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Carlson scholarship mirrors the profound and touching impact of a mother and teacher

Summary: Debra Carlson '72 has established a scholarship in her mother's memory.

(January 6, 2011)-Debra Carlson '72 has many stories to tell about LaVonne Adeline Solem Carlson, but two especially illustrate why she lovingly established a scholarship in her mother's memory.

Shortly before LaVonne passed away in 2008, the 85-year-old retired teacher received a letter from a student from long-ago country school days. The writer remembered science class hikes, penmanship practice, and the beginning of a lifelong passion for reading. He closed the thank-you missive with "a grateful student."

LaVonne died a few weeks later. During visitation in the church library, chosen because of LaVonne's love for books, Debra noticed a cardless vase of exquisite yellow roses. The funeral director contacted the florist, who provided a phone number and name. Curious, Debra called the number later and found herself speaking to another of LaVonne's students. Living in Montana, the woman read online of LaVonne's death.

Yes, she sent the roses.

The woman told Debra that she had been thinking about her teacher a lot. "Mrs. Carlson always encouraged, always challenged. She made each of us feel special. Remember in the 80s, when we learned those 'close your eyes and go to your happy place' exercises? My happy place was Mrs. Carlson's classroom. I felt safe and wonderful there. She taught us our lessons and to enjoy the process. To this day, I love opening new books. I've been thinking of her because my four-year old son is autistic. I want a Mrs. Carlson for him."

Debra's gift reflects her mother's ideals to love learning and to love people. A bequest will create the LaVonne Adeline Solem Carlson Scholarship to promote a diverse student body. West central Minnesota first generation college students, especially women, may be given preference.

Debra's career also reflects her mother's influence, as she directs the St. Cloud State University (SCSU) Lindgren Child Care Center, which cares for the children of students and employees, and provides experiences to SCSU students studying nursing sciences, child and family studies, social work, communication sciences and disorders, community psychology, community studies, and special education.

A biology and English major at Morris, Debra also holds a master of public affairs from the University of Minnesota Humphrey Institute.

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