

EMMA CAROLINE CAHOON HEATH (1887-1970)

In my mind, I can hear my gentle but persuasive mother reasoning with the Lord: (I hope she will pardon me for using "you and yours" instead of "Thee and Thine.")

"If you will hear me out, I know you will see things my way. My children now feel that I should no longer be here alone in my own home. They may be right, but, as you well know, I am determined not to be a burden to any of them in spite of their assurances and willingness. Fred (he's my eternal husband, you now) has had plenty of time over there to get lonely and to prepare a place for me, and there are many more loved ones there pulling me than there are here holding me back. I've lived 83 good, full years, and I've loved life. But now I'm ready to move on. Please, let's get it over with now!"

The Lord saw it her way even though she had little excuse for dying. She had not been sick except for "just a little cold." A few days before, I had talked seriously with her for the first time about her closing the home, which she loved so deeply, and moving in with one of us. She listened but wasn't convinced.

It was my privilege to find Mom, dignified, calm, in command even in death. I had removed the locked door by taking off the hinges when nephew Johnny Heath drove up with Deon, his mother. Johnny and I found Mom firmly seated in her blue platform rocker, her feet placed squarely on the floor, her head leaning comfortably on the backrest of the chair. The television was still on; a crossword puzzle from the Deseret News had been completed and folded and neatly placed upon a T.V. tray by the side of the chair. I called to her and felt her arm for a pulse but knew she had died. Then I realized that it was the first time I had touched a dead person, and the sensation was not the least unpleasant.

I imagined her finishing the crossword puzzle, placing it on the TV tray, deciding the T.V. program was as inane as ever, taking off her glasses and having her fateful conversation with the Lord. It was a pleasant experience for me, finding my mother, but exceedingly sad. No one has been able to fill the void.

After the mortuary men had taken Mom away, I stood alone in the quiet house where so many pleasant times had been shared. I walked into the neat bedroom, opened a dresser drawer and saw dozens of new handkerchiefs and scarves from birthdays and Christmases past waiting patiently to be used. I wandered past the back bedroom where Mom slept and into the kitchen. Everything was in order. I glanced into the refrigerator and saw a quart of milk, a few eggs, a half loaf of bread and half a TV dinner wrapped neatly in plastic. The freezing compartment contained several items including TV dinners I had given her for Christmas because I knew she enjoyed them and they encouraged her to eat regularly. "Fixing food for one isn't much fun," she had told me.

I then glanced into the bathroom and again saw the old-style tub with high sides which had trapped Mom once, before she got a stool to ease the struggle to get out of the tub.

remembered her embarrassment as she explained her predicament.

Mom's typically Mormon funeral with viewings, speeches, songs and prayers was a sweet reunion of family and friends, a grand social event. It also was a spiritual experience worthy of a great and faithful soul.

I don't relish death; neither do I fear it, because of the faith and assurances of my mother. "The funeral was full of hope as my thoughts centered on an impressive story Mom had told me long before. "Before you were born," she related in reverent tones, "I died. It was during the flu epidemic of 1918." I knew I was being let in on a sacred secret and I listened eagerly.

As her beautiful hazel eyes filled with mist, she continued, "I was lying in bed, your father and the doctor standing closely with their heads bowed in grief. My spirit left my body and I found myself in a sunny, warm, delightful place surrounded by happy people. I saw Grandma and many friends, but before I had a chance to speak to them I heard my name called and I was told that my mission on earth had not been completed and that I had to return." She brushed the tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand. "It was terribly difficult to enter that cold, sick body again, but I knew I had no choice. And I'm glad I did. Yet," she added, "that wonderful experience has erased all fear of death, and if people knew what I know they wouldn't fear death either."

I sighed and told her how happy I was that she didn't stay dead and that she was my mother. She hugged me and said she was happy, too.

So far as I know, Mom never lied to me; so I accept as fact all that she told me. Through war and loss of loved ones, this calm assurance has been a tremendous blessing to me.

Emma Caroline Cahoon, the second of ten children of John Farrington Cahoon and Magdalena Hansen, was born in Murray, Utah, on Sept. 2, 1887, in the home of her mother's parents. She was the only one of the large family born outside of Idaho where John and Magdalena had moved to establish a brick factory as other Cahoons had done in Utah.

Mom remembered vividly the death of her older sister, Sarah, even though Mom was only six. The cold January death and burial left indelible impressions on a very bright mind. She talked of helping her father make bricks and with other outside work. She was her dad's right-hand man, she said. "I really should have been a man," she said on many occasions. She was drawn to where the outside action was. When I repaired leaking taps or hammered nails or raked leaves or cut grass or pruned roses, Mom was close at hand watching and commenting. She was interested in everything.

A big regret that Mom harbored was that she was unable to go further in school. She was graduated from the eighth grade at the head of her class in Hibbard, near Rexburg. She was the validictorian at her graduation.

Mom was a telephone operator in Rexburg when she went to a dance and met my father-to-be. She was beautiful, brunette,

stately, captivating and nineteen years old; my father was a returned missionary from Salt Lake City, catch of the year, much sought after and twenty three when they were married on , December 19, 1906. They traveled by train to the Salt Lake Temple for the ceremony and after appropriate family parties returned to Idaho to make their home in Sugar City.

New and challenging, Sugar City was good to the new couple. Dad was timekeeper at the sugar factory, kept books for various businesses and then purchased the general store with a small hotel on the second floor. In his spare time, he managed the town baseball team and bragged for years at how good his teams were. Photos, I guess, can't be trusted because the team looks awfully scraggly and my dad looks hopelessly young and innocent.

The ninth of eleven children, I was the last to join the family in Idaho. I was born in 1919 as the family, was preparing to move to Utah on doctor's orders. My dad's asthma had finally gotten the better of him. Despite the death of her sixth child in infancy, Mom always spoke fondly of Sugar City: "For years I was so homesick I would have gladly kissed a cat from Idaho." To know her dislike for cats adds meaning to her remark. Dogs she barely tolerated; cats she didn't. I guess she felt she had plenty of children and their friends, that she had no need for additional pets.

In addition, strange as it may seem to people with fewer children and more confusion, Mom presided jealously over a house of order, a calm refuge where her family could gather for rest, regeneration and good companionship. And there was always plenty of challenge and exchange of friends and ideas. And food. Mom was an inventive and quantitative cook. Lots of beans, roasts, potatoes and gravy, stew, macaroni and cheese, bottled fruits, jellies and jam. When we moved, hundreds of bottles of stuff were carted along. In addition she made pies and cakes by the dozens.

Speaking of cakes, I remember times she would make a boiled raisin cake For church or the family of a sick friend and would have to attach notes to prolong its existence. Otherwise a few of us could dispose of a cake or batch of oatmeal cookies in short order, long before dinner or dessert time.

Flowers for Mothers' Day, An Open Letter to My Mother

Hi, Mom:

I feel compelled to write you this letter, even though you have been dead many years. The time has passed quickly since you left, but seldom does a day pass that I don't miss you and wish you were still here. Yet, reason and faith tell me you are happy in the arms of a worthy husband, in the presence of a big family and many friends.

In all my experience, most of a century now, in my travels, in business and recreation, I have never met anyone as noble, as inspiring, as engrossed in service to others, as loving as you. Sometimes I have wished I had more money or talent or brain

power, but I would take absolutely nothing in this world in exchange for having you as my mother. You are the greatest blessing of my life. I cherish your memory and bask in your constant love.

It's easy to write you now and tell you things I did not tell you while you were here. Were you here, you would accuse me of exaggeration, which wouldn't be the first time. But inasmuch as you can't "correct" me, I shall continue.

You taught me many things, probably everything I need to know to be happy. (The infrequent unhappiness has been my own doing.) But let me cite a few specific examples.

1) I cannot remember a time when you lied to me. Lying or cheating was never condoned in our home. Honesty in every circumstance was the expected, the normal thing. Nothing less. "Thou shalt not bear false witness" was burned into my being. Honesty was shown to us every day in every circumstance. Even "little white lies" were avoided. This led to some interesting discussions. Remember?

"But if she asks me what I think of her hat, how can I be honest and still not hurt her feelings?" I asked. And I can hear you: "Surely you can think of something nice to say without lying. Tell her it's a beautiful color and it matches her pretty eyes. You don't have to tell her it looks like it came out of a cow pasture."

Honesty would be a marvelous thing, wouldn't it? If everyone were honest in government, business, family life, in everything, we would have very little trouble. Incidentally, I'm glad you were spared Watergate, the staunch Republican you were. I'd be tempted to tease you a little, except it's really too sad to make fun of. Maybe as time passes we'll return to a national morality, and Watergate will have served a bitter but necessary purpose. One point though: one of my co-workers threw up his hands and said, "Everybody's doing it, the Democrats, too." Your answer comes through loud and clear: "It doesn't matter how many people are lying and cheating, that doesn't make it right. Don't you do it!"

2) Humor in our home was constant. I wish it filled every home. How could we have survived the depression, the disappointments, the sickness without it? Humor dispels the monotony of day to day living. How grateful I am that you taught me by example the difference between good, honest, twinkling-eyed humor and the dirty story told with surly intensity, with signals when to guffaw. Thanks mainly to you, I'm still uncomfortable with the shady story and hope it will remain so. One thing, though, I really do wish I wouldn't take myself so seriously. Which leads me to another lesson:

3) "If you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything." What a beautiful teaching, illustrated so well at home. I must admit that I have become silent on many occasions when I would like to have contributed something interesting. As a companion to this speak-no-evil lesson, you accepted all my

friends without question. You accepted everyone as a son or daughter of God, so graciously, so lovingly. No wonder you were so well loved in return. Really, I wish I could practice this people-acceptance as well. Maybe some day when the house is empty and people are not so pressing (when it's too late) I'll be able to come closer to your standard. It's really very easy to love our neighbors as ourselves when we have no contact with neighbors and no conflict of interests, no differences of opinion.

4) Another item: You taught me the Gospel of Jesus Christ by word and, more importantly, by example. Prayer was daily. And prayers were answered. Our Father in Heaven was with us constantly. In word and action we respected God and Jesus Christ. I never heard in our home the name of Deity taken in vain. Foul language was unacceptable. It offends me deeply today to hear it. Thank you for your example. The Priesthood was honored. You honored your husband. But then he was worth honoring which may not be true in every home. We really didn't study the Scriptures extensively, but they and other good books were always near at hand. And watching you prepare Relief Society lessons was always an inspiration. I marveled at the dedication you had and the time you spent. No wonder Dad said, with deep feeling, that if the Priesthood holders were as dedicated as the Relief Society sisters the Church would move ahead much faster. Because of you, principally, there was never a time I didn't know the Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by our Church was true. You may remember that at my missionary farewell I said I believed and had faith but didn't know. Well, I knew. I just didn't know that I knew. The Holy Ghost had testified to me, and still does. I am most grateful for the Gospel in our home, for our discussions, for your willingness to listen, for your intelligent responses. And here again you did not claim to know it all, or even very much, but I never found you to be wrong. False doctrine was not a problem; there was no dogmatic approach nor easy answers. It was a house of challenge and learning. What a blessing!

5) I could mention other teachings which have brought peace of mind: Enthusiasm for life. An appreciation of time. Solid support in letting me make my own decisions from earliest childhood. Honoring the rights and property of others. (In a household of ten children, father and mother and sometimes guests, how else could we have had possessions safe and undisturbed?) Love of flag and country. (It must have hurt to let four of us go into the services during wartime. But there were smiles and kisses at leaving; the same on return.) Taxes, tithing, sharing bathroom and bedrooms--all took their proper places. (How vital gracious sharing is. What would life be without it? Everything is better shared-- except maybe bathrooms where patience becomes vigorously taxed.)

And now for a conclusion to this long letter which will not be mailed. It's difficult to leave you. Words won't stop. Thoughts keep rolling in. Well, it won't be long before we're together again. I look to that time with keen anticipation. Where

you are, I want to be, but don't get the idea I'm in any great hurry. Everything in it's own good time. Do you remember when I was four and you made or bought me coveralls with a red belt? It was just before the Fourth of July and you fired my imagination with how much fun it would be to roll down a hill in the canyon in my new coveralls. What a silly pastime, I think now, but you made it sound so exciting I can still feel it. (I don't know how you made time for all ten children, yet you did because as I checked with the others, each one knew he or she was your favorite. Back to the point.)

When my time arrives and I come rolling down the hill, will you be at the bottom to help pick me up and brush off the dirt? I've already got my coveralls, if a gold jumpsuit will do.

Happy Mothers' Day. May God bless you -- and all mothers this special day and always.

All my love,
Grant, your favorite