

A Manner of Speaking by Bonnie Neugebauer

Coach, mentor, guide, teacher, parent, counselor — it's difficult to call out the differences among these labels when we are thinking of mentors. But wherever we are, each day of our lives, people are shaping us — influencing who we are in the moment and who we will become. Mentorship is a powerful force for strengthening our talents, directing our purpose — or the opposite.

Reflecting on the mentors in our lives, it's important to remember that parenting requires a significant amount of mentoring. Hopefully empowering and sometimes irritating — our lives as children, even grown children, are impacted greatly by the actions and attitudes of our parents as mentors. Clara Ann Titze Neugebauer, my mother-in-law for almost 45 years, mentored quietly but fiercely, seldom telling us what she expected of us, yet we always knew. She recently passed away and in reflecting on her life, I was struck by remembrances of her mentorship. She was described as a woman of strong faith, steadfast loyalty, intellectual curiosity, refreshing sensibility, and infectious good humor.

When Roger and his brothers Bob and Brian were young, Clara had the idea of publishing a neighborhood newspaper that they named *The Belmont Bugle*. The Boys (as they are still referred to) would comb the block for stories and ideas. Clara would type their reports and then create copies by using a laborious gel process. And the Boys would again roam through the neighborhood, selling news to the people who had created the stories. (They must have been very cute children!) I imagine that this was the seed that became this magazine, planted by Clara spending time with her sons. Along the way, she taught them vocabulary, pronunciation, and quality standards and valued their bright minds and sense of humor. There would definitely have been laughter and tousing around — and a sense of importance and accomplishment.

"Tell me about the Boys growing up, what was that like?" I would ask. And Clara always responded, "They were really good boys. They had a set of blocks and that's all they needed." I must have asked that question once a year in search of more details, but it was always the blocks and the deep-rooted belief in the goodness of her family.

Clara helped me learn to value all the conversation opportunities with 'trapped' teenagers in a car en route to sports practice and music lessons. I constantly marveled at her ability to enjoy conversation and humor. She could laugh, really laugh at the same joke every time it was told. I would study her for playacting, but only genuine humor was there.

My mother Louise also mentored the growth of *Exchange* and protected our reputation, taking on the role of proofreader for several years. She had an eagle eye, and even after she gave up this proofing responsibility, she would always be the first to inform us that we had printed a typo on page 37.

She mentored in me a strong sense of right and wrong, a sensitivity to the needs of others, and the imperative that I can and must respond to these human opportunities.

"What did your parents give you?" has become my favorite conversation starter/party question. The stories that have been the answers have proved enjoyable and provocative. It started with a chance encounter at a shopping mall. As a stranger held the door for me, we engaged in a bantering conversation about women who do and do not like such gentlemanly actions. He said, "There are still some of us around. My mother taught me: Be kind. Be courteous. Do good things for women. I loved my Mom."

And so the question became important to me.

I first asked Bob Siegel and liked his answer so much that I continued: "My parents gave me two great gifts: joy and freedom from guilt."

Hal Neugebauer, Roger's dad: "My parents taught me to be frugal and resourceful. If you're going to do a job, do it right."

Roger: "A love of reading and a sense of humor. And the knowledge that nothing comes easy — you really need to work to achieve what you want."

My friend Vicki: "Self-confidence and the ability to be with people."

Nancy Rosenow: "A love of reading and learning and the importance of doing things well."

Acquaintance Rick: "A wacky sense of humor and a strong work ethic."

Willy Dugan: "Patience and optimism. Discernment, stop and think about what you are doing and how it will impact the outcome."

Donna Rafanello: "Any grace I have comes from my mom. It's how she raised me to be."

What did your parents give you? I would enjoy hearing your stories. Let's take this conversation online:
www.WorldForumFoundation.org/bonnie