

The Blossoms of Ordinary Times

(Column 9: May 6, 2019)

By Lucia A. Silecchia

Late last April, the carnations in the supermarket caught my eye. They were that soft peach that melts together the best of pink and orange. Best of all, they were on sale! I bought two bunches of them, tied them together with a rubber band, and brought them home to my Mom. She had been ill and they brightened her day and her smile as they bloomed by her bed.

They were the last gift I ever gave her.

During Mother's Day week, my Mom passed into eternity. We laid her to rest under a spray of beautiful white roses. These flowers of June celebrated the precious joy of the month her parents welcomed her into this world. The bright Baptismal white celebrated the more precious but harder hope with which her children commended her to God's care.

Quietly, I took some of the wilting carnations she had enjoyed so much and left them with her, tucked under the fresh white roses she never saw. This was not merely sentimental. In so many ways, my Mom's life – like that of so many mothers -- was the story of simple carnations, not splashy roses.

In the years I was blessed with my Mom at my side, there were special "rose" moments. We traveled abroad together on some memorable adventures; we celebrated graduations and landmark birthdays at parties she planned; and we drank afternoon tea together at hotels that felt like movie sets. I remember times like these with joy and gratitude.

Yet, what I cherish most are the simple "carnation" moments that filled those years. It is the way Mom called me when I had early classes to make sure I did not oversleep – and called me when I had late classes to make sure I was safely home. It is the way she always found a reason for coffee when we were running errands, and the way she waited up to have dinner with me even when I got home after midnight. It is the way her home held more of my belongings than hers long after I had moved away, and the way she let me plan extravagant birthday parties for my cat. It is the way she mailed home-baked cookies, newspaper clippings, and loving letters to me. My mailbox seems strangely empty now.

It is the way she accepted with gracious enthusiasm (and maybe some fear!) a fragile bathrobe I once made for her – glued together because sewing was not in my childhood skill set. It is the way she sewed a trunk full of cloths for my dolls and years of

Halloween costumes for me. It is the way she let my siblings and me “tailgate” in the parking lots of fast food restaurants because I thought everything tasted better sitting in the trunk of a station wagon. It is the patience with which she took us shopping for Halloween pumpkins and Christmas trees and endured the seriousness with which I made these weighty purchases. It is the way she celebrated St. Lucy’s Day for me every December and the way she played the piano, often starting or ending these concerts playing “Santa Lucia” just because I liked it. It is the way she lit candles after Mass when she prayed for all those she loved, and the way family photographs and not fine art had pride of place in her home. It is all the ways she loved my Dad.

I hope my Mom knew how special all of these moments were and that they brought her the same joy they brought to me. I like to think they did.

If, this Mother’s Day, your heart aches a bit, you will be in my prayers. I know the bitter in bittersweet.

However, if, this Mother’s Day, your mother is still with you, I hope that you celebrate with all that is grand, exuberant and special. More importantly, I hope that on an ordinary Thursday afternoon, long after Mother’s Day has passed, some carnations will catch your eye. I hope that you will buy them-- especially if they are on sale. I hope you tie them together with rubber bands and give them to your mother. They are the blessed, beautiful blooms of ordinary times.

Lucia A. Silecchia is a Professor of Law at The Catholic University of America. "On Ordinary Times" is a bi-weekly column reflecting on the ways to find the sacred in the simple. Email her at silecchia@cua.edu.