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By: LeeAnne Richter

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Remembering My Mom - Jane Ellen Anderson Luster

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By: LeeAnne Richter

Growing up in my mother's household was not easy. She was a demanding, difficult, pushy, never been wrong, never made a mistake, argumentative, short tempered, and proud individual. I was terrified of making her angry and even more terrified to disobey her; I was convinced that she was not afraid of prison and would gladly kill me should I have ever transgressed. I never did, transgress that is, so greatly was I convinced. So why write a story about such a woman? What makes her so deserving of eulogy? She was also loyal, loving, a great friend, a defender, a cheerleader, an advocate, no person would you rather have on your side in a fight. If you were wrong, she would tell you, and if you were wronged, she would have stormed the gates of hell itself to make things right again. There was never a day when I did not know that above all, I was loved.

She was born a perfectly healthy child to a man and woman who were separated, or more to the point, he had abandoned them. My mother was the second child, and in the 40's her mother could not care for two children and support a household alone. She gave my mother to foster care services in Pennsylvania and washed her hands. The over-burdened system placed my mother at six days old with an elderly couple until a more proper home could be found. They did not own a crib, so they put mom to sleep on an overstuffed chair, which she managed to roll off of and land on her head. At the time they did not know the extent of the damage; they would later learn, she was paralyzed on her right side and had multiple language and learning disabilities. She was then placed with the people I know as my grandparents.

Bill and Virginia, grandmother (I called my dad's mom Granny, and she refused to answer to it) and Grandpa, were not allowed to adopt my mother under the Pennsylvania law because she, in her handicapped state, was considered too much of a financial burden. This young couple with two daughters of their own willingly took my mother in as their third child. I think she was about six months old when they brought her home. After about three months when the baby still didn't turn over and was not trying to examine things or play with toys or even cry, they began to get worried; all babies cry.

The story has been told to me that Virginia took Jane, my mother, to the doctor and they ran multiple tests. They were then referred to a neurologist and more tests were performed. Then the doctors sat grandma and grandpa down and told them that they should put the baby into a home for invalid children. She was diagnosed with Acquired Cerebral Palsy. They advised them that Jane would never walk, never talk, and be a vegetable her entire life, which hopefully would be a mercifully short life. My grandmother, who I knew to be an extremely strong and opinionated person, said it was unthinkable, that they were wrong, and stormed out of the office.

Disheartened, they came home and told the my great-grandparents about the trip to the doctor. My great-grandmother was said to be a woman of great faith, and she told grandma not to worry that she would have the ladies of the church pray. So with heavy hearts life continued. One day when Grandma was doing chores, she had placed Jane on a blanket on the floor in the living room with some toys. Grandma ran down stairs to move the laundry from the washer to the dryer when she heard the baby crying in the basement. Somehow, this child that had never rolled over, crawled, or even cried, had crawled through the living room, dining room, and kitchen, and rolled down the basement steps hit the bottom and cried. This she did without a mark or bone broken. Grandma immediately called my great-grandmother and told her the story. "This is your sign Virginia, Janie is going to be just fine," was her reply.

Mom was fine, well after fifteen surgeries, several long stays at D. T. Watson Home for Crippled Children, and mountains of therapy, she was. Throughout her life she was told many things: she would never be able to walk without crutches or braces. She walked with a limp, but from the time she was 17 until she was 53, she never used a crutch, cane or brace again. They told her she would never go to college, with her dyslexia and other problems that she would be lucky to finish high school. She attended a two-year community college and received a certificate to be a medical records technician. They told her she would never have a child, that she would not be able to carry one to term. After a very difficult nine months I was born on September 28, 1968. She was still swearing when I turned 21 that I was her Christmas miracle.

She had told my Dad on Christmas morning that she knew she was pregnant. My Dad, of course, thought she was crazy. He knew she could never carry a child, and he also knew that because of his time in Okinawa that he was sterile, and yet there was still a child.

My mother was strong stubborn and independent. It was a good thing too, because with all of the experts telling her she couldn't, if she had not of been all those things she might have believed them. One of her greatest fears is that she would turn in to her mother which is hysterical to me because that is everyone's fear and yet we all do it to a certain degree. Grandmother was hard, domineering, never been wrong a day in her life, and stubborn; mom was just like her. If I ever really wanted to get her to shut up (mom was a shouter, any point could be made if she just yelled it loud enough) all I had to do was say, "You are just like grandma." Of course that usually created a whole other problem for me, but teenagers are teenagers, we learn the hard way.

I guess what I really want people to know is that even though she was so difficult at times, whenever I was doing anything; dance recitals, marching band, demonstrating stained glass at a 6th grade art show, or entering a poem in an exhibit she was there. She was always in the crowd, clapping waving a pennant, or sending me flowers. Every Mother's Day, I wish I could tell her how much she meant to me, missing her always seems to overshadow that I am a mom now. I am so grateful that she taught me to be a good mom, because now it is my turn to tell the doctors they are wrong, and it is my turn to say no he can and he will. My son was eighteen months old when the doctors warned us that he would have trouble being an independent adult. He was two months premature, and when we adopted him they said he had Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and so many more things it would be impossible to list them here. They said he would have trouble attending regular school, but if you met my son you would have trouble determining any difference in him than from any other pre-teen his age. Sometimes sheer determination works. I am third generation proof, but that is a story for another day.