



Tribute to My Mother
Esther Sarah Martin Funk
At her memorial service
Church of the Nazarene in Newton, Kansas
May 6, 2009

Who Mom Was

Peggy Voth

The youngest of ten children, Mom is survived by none. In the last years, she greatly missed her sisters, Susie and Helen, whose deaths left her alone without her childhood family. She leaves to mourn many nieces and nephews, her four children, ten grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Her husband predeceased her by eight days.

Mom was born and raised in Corn, Oklahoma. She grew up in the Mennonite Brethren Church, where she was saved and baptized when she was 11 years old. At age 19, she and my father married. They lived with Mom's parents, where my mother took care of her mother until she died a year later. My parents then moved to south Texas, where I and my brothers were born. In 1952, they moved to Shamrock, along Route 66 in the panhandle of Texas, and that's where my sister was born. Shamrock had no Mennonite Brethren church and my parents chose the Nazarene Church as their church home. All of us kids grew up going to a Nazarene church.

My mother enjoyed music. She had a pretty voice. When she was six years old, her father was badly burned in a house fire, which killed her 19 year old brother, David. During her father's days of recuperation, he would often ask her to come into his room and sing for him because it helped soothe his pain.

When she was 8 or 9, she received a small second-hand guitar. That guitar and Mother's voice reverberate in my memories of childhood. We often went down into the storm cellar because of bad weather. Mom would light the kerosene lamp and then pick up her guitar, which she kept in the cellar. That's the only time I remember her playing her guitar. She would sing us through the storms, providing an emotional and spiritual shelter within the safety of the physical shelter. Her pool of light and tranquil music provided me a wonderful legacy about enduring the storms of life with a sense of inner calm.

She also led the singing at church on Sunday mornings, Sunday and Wednesday evenings. For me, hymns and Christmas carols are synonymous with her voice.

I want to mention Mother's creativity. It's a prominent memory for me. When Mom and Dad bought their first farm, in 1957, they saved every penny in order to make a payment by the end of the year. We had a memorable Christmas that year--all gifts were homemade. I was ten years old. One tiny room in the house was designated as "Santa's Workshop." When the door was closed and the "Santa at Work" sign was hung on the knob, we knew not to enter. My parents made hobby horses for my brothers, a dollhouse for my sister, and some beautiful doll clothes and doll jewelry for me. Mom and Dad oohed and ahhed over the simple, childlike gifts we made for them. That year Mom also made our birthdays special, despite the lack of money. For my birthday,

she created an outdoor treasure hunt, culminating in an inexpensive gift for each of us, mine being a little more spectacular than the others.

Much of Mom's creative expression occurred in the context of the home and family, but when she was in her 50's and 60's, she worked at the public library, and the wider world experienced the flow of her creativity. She decorated bulletin boards. She conducted Children's Story Hour, where she became known as "Grandma Esther" to many young children. She seemed particularly happy during this time, planning crafts, making props, performing puppet skits and dramatizing stories.

Mom was very creative in her day-to-day living. One example is the stock tank at her house in Newton. Unwilling to give up her beloved gardening, she downsized by planting tomatoes and beans and cucumbers within the small circle of the stock tank. This raised her garden up above the ground so that she didn't have to stoop so far to tend her plants, and she was able to garden right through last summer.

Mom enjoyed people and naturally wanted to give something of herself--food she grew or cooked, something she had made. We invited you to bring something you had received from her today, to celebrate her creativity and her generosity. She always had sewing projects on the go and she always had a stash of handmade things to share with others. Engaged with life right up to the end, she has now left some projects unfinished.

My mother knew how to make people feel welcome. She opened her arms to children and drew them onto her lap. She did the same thing for adults, in an emotional way. When my brother recently brought his fiancée home, Mom, who was quite ill by then, said, "Take lots of pictures of me with Penny; she's pretty." Two weeks ago, my son brought his Chinese bride to meet his grandparents; Mom wouldn't let anyone feed her but Xinna.

The real test about who a person is comes, of course, from her reputation with the people closest to her. My sister-in-law told me a couple of days ago that she wants to be the kind of mother-in-law that Mom was to her. When I asked her what made Mom a good mother-in-law, Leona said, "She was a good listener. She was interested in my kids. She taught me how to cook and bake. I made lots of mistakes but she kept teaching me. When we crossed paths with each other, we worked it out and went on being friends." One of Mom's granddaughters said what stood out for her was that "Grandma always wanted to know what was happening in my life."

Speaking for myself, I've realized in the last year or two that throughout my life, I've sat at the feet of my mother in learning how to let my humanness be seen and how to feel compassion for others. She taught me how to relate to people--not just on a social level but on a deeper level that fosters connection and makes a difference in people's lives.

One of the conversations Mom and I had before she died was about the potential for healing that a woman can bring to her husband, if she can maintain a right attitude as she lives with him. I saw my mother do this. She recognized my father's greatest

vulnerabilities and deepest wounds, and then she protected him in his weakness and tended to his hurts. At times, this cost her a great deal. She *chose* to make these sacrifices in service to her love for my father. It was her conscious choosing to turn toward my father, rather than away from him, that brought wholeness to both of them.

My mother was a woman of faith. Life delivered some very difficult times to her. She lived with a lot of physical pain for a very long time. Her trust in God's goodness did not waver. Hymns and scripture and prayer comforted her and strengthened her. She remained open to life and to people, and her cheerful spirit touched all of us.

I will miss my mother...I know you will too.