

My mother gave us all more than I can begin to tell you, but I will mention what I think may be the three most important gifts.

The first, and the foundation of everything she gave, was unconditional love. She loved me just as I am, even when she was mad at me or disagreed with me. She just loved me as I was. Because of the unconditional love my parents showed me, I have been able to believe that God loves me the same way – unconditionally.

The second gift Mom gave me grew out of that unconditional love. That gift was freedom, specifically emotional and intellectual freedom. From childhood there weren't any no-go areas; I could ask her absolutely anything and she would answer honestly. I could challenge anything I disagree with, and she would listen with interest, delighted that I was exploring new ideas or new feelings. She'd say very clearly how she felt and what she thought, but I was always free to disagree without fear of losing her love. Sometimes she'd look at me and say "you're really weird" – but she would say it rejoicing in who I was. I was free to be me.

The third gift was hope – creative hope. Partly that was temperamental – Mom used to compare herself to the character of the Little Toy Clown in the children's book "The Little Engine that Could", always saying "maybe the NEXT engine will help us!" But Mom's hope was also a conscious choice. She told me more than once that the best gift she could give all the people who came to her for counseling was her hope that they could get better, that things could improve. She believed and demonstrated that hope acts creatively to create what is hoped for.

I want to close with three very brief quotes from a sermon my mother gave in 2008. (I'll email an audio file of the whole sermon to anyone who wants.)

She began as she always did: "In the name of God, who made us for love, who saved us by love, and who loves us still."

"We have a God who NEVER gives up on us: who loves us, lures us, pursues us, sometimes even pushes us, to become the best that we can become, and to help our world become the best it can be."

"God is love, and constantly calls the world to that love."