

NICKI PARHAM'S HOME-GOING

Reflections of a Son

My mother was a fighter, a peaceful warrior crafted by God from a mixture of courage, compassion, and hope. In the days since her death, I've struggled to come to grips with the cold finality of her passing, and I find myself buried in the moments of our life together, struggling to find patterns and meaning in the patchwork of memories that make up the rich tapestry of our past.

My earliest memories are of her as the nurturer. I felt like the center of her universe, and I know that she was the center of mine. She'd come home from work and I from school, and I'd follow her closely around the house, because what she was doing seemed infinitely more interesting than anything I could think to do. In my mind, those were our golden years together, and in them she taught me how to think, and how to live, and how to love.

I was an adopted child because even then her body was not strong enough to have a child of her own, but I know that, to her, I was her own. I can't recall a time that I felt anything but her love and acceptance.

I think now that her life, more than most, was about struggle, and I remember that, even as her struggles began to mount, I was wrapped in a child's complete and naive faith in his mother's strength. In my mind, she was never deteriorating--always "getting better". Even during the past week as she fought for the last time, I was still caught in that childhood naivety, unable to see my mother as anything but timeless and invincible.

I now realize that life for her was a constant battle against failing health. Seeing this so clearly now, I can sense the true depth of her greatness. She fought through her pain, drawing strength from God, and shining through it all upon the lives of everyone she touched. As I struggle in vain for a sense of closure on her life, I like to think of her as an icon in the lives of those who knew her, a brilliant example of the triumph of faith, positivity, and courage over human frailty.

I see her now in my mind, a clear and vibrant memory of my mother. She was sitting in her hospital bed awaiting surgery the following day. Her biggest concern was how well she was treating her husband, and whether one of the nurses would accept a gift as gratitude for kindness. She talked excitedly of the future, and of seeing her grandchildren. She was so full of hope and life. I never doubted for a moment that she would triumph once again. After the surgery, I leaned against her bed and called to my mother. When she turned and opened her eyes, I think her gaze finally extinguished that childhood naivety, and I realized it was time for her to go. I like to think that when she died, she was stronger than ever, for even though her old, earthly enemy finally took her body, it never won her spirit.