
Country Philosopher

Forevermore

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My mother was a good woman.

Perhaps I should be more radiant with my praise. Maybe I should have searched my soul for words sublime enough to eulogize that dear person. But really, my friends, isn't this one small sentence magnificent in itself?

Because she WAS good. To every living thing and especially to her own family. She cherished and loved with warmth and laughter and poured forth from her heart a rich goodness that touched all of us.

I remember on Sunday mornings she would inspect each of her four children before they went off to Sunday School. And glory... if she found so much as a dab of dirt behind the ear she marched you back to the bathroom and rather forcefully helped you do what you couldn't do by yourself. That dear lady firmly believed that cleanliness was next to Godliness. And later, in church, she sat with two of her children while the other two sang in the choir, and the light from her happiness cast a glow over that entire church. Religion wasn't hell and brimstone for Mama. It was joyful and happy and the sunshine of her life.

She was tremendously proud of her children. My brother and sisters were

phenomenally brilliant, but she gave them not one ounce of love more than she did her baby, Amos. In those young years of mine, I experienced the softness of a woman's touch. Whenever I fell and hurt myself (which happened 42,000 times a day) she would soothe me with soft words and tender caresses. And I remember that always, while kneeling to say my prayers, I ended with, "And God bless Mama."

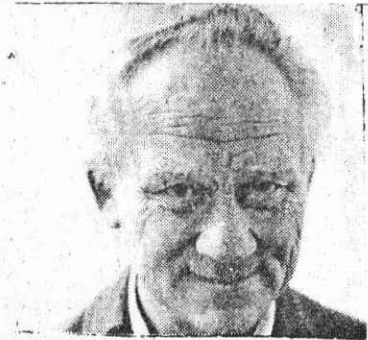
Mama thought that "spare the rod and spoil the child" was a beautiful rule of life, and she had various weapons she could use to uphold this premise. Switches, brooms, or the flat of the hand were freely given my tender rear-end. If I dropped my pants anytime during this period you would have taken me for an Indian. My rear-end was ALWAYS a bright, glowing red.

When I went off to war she came down to Union Station with me so that I could catch my train. She said, "Amos, when you go through that gate please don't look back." I went through the gate, walked about ten paces, and then turned around in exaggerated sorrow. Mama had started to cry but when I turned around her tears turned to laughter, and as I turned from her view she was still shaking her fist at me.

What lonely, frightening, years

those must have been for my mother. Her two sons (and how she loved them) away in foreign lands where death hovered real and threatening. And then I came home. I didn't send word that I was coming because I wanted to surprise my family. I ran up the steps of my house and went through the front door. I continued through the hall and the library and on to the door to the kitchen. And there, in the kitchen, was my mother. She hadn't heard me come in and was busy adding things to her soup. I said, "Is there a special greeting for returning heroes?" She turned around slowly... and dear God... the love in her eyes. She came and held my face in her hands, tears pouring down her cheeks, and she couldn't speak a word. I put my arms around that plump, little woman and it was one of the most glorious moments of my life.

I guess that Mama wasn't any different than other mothers in that she worked 600 hours a day... cooking and ironing and cleaning house... and all this while devoting an extra thousand hours of love and companionship to her husband and children. Mama had one dirty, dirty word that she used only when she came to the end of her rope. She was such a dear, Christian woman who NEVER used bad language that when



she did use her dirty word we children would just double over with laughter. I knew then, just as I know now, that my gentle love, my interest in others, my obedience to God, my ability to see another point of view, my loyalty and generosity... were given to me by the example set by my mother.

And then... one cold, rainy night... I went to Providence Hospital because Mama was dying from cancer. She lay there in the bed, shrunken and gray, and terribly weak. I stood beside the bed and held her hand. She never said a word but her eyes never left my face. And that night, after I had gone to bed, my sister called to tell me that Mama had died.

I have filled my life with love. I have a wife who is indescribably lovely and children and grandchildren and friends... but that emptiness created by Mama's death will lay hurting and sorrowful till the end of my days.

And I shall love the memory of her.
Forevermore.