

Thanksgiving

By Gayle Meadows

Mama was kind, soft-spoken, and worried. She smiled at me in a way that made me feel safe and special. She was about 5'3" and not chubby, but round and soft and comfortable. She wore flowered housedresses, tied at the waist. Her hair was flaming red, combed back off her face, with a cowlick at her forehead. (Daddy loved that red hair.) Mama was my best friend. She didn't socialize very much because she was so stilted by my dad's alcoholism. She didn't laugh out loud easily, and almost never cried. But I could make her laugh.

We spent hours together, shopping, folding clothes, taking lunch or supplies to Daddy on the job. We talked easily and intimately, sharing our feelings and opinions. We analyzed everybody we knew and we knew just what was wrong with them and what they needed to do about it.

I give Mama credit for helping me see and express the deep-seated good characteristics in me: my interest in people's stories; my passion for spiritual psychology; my patience; my ability to recognize people's masks and see through to their soul. Whatever gentleness came through me in raising my own children was hers.

In Mama's elder years, I cared for her for six years in her home. I visit her now in the assisted living care home and she's still so beautiful. The cowlick at her forehead is white now. She's not as round and soft, but tiny and frail. The lovely reassuring smile is now looking for reassurance. Oh, if there were only a way to thank the most important person in your life for what they've meant to you. I do my best but it never feels like enough.

Last week I signed Mama up for hospice care. She had had a stroke that left her weak and unresponsive. The doctor doesn't expect her to be with us six more months, probably much less. As I pushed myself through my days, she was all around me - young, beautiful, laughing. She was nurturing me as an infant; she was guiding me as an adolescent; she was advising me as a young mother myself.

Last night at midnight I lay in bed crying and trying to pray. My tortured mind and broken heart were full of her. I wanted release for her, but felt absolutely unable to handle the emotional onslaught her passing would bring. Painful thoughts and questions tumbled around on top of each other. *Why this awful thing called death? Why do the ones we love so much have to be ripped away from us? Why so much pain? Why? On and on...* I fell asleep and woke again at 1:03. *Okay, now I'm ready for help. Spirit help me. Help me. Help me. Please.* I drifted off with the prayer for help on my lips.

When I woke an hour later, it was as if I was being ushered out of my sleep with a different energy, a whole new awareness. I was immersed and enveloped in a Presence of Love, and Comfort, and Gratitude. Gratitude for her and gratitude to her and, most importantly, gratitude for the remembrance of that Presence. All the tortured thoughts were replaced by one, not consciously initiated by me, but coming from somewhere deep inside me like an internal mantra. *Thank you.....thank you.....thank you.....thank you.* The only thought, the only word, the only emotion was *thank you.*

That comforting Presence accompanies me now as I care for Mama, as I think about her, as I organize caregivers, and talk to her doctors.

“And let me not forget my hourly thanksgiving that You have remained with me, and always will be there to here my call to You and answer me.” (W-pII.232.1:3)