

Most mothers give life to their children. My mother couldn't do that. Instead, she gave me something only she could give: the life I lead.

My mother Marie had a hard life. She grew up during the Depression, and prosperity was not right around the corner for her and her eight siblings. Her father had a stroke, and she had to work to help support her family. She worked as a clerk in a drug store. She was a movie-theater usher. (She saw *Gone with the Wind* so many times she could never watch it again.) On Sundays she played the organ at several of the churches in her small town in Colorado. She did what she had to do to help provide for her family. She didn't ask herself whether she enjoyed herself. She didn't ask whether she was fulfilled. She just did whatever was necessary because it was the right thing to do.

My mom wanted a family of her own. She left Colorado, married twice, and returned frustrated. She began dating my father, David, her eldest brother's best friend, and they soon married. Mom could not have children of her own, so my parents adopted a baby boy in 1955, named him David and began their family. In 1961, they adopted a baby girl, Debbie. After the adoption my parents learned that Debbie was retarded and had severe cerebral palsy. Heeding the medical advice of the time, my parents surrendered custody of Debbie and placed her in a home for the disabled. My mom believed that was the right thing to do, but that decision traumatized her and made her hard.

My parents adopted me in 1961. Six months later, they learned that I too had cerebral palsy. This time, however, my mom refused to go through the same pain she had experienced just two years earlier. She believed that she and my father were meant to have a child with a disability, and they decided to give me the best life they possibly could. My mom saw to it that I had medical care that I needed. From the time I was six months' old until I was twelve, I had surgery twice a year to relax constricted muscles and to straighten deformed bones that prevented me from functioning. My mom drove me fifty miles twice a week to the hospital in Denver for physical and occupational therapy so that I could learn to walk and dress myself and do all those things most parents take for granted that their children will learn simply by living. Mom never complained about all the extra work and all the emotional strain that accompanied raising a child with a disability. She did what she had to do because it was the right thing to do.

In an unbelievable coincidence, the family who lived next door to my family while I was growing up also had a son about my age who had cerebral palsy, and he became my best friend for years. His mother was not diligent in taking him for therapy or making sure that he had all the necessary surgeries. His mother asked mine once if she thought all the therapy and surgeries made any difference. My mom answered that she never asked herself that. She said that all she could think of was what my condition would have been without the therapy and the surgeries.

My parents had no experience in raising a child with a disability, and did not have the benefit of all the legislation and support systems that today help parents of children with disabilities. So they did what they knew to do: they raised me just like they raised my older brother. They laughed when I laughed, cried when I cried, praised me when I did well, and disciplined me when I misbehaved. Within the obvious limits of my disability, they expected me to grow up, go to school, live a life, and be an ordinary contributor to the community.

State law in Colorado required that children six years-old go to school. So when I turned six, Mom decided to enroll me in my neighborhood elementary school. My grandmother opposed the idea, commenting that I should be left to play. Mom replied, "But Momma, it's the law that he has to go to school." It never occurred to her that my disability should prevent me from going to school.

Others thought differently. Before the school principal would enroll me, he required that Mom prove that I was intellectually capable of going to school, something he did not require of other mothers. She had me psychologically tested to prove that I could handle the first grade curriculum. The principal reluctantly enrolled me, but after four days told Mom that the school was not equipped to handle a child with a disability. Mom hired a tutor for me while she fought with the local school board and threatened lawsuits unless I was put back in school. I was a child—just like any other child—who needed an education, and she was going to see that I was educated. The school board relented when a principal from an elementary school across town, who had experience with children with cerebral palsy, offered to have me attend his school. Mom drove me every day to the school and home again for the next six years. She fought for my right to education and inconvenienced herself daily to see that I was educated because it was what needed to be done.

Growing up with a disability was not easy or always pleasant. I hated having to be in the hospital so much, I hated the therapy, I hated not being able to do what other children could do so easily without thought. But I learned from my mother that whether I liked things or not didn't matter much. If I wanted to live like other people live, if I wanted to accomplish things, I would have to do whatever I was required to do. As a child I was dependent on my parents to dress me every day. That gave them a certain additional measure of control over me that often interfered with things I wanted to do. So, over time, I learned to dress myself, using my good arm and hand and my limited balance to get my clothes where they needed to be on my body. When I wanted to drive a car as a teenager, my right arm and hand were so weak and constricted that I found it nearly impossible to steer the car. (I had to use my left "good" arm to operate the hand controls.) I told the instructor that I couldn't steer with my right arm and hand, and he replied that he was sorry to hear that because that was the only way I could drive a car. So I practiced until my arm was strong enough to steer. When I became an attorney, I wore a clip-on tie because I could not tie a tie. As soon as I realized what an execrable fashion faux-pas that was, I spent weeks mastering a technique to tie a tie with one hand. Now I am a fashion-plate.

Today I am Chief Counsel of the Criminal Appeals Section of the Arizona Attorney General's Office. I have argued more than 60 cases before the Arizona Court of Appeals, the Arizona Supreme Court, and the federal Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. I supervise nineteen attorneys, directing them and teaching them how to best represent the State of Arizona in the appellate courts. I live independently, I travel, I cook for myself and friends without poisoning them. And while many people have helped me achieve the success that I have, I would not be where I am today without my mother. Her decisions to do the right things, the necessary things, without considering whether they were easy, fun, or fulfilling, gave me the opportunity for a good life, and the lessons I learned from her gave me the tools to achieve the life I lead today. My mother did not give me birth, but she gave me my life.