

Mother's Day is for all the women who care for us in youth

May 8, 2016, By Daniel J. Bauer

On Mother's Day this year, all of us, regardless of our station in life, are likely to have our mothers powerfully in mind.

I have cousins on my Mom's side of the family who, when they were with their mom face to face, always called her "mother." I often heard them say things like, "Mother, would you like another piece of toast?"

I do not recall any of us in my family ever calling Mom anything except that warm and huggable term, "Mom." Somehow, "mother" wasn't quite the right word for Mom.

"Look, Mom, what a pretty sun we've got today," we might say to her. That's how we spoke when we tried as children to cheer Mom up, tried to drive that watery-eyed sadness from her face.

"Would you like some butter pecan ice cream, Mom? We've got some in the 'fridge'." That one sometimes did the trick. Trapped inside her turbulent emotions, Mom could perk up briefly at the thought of a sweet snack.

The mother we had in our house while growing up was tender in many ways, and will always be dear to us. That won't change. What also will not change is the fact that Mom suffered from a devastating form of mental illness. That illness went on and on, and only softened shortly before she passed away nearly 40 years ago.

We kids were very blessed with a group I fondly picture today as our "Bauer almost moms, plus one." These were women who were in our family circle, but women who were, and it hurts me to have to say so, but I will, women who were normal.

For you can be just a child, but know that something is tragically off kilter with your mom. You may be just a tyke who hardly knows when to blow his nose, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that your Mom has something wrong with her.

Mom was too sick most of the time to be a proper mom for us. That was when our "almost moms" were such a help for us kids, and surely too for Dad.

Dad's big, all-embracing Bauer family was a ball diamond of affection for us, especially when Mom was hospitalized, which was practically all the time.

All Dad's brothers were married, and each of my Bauer aunts had something in her to be an "almost mom" for us. None were completely free themselves of life's ordinary troubles, but each found room in her heart not only for their children, my cousins, but for us, too.

Aunt Martha never saw me as a college student for a visit in her home when she didn't look me right in the eye, and say what many people feared to. "Well, Danny, tell me: how is your Mom doing?"

Aunt Grace was chubby and cuddly, a real Mama Bear. She was a doer, not a talker. I remember the time she sent her daughter, Arlene, to our house when Mom had just suffered a particularly harsh breakdown. My cousin (who seemed too grown up to be a cousin) baked apple pies from scratch in Mom's kitchen. She took our gloom away and filled our house with the aroma of a terrific bakery.

My Dad was especially close to his younger brother, Uncle Vern, and his beloved, our Aunt Margaret, was a Godsend, the likes of which I cannot describe in mere words. Her much anticipated potato salad at family gatherings, the humorous ribbing she dished out over how we combed our hair to try to look kooky and cool as teenagers, her pride when "us kids" finally found our niches in life: these were the gifts Aunt Margaret gave us that our Mom was not able to.

Dad's older sister was our Aunt Hattie. She had a heart of gold, but she took nonsense from no one. She told me bluntly that my college student beard looked lousy. She advised a sharp razor and a pot of shaving cream. She hinted I wanted to resemble a Vietnam War protester, which was sort of true. Her words stung. Mom wasn't there to challenge my liberal views, so I guess Aunt Hattie felt she had to do it. Now and again, everybody needs an Aunt Hattie.

My greatest "almost Mom" was Mrs. Finnegan. She was not a Bauer. She was the mom of my closest boyhood buddy, John. I have never returned to Toledo, Ohio on a trip from Taipei and not visited her in her home.

On Mother's Day 2016, I want to thank the "almost moms" my sibs and I had when losing Mom at home became a threat to the whole ball game of life. The Bauer family "almost moms" really saved the day.

So often it felt we were behind by a run with two out in the ninth, and a runner on base, the count 3-2. The Bauer boys sent in the "almost moms" to pinch-hit. And do you know what?

Those tough old gals hit a homer every time.

And Mrs. Finnegan met them at home plate as they rounded the bases, an Irish smile on her chops. She gave them a hug, one by one. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points

- 1) Although a comparison between family life and a baseball game may make this column a little hard to completely understand, the main idea is simple: the "aunts" in our families are a part of a 'family team,' add a lot of love to the lives of all of us. "Mother's Day" ought to include a word of thanks to our aunts, too. Do YOU have a favorite aunt (or uncle?)
- 2) This column speaks of several aunts in the life of the author who helped his family when his mother was sick. How many aunts do you have, and are they important people in your life? If so, why?
- 3) Our aunts, uncles, and cousins all add much happiness to the lives of our families. Can you share a story about one of them and their place in your life?

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