

Adding Pearls

When I was a teenager, add-a-pearl necklaces were all the rage. They were a classic concept: a gift of a single pearl on a dainty chain given with the intention of adding other pearls on important holidays and special occasions.

Today, I think of add-a-pearls as a beautiful analogy of the accumulated wisdom we learn from our mothers. Oh, sure, we snicker as young girls. Not all of their advice strikes us as useful and some of it seems positively fossilized, but hopefully, over time and with the Father's blessing, we gain enough perspective to see that these mama-isms—the important values and the silly little lagniappe—are all unique treasures that only increase in value with the years in spite of any early resistance on our part.

My poor Mama exhausted herself trying to smooth the rough edges of her three little girls. Mama was a true “Southern lady,” a natural beauty born the second of five to a Baptist preacher in Natchez, Mississippi. Her innate grace helped make her a basketball star; her black hair and bright wide smile topped a tall slender frame and earned her the hometown title of “Miss Forestry Queen.”

Mama's marriage to her high school sweetheart ended shortly after she brought me, her third daughter, home from the hospital. Biological Dad was more interested in cards and liquor than diapers and bottles. Mama was raising three little girls on a clerk's salary when a childhood friend came to town and dropped by to pay her family a visit. It'd been years since that young man and Mama had seen one another. By this time he was fresh out of the service and farming a plot of land in Louisiana. For the next year or more he made the two-hour trip to court Mama. My sisters and I, ages two, three and five, were their ever-present chaperones. We rode in the back seat of his car and sang along with Mama to Conway Twitty's new hit song, *Mississippi Woman, Louisiana Man*.

It wasn't long before Papa married us, taking his prize bride and her tiny wedding party to the Delta to live on Bull Run Road. He built her a little white brick home with 900 square feet. She kept his castle spotless and worked beside him in the fields. In years to come, he would build her a larger house and she would tend it, too, with the same love and care than she gave the small one.

Mama looked as much a lady driving Papa's bean truck and grain cart during the day, as she did on the piano bench at Melbourne Baptist Church. Manners were important to Mama, a theme most of her lectures centered on, as she constantly schooled us in the things little ladies did and did not do. Unfortunately for Mama, my sisters and I had a hard time differentiating between the two. But, bless her heart, the woman persevered, leaving her precious pearls in every area of our lives. Today, my sisters and I recognize the great legacy that is ours in the time-tested values our Southern Mama continues to pass on to her children, grandchildren, and now great grandchildren.

I'd love to think that everyone reading my words had a mother like mine, a woman of faith who taught me from childhood of the Risen Savior who saves souls and anchors lives. But, dear reader, if that's not your past, I hope you know it can be your future. I pray you'll be the one that begins such a legacy, and that you'll start building that heritage today. One pearl at a time.

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