



## Mabel F. Duvall

May 30, 1933 - January 10, 2017

Mabel Duvall was a warm, friendly, funny, courageous, positive and beautiful lady who made people smile everywhere she went. Mabel's passing on January 10, 2017 was rather sudden and mainly a result of her battle with Alzheimer's.

I would like to share a bit of her story to give you an idea of who she was. Many of the details are a bit fuzzy and I can only verify that this was the story she told me. I just want to give a glimpse of this amazing woman who was my mom; Mabel Frances Leabo Duvall.

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### BIRTH

In May of 1933 Jacob and Dora Lamar Leabo welcomed their baby daughter into the world. They lived in Hamilton Missouri. As you know, 1933 would not be an easy year to add to one's family. It was the midst of the great depression. Jake and Dora had lived in poverty even when times were good but during this time the when the whole country was floundering it made their struggle even more Profound. Even so it was a joy to add this beautiful sweet baby girl to the two sons they already had. They found room for the new baby in a drawer.

### FIRE!

Their struggle to put a roof over their heads and food on the table meant long hours working or looking for work. Then things got worse. A fire broke out in

their little home and as flames engulfed it, Mabel's oldest brother Henry realized that his baby sister was still inside. He rushed through the flames and as he got near the drawer where Mabel slept, a burning beam from the ceiling fell right on top of it! He reached in, scooped up his baby sister and ran out of the burning building. Outside he was amazed to find that Mabel was alright! The only injury was that one ear had been burned. They didn't have money for a doctor so they put some home remedy on it and wrapped her head in a bandage which left her with a scarred ear that was stuck to her head. She was a bit frustrated with this scar, but I think it was also a reminder to her. She had come through the fire. She was a survivor. I think this story gave her a sense of courage and a positive outlook that remained with her throughout her life. Sometimes she needed to be reminded of the courage that was in her. But it was there and it was strong. And she would need it!

#### ROOM ABOVE LEABO GARAGE

The Fire had taken the family's home and possessions. But there was help in this dark time. Mabel's uncle had a place they could live. Uncle Clarence had an automotive garage. He could fix anything and would often do so without pay when people needed it. He was kind, generous and good. He let Mabel's family move into a room above the garage. There was not much space and all the kids had to share a bed. My mom told me at bedtime she would try to get ready for bed quickly so she would not be the last one in because the kid on the outside often got pushed out of bed during the night. Dora and Jake had seven children so Mabel learned to fight for what we she wanted.

#### ST JOSEPH MISSOURI AND "MORE WATER FOR THE SOUP."

Her parents fought too to make a good life for their kids but there was not enough work in the little town of Hamilton. So They headed out to big city of St Joe's MS. While there Mabel's mom worked long hours and still didn't have much to feed the family. Mabel told me this about her mother Dora during this time." Many nights as she was heating up soup for supper there would be a

knock on the back door. They would open the door to find a strange man or two, some of the men who rode the trains looking for work. These men were hungry and they would ask for food. Dora would say, “ You can always add more water to the soup.” And that’s what she did. That concept of finding ways to help others even when you did not have much yourself was part of the teaching mom handed down to me from her mother.

### DORA’S DEATH AND MOVING TO A FARM

But I never knew my grandmother. She died when Mabel was only 10 years old leaving behind seven children and husband who could not cope with her death. Jake decided to take his kids back to Hamilton where they had relatives to help.

For some reason, They did not move back in with uncle Clarence and Aunt Iva, but instead Jake chose to take them to another Brother who lived on a farm.. Life there was cold and muddy and Mabel said she was always hungry and exhausted. All of the kids had to work hard but it was particularly awful for the girls. His daughters had moved away as soon as they were able and they encouraged other family members to intervene and get the Mabel and her sisters away from this hard life. They found out her uncle Clarence and Aunt Iva had been told by Dora that if anything happened that to her that Mabel should live with them. One day a shiny black car pulled into the dirty farm yard and out came Clarence and Ivy. They asked if she wanted to come with them and she was overjoyed. She went from a bedraggled and unhappy waif to the daughter they always wanted.

### MOVE TO PHOENIX

Happy times did not mean things were good financially. Clarence and Ivy decided to move to California to see if they could find greener pastures. They packed up their belongings and their family and headed off on the train to better times.

This WW2 the train was quite full with soldiers and there were no seats for her but Mabel passed the time singing for the soldiers and she entertained the troops all the way to a stop in Phoenix Arizona. Here her uncle got off for a smoke and just before the train pulled out he came running back and shouted, " Throw everything off the train, we are staying here!!" The rest of the family was a bit disappointed that they were not going to Hollywood and the beach.

### LIFE IN A TENT CITY, SCHOOL AND CALIFORNIA

They could not find any place they could afford to live. The whole town was full of military and their families and building supplies were rationed. So the Leabo's ended up living in a tent city for over a year. The physical conditions were pretty bad...think of Arizona in the summer time!! Mabel struggled to learn to be as stoic as her aunt but it was hard when a prickly heat rash covered her head to toe from the sweltering heat. Yet Even so it she was very grateful to her aunt and Uncle for taking her into their family.

Finally, the family was able to build a small home. Mabel attended high school where she was involved in lots of activities such as student council and cheerleading. She was happy, hard working and had many friends. After graduating, she finally got to move to California. She loved living in Redondo Beach, west of LA.. Her aunt and a cousin also moved out to California but sadly her uncle Clarence passed away in 1950.

### LEGAL SECRETARY

She soon got a job as a secretary for Law Firm of Arnold M Cowan in Redondo Beach, CA. She held this job for the next 25 years or so. She may have started as a receptionist, I am not quite sure, but she soon became indispensable to the firm. She could keep the office running smoothly, help to find all sorts of lost things, keep everyone's schedule straight and still

welcome clients with a reassuring smile. She really loved her job and she was very good at it! I will always remember how she looked so beautiful every morning as she left and I was so proud to have such a talented, beautiful mom. I ended up working at the law office with her off and on as I was growing up. It was good training, though I never had the desire to be a secretary or a lawyer.

## MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

Back to the home side of things, she married Rolland Laurence In 1959 and became Step mom to his daughter Diane. She soon had me, Denise and then my twin brothers, Dana and Daryl a couple years later. It was a crazy few years after the boys were born, twins can be a handful but these guys could get into trouble in their sleep...truly! But mom kept her sense of humor, which was a good thing.

I won't say everything was great during the next few years. The family moved into a nice home in Torrance CA. There were also some hard times. After 10 years of marriage, Mabel and Rolland separated. It was not easy to be a single mom and I know painful to her to be a single mom but we still laughed often and had many fun times. Her children had great pride in her and how she had perseverance, courage and a great sense of humor even still. I think her sometimes would tell me the story of her surviving that fire when she was a baby to remind herself that she could do this, that she was a survivor. That gave her courage to face her fears.

## FREEWAYS AND CAMPING

One of her big fears was driving on the freeway. She lived in California but had never driven on a freeway. Everywhere we went we drove on surface streets which was fine but we really loved camping and to get there you had to drive at least part of the way on the freeway. We made plans to go anyway and picked up a driver's manual at the DMV which I studied meticulously for hints on freeway driving. We packed up the car and headed off. My mom was

so scared but we started up the on ramp, very slowly. and I told her "Okay speed up...you have to match the speed of traffic...Umm, faster than 30 mph, mom ! C'mon!!" She was so scared but she sped up, racing toward the end of the onramp. Then I said, "Now merge...just blend into traffic there is room."But she didn't. She was yelling "I can't" and we were yelling "Merge" ...just before our lane ended she managed to pull into traffic and everyone in the car erupted in cheers! We arrived at the campground and unpacked our giant 8-man tent only to realize there was no way we could put it up with one petite lady one even shorter 11 year old girl and the twins who were already off chasing rabbits. Somehow, we managed to corral the boys and get it partially set up but it was less than 4 Ft. off the ground. My brothers walked in and the ceiling brushed the top of their little heads and they said, "I think this is just fine." We laughed for hours looking at that poor, lumpy, misshapen tent and laughed even more when the whole thing came tumbling down. Some big tall men from other campsites had pity on us and helped us set it up but we kind of missed short little tent mound□

GOD

On a more serious note, I think that an important part of mom's story was her relationship with God. God was not a part of our life growing up. I think much of her opposition to spiritual things was because she was afraid God would not accept her as she was, that he could not love her. She didn't want me to suffer the same disillusionment she did. I think she had the idea that God had a lot of rules and hoops a person had to jump through and she was not sure she was good enough.

She was a bit uncomfortable with my interest in spiritual things and quest to find God that started at age 6. Honestly, that was what I thought about God too. That was until when I was around 13 years old, quite suddenly God made it clear to me that his love was not based on what I could do for him but what he had already done for me. A few months after I began to follow Jesus I wanted to try going to church and she was very upset by that, afraid that it would be an awful experience for me. But I was determined and set out early

one morning with my little brother Daryl in tow. Mom got in the car and drove to where we were walking along the road, and said "Get in I will give you a ride." In time as my brothers and I attended church she began to come with us. She and I would study the bible together but the wounds she had made it hard for her to believe. Yet little by little she did come to the Lord. Just as my life had completely changed overnight , her life changed too, but it was over time as she accepted that God loved her and came to know that she was of great worth to Him. One day I just could see new life in her, healing and joy were evident.

## BOB

Time went by, I moved out and the boys graduated from High school. I started dating Dwight, and we got married. Even though we spent a lot of time with her, I think Mom began to feel a bit lonely and wondered if she ever would meet the right man. Happily, she met Bob and they got married in 1884. Bob was a good man, a great husband, a strong follower of Jesus and a wonderful grandpa to their grandchildren Zach, Kaitlyn, Chase and Hannah. But best of all was how Mabel and Bob would laugh, tease each other and enjoy life together. They moved out to a cabin on the river in Beaver, Utah where they could fish, grow their own vegetables, and cut their own firewood. It was a wonderful home. They were also very instrumental in getting a small church established there. As one of the founding families they volunteered in a hundred ways and helped build the building they are still in today. Mabel also worked at the town newspaper, and later at the Forest Service office. In addition, she volunteered at the Food Bank. Bob was a little league coach and friend and mentor to many. They were loved in their little town and it was a sad day in 2006 when Bob Duvall passed away.

## THE GREAT THIEF- ALZHEIMER'S

A couple years later, it became obvious that mom was having trouble and so we, Denise and Dwight Birdsall, brought her here to live with us in our home in

Fort Collins, Colorado. Around seven years ago, she was finally diagnostic with Alzheimer's like dementia but she still had several years where she could enjoy things like going on wonderful vacations with us and with my brother Dana and his family to places she loved like Vermont and Hawaii. She loved to read, listen to music, and to take walks. And of course, she always loved to eat, especially desserts! She loved to go visit California and see Dana, Kim, Chase and Hannah and go on outings with Daryl and his wife Karen. Here in Fort Collins she made many friends in our home, especially lots of people from Timberline Oldtown Church where she attended with us. She loved her grandkids- hanging out with Kaitlyn and her husband Mark who lived here and Zach and Stacey when would come to visit with their two little girls, Isabell and Olivia. She also spent many happy days doing activities at Elderhaus and teasing and laughing with the kind caregivers that helped her out a bit some mornings or evenings- Ida, Angelina, Talia, Susan, Saphyre, Maura and others!

Dementia, cognitive impairment and the loss of her ability to communicate and move easily began to make life more and more difficult for her in the past four years. It stole away, little by little, the person that she once was. Thankfully, her journey was not typical and she usually remembered who we were until this past year when even that was starting to go. And yet, those of you who know her know she still had aspects of her vibrant personality - in her warm smile, in her contagious laugh, in her mischievous humor and her great hugs. But as this year wore on she her ability to communicate and interact was slipping away. There would still be good days, maybe good moments but aspects of her awesome personality were becoming trapped by a brain and a body that just would not work as she wanted it to.

#### ENDING THIS EARTHLY LIFE

Mabel had a quite a full month before passing with lots of family visiting our home. We were not expecting for her struggle to end so suddenly and it was a

shock but even though I miss her so much I know that she is free, that she is whole and that she is healed. That she has traded her earthly body for a new life in heaven. During the week that she was getting ready to go part of me wanted to hold on to her and keep her here. But I also experienced something which gave me incredible comfort and made me sure of seeing her again one day.

#### THE THINNING OF THE VEIL BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

She had been in bed for a day or so when she began talking to people I couldn't see. It was so different than when she had experienced hallucinations or when she talked in her sleep. She was not actually asleep but she had her eyes closed and she was having full on conversations with people who had passed away. Before this she had lost much of her ability to speak clearly most of the time. Here and there we'd share a few sentences but lots of gibberish or unclear speech. Now she was talking loud and clear and laughing in a way I hadn't heard her laugh in months. Full on joyful hilarious laughter. She was with Bobby a lot of the time, talking to him about all kinds of things and enjoying things like riding bikes together and laughing all the while. She was with other people that we have not talked about in years. She told me that an uncle who died 40 years ago was there and wanted to tell us that he was sorry please forgive him, which was something he needed to say. She even began talking to God and spending time hanging out with Jesus. I know people may tell me these were just figments of her imagination but if you had been there, I tell you it felt like the veil between heaven and earth had grown very thin in that room, like it was a sacred place where Mabel could peek over to the other side and let me know that it is okay for her to go and that she was going to a better place. After that she grew quiet and every breath became a chore. It was a painful day although she had already slipped off to sleep for the last time and thankfully her suffering was short and in the end I whispered to her "It's alright to go mom, go enjoy heaven." And that was what she finally did.

She left behind her children-

Denise and Husband, Dwight Birdsall. Dana and wife, Kim Laurence. Daryl and wife, Karen Laurence

Her Grandchildren Zach and wife Stacey Birdsall. Kailtyn and husband Mark Birdsall-Thomas, Chase Laurence, Hannah Laurence

Her Great grandchildren Isabell and Olivia Birdsall

Her Step children Diane and Michael Clifford and Cy Duvall and wife

And of course Mabel's many friends

We will all miss her and look forward to seeing her again one day in Heaven!

# Tribute Wall



“ *Justice Hardman lit a candle in memory of Mabel F. Duvall* ”



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**Justice Hardman** - February 04, 2017 at 01:07 AM