

Gifts

By Mary Lee Peterson

How do I choose just one gift? I have received so many incredible gifts throughout my life and everyone involved a person opening up to me and showing me something wonderful about myself and about life.

Mrs. Shooter, the librarian at Lincoln Elementary in the 50's, allowed me to browse and read from the advanced library and invited me in after school to help reshelv books. Then, one day she asked me to spend my library period outside in the hall reading with a younger student who was having trouble reading. How is that possible that someone could have trouble reading when reading was my joy and as natural as breathing. I was challenged and inspired to find a way to help him. She gave me the gift of seeing myself as intelligent and capable of helping another.

Mrs. Almarie Brashear, my best friend's mother, invited me to spend many weekends throughout many summers at a cabin she was building in the mountains outside of Idaho Springs. She built that cabin from scratch, sawing lumber, mixing and pouring cement, nailing in rafters and siding, cooking over a wood stove. And she ran her own answering service business in south Denver. She gave me the gift of seeing what a *woman* could do in the world.

Dr. Antonio Brico, the conductor of the Denver Businessman's Symphony, lived two doors down from me on South Pennsylvania. She moved in when I was nine and every morning and evening she would walk her small dog, Sawtu, around the block. It wasn't long before I would watch for her, grab my coat and run out to join her. One day she approached my mother to offer piano lessons to me for a very reduced rate and allowed me to practice the piano in her bedroom upstairs. The walls were covered with artifacts from her travels every year to spend time with Albert Schweitzer and Jean Sibelius. She let her students usher at her concerts and allowed us to sing in her chorus. I sang Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at 10 and to this day that music fills my heart with a deep joy whenever I hear it. She gave me the gift of music.

And, of course, my mother, Doris Eaton Peterson. She was a widow and single mother with three children at a time when I was the only child I knew who had no father. She made sure I had ballet lessons, clarinet and violin and piano lessons, and scouting. She didn't kill me when I turned 13 and developed an unbelievable attitude. She gave me the gift of unconditional love and, of course, life.