

# Mother's spirit alive in daughter

Jessica Clem wrote this tribute to her late mother, Laurie Clem. The younger Clem grew up in Palmyra, Neb., and now lives in Omaha.

Ideally, Mother's Day begins with brunch. Perhaps a breakfast served in bed, with a peppering of roses, a tennis bracelet, relief from the day's chores.

Maybe tiny hands are pressed against her lips, teenage palms turned upward, this time not for money, but for her hand. On this day, mother is worshipped.

My Mother's Day is not to begin this way. Instead, my palms will be clasped against one another. I, too, will be worshipping my mother, not in physical presence, but in memory.

I remember opening the only drawer that I could reach in the bathroom. Curious of my mother, I brushed a plump 10-year-old hand through her be-

longings. One small bottle of foundation, mascara. One brush. No tweezers. She was the epitome of low maintenance. I found a plethora of index cards, with notes from her biology lecture, moves for her aerobics classes. This was her makeup — this made her up as the woman she was.

I put on her tennis shoes, slightly too big, still warm from her feet. I tried to emulate her moves in a full-length mirror. She had one pair of heels, thrown in the back of the closet, next to the dress with impressive shoulder pads. Outdated, my mother never really bothered with fashion.

Feeling pliable, despite the boxiness of the Reeboks, I danced in front of the mirror, feeling powerful. I wanted to be just like her.

Four years later, I told her these things while she was in the

hospital. I rubbed cucumber lotion on her arms, her skin dry and papery from the IVs. I had grown tenfold overnight, she had grown weaker. Stage 4 breast cancer ravaged her body. I tell her these moments again and again. I felt her chest constrict with a faint laugh, and I smiled for that moment of happiness.

At 36, this diagnosis was simply not fair. At 14, I couldn't be ready for what the few weeks she had left would entail. At 5, my brother was too young to be without his mother. At 39, my dad silently cried like an abandoned infant. Combined, my family was sinking. Sinking at Christmastime. The holiday spirit wasn't enough to keep the life in my mother's eyes.

I knew all of this. Still, I kept rubbing the lotion in. In the time we had left, I worshipped the details of my mother.

Today, at 47, my dad is my role

model, my confidant. At 14, my brother looks just like her. And at 23, I am beyond the material in the meaning of this day.

So I will not be cooking breakfast. I will not be searching Pottery Barn for a tray to place pancakes on. And I will not be touching my mother's wrist, dripping with diamonds.

Instead, I will be in a place of reflection, trying to recall the memories of makeup, watching her study and reading Stephen King with her on the couch.

This is a day for pampering our mothers, for celebrating these incredible women who give us life and help mold our futures. I have her to thank for the places I have gone, the goals I have achieved, the fire and love in my heart. And in essence, I will be on the road with her again this day, singing to Queen, and reveling in her powerful spirit that remains in me.