



One arm to Heaven

Right now I am writing from a hospital room. The day's last rays of sunlight are coming from the window and casting a warm light on my mother who is lying in the bed beside where I sit. Ave Maria is playing on my computer which faces me as I try to compose my thoughts which I want to share with

you. A few days ago, my mother, June Meady had a massive stroke in the early evening. She was not found until the next day when my brother came home for lunch with her, as was his routine. According to the neuroscientist, it was the kind of stroke and circumstances which would have killed most people outright. But somehow she hung on.

Now it is six days later. She survived a subsequent heart arrest situation and was brought back. But she cannot move her left side or speak very clearly. She has a feeding tube in her nose, and an oxygen mask. But that is not what I wanted to share with you, her Sisters whom she held so closely,

Words are raspy and seem to strangle partially formed in her mouth. For someone whose joking motto was "help I've fallen and I can't stop talking!" this must be the greatest frustration. However, she has turned to her good right hand to reach out and talk with us. Thumbs up. Thumbs down. Miming an oxygen mask so they would replace the nasal version. Tapping her nails on the bed rail when she wants the attention of one her children in the room, and indicating where she hurts so that one of us will massage the area until she relaxes again and falls asleep. What she can communicate to the nurses and her family has been remarkable. But it not just immediate need she "tells" us about. It is more. She responds to her grandchildren's notes by rubbing her hand against her heart. She points to her son-in-law and gives him thumbs up for his caring about her daughter. She mimes talking and points to me when she wants to talk about our happy times. I was talking earlier this evening about our tea parties in the back yard, the raspberry bushes we would hide in and the year she grew corn which was taller than all of us kids but never produced a cob. Then she gestured a salute and I realized she was reminding of the days when she was Brown Owl with the 5th Pack of brownies. None of us could afford to go to camp at Polly Lake, so she brought the camp to her backyard. "Brownie camp Mom?" Finger to nose. "Bingo."

Memories. Eighty eight years of memories. Where do I start? What does she want to talk about? Well, she told me. Her family. Her friends. The funny things which she cherished. Anyone who knows my mother that she was all about "the funny". Whether she was encouraging others to break out of their shell and dance with her, wearing her Viking helmet during a presentation to her sisters, teasing a grumpy priest, or reminding her children to laugh when they got too serious – June was a lifelong optimist and lover of laughter. The most thumbs up over the last few days have been for those moments of silliness, those absurd observations and unexpected jokes which emerge in the middle of times of great stress. Luckily, we kids and grandkids "don't fall far from the tree" so we have been supplying them abundance.

But that giant heart of June's has taken a kicking and now she is struggling. But she will not want anyone to remember her in that way, but as the energetic, optimist who never gave up, never lost faith. What I most wish to share with you is something new she created – a way to let us know when she wants to pray. One arm raised upwards to Heaven, her hand cupped and outstretched as if to receive the graces of God.

I thank God for the great blessing of a mother like June. A mother, a sister, a daughter, a friend, a grandmother, great-grandmother, Sister, Life member, mentor, teacher, entertainer, writer, painter animal rescuer who shared her great whole heart with everyone she met. And I thank God for granting her the time with us to witness her strength, her overflowing love and her steadfast faith.

If you knew June, she would love to know that she has sometime made you smile, or feel better about yourself, or dare to try something you were afraid of. Even now, in her last hours, my mother is reminding me to laugh at the absurdities of life, to be brave and face your fears and to reach out to God and ask for His graces. Thank you God for the abundances of graces you have given my mother and her family and circle of friends. Thank you for June Gloria.

Angela Meady

Photo: June with daughter Lori