



THANKS MOM!

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

I was fortunate to have grown up in a tennis family. My Dad, Mom, older brother, and I all played. Tennis was the common thread in our lives that held us together. My Mom was the expert seamstress who used that thread to keep us connected, and still does to this very day.

Mom will be ninety-years-old later this year, and while her tennis playing days are over, tennis still keeps our family connected. Tennis is still our common thread.

Young boys aren't very good at acknowledging other people's efforts, or offering the occasional "Thank you." I guess they're too busy keeping up with their favorite sports stars and teams, or dreaming about the cool car they were going to get once they're able to drive. Boys are just too busy to notice how much their parents sacrifice for them.

Without my Mom's efforts, tennis would not have played such an important part of my life. While it was my Dad who would instruct me on how to play, it was Mom who was instrumental in getting me out on the tennis court in the first place. I had my sights set on becoming a professional baseball player, but Mom thought tennis would help my baseball, and as usual, she was right!

I remember my very first tennis tournament, which was held at the local high school. On the drive over to the courts, I remember being paralyzed with fear. I didn't have my usual teammates to back me up, like I did with baseball. *What if I failed?* Crying my eyes out, there was no way I was going to get out of the car and play a tennis tournament. But after a pep talk from Mom, I finally made it out on the court for my match. To this day, I'm still not sure how she convinced me to play. I lost the match.

Afterwards, we went for an ice cream. At the ice cream shop, Mom asked me if I wanted to play the next tournament in two weeks. It would be my first USTA(it was USLTA back then!) tournament. "Sure, Mom," I said. "I'll do better next time."

I lost that match too, but that was the beginning of many weekends where Mom would drive me all over Southern California to play junior tennis tournaments. I eventually started notching some wins as I worked towards a higher ranking.

Mom and I spent most weekends on the road, sometimes bringing along my brother or another local tournament player, until I finally got my first car, The Beige Hornet, a used 1971 Volkswagen Super Beetle. Not

quite the car of my dreams, but good, reliable transportation, and to this day, the only car I sold for more money than I bought it for!

With the arrival of my own transportation came a new independence, and to Mom's credit, she understood the importance of letting me navigate the junior tennis world on my own. She was never too far away, but she let me take the lead on all tournament planning, logistics, and preparation, which often involved making uncomfortable phone calls to Tournament Directors of National Level tournaments requesting a place in the draw. Sometimes the answer was "Yes," and more often it was "No." I learned a lot of valuable life-lessons during this time. How did Mom know it was time to let me find my own way?

Over the years, my father became a celebrated and record-holding senior tennis champion, and my brother, while he never spent a lot of time playing tennis tournaments in adulthood, has always kept tennis as a central part of his life. He can't wait for the clay court season to open each year in Germany, where he lives. I've continued to play competitively throughout my life, and still get nervous prior to a tournament or league match.

The thought of my Mom and a post-match ice cream are usually enough to settle my nerves.

Mom suffers from Macular Degeneration, which she attributes to her many years peering into a microscope as a Laboratory Technologist. But that doesn't stop her from watching tennis on television everyday. Even with her failing eyesight, she can keep track of her favorite players. Our weekly phone conversations always include a rundown of the week's tournaments and lately, what to make of the poor showing of her favorite, Sascha Zverev.

This summer, we plan to move Mom to a senior living community, so that she can be closer to us. It is a strange stage in life where roles have switched, and she is now dependent upon the other members of the family. She was always the skilled planner, organizer, negotiator, counselor, coach, and cheerleader. Now it is our turn. *I hope I can do a good job.*

For all of the times I neglected to say, "Thank you," when I was younger, I'm happy to get the opportunity to care for Mom, and look forward to many more conversations about tennis. "Thank you, Mom!"