

## Mother of the Year Speech – May, 2008

Thank you. It is a tremendous honor to receive this award—especially when I feel like I am no different than the millions of mothers who are raising children in America today.

When I began to consider what I would say to you during this presentation, I started thinking about what a mother is and the words that best describe a mother's role. Of course, **loving** is the word that first comes to mind. We **love** our children unconditionally and always want the best for them.

Mothers also **give**—and we **sacrifice**. We are expert **jugglers** and **psychologists**. And, we serve as role **models**.

Let's start with **giving** and **sacrificing**.

I had the privilege of raising our son and daughter as a stay-at-home mom. As you know, stay-at-home moms are a rarity these days because so many families must have two incomes to survive. While I admire those who choose to stay home with their children, I praise those who serve in dual roles as mothers and breadwinners. Both types of mothers **give**—and they **sacrifice**.

The stay-at-home mom may not have the opportunity to earn the title and the personal advancement that may have been possible with an outside job. And, she probably does not enjoy as much interaction with other adults as the working mom.

The working mother, on the other hand, will skip lunch, get up early or stay up late to accomplish things she needs to do so she has more time to spend with her kids. Both working and stay-at-home moms sacrifice time with friends. We place our own hobbies and careers on hold so our children have the opportunity to pursue *their* interests.

And despite the sacrifices mothers make, many of us experience occasional bouts of guilt. Stay-at-home moms may feel guilty because they are not contributing to the family's income and they are not reaching the professional goals they once set for themselves.

Working mothers may have feelings of guilt because they are not spending as much time as they would like with their children. They may not be there for the school recognition luncheon or they may miss a soccer game. Guilt is part of the **sacrifice** we make as mothers.

As I mentioned earlier, mothers are jugglers. We are constantly juggling our own time and our family's schedules. Our son, Joe, always loved sports and played a different sport every season. Our daughter, Debbie, on the other hand, had her own interests. It never failed that when Debbie needed to be on one side of town for an activity, Joe had a game in the opposite direction.

Over the years, our family gave up many summer vacations so our children could participate in sports and other activities. And, my husband and I drove thousands of miles so we could accommodate our children's schedules. As mothers, we **sacrifice** and we **juggle**.

Mothers are also **psychologists**. From the time our children are very young, we learn to analyze them so we can help them develop to their full potential.

I think one of a parent's greatest challenges is resisting the temptation to re-live their own lives through their children. I'm sure you've seen it many times. Dad wanted to be a football star, so

he forces Junior to play football even though Junior wants to be a tuba player in the band. Mom wanted to become a concert pianist so she pushes Susie into years of piano lessons even though Susie prefers to run track.

That's part of our duties as mothers. We must be able to analyze our children, determine their personalities and identify their strengths. Then, we must be willing to step back and take a supportive role as they develop as individuals.

I am sure you have asked this same question. How can we raise our children in the same environment and try to instill the same values, yet our children turn out to be so different?

Our children, Joe and Debbie, are as different as night and day. Joe was always the gregarious child and the center of attention. Our family usually went camping when we took summer vacations and Joe would always have several children playing games on the picnic table before we finished setting up camp.

Debbie was more reserved and quiet. When we traveled, I always made sure that I found friends for her to spend time with because if I didn't, she would remain in the motor home reading books. While Joe was playing baseball, basketball and other sports, Debbie was the spectator. She even became interested in following professional sports teams.

Both of our children were achievers in their own way. They both graduated from college and today Joe is a Ranger in the United States Army serving in Iraq, and Debbie is a stay-at-home mom raising her own (insert number) children. Our children were able to reach their potential and fulfill their dreams because my husband and I were able to play the role of psychologist and identify their personalities and areas of strength. Then, we allowed them to develop as individuals.

Part of the psychology of raising children is dealing with the bickering. When our children were growing up, they fought like cats and dogs. We had an area within the back seat of our Mazda that was designated as "no man's land" and each child was supposed to stay on his or her side of the car without allowing any body part to stray into "no man's land." Of course, as soon as we hit the road, the bickering would start. "He has his foot on my side" or "her arm is touching my seat!"

Debbie was always a very neat child and as she grew older, she had a place for everything in her room, and she always kept everything in its place. Joe—who could never be classified as neat—derived a tremendous sense of pleasure from going into Debbie's room and moving just one thing. Then, he would sit back and see how long it would take his sister to discover what he had done. Of course, there was always trouble.

A mother once told me that she was envious of one particular friend whose three children got along very well and never seemed to bicker—when hers were constantly arguing. I reminded this mother that arguing and bickering is a natural part of development—especially when children have strong personalities and begin to exert themselves as individuals.

Today, this woman's son is a successful businessman and her daughter is pursuing a doctorate degree in physical therapy. Understanding the reason for the bickering is part of the **psychology** of being a mother.

Lastly, mothers are **role models**. Our children begin to watch us and emulate us when they are very young. I'm sure you've heard the country music song that describes a father's distress when his child utters a four letter word and he realizes the child learned the word from him. As the

song progresses, it describes the many good things the child learned from the father and the father's success as a role model. The child even says "I want to be like you." We must remember that our children are constantly watching and imitating us—even after they become adults.

I realize that my own mother and father, Fred and Edith Agnew, were my role models for parenting. They are both very loving and giving people, and I have tried to follow their example.

When I was notified that I had been named "Mother of the Year," Olive Dadisman told me that my work as a community servant and my support for charities such as St. Jude Children's Research Hospital were essential to my selection. I consider my work with charities as an extension of my role as a mother, and I feel very fortunate to be able to give to St. Jude and other organizations as a member of the Fraternal Order of Eagles.

My charity work reflects the giving spirit I witnessed in my own parents and I believe I have set a good example for my children, who are dedicating their lives to their families and others. As mothers, we are constantly **role models** for our children.

In closing, I would like to read the following poem, authored by Helen Steiner Rice, which sums up "A Mother's Love."

*A Mother's love is something  
that no one can explain,  
It is made of deep devotion  
and of sacrifice and pain,  
It is endless and unselfish and enduring come what may  
For nothing can destroy it  
or take that love away...  
It is patient and forgiving  
when all others are forsaking,  
And it never fails or falters  
even though the heart is breaking...  
It believes beyond believing  
when the world around condemns,  
And it glows with all the beauty  
of the rarest, brightest gems...It is far beyond defining,  
It defies all explanation,  
And it still remains a secret  
like the mysteries of creation...  
A many splendored miracle  
man cannot understand  
And another wondrous evidence  
of God's tender guiding hand.*

Again, I would like to thank you for the honor you have bestowed on me today. This is my first visit to the Mother's Day Shrine in Grafton and I am proud to be here as a mother and a member of the Fraternal Order of Eagles.

I wish mothers everywhere a happy and blessed Mother's Day.

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