

Tribute to Janet L. Norwood

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My memorial talk in celebration of my mother's life is going to be a very personal one. While she is well known to many of you for her accomplishments, my relationship with her was a mother to son relationship. And she influenced me deeply. I now realize that I learned quite a few lessons from my mother.

Lesson 1: Great parents support their kids, have high expectations for them, but have enough faith in them to allow them to find their own way.

I knew that my parents had high expectations for me. It was simply expected that you would do well in school and continue to do important things in your work life. It never occurred to me that I would not perform well and achieve great things. Those were the unspoken expectations. It was never communicated through pressure though. They created a supportive environment for me that allowed me to take my time finding my way in this life. And quite frankly, it took me a long time to find my way onto a path that felt right and has become very fulfilling. They had to have faith that my wanderings would end up in a good place. They had to have patience when I seemed lost – or when I was “floundering” as my grandfather once memorably labeled it. I realized they were hoping I would find my way and it gives me a great sense of satisfaction – especially since the route was circuitous, to be where I am now where I can feel a sense of accomplishment that comes not just from the accomplishments themselves, but that comes just as much from seeing the pride in a parent's eyes. They cared, they had faith in me, they expected a lot from me, and I know I wouldn't have kept pushing myself and getting to where I wanted to be without their expectations and their support. So in the most fundamental way, they did an amazing job of raising me.

Lesson 2: A great marriage can be a big help in leading a happy life and in accomplishing great things.

Now, it's very hard for me to talk about my mother and my father separately. For one thing, they had a model marriage lasting more than 7 decades – they were probably closer than any two people I have ever known. You could see how much they loved each other and how much they saw their lives as something that they shared together. They've been a great role model for me in showing me what a loving relationship can be like. They have the best marriage I've ever witnessed.

Lesson 3: Feminism is a natural state.

What do I mean by that? It means that I'm a feminist because I was raised that way and it seems completely natural to me. That's because of the role model I had in a mother who was a rock star and a father who celebrated every one of her accomplishments. It was always a forgone conclusion that they were equal in every respect. It was good to grow up seeing that – for it be so natural for me to be a feminist. When you are brought up that way, you can't imagine the world any other way. It was never an abstract principle, it was who we were. That's a powerful gift to have been given by them. It helped me be a better father, a better manager, and a better person. It didn't just affect me, it affected my children – directly. Imagine you are two young kids sitting on the grounds at Harvard yard seeing your grandmother getting her honorary doctorate – on the same stage with Madeline Albright, Quincy Jones, and Arthur Miller. Imagine how that frees you to pursue lofty goals in your own life. We were lucky to have that experience – to have that role model.

Lesson 4: Work can be very fulfilling, especially if your work is about more than just you.

I remember how they would come home from work and after dinner, they would be sitting in the living

room continuing their work. They'd be in the living room quietly reading papers from work. It was obvious from this and from their conversations that they loved their work and valued it highly. I intuitively felt how important their work was and felt it very natural for work to be a central part of life. They visibly took pride in the way their work had a positive impact on huge numbers of people. My mother was known for her impartiality which translated in my mind into a value of integrity. Don't serve base political ends, but instead do what is right for the people. That kind of public service mentality colored my perception of work.

My father would explain to me that the economic policies he was instrumental in putting into place had enormous effects on the macro-economy. My mother's work directly impacted the whole country. I knew that huge numbers of Americans had their incomes tied to the Consumer Price Index and that the Unemployment Index was a key indicator of market health. They took their jobs very seriously because their jobs mattered.

I remember a friend of mine who was an economics professor at the University of Texas coming over to my house and looking through my bookshelf and commenting quizzically that it was rather unusual to find video tapes labeled BLS Testimony and "More BLS Testimony". It was quite an experience to see my mother testifying at congressional hearings. The effect it had was that it made it so that I can never see my career as simply a way to make money. Instead I'm always thinking about the broader impact on other people's lives that my work has. That's an important part of my mother's legacy.

The importance of my parents' careers to their lives and the support they gave each other in their careers made a huge impression on me. I learned the value and the satisfaction that good work can bring to a life.

Lesson 5: How to be a good manager.

My mother was an outstanding manager. I could always sense that. I realized a long time ago that my mother was my role model for being a good manager. A good manager in any intellectual professional career means being smart enough to surround yourself with very smart people, respecting them, motivating them and getting them to work together. I often think of one thing she told me – if you need some-

one to do something, get them to feel like it was their idea. I've used this countless times. Managing is not about commanding people to do things so much as it is about getting people motivated to accomplish great things. This is harder than it seems when people are measured by their ideas and it requires a deprecation of your ego in order to become a better leader. My mother had the demeanor of an executive manager – a gravitas that comes from people who have become skilled at managing significant organizations. I think I actually learned a lot about how to behave in my career by picking up on that demeanor through osmosis – seeing how she handled herself. She taught me how to be passionate without being too excitable, how to handle important and stressful situations calmly, and to make informed decisions after letting people's voices be heard. She taught me how to be a leader.

Lesson 6: Family is important; be there for your family.

While she had a formidable career, she had a huge impact on the family too. She was very important to her grandchildren. She gave them unconditional love. She thought they were all amazing. She was also a strong influence on her nieces and nephews. She believed in them, even when they didn't believe in themselves. She counseled them. She loved them and supported them. They would go to her for advice on their careers or personal situations in their lives. I know that the emotional support and the advice she gave was hugely important to many of those relatives in this room – life changing in some cases. She was hugely important to my wife. While I lucked out in the parent lottery – she didn't do so well and the relationship with my mother was extremely important. Jeannette loved my mother dearly and it was a pleasure for her to repay the support she got from her by taking care of her towards the end of her life. It was beautiful to see.

In conclusion, I would just like to say. . . .

My mother lived a full life and while I will miss her, I'm so happy with the way she left. She was happy and so positive at the end. When her mind and body started to fall away, the beauty of her essence shined through brightly. She left feeling loved and she left all of us with huge gifts we should cherish. She's left me with a model for how to live a good life and I am very thankful for that.