

## An Uplifting Influence

Carl Mays is a motivational speaker, a member of the National Speakers Association, and a warm and caring individual well known to Life Care, since he has addressed our directors of nursing, the annual management meeting and American Lifestyles. His mother, a resident of a nursing home, died this past February. His column on that event is presented here because (1) of his relationship with Life Care, but, more importantly, (2) the story of his mother's time on this earth represents a life well lived and productive in its influence on others.

### By Carl Mays

On Saturday, February 21, I presented the message at my mother's funeral in West Tennessee. Prior to the trip, a friend said, "It'll be difficult." I responded, "In this case, I don't think 'difficult' would be the word to use." Then I explained that "difficult" fit a situation when I was asked to speak at the funeral of a young man who had no spiritual foundation whatsoever. I didn't know him or his family -- but I was asked to reach out to the family and to comfort them. Scripture tells us, "Some things require much prayer." The young man's funeral was certainly one of those occasions.

But the service of my mother was quite different. We gathered to honor and celebrate the life of a lady who lived on this earth for over 94 years. Throughout these years, she honored and celebrated the love of God. After suffering a stroke, she resided in a nursing home the last dozen years of her life. When my sister Carol visited the home one day, a woman told Carol that she was there to lead a Bible study and said that if it had not been for our mother she would not be doing it.

The woman went on to explain that years earlier Mother had invited her to church and then came by in her car to get her. The woman said that there is no telling how many people Mother invited and drove to church and other activities over the years. She paused and remarked, "Your mother has such a sweet, sweet spirit." It is most important how a person is seen through the eyes of God -- but it is very telling how one is seen and remembered by other people.

Sometimes, we may compliment someone or extend appreciation -- and the person may jokingly say, "Would you put that in writing?" In one of my first books, *"You Can Do It,"* published by Broadman Press in 1977, I did put into writing something about Mother. I contrasted her to a middle-aged woman who bitterly complained about how she sacrificed for a family that never appreciated her. I didn't know the woman's family, and maybe they did lack in appreciation, but it was evident to me that her attitude wasn't helping the situation any.

(more)

In contrast, I can never recall my mother seeking a show of appreciation for anything she did in the home, business or church, but she received it. No self-pity or bitterness was ever evident in her life. She never looked upon her work as something to be repaid by praise. She looked upon it as something she loved to do for her family and others. After our father passed away relatively young in 1969, she continued to have a great attitude and sought to serve others, even though her family protested that she was doing too much. Still, she never sought appreciation, but always received it.

Mother realized that even though what happens in life is important, even more important is the way we respond. She understood that having a great attitude and a close relationship with God doesn't mean there will be no problems, obstacles and disappointments. But she knew it does mean that regardless of what happens, if we have the right attitude and the power of God working through us, "The impossible is made possible." The foundation of her memorial service and the celebration of her life were built upon this faith and hope.

*Servant Leadership* is a term used in contemporary society. Mother lived the term. She grew up in Missouri, picked cotton near the Mississippi River, moved to Tennessee in her late teens to work, married a good man, reared a family, and continues to be an uplifting influence on untold numbers. Even though my sister Carol, my brother Ralph and I can never fully emulate our parents, what great lessons we learned at the feet of James Perry Mays and Hildred Hudson Arnold Mays.