



Happy Mother's Day

The Face of Montana this month is familiar enough to you. Mother. Your mom. All the moms in Montana, in fact. At least in the way I see moms.

Which is by way of the gauzy memory of my own mother. I remember . . .

My mother gave me a love for big band swing music, that easy-going cousin of jazz. I have a picture somewhere of her and my dad at a club with friends in New York, my dad in his Cracker Jack Navy uniform on liberty from his ship at the end of World War II. You've seen this picture being taken in the movies of the period, a skimpy-skirted photographer miss snapping off a shot and selling it to the cigarette-smoking patrons.

All that's missing from that picture is the sound track of Duke Ellington playing from the bandstand.

She listened to swing all the time when she was pregnant with me — she must have, because I am imprinted with this music. My first memories of music, in fact, are not of her singing to me, but of swing and that original twangy country and western.

When dad was home, it was the country on the phonograph. As soon as he walked out the door on the way to work at Marias River Electric in Shelby, country's smoking, drinking and carousing was displaced by the mellow, orderly jump of swing. She must have played *Take the A Train* a lot because it seems literally hard-wired to my genes.

My mother taught me a lot of things. She taught me how to cut my own meat. Which may not seem like much to you, but the way she did it made a lasting impression on me. She'd cut up the food for

me and, as a reward for her troubles, she'd take a couple bites of the best cuts. In no time at all, I stopped asking for my food to be cut up and began to look out for myself.

My mom loved a good recipe, by the way, and some of hers that survive her — the Roquefort dressing for one — are regular family heirlooms.

In my young adult years, she taught me how to move out of the house. I was making some good money and spending a good deal too much of it at all the best Christian bookstores in the region, if my memory serves me. And she was taking a piece of my paycheck, 15 percent, in fact. I never knew where she got this strategy or percentage until the last decade or so, when *The Sopranos* became popular, and I saw Tony taking his taste of all the income his earners brought in.

My mother laughed a lot. Besides the recipes, that laughter gene was one of my luckier inheritances from her, and I'm so glad that the laughter gene passed to my children as well.

It's too bad that we can't bottle her funny bone and put it into the drinking water of politicians in Washington, D.C. Ordinary words these days and even unspoken nuances become incitements to taking offense. An entire outrage industry has sprung up in America.

Instead of taking offense and making major news stories of such things, I'd bet a lot of moms today would be happy to tell the political campaigns and the press to "Get over it."

My mom's vernacular was even more direct. "Tough," she'd tell me when I was whining about something. At times, she was even less polite about it. The grammar lesson she taught me was that

the adjective, *tough*, can modify a lot of earthy nouns.

I admit, the vision in my mind's eye might not be entirely accurate where my mother is concerned. Because 20-some years is a long way to look back when she was alive, and heaven is a long way to look forward to where she now lives.

I admit I've probably remembered the wrong things about her. I should be thanking her for teaching me how to love rather than how to cut my meat and conjure up a Roquefort dressing that she now serves to a better mannered clientele than me and the boys.

I admit Mom wasn't perfect. In some ways she was downright *im*-perfect. For instance, in the way when you bragged on your kids, she'd bring up your brother's kids. Which, I found out after she was gone, is what she did to every one of us.

I admit that I could have been a better son. I wish I had been. But even if she were alive, she wouldn't care about any of that — the regrets and such. We'd be sitting down to a good dinner and a few laughs. I'd be bragging on my kids, and she'd be bragging on my nieces and nephews.

It'd be a blessed Mother's Day. Which is what I hope yours will be as well.

Now, if you don't mind, pass the Roquefort. For, you see, it's not merely a heavenly blend of ingredients. It's a blend of best memories of my mother.



Mom