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Celebrating Motherhood



A Tribute To Mothers

by **Wendy Jensen**

Celebrating Motherhood: A Tribute To Mothers

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This book is dedicated to my mom, my mother-in-law, and all of the other wonderful women in my life who have had a profound and positive influence on my life as well as the lives of my children. Thank You!!

Introduction

Why I Decided To Write This Book

I was pondering and praying for a project that would uplift and inspire others, when an impression came one early morning. The idea was to put together a book that would celebrate and give tribute to mothers. I began thinking about my mother and everything that she taught me. I reflected on my mother-in-law and how grateful I was for her in my life. I considered my grandmothers and my own role as a mother. I contemplated all of the wonderful women in my life who have influenced me in a positive way. So many ideas started flooding my mind that I couldn't wait to begin writing!

This project has been highly rewarding for me. Although I have written a few books, this one held a little extra "magic" since I was able to stir up a measure of creativity that had been sitting dormant for some time. As I tried to describe my children in some of these stories, I started to glimpse each of them in a new light, almost as if seeing them for the first time. I was able to take brief moments in time and put them down on paper before they slipped through my mind like sand through an hour-glass. It has been fulfilling to be able to write about the experiences that I hold most dear – that of being a mother.

Many of my thoughts have been recorded in my numerous journals that I have kept throughout the years, but they had never been put in story form. As I was searching for particular experiences in my journals, I was blessed several times by locating the correct journal and opening it up to the exact page of the story for which I was searching. I have also had several names come to mind of people who I felt had stories to share. Some already had their stories written down and some had never actually put their amazing stories in print. I wish to thank all of those who sent me their experiences.

Some are dear friends and some are strangers, but we are all linked by the common thread of motherhood.

I hope you will be able to enjoy this book as we share our commonalities and differences. All of us have stories to share – anecdotes that will lift and encourage, narratives that will make us laugh and make us cry. Every one in the world has been touched by the love of a mother. Let us share this love together as we celebrate motherhood!

Stories on Motherhood

A Piece Of Heaven

My newborn daughter's emergence from her dark, cozy, secure world into the bright light and bustling confusion of a hospital room brought forth loud, angry cries of protest that were exquisite music to my ears. Finally! She was here! This beautiful, perfect little person was placed upon my chest, still damp and warm from her recent journey. She snuggled in, becoming still and content.

I tried (for just a moment) to remember everything that had brought her here. I thought about the fatigue, heartburn, and nausea. I recalled the leg cramps, back pain, and continuous jabs of pain in my rib cage. I contemplated the sleepless nights and weeks of braxton hicks. I thought about the difficulty in doing the simplest things such as tying my shoes or rolling over in bed. I sighed recalling insensitive comments from well-meaning but tactless people over how "big" I was. I considered my roller-coaster hormones and feeling frumpy and fat. I thought about stretch marks and wearing the same huge clothes over and over, constantly counting the days, weeks, and months. I thought about the pain of labor and finally giving birth...

But that was all over now. Here she was – lying in my arms and all of the fleeting memories of the past nine months had slipped away, filed into a far away corner of my brain labeled, "experience of pregnancy." My husband and I had assisted in creating one of God's miracles! I smiled, my husband cried. Our hearts opened up and our love grew. I gazed deep into those little blue eyes and saw a piece of heaven. My life had changed forever... I was a mother!

--Wendy Jensen--

“And A Little Child Shall Lead Them...”

When my son was a toddler, he grabbed his cup of juice and flung it off the high chair. The lid popped off and juice splattered in all directions. Spills are all a part of raising children, but I must have been feeling a little extra tired and irritated that day because without even thinking I raised my voice exclaiming, “No No!” My three year old daughter watched the scene with interest and asked innocently, “Are you angry Mommy?” I admitted that I was a little angry and she said, “Why don’t you pray to Heavenly Father that you won’t be angry?” I immediately felt humbled as I gazed at both my children. Their little faces looked up at me with sincere blue eyes. “Thank you for that reminder,” I said softly, “I will pray.”

--Wendy Jensen—

“Just Hold My Hand!”

When Jaden, our oldest son was about to turn 4, he seemed so grown up to me. I said to him, "Jaden, I don't know if I'm ready for a 4-year-old. What will I do when you turn 4?" The wise answer I got from my little boy was, "Just hold my hand." Since that occasion, and through the years I have come to realize that that is a great lesson in parenting. We can endlessly try to push our children into doing what we want them to, or we can develop a close companionship with them and lead them by the hand through their lessons in life.

--Jenny Condie--

Marrying Mom

I went to work at a Mom's Day Out program when my son Keaton turned three. He needed to be around other children and I had to learn how to let him go just a little. One day after MDO we headed to the car. What we did not know at the time was that while we were inside, my husband had filled my car with roses. There were so many roses that I had to move them to be able to sit down. When I placed Keaton in his car seat and drove off, he asked me why Daddy did that. I explained to him that husbands do sweet things for their wives because they love them. Then I heard this little cry coming from the back seat. I turned to look and there was my son with tears streaming down his face. I asked him why he was so upset. He replied, "It's not fair. I wanted to marry you, but Daddy married you first!" On that day I realized that I had to be the luckiest girl in the world to have two guys who loved me more than I could have ever dreamed!

--Tara Love--

"Thank You For Being My Hero!"

When Jaden was four years old, he kept asking me to get things for him, or help him with this or that. After I finally got him and his brother cleaned up from their lunch, I sat down in hopes to finish my own. Jaden again began calling, "Mommy...Mommy..." After ignoring him a few times, I finally responded with a little annoyance, "What??" In his innocent little voice, he answered "Thank you for being my hero." The little things we do as mothers for our children can seem insignificant and even bothersome at times, but in the eyes of our little ones, we are simply heroic!

--Jenny Condie--

The Christmas Letter

Last Christmas I wanted to give our children something a little more meaningful than plastic swords, light sabers, and roller blades. So I decided to write each of them a heartfelt letter expressing my love for them. In the letter I told them how proud I was of them and that I loved them simply for who they were. I also listed some of their talents and strengths and thanked them for everything they do to make our family a success.

Before they were allowed to open their one Christmas Eve present, I told them that I had a special gift for them and passed out the letters. The children who were old enough to read went ahead and read their letters, while my husband and I read the letters to the younger children. They all gave a sincere thanks and then were ready to move on to opening presents.

However, my nine year old son announced, "Wait, I'm not finished reading mine yet!" We all waited as he finished. Tears began to stream down his face. Then he hopped off the couch, walked over to me and gave me the longest, warmest hug I think I've ever received from him!

I was so moved that my fun-loving, basketball, soccer-playing son was so touched by these simple words of love. This was the boy that had knocked over a bucket of bright blue paint all over light tan carpet when his dad was painting his room. He was the one who made a two foot hole in our wall while mattress surfing down our stairs. He is the one who stood on a cupboard door to reach something up high and not only broke it right off its hinges, but also cracked the cupboard door in half (in not one, but two houses!) This is the same boy who wore the same dirty socks for five days in a row before we noticed an awful smell coming from his feet. He was the one who managed to wear out several pairs of jeans and a pair of shoes in just one month and always came home from school with a dirty shirt.

This was also the boy who took care of his two year old sister every night when she asked for a drink of water or wanted a story. He was the one who brought her to mom and dad if she got scared in the night and fixed her a bowl of cereal every morning. This was the boy who tenaciously practiced his multiplication test over and over until he could fill out all 144 squares in less than three minutes. He is the one who always unloaded his dishwasher without being asked. This was the boy who stood in my arms and cried on Christmas Eve.

Later on that night he went upstairs to his room and re-read the letter, again becoming teary-eyed. When his sister asked him if he was okay, he simply said, "My letter -- it's...happy!" As I went to kiss him good-night I saw him re-reading the letter one last time before his eyes closed in sleep.

We all enjoyed opening our gifts the next morning, but the best gift I received was a sincere warm hug of thanks from a teary-eyed nine-year old boy with a dimple in his cheek, perpetual holes in his jeans, and smelly socks.

--Wendy Jensen--

Will You Tuck Me In?

When my daughter was four years old, she liked BOTH Mommy and Daddy to come tuck her in. So if Daddy had already tucked her in, she would call for Mommy and actually get out of the covers so that Mommy could tuck her in too. One day she said, "Do you know why I have you and Daddy both tuck me in? I asked, "Why?" She piped up, "so that one of you doesn't feel bad that you didn't get to do it!"

--Wendy Jensen--

Faith in the Eyes of a Child

My daughter Payton was accompanying me on one of my frequent trips to Costco. With five children, it's hard to keep the pantry stocked. I grabbed a cart, and headed inside with a mental list of essentials. After acquiring a few items that were on my list and a few that weren't, we stopped to look at a display of religious art.

Large, beautifully framed prints depicting Christ in various scenes were arranged elegantly. It was this out-of-place elegance that caught our attention. Payton and I paused and were soon entranced by the portraits of the savior. The warmth of soft light radiating from the face of Christ held our gaze for a few calm moments of silent wonder.

After blinking, my focus was shifted to a brightly colored schedule that was posted beside one of the paintings Payton wanted to purchase. The artist, Greg Olsen, was going to be there all week signing his prints; in fact he was going to be there that very day. I must have inadvertently said this out loud, omitting the name of the artist. In fact, I think the only part of this Payton heard was, "He's going to be here today."

Payton grabbed my arm suddenly, and then quickly clasped her hands. I didn't think it was possible for an 11 year old girl's voice to be so high, but I soon found that I had been wrong. Without warning, Payton's voice rose octaves, achieving a tone not generally heard by humans. Her eyes were wide with excitement, and she screeched, "What?!!!! He's coming today? Jesus is coming to Costco?!"

I was momentarily startled by her over-zealous reaction, until what she said actually penetrated. I couldn't help but smile. I may have even laughed outright. "No, Payton, the artist is going to be here. He'll be signing his paintings for people that buy them."

“Oh.” Some of the light left her eyes, as she realized her mistake.

I instantly wanted to recapture the simple and beautiful innocence that had played across her face when she thought she might meet the Savior.

“Payton, were you excited when you thought you were going to meet Jesus?”

“Yes, but I was kind of worried too.”

“You were worried? What about?”

“Well, there might be a few people I need to say sorry to before I meet him.”

Smiling and giving her a half-hug, I uttered softly, “Yeah, me too.”

We moved on, and finished our shopping, but I went back to buy the painting Payton admired most. I will always remember this day with my daughter as I see the portrait of Christ hanging in my home. What a magnificent thing it is to see faith through the eyes of a child.

--Tiffany Driggs--

A Mile of Smiles

When Jeremy was about two or so and was learning how to dress himself, I'd go pick out some clothes for him and he'd put them on. At two, Kevin wanted a choice, so I'd ask him if he wanted the green outfit or the blue outfit and he'd choose one and put them on. Then came Mark. When he was two and I asked him if he would like the green outfit or the blue outfit his response was, "**I WANT THE RED ONE!!!**" And sometimes he'd get dressed on his own and sometimes not.

One day I was planning to run some errands and told Mark to get dressed about an hour before I needed to leave. He putted around and didn't get dressed until finally the time had arrived to leave. I noticed that he had picked the top from one outfit and the bottom from another. Not too unusual! Mark, being Mark, decided to put the shirt on his legs and the pants on his head, one leg hanging over each side like dog ears! I thought to myself, "Well, he's dressed! He's got his shirt and pants on!" And off we went! We went to the bank, to the office, to the grocery store and to the school. We got the funniest looks from people. I just smiled and said, "He's two and he dressed himself today." He may have not been dressed the "right" way, but we certainly left a mile of smiles behind us that day!

--Sue Guebert--

One Little Voice

When my daughter was nine years old, she informed me that she would be singing with her elementary school choir at a Veteran's Day performance at our local grocery store. She asked if I would come and watch her sing and I told her that of course I would come!

When it was time to leave for the performance, I reluctantly woke up my younger children from their naps, loaded them in the mini-van,

and headed off to the store. Parking has never been a problem at this store before, but today there was apparently a big event going on along with the choir performance and the parking lot was completely packed. After driving around in frustration I finally found a spot in a far-away corner and hurried in with all three children in tow.

The choir had already started its performance. Because of the large size of the choir and inadequate area in which to perform, parents and shoppers were crowded into a large circle which wound all the way around the choir. The only place I could find that would fit me and a shopping cart with three children, was in the back behind the choir. I couldn't see the choir kids very well and my daughter couldn't see me. My husband had joined us by this time but neither of us could get her attention. I could see her searching the faces looking for us but she couldn't see us in the back behind all of the people.

Finally I got the attention of the boy next to her and motioned for him to tap her. She finally turned around and spotted me and what I saw broke my heart! She had tears running down her face. She thought I hadn't come! The rest of the performance she kept turning around to make sure I was watching. She was now smiling and singing cheerily. I, on the other hand, was wiping my own tears away, moved both by the patriotic numbers ringing forth from the children's voices and also realizing how hurt my daughter was when she thought I hadn't come to watch her sing -- one little voice among dozens of children.

Now, if I ever find myself saying, "Do I really need to go to that reader's theatre or that Halloween parade...?" I think about my little tear-streaked daughter searching the crowds of faces for her mom. Of course I need to go! After all, isn't that what being a mom is all about?

--Wendy Jensen--

Lipstick

The other day, my eleven year old daughter was putting play make-up on our four and two year old girls. My four year old proudly walked out with bright hot-pink lipstick on her lips. She threw her arms up in the air and shouted, "I am a Mother!" Being a mom may not be as simple as throwing on some lipstick, but it sure is a lot more fun! (Besides, who has time to wear lipstick?)

--Wendy Jensen—

Optometrist

My daughter and I were driving home from town one day when she noticed a sign for a local doctor that read "Optometrist." She read it out loud, only she mispronounced it as "op—ti – mitrist." The way she pronounced it sounded similar to the word "optimist" and clearly she assumed that is what it meant because she asked, "Is that like a doctor who helps people become optimistic?" I chuckled. "No, honey, an optometrist is an eye doctor. But I like that idea. I can think of many pessimistic people who could use a visit to a doctor like that!"

I later told my husband about this account and he repeated, "op-ti-mitrist." I like that word! We can be self-proclaimed op-ti-mitrists!" So there you go, not only are we parents, we are op-ti-mi-trists. After all, in order to be a good parent, you have to be amazingly optimistic during all of those kid crises that come along each and everyday. So while I may not be a doctor or have my Ph.D., I do have three very important letters behind my name... M.O.M.!

--Wendy Jensen--

Premonition

I am the mother of four children, two girls and two boys. I believe that as mothers who are trying to raise children to be honest, respectful, and loving people, we have been given certain gifts to aid us with this task. When we are truly trying to bring up our children to grow into responsible adults who will contribute positively to society, we are entitled to times when we are allowed insights or “premonitions” that will benefit those children. This is a story of one of those times.

Todd is my third child and first son. Even before he entered elementary school he was interested in competitive sports. Living in a small town in Southern Utah he had lots of opportunities to participate in little league and school sports programs. His favorite of all the sports was football. He started playing flag football in early elementary and went from flag football to little league tackle ball and then began to play on the high school team in his ninth grade year.

Todd had a successful football season during his junior school year and was really looking forward to his big senior year. The coach was planning to use him as one of their main wide end receivers. The summer between his junior and senior year, he worked with his father as a mason tender lifting heavy block eight to ten hours a day. He looked at this work as a conditioning program to get ready for the coming up football season. It was never hard to get Todd up to go to work early in the morning because to him it was just another way to ensure a great year of football.

As the summer progressed, many of our family conversations at the dinner table centered on what he wanted to accomplish in football. Often when Todd’s friends would be at our home, we would hear their conversations excitedly boasting of how the Tigers were going to take State this year. You could feel the youthful positive energy they all had as they anticipated the upcoming event.

It was during this time period that Todd would often come home from work to tell me that he had a really bad headache. I just brushed it off as being caused by the hard work that he was doing in the heat. I'd tell him to take a couple of headache meds and a good shower to see if it would go away. Todd was never one to complain very much, and he would go on with his normal social life. We let the headaches go by with little concern. Soon the summer was coming to a close and football practice had started. You could feel the excitement in the air! It was time for conditioning. Todd seemed to be doing well at this since he had been working out all summer. The next Monday the team would be starting their hard week, where they wear their full uniforms and helmets and start practicing with contact for the first time.

One evening while I was fixing dinner, Todd came to me and asked me why his head ached so badly all of the time. He told me that sometimes it was so bad he could hardly see. That night when I went to bed, I could not go to sleep. I tossed and turned for several hours. I could not get my mind off the look Todd had on his face as he was telling me about his headaches. I finally woke my husband and told him I didn't know what it was but I had a really uneasy feeling about Todd and contact football practice. I told him I strongly felt we needed to get a doctor to look at him before the next week's contact practice started.

We were able to get a doctor's appointment for the next afternoon. While we were at the doctor's office, I let Todd do most of the talking. He explained how he had been feeling and the doctor was leaning towards possible migraines as a diagnosis. As the doctor was telling us what he wanted us to do and what Todd should take for the problem, the sickest feeling came over me. I am not one to cry easily. In fact, I hardly ever cry; but the tears started to run down my face. I told the doctor I didn't know what it was but I felt very strongly that we should not leave his office until he could find out what was really wrong with Todd. I said, "I do not know if it is a

'Mother's Premonition' or what, but I know there is something more serious with this."

Our doctor happened to be a family doctor that we had been going to for years. He told me that he was not one to argue with a mother's instinct. He scheduled Todd for a brain scan. When the results came back there was a troublesome spot in the center of his brain on the stem. The doctor arranged for us to take Todd to Salt Lake City, the next day to meet with a neurologist. Todd received an MRI that showed a brain tumor. That led to a biopsy surgery, which led to extensive brain surgery in order to remove the tumor.

Todd and our family had many faith building experiences during the time of his surgery, his stay in the hospital and his recovery. The hospital was in Salt Lake City, which was five hours away from our home. Since my husband's job was more flexible than mine, we had arranged for him to stay with Todd at the hospital while I worked and took care of things at home. I then went up on the weekends while my mother stayed with our other children.

One weekend Todd was not doing very well and seemed to be regressing. When Sunday evening arrived, I was feeling sad that I had to return home and leave him. During the long drive home I felt very lonely and discouraged. I wondered why I had to be suffering so much and why Todd had to be going through such a trial. As a mother, it would have been easier to go through the pain myself rather than witness my child suffer. I was feeling emotions of fear, anger, discouragement, and confusion. I arrived home in the middle of the night and after my mother left I started feeling very lonely. I began to cry out of control. I felt I had to turn somewhere for the strength and understanding to make it through this.

I knelt down in prayer, pouring out my heart and soul to my Father-in-Heaven asking why we had to go through such a hardship. While I was praying, I suddenly experienced a greater peace and calm than I had ever felt before. I knew that there were still

challenges ahead, but I also knew that Todd was going to live a full and happy life. I knew he would reach manhood and become a responsible adult that would serve and bring joy to others. I knew that I was not going through this experience alone, and I knew that I could call upon a higher power to assist me at times like this when I just couldn't do it by myself. I was given a strong impression that my Father-in-Heaven loved me and was aware of my pain and sorrow.

We received such an amazing out-pouring of love over the course of the next several weeks. Friends, family, our church congregation, the football team, and most of the entire high school student body all fasted and prayed for Todd. The surgery was successful and we were told that the tumor had been discovered and removed before it became dangerously cancerous. Todd remained in the hospital for three weeks and was able to return to school a week later.

As far as Todd's football aspirations went, that dream had to be let go. The doctors told us that had Todd continued on with football (not knowing about the tumor), a hit or fall in the right place could have left him dead on the field. They did not feel he would have made it through a complete season of contact sports. After his surgery, he was still able to be involved in non-contact sports; however, and was heavily involved in Track his Senior year. Now, years later, Todd has a master's degree, a wonderful job, a lovely wife and five beautiful children.

I am so filled with gratitude today for the warning that I received many years ago concerning my son's health. Call it a "Premonition," call it an "Act of God," call it what ever you want; but I believe that it is a "Gift to Mothers." Those feelings that come to us – those small voices that whisper to our hearts and our minds, are gifts that have been given to us to help us with our stewardship of Motherhood.

--ValRae Chamberlain--

A Day In The Life Of A Mother – A Two Year Old's Perspective

My mommy and daddy think I am a “handful.” I’m not sure what that is, but it must be something good like, “a handful of candy!” I love candy! I also love to “mountain climb!” Only we don’t have any mountains in our house, and so I had to make my own. I pull over a chair and climb on top and then I can get on top of the kitchen table or counters. One time I climbed a bigger mountain – the piano! Mommy almost dropped the phone when she saw me and her face got all white. I don’t know why – I mean, I was the one climbing, not her!

I have so much to do and so little time! One morning I noticed that our wood floor looked a little too brown and so I dumped my cup of milk all over it to make it a nice pretty white color. Then I noticed that the table was a boring brown too. So I colored the table and my arms a very nice shade of Christmas green. My mommy must have liked boring old brown better though because she wiped the pretty green away. I’ll try a pretty blue next time, maybe she will like that better!

Not only am I good with art, I am pretty good with music too. After my art projects I played drums in my yogurt and then flipped it across the room to see if it could hit the cupboards – they are brown too and I thought a little pink accent would be nice.

Well, that was my morning’s activities – in the afternoon I had more fun (after my nap of course). My mommy is VERY grateful that I sleep for three hours every afternoon. I still don’t see what is so exciting about that, but my mommy seems PLENTY excited about it!

I love to play with baby brother. Everyone keeps telling me, “Be soft with the baby!” Once I heard someone whisper, “I don’t think she

knows what soft means.” Of course I do – soft means my pillow. So I lay on him and then they get all upset. Parents are sure hard to figure out sometimes!

My family says that I have “my own mind.” Of course I do, I mean who else would have my mind? Grown ups can be so silly! I let everyone know that I was “too big” for my high-chair, crib, bib, and sippy cup! But there must have been something wrong with my big-kid cup because it would always tip over and spill my drink. So my Daddy made me have a sippy cup again. If I want something then I lay on the floor and kick my legs and scream. My friends all say that it works for them but my parents never fall for it.

I have discovered lots of fun things this year like... toothpaste (rubbing it all over my body), paints and markers (coloring myself and the furniture), tuna-fish (putting it on my head), yogurt (smearing it on the snack bar), make-up (oh so pretty!) and toilet paper! I made lots and lots of balls out of toilet paper. It was so much fun! Then I threw the balls into the toilet and flushed. The water came up and up and up until it overflowed into a water-fall! Then there were lots of fun puddles on the ground. My Daddy saw it and shouted my name really loud. I guess my Daddy doesn't like water-falls.

Well, as you can see I am very smart! I am also very cute! Everybody tells me so. Whenever I get in trouble they say, “It's a good thing you are so cute!” My Mommy, Daddy, brothers, and sisters all love me so much. They all say that I bring so much excitement to their world! I can't wait to see what fun things I discover when I am three. Maybe I'll remodel the house – won't my parents be excited?

-- Wendy Jensen –
(Excerpt taken from the history of my two year old daughter.)

A Vision of Mother's Day

I remember when I was a teenager sitting in church on Mother's Day. I loved going to church on Mother's Day because there was always a special program of beaming children singing songs of praises that celebrated their mothers. It would be a cacophony of voices – some singing with gusto (usually off-key) and others a little more sweet and shy. The pure innocent voices of children always made me sentimental. I would smile as I envisioned the future when I would be a mother and my children would be the ones on the stand singing. Then I carried my vision a little further as I pondered what Mother's Day would be like...

I imagined the scent of bacon and eggs wafting into my room as my husband and children came waltzing in with breakfast in bed. There would be a bouquet of flowers from my husband on the table and my kids would be all dressed in their Sunday best with their hair done and faces shining. The house would be immaculate and we would all happily leave for church singing together as a family.

Okay, so I've yet to experience a Mother's Day like the one described above. Usually my husband is already at our church for his weekly Sunday early morning meetings, and I am rudely wakened to the smell of something burning and the baby crying. I am lucky to get any breakfast at all as I rush around trying to get six little children fed, dressed, and ready for church by 9:00 a.m. The baby usually manages to mess his diaper right as we are walking out the door but if we are lucky, we still manage to slip into our bench before the doors are closed. (Alright, so two of the kids are still in their pajamas, but their church clothes are stuffed in the diaper bag and hopefully nobody will notice us changing them during the service.)

The program begins....ahhh, my moment of glory is soon to begin when my children will sing those sweet sentimental mother's

day songs. It doesn't exactly turn out as planned, however. My three year old refuses to go up on the stand with the other children and my six year old follows suit by sprawling out on the floor. No amount of bribery seems to work. My eight and ten year old join the other children on the stand, but I can't see them since they are the shortest ones in their classes. I try to keep my baby and toddler quiet so that I can hear the sweet melodious music but end up in the lobby. What happened to that spirit of sweet sentiment I envisioned so many years ago?

After the meeting, I receive my potted plant along with all of the other women in the meeting and carry it around with me along with my baby, diaper bag, scriptures, and lesson supplies. It is dead by the time we get home. After our meetings, my children come running up to greet me. They excitedly jump up and down as they thrust pictures and home-made gifts in my face and shout, "Mommy, Mommy open this!" They are causing a traffic jam in the hall and so I hurry them out the door and promise to open the gifts when we get home.

"What's for lunch?" everyone questions. So much for "Mom's day off," I muse. I sigh and suggest that we get breakfast cleaned up before we worry about lunch. My ten year old daughter understands. "Mom, go lie down, we'll take care of everything!" she says. What a nice thought. Fifteen minutes later we all sit down to Macaroni and Cheese. Next year I will put a turkey in the oven, I decide.

The kids can't wait any longer for me to open my gifts. My two year old proudly holds up her scribbles on a paper that says, "I love you mom" at the top. "What beautiful colors!" I exclaim. My four year old exuberantly hands over her magnet hand-shape along with the picture she drew. The drawing consists of an enormous face with two oddly shaped eye-balls and two long lines going straight down the page. "This is you," she states merrily. "Wow – that's great!" I applaud.

My son gives me a hand-print with a touching poem about growing up. I read it, wipe away a few tears, frame it, and hang it in my bedroom. My six year old beams with pride as he hands over his home-made door hanger decorated with brightly colored stickers. He gives me a big hug and says, "I love you Mommy! You are the best Mommy in the whole world!" "Thank you!" I whisper back, "You are my very favorite six year old in the whole world!" My oldest daughter gives me a bracelet she made and I proudly put it on. She smiles as she hands over a home-made coupon book where she promises to help with chores, tend her younger siblings, fix meals, and give me a massage. "Just what I need!" I exclaim, and she nods a little too knowingly.

The little gifts are wonderful, but they are really just symbols of the real gifts that I have received -- the extraordinary blessings of a loving husband and six beautiful blue-eyed children. Each child is as unique as an individual snowflake that falls from the heavens, waiting for its perfect design to be discovered. I ponder each one...my daughter's sincere concern, my boys' playful roughhousing, the giggles of my little girls, and my baby's toothless grin. I feel overwhelmed by the love I feel and thank my Father in Heaven for blessing me so abundantly. Mother's Day isn't exactly how I pictured it so many years ago...no, it's much, much better!

--Wendy Jensen--

Mother's Day Tea

Since my husband and I live several hours away from both our parents, we celebrate Mother's Day with our family in our own little way by gathering together for "Mother's Day Tea." Everyone dresses up in costumes including outlandish hats. We all take on the character of someone from a different area or country and attempt to speak in the accent from that particular region.

For example, one year my husband wore a French Beret and spoke with a French accent. I was a Southern Belle and spoke with a Southern Accent. Our six children ages 11 and under, also dress up and try and speak with accents. One year our daughter spoke with a British accent the entire time. My husband stays inside and the kids and I all go outside and line up. Then we ring the doorbell one at a time beginning with the youngest child and going on up.

My husband welcomes everyone in one at a time as he plays his character and invites everyone to tea. He takes a picture of each child as they enter the home. Then I come in (the guest of honor) and everyone shouts, "Mother!" in their own accent. Then we have a tea party with all sorts of yummy desserts and milk. Afterwards we take family pictures with the camera's self-timer and we do some crazy shots. Then my husband hooks the digital camera up to the TV and we watch all of the pictures as a slide show. We laugh and laugh as we watch our family dressed up and doing funny poses! This tradition makes Mother's Day fun for all of us!

--Wendy Jensen--

Did God Make The Butterflies?

When I was around four years old, I asked my mom, "Mommy, did God make the flowers?" She responded, "Yes he did." Then I asked, "Did he make the trees?" She again answered, "Yes, He most certainly did." "Well did he make the birds?" I asked. "Yes," she remarked. I then inquired, "Did God make the butterflies?" She explained, "Well, butterflies actually come from caterpillars – they go into a cocoon and there they change into a butterfly." I pondered this information for a moment and then said innocently, "Good! That saved God some work!"

--Wendy Jensen--

Growing Up

I sat in the elementary school gymnasium with my pre-teen daughter as the fifth grade maturation program was about to begin. I glanced around at the many daughters hanging nervously on to their mother's arm – many of the young girls looking exactly like a younger version of the woman sitting next to them. My daughter looks just like her dad when he was her age – but there is no mistaking that she belongs to me as she puts my arm around her back and lifts her arm for me to gently tickle.

As the program begins I take a moment to reflect on this stage of life. Was I really here with my oldest child discussing bras and menstruation? Not that we hadn't already had this discussion many times before, but now suddenly all of these changes seemed to be right around the corner. Was she ready? Was I ready? The movie begins, showing several young girls going through many "firsts" -- with their moms helping them along the way.

Suddenly feeling emotional, I discreetly brush a few tears away. Soon this little vignette would be my daughter and me. Wasn't it just minutes ago that I carried her home from the hospital with a little pink bow glued on to her head with corn syrup? I would push her proudly around in her stroller and everyone would tell me to enjoy this new baby because they grow up so fast! And now here she was, wearing false nails and deodorant to school.

I look at her steadily, suddenly taking a mental picture. She is still so little and petite. Her bangs are pulled back in little rubber bands and her long brown hair falls gently down her back. Her dark blue-gray eyes are framed with those coveted long black eyelashes underneath the full arched eyebrows that she inherited from her dad. She smiles -- her big beautiful teeth flashing new braces with purple rubber bands. A sprinkling of freckles covers her button nose with a few stubborn pimples across her forehead.

She is beautiful! I pat at my eyes and my daughter looks over with raised eyebrows. "Mom, are you crying?" she whispers. What could I say? You know those "hormones" they were just talking about? Well, moms get them too!" Of course she has had her moments of being touched by emotion too. Last summer when she and I went to the Broadway musical "CATS," she had tears streaming down her face as Grizabella sang her touching rendition of "Memory." I couldn't help but smile.

Hopefully we still have a few years before too many changes start happening. Right now she is at that ideal age where daughters still want their mothers around. She offers me back rubs and asks me about my day. But soon she will be a teenager. Will she still want "Mommy Time?" Will she still want me to tickle her back and tell her stories? Or will her friends nudge me out of my position, ready to jump in and take priority? Will she suddenly want a cell phone and be too busy texting messages to all her friends to let me know what is going on in her life?

I cannot answer these questions and I shouldn't worry too much about what I can't foresee. For now, I can just be here – in the present. And maybe the next time she asks me to tuck her in and tickle her back for just a few more minutes, maybe I won't be so quick to roll my eyes or sigh with exasperation at her "excuses" for prolonging her bed-time. Perhaps I won't hastily flip out the lights as I practically run out the door. Maybe I'll just stay a minute longer in the here and now. Because here and now is perfect.

--Wendy Jensen--

Grace's Story

Grace's story begins three months before she was born. She was diagnosed with 3rd degree heart block and given a 15% chance of being born alive. After much faith and many prayers the miracles began. Grace showed her will to live with her high activity level. It was as if she was letting us know, "I'm still here!" She baffled many doctors as her heart rate continued to drop yet her activity level remained high.

Exactly three months after being diagnosed with heart block, Grace was born at the University of Utah Hospital. She appeared to be a healthy baby. Her color was good, she cried, she was even moving her arms and legs. However her heart rate was 49 beats per minute instead of the normal newborn rate of 120 to 180 beats per minute. Immediately after her birth they whisked her away and stabilized her. Two hours after birth they transported her to Primary Children's Medical Center in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit.

Three days later, Grace had a pacemaker put in. She had many different complications and was finally released from the hospital a month later. What a joy it was to have her home with us! We enjoyed her for a month before she was readmitted to the hospital due to high carbon dioxide levels.

A couple of weeks later, Grace was diagnosed with subglottic stenosis (meaning she had a narrow airway). Several days later she underwent surgery for airway reconstruction which lasted 2 hours. They actually grafted in cartilage from her thyroid. She then had to be paralyzed and sedated for a week. After this surgery she started to do much better and was actually transferred out of the Intensive Care Unit. She was in the Infant Care Unit for a little over a week. Then her carbon dioxide levels climbed higher and higher and she also got a fever. So it was back to the Intensive Care Unit.

Grace's condition continued to worsen. She got to the point where her oxygen levels would drop dramatically unless she was on the continuous pressurized air. The doctors were stumped and were to the point that our only option for getting her home was to give her a tracheotomy. However a new doctor came on shift at this point and did not feel like a tracheotomy was what Grace needed. She researched and studied and consulted and felt like Grace had a rare lung disease. She talked with one of the top surgeons about her theory. The surgeon looked at every x-ray Grace had had since her birth and he agreed. Grace was diagnosed with Bilateral Congenital Lobar Emphysema on the next month.

She was scheduled for surgery a week later to have her right middle lobe of her lung removed. (You have 3 lobes in your right lung and 2 lobes in your left lung). After a 3-hour surgery her lobe was successfully removed. The lobe was so hyper-inflated it was three times the size it should have been. Removing this lobe gave her other lobes room to function properly. Her upper left lobe is also hyper-inflated and it is yet to be determined if she will have to have that one removed as well. Immediately following the surgery her carbon dioxide levels dropped to 33-the lowest they have been in three months!

Grace was transferred out of intensive care only six days after having a part of her lung removed! Amazing! Another miracle! Grace was released from Primary Children's a few days later. What a wonderful way to begin the new year!

She is alert and active. She is smiling at us. It is wonderful to see her so responsive. We have had her home for nearly two months now and Grace continues to improve every day. She is over twelve pounds! She has been without oxygen for almost two whole weeks- she is actually breathing room air. This is incredible when you consider that when she was home previously she was on 1-litre of oxygen per minute and anytime her oxygen was off her alarm would

immediately go off and her oxygen levels would drop to 60 % within seconds. Literally she could not breathe and would have died without the oxygen.

We have witnessed many miracles through this experience. The doctors who have discovered what was wrong with her, the caring nurses who have loved and cared for Grace, the meals brought to us, the people who have given so generously. So many people have literally been an instrument in His hands. We wish to thank everyone who has been a part of these miracles.

Our hearts have been touched and our burdens lifted by the many prayers offered in our behalf. Our Savior has carried us through this time in our lives and I know He will continue to carry us. We have felt His arms around us many times. I wish there were words to express our gratitude and let everyone know how much this goodness and generosity means to us. I especially want to thank my Father in Heaven for blessing us with this special gift and for giving me the opportunity to be her mother!

--Cheri Penrod

A Chance To Start Again

In Dec 1994, I met a wonderful man, Pieter, who was in the South African Army Police. I was in the South African National Defense Force myself and being in love and foolish I became pregnant at age 22. We decided to marry since we figured that our relationship would have ended up in marriage anyway. Till today I never believed in a "have-to-get-married" situation because either you want to or not! Any case, we lived happily and even after our son's birth (named after his dad), our relationship grew stronger.

Little Pieter was a bit more chubby than his peers, although he was a very big child born at 3.75kg and 51cms! I would never have

thought his little extra weight would save his life - even though only for a while.

On 8 August 1996, 4 months before Pieter's 1st birthday, all three of us were in a motor vehicle accident. My husband (then 26) was killed instantly, my son, seated on my lap at the time sustained very serious injuries internally and we only realized after a couple of weeks that he was actually paralyzed from T4, the waist down. An eight month old baby had to start at the beginning as if he was just born, he couldn't even lift his own head. After two weeks I was released from the hospital, but the baby stayed another six weeks before he could finally come home. (He lost so much weight and at this stage I was thankful that he was indeed a bit overweight before the accident).

The accident left me absolutely devastated - so devastated that at times I actually wished that it was my son instead of my husband that left me. It is unthinkable for a mother to wish her child gone, but I was so lonely and needed that strong person in my life to lean on. However, I knew that God certainly had His plan set out for me and I still had a long and narrow path to walk.

Pieter reacted incredibly well to occupational therapy, physiotherapy and love and attention - so much so that he could actually start leopard crawling with his elbows! I could see him already playing with his friends -- him on his skateboard on his tummy with little gloves on his hands! I wish I explain everything in detail... It was so awesome!

Unfortunately our winter did not do him well and nine months after the dreadful accident he was taken to heaven as well, to sit on his dad's lap. I always believed he would be able to walk sooner or later – it was just much sooner than I could ever have thought. I was a motherless child and at the same time a wife with no husband.

After the deaths of my husband and son, there were a couple of

years where everything seemed dark. At times I thought there was no God. Other times I felt His presence so clearly it was astonishing. Through everything, I had such wonderful support from family and friends and I realized that I was much stronger than I ever thought. I believe things happen for a reason and I still believe God has a plan with all of us, but I also think that we should not question things too much as we might not be able to understand the answer.

In December 2003, after numerous attempts to date again, I met a God-sent miracle with long dark hair and soft brown eyes. Cobus had some difficulty in the beginning convincing me to go out with him, but thanks to his persistence, we got married in November last year and I received a second chance. It took me ten years to recover and restart the life I was intended to lead. We are both looking forward to starting a family after we have spent some quality time together as husband and wife. At this time I'm just basking my face in the warmth of happiness and love that I'm allowed to feel now and know there is no reason to worry about tomorrow.

Sometimes I miss my son dearly and then my new husband takes out the home videos and box of tissues and puts his arms around me and leaves me to watch and cry and babble as long as I need. Never in my life would I have thought that I would experience unconditional love again and be able to smile and laugh out loud - it's wonderful!

I hope to one day be a good mother and pray that I will be able to see a big part of my child(rens) lives and the first thing I will buy when I find out I'm pregnant - is a baby chair for the car! If there's only one good thing that should come from this experience - it would be to warn others to never let your child sit on your lap in a car!

--Anria Malan—

Every Baby is a Miracle

Every baby born is truly a miracle. However, some miracles cause you to stop and take notice because of the steps that happen along the way. Our baby Tessa, who just turned nine, is one such miracle. When our first daughter, Emily, was born, she brought a tremendous joy into our lives. The pregnancy was a textbook case with no complications, just a few days past her due date. Because we wanted to have our children about two years apart, we were elated to find out we were pregnant a year and a few months later and that our baby would be due the exact week our first child was born.

Early in the pregnancy though, some complications resulted in an ultrasound at just eight weeks. What a surprise to discover that we were expecting twins. I know I was quite shocked and wasn't exactly sure whether to feel scared, overwhelmed or overjoyed at that discovery. However, elation took over and as I adjusted to the idea of just how much work it was going to be and how much life would change, I became obsessed with the excitement of having twins.

The complications subsided and at each subsequent doctor's appointment, I would feel so relieved when we would hear both heartbeats and more visions of life with our happy two year old and beautiful twin babies would play again through my mind.

At the normal twenty-week scheduled ultrasound, everything changed. My husband and I decided to find out the gender of the babies since our surprise already came with the news of having two. But when the technician didn't say much and left to find another technician to come in, I knew something wasn't right. After the second technician performed the ultrasound, they called my doctor and said they needed to have me talk to him. Tears rolled down my cheeks before he even said hello. He went on to explain that though they could see both sacs, only one baby was still there. It is often called the "disappearing twin syndrome" and apparently happens frequently but because most women don't have ultrasounds that

early, they don't ever know they were even expecting twins. At some point in the pregnancy, the other twin stopped developing and rather than leaving my body through a miscarriage, it was just absorbed back into the tissue, lining, etc. If I had miscarried, I may have lost both so we were so blessed that that didn't occur. I questioned the doctor thoroughly as to whether there were really twins to begin with or if they had made a misdiagnosis; they assured me there were twins but now there were not.

I was filled to gratitude to know that one of the babies was still there and was developing just fine but at the same time, I felt a tremendous loss as if a baby I had known had just been taken away. I had a new understanding for women who suffer miscarriages and my heart hurt for us and for each of them as well. I went home feeling joy and grief at the same time, which was difficult for several days. But I knew to get past that I would focus on how lucky we were to be having another baby (we couldn't find out the gender during the ultrasound because of the way the baby was positioned).

Then, exactly one week after that ultrasound, I came home from school...I was teaching fifth grade half days; and my back was hurting more than usual. I did the normal preparations for dinner but then lay down to see if my back pain would subside. A short time later, I felt a pop and something unusual happened. I told my husband "I think my water just broke." We both thought it was strange since I was only twenty-one weeks along. I called my doctor who said that would be extremely unusual and to lie down and wait. If I felt a gush again within the next two hours, I should go to the emergency room. Twenty minutes later, it happened again so off we went.

I had no idea what the next course of events would entail. I actually believed they would say it was just something else and I would be home within a few hours. After some testing and of course waiting, I was told that yes, it was amniotic fluid and that they were checking me into the hospital. The severity of what was happening

didn't sink in for a few hours; then I realized that I might be losing this baby too.

My doctor came the next morning and explained the situation. Typically, when the water breaks, delivery is imminent and most women go into labor within a couple of days. If the baby were born this premature, it wouldn't likely survive. My doctor, and very few at the hospital, had ever experienced someone whose water broke that early whose baby actually lived. If I did not go into labor and remained pregnant, they would take measures to help me reach at least the 24th week when the baby would be considered viable, but hopefully even further than that. By "measures," they meant they would watch my health and make sure I wasn't getting an infection but there was not much they could do to ensure I didn't go into labor; it would be too early to try magnesium sulfate or other labor stopping drugs since the baby's lungs wouldn't be developed yet and it would be too risky.

I was told I needed to speak to a neonatology specialist about other risk factors. I was wheeled to a different room where a stranger came in and spoke to my husband and I for about thirty minutes about all of the problems and defects our child would likely be born with because of the lack of amniotic fluid, that is *if* we decided to go through with the pregnancy. He told us that if I didn't go into labor on my own, we had the option of terminating the pregnancy of our own choice because of the severe possibilities for defects. Then he left.

In my mind, I knew he was just doing his job but in my heart I had never felt so disgusted at any suggestion in my life. My husband and I would never consider that option and didn't even give it a moments thought. We wanted this baby, no matter what circumstances it was born in and what needs it would have.

After two days of staying in the hospital, they released me to go home and stay flat in bed, only getting up to quickly shower and use the bathroom. Even then, there was an attitude of "you probably will

miscarry but we'll see." To say I wasn't scared would be a lie; but I didn't believe I would lose this baby too and I felt assured that I would continue this pregnancy for a while longer. The doctor told me that if I was still pregnant at 24 weeks, that I could return to the hospital and when I did go into labor, that the baby would be considered viable and that they were trained in dealing with premature births and babies.

A nurse came to my home every other day to take my vitals, give me high doses of antibiotics and check for any signs of infection (with the amniotic sac broken, there was a greater risk). My husband, family and friends were amazing and helped take care of Emily and everything else while I stayed upstairs in my bedroom. My daughter and I colored more pictures, read more stories and painted more toenails than I can remember during those three weeks.

Miraculously, I didn't go into labor and so at exactly 24 weeks, I returned to the hospital. This time I wouldn't be coming home until the baby was born. I couldn't fathom that I would really be lying there for 16 weeks, waiting until week 40 when most babies are born. I was quickly reassured that I definitely wouldn't be there that long because due to having no amniotic fluid for the baby to develop in, this baby was going to be premature and that each week was another milestone in the development of the baby. Twenty-eight weeks is a big turning point and if we could hold off the birth until then, my baby would have a greater chance of survival. So there I was, carefully monitored just waiting and praying that another day would go by without going into labor.

There were a few of us on the maternity floor in high risk situations and we were each acutely aware of the mothers taking home their newborn babies, many oblivious to the fearful and unknown situations we were in. Again, my understanding and empathy for the difficulties women have when bringing children into this world was enlightened and I felt almost guilty for the smooth and uneventful birth of my first daughter.

While at the hospital, because of the lack of fluid, I could feel each and every movement of our baby inside me. This is something that most women look forward to for reassurance of the baby's activity and life. For me, however, the joy each kick and punch brought was ecstatic. Not only did I know she was active and still there, I knew she was feisty and was going to be strong. I had many ultrasounds and non-stress tests and she didn't like them at all. It was as if she was saying "stop bugging me and just let me grow." We didn't ever have a clear shot of the gender, but through a spiritual impression, I knew that it was a girl. My husband and I even chose the name Tessa and knew it was right before ever seeing her.

Each week, I would start to have contractions and I would be wheeled to the delivery room in case it was the time for her to come. But each week the contractions would stop and after spending a night there, I would come back to my room. Tessa received two doses of steroid shots to increase the development of her lungs. We were lucky she was able to have those shots before she decided to come because without them, her lungs would have taken even longer to develop.

My husband was an unbelievable support. Not only did he take care of Emily and everything at home, but he came to be with me every night for several hours. It was actually very difficult to watch him have to do everything while I felt like all I was doing was lying there. However, I knew that in our situation, one of the factors that helped to hold off labor was the fact that I wasn't moving, no matter how helpless or unproductive it felt.

I went through many routines that other mothers-to-be of premature babies go through. I was shown the Newborn Intensive Care Unit and was taken aback by actually seeing babies so small and attached to so many machines to keep them alive. I was given books by the staff to read about care for extremely premature infants to know more of what to expect. I even attended a few support

meetings where parents could share their feelings. Though each was important and I wanted to be informed, part of me only wanted to focus on the positive and not face the negative things that could happen.

It was also during these weeks that I had a great deal of time to reflect. I thought about how with all of the things that can go wrong, it is amazing that babies are actually born each day full term and without any complications. I thought about all the women who want desperately to have children but for unknown reasons can not get pregnant and the heartbreak that must cause. I thought about people I needed to forgive because life is too short and too fragile to be filled with anger or resentment. I thought about God and the comfort that comes from trusting in His plan. And I thought about Tessa, and the strong will she must have to live and come to earth for a purpose. I felt tremendous comfort that she would be okay. I knew she would have major obstacles to overcome but I just knew inside that she would make it and would be a part of our family.

After four weeks, on the 28th week mark exactly, my contractions started again and it looked as if this time it were for real. I was given one dose of magnesium sulfate but the labor continued and at this point it was safer for Tessa to continue developing out of the womb as opposed to inside with no fluid. Tessa was born at 2:30 a.m. weighing 2 pounds 7 ounces. I think my heart stopped beating and I stopped breathing until I heard a faint cry, not because I didn't think she would be alive, but because I believed she couldn't have made a sound if her lungs didn't have some development. I was able to see her for just a moment. So tiny, so purple, so fragile and so beautiful!

The next eight weeks were a roller coaster of emotion. I had to wait nine days before I could hold her. I could barely stand to watch as they placed IV's into the top of her tiny head because that was the easiest place to find veins. Several times I had to watch as her tiny body shook from pain as the morphine wore off and they were yet to

give her another dose. The series of oscillators and respirators that she advanced to, and then reverted back to due to her lungs and their development, caused days of great hope and then set backs that brought up unsure feelings and moments of despair. All the while saving breast milk for when she could drink it, traveling back and forth to the hospital three to four times daily and nightly, and trying to give time and energy to Emily as well.

Anyone who has had a premature baby in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit understands the sounds, the rules, the tests, the hurried energy, and the love of that place. Doctors and nurses became like idols to me because of their knowledge in how to help these tiny infants.

We were able to bring Tessa home the day before Mother's Day, weighing 4 lbs. 8 oz. She came home with a gavage feeding tube, an apnea/bradycardia monitor and oxygen tank. Emily just accepted these as Tessa's "tubes" and thought this was normal. Tessa developed so well. Though she gained weight very slowly, had surgery for a club foot at 8 months old, and had RSV twice, she was amazing. At 22 months, she got pneumonia which was another scary event but a miracle just the same. While in the hospital, one of the respiratory therapists discovered that the heart murmur Tessa's pediatrician had been watching, was actually much more serious. She had several small holes between the chambers of her heart which never closed on their own and required immediate surgery. The ASD surgery was a complete success and again, Tessa proved that she has such a strong will to survive.

Yes, miracles happen in large ways and in small. Several months after we brought Tessa home, we opened the newspaper one day to read an article about another child overcoming an illness, also named Tessa. It wasn't until we read that article that we learned what the name Tessa means...*blessed of God*.

--Julie B. Peery--

My Children Taught Me To Love

I had a difficult childhood and many of my memories are not the best. But I did learn one of life's lessons from my children. I was never given a lot of love or hugs growing up in my life, so when my children would come up and just hug me for no reason my first reaction was always to quickly give them the hug and push them away because I was not used to this. Still they would come up to me and just want to hug and cuddle and love me. They helped me open up my protective wall that I had built around me over the years. After years of hurt I had to learn that my children were not going to hurt me and that they will always love me. So I can say that my children taught me to love and go to a place that I had never been before. They taught me that it is okay to receive love and to give it back!

--Shawnya--

The Meaning Of A Mother's Love

I would like to share the meaning of a mother's love. When you are young, you take the love of your mother for granted, but once you have your own children, you realize how deep your mother really cared for you. One never knows the real meaning of love until you have your own child. This, I believe, is a love indescribable!

--Olga Jones--

The Gift Of Charity

Every once in awhile we as parents have the opportunity of seeing something special happen with our children that leaves us just a little bit in awe. Such a moment happened just the other day. My ten year old daughter came walking into the kitchen and announced matter of factly, "I don't want any presents for Christmas this year -- I want to send all my money to Humanitarian Aid..."

Wondering if she even knew what that big word meant I asked, "What do you mean by `Humanitarian'?" She said, "You know -- people who are poor. I mean, I already have enough stuff, I don't need any more. Do you think I could pack up our stuffed animals and things and give it to someone who doesn't have any?" Granted she doesn't have much money or toys to begin with, but I thought it was neat that she would be willing to give up all of her Christmas presents in order to help someone else!

She notices the little things too. She came home from church one Sunday and said that one of her teachers seemed a little sad today -- is it okay if I make cookies and bring them over to her? And can we bring cookies to the new neighbors who just moved in?" "Sure!" I replied.

We enjoyed the evening together baking cookies and talking and laughing. She then brought the gifts to our neighbors in order to cheer one up and to make another feel welcome. It was just a little thing but it was an important reminder for me. The Gift of Charity -- what a wonderful lesson my child taught me that day!

--Wendy Jensen--

A Gift From God

When my husband to be and I found each other, we were both in our forties. We knew we had found true love and soon married. My husband's dream was to move to the sea to pursue his creative talents. Within six months of being married, we sold two successful businesses in Johannesburg - RSA, sold three properties, left beloved family and friends and took the plunge. We left for our honeymoon and during this period looked for the ideal property on the coast.

We asked God to guide us in our search as we prayed every step of the way. Eventually He gave His word and showed us where to be relocated to. Five months after being married I became pregnant. We were so delighted that at our age under stressful conditions we were able to become pregnant. We flew to Johannesburg six weeks later to tell our family and friends of this wonderful news. Literally, on the night of arrival, I became very ill, and was rushed to the hospital, where I learned that my appendix had burst.

Emergency surgery was done with great precaution because I was 41 years old and six weeks pregnant. Thank goodness I was very fit and in excellent health. All went well, and we returned to Knysna where we began to build our dream home. My husband used his creative talents and building skills by taking unskilled laborers from the street and teaching them to build. His motto was: "Why not give others a chance to learn and develop?"

Meanwhile I struggled through my pregnancy. I had a condition called placenta prevea which causes bleeding throughout pregnancy and limits any form of activity. This was very difficult for me since I am a highly energetic and fit woman. At 32 weeks I could no longer hold the baby and was rushed into the hospital for an emergency cesarean.

Nathan was born at 2.2 kg and was diagnosed with a trachea esophageal fistula (in short the esophagus and airway to the lungs were not formed properly -- air was going into the baby's tummy as well as the lung). In order to save Nathan's life he under went a five hour operation to re-construct this abnormality. In the process the lymph node under this arm was unfortunately cut, which complicated issues further. Kayla thorax continued to drain from this area for two months and his liver and kidneys both started to malfunction. He had to have kidney dialysis and he was continually ventilated and so we decided to fly him and me to a "special children's hospital" in Cape Town.

I also had added complications. My uterus would not contract and I started to bleed uncontrollably. Doctors eventually decided to give me a hysterectomy and I spent five days in ICU. During this period I could not see Nathan and was only given a little picture of him. (One could hardly make out this little baby as he had tubes, drips, pipes and bandages in every possible area). Eventually on the third day ICU nurses took me to see him.

Nathan spent three months in the ICU. He underwent continual treatment, contracted various infections, was feed via a tube in his tummy and had to have dilatations to his esophagus which was now restricted. During this period I had to express milk every three hours. The milk was frozen and kept for when Nathan could eventually tolerate the high fat content of the milk. I spent every waking moment at his side watching as he went through highs and lows. After two months, he finally grew strong enough so that I could hold him.

When Nathan and I were discharged, he still underwent six months of continual dilatations and hospitalization. This meant trips to Cape Town initially every week, then every 2nd week and every 4 weeks. In the mean time, my husband continued frantically to build our house. He visited as often as time permitted and continued to keep his faith in God in hopes that one day he would bring his family home.

Difficulty was also increased during this of time because of the distance between family and friends. Being new in the area, we really didn't know many people very well. Family members found it difficult to visit us because of age and other commitments. God and His Angels were our army and strength and we are now a happy little family in our lovely home. Nathan is 2 ½ years old and very healthy. Despite his rocky beginning, it looks like Nathan will become a strapping man!

My husband's creative juices are flowing as he has now started his own hand crafted lighting business. I thank God everyday for granting us this special gift and wonderful life as I juggle the many hats of mom, wife, business lady and so forth!

--Laurie Potgieter—

Little Moments Of Life

Life is made up of little moments that stick together in order to make a puzzle of opportunities. Take one ordinary summer day for me: My two year old walks into the kitchen in her pajamas with sticky gel toothpaste covering her arms and legs. Her big blue eyes look guiltily from under her blonde unkempt hair. I sigh and put her in the tub. Her four year old sister starts jumping up and down shouting, "I want a bath, I want a bath!"

So I perch myself sitting on top of our toilet seat and begin to eat a bowl of cereal. (I know, it's probably not very sanitary, but I might not get another chance to eat). Soon the baby starts to fuss because he is hungry too. So now I put my multi-tasking capabilities into action as I watch the girls, nurse my baby, and attempt to get a few spoonfuls of cereal into my own mouth before it turns into a bowl of soggy mush.

Things are going pretty smoothly until my older daughter (who is showering upstairs) starts to shout that she needs more shampoo. My eight year old comes bursting in announcing he has just finished all of his jobs, so could I bring him to his friend's house? I tell him I will after the girls are finished with their bath and put him in charge of watching the girls while I run some shampoo upstairs to my daughter. His temporary baby-sitting job results in an all out water-fight between him and his two sisters. I walk in just in time to get drenched with a cup full of water. "Will this ever get any easier?" I wonder.

We haven't even gotten breakfast cleaned up yet and it is already time for lunch. My daughter pitches in by cooking some Top Ramen and we manage to get the kitchen somewhat clean. Then I curl my little girls into my arms to read them a story and my two older boys race over to try and see the pictures to the book.

Luckily amidst the chaos there are also moments of harmony. It is those moments that keep me sane and remind me of why I decided to become a mother of not just one, but six children. The baby finally drifts peacefully off to sleep and I tuck my two year old down for her nap. The older children become involved in a quiet game of monopoly.

I walk into my room to find a little note on my bed from my eleven year old daughter. She typed it herself on the computer with fancy fonts and clip art. It says, "Thank you mom for helping me sweep the floor today. This is good for a free back massage or meal cooked by me! I love you!" I smile, feeling very proud of how grown up my daughter is becoming.

Then I realize that with the two youngest children in bed, I can actually take a little nap! I lay down and almost drift off when I hear my baby crying from the next room. I guess my chance for a nap was too good to be true. I get him out of bed and catch a whiff of what is in his pants. It looks like (or smells like) another emergency bath is in order. There I am again on my little white seat. The baby has a

grand time splashing away in the tub and then I get him re-dressed. The kitchen is a mess, laundry is piled up, and toys are strewn over every room in the house.

I sigh again, wondering what to tackle first – that is if the baby will be good long enough for me to accomplish anything. Then my six year old son excitedly presents his latest art project. It is a card with "M-O-M" scrawled in giant letters with a pipe-cleaner taped to the front shaped into a big smiley face. He hugs me and says, "I love you so much Mom! I want you to keep this card forever and ever!" and I promise that I will.

Yes, life is made up of little moments that stick together in order to make a puzzle of opportunities. Sometimes it seems that that the pieces will never fit together and sometimes, just once in awhile, that last piece will magically fit right into place.

--Wendy Jensen—

The Peace-Maker

I thought that the middle child was supposed to be the peace-maker. After all, those birth order personality things are usually pretty accurate...the first child is the confident but bossy one, the baby is the spoiled one, often the family clown, and the middle one is the peace-maker. Right? I grew up as the middle child in my family and I was (true to typical behavior) the peace maker in our home. My mom said that when I would cry, she would often be so busy with my two older brothers that by the time she got to me, I had stopped. (I know, you feel sorry for me now, don't you?)

Well, perhaps as a mom, I was also so busy with my first two, that I didn't get to my son right away. However, he didn't stop crying, he just howled all the louder until eventually he managed to get my attention. Even as a baby, he wanted his fair share of attention (and

he got it!) He learned how to get everyone else's attention as well! When he was old enough to really cause trouble, he would steal his sister's dolls just to make them cry, or for even a bigger thrill, he would put on a scary mask and walk up to them with his arms out-stretched, and a growl coming from his lips. He got his desired reaction as both of his sisters would start screaming and come running to me in tears. Many friends of mine suffered similar dilemmas. Whenever we would get together, we would share a few horror stories from our "high-spirited" children.

Cheryl often remarked how mild mannered and obedient her first two children were. She couldn't figure out what all of the fuss was about when people complained about their difficult children. "Must be in the parenting," she thought smugly. Then child number three came along! Suddenly she understood the glazed eyes and frazzled nerves of her sisters and friends. She explained, "My daughter would break her brother's toys, destroy her sister's art-work, and color all over the walls. I never had this problem with my first two!" Then she added, "My sister's boy was exactly the same way." "Most parents have a little difficulty leaving their child at kindergarten that first day, but my sister dropped her son off the corner and peeled out of there as fast as she could!" She laughed, "She just really needed a break. And now I understood perfectly!"

My other friend shared stories about how her younger son would pick on his older brother and sister. She states, "...one time when he was four (or barely five) he and his brother happened to see a commercial for a scary movie called, "Chucky the live doll." It was something about a doll that comes to life and has a knife. Of course we would never allow our children to watch such a show. The commercial alone scared my older son half to death. But of course it didn't even phase our four year old. Often when we were in the car, he would whisper to his brother Hunter in a spooky voice, "Hunta, Hunta, it's Chucky, the live doll..." Hunter would get terrified and scream, "He said it, he said it, tell him to stop!" This younger brother knew exactly what would get a rise out of his older brother and

seemed to revel in pushing his buttons.

When this same little boy was six, he managed to get his older sister in trouble by pretending that she was bugging him. This was also in the car. My friend explains what happened: “We were all in the car and we heard our son shouting, “Ashley, stop it!” So we told Ashley to leave her brother alone. Then a minute later we hear again, “Ouch! Ashley, leave me alone!” We again got mad at her and told her to stop. After several times, my husband was getting really irritated and pulled over the car. Then our son clapped his hands together and exclaimed, “Ha Ha – My plan worked!” My husband and I just looked at each other and our mouths dropped. I said, “Did he just say that?” We can’t help but find ourselves wondering where he comes up with this stuff!

They aren’t the only ones who have trouble with their middle child. Our son could make his older brother upset, but it was usually his younger sister that he loved teasing. She had a favorite blanket that she would always sleep with. She loved to have it whenever she watched television and would hold it comfortingly while she sucked her thumb. Well, our son, knowing how attached she was to her blanket, loved to sneak up to her, grab the blanket by the corner and run off with it. He must have loved causing the high-pitched blood curdling scream that would follow. If we put him in time-out, he would just sit there with a smirk on his face.

After a year or two, however, things started to change. My son actually started playing with his younger sister. He shared his treats with her and even drew her pictures. One day I couldn’t get my daughter to take a nap and he offered to read to her. He read to her for about twenty minutes until she drifted off to sleep. I was thrilled! Then just yesterday my four year old and two year old daughters were fighting over the same “yo yo.” My “high-spirited” son (now seven) intervened by walking up to my two year old saying, “Here have my yo-yo.” “Thanks!” she shouted as she ran off. Could it be? My son...is....a...PEACE-MAKER!!” I took just a moment to sigh in

gratitude when I was startled by a loud crash followed by a scream: "Mom! He just knocked over my tower!" Okay, maybe we'll settle for PART-TIME peace-maker!

--Wendy Jensen--

An Extraordinary Woman

"What seven things do you want to do before you die?" Had I been asked this question several years ago I would have had a hard time narrowing it down to just seven, and my answers to this question would have been amazingly different from what they are today.

As I pondered this question the other day, many things I planned and wished to do when I was single came to mind: world travel, intense educational studies, and career goals. I knew I had a good mind and felt certain that there were extraordinary things in my future. I knew being a mother was in my future too. I even hoped that in the scheme of my life I would have the opportunity to be a stay at home mom. Still, there were things I wanted to do *some time* in my life -- exciting things, challenging things, things that not your average run-of-the-mill house wife would do. I was determined to grow into an extraordinary woman.

Now, I am a stay at home mother of six children. Many of my past plans have been furloughed in favor of that one dream. As I welcomed each child into my arms and heart, my idea of exciting and extraordinary shifted. There are still things I want to accomplish and do before I die, but my greatest desires have evolved, and my timetable has been rearranged. My plans no longer entail traveling the world, performing on a stage, or immersing myself in an exciting career.

My dearest hopes and dreams are simple. I hope my children will be prepared to face this difficult world and succeed as thriving adults. I hope they will learn to be loving, honest and spiritual people. I hope my children will have childhood experiences they cherish throughout their lives. I hope that we will always be a family bonded together in love, one that enjoys spending time together and supports one another through tough times. If I am granted all of this, there is little more I need ask for.

Yet, as I work day in and day out folding laundry, cooking meals, and getting frustrated with the oft times slow progress children make, I begin to wonder if my personal identity is being washed away. Am I “just a mom?” I begin to day dream about some of my old plans and wonder how my life would have been different if I had gotten that college degree or pursued a career. Sometimes I find myself wishing that I could be out in the world doing something extraordinary. Then the moment of frustration passes, I remember what is dearest to my heart and realize I don't need to *do* any thing extraordinary anymore. Now I need to *be* extraordinary.

I need to be the mom who is her children's greatest support and advocate. I need to be a listening ear and an open heart. I need to be a teacher and a friend. I need to be a cook, maid, homework corrector, chauffeur, and all the other things moms do. I renew my belief that if I put my heart and soul into motherhood, if I serve and teach my children with grace and patience, then I *will* be an extraordinary woman. Perhaps I seem to be a typical run-of-the-mill house wife to people who don't understand the challenges and sacrifices that are made within the walls of my home. However, to those who *do* understand, to those who matter to me the most, I will be extraordinary none the less!

--Karla Seamons--

Poems On Motherhood

For My Mom

Although I can't remember, the time I was a babe
and relied on you for every need, for food and love and aid.

I feel your love and endless care, and all the sacrifice
that you must have showered o'er me, from the first day of my life.

I feel it when I hold my child and gaze deep into his eyes,
I feel it when he's lonely or discouraged and starts to cry.

I feel it when I comfort my children in sickness or distress,
When they want to snuggle next to me and feel my soft caress.

I feel it during sleepless nights, when only a mother's care will do
I feel it when I'm frustrated with my toddler's "terrible twos!"

I feel it after a warm embrace when my child has scraped her knee,
I feel it in the pride that's there, when she says her ABC's.

Although my children are still small, they've taught me something
great;
I've felt the love you had for me, when your own needs had to wait.

So thank you dear mother, for your worry and your prayers
And for always being there to let me know you cared.

I never quite understood all that my mother meant to me,
Until I became a mother too – with a family for eternity!

--- Wendy Jensen ---

My Mother-In-Law

I smile at my husband and children,
As he growls, pretending to fight,
The little ones climb on his back,
Squealing with laughter and delight.

I breathe a prayer of thanks,
For this man – my children’s father,
And also to the one who loved him first,
My husband’s sweet angel mother.

It was she who carried him nine long months,
Bringing him painfully into the world.
A little bundle was placed in her arms
A tiny hand around her finger curled.

She was the first to whisper, “I love you...”
her soft breath across his cheek.
She was the first to realize his needs
And sing him off to sleep.

She was the one who encouraged him
and taught him how to pray,
She planted seeds of nobleness,
Inspiring his role as father someday.

She gently nudged him off to school.
Cheered when he returned triumphant.
She taught him to laugh and live life fully,
Celebrating his many accomplishments.

She helped him with his schoolwork
And cheered when he succeeded
She cried with him when things went wrong
Giving solace when he felt defeated.

She welcomed his friends with open arms
She was a mom who was "with it,"
She joined in all of the childhood fun,
As they all told stories, she listened.

When he was young, she bandaged him
Whenever he scraped his knee
Later she led him through teenage years
On that crazy adolescent journey.

Whenever he needed to talk to someone,
She was always there close by
She watched him become a successful man
Amazing! How the time did fly.

She consoled him when his heart was broken
And he wondered who he would marry,
She promised him that someday soon,
That he would be led, to me...

And he was.
To our mother, THANK YOU!

--Wendy Jensen--

Poem From My Daughter

Mom is a jaguar keeping her babies safe.
She is a compass showing me the right way.
Mom is a harp playing me to sleep.
She is an angel helping me feel better when I am sad.
Mom is a daisy lighting up my day.

--Janika Jensen (age ten) --

I Was Blessed

I woke up early at the break of dawn, and gazed over the horizon
Stripes of pink clouds streaked across the heavens,
Like a paintbrush across canvas. I held my breath,
And knew that I was blessed.

I looked out my window at noonday,
Red rock mountains clashed against a bright blue sky.
Not a cloud pierced through the image.
I sighed in awe,
and knew that I was blessed.

I breathed in cold crisp air as my feet crunched upon pure white
snow
Tall pines stretched toward heaven, covering purple mountains.
A clear blue river lapped against the shores of the earth.
I absorbed the nature around me,
and knew that I was blessed.

I walked in the door and a small child ran towards me
She jumped in my arms and threw her arms around my neck.
She leaned her messy little mouth towards my ear and
whispered, "I love you Mommy!"
And I knew that I was blessed!

--Wendy Jensen--

Ma Mere

I lost my parents at the very tender age of seven and eight. It was the worst thing that could have happened to me and as I look back, I wonder how I did it. However, God is great and looked after me. I am now a mother of eight children. Yes, you read right! I have seven sons and one daughter and I have no regrets. I love my kids and they adore me. We get out of life exactly what we put into it. My children and I share a LOVE and a bond that is great! Here is my poem written for my mom:

Ma mere Ma mere Ma mere.
In the womb the bond is tied.
Birth eradicates any pride.

Hands are held as we learn to walk.
words are taught as we play and talk.

In the mind we hear her voice.
In the heart we know her touch.

In still dawn we sing....it rains.
Here comes noon we have grown again.

Then at dusk our paths grow wide,
Threads of love still by our side.

It is hope.....It is faith.
That our love still integrates.

It is us, that you have raised,
And for that, to YOU we praise.

Ma mere Ma mere Ma mere.
--Kathleen--

Forever Friend

(Song written by Rick Jensen for his mom)

So long ago, I saw your eyes...
You held me in your arms, as I watched you cry...
Though just a babe – I could see right then,
The beginnings of my forever friend.

While in my youth,
you taught me truth,
And through the years,
through smiles and through tears,
You showed you cared for me...

You're an angel from above,
That showers the world with love,
And your love is felt by all.
You're a gift from Him,
that brings hope within,
On you, I'll depend,
Because... you're my forever friend.

Throughout my life, I felt your light,
Your example gives me strength to know wrong from right.
Though I'm grown, I think now and then,
Of times with my forever friend.

On those special nights, it all seems so right,
Your words of love, sent from Him up above
I knew you cared for me...

You're an angel from above,
That showers the world with love,
And your love is felt by all.

You're a gift from Him, that brings hope within,
On you, I'll depend,
Because...you're my forever friend.

I remember each day,
Your every smile, your every way.
The joy you shared with me.
I'll share with my own kin,
The joy that you brought in
And they'll know, you are my friend...

You're an angel from above,
That showers the world with love,
And your love is felt by all.
You're a gift from Him, that brings hope within,
On you I'll depend,
Because... you're my forever friend!

--Rick Jensen--

Favorite Sayings of My Mom

My Mom, Violet, always said to "To be kind to everyone." This has helped me through my whole life because I have tried to make everyone feel warm and welcome when I meet them. I know I have been rewarded over and over.

My Mother In Law, Dee, always said, "There are never any guarantees in life." I know when making decisions, I remember this quote, and make them through the spirit and my heart.

--Brenda Dayton--

Tributes To Mothers

Christmas Day

The greatest lesson my mother taught me was to make Christmas Day a day to remember, full of fun, happiness and love. Every year for as long as I can remember Christmas Days at home were wonderful, really magical. My mum and dad used to get up really early; they were more excited than me and my brother. Mum would put Christmas Carols on the stereo, so we woke up to "We wish you a Merry Christmas" or "Silent Night" which was a great way to wake up. We would then wander downstairs sleepily to an entrance of a huge Santa sack and mum and dad grinning from ear to ear. Then it would be a frantic race of opening presents. Family and friends would visit throughout the day and mum would do a fantastic Christmas dinner.

Mum worked so hard not just on that day but all the months of preparation before hand, from buying all the food and gifts, to wrapping them up, plus all the cooking and cleaning. The house always looked great, mum took great care when decorating the tree, this was one thing we were not allowed to have much involvement in. It was always color coordinated and looked really professional. I have really great memories of these times and this has transferred to my own children. Even though they are not old enough really yet to know much about Christmas (they are only two and a half) I still carry out all the little touches so when they are old enough they will remember Christmas Day as being as wonderful as I do.

--Kim Raffles--

Tribute to Aunt Lu

I would like to pay tribute to my "Mom" not Mother. My Mother's sister raised my sister and I from age five until we left home and got married. My "Mother" left us at my grandparent's one weekend and didn't return for us until four years later. As it so happened, we were involved in an auto accident and Grandpa and Grandma were not able to leave the hospital, so Aunt Lu and Uncle Dave came and took us in. We went to live with them and they enrolled us in school. Aunt Lu made us dresses that were blue and pink. (We did not like them at the time because they were identical except in color). She combed our hair into those long banana curls. To this day if an elder in the church sees us, they comment on how beautiful "Lucy" used to fix our hair.

She was not my mother by birth, but she raised us and loved us as her own. She is Grandma to my kids. She instilled in me a love for music and I feel I owe her for my persistence in getting out my first children's CD. I remember she walked us to school the first week. We were walking home the second day of the second week and we saw her following behind, making sure we knew the way home and were safe. She has been Aunt Lu to hundreds of children growing up in our church and the ones that were in her home day care, but she is "mom" to us. She is loved by us all!

--Linda Conrad--

A Flowered Dress

When I was in the sixth grade, it was the day of our “special 6th grade luncheon.” My mother, who sewed all my clothes, made a pretty flowered dress for me to wear. It had a tie belt with little daisies sewn on it. Right before the lunch, the belt came undone. My teacher called my mom. We lived about a half mile from the school and I would either walk or ride my bike. We only had one family car and my dad used it for work. (This was 1960-1961). My mother, who I had never seen at my school before that day, nor after that day, rode my sister’s bike to the school to sew my dress. I have always held that as a very special example of a mother’s love. She is 84 years old and still lives in her own apartment about seven minutes from our house.

--Deborah--

An Amazing Woman

My mother is an amazing woman, she was able to raise 5 children while working full time and now she has 3 grandchildren. Amazingly enough she still has time for all of us and she always dedicates time for each of us individually. Mum was always the first one up and the last one to go to bed. I will always remember my mother for her kindness and giving nature. She gives help to those around her unconditionally. I will forever be thankful to my mother for teaching me everything that I know and one day I hope to be as great to my children as she has been to me!

--Yanci Montes--

Legacy Of A Praying Mother

Sending this tribute sends tears to my eyes, because I miss my mom so much! My mom died, six and a half years ago, of cancer. I'm only 33 and feel like I still need my mom. Sometimes I wonder why God took her away so early in her life and in mine. However, what I do cherish is good memories of my mom.

My mom was my best friend. There wasn't a day that passed by that we didn't talk to one another, either in person or on the phone. If my mom didn't call me, I wondered why. At the end of her life this happened more and more because the cancer had metastasized in her brain and she could no longer remember my phone number.

My mom was always making us laugh; she had a silly way about her and took life lightly. However, when life got serious, you knew that mom was down on her knees praying for you. Very often, she was up in the middle of the night praying for either myself or one of my siblings. When we weren't living at home she would say to us, "God woke me up at such and such a time last night to pray for you, so what happened at that time?" Very often it was exactly the time that we needed prayer the most.

My mom left behind the legacy of a praying mother. I feel at times as though my mom's prayers are living on today. There are times now that I am woken in the middle of the night to pray for matters in my own children's lives, or even for matters of my own (it is nearly 3:00 am now, God woke me for a date with him tonight again). May this legacy be passed down to my own children as well.

--Rhonda Derksen--

My Mother Stood Up For My Rights

I remember I was 18 years old and had cleared entrance into a very prestigious university of my country. My father was severely alcoholic and those were the days when he had become extremely suicidal. I had given up all hopes to study any further and I just wanted to be with my mother and somehow earn some money for her and my younger brother. My father was bedridden and he had no idea about my university call. I spoke to my mother about my decision of not joining the university and just be with her, knowing anything could happen to father any day.

She, being a strong woman, told me to go ahead and complete my studies. She said, if I became something in life, that would be her achievement and support. She said my absence would be a problem for her, but my career was of far greater importance than anything. She insisted that I should leave for the University the next day.

I come from a very orthodox culture. My city doesn't even exist in world political maps. Coming from such a background, where girls get married soon in a healthy family, my mother stood up for my rights to have a bright future, when everyone was against my studies.

Today, things are normal in my family. My father has left alcohol and is leading a normal healthy life, thanks to my mother. My younger brother finished his studies and is now running a very successful business. I have become a psychologist and have a good practice and a happy married life. I owe this to my mother...thanks mom!

--Aanchal Agrawal--

A Thanksgiving Celebration

One of my most memorable Thanksgivings happened when I was dating a wonderful guy named Rick (who is now my husband). I was invited to spend Thanksgiving Day with his family. We all gathered around an elegant table in the dining room that was set with lovely china. The table was covered with the delicious and traditional foods that go hand in hand with Thanksgiving -- turkey, candied yams, potatoes and gravy, vegetables, rolls, and more. The aroma titillated our senses in anticipation of each glorious bite that would soon be ours.

Before we all ate, however, it was suggested that we go around the table and say something that we were thankful for. When it was Rick's sister's turn to speak, she became very emotional. With tears in her eyes, she expressed her gratitude that her mother was present. You see, her mom was struggling with cancer and no one really knew how long she would live. The air was thick with emotion as eyes filled with tears and words choked on heart-felt expressions of love. Perhaps a feeling of humility and a realization of the fragility of life brought everyone a little closer that day.

By God's grace, our mother and grandmother was allowed to live. She overcame her battle with cancer and is still with us today. She has blessed the lives of each member of our family in ways we can't even begin to number. We don't know why we were granted this blessing -- we can only humbly thank God and be grateful that He has granted us yet another day together. Members of my family know all too well the pain of death, as loved ones have slipped from their grasp. We never know when a loved one will be taken from us and returned to Him who gave them life. While we never know how long or short our journey in life will be, we can carry gratitude in our hearts for each precious moment that we have together!

--Wendy Jensen--

“Hey Mom, I’m Home!”

“Hey mom, “I’m home!” These were always the first words coming out of my mouth whenever I ran through our front door. The door was never locked, the house was never empty. Our house was always filled with children and noise and there was always a mother who would answer, “I’m here!”

If I had a great day I would come bursting through the house with excitement ready to tell my mom everything. If I had a particularly bad day I knew I had someone to talk to and a shoulder to cry on. When I came home one day from Junior High upset over an incident with some other kids, my mom was there to listen. And when I came home from girl’s camp visibly distressed because the older girls had stolen the younger girls bras and hung them on the flag pole and dumped corn syrup on their hair...my mom let me sit on her lap and cry.

When I was sixteen and had only had my driver’s license for a week, my mom had warned me to be careful about pulling out of my friend’s driveway. I waved my “okay” as I ran out the door. Later, when I dropped off my friend and pulled out of her driveway, I backed right into someone’s brand new parked car. I cried all the way home. My mom comforted me and never said, “I told you so.”

Of course I shared the good times too. When I got asked out on my first date I gushed excitedly to my mom. Through my high school years I remember shopping for prom dresses, trying on dress after dress until we found the perfect one. After each date I would come into my mom’s room and sit on the edge of her bed and tell her all about it. She was always there to listen and was interested in all of the details.

I shared my excitement when I succeeded academically or did well in a track or cross county race or drama competition. I was thrilled to share the good news with my mom when I made certain college music groups that I had auditioned for or when I landed a desired job. She was there when I learned where I would be going to serve a mission for my church, and was supportive in helping me graduate from college. Some of the accomplishments were big and others were small, but my mom was always there to celebrate with me.

Of course I always spent many hours discussing boys. I cried on the phone to my mom from college when I was dumped for the first time and later excitedly chattered on when I got asked out by a new guy that I liked. My mom helped me through all of the many stresses and ups and downs of those exhilarating but emotional dating years. When I was engaged, my mom was there every step of the way and did everything she could to make my wedding day perfect!

Several months later when my husband and I learned that I was expecting, I couldn't wait to tell my mom. Later on when I was in the hospital giving birth to each of my children, we would call my mom. How comforting it was just to hear her voice! As soon as they could, she and my dad would travel several hours to come and stay with us for a few days in order to help with the new baby and other children.

As I look back on my life, I see a mom who always said, "I'm here." Even now, although several hundred miles apart, I will often receive an e-mail with encouraging words that seem to say those sweet words, "I'm here." Just like my mom, I hope and pray that I too will always "be here" for my children. Thanks mom – I love you!

--Wendy Jensen--

My Listener and Advisor

My grandma passed away when my mum was only six years old. She had to stay with her nearest aunt in order to survive and had to learn to do things independently without complaining. Waking up early and going to bed late at night was her usual life. She cried without her mum's shoulder when she was sad and had no one to celebrate her accomplishments when she did things right. Despite her situation, she managed to become a successful mother and business woman. I am proud of her and am grateful for her love, encouragement, and advice. She helped to resolve the barriers in my life. She is a good listener and adviser. She is my friend and a good mum. I hope to also be a good mum to my two children and pass down these qualities to them.

--Chong Mee Yan--

"Waste Not, Want Not"

My mum was widowed at 40, and no pension at the time... so she taught me and my sister to "waste not, want not," and to "want what we have" rather than "not have what we want". So we always had enough not only for ourselves, but also enough to share with others. We also developed a love of literature. When I was a kid the public library was just two corners away from where I lived so of course I devoured 3 books a day and went on the morrow for 3 more. The librarian didn't believe that I could be getting through them. So I told him the 3 stories, every day for a week - and he didn't say anything more! One of my kids used to take a book to the bathroom, fill a sink with water, and move the facecloth around as he read, so I would think he was having a wash!

--Tanja Cilia--

Tribute to My Grandma

When I think of my grandma I think of delicious meals, including home-made rolls, fresh strawberry jam in little blue bowls, and home-made candy! I always think of my grandma with a beautiful smile on her face. Growing up we loved to go fishing with grandma and grandpa. We would wake up really early in the morning to go out on the Lake at Strawberry Reservoir in Grandpa's boat. We got to sleep in the bed that was in the back of their truck and play in their motor home. We even got to go water-skiing when Grandpa bought a ski-boat!!

My grandma always had the most wonderful garden. We loved to pick raspberries at her house or fruit off their fruit trees. I remember the beautiful poems that she wrote or recited from memory. I remember receiving letters from my grandma while I was away to school or doing missionary service and I knew her prayers were with me.

Grandma and Grandpa always loved to play games and cards and I'll always remember my parents going each week to play games with them. Sometimes we kids got to play scrabble with them too. I'll always remember how immaculate her house was with everything in its place. I remember Christmas parties and get-togethers and playing with our cousins in Grandma's back yard and rolling down their hill on the side of their house.

I remember blowing bubbles through spools and bowling with milk jugs. I've always thought it was neat how Grandma and Grandpa have always been so unified – doing so many things together that they both love.

I am so grateful for my Grandma! The most priceless heritage she has given me is in the form of my mother. I wish to thank my Grandma for raising her children in such a way that has allowed me in turn to receive such a wonderful up-bringing. The lessons that

have been passed down from mother to daughter will be carried on for generations yet to come. Thank you, Grandma, for your wonderful example – I love you!

--Wendy Jensen--

My Grandmother, My Inspiration!

I want to tell you a little about a wonderful woman, my grandmother. You see, when I was three my mother died suddenly leaving my dad a widow with three young children. My grandmother stepped in and helped my father raise me and my brothers. She was 62 years old, taking on the task of raising a ten, three and one year old. I'm sure it wasn't an easy task but she never let it show. She was the most strong, loving, amazing woman I've ever known. She was such a positive influence in my life. She taught me to love people for who they are on the inside. She taught me to cherish what we have in life and not take it for granted.

She taught me to roll with the punches. She showed me that the greatest gift you can give anyone is a kind word and a smile. She taught me that it is better to be a good listener than a good talker. She showed me what life and motherhood is all about. I know I wouldn't be the same person I am today if she hadn't been such a major part of my life. I look forward to instilling the same values in my daughter that she taught me. I owe a lot to my grandmother, the only mother I can remember. She was a true inspiration. I just hope my mother and grandmother are looking down from heaven with pride for the woman and mother I've become. I couldn't have done it without them!

--Jade--

Like Mother, Like Son

If you are ever lucky enough to meet my mother-in-law, you will understand how I fell head-over-heels in love with her son. Whether through genes, environment, or both, he had developed her sense of humor, optimism, and zest for life. Those qualities, along with his dad's gift for music and gorgeous singing voice, made him especially attractive to me!

When Rick and I had started dating, I gave him a card to celebrate his recent graduation from college. I don't know what prompted me to do this, but I wrote, "Congratulations on your graduation, I really look forward to marrying you someday!" When he told his mom about the card she said, "You had better watch out for this one – she is planting seeds in your mind!" When Rick brought me to meet his family later on, I was enamored by their exquisite yard filled with colorful flowers, trees, bushes, and water-fountains. "Wow," I breathed, "This would be a perfect place for a wedding reception!" I'm sure if his mother would have heard me, she would have silently whispered in his ear, "See what I told you? She is planting seeds..."

I knew she was a fun mom when the three of us sat on a little bench in their backyard and she told us about a recent retreat she had taken with her friends. She laughingly told us about some silly antics they had done such as saran wrapping a friend to the bed – and the fun didn't stop! Later on I was invited back to their house in the fall for their infamous "scary dinner" at Halloween. Rick's mom was dressed in a bright yellow curly wig and was serving lemonade from a bed-pan along with all sorts of gross looking food like fresh "fingers" (Vienna sausages with fake fingernails stuck in them). She then led the family in gory stories about where the food came from.

Rick's dating activities seemed to fit into the "fun" mold of his family. He planned everything from picnics in the park, to dancing in formals underneath the stars in his backyard. Once on a date he had

me put together a party for us from the contents of a paper sack and another time we went to the grocery store, where our objective was to purchase a meal for both of us for under \$2.00. It wasn't until later on that I learned that "the party bag" and probably half of these other schemes were actually his mom's idea! Maybe she was testing my ingenuity to see if I would fit into this family, or maybe she was just helping her son to win my heart!

Whether his own ideas or not, I was definitely attracted to Rick's resourcefulness. He was so creative (cheap) and fun! How could I help but fall in love? So my lucky husband should be grateful that he has such a wonderful mom, who had come through so many of life's challenges with a smile on her face. After all, one of the reasons I married him was so that I could have her too!

Now our children get a grandma who is not only the "Queen of Chicken Foot," but also the "wife of Santa Clause." As far as Christmas is concerned, the content of that story is so big that it will have to wait for another time to be told. Grandma mails the kids a box of "junk-food" from their annual Valentines Bingo party since we live too far way to attend and makes sure that our family's winning hard-boiled egg gets to compete in their annual "egg-bashing" contest at Easter.

When my husband came up with our own little family traditions of "Father's Day Flee" and "Mother's Day Tea," I could immediately envision it. I mean look at all of the clever traditions his mom has come up with? I don't know if our children know how lucky they are to have a grandma like this, but I know. When my husband lights candles around the room and melodramatically begins to weave a story for our children, I look at their entranced faces...and I look at him...and I know.

-- Wendy Jensen --

A Woman Of Strength and Wisdom

This is how strong and wonderful my mother is. My mother had a kidney transplant about 1 year ago. It was successful; however my mother was in extreme pain and was unable to walk. Pain after the first day of operation was understandable, also after one week it was understandable. The consultant, Dr. B told my mother to stop complaining about the pain, and should be more grateful that they gave the kidney to her and not some one else. My mother (and father) were dumbfounded.

After six weeks of intense pain my mother made an appointment with the GP doctor. She was afraid the consultant would shout at her again. The doctor found a lump the size of a tennis ball where they had operated. An emergency appointment was made.

The new kidney they gave my mother had a fungal infection in it. The original scan showed that the infection was the size of a coin after the first week, and due to negligence on behalf of Dr. B and his team, my mother was suffering so much and they ignored her complaints of pain.

The operation to take out the infected kidney was now critical, and the consultant said he doesn't know what he will do until he has opened her up. Before the operation we went to see mother thinking we would never see her again.

After the second operation my mother was still unable to walk and the pain had moved down her leg. The nerves to her leg were blocked and blood was not flowing. Another emergency operation followed. The nurse in dialysis later told my mother that one of the patients had the same problem and had his leg amputated.

Dr. B said, in 30 years of doing kidney transplants, my mothers case was the first he had ever come across. My mother knows she is here for a reason, and we (my four other sisters and I) also know she

is here for a reason. She is grateful she is still alive. The nerves in her leg/hips are all damaged and still painful, yet she is thankful she still has her legs.

My mother is amazing. She has so many illnesses, yet she does not complain. She looked after my Nan in her old age, who was manic depressive and disabled. One year later, my mother still cooks for ten of us at home as well as for visitors. She looks after five grandchildren, and she teaches women in our community. All of this while on dialysis. I look up to my mother through her strength and wisdom. My mother is an amazing, great woman and I love her to pieces!

-- Rakiya Rahman --

The Value of Learning

My mom instilled many wonderful values within her children, including a love for reading, and the importance of receiving an education. Growing up we would often go to the library and bring home bags overflowing with good books. My mom would also read to us -- carefully chosen books that taught important values such as obedience, honesty, and respect. Whenever we sat down to eat a snack, we would usually look around for something to read. So my mom began strategically placing specific articles or books (usually on topics that related to things we were going through at that time) within arms reach so that we would "happen to read" them while we were eating. She and Dad also helped us with homework and stressed the importance of education. I guess it is no surprise then that all six of their children graduated from college. I am grateful for all of the wonderful lessons I learned from my mother!

--Wendy Jensen--

Mom Was My Rock

At the height of my career (that I loved so much - working at a secluded beach resort, absolute paradise to say the least), my longtime boyfriend (13yrs) and I broke up. We were told we couldn't have kids and besides that I was petrified to have children. My upbringing was quite a stressful one - my parents got divorced (my Mom once and my Dad three times!) The man she remarried didn't act like a father should. I've only recently been able to forgive him and carry on with my life. My Mom was extremely strict with me and had very high morals; I often felt that I could not lean on her through bad times, which really lined me into thinking that I don't want kids at all. I wouldn't want the same to happen to them.

After the break up with my boyfriend, I made a huge mistake with my very best friend at the lodge and became pregnant. I was devastated. I had no one to turn to. I eventually had to leave and decided to try going back to Mom. When I told her what had happened, she was extremely understanding. The father of the child kept trying to force me to have an abortion. I was in a real mess - and that's when I saw a side to my Mom, that I had never seen before. She never once ridiculed me, but instead she seemed to be my rock - she got the whole family together and they were all behind me.

She went with me to every doctor's appointment and every scan; it was wonderful to be able to share the first part of my pregnancy with my Mom. My ex-boyfriend wanted to get back with me (not knowing what had happened) and I just said it wouldn't be the right thing to do - even though I still loved him so much. My Mom intervened and he accepted me back full-heartedly and unconditionally. To this day I have never seen any granny that is as close as her and my little girl. It's as if they are soul mates! My boyfriend and I got married and we now have TWO children and are loving it. Although I know what I did was wrong, with my Mom's help I managed to start making the right decisions and now have a family of

my own. Having learned my lesson, I hope that no matter how small or large the problem that my children may face one day, I will also be there for them.

--Louise--

Cookie Cookie With Mummie

My mom was like most moms -- caring, loving, warm and tender. She was the one who attended the school sports days, prize giving and parents and teachers meetings. Dad was always working. I have a special tradition which I have continued with my little one and this is Saturday afternoon baking. Whenever I smell biscuits or bread baking I have the fondest memories of my dear mom.

Saturday afternoons was an EVENT to look forward to. I remember so clearly helping her mix the cake, biscuit or bread dough, pour the sugar and vanilla into the bowl, break the eggs and of course the best part of all, licking off the leftovers on the spoon and in the bowl - this was the yummiest part!

We always had cookies and cake in our house. Hence this tradition has continued in my household. Like most children, my little one loves to "cookie cookie with mummie" and he too can't wait to get his little fingers in the bowl and his lips around the spoon. Isn't it funny how certain smells associate you to certain things? Thanks Mom!

--Laurie Potgieter--

Hats Off To My Mom!

My mom was a young and beautiful girl of 18 yrs when she married my Dad, who already had 5 children. My dad's first wife (my mom's elder sister) died of cancer after delivering her fifth child. My mom who was taking care of the infant was finding it difficult to see five motherless children aged between 9 yrs to 5 months. She willingly entered into this wedlock knowing she would have to bring up five children. It was really a tough decision. I cannot even imagine someone that young being willing to take the responsibility of bringing up 5 children (four girls and one boy) who were not really hers. It certainly wasn't easy.

Dad was a small time earner (and at first was the only one bringing in money to the family). His new young wife being a strong lady took hold of the family and ran a small time business, earning money along with my father. This insured that the children were not deprived of the things they needed, be it clothes, shoes, education and so on. We were 12 people living in a small house and my parents had absolutely no privacy. They were always working for their kids. I don't remember any time when she lost patience with any of us 9 kids while we grew up, while I tend to lose my patience so easily with my own kids. All her life she has spent only for those 5 children and 4 of her own. Never at any time did she think about herself – shopping for herself, or doing something she enjoyed. She always thought about the kids first. Thinking back now I am amazed how a woman can be like that.

I am her own second child and now when she tells us stories of what she went through at every phase, it's amazing. Hearing her tales helps us to be stronger and more courageous. She is so happy to see all her children doing very well and settled now. Even to this day she prays for all of us and our families well being. Hats off to her!!

--Nandini Narayana--

Oak Trees and Lamp Posts

My mom, since I can remember, has always been there for me. I'm 29, married, and have three kids of my own. I cherish all the little things that my mom did with me. Her childhood was not the best, but even to this day she always looks on the bright side of things. She gives me the strength when I need it the most. I always wonder how she knows, even though we live on the other side of world from each other.

When growing up we lived in a small town. When I was almost seven, I desperately wanted to walk to school on my own. Back then things were different. My mom didn't like the idea at all, but after much whining.....and following her around the house (funny the things you remember), she finally gave in and said that I could walk to school with another girlfriend of mine.

The morning came and my girlfriend came to the house with her mom and said her goodbyes. I got my backpack and school gear ready to go, gave my mom a kiss goodbye and smiled as my friend and I held hands down the road. Along our street we had oak trees, some large, others small, but trees none the less. (Just thinking about this story makes my laugh). Half way down the road, I noticed something moving. I quickly looked but nothing seemed to be there. After a few more times of seeing this disappearing figure, I realized that my mom was following us. All the way to school she was hiding behind trees, lamp posts, mail boxes, cars -- you get the idea. What people must have thought of her as they walked by!

She never knew that I saw her, but I felt safe and loved with every tree, and lamp post, and car that she hid behind and it was all because she loved me. My mom has always been my support through all my life's trials, even my first day to school. So trust me when I say it's the little things a daughter cherishes. I love you mom!

--Laurie Kagbala--

Below are two beautiful tributes written for the same mother, JoAnn Evans Lewis, by three of her daughters. JoAnn Evans Lewis was born in Spanish Fork, Utah. At 21, she married Robert Lewis and they had eight children. Home, family and church service were the most important things to her. She consecrated her life to supporting those efforts. She was a true, professional homemaker. She was diagnosed with Stomach Cancer at age 61 and died a few months later, leaving her husband, children and 32 grandchildren.

Excerpts from “Tribute to JoAnn Lewis”

By Valerie Lewis Chandler

Since I left the security of living under my parent’s roof eighteen years ago, I have found the telephone to be my lifeline... I’ve needed it to be able to tap into my mom’s support and advice. While I was away at college in Logan, Utah for five years without a car, I may as well have been in Pakistan— And I felt even further away during four long Minnesota winters, and five long Texas summers. But fortunately my mother was never further than a phone call when I had news, when I was lonely, if I was having issues in my dating relationships or my friendships, or if I had parenting concerns.

I always called if I had a new political opinion, or if I had heard an interesting current event. She had the ability to frame everything in the tight mold of morals and values, and God’s expectations for us both. Yes, with something on my mind, she’s who I would think to call, and invariably, she would add to and enlighten, she’d cheer me up, or dig me right out of my funk. Her beautiful blend of empathy and wisdom, always lifted my sights and cheered my spirits.

I didn’t have a name for this maternal phenomenon, but I knew that I had a wise, witty, unwavering, wonderful mother. Then, in May of 2004 during a church conference, a leader of the young women in our church, Julie Beck, described a condition of the female soul. She

called it, “The Mother Heart.” (Julie B. Beck, “A ‘Mother Heart’,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 75)

I liked that phrase right off. And as Sister Beck shared her definition of a mother heart, I was sure that my mom was one of those whom she described. She said that a woman with a mother heart has a testimony of Christ and His gospel. She keeps covenants. She shares her talents and skills unselfishly. She gains education. She improves her mind. She is filled with the desire to teach what she has learned to the generations who follow her. She lives and teaches standards of behavior exactly in line with prophets of God. She believes that nurturing children is a dignified and sacred calling, and that caring for a family’s physical needs is an honor. She is “not weary in well-doing.” Yes, my mom has a mother heart!

...In her personal history, my mother wrote, “As a child I loved playing with dolls and enjoyed caring for them way past the age of most of my friends. When I thought of growing up, I didn’t dream of being a teacher or a secretary, or anything but a mother. I remember that the worst thing that could happen to me would be if I would never marry and have children. My friends and I used to joke that we were going to be “Old Maids,” and that our partners had been killed in the war in heaven. But in my private thoughts, that was the worst thing I could imagine for myself.”

She said that she tended her little brother, Gary, “a lot” while her mother worked summers at the Del Monte Cannery. In her history, she wrote, “Each morning I would tidy up the house and always felt a lot of pride to see it all clean. I remember one time sitting in the living room and pretending that I was all grown up, and someone from *Better Homes and Gardens* (magazine) was interviewing me to find out what my secrets were for keeping such a nice, clean house.”

As my mom grew a little older and could go to church activities for young women, she found that she had a lot of respect and admiration for her leaders. She noted that, “The young couples in our

congregation who were active in the church and were raising cute, little families really impressed me. It was my goal to be just like them when I grew up. The goals of temple marriage and church activity guided me through my teenage years and pre-determined what my actions would be. I don't ever remember thinking of doing something that would set me at odds with my religious goals. I remember telling my friends that I planned to be "perfect by thirty." In my mind that meant marrying in the LDS temple, starting a cute, little family and being active in the church."

While she was a sophomore at Brigham Young University, she became disenchanted with her business major and made an appointment with a counselor for some advice. "He told me that if I wanted to get married and have children that he would advise me to have a child development degree. A Human Development and Family Relations major took a lot of teasing, with people saying that all you wanted to do was get married. Some of my honors program friends scoffed saying, 'Anyone can be a mother,' but I had found my niche and was delighted with what I was learning. As a result my grades went up, and I made the honor roll, and was honored as "Most Outstanding Girl at Whitney Hall" at a campus assembly."

As I became a young mother, I set out to start a library for my first new baby. I wanted all the books that had been dear to me as a child: "Make Way for Ducklings," "The Little House," "Blueberries for Sal," "The Big Snow". As I collected them, I realized that I had been read every Caldecott award winner. When I approached my mom with that realization, she said, "Of course, always the best." It was one of those moments when I became aware that she was accessing her education in my behalf and treating her deliberate choice to mother as a profession. Once she heard someone say, "I'd stay home, but I don't do crafts." To which she cautioned me, "Don't buy into that. Don't ever allow anyone to diminish your sacred calling to someone who just does crafts!" Her organized, well-functioning, happy home was not an accident. She knew complete commitment

to her chosen field and felt that it was worth any financial sacrifice. Always home, always available, always supportive and caring.

As my mother wrapped this motherly cloak about herself, she has blessed the lives of my dad, my siblings and our children. But this love and nurturing reached far beyond our family. I'm sure that many of your names have appeared in the little notebook she called her "Worry List." Inside, was page, after page, after page of homemade spreadsheets filled with names of people who were on her mind. The most important column was the one that kept her accountable to herself— it recorded the actions she took on those impulses and impressions.

President David O. McKay, a leader in our church, said "She who can paint a masterpiece or write a book that will influence millions deserves the admiration and the plaudits of mankind; but she who rears successfully a family, whose influence will be felt through generations to come, . . . deserves the highest honor that man can give, and the choicest blessings of God." (*Gospel Ideals*, Deseret Book, 1993 p. 453-54.)

Now she's been called home, and sadly my telephone calls will have to be placed to someone else. But, I take comfort in the knowledge that when she left us, she took her "mother heart" with her... And she's not gone from us really, because her influence continues to be felt here on earth. Why? Because she has blessed us abundantly with her true "mother heart," and she has helped so many of us discover that we have one of our very own...

--Valerie Lewis Chandler--

Excerpts from "Remembrances of Our Mother: JoAnn Lewis"

By Alison Lewis Soderquist and Angela Lewis Stanford

Alison: We have been asked to share some memories of our Mom, especially in her role as a mother and a grandmother.

First of all, from the time that we were just tiny, we remember that she treated us as people... she was so positive. Even in little things, like walking with us, she would make sure that our arm wasn't up too high to make us uncomfortable or that we weren't being made to walk faster than we could. She would just walk slowly with us, and worked on our level.

Angela: She just really was a firm believer in positive reinforcement, too. She said things like, "I love it when you say, "Yes" and "I love to hear you say, 'Okay.'" Emilie remembers the time when Mom said to her, "Emilie, I like the way you picked up your blocks before you got out another toy." Emilie felt so proud and it was so meaningful to her, that she tried to do that from then on.

Alison: I think we all felt that way. She used her Child Development training and explained the reasons for things, instead of spanking or saying, "No." When we did anything wrong, she sat us down and explained to us -- the assumption was that if we had fully understood what we were supposed to do we would have done it, so she would sit us down and talk to us about it.

Angela: I remember her wanting us to feel like that church was a happy place and that is where you would learn to live happily. On Saturday evenings, I remember us sitting down and watching "Donny and Marie" (Osmond) while she put sponge rollers in all of our hair to help make us look nice for Sunday.

Alison: When we were teenagers, we got to the point that not every church meeting seemed like it would be fun to go to. She would explain to us that you don't pick and choose your church meetings. She would emphasize that you're either in the Church or you're not, and you should choose to go to each thing that has been planned.

She was very diligent in doing what was asked of her by our church. I remember her teaching the children in primary class for many years. When she would teach a lesson, she would come home and tell us all about it. There was one particular story from the 11 year old boys that she was teaching.

There was a doctor who had caused the death of a person's wife, because he didn't wash his hands before he came to deliver her baby. The man held this grudge about it his whole life long and let it fester inside him. Finally somebody came to him and said, "Leave it alone, John. (Let it go)."

If we ever got in that situation where we needed to forgive and forget, she would say, "Leave it alone, John." We knew exactly what she was talking about. She had taken those stories and lessons and applied them into our lives.

Angela: Education was really important to her. She took us to the library often. She talked about her college days. I think her theory was that high school was fine—it was fun, but college—that was when you really had a good time!

Alison: She was always trying to think of stimulating us—instead of trying to get away from us little toddlers. She said, "I just want to take my kids to the grocery store, to stimulate their minds, to take them places, and do things to help them achieve."

She helped me to become excited about reading when I was two. She made flash cards and taught me all sorts of words.

Angela: At one point as we were growing up, our parents decided it was important that we have encyclopedias in our home. I'm sure it was a sacrifice financially for them to get them. But from that time on, when we asked her a question and she'd say "Why don't you go look it up in the encyclopedia?"

Alison: She would visit all our teachers every time we had parent teacher conferences. At every parent teacher conference she would go to, she would take detailed notes. Then Mom would sit us down and tell us just what the teachers had said. She would especially accentuate the positive things they had said. By the time mom finished talking to you, you left her believing that, "My teachers love me at school!" It was more what she was telling us rather than what was true...

Alison: She taught us about personal responsibility. A famous quote of hers was, "I'm sorry you got hurt in your fighting."

Angela: One summer she put a sign on the fridge that said, "Busy children are happy children." Really, the meaning of that was that if you're a little cross or grumpy, you're going to get a job to do.

Alison: We had to take personal responsibility for reaching out to other people, too. We'd say, "I don't want to go to that youth dance. No one will talk to me. I don't have any friends." And she would say, "Look for someone that is lonelier than you and then you won't be lonely." It was our choice to reach out to other people.

Angela: When we were in the car going to a family reunion or family get-together she would say something like, "How many people do you think can you talk to today?" "Think you can you talk to seven?" "How many conversations can you start?" And it was our job to reach out to others and to get to know them and make them feel good.

Alison: You would come to the kitchen counter and all the doughnuts or cookies would be gone and you'd say, "It's not fair. I

didn't get any." She would say, "Who promised you this life was going to be fair. No one ever told you it would be fair."

Angela: She had such a devotion to duty. She felt very strongly about what she was supposed to be doing.

Alison: When she was given a new responsibility from our church, she would just get organized and pull the manual apart. In fact, she was teaching when she was nine months along with Nathan and was in labor. She taught her lesson on Wednesday afternoon, went to the hospital that evening and had her baby, and was back the next Wednesday teaching her lesson.

Angela: She made lists each day and checked it off during the day. That was her secret for getting so much done. She took notes about everything, like instructions from doctors, or even what the plumber had said...

She was very devoted to our little brothers and their health problems and took such good care of them, always thinking of what they needed.

Alison (with notes added from Valerie): When Michael was born, he had just three chambers in his heart. He couldn't go out in public for several years, so she was really stuck home most of that time. But she was perfectly willing to stay and take care of him the way he needed to be taken care of. She had feeding charts on the wall tracking, the first year or two, how much formula he'd drink at one time, the ounces, etc. She'd keep track of his medicines. She dedicated everything to his care when he needed it. His life was continuously challenging: open heart surgeries, illness, medications, and restrictions. He grew to be an amazing kid, even an eagle scout! He died of heart failure at age 14.

Nathan was struck by a car when he was almost three. He was comatose for six weeks, and emerged just like a newborn baby.

Angela: After Nathan had his accident she moved his crib out in the family room so that he could be stimulated and so that the rest of us would hang out around him. We'd go over and talk to him and sing to him. She spent countless hours of physical therapy and in doctor's offices, helping him learn, and finding things for him to be successful in, like piano and swimming. Mom found the potential in both these boys. She nurtured them into miracles!

Alison: Her needs were way down the list. She just made all the sacrifices she could for her children. One time Emilie had a pair of shoes she really hated... Emilie said, "When can I get new ones?" Mom said, "As soon as those wear out, you can get new ones." So she went out and got a scuff on them the very first day and brought them home and said, "Look. These are scuffed. Can I have a new pair?" Mom pulled off her shoe and showed her the bottom of her shoes that had holes and the soles ripped off and said, "As soon as your shoes look like this, I'll buy you new ones."

Angela: She had such a sense of humor and expressed herself so cleverly. The story of Mary and Martha out of the Bible is one story she talked about it from time to time. There is Martha bustling about getting dinner and Mary is just sitting there not doing too much.

Alison: She was listening to Jesus.

Angela: But in mom's point of view it was the Martha's that make the world go 'round...!

Angela:Mom had such a magnetic personality. We all wanted to be with her. She controlled the mood of the home. Each morning when she was happy she'd sing "Good morning Merry Sunshine" when she saw us. And later when we were teenagers she'd wake us with a verse of "Rise and shout. The Cougars are out."

Alison: When we'd come home from school every day, we found her first thing, wherever she was. Usually she would sit with us in the living room or especially at the kitchen counter. She would stand at

the counter doing dishes. We can't count how many hours we spent at the bar stools, watching her change the tinfoil on the stove burners. We were always watching her do things...we just wanted to be with her magnetic personality. We were attracted to her wherever she was and we followed her around, watching her work and she would talk to us.

Angela: She created traditions and events and she made holidays bigger. However she created her own to foster unity in the family and for fun. She always made sure holidays were fun. She and the younger boys always made peanut butter cups and taped the Super Bowl so that they could watch the commercials at 12:01 on Monday mornings. She had "Sorry" tournaments and one time she even had a Rocky-fest. She rented all of the Rocky movies and we sat and watched all of them straight through.

Alison: She would make up parties like the Christmas Kick-off where we get together for dinner, choose a king or queen out of the grandkids, have a talent show and then the adults sing Christmas carols, massacre the Hallelujah Chorus, and play all the musical instruments. David and Matthew would get out their musical instruments that they hadn't played since junior high. Once a year she would get them out because she'd "paid good money for them."

Angela: After some of the grandchildren were born I remember her wondering about how we could pass values on to the next generation to the grandchildren. From this came our yearly extended "Family Camp." She organized gospel centered themes and skits and we had discussions of gospel topics along with fun camping activities.

Alison: She wasn't afraid to set her own standards. A common saying in our family was, "Our family doesn't say those words," or "our family doesn't do such and such." She was very particular about the TV shows we would watch and movies we watched. During the miniskirt era, in elementary school, our skirts had to touch down to our knees, when nobody else had to.

Angela: We were little fuddies duddies.

Alison: Yep. We wore dresses on Sunday to help us remember that it was the Sabbath. Even when we were older and started making our own choices about things when she found out we had gone to certain movies she cut the movie list out of the newspaper and highlight all of the vulgarity and the violence and put this up on the bulletin board for everybody to see, circling the movie she heard we had seen.

Angela: She believed in and she liked unity. Each summer she made us matching summer clothes so she wouldn't lose us at the local amusement park. She dressed us in matching clothes when we were little and even for weddings as when we had reached adulthood. At "family camp" we had matching T-shirts...

Alison: ...that we had to wear, for three days straight, or we were out of the will. She was a person who was very interested in individuals. I'm sure you all felt this. From our own standpoint she was interested in us as individuals, as her children. For years and years she kept a notebook in the cupboard or in the drawer, to write down our little successes in life.

She called it "We are proud ofs". If we got 100% on a test, if the little kids shared a candy bar with their brother, then it was down on that list and she would gather us all around and just stand up and say, "We are proud of Valerie. She did this and this and this..." She would write it down and put it up on the fridge and it was up there for a week, until we would do it again. Our friends would walk in the back door and the first thing they would do is check out the "We are proud ofs".

Angela: When we left to go to college, missions for our church, or for summer jobs, she wrote us each week and sent us care packages. I worked at a summer camp and my camp name was Koala. All of her letters she signed, "Love, Mama Bear."

These last six months, we each had a day to visit her and as each of us left, we realized that she made each of us feel we were a good person. She would tell me I was sweet and I was good and I would leave feeling like that I had been exactly what she needed that day. I would carry that feeling home, knowing that I was doing a good job and that I could continue to do a good job. Others in the family shared that, too.

Alison: She was our greatest fan and our cheerleader. She would come to our activities often, especially as we were adults, and tell us, "You can do it. You can do hard things. You're the best at things like that." The morning that she died, Valerie threw her arms up and said, "Now who is going to think I'm great?" We all felt exactly the same way. There is no one left in this world that will cheer us on like that.

Angela: She took an individual interest in the grandchildren. She had personal conversations with them and supported their interests, got to know them individually, even the tiny little ones that liked their Moms and Dads better. She just tried to get to know them. She told us in May that she wanted us to e-mail her with all their summer activities, because she was coming to as many of the children's things as possible.

Alison: Every single summer she had them come stay in 2's or 3's so she could get to know them better. The pace they set was incredible. They'd come and at first they'd sit down and have a meeting about what they were going to do. They'd make an agenda, 3-5 activities a day. They got to choose their own food. They'd just race all over the valley, seeing everything there was to see.

Angela: She did special individual things for the children. She and Paul had a special "cup of cheer" each night he stayed there. My youngest, Tricia, had health challenges and she would be at the doctor's appointments and make it be pleasant. She'd come with snacks in her pockets and take her out if the doctors were going to say something scary. She would go get us food when we'd been

there for too many hours and stayed with her at the hospital to let me have a break. She was such a huge support. She just had a special relationship with Tricia.

Alison: For each one of their birthdays, she would come and visit and bring a present. She made each of them pajamas at Christmas time, and had Dad make a tree house in the backyard as well as a nice swing set. She bought a big doll house and had a room with all sorts of Grandma-toys gathered in that they could play with. She made her home a nice place for her grand-children to be.

Angela: The children have been especially fond of her “Tweety Bird and Sylvester” waffles. She made so many trips to visit which made for a lot of time spent in the car. So she started sticking treats in the trunk which the kids love. They call it “Grandma’s Trunk Treats.”

Alison: When we wrote her obituary, we wrote the words, that “She especially cherished her role as mother and grandmother and joyfully devoted all her energies to the blessing of her family. She worked tirelessly to build a unified, eternal family.” She really lived a full life in a short amount of years. She packed as much into life as she could.

Angela: We are so sorry to have lost her, but we feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for having her in our lives and having been able to be associated with her. We hope to be able to live up to the standard of happiness that she envisioned for us.

Both: We want to be just like her!

--Alison Lewis Soderquist and Angela Lewis Stanford—

Help With Victoria

I never really realized how important my mum was to me until I became a mother myself. Like most first-time mothers, everything was a frenzy, more so when I needed to balance life between work and home within the 24 hours of a day (seems like such a small amount of time) and when my husband was working outstation, coming home only one weekend every three weeks.

My mum came to visit me at my home in Singapore as often as she could (it's a 3-hour flight from where she lives) to help me with Victoria (after babysitting hours) so that I needn't rush back from work everyday and she waited till I was home before we had dinner together – sometimes past 9 pm! On days when she isn't around, I would have to pack dinner from outside and eat alone. Life without her around was no different from that of a single parent really. With mum around however, I felt the warmth of a family, of having someone caring for me and making sure my needs were looked after, as well as my daughter's. I don't know anyone else in this entire world who could ever replace her and thus here's my tribute to my mother - MUMMY, I LOVE YOU SO MUCH!

--Annie Tan Yueh Min--

Mom, The Great Connector

Mom has always been the Great Connector in our family. Even now, she keeps us all closer together as the "hub" and organizer of family information, birthdays, and other events. I always remember how much she simply cares, and took time to talk to each of us as we grew up, and now also. She knows enough about our lives to ask real questions about how we and the kids are doing.

--Christopher Westra--

Children's Funnies

Telephone Faux pas

When my daughter was almost three years old she was learning how to answer the phone. One time she picked up the phone and said, "Hello." I smiled with pride seeing how polite she was. Her articulation was a little off, however, and my pride soon melted to embarrassment as she asked the caller, "Would you like to sleep with my mommy?" I was horrified! I grabbed the phone from her. Luckily the person on the other end was my laughing husband!

--Wendy Jensen--

"Thou Shalt Not Whine!"

My son, Mark, age 3, has a tendency to be, shall we say, a little intense! I have a plaque on the kitchen wall that looks like it could be one of the 10 Commandments. It says, "**THOU SHALT NOT WHINE**". After his older brothers had repeatedly pointed it out to him, he looked at me and said, "I want you to take that stone thing off the wall!"

--Sue Geubert--

What Is The Clock Telling Me?

When my daughter was three years old, she thought that the clock gave us messages. She always saw us glance at the clock and say, "Time to go" or "Time for bed," "Time for Daddy to get home" and so forth. She started looking at the clock and asking, "What is that clock saying to me? Is it telling me to go to bed?" I of course jumped on that one by exclaiming, "Yep! Time for bed!" One evening

about 8:00 she told me that she was hungry again. Then she looked at the clock and said, "Mom! The clock said...`Janika, it is time for you to eat!" About 7:15 in the morning, she would wake up and I would encourage her to come lay by me. She began watching the clock and asked, "What is that clock saying to me? I told her that the clock is telling her to lay down and go back to sleep until the first number is an eight. It never worked!

--Wendy Jensen--

Eating Icicles

My older boys came in from school, each sucking casually on an icicle. I exclaimed, "Yuck! That water has run down from the roof, it's all dirty...!" To which my seven year old nonchalantly replied, "It's okay, we didn't get it from the roof, we got it off the garbage can!"

--Jen Blackham--

How Did I Get Into Your Belly?

Every year on my son's birthday, we take a piece of leftover cake and relight a candle on it to honor his time of birth. Five years ago on his third birthday, I began to tell him about how he grew "in my belly" and how wonderful it was to see his beautiful face when he was born. As the minute grew near to 9:58, and we were ready for him to blow out his candle he looked up at me with a distraught and angry look on his face and said to me "How did I get into your belly?.....Did you eat me? At that moment I realized that I would rather have my son think I ate him, than have my three year old explaining what a uterus is to his friends at daycare (which he also did, but that's another story)!

--Sheri Boucher--

Hilarious Mom!

I have been struggling with a short-term memory problems for a while, associated with lack of sleep and Fibromyalgia. The other day Kevin (nine) and Jeremy (15), were playing or something (I can't remember what they were actually doing) and Kevin says, "Oh silly me, I forgot".

Jeremy promptly responded, "Well, if forgetting stuff is silly, then Mom is hilarious!"

Ah, the joys of children!

--Sue Guebert--

Are You Unavailable?

When my son Jase was six years old, we finally got around to getting "Caller ID." I told the kids that if the phone said "UNAVAILABLE," that meant we didn't know the person and they didn't need to answer the phone. One day the phone rang and I didn't answer it. I explained that it said, "unavailable." Jase said, "Boy she sure calls a lot, doesn't she?!" Jase soon learned to recognize when the caller ID said "UNAVAILABLE" and would warn us not to answer the phone. One time he picked up the phone on the first ring and then said, "Mom, it's for you!" After being stuck on the phone for ten minutes with some salesperson, I told Jase not to pick it up so fast next time. I explained that it was "unavailable" -- which means we don't know who they are. He solved that problem by saying, "Next time I answer the phone I will just ask, "Are you unavailable? And if they say "yes" then I will say I can't talk and hang up!"

--Wendy Jensen--

How Old Is Your Truck?

When our son was eight years old, he started learning his times tables. One day we were walking to the park and a 4X4 truck drove by. My son nonchalantly stated, "There goes one of those 16 year old trucks again!"

--Wendy Jensen--

"Will The Doctor Give Me A New Head?"

Tonight, Tanner (age four) announced that he needed to go to the doctor. When I asked him the reason, he said, scratching his head, "Because my head keeps itching. Do you think he will give me a new head?"

--Jenny Condie--

"I'm Not Normal, I'm a Little Boy!"

Cold and flu season was upon us and the family had all been hit by the standard cold. Three-year-old Jeremy had suffered a particularly bad cold and ended up with a mild case of pneumonia. After about 2 weeks, his symptoms were almost gone. After Church one morning, a friend Mr. Robson was speaking to us and asked how Jeremy was doing. I responded, "Good! He's just about back to normal." Jeremy looked up at me quite indignant and said, "I'm not normal, I'm a little boy!" (So true, so true!)

--Sue Guebert--

Finished With My Taxes

I made a little star chart as an incentive for my three year old daughter to help me with little jobs around the house. We put it on a cork board and then she had fun playing with all of the little thumb tacks, pushing them into the cork board. Later on, she was getting on her daddy's nerves as he was trying to work and he suggested, "Why don't you go play with your tacks?" She left and a little while later came out and said triumphantly, "Well, I'm done with my taxes!"

--Wendy Jensen--

Is This An Emergency?

When Tanner was 4 years old, we decided it was time to teach him and his older brother about dialing 911 in case of an emergency, and we discussed various examples of emergency situations. Tanner must have felt that a fight with an older brother falls into the category of an emergency because one evening, we received a call from 911 informing us that our little boy had abused the system by dialing 911 to request that the cops come and arrest his mean brother. The dispatcher asked that we make sure we watch our son to prevent him from calling in the future!

--Jenny Condie—

Hang Lip

My kids would often get hang nails on their fingernails and ask mom or dad to get the clippers and cut it off for them. Well, one time my daughter had that little piece of skin that sometimes protrudes from the middle of the lip. She showed everyone and exclaimed, "Look, I have a "hang lip!"

--Wendy Jensen--

Cinderella

I was changing my baby's diaper and I asked my three year old daughter to bring me a clean one. She then turned to me, put her hands on her hips and exclaimed, "Do I look like Cinderella to you?"

--Wendy Richards--

Walking By Myself

Mark, 5, the third boy in our family, started Kindergarten this year. Having brothers aged nine and 15, he is fiercely independent and can hardly wait to do the things the big guys do. After arriving home from his first day of Kindergarten, he stated with all importance and independence, "Mom, tomorrow I would like to walk to Kindergarten by myself." I thought to myself, "Not on your life buddy, even if it is only a block away." I bit my tongue and replied, "No, I need to go with you, just to make sure that you get your coat, shoes and back pack all in the right place." This seemed acceptable, until the next day. Mark came up to me and said quietly, "Mom, I've been thinking..." (with Mark, this is always a red flag warning). I took a deep breath and waited for him to continue. "You walk slower than

me, right? So...if you walk behind me, it will be LIKE I am walking to school by myself, OK?"

They just grow up too fast!

--Sue Guebert--

Did They Have Photos Back Then?

Mark: "Mom, who is this picture of on your dresser?"

Mom: "Well, that one is Granny when she was a little girl."

Mark: "And who is this?"

Mom: "That's Katie, she's our goddaughter."

Mark: "I know who this one is, this one is you when you where a baby."

Mom: "You're right Mark!"

Mark: "But I *know* there's not a picture of Daddy 'cause they just had drawings back then!"

--Sue Guebert--

I hope you have enjoyed “Celebrating Motherhood: A Tribute to Mothers.” Being a Mother is probably the most difficult job you will ever have, but it is also the most rewarding -- and the most important. The work you do as a Mother and Grandmother now, will benefit many generations to come! So pat yourself on the back – you are doing a great job! Let us all express our thanks to the wonderful women in our lives who have molded us into who we are today! I hope and pray that we will all continue to support each other on our journey as we celebrate Motherhood!

Submit Your Stories To “Celebrating Motherhood!”

Share your comments about “Celebrating Motherhood.” We would like to know what you think. What was your favorite story? What was your least favorite story? Send your comments in at the link below. Also, do you have a story, poem, mother’s tribute, or “children’s funny” that you would like to submit to us? By sending us your writing, you are giving us permission to publish your comments and/or submissions in future editions of this book, as well as in our newsletters and web-site. We have the right to edit each submission. Please include your full name, address, phone number, and e-mail so that we can contact you if necessary. Submissions will not be returned. You can send your submissions via e-mail at the following link:

<http://www.celebratingmother.com/contact/Submissions/Submissions.htm>

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