

ST, JOSEPH CATHEDRAL, BATON ROUGE - TALK 11/15/2012

"Mary, 'Feminine Genius,' and My Family"

A Louisiana Catholic Celebrates the Year of Faith through a Family  
Photo Book Illustrating the "Feminine Genius"

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## THANKS AND INTRO

MY DEAR SISTERS IN CHRIST, THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME TO BE HERE TODAY, AND THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE A FEW OF MY "BATON ROUGE BLESSINGS" WITH YOU. BECAUSE WE HAVE LIMITED TIME, I WILL FOCUS ON FOUR SPECIAL WOMEN, WHO HAVE BLESSED MY LIFE THROUGH THEIR EXAMPLES OF LIVELY FAITH: MY MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER, MY MOTHER, MY DAUGHTER AND BLESSED MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA, WHO HAS HELPED ME TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THE VOCATIONS OF WIFE, MOTHER, AND GRANDMOTHER. ALTHOUGH THE WOMEN I WILL BE SPEAKING ABOUT ARE FROM DIFFERENT ERAS, AND ONE IS FROM A DIFFERENT CONTINENT, THEY ALL HAVE TIES TO BATON ROUGE, AS WELL AS TO OUR BEAUTIFUL CATHEDRAL.

YOU KNOW, CATHOLIC CULTURE HAS A REMARKABLE HISTORY OF TELLING STORIES OF FAITH, NOT ONLY THROUGH WORD, BUT ALSO THROUGH ART. PAINTING, SCULPTURE AND BEAUTIFUL OBJECTS, LIKE POTTERY, HAVE BEEN USED FOR CENTURIES BY ANCIENT CULTURES TO TELL STORIES ABOUT THEIR GODS AND GODDESSES. IN HER WISDOM AND LOVE FOR THE TRUE GOD OF SALVATION, OUR EARLY CHURCH ADAPTED THESE ARTS TO TELL THE BEAUTIFUL STORY OF JESUS, MARY AND THE SAINTS.

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IN THE MIDDLE AGES, STAIN GLASS WINDOWS BECAME A MUCH-LOVED SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING, ESPECIALLY FOR PEOPLE WHO COULD NOT READ. IN OUR OWN DAY, THOSE OF US WHO WORK, ESPECIALLY IN MEDIA, IN EDUCATION, OR IN ADVERTISING, ARE INCREASINGLY AWARE OF THE POWER OF VISUAL IMAGERY, SOMETIMES COMBINED WITH TEXT AND SOMETIMES NOT, TO COMMUNICATE AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE.

DURING MY TALK, I WOULD LIKE YOU TO CONSIDER HOW, IN THIS YEAR OF FAITH, YOU MIGHT PASS ALONG YOUR OWN IMPORTANT STORIES OF FAITH, ENHANCED BY THE POWER OF FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHICH FEATURE IMPORTANT SACRAMENTAL MILESTONES, OR ARTWORK FROM ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE CHURCHES.

AS AN EXAMPLE, I'VE BROUGHT SOME COPIES OF A ROUGH DRAFT WITH A FEW PAGES FROM WHAT I PLAN TO BECOME A SOFT-COVER PHOTO BOOKLET. I HOPE THE FINISHED PRODUCT WILL BE A SIMPLE JOURNAL OF FAITH ACROSS SEVERAL GENERATIONS OF MY FAMILY. I APPRECIATE YOUR BEING MY TEST AUDIENCE, SO I MAY SEE IF MY STORIES, WHICH ARE ILLUSTRATED NOT ONLY WITH FAMILY PHOTOS BUT ALSO WITH IMAGES FROM ST. JOSEPH CATHEDRAL, ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

I WILL SHOW A FEW MY PHOTOS PAGES AFTER MY TALK.

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I WILL ALSO HAVE HANDOUTS FOR THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN CREATING THEIR OWN BOOK OF FAITH STORIES. THE HANDOUTS HAVE CONTACT INFORMATION ABOUT BLURB, THE PUBLISHING COMPANY I PLAN TO USE, WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE VERY REASONABLE PRICES. I ALSO INVITE THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE YOUR OWN INSPIRATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS TO BE PART OF OUR DISCUSSION. YOU MAY HAVE BETTER IDEAS, AND I WELCOME YOUR SHARING THEM WITH US.

2 MY COMMUNITY: BATON ROUGE, LA

BEFORE MY PRESENTATION, I WOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU A LITTLE ABOUT THE "OLD BATON ROUGE" COMMUNITY TO GIVE MY STORIES CONTEXT. IN THE LATE 1930S AND 40S, WHEN MY PARENTS, MARGARET LORRAINE "PEGGY" NESOM AND WILLIAM DALRYMPLE "DAL" FAUVER, WERE GROWING UP, BATON ROUGE HAD ABOUT 30,000 PEOPLE, AND THE CITY LIMITS EXTENDED AS FAR OUT AS BATON ROUGE HIGH SCHOOL ON GOVERNMENT STREET. MOTHER ONCE REMARKED THAT BATON ROUGE WAS SO SMALL, THAT EVERYBODY KNEW EVERYBODY ELSE, AT LEAST BY SIGHT.

PEOPLE TENDED TO KNOW EACH OTHER MORE PERSONALLY THROUGH FAMILY, CHURCH AND SYNAGOGUE.

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IT WAS AN ATMOSPHERE OF DEEPLY-HELD, SHARED BELIEFS, WHICH PROMOTED WHAT BLESSED POPE JOHN PAUL THE SECOND WOULD LATER DESCRIBE AS "SOLIDARITY." WHETHER THEY WERE CATHOLIC, PROTESTANT OR JEW, OLD BATON ROUGEANS WERE PEOPLE WHO LOVED GOD AND WHO LOVED NEIGHBOR.

3 MY GRANDMOTHER: VIRGIE LEBLANC NESOM  
"MOM"

WHEN MY GRANDPARENTS WERE GROWING UP IN THE EARLY 1900'S, EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH HAD SLIGHTLY MORE THAN 30,000 RESIDENTS. BATON ROUGE ITSELF HAD ONLY 11,000. MY MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER, VIRGIE GRAZIELLE LEBLANC NESOM, WHOM WE CALLED "MOM," GREW UP ACROSS THE RIVER IN "FRONT BRUSLY," WHERE HER FATHER, JOSEPH ELOI LEBLANC, WAS A CIRCUIT JUDGE.

MOM WAS A BIT OF A TOMBOY, AND LOVED TELLING ME HOW SHE AND HER GIRLFRIENDS REGULARLY BEAT THE NEIGHBORHOOD BOYS PLAYING BASEBALL. I WAS HER ELDEST GRANDCHILD AND HER ONLY GRANDDAUGHTER, AND BEING OUTNUMBERED BY BOYS, MY BROTHER AND THREE FIRST COUSINS, I PARTICULARLY LOVED HEARING THAT STORY!

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HER MOTHER, MARIE GRAZIELLE HEBERT LEBLANC, DIED WHEN MOM WAS ONLY FOURTEEN YEARS OLD. HER FATHER WAS OFTEN AWAY FROM HOME WITH CIRCUIT COURT DUTIES, SO MOM BOARDED AT SACRED HEART ACADEMY IN GRAND COTEAU. I KNEW SHE LOVED OUR LADY AND THE ROSARY, AND WOULD CLING TO IT, ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF TROUBLE. I BELIEVE MOM MAY HAVE DEVELOPED HER LIFE-LONG DEVOTION TO OUR LADY, BECAUSE SHE, LIKE SO MANY PEOPLE TODAY, NEEDED THE COMFORT OF A MOTHER'S LOVE.

NEVERTHELESS, IN SPITE OF THE DIFFICULTIES IN HER YOUTH, MOM WAS AN UPBEAT, ENERGETIC WOMAN, WITH MANY FRIENDS. SHE WAS VERY ACTIVE IN THE CATHOLIC DAUGHTERS, AND WAS EVEN STATE REGENT - TWICE! WHENEVER I SEE THE STAIN GLASS WINDOW OF SAINT , WHICH WAS DONATED BY THE CATHOLIC DAUGHTERS AND IS LOCATED IN THE CATHEDRAL'S EAST CHAPEL, I THINK OF MOM.

AFTER SHE AND MY GRANDFATHER, FRANK ALFRED NESOM, MARRIED ON SEPTEMBER 9, 1920 AT THEN-ST. JOSEPH CHURCH, MOM BECAME A TERRIFIC HOME-MAKER, MOTHER, AND COOK. IN SPITE OF THEIR FAMILY'S CONTINUAL FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES DURING THE DEPRESSION, MOM ALWAYS HAD SOMETHING GOOD TO EAT AND A LITTLE SOMETHING EXTRA TO SHARE, ESPECIALLY WITH THE "HOBOS" WHO OCCASIONALLY CAME TO HER BACK-DOOR.

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MOM'S COOKING SKILLS ALSO HELPED BRING MY PARENTS TOGETHER AS TEENAGE SWEETHEARTS, WHICH I WILL EXPLAIN A LITTLE LATER IN MY TALK!

LIKE OUR LADY AND BLESSED MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA, MOM UNDERSTOOD THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING "SMALL THINGS WITH GREAT LOVE." SHE ALSO SHARED MOTHER TERESA'S WONDERFUL, IRONIC SENSE OF HUMOR.

MOM IS MY FAMILY ICON FOR SIMPLICITY OF SPIRIT, ACCEPTANCE OF GOD'S WILL, AND PERSEVERING THROUGH DARK TIMES WITH FAITH, HOPE, TRUST AND, ESPECIALLY, JOY.

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#### MY MOTHER: PEGGY NESOM FAUVER "MOTHER"

MY MOTHER FIRST MET MY DAD, WHEN THEY ATTENDED LSU'S UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL, WHICH WAS THEN LOCATED IN PEABODY HALL, THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION BUILDING. I HAVE LOTS OF FAMILY PICTURES, SO I CAN TESTIFY THEY MADE A VERY CUTE COUPLE, INNOCENT, ATTRACTIVE AND FUN.

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ANGLING FOR A FIRST DATE, DAD ASKED MOTHER TO TEACH HIM HOW TO DANCE, SO THEY MET FOR A LESSON AT MOTHER'S HOME, WHICH WAS LOCATED ON LAUREL STREET, RIGHT ACROSS FROM THE OLD LIBRARY, WHICH IS NOW THE CAPITAL AREA UNITED WAY OFFICE IN DOWNTOWN BATON ROUGE.

WHEN DAD'S BIRTHDAY CAME UP, MOM MADE A CAKE FOR MOTHER TO GIVE HIM AS A PRESENT. THIS WAS DURING THE DEPRESSION, SO MOTHER'S FAMILY REALLY COULDN'T AFFORD TO GIVE DAD ANYTHING MORE. YOU CAN IMAGINE MOTHER'S SURPRISE, WHEN DAD TOLD HER THAT IT WAS THE FIRST BIRTHDAY CAKE HE HAD EVER RECEIVED!

APPARENTLY, DAD'S FAMILY DIDN'T OBSERVE BIRTHDAYS WITH CAKES! AS A KID, I THOUGHT THAT DAD FIRST FELL IN LOVE WITH MOTHER, BECAUSE OF MOM'S BAKING SKILLS.

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## MY PARENTS WED

SEVERAL YEARS LATER AND BEFORE MY PARENTS WERE MARRIED, DAD WAS A FORWARD OBSERVER IN THE ARMY ARTILLERY DURING WORLD WAR II. MOTHER AND MOM ATTENDED THE WEEKLY NOVENA TO OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP AT ST. JOSEPH CHURCH TO PRAY FOR DAD'S PROTECTION.

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ACCORDING TO AN ARTICLE I READ IN WIKIPEDIA, ARMY "FORWARD OBSERVERS SERVED AS THE EYES OF THE ARTILLERY GUNNERS... THEY WERE CONSIDERED HIGH-PRIORITY TARGETS BY ENEMY FORCES, AS THEY CONTROLLED A GREAT AMOUNT OF FIREPOWER, WERE WITHIN VISUAL RANGE OF THE ENEMY, AND WERE OFTEN LOCATED DEEP WITHIN ENEMY TERRITORY...THE ARTILLERY OBSERVER HAD TO BE SKILLED NOT ONLY IN FIRE DIRECTION, BUT ALSO IN STEALTH AND, IF NECESSARY, COMBAT IN SELF-DEFENCE."

READ MORE:

[HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/ARTILLERY\\_OBSERVER](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artillery_observer)

WITH THEIR MILITARY JOBS CARRYING SUCH HIGH-LEVEL RISK, FORWARD OBSERVERS HAD ONE OF THE HIGHEST ARMY MORTALITY RATES DURING WORLD WAR II. IT WAS QUITE APPARENT TO ME AS A CHILD LISTENING TO MY DAD'S WAR STORIES THAT HE HAD ESCAPED CERTAIN DEATH MANY TIMES, BECAUSE OF THE PRAYERS OF MY MOTHER AND MY GRANDMOTHER.

AFTER DAD CAME BACK TO BATON ROUGE, WHEN THE WAR IN EUROPE HAD ENDED, HE AND HIS MEN WERE STILL WAITING TO HEAR IF THEY WERE GOING TO BE SENT TO THE PACIFIC. IN A RARE DISPLAY OF CONCERN, DAD TOLD MY BROTHER AND ME THAT, IF HE HAD BEEN SENT THERE TO FIGHT, HE FELT HE WOULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED.

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YOU CAN IMAGINE EVERYONE'S HAPPINESS WHEN A FEW WEEKS LATER, ON AUGUST 15, 1945, THE FEAST OF OUR LADY'S ASSUMPTION, EMPEROR HIROHITO READ OUT THE IMPERIAL RESCRIPT ON THE TERMINATION OF THE WAR OVER THE JAPANESE RADIO.

ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 1946, A LITTLE MORE THAN ONE YEAR AFTER WORLD WAR II HAD ENDED, MY PARENTS WERE MARRIED HERE AT ST. JOSEPH CHURCH. THEY HAD A LOVELY RECEPTION, HELD NOT FAR AWAY AT THE WOMAN'S CLUBHOUSE ON EAST BOULEVARD. I INCLUDED FEW PHOTOS IN MY BOOKLET, WHICH I THINK WERE TAKEN BY SID BOWERS (FR. MATTHEW MCCAUGHEY'S MATERNAL GRANDFATHER), TO SHOW WHAT A BEAMING COUPLE THEY WERE.

## 6 MOTHER'S LEADERSHIP

JUST AS MY GRANDMOTHER, HAD BEEN ACTIVE IN THE CATHOLIC DAUGHTERS WHILE HER CHILDREN WERE GROWING UP, MOTHER WAS GOOD AT JUGGLING A BUSY HOME LIFE WITH ACTIVE SERVICE TO OUR SCHOOL, TO OUR COMMUNITY, AND ESPECIALLY TO OUR CHURCH. HAVING TRAINED AS A TEACHER, MOTHER HELPED ESTABLISH THE FIRST SCHOOL FOR THE CONFRATERNITY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AT SACRED HEART OF JESUS CHURCH PARISH, WHERE OUR YOUNG FAMILY WAS NOW A MEMBER.

(MORE)

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BECAUSE SHE WAS A TRUE EDUCATOR, MOTHER KNEW OUR FAITH VERY WELL. SHE ALWAYS HAD SOME KIND INFORMATIVE BOOK ON HER NIGHT-STAND. AND SHE MADE SURE MY BROTHER AND I HAD PLENTY OF BOOKS ON THE FAITH TOO.

MOTHER'S BOOKS GREW IN NUMBER DURING VATICAN II, WHICH COINCIDED WITH THE FORMATION OF OUR NEW DIOCESE. AS A PRE-TEEN, I FOUND IT VERY EXCITING TO SEE MOTHER, DAD, THEIR FRIENDS, AND MANY PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS FROM OUR AREA READING AND TALKING ABOUT OUR FAITH, AS WELL AS ORGANIZING GOOD WORKS INSPIRED BY THEIR DISCUSSIONS.

MOTHER'S REPUTATION FOR SELFLESS DEVOTION, COMBINED WITH EXCELLENT ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS, EVENTUALLY LED HER TO BECOME ONE OF THE FIRST MEMBERS OF SACRED HEART'S PARISH COUNCIL. LATER, WITH THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF OUR PASTOR, MSGR. PAUL GAUCI, SHE BECAME THE FIRST WOMAN IN OUR COUNTRY TO HEAD A LAY DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL. A PIONEER FOR LAY WOMEN'S EXPANDED PARTICIPATION IN OUR CHURCH, MOTHER IS MY IMAGE FOR PUTTING ONE'S SELF "AT THE SERVICE OF OTHERS."

LIKE BLESSED POPE JOHN PAUL II, WHEN MOTHER ENTERED OLD AGE, SHE BECAME QUITE DEBILITATED. MY CHILDREN AND I HAD THE BLESSING TO CARE FOR HER THE WAY SHE CARED FOR US.

(MORE)

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PERHAPS MOTHER'S BEST LEGACY WAS HOW HER LIFE MIRRORED HER CONFIRMATION PATRON, SAINT VERONICA, WHO IS AN IMAGE OF SERVICE TO THE SUFFERING CHRIST.

WHENEVER I SEE THE MOSAIC OF THE STATION OF THE CROSS, WHICH PORTRAYS VERONICA WIPING JESUS' FACE, I THINK OF MOTHER WHO CARED FOR OUR FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS, AS WELL AS FOR THE PEOPLE OF OUR CHURCH.

7 MY DAUGHTER: LAUREN CONSTANCE ANDERSON  
DE MORENO

I'M GOING TO SKIP SEVERAL DECADES AND NOW TELL YOU ABOUT MY FIRST CHILD, LAUREN CONSTANCE, WHO HAS BEEN ONE OF MY DEAREST "BATON ROUGE BLESSINGS." I WILL COME BACK TO MY OWN STORY IN A MINUTE.

LAUREN WAS BORN ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1979. (YOU MIGHT NOTE THAT THIS COMING SUNDAY IS NOVEMBER 18, WHICH WILL BE LAUREN'S 33RD BIRTHDAY.) MY HUSBAND, LARRY, AND I BROUGHT LAUREN HOME A FEW DAYS LATER ON THURSDAY, WHICH THAT YEAR ALSO HAPPENED TO BE THANKSGIVING DAY.

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OVER THE YEARS, OUR FAMILY HAS HAD A LOT FOR WHICH TO BE THANKFUL, ONE OF THEM INCLUDES LAUREN, WHO HAS GROWN INTO A GIFTED YOUNG LADY.

## 8 LAUREN AND OSCAR WED

SKIPPING SEVERAL DECADES AGAIN, I WOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU ABOUT MY DAUGHTER'S WEDDING. ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2009 AT ST. JOSEPH CATHEDRAL, LAUREN WED HER WONDERFUL HUSBAND, DR. OSCAR MORENO PONTE, WHOSE FAMILY IS FROM BARQUISIMETO, VENEZUELA. OUR SHARED CATHOLIC TRADITIONS, PARTICULARLY OUR SHARED LOVE FOR THE ROSARY AND FOR OUR LADY, HELPED UNITE OUR TWO FAMILIES, ALTHOUGH WE WERE FROM DIFFERENT CONTINENTS AND CULTURES.

LAUREN, WHO IS NOW AN ASSISTANT CLINICAL PROFESSOR OF OTOLARYNGOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY MEDICAL SCHOOL WHERE OSCAR IS COMPLETING HIS SURGICAL RESIDENCY, IS MY ROLE MODEL FOR LIVING FAITH AT HOME AND IN THE WORKPLACE, IN SPITE OF THE MANY DEMANDS ON HER TIME. LAUREN IS BLESSED TO HAVE A HUSBAND, WHO APPRECIATES AND SUPPORTS HER EFFORTS.

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I'M SURE THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE MARRIED DAUGHTERS WHO WORK, OR WHO MAY BE MARRIED AND IN THE WORKPLACE YOURSELF, KNOW HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO KEEP LIFE BALANCED, WITHOUT THE HELP OF A GOOD HUSBAND. YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN HEARING ABOUT THE TRADITIONS, WHICH WE INCORPORATED INTO LAUREN AND OSCAR'S CEREMONY. I HOPE THESE TRADITIONS WILL BE A CONTINUAL REMINDER ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY IN THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE. HERE IS THE DESCRIPTION OF EACH TRADITION FROM THEIR NUPTIAL MASS BOOKLET.

THE ARAS. THE CUSTOM OF THE THIRTEEN WEDDING UNITY COINS (ARRAS) ORIGINATED IN SPAIN. THE COINS ARE A SYMBOL OF OSCAR'S UNQUESTIONABLE TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN LAUREN. THEY SIGNIFY THAT OSCAR RECOGNIZES HIS RESPONSIBILITY AS A PROVIDER, AND PLEDGES HIS ABILITY TO SUPPORT AND CARE FOR HER AND THEIR FUTURE FAMILY. ACCEPTANCE BY LAUREN MEANS TAKING THAT TRUST AND CONFIDENCE UNCONDITIONALLY WITH TOTAL DEDICATION AND PRUDENCE. THE THIRTEEN COINS REPRESENT CHRIST AND HIS TWELVE APOSTLES.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE FLOWERS. FROM THE MOST ANCIENT TIMES THE BLESSED VIRGIN HAS BEEN HONORED WITH THE TITLE OF "MOTHER OF GOD," TO WHOSE PROTECTION THE FAITHFUL TURN IN ALL THEIR DANGERS AND NEEDS.

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LAUREN AND OSCAR'S PRESENTATION OF FLOWERS IS A PRAYER ASKING THEIR MOTHERS AND OSCAR'S GRANDMOTHER TO INTERCEDE FOR THEM, JUST AS MARY DID FOR THE NEWLY MARRIED COUPLE AT CANA. WHEN LAUREN AND OSCAR RETURN TO THE ALTAR, THEIR PARENTS, LARRY AND CONNIE ANDERSON AND JOSE ANTONIO MORENO YANES AND BEATRIZ PONTE DE MORENO, WILL PLACE A LARGE LASSO/LAZO OF ROSARY BEADS AROUND THEIR SHOULDERS.

THE LAZO. THE LASSO/LAZO IS SYMBOLIC OF THE LOVE, WHICH SHOULD BIND THE COUPLE TOGETHER EVERYDAY AS THEY EQUALLY SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MARRIAGE FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES. AFTER THE NUPTIAL BLESSING, THE LAZO WILL BE REMOVED BY MONSIGNOR ROBERT BERGGREEN, THEIR CELEBRANT, AND GIVEN TO LAUREN. IT WILL BE A WEDDING DAY MEMENTO OF HER BECOMING THE LADY OF OSCAR'S HEART AND HOME, AND WILL SYMBOLIZE THEIR PROMISE TO ALWAYS BE TOGETHER SIDE-BY-SIDE.

WE WERE BLESSED TO HAVE OUR FRIENDS, GAY BOUDREAUX AND JOHN AND JOY BALLANCE, TO SHARE THEIR WONDERFUL PROFESSIONAL TALENTS WITH US FOR THIS VERY SPECIAL EVENT. GAY, WHOSE FAMILY OWNED OLD BATON ROUGE'S MOST FAMOUS STATIONERY STORE, LATIL'S, HELPED US WITH ALL OUR PRINTING NEEDS, INCLUDING HAND-TIEING THE RIBBON ON EACH MASS BOOK. JOY WAS OUR MARVELOUS CANTOR, AND JOHN WAS OUR SKILLED PHOTOGRAPHER.

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HERE ARE SAMPLES OF THEIR WORK, WHICH WILL CONTINUE TO HELP OUR TWO FAMILIES PRESERVE THE FAITH STORY OF OUR CHILDREN'S WEDDING. I HOPE TO CREATE A WEDDING BOOK FROM THE PHOTOS JOHN TOOK, SO I WILL SHARE A FEW OF THAT WORK'S ROUGH DRAFT PAGES TOO.

(Show wedding booklet, show wedding photo book to be printed)

9 [MY FAITH STORY: INDIA & MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA](#)

NOW THAT I HAVE TOLD YOU ABOUT THREE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WOMEN IN MY LIFE, I WILL TELL YOU A LITTLE OF MY OWN STORY, AND I WILL EXPLAIN WHY MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA AND HER MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY HAVE MADE SUCH A LASTING IMPACT ON ME, BOTH PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY.

IN DECEMBER 1970 THROUGH JANUARY 1971, MY BROTHER AND I HAD THE EXTRAORDINARY PRIVILEGE OF VISITING OUR PARENTS, WHO WERE THEN LIVING IN BOMBAY (MUMBAI), INDIA. DAD HAD BEEN SENT TO BOMBAY BY HIS EMPLOYER, EXXON. INDIRA GANDHI, THE INDIAN PRIME MINISTER, WAS NATIONALIZING THE OIL FIELDS, SO DAD WAS SENT TO HELP THE TRANSITION MOVE ALONG SMOOTHLY AND DIPLOMATICALLY.

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INDIA FOR ME WAS AN UNFORGETTABLE MIX OF SIGHT, SOUND, AND SMELLS. COMING FROM MY NICE, COMFORTABLE, CLEAN SORORITY HOUSE ON THE LSU CAMPUS, THE MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCE MADE QUITE AN IMPRESSION ON ME.

THERE WERE TEAMING CROWDS OF PEOPLE EVERYWHERE. BOMBAY'S CITY STREETS WERE THROGGED WITH NOISY CARS, JANGLING BICYCLES, PEOPLE ON FOOT, NAKED CHILDREN, SNAKE CHARMERS, AND CLUNKING OX CARTS, WHICH WERE COVERED WITH COLORFUL FLOWERS AND WITH TINKLING BELLS.

THE COUNTRYSIDE, WHERE MOTHER AND DAD LIVED IN A VERY ATTRACTIVE "COMPOUND," HAD ITS OWN SET OF HOLIDAY SURPRISES. ON CHRISTMAS DAY, A FLOCK OF SCREECHING BIRDS FLEW THROUGH THE OPEN-AIR CHURCH, WHERE WE WERE ATTENDING MASS. AS WE WERE LEAVING CHURCH FOR HOME, SOMEONE THREW A LIT CHERRY BOMB INTO OUR CAR.

(My apologies for those who are still eating and who have sensitive stomachs.)

THE FINAL ELEMENT OF THIS SENSORY ASSAULT WAS BOMBAY'S CITY AIR, WHICH WAS PERMEATED WITH THE PUNGENT SMELL OF BURNING COW DUNG. THE POOREST OF THE POOR LIVED EVERYWHERE, ON SIDEWALKS AND IN PUBLIC PARKS THROUGHOUT THE CITY.

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THESE "UNTOUCHABLES," WHO WERE SO NAMED BECAUSE THEY REALLY WERE FILTHY, USED THE PLENTIFUL AND FREE MATERIAL FOR FUEL. SADLY, THEY USED THIS EXCREMENT, NOT ONLY TO WARM THEMSELVES BUT ALSO TO COOK WHAT LITTLE FOOD THEY COULD FIND. IT TOOK SEVERAL TRIPS TO THE CITY TO ACCLIMATE MY NOSE AND MY STOMACH TO THE STENCH.

NEVERTHELESS, IN SPITE OF THE HORRIFIC POVERTY, INDIA WAS ALSO AN EXPERIENCE OF EXQUISITE BEAUTY. MY PARENTS WANTED OUR ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME VISIT TO INCLUDE A FAMILY TRIP TO SOME OF INDIA'S MOST FAMOUS HISTORIC SIGHTS, WHICH INCLUDED SEEING THE FABULOUS TAJ MAHAL.

EXXON CONNECTED US TO SOME WONDERFUL PEOPLE, WHO HELPED US TO PLAN OUR TRIP. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE ONGOING WARS IN BANGLADESH AND IN VIETNAM, OUR TRAVEL AGENT WARNED US NOT TO GO TO CALCUTTA, BECAUSE IT WAS SO DANGEROUS, PARTICULARLY FOR AMERICANS. MOTHER TERESA AND HER WORK WITH THE MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY AND THE POOREST OF THE POOR WERE NOT WIDELY KNOWN AT THIS TIME. HEARING THAT AMERICANS WERE OFTEN SHOT ON SIGHT, MY FAMILY AND I HAD NO DESIRE TO GO THERE.

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MANY YEARS LATER, WHEN I WAS DOING VOLUNTEER WORK WITH MISSIONARIES IN BATON ROUGE, LSU BASKETBALL COACH, DALE BROWN, HAD JUST RETURNED FROM CALCUTTA. HE MADE NO SECRET OF HIS EXPERIENCE OF BEING OVERWHELMED, TRYING TO HELP MOTHER TERESA AND HER SISTERS. I SYMPATHIZED WITH COACH BROWN. I ALSO REMEMBER THINKING, "HOW CAN THAT LITTLE LADY WORK DAY AFTER DAY IN SUCH CHAOS, DANGER AND CONFUSION AND NOT GET OVERWHELMED HERSELF?"

SHORTLY AFTER COACH BROWN'S RETURN TO BATON ROUGE, I READ ONE OF MOTHER'S TERESA'S QUOTES IN A BOOK OF HER COLLECTED SAYINGS, *LOVE - A FRUIT ALWAYS IN SEASON*. ENLIGHTENED BY WHAT MUST SURELY HAVE BEEN THE HOLY SPIRIT, MOTHER TERESA COMMENTED, "BEFORE YOU GO TO INDIA TO WORK WITH THE POOREST OF THE POOR, FIRST, YOU START IN YOUR OWN HOMES. THEY MAY NOT BE HUNGRY FOR BREAD. THEY MAY BE HUNGRY FOR A KIND WORD."

I SUPPOSE YOU COULD CALL THIS THE TURNING POINT OF MY LIFE, MY MOMENT OF CONVERSION, ONE OF MY MOST TREASURED "BATON ROUGE BLESSINGS." I KNEW FROM MY EXPERIENCE AS A PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR AND COMMUNICATOR, AND, EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, AS A GRAND-DAUGHTER, A DAUGHTER, A WIFE AND A MOTHER, THAT NO ONE CAN MASTER A COMPLEX SUBJECT, UNLESS SHE HAS UNDERSTOOD AND HAS MASTERED THAT SUBJECT'S BASICS FIRST.

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TO ME, "GOING TO INDIA TO WORK WITH THE POOREST OF THE POOR" BECAME A METAPHOR FOR ANY IMPOSSIBLE PROBLEM IN OUR POST-MODERN WORLD, WHICH FOR ME INCLUDES THE FOUNDATIONAL ISSUE OF PROTECTING THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON, AS WELL AS HER RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, FROM BEGINNING AT CONCEPTION TO END AT NATURAL DEATH. IF SOMEONE WERE TO BE CALLED TO WORK WITH THE SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE CHALLENGES OF OUR DAY, THEN SHE MUST BE WELL-GROUNDED IN THE FUNDAMENTALS OF KIND WORDS, FIRST, IN HER OWN HOME.

THIS IS WHY WOMEN LIKE YOU AND ME HAVE A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN BRINGING ABOUT WORLD PEACE, AND I SAY THIS WITH NO EXAGGERATION. WE MAY NEVER KNOW HOW OUR WORDS AND GESTURES MIGHT AFFECT A LOVE ONE, A FRIEND, OR EVEN A STRANGER SIMPLY BY OFFERING THEM "SMALLS THING WITH GREAT LOVE." BUT I BELIEVE YOU CAN SEE FROM THE STORIES OF MY FAMILY'S FAITH, WHICH I JUST SHARED, THAT THEIR SIMPLE ACTS OF KINDNESS, COMPASSION, SERVICE AND LOVE HAVE PROFOUNDLY INFLUENCED ME.

I WANT TO PASS ON THE FAITH LEGACY I'VE RECEIVED FROM MY GRANDMOTHER AND MY MOTHER TO MY CHILDREN, AND, HOPEFULLY, TO THEIR CHILDREN.

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I BELIEVE THE BEST WAY I CAN DO THAT IS THROUGH STORYTELLING,  
ENHANCED BY SELECTIVE USE OF FAMILY PHOTOS. I HONESTLY  
BELIEVE EVERYONE IN THIS ROOM CAN DO THE SAME THING.

10      CLOSING THOUGHTS: CREATING FAMILY STORIES  
OF FAITH

THIS THANKSGIVING, OR THE NEXT HOLIDAY YOU SPEND WITH YOUR  
FAMILY OR WITH CLOSE FRIENDS, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO SHARE YOUR  
FAITH STORIES TOO. LIKE MY STORIES, THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE  
ABOUT PERFECT PEOPLE. THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE TO BE DRAMATIC.  
RATHER THEY NEED TO CONVEY YOUR OWN HONEST WITNESS TO THE  
GOODNESS OF PEOPLE YOU HAVE KNOWN, AND HOW THEIR LIVES HAVE  
REFLECTED THEIR PERSONAL LOVE OF GOD AND NEIGHBOR.

YOU DON'T NEED A ROOM FULL OF PEOPLE OR A LOT OF FANCY  
TECHNOLOGY TO SHARE YOUR GOOD NEWS EITHER. LIKE MOTHER TERESA  
AND THE MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY, THEY ONLY NEED TO BE ABOUT  
PEOPLE WHO DO "SMALL THINGS WITH GREAT LOVE."

THANK YOU FOR INVITING ME TO SHARE MY FAMILY'S STORIES OF  
BATON ROUGE BLESSINGS WITH YOU.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

AND MAY YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES CELEBRATE THE UPCOMING HOLIDAY SEASON, AS WELL AS OUR CHURCH'S YEAR OF FAITH, IN JOYFUL SOLIDARITY WITH EACH OTHER AND AS BLESSED AS THE OLD BATON ROUGE COMMUNITY IN WHICH SO MANY OF US IN THIS ROOM GREW!