



Ten Million Strawberries

I love strawberries, and I love this spring's bumper crop. The yield thus far: 24 jars of freezer jam, strawberry pie, strawberry shortcake, and a little girl whose red pants, face and hands offer stained evidence of a day spent helping pick what she called ten million strawberries.

My granddaughter, Faith, now four, loves fruit. Each summer's visit to "*Sioux Falls, South Dakota!*" offers evidence of growth and greater dexterity. Last year we picked and she ate what we placed in a bucket. This year she picks, eats and later reaches the bowl I tried to hide at the back of the kitchen counter in hopes of having enough strawberries for the shortcake baking in the oven.

I shouldn't have worried. When you have a bumper crop, the supply seems unending. There's enough to pick, preserve and share. After all, as Faith said, we picked ten million strawberries.



Mom grew and picked and preserved what must have seemed like ten million strawberries in her lifetime. It was easy to take her strawberries for granted. Picked, washed, sliced and ready to eat, no work on our part, just sore fingers and a sore back for Mom, and hopefully the joy of sharing her garden's bounty with her family.

Mom's real gifts, though, were the values that led her to work that hard for us and share her strawberries. Her commitment to quality meant carefully preparing soil, planting, weeding, picking, cleaning and preserving. Her commitment to hard work included hours spent weeding out what wasn't essential to ensure space for what was—plants that produced a crop that fed us. And her generous spirit said there was enough for us and for the birds, since they, too, loved strawberries.

The core values of a mom that relate to gardening—quality, hard work and generosity—are the essential elements of life we need to practice and live in order to create our own bountiful harvest: a truly wonderful journey that we, in turn, share with our kids and grandkids.

Mom's gifts of values remind me of my strawberry patch. It simply keeps producing large, ripe berries that we all enjoy. As I picked, bent in positions my back still regrets, Faith would take the berries from my hand and place them—well, some of them—in the "good berries" bucket. Berries water-logged and moldy from all the rain went into the "bad berries" bucket.

Good berries, bad berries. One becomes the preserves my granddaughter will enjoy this winter and the strawberry shortcake we devoured in one sitting. The others don't even come into the house.

Every mom gives their children both kinds of berries. It's our job to take the best and let go of the rest, forgiving her for imperfections we might see in ourselves as well, if we look honestly and openly at our life.

Picking ten million strawberries is hard work. As the temperatures rose, Faith decided to shed her pretty pink sweater. I unbuttoned it, and asked her to put it in the house so it wouldn't get "yucky" outside.

When we were all done, resting on the deck, eating more strawberries, I smiled. My pink flamingo was wearing Faith's pretty pink sweater. A perfect choice made by a little girl on a perfect day picking ten million strawberries.

Life is an amazing journey with great choices. We choose which berries to keep, how many to eat and preserve, and which ones to not even take with us on our journey. Choose to keep the best gifts of your mother's life—and enjoy the sumptuous feast that is yours to savor and share with those you love.

My best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dee Dee".

Dee Dee

Dear Mom E-Letter is a free, monthly publication that encourages the journey of remembering and celebrating the gifts of a mom, and supports healing from loss. Please pass this on to your family, friends, as well as your pastor or parish nurse in order to help others who share this journey.

Dee Dee Raap is the author of *Dear Mom: Remembering, Celebrating, Healing and Find Your Pink Flamingos*. All rights reserved. To sign up for Dee Dee's free e-letters, go to www.DeDeeRaap.com.