

# Gratitude for a Mother

Leonard Pitts Jr., award-winning columnist for *The Miami Herald*, described the feeling he had when business took him to Natchez, Miss., where his mother was born and raised.



Driving the streets of the town, he recalled how he had dreamed of the riches he had once hoped to give his mother. “The costliest gift I ever gave her was a plane ticket. Actually, my sisters and brother and I all chipped in on that,” he said.

“The ticket was a gift for what was to be her final birthday before cancer won its years-long battle. It seemed woefully inadequate in light of what she had given us: spirit riches in the shadow of poverty; security on the edge of apprehension; a home in a city jungle. Sick from heart disease and hypertension, abused by a husband who’d sold his soul to the bottle, she gave us *ourselves*. She made us women and men. What’s a plane ticket compared to that?”

Pitts had all but forgotten the gift until he stopped on his trip into Natchez at the home of his mother’s lifelong friend, Isabel. She told him that his mother had said, “My life has been really rough. But if I didn’t have my children, I don’t know what I’d have done. My children sent me home for my birthday. I’d been wanting to come home one more time.”



Hearing that, Pitts reflected, “I had always wondered if she knew how grateful we were. She knew.”

Pitts’ story naturally raises the question: Does your mother (or father) know? Did mine?



Just before Christmas last year (and that holiday was my mother’s favorite time with family), I visited the cemetery in a quiet, rural part of Putnam County, Tenn., where my mother and father were laid to rest. I thought about all the good times – and the hard, struggling times our family experienced, such as when she started working as a dishwasher in a restaurant so her sons could get a college education – and all the opportunities I took to tell my mother how much I loved her.

And there before me was this cold, marble headstone with her precious name – Rebecca S. Hunter – engraved on it. I whispered one more time, “Mama, I love you.”

And she knows.

– Beecher Hunter