

## My Mom: The Anchor

By Terri White

She was always there. Always available. Always sacrificed. My mom. Moms are often described as the glue in the family. That was certainly true in ours.

In the 50s and 60s, our family moved several times. With four children, Mom needed to enroll us in a new school – sometimes three different schools. I only remember my experience, but it must have been quite a feat in those days driving to each school, going to the office with school records, and then saying goodbye to frightened children in a new environment. But she always managed.

A stay-at-home mother until most of us reached school age, Mom began her career as a medical technologist with on-the-job training. In her forties, she returned to college to complete her B.S. degree and eventually became the administrator of our local hospital's lab. If the other techs couldn't find a vein to draw blood, they called for her. She never missed. With her expertise, she even drew our blood at home and brought it to the lab. Lucky us.

Even though she worked full time, she never missed a school program. With four children, that was remarkable. I can still picture her face in the audience as we sang our songs and acted in our plays. Always there.

If any of us kids stayed home sick, mom stayed home from work, too. She faithfully nursed us back to health. To occupy our time, she often played board games and cards with us. Ever comforting.

Our dad's job required traveling, so Mom held down the fort. She never failed to serve homemade meals, to teach us manners, to instill a strong work ethic, and to model kindness. One of my strongest memories is accompanying her to deliver food and gifts at Christmas time to a needy family. In South Dakota, winters are brutal. This family lived in a shack with a dirt floor and no indoor plumbing. That experience changed me.

So it was no surprise that I noticed a girl with worn-out clothes in fourth grade. It bothered me so much that I asked my mom if we could buy her some new clothes. True to her nature, Mom purchased a few new items. Then she left work to meet us during recess to give the girl her gift. What a treasured moment. That girl and I became friends.

All through my teens and twenties - those years of angst - Mom remained my rock. As I floundered, she never condemned me. Her solid presence spelled love, an anchor in my turbulent sea of life. When I lived 1,200 miles away, her letters comforted me. Her visits quietly affirmed her love. Her phone calls brought a taste of home. Solid.

On a trip to Myrtle Beach from Wisconsin, my parents stopped in Lynchburg, Virginia, during my spring break. Once there, they invited me to join them for a week. Looking back, I realize that they had planned their surprise visit all along. I was lonely. They knew it. Not only did I need to see them, but they needed to see me. The trip, salve to my soul, remains a jeweled memory.

Years later, when I moved to Texas and married, Mom still kept in touch, still visited, still cheered me on. Giving birth? She stayed the week with each baby. Visiting just because? Of course! Always available.

As my parents aged, the tables gradually turned. My siblings and I became their anchors and comforters. We visited, called, and tended to their needs.

Then in 2018 at age 93, my dad passed away. Now Mom lives alone in a facility for the elderly. With the mandated quarantine in 2020, Mom was isolated with only weekly visits from my sister to comfort her. Virtually a prisoner. A miserable way to live out her last years. And I couldn't visit her. After eight months of isolation, Mom's vision deteriorated. She's blind.

Finally, in May 2021, I could visit and celebrate her 96<sup>th</sup> birthday with her! While there, my sister and I assessed her needs, consulted with our brother, and made plans to meet those needs. Each day, I massaged her feet and hands several times while regaling her with family memories and stories from my own life. Each day I comforted her. Each day I remained her anchor - solid in her fragile, sightless life.

On the last day with Mom, my heart lurched. Would this be the last time I would see her? Would I ever hug her again? Wondering if I would ever gaze on her sweet, kind face again, I lingered at the door. Then I stepped out, weeping.

Moms. They carry us. They birth us. They nurture us. They teach us. They cheer us on – throughout our lives. I'm lucky. My mom is the best of the best.