

Memories of my Mother  
“I can’t thank her enough”

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Michael Baird

I would like to share some memories of Mom. They are personal memories but are both shared and representative of memories of my brothers and sisters.

One of my favorite early memories is of Mom reading to me and teaching me how to read. She taught me how to read long before I started going to school and developed in me a love for reading. Throughout our life we would share with each other books we enjoyed so that the other might also read and enjoy it. We especially shared a love of historical fiction and good adventure books. It was hard for her toward the end of her life when she could no longer read. So Dad would take time to read out loud to her. I read hundreds of books every year and I attribute my love of reading to the start my mother gave me. As a boy who had a mother like that, I can’t thank her enough.

Our mother was not above a little manipulation to teach us or to get us to do what she thought was right. The key being she did not manipulate us for her benefit but rather it was always for “our sake”. The fact is all of us children and grandchildren alike could tell stories of these manipulations for our behalf. She would often say or do unusual or sometimes silly things that made a great impression on us.

When I was about 6 years old we were at my grandparent’s farm, that is Mom’s parents farm, out in Wapello, Idaho. As was the way that things were done then the laundry was hung out on a clothes line in the back yard to dry. I was outside playing when Mom got me and took me over to the clothes line and showed me a pair of my uncles Kenneth’s jeans. I can still picture those jeans hanging there. They were faded with several holes in them along with several spots that looked like they had been bleached with Clorox.

My mother said to me (and I can still hear the words in my head) “if you drink coca cola your stomach will look like those jeans”. It sure made an impression on me. To this day I can count on one hand how many times I have drunk a coke of any kind. As a boy who had a mother like that, I can’t thank her enough.

I think that the greatest influence that my mother had on me (or any of us) was when I was a teenager. She had a way with teenagers. She told me later when I had teenagers of my own how much she loved teenagers and that how she always just understood them, how to talk with and relate to them and just didn't understand how other people couldn't understand teenagers.

As a teenager I think I was best manipulated with food. After school my friends would say: "Let's go over to your house". I would agree because I knew, just as they did, that *my* mother would have warm loaves of homemade bread waiting for us. We would show up and devour whole loaves of bread with honey or homemade jam along with gallons of milk and talk of our day and other things with mom. I know she didn't ever despair of this as she loved having us there.

I remember her being to all of my basketball and football games no matter how far the drive and it was sometimes several hours of driving where we lived to the other schools.

When I became old enough to be interested in girls Mom taught me what was appropriate behavior and what was not. When I began dating is when she coined the clever phrase which Joan shared earlier. "Between the neck and the knees, hands off please". It was later when my sister Barbara began dating she added "Between the nose and the toes nothing goes".

Those phrases are familiar to all our family and even to many in my own ward and stake, and I'm sure familiar too in other wards where mom's children and grandchildren live. My daughter Shellie received a text a couple of days ago from a friend who grew up in our ward which said: "I'm really sorry about your grandma. I'll never forget "Neck to knees, hands off please. Nose to toes, nothing goes".

When I would leave the house for dates or to be with friends she would come up to me beforehand and make like she was plucking one of her eyes out. She would then reach out and grab my pants pocket and "put" her "eyeball" in my pants pocket and say something like "you have my eyeball in your pocket so be good because I'll be able to see everything you do." Every time I was out I would come back and talk with my mother about the night's doings. Before I ever heard the

now popular phrase “Return with Honor” my mother taught me to return with honor. As a teenager who had a mother like that, I can’t thank her enough.

Growing up as a boy I had to have everything ordered. Mom would tell me how when I was little every night before going to bed I had to order my toys in a row from smallest to largest and by kind. All my life things need to be ordered or in geometric patterns. This is sometimes to my wife’s despair when I’ve reordered things in her kitchen or seen something out of place in our house and proceed to “fix”it. Or sometimes it is to my amusement when I notice that while talking to someone I have been fiddling with my hands and lined up everything within reach. I mention this because it wasn’t until I was older that I realized that my mother also had an analytical mindset that demanded order. In her life everything needed to be ordered. We laughed together one day not too long ago as we compared some of the quirky things this demand for order in our lives caused us to do. The one quirk that she had up on me was she couldn’t buy a shirt if it had just one breast pocket. It had to be symmetrical with two pockets before she could buy the shirt because it just didn’t look right. All of us children could share stories of her need for things to line up right, or be in the correct order.

As I look back now I’ve come to realize that this shared characteristic helped her understand me and have patience with me. I remember a time when I was about 4 or 5 years old where she made me take a nap or at least I had to lay down for a rest. She gave me her watch to time the nap saying I could get up only after so many minutes had passed by. These were in the days before watches had batteries and you had to wind it up to go. To my young mind it made sense that if you wound up the watch to run then the more you wound it the faster it would run. And so I wound and wound the watch to make the nap time go by faster and ended up breaking the watch. I remember felling horrible about it yet I remember most her patience with me explaining that wasn’t the way watches and time worked. As a boy who had a mother like that, I can’t thank her enough.

Mom was always one “to do” and not sit around complaining about things. If something needed to be done you just did it. Even if the job was not fun or “yucky” you just did it. This is a trait I’m sure she learned growing up. She grew up on a dairy farm in Wapello Idaho. As a teenager after her two older brothers left for college and her younger brother was as she said “allergic to everything so he couldn’t help” she would do the farm chores. In the mornings she would feed

the calves and gather eggs from the chicken coop and then rush to catch the bus to school (without bathing). Her father at that time worked from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM at the feed store in town. So after school she would get the cows in and start the milking getting 5 or 6 cows milked for when her father came home and then she would help finish the milking and feed the calves. In the summer she would be the tractor driver for haying. Growing up on a farm she learned how to be responsible, self-sufficient and confident in her abilities to get things done. When we children were growing up my parents found ways for us to have such "fun" chores to teach us responsibility and the value of work. At various times we milked cows, raised chickens and pigs and always had a garden to weed. I remember when I was about 10 or 11 years old swearing that I would never have a garden when I grew up. Which is funny of course since I've had a garden for the past 25 years or so and find a kind of Zen-like peace in working in my garden. This attitude of if something needs to be done you just do it and when you do a job you do it right is a characteristic of our family that both of our parents taught us. As a man who had a mother like that, I can't thank her enough.

Mom served in many callings. Emblematic is her service as a Relief society president - twice. The second time was in Oregon where they lived in a different ward but in the same stake as my family for about 15 years. A hallmark of her service is she was always helping the sisters in practical ways. She was not one to just tell them what they should be doing but would go to them and show them what they should do. This included everything from how to clean toilets to baking bread to how to do a family night lesson. It was not uncommon for her to just show up unannounced at some sisters home to teach some homemaking skill. The wife of my Stake President was one of the young sisters that she helped in such a way. I was standing in line at a local grade school to sign up for youth basketball or soccer or something - I can't remember which now. I was behind this sister in the line and we got to talking. She told me "I just love your mother". You know I would be a rich man if I had a dollar for every time someone has said that to me. It seems like every time I would meet members of Mom & Dad's ward at various stake functions I would hear something like. "You are Dick and Darlene's son yes? We just love them". This sister told me how my mother just showed up one day at her door and announced she was there to teach her how to bake bread. "She came in and taught me how to bake bread and do other cooking." This sister then looked at me with this look of wonder in her face and said "It was as if Mary Poppins came

swooping into my house and put everything right”. As a man who had a mother like that, I can’t praise her enough.

Our family moved around a lot growing up. Mom and dad have also moved a lot since I left home. They have lived in many house and many places and in many wards and branches. I asked Mom how hard that was for her one time and she said to me “You know me. Bloom where you are planted”. I have thought about that. What did she really mean by that saying? How did she bloom where she was planted? I think there are various ways but this is the thing that comes foremost to my mind. My mother was the very definition of empathy. It was one of her most defining characteristics. She had this gift to be able to look at you and immediately have feelings for you and she just seemed to *know* you - understand you, what motivated you, what your hopes, your trials and struggles were and so on. Before you knew it she was was your friend. Doing things to uplift you, helping you in very practical ways, giving you hope and laughter and just being a good friend. It was something she did *everywhere she lived*. I remember several times her trying to teach this analytical young man what it meant to walk in another person’s shoes as she would put it. As a man who had a mother like that, I can’t praise her enough.

One of the greatest legacies our family has received from Mom is one of unwavering faith and good cheer in the face of trials and tribulations. She had many physical ailments throughout her life. She would say that life is not perfect and if we were all to hang our troubles out like clothes on a line where we could all see them and then got to pick which problems and trials we would like as our own, that we would each still pick our own to carry. That our trials were for our own good and that through faith and laughter we can carry them. This was no better exemplified than the way she carried herself through the trials of cancer that took her life. She carried herself with a grace that was amazing and yet at the same time was no surprise to all of us. When I would call and talk to her the way I would know she was not feeling well would be because she would say something like “Oh I’m just being lazy today sitting around in my lazy girl chair”. She would say to the doctors “why don’t you just put a zipper in my stomach so you can just open me up and slurp out the cancer instead of doing these surgeries”. Or she would talk of the surgeries that would remove 10-15 lbs of stuff from stomach as her “weight loss program”. My father related to me recently how one of her doctors wondered how she could always be so positive

and cheerful in the face of her health trials. Her reply to the doctor was “Nobody likes a grouch”.

In our life growing up there were times when things were tough and yet we children never really knew it. I don't remember them as tough times though now I know they had to be. As an example Dad went to college at BYU in Utah when I was just starting 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. 5 years of college with 4 young children. Imagine that if you will. We lived in Orem, Utah in a fairly nice neighborhood and looking back I'm sure we had to be about the poorest family in the neighborhood. I remember helping during the ward welfare assignment picking fruit in the orchard and then going with Mom back to those very same orchards and gathering fruit after the picking was done. Gleaning the fields as it were. We would spread blankets around on the ground and then I would climb up in the tree and shake the tree so the fruit would fall on them. We would then take the fruit home and can it. I mentioned this memory to my mother not too long ago. I was struck by her reply. She didn't say anything about how tough the times were or or complain or even say why she was out “gleaning in the orchard” to help feed her family. Instead she said the thing she remembered most about that was a framed picture in her mind of me up in the tree with my eyes sparkling and dancing with delight as I would ask her: “Do we need some more?” while I tried to shake fruit onto her when she tried to go under the tree. As a boy who had a mother like that, I can't thank her enough.

Thanks to the faith and hope in Christ instilled in me and nurtured by my mother and father, I know that someday I will see Mom again. I know that death is but a parting in sweet sorrow. I know that Mom is in a place free from suffering. I know Mom had this same faith and hope of a life together after death. She affirmed that to me in some of our last Mother-Son conversations together. With a faith like she had how could I not have the same faith?

Mom, as children who had a mother like that, we all can't thank you or praise you enough. Thanks Mom.