

never heard either of them say anything negative about anything. They were always too busy enjoying the good things in life. Maybe to some it would sound as if it were a dream world. Well, my aunt always said, “We are the creators of our worlds.”

Mike and I didn’t see one another until the following summer, but I had changed. It just wasn’t the same. I had discovered I had so much more to learn before I wanted to settle down. I think now it was just as well since he became a preacher.

My aunt passed away several years ago, but she will always live in my heart forever. All the things she taught me about—you couldn’t buy for any amount of money. There is something to be said for having peace in your life—real peace. Maybe, it’s just, “taking a moment to make a memory with a loved one.” We finished that painting together. It still hangs on my parents’ living room wall. Every time I look at it, I remember the summer of 1976.

Aunt Hazel will always be a special part of my growing up. Right before she passed away, I was able to tell her how much that summer meant to me and how much she was loved by me. We stood in her bedroom holding hands and I watched a tear fall from her cheek. I was thirty-two years of age by then. It never occurred to me at the time that it would be the last time I would see her—at least, in this life time. My nightmare summer turned out to be one of my most treasured memories. It was—”just lovely.”

MY MOM, SO PRECIOUS

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I have been blessed to have my mother in my life for thirty-six years. She has been the focal point of love, and her support has been endless. Her greatest achievement in life has been fulfilling the role of both mother and father. It will be difficult to express in words the love and admiration I feel for her. My mother has truly been a gift. so very precious.

My father died when I was six and my sister was twelve. The memories I have of that time are very faint, but I remember seeing Mom crying and remember my sister and I receiving extra hugs. Life as it seemed to me returned to normal with the exception that I had no father. At the time my father died, Mom was thirty-five years old and worked a full-time job in a factory. She worked the night-shift, and as a result, my sister and I stayed with an elderly couple who lived down the street from us during the week. My sister hated it there, but I did not mind it. However, when Friday came, I realized how much I missed my mom.

Mom picked us up every Friday after work to take us home for the weekend. The weekends always went by too fast, but were filled with laughter and affection. We did the housework, shopping, and whatever else needed to be done. My sister could have easily argued that she did all the work as I sat and watched, but she never complained. Our Sundays consisted of going to the laundromat in the morning, then coming home to watch old Charlie Chan and Sherlock Holmes movies in the afternoon. We always had a large Sunday dinner and it was great because we were with Mom.

During the next six years we moved three times. Each move was always quick and smooth. It did not take long for each place to feel like home. Mom was the sole reason for that feeling. We always cleaned and painted before moving in, and Mom seemed to take all the work in stride. Although each apartment was usually larger than the last, I always shared a bedroom with Mom. One of the fondest memories I have is falling asleep each night with one arm and one leg across her back. I remember lying there and thinking how much I loved her and cherished her soothing scent.

Years later, Mom expressed the sadness she felt for leaving us during the week. As my sister and I looked back, we assured her that we understood. She really had no other choice. She needed to provide for her children, and her job was the basis on which to accomplish it. We always felt secure through the tenderness and love she so effortlessly displayed, and that has been constant throughout our whole lives. Mom's presence and personality have always been so peaceful and serene. For a single mother raising two children, working six days a week and running a household, life's ups and downs came naturally for her.

When my sister and I were a few years older, we always met Mom at her factory job on Fridays after school. We waited for her while at least seventy-five women walked through the door single file. Mom was usually one of the last ones, but I remember the feeling of excitement I felt

when I knew she was about to appear. She always peered around the doorway and looked right at the spot she knew we would be sitting. A great smile crossed her face when she saw us and I would run up to hug her. The rest of the night was spent going to dinner and shopping at Sears. Sears was the main department store in our neighborhood and was the place to shop. Mom pretty much spoiled us and made sure we always had the clothes and accessories needed for school and things in general.

We were very close to my grandmother who came to live with us a couple of different times. Mom always welcomed her and was sad to see her leave again. My grandmother was an amusing, witty, charming, and wonderful human being. When she was diagnosed with cancer, the effects of the disease on her, as well as us, were horrible. Mom took care of my grandmother until the day she died. The only family Mom had besides us was her mother. I was sixteen at the time and witnessed the devastation my mom endured. Mom's strength and composure helped us through the funeral, and for considerable time afterwards when the void in all our hearts was felt.

My sister married just before my grandmother died, so now it was just Mom and me. It certainly was an adjustment to make because we missed my sister so much. She only lived forty-five minutes away, but we felt it was on the other side of the world. My mom never really let on how much she missed her other daughter, but I knew how much, and felt the same way. My sister was always there with warmth, affection, and whatever else was needed when Mom could not always be around. Mom was grateful for all the support my sister gave so generously.

Mom and I spent many times watching old movies. She knew all the movie stars' names and whom they were married to at what time. We used to love cleaning the house while listening to Frank Sinatra records. He is still her all-time favorite. It is so cute to see the twinkle in her eyes when his name is mentioned. I think every Christmas for many years I was never at a loss what to buy for her. If all else failed, buy her a Frankie record, she would be happy. In 1993, my sister and I bought Sinatra concert tickets for the three of us. As we sat ten rows back, my mom entered a heavenly state.

When the three of us took a trip to Las Vegas, we had a great time. We spent the day running around to try our luck at all the casinos. We spent the evenings at dinner laughing and talking about everything under the sun. Mom loved all the nightclub acts so we went to as many as possible. One of the nights Mom retired early, so my sister and I gambled the night away. At 6:00 a.m., we were walking towards the elevator and as the doors opened, here was Mom, half asleep, hair ruffled and her shirt

on backwards. In the midst of her yelling, we assumed she was trying to find her two “grown” daughters. We started laughing, but still had to listen to her rant and rave that just because we were adults did not mean she stopped worrying about us. We led her to the room and tucked her back in bed.

A year after I graduated from high school, my boyfriend and I decided to get married and start a family right away. I was not sure how Mom would like this idea and it must have taken me a month to sit her down to tell her. The reaction I listened to was one of understanding and respect. She explained how hard it would be for a young couple just starting out and trying to make it on their own. We cried and hugged each other for a long time. Mom offered to rent the upstairs apartment to us, and little did she know I would not have wanted it any other way. As much as I wanted to be married, I shivered at the thought of leaving her. This way I could have the best of both worlds. Mom gave us all the privacy we needed, and I could still run down anytime to be with her.

When my daughter was born, Mom took two weeks vacation time to help me. I was frightened and not sure what to do at first. Mom was a God-send as she guided me through everything. She put me at ease to the point I thought this whole mother idea was a piece of cake. That probably lasted two days and my tears started to fall. She chuckled and said, “Welcome to motherhood.”

We moved five years later, and found a house to add an apartment downstairs for my mom. My husband had no reservations about it as he remarked many times, “She is definitely not the typical mother-in-law type.” Her place was fixed up just as she wanted and she let us know that she enjoyed living with us. I had two children by this time and cherished that my kids could experience the love my mom had to give.

We moved from Chicago to Valparaiso eight months ago when my husband’s job relocated. The same arrangement was made for Mom in our new home. She finally retired after working forty years and we wanted to make sure her new place was better than the last. The move has worked out well for all of us, and her place is perfect.

I could not imagine Mom living anywhere else other than with me. She has been with me through all the smooth and rough times. Her constant love and support have been without judgment or criticism. I have made plenty of mistakes, but have been fortunate to have her close to help sort things through. There has never been a magic wand that she has waved over me to take all of life’s problems away; just her being there was

enough. I am thankful to have such a person in my life, and the fact that she is my mother is more valuable than I could ever express.

“TELL ME ABOUT WHEN YOU MET ME.”

Elizabeth Johnston

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On May 23, 1996, Mom and I were rushing to get checked into the Xiamen Hotel, and we could hardly wait for our bags to get to the room. In less than a half an hour, we would be at the Xiamen Children’s Welfare Institute of China. Mom and I had already waited eight months to meet you and we only had about thirty minutes to go. Once we got our bags, we tore apart the suitcases looking for all the things that we needed to bring to the orphanage: diaper bag, clothing, and supplies for the orphanage. All eight of your Chinese sisters’ families, our interpreter Tina, and our lawyer Keith scrambled to get on the bus.

The bus was very similar to the one that we rode in Beijing just a few days earlier. It was old, smelled like moth balls, and it looked like it was made in the late sixties, but that didn’t matter to me. My dream was coming true; I was going to meet my sister. Once we arrived at the orphanage we were told that we could only film our babies. All of the parents brought cameras, but only Keith and I brought video cameras. Mine was the only one that decided to work, so I became the photographer for the day.

Once inside we were led by one of the nannies down a short hallway. All the curtains to the rooms were shut so we could not see the rooms that we passed by. At the end of the hallway was the meeting room. The room was in a circular shape and the ceiling was painted blue with white clouds. Everyone found a place to sit down on the big couches that were covered with mauve velvet material and waited. I sat there calmly, but inside my heart was pounding. I was excited, scared, and nervous all at once. Keith and Tina spoke to the nannies and to the director of the orphanage. All of the nannies were beautiful and kind. After a few business issues were taken care of, the nannies left the room. It seemed like days, but in only minutes the first baby arrived. It was you.