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FEATURE STORY

Mother/Daughter Bonding

A memory of wrong turns, laughter, hard-won understanding, and one final unforgettable gift.

Story by Debbie Ables

Phone: 931-214-4179
Email: dables@bardstown.com

I woke up this morning feeling great. After struggling with a shattered left elbow, a broken arm, and a broken left leg from a fall a couple of months ago, I was finally able to sleep on my right side — my favorite — for the first time in a long while. It was joyful. I dreamed about my mother, who has been gone for more than 10 years.

We had always had a confrontational relationship — the mother-daughter syndrome. However, I remembered one particular day when we were in the car in Atlanta, our hometown, headed to Gainesville, Georgia, to help my father with an antique show he was promoting and running.

We started talking like two girlfriends instead of mother and daughter. We laughed, joked about men, and talked about things we found funny. We were full of questions for each other and enjoyed each other’s responses. My mother was only 20 years older than me, so it was like we were sisters for the ride.

We discovered we had a lot more in common than we had ever thought. It was amazing how well we were getting along.

THE WRONG ROAD

Suddenly, my mother looked out the windshield and let out a small shriek. We both saw a highway sign above the lanes that read, “Anderson, SC, 12 miles ahead.” We had driven 154, not the 54, to Gainesville.

INSIDE

Companion Guide: Mother/Daughter Bonding — from caregiver/child to peer-to-peer friendship.
Use the guide on page 3 as a gentle reminder to listen, set boundaries, and make the time together valuable.

THIS ISSUE

A story about the rare and precious moment when a mother and daughter stop battling roles and start seeing each other as women, friends, and family.

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Oh, we were in trouble, and now we would have to turn around and drive 100 miles back! Knowing my father would be beside himself with worry, we concentrated on what we would tell him when we got there.

When we walked into the National Guard Armory, where the show had started, he was standing in the entry, wringing his hands in worry. This was in the '70s — no cell phones, no way of letting him know we were all right. I remember him being really mad but glad we were okay. I don't think he ever believed we had gotten along for that many hours, but he accepted our story.

ONE OF THE BEST TIMES

It stands as one of the best times I had with my mother, and we had many more after that. My mother, Frieda, came to live with me when she turned 81 and enjoyed every minute of her last five years. I have always felt privileged to have been able to take care of her needs, as she took good care of mine growing up.

With her last words to the doctor, she introduced me as her eldest child and said she had four children: twin boys and a younger daughter. She told him that, of the four, Deborah was the only one to amount to anything and the only one who never took advantage of her.

I had waited 62 years to hear that, but she gave me a great gift by saying it...and then stuck her tongue out at me. Her last salvo.

A GIFT WORTH WAITING FOR

Some gifts arrive wrapped in ribbons. Some arrive in a hospital room, spoken out loud after decades of waiting. And some arrive with one last flash of personality, just to make sure you remember exactly who gave it to you.



MOM AND ME

MOTHER/DAUGHTER BONDING

FROM CAREGIVER/CHILD TO PEER-TO-PEER FRIENDSHIP

Relationships between mothers and daughters shift over time. The goal is not perfection. The goal is to listen better, protect the relationship, and create new memories instead of reliving every old conflict.

COMMUNICATION

- [] Be nonjudgmental in your communication.
- [] Learn to listen, not just think about how you would solve the problem for each other.
- [] Address conflicts when both parties are calm and open to conversation.
- [] Be willing to meet halfway and find common ground on disagreements.

BOUNDARIES & ROLES

- [] Build healthy boundaries that neither person crosses.
- [] Acknowledge your shifting roles.
- [] Older mothers need to learn to let go and allow their daughters to define their own path.
- [] Show affirmation for the daughter’s skills and validate the mother’s as well.

TIME TOGETHER

- [] Spend quality time together; it is not the quantity that counts.
- [] Share in each other’s milestones — marriages, failures, motherhood, and infirmities.
- [] Have empathy for the parent and their lifestyle, along with the changes that come with older age.

MAKE IT VALUABLE

- [] Acknowledge mortality and the limited time you have together.
- [] Refrain from drama when possible.
- [] Create new memories instead of reliving past conflicts.