

Mom

I have been given the daunting task of describing what Mom meant to us as our mother. I think that Fred has already touched on several of the aspects of Mom that I originally intended to mention, so I consider myself to be augmenting his lovely presentation.

Mom was always what you might call a character. She set a high bar for witty discourse and dry, ironic repartee. When I think of her, I generally picture her with a little smile as she described a person or situation with her characteristically elegant turn of phrase. And yet she was equally adept at summoning colorful, more homespun phrases from her childhood, such as the ones that Fred mentioned. My friends' mothers always seemed so different from Mom! None of them described feeling a little bit down as "feeling piano" or would try to boost their spirits by saying,

*Cheer up, my lad!*

*Why be sad?*

*Tomorrow's your wedding day!*

*Look! See! Here come the villagers!*

Mom was unique in her outlook, her quick mind, her humor, her knowledge, her fearlessness, and her 24-hour-a-day dedication to her family. As Terry said recently, "She was there for each of us, every step of the way. That's a lot of steps when you multiply them by five." Mom was our guiding light. She was ever curious, ever confident of her ability to tackle obstacles, and she set a great example to us with these qualities—an example that was difficult to live up to.

Mom loved her freedom. She loved to drive ever since she was a young girl, and one of the hardest pills she had to swallow was being deprived of that pleasure a few years ago. Up to the end, she talked about getting a new car. By then, we had all learned to nod and listen to her plans.

Christmas and Thanksgiving were glorious holidays in our house, full of traditions from her childhood and ones we added on as the years went by. And the traditions were *always* piling on. With her tender touch, Mom embraced any gesture we loved –like having waffles for dinner one Christmas Eve—as a new tradition in the making.

She was such a font of knowledge. You couldn't wonder aloud why the winter sun always seems directly in your eyes without Mom hauling out a globe and an orange to describe the movement of the earth around the sun throughout the year. As Terry has said, you didn't need Google when you had Mom around.

Terry has also commented that "money was not a big deal to us growing up. We didn't do frivolous things. Thrift meant lots of hand me downs, homemade clothes (both sewn and knitted), mom's haircuts, all our meals at home (which was no sacrifice at all since Mom such a good cook), and only one car for many years. Mom made all of this seem like an adventure, not a limitation."

Everyone who knew Mom knew of her adventurous spirit. She tackled any new challenge with gusto, including researching and organizing those famous car rallies, mastering the history of Princeton University and its gargoyles, legends, and lore, learning to speak Russian and to how bone a fowl á la Julia Child, fixing any broken thing in the house from the toaster to the air conditioning, refinishing furniture, and doing her own statistical analysis of the home-court advantage as she knitted fabulous sweaters while watching her beloved Knicks. When our wooden puzzles lost pieces, she would whip out the jigsaw and cut new ones that fit perfectly. When Dad had a heart attack and had to change his diet, she left behind a lifetime of accumulated comfort food specialties (like pork chops in gravy, meat loaf, and standing rib roast with Yorkshire pudding) and quickly mastered a new repertoire of light, delicious cuisine. And when our oil tank exploded a couple of days before Christmas and we were forced to spend the holiday in a motel, she managed to pack all of us and our live-in grandmother up and didn't forget to bring along the cookie cutters so that she could still bake our traditional Christmas cookies. She told me years later that she was quite worried that staying in this shabby motel on Route 1 outside of Washington DC would ruin the holiday for us. But her brave face and manner at the time told a different story. To this day, that Christmas stands out as a fantastic adventure in all of our memories.

It has been difficult over the past few years to see that adventure end. I think that losing Dad changed everything for Mom. She lived with Terry quite securely for several years, but always missed her life with Dad on Duffield Place. As much as she loved her freedom, both Dad and Mom loved their home life. Even now, the child in me wants to walk through that front door and see Mom bringing Dad's sherry and her cocktail into the sitting room to enjoy in front of a lovely fire, with nuts on the little airline trays that Mom saved from a long-ago trip. Well, now they are together again, at last and for eternity. Maybe they are driving around in Mom's new car—or our old station wagon that Dad always said had such comfortable seats.

When Mom was young and unmarried, she promised herself that if she ever had children, she would enjoy them. She certainly did. We never doubted that we were the center of her life. When she came to stay with me after I had my first child, I told her that I didn't know what I would have done without her help. She was bursting with happiness as she said, "It's so good to be needed again!"

Mom, you can never die. You were our fearless leader, and we feel your spirit wherever we go. You will live forever in our hearts.