

My View – “Late Mom Taught Us to Live the Moment”, by Eileen Needham

The house was almost empty now, but there were traces of her in it. Of course, there were several tea cups in the cupboard, a tea kettle on the stove and plenty of tea bags nearby. Everyone knew that it would still be her home if it retained a cup of tea.

I looked around the kitchen and the tears flowed. The tears were not of sorrow, but of gratitude for all the years I was able to call her Mom.

I remembered visiting her, not long after Dad died. The door of her home was eternally open, anticipating company. She always had plenty of food prepared, “Just in case someone stops over.” Her warmth, sparkling eyes and hug greeted me, along with a cup of tea. The tranquility of her home filled my heart.

The Christian song “Welcome Home,” by Ralph Jeswald, echoed throughout the home. I knew it reminded her of Dad.

When we sat down at the kitchen table, I was surprised at the words she spoke.

“I don’t really miss him.”

She paused, lost in thoughts before continuing to speak of her husband of 67 years. “I know he’s still with me. We’ve been together for so long, he’s just part of me. He will be with me forever.”

The wisdom of her words was surreal. Her faith in Dad was united with her faith in God.

Alone at the kitchen table, I sat down and poured myself a cup of tea. My thoughts drifted to years past when our table was abundant with food and 10 children grabbing to get their share. Food was never wasted. If a ham dinner was served for dinner on Monday, it would reappear in scalloped potatoes on Tuesday and pea soup on Wednesday. It was amazing what she could do with a good ham bone.

We had golden rules at the dinner table. Dinner was promptly served at 5:30 p.m. and you needed a medical excuse if you were late. Dessert was always served, often chocolate cake with peanut butter frosting. Then one day at dinner, she changed everything with an announcement. She was going back to school to become a nurse. This meant one thing: We could never complain about school or hard work again.

It also meant that we all needed to assist with meal preparation. For the older siblings, this was easy. Meatloaf on Monday, sloppy Joes on Tuesday and spaghetti on Wednesday. Many of the subsequent dinner conversations seemed to focus on my limited culinary skills. The term “Eileen’s Diner” was bantered about every time I attempted to cook.

After graduating from nursing school, mom was hired at the VA hospital. She cared for our veterans, listened intently to their stories, and assisted with my grandparents when her shift ended without a single complaint. Like so many role models of her generation, she recognized that life was not easy and served with gratitude.

“Gratitude” and “living in the moment,” were my mom’s credos. She lived an unselfish, authentic life and was constantly happy.

As I looked around her kitchen for the last time, I recalled all the stories, wisdom and laughter. Tears swelled in my eyes as I set the teacup back in the cupboard.

As I closed the door to the house, I knew the truth. We were blessed to have her for 92 years and her legacy will live on in the hearts of her 10 children, 29 grandchildren and 37 great-grandchildren. May they forever remember to, "Love each other in all ways, always." We miss you, Mom.

Eileen Needham, of Hamburg, is a retired social worker.