

May 14, 2017

Happy Mother's Day, Mom!

Looking through a photo album....

The first photo is of a little girl with a 1930s bob and patent leather shoes, sitting on the ground aside a wooden porch, surrounded by her dolls (including a rag doll she named "Bouncer" due to her brothers "bouncing" it off the wall of the house).

This is my mom, a truly amazing person. She grew up on a farm in eastern Colorado, the youngest of 10 children. Mom was a happy surprise to the farm couple; her father was an immigrant from Luxembourg born not long after the end of the American Civil War, while her mother was of German heritage.

Her sister, Sister Margaret, was a Benedictine nun who taught school in Milwaukee, which made Mom holy by association. Her parents were deeply devout Catholics; when Mom mistakenly thought her first confession was actually a rehearsal, she came up with a batch of particularly heinous sins. It was her parents who fought to keep their second grader from being excommunicated.

With her 10 brothers and sisters, Mom never wanted for company (although knowing how siblings can be, there were probably moments when she wished she were an only child).

The next photo is of Mom, around 15 years old, posing with her next oldest brother, Ralph, saddle shoes and rolled up jeans, a picture of the America plains as it begins to edge toward the fifties.

Her folks weren't rich, but found great wealth in the gifts of each other and the joyous farm life on the plains of Colorado. At night, they might gather around the radio. Then Mom would tackle her homework by lantern-light. There was no electricity in her home; no indoor plumbing. To make a phone call, they had to go to the church a few miles away. And they had no internet, either. But maybe that goes without saying.

Her sisters would play dolls with her, and her brothers would take her horseback riding until she learned to ride by herself. I'm sure that sometimes it was the boys who played dolls with her, finding joy and laughter with their little sister.

Her only enemy was a rooster that would chase Mom as she raced to the outhouse. Once inside, she would hear the rooster marching around the little building, trying to find a way in. From this Mom developed a lifelong fear of birds, and it's no wonder.

The next photograph shows my mom and dad in the late sixties, surrounded on their couch by four kids.

Later, after she met my dad, she would climb onto her horse, Ranger, on which she would gallop into town to Dad's office – and into his heart. They were married in 1955, and Mom would give birth to four children, two girls and two boys, including me, the youngest. The first three were relatively normal, while I was quite special. I know this because people throughout my life (mostly teachers) told my Mom, "He's a special child."

Dad was a geophysicist, and he and Mom moved around the country, living in Montana, Oklahoma, and Wyoming before settling in Colorado. When he was sent to Africa for a two-month assignment, Mom decided to stay put and keep the home fires burning.

And next is a picture of Hamed and Ismael, two men from Eritrea, posing with their second mom, smiling in my back yard, so happy in their new home.

Later Mom and Dad would open their hearts and their home to refugees from war-torn Africa: Ethiopians and Eritreans, starting with a young man who operated Dad's short-wave while Dad was in Africa. One by one, African men would ask for shelter with us—some Muslim, some Christian—leading me to wonder how many women in the world would open their homes and their hearts to men from other countries, strangers all of them? My Mom did.

Those refugees thought of my mom as their mom--their second mom. Eventually, the number of African refugees in Denver grew into the hundreds (not all of them living with us, of course).

My wife and I attended some of their parties, and one time someone yelled out “Jim and Ruth Myers are here!” Several hundred people jumped to their feet, whistling and clapping and looking all around to see where my folks were sitting. I was so proud of my Mom and Pop, as the Ethiopians and Eritreans were so proud of them.

The last photo shows my mom and dad, sitting on their couch in their assisted living apartment, smiling, Mom’s arm around her 92-year-old husband.

Mother’s Day comes just once a year, but every day should be Mother’s Day. My Mom and Dad helped fearful and worried refugee men find jobs, security and safety from harm – and fun. That’s why my Mom and Dad were so beloved to them, and one of the reasons they are so beloved to me.

The people of Israel and later many other countries said of Christians, “See how they love one another!” They were amazed. My folks were and still are amazing. My Mother is amazing.

Your four children and all of your Ethiopian and Eritrean children -- and their children -- honor you Mom, and wish you all of God’s blessings.

Happy Mothers Day Mom!