

Why Heritage and Honor Come Into Play This Weekend

In many cultures of the world, honor is still a way of life, especially when it comes to honoring previous generations. It is not considered unusual for parents and grandparents to be cared for in their latter years in the homes of their children and grandchildren. Instead of the elderly being a burden, they are viewed as a blessing, a vast resource of wisdom and knowledge. Even in America, there once was a time when we took pains to honor the elderly, recognizing them for their faithfulness and wisdom. The younger generations appreciated the experience and insights of their elders.

I was reminded of my own heritage of honor when I watched the movie *The Last Samurai*. The Japanese word *samurai* simply means “servant.” The entire duty of a *samurai* was to serve the emperor and defend his honor.

After my mother became a widow, my sister and brother both asked her to live with them, but she wouldn’t have it. “I live with my oldest boy, Dougie!” I was 38 years old, single and leading an international ministry—buying a house with my mother was not exactly the path I had envisioned for my life at that time! But as the eldest Asian son, I knew it was my responsibility to care for her.

In 1996, she moved in with me and lived with me for nearly eight years. She had experienced some health problems, and in 2003, with her difficulties increasing and my travel schedule becoming more intense, we moved her into an apartment in Austin to be near my sister, Jeanne, and her family. She missed Houston, but she loved being close to Jeanne’s children, and they loved having her there. A year and a half later, she went to be with Jesus just a few weeks after she had been diagnosed with cancer. I am so thankful I chose to

honor her by taking care of her.

'Dougie, Take Your Shoes Off!'

I still find myself honoring my mother by obeying certain things she taught me, such as taking off my shoes before going into the house. Anytime I determine to walk through the house fully shod, I can get only so far before I hear her voice saying, "Dougie! Do you have your shoes on? Douglas, take off your shoes!" Now I even make my guests take off their shoes from time to time.

Once I had an urgent voice message from Jeanne saying that she was on her way to check on Mom, who had called because she thought she was having a heart attack. I called and anxiously asked, "How is she? Is everything OK?"

"I don't know," Jeanne said, "the lights are off."

"Why don't you turn the lights on?"

"Because I'm crawling on the floor."

"Why are you crawling on the floor?!"

"Because I have my shoes on!"

"Don't worry about your shoes; check on Mom!" I said.

We laugh about it now, but it shows how much our mother ingrained that principle into our thought processes!

I also remember my mother telling me not to throw tissues in the toilet. "Dougie, they clog the drain!" I would argue with her that there was no difference between tissues and toilet paper. Years later, I learned she was right when I saw it on television. It was confirmed again by a woman who had heard me tell the story when I was preaching at a church in Cheshire, Connecticut. She sent me an email titled, "Your Mother Was Right":

I heard you tell the story about your mother and her opposition to having tissues thrown into the toilet. She was right, you know! I laughed to myself as I thought what my 9-year-old would tell you if you were to walk up and ask him why we don't throw tissues into the toilet.

A couple of years ago, Chaska and I set up a small experiment. We put a tissue in a cup of water and toilet paper in another cup of water and let it sit overnight. Sure enough, the next day, the toilet paper had broken up very well, but the tissue was still completely intact.

While I was talking with my husband about what you had said, I looked at Chaska and asked, "Chaska, why don't we throw tissues into the toilet?"

He looked up at me over the rim of his glasses and said, "Because they'll clog the drain."

Then, knowing that our 6-year-old had been trained not to throw the tissues into the toilet, I asked, "Kenya, why don't we throw tissues into the toilet?"

He raised his curly mop and said, "Because we frow dem in the trash."

"But, Kenya, why do we throw them in the trash?"

"Because we can't frow dem in the toiwet."

"Kenya, what would happen if we threw them in the toilet?"

He raised his curly mop again and paused for a moment. Then, making a gagging noise and sticking out his precious little tongue, he said, "It would choke!"

Dancing With Jesus

After my mom passed, I wrote a tribute to her called "Dancing with Jesus," and I want to share some of it below:

"Here, this is for Mom." I handed my sister Jeanne half of a Reuben sandwich and kept the other half for myself.

It was April 24, 2005, the day after Mother's funeral. Just a few weeks earlier—on March 22—she had been diagnosed with terminal cancer in her lungs and brain. The doctors told us we would have her for up to six months. She asked the Lord for 10 more years, and we all believed Him for a miracle. But in His sovereign wisdom, grace and mercy, the Lord chose to take her home quickly and relatively painlessly.

Two weeks earlier, she had just completed her first full week of radiation and her body had handled it beautifully! She was feeling weak and needed some help walking, and had begun losing her hair. But she wanted to visit her friends in Houston, so I brought her home with me from Austin. She had a list of things she wanted to do: She wanted to see her friends at our ministry's Friday night Bible study and go to Denny's afterward. On Saturday, she wanted to see her Japanese friends and go to a good Japanese restaurant. And, among other things, she wanted to go to PetSmart to pick up some things for Coco, her Pomeranian companion and friend. As she got older, she had begun wearing her hair in a way that I called a Japanese Afro, and I used to tease her by calling her "Coco 1" and the dog "Coco 2."

I had to preach Sunday morning, but Mother was too weak to join me. When I got back, she had taken a fall and was obviously in pain. From that time on, her health deteriorated quickly.

It seemed as if God had given her the grace and strength on Friday and Saturday to accomplish everything on her list of things to do, except for one: We never made it to a deli for a good Reuben sandwich.

Preparing the Way

In hindsight, I can see the Lord's preparation had begun long before my mother showed up that weekend with her list.

In October before she passed away, my sister, brother and I pulled together the money for her to fly with me to Japan, where she visited family while I ministered. After I finished my teaching commitment, I was able to join them for our final day before departing for the U.S.

The day after we returned to Houston, my little nephew Randy kept calling from Austin to say, "Mammaw, are you coming home *today*?" Only five months later, she truly had gone home.

Sushi, Shoes and Salsa

Her memorial service was a beautiful mixture of tearful good-byes and happy remembrances. My mother had a soft heart that welcomed people into her life and made them feel like family. Close friends shared of the joy and laughter she brought into their lives. She loved to cook for people, and she would have neighbors over for "girls' nights" at my sister's house, serving them sushi and outdancing every one of them!

Others remembered Mother teaching them a Japanese "fan dance" and the jitterbug. "But don't tell Dougie!" she would say. And I recalled her participation in what became known as the "salsa revival night" at Houston's Prayer Mountain, a series of 40 days of worship, the last 40 days of 1996. As local Hispanic leaders led us in worship that night, a spirit of overwhelming joy and exuberance broke out resulting in a salsa line of praise to the Lord. As Mother danced past me, she said, "Dougie, what's the matter with you? Come on! Let's praise the Lord!"

How precious it was to see my mother, whom I had the pleasure of leading to Christ, praising the Lord that way.

This is part 1 of a 2-part series. Listen to the podcasts to hear more from Doug Stringer.