

Life.

Experienced.

LAURIE MULLET | JANUARY 2019



My uncle died nine days before Christmas. My heart broke for me but soared for him. His memorial service occurred four days before Christmas. I cried tears of sorrow for me. In the evening, I toasted him with a dirty martini, up, with extra blue cheese olives, one of his favorites.

Christmas Eve came and as I sang "Silent Night" tears of sadness streamed down my face for me. Soon, they were joined by tears of joy for him. I knew he was in the heavens witnessing radiant beams from the most Holy face.

Christmas Day came and went in a flurry. I always host our family holidays thus fifty people descend upon our home for six hours of nonstop chaos, eating, laughing, presents and the ever-popular "selfies." I thought about my uncle often that day as he had been a part of my celebrations since I was a small child when he would drop by for a cup of cheer. I would keep all of my presents from Santa stacked in a pile and he actively participated in my "Show and Tell" with great interest and enthusiasm; reinforcing the sentiment that I had been a good girl the previous year based on my bounty.

As memories often do, many cascaded to the forefront that day, and when all the guests had left, I stopped to reminisce with my husband Joe.

I was five when our family moved from the city to rural Porter County. We attended church in the small neighboring town of Westville. My father was extremely outgoing and my mother, the exact opposite, a true introvert. They were excited to settle into a new community and made friends in the church finding their spirit couple, "Uncle Jack and Aunt Shirley."

Jack was extremely handsome and charming. Shirley was beautiful and kind with a softness few women possess. Dad and Jack became best friends, and Mom opened up to allow Shirley into her life. They enjoyed each other's company in times of joy and sorrow. The four of them celebrated life with gusto, Jack often taking the lead.

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Jack taught Sunday school, and Shirley was the choir director that taught all of us to sing like angels. When I was in fifth grade, Jack introduced our class to the Holt Adoption Agency, and we all agreed to support children in Korea with our nickels and dimes. I went home and advised my parents that our meager offerings were not enough, and I believed we should adopt a child. Well, guess what? They agreed, three times. Jack and Shirley agreed four times. Another family in the church agreed two times. In addition, many foster children came through the little congregation and were loved for a season by all. I learned the true meaning of unconditional love from this experience and truly grew as a human because of it.

As I aged, Jack continued his interest in my pursuits. "What are you studying in school?" "Look at you! No braces and contact lenses!" "Your dad tells me you are going to journalism camp tell me about it." These conversations progressed over the years and included my choice of college, engagement and marriage, children, work, faith. I could go on and on. I shared more of my thoughts, feelings, and beliefs with him over the years than I did with my parents. He always listened intently without opinion. It truly never occurred to me that he could be just that: a nudge of moral support. He didn't have the burden of parenthood, he could just listen. And what a gift that was to me; more precious than any material present would ever be.

Later in life, Jack came to live at Pines Village. While residing here, he fulfilled a life-long dream when he went to the Porter County Air Show and flew a WWII Bomber. I was so excited to be a part of this life event and listened intently while he explained the exhilaration he felt when he took control of the plane from the pilot. I could hear the excitement of a child on Christmas morning in his voice. ***It was my turn to just listen—I am so grateful I was able to return his gift.***



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