

Mom

by Marilyn Reeves

Both of my parents died last year after a year and a half of assisted living in a place that was not their home. Dad passed away on May 18 at the age of 98, weighing in at 118 pounds. Mom followed less than three months later, a few months shy of 97.

People think they want to live to be 100. Believe me, you don't ... unless you can somehow escape the ravages of Alzheimer's, which robs you of your identity and your dignity and your grasp on reality. As in indignantly raging at the people on the second floor whose apartment is directly below yours because they somehow moved in and took over your place while you were downstairs having dinner! That was Dad, who couldn't comprehend that he'd gotten off on the wrong floor. Mom simply reverted to infancy, sleeping away the last five years of her life. Occasionally she would look at me and call me "Marilynn", so at least she knew who I was part of the time.

She was still pretty, however, even in her advanced old age. Mom was a ringer for Queen Elizabeth, except Mom was more petite and had dark brown eyes. But whenever I see the queen, I do a double-take. None of us three girls inherited her natural beauty. She didn't need make-up – only wore a bit of lipstick now and then for special occasions.

Speaking of which, the only time I remember Mom get really angry was when she found me at age four playing with her lipstick. I must have smeared it all over my face and on the walls. She was very upset with me. But that was rare for her. She was nearly always kind and gentle and hardly ever lost her temper.

As with most children, my mother was the first person I fell in love with. I would pick

dandelion bouquets and bring them to her, and she would express delight as if they had been bouquets of roses.

Mom was born Ruth Evelyn Wilson and was raised on a farm in Illinois. She suffered all her life from a crippling shyness that was partly due to her being undervalued as the only girl in a family of five older brothers who teased her unmercifully. And her own mother apparently didn't cut her much slack either. One time she was sent down to the cellar with a sugar bowl to fill with sugar. She fell down the stairs and my grandmother hollered at her, "Ruth! Did you break my sugar bowl?"

But she won the prize when she met a man named Richard Tuttle while attending Illinois State Normal. He was as outgoing and self-confident as she was shy. Mom did possess a quiet strength and intelligence, however. It was her idea to move to Salida and start the store. And it was she who stopped Dad from getting on that fatal plane ride that claimed the lives of the other County Commissioners back in the mid-70's.

When I think of my mother, I see her standing by a campfire in her red Chimayo jacket and matching red scarf, which she wore every Sunday in the summer on our weekly excursions to the mountains.

Sadly, as I grew older, my mother and I grew apart. I wasn't like her; she didn't understand me. But she taught me the basic skills of living – how to cook, how to clean, and, more importantly, how to love.

Ruth Evelyn Wilson Tuttle. My mother. A sweet, gentle soul who lived for others. May she rest in peace.