

Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message

“A Tribute to Mom With Fond Memories”

By Jamie Nagata

**On November 1st, the One Year Memorial Service for our beloved temple member, the late Mrs. Janet Mineishi, was conducted at the house of her only daughter, Mrs. Jamie Nagata. After the service, reflecting all those wonderful memories with Jamie, I could not help but ask her to write memories of her Mom. Jamie did not accept my request immediately. She asked me to wait for a few days. I understood her feelings and was fully ready to respect her decision. One week later, I called her. She replied, “I’ll try, but I’m not sure. We’ll see.” She told me later that she struggled at first and words were not coming easily. Then, all of a sudden everything started to flow. I said to her that perhaps her Mom was helping her. Thank you, Jamie, for your kind permission to share your most beautiful memories with my dear temple members! Gassho*

It’s hard to believe that on Nov. 20th it will be one year since my mom’s passing. Oh how I miss her! She always put a smile on my face whenever she told the story of how thrilled she was when I was born after having three sons.

She was a stay at home mom who sent us off to school each morning, making sure we made our beds before leaving the house. She often welcomed us home with the smell of baked cookies. She was my best friend.

Mom’s favorite saying was, “Never put off ‘til tomorrow what you can do today.” How many times did I put off things and pay the price! I’ve learned the hard way and now try to do things right away.

Mom lit senko (incense) and candles every day and prayed before the Buddha. Since she didn’t drive, she sent my dad out every Thursday to purchase fresh flowers for the altar. There was always fresh fruit offered and whenever she baked or someone gave her manju, she offered it to the Buddha first. Without fail, every night she would offer o-buppan and tea. Even if we had enough rice leftover for dinner from the previous day, she would cook rice just to offer to the Buddha. Whenever I have memorial services at my home, Sensei, looking at the altar would say, “You know (how it’s done).” My mother laid the foundation for me for which I am grateful. Each time I have service at home, it is a learning experience, and I continue to learn from Sensei and by attending Temple.

Whenever any of us left her house after visiting, mom would stand at the front door and wave to us and say, “kiyotsukete” (take care). She would not go inside until we have driven off. Now, Joni (my sister-in-law) and I say it to each other with thoughts of mom whenever we leave each other’s home.

When I had my first child, she came to stay with us for a month. She always said how wonderful it was to have a grandchild. How I appreciated her help and how I cried when she left! The bond she had with both of my children was a very special one.

In 1994 mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. It was a very slow progressing Alzheimer’s. After my dad passed, mom came to live with us. My husband, John, was diagnosed with liver cancer shortly after and I could no longer care for mom and sadly placed her in a care facility.

I visited her two to three times a week and whenever I did she would greet me with a smile and look around her to make sure there was a chair for me to sit on. If it was lunch time, she would say, “Oh stay for lunch, I’ll ask them to make you something to eat.” I would sit at her table and feed her and feed the woman who sat next to her. Mom would comment to her friend, “Very good, you are doing a good job. Your mom will be very happy you are eating.” It’s just like mom to have encouraging words.

The caregivers loved her as she was one of the few residents who was able to speak. The disease couldn’t take away her manners. She was polite and said thank you for everything. She sang songs and taught the caregivers (who were from China and spoke little English) songs and nursery rhymes. It may seem odd for others to watch, but for me it really was wonderful. We sang nursery songs, particularly, Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star (hand motions and all) while the other residents joined in by clapping. It made mom happy and it brought joy to the other residents.

Not all times were happy. There were many times she would get angry, but somehow something would come back to her and she would apologize for acting that way. In the last year of her life, she hardly called me by my name. Although she knew we were related, to her I was her sister or niece, but never her daughter. That was okay with me, because I could see the love in her eyes whenever I visited.

She gave me the ultimate gift at the end of her life. She was in the hospital for four days. During those four days she remembered and called me by my name every day. I was her daughter again. It was her last gift just for me and that I will never forget. She was again taking care of me. When Sensei came to the hospital to visit and pray with her, it was unbelievable. She was lucid; speaking Japanese, thanking everyone and praying with gratitude. I believed she had attained enlightenment.

Throughout life, my mom nurtured me, was my teacher, and she helped guide me. Not even Alzheimer's could take away the fact that she was my "MOM" and at the end I was her daughter.

We must all learn that Alzheimer's can be a difficult disease that will pull on your heartstrings. No matter how frustrating it can be, we must remember the wonderful times we spent with our loved ones and treat them with dignity.

Kiyotsukete, mom, until we meet again.

Thank you for allowing me to share my mom with you.

In Gassho,
Jamie Nagata

- *Unforgettable Words of Mrs. Janet Mineishi:*
 - *"I don't want to cause any troubles. And this is what my Lord Buddha taught me."*
 - *She was always praying, during the medical treatment or whenever she had extra time for herself.*