

The Toy Balloon

by
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Many years ago, in a dusty Salvation Army bookstore, I came across the following poem.

I always wanted
a toy balloon
they only cost
a dime
But Mom said it
was risky
They broke so
quickly...
and besides...
She didn't have
a dime.
And even if she
did
she didn't
think they were
worth a dime.
I lived on a
farm
And I only went
to one circus
and fair
And all the
balloons I ever
saw were there
There were yellow
ones..and blue
ones
But the kind I
liked best were
red
and I don't see
why she couldn't

have stopped
and said...that
maybe I could
have had one.
But she didn't.
I suppose today
you can buy
them most anywheres
That they still
sell red ones
at circuses and
fairs
I've got a little
money saved
And I've got
lot of time
But there's no one
to tell me how
to spend my dime
Plenty of balloons..
but my values
have changed...
somehow...

This poem always brings to me a deep melancholy. You see, I have no one to tell me how to spend MY dime. My mother died twenty some years ago and my sorrow at her death still lies just beneath the surface of my consciousness. Not just sorrow, but a dull ache of despair over the insensitivity I displayed when my mother lived.

In my mother I had the finest example of love I will ever encounter.

She had a full understanding that love is giving and she gave to me, constantly, the richness of her caring. She loved me so grandly when I was a child: Bathing the fevered brow and drying the falling tears. And there was not a time, day or night, when she would not have laid down her life for mine. I do not believe that I will ever find, in all my days, a love like hers. Not from my precious wife, and not from my beautiful children. For I know, without a doubt, that a mother's love is the only unselfish love to be found on the face of this earth.

I know that I passed through those many years without realizing my mother's magnificence. In fact, it was my constant stupidity and unawareness that has prompted this column. You see, I never understood my mother's love, and her warm spirit of giving was totally ignored.

I was a cool dude. I swept through my teenage years with a colossal conception of my own mental abilities. The many motherly tokens of love, showered on me daily, went unnoticed. I met this dear woman's suggestions with laughter and her rules with defiance. I never thought of her as being other than a convenience at times, a hindrance at other times. I never comforted her tears or shared



her laughter. And I can't remember, in all those years, of ever appreciating the fact that I grew up in the shadow of her tender heart.

Even as a young man, after I had returned from World War Two, I don't think I realized that my mother was a stupendously rich treasure in my life. I almost weep when my memory cannot bring forth one single occasion where I took her in my arms. I look back in horror when I realize I never once sat down and talked with her. Never once did I hold her hand. Never once did I kiss her cheek.

It wouldn't hurt so much if I didn't sit back now and know how much she loved me. The light in her eyes when I did something especially well. The gentle pat on the head whenever she passed. The sad smile of forgiveness when she met my cold indifference.

Well, I am fifty-four years old now. My mother has been dead these many years. I am no longer a cool dude. I understand how cruel I was and how much I missed. I wish, that through some miracle, she could return to this earth for just a moment. Just for that space of time that would allow me to take her hand, and say, "Mama, I'm sorry".