Tim's Treasures

Treasured Memories of Mother

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There can be great joy in one's life if the heart is in the right place. As it is written in the book of Matthew, " *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* For many, those thoughts of your mother invoke cherished memories of the heart, treasures for life. Yet, some memories of our mothers are bitter pages from a hard life. As difficult as it is for those with childhood trauma to remember their mothers, there can always be a silver lining to those dark storm clouds – a hidden gem of hope, of love, which was clouded by the trials of life.

From whence cometh that effervescent spring of happiness is as much the question as to where your heart is; there too shall be your treasures. You can dwell on the negative, or you can choose to focus on the positive. The other night, I watched a movie about Fred Rogers, more popularly known as "Mr. Rogers." Fred told a reporter in an interview that for you to relate to a child, you must first be able to take yourself back to that time in your life when you were a child. As a child, you were happy to crawl on your hands and knees, pushing your toy tractor across the floor pretending to make furrows in the soil, make-believing you were grandpa. Those childhood memories become relics of eternal joy if we can find them. But for many, those childhood memories are clouded by bitter anguish – theirs are painful recollections.

My mom and dad separated when I was barely a year old. Thankfully, I wasn't given up for adoption. Instead, my mom chose to face the difficult challenge of caring for a child as a single parent. My dad wasn't any help, skipping out most of the time on his child support. They both were just starting in life, and it was tough. There wasn't enough money for my mother to buy me clothes or toys, so she took whatever hand-me-downs her co-workers could provide. They knew she was struggling even though she put on a façade of "All is well." My mother was very blessed in that regard. As time would reveal, some of her fondest friends and colleagues were those at Hardy Sand Company in Evansville. I can remember her, years after she left the company, visiting them in their fine Colonial homes in the upper-crust section of the city. That's how much they meant to her, and she to them.

But then, I didn't know nor care little whence came those warm clothes and toys. I was mostly happy with the playthings. I fondly recall a Lincoln Log set – well, sort of. It wasn't entirely complete. In fact, I never owned a full set of Lincoln Logs. They came in the round cardboard container that resembled the Quaker Oats boxes. The roofing material in the kit was twelve-inch-long by one-inch wide, Kelly green slats. The logs were cut so that you could ship-lap the ends, overlapping each other to make your cabin. However, as I mentioned earlier, my kit was used, so it was missing several pieces. There were never enough logs to make an entire cabin, nor were there enough roofing slats to cover the whole structure – so I had to learn to improvise with whatever was available. Not knowing then that things were missing, I figured it was just how things were – you had to make do with whatever God provided. It became the perfect mirror of my life. My mother did her best to raise a child through her season of being a single mom. I can remember being left alone with a long line of babysitters. She was a young divorcee, which was frowned upon by her small town, so she left them behind and moved into the big city, finding a studio apartment. The first place I can remember was tiny. A curtain separated the kitchen area from the living/bedroom area. Her parents often took care of me during the week, so I didn't spend a lot of time with her on those days. When I did, she must have struggled. Mom must not have thought about what a toddler would eat at that stage of her life. One of those moments that stuck with me forever was the morning when all there was left to eat was Raisin Bran. She poured some in a bowl, spread milk over it, and tried to get me to eat - no sugar, nothing, just plain old Raisin Bran. I don't know exactly what I usually ate at Grandma's. However, if one had to guess, Grandma Mary would have probably fried up some eggs and bacon and baked a pan of biscuits. But there I was, facing a cold bowl of cereal. I tasted the spoonful and instantly disliked the texture and taste of the raisins. My mother began yelling. As a little child, those words were unintelligible, yet they hurt. From that day forward, I could never eat raisins without feeling some sense of pain. It was a difficult time. She must have been at her wit's end because I can still hear her voice raised in frustration at trying to get me to eat, which of course, I couldn't – not after that.

Another memory comes from when I must have been around two or three at the most. When I wasn't in the hospital with double pneumonia, at the age of one and two, I was sick with something else. Mom's job at the sand company was crucial. So, there was nothing that could stop her from keeping it – even me. It must have been difficult to date or even to find a man that was willing to take on a relationship with a woman who had a sickly little child tagging along. Shy but curious, I would sneak around the corners of the apartment, trying to catch a glimpse of the other man who would often visit us late at night. Then there was the longing, the perpetual ache within the broken home's child's heart of missing the other parent. In my case, it was my father. It was a hurt that had no meaning. "Why weren't they together?" "Was it me?"

Eventually, she met a handsome young man named "Charlie" who was slightly on the wild side. He rode motorcycles and worked at a seat cover trim shop in town. He was very understanding and gentle toward me – something I couldn't understand, for it was something that had been missing in my relationship with my mother. Instead of imposing himself upon me, he kept his distance so as not to crowd me, giving me time to accept him. Later, I would find that he was also from a broken family – so he understood.

Later, we moved closer to her work and a slightly bigger apartment. It had doors separating the rooms. One day, I was sitting in bed recovering from Chickenpox when my mother came in to check on me. She began talking, although I couldn't understand what she meant in her words. As she spoke, she started crying and wrapped her arms around my little body, hugging me in a warm, loving embrace. I can feel it to this day. She and Charlie had possibly fought over something and had subsequently broken up. Feeling lost and abandoned, she had nobody but me, the little two-year-old. I sat on the bed as she wept on my little shoulder. I held her head in my little hands and wanted to help, but I felt helpless to do anything. Inside, it felt like my heart would break for her as her warm tears fell across my shoulder. "Why doesn't he just come back," I thought to myself. I had no sooner let the idea slip out of my mind than a car came driving up the alley past the window. I could see Charlie driving his car, passing the open window. Either I said something, or she noticed and jumped up, running out of the room to the apartment door. The shoulder of my little pajamas was still damp from her tears, but my heart went from pain to joy, not of my own, but for her. She was happy again.

You see, we can look back upon our lives when our memory allows and choose to either bundle those thoughts into something that causes us to be burdened with torment and anguish, or we can reflect back to those moments, lifting ourselves above the mental carnage and observe those around us and how we all struggled. We can choose to take the high road if you will. We weren't alone, even when we felt abandoned. In these moments of reflection, we can truly see the hand of God working. We may not have known it then, or we may have lived most of our lives caught up in the agony from those moments of trauma only to find ourselves realizing, as an epiphany, that we were loved even through what may have seemed endless torture or abuse. It can take a monumental effort in thought or therapy for some to unwrap years of accumulated bitterness. We naturally tend to take the path of least resistance. In that manner of thinking, we then only heap on more and more layers of hate toward those painful memories. Only when we begin to unwrap them as layers of an onion do we finally come to the root cause of their pain? It is then we can start to heal. From that death of one, we began to live. It is the crucible of all Christianity – the death, and resurrection of Christ, so that we may have eternal life with Him.

Having spent a short time working at a children's home known as Crossnore, I

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