



Solutions! for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
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Life Lessons from Mother

So, my mom died. There, got that out of the way. It's been about 5 weeks as I write this. I'm still in shock and still overwhelmed by sadness at times. She was a vibrant 71 year old who was working 2 part time jobs when she passed away. One of the jobs was at my office, so it's been a bit hard to escape the fact that she's gone and I have this really big void in my life.

I decided to write this month's article on the things I want to carry with me from my mother. Frankly, it's all I can write about because it's all I can think about. But, it's not a bad deal for you - my mom was pretty amazing.

Life was never easy for my mom. She struggled financially the majority of her life. She was a single parent to my brother and me, and my father was required to pay very little child support. She managed to make our childhood happy, and somehow she knew not to burden us with the money issues or the unfairness of my father's requirements. In my adulthood, she shared with me how dire things were at times, and I know she must have been so scared.

Another area of struggle for Mother (that's what she wanted to be called, and really, she wasn't a "Mom" or "Mamma", so it suited her) was men. She had a difficult time figuring out romantic relationships and making them work. But she never gave up on love. She was married more than once, and always seemed to believe that *this* marriage was going to work. When she finally did meet the true love of her life a few years ago, she had much too little time with him before he died unexpectedly. She mourned his death until her own. One of my first thoughts after we discovered her death was, "At least now she can be with Tom."

My mom wasn't a typical mom. As a single parent, she had to work full time, which was different from most of my

friend's moms. There also wasn't a lot of cookie baking or other "traditional" things going on at our house. On the weekends, the three of us cleaned the house together (again, different from my friends), then we would hit the road for whatever adventure we could think of and afford. She was the same kind of grandmother: untraditional. All the grandkids remember the camping trips they took with her, all the games played and all the activities (including white water rafting and zip lining). One of my son's prized stories is the time his grandmother taught him to spit. (When I bemoaned the fact that she had done this, her response was, "Keri, every boy needs to know how to spit.")

So as I say goodbye to my mom multiple times every day, I wanted to honor her with passing along to you three life lessons I learned from her:

Happiness is a choice. As I indicated, my mom had a tough life at times. And she would get upset or sad for a little while. But then she would pull it together, put a smile on her face and go on. There was never a lot of sympathy at my house. There was empathy: "I know you are sad that this happened, and I can understand that. But feeling sorry for yourself is not doing you any good. You need to learn from this and decide what you want to do about it." She very much applied this philosophy to herself. As I mentioned before, she was still deeply mourning the loss of her last boyfriend when she died. But she managed to laugh, sing, find joy, and move forward with her life.

Deal with things head on. I really don't know how my mom figured this one out. She wasn't raised to deal with conflict effectively. Somehow, she realized that dealing with issues is much better than letting them fester. She always made my brother and me sit down and talk when we were arguing. We had to tell



each other what we were upset about, apologize when we were wrong, and promise to do better. She probably made us hug each other too, ugh! It has been so helpful personally and professionally for me to not be afraid of conflict.

The show must go on. Due to several circumstances, I was back at work the day after we buried Mother. Mother was back at work the day after we buried her boyfriend too. I remember her saying, "I'd rather be here than sitting at home being all depressed. At least here, I can maybe get a little break from everything." I've handled her death much the same way. Oh, I've had my moments, don't get me wrong. And after I've had those moments, I've gotten up and gotten busy. I allow myself to be sad, then I take a big breath and get back to the business of life. I watched my mom have several setbacks in life. I also watched her get up, dust herself off, and start all over again.

These life lessons are just the start of my mom's impact and legacy. Her visitation and funeral was "chock full" (one of her favorite phrases) of people telling me how wonderful a person she was, how happy she always was "with such a great smile", and how special she always made them feel. Mother, I'm going to do my best to carry on in your style!