

may is for mom

We all know that May means Mother's Day. Whether they're supportive angels or somewhat more complicated and problematic, they have a huge impact on us that doesn't stop when they are no longer in our lives. I was lucky enough to have two mothers, the second, Fay Honey, arriving in my adult life when my relationship with the first was, shall we say, "strained." Both women were strong role models and I miss them deeply.

In recognition of our moms, we asked a few friends of OITM to write about their moms (thanks to Bill Lippert for initiating the idea) or their own experience as mothers. Thanks to all who contributed. — EB



Hard Times Mothering by Alverta Perkins

Which is harder, being a mother or being a daughter??? Sometimes it was one and sometimes it was the other.

My mother and I never got along very well. She had her own hard life to deal with, having borne a daughter "illegitimately,"

way she interacted with me. I came along about 9 months after she married my father, another girl. She told me she did not want another baby, and I can guess that she sure didn't want another girl.

So my life with my mother was one of strife, argu-

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as they said in those days (a result of a rape, she told me). She grew up in a poor family and had to go to work before she could finish high school. After she had her daughter "out of wedlock" her family pretty much disowned her. She kept the baby until the girl was about 3 months old and then gave her up for adoption. She had met the man whom she was to marry and who became my father. He refused to marry her if she insisted on keeping this daughter so she gave her up. How difficult that must have been I can only begin to imagine.

Her early life and trials must have strongly influenced the

ments, misunderstanding, and a feeling that I did not love her nor did she love me. She was unable to "mother" me in the way that I wanted to be mothered.

Being a daughter was hard. I felt a strong sense of responsibility for her. I heard, over and over, "Honor your Mother and your Father." I maintained contact with her even though I moved thousands of miles away. I dutifully telephoned her every week and continued to send money for her support until she died. Being a daughter brings responsibilities, like it or not.

So now I am dealing with being a mother. I have a

daughter, a middle child, between two boys. A middle child with the attending problems, so say the "books" on birth order. I don't know if I ever told her how much I loved her. I know that I rarely hugged or kissed her. I also know that I loved her almost more than life itself, and I never learned to show that love or say it. My daughter subsequently accused me of not loving her, and I wondered if she loved me. Is it true that what goes around, comes around?

My daughter's teen years were horrible for me, probably for her too. But she finally grew up, became a mother and after some very bad scenes with me, connected some with me. She knows that I have identified as a lesbian for the past 30 years. We are now on a semi-friendly basis, talk on the phone once in a while and even get together occasionally. When we do I am filled with joy.

I never learned to mother because my own mother could not mother me and her own mother had little to do with her after she became pregnant. Her mother's mother had had a very hard life with many children and little money and was not able to mother her children.

My daughter would probably say that I was not and am not a good mother, just as I said that about my mother. But she is a good mother and loving toward her children. I must have done something right!

Being a mother is probably the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. Wanting to be a good, perfect mother, has been a supreme goal, but one where I frequently feel I have failed.

I have loved my daughter more than anything and yet cannot feel a closeness with her that I long for. I wonder if my mother wanted a closer relationship with me. I don't know nor will I ever know, she died a year ago.

So which is harder, being a daughter or being a mother? It depends ... Both are hard and both bring times of joy and times of tears. ▼

Alverta Perkins lives in South Burlington.

I'll Share Mine by Keith Goslant

I still have the tape. I watch it every now and then. It is the lead story on the 6 o'clock news. The voice-over is saying, "One of the most controversial bills being considered ... the largest public hearing in Vermont legislative history."

And then there she is, a 60-year-old woman, tears falling, surrounded by TV cameras, looking at a joint House & Senate Judiciary committee and saying, "My name is Mary Etta Haines Goslant Chase, and as a mother, a grandmother and a Christian, I am asking you to please pass this bill so all my children are protected. So they are all treated equally. I believe I was taught by my God to love all my neighbors, not just some of them."

No, this wasn't one of the Spring 2000 hearings on Civil Unions. This was the hearing held in 1990 on a "Bill to Prohibit Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation." And, yes — that woman testifying is my mother.

As my friends attest, I

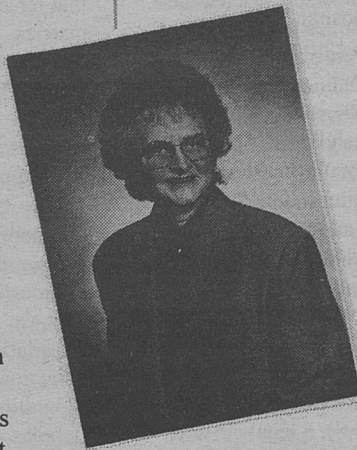
ly didn't know much about being gay, so they left it to me to find my own mentors. She treated my partners with the same acceptance and support that she did my brothers and their respective partners. We won't talk about the time she considered fixing me up with the new single minister.

Over the years she has stood next to me during the joyous and the difficult times. She baked whoopee pies for Sister Kenn as he was dying from AIDS — these culinary delights were the only thing he still would/could eat. She didn't hesitate with the hugs either.

When I helped organize several Pride Days in Montpelier, I mentioned to her that I wasn't sure there would be a large turn-out. True to form she arrived with lawn chair in hand to applaud speakers and marchers alike.

While officiating at one of my first Civil Union ceremonies, I looked over to see my mother crying in joy for the lesbian couple she had just met and whose union she was helping to celebrate.

If you need winter hats or



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frequently tell people, "If you need a mother to hug you, listen to you or just laugh with you, I'll share mine." As a child she not only taught my brothers and me that everyone truly is created equal, she lived it. No one was turned away from our home. Everyone was given equal opportunity to excel or fail, and all were loved unconditionally.

This unconditional love got its first test when I came out to my parents in my mid-teens. My mother did not hesitate in telling me that she loved me and had already known about my orientation. She and my father had talked about it and decided that they real-

ly didn't know much about being gay, so they left it to me to find my own mentors. She treated my partners with the same acceptance and support that she did my brothers and their respective partners. We won't talk about the time she considered fixing me up with the new single minister.

And she was there when that "Bill to Prohibit Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation" was signed into law. She again became the lead story as she told reporters and legislators how much it meant to her that all her children were protected.

I guess that old stereotype about mothers and their gay sons just might be true. And, I for one, am grateful for it. ▼

Keith Goslant lives in Plainfield.