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THE GREATEST GIFT

—By Orv Owens

Companionship

His opportunity came at one of those surprise birthday parties where hics flowed freely—a time for the sweet red wine.

From that insignificant beginning, a strong oak grew. New friendships have rough beginnings sometimes, and this one was no exception.

She was a brunette with a flair for the dramatic and must have weighed all of 90 pounds. The blood of ancient Scottish ancestors with some Irish thrown in for good measure flowed through her veins. Her brown eyes threw darts of anger when she was angry.

The acorn was planted at the party. To become a sturdy oak they must stand shoulder to shoulder over the years. They must also change in a time of changing morals and values.

He was tired of the single life, tired of looking at bare antique walls with missing family pictures. The single life grew boring. Once the good times called. Once the dance floor called; but as time

passed, dancing at buckets of blood (some dance halls and barns were called that because of the many fights over women), the good times dimmed.

It was lonely on holidays. In spite of earning what he considered good money, there was no one special to buy presents for. If truth were known, he was feeling sorry for himself because no one cared about his single status. People had enough problems without adding his to their list.

He spent some time searching and wandering in New Mexico, Kansas, and Washington State, working at the printer's trade. The ever green hills of home kept calling him back to his beloved Western Oklahoma.

It took a surprise party to settle him down. After courtship and marriage to a native, he wasn't

surprised to find that family life was better than single life, which had become like no life at all. With this in mind, he ignored all those anti-family and began marriage in debt.

To an outsider it would seem that she had made a poor choice. There were weeks when they had only a few cents left over, and her foolish husband wanted a Coke. He had long ago decided that if he was going to be broke, he was going whole hog and not linger on the outskirts of wealth.

Through some good times

and bad, she stood beside him. She stood firm against all odds, against all surprises, against all sorrows—and remembered the good.

Along came babies two years apart—two daughters and a son. She bore the pain as well as the joy of new life in a growing family. She stayed home to care for and mold her children, not entering the job market until the children entered high school. She started work for the local nursing home and later the hospital. Caring for the old and the sick is an exhausting job, but she remained true to the cause.

She sacrificed for husband and children, budgeting so that the future might have a

bit of savings against those rainy days which at times came in bunches and so close

together it

seemed as though they'd never survive. She worked hard and long to make family work against overwhelming odds.

From a honeymoon cottage to an old home to a new frame home to another brick home in another town. From renting to owning with joy and expectations of good things yet to come.

They didn't do anything others haven't done before and will likely do in the future. They merely stood together, were strengthened by each other through each day, each year, striving

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toward new horizons—never fearing failure but learning from it and being strengthened by adversity.

They loved to read and spent many peaceful hours reading about conflicts that overshadowed their own.

Subdued colors were best for her: lavenders, beiges, warm browns, and pinks—colors that speak of quality the world over. From multi-colored scraps, needle, thread, and glue gun, creative fingers spun gifts of beauty and worth.

They bickered, quarreled, and at times tears flowed down her cheeks; but as the day ended, they kissed goodnight. Rarely did a dispute last through a sleepless night.

They endured. They conquered. They forgave

when forgiveness was desperately needed.

Their fondest hope now is that they have been the right kind of example for their children, at the same time knowing that family means strength and love and sharing of all things large and small.

Happiness is a walk when the sun sinks into their tomorrow and someone's today on the other side of the world. They watch a squirrel flip its tail and a cardinal with sunshine on its wings flit through the oaks. They smile when the mockingbird sings, knowing full well that it depends upon the talents of others for its song.

They take each day at a time, knowing that bridges are

to be crossed only when they arrive and not before lest they fall into despair.

Within her breast the ghosts walk, the ghosts of a million tears, the ghosts of a million smiles of faith that are part of yesterdays, todays, and tomorrows.

He listens to the soft purr as she sleeps and realizes that along

with companionship and love she gave him a far greater gift: she had become his dearest friend. ♡

...she gave
a far
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gift...

(ORV OWENS writes a column—"Reflections"—for the WATONGA REPUBLICAN, does free-lance writing, and started submitting to WESTVIEW beginning with the Spring, 1990 issue.)

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Companionship

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