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## Loving the unloving

Constance L. Pierce

Have you ever felt like you were on a deserted island with your problems? I was several thousand miles away from home when I received a call that my mother was dying. After trying and trying to get a flight home, I just couldn't. I slumped to the floor crying.

Frankly, my husband and daughter were surprised I was this upset. You see, my mother had been abusive to me my whole life, including the last five years when we'd taken care of her in our home. To some in my family, her dying seemed like a solution to the problem.

No one understood why I had spent over fifty years trying to achieve a loving relationship with this woman. Now, she was in her nineties, had dementia, and couldn't walk.

I can't begin to relate the kinds of abuse her own personality combined with the dementia caused her to fling at me. To everyone around me, her dying seemed compensation for what I had lived through.

But I was convinced I had to fix this relationship before she died.

I did get a plane the next day. She was still alive, though unconscious. Her condition was serious. She looked gray and like she wouldn't last long.

I have always believed in the power of prayer so I just turned to God, pouring out all my heartache. Then the answer came to say out loud the prayers she knew. I did so that day, and the next day, while thinking about them myself. Soon she was mouthing the words along with me.

She did *not* die. And that night, I awoke to a message that came again to me several times over the next few days – "Connie, you don't need to fix this relationship. That's not what this is all about. Your job is to see her as My child. You don't have to make the relationship work. I love you already, and I love her."

This really sunk in, finally. And I let go of so many things. That I was a victim. That I needed to change her. That I *could* change her. That she needed changing before I could love her, or before she could love me. No, I could love *now*.

And finally, that's what I did. I really loved. With no expectation and no feelings of injustice. I just loved. And I let go of the final thing – my conviction that I had to "make" this relationship right before she passed away and it was too late.

The next time I went to see her in the hospital, she had been moved to another ward. She was actually getting better. When I found her in her new room, she motioned me to sit by her. And I was given one of the most holy moments of my life. She spent an hour telling me of her love for me – and it's no exaggeration to say she'd *never* done this before.

Through my tears as I went back to my car I wondered if this meant she was passing on. Maybe this was some kind of last moment turnaround. It wasn't. She came home again, and we spent the next six months together. The dementia was gone. She was in full possession of her faculties and was nothing but loving from that day forward.

I was given a gift. I was given a mother I never knew I had, when I let go of trying to get the mother I wanted. And when it was my turn to do something for her, to help her with her fear of death and be with her for that transition, I could do so with a full and peaceful heart.

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**The International Journal of Healing and Caring**  
**P.O. Box 76, Bellmawr, NJ 08099**  
**Phone (609) 714-1885 - Fax (609) 714-3553**

Email: [center@ijhc.org](mailto:center@ijhc.org) Web Site: <http://www.ijhc.org>

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