

## Down By The Berry Patch

### "No Carnations"

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Published 9 August 2014

She loved daisies. She and her sisters drove out to a farmer's field and picked bushels of wild ones to decorate the church and reception hall for her wedding. Daisies always cheered her up. They tied cascading streams of satin ribbon around an armful of the flowers for her bridal bouquet.

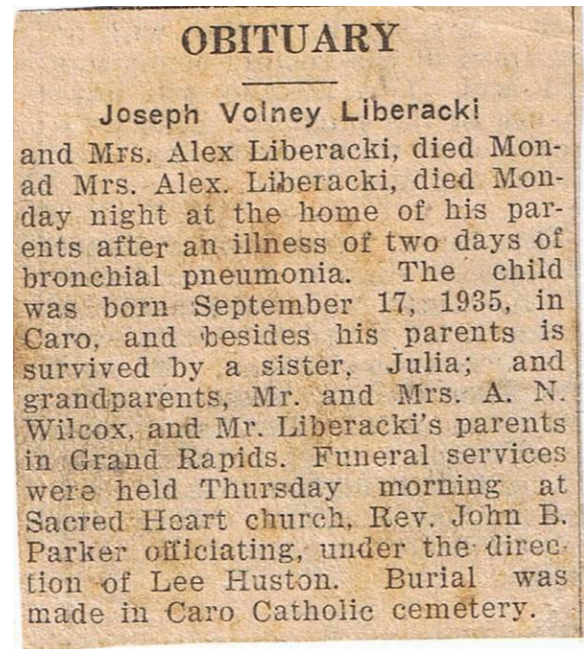
Mother didn't like carnations. She could smell them in her mind from Joe's funeral. To her, "The whole house smelled like carnations." My oldest brother, Joe, died of pneumonia when he was only seven months old, almost two years before I was born. He was only a story to me but his presence never left Mother.

Whenever one of my children developed pneumonia she would be there within two hours to keep watch. I would tell her, "The doctor gave a shot of penicillin. Everything is fine." She didn't believe me because to Mother, death and pneumonia, were forever linked together. She would tell me there was no penicillin for Joe, and sulfa couldn't save him. Nothing could. She and Daddy took turns sitting in a steam tent with him to help him breathe, but in the end, there was only the smell of carnations.

There was a photograph of him sleeping in a casket. When I as a kid it was in the top tray of the old forbidden trunk out in the garage. I don't know how I ever knew it was Joe or who told me the picture was taken because they didn't have any other pictures of him. I figured that picture was the reason the trunk was forbidden and never dared to ask about it. When I would get it out it was a curiosity thing. I was fascinated because he was dead. Not because he was my brother.

Mother always said she was so happy when I was born. She had wished for a girl because boys died. By the time Andy and Bruce were born she was glad to have boys again. When they died at 40 and 48 she felt responsible for their deaths. She insisted that all her boys died and it wasn't fair to them for her to even have had them. She grieved for all three of her sons. I only grieved for two.

Daddy donated raspberry patch land to the Catholic Church in Unionville for a cemetery. Bruce and Andy are buried there. Mother and Daddy are buried in the Catholic Cemetery in Caro. Joe is buried beside them.



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Reprinted from *Down by the Berry Patch*

<http://berrypatch.info/rita/007.html>

Last updated on 9 August 2014

Ten years after mother died I took red geraniums to the cemeteries. While kneeling by my parents' graves to pull weeds that were creeping into their space, and reading Joe's headstone, I began thinking about my newest grandson-my baby Joseph. He was almost the age of brother Joe when he died. At that moment an image appeared.

*I stood off to the side watching mother and Daddy. I had never seen them like they were at that moment. They were so young as they hovered over the baby basket that was first used by Joe and then all the family babies from that time on. Daddy's arm was tightly wrapped around Mother's shoulders, pulling the two of them close together, as they stood guard over their sweet baby. They were so helpless.*

My heart ached with them. Tears began to flow. For the very first time, I felt the presence of three brothers, and smelled the carnations. I finally understood why that scent haunted Mother as long as she lived.

Next year I'll take daisies.