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The origins of our faith take many forms, often an unusual and memorable experience. Cindy Berg recorded such an experience, shared it with me, and gave me permission to share it with you:

My Mother's Hug

When in the presence of my mother, you could tell that you were in the presence of a kind and loving heart. It radiated from her as a glow from the depth of her soul.

My mother raised me with many words of advice which have stayed with me all my life. The essence of her spirit was reflected in these quotes. The two main ones that I remember are, "All people have value," and "There is good in everyone, if you just look hard enough." Somehow, I knew in that statement she was also validating there was good in me. I learned empathy by relating that others were of as much value as the value she saw in me. Her focus was on the needs of others in spite of the fact she had late-stage breast cancer when I was age one. My brother and I were the focus of what was most important to her. Even so she volunteered in many ways to make the lives of others better.

I was unaware of my mother's cancer until I was in third grade. She had lived a life on the bright side and the illness was never mentioned. She was well until I was age 8 or 9 and was living as if it had never happened. She was living as if she was going to live forever. She was just being my mother, living without the burden of worrying that the other shoe could drop. She never missed a chance to count the blessings of each day.

My mother was the kind of mother who was always there for me. What I remember most was her encouragement of me no matter what challenge I

was faced with....whether it was a test, an assignment, a performance in an operetta or a sports activity....or any hurdle I had to master. She comforted me when I had a bad experience. I even felt loved when she had to discipline me for some bad behavior. I wanted to please her, so my bad behavior was most often poor judgement. Only once did I feel unloved when she had to send me to my room. I still remember the pain of that separation and it motivated me even more to learn from her and follow her advice. I was very bonded to her and yet she was always teaching me to be "true to myself" and to be independent.

Her surgery when I was one was an extreme bilateral mastectomy, almost to the mutilating level. They knew then that they had not gotten it all. In the early 1940's, there weren't many treatments available and cancer was sometimes feared to be contagious. It was not a welcome topic of conversation. When I was around age 7, I asked her about why she had the scars and she replied, "It was a surgery a long time ago and is over now. We don't think about it anymore." Amazingly I was satisfied with that answer and went on with my day. Little did we know that the following year she would metastasize and be sick again.

My mother died when I was age 14. The night she died I was to go to a party. For some reason I refused to go. I sat in the upstairs bedroom which we used as the TV room. I had the door closed as if I were going to watch a TV show. I must have sat there without the TV on, staring at the wall for hours. Eventually I heard my grandmother say, "Oh no." She had been sitting next to my mother's bedside in the next room. I then heard her go downstairs and bring my father back up. The next period of time was as if I were in limbo. I still stared at the wall for an undetermined amount of time. I heard my father come up and down the stairs. I heard people start to arrive. Finally, Dad opened the door. He told me that my mother had died and asked if I wanted to see her. I said "yes".

I went to the door of their room and saw her on the bed with a peaceful look on her face. It was a pleasant relief from the painful grimace she had had for so long from the excruciating pain she had been experiencing. I hesitated at the door and then felt almost pushed into the room by an unknown force. It moved me to her bedside. Her arms were folded over her as if she were asleep. I felt moved to touch her arm. It felt somewhat hard, like a piece of wood. It was at that exact moment that I felt HUMAN arms hug me. It wasn't a slight hug. It was the same as the hug my mother had always given me. I was stunned. I said to myself, "Oh my God, there really is a difference between body and soul. There really is life after death." I knew immediately that my mother had hugged me. I felt supported and loved, a feeling that went deep into my very being. And yet I never told anyone until I was almost age 50.

If it had simply been that it was just my wish fulfillment, as psychiatrists would like to say, I more likely would have responded with, "Oh, Mommy. I miss you. Don't leave me." But I didn't. I responded by believing something that I had no basis for believing or any history for believing. I was THE Doubting Thomas who had years before rejected anything about the Bible that couldn't be proved. To believe this was contrary to my beliefs.

No one can take away from me what I believe happened that night. It was a hug which I internalized and which held me through so many of the hardships I faced after that. My mother's presence is always with me and I consider that one of the most beautiful blessings of my life.

~Written by Ned Edwards

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8190 Lincoln Rd. Beulah, MI 49617

231.882.4241

www.benziestandrews.com



Benzie St. Andrews | 8190 Lincoln Rd | Beulah, MI 49617 US

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