

May 8th, 2016

Dear Mom,

Today is your day, Mother's Day, so I thought I would sit down and write you a letter, just to wish you a Happy Mother's Day and tell you how much I miss you still.

You know theres not much I really remember from when I was real young. I know what people say, but then that's from what they thought or say happened. I want to talk about what I know happened. I guess I'll start when I can first remember...

The earlist memories I have, are riding horses with you...Which was one of your favorite things to do. I remember riding in your lap around the yard on Carrie Road, or wherever it was, as well as when you would ride with Aunt Karen in the parades downtown. I am sure you remember those days, too.

I know you were also afriad of getting into deep water, which shows me how much you really loved me. Do you remember the time we were at our swimming spot on the Sacramento River? I think I was 5 or 6 at the time. We were having fun. All I really remember was grabbing onto a log that was in the shallows, while all the boats were racing back and forth in the middle of the river. All of a sudden, the log was shaken loose by the waves of the racing boats, and low an behold, I hung onto the log as it moved further out into the river. I was scared shitless, but there was nothing I could do because I was afraid to let go because of all the boats and because I couldn't swim. I remember hearing you hollering, but not what you were saying. Nobody would stop and help, the boats just kept flying back and forth, and nobody tried to swim out to me...And then, there you were, telling me to hold on as you dragged the log back close enough for you to stand up and grab me. The whole time you were crying and hugging me, I can remember you shaking real hard. You told me to never do that again. After that day, I wanted to learn to swim real bad, because I knew how much you hated to swim mom, yet your love over-rode your fear. By the way, I can swim like the fishes now!

I also remember all the times you fell off Suger (or other horses for that matter). There was that one time you fell, that you landed on your head on the street. They had to rush you to the hospital. They said you had a concussion, and let me tell you, although I didn't totally understand what that meant, I thought you were going to die. And it wasn't long til you were right back in the saddle, showing Suger who was boss.

Yeah, I was a real pain in your ass when I was young. Always stealing, causing problems, jumping in front of the school bus, starting fires, fighting with Dee and Mike, always stealing food...and things like that. I remember when I jumped in front of the school bus as it was pulling up infront of our house. Nobody could figure out why I did it. That was when I first started counseling at Bell Avenue School. I was about 9. I know you know why I did it, but I'm not gonna write about that here.

Then you had had enough because you couldn't control me, so you sent me to Louisiana. Well let me tell you, they couldn't do any better then you did. Shoot, they probably did worse, because they didn't have love for me. They just wanted to prove they could break me. The jokes on them, because kids know the difference, believe me, we do!

Dee an I lived through that hell from 87' til Christmas of 89', when you allowed us to come home. We were only suppose to stay for 2 weeks, but you decided you wanted us to stay there with you. At first, everything was great. I fell in love with Lydia Darr, when we were 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ /13. And you know what's so funny about that. It happened just like in the George Strait song, 'Check Yes or No.' That's exactly how she and I got together! I passed a note in my school book as she sat right in front of me, and she responded and sent it back to me. After I read it, I got in trouble for reading it and refused to give it to the teacher, so I had to stand outside the classroom for 15 minutes. I was happy Lydia said yes.

Then everything started going bad. I started stealing again; Dee ran away; and I was skipping school to spend the money I was stealing from you. And of course, Jeff and I had our problems. One incident that set everything off, happened on my birthday, Febraury 5th, 1990.

I had been suspended from school and was staying at Aunt Karens place, so I thought everyone forgot about my birthday. I was missing Lydia too. So, on my birthday, unbeknownst to me, Aunt Karen and you had it planned out. Aunt Karen told me to get my stuff, I was going home. When we got there, everyone was there already. Lydia was there with her older sister. She drove Lydia there without a drivers license. Anyways, after the party, I wanted to spend some time with Lydia so I told you and Jeff that we were going to the store. Well, Lydia's sister offer-

ed to drive us as she was leaving anyways. You and Jeff said I better not get in that car with her. So Lydia and I started walking down the road to the store. Along came her sister, offering us a ride. We refused, so she offered to let us ride on the hood instead. So that's what we did. When I got back to the house, you and Jeff accused me of getting in the car, when I hadn't, and I got grounded. I got mad because you didn't believe me, but what did I expect to happen when I lied all the time?

After that, I just kept doing stuff to get in trouble and suspended from school, until I got expelled. That was the last straw. That's when you sent me back to Louisiana.

And as you already know, there were more and more problems there, too. I ended up in an adolescent ward and the State Hospital when I was 15. I was allowed to go to Aunt Adries for weekend visits to see if things could be worked out. I think she only allowed that to happen because you were still alive and watching.

Then Easter of 93 happened.

By then, you had gotten a 1-800 number so I could call you from the hospital. On Tuesday after Easter, I called you. We talked about me getting better and working through my problems and coming home. We also talked about what was going on with you and everyone there. Just before we hung up that day, I broke down. Something came over me and I felt it would be the last time I could tell you how I really felt. I can remember that day as though it happened this morning, mom. I told you I was trying and I was sorry for everything, and that I loved and missed you so much. I started crying and begging you to let me come home before it was too late.

You were crying when you told me that you loved me and wished you could, but that I wasn't ready to come home yet. I still had work to do to get better. I promised you everything in the world to let me come home...But you stood fast. And then you told me not to forget to call you on Friday, like I would forget. Those calls are what drove me on through the weeks.

So on Friday, like every Friday and Tuesday, I got up early, and got everything ready for classes. I waited til 6:30, which was when they allowed us out of our dorms. I showered and all that I needed to do to be ready for classes at 8am. I started calling you at 7:30 like I always did, but nobody answered. When you didn't answer the first time I called, I knew something was wrong. I didn't know what, but I kept trying and trying till it was time to go to class. During lunch, I didn't eat either, I went straight to the phones and tried again. Nobody picked up then either. After school, I went straight back to the phones again. This time after I tried, and nobody answered and I hung up the phone, the head nurse asked me if everything was alright? I told her something was wrong because you wouldn't answer the phone and you wouldn't miss my calls. She told me you were probably out and to keep trying. I kept it up all weekend, all the way up til 7:30 am Monday morning, when I was told that Mrs. Roxanne and Mrs. Mary wanted to see me at 8am, instead of going to classes. (Mrs. Roxanne and Mrs. Mary were my counselor and social workers)

Little did I know that on Friday, Mrs Roxanne was called and told what happened to you and that Aunt Adrie would be there on Monday morning to tell me. So Mrs. Roxanne told the nurses to keep a watch on me just incase i found out. That's why the whole weekend, all the nurses and techs were asking me if I was alright.

So when the time came to go to their office in the front building I went. When I opened the front door, grandma and Sissy were there with the twins. I stopped and asked what was going on, because I didn't expect them to be there. Nobody said anything except grandma told me that Aunt Adrie was with Mrs. Roxanne, and I was suppose to go right in. So I went and knocked on the door.

As soon as the door opened, I seen Aunt Adrie and ignored everyone else, and asked her what was wrong. She stood up and said, 'Your mom died on Friday. Do you want to go to the funeral?' She then said, before I could understand what I heard, that if I didn't behave, I wouldn't go. I told her, 'I'm going one way or another.' That's when Mrs. Roxanne stepped in and calmed me down as much as she could.

Needless to say, I went to the funeral. I was 16 years old Mom, when you left. Although nobody is ready for their mother to leave them, I just gave up. I stopped caring what happened after that.

Even though everyone else, like Aunt Karen, Aunt Adrie, Joanne and the rest said they cared and loved me (when they weren't fighting over what you left behind), the only person who was really there for me, and still is, was your best friend, Aunt Kay. She has been the only one who has been there, no matter what happened, what I did or didn't do, and has stood by me. She became 'MOM' after you passed, even though I still call her Aunt Kay. I guess I have to tell

her story and what she's meant to me, too.

It's been 23 years now Mom, since your passing, and there's not a single day that passes by that I don't think about you and what might have been. There's a song out right now by Easton Corban called, 'Wish you were here.' People always tell me you're in a better place. Maybe they're right...I just don't believe it. I don't believe you would feel that way. You had your grandson, Nadal, and Mike to raise still. So I don't buy it Mom. And yet, I guess it was your time.

Well, I don't think I said everything I wanted to or could say, so I'll have to write you more letters later on. I just wanted to wish you a Happy Mother's Day and let you know you aren't forgotten and are missed sorely. You are always in my heart, and I'm sure Mike and dee always think of you, too. I know Aunt Kay does. I guess I'll close by saying even though I'm a grown man now, if you were still here, I'd cry on your shoulders still. I love you and always will Mom. HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!!!

Your Lovning Son,

Bobby Joe Paul