



**M**y mom had a vibrant personality and a heart of gold. Everyone loved Kiki. She'd light up a room from the moment she entered. Kiki was upbeat and had an infectious laugh. Being with her always made you feel good. Her most endearing quality was that she genuinely cared about people. Kiki listened and took time to really get to know people. **She was thoughtful, fun-loving, and kind. Pitching in to help others was her way of life.**

My mom was the first child in her family to be born in the United States. Her mother, Elsie, came to the U.S. on a boat from Sweden by herself when she was 16 years old. I can't imagine what it was like for my grandmother to start a new life, in a foreign land, at such a young age. Her courage and determination rubbed off on my mom.

My mom also weathered a turbulent childhood. Her dad was an alcoholic who was physically abusive to her mom. To shield the kids from his fury, my grandmother would rush my mom and her brother out into the street in their nightclothes. When she turned 17, my mom gave my grandmother an ultimatum--either you leave Daddy or I leave you. My grandmother moved forward with a divorce. My mom would remind me of how important it was to "not take crap from anyone and that I deserved only the best in life." She wanted to make sure I didn't fall prey to an unhealthy relationship like her mom did. **It was important to my mom that I had self-worth and self-respect. She wanted me to believe in myself and know I could create positive change in my life.**

After high school, my mom put herself through beauty school and became a beautician. My dad built a shop in our basement so Mom could work from home. When I was a teenager, I helped to schedule customers, buy supplies, maintain equipment, and do the books with

mom. **She was adamant that I have “business skills” and said it would be the “key to my success.”**

My first job was as mom’s “shampoo and blow dry girl.” Mom taught me how to cut, perm, and style hair, too. She would say, “You’re going to save a lot of money in life with these skills.” She was right. I put myself through college cutting hair for the football, baseball, hockey, and basketball teams. When I got married, I cut all four of my kid’s hair and still cut my husband’s hair to this day.

Thoughts of mom make me grin. As a young adult, I had no idea I would use the skills she taught me time after time. I’ve had great success in business and personal life because of her **persistence to develop my confidence, creativity, organization, and people skills**. All of these influenced my ability to **build relationships and not be afraid to tackle things outside my comfort zone**.

My mom passed when she was 56 years old from breast cancer. I was 25. I recall being so concerned about how she would handle losing her hair during chemo. Hair was her life. To my surprise, she turned “wig shopping” into a fun event and would even flip off the wig during conversations with friends to get them to laugh and put them at ease. Mom was like this through the end - always thinking of others and keeping our hearts smiling.

To witness mom’s **tenacity** and her ability to **see the positives in life, despite the challenges she faced**, was an incredible gift. Her greatest influence came to me at her most vulnerable moments. She taught me the true meaning of **courage, kindness, forgiveness, and love**. Her **impeccable zest for life** and **deep appreciation of family and friends** made me the person I am today.

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*My life has been blessed by many strong, wise, and courageous women who took time to share their knowledge, lift my spirit, and help lighten my load. Each have influenced my growth and development in significant ways. As I celebrate Women’s History Month, I am forever grateful for their gifts and imprint they left in my heart, mind, and soul.*

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