**Gifts of Love in Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

My college graduation was a rainy, soggy mess -- and it was wonderful.

It was a beautiful evening in June, and my graduation was the next morning. June weather in New York can be glorious. So, I just assumed graduation would be a sunny celebration outdoors on the campus quad with my classmates and a large enthusiastic crowd of our family and friends.

But, as the night wore on, there was talk of rain. This was not a forecast for the gentle, sweet rain that refreshes, but the more foreboding, soaking rain that lashes out with wind and thunder. I love a good thunder storm … but *not* on my graduation day.

There was a commencement rain plan that would require a difficult choice for me. On campus, we had an auditorium that could hold the graduates, but none of their guests. There was also a gymnasium that could accommodate guests to watch a live broadcast of the graduation. (Yes, this was in the ancient days before the internet could livestream the graduation to the most remote corners of the globe.) Unfortunately, each graduate would get only one ticket for a single guest to attend this broadcast.

My siblings would be content to sit out this event. We were at a stage in my family’s history where every year one of us seemed to be graduating from somewhere! But, as the night wore on, it looked ever more likely that I could only ask one guest to watch my graduation. The burden of choosing between my Mom and my Dad weighed heavily on my mind.

But then, one of my most cherished memories unfolded. My Dad took me aside and told me quietly that if I could only have one guest, there was no question that it should be my Mom. He reminded me of all the ways she had supported me through college and how, after her many years as a teacher, education was so important to her. He knew my Mom would cherish the chance to see her daughter graduate college. Then, not long after, my Mom took me aside and told me quietly that if I could only have one guest, there was no question that it should be my Dad. She reminded me of how hard he had worked to provide for his children’s education and how he had been looking forward to the first of the college graduations his three children would celebrate. She knew my Dad would cherish the chance to see his daughter graduate college. Without question, each was absolutely certain that the other came first.

When graduation day dawned, the skies were less threatening and the forecasts became optimistic. It was announced, to my great relief, that we would have graduation outdoors with an unlimited number of guests after all. Problem solved!

The ceremony started and, as if on cue, as soon as we had processed in and the opening remarks were made, the sky turned dark, rumbles of thunder began, and the clouds opened with torrential rains. We had the shortest commencement in the college’s history. When the truncated ceremony was over, I met my family on the soggy lawn. My drenched cardboard mortar board was rippled like corrugated paper. The black ink in the rayon graduation robe was bleeding onto my dress, and the graduation program was a wet rag in my hands. And, I could not have been happier. I was in the embrace of *all* the people I loved.

All these years later, I have no recollection of the ceremony itself or of what was said, what was done, and who had spoken. I remember only two things. I remember being very, very wet. And, I remember my parents’ quiet, selfless love for each other.

If you are a 2021 graduate with limited tickets to your celebration, congratulations! Alas, I have absolutely no helpful advice for you on allocating those tickets.

But, if you are a parent, and you have any opportunity to show your children that you love each other, do it. Of course, the long-planned grand gestures and the eagerly anticipated celebrations of milestone anniversaries and birthdays are memorable. But, to me, the two quiet conversations I had with my parents on the eve of my graduation meant the world.

Both my Mom and my Dad had long worked and waited to see their children graduate.

Yet, to each of them, giving the joy of that celebration to the other was what they preferred over keeping that gift for themselves. It was not an expensive, grand gesture in the balance. It was a ticket to sit on a creaky folding chair in an old gymnasium to watch what would likely be a fuzzy broadcast of a lengthy ceremony. That was all, and that was everything.

After a quarter century of marriage, “*He comes first,”* and “*She comes first”* were their first responses and best instincts, and I was blessed to witness that first hand. I noticed that love back then, and I cherish the memory of it now. When you do not think your children notice the simple ways their parents love each other, they do. When they look back, more than almost anything, they will cherish the generous, simple gifts of love that their parents exchange in ordinary times.

*Thanks, Mom and Dad, and praying that you are together again, today and for eternity.*

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