

Celebrating Mothers

Jones keep faith and family first

When Elwanda Jones talks about her customers at Jones Body Shop, the car repair service she's owned with husband Donnie for almost 40 years, you can hear the "momma" in her voice. Switching from praise to concern and back to praise, the mother of three and grandmother to four is practiced at taking care of others in both words and deeds.

"She's taught me everything I know so far," says daughter Christie Leiva, who is following in her parent's path and with her husband Marlon and brother-in-law Brian Exum make up the "family" aspect of the family business on Hyndsver Road in Martin.

"She learned it all through the school of hard knocks," explains Christie of her mother's administrative role that has helped the small enterprise beat the odds for most small business. "So many don't make it through the first year, but they've had a team effort for 38 years. Neither could have done it by themselves."

The shop started in a converted old barn in 1980, only six years into the Jones' marriage. They rented and, in 1987, bought the building where they continue to operate. Elwanda left her inspector's job at a boot factory in 1995 to take over computer estimates, finances and, as Christie puts it, "keeping Daddy straight."

Elwanda knew the pros and cons of being a "spouse 24/7" when she took on the role. She says she told Donnie, "We'll either kill each other or we'll make it work!" Since the first wasn't really an option given the couple's strong Christian



Jones Body Shop is a family business started by Donnie in 1980 with Elwanda joining him in 1995. Now daughter Christie with Marlon Leiva and son-in-law Brian Exum (married to oldest sibling Sabrina) are part of the staff. While grandchildren Marti, Maggie, Gus and Lily May can be seen on the premises occasionally, youngest daughter Whitney Rich is the only one living outside Martin as she is currently an OB/GYN resident in Johnson City.

faith, she says "prayer and the Good Lord helping us" were the main ingredients to both their business's and marriage's longevity.

"Our kind of job is not promised," she explained of the seasonal nature of the work that sees high traffic in the shop during deer season and then has times when things are definitely slower. "The Good Lord has seen us through it all."

Watching the trends, Elwanda has identified a

few concerns for her very loyal and appreciated customer base. Cell phone usage while driving is one she warns both her family and her customer/friends to avoid. She also notes that while drivers tend to use caution when driving in icy conditions, during the rainy season "people don't slow down, and we get a lot more business."

Thankful for all her good customers, she wants to keep them safe ... and happy.

That's one of the main messages she and Donnie are instilling in the next generation as they share the lessons they've learned with Christie, Marlon, and Brian.

"I hope they do good honest work for the customers," she says of the day that the couple eventually pass along the business. "You have to make the customer happy and the work speaks for you. We may not be perfect, but we try."

Bridging the distance on Mother's Day

Many modern families are spread out across the country if not the globe. Some people move away from family to further their careers, while others are called upon to care for others. Children may separate from their parents to witness new travel experiences. Military service may call individuals away from home as well.

Distance can make it challenging to spend time together for major holidays and other special occasions - like Mother's Day. But Mother's Day can still be special even if Mom lives hundreds or thousands of miles away.

Embrace technology

Technology helps break down some of the barriers created by distance. While phone calls were once the way to keep in touch, many people now utilize various forms of digital communication. Someone who lives across different time zones can talk through texting or the various social media avenues available on computers, phones and tablets. Video apps like Skype and FaceTime enable you to video chat with others in real time. Come Mother's Day, connect with mom via such apps so you can watch her open up her gifts.

Reconnect with home

If Mom is the one who ventured from home, help her to reconnect with her hometown or another place she feels attached to. Ship her some favorite regional foods that can only be bought in town. Make a photo or video montage of places of interest in town. These little touches of home can mean the world to her.

Create a special day

Even if you do not live near your mother, you can still plan a fun day for her in her town. Make reservations for a spa, hair salon or other sources of pampering and surprise her with all the details.

Treat her to the ultimate surprise

If possible, make a surprise visit this Mother's Day. Coordinate the plan with your father or another relative and then enjoy seeing her eyes light up when you arrive.

With a little creativity, even families separated by geography can share the magic of Mother's Day together.

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