

# THE INFLUENCERS

By Fred Hobbs

Celebrities and public figures are often asked in media interviews the question: What one person was most influential in your life? Sometimes that answer turns out to be contained in a story about a poor kid from the wrong side of the tracks who later becomes a rich industrialist, an Academy Award-winning actor, President of the United States or possibly, the Pope.

These are the exceptions of course, but most of us in some manner have been encouraged and guided by a benefactor on our way to whatever measure of fortune, fame or success we have attained.

Fortunately for me, a small cadre of influencers helped pave my way through life's road filled with opportunities, choices and decisions: my mother, my sister, my three brothers and my brother-law collectively and individually assisted in charting my course.

My father died at age 34 when I was only three months old. I am not sure what traits I may have inherited from him, but by all accounts he was a good and honest man with a promising future before being struck down by tuberculosis at such an early point in life.

My widowed mother was an exceptional woman, working when she could while raising five children during the height of the Great Depression. She was firm, but not stern. My older siblings agree that some almost magical trait existed in our mother that caused us to behave in an acceptable manner with a minimum of scolding or undue supervision on her part. We weren't angels; we just knew what was expected of us and were both respectful and somewhat fearful of exceeding her prescribed boundaries.

My three older brothers were role models. All three were in the service in World War II; (I was six years younger than the next oldest); they were more like uncles. Each provided a perspective and some experiences that were useful in my development. And while they were away, my sister (my oldest sibling) got married. Then, I had the experience of being an "only child" which provided a different, closer dynamic in the relationship with my mother.

The greatest influence on my life, however, came from my sister and brother-in-law, Sara and Elven. I spent the summers of my teen years with them in Idaho and Oregon. This relieved my mother of worries about me while she was at work. Sara (10 years older than I) was an excellent "surrogate" mother. She was old enough to exhibit some maturity (with two little daughters) and young enough to understand and appreciate how a teenager feels and behaves.

Despite our age difference, Sara and I shared the same sense of humor and observations about people that we knew. Although she married at an early age and didn't go to college, she was very intelligent and knowledgeable. Elven was well versed on political and business matters. I spent my last summer with them working in one of the string of tire stores Elven owned.

From both Sara and Elven, I developed a social consciousness concerning human rights and a political liberalism that serve me well to this day, lessons that truly changed my life.