

Janna Ruth Hey Dean
by Steve J. Dean
December 17, 1931 - July 8, 2025

Mother grew up in a middle class brick house with nice amenities and the latest appliances. She married a west Texas man who fed a cob heater in his drafty boyhood house which sported an outhouse. She moved out of her stately brick home and into our antebellum farmhouse with no running water, but two battalions of scampering mice. She loved my Dad. Moving from comfort to sparseness must not have been easy. Really not easy. She never complained. Never, ever, ever. With hard work and patience, the two of them built a comfortable house.

Mother's sports prowess is legendary in our circle. One incident was never broadcast—because I did a news blackout and coverup. I was playing a lot of tennis when I was about 14, especially with my close friend Jan who was very athletic. I thought I was getting pretty good, and it turns out as an adult, I wasn't all that bad. I knew Mother played tennis, and I asked if she wanted to play. Sure. We went to Platt Park. I can vividly remember the day, court, and scene. And I can remember the temperature and which side of the court I started on. Sort of like remembering where I was when I learned Kennedy had been assassinated. I never returned one of her serves. I saw a few of them. I did get my racket on a couple. I was accustomed to lobs from Jan; Mother served flashes. Mother won straight sets 6-0, 6-0. All Mother said was, "You need to drill on basics." Of course you wouldn't tell your teen friends that your 36 year old mother trounced you. I never breathed a word of that disaster to my buddies.

Growing up, we never had a television. Mother wasn't religiously against it, she just thought the 3 channel programming inane, far beneath anyone's respectable mental and moral level. Instead, we read, and read, and read. The Bible first and most. It's no coincidence that each of us can read with pleasure English literature from Chaucer to Shakespeare to Faulkner. It's also likely not an accident that none of us sons are addicted to social media.

My strongest memories waft over the ghost of family dinners past. Conversations embraced current events, politics, history, geography, and religion. It was over fried chicken, sweet corn, and salad that my mind imbibed a love of learning. Mother was the initiator and fount of this mine of mental material. As Plutarch recorded of ancient Cato's dinner table, discussions must be edifying, no gossip or ignoble subjects tolerated.

Etched in my memory is a second grade scene. For you young ones, my teacher's request of Mother is difficult to conceive: modern teachers would "kill" to have parents read with their children. But the 1950s was also an era where dad's weren't to darken the door of the maternity ward: the pros handled everything. Mother returned from a school conference and reported, "Steve, Mrs. Tierney asked that we stop reading with you. You read so well that it creates problems in class." Then Mother added, "But we aren't going to stop reading with you."

But what Mother most steeped me in was the faith and charity of Jesus. Venerable Greeks and Moses had engraved "Eye for eye." Jesus left the ancients far behind: "Forgive your enemies. Turn the other cheek. Go the extra mile." He incarnated forgiveness from His cross. Quite plain: life isn't fair (get over it), forgive everyone making it not fair, and be kind and good to anyone in your perimeter. This atmosphere Mother breathed out, and I breathed in.

Growing up, I idolized my father. I still revere and respect him. But as an aging adult, I gradually and steadily came to see that I was more like my mother, who was more like her birth family, the Heys: polite, thoughtful, kind, considerate, quiet, and gentle. Mother was very much like her father, Grandpa Hey. I would be honored to pass for either of them, temperamentally.

Three precepts Jesus verbalized describe my mother:

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the peacemakers:

for they shall be called the children of God.

Kurt Vonnegut, who wrote the great anti-Vietnam war novel, *Slaughterhouse Five*, championed Jesus when Mr. Vonnegut stated, "'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.' And for these twelve words alone he deserves to be called The Prince of Peace." Vonnegut, no Christian himself, knew that practicing these words of Jesus would bring peace to marriages, families, businesses, teams, unions, clubs, governments, and the world.

I have never—and I mean never—known my Mother to hold a grudge or utter a word in anger or haste against anyone. Can you imagine living your life and never thinking, "I wish I hadn't said that." We sons learned to respect difficult teachers, tiresome neighbors, and members of the opposite political party. Mother, a staunch Republican, was an antidote for today's

cultural and political polarization. Indelibly etched in my memory is Mother coming up the stairs crying while I was dressing for high school one morning. It must have been Friday, April 5, 1968. Through tears she said, "They killed Martin Luther King last night." He was Democrat, quasi-socialist, Black, and an activist. Mother was none of these. And Mother was distraught. Can a mother better prepare a son for the real world?

The elderly often repeat themselves. More often than any other words, Mother repeated these to me: "Dad and I never had an argument in 60 years." She was proud of that, and rightly so. Mother was 60 year proof that "it takes two to have an argument." Their "60 year perfect peace trophy" belongs properly to Mother. Dad was—let's just say—opinionated. Strongly opinionated. Very strongly opinionated. No gray opinions. Only black and white opinions. And occasional moods. Because of Mother, peace reigned in our home. Not fake chill. Real peace. A calm and tranquility pervaded our home that multitudes of less fortunate boys and girls never experience their entire lives.

Not just some religious shibboleth with mother. Every day flesh and blood: "Blessed are the peacemakers."

I would never say there's never a time to leave your spouse. A handful of humans are "incorrigibly warped." I am implying that multitudes of marriages could be healed if just one of the spouses—husband or wife—traced Mother's footsteps who was herself tracking Jesus.

The last time that we three boys had been together with Mother was a year ago Mother's Day." We took her to our old family home, had dinner, told stories, and reminisced. Tuesday, a few hours before she passed, we four were providentially reunited. Jerry came at noon. I arrived about 1:00. Mike about 3:00. Several visitors, without being asked, spontaneously left us alone with Mother, who remained outwardly unresponsive. Together we recited Psalm 23 and sang "Amazing Grace." Told stories. Reminisced for over an hour. We three left to go home. A few minutes later Mother then left to go Home. Home.

The last time I heard my Mother's voice was the day before her passing. Mother called me Monday morning early. About 5:30 am. In a voice so weak and halting as to require utmost attention to decipher said only these words. "Goodbye, Steve. I'm going home." She called back about a half later and repeated, "Goodbye, Steve. I'm going home."