

## EULOGIES: IN PRAISE OF MY PARENTS

Was I surprised when I looked in my dictionary for the definition of “eulogy” in preparation for this essay! Nowhere to be found were the phrases I had expected: after a person’s death; at a funeral; at a memorial service. Instead, eulogy is defined as 1. a commendatory formal statement and 2. high praise. To eulogize is to speak or write in high praise of; to extol. Two misconceptions surfaced for me as I checked the dictionary. First, I really did think a eulogy was a speech given or written about someone who had died. Now I know that a person living or dead may be eulogized. Second, I thought giving a eulogy meant just talking about the person, especially good, comforting things in a time of grief. High praise is a different matter! I will surely look at praise in a new light after this correction.

For example, I see that there is an excellent eulogy in Proverbs 31 where a hard-working woman, a wife of noble character, is being described. Listen to verses 28 and 29: *Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.”* That’s high praise, both from the children and the husband! I can well imagine that the husband and children also received praise from the woman. How wonderful, how nurturing to live in an atmosphere like that!

An incident in the life of David has been on my mind since I have been meditating on this subject. It concerns his reaction to the news that Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. 2 Samuel 1:17 says: *David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, and ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the book of Jashar).* A lament is “a crying out in grief: wailing.” I wonder if the book of Jashar might have been a music book in which a tune for this lament was written, perhaps to be accompanied by bowed instruments. David was a musician as well as a poet. What better way to teach everybody the lament than to set it to music?

Part of the lament was a eulogy. Listen to this high praise for the two of them (2 Samuel 1:23-27): *“Saul and Jonathan – in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold. How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women. How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished!”*

I would have expected David to praise Jonathan, his best friend, but David’s relationship with King Saul was uneven, to say the least. Sometimes Saul treated him like a beloved son; other times he would fly into a rage and try to kill him. For years David and those with him hid in the hills from Saul and his soldiers, whose only object was to kill David. A few times David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he would not do it. He looked at Saul not primarily as his enemy, but as the Lord’s anointed; this being true, David simply would not harm him. He even felt guilty for cutting off a piece of Saul’s robe on one occasion!

This eulogy gives me a new glimpse at David’s heart, which was so pleasing to God. I believe David’s words were completely sincere. That means he carried no grudge against Saul; he must have practiced “forgetting (on purpose).”<sup>\*</sup> What a role model for us! Why not practice letting go of unpleasant memories, forgiving those who have harmed us, and seeing people in such a way that only praise, mingled with grief, comes to mind when we hear of their death?

<sup>\*</sup>Note: For an explanation of “forgetting (on purpose),” see my essay by that name.

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I want to complete this essay with eulogies in honor of my parents. The first one is the text of a talk I gave at my father's funeral service on April 25, 2000 at the Palmyra, PA Church of the Brethren. Dad died in the nursing section of the Lebanon Valley Brethren Home on April 19, about two hours after I arrived to be with him. He was 93 years old. I wrote the tribute during the night a couple days later, when I awoke in the guest cottage at the Brethren Home with thoughts of Dad swirling around in my head.

A eulogy doesn't have to be long to be effective. After I concluded my talk in the church, I added the following: "My sister-in-law, Anita Ziegler, has asked me to say that she has lost not just a father-in-law, but also a very dear friend." That is indeed high praise!

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#### A Tribute to My Father: William J. Ziegler

My name is Verna Kwiatkowski, and I am William Ziegler's daughter. My dad was an inspiration to me in many ways.

Proverbs 22:1 says, *"A good name is more desirable than riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold."* My dad had a good name, a good reputation. Here, in the area where he lived and worked for so many years, I enjoy saying "I am William Ziegler's daughter." Whether people reply by saying, "I worked with him in the hosiery mill" or "He built our house thirty years ago," I know their memories of Dad are good ones. His honesty and integrity give me a sense of security and pleasure that will go with me all my life.

Every time I read Luke 6:38, I think of my parents. The verse says, *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

Dad raised a variety of vegetables and some fruits (mainly strawberries), and sold them throughout the town. Mom played a big role in getting them ready to sell. Everything had to be cleaned, sorted and, depending on the vegetable, shelled before it was sold. A childhood picture so vivid in my mind is a porch full of people, including my brother Harold and me, shelling baskets full of peas and lima beans, even soy beans, into containers on our laps.

Then the food was measured into pint or quart boxes. Mom would shake them and press them down, filling the boxes until they overflowed. A good measure indeed! When I helped to deliver those vegetables and the strawberries to customers, I did not have to be ashamed; rather, there was a feeling of pride, pleasure, accomplishment. I was learning from the example of my parents.

Dad also inspired me in the area of faith. He faithfully took me to church all through my growing up years. There was never a Sunday when Dad did not want to go to Sunday School and church! Barring illness or dangerous road conditions, we were there! This was not just a routine; it was a pleasure.

Dad did not have good speaking skills. His faith was demonstrated more by his actions than his words. I sat by his side in the Annville Church of the Brethren, third row from the back, at the center aisle. There I heard him singing the old hymns, though he really could not carry a tune. From there I watched him walk up front with three other men to take up the offering. Ushering was one thing he could do, and he did it well.

Dad is in Heaven now with his Lord Jesus and with all the other people of faith who have gone before him. He's singing with all his might: in tune with angels! He's happy!

And I am left behind with good memories and two important things:

1. Hope. I know I'll see Dad again, for his Lord Jesus is also mine. We have the same Savior. That's the best bond any two people can have, for it's eternal.
2. Inspiration. Just as Dad was a good example for me, I hope that my children and friends will see in my life honesty, integrity, faith – and actions that will bring them security, pleasure and faith.

I celebrate my dad's life. His influence on earth will go on for years to come. To God be the glory!  
Amen.

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Mom died May 5, 2006 at the age of 97. Like Dad, Mom died in the nursing section of the Lebanon Valley Brethren Home. The service was held at Kreamer's Funeral Home in Annville on May 10. I, a resident of a nursing home myself, was not able to be there. As the beginning of the tribute to my mother explains, I prepared it to be handed out to those attending her funeral, and it was. But there was also a bonus: my son George read it aloud to the assembled people! My brother Bob taped the service for me, allowing me to hear what a fine job George did as my substitute. My thanks to both of them.

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#### A Tribute to My Mother: Florence Eva Hicks Ziegler

When I first wrote this tribute in March, 2003, Mom was receiving hospice care; therefore I assumed she had only a brief time to live. I wanted to have something written that I could read at her funeral in case I suddenly heard that she was gone. How things have changed! Mom's condition stabilized and hospice was discontinued. On the other hand, I was diagnosed with PLS, a neurological disease that is crippling me, including my ability to talk. Mom no longer recognizes people. That means she does not miss me or know I am ill; I find this comforting. I do not know if I will be able to attend her funeral; I might die before she does! Certainly I will not be able to read this tribute aloud, so I am revising it now, in November, 2004, to be distributed at her funeral. This is what I would like you to know about my mom.

The first quality I can remember my mother giving me is hope. At the end of my first year of school I was heartbroken because my first grade teacher and our music teacher were leaving the school district. I couldn't bear the thought of not seeing them again. Mom said, "Maybe we can visit them sometime." It was not a promise, just a possibility – and it was enough to dry my tears. I held onto that hope until it no longer mattered that the teachers were gone. Mother was always careful not to get herself boxed in with promises; rather, "We'll see" was her usual response to my requests. This, too, built hope within me, for sometimes the requests were fulfilled; I just never knew for sure.

Recently Mom asked me if people know each other in Heaven. It was my turn to give her hope. "Absolutely!" I said. Mom relaxed, her eyes glistening with tears that she was reluctant to shed in my presence. And that's another thing: Mom kept a lot of her thoughts and feelings to herself, not wanting to upset her children. Mom had good intentions, but perhaps we would have benefitted from knowing more about what was going on.

Being secretive can be a positive quality. For example, Mom was not a gossip! She enjoyed working in various factories, operating sewing machines and doing her work well. Sometimes an operator would send a juicy bit of gossip down the row of seamstresses, hoping to reach everybody. "Skip over Florence," the ladies used to say. "She's so tight-lipped the news will stop with her!" I always felt so proud of Mom when I heard that story.

I knew nothing of our financial situation as a child. Later I came to realize that money was sometimes in short supply in our family. I was often sick and spent much time in doctors' offices, even in hospitals. Never did Mom or Dad even hint that my illnesses caused them financial stress. "We were just glad that

we had the money for the doctors,” Mom said when I asked her about that as a teenager. What a relief that was to my ears – and to my soul!

Mom and Dad relied on actions rather than words to let us know we were loved. Mom used to come into our icy-cold bedrooms on wintry school days, reach under the covers and dress our feet with socks that she had warmed on the furnace grating downstairs. That’s love! So were the meals that she spent hours preparing for us. Mom loved her children, their spouses, and their offspring. Somehow she remembered our favorite foods and prepared meals accordingly. She cooked big Thanksgiving dinners, then said to all assembled, “I’ve done my part; now you do yours!”

Mom taught me that unpleasant things eventually end – so there’s no use worrying about them. I dreaded going uptown to the dentist, for example. Mom would say, “Tomorrow at this time your appointment will be over.” That was true, of course, but the way she said it made it seem like dreading the event was indeed a waste of energy. All through the years this thought has given me comfort: “It will soon be over.”

Mom taught me to wait, to anticipate future pleasures. What a valuable lesson! In my teenage years I wanted adventure! Mom was content to be at home. “Your adventure will begin as soon as you get to college,” she said. So I waited – and it did! And Mom let me go. She let me go away to college, study what I wished, work and live away from home, then get married and move away for good. Mom never put pressure on us to come home to visit. We were always welcomed, though, whenever we could come.

Mom was there on the two most important days of my life: the day I was born and the day in 1953 when I had a life-changing experience with God. I was walking home from the shoe factory that summer day when the event occurred. I dashed home, ran to my bedroom to jot down the poem that was ringing in my head and then read it to Mom: “Nature proves there is a God. Look at the sky and the trees, feel the warm sun and the breeze: There is a God!” Poor Mom hardly knew what to think. Obviously something had happened to me, but she was not used to talking about spiritual matters. The best she could do was observe me to see what the outcome of this experience would be. And she did.

When I visited Mom in January of 2003, I took home with me her childhood Bible, knowing that she could no longer read it. There were three small slips of paper tucked in various places in the Bible. I was amazed to discover that one was in my handwriting: a bit of a letter that I had sent her with the reference Isaiah 41:10 written on it. The sentence on the other side showed that I wrote the letter in September, 1955, just when I started teaching school! Mom had cut the reference from the letter, looked it up in her Bible and then marked the place with the strip of paper. If she found comfort in these words, I am glad: *Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

In the Lebanon Valley Brethren Home, Mom lived in four different sections. I think all of us were amazed at how well Mom adjusted to being in the Home, after telling us for years that she could never do that. Somehow, within herself, she found the capacity to adapt when she had to. I was with her when she had her first meal in Personal Care. There on the back of her chair was a large bib (“clothing protector”). Mom was horrified and did not put it on. The next day I was again with her for the noon meal. “I have accepted the bib,” Mom said as she put it on. I was stunned! What a quick adjustment! What a lesson for me!

A few years ago Mom began to have trouble with her speech, a constant source of frustration for her. In Tranquil Terrace, in the summer of 2002, Mom looked at me sitting next to her and wished she could speak, wished her head were clearer. Then she twirled her right hand near her right ear and said, “Oh, this ferhoodle!” She smiled and asked if I knew what “ferhoodle” meant. I had not heard that word for years! “Yes, it means all mixed up,” I replied and then added, perhaps coining a word, “There will be no ferhoodlement in Heaven!” Mom’s eyes filled with tears, as usual when Heaven or death were mentioned.

Mom's there now – thinking more clearly than she ever did on earth – not ferhoodled in the least! She can even smell the flowers now without sneezing, getting watery eyes or tight in the chest – beautiful thought! When I was a girl, Mom, with her allergy problems and frequent illnesses, appeared to be in fragile health. I thought she would die while still young, but she certainly fooled me! Yet all her years were just a drop in the bucket compared to eternity, where, together with all other believers, Mom, Dad and I will worship our Lord Jesus forever. Blessed hope! To you, the reader:

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you will overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). Amen.*

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