

# Let Me Tell You about MY MOM!

## Emma M. (Bunny) Rapalje (1922-2014)

by Bob and Martha Rapalje

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***“We do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep [die], or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13.*** We have the promise for all who have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord of a glorious resurrection and life in Heaven for eternity. And that’s a LONG time!!

**We were not ready for this!** We NEVER are! Just last Sunday the family celebrated Mom’s 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday in the UMAC building. We all had such a good time with her, and she was so alive and seemed so healthy to us. We even talked about reserving the social hall for her 95<sup>th</sup>, 98<sup>th</sup>, and 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Mom had been asking us **to help her complete this preparation booklet** to plan her funeral and make final decisions. We planned to do it NEXT week!! But, as we all know, we are not promised “next week.” At her birthday party, someone asked Mom, “What would you like for your birthday?” Mom’s answer: **“I would like to see John!”** Well, on Friday morning, sometime between 7 and 7:30 a.m., **Mom fell asleep in her chair** beside her bed, and she didn’t wake up! The Lord took her peacefully in her sleep, and she got her birthday wish!

Here are a few thoughts that everybody probably already knows about Bunny:

- a. **Bunny's jokes**—She had a joke for EVERYONE, even people she didn't know!
- b. **Bunny's angels**—She made thousands of them and gave them all away!
- c. **Bunny's generosity**—she didn't buy much for herself. She was always giving . . .
- d. **Oldest active member of this church—since 1949.** (Last week she told me that she was everyone's mother!)
- e. **Membership chairman and member of this choir for about 60 years—**  
6 DECADES!
- f. **She was married to John Rapalje, the love of her life, our Dad!** The amazing thing, in 54 years of marriage, they NEVER had a fight or even a disagreement. Really!! Mom said it was because Dad was such a great man (which we agree!), but **WE** know it was because of the way Mom treated Dad and agreed with him about everything. She said he was always right, and that's the way she lived!! They both had **J O Y** in their lives. **J**esus first, **O**thers next, and **Y**ourself last. The way she spelled **J O H N** was **J**esus first, **O**thers second, **H**ome third, and she **N**ever thought about herself at all!!

Mom and Dad really LOVED one another. It's not that mushy feeling that boys and girls have when they have a crush and fall in "love" with some handsome guy or beautiful girl. **Mom believed that love means to always choose the other person's highest good!** Mom and Dad had that kind of love. **Dad loved trains**, and he hated airplanes! Because Mom loved Dad so much, she chose Dad's highest good. She rode trains with Dad all over the country! Of course Dad also loved Mom very much. For their **50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary**, he surprised her with a trip to Hawaii. What a surprise! There are NO trains that go to Hawaii! So Dad, who had NEVER flown in an airplane in his life, loved Mom so much that he chose Mom's highest good by FLYING with her all the way to Hawaii and back on an AIRPLANE!!

### **My Memories of Mom.**

Mom's main focus in life was her family—her husband first, then children, grandchildren, and now the great grandchildren. She was always supportive of

everything we did, and **FAMILY was EVERYTHING to Mom.** The best illustration of this has already been mentioned by some of her grandchildren—**SUNDAY DINNER!** All four of us children got married in the same summer—1971. From that year forward, Mom had Sunday dinner for the whole family almost EVERY week—for the next 25 years! This shows her dedication to her family. **She LOVED her family!!**

From the way I described Mom and Dad's marriage, from the way she has lived for the past few years, and from your own recent contacts with her, when you think of "Bunny", you are probably picturing a sweet little old lady who loved everyone, told lots of jokes, and never raised her voice, never got excited or upset about anything. Well, I want to tell you, anyone or anything that EVER threatened the people that Bunny loved, would certainly experience something you never want to see. I call it the **WRATH of Bunny!!** One day when we were very small children, a rat entered our bedroom! Now, I have seen some of the ladies and especially the young girls of our day. When you see a bug or spider, you run screaming from the room like you've been attacked by a monster. Now let's get back to Mom's story. This was not a tiny BUG or SPIDER that she saw! It was a RAT—a BIG, NASTY RAT, one that was a very real threat to her precious children! What do you think she did? Did she run screaming from the room? Did she call 911? (That's a joke—there was no 911 in those days. In fact, we barely had a telephone!!) NO! Mom grabbed a HAMMER and hit that rat on the head, killing it instantly! I'm telling you, our Mom was a WARRIOR! She was like a momma bear with cubs when it came to defending the people that she loved!!

**Mom also loved to help people.** I used to have a bicycle paper route when I was a kid (age 11 to 16). I remember Mom helping me roll the newspapers. When the weather was too bad, I parked the bike and she DROVE me on the paper route. When I was in high school, I used to catch those **big yellow grasshoppers** and sell them for a nickel (with inflation, by my senior year, the price went up to a quarter!) to students in biology class to dissect. If I ran out of grasshoppers, I would call Mom at home to go out and catch me some more!! Then she would BRING them to me at school! Can you picture this: my MOM, out in the yard catching grasshoppers for me and then bringing them to me at school? So I could sell them for a quarter???

I have a very distinct memory, when we were young children, of Mom taking us to the County Fair one year. We were walking by a side show where there was a game for 25 cents that looked like it would be really easy to win. We didn't have much money in those days, so it would be really great to win a transistor radio for the

family for just a few quarters. She played that game and lost \$5. It was \$5 that our family really could not afford to lose! And that man KEPT her money! It made a real impression on me. I learned from Mom when I was a little boy, **it doesn't pay to gamble money that you can't afford to lose!!**

**Mom used to take a LOT of pictures! [A lot of people think I must be related to her!!]** However, in Mom's day, there was very little color photography. It was mostly black and white pictures, and even getting to see your pictures could take a week or two! Mom had a darkroom, chemicals, and special photo paper to develop the film, to print and dry her own black and white pictures. Mom took pictures for anyone who wanted their picture taken, even for people she did not know!

We have a brother Jim who passed away in 2008. It seems that Jim was the kid who got into trouble all the time. However, a lot of the things that Jim did that got him in trouble, he actually learned from ME. I got into a LOT of trouble, especially when I was in the **third grade!** Ironically, this was the grade that Martha used to teach. You may not know this, but I met Martha because she was the teacher who supervised Janet's internship to become an elementary teacher herself. After Janet finished her internship, she brought Martha home to meet the family. Mom was so happy that her children were born BOY, GIRL, BOY, GIRL. According to Mom, the boys should bring home nice friends for the girls to marry, and the girls should bring home nice friends for the boys. However the way it worked out, Janet was the only one of us that did it the way Mom wanted it. So, **THANK YOU JANET, for my lovely wife MARTHA!!** In our school days, Tavares had only one school campus, with elementary, junior high, and high school on the same campus. I was in so much trouble in the third grade, that couldn't seem to stay out of the principal's office. The elementary principal got so tired of seeing me that she took me over to Mr. Rou's office in the high school. Mr. H. Jennings Rou, who was a member of this church, was principal of Tavares High School for DECADES! There I was, a little third grader, in trouble with the BIG man!! After a brief encounter with Mr. Rou, I think I finally got straightened out. I'm telling you this to show that, **as BAD as I was, a few years later, Mom never remembered ANY of this!!** Mom remembered ONLY the good things we did, and she forgot the bad. A similar thing, but slightly different, happens with the Lord. According to the Bible, when we accept Christ, our sins are washed away, and we become completely clean. However, this is NOT because the Lord forgot about them, but because, in Christ, we are made clean! Of all the religions in the world, Christianity is the ONLY one that has a Savior. His name is Jesus!

## Mom's Lifestyle Was Biblical

What was SO SPECIAL about Bunny Rapalje? Mom seemed to LOVE everybody! In this family, we are all very different in so many ways, but she loved us ALL. She believed in us and she had a way of seeing the good and forgiving the faults in everyone. She always seemed to have JOY in her life

In John 15:9-14, Jesus spoke some words that relate to Mom's lifestyle of LOVE and JOY. Look at all the LOVE and JOY in the following verses!! But to have these in our lives, there are also commands to obey!

*"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command."* John 15: 9-14

After talking about love and joy, Jesus told us to obey His commands. There were a LOT of commands, but this is most important—to love one another. Mom made this kind of LOVE her lifestyle, and this is why her life was filled with JOY!

A scripture that I think relates to Mom is from the Old Testament book of Micah. In Micah 6:8, the Bible asks the question, "What does the Lord want from us?" "What does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God!" Doing justly means doing the right thing! Loving mercy means treating other people with kindness and respect. Walking HUMBLY means thinking every one you meet is more important than yourself. That's how Mom lived her life!

The most common chapter used in funerals is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, because it deals with walking in the shadow of death. It says that those who have trusted the Lord can "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" and yet "fear no evil." When I was a boy, I remember Dad preached a sermon on the 24<sup>th</sup> Psalm. In verse 3, it says, "Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord?" In other words, who can approach God. Who can go to Heaven? We ALL agree that Mom made it to Heaven! Does EVERYONE get to go to Heaven? [I don't think so!!] What does it take for a person to make it to Heaven? The answer is in the next verse: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart!" The only way to get your hands clean enough and your heart pure enough to get into heaven is to give your life to Christ and let Him wash

**them for you. Mom’s hands were clean, and her heart was pure, not by her own efforts, but because she trusted the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Mom left an ever-lasting impression on all of us! Whether it was by telling her jokes, or giving you one of her angels, or singing in the choir, or just being “Bunny” with kindness and love—she touched us all. Now, after 92 years of touching and giving to us all, **she still has one last request!** As she loved to have her family together here on earth, now she wants to have her whole family together in heaven. Make sure that when YOUR time comes, make sure that YOU are there. **Until then, while you are living the rest of this life, your Father in Heaven is watching you. Now, your Mom, your Grandma Bunny, your Grammy is watching you too!! Let’s try to live our lives in a way to make them BOTH really proud of us!!**

### **My Last Story**

It was really a blessing for me to be able to call Mom and talk with her on the telephone for all these years, especially in the evening. When I would call her, she would always start the conversation, “How’s Martha?” Then we would talk, and she would always thank me for all that I was doing for her (however LITTLE I may have actually done for her!). We talked about our activities of the day or the week and what we planned to do the next week. Then, after we had talked she would remind me that I needed to get back to Martha. Finally we would say, not “Goodbye,” but “Good Night!” She would start by saying, “Say Goodnight to Martha”, I would reply, “Good night”. She would say, “Good night.” I would say, “Good night Mom”, she would say “Good night”, I would say “Good night”, and then she would hang up. Or maybe I would hang up. Hopefully, one of us would hang up. We sounded like the Waltons on TV, “Good night John Boy.” Now, I’m going to miss this important part of my life. She always let me have the last “Good night.” That’s the way it will be now: **“Good night Mom.” We Love You!!**

*Love,*

**Bob and Martha**

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