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Mumsie

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Nobody knew where her red hair came from. Her father believed there had been a red-headed uncle on some distant limb of the family tree, possibly on the McAfee side. But her abundant red hair was just one of the things that made Barbara Anne Bader so special.

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Times were tough in the Midwest during Depression '30s, when Barbara was growing up. But she had an unquenchable zest for fun. She loved to read and draw, and listen to swing bands on the radio. She adored the movies. And she was nuts about the ocean, as only someone born and raised in the flatlands of Nebraska can be. At 21, she moved to California with her kid sister, Jeannie, where she met and soon married Art Jensen, a sailor who shared her love for the sea.

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She and I shared so much—books, movies, drawing, baking cookies. But I never got my fair share of her fabulous red hair. As her only daughter, I was highly miffed that I didn't inherit it, along with my mom's hazel eyes and pink, freckled complexion. Her hair never even turned grey, much less white. It had only faded to a kind of dull, dishwater bronze by the time she passed away last week, in her beloved Hermosa Beach, one month shy of her 89th birthday.

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Just about everything that I care about in life can be traced back to my mom's influence. My political awareness comes from her feisty, lifelong devotion to keeping democracy safe from the Republicans. Ours was a reading household, with books and magazines literally crammed to the rafters; my dad was always out in his garage, building us new bookshelves. From an early age, Mom had me reading "Little Women" and her favorite, "Anne of Green Gables." (They had red hair and that "e" in "Anne" in common.) We always had crayons and charcoal pencils, drawing tablets and packs of Jiffy notebook paper in the house.

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Because her own upbringing with her Methodist minister father had been so strict and practical, she was always exhorting my brothers, Mike and Steve, and me to be creative. We didn't get much sympathy if we were moping around the house, claiming to be bored. "Draw a picture!" my mom would say. "Write a story!"



We spent our formative years watching old movies on TV with

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Twenty years after the

my mom. She also loved cartoons (her favorite character was Yosemite Sam), variety shows, and sitcoms. A family favorite was "Dobie Gillis," one of whose characters, snooty rich-boy Chatsworth Osborne Jr., always referred to his formidable mother as "Mumsie." That became our nickname for Mom, which she wore with pride for the rest of her life.



She loved to have fun ("I'm a grasshopper, not an ant," she'd laugh), and to make things fun for us. Every birthday cake was an extravaganza, every holiday filled with goodies, and festivity. Constantly worried that one false move on her part might somehow warp me for life, she never tried to overwhelm the tender shoots of my emerging selfhood with her own ideas about who or what I should be. She trusted my judgment. It was love at first sight when she met Jim, my groom-to-be. He could always make her laugh. She couldn't have been more tickled when he gave up a lucrative retail business to become an artist. She wanted everyone to do whatever they loved to do.

I must have disappointed her in many ways. I never gave her grandchildren (although she never, ever nagged me about it). And we lived so far apart. On the other hand, she bonded with all of our kitties, and loved visiting us in Santa Cruz. We'd take her to movies at the Nick, Marini's for ice cream, then out for long walks around the harbor, or along West Cliff.

When my mom could still write, we wrote letters to each other all the time, sometimes two or three a week. She was always the best audience for my jokes and stories; nothing that happened in my life seemed real until I'd written it down for my mom. She was delighted that I wrote novels—published or not—read each one as a boxed manuscript, and encouraged me with unflagging enthusiasm.

A few minor strokes after age 80 left my mom housebound, and eventually bedridden. No more baking, no more movies (except on DVD), no more walks along the beach. Mike, Steve, and our cousin, Megan (Jeannie's daughter) lived with her, so she never had to leave the house our family had moved into when I was 2.

We went down to see her as often as we could in those last months of her life, for visits that were always too short. She couldn't have much fun any more, but she was always in good spirits. After a while, all I could do was sit beside her bed, hold her hand and tell her how much I loved her. Less and less able to respond, she could still usually say, "I love you too, honey." On one of the last times I saw her, apologizing again that I had to go back to my life, I told her, "Even when I'm not here, you're always in my heart." She squeezed my hand and said quite clearly, "That's a good place to be!"

That's where she is now, where she has always been. I wasn't there for the ceremony of her death. But the ceremony of her life was something we shared for 57 years, and I will cherish those memories forever.

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Moving Story!

written by [Maggie Renner Hellmann](#), March 08, 2010

Beautiful story Lisa! Your love radiates as does your Mom!

Thank you! Makes me miss my Mom.

+0

Thanks, Lisa

written by [Eugene Kohlbecker](#), March 04, 2010

What a great mom! Your family's love shines through.

+0

I agree

written by [Steve Jensen](#), March 03, 2010

Nice job, Duckie! :)

+0

lovely story

written by [David Miln Smith](#), March 02, 2010

Very touching, heart skipping story about a daughter's faithfulness and love of Mumsie.

+0

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