

“Motherhood” Carrie Vine

When asked to talk about motherhood today I had no idea where to begin. By the time Skylar graduates high school I will have been in the role of mothering for 40 years. I know that once a mother always a mother, but this will be 40 years of someone else depending on me for daily living. I was 19 when I had my oldest son and will be 59 when Skylar graduates high school.

As I think about embodying motherhood I realize that for each person it is extremely different. Our lives are unique and our experiences make us who we are. I can also honestly say that even though I am technically the same mother to my oldest child and to my youngest child, my embodiment of mothering is and was very, very different.

The experiences I had shaped me as a person and as a mother. Even just the pregnancy and birth stories of my oldest and my youngest are almost opposite. I'm sure if they compare notes a few years down there will be more differences than similarities in the way that I mothered them.

My oldest child, Corydon, was born in 1995 and will be 22 this year. I was a 19 year old college student when I found out I was pregnant. I had a full ride music scholarship at Austin Peay. My relationship with the father was tumultuous to say the least. He was a young soldier stationed at Fort Campbell, who also happened to be an alcoholic. I believed he could change and stuck with him for as long as I could. The days of no phone calls turned into weeks of no contact. When I delivered my son it had been about 2 months since I had even seen his father. Besides the support of my mother and one friend I was pretty much alone. I didn't call the father when I was in labor mostly because I think I was afraid of being disappointed again in a very vulnerable state.

The day after my son was born he showed up at the hospital. He carried him down on discharge and said he would call soon. That was the last we saw him. Since then he has found me on Facebook of course and has all sorts of regrets. He still has the same crystal blue eyes.....but now he is bald. He also has severe PTSD from his 3 tours in Afghanistan as a commanding officer with the 82nd Airborne.

I was a fierce single mother. I had a lot of support from my parents, but I was determined to do the best I could. I worked two jobs for a while and lived

with a roommate. When Corydon was almost 2 I got married and we moved to Texas. Chris was all he ever knew of a father and his birth father totally missed out on what a fantastic person Corydon is.

Connor and Callandra were both born at the Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas. Connor was a quick and easy delivery that surprised the doctors. They didn't believe me that he was coming and told me it would be a while because everyone was assisting in a c-section down the hall. Finally Chris convinced an irritated nurse to come check me and sure enough Connor was there trying to make his entrance. She ran down the hall to get someone and the midwife came in to essentially just catch him. I don't know about other moms out there, but for me it was pretty obvious that an 8 and a half-pound baby was coming.

Callandra was long overdue and labor stalled multiple times. After a little induction she came and Chris and I welcomed child #3, and a little girl to the family. My parents brought the boys to the hospital to see their little sister.

Fast forward a few years. Life progressed. Things changed and we all changed. We moved here to Southern Illinois, I got a few degrees, Chris went to Oklahoma and Kuwait, My oldest graduated high school, and distance took its toll on my marriage.

When Curt and I met and got together I never thought I would have the chance to mother again. I was older and my children were at the point where they were pretty self-sufficient. My mothering just consisted mostly of running kids to activities or transferring money to the youth account so Connor could get gas or get food.

Skylar coming in to my life has let me mother with more patience than I ever have. Her birth was magical and prepared for. Friends and family surrounded us as we chanted through the whole labor process. Curt's daughter Amina and my daughter Callie were both present for the birth. We had a doula who prepared us for everything and gave us a voice in the delivery room. My mom was at this birth just like my oldest, but this time we were not alone. I had my loving partner with me and a few other friends that proved to be very supportive. As Skylar came into this world we sang the Longtime Sunshine Song. It will forever be Skylar's song.

Skylar has been a true blessing for me. She definitely has a different mom than the scared, alone, 19 year old that my older son had. I have to say that I have mothered all of my children in the best way I know how. I have not been perfect. I have made mistakes, and I'm sure will make more as the years roll by. I still have lots of time to embody motherhood and cherish my children to the best of my ability..... even if I am tired and overwhelmed sometimes.

“Words From My Mothers” Darl Young

I have a working theory about grandmothers. I have no hard data on this and it is only a working theory, but a theory nonetheless. Here is my theory: The majority, if not the preponderance of people, had two grandmothers which can fit broadly into one of two categories. One is the cookies and milk grandma where you could always go for cookies and milk, or pie, and also find a reassuring hug and all the warm fuzzies a grandmother can provide. Then there is the “other grandma”. Well, I’m not going to talk about that other grandma today. I’m going to talk about my “cookies and milk” grandma because it is my highest hope in life to embody some aspect or aspects of her. I had what can only be described as a tumultuous childhood. I learned early on in my life that really nothing and nobody was permanent and the world was a harsh place. However, standing out from the din and the confusing, frightening noise that I remember as my childhood is my Grandma Young. My Grandma Young was my anchor. Among all the lack of permanence she was always there with the cookies and milk, a hug, and the reassurance that she loved me just how I was. Her home and her presence were the very personification of my childhood concept of home, or permanence, and unconditional love.

After she had to leave her house toward the end of her life I vowed I would never drive by or enter the house again. Without seeing the house with its subsequent owners and inevitable changes I could for the rest of my life close my eyes and go to grandma’s house, because in my mind’s eye nothing would ever change. In times of stress, anxiety, worry, or nostalgia I still close my eyes and wander into grandma’s house where nothing has changed. She was one of the greatest stars in my life and I can still feel the rawness of the

pain the day the call came that she had been carried away to eternity. (Then the subsequent “fun” of discovering she left me in charge of her funeral arrangements, complete with getting her flown back to Springfield from California.) The question, though, is: What do I embody of my grandmother? I would like to say that I learned from her faith, unconditional love, and the perseverance that comes with living to be one week short of 100 years old. I am not sure that I do embody those qualities as much as wishful thinking might make it so. But, on a really practical level sometimes I open my mouth and out comes the things my grandmother would say. It might seem trivial, but perhaps it is not. Perhaps it is more profound as the pearls of wisdom, axioms, and funny expressions color my day-to-day life. “That is for the birds.”, “Well, not as a rule” , “If I am not home, I will be gone.”, “That will be enough of that if you don’t mind.”, “If you are backing out those other cars are just going to have to wait.”, “Leave well enough alone.”, “If you don’t have something nice to say don’t say anything at all.” “You know I love you.”

The second great maternal figure in my life was my stepmother, Victoria. She came into my life when I was about 11 and she was there for every second of the ever awkward early teenage years all the way through to when I left for college. Victoria will always exemplify for me the very embodiment of kindness. She loved me when she didn’t have to and she was unfailingly kind to me. As a step-parent she set an example that I could never hope to live up to. Don’t think for a second that it was all unicorns and rainbows! There was the time she poured water on me to get me out of bed in the morning (after a lot of warnings)! Then there was the time I complained about how she did my laundry. That complaint earned me a private tour and operation instructions for the washer and dryer. A form of early-onset Alzheimer’s Disease began to take her way from us when she was only 48. I held her in my arms as that dreadful disease took the very last bit of the kindest person I have ever known when she was only 59. The question, though is: What do I embody of my dear stepmother? I would like to think I embody all of that patience, kindness, caring, and compassion, but again that would be wishful thinking. But, guess what, sometimes I open my mouth and Victoria comes out, too! “Hey is for horses and cows, straws for sheep, grass is free, buy a farm and get all three.”, “Be yourself, there is no one better

qualified”, “The people in hell want ice water”, “This is the smallest record player in the world playing ‘My Heart Bleeds for You’”, “Mean people suck”, “You got to wanna”.

Finally, there is my own mother. My mom embodies sheer determination, resolve, survivorship, and overcoming adversity. Were my mom to write the story of her childhood and young adulthood you would dismiss it as too strange to even be fiction. Then just 8 days after she turned 18 she became my mother. She determined at an early age that her own children would never know the distant, uncaring mother she had. Her children would know her love. As the oldest I had a particular view of the sacrifices our mom made for us. She gave up nearly every creature comfort or luxury item for us to have the things we needed or wanted. There were many sacrifices I only knew about much after the fact and there are many more about which I will never know. In summation my mom embodies survivorship, but more than survivorship she represents overcoming. I think of all of three maternal figures I have talked about today, perhaps I most embody this survivor/overcomer mentality that comes from my mom. Life has thrown me some interesting curves and there have been some curves that were entirely self-selected (you know how that goes!). I have learned from my mom to survive and to overcome. Also, not surprisingly she most often comes out of my mouth or her words at least play through my head. “Who told you life was fair? They were lying.”, “Don’t hit your sister in the head. You can really hurt someone that way!”, “You teach people how to treat you”, and my number one most favorite, the piece of my mother’s advice that I share nearly every day with some second grader: “Take care of yourself, that is a full time job”.

These are the words from my mothers, at least the ones I can remember right now. These are their legacy to me. These words are their embodiment for years to come in my own home as a teenage boy grows to be a man and a baby girl will soon be walking and talking. These words of my mothers and others I cannot even remember at the moment will without doubt continue to tumble out of my mouth to offer wisdom, guidance, humor, and there may even need to be some cookies and milk from time to time.