

L'Extase de Sainte-Thérèse

Co-written by Stella Pierrette Michaud and Emily Rose Michaud.

Her love was demonstrative in her own way.

Alone with 10 children to raise, ranging in age from 1 to 18, isolated and alone in the country, she managed as best she could. She managed, but it was a constant struggle.

We were fed three times a day: plain food, good food. We were clean, the house was clean, and our friends were always welcome to come over. It was no wonder, with over 27 acres of field and forest for us to bounce around on.

There was also a large heart-shaped quarry that used to be mined for its' mica and quartz. 70 years earlier, an underground vein had burst, and it had sprung a leak and filled with artesian spring water, to form a natural pool. Now it was simply called The Pool. "We're going to the pool mum", we'd yell, grabbing our towels and bathing suits off the clothesline. She'd yell back, "OK, come home for lunch when you hear the bell".

She had rigged up a large cow bell to a tree branch and when she rang it, we'd hear it from up on the hill and come dashing back for sandwiches and kool-aid.

She felt we were safe and she kept us safe.

Later, as an adult with children of my own, I admired her discipline. How else could she have done it?

We would disappear into the woods for hours at a time to play cops and robbers or build treehouses and forts.

There were always books around the house to keep us quiet on rainy days. She introduced me to the works of Thomas Hardy and Kahlil Gibran, to the poetry of Longfellow, Rumi and others. She was a literate soul and would often give us a choice when we whined that we were bored. "Go suck your thumb or go read a book", she would say. Knowing we were too old for thumb sucking, the second choice seemed like a good one.

In retrospect, she was a renaissance woman and she didn't know it.

When I was little, I used to admire an oil painting she had made of my two eldest brothers. When I asked her why she no longer painted, she said she felt she had no talent. I thought the painting was beautiful.

I suppose today, she would be labelled poor and dysfunctional but it didn't feel that way.

Yes she was ill, sometimes so ill she'd disappear for a while to the hospital. I hated seeing her so distraught, overwhelmed with the burden of it all, yelling at her demons. No one around to help until it was time to put her away again.

She rarely drank other than the odd Friday night gimlet I'd mix for her before sitting down to watch the Tommy Hunter show, a plate of sardines and crackers before us. She didn't care much for smoking either - she couldn't afford to and it just wasn't much of a priority.

* sound *

As an adult, knowing and still seeing her pain, I often wished she could be taken to the other side. I thought it would be a blessing, so she would be free from her burdens.

* sound *

I remember the night you sat outside the house howling and yelling at the full moon. Me and my friends could hear you half a mile away. I remember the neighbourhood men that came over to find you in the lawn chair in the middle of the driveway, screaming at the house. You were hauled away in an ambulance once more. It broke my heart, yet again.

The weight of this material world was too much for you.

I neglected you in my adult years, and for this I carry a rock of remorse in my chest.

When yet another one of my brothers...your sons died, distraught, you wept to me and said, "I feel like

I'm living in a nightmare". This is what angered me most: that you had barely (if ever), had any reprieve in all your years from some form of grief. Grief seemed to be a constant in your life.

I hated when you were sick Mum, because I felt you weren't there.

Sometimes I felt you disappeared so far into your pain that you were on a different plane - a sort of limbo - a place of nothingness.

Those were the moments when I hoped you would cross over to a better place. I just wanted your pain to end.

Thank you for showing me that life is not black and white.

Thank you for your sense of humour.

Thank you for teaching me that classical music and opera sounds better as you get older.

Thank you for always being so kind and sweet to me.

Thank you for not shoving the church and its teachings down my throat.

Thank you for never judging me.

Thank you.

Thank you for being a grandmother to my two beautiful, caring and creative children.

Thank you for inspiring my life.

Your love continues.

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