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## **Aging Mom a Lesson in Wisdom and Love**

The workmen were scheduled to arrive at 8:00 a.m. I awoke at 7:30, gulped down my tea, jumped into my workout clothes, popped in the exercise tape, and started to move. I had to finish before they arrived. No one, except my husband, could see me exercise – and live.

As a precaution, I pulled the drapes over my sliding glass door, the one the workmen were coming to replace. Since starting the remodeling project, I missed exercising because the workers arrived at my usual workout time. I tried to get going before they got there but always failed.

At fifty-something, a lost workout backtracks faster than a “D” on an over-achieving college freshman’s cumulative average. I was losing ground – slipping from an A-minus to a C-plus very fast.

Just as I began the bicep curls, I heard a knock on the glass door. Oh, no! The painter was here. He had come through the sliding door many times in the last few weeks. Now something was different. Why the drapes?

I turned off the tape and let him in. His puzzled look made me want to explain. Somewhat sheepishly, I told him the drapes were pulled because I was doing aerobics and didn’t want him to see.

He walked through the door with drop cloth, brushes and paint can in hand. “My mother,” I explained, “had had two heart attacks. I need to keep in shape, to keep fit to avoid her fate.” He looked at me. “You still have your mama?” “Yes,” I replied. His response, “You are lucky.”

He told me he lost his mama when he was 12 years old and his papa when he was 21. We had never spoken of anything other than spackle and trim before this moment. Now he was telling me about his parents as he prepared for a day of work painting the new French doors.

I gave a small prayer of thanks for my 78-year-old mother and regretted showing impatience when I care for her. I remember well the pain of losing my father and wondered, for the one-millionth time, why my two brothers and younger sister have abandoned her in her hour of need.

I come from a family of five children, raised alike – spawned from the same gene pool. Character, it seems, comes from another place. Late in the sunset of my mother’s years, my sister and I are the ones who fill her prescriptions, send her flowers, visit often, take her to the doctor, sit by her side and listen to the same story – over and over.

My siblings who do not visit or send flowers – or even a card, did not lose their mama when they were 12 years old. They did not miss a meal, did not go without a warm winter coat, did not look out at a sea of faces, and fail to see a proud parent at their high school graduation.

The painter and I continued to chat as he opened the paint can. He muttered, softly and mostly to himself, “I need a mama.” I was struck by his sorrow.

It must be as deep and wide as my mother’s pain as she contemplates her ungrateful children. A voracious reader all her life, my mother must recall Shakespeare’s famous quote: “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child.”

Every day my mother needs me is a day of learning. Every moment I hold my tongue inches me toward wisdom. The insight I gained from the painter nudged me toward a deeper understanding of loss and reminded me once again that it is from the difficulties in life that we grow.

The loss my siblings will sustain is far deeper than the loss of a parent at an early age. The painter had no hand in his loss, but they did. My siblings are parents themselves, teaching their own children by example a lesson from which they will bear bitter fruit. After she is gone, it is they who will say, with lonesome regret: “I need a mama.”