

A Day I'll Always Remember

By Larry Richman

As a freshman in college, I was asked to write a paper describing an experience through someone else's eyes. I tried to put myself in my mother's place and write about some of the suffering she went through. I don't know if what I wrote correctly describes her feelings, but this what I wrote.

I suppose there are times in everyone's life when you want something so very much that you would do anything to get it. Usually you can get anything you want if you work hard enough to get it. But when my son Jeff left for his mission, I could not attend his farewell, even though I tried desperately to do so.

At the first of the week, I felt OK, but as the week drew on, my health went downhill. By Friday, most of Jeff's grandparents, aunts, and uncles had arrived. It was a big family reunion. I wanted to be a gracious hostess to our company, but I was only feeling well enough to get out of bed a few times the entire day. I felt I was putting a damper on the occasion, but I had no other choice.

On Saturday, my entire day was spent within the four walls of my bedroom. I didn't dislike the bedroom; it was my creation. I had chosen the furniture, the bedspread, and even the draperies. But the very fact that I was confined to this one room somehow made the colors not so bright and the designs not so interesting. Things were not as sharp and clear as I remembered them being. Colors which were once brilliant and lively suddenly were dull and uninteresting. My lessened awareness of the things around me was due to the pain I experienced and the medications I had to take for the pain. The pain was not new to me. In fact, I had experienced the same thing several times that month. After a few days, it would pass and I would be all right for about a week. However, this time I sensed it was different. It felt much the same as before, only perhaps a little more intense.

Sunday came. I knew that if I could only hold on through the morning and the early afternoon, I could go hear my son's farewell address in sacrament meeting. I knew that being there would mean a lot to Jeff, and I wanted to be there as much as he wanted me there. I tried. I struggled so desperately with myself to stabilize the ever-increasing pain. My husband often used to say, "It's all in your mind" when I wasn't feeling well. I tried to believe that and to mentally expel the pain. It didn't work. By noon, the pain was so severe that I realized there was no hope of attending church that day, and I consented to let my husband take me to the hospital.

Jeff's father and uncle helped me out of the bedroom and to the car. I had suffered so much pain by that time that I didn't have the strength to stand by myself. Those 75 feet to the car were the longest 75 feet I ever traveled. Every step was painful. Even when feeling well, I could seldom walk without some pain. There was almost no circulation in my feet, and they were often

swollen. But that time, it was like having every pain I had ever experienced all rolled up into one agonizing package. Every step shot sharp pains up my legs and back. I could even feel them in the back of my neck.

On we crept. It seemed like hours had gone by, but it had only been seconds. Walking was no longer an unconscious motor skill; I had to think about every step I took. We inched down the hallway and toward the door. Beyond the door I knew there were three steps which led to the lawn. This was a major challenge. I didn't like steps because it was always so painful to use them. I knew it would be difficult, but I had no choice.

At long last, we reached the bottom and slowly made our way across the lawn to the car. I sat down on the car seat and my husband lifted my legs into the car. As he went around the car to drive, I looked out the window at my beautiful family. They were standing at the door of the house. Their faces were so full of concern I wanted to cry. As we pulled away from the house, I looked at Jeff. He was standing at the door with tears in his eyes. They were not tears wishing that his mother could hear his farewell speech, but tears of love which prayed that his mother would recover.

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After a week or two in the hospital, Mom would usually be all right, and would come home. But we all knew the routine could not go on forever. She received dialysis treatment at the old St. Alphonsis Hospital in Boise. Through a valve they inserted into her stomach, they filled her stomach cavity with liquid to soak out the impurities in her system, then drained the liquid out. This painful procedure was repeated hour after hour, day after day. My father was at the hospital with her most of the time. Because she became progressively worse, it was decided to move her to the University of Utah Medical Center in Salt Lake City where she could receive some of the best kidney treatment available in the country. It was not her first stay at the Medical Center.

The night before she left Boise, the entire family (except Jeff who was on his mission in Germany) went to the hospital to see her. She was heavily sedated at the time and dozed off and woke up several times while we were there. She was very happy to see us. I can remember her smile to this day. That was the last time I saw my mother alive. I didn't really try to explain to her how much I loved her, although I am sure she knew. I probably did tell her that I loved her, but in retrospect, there are things I wish I had said. But you can never really explain with words how you feel; there are higher forms of communication for that.

The next day, Mom and Dad flew to Salt Lake while the rest of us stayed in Boise. We had long

since learned to be self-sufficient, cooking meals, washing clothes, and cleaning the house. We all did our share of the work.

Several days later, I was sitting in my algebra class at school when someone came to the door with a note asking Larry Richman to go to the office. Students always fear notes like that, but although I knew I hadn't done anything wrong, I was still afraid because I knew something must be wrong. I walked out of the classroom and saw Bishop Olpin standing down the hall. I immediately knew something was wrong. The bishop said, "Your Dad is home and wants to talk to you." I was glad to hear that Dad was home, but also feared what that could mean.

The bishop's wife was in the car. They were both very calm, concerned, and relaxed. We drove to the other schools and picked up my brother and my sister. While the bishop was in the schools getting them, Sister Olpin calmly talked to me about school and how things were going, with no indication that anything was wrong. When we got home, there was no question in my mind but that something was very wrong. We walked in and I saw my father. It was evident he had been crying. He gathered us together and said, "I want to tell you something. Yesterday your mother passed away." (She had passed away December 13, 1971, on my father's 43rd birthday.) Then all the premonitions I wouldn't let myself believe were confirmed. We all cried. Aunt Jean had flown to Boise with Dad and she was a great strength to my sister Joy Lynn. In a few minutes, we knelt down and humbly thanked our Father in Heaven for the time that our mother had been with us here on this earth, and for the strength that she was to us, and for what she meant to us.

That whole day, I walked around and thought about what had happened. I had no cares about school or work. At the time, I was working at the M&W grocery store on 9th and Fort streets and was scheduled to work later that day. I called the store and asked if I could be excused from work for a while. Later, Dad and I went by and asked if I could take leave of work until after Christmas so I could be home with the family. My boss was accommodating and granted me the time.

That day, the First Presidency was notified that my mother had passed away. Since Jeff was a missionary, they were to contact his mission president, and he was to tell Jeff. Later that night, when we still hadn't received any word from Jeff, Dad decided he would try to phone him. Jeff was at the mission home at the time, and after several attempts to get a call through to Germany, Dad finally reached him. It was a poor connection, so after telling Jeff what had happened, Dad asked him if he had heard what he had said. Jeff said, "I don't think so. Say it again." Dad repeated it and then asked him once more if he understood what he said. Jeff replied that he wasn't sure and asked him to repeat it again. After the third time, Dad asked him if he understood, and Jeff said, "I think so." Dad said he would like Jeff to come home for the funeral. but if that meant that he would not be able to go back to Germany and finish his mission, Dad would rather him stay there, because he knew that's what his mother would want him to do.

Jeff was able to come home for the funeral, then return to Germany. On his way home, he had

several problems with his flights. Some were late, and caused him to miss connections, and he had to spend a night in the Chicago airport. Jeff hadn't arrived by 1:00pm when the funeral was to begin. A friend of my father met Jeff at the airport and rushed him to the Northview chapel for the funeral. It was 2:30 or 3:00pm when my brother finally arrived. I had pretty well controlled my emotions until that time, but when Jeff arrived and met Dad with a warm embrace, I began crying.

Before he arrived, people had come to the Relief Society room for the viewing. I remember seeing all those dear people come through the line who had meant so much to me, and who were so concerned about our family, and loved my mother. All my friends were there. The handshakes from Bob Peck and David Beal were a great strength to me, and the embrace from Claudia Flake and KaLee Neal helped a lot. When Jeff arrived, we went in and had the family prayer. Then Aunt Jean placed the veil over my mother's face, and the casket was closed.

The chapel was full. Notwithstanding the delay from 1:00 to almost 3:00 waiting for Jeff to arrive. Only a few people had left.

A second funeral was held in Brigham City on Saturday the 18th at the chapel on 2nd South, and she was buried in a lovely spot in the Brigham City Cemetery near a stream.

The lessons my mother taught me have influenced my life greatly. She was loved by everyone who knew her. I include here an excerpt from a letter her mother wrote to me a little over three years later. My Dad had remarried, and I was on my mission in Guatemala:

"Larry, you have a wonderful Dad and I am so glad that he has Betty. She can't be beat. She is doing a wonderful job with your family. Of course, I think your Mom did a wonderful job training you kids before she left you. It was her birthday last week. I used to say to her, 'sometimes I think I'm the little girl and you are the mother.' She sure helped me train my children." (April 28, 1975)