

# timbrel

WOMEN IN CONVERSATION TOGETHER WITH GOD

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## *Honoring Our Mothers*

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## Honoring our Mothers



**Patricia  
Burdette**

*Cover: Holley Ann Troiano gives her grandmother, Claudia Troiano, a kiss at Claudia's 70th birthday party. Claudia lives on the Tuscarora Reservation in Sanborn, New York. (See story p. 4)*


*Photo by Rosalyn Troiano*

When my mother died in 2000, even though I was a mother of five and grandmother of nine, I felt the great loss of being without a mother. Now, however, I realize that I have been blessed with many mothers, not just my biological mother. I have had any number of spiritual mothers—many of them younger than I am—and many emotional and intellectual mothers as well. In addition, I share with all humanity the mother we call earth—the planet and its systems that give life to all of creation. All of these mothers have given me birth in different areas of my development.

How can we ever honor our mothers adequately when they have given us life? May is the time in the United States when we traditionally try to express to our mothers how much we appreciate what they do for us, but there are many women in our lives who we may also think of as mother figures. Sometimes it is a special auntie, a grandmother, adoptive mother, or a friend who gives us spiritual, intellectual, or emotional life; if we are fortunate, all this can come from our biological mother, but in most circumstances, this is not the case. Yet, it is significant to remember the special women in our lives who have given us so much. And, if we are mothers, it is significant to remember ways our children and grandchildren honor us.

Many times the rewards for mothering another are much smaller—at times even non-existent. Still, mothers from all walks of life continue to give physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual life to others. It is one of the unique gifts we share as women. Some of the most remembered women from the Bible are honored for their selfless mothering: Sarah, Hannah, and Mary the mother of Jesus, to name a few. In several places, scripture uses the analogy of mother for God. Jesus uses the analogy of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings for himself. Honoring our mothers becomes one important way we can connect with God and thank God for the abundant life we enjoy in Christ. Whether we are biological mothers or not, we are givers of life to those whose lives we share.

### Sister Question for July–August

In preparation for the next issue of *timbrel*, which will focus on Human Trafficking, consider: **In what way does “modern day slavery” intersect with my life?** Send your response to <PattyB@mennonitewomenusa.org>. 

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# Claudia's daughter

by Rosalyn Troiano

God has truly blessed me. I get to be Claudia's daughter for my entire life. God decided I should start my earth walk in 1959 and since He already knew how many hairs would be growing out of my head, He wove me together in my mother's womb and so here I am, Claudia's daughter, Rosalyn. That's how most of the older folks refer to me on the Tuscarora Indian Reservation in Sanborn, New York, where my mother was born in the house her dad built and where I lived until I was five years old.

I like the idea of God getting busy weaving and knitting up all the people who will ever walk the earth, only He works with bones and sinews instead of fuzzy mohair or the pastel ombre polyester yarn I used to squeeze and squish at Woolworth's.

It is a great blessing to be created in the image of God, the Great Creator, and to have the choice to do good works in the manner of our Creator. Sometimes though, creativity can have an urgent purpose and edge to it, as I found out when my mom insisted we get our collective creativity into high gear during the last few weeks of the summer of '79.

My dad's home insulation business started to derail that year, indicating the first blip of the economic recession of the eighties, yet I still had to get back to music school in Ohio. Tired of hearing bad news all the time, Mom came up with a plan and it sure as blazes didn't include "taking a year off from school to work" or "moping around feeling sorry for yourself."

For Mom, the solution to this tough situation was simple; make something with beads and sell it. If there is a beadwork and merchandising gene, then it is the creative and entrepreneurial DNA that has connected and sustained generations of Tuscarora women.



*Rosalyn Troiano wears the prayer vest her mother beaded for her to wear during her graduate school exams. Rosalyn received her Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York.*

It was definitely present in my mom and I as we gleaned our raw materials from boxes and bins around the house. With the days ticking by, numerous varieties of beads and leather, braid, feathers, and fabric were transformed into dolls and belts, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. We had to create a lot of merchandise, enough to last us ten days at the Indian Village of the New York State Fair.

*Since the Iroquois are known as the “People of the Longhouse,” there are four large bark-covered buildings in the shape of a longhouse that are home to the Agricultural Museum, Fine Arts Building, Women’s Building for displays of quilts, canning, and beadwork, and one for more craft sales.*

For the weary and dusty fairgoers, the Indian Village of the Six Nations of the Iroquois is an oasis of tall shade trees and rolling green lawns, offering a slower, quieter pace from the flashy mile-long mid-way amusements and the ear-splitting, exhaust-fume stink of the stock car races at the grandstand. Most of the artisans, dancers, singers, cooks, and lecturers representing the Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Tuscarora nations live in the Indian Village for the duration of the fair.

The focal point of the village is the dance mound, a raised stage in the shape of a turtle, signifying our Earth Mother, made of dirt and covered with a layer of asphalt, worn smooth over the years by countless performances of Iroquois social dances.

Next to a pond is the Soup House where people can wait in line for traditional Indian corn soup made of hominy, kidney beans and pork. It’s good with a side of fry bread, oozing with butter and strawberry jam. Since the Iroquois are known as the “People of the Longhouse,” there are four large bark-covered buildings in the shape of a longhouse that are home to the Agricultural Museum,



*Authentically detailed dolls in traditional Iroquois dress made by Claudia Troiano to sell at the fair.*

Fine Arts Building, Women's Building for displays of quilts, canning, and beadwork, and one for more craft sales.

Among the old-timers, this last structure was known as the Reed Building, referring to my grandparents, Lucinda and Tom Reed. My grandfather filled one side of the longhouse with displays of Iroquois artifacts and my grandmother gave lectures on leather tanning and domestic life to as many people as could squeeze in. At one end of the longhouse were tables of handmade arts and crafts of the Iroquois.

Dressed in traditional Iroquois clothing, my mom, Aunt Leona and Uncle Charlie took care of brisk sales. Though it was stressful getting ready for the fair, it was good to see the women elders from other reservations setting up their tables in the Women's Building. "Oh look who's here; it's Claudia and her daughter", they said.

After we hauled the last of our merchandise, cots and bedding into the Reed Building, Mom thought we should go down to the midway to get something to eat. The New York State Fair is held in Syracuse, New York, and after paying for gas and tolls we only had enough cash for one sloppy joe dinner, so we split it. Mom and I "broke the ice" or made our first sale the next morning soon after the fair opened for visitors. By the end of the day we had made enough money to buy a plane ticket for me to return to Cleveland and that night we each had our own sloppy joe dinner. Later in the week, I had enough for a new set of viola strings, some books for the semester and I could order the viola music my teacher wanted me to learn that year. My worries about returning to school turned into anticipation and gratitude, not only for the funds I needed, but also for the time Mom and I spent together.

I see a lot of my mom, Claudia, in the industrious woman in Proverbs 31:24 and 27: She makes linen garments and sells them; she supplies the merchant with sashes (v. 24). She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness (v. 27).

I would also add that she'd be happy to share her sloppy joe dinner with you. 🍷



*Some raised beadwork items made by Claudia Troiano to sell to tourists. Some of the designs have been handed down in her family for hundreds of years. Raised beadwork is a unique type of beadwork done by the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, which includes Claudia's tribe, the Tuscarora.*

# “Tell it like it is:” honoring our mothers

by *Jean Kilheffer Hess*

A mother is a woman who gives a child insider-clues about living, who shapes a daughter’s world in significant ways. For some, biology creates the pair. For others, the one who nurtures and guides—who mothers—is unrelated to her children by blood.

Mothers can inspire their daughters to resist society’s stultifying influence on girls and model how to live with spirit. At the same time, mothers hold incredible power to fasten in place the soul-killing straightjacket of gender stereotypes for their daughters and sons by singing the tune of patriarchal oppression right on pitch.

Mothers face stereotypes as well. Recently a friend thanked me for “mothering” her in the midst of a personal crisis. She meant it as a compliment spoken out of gratitude, but when I heard her words, something within me felt askew. I realized that common usage assigns a negative connotation to mothering. “Stop mothering me!” equates mothering with being bossy or overbearing. This attitude dishonors women who mother in so many healthy ways.

May has become a month to honor mothers and all women who care about and nurture others. I do not have children. I recall my shock as I listened to women who raised children to adulthood describe how distressing Mother’s Day can be for them. One shared that amidst the accolades about perfect mothers, she often felt inadequate and found that her own parenting regrets came to the fore. How can we honor our “mothers” in a way that includes the realities of life with grace and grit?

To honor is first of all to acknowledge. Appreciation follows, which is simply recognizing the difference a person has made in your life. Acting on your understanding completes the steps of honoring.

If your experience has been healthy, celebrate it, thank the living ones you honor, and tell the story. If it has been hurtful, review the damage with a steady eye, find companions for the healing

journey, and tell the story when you can.

I realize that's a rather philosophical approach to honoring. What might a practical, everyday life approach look like?

Recently my pastor, Sue Conrad, preached a sermon that included the admonition to "stop, listen, love." This trio strikes me as a good rule of thumb for many of life's opportunities and challenges, and it fits well with a practical suggestion for honoring our mothers: stop and listen to their life stories.

I suspect mothers sometimes feel invisible. Statistics show that even in households where the affirmed intent of both spouses is to share the homemaking equally, women end up with a much higher burden of housekeeping chores and child care. Single moms keep the household wheels turning primarily on their own, their monumental efforts often unnoticed by anyone on a daily basis.

One way to honor the mothers in your life is to let them know they're noticed by taking the time to listen to their stories and ask about their life experiences. Go beyond "How are you?" to "What was it like growing up a middle child in a minister's family?" or "How did you decide to pursue art as your vocation?"

In *Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, Sue Monk Kidd says, "In a way humans are not made of skin and bone as much as we're made of stories." As you listen to a woman's stories, you learn what she has faced in life, how she makes sense of it, and how it has shaped her and maybe you. You honor her by listening well and without immediate judgment.

Even if your mother is no longer living, you may have access to resources that convey parts of her story, such as living siblings or her words recorded in letters or in audio form.

Listening to a person's story is a way to honor even one who has caused harm. Let me be clear: there is no excuse for abuse. But the act of listening honors the fact that your lives entwined at points. And knowing her personal story may provide a stable place for your own next step towards healing.

As an independent scholar and historian focusing on oral history, I have the distinct pleasure of eliciting stories and listening well on a regular basis. In an interview with Miriam (Blank) LeFever



**Mira Kauffman Blank (left) and her daughter, Miriam (Blank) LeFever regularly played Scrabble together in the 1950's.**

**Photo used by permission of Jean Killeffer Hess**

last spring, I noticed that she intermittently prefaced her comments with, "I hadn't thought of this until right now, but . . ." We are so unaccustomed to being asked carefully-chosen questions and then provided with undivided attention that I believe the situation cre-


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ates a holy space for self-reflection. Holy in the sense of separate and holy in the sense of kissed with the Spirit.

Among other things, I asked Miriam about significant lessons she learned from married life. Her response began with, "Well I certainly learned that there's a difference between two people. Lloyd was an introvert, and I was an extrovert. But that was good because I had to learn when to keep quiet, and he had to learn when to talk."

Regarding her mother, Mira Kauffman Blank: "My mother was outgoing, strong. When she wanted something done, she made every effort to do it. She was a businesswoman."

As to getting along with others: "I've always tried to find something good in everyone, even the nastiest person. I can find something so that in that way I can make them feel good about themselves."

Be aware that when you honor a woman by asking her to share, she likewise honors you when she trusts you with stories from her life. Stop and listen. The love just may flow both ways. 

## Resources

### Books

Kidd, Sue Monk. *Dance of the Dissident Daughter*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

Owens, Virginia Stem. *Caring for Mother: A Daughter's Long Goodbye*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox P, 2007.

Tannen, Deborah. *You're Wearing That? Understanding Mothers and Daughters in Conversation*. New York, NY: Random House, 2006.

# Family unity through forgiveness

by Elizabeth Soto Albrecht

**Genesis 45:5. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. (NRSV) Read Genesis 45:1–15.**

In worship we usually recognize monthly those celebrating a birthday, anniversary, or special event, and pray for them. One Sunday a couple stood up and announced they would be celebrating their 47th wedding anniversary that day. As we applauded for them, the wife quickly mentioned, “I have come to the awareness that part of our success in marriage has been both of us learning to master the art of forgiving.” Those words are profound: in order to have unity, we need to learn how to forgive.

**Today, as we gather around the table we ask: how can unity be nurtured in families? Why do families become fragmented? And how is it that we drift apart from the people we love?** We are reminded of the fragility of relationships in our extended families when we hear of yet another divorce or children taken away from their parents because of abuse or neglect. We cannot take for granted the gift of family, but we must work at the unity within it.

We realize that serious differences produce conflict among family members. Using violence should not be a normal way to resolve these differences in the family. In working with conflict mediation, we soon recognize that conflict is a normal human reaction because we are social human beings. What is not normal is how we choose to bring about resolution to those differences. We need to learn to live with those differences that may not result in the same opinions or ways of doing things.

We are familiar with Joseph’s story found in Genesis 37 to 47. In Genesis 45, we find the famous narrative of the re-encounter of Joseph with the brothers who sold him into slavery.

In biblical interpretation, we treat this story not as a biblical prescription like the Ten Commandments. This story is a description indicating how human beings, even in the Bible, choose negative behaviors that result in negative consequences. This story was preserved, in part, to explain how the Hebrew people arrived in

*This Bible study is an excerpt from the forthcoming Bible Study Guide by Elizabeth Soto, Seek Peace and Pursue It: Women, Faith, and Family Care, which will be available in June from Mennonite Publishing Network.*

*Seek Peace and Pursue It is developed by Mennonite Women USA and Mennonite Women Canada.*

Egypt through a favored brother becoming powerful, and were later enslaved by the system, and finally liberated by God.

In many ways the story of Joseph calls us to re-visit the concept of forgiveness. This is a very hard issue when a woman has been sexually violated. No one should prescribe forgiveness: it must be birthed within and arrive in the heart of the one offended, sometimes as a process of repentance from the offender. On other occasions it could appeal as an option to let go of the offense. But we can decide not to hold resentment, because this will turn into hate and hate has been a leading cause of violence.

The clue for transformation is not to allow resentment to make a bed in our hearts and minds. Can we try that? Can you receive

## *PONDER*

- 1. Name areas where we need forgiveness in the family.*
- 2. What is needed to find "reconciliation" and to let go in order to forgive?*
- 3. What did Joseph do in order to forgive?*

healing from a broken relationship? Can you live in peace even when you feel one of your siblings, parents, relatives or other loved ones has done you wrong? Joseph had every reason to be resentful toward his brothers but he decided not to be led by hate, but rather, by love. Forgiveness is a long journey, a path less traveled, painful and difficult, but God promises to be with us in every step. 📖

**Prayer:** Parent God, may we be one, as you and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one. Cement our unity in your word, confirm our togetherness by your presence, reassure us through the love of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

# Three Windows Three Women

## Honoring our mothers

*Hannah Heinzkehr, 25  
Claremont, California*



I am the oldest daughter of an oldest daughter of an oldest daughter. Ever since I was little, I have prided myself on being a part of a line of independent, intelligent women.

I was 10 when my mom experienced a clear call to pastoral ministry. While preaching one Sunday at our church in San Antonio about Samuel's call to ministry she heard her own sermon words about responding to God's call reflected back to her. So, our family picked up and moved to Elkhart, Indiana, where Mom attended seminary for three years and then entered the pastorate.

My mom's journey to the ministry came at a very formative time in my own growth. I was so impressed by my mom's call. I saw her as a brave trailblazer, and although I certainly didn't enjoy the move and my mom and I had our own share of struggles and spats as I moved into the pre-teen phase, I idealized her new role as pastor. For a long time, I secretly harbored the thought that I, too, was probably called to be a pastor. In many ways, I internalized my mom's call as my own and it seemed that the best way I could honor my mother would be to become a pastor, too.

This changed for me in college. During my time at Bluffton, I was accepted into the *Pathways to Ministry* program. For a year, I met twice a month with other sophomores who were exploring a call to pastoral ministry. Pastors who were visiting campus had conversations with us about vocational call and experience. During these conversations, I realized something that may seem obvious, but felt revolutionary to me: ministry can happen in many different settings, and you don't have to be a pastor to serve the church.

I currently work for a church agency that lets me use my gifts of communication and extrovertedness for ministry in unconventional ways. As I work, I like to think that I'm still honoring my mother's legacy of service and ministry, just with my own, unique flavor. 📌

*Carol Conrad, 41  
New Carlisle, Ohio*

How many times have you heard a woman say, "I'm not going to be like my mother"? Often it is spoken in haste, and usually with some distaste. We spend both mental and physical energy as women, on the journey of motherhood, trying to not be like our mothers. The protest may be as small as a chuckle about a particular mannerism, or a frustration with a worn-out possession. Then there are times when the aversion is directed towards an idea or value. We make efforts to clearly spell out goals to avoid repeating what they have done. Or in some cases we may fail to create a goal of any kind. Either way leaves us floundering for who we are as a mother.

I have a unique situation, in that my mother lives next door to me, but in the same house. I count this as a rich blessing. It has allowed me to realize how unproductive trying to not be like my mother, can be. I am learning that changing my attitude about carrying on in the next generation, and choosing not to dwell on the negative, is of great value to me. This also is honoring to my mother. How much better to seek out all of her positives, add my own reflective positives, and recreate myself as a new mother. One that she probably hoped I would become. In reality a mother, who with God's direction, I know I want to become.

In her lovely children's picture book entitled, *Just Like Mama*, Beverly Lewis states it so plainly, "I have a wonderful-good idea... Let's be more like the Lord Jesus...together." This recognizes the journey, however easy or difficult, each person has traveled. With this understanding we then can humbly extend grace and mercy more freely, and promote healing and peace wherever we go. 📖



*Editor's note: This column is a forum for women to share perspectives on the current timbrel theme. It introduces women spanning their 20's-30's, 40's-50's, and 60's and above. If you are interested in writing for this column, please contact editor, Patricia Burdette, at <PattyB@MennoniteWomenUSA.org>.*



*Bev Regier, 53  
Newton, Kansas*

I've often said that I learned all my best stuff from my mom. Maybe imitation really is the sincerest form of flattery. If so, I'm still flattering my mom.

Mom worked full-time when most moms stayed home. Yet somehow, Mom got the importance of being present. When I was in high school, I would come home late from an evening out and find Mom up ironing Dad's shirts. She wasn't up because she was a night owl or because those shirts absolutely had to be ironed before she went to bed. She was up because she knew the best time to hear about my day was the moment I walked in the door.

Last night, I was up until sometime between 1–2 a.m. because I am a night owl, and I like to work or read at night. This morning when my boys got up, I thought about staying in bed. They are 16 and 17 now and capable of getting themselves off to school on time without me. But I remember how good it felt to have someone who just wanted to be around when I was there. I got up to hang out with my boys. Maybe I'll go to bed earlier tonight.

The other thing that Mom (and Dad) did for me was believe in me. Who knew my weaknesses better than they did? Yet I had the sense that they were confident that I could do well. I don't know that I've done as well at that as they did, but I'm still trying.

When I think about honoring our mothers, I'm grateful that my mother is the kind of mother who is easy for me to honor. I think Mom enjoys that fact. I think she is also uncomfortable with it. My similarity to my mother includes our awareness of ways we wish we had done better.

God is the mother that we both strive to emulate. God is the one who manages to be always present. God is the one who can face our faults while still believing in us and offering us yet another chance to be who we are designed to be. 🙏

# Grapevine

## Honoring my mother

by Berni Kaufman, Executive Assistant, Mennonite Women USA

It's Sunday night and I've just returned from our weekly family ritual. We (two brothers, a sister-in-law, two nieces and a two-year-old grandniece, and I) gather with Mom and Dad for supper and the evening. After supper, some of us play cards, others play with the toddler and often the two activities intertwine. An evening like this portrays Mom in her element.

**Teaching:** She often prepares supper with her granddaughter. She feely shares her recipes with others. We come expecting the tried-and-true dishes we remember from childhood.

**Nurturing:** People are well-fed at Mom's table. In fact, unless there is food left over, in her eyes, she has not prepared enough.

**Accepting:** She readily accepts the extra care a toddler requires. She (and Dad) listen to our needs and help as they can.

**Fun-loving:** Mom loves playing games. She laughs easily and heartily. She is loving, a Rock of Gibraltar and a joy to be around.

**Always a mom:** She stands on the porch as we leave, waiting till we leave. She waves the hand sign for "I love you," her last words to us as we part.

Neva Kaufman's table is her mission field. Here we are fed physically and spiritually, welcomed with love, and sent on our way affirmed. 📷

**MW USA Mission and Vision:**

*Our mission at Mennonite Women USA is to empower women and women's groups as we nurture our life in Christ through studying the Bible, using our gifts, hearing each other, and engaging in mission and service.*

*Mennonite Women USA invites women across generations, cultures, and places to share and honor our stories, care for each other, and express our prophetic voice boldly as we seek to follow Christ.*

*Berni Kaufman and her mother, Neva Kaufman*



*Courtesy photo*

# Across the Border

## Honoring our mothers

by *Linda Oyer*

One of the first things I learned upon arriving in France in 1971 was the importance of history. The French go to great lengths to remember and preserve the past. A phrase one often hears is “An understanding of the past is necessary in order to fully live in the present and to prepare for the future.” Not remembering the past is like being a tree without roots.

For example, in the town where I live there is an old three-sided stone building next to a stream. In the past, women would come here to wash their laundry. Although today this *laverie* is of absolutely no use, no one would even think of tearing it down. It is part of the town’s heritage.

Another example is the name of the square in which our 1892 chapel is located. It is called “Calvary Square,” not because of our church, but rather because in the 13th century the Knights Templar erected a large red cross in this square. It has kept this name for 800 years.

Honoring our mothers includes realizing that we are part of a story that precedes us. It implies giving “weight,” attaching an importance to our history, recognizing that the memory of the past is as important as the newness and immediacy of the present.

We are all influenced by the choices of those who went before us—the good choices and the poor choices. My own story is an example of this.

My ancestors were among the many Mennonites who made a choice to emigrate from France to the United States in the mid-19th century. It was probably a good choice for them, but a regretful choice for French Mennonite Churches who were largely depleted and weakened by the emigration. At least 16 churches closed.

*timbrel connects today’s Mennonite women in all our diversity by sharing our stories and perspectives. Through our conversations with each other, we seek to walk more closely with God and to show greater love for self and neighbors near and far.*

*The perspectives expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of MW USA, timbrel, or the board of MW USA.*

# Across the Ocean

My mother married late in life and had a difficult time getting pregnant. Like Hannah of the Old Testament, Mother made a choice to ask God for a child, specifically a girl. She promised that if her prayer were answered she would give this daughter to serve God and the Church overseas. My mother never told me of her promise, even after I came to France with Mennonite Mission Network. I only learned about it after her death in 2001.

When I was a young child, the Mennonite Church of which my parents were members experienced a very difficult split. Families were ripped apart. Deep friendships were painfully severed. Harsh words were spoken that wounded and left scars. All of my mother's side of the family left the Mennonite Church. All of my father's side stayed. In the end, my parents made the choice to leave. Due to the split, I lost my heritage, my identity and a way of speaking about what was deep inside of me. I was cut off from relationships with a people of whom I was a part.

I then made a choice to come to France without knowing that I had French roots and knowing little of my Mennonite heritage. I found my family and cultural roots in France as well as my theological "home" in the Mennonite Church. I came back full circle to serve the Church in a country that my ancestors left.

Honoring our mothers means that we are thankful for the good choices they made, the heritage they transmitted to us and all that we received from them. It also means that we learn from the past and the not-so-good choices so as not to repeat them.

In the end, honoring our mothers is recognizing that in the good and the poor choices, God's grace and faithfulness continue to be present—even across generations and oceans. What a source of hope for the daughters coming after us! 📖



*Linda Oyer and  
her mother, Freda*

*Courtesy photo*

## Honoring mother



by *Ruth Yellowhawk*

My mother loved the earth. Nothing could please her more than to see nature's abundance displayed prominently in our home and nurturing our bellies.

If we brought home a rock, or stick, a handful of dandelions, or a crumpled stalk of Queen Anne's Lace, my mother would stop whatever she was doing (and believe me she was doing a lot with ten children to look after!) and she would say: "Oh my, this is so beautiful!" She made us feel special for noticing the rich creation before us. Then she would gather a cherished bowl, or a vase, or a plate and make a centerpiece for our table.

Mom saw abundance. It was a gift. She courted it. And more importantly she invited us to court it too. But not in the way I have all too often mistakenly encouraged my son to take notice in that "aren't those flowers gorgeous?" kind of way. No, she tied us to the land by letting us roam. For hours and hours.

She let us get hurt, stung, bruised and battered by the natural world. We left each experience wanting more. We swam in creeks until we knew every turn, each deep pool, turtle, water spider and snake. When it rained, we rolled in wet mud, and slid in the gullies that filled with rainwater. We washed our hair under the roof gutters. And we counted time by the four o'clocks that she planted.

We explored the complexities and corridors of newly developed underground water drainage pipes being installed in our neighborhood as if they were our own cities. We sat for hours in haylofts and swung from the pulleys on the rafters. We jumped off our barn, and climbed on our home's steep roof. We ran under our horse, and hid between our neighbor's milking cows. We could daydream in these places. We lived fully and came home hungry.

These days I long to see more children running barefoot, dirty, and carefree. But at every turn, it feels as though so many of the constraints that have been put into place for child welfare serve only to create a pattern of mothering that shouts, “No!”

This shortsighted approach points out the dangers of each plant, cliff, and route rather than encouraging wonder. A simple walk can turn into a stressful session of “Hurry up!” “Stay on the path,” and “Don’t touch that!” Such legalistic pressures create a *disconnect* from the bounty of Mother Earth and they *dishonor* our intuitive mothering skills. They say to children, “Beware” rather than “Be awed. “

For me, honoring my mother means reconnecting with the earth, this grand and glorious mother who sustains each one of us as special guests at her immaculate table. I long to feel it again—all of it—the worms beneath my bare feet, the clover ripe with nectar for honey, the cool waters of the creek under the shade of the maple tree, the rocks that were always in my pocket.

And while it would be easy to provide the legalistic list, the ten commandments of honoring our earth—recycle, reduce, reuse, grow your own, go organic, quit wanting so much stuff!—the simple truth is, I want to say, “Want more!”

Want more vistas that aren’t marred by gray haze, styrofoam, or noise pollution. Want more to eat that is not flecked with ingredients that are man-made or packaged beyond recognition. Want your grandchildren and theirs to remember the feel of dirt in their hands, in their toes and definitely in their mouths. Want to feel free to wander this earth just to see what might be found quivering with life underneath the rock, bursting with color and light within the deep bud of the flower, and gleaming beneath the water’s surface.

And for our mothers, let us want the same—to always seek the depths within her heart without fear of, “No.” Take your mother for a walk outside, or bring what is outside in to her. Either way, there is honor for her there. 📍

# A bit of earth

by Heidi Martin



When I was a girl, Christmas came twice a year. We celebrated the birth of Jesus on December 25th, but that same feeling of joy, hope and new beginnings washed over me when Dad brought home seeds for our summer garden. My brothers and I would plop down on the grass and watch Dad push fresh earth back and forth with the rake and then make long, straight rows for seeds. We took turns planting peppers, tomatoes, onions, beans, carrots for our lop-eared bunnies, and my favorite, strawberries. One year we experimented with pumpkins which took over the entire yard. We had so many that we sold them for fifty cents each in a wheelbarrow by the road. We made forty dollars off those pumpkins.

In the sweet story *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, Mary Lennox begins as a small, sickly child known for her limp yellow hair, sour expressions and terrible temper. But Mary becomes enthralled by the outdoor world and, one morning, gathers all her courage to ask her gruff uncle for a garden of her own.

“Might I,” quavered Mary, “might I have a bit of earth?...To plant seeds in—to make things grow—to see them come alive.”

I recently curled up in a blanket to watch an older version of this story on VHS. During this particular scene, shivers of excitement raced up and down my spine and I heard my mom whisper, “I love this part.”

What is it about Mary’s question that causes us to shiver with hope and excitement? What is it that causes us to actually become Mary standing before her uncle with one overwhelmingly deep desire? What is it that resonates in our hearts? I wonder if “it” is simply the joy of digging in the earth and watching new life spring forth.

In many ways, gardening is ingrained into our very beings. We began by gardening in the Garden of Eden, and gardens as large as farms or as small as window boxes have been part of our lives ever since. Broadening the definition, we “garden” as we raise families and grow homes. We plant seeds of love and kindness into our children and grandchildren. We water with grace. We pull out weeds of poor decisions or junk food or inappropriate language. We harvest through laughter, accomplishments, and even a good

night of sleep.

This month, we honor our mothers who plant, water, weed, and harvest on a daily basis.

One way our mothers garden is through the beauty of enduring marriage. Thomas Kinkade is famous for his paintings, but he is also an author, and together with his wife, Nanette, penned *The Many Loves of Marriage*. The story begins with the Kinkade love story and each chapter that follows is dedicated to a different facet of love including “An Enduring Love,” “A Sharing Love,” and “A Sheltering Love.” The language is beautifully poetic and simple. The stories are pleasant and hopeful. The book is grounded in truth and life and is inspirational to the married and single alike.

A woman’s position as wife and mother is tremendously powerful—as powerful as sunlight on a patch of vegetables waiting to sprout. In the work place, in marriage, with children, and at home, our mothers have the ability to build up and encourage, or break down and hinder. Her role is highly influential, and in many ways, this is a gift which, when used well, reaps a bountiful harvest. Kati Marton highlights this unique capacity in women through her book, *Hidden Power*. Beginning with Edith and Woodrow Wilson and continuing through Laura and George W. Bush, Marton details the marriage relationship between each president and spouse noting how the First Ladies significantly impacted the nation, just as our mothers significantly impact their own “nations.”

But in gardens, as in life, unexpected difficulties arise. Though our mothers pour heart and soul into their gardens, they face the inevitable destruction of weeds, insects, drought and floods. Because of this, we ask you mothers, please also care for the garden of your own soul. One way to do so is to read *My Heart’s Cry* by Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of Billy and Ruth Graham. Dedicated “to those who long for more than just enough of Jesus,” the pages of this book offer comfort and rejuvenation. The chapters include titles such as “More of His Voice in My Ear,” “More of His Hope in My Grief,” “More of His Love in My Home,” and “More of His Courage in My Convictions.”

Mothers, we take your calloused, strong hands in our own and thank you for your years of gardening. And, with your blessing and watchful eye, we take our seeds, plant them, and watch them come alive in our own bit of earth. 🌱

*These books are recommended by my own mother, a proficient gardener in more ways than one.*

# Stirrings

# Response to Sister Question:

**Editor's note:** Each issue, we print responses to our Sister Question. The question for May–June was: What has helped to change the situation when you have felt lonely in your

community? **Pat McFarlane, Goshen, Indiana responded:**

After my mother and dearest friend, Fern Metzler Lehman, died suddenly when I was 26, I missed her often. However, she is present with me in a way I had never anticipated. Not long after her funeral, I found this poem in her cedar chest. “Dear Lord, my life is a prayer for the girls. My life is a prayer for the children. Dear Lord, my life is a prayer for the girls. My life is one long prayer.” I realized in the months following her death that she had already prayed me through most of the joys and sorrows I would face in life. And this “praying through” is a gift I intentionally want to give to my own children in honor of their grandmother Fern. I want to pray for their lives from birth through death in the same way I know my own mother did. “Dear Lord, my life is a prayer for Jen and for Theo. My life is one long prayer.” ☑



Pat McFarlane (r) and her daughter, Jennifer McFarlane-Harris

## Cup of Water

**Give to MW USA's Ministries.** Sister-Care, “Postcard and Prayer,” Women in Conversation, the International Women’s Fund, and *timbrel* are among the many ministries of Mennonite Women USA. All of these ministries—and more—are funded by you, women and women’s groups throughout the USA.

One way to support these ministries and to honor the mothers in our lives is to give a gift in honor of them or in memory of them. We hope you will prayerfully consider making such a gift to MW USA and subscribing or renewing your subscription to *timbrel*. A gift subscription to *timbrel* is another way to honor the mothers in our lives.

If you wish to honor or memorialize a woman who has been significant in your life, send your gift to the MW USA office (see sidebar), or go online to <[www.mennonitewomenusa.org](http://www.mennonitewomenusa.org)> to make a donation or subscribe to *timbrel* now. To make a pledge online now, go to <[www.mennonitewomenusa.org/Give/Lists/Pledge/NewForm.aspx](http://www.mennonitewomenusa.org/Give/Lists/Pledge/NewForm.aspx)>. ☑

To contribute to MW USA, send your check to 722 N. Main Street, Newton, KS 67114-0347, or to contribute online go to <[www.mennonitewomenusa.org/Give](http://www.mennonitewomenusa.org/Give)>.

### My adopted mother

Each spring and fall Mennonite Women USA invites gifts given in honor or in memory of a significant woman in your life. As I read the names of women honored and remembered, I wonder about the stories behind these gifts. You are welcome to send us these stories.

In 2010, my gift for MW USA is given in honor of Cecelia Metzler, my adopted mother, and now 94 years old, living in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I share this with her blessing.

I first met Cecelia at my wedding. She traveled to Goshen on a chartered bus bringing Bob's Pennsylvania relatives and friends. In the 38 years since that day, I don't recall many bus loads traveling 600 miles to a wedding. I've often thought that so many people came because of Bob's loss two years and three months earlier. He was engaged to Eunice Metzler, who unexpectedly died during a planned open heart surgery. I remember feeling shy as I met Eunice's parents, Clyde and Cecelia, at the reception.

Years passed; Clyde also died, and Bob and I regularly stopped to see Cecelia. Twelve years after the wedding, Cecelia and I went out for an afternoon tea, the first time we visited without Bob. That day we became friends in a new way, and it was soon after when we adopted each other. I don't know who voiced it first, but Bob and I began sending Cecelia Mother's Day cards, and at Christmas we received cards signed, "Love, Mom Metzler."

In this issue of *timbrel* honoring mothers, I share this story of a very special woman who has welcomed me into her life. Her love models courage in adversity and has opened new doors of possibility in my life, helping our family become more whole. 📷



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*Rhoda Keener, Cecelia Metzler, and Bob Keener*

*Courtesy Photo*



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Thank you for your support of Mennonite Women USA's ministry through your prayers and financial gifts. MW USA ended the 2009–2010 fiscal year on January 31 with overall income of \$222,601 and expenses of \$210,912. Several grants were received for Sister-Care program development that are also being used in the current fiscal year.

The MW USA board approved operational reductions midway through last year. Careful stewardship, faithful giving, and your *timbrel* subscriptions continue to keep our organization strong. 📷



Photo by Sophi Lapp

**MW USA board members (l to r) Carol Roth, Mary Meyer, Ruth Guengerich, Karen Lehman, Barb Voth, Twila Yoder, Carolyn Heggen, Gail Harder, Maria Tijerina, Gail Shetler. Not pictured are Regina Shands Stoltzfus and Cora Brown.**

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