

The Story of Kathleen Keehn's Strength

"I complained I had no shoes, until I met a man that had no feet".

As the youngest of thirteen children raised without electricity, running water and only felt shoes to adorn her feet that carried her for miles walking through the country snow to attend school, my mother intimately understood and lived by this saying; a poem of which hung in our bathroom my entire childhood. When my father left her and her three children (I was eight years old), she supported us on the wages of a waitress, and had to forgo her own dinner many nights for that of her children, yet not one complaint was uttered by Kathleen. Actually, we had no idea of her sacrifice. Her abundance was overflowing in that she would take a portion of her very small pay cheque weekly and purchase one carnation as "fresh flowers" were always important to her and she believed in teaching her children that you can feel wealthy independent of your financial situation. I also recall a time when we had a modest amount of toys and food for Christmas (I use the word modest as a euphemism - although, as children, we never felt that we did without), my mother was insistent that we volunteered for Santa's Anonymous even though our family could have used the resources more than many of the people we delivered the goods to.

"Always seek out the person that no one is talking to at a party or in life. The popular person already has enough friends and attention".

I remember the day my mother and I walked outside the U of A hospital, me in a daze, after my step-father had a massive stroke. He would then need round the clock attention for six years; three of which my mother, painstakingly and only at the urgency of the doctors, had to enter into a long-term care facility. Daily care was given to my step-father by my mother happily, although exhaustively. That day, taking a much needed deep breath of fresh air together outside, my mother's attention was taken elsewhere. Without a word, she headed over to a scruffy and un-kept individual and chatted with him for what seemed like forever. She, without being asked, gathered every coin and dollar from her purse and handed it to the fellow after a few hearty laughs, an arm hug and a follow-up waive. When my mother returned to me, I asked how she had known the fellow and who he was. "Oh, he just looked sad" she said to me, "and looked like he needed a laugh and some love".

I'm not quite sure what biblical verse praises those that look after their family and friends. But I know heaven holds a special place for those that extend their love and generosity to those they've never met. This is a daily practice for my mother.

Lastly, at the young age of 70, my mother continues to serve with delight, joy and without reciprocity - simply, because she believes it's her purpose in life. Weather it's shoveling the snow of her "older" neighbours, revisiting the long-term care facility where her husband has long since deceased from or simply walking up to a stranger, offering her support, love and bounteousness. This is the life of my mother. My angel, best friend in the universe, mentor and hero, Kathleen S. Keehn.

- Kelly Keehn

