

*Threads of  
Family Life*



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## DEPENDS ON HOW YOU SEE LIFE

A night after having a happy and pleasant day in the field, we were meeting in the field of my aunt's house, as was our custom. All cousins and nieces sat near the fire so we could get warm, and we drank coffee or hot chocolate because the weather was very cold. My aunt started to relate terror stories, many invented from her imagination and others invented from the people of the region. We were feeling scared hearing about them, but we wanted to hear them. In the middle of the night we had to leave, to sleep in our field house (more or less a two-mile distance). We all left, cousins and nieces, all holding each others' hands. We were very afraid. The road was very dark. We heard the noise of the livestock and the dogs, and anything would scare us. When we got to the mountain, we saw a big shadow with horns. The closer we got, the bigger our shadow got. We were terrified. Suddenly, we heard a noise and zaz! My niece fell down to the ground in a swoon. In this moment my brother Gerardo, who was the youngest of the group, shouted "Dummies, it's only a horse!" The noise was the neigh of a horse (that we scared with us appearing or with the train that was closer), but the scare was terrible.

When we arrived at the house, we told my mother about our experience. My mother said, "Life is the same depending on the way you see it. You saw with terror and were scared because it is what you wanted to see. If you see people with eyes of terror, you will feel terror. If you see people with distrust, you will feel distrust. With indifference, the same will happen, and if you take precautions against the world, the world will go against you. If you give love, the world will love you".

Each time I think how precise my mother was I cannot avoid the tears in my eyes because I do not have her

anymore. She gave me a lot of her experience. Now I see many things with more clarity.

As humans, we continue to make mistakes. I think that her love taught me to love and fight for my convictions. She always said that when people are sure of what they want, they should fight to get it. Impossible as it looks, it's better to have the satisfaction of having tried it than sadness of not trying it at all. The impossible love can triumph, the sick can recover their health, and miracles appear to those that persist and those who love. Even if you suffer, love will fill you up and satisfy you more than any money in the world.

Never in my life have I felt how I feel now. I am fragile and defenseless. Now is the moment when I should put in practice all of my mother's teachings. I have to see life as beautiful and give thanks to the Almighty for people that are around me. They give me love. Things could be worse and I should not feel that, as it seems, all is as terrible. I give thanks for life and for learning that I can resolve anything I set my mind to.

*Doris Molina-Hernandez*

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### RECIPE FOR SINGLE MOTHERHOOD

3 C. Faith and Hope  
 1 C. Extra Responsibility  
 5 Tbsp. Acceptance of Two Roles  
 1 Tsp. Encouragement  
 2 dashes Daily Work to Improve Life  
 3 Tsp. Grace  
 2 C. Love  
 4 Tsp. Understanding  
 6 oz. Perseverance  
 4 Tbsp. Optimism  
 3 C. Concern  
 3 Tsp. Flexibility  
 1 1/2 C. Balance  
 2 1/2 C. Belief in Yourself  
 4 C. Determination to Prevail  
 2 C. Sacrifice  
 10 C. Devotion to Children  
 1 C. Pride

Take Faith and Hope and combine with Acceptance and Extra Responsibility. While Stirring in God's Grace and Love, fold in Acceptance of Two Roles to mix with daily work to improve life. Sprinkle in Understanding, Listening, Perseverance, Optimism, Concern and Flexibility along with a Belief in Yourself and Determination to prevail. Sprinkle Balance in with Sacrifice and Devotion to Children. Grow Self and learn to peel back Pride and dish out Encouragement. Bake for a lifetime of fulfillment.

*Kum Sun Kim*

## THAT'S WHAT MOTHERS ARE FOR

Mothers are there from the first day  
you open your eyes and look into her face.  
Mothers try to protect you  
from getting any kind of germs, bites, and bruises.  
They shelter you with blankets  
so that you won't catch a cold.  
Mothers sacrifice and compromise everything and anything  
to give their child or children the best of the best.

That's what mothers are for.

Mothers are there to give you advice and bright ideas.  
They're there to support you in every choice you make.  
Mothers are the most important part of your life.  
They give you life; they put you first.

That's what mothers are for.

There is a saying in the Bible that says,  
"Honor thy mother and father."  
I believe this to be true. The more you do for them,  
the more you will be blessed.  
Mothers appreciate their child,  
never ridicule them or seem selfish.  
They share their life stories with you to give you an idea  
of how you should live your life to the fullest.  
Mothers will always be there for you,  
no matter what you go through.  
Always remember that special lady in your life,  
especially on Mother's Day.

That's what mothers are for.

*Shanequa Morrow*

## JOHN AND JOSEPH, MY TWIN BOYS

After five years of marriage and two miscarriages, I was blessed by God fourteen months ago to give birth to twin boys, John and Joseph. Although they came from the same womb, I discovered in the early hours after their birth that they are different; each one is unique.

John was the first to be born, but according to my native tradition, he should be considered the youngest because in my country of Togo, people believe that Joseph told John, while in the womb, to go first and check out the world before he entered. Therefore, Joseph was truly the oldest.

John is a baby with a graceful figure whose facial appearance looks like mine. He has a flat nose, a tiny mouth, and a laughing eye. Compared to Joseph, John is a precocious baby; he was the first to sit down, to crawl, and finally to walk completely at 10 months. Adorable and smiling all the time, John seems to look for people's company like our friends who can hold him. Even strangers who are unknown to him, like doctors and nurses, he seeks their attention. John is very affectionate and endearing and only cries for real needs: to be changed or to be fed. John is the biggest one, but Joseph is the most active.

Joseph looks like his dad; he has a long face and a tall, skinny body. I can easily recognize his father's smile, which captivates me so much. Unlike John, Joseph is a quiet and reserved baby. Before he makes a move toward a stranger, he takes some observation time. Most of the time, he doesn't like people who are unknown to him. However, he is the master of the house; he knows everything. He can turn on the television, climb the furniture, open doors, and move clothes from the bedroom closet to the living room.

He is someone you cannot underestimate. He has the capacity to discover the whole house and to do some unbelievable things like lift his feet to reach and open doors or simply to lock his brother in the closet. Joseph is someone who needs to be watched incessantly. Joseph will cry for anything to divert your attention from John. He is the one who wants to be the focus of the family all the time. He is very possessive.

Although John and Joseph are different, both of them have characteristics and attributes that make babies so charming and adorable, and my love for them is the same.

*Afi Abi DeSouza*



## FISHING WITH LADYBUG

Everyone has one person in his/her life who makes a significant difference. It may be a stranger or a close loved one. For me that person was my grandpa.

My grandpa was the one person in my childhood who stands out the most. When I was a child, my family moved into my grandparents' house. I remember getting up every morning, and running downstairs to see what Grandpa and I could do that day. At that point in my life I didn't realize that you had to work to make a living. I was disappointed to have Grandpa say, "Not this morning, Ladybug. I have to work." I would sit and wait by the large window in the sitting room for him to return. Around six o'clock, his beat-up blue Dodge would pull in the driveway. I would run outside and meet him by the well. He would be covered from head to foot with coal dust. The only white part left on him were the circles around his eyes where his safety glasses had been. I'd pump the well as Grandpa washed up. We did this every day.

I was always glad to see the weekends come. That meant I got to play with Grandpa all day. Every Saturday we would get up early, put our fishing gear in the truck and head out to the small fishing hole not far from the house. That is one of my fondest memories as a child.

Not too long after my seventh birthday, Grandpa was diagnosed with lung cancer. He had black lung from the coal mines that he had worked so hard in. They tried everything they could, but the cancer was already spreading to other organs. Grandpa made the decision to go into hospice care. He felt it was too much for Grandma to deal with. In the last weeks of Grandpa's life, we were with him every day. I remember going into his room the day he died and sitting on his bed. At that age I didn't understand what was going on. I

remember asking Grandpa why he had to go to heaven. With tears in his eyes he looked at me and said, "I'm just going fishing."

*Jess Barnhart*

## CELEBRATE BOY'S DEPARTURE

There is a young bird  
Just about to leave his nest  
Faltering, jumping, leading to the twig  
Flapping his wings, scattering the leaves  
But soon I saw him soar into the high sky  
And start to fly circling around his nest  
"Fly," I call to him  
You will find the sky is without limits!

*Kay Goetz*

## DENWA

“Do you know what she said?”

“I have no idea.”

“PRAY FOR ME”

“Who said that?”

“A woman with Sarah. She must be Sarah’s attendant.”

“What was Sarah doing?”

“She was on the floor ... kind of sitting, like a frog.”

“You mean, squatting? Where? Which floor?” (Oh, please not in the Principal’s office!)

“Yeah, Sarah was squatting in the hallway all right. Her book bag, books, and notebooks were scattered on the floor.” Sarah should be in her classroom, just like all other kids in their homeroom. I wondered...what was she supposed to be doing first thing in the morning?

When I heard the sound of the *Denwa* ringing (“Denwa” means telephone in Japanese), I was washing the dishes, clearing the room after the war of sending-the-kid-to-school-on-time. It was from my friend. She had dropped her kid off at school and told me she had just seen Sarah. I moved to sit in a kitchen chair and asked her what the attendant looked like.

“She’s kind of skinny and old. She sounds like a nice old lady, an ordinary person, just like the kind you would find in your neighborhood. She just seemed to be at a loss as to what to do with Sarah.”

“Oh, she must be the same substitute that Sarah had a couple of months ago. Remember, I told you about that sub? At the end of the day, she brought Sarah to the van driver, panting and out of breath. She said she hadn’t thought her job was this much hard work. The van driver asked her, ‘What did you expect? Sarah is young and you are old.’ Sarah has special needs. By now, the sub should know how special Sarah is; that’s what she is being paid for. At least that’s what the van driver told me. I bet Sarah challenged her all day long, with her refusal to do school work. The sub probably chased after Sarah all day. No wonder she asked you for additional spiritual help!”

I can’t help but laugh, knowing exactly how she feels. Welcome on board! I do that all the time except without pay. I still remember how Sarah used to run away, hit, kick, bite, and throw things, all while I was guarding a sheet of homework from being ripped out of my hands by her. It took a while to teach Sarah what was expected from her before she actually started doing it — not just listening and repeating after me. She seems to have out grown the stage of the young-Helen-Keller-battling-with-Mrs. Sullivan. Still, she sometimes demonstrates how she is unhappy when she doesn’t get what she wants. She shows her anger everywhere we go, by clenching her fists really tight and roaring like a lion. Or manipulating the situation by sobbing; with big crocodile tears trickling down her cheeks one after another (just to make you feel guilty and miserable — this is THE masterpiece of her tricks that many people fall for!)

I walked to the kitchen counter, holding the receiver between my shoulder and cheek, reaching for a cup of coffee while continuing to talk. I told her how Sarah was excited about going on the 6<sup>th</sup> grade Chicago trip (every single day she reminded us).

“Who is staying with Sarah for three days? An attendant?”

“Me. I’m going with Sarah. I won’t miss this chance to oversee Sarah’s life skills. It might give me an idea about next year’s IEP goals.”

“You know, parents are not allowed to go. We can’t even be chaperones.”

“I guess NOT in Sarah’s case. When I paid the deposit, I confirmed with the teacher in charge. He assured me that somebody HAD to go with Sarah. How about you? Are you sending your kid to Toronto?”

“He couldn’t make up his mind. Right up to the very morning the deposit was due. Last summer, we lost him for ten minutes at Disney World. When we found him, he thought everybody else had got lost, not him! That’s how these kids’ minds work! (I agreed with her — for this was the case with Sarah too.) My husband said it would be better to wait for him to grow up some more and to gain some more maturity. Besides, the school hasn’t given him an attendant, even if it was written in the IEP! What can I expect from the field trip chaperones? I don’t want my son missing in another country!”

While talking with her, dozens of memories came alive. How I panicked when I thought I lost Sarah (she was about to open the door of a stranger’s house — and it wasn’t for the first time either!); or how I was frozen with fear to see Sarah grabbing and squeezing a four-foot-long slithering snake at Zoo Day; or to spot her hand a few inches away from a big black fuzzy spider (I think it was tarantula) which she was about to grab.

I still remember the perfect spring day under a blue sky, filled with kids’ chattering and cheering, with faint sounds of

passing cars across the street. Sarah's teacher was on the playground, wearing a pearl necklace and a miniskirt. She was talking to the kids, then her voice got louder and louder as she was calling Sarah's name. Sarah just kept trotting away. The teacher's beautiful face turned pale, twitching with a tense expression showing under her perfect make-up. Her high heels clicked the ground as she dashed after Sarah frantically. In the other scene, I was in the school's library, consulting with the parents of Sarah's classmates while stamping the date on a lending slip. I was very concerned about how to deal with certain teachers who Sarah had kicked or slapped in the face.

One after another, the troubled, embarrassing memories were popping up in my head. These pictures of Sarah's escapades made me feel uneasy. In my gut, I could feel anxiety starting to swell and form a black cloud. Its shape got bigger, thicker and darker all the while accompanying the soundtrack to Godzilla.

My thoughts ran through the strategies I needed to use in order to avoid the worst-case scenario of Sarah exploding and melting down in Chicago. How am I going to get through two nights and three days without my husband's help? How can I motivate her without playing our last card? What would be good enough to beat The Computer (or DVD) Time?

Now, should I think seriously about asking? Asking all my friends — no, asking all my friends AND family. . .

“Will you pray for me?”

*Fumiko Adair*

## OUR MOTHERS

Where are they now?  
They were always here.  
Where did they go?  
We kept them so near.  
Whatever the problem, we would just call.  
It seems like our mothers did know it all.

Whenever we hurt and it seemed no one cared,  
Somehow our mothers would be right there.  
They knew exactly what to do to make us feel as good as  
new.  
Where are they now?  
Where did they go?

God, it doesn't seem all that long ago.  
We gave them a hug or touched their sweet face.  
Our eyes search, but we can't see.  
We listen intently for voices familiar to you and me.  
Where are they now?  
They were always here.

Was that touch on our cheek just a tear?  
Or were our mothers reaching out from heaven above  
To let us know our tears are filled with their love?

*Joan Kay Joseph*



### WHAT IS A DAD?

What is a dad? I always thought I knew what a dad was until one day he went away. I had lost the feeling of what a dad is, and I wondered if I would ever feel that feeling again. I always thought I knew what a dad was. I know that a dad is supposed to love his child, but when I said, "I love you," I got no reply. A dad should always believe in his child, but he never believed in me. A dad should always be there for his child; my "dad" was never there for me. He was always at the bar, meeting other women, and cheating on my mom. When he had another girlfriend, she wouldn't allow him to speak to any of his children, and if he did, there would always be a fight.

I do not speak to the person I used to call my "dad" because now I have a dad, and his name is Tom. He is a person who loves me for me. He believes in me and all that I do. He tells me I can do it and not to give up! He is always there for me. He recently had a long stay in the hospital. He had a five-way bypass, and I had never been so scared in my life. I thought I was going to lose him. I went to the hospital to see my dad. When I walked in the room and saw all the I.V.s and tubes running out of this body, tears began to come from my eyes. I would call my dad every day to check on him to make sure he was okay. My dad is home now and doing well. I wanted to show my love for him, so I drew a picture for him. It is his motorcycle, a 2001 Harley Davidson Softail. I thought it would cheer him up to know that someone loves him. I love you, Dad. I drew this picture for you because you are the dad I never had.

*Tonya L. Lay*

## PRINCESS

The thing that makes me happiest is my daughter, whom I love dearly. She is just a doll, and I adore her. I call her my "Princess," which is also her nickname. I baby her very much. She can get away with just about anything with me as long as she behaves. Her name is Lexus, and even though she feels as if it is really boring being the only child, she knows that it has advantages.

Lexus brightens up my life, especially when she has a terrific day in school. I tell her that school is a way to make your dreams come true. It makes you able to succeed in accomplishing your goals. I often tell her you are never too old to try to finish school. I tell her, "I am still going. I am doing it for you just so you can see what good things we can do together and for each other."

The happiest time I have ever experienced with her was when she received several certificates for making the Honor Roll in school. That showed me that she is smart and that she can take care of business. "That's my Princess!"

*Mercedes Garcia*

## MY LOVING GRANDPARENTS

Two very important people in my life are my Mammaw and Pappaw, grandparents on my mother's side. My own Mom and Dad got caught up in drugs and alcohol. My Dad went to jail and Mom could not take care of me and my brother. I moved in with Mammaw and Pappaw when I was 7 years old and lived with them for about 10 years total.

Even though there was never a lot of money, my grandparents always made sure we had what we needed. They always celebrated our birthdays, and holidays like Christmas, regardless of what was going on. I especially remember my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Pappaw got me a porcelain doll that looked like me. It was the first doll I ever had. After that, he bought me a doll every year for my birthday. I still have them all.

The older we got, the more problems we gave them. I am sure we drove them crazy, but they always stood by us. They seemed to always be paying our bills and bailing us out of trouble. My brother was not that bad, but me, on the other hand, I was always asking for money.

I started skipping school and getting into fights which got me suspended from school. My brother only got suspended once, but by the 9<sup>th</sup> grade I was out of school more than I was in it. When I was 17, I got pregnant and dropped out of school completely.

When I got pregnant at a young age, I thought Mammaw and Pappaw would kick me out and make me deal with it on my own. But they stood by me again and this time I really needed them. I found out I was having twins and then not long after I lost them. They were stillborn at 21 weeks. I thought that I would die too, but Mammaw and Pappaw were

there for me. They took care of me, let me move back in (again) and assured me everything would be okay.

I am not quite sure why they stuck by us. I guess they figured if they didn't we would have either ended up in a foster home or dead. Maybe it was their way to show us that we didn't have to follow in our parent's footsteps because there was a better life out there. Mammaw and Pappaw taught me to love and to cherish everyone in your family no matter what the situation may be. Love is not just a word you say. It is a feeling you can't hide no matter what mood you are in.

I wish I could pay back all the money they have given me throughout the years. Words will never describe the way I feel about them. I see Mammaw and Pappaw everyday because my grandmother watches my daughter while I work.

Mammaw and Pappaw have made me a stronger person. I hope my daughter never has to go through what I did. I know she will have problems in school, with her friends and even with boys but because of Mammaw and Pappaw, she will always have me to depend on and guide her through whatever God throws her way.

I am truly grateful and appreciative to have had Mammaw and Pappaw in my life.

*Misty L. Tinker*

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## MEMORY OF MAMAW

When I was a child of ten, our family went again to Hazard, Kentucky, way back in the holler to see my Mamaw Lizzie.

That first night after visiting and eating, it was off to bed. I woke up hearing something moving around downstairs. As I sit here thinking about it now, I had heard someone downstairs before, but I had just turned over those times and had gone back to sleep. I didn't care this time; I went downstairs to investigate.

I came downstairs as quietly as I could, but Mamaw saw me.

"Elizabeth," she said.

"Yes," I answered.

"Okay, young lady since you're up you might as well start learning what goes on when you live on a farm." I'm wondering what on earth Mamaw is talking about.

My eyes were half open as I walked towards her to get hold of her hand; I passed the big clock that stood beside the door. It read four-thirty; it was dark outside.

Mamaw had my hand in hers as we headed towards the chicken coop. Mamaw Lizzie was wearing one of her old dresses with an apron tied around it. I was still in my nightclothes. Mamaw Lizzie said, "We are going to have fried chicken for breakfast."

We reached the chicken coop and Mamaw tried to open the door lightly so it wouldn't wake up the chickens. "Oops!" It did anyway. They all started clucking and pecking at Mamaw's feet. She then opened up the old apron; it was full of feed. Mamaw started tossing the feed out to the chickens to calm them down.

The chickens were pecking away at the ground as Mamaw scanned the bunch for a fat chicken.

She reached down to grab one, but it ran. Then she tried for another and another until she finally caught one.

There I stood watching my mamaw running after those frying chickens; it was a funny sight to see. It was chilly, but watching her made me laugh so hard I forgot about being cold.

Mamaw Lizzie caught a nice looking fryer. She held it up, then started slinging the chicken around and around by its neck until it went limp. My eyes and mouth were wide open by then. Why was my mamaw hurting her frying chicken? All I could think was they laid eggs for us to eat. Later I was told that laying chickens gave us eggs, not frying chickens.

After the chicken was limp enough, she took it over to the far side of the coop where a large flat-sided rock lay. There, hanging on the fence of the coop was a small hatchet. I always knew it was hanging there, but never knew what for –till now!

Mamaw picked up the hatchet off the fence, laid the limp chicken on the flat rock with its body on one side and its neck on the other. Mamaw raised the hatchet and chopped the chicken's head right off! I stood there with her watching the blood drain from the neck.

Next I saw the body of the chicken start dancing around the coop. I was crying and laughing at the same time; meanwhile, Mamaw was trying to catch the dancing chicken. It was so funny.

Once it slowed down, the chicken fell over and died. Mamaw picked up the chicken, took hold of my hand, and we went straight to the porch where we sat down.

Mamaw started plucking the feathers out. When all the plucking was done, mamaw and I went inside to wash and cut up the fryer.

Mamaw said, "This bird now is ready to fry."

That lesson was on how to catch, pluck, clean, and cut up a fryer chicken. She always gave me lessons in the same way about many different things and her wisdom of life, from cooking to housekeeping to relationships, and personal problems. Mamaw always said, "Child, you always learn

better by doing something over and over, never stop trying.”  
I miss those lessons.

*Elizabeth C. Marinich*

