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**MY TURN** CHARLES PINNING

# Mother's Day memory: My lying mom

I trusted her. After all, she was the person who'd carried me inside of herself, delivered me into the world, tolerated behavior that would drive any man insane.

It began innocently enough. I just didn't feel well. Still, we took a wait-and-see attitude and she packed my lunchbox and sent me off to school.

I loved my little school, Miss Collings, on Rhode Island Avenue in Newport. I made it through the day and when I returned home, my grandmother was waiting for me at the front door. I'd forgotten that my mother had gone to Providence, "to Governor Street," to have some dental work done.

My Nana, who doted on me, put her hand on my forehead.

"You feel warm," she said.

When my mother got home Nana said, "Mary, he feels warm."

"Oh, he's fine, Ma," said my mother. "He's probably just overheated from walking home."

Nana gave me a kiss and left, bustling in a way to let my mother know that she wasn't pleased. My mother dropped into the gray naugahyde my father usually sat in. She looked exhausted.

"I wish your father was home," she said. My father was in the Navy, and his ship was in the Mediterranean. He wasn't due back for a couple more months. I turned on the TV to watch cartoons and then "Salty Brine's Shack." I felt my forehead. It did feel warm.

After dinner, I could tell I was getting warmer. I put on my pajamas. I was sweating. I went into the bathroom and drank straight from the faucet.

I felt so tired. It was the first time I remember going to sleep before I was told to. I heard my mother open the door and a few moments later, close it.

In the middle of the night, I woke up hallucinating. My older brother was standing over me.

"Are you okay?" he was asking.

"Are you dreaming?"

I didn't know what I was doing. I was talking in tongues, freaking him out. He woke up my mother. She took my temperature. "What is it?" I heard my brother ask.

"A hundred and six. I have to call Dr. Abramson."

She rushed out of the room while I writhed and hyperventilated on the bed.

"Don't worry, you'll be OK," my brother said.

"I feel weird," I said.

My mother came back and marched me into the bathroom. She was filling the tub. She took my pajamas off and I began shaking, I was suddenly so cold.

When the tub was full she said, "Get in."

I put my foot in but the water was freezing. "No!" I screamed. I was becoming untinged.

My mother stuck her hand in the tub and pulled it out quickly.

"That water is so damn hot,

I can't even keep my hand in it. It only feels cold to you because you're so sick."

"Are you sure?" I asked her. I was shaking.

"Of course I am. Do this for me, please."

Holding my mother's hand, I stepped into the tub.

"Now sit down," she said.

Slowly I sank into the water.

"Now lie back."

Sometime later, I was put back into bed. My brother had changed the sheets and Dr. Abramson had arrived with his black bag. He gave me something, and I fell asleep.

It was pneumonia, and I was in bed for days. I recovered and my robust young life resumed. Years later, I was visiting Newport with a friend who wasn't feeling well and took her to Dr. Abramson. Afterwards, he invited us to stay for dinner with him and his wife and that's when he told me how my mother had saved my life by pretending the cold water in the bathtub was hot so I'd get in.

"We had to get your fever down immediately and I told her to get you into a tub of ice cold water."

"She tricked me," I said.

"You're right, and it's a damn good thing for you that she did."

On this Mother's Day, I thank you, Mama. Again.

— Charles Pinning, of Providence, is a novelist and an occasional contributor.