

## A Mother's Love



*Beecher Hunter's mother, Rebecca  
Hunter*

When I was a junior in high school, my mother announced to the family that she would seek a job outside of the household so that her three sons could go to college. My father was a barber in Cookeville, Tennessee – and a good one – but his income was not enough to pay for the expenses required for one son to attend Tennessee Tech, let alone three.

The oldest of the siblings, I was always fascinated by books. Even before I could read, my mother would take me on her lap and share their stories with me. From my earliest recollections, her dream related to me was for me to go to elementary and high school, and then one day walk across the stage and receive my college diploma. No one in my family had ever gone to college before.

So my mother went to work – first as a dishwasher in a restaurant downtown, and soon afterward, as an employee of Wilson Sporting Goods in Cookeville, making uniforms for sports teams. She was assigned to the

second shift at the factory, and my father and I would alternate driving to the plant at 11 p.m. to pick her up from her job.

My mother implanted the desire for learning within me, and there was never a question that I would travel down the road to education that she outlined for me. I had some understanding of the price to be paid, and after enrolling at Tennessee Tech, I worked at two part-time jobs to accomplish my – and her – dream.

When I received my diploma – a bachelor of arts degree in English – from Tech, my mother was radiant. One of her life's goals had been reached. She kept telling me how proud she was of me, and how much it meant to her that I had been willing to sacrifice for what I had gained. She never mentioned what it had cost her.

Years later, when my father was lying in Cookeville Regional Medical Center after suffering from a stroke, I took a leave from his bedside and the company of my mother to go downstairs to the hospital's cafeteria for lunch. A longtime family friend and president of the local bank, Glenn Ramsey, stopped by my table and asked if he could join me. I was glad to have his company and the conversation.

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At one point, he looked straight into my eyes and said, “You have a very special mother. Do you understand that?” I nodded affirmatively, but asked, “Why do you say that?”

He replied, “I’m going to break a promise I made to your mother years ago, but you need to know this. Once in a while, she would come into the bank and say, ‘Mr. Ramsey, Beecher needs a little more money for college. Can I borrow some for him?’ I always gave her what she asked for, and the request on each occasion was the same: ‘Don’t tell Beecher.’ She always paid the money back when it was due.”

His words jarred me. From time to time, when she gave me money, I never questioned where it came from. I supposed she had saved it from her paycheck. But I always knew why she gave it to me. It was her investment in my education.

There is no way I could ever repay her. She would say the account was paid in full when the diploma was placed in my hands.

My mother died in 1999. Her spirit is ever with me, and I think of her often. This Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 12, will be a time for bittersweet reflections. I will be sad because she is not living in that home on Fifth Street in West Cookeville, where I could go and hug her and tell her once again how much I love her. But I am eternally grateful for her love and for her inspiration, for her tears and for her prayers for me.

Most of you who read this today can relate to my story, because you have a mother who wanted only the best for you. The price she paid to help you get to where you are now was never too high, never too demanding, never too challenging – because it was for you. On this Mother’s Day Sunday, if she is still alive, honor her with your presence, or, if that is not possible, with a telephone conversation.

That is the gift she most prefers – time spent with you. Many children will be coming to our centers in Life Care and Century Park this weekend to be with their mothers. Let’s do all that we can to make those visits special and memory-making.

– Beecher Hunter