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Notes about living as a  
Christian

## continuous conversion

### My Mother

by Sara Tusek

#### SEVEN AGES OF (HU)MAN

My mother died in 1994. Since she died, I have felt much closer to her than when she was living and think about her life very often. As I get older I see my mother in myself, the better parts of myself. I wish I could have more successfully communicated my respect and admiration for her when she was still alive, and I am sorry that I didn't fully realize her love for me (and her tremendous influence on me and my brother) until her death.

In the spirit of wanting to share my love for my mother with my family, I'd like to record what I remember (and no doubt my memory is not completely trustworthy) of the high points of my mother's life., using the metaphor found in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*; Jacques's soliloquy begins thus:

"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages." *(complete speech on p. 2)*

#### 1ST AGE: THE INFANT

My mother's father, John Moss, owned a sawmill and a farm in Kentucky. He and his wife Annie had six children; my mother, Frances, was the next-to-last. Her life-long favorite sister, Johnnee, was born several months after John died of influenza in 1918 or 1919, leaving the widowed Annie to keep the mill business running and raise the children, most of whom were still young. Annie did her best to keep everything going but eventually sold the farm and moved into the small town of Munfordville. She supported her children by taking in laundry and lived in Munfordville till she died at the age of 84.

#### 2ND AGE: THE SCHOOLBOY(GIRL)

My mother was smart and a good student all through school. She memorized poems and read books (including Shakespeare's plays) with great pleasure. She wanted to become a nurse and live in a bigger city than Munfordville. But Kentucky (never a wealthy state) suffered during the Great Depression of the 1930's, and her plans were put on hold. An ardent Democrat, she was a great fan of Franklin Delano Roosevelt for his humane policies during the Depression; later she would carry the same regard for John F. Kennedy for his civil rights policies in the 1960's.

#### 3RD STAGE: THE LOVER

Still in Munfordville, Frances began to date her friend Jean Doyel's older brother John, known as Jack (the Doyel family had seven children). Jack was smitten by Frances' beauty and brains, and they married in 1939, moving to Louisville, 70 miles from Munfordville. Jack aspired to be a writer and artist; he completed a year of college at Western Kentucky University, but had to leave for financial reasons.



**My mother as a young woman**

#### 4TH AGE: THE SOLDIER

Then WWII intervened. My father became the soldier, with my mother living back in Munfordville with her baby, my brother John, so she could be close to her family. Like everyone else, Frances and Jack had to put their personal plans aside for three years while my father worked in the Army's dental unit, making crowns and false teeth.

*To p. 2*

## continuous conversion

### 5TH AGE: THE JUSTICE

From p

Justice was one of my mother's guiding principles. Watching the news on TV with her, or being in the room when she read the newspaper, meant that you were in for a fervent discussion on whatever she saw that day as a lack of justice.

Civil rights for African Americans ("colored people" in those days) was her number one cause. She could not abide the brazen injustice of segregation that still ruled Louisville, a century after the Civil War and a decade after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling, "Brown vs. the Board of Education" that had declared segregation illegal and unconstitutional.

The Civil Rights marches in Alabama, where white policemen turned fire hoses and dogs on men, women and children who were peaceably marching to show their support of social equality, enraged my mother. She was ashamed that her country would allow such treatment of its own citizens.

I don't know anyone else from that time period in Louisville who felt as passionately about equality and fairness as my mother did. Most Southern Democrats in those days were about as socially liberal as today's far-right Republicans. My mother was different, and not the least bit shy to let anyone know exactly how she felt about injustice.

### 6TH AGE: THE LEAN AND SLIPPED PANTALOON

In her fifties, my mother began to mellow. She became more patient with people with whom she disagreed, and was more willing to hear their side of the story. She laughed more, and she seemed much more relaxed. She and my father had divorced in 1960, and by the 1980's she'd been living alone so long that she was happy in her own company. She read, cooked, gardened and took care of her home, always in the company of a cat. There was no question of her mental faculties diminishing—she still did her daily crossword puzzle (the hard one, from the *New York Times*) and watched every news show on TV.

She seemed to have made peace with the plans she'd had to lay aside in her life, and relished her role as "Nana" to her grandchildren (my brother's four daughters and my son and daughter). She retired,

*Jacques: All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.  
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the canon's mouth. And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lined,  
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;  
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.  
(As You Like It, 2. 7. 139-167)*

after 40 years of working as a waitress in some of Louisville's best restaurants, and moved back to Munfordville. There she could be with her beloved sister Johnnee and enjoy her free time after a life of work.

### 6TH AGE: A CHILD AGAIN

My father died in 1992 while living with my brother John and his wife Kim in Louisiana. Although my parents never reunited after their divorce, neither of them remarried. I believe that their love endured, in a small but vital way. When my father died, my mother was as involved with the funeral as if they'd still been married.

She then moved in with John and Kim, and began her last stage of life. She suffered from cancer in several parts of her body; the ravages of the cancer changed her personality and she became very gentle and mild, like a sweet

child. She died on John's sofa, after the hospital and doctors had done all they could. This seems fitting for a woman who was born at home. She began and ended her life with her family.

### MY MOTHER IN ME

From my mother I received my strong devotion to truthfulness and courage. She took me to church from infancy. She was not intimidated by wealth or power, but "called it like she saw it." From her I got my devotion to reading (and from my father, my devotion to writing). My mother was a careful, meticulous person—from her I got my sense of order and appreciation for detail.

I can see my mother, helplessly laughing at a "Pink Panther" movie; I can hear her calling me to dinner when I was a child. I wish I could see her one more time to tell her how much I love her, and how much I miss her.