

## Timeless Transformations

### *Life Doesn't Come with an Instruction Book, It Comes With a Mother*

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You will never know how many times I have said, *I wish there was an instruction book for how to be a good mother.* There isn't one. I've searched everywhere. Further, it is difficult to find good role models. In my lifetime, I can only name a few that would be an example of a good mother. I don't know that I have ever said, *"I want to be just like her."* Plus, I didn't just want to be a good mother; I wanted to be a great mother. I knew I had no bigger purpose in my life than to guide you three beautiful girls!

What I have learned in my 28 years of being a mother is there are no perfect mothers. We are doing the best job we can. There are no easy answers, no magical solutions, and no absolutes when it comes to raising children. There isn't a success formula. Yet when things go wrong, the stakes are high. The mother is the first to be blamed.

To complicate matters, mothers are reinvented as each age in society is defined. The expectations of mothers are culture-bound. What was a good mother in the 1960s is different than the 1990s, and will be perceived differently in the 2020s. Probably one of the most difficult challenges that I had with your dad in the early years was false expectations in how to raise you three girls. Sometimes his perspective about how to raise children was different than mine. Balancing education, career, and family is by far the hardest challenge in my life. It still challenges me today.

So prepare yourself, being a good mother is the hardest job in the world. Being a great mother may be unattainable. I have clung to the ideal of being a perfect mother, working tirelessly, but the task is difficult, labor intensive, and unclear. I heard a Unity minister say the other day, that Socrates said, "Parents are destined to disappoint their children." With mothers, especially with their daughters, the expectations are even higher. Most mothers work all of their lives to achieve the status of being a great mother, only to feel in the end, we could have done better.

So for this morning, it being Mother's Day, I thought I would reflect back on the mothers in my family that served as role models for me. Here are parts of an instruction book, found in each mother, that when combined, makes up an instruction book for how to be a great mother. As you build your family, my hope is that you can add your own new chapters. Always remember you can learn as much from the negative as you can from the positive!

**My Mother** – When I think of my mother as I was growing up, she was the most positive person I knew. She always said, "You can choose to see the glass half empty or half full. Always choose half full." She was young. She was thin. She was perky. She walked with enthusiasm. She was fashionable. She was happy. She was vibrant. She was a motivator. She always made me feel like I was the best at whatever I wanted to do. She had this no-limit attitude when it came to me. That is always how she made me feel. I never remember her saying one negative thing to me or about me. She always told me, there is nothing you could do that would make me not love you. I knew that to be true every day of my life. I saw her as a perfect mother. Then, after you three were born, the emotional support that she gave me was priceless. No one ever understood that. She was there for me when you were sick, she was there for me when I needed help, whether it be to travel or work late, she was there to share every celebration. She loved you as much as I did and in the same way. I knew I could depend on her for anything. Even to this day, she is the only one that loves you like I do. To see her life unfold the way that it has is heart wrenching. It is my life's biggest disappointment. What I learned from her is that the job of a mother spans over a lifetime. Though there are peaks and valleys. Being consistent and making right choices is critical. Sustaining the enthusiasm and zest for life must be maintained.

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**Aneene** – When I met Aneene, I thought she was one of the classiest ladies I had ever met. She was gorgeous. She was smart. She was social. She was a great cook. She was a fantastic conversationalist. She was trustworthy. She knew how to plan an event like no other. If there was a holiday or anything special, you knew she would be dressed to the nines. I always admired her fashion. To not have her here now to celebrate you three as you start your lives and families is also heart wrenching for me. What I learned from her is that it is important to maintain your own interests and friendships. It matters how you take care of yourself, even on casual days around the house. And, it is nice to set the table and make holiday events special. I always appreciated her perspective about life. One thing I always remember her saying is that if you have a problem with your husband – or he has a problem with you, it is mostly a personal problem rather than a problem with the other person. You have to work through your own personal problems before you start finding fault with the other person. I think about it a lot, she could be so helpful to me now. I wish the chapter of her life had not closed so soon. Her chapter was way too short.

**Grandmother Holmes** – I wished you could have met her. She was 38 when she had mom and Aunt Niicy. In that day, that was really old to have children, especially twins. She had a great sense of humor. She would start laughing and she couldn't stop. It would always be over the simple things. Also, she was so generous. She always had coins and dollars in her purse. When we went to the store, she would open up her little coin purse and start giving us money. That would keep us busy for as long as she was in the store. She loved going shopping. It was a Saturday event. She would always buy us our favorite cookies and candy. What I remember most was that she was a hard worker. She didn't have any formal education but her and my grandfather had many homes that they built and rented – all up and down the street that she lived on. They were all white with black trim, small, and wood framed. She collected rent every month and if they didn't pay – they were out. What I learned from her was that hard work pays off. Back then they didn't have retirement. She spent a lifetime with my grandfather, building houses, keeping them up, so when she was too old to work, she had a steady cash income.

**Granny Sweeney** – You knew her for a short amount of time. Her life with me started out as heart wrenching because she lost her perfect son while traveling to see mom, to only find out mom was 7 months pregnant with me when he died. He was her perfect son because he was handsome, caring, and had a greater plan for himself. He was weeks away from graduating from college – the first in her family. To lose him at 23 was something she never recovered from. But, as it related to the relationship between Granny and me, she adored me and I knew it. That is where I learned the art of spoiling. She waited on me hand and foot. There wasn't anything she wouldn't do – from ice cream in bed, to cutting out the seeds in grapes (they didn't have seedless back then), to sitting in her lap when she drove her old car, to reading me stories in her rocking chair, to visiting every night to tuck me in – no task was too much! I took in what it meant to feel special, very special, from Granny Sweeney.

I could go on to include other mothers that have impacted my life, but I'll stop here because these are the primary mothers that influenced who I am as a mother. Taking the best from every experience of mothers that have impacted me is the best instruction book there is. **Life doesn't come with an instruction manual, it comes with a Mother!**

In the end, mothers aren't perfect; I know I surely am not. All mothers are in various stages of learning, growing, and unfolding – which will last a lifetime and will change with every phase.

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At the end of the day, I believe you know that I've given every ounce of my energy to trying to be the best mother that I can be and will be in the future. I know my job now is to *guide and step aside*. You three are perfect daughters. I make a vow to be forgiving, understanding, accepting, tolerant, noncritical, and unconditional in my love for you.

Every day is Mother's day for me! You three show me that every day not just on this special day.

I love you more than all the days left in my life, and then in all the days left in yours - Love Mom