

## Lessons our Mother Taught Us: Reflections by Ann Schneider's Daughters

When she was four years old Ann pulled on the wrong handle of a car door while throwing away the pit of a prune. This occurred in an era before seat belts (*or knowing better than to throw garbage from the car*) and she tumbled out onto the street, while driving over the Broadway bridge. It was a cold day and she wore a snowsuit that saved her life with its padding. She spent months in the hospital, with bruises all over her small body, and would need to re-learn to walk.

I've always wondered about the impact this had on our mother. Perhaps the near-death experience and harrowing recovering at such a young age helps explain her appreciation for life and compassion for people in pain of any kind.

Whatever the reasons, our mother embodied the sentiment expressed by Henri-Frédéric Amiel: "Life is short. We don't have much time to gladden the hearts of those who walk this way with us. So, be swift to love and make haste to be kind."

As we grapple with her loss - and the huge hole it leaves in our lives, we also feel deep gratitude to have had Ann as our mother.

She loved us unconditionally. Her kindness, generosity and wisdom inspired us. And she taught us many lessons in the time we had with her. For example:

- Children's birthday parties should have themes!
- Starting times are mere suggestions;
- Do work that means something to you;
- Spiritual life is an anchor in good times and bad; and
- We are better partners when grounded ourselves.

At the center of it all, Mom showed us what it meant to embrace life whole-heartedly.

As we reflect on the impact she had on our lives and the enduring legacy she leaves - there are four lessons we learned from our mother that we hope can help all of us be more fully alive in the months and years to come.

### 1. **Our mother taught us that artistic expressions are sacred and life giving.**

A favorite book of our mothers' was "The Artist's Way," by Julia Cameron. Cameron describes "Art as an act of faith. . . We must be faithful to our faith, willing to share it to help others, and be helped in return."

Our mom had her own artistic practices, encouraged us to develop our creative expressions, and supported and inspired many others to explore their own gifts.

She believed deeply that everyone has the ability to be creative. (*Sometimes more than the person themselves; Dad, for example, was never as certain as Mom that he had a gifted dancer inside him*)

From as far back as I can remember, our mother expressed herself through the arts. She joyfully brought sacred dance to her faith communities. Each Christmas we could count on mom to initiate the signing of "Silent Night." She helped choreograph the dance of angels for the Christmas pageant. At Epiphany events she always led the three kings dance.

Mom exposed us to many different art forms. From an early age we were encouraged to try every possible musical instrument and all kind of creative movements. In playdates mom set up art projects like potato stamps and sock puppetry.

We spent weeks every summer at Althea Broome's Willowbrook Art Camp. The diverse exposure to arts at Willowbrook had a lasting impact on both of us. And it became the inspiration for our mother to help conceive and develop Grace Art Camp, which enriches the lives of over a thousand young artists each summer.

Mom was inspired by friend Joy Ruplinger to create a memory quilt in honor of each of our high school graduations. She delighted in the symbolism of the quilts: our friends and family pouring their best wishes into something that would comfort us during one of life's great transitions.

And after this, mom got into quilting - *like really really really into quilting*. She adored the colors and patterns, the stories they could tell, the communal experience of making them with people who became friends, and gifting them at the birth of a child or to raise resources for an important cause.

As our family expanded with the addition of her grandchildren, Ceci and Eli, mom relished the opportunity to re-engage with little ones in creative play. The imaginative art projects she prepared would be centered around seasonal or cultural themes: painting pumpkins in the fall, making Scandinavian hearts before Christmas.

In these times of sorrow and in times of celebration ahead, we will do our best to express our own creativity and to encourage others to express theirs.

## **2. The second lesson we learned from our mother is to live your values out loud.**

Our mother showed us her ideals. Through her actions and deeds we witnessed her commitment to i) appreciating every person's unique gifts and ii) creating a more compassionate and just world.

She expressed her values in every aspect of her life and especially throughout her career working with refugee and immigrant job seekers. As far as my elementary-school-self could tell:

- Mom's vocational English classes at IRCO and Mt Hood Community College were marked by lots of multicultural celebrations with food, costumes and laughter;
- I remember seeing Mom's excitement when a doctor from Vietnam with limited English skills found a job in the healthcare field and no longer needed to work on a factory floor for minimum wage; and
- She shared devastating stories about the trauma many people had experienced in their home countries – or the isolation they felt in this one.

From an early age, we learned that living by your values can take courage. And it doesn't always pay well. But that integrity has its own rewards.

About a dozen years ago, while working in economic development for then-Commissioner Sam Adams, I was re-introduced to our mother's work from a different perspective. Through her former colleagues I heard about her persistent advocacy for the system to work for people with limited English skills and in culturally responsive ways.

I came to understand that she empowered people to find a place in the world that upheld their dignity and well-being.

Living her values out loud meant our mother was never shy about advocating for what she believed in or enlisting others who were interested in joining her.

I imagine a good number of people in this sanctuary developed an event or program, attended a celebration supporting another cultural community, donated to a cause, or hosted a student from another country with the encouragement of our mother.

Her clear moral compass and sense of purpose not only helped make the world a more just place. It inspired Lindsay and me - like so many others - to hold onto our ideals. To strive to live a life of integrity. To be in service to something greater than ourselves.

### **3. The third lesson we learned from our mother is to nurture community with love.**

In the days since our mother's accident and death, we have been grateful beyond words for the communities - of family, faith, friends, colleagues, and neighbors - who have embraced us, supported us, and reminded us of her abiding legacy.

Surrounded by flowers from members of our communities and in the church today, I recall how our mother loved to garden. She enjoyed the process of envisioning what she'd like a section of her garden to look like - perhaps with a color pallet or as a place for her grandchildren's fairy houses - and then developing that vision by cultivating the land, sowing plants, nurturing their growth, and sharing the fruits of her garden with others.

Mom cultivated communities like she cultivated her garden. With intention, with vision and by paying attention to its individual parts. By trusting in everything's eventual growth and sharing in its abundance.

Our mother nurtured her family with unconditional love. She showed up for us in every aspect of our lives and created rhythms that bound us together. Growing up, this meant the four of us sat down around our table, sang grace, and shared meaningful conversations over dinner every evening.

She loved connecting with her extended family: her parents' siblings and partners, their children and grandchildren. She understood that relationships need tending in order to thrive and reveled in opportunities to visit family with members across the county and here in Oregon. We're grateful to have members of both the extended Herzog and Lee families with us today.

Mom's revolutionary spirit saw community building as a means to push back against harmful social divisions.

She co-led our girl scout troops at Irvington Elementary school to create bonds outside the classroom. Mom knew that proximity alone might not overcome the noxious weeds of separation by class or race. Sharing experiences, learning new things, and being playful together did.

Our mother helped plant the seeds or nurtured the growth of many communities over the years. From St. John the Baptist and Grace Memorial to Trinity Cathedral and St. Andrew, where she played instrumental roles in labyrinth, quilting, and sacred dance guilds, faith and life sharing groups and where she made her contributions to the worship life of the church. She shared her gifts and creativity with our beloved Five Family community. And enriched her life and the lives of others with dedication and joy as a member of the Kúkátónón board, a Jungian Women's circle, the African Women's Coalition board, her neighborhood, and many social justice groups.

She cultivated deep friendships and strong networks through these groups and shared interests. *(As a child this meant we were always among the last to leave coffee hour. As an adult this meant her social calendar was busier than mine!)*

Mom taught us never to take thriving communities for granted. And I imagine her smiling somewhere, knowing that the roots of the relationships she tended are strong; and will bear fruit for generations to come.

#### **4. The fourth lesson we learned was to find light in the darkness.**

Mom loved the seasons. She appreciated them for their natural beauty and for their symbolic resonance. Autumn was her favorite. The colored leaves, the sunny days, Halloween, All Saints and All Souls days, Thanksgiving. The abundance of the harvest. The preparation for winter when life went underground, and we go inward.

A silk screen print by John August Swanson with words from Ecclesiastes hangs above our parent's mantel and reminds us that for everything there is a season - a time to be born, a time to die . . . a time to mourn and a time to dance. Our mother frequently referenced this passage as if to tell us that whatever was happening was okay - the experience was only for a time. And to remind us that there would be times for other things too. Nothing is permanent. That even when things seem hopeless. We should have faith and connect to what matters.

As all mothers, ours had a difficult time when either of us were struggling. She would encourage us to find what wisdom we could in the challenge we were facing. And she had her own sorrows throughout her life. She experienced times of depression and, in the last decade of her life, injuries to her legs inhibited her ability to navigate the world with ease. She faced these sorrows as if they were lessons - if frustrating lessons: opportunities to go deeper in her faith, to find different avenues for her creativity, to empathize with others from a deep, holy place.

This fourth practice: to find the light, in ourselves, in the world - to bring that light to others when they experience sorrow or feel lost, is perhaps the most profound lesson in this season of our lives.

In "The Uses of Sorrow," poet Mary Oliver writes: "Someone I loved once gave me / a box full of darkness. / It took me years to understand / that this, too, was a gift."

Our mother was a light for us, and for so many of you here today. Not only in times of shadows but she made the bright times brighter, the creative times more generative, and brought a sparkle into our daily lives.

#### **Closing**

A phrase our mother routinely said following her "retirement" was "it's time to pass the torch." We wish there'd been more time. But now, it really is up to all of us to carry her torch forward. Those of us gathered here today and people whose lives she touched. To celebrate who she was and who we can become because of her.

To embody the values she planted within us: 1. artistic expressions are sacred and life-giving; 2. live your values out loud! 3. nurture community with love; and 4. find light in the darkness.

Although these early days are heavy without her beside us, we lean into the moments of light we have seen, and find strength in her example. We love you Mom. And today, we are grateful for that.