

## My Other Mother

By Marilyn Reeves

When I was a young girl I struggled to fit in. Although I was blessed with a group of friends, I always felt that I was somehow different from all the rest. I was quiet and introspective and my friends would come to me for advice about their problems, mostly about boys. I had matured early but I wasn't all that interested in boys. Instead I spent my time reading books like *Jane Eyre* and *How Green Was My Valley*. And sketching pictures of handsome men like Rock Hudson and Burt Lancaster.

When I turned 13, at the age I needed her most, my mother abandoned me. Not physically, but emotionally. I needed guidance. I needed answers! But Mom turned away from me because she had no answers. It broke my heart. And it wasn't until I was in my forties that I was finally able to accept my mother for who she was. She gave me all she could. She just wasn't able to give me what I needed.

But then along came Mrs. Griffith, my seventh grade English teacher. Mrs. Griffith was stern. She was harsh. And she made liberal use of her red pen, making me redo my papers again and again until I got them right. But she gave me an appreciation for the finer points of the English language, its music and its clarity.

Then one day she asked me to come into her office after class. I was a bit unnerved by the prospect of talking with her one-on-one, as I simply didn't know what to expect. But she sat me down and looked at me with her penetrating eyes and told me she could feel my pain. She knew I was struggling to understand myself. A sort of lost ship searching for an anchor.

She told me I was right-brained. My father's daughter. She used the term 'old soul.' She answered some of my questions about sex and religion and philosophy. She told me that getting to know myself would be a life-long process. There would always be others who were smarter than I was, more successful, better looking. But at the same time, there would be still others who would envy *me* for what *I* had.

She said the key to growing up was to learn to accept myself for who I was and to accept others as they were. Don't try to change them. Don't seek to impress them. For only those who could see me for who I truly was would love me, and those who could not, would not.

Over the next few years, Mrs. Griffith continued to counsel me from time to time. She watched me grow from a lost child into someone who was on her way to achieving a sense of selfhood.

And when she died at the age of 40 I was bereft. I had lost my second mother. But she had given me a life-long gift that I cherish to this day. Learning to accept people for who they are, including myself. For this is a sign of true maturity.

Thank you, Mrs. Griffith, for helping me discover who I am. But it's still a work in progress.