

My mother awaits the Master's voice

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By John Harris

LIBERTY CITY, Texas—I don't claim to be much of a writer, but my pastor, Dave Havir, asked me to share some thoughts after I wrote a eulogy to be read at my mother's funeral on Monday, Dec. 13, 2010.

Carrie Mae Harris died on Friday, Dec. 10. Here is an excerpt from the obituary my family wrote for her.

"She was born April 25, 1932, in Commerce, Texas, to Lewis Delbert and Ninnie Mae Day.

"She attended school in Commerce and graduated from Commerce High School. After graduation she married Larry Harris. This union produced eight children.

"A homemaker most of her life, she enjoyed cooking wonderful meals for her family and friends, working in her flower gardens, and always ready to go places be it camping, shopping or just visiting.

"The family would like to express their gratitude to the wonderful staff at Marshall Manor [in Marshall, Texas] for their care of their loved one."

Mom's final six months

Our mother entered the Marshall Manor in May 2010 when she was diagnosed with a stroke. At that time, she also learned that she had a brain tumor in two thirds of her left lobe.

During her time at the Manor, she had many days when her thoughts were not very clear. This was quite unusual for this lady who had spent so many years sharing so much clear thinking with her eight children—five sons and three daughters.

I had the opportunity to visit her regularly throughout the past six months. My children and I went to visit her on Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 25). As I mentioned earlier, she passed away on Dec. 10.

On the night of visitation (Sunday, Dec. 12), Mr. Havir asked family members if they wanted to say anything during the eulogy part of the funeral service.

He wanted to give us the opportunity to express recollections as we gave honor to mom.

Mr. Havir generally makes this request, but he understands when people find it difficult to speak at such an emotional time. Three family members volunteered to share some memories. Two of Mom's grandchildren (a nephew and a niece of mine) and my brother Gerald agreed to say a few words.

I knew that I couldn't say anything at the funeral. Mr. Havir asked me if I would write something. I agreed to. He mentioned his opinion that he believes it is good to both laugh and cry at a funeral.

Words of recollection

Following are the words that I asked Mr. Havir to read at my mother's funeral. It was titled "Mother."

For some reason when I think of Mama, I think of the mama I had as a young boy. Maybe she's the mama I know best, or perhaps she's just the mama for whom I have the fondest memories.

My mama was a *busy* woman.

I recall a well-kept house, hardwood floors that were waxed and shined every Friday. And, most often, furniture was rearranged. A tidy row of polished shoes of various sizes atop an unfolded newspaper would lie upon the kitchen table, waiting for Daddy's arrival to whisk us off to the grocery store.

Mother put everything she had, all of herself, into raising her children. I don't recall ever hearing my mother complain about cooking three meals a day for 10 people or the baskets of laundry that had to be processed. This was done in the days when clothes still had to be ironed.

This brings to mind the thought of smells I will always associate with Mama. I can remember the smell of gingerbread fresh from the oven. I can especially remember all the smells of the trappings of Thanksgiving Day.

For all her loving-kindness, Mama could also be tough when it came to bringing unruly children back in line.

Mama had lots of rules to go by, and the one I cared the least for was eating everything on your plate before eating dessert.

I recall a particular incident at the supper table one night in which Mama had made a nice pot roast with potatoes and carrots. She also made a cake for dessert.

I was seated on a little bench along with a person (who for shame's sake I will allow to remain nameless). Well, "nameless" and I began to marvel at the close resemblance in color of cooked carrots and the oak hardwood floor beneath our feet.

I don't recall how we got the carrots off the plates without Mama knowing, but we began putting them under our feet under the table.

I'm sure "nameless" put me up to the whole bad idea!

I'm not sure whether one of our older siblings ratted us out. Or maybe it was just that sixth sense that all people with the title "Mother" seem to have. But she found us out and made us scrape the flattened carrots off the floor. And, yes, eat them.

I don't recall if we had any cake afterwards, but I sure know we had carrots.

I also recall that Mama didn't care for the use of expletives by young boys. And therefore she developed in me a particular distaste for the flavor of Zest soap—a brand that I don't search for on the supermarket shelf and don't allow in my house.

Mother was slow to spank—not that spanking was outside her abilities. But it just wasn't necessary when she had all the other crafty ideas as I have already demonstrated.

There are many things I could write about Mama—including her cooking, her heroics in saving drowning children (no small feat for a woman who couldn't swim due to a dreadful fear of water), her love for only one man and her total dedication to her children.

But I would like to conclude with the subject of flowers. My mother loved flowers.

She planted them everywhere in her yard—flowers of many varieties, although I think irises may have been her favorites. I say that because she planted them in abundance everywhere we lived.

I know purple was her favorite color, and I shall never be able to look at a purple iris without thinking of Mama.

Today it is winter—not just outside. Winter has come to my heart as well. I know there is a spring, just around the corner, for myself and for my mama.

She now awaits the Master's voice: "Awake, My daughter, awake. I have irises for you to plant."