

# A salute to all the brave parents and heroes

By MURIEL JENSEN  
For The Daily Astorian

The approach of Memorial Day brings to mind thoughts of our heroes.

At this time in our history, I am humbled by the courage displayed by our military, by their willingness to offer all and to give it, all too often. We are blessed, and our security is assured, by their heroism.

Heroism, though, isn't found only in combat. Many men display great bravery on the battlefield of their ordinary lives. My father, Michael Pacheco of New Bedford, Massachusetts, was such a man.

Of Portuguese extraction, he was 5 feet 7 inches tall with a beautiful beaky nose, thick gray hair, and a sort of "Godfather" vibe. He left school in the sixth grade, because that's what lower middle-class immigrant children did in the early 1930s, and went to work to help support the family.

He deserves an award for bravery because he was married to my mother, Jeannette Bourgeois Pacheco. She was an inch shy of 5 feet tall with a serious Napoleonic personality. She had boundless enthusiasm for all kinds of things, and I think he decided early on that agreeing with whatever she wanted to do was easier and less exhausting than opposing it.

(I should mention here that he was part of the 85th Custer Division involved in the liberation of Rome during World War II. He was also part of a team that liberated an Austrian general from the Nazis. He was one of just a few who returned from that mission, and was awarded the Bronze Star. It isn't that he lacked the warrior instinct. But my mother was like Joan of Arc on steroids.)

Cases in point: I was born to her sister, Estelle, in January 1945. In April of that year, Estelle died, leaving a husband and 14 children. Many of the younger children were taken in by the older ones who were married, and the older boys stayed with our natural father. Jeannette and Mike had been married almost 10 years at that point and had no children. Jeannette wanted to adopt my 9-year-old sister Lorraine and me, but Mike was in Italy with the Fifth Army. She contacted the Red Cross, who finally found him. They talked on the phone. He told her that he was in agreement with the adoption, but, though he had every intention of coming home, she should be prepared to raise us by herself if the worst happened. She started proceedings.

Happily, he came home and we settled into life on the second floor of a tenement in New Bedford. He was a foreman in a handbag factory, and Jeannette stayed home. Life was good.

My older sister, Rita, lived several blocks from us and had a daughter, Jenny, just six months younger than I. We were constant companions throughout our childhood.

I remember the two of us leaving her house one snowy afternoon to go to my house. Instead of the usual one-block walk to the main thoroughfare, which would take us to my home three blocks away, we decided to explore and walked along a back street. We were stopped by a couple of bigger boys who pelted us with snowballs for being in their neighborhood. Jenny broke away and ran to my house, telling my parents something like, "Two boys grabbed Muriel and I got away!"

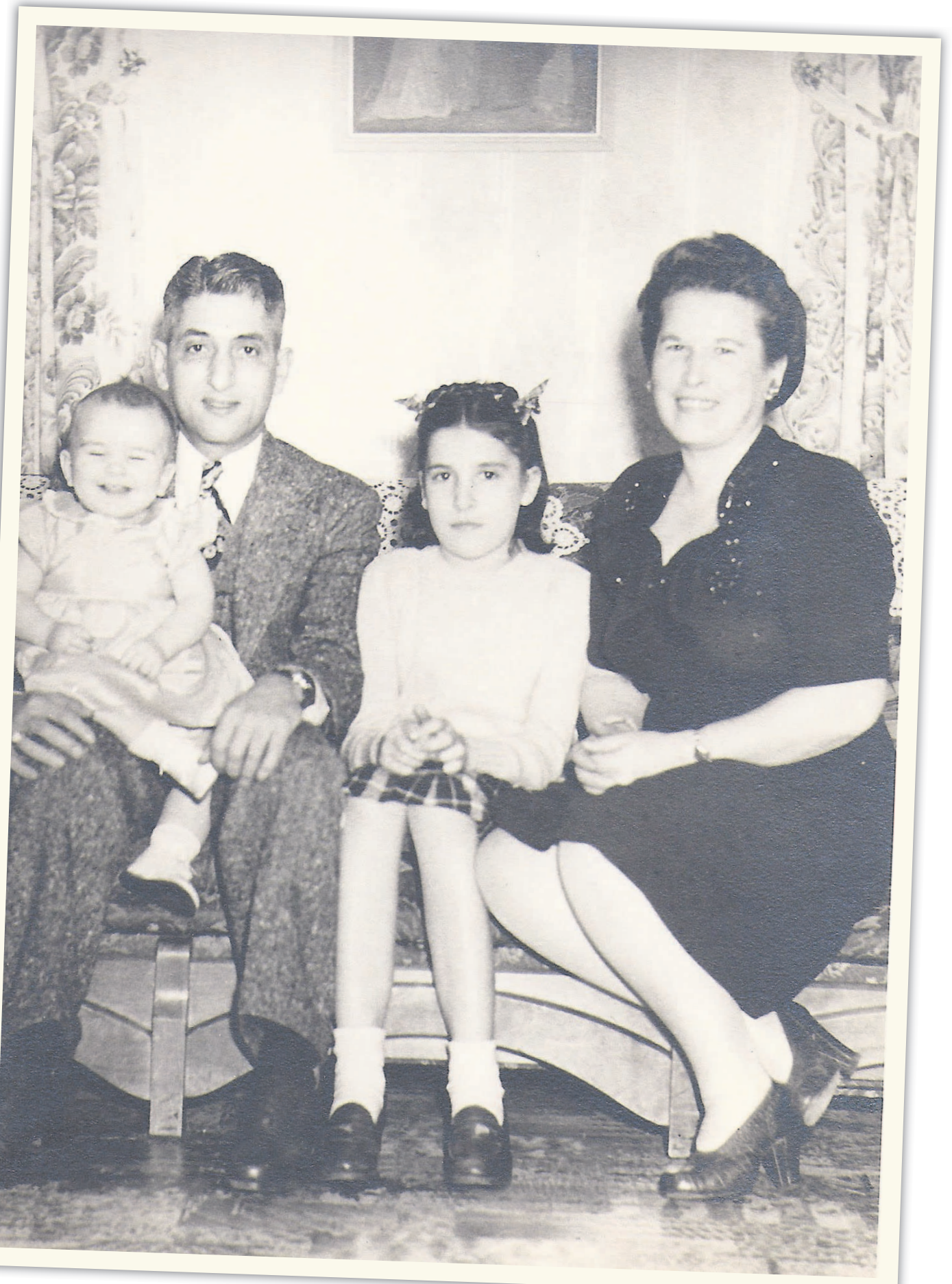
The boys' intentions were no more sinister than squashing snowballs on my face, but while I was doing a creditable job of disarming them, my father, with Jenny trying to keep up, came running down the street. He wore a sleeveless T-shirt, pajama bottoms and his bedroom slippers. He had to be freezing. The boys ran and he shouted at me for not following the more public road home.

While I was offended at the time, I often think about the love that sent him running out the door without stopping long enough to grab a jacket or run around the back to get the car in the dead of a Massachusetts' winter.

We got a puppy at about that same time, a toy fox terrier with a big personality and budding teeth. The first time we left him alone, my mother tied him to the leg of the sofa, thinking he would be unable to reach anything valuable.

My father's leather-bound Zane Grey collection was in a bookcase across the room.

Are you ahead of me? When we got home, Zane Grey was everywhere. Tippy had chewed through his leash, most of the books, the bottom of the sofa and the rocker of a chair.



Muriel Jensen's dad, Mike Pacheco, with her at about 10 months old in his lap. Her sister, Lorraine, 9, and mom, Jeannette, round out the family photo. Submitted Photo

## Writer's Notebook

My father declared, "That dog has got to go!" My sister squared her shoulders and said, "If the dog goes, I go." In support of my sister, I added, "I'm going with Lorraine!" My mother, who sometimes saw humor in the strangest things, said, "Well, if the dog and the kids are gone, you won't need me."

"Fine!" he shouted. "Why don't you all stay home and I'll go?" He left, and was back in half an hour with ice cream.

He bought me a Cinderella watch after he suffered a slipped disk and I told him I asked the kids in my third grade class at St. Anthony's to pray for him.

Lorraine joined the convent after high school and my parents and I went to Canada to see her investiture. She received a white veil, indicating she was a novice, and was given the name by which she would be known for the rest of her life. She chose "Sister Michael" for our father.

When that was announced, he burst into tears. It was the first time I'd ever seen him cry.

He worked nights when I went into high school, but he got up a few hours early every Friday night to take my friends and me to our football games, then brought us home and went on to work.

## My mother was like Joan of Arc on steroids.

The summer between my junior and senior year, I was given custody of our class mascot, a rubber lizard named, appropriately, Lizzie. I'm not sure how it started, but I carelessly left it on my bed and scared my mother to death with it when she came in to vacuum. So we all started hiding it on one another.

At the beginning of my senior year, I was to give a speech to parents and students about our final year in high school. I opened my small clutch purse to retrieve my notes, and Lizzie, stuffed in like the last pickle in a jar, popped out. Everyone got a good laugh, Dad, the perpetrator, particularly.

Our family was far from perfect. The French and Portuguese are volatile and passionate and every complaint or dissent is spoken at high volume. But my parents were loving and kind and dug in to do whatever had to be done at a time when there was no such thing as "finding yourself." Whatever they wanted personally was always second to what the family needed. As I struggle to be a good person today, I think about how easy they made it look.

A salute to all those parents out there who battle life every day to keep their children safe and loved.

Astoria resident Muriel Jensen has published more than 70 books and novellas.

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