

MY MOTHER, MYSELF

She paved a pathway for me to follow.

By Christine A. Robinson, DTM



Lois and Christine Robinson

Here's to my mother, who told me to eat everything on my plate when I was a child and, when I became an adult, told me to go on a diet.

Here's to my mother, Lois Robinson, who showed me the way to Toastmasters International. We discovered Toastmasters shortly after my father died in 1974, when we felt lost without our guiding star. A teenager

president and founder of Speakeasy Toastmasters in Reno, Nevada, and as area governor for District 4. She expanded into our community, running for political office. Although she did not win, Mom never lost the self-esteem she had acquired after the death of her husband. She gained friendships and job opportunities; a new chapter began and has continued for the last 35 years.

was a semifinalist in 2010 and 2012. Like my mother, I did not place first. Nonetheless, each competition brought unexpected demonstrations of generosity and support from fellow members.

Toastmasters forged a link between my mother and me, a link we had not shared since my childhood. Although we didn't always agree, she and I found common ground through our club meetings. We shared our speeches and our Table Topics. We sent each other evaluations. Who could do a more thorough evaluation than dear old Mom?

The date I earned my Distinguished Toastmaster award is my mother's birthday, August 28. I became distinguished on the date of her birth. A gentle reminder, like most of Mom's reminders: Without her, I would not be here.

As of this writing, my mother lies in the hospital with heart complications. Soon, she will leave this Earth. Like so many of my contemporaries, I am beginning to comprehend life without my mother. So long as I live, she shall never die. The waters of life flow from her through me to you today. **T**

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at the time, I thought Toastmasters was some sort of drinking club, a community where one learned the art of wassailing or toasting one another. Surely, I thought, Mom's gone off the deep end, drinking her sorrow away. In a way, she did go off the deep end: She plunged right into Toastmasters.

Like so many newcomers, Mom began as a guest in the back of the room (her club met in a pizza parlor). She was smitten by the warmth and brightness of the members, the laughter, camaraderie and fellowship. Of course she would join! Delving into the communication track, she wended her way from the back of the room to the front, giving speeches, earning what was then called an ATM (Able Toastmaster) award, and entering speech competitions. Mom also learned the art of leadership, as

Like my mother, I was a wallflower, only I was more like the plasterboard holding the flower up. I was the quintessential loner, outsider, introvert. In many ways, Mom's story is my story.

Starting a new chapter in my life in 1989, I dropped into California not knowing a soul. With nowhere to go but my office, how could I build a community? Where was I to make friends? Like Mom, I began with an evening meeting in a pizza parlor, which is where the Southern Marin Toastmasters met in Mill Valley, California. The club's encouragement and dedication to this program buoyed me from the back of the room all the way to the Toastmasters International Speech Contest. I advanced to the regional level in 2005 in Eugene, Oregon (before Toastmasters went to its current semifinals format), and