

Celebrating Mom

During the month of May, I usually write about our industry's labor needs.

Normally, I express my dismay that Congress is kicking the immigration reform can down the road yet again.

But on a personal level, it's really Mother's Day that defines the month of May for me. Mothers play a central role in molding sons and daughters, and my mother, Sandy, certainly did that for me.

It has been two years since she passed. This month, I want to tell you about her.

She was born in Beatrice, Nebraska and raised in the small town of Stevenson, Washington, where the Columbia River cuts through the Cascade Range. She lost her father when she was a teenager and developed a sense of independence.

Some people know what they want to be from the beginning. My mom was called to be a nurse. As a registered nurse, she worked in many types of practice, but for her, pediatrics was first and foremost.

Always civic minded, she was a part of the Junior League and was honored as one of Eugene's Outstanding Women. A big football fan, she was an original member of Daisy Ducks, a booster group for University of Oregon athletic teams and programs. No one could question her love for the green and gold.

All that could have been enough to impress — for most it is — but she also answered a strong call to service by joining the emergency medical response team for Northwest Medical Teams, now known as Medical Teams International (MTI). After hearing about dire situations around the world, and people who had enormous medical needs, she committed herself to helping.

MTI has sent more than 3,000 teams to areas of distress during its history. My mother was on the second team they ever sent. From 1979 to 2008, she participated in 20 assignments all over the globe, including the Far East, the Middle East, Africa, and Central America. This dedication defined who she was and served as a great example to me and others.

She was a rock. An inspiration. A woman of faith, with remarkable strength and dedication. A committed wife, mother,

auntie and grandmother. Nobody told my mother what to do or how to do it. She set her own course and provided a tangible example for us all to follow.

Serving where most needed

By serving, my mom was not just a witness to history, but a part of fixing big problems. During her three decades of service, three stories stand out.

1979 – Thailand-Cambodia border – After the reign of Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge was holding on and slaughtering innocent people right and left. In brutally hot conditions, people were succumbing to sickness and war-related injuries. The Khmer Rouge tried to infiltrate the makeshift hospitals to try to finish off their victims, but she protected her patients.

1986 – Ethiopia – The government was starving its people, and a health crisis of huge proportions ensued. My mother would venture out to tend to the sick who could not make it in to the bare-bones clinics.

Out of all the peoples she encountered and helped, she thought the Ethiopian people were the most beautiful, inside and out. The government came in and burned mud huts as far as the eye could see. Smoke billowed in the valley as the people ran to save what was left of their lives.

For several days, we did not know if she was alive or dead, only that the area she was in had burned to the ground. She took a chance writing about her experience in journals that are now being transcribed by my daughters.

1993 - Rwanda – The Hutu-led government engaged in massive genocide against the Tutsi people, also targeting moderate members of the Hutu people. My mom told stories of arriving in a soccer stadium too late — it had already been turned into a killing zone. While tending people's wounds that were created by machetes, she heard firsthand about what had happened to them.

Her last night in the country was the worst. Army personnel entered their quarters. The aid workers were robbed and their interpreter was beaten. My mother made peace to die right then and there, as she felt the cold steel of an M-16 to her head.

She thought it was over, but the soldiers then left. The aid workers prayed in thanks.



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Outside, they found a mass grave that had been dug for their bodies.

In spite of this horrifying experience, her commitment stayed resolute. She not only served but put it all on the line.

Putting family first

My mother loved us, no doubt. Being a mother of three boys could not have been easy, but she often told me she wouldn't have wanted it any other way. Nobody was more surprised when all three of us got married. We "outkicked our coverage," she would say.

When she met my wife-to-be, Jennifer, she pulled me aside and said, "Don't mess this one up."

My brother Craig and I gave my mom three grandchildren — all girls — and being a mother of three boys, she was perplexed over what to do with them. Those three granddaughters dressed her up. She loved them dearly and was the only grandmother they ever knew.

But her love extended beyond immediate family. Jennifer lost her mother, Andrea Satalino, in 1987. (My oldest daughter is named after her.) My sister-in-law, Amy, lost her mother, Betty Morin, just two years later. My mom responded by loving them both as daughters. She was saddled with three boys and frankly needed the break!

I see a lot of myself in my mother. My personality is very much shaped by her. She was an inspiration to me and made me a better friend, father and man.

I miss her every day, but I see glimpses of her in my two daughters, and all is right in the world. Happy Mother's Day! ☺