my Coach. Since I was three years old, I have loved baby dolls as well as human babies. My younger sister and I were mostly on the same page until she had enough of dolls by age ten. It was at this point that I would have to bribe her to play dolls with me. When I say play, I mean taking our baby dolls to the park in their doll carriages. My sister began to think this was not so cool even though we went to a secluded part of the park where my sister's friends were sure not to see her. As for my older sister, she wanted no part of playing with dolls.

My Father, a wonderful fun loving person, was very understanding of my love of dolls and surprised me with a new doll every Christmas until my mom said, "No more dolls!" when I was 13. I felt very bad. That was the year I put my name in at the A & P grocery store giveaway. Guess what? I won a great big doll which I carried home with great pride. I did not care that my girlfriends were beginning to think about boys and not dolls.

I gave up my dolls for a while when I went to high school. High school was a brand new exciting experience. So exciting that I put aside my beloved dolls so I could pursue the full high school experience. Parties, dances, boyfriends, and the like took up most of my spare time. Of course I oohed and awed at every baby I saw. And when a family friend had twins, I was ecstatic and loved to visit them. A chubby little boy and an energetic, petite little girl always loved when my sisters and I came because it was out of the playpen time for them as we laughed at everything they did.

After high school, I went to New York City to work as a secretary in the telephone company on West Street. Riding the crowded subway train early in the morning and being depended on for my secretarial skills I learned in school was very maturing and gratifying. Needless to say payday was another important part of the 9 to 5 routine.

The social life in the city was lots of fun. It was there that I met my future husband, a man who loved children and family as much as I did. After a brief courtship, we married and moved to Albany, New York. My company also transferred me there and I worked until we started our family. My husband was then transferred back to New York City so we bought a house in Merrick, Long Island. I was thrilled when we were blessed with our first child, a beautiful

healthy baby boy we named James. The neighborhood we lived in had sidewalks, stores and a pond close by. We bought a beautiful black coach carriage to parade my beautiful baby around in. No more need for dolls. Soon after James came Charles, then Brendan and our first girl, Mary Ellen followed by Daniel. At this point my husband was transferred to upstate New York. I was devastated, I was going to be 400 miles away from my extended family, from the city I loved to the country I was unsure of. We moved to a town south of Buffalo, East Aurora. I was expecting our fifth child, who we named Matthew. He then occupied the coach in our backyard under the watchful eye of our collie dog named Brigand. Alana and finally Malachy followed Matthew for sleepy time in the carriage.

My coach carriage was still looking good but I was ending my reproductive era. I cleaned up the coach, covered it and into the garage it went for safe keeping. We eventually needed garage space for a second car, what to do with my beloved carriage. I had to find someone to give it to who loved babies as much as I.

Then I saw a request in our church bulletin, by a new mom who needed a carriage for her baby. Perfect I thought, this would be wonderful. My beloved carriage would soon be cuddling a new baby. I uncovered the coach and as soon as I saw it I started to tear up. All the wonderful memories came flooding through my mind. I dusted and polished the outside and by the time I got to the hood I was sobbing. All those wonderful years parading my babies around was a memory so vivid that by the time I put the carriage on the back of the new mom's husband's truck I was bawling. My husband had to explain my quick exit and wish the couple as much happiness with my coach as I had had.

I cherish the memories of this period of my life. I have enjoyed motherhood with its ups and downs. Visits to the emergency room, broken arms, soccer games, school plays kept us very busy. The joys of raising an ace mechanic, an English teacher, a computer whiz, a lawyer's assistant, a Pediatric Cardiologist, an Adolescent Psychiatrist, a Physical Therapist and a Herpetologist/yeast maker made it all worthwhile. I am now enjoying grand motherhood - minus my beautiful coach carriage. Motherhood expanded me far beyond my wildest dreams. Dreams I never knew when we first purchased my Coach Carriage or when I was playing with my dolls when I was 3.

