

## Feature Articles

## Words to Remember: Mother's Sayings Help Us Get Through the Pandemic

By C. Meade Hartfield



In these strange new days of back-to-back virtual meetings, working from home offices, home-schooling children, and social distancing from the grocery store, not to mention from most human beings—who is to say that anyone

actually will read these pearls of wisdom from my sweet, dearly departed mother. But for those old-school lawyers like me, pilfering through their six-month stack of legal magazines from organizations still sending print publications in hopes of life returning to “normal” soon, here are a few sayings from my mother that she would apply to today’s unusual environment. I hope these two phrases bring you comfort and ever-valuable perspective in a time when we have been knocked from our rhythm of life and placed into an untimed time-out from our old ways and daily routines.

**“You can let this make you upset; or you can not.”**

Whenever I used to call Mother to discuss life’s latest drama, she could hear in my voice that my feathers were ruffled. I would be ready to articulate the injustices, the difficulties, the nuances of whatever situation I faced. As calm and light-hearted as could be, Mother would respond, “You can let this make you upset, or you can not.” It did not matter the circumstances. Whether the issue was big or small, the advice remained the same. What Mother meant was that we each have a choice—we may not be able to control what happens to us, or how we initially feel about it, but we can control how we ultimately respond.



*C. Meade Hartfield with her mother Sherry Pierce Hartfield.*

Photo courtesy of C. Meade Hartfield

As the pandemic hit us hard this past Spring, you may have reacted with anger, grief, sadness, disbelief, or some combination thereof. All are normal and natural feelings, given the personal and professional disruption we have encountered this year. But, at some point, you have a choice to make in whether to stay in that headspace or to shift your outlook to something more uplifting.

Mother took her own advice, her resilience awe inspiring. Her personal “shut-down moment” was being diagnosed with stage IV inflammatory breast cancer, the rarest and deadliest form of breast cancer. She did not crumble; she did not waiver; she did not flinch. She chose to be positive about every single one of the sixteen different chemotherapy drugs she tried over the next five and a half years. She knew she had a choice to allow herself to wallow in unhappiness with her doctor-proclaimed death sentence, or she could choose to try to enjoy every single moment she had left

on earth. And in so choosing, she strengthened her spirit throughout a season of great difficulty.

It’s simple, really. You can either let the things which you cannot control beat you down, or you can let go of your expectations that life will go as planned. You can drain all your emotional energy on something you cannot change, something that did not go as expected; or you can accept the fact that the sun still rises and, if you are still breathing, you can adjust to make the best of the situation, however bad it initially seems.

I can just hear Mother saying, “You’ll be a lot happier” if you do the latter. Stay positive, friends.

**“We all have the same thing: It’s called today.”**

After Mother’s diagnosis, people would constantly say to us, “I’m so sorry.” I used to respond with, “Don’t be sorry—be strong.” I never needed anyone’s pity; I did need to share some of their strength and encouragement. Mother’s response was even better: She used to say something like, “It’s okay. Cancer or not, we all have the same thing: It’s called today.” That woman didn’t miss a beat. Humbly, she meant every word. Once she had gotten their attention, she would repeat her lesson. “You and I have the same thing: It’s called today.” Friends, you and I have the same thing.

In the midst of the seismic shifts happening now as a result of the pandemic, learn to be in the moment and make the best of each day. You don’t know if you, or someone you love, will get COVID-19. You don’t know the seriousness of symptoms they will experience. You don’t know if you will look back and wonder what happened with all that free time and why you didn’t clean out those closets you’ve been meaning to get to. That’s okay. Just don’t let this season of life pass by you.

Mother understood that it shouldn’t take a diagnosis of cancer (or COVID-19) to motivate us to live each day well and to understand that each day is a gift. She lived that way her whole life. Cancer just upped the stakes to lovingly remind others of this life-giving principle.

Figure out what brings you small joys in the daily grind of it all. Do more of those things. Take a walk around the



*Sherry Pierce Hartfield*

Photo courtesy of C. Meade Hartfield

block. Write someone you know in an assisted living home a letter of encouragement. Call your friends and check on them. When you connect with nature and other people, even right now from a social distance, you feel more grounded, more purposeful, more fulfilled.

Pandemic or not, we all have the same thing—today. Make it count.

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In sum, Mother would have taken every pandemic precaution known to man. But, importantly, she would not have let the pandemic alter her perspective that life is good; family and friends should be cherished; and love and hope sustain us through temporarily tough seasons on earth. Listen to Mother!

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