

Sports ran deep in Mother's family, and she was very good. Grandpa Hey was a die-hard Cubs fan, and older brother Phil was a high school and university coach. She grew up playing basketball in the driveway with him and his friends because Grandma and Grandpa Hey gave the basketball to *her* for some reason, so the boys couldn't play unless they let her in the game. (At least that's how she told it.)

Aunt Sue was just as big a fan. After Dad was in heaven, I drove down to see her and Mother whenever I could – on evenings when there were games if possible, so Mother and I could go over after supper and watch the Cubs or Bulls with her. I didn't go down to watch the *game* though. I went down to watch *them* watch the game. There's nothing like two wonderful ladies in their 80's cheering and booing – loudly.

It's impossible to talk about Mother without Dad. Like every good woman, she loved him selflessly and completely all her life, for reasons that made perfect sense to her. Like every good man, all his life he wondered why, and loved her back the best he knew how.

I remember by age 6 or 7, she had already taught us to throw and catch. Nowadays kids that age play T-ball. But Dad would come home after work and hit 300-foot fly balls out into the pasture. He grew up in the Depression, sharecropping in West Texas, which was mostly sand, oil, and rattlesnakes. By the time *he* was 6 or 7, he was driving a mule team, chopping cotton, and hauling 100 lb. bags to the wagon in scorching heat – barefoot, because they couldn't afford shoes.

So I think it never occurred to him that one of those fly balls he hit could have killed us. It did occur to *me* I might die, every time I saw one coming out of the sky like a missile. I think that Dad taught us to have no fear, that Mother made sure we lived to tell about it, and that's why God made fathers and mothers different.

We're thankful for Aaron. He took care of Mother's house and yard, and after she fell last year, he would bring pizza and watch games with her. I was in the kitchen once and heard them celebrating a poster dunk – just as loud as Mother and Sue – and I thanked the Lord that He sent Aaron to help her enjoy a few good times again.

We're thankful for Pastor and the wonderful friends here at church, too, who visited and encouraged her so often.

We're especially thankful for Brigett. She cared faithfully for Uncle Ed and Aunt Sue all those years and finally for Mother, and became like one of the family. She was our eyes and ears and Mother's friend and guardian angel all in one. I don't know what we'd have done without her.

Mother had an extraordinary mind. She told me once that she studied philosophy at Harden Simmons in Abilene after she and Dad were married. That's not something young brides do, but that's who she was. So when it came time for *me* to decide how *I* would think and live, I knew from her that it doesn't matter whether Christianity or

anything else sounds good. What *does* matter is whether it's true, that to deny God is to deny reason, and that God is pleased with humble questions because He loves to answer them in His own time.

God reminded me within hours of Mother's going home. During dinner with Jerry her last night on earth, he talked about remarkable answers to prayer throughout his life. He and men in his church pray faithfully for the public affairs work Mother prepared and inspired me to do, so I asked him to pray about something specific I'm doing now. Very early the next morning, less than 8 hours after Mother arrived in heaven, a call came from Washington answering that prayer. Now that she was with God, I wondered whether He was letting her see how her prayers had shaped our lives and destinies.

After moving to Illinois with young children, she and Dad decided to live wholly for the Lord. She read through the old Schofield Bible and looked up every one of the 15,000+ cross-references. Twice. At that time, she and Dad still had a few old pop music 45's. Those disappeared. They didn't have TV or go to movies or party either – partly because they didn't have the money, but mostly because there was no point to that sort of thing.

They didn't care about being big names in town either. While still in grade school, I remember Mother telling a friend she didn't want a job downtown – that it was more important to be home with her boys. In high school, I remember Dad picking me up after football practice one night. Watching him drive home in our beat up old van, still neatly groomed, but tired and silent after a long day's work, I realized there was no comparison between him and my popular coaches and teachers. Character matters, and he was the strongest man I knew.

Every morning like clockwork we had family devotions. Mother read Our Daily Bread, Dad read Scripture, we all prayed. But devotions would have meant nothing without the devotion Mother and Dad showed consistently throughout their lives. They weren't perfect, but they meant business for the Lord and lived the old motto that hung in our play room – “Just one life t'will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last.”

Dad made life simple. Mother made it good. I was teasing our own children once about my two family rules and realized that I learned them from Mother and Dad – one for the children, one for me. The *children's* rule I learned from Dad, of course: “Do whatever I say, whenever I say it. Now.” The rule for *me* I learned from Mother: “Don't say much. Kids are smart, they'll figure it out. They're going to turn out like you anyway, so save your breath. Besides, Mom will talk enough for both of you and everyone will be happy because she knows what to say and you don't.”

Mother was blessed with the quiet godly faith that is sometimes hard for young mothers – faith to endure childbirth, then spend years changing diapers, washing, ironing, getting ready for school and church, caring for sick ones, reading, teaching, praying,

and doing the million other things that matter eternally – never quitting, even when a mother is deadly tired and discouraged and no one seems to notice or care.

I think that's why it was hard for her sometimes at the end. All her life she had cared for everyone else. Now it was her turn. Sometimes she would say sadly that she wasn't much use any more, and I would remind her what she told me Great Grandma Holtzmann had said at the same age – "All I can do now is pray." I would ask her to keep praying for me and our family like always, and she did.

After Dad was gone, she still tutored students and spent her time reading, doing crosswords, writing letters, encouraging others, praying, and listening to hymns at night because she didn't sleep much. Whenever I went down, she would tell familiar stories about things that mattered. She was content, and knew the Lord's comfort. But sooner or later she would say quietly, "I miss Dad so much." All I could ever say was "I do too."

It hurt leaving her late at night to go back home. By the time I left the driveway, the lights inside were already off except the one over the kitchen sink window. She would stand there looking out into the darkness all alone, and I always drove away slowly so she could see the car lights just a little longer.

She once told me she dreamed that she heard a beautiful baritone voice singing hymns. She turned to look, and it was Dad. Another time she and Dad were walking through a meadow together and stopped at a little table for coffee. When Dad finished, he said, "I'm going on ahead now. But I'll wait, and after while you come too." He walked on, and when he was out of sight, she woke up.

I know Christ suffered everything for us. But Mother saying good-bye to the love of her life somehow seemed different. Perhaps that's God's way of keeping our eyes on Him and eternity, but I'm still a little sad when I read Christ's words that in the resurrection we're no longer married. I don't know what heaven is like, but to be better than what Mother and Dad had and what I've been blessed with, it has to be inconceivably beautiful and good.

Whatever it's like, Mother is with her Savior and with Dad now, and she isn't hurting or lonely any more. I like to think of them standing there together with their Lord saying, "We've gone on ahead, and we're waiting. After a little while, you come too."

In a few minutes when Jerry tells you how, they would want you to listen carefully and receive Christ as Savior so that you can join them with Him.