

Happy Mother's Day, Grandma!

Little did we realize when we visited my Aunt Ruby last week in North Little Rock, Arkansas that it was going to be the last opportunity this side of Heaven to see her. My mom has been missing her and although she was under the weather herself, she had this very strong urge to have us drop her off to spend the week with her precious sister.

My mom called at 4:30 Thursday morning just before I left for the National Day of Prayer meeting here at Christchurch to inform me of the passing of Aunt Ruby. All day long memories of our very special aunt have been flooding my mind.

Aunt Ruby was academically challenged, physically challenged and had a severe impediment of speech. My grandfather and grandmother tried sending her to more than one school, but every time the teachers sent her back home saying they were unable to teach her. My loving grandparents were heartbroken as other children would make fun of her. The final straw that broke the attempts to formally educate her came when her frail body could not sustain the see-saw ride and she fell, breaking her fragile little arm. She never saw the end of her second grade...and that's about how we knew her for the rest of our lives, locked-in at grade two. But at home, she found a haven of love and comfort. Recently, I was looking at pictures of my mom, Aunt Florene, Aunt Pearlene and Aunt Ruby when they were little girls in the Great Depression. In the midst of the picture surrounded by the bouquet of little "Edwards roses" was the special little flower that never moved beyond the bud stage, Aunt Ruby...holding her little doll. Maybe I was looking for it, but it appeared the sisters were all getting as close as they could to Ruby in a precious protective mode. Her brothers equally took a protective spirit over Ruby, especially as my grandfather became terminally ill. Ruby always played with dolls. My uncles, especially Calvin, always saw to it that Ruby had a new toy every so often. Benjamin and Glenna were the twins of the family. They were the youngest, but Ruby was always Grandma's baby for obvious reasons.

Had abortion on demand been available when Ruby was being carried and they foresaw how she would be after birth, I'm sure she would have been a prime candidate for this criminal act, deemed as one not worthy of life due to the weak, sickly definitions of "quality" verses "quantity" of life. How ludicrous! What is man, that could dare "play God" and judge who is fit to live or die by our estimations. Most families have an Aunt Ruby somewhere in their family tree, not far from the branch from which they descended. There will be no write-up in the U.S.A. Today or Time Magazine and don't look for her picture near the celebrity pictures that are listed at year's end who died in the past twelve months, but please allow me in the forum of my Pastor's Word to give Aunt Ruby a tribute. Through my life as her nephew, I would like to comment about a few of the things this dear lady taught our family about life.

I. Our good health should never be taken for granted.

Aunt Ruby would squeal like a little child when she saw my brother, my cousins and me play from morning until night. She would anxiously await our entry into the screen door at nightfall, hoping after dinner we would challenge her to checkers. How she loved to play! As children we knew Aunt Ruby couldn't run with us. We never came out and talked about it, but we developed thankfulness for bones not apt to break like Aunt Ruby's.

We had to listen very closely to understand her speech. We never said anything about it, but we realized that God could have just as easily allowed us to be unable to form the most simple sentence. She loved music and would listen to the radio constantly, searching the channel for a beautiful melody. Her eyes lit up like a Christmas tree when any or all of us sang. She would have loved to join in...but could not. We didn't say anything, but we became thankful for the ability to even sing one note of praise to God.

There were so many afflictions in this little lady's life; I don't believe I could give you an accurate description of them all. One of the most memorable events would come at night, just at bedtime, when Aunt Ruby would often go into a grand mal seizure. I remember seeing my mom leave the room crying as Grandma would often times have to throw her body on top of Ruby's to settle her down from uncontrollable shaking. I can still see the gentle face of my grandmother stroking her hair and singing softly to her as her Ruby Masel would go off to sleep, finally in peace. How fortunate we were just to close our eyes and be able to go to sleep. My dear aunt didn't always have that privilege. She taught us gratitude for even sleep at night.

In a word, without even knowing it, Aunt Ruby was our finest teacher on being appreciative for the basics of health that we are so prone to take for granted.

II. Love and let it show.

When we came over to Grandma's we'd better brace ourselves and get ready for the biggest hug we'll ever get in the course of a year. When we walked into the door, although she was not very mobile she would reach with arms as wide as she could stretch and there was absolutely no peace until we partook of a full embrace. She would hug and hug, while all along be explaining in unintelligible tones and words how much she appreciated seeing us. We always knew her sign off, as her bear hug loosened, "I love you, Hon. I love you, I sure do." As we eased out of her arms, she would point to us and announce to one and all present how pretty or handsome we were (she also had a problem seeing) and declare to everyone how much she loves us. We never said good-bye without the repeated ritual of the hugging, the declaration of beauty, and the accolades of love. She cried when we left, every time.

As all of the grandchildren married she immediately took in the in-laws as though they were children, too. In Aunt Ruby's life there were never any former loves; she loved unreservedly and unconditionally.

She taught us all to love and not to be embarrassed to let it show! She never married, never had a husband...so I guess she just shared all her heart with everybody in the family. We were all she had and, oh, how she loved us! And we all loved her, too. But, she was the teacher!

III. Keep peace in the family.

All of the Edwards are hotheads. We were of the understanding that between my Irish grandfather and part-Cherokee grandmother, a lot of temper was readily at hand. The one thing Aunt Ruby could not handle was when any of us would get cross-ways with each other. If anyone started yelling, she would often start getting loud, too, trying to settle the rest of us down. When we tried to explain our "righteous" cause to her she was not articulate to explain what we were doing to each other when we were unkind. She explained in no uncertain terms what it meant to her when loved ones don't act lovingly. She was always quick to smile, but when we would fight, she would get that serious look on her face, call out our names, shake her head and then get very still as a tear would form then fall down over her wrinkle-less cheek as she stared a hole through us. If we approached her to console her and explain our reasons, she would turn her head and act like she wouldn't listen. It wasn't until we said, "Okay, Aunt Ruby, I was wrong and I was wrong to holler and I'm going to stop now." I can see it like it was yesterday. Then she would turn, flash that toothless smile, hug my neck and say something like, "I'm proud of you, Johnny." Then she would form her twisted little tongue as best she could and announce to the room that Johnny was sorry and now he was going to stop, so "Ya'll be nice to him, ya'll all be nice to each other, too." Her voice was an echo of another that at times she reminded me of, "*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God*" (Matthew 5:9).

I'm glad I got one more good hug last week. She patted me on the back and called my name out one more time. Even though she was harder than ever to understand verbally, it is not difficult to understand the language of love. Ah, she spoke that fluently all the way to the end.

This morning in my prayer time I visualized Aunt Ruby, walking gracefully into the presence of Jesus. I saw Him in my mind welcoming her. Then just beyond our Lord, I saw Grandma and just over her shoulder, Grandpa, Uncle Homer, Uncle Luther, Aunt Sovella, and Daddy. I saw my aunt smile a beautiful "toothy" smile and in perfect diction say, "Good morning, Mamma. I thought I would come and spend Mother's Day up here with you." I can see them all enfolded in an embrace as they begin to walk down the corridor of that lovely city as a spontaneous song is being sung by them all...and as they trail off into the glory I hear the final fade of the prettiest voice of all – why, it's Aunt Ruby! God bless her and God help all of us not to forget the great lessons in life she taught us. *"...and a little child shall lead them"* (Isaiah 11:6).

- Pastor Pope -

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