

A Mother's Influence

By Fred A. Hartley, III



I've always known that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. In the past few days since my mom died, I have realized that more than anyone else, she is the person who has had the single greatest influence on my life. I can identify with Saint Augustine who always said that he could not outrun the prayer of his mother, Monnica, and books have been written on the undeniable influence of Margarethe on her son, Martin Luther. I promise to do my best to avoid nepotism or sounding sappy, but I want to share a few significant life-principles you may find refreshing. Someday soon I hope to write a tribute to my mom, but today I want to tap some deep springs inside my soul and explain why her influence was so profound. Here's what I've been thinking.

➤ **There is irreplaceable value in spending repeated time with a healthy soul.**

My mother was a healthy soul. The day my dad died fourteen years ago, I decided to talk to my mother on the phone every day. I set her up with a cell phone so I could reach her at any time anywhere. When I would travel, next to my wife, Sherry, she was always the last person I would call before a trip and the first person I'd call when I returned. This pattern was far more than an obligation or routine; I did it because I wanted to. She always thought I was calling her because I was a good son and I let her keep on believing that, and in the beginning I believed it myself. But recently I realized, *Who am I kidding? I call my mother not as much for her sake, but for mine!* In reality I needed her more than she needed me. Thank you, Mom, for being a healthy soul and sharing your life so freely with me. I loved every minute of every talk.

➤ **Perspective, sound judgment, common sense, morals and personal ethics are not learned so much from a written code, as from spending time with someone who embodies them—someone you trust.**

My mother was a Christian with a strong moral standard and a lot of *uncommon* common sense. She lived her faith authentically and modeled compassion and human sensitivity. She saw value in every person and expressed it well. She lived with an eternal perspective rooted in the one true God whose Son is Jesus Christ. I have always known I have a high level of "blink," or what bestselling author Malcolm Gladwell calls, "thinking without thinking." It's the ability to make the correct decision in a nanosecond. Where did I get "blink" from besides God? From my mother. Perspective and an accurate internal moral compass were built and rebuilt in me with every conversation.

➤ **Confidence, self-worth and compassion for others are not primarily gained by reading the right books or listening to motivational speakers, but from periodic conversations with someone who loves you just for who you are.**

Although she was a person with clear and compelling thoughts on just about everything, when we talked, my mother never pushed her agenda. She would ask good questions, listen a lot and help me think. Like a salmon returning to its spawning grounds, I instinctively returned to

conversations with her, and I fed on everyone of them. Her unshakeable love for me built my confidence, self-worth, and compassion for others.

➤ **Love for life, creativity, appreciation for art, nature and good food, are built into us through shared experiences with people who live authentically.**

I can tend to be a minimalist. I am a practitioner and can get by doing what needs to be done, but my mother taught me balance. Cadence. Breath. Seasoning. I am basically a meat and potatoes guy, but my mother taught me to enjoy the right seasoning, the right flavor. She taught me the role of play and recreation and laughter, wildflowers, bird watching, shelling, thinking, reading, learning, friends, partying—all the things that take life from being common, ordinary, mundane. My mother lived with such a grateful heart, it always surprised me—almost shocked me—that she was uncharacteristically quick to complain when the restaurant food was substandard. But then I realized that at her core, my mother had such a love for good seasoning so why settle for less! She put a love in me for beauty and a well-balanced seasoning in life.

➤ **True dignity doesn't demand respect, it shows respect and makes others feel significant.**

My mother dressed well and always looked sharp. Even in the hurricane shelter, one of her friends told me yesterday, "She had such a positive attitude. She even looked good while the rest of us were a wreck." But what she wore that set her apart was a strong anointing of grace and dignity. The wise King Solomon said, "*Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman of noble character is to be praised.*" (See Proverbs 31:30.) My mother never wore a tiara, but her hair rocked. Believe it or not, her hair turned grey at age 17, yet she never colored it. What you see is what you get. It always surprised her that she received more compliments for her hair than Farah Fawcett in her hay day. Grocery store clerks, hospital orderlies, you name it, people commented on my mother's hair. Yet her dignity was way beyond her hair. Her beauty ran deep.

Just a few thoughts that prove that an ounce of mother will always outweigh a pound of clergy. I love you, Mom! And your influence will yet go a long way.