

Love Mary B: A Teacher's Life

By

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"Teaching is the noblest, most unselfish, most honorable profession."

- Leonard Bernstein

Standing there in the parking lot after seeing Mary B for the last time, I wondered how I could magically gather all the special people in my life together, and invite them to visit her before she moved away. My wish would be for each one of them to experience this gifted teacher of ninety-six years, who would welcome them in with a cup of love and kindness. She would then offer them a story or two that would fill them with the simple joy of being alive.

The magic of a visit with Mary B is that it re-awakens you to your all-time favorite teacher from school or some other pivotal life experience. Someone who really saw you for who were, and who you wanted to be. At the same time, she opened a new door for you by simply sharing a learning experience from her own life.

Mary B could, at one moment, share a memory of her grandmother from the mid 1800s that was filled with quiet and tenderness, and how those events shaped her view of life. Later in that same conversation, she could speak of injustices past and present that could still stir up an outrage in her with a wish to be marching on line again.

Was it any wonder that she became a teacher, and a kindergarten teacher at that. She was the one embodied in Robert Fulghum's book, "Everything I Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten." She was the one who taught so many how to learn, how to wonder and how to take pleasure in discovering the newness of life. For over forty years she opened doors to undiscovered worlds and relationships. Now even though retired for over thirty years she still invites people to, "Stop, look and listen."

I still clearly remember the last time I visited her. A living room filled with packing boxes. Some taped up and ready for shipping. Others waiting to receive more of her life's treasures. The drapes taken down from the windows now decorating the backs of chairs. The entire collection of her life's belongings soon to be shipped southward to her son's home in New Jersey, where she would soon join them.

There in the midst of all this chaos, Mary B stood glowing as though she was hosting one of her famous dinner parties. Gracious as ever, she was giving me some final assignments of who and what at New Pond Village needed some follow up attention. "Listen, darling, the Knitting Nannies really enjoy helping children and families. So remember that when the holidays come around. You can help them make arrangements for that.

“By the way, did I ever tell you that story about how my family would celebrate Thanksgiving? We would all gather together with my grandparents at their house, and we would not only share lots of food, but even lots more love and laughter.

“It reminds me of a time at one of these gatherings, my grandmother took all of us children for a walk after dinner to a place behind their home that we had never seen before. There was nothing quite like it.” Then Mary B wove another one of her lovely tapestries made from the thread and fabric of her memory, imagination and love.

But now it was time for her to move on for the simple, yet layered reason that “I’m ready for a change, dear. Portia is gone now. Sure I’ll miss all my friends, but it still gets lonely at times. Besides it will be wonderful to be with Donald, since he is alone, too.”

Although genuinely pleased with her decision, I was also left with the question of what would I do without all the wonderful magic of her stories and friendship. I wasn’t ready to have her move on. But being the thoughtful teacher she was, Mary B had already anticipated that question. “Would you mind if I wrote to you, dear? It seems as though I’m remembering something new each day. Writing it down helps make me stronger somehow. It will also be a wonderful way for us to continue sharing our stories.”

As a good student and friend, I was honored to be able continue the dialogue of our stories. I am equally honored to share the memoirs and insights of this gifted teacher with so many others in this book and dramatic production. It is my hope and belief that these reflections from Mary B will not only endear you to her, but will also awaken you to those other teachers that have changed your life.

So come join the many other students who have sat in this class and read on, so that you also may learn to Love Mary B.