

Heart-to-heart: Children become her career goal



REV. KATE THORESEN

Dear Mama, I used to hate those heart-to-heart talks when I was a kid growing up. I'd do anything to avoid them. But I've been thinking so much about you lately, maybe because it's around Mother's Day and maybe because now that I'm a mother, I can better appreciate what a strong, gutsy lady you were.

I wish we had a word that values you and all that you did for us. When you'd put down "housewife" as your occupation on those IRS forms or whatever, it just doesn't begin to capture the significant, rich contributions you've made to people.

Could we call you a feminist? You did embody so many of those characteristics that we know as "feminine." You worked hard and creatively to provide us with harmony, beauty, nourishing meals, regular routines, stretching a dollar, handmade articles, a safe environment, nurturing stories and an ongoing sense of your presence. But I think you'd wince at some of the connotations associated with feminism today.

What word is there that even

begins to value the way that you made us kids your "career"? You taught us so many things! There is an old saying that goes, "There are two lasting bequests we can give our children. One is roots; the other is wings." You gave roots that anchor us to this day. And you gave us wings to try and soar to wherever our dreams would take us. And you did that in such simple, everyday, seemingly ordinary ways.

We learned to simply ENJOY the people we are with through the rituals we had growing up. Birthdays were a big deal. You'd make us our favorite meals, and we could order ANY birthday cake we wanted! You'd serve it up with all the fanfare directed at us. Christmas and Easter were highlights of the year. I'll never know how you did our Sunday dinners every week — with the silver and china spread out on the starched, freshly ironed, hand-embroidered tablecloth stitched by you or your own mother.

You VALUED us, your family. Your energies, your creativity, your presence, your love and your laughter were centered on us and our well-being. Because you were always there, I think I took you for granted — and all the breakfasts ready for us in the morning, the chicken noodle soup lunches at noon and the dinners at 6 o'clock nearly every day throughout each year. On a "job appraisal" form, that one task would

translate out to three meals a day for more than 40 years, totaling approximately 43,800 meals. And I won't even begin to calculate the hours you spent in planning, shopping, preparation, growing and cooking vegetables, presentation, maintaining themselves and final cleanup.

You OPENED the world for us. In our home movies, you are one of the grandkids and both concentrating on a particular tree. You were telling her the name of it and holding her hand to touch the rough leaves — just as you did 20 million times for your own children in our formative years. How many places did you carry us — and later lead us — to teach us about this amazing world and the names for what we discover in it?

You also LISTENED. You were there as we first started to put words together to read. You were there through the long agonizing hours of piano practice and clarinet lessons. You listened to all of that. You listened with your heart and knew when our days were going well or pretty rough. In your quiet way, you'd sometimes respond and say your words of wisdom that are with me still. You listened to our stories and sometimes rolled your eyes as you laughed at our jokes.

Mama, I wish I realized all these things long ago. I would have been able to engage in more of those heart-to-heart talks. I'd let you know how I struggle with

words that begin to adequately describe what you mean to me. But in that 20/20 vision of hindsight, I am finding some of the incredible gifts you gave us over and over again — enjoyment, values, openness and listening.

And looking backwards, I discover that the first letters of your characteristics spell out E.V.O.L. That's looking at L.O.V.E. in re-

verse! And finally, we have a word that begins to capture what you have meant to us, and how you are cherished beyond time.

Thank you, Mama, for the roots you gave us as a creatively loving woman. And thank you for the wings of steadfast confidence you had in each one of us. You enabled us to soar to new adventures.

I'll try and pass on your love to my children.

The Rev. Kate Thoresen is director of the Partnership Ministries at the First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham. If you have a question or comment, call her at 853-2047, mailbox number 1882, on a Touch-Tone phone.

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