

Loving Barbara

My daughter Barbara was my greatest teacher. Barbara was a Downs Syndrome child who came in love and remained in love all of her 59 years. No matter how she was treated by others because she was different she always found a way to forgive.

We had seven children. Barbara was the oldest and could not understand the privileges her younger brothers and sisters had that she could not have. Often times it was hard to see the hurt and confusion as she struggled trying to make rational sense of it all.

Her father and I were arguing one day in the upper hall in our home not far from her room. Our household was a loud and boisterous one with all the members and their friends coming and going as they did. The volume of our voices got higher as each tried to prove their point. Barbara came bursting out of her room, grabbed each of us by an arm and said, "Stop this right now! Come here you two, put your arms around each other and tell each other you love them." We were embarrassed to silence. We looked at each other and burst out laughing at the ridiculous sight we must have been. Her only comment was, "now that's better" and she marched back in her room.

I can't remember what the argument was about or if it was important. I only remember the lesson it brought us about the importance of putting the petty minutiae we allow ourselves to become enmeshed in, in proper perspective and move into the important reasons we were together.

I could have avoided a lot of frustration and pain if I had learned earlier the importance of really loving myself and being able to give that love to all things. It leaves no room for regret. Saying it where appropriate and acting it always is a high goal. I often can not achieve it, but I try. Letting people know I care about them by acting it can never be wrong I think. If we can love fully the pain of losing may be greater but life will have taken on deeper meaning.

Most of the world's problems suffer from lack of it. I may not like the actions of others but I don't have to hold one more burden by hating them. It is freeing to let go of only my position and move into the others space to look at the other side, even if I don't agree, it brings respect to the situation. It gives it a dignity.

This kind of love is not only physical but heart love. It simply IS because it is so simple and yet so difficult.

Both Barbara and her father are gone now, only the love remains. That is forever. Her teachings have made me a richer person. They both lie softly on my heart. Love was all she had to give and she gave it freely.

Claire Shaw
4-5-07