

## MY VIEW

# Tolerance was saluted in my family of police

As a policeman's daughter and surrounded by a family of law enforcement, it is difficult to watch the chaos and division in our society. The despair in our nation is disheartening. As the news continues to report on the dissension, I remember two stories from my childhood that offer hope. One story begins with my mother's funeral.

The funeral home was overcrowded, as Irish funerals are, but there was one guest I'll never forget. We did not recognize her when she walked in with her family. As I introduced myself, the woman responded that she saw the last name in the newspaper and was there to honor a memory from long ago. It was a memory that included my sister Peggy.

She had not seen Peggy since grammar school, where they first

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met. Unbeknownst to the young girl at the time, on Peggy's first day of fourth grade, our mother explained that the busing policy had changed to include students from different neighborhoods. She reminded us to be kind to all people and inclusive of people no matter what their skin color.

My mother's words inspired Peg to introduce herself to the shy African American girl and their friendship grew. Soon, Peggy's friend was coming to our house for lunches. Bologna sandwiches were a staple back then. The message of inclusion had been instilled by both of my parents.

Almost 50 years later, this impressive woman paid respects to our family and told us how Peggy's thoughtfulness positively impacted her experience at a new school in South Buffalo. She never forgot Peggy's simple act of friendship and kindness.



*Eileen Needham, of Hamburg, was raised in a family of 10 in South Buffalo.*

The other story involves my father. He was a Buffalo police officer for almost 40 years and also held other jobs to support his 10 children. He worked for Brinks Security and moonlighted as a security guard at a Burger King. He was a fair, humble man who would occasionally tell us stories about experiences from his work life.

One of the stories involved a little African American boy who had been staring at my father while the boy was in line at Burger King. As the boy got closer to my father, he captivated everyone's attention in the restaurant by asking my father if he could compare noses. Of course, my kind father complied and bent down to the little boy's level. As my dad leaned over, the boy stood on his toes and rubbed noses with my dad. It must have been a beautiful sight to see a tall white man in a uniform rub noses with a child from the neighborhood.

My father wore many uniforms as a Marine, a police officer and as a Brinks guard. He took an oath to protect people, as did my husband, my son and many of my family members.

In today's world, where people are taking sides against each other, I am thankful to be able to reminisce about stories that weave people together. I was fortunate to be taught not to judge people by the color of their skin, but their everyday actions. I also know from firsthand experience how many great law enforcement officers serve honorably every day.

In this world, we all have different opinions. Take the time to teach your child to listen to another person's perspective. Also, invite people over to share a bologna sandwich. You might learn something.

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**My View** is a first-person column open to all Western New Yorkers. If your article is selected for publication, a photo of you is required. Email submissions to [editpage@buffnews.com](mailto:editpage@buffnews.com).