

Struggles and **TRIUMPH**

Her name: Sally Rebecca Sullivan. She was a fifth-generation American of Irish descent, born in 1915 into a family that had made its way to the Southeastern United States. Her path of life would not be easy.

Her parents owned a small farm. With hoes and a plow pulled by mules, they were able to till the soil to grow crops and eke out a living for themselves, their three daughters and a son. The farm demanded much: early rising, feeding the animals, harvesting the crops, canning the produce, back-breaking labor, carrying water from a spring. With no electricity, chopped wood fed the flames of the fireplace to heat the house and the kitchen stove to cook the meals.

Education for the children came in one-room schoolhouses, which doubled as community centers.

When she was 19 and newly married, Rebecca's father died suddenly at the age of 42. One month later, her mother also passed away. As the oldest child and now with her own family, Rebecca and her husband took responsibility for raising her brother, age 4.

The country was straining to emerge from the effects of the Great Depression, and the young family huddled around a battery-operated radio to listen for any good news President Roosevelt could offer in his fireside chats. World War II came along, and Rebecca – attempting to generate some additional family income – took in washing of uniforms, soaked in a huge iron kettle, for soldiers training for combat in the woods near her home.



After a while, the family moved inside the city limits of a nearby town in order for the husband to gain employment at public works and so that the children – now including three sons – could start school. That was a passion of Rebecca's heart – to see that her boys could go to college and get an education that she had been denied. When the oldest was in his third year of high school, Rebecca announced to the family that she would get a job to see that her children could meet her goal for them. First as a dishwasher in a restaurant and then as an assembly-line worker in a sporting goods factory, Rebecca worked for years to accomplish her dream.

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When her husband died in 1985 – her sons grown and gone – she was left alone to face what the years would bring. Because she wanted to “help someone else” in the hard knocks that life can deliver, she became a volunteer in the hospital near her home. It was an activity that she cherished.

Diagnosed with lung cancer, she entered that same hospital for surgery. She never made it through and died 11 days short of her 84th birthday. It was discovered during the operation that the diagnosis of cancer was incorrect. The spots on her lung were benign, after all. Perhaps it was an ironic end to a life of struggles. But now her triumph – because of an unwavering faith in Christ, her Lord – had been achieved.



Sally Rebecca Sullivan Hunter was my mother. Even though she has been dead since 1999, I still find myself wanting to pick up the phone and call (931) 526-4878 and hear her distinctive voice on the other end; or give her a hug when arriving at that little brick house on Fifth St. in Cookeville, Tennessee, for Thanksgiving weekend or the Christmas holidays.

She pushed me, she encouraged me, she believed in me, she prayed for me, she loved me. Her dreams and her challenges made life for me better than I deserve.

What's the point of my recollections? Sunday is Mother's Day. Those of you who – like me – have mothers who have passed away know clearly the loss you have experienced and the debt you owe. But for those of you with mothers still alive, cherish the moments – and make as many as you can – to spend time, on the phone or in person, with the woman who gave you life and helped make you what you are.

– Beecher Hunter