

A Tribute to Mom

By Fred McClurg

We place a great value on the "things" that are in scarce supply or difficult to obtain. I have heard it said that diamonds are mined in only one location of the world. This is one reason they are such a valuable commodity. Wanda Lee McClurg was one of those diamonds because she was truly one in a million.

Come with me for a few minutes and by way of some verbal snapshots, I would like to invite you to see a glimpse of some treasures that my mom shared with me over the years.

In this stage of my life, I have come to realize that there are some things that I value more than a dozen sparkling rocks. The treasure that is the most precious to me is the legacy my mom left behind.

One part of mom's legacy is ...

The treasure of a God-honoring heart

Some senior citizens become apathetic regarding their faith in the golden years, but it seemed to me that Mom and Dad became more passionate about spiritual things in their later years. On the farm, mom and dad were busy with never-ending chores, just trying to squeak out a living for their family. Upon retirement they had time to become more active in the church. They started reading the Bible all the way through and were successful in accomplishing that goal for a number of years. They continued that pattern of Bible reading even in the nursing home.

Some of my favorite memories of Mom involved her love for God's Word. My sister, Cora Lee, said this was one of her favorite memories as well. I can remember waking up early in the morning to find her sitting at the kitchen table reading her Bible. I don't think she ever slept at night. I think this may be a common trait of most moms that have so many things to do and simply not enough time to do them. Mom did, however, always seem to make spending time in God's Word a priority. I remember coming to the nursing home unannounced on several occasions only to find her reading the Bible. While the rest of the residents were napping or watching television, she was making the *best* use of her time. Her love for God's Word coincided with her love for Jesus, and she was looking forward to seeing Him face to face.

Her routine at home was to have the Halley's Bible Handbook on her left, her Bible in the center, and a big slab of chocolate on the right. For a number of years, she

would receive a pound of chocolate as a present for Christmas. Somehow she was able to make that chocolate stretch for an entire year.

I suppose many people might have viewed my mom as a simple farm wife. In reality, she was really quite a scholar and knew an amazing amount of Biblical knowledge. However, I don't think she would have been offended at the title "farm wife" at all, but rather wore it as a badge of honor.

She gave up her teaching career shortly after she and my dad married to become a full-time homemaker and mom. We kids and my dad are the ones who benefitted from that act of selflessness. Mom was always there when we got off the bus. Sometimes there would even be cookies waiting for us, which were often not as tasty as we would have liked, but they were made as a loving action. She was always eager to hear about how our day at school went.

She was also instrumental in sharing the love of Jesus with not only her own children, but just about everyone she met.

Another part of mom's legacy is ...

The treasure of a generous heart

One of my mom's treasures was the gift of giving. On the farm, Mom had a nook upstairs behind a curtain that was filled with her stash of "goodies" that she had purchased simply to give away to people. She had such a giving heart. So much so that I am sure the manager at Dollar General simply loved seeing her come into the store. We tried to get her to stop buying so much stuff for people. It would have been easier to have held back the tide than to have gotten her to stop giving. She was very others-centered. It was just part of her nature. No one left my mom's house without a bag of something she had saved for the occasion. Unfortunately, some of the things she saved had long since passed their expiration dates, but her generous heart was in the right place.

It wasn't just "stuff" that Mom was quick to give. She was generous with her life. Before she was admitted to the nursing home, I went with her on several occasions to visit one of the patients. I remember asking her with exasperation, "For goodness sakes, Mom, do you have to water every resident in the nursing home?" Her reply was simple, "It would be a terrible thing to be thirsty and not be able to get yourself a drink of water. I hope that if I am ever in that situation, that someone will give me a drink."

Another part of mom's legacy is ...

The treasure of a gracious heart

Even though one of my mom's treasures was the gift of hospitality, we did not invite people over to the house very often. Mom's housekeeping skills left a lot of room for improvement. However, she did have a way of making people feel welcome. There are probably a number of people that attend Laura Street Baptist church because Mom invited them and made them feel at home.

Mom's cooking skills were also not one of her strengths. I would absolutely melt when she would cook up a batch of peppermint tea and serve it to one of my friends or some unsuspecting stranger. I guess no one told mom that you were supposed to filter the tea and take the leaves out before serving. I would simply cringe when Mom would hand someone a mug of this green liquid with a melange of leaves at the bottom and stems sticking out the top.

Growing up, I looked forward to church picnics so I would not have to endure jello with the tops of onions sliced up in it, "to make it pretty". To this day, jello is not one of my favorite foods. It carries with it too many bad memories. My dad never seemed to notice Mom's lack of cooking skills, and I never heard him complain. In his later years, my dad picked up where Mom left off by making his famous "Tomato Aspic", which he would prepare for every social occasion. It was just plain ghastly. I often thought the name of that recipe was indeed appropriate because the word "Aspic" is similar to the word "Ipecac", which is a medicine that is used to induce vomiting. At our house, the name of the recipe was changed to "Tomato Ipecac". Due to this experience, both Mom and Dad taught me to always be grateful for whatever my spouse prepares.

Another part of mom's legacy is ...

The treasure of a cheerful heart

With Mom, it was difficult to take life too seriously. And, I hope I haven't given you the impression that Wanda Lee was perfect. Those that knew her, know better. However, she had such a good heart that it was hard to be upset with her for long. Growing up, my mom had a knack for embarrassing me, and as an adult, I have carried on that tradition with my own children. I have come to the conclusion that this is something all good parents do.

Once in grade school, I had to create a monologue for a character from history. I covered a toy army helmet with tin foil to make a knight's head gear, and my dad made a wooden sword to go with it. A cardboard shield with the words "Sir Fred" emblazoned on the surface completed the outfit. I was mortified when my mom showed up at the school to take my picture. Mom had a peculiar way of taking those pictures. She was not able to close one eye and wink like most people. So, she would reach a finger under her glasses and mash down her eye lid in order to

take a picture. And she would take snapshots of everything. Today, those photos are a priceless treasure.

More recently, mom's skill at embarrassment showed up at dad's funeral. During a quiet and especially reverent moment, she said to Cora Lee in a "whisper" that the entire church could hear, "Thanks for taking me to the toilet!"

Another part of mom's legacy is ...

The treasure of an encouraging heart

One of my mom's greatest treasures was the gift of encouragement. Wanda Lee always knew how to build people up. It did not matter what I was doing or how insignificant it was, she always made me feel like what I was doing was amazing. In her eyes, I was the world's greatest trumpet player. In reality, I never could read music very well. When she went to my games, she never noticed that I spent the majority of three years sitting on the bench. Mom thought I was the brightest, most clever, person in school. It did not matter to her in the least that my grades illustrated otherwise.

In Mom's eyes, I could do anything and become anybody. Deep down inside, I knew that this was probably not the case, however, I did try my best to live up to her high expectations of me.

Another part of mom's legacy is ...

The treasure of a heart with purpose

Growing up, one of Mom's favorite verses was, Ecclesiastes 9:10 which she used as a whip to motivate me into action.

*Whatever thy hand findeth to do, **do it** with [all] thy might[!]*

It was not until recently that I realized the words "do it" are not emphasized in the original Hebrew text of Scripture. In addition, I think she threw in the word "all" especially for my benefit.

Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived had this to say about the sovereignty of God in Ecclesiastes 3:1,2:

*To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born,
And a time to die*

I am sure that you have heard the expression "untimely death". However, from our perspective there is never a good time for death. But I know that on God's calendar, this was Mom's time. My wife, Marty, reminded me that two years ago, my dad passed away one week before I had lost my job. My mom passed away one week after I finally got hired again as a full-time employee. There is no question in my mind that I have my new job partly because of the faithful prayers of my mom and others. My greatest regret is that she is no longer here to pray for my family any more. So, perhaps now it is time for me (and you) to pick up the baton from my mom (and dad), start running the race in earnest, and make our lives count for eternity. Perhaps it is time to start reading **our** Bibles in order to get to know the Jesus we say we believe in. Perhaps it's time for us to start serving and laying up treasures in heaven, like my parents did.

Another part of mom's legacy is ...

The treasure of a loving heart

Growing up, it gave me great security to know that Mom loved Dad. When Lloyd proposed to Wanda Lee, he was taken by surprise at her profound reply. From memory, she quoted from the Book of Ruth verse 1:16:

*For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people,
And your God, my God.*

In preparing this tribute, I noticed that the verse following this passage was also very apropos:

*Where you die, I will die,
And there will I be buried.*

Today, a portion of that verse will come true in Mom's life. She will be buried beside the husband that she labored so diligently with for 59 years. Finally, Ruth's quote from the Bible closes with this solemn promise:

*The LORD do so to me, and more also,
If anything but death parts you and me.*

My parents did not have the perfect marriage, however, they were true to their promises to be faithful to one another.

Even in the final years of their life together, Mom and Dad continued to love each other. When my mom was admitted to the nursing home and Dad was still living at the house, he would drive to visit her every day, often bringing two yogurts for them to share.

On several occasions, I was privy to a few of their sacred visits. After eating some yogurt, we would read a passage in the Bible together. When it was time to leave, Dad would escort Mom to the dining room. They would shuffle down the hall together. Dad with his cane and Mom with her stroller, they would stop at the alarmed double door for just a moment. I noticed Mom let go of her stroller and reach for Dad. When I saw her do that, I held my breath, fearing that she might fall. Regardless of the risk, she reached up to touch Dad's face and leaned over and kissed him. I think they both realized that kiss might be the last one they would ever share. And then a smile would come across my mom's face and she would shrug her shoulders shyly and giggle a little. I am sure that in her mind she was that pretty young school teacher again, kissing her handsome man with the boyish face who'd just returned home from the war.

Up in heaven, I wonder how many of patriarchs and completely unknown strangers have been the recipient of my mom's signature arm rubbing "love pat". I would not be surprised if she was serving Jesus a mug of peppermint tea with stalks sticking out the top. And, I am also sure that her Lord is saying to her, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things. Enter into the joy of your master." Matt 25:21

Wanda Lee McClurg shared her precious treasures with so many of us. Her worth was far above rubies, and she will be greatly missed by all.