

Thank you for being here. I appreciate all of you!

As I grew up, I was flat chested, tall and skinny until my late teens. My mom has a picture from when I was five, of four ballet students (that I called Dink-da-dink for some reason,) my head is one head taller than the other three five year old girls. In school, when we lined up for pictures by height, I was always in the back with a couple boys taller than me. As I became a teen, my dad would pick on me about how he had bigger breasts than me. My nickname became Olive Oyl from the cartoon Popeye, but age has changed most of that. I was physically abused by one of my parents, partly because my young parents didn't realize I was half deaf. A side story about that, that I don't like telling people. When my mom went into labor on my due date, Palm Sunday 1965, there were a swath of tornados going across the midwest and caused a lot of issues and deaths, including doctors not able to get to the hospital. The nurses put ether on my mom and the next day they said she was preventing birth by not pushing. In kindergarten, when my teacher asked me to do something and I didn't do it, she realized it was because I couldn't hear and not that I was defiant as my parents had thought. That's when they realized that my hearing loss likely happened at my birth. I used to have a nightmare of two worlds coming together and I always got out just in time, I realized as an adult it was my birth I was dreaming about. My mom had taught me to read at 3 years old and I think that's partly why I speak so well, no one notices that I am partly deaf. I was sexually abused at ten years old a number of times by a family friend (and remember I did not develop till my late teens.) My dad became an active alcoholic as I was growing up as well. Needless to say, when I met my then to be husband in Al-anon and Adult children of alcoholic meetings, I had a very low sense of esteem and his attention to me was desirable. All I had wanted as I grew up

was to be a mom, and he knew that but hadn't wanted to get married nor have kids. He was 11 1/2 years older than me and a little set in his ways. But he finally concluded that he wanted to be with me, and asked me to marry him. We had our first daughter five years after we were married. I was determined to breastfeed my daughter. My mom had breastfed me until I was 11 months old, when the doctor yelled at her to stop at my one year check up. She weaned me right away and got immediately pregnant with my brother. I was a lucky baby for those times. The week my oldest was born, I reached out for support from a local La Leche League Leader by asking to borrow a couple books, one about co-sleeping and one about using breastfeeding as birth control. That Leader knew then that I would become a Leader based on those books. That started me on a wonderful journey with an organization that became near and dear to my heart. I became an LLL Leader myself a few months before my second daughter was born. A quote by Barbara Katz Rothman sums up to me what LLL stands for: "Birth is not only about making babies, It's about making mothers; strong, competent, capable mothers who trust themselves and believe in their inner strength." I found in LLL love and care for each other, a wonderful support system, especially as I became a Leader. In order to become a leader, you have to lead meetings for mothers and their babies. I had always been so nervous to speak in front of people. Doing speeches at school or any public speaking was not something I looked forward to by any means! When I was at college, I did a study and paper that I was asked to present at an undergraduate psychology conference at Nazareth College and it was terrifying for me! I was glad I didn't know that some famous physiologist had come to hear *my* presentation until after. I do recall a gasp when I presented one part. In any case, speaking in front of groups was not something I enjoyed. Leading meetings for mothers was scary at first, but as with most things, the more I did it the easier it became. We also had conferences where there were presentations or workshops. I would lead some of those on topics I was familiar with, like how

many uses there are for breastmilk and being frugal (as we were a single income family for over 14 years and made lots of sacrifices for me to be home raising our daughters.) When we moved to the Ithaca area in March of 2000, we were encouraged to attend Fusit and I felt like I finally found home, and that I had always been a UU but hadn't known enough about it. We had attended the church in Bristol that Richard/Dick Gilbert grew up in and his mother brought food and booties she knit for my girls. Where we lived in Bristol was actually across the street from two UU ministers that were serving at the Canandaigua UU church. My youngest daughter was two and still breastfeeding and a few of you may even remember me breastfeeding her here. After a few years of attending, I was asked to be on a settled minister search committee, and after that I asked to join the board, where I served two years as board president during my six years on it. Some time after that, I joined the Celebration Team and have been a celebration associate for quite a few years now. Last summer, Jens had asked me to lead "Come Sing a Song with Me" that he knew I had memorized as I sing myself to sleep with it so I came to the service thinking I was just leading that hymn and then five minutes before the service found out I was CA. No problem, no one even noticed! Two weeks ago I was given the opening, closing and reading five minutes before the service and looked the words over quickly, and read them with no problem. I also was asked to project a couple of pictures right before the service if possible and managed to do that too with almost no notice! I now realize how far I have come from that flat chested, low self esteem young woman. I used to get nervous at first but repetition makes it easier and easier! Now, doing a sermon does make me a little more nervous because *I* have to write it and share some of myself! Thank you all for being here, I appreciate you all!

Opening reading:

The moment a child is born, the mother is also born. She never existed before. The woman existed, but the mother, never. A mother is something absolutely new.

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh

Reading: Growing with you

When I wrap you in my arms

And imagine you so small,

I see the growing that we've done,

And wonder at it all.

How they handed you to me,

and the day we left,

I remember it so well,

So many feelings bereft.

Our start was not what I imagined,

And I had flashbacks of that day.

I was so afraid to lose you,

So frightened in many a way.

And when we got home,

It felt like being lost at sea.

We had no one around,

It was just you, your dad and me.

But we fumbled through it all,

Through tears, anger, shock and laughter.

Day after day we grew,

Until the present became our 'after'.

The anxiety subsided to a hum,

The shock it slowly wore.

We all grew stronger, closer,

Till the pain of it was no more.

And yes I still hold grief,

For what happened in that time.

The feelings imprinted on memory,

But thankful you're here, you're mine.

And every day I wake to see,

Your beautiful smiling face.

Watching you grow and journeying with you,

Is a privilege I can't replace.

So thank you for picking me,

For making me your mum,

You've changed my life forever,

It's through you I've truly become -

The person that I need to be.

Stronger, braver than I ever knew.

It's through you I've found myself,

Breaking, moulding, growing anew.

Sinead Lehane

Closing words: There are places in your heart you don't even know they exist until you have a child. Anne Lamott