

# PARENTING

## Mother's example inspires all who meet her

From the back seat of our van, the sweet and melodic voice of my daughter, Teresa, sang along to "The Sound of Music," which was playing on the tape deck. We were taking an unexpected trip to see my mother and I was trying hard to simply think of "My Favorite Things," but Teresa was having much more success than I was.

Many of my favorite things originate with my mother, and it was difficult to think of her at that moment because I was worried about her. The day before my father had called to tell me my mother had broken her hip. Teresa and I were on our way to the hospital.

It's such an unusual feeling to think of Mom in the hospital. My mother is never sick; she's only been in the hospital to have her six children. My mother will be the first to say, "It's not that bad; this can be fixed." But for the rest of us who marvel at her boundless energy, her zest for life, her enthusiasm for teaching and her remarkable health, it's almost impossible to contemplate her keeping still. I'm accustomed to having a mother in motion. And as I listened to Teresa sing, it occurred to me that Mother Superior's song about her young novice, Maria, succinctly captured my concerns about my mother's recovery: "How do you keep a wave upon the sand?"

My mother is a giver. She taught English As a Second Language, and as a Red Cross volunteer she taught thousands of children to swim and dive. Her concern for senior citizens led her to volunteer at her town's "Dial-A-Ride" program and for the Little Sisters of the Poor.

When I look at my mother I see so clearly the person that Jesus asks each of us to be. Without any fanfare or fuss, but always with a happy heart and a childlike spirit, my mother lives out the Gospel every day. She



family matters

By EILEEN MARX

sees a need, and using the talents and gifts she's been blessed with, she reaches out and make a difference to hearts in need of healing and souls in need of soothing.

One of the ways my mother has made an extraordinary difference is through her 20-year involvement with the Christian Service Program (CSP) at De Paul Diocesan High School in Wayne, N.J. For the past 11 years she has served as the program's director. In the CSP program, every high school senior is required to give 1 1/2 hours of service each week. The students visit the elderly at nursing homes, tutor children in elementary schools, play and read to children at day care centers and offer assistance to young people with emotional and physical disabilities. A dedicated group of volunteers serve as discussion leaders with the students as they talk about their experiences in CSP. My mother often comments that one of the most rewarding aspects of CSP is that students who are struggling at school or at home seem to shine as they reach out to help others in need.

When Teresa and I pulled into the hospital parking lot, I wondered if my mother, who has given so much of herself over the years, would be able to receive from others. I was also concerned that she may be in pain or even look different. Not to worry.

For the next three hours, she held court as my father, a group of friends and her coworkers gathered around her. My sister-in-law, Allison, said what was in all our hearts: "It makes me so happy to give this little bit back to your mother after all she's done for us."

The next day my husband Joe arrived with my son Bobby, and "Grandma" played a wild game of Bingo with the kids. That visit from her grandchildren worked much better than any pain medication.

Knowing my mother's extraordinary good health and her positive attitude about life, I believe she will enjoy many more years of health and happiness.

God will continue to work through such a faithful follower. Still I couldn't shake the thought that — for the first time ever — I saw a chink in the armor. It's the realization that nobody is on earth forever, not even my mother. This of course leads me to the unpleasant thought that I won't be here forever either. But I feel grateful and blessed that I have a master teacher who has consistently shown me in word and example that our faith in God, love of family and service to our neighbor is what's truly important during our time on earth.

I talked to my mother this morning. Less than three weeks after her fall, she has graduated to a cane. The walker is history. She was driving yesterday and this week she'll be back at school. Later that morn-

ing, Teresa and I headed out to the post office to mail my mother a care package. As we drove along, I silently reached back for Teresa's hand and waited until I felt her fingers squeeze mine. And I held on tightly to one of my favorite things.

Marx lives in Lawrenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.

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Greg Francis/Staff photographer

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