Mom's 80th Birthday Toast

I want to make a toast to the matriarch of the family, my Mom.

This is told from the perspective of her son over the 54 years I've known her.

We can't know ourselves directly. We can only know ourselves through the reflection of others. Your eyes have never seen your own face. You need a mirror or the reflection of another to see yourself. Sometimes our loved ones believe in us more than we believe in ourselves. Mom has always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. She was and still is my greatest fan. From encouraging me to ski when I was 5, helping me with my homework in school, to taking piano lessons and entering piano competitions when I was in junior high, to majoring in classical music then jazz as a career, to following my heart in yoga, and getting married to my beautiful bride; you always believed in me and encouraged me to follow my heart.

Believing in someone is a kind of love; a love of the highest order. Your belief in me helped me become myself and do extraordinary things and live an extraordinary life. Your belief in me taught me how to love myself and others. Love was the most valuable lesson you gave me. Love is not passed from person to person. It's passed from soul to soul, heart to heart. It cannot be learned. It can only be felt.

I imagine that turning 80, you reflect back on your life and ask the question, "Was I successful?" The answer is a resounding YES! You were (and still are) successful as a mother. Your son is happy, healthy, and still passionately married after 20 years. What more does a mother need?

You can judge a mother by her offspring. Sherri's newfound happiness is special. We can sometimes wait lifetimes for a love like this. I would guess that Bill is the biggest player in Sherri's happiness. But I'm certain she's happy because of her two beautiful children who've grown up to be amazing adults. But it always takes two to make a relationship. You have to be ready for a good life, ready for happiness, hungry for it, because happiness only comes with wisdom gained through painful lessons. Sherri is ready for happiness.

As I reflect on our family, I see we have all grown up in unique ways. But the one thread that connects us is love. We love; not just each other, but love is the cornerstone in each of our lives, whether that expresses itself through raising a family, through career, through our talents, or through service to others. Love rules in this family.

My main message to Mom today is gratitude. I'm so grateful for your love. I celebrate you.

I leave you now with a poem from a popular Buddhist teacher in CA, Jack Kornfield, which reminds me of my mother.

Happy birthday Mom. May you have many more. I love you.
Reverse Living
by Jack Kornfield, from After the Ecstasy, the Laundry, p. 284

Life is tough.
It takes a lot of your time,
all your weekends,
and what do you get at the end of it?
Death, a great reward.
I think that the life cycle is all backwards.
You should die first, get it out of the way.
Then you live twenty years in an old age home.
You are kicked out when you are too young.
You get a gold watch, you go to work.
You work forty years until you're young enough to enjoy your retirement.
You go to college,
you party until you’re ready for high school.
You become a little kid, you play,
you have no responsibilities,
you become a little boy or girl,
you go back into the womb,
you spend your last nine months floating.
And you finish off as a gleam in someone’s eye.