

A Tribute to Mom

In band, bowling, or life itself, Mom was my biggest cheerleader. She was never the loudest, but she was definitely the most consistent. She pushed me to keep going when I wanted to quit, yet fully supported me when it was time to move on.

She never sought to be the center of attention, but she always made her presence known when it mattered. She didn't make life about herself; it was always about you. She was concerned about seeming needy, overbearing, or a nuisance. Yet, everyone would bend over backward to help her. She was the nicest person you'd ever meet—until you crossed someone she loved. She was simply always there when you needed her, magically, in the perfect way.

I remember her as someone who was constantly doing everything for everyone, often neglecting her own needs.

- For years, she took care of my dad after his accident.
- She took care of my Grandma and my Grandpa.
- She took care of me.
- She took care of the neighborhood kids.
- She drove my friends and I all over town before we could drive.

She never seemed to run out of time to help.

In the midst of all this, she still found time for painting, ceramics, sewing, cloth art, needlepoint, and every artistic endeavor you can imagine. Fishing, baseball, hiking, you name it she was involved.

- She made my Halloween costumes.
- She made Christmas ornaments.
- She painted murals on our picture window for the holidays.
- She worked in our garden.
- She delivered newspapers.
- She took me to the park.
- She played catch with me.
- She was my Cub scout den mother.
- She taught me so much.

Now, every time I see one of those handmade Christmas ornaments, or remember the mural on the picture window, I know her love is still right here, in the details she created. Her hands were always busy—creating, fixing, comforting. She left behind a world full of color and craft, and every piece is a reminder of her love.

She was a shield. We were poor, but I never knew it until I was grown. She sacrificed so I could have, shielding me from the harsh realities of being one of the "have nots." Maybe that's why we made our own Christmas ornaments and why she made my Halloween costumes—I never would have guessed at the time. It's funny how much we miss as kids. All the signs were there, but I was oblivious I was just a happy kid. One year, when things came to a boiling point and we were being treated poorly at church, she moved us across town to start fresh. When I turned 16 and needed a car, she "magically" needed a new one and sold me their old one for next to nothing. There are countless examples of things she did for me that I never knew how much she had to sacrifice to give. She always seemed to know what I needed. Yet, she also knew when to step back and let me grow. She let me make my

own choices and fail on my own. There was never an "I told you so" just a hug, a smile, and a conversation about what we learned by this.

She was at every band concert, every bowling event, and every important event of my life. I realize now that her consistency was not just about attendance; it was the foundation for my entire sense of stability. She didn't lecture; she just lived by example. Every choice she made taught me the quiet power of showing up, day after day. I realize now just how much of her is in me. For years I've said, "I may not be loud, I may not be flashy, but my super power is that I show up. I'm there when you need me." It was not until writing this that I realized I also get that from her.

We shared a love of history, specifically the Civil War. We watched movies. We listened to music. I will never forget the year we spent watching Ken Burns' *Civil War*. This was back when you had to set up the VCR to tape it on Iowa PBS. We watched every episode, then we watched them again. We signed up for the Time Life Civil War series and read those. We consumed every possible source of Civil War information from the library. Then she surprised me and we took a trip (with grandma and grandpa too) to the southern US to visit Civil War battlefields (and Space Camp). We were always watching some movie on TV and she seemed to enjoy just about everything. I will also never forget the time she was driving my friends and I to something... that part I forget... but Vanilla Ice came on and she, somehow, knew all of the words to "Ice Ice Baby." This was back in 1990 and the song couldn't have been more than a month old.

I owe so much of who I am to my mom. I already feel lost without her.

I was lucky enough to have her for 50 years. I was also lucky to be able to talk to her about end of life. I know she was ready to go; she had fought MS for so long. I had time to prepare... but you are never prepared. I know she's at peace now. She's done fighting. Somewhere, in heaven, she's dancing, running, and probably giving my Grandpa hell.

Somehow, it doesn't sting any less.