

# **Baking Loaves of Love**

## **Grand Visitation - Tooele Valley Chapter #25**

### **March 6, 2008**

As I approached this year, I tried to identify what some of our needs might be; what some of my goals should be. Was there something specific that I should or could do. Was there something that I could accomplish, or something collective that we could bring to fruition? The more I pondered, the more obvious it became that what I needed to do was to “be myself” and always to be encouraging of your efforts, your projects and the time spent on behalf of our Eastern Star and our entire Masonic Family. My mother often used the phrase “Many hands make light work.” It was Mom’s way of trying; without nagging, to get all five of us kids to share in the daily chores. “Together” ; for me, became one of those warm, fuzzy, comforting words. Together we can enjoy being a helping hand.

In 1996 there was an article in a Catholic Journal from the Philippines which Marion Uy, Miss International Job’s Daughter, shared with me. From this article Marion fashioned a set of remarks which she gave in Utah and at the Conference of Grand Masters. I’d like to share and expand on parts of this article. The Bishop who wrote the article was explaining how important our hands were. He asked us to contemplate what we would do or feel if we were missing a finger or a hand. How would we make the simplest of gestures, accomplish the simplest of tasks? It made me think and made me appreciate all the more what our Shrine Nobles accomplish for the children. It also reminds me of Sister Carma Schwoerer who was a Shriners child, and a member of Tooele Valley Chapter. I’d like to dedicate this set of remarks to Carma. Without a full set of fingers she accomplished everything. We miss her.

Our hand - five little fingers - but so important as a **HELPING HAND**.

**The thumb symbolizes self-esteem.** This self-esteem can come from doing various activities; forming new friendships and savoring the old ones; reaching out to others in need; and when we extend the love of our family to others. The self- esteem that comes when a child is able to speak, or read, as a result of the dedicated people and volunteers at the Scottish Rite Learning Centers is a gift of service. The self-esteem that comes when a child is able to do things by himself, for himself, as a result of the dedicated professionals and volunteers at our Shrine Hospitals is another precious gift we can give.

**The pointer finger symbolizes direction.** This finger is not only used to point the direction to the Learning Center, or the Shrine Hospital, but also to remind us of the direction we want for our lives. This direction is achieved through putting into action concepts of fidelity, patience, teamwork, friendship, discipline and love.

**The middle finger** is the tallest of all fingers, signifying its importance. It **symbolizes respect** not only of God and country, but also for all peoples and ourselves. Each of us has different abilities and capabilities. Our respect for others will enable us to value the different contributions we each make according to our own individual abilities, talents and capabilities.

**The ring finger symbolizes commitment** - to do all we say we will do and to do our best in all we do. This commitment we proudly practice in the support we give to our Chapter and

Grand Chapter Charities; in the effort we make to do our work to the best of our abilities; in “our purpose to protect the widow and orphan, to comfort the afflicted, to sympathize with the sorrowing, and to relieve the destitute and distressed.”

**The pinkie symbolizes small contributions**, whether it’s volunteering in our schools, churches or hospitals; the meals we provide for the sick; the quilts we make for newborns or our troops; hats or scarves we knit for families in shelters or kids undergoing chemotherapy. Small contributions add up and grow to make the big projects manageable. Just as a trickle starts with a single raindrop and grows into a stream and then a river, so too, do our small contributions grow into the millions of dollars donated annually by members of our masonic family.

When we look at our own hand we don’t see those symbols. When we greet someone by taking their hand we may see the talented fingers that dance on the piano keyboard – we may feel the callouses that build, or garden, or shovel snow – we may feel the strength of the individual – we may feel the gentle touch of a medical professional. Whatever we feel - we always feel affection. Our hands are responsible for demonstrating love in so many ways.

I remember a summer when I was thirteen. Mom was expecting baby number five and three of us were to spend a week with Aunt Bell and Uncle Johnny on their farm. Because of Mom’s health, that week became almost two months. The best two months of my youth. I learned a lot about farming but ever so much about how you show love for family.

When we arrived at the farm we entered the house through the back door directly into the kitchen. It was as simple a kitchen as I had ever seen. Yet the old stove was already warm. I immediately felt a sense of peacefulness, as if the whole house was radiating positive energy. The windows were open and the air smelled so fresh. I could hear Uncle Johnny on his tractor in the field out back and hear the pigs squealing in the pen by the barn.

Aunt Bell showed me a giant dishpan in which a batch of bread dough was already rising. She explained that we would need another batch and asked if I wanted to make it. Mom had never let me make the bread so getting my hands into the dough sounded like fun. Aunt Bell’s radiant face indicated her implicit approval.

She then produced another giant dishpan and told me to combine five cups of sifted flour, a cup of oil, five egg yolks and salt. The leavening yeast was left to rise in another dish. I mixed the ingredients together by plunging my hands into the mass feeling as if I were a little girl again, playing in a sandbox. I didn’t stop mushing until Aunt Bell told me to roll the dough into a giant ball and place it on her countertop. It was time to knead.

What a transforming experience! I felt as if God’s feminine side whispered in my ear, “you have a wonderful task to do and it involves working this dough to the point of pure pleasure.” For half an hour I pressed, rolled, pushed, pulled, squeezed, turned, and lifted the dough as hard as I could. Aunt Bell, an instinctive teacher, praised my kneading technique and the strength of my hands.

I found myself sharing Mom’s memories of her mother making bread to subsidize their income; and my memories of watching Mom make bread every weekend. My hands, it seemed, had been inherited from a long line of women empowered by a sacred undertaking.

When my hands and arms grew tired, Aunt Bell encouraged me to rest and have a snack – delicious marble cake with a creamy cheesecake topping, and a scoop of homemade coffee ice cream – all handmade from the egg whites left over from her bread baking.

After our snack, we returned to our baking. Aunt Bell produced a bowl in which the bread - traditional challah - had already risen. I cut the dough into six pieces, which I then rolled into long, thin strips for braiding. I loved braiding the dough. After all the loaves were shaped, we made some miniature loaves with the leftover dough. Everything went into the oven. Aunt Bell invited me to join Uncle Johnny in the fields or just go and play in the hay loft. The time flew by and I returned to the house in about an hour to find Aunt Bell putting the fruits of our labor onto a platter. The aroma filled the air. I thought we had enough Challah to last a month. Boy was I wrong. I ran two miniature loaves and some fresh churned butter out to Uncle Johnny. I'll never forget the love I felt when I climbed up on to the tractor and he took the first bite of the first loaf of bread I'd made with my own hands. To this day, the scent of fresh baked challah and the memory it invokes replenishes me. To this day, to do something with my hands gives me a sense of a job well done.

From my experience I learned that I am strong and full of life. Any vibrancy I may feel or have, is a reflection of my own courage and energies to try what to me was new even though in my culture it is very old. And yet my vibrancy is also a clear reflection of the energies of women who I will never know – women who gave birth to babies and loved and cared for their families generation after generation so I could finally be born. My hands are strong because those ancestors had strong helping hands and full loving hearts!

Thank you to each of you for being here this evening. You help make this evening a success. As we extend our hands in friendship and fellowship, and in working together, let's always remember the principles taught by our hand – **self-esteem, direction, respect, commitment, and small contributions**. If we all work together, keeping our HELPING HANDS visible in all our endeavors; whether it's extending your pinkie to hold a baby's hand; sitting by the side of the bed and holding the hand of a terminally ill parent or friend; or BAKING LOAVES OF LOVE, we will achieve more than we thought possible.