

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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When we lose a parent. From across the nation, we came; from nine different states. From California and Colorado; from Illinois, Iowa, Michigan and Minnesota; from New York and Pennsylvania, and of course, my spouse and I from Florida.

To the Fourth Street United Methodist Church in Aurora, Illinois, we came; to remember and celebrate the life of my eighty-nine year-old mother. Along with my father, we were my three siblings, our respective spouses, and ten of the twelve grandchildren (the other two live in Europe and were unable to make it back). Filing into the front pews of the sanctuary to signal the start of the service, it was an emotional moment.

As children and youth, we'd grown up at *Fourth Street*. By now, the sanctuary had long-since been both *turned around* and refurbished. Still, the memories came shooting back: of Sunday School and youth group; of special services at Christmas and Easter; and of the simple and reassuring, weekly rhythm of life in the local church.

The service was beautiful and filled with meaning throughout, a wonderful remembrance of the woman we called *mom* and *grandma*.

High principled and with a regal dignity, mom was an accomplished artist and was admired by all who knew her. But mostly, she was our devoted mother, grandmother, and my father's life-companion for sixty-seven years.

The sadness that lingers. If it can be said about our dying, my mother had a *good death* (prompted by multi-stroke dementia that set in three years ago). In no way was her dying tragic, nor did it catch us by surprise. Still, it's sad and the sadness lingers.

After all, it's *mom*. We only have one mother; and always, mothers are sacred. They birthed us and nurtured us into adulthood. They traveled with us through thick and through thin. In most circumstances, they loved us unconditionally. *We could always count on mom.*

My mother (my father, too) was a permanent fixture in my identity. She was always there, behind the scenes; reliable, responsible, compassionate and caring; loving us, it seemed, without condition. Again, *we could always count on mom.*

Although *the sadness that lingers* will no doubt be with me for a time, it's important to be able to talk about it. So often in our culture, our *death-denying* impulses steer us away from a fluid and open sharing. Nonetheless, death is not our enemy; it's part of our living, a transition point in the cycle of life.

While grief is always personal (there's no *right* or *wrong* way to grieve), still, being open about our dying enables us to be more alive to the promises of our living.

And yet (and it's okay), there a *sadness that lingers*.

Love never ends. As the Good Book reminds us (1 Corinthians 13): *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Love never ends.*

In the aftermath of our dying, I can think of no more reassuring words.

On a personal level, as people of faith, this affirmation warms the heart. Often times, it's the idea of an *ending* that chills the spirit. Such endings seem so harsh and sudden, so final and closed.

Always, we want to think, *there's more*. More time, more precious moments; more gentle touches and feelings. But it's the *meanings* that count. And the *meanings* come through the love, which never ends.

Love never ends because it lives on through us. We are the bearers of love's heart beat and spirit. All that my *mom* was and is pulsates in my being as it shines on in my spirit.

Already, to be sure, I miss her. But I find reassurance in knowing that her spirit is freed from the stroke-ridden body that was once its temple. And always, I can feel the love and the memories. I can remember the words and the touching. And in me and through me (and all of us who knew her), the love and the meanings live on.

Love never ends.