

Mom & Dad's Amplifiers

By Marilyn Reeves

The first weekend in May of 2009, my two sisters and I drove home to Salida to celebrate our father's 95th birthday.

At the time, despite their advanced years and both of them being nearly stone deaf, Mom and Dad were still managing to cope on their own. They still participated in the activities at the Salida Senior Center and continued to attend the First Methodist Church on Sundays. And on that particular Sunday, because it was a special occasion, Mom insisted that we girls accompany them to church.

I experienced a moment of overwhelming nostalgia as I walked into the sanctuary for the first time in nearly 50 years. Little had changed in all that time. There were still the same lovely stained glass windows. The same brass pipes that stood tall above the organ. The same pulpit in front of the choir loft where I used to sing. The only thing that had changed was the population. There was barely more than half the attendance I remembered as a girl, and nearly everyone there were senior citizens. Many of them I didn't recognize, but those old folks recognized us. They knew we were the Tuttle girls, all grown up and gone gray, come home to visit our father on his special day.

It had become a tradition for those who were celebrating a birthday or other special occasion to provide cake for the congregation following the service. Once we arrived at the church, Dad placed the cakes he had ordered from the bakery in the anteroom where he would serve it after the service was concluded.

Since both Mom and Dad had lost more than 90% of their hearing, they brought along some sort of devices that amplified the sound and enabled them to hear better. And so could the rest of the congregation, as it turned out. The minister didn't need a microphone to project his voice, our parents' devices did that job for him. But, apparently they were blithely unaware of just how loud those little amplifiers were.

We three daughters just smiled and stared straight ahead, pretending all was just as it should be. That is, until Mom tapped Dad on the shoulder and said, "WHAT TIME SHOULD WE GO CUT THE CAKE, DICK? DICK? ANSWER ME! WHAT TIME SHOULD WE GO CUT THE CAKE?"

The minister cut his sermon mid-sentence. The rest of the congregation just sat there in dead silence. I did my best to shush Mom, but she just didn't get it. She was completely unaware that her voice came over that speaker loud enough to be heard all over the sanctuary!

As Janet, Rosie and I drove back to Denver, we got to talking about what had transpired that morning. It was awful! It was mortifying! It was also hilarious! We wondered how long Mom and Dad had been 'entertaining' the congregation with their amplifiers, and if that was the reason the attendance had gone down. We laughed until our sides ached! But, thankfully, our poor parents remained blissfully unaware, and they continued to attend the church services with their little hearing devices for as long as they were able to live on their own.