

Family



Anonymous, Youngstown ABLE



I AM

I am pregnant.
I wonder what my baby will look like.
I hear people talking about my baby.
I see myself getting bigger.

I pretend that the baby looks like me.
I feel happy.
I touch my belly.
I worry about my unborn child.
I cry because I'm happy.
I am pregnant.

I understand my body is changing.
I say wow! This is so amazing.
I dream of playing with my baby.
I try to not worry.
I wish my baby was here.
I am pregnant.

Gabrielle Doherty

MY MOTHER

My mother, Margaret Lovell, had me on November 17, 1972, at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Dayton, Ohio. She and her mother, Aletha Lovell, are from West Virginia. I remember my mom telling me about her mom living in a shack and walking great distances over a homemade bridge to school. Life must have been very hard for my grandma, because she suffered from nervous breakdowns at a very young age and would later in life be diagnosed as schizophrenic.

As a result of my grandma's illness, my mom became the caretaker of my aunt and uncles when she was a child herself. She tells me of times when there just wasn't enough to eat, and they moved constantly from place to place. She dearly loved my grandfather, Charles Lee Lovell, and talks about how handsome and charming he was, but I know he had an alcohol problem and wasn't in her life as much as she wanted him to be. I just wish I would have been able to know him, but he passed away when I was just a baby.

So, when my mom met my father and became pregnant with me, I'm sure she thought of it as her chance for happiness. But, alas, he was also an alcoholic, and a drug addict, and became very abusive. She finally got away from him.

What I value most about my mother is the way she cares about people with all her heart. Sometimes this is hard on her because she feels other people's emotions, especially children. I remember she used to watch those commercials about those kids in other countries who were starving and cry, something I find myself doing too. I remember asking my father to let me sponsor one of those children instead of getting a Christmas present one year. We sent for the information and everything, but he never followed through on it. I always felt somehow guilty over that, silly as it may seem.

I know she cared about my education and did what she could to excite me about going to school. Every morning

before we caught the bus, she would make my sister and me anything we wanted for breakfast, my favorite being peanut butter pancakes! She had a thousand ways to make pancakes, but it was more than the food, it was the love that came with it.

I remember her taking us on a bus to McCrory's, a five-and-dime store that used to be downtown, and how we used to love the escalators and would go up and down them over and over again. One time, my sis and I got our pictures taken there, and they used ours as an advertisement and set it in the front of the store. I remember how happy Mom was, and how beautiful she was when she smiled like she did that day. My mom was so proud, but she reminded us that beauty is only skin deep, and that it's important to work on ourselves from the inside out.

I've never seen my mother get so angry with us as she did when we lied to her. She had a strict "honesty is the best policy" theory, and if we told the truth, no matter how bad it was, she was always much easier on us.

Another time, my sister and I got caught stealing at J.C. Penney's, and the police brought us home. My mother went into a rage. We got whipped and grounded, but I remember the hardest part was the hurt and shame on my mother's face. It is something I have never forgotten, and I never stole after that.

I believe my mother instilled some strong values in me. She taught me honesty, respect for myself and others, a love for other people and consideration of their feelings, not to steal from others but to give, and that real beauty comes from the heart and soul and can never be faked.

I grew up trying to be a good daughter to my mother, always sensing a sadness deep inside her. My stepfather was also abusive, but he never hit my mother, and I knew that, in his way, he loved me, my sister, and my mother. They had my brother Anthony, and we all adored his chubby little cheeks and big blue eyes, and my mother was happy for a while.

But the sadness came back for my mom—if it ever really left. I have spent all my life looking forward to the happy moments in her life, and far too few causing them. My sister and my baby brother and I have put her through some hard times, but it was worst for her when she didn't know where we were or what we were doing. I regret the heartaches I have caused her. I'm going to try to change my life so that I can try to give my mom some happiness. I want to see her change from that beautiful but sad and haunted woman she seems sometimes. I want her to get back that smile.

I love you, Mom. Thank you for being my mother.

Shellie Van Driel

GRANDMA'S GIFT

My most memorable childhood toy was given to me on my seventh birthday. It was a brown teddy bear in a sitting position. It had a pink toboggan with a fuzzy pink ball at the end of it. The hat also had green print on it. The bear was wearing a long-sleeved sweater that was pink with green print on it like the hat.

I remember I was really sick on that birthday because I had a bad ear infection. My aunts, uncles, and cousins were there when my favorite grandma, who has since passed away, called me to her. I felt my face go red because everyone got really quiet and was watching me. She sat me on her lap. Then she reached down to the floor and pulled up the bear.

It was my favorite toy because my grandma gave it to me. I slept with the bear every night, and then one night I fell asleep with pink gum in my mouth. When I awoke my bear was covered in the pink gum. My mom said she was going to get the gum off and I never saw the bear again.

I am twenty years old now. I have been given a lot of teddy bears since, but that one bear was my most memorable childhood toy.

Joyce Jeffries

VANISH

His name is Steve, the love of my life.
Chemistry is what we had.
And a baby soon to come.

A family you said we'd be.
But the only family that I see...
Is a mother and her baby.

Now you're with her in her house.
What about your responsibility?
What about your vow?

Now you call, after so long.
But what we need most of all...
Is for you to vanish and be gone.

Jessica Westdyke

MANGO DAY

I could say that this is one of the most vivid memories I have of my father. I can remember his strong, beautiful hand and the way he used to handle his Chesterfield cigarette, smoking it after our "Pre-Christmas Mango Early Dinner."

For my siblings and me, the mango season was a big event. It was around middle December, just a few weeks before Christmas, when small and sweet mangoes come out and you can see street vendors selling the seasonal fruit.

Our Christmas air was of a very particular kind, a mixture of tropical and traditional. Imagine all that mango flavor and its scent mixed with freshly cut cypress Christmas tree smell, added to the unique aroma of Christmas ornaments that have been kept in storage a whole year. The house had to be ready for Christmas by December 16 when the Novena for Baby Jesus started. We used to dress up our house for Christmas. It was wonderful because each year we had the tree and the Nativity in a different place. This year the living room, last year the family room, the year before, the den; the year before that one, a different corner of the living room, and so on. However, certain ornaments had their own place, like the one Mom used for the dining table. It was a blue glass bowl filled with some of the Christmas bright glass ball ornaments left after the tree was fully dressed up. I specially remember this bowl because it shined beautifully with the reflections of the ceiling lamp, like sun-rays spreading all over the big dining table, so big that it well accommodated ten or twelve people. On Mango Day, the bowl and the shining rays would go to rest on the cupboard for a few hours.

Our much expected annual Mango ritual began when Father went to the big fresh fruit street market with one or two of us to choose a wooden box with the nicest mangoes we could find to take home. Those boxes looked huge to me: they contained about 150 or 200 mangoes.

I remember a clear, sunny December afternoon: I was eight, maybe nine. It had to be a weekend because on weekdays my father left early in the morning and usually came home late at night. That day Father took my sister Monse and me to the market; it was a short drive from our house, so we came back for lunch, with our nice, big box of full ripe mangoes. Once the big box was emptied and all the mangoes washed and cleaned multiple times, Mom would take two big crystal bowls and place them on the center of the dinner table. One of the bowls was full of mangoes and the other one was empty.

Then Mom would tighten a big white napkin around our necks. We all sat extremely quietly, trying to choose the best mango from the crystal bowl using only our eyes.

The big moment was yet to come: Dad would choose the biggest serrated kitchen knife and take it along with the wooden cutting board to the dining room. He then dressed himself with a white cotton chef apron and one of our biggest and always plaid kitchen towels around his neck. He would then sit and grab the mango I had chosen. It would probably take him half a minute or so, which seemed like the longest minute of my life, to examine the mango's hardness, choose a spot next to the seed, and make the first of two vertical cuts as close as possible to the seed. Whatever mango you chose, it had to be hard enough to bear a knife cut, otherwise, all of the pulp would come out at the first cut.

After all these years, I can still hear in my mind the smooth, slow, and sweet sound of the knife sliding over the mango pulp. At the same time, a thick juice would come out of the mango, a drop at a time, very slowly, along with the strong smell of sweet mangoes. Father then would take the three mango pieces, one after another, and place them on the first pile of plates next to his left arm and hand it to me.

"Is your next mango already chosen?" he would ask. And Lula, then Monse, Mena and Galo, would choose their mangoes to be eaten. By the time Galo was ready to eat his first mango, I would be ready for my second one.

We had a very particular way of eating these mangoes. The cut done by Dad left the mango like a potato skin overflowed with mango pulp. Therefore, it was easy to take out big bites of pulp using your front teeth. Once the skins were empty, the next step was to lick all sides of the seed, as if we wanted to take out the entire soul of the mango. This was the stage when all those small mango hairs tried to stick between our front teeth.

Grandma and Mom did not like mangoes that much so they would only eat one or two. They used to eat mangoes in a different way, cutting a small slit on top of the mango and with their hands smoothing the mango until the juice started to come out from the slit. Then they would place their mouth on the slit and start to suck until all the thick juice came out. Obviously, this was a much cleaner way to eat a mango, but they missed all the fun of having many small mango hairs between their teeth.

When our plates were full, we would throw the remnants in the second big crystal bowl and get ready for the next mango.

And so, we would spend our afternoon eating mango after mango until the last one was gone. We gathered around our big dinner table with everyone talking at the same time, Mom making us laugh with her jokes and contagious laughter while we'd be chatting and having lots of fun.

After the hundred and some mangoes were gone, and the bowls had been emptied many times, Mom would clean the table. Meanwhile, the five of us should be in line in front of the kitchen faucet, our faces and hands ready to be washed a couple of times by Grandma until all the thin mango hairs were gone.

Once we were clean, we would help Mom and Grandma to set up the dinner table for a small supper. Mom used to have her dark coffee with hot croissants, Grandma her coffee latte also with croissants and the five of us tall glasses of milk with our croissants smeared with lots of butter and guava jelly.

Father then would get from the pantry a big bottle of sparkling water and pour some of its contents into his special glass. While he waited for some of the bubbles to be gone from the sides of the glass, he would light his Chesterfield, smoking very slowly and enjoying it as if he wished the pleasure of the act of smoking would last forever, handling the cigarette with his beautiful, strong hand.

I love that particular memory of my father, cutting mangoes for us and later smoking his Chesterfield and drinking his sparkling water very slowly, while the rest of us seven made our bets on which sparkling water bubble would last longer.

The prize for the winner was usually the right to have two ice cream cones instead of just one on our next trip to the ice-cream parlor. That was the end of our annual Mango Day. Surely we would have another one with the late mangoes, by the end of January, but this one never had all the fun and magic of the one before Christmas.

After all these years, I still do not know why I especially remember that particular Mango Day and my Father's hand image as fresh as if it were yesterday.

In the end, I do know something for sure. These cheerful memories of my childhood come to my mind from time to time, as a clear reminder of how those delicate and special threads called family rituals can be tightly woven. So tightly, that somehow across time, they become that much beloved tapestry called family closeness. It certainly lasts forever.

Monica Pazmino

I AM

I am a single woman who is a mother all of the time. I wash clothes. I work fulltime outside of my home 6 or 7 days a week. I cook; I clean; I do laundry. I see that the dishes get washed, and I do whatever needs to be done to take care of my two girls.

I am a woman who is also a father all of the time. I cut the grass; I pay the bills; I do all the shopping; I do yard work, and I do odd jobs. I'm a do-it-all mom.

I am a woman who is also an Easter Bunny helper. In the middle of the night, I get up after the children are asleep, and I arrange two baskets. I set them in the living room for my children to find the next morning.

I am a woman who is also a tooth fairy helper. Whenever a tooth is lost, I sneak into my children's room and help get the lost tooth out from under their pillow, and I put money in place of the lost tooth.

I am Santa Claus's helper on Christmas Eve. I stuff their stockings with fun things. I wrap any presents that haven't been wrapped yet. I bake Christmas goodies, and I do whatever needs to be done for Christmas day.

I am a woman who is also a caregiver to my children. I encourage, inspire, praise, punish, correct, teach, share, listen, and make mistakes. I'm not a perfect parent by far, but I give them what they need the most. I'm there for them.

I am a woman who has become a sports fan. I go to my children's ball games, and I root for their teams. I'm the most supportive fan my children have. I don't feel that I have

enough time to go to their games, but if I don't go watch, nobody else will. So when I can, I go.

I am one person trying to be everything my children need. Sometimes I'm torn between two roles. I am tired a lot of the time, but I do what I feel needs to be done. I'm not a part-time parent; I'm a full-time parent. When my children are all grown up, I can honestly say I did everything I could to raise them right. My reward for all my hard work is the best gift of all. I have two wonderful children who love me very much.

Karen Smith

LIFE'S UNTOLD MEDICINES

"Life's Untold Medicines" is all about the many years of my life from a young child to the adult I am today. I was born in Manistique Michigan, Hiawatha Township, Schoolcraft County in 1929.

I can still remember all the home remedies my grandma used for medicine. When I was two years old I had diarrhea. It used to be called summer complaint when I was a child. Grandma used a cup of flour tied up in a white cloth that had been boiled for three hours. She would remove it from the cook stove, cut it open and remove the hard cooked flour. She then put it in a cup, added some cream and sugar and fed it to me. This old-fashioned remedy saved my life.

At the age of six, I jumped off a stool and fell into a pile of broken glass – feet first – cutting the bottom of my right foot. Grandma put my foot in a pan of water to wash the wound and dried it. She then put a piece of fat bacon on the cuts and tied a white cloth around my foot until it was completely healed.

I can also remember the time a neighbor's little girl was playing in a shed and she fell on her daddy's crosscut saw. She cut her knee wide open. Her mother picked her up and carried her to my grandma's house. Grandma took the tobacco that she was chewing right out of her mouth and placed it on the cut, and tied a white bandage around it until it healed.

These are just a few of the home remedies that my grandma used to use. She also used red perspicuity mixed with lard to kill head lice. Spirit of turpentine was used on minor cuts. If you had a boil or skin infection, Grandma would use bittersweet berries or plantain leaf. She would find the berries in the woods on a wild growing vine or she would gather plantain leaf from the yard. She also used coal oil, or what we call kerosene today, for the croup.

I am now seventy-three years old. I have fond memories of my grandma. She had many home remedies that I still use today.

Ida Osborn

LOOK AT ME!

Look at me Mommy, look at me now
As I jump from this tree
And fall to my knees.
Oh Mommy, please, oh please look at me.

You look at Sissy as she plays with her dolls
As she walks from the house into the yard
With love in your eyes and a smile on your face
You used to love me until she took my place.

I know she is cuter and smaller than me
But can't you once more
Just look at me!

You look at him with tears in your eyes
A smile on your face
And love in your heart.

I know he doesn't care
I can see through his heart
That he would be happy if we were apart!
You look at him, a smile on your face
You used to love me until he took my place.

I know he is tall and I am so small
He tells you I'm mean and won't mind at all
It's not that I'm mean, I don't mean to be
But I need your attention, any at all.

Do you know, Mommy, of the feelings I have
The pain in my heart
The dreams that I have?
Do you know, Mommy, or do you care
That I'm your little boy alone

And so scared?

Please, Mommy, please, oh please look at me!

Patricia A. Martin

A TRIBUTE TO MOM

My mom is very unique and special to all of us. It is hard to describe her overall personality since there is so much to say. She always has a comeback for what we say and can be serious at the same time. Mom is always there to give us advice and lend a helping hand.

I have to say I was not the easiest child for her to raise. In fact, I was the hardest to raise, for I had a mean streak a mile long, and I'm stubborn as a mule. For example, if there was something I wanted or wanted to do, nothing would stand in my way. This caused many arguments and disagreements during my teenage years.

Being the youngest by seventeen years made life lonely for me. Mom and dad made sure I was well taken care of, and they made it a priority to give plenty of attention to me. This was often a thankless job. For example, there came a time when I was a teenager and my brother tried to get mom to give me up for all of the trouble I caused. Like me, nothing would stand in the way of what she wanted or thought important. She obviously wanted me and thought I was important because mom told him she would not give up on her own child. For this I greatly thank her. My mother has helped me in more ways than I could imagine. She has consistently and lovingly helped me financially, emotionally, and just by being there.

Mom is very family oriented and set in her ways. This combination makes her sometimes painfully blunt remarks and suggestions all the more meaningful. She lets everyone know what she thinks by lending experienced advice that is presented in options, enabling us to choose our own path in life. This is very dignifying and respectful. Most importantly, it has taught me the value of learning from my mistakes.

Growing up I did not like to hear her tell stories of her childhood or my older siblings' childhood. Now I could sit for hours and not hear enough of them. The life she has led

and experiences she has had are fascinating to me. She is a strong and amazing person. During the course of the past two years, I have seen my mom struggle with a disease that significantly impairs her vision. My mom has lost all but the side view of her eyesight. Being strong willed and dependent, she does not like to ask for our help, whether it be to drive her to the store or ask if the oven is set where it needs to be. This is difficult because I am so willing to help her as she has made the world such a better place for me.

Mom absolutely refuses for her disability to get the best of her. This is inspiring to watch and her attitude is encouraging.

I could go on forever on how great she really is. She has been such a wonderful person and role model to me. As a 51-year resident of Morrow, Ohio, she is the person I respect the most in Ohio, and the whole world.

Thelma L. Bennett

GRANDMOTHERS

Grandmothers are
Cast iron skillets,
Rigidly coiffed hair,
Fluttery hands,
And flowery sachet.

Grandmothers are
Bingo players, churchgoers,
And built-in baby sitters
Carrying birthday presents and Christmas cash.

Grandmothers have
Too many breakables,
Musty smelling pillows,
Faded photographs,
And a lot of free time.

Grandmothers are
Benign strangers
Who have had their identities absorbed
By greeting-card sentimentalism
And Americana stereotypes.

Grandmothers are
Loved with duty,
If not with fervor.

How unfortunate
We've lost the art.
Mislaid the word.

Matriarch.

Leanna Gillespie

