

Was It YOU?

All across the land, mothers were praised and honored Sunday for their love and their sacrifices for their children. Deservedly so. Mother's Day also launched the beginning of National Nursing Home Week, a celebration that continues through Saturday, May 19. It is a golden opportunity for families and the public at large to visit long-term care facilities, to see for themselves what they are like, and to get a feel for the dedication and compassion of those who work there.

The theme of the week is *Treasure Our Elders*, and Life Care centers have an amazing array of activities planned, involving residents and visitors. For many who walk through the front doors, this week will change long-held misconceptions about nursing homes.

Perhaps the most remarkable tribute that could ever be paid to a staff in long-term care arrived at Life Care Center of Kona just before Mother's Day and in time for the start of National Nursing Home Week. It is a letter written by Debbie Mesch, a pre-school teacher in Durango, Colorado, about the love and the service received by her mother, who has been a resident in the building for about a year. Here it is:

On this Mother's Day, I have some questions that have been on my heart. Since I live so far away and YOU are with my Mom, Donna Fox, daily, I was wondering...

Was it YOU that made her feel that she was at home in this new place? Was it YOU that helped her with her paperwork so that she didn't have to worry? Was it YOU that gave her hope about getting and feeling stronger? Was it YOU that helped her in and out of bed, being patient and not rushing her?

Was it YOU that handled her gently and gave her that loving pat with a smile? Were YOU the one that assisted her in the bathroom and treated her with dignity and made her feel respected as an elderly person who'd really rather do it herself?

I heard that YOU took the time to listen to her stories and actually sincerely want to know her as a person. That YOU looked in her eyes and really wanted to see HER. Was that YOU?

Even though you had many other things to do, was it YOU that peeked in on her at night while she slept? Was it YOU that worked around your schedule and came back another time because she just wasn't ready yet? Are YOU the one who sets up all the activities that she loves to look forward to? YOU give her a sense of value because she's worth the effort.

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Are YOU the one who actually likes her as a person and enjoys teasing or laughing together? Was it YOU that prepared meals for her that you'd proudly make for your own family? Are YOU the one who brought their children around for her to enjoy seeing? Their youth and energy remind her of all the children she has raised.

Was it YOU that fixed her hair and made her remember times out on the town? Were YOU the one who helped her down the hall in the wheelchair? Was it YOU that asked permission or gave her a choice about something?

Yes, I think it was YOU that went home exhausted with tired feet, hands and a sore back. YOU might have been the one that shed a few tears on your way home over what YOU had seen that day. Was it YOU that treated Mom like she was your own mother?

To all of YOU ... I say God bless YOU! Thank you so much for all YOU do. May God take good care of YOU and your families and prepare a special place for YOU when YOU are old and need the wonderful care YOU give to others now. I thank God for YOU. I appreciate YOU with all my heart!

The letter was signed Debbie Mesch, Donna's "Other" Daughter.



Mrs. Donna Fox, seated, is surrounded by three of her five children: Debbie, left, Bart and Linda.

Mrs. Mesch lived in Hawaii for 17 years, and taught at Kona Christian Academy before moving to Colorado. Her mother raised five children by herself, working first as a waitress and then in a cannery. When Mrs. Fox was admitted to Life Care Center of Kona, she wasn't expected to live long, according to Ray Marks, executive director, "but she has shown remarkable improvement."

While Mrs. Mesch's commendation was directed to the staff of that facility, her letter defines the reach in performance of every associate throughout Life

Care who believes God has called him or her to the ministry of caring for His frail and infirm children.

--Beecher Hunter