

For 38 years, my mom did everything for her family. The months since she passed have therefore been hard for all of us. But we are consoled by the fact that mom will live on through the lessons she passed on to us. Here are four I cherish most.

Embrace risk... and change.

My mom hardly spoke English, and had been on only a handful of dates with my dad, when she made the 7000+ mile trip from Taipei to Illinois. When she got off the plane, with just \$40 to her name, she walked into a wintry landscape that was as alien as it was terrifying. But this new world was one that would present itself with incredible opportunity, and most importantly, for her future family to thrive.

In modern life, we are so comfortable that we miss opportunities to transform our lives, or the world, for the better. Don't settle for the way things are. Don't be afraid of change. Seize the day when the opportunity comes to do something insanely great.

Success comes from effort, not talent.

The public school I attended did not have the highest of standards, so I rarely felt the need to work hard in order get good grades. I would get home and try to sneak into my room to play computer games or find a good comic book. My mom never accepted this. She believed that discipline was more important than talent and that I would let myself down if I didn't try my best -- even if my best was not required. She lived this in her own life. Despite opening what would become the most successful Kumon Learning Center in the state of Indiana, mom never stopped in working as hard as she could for her family, her friends, and above all, her kids. She would make food for us. Help us with our homework. Listen to us as we practiced piano or cello. And clean up after us every day.

One of the powerful memories that will never leave me is the scene in our home every evening before the rest of us would go to bed. Though mom was always the busiest of all of us, exhausted after a long day of running a business and a family, she would sweep the entire house while the rest of us went to bed. Sweep, sweep, sweep, the sound of the broom would make, and with every sweep, she cleared the way for those she loved more than life itself.

The details matter.

Mom was better at math than any of us. She could instantly factor a complex polynomial in her head, the computations whirring through her mind in an instant. But she always insisted that we never take short cuts. The details mattered, she believed, and it was in understanding the details -- and not just getting at the desired outcome -- that we could achieve mastery and success.

In a world where automation is the rule, mom's emphasis on detail and process was unique. But

for those of us who seek true conceptual understanding -- and the impact that stems from it -- the details still matter a lot. On my first day on the job as a securities litigator in Chicago, I was handed a file that was nearly a foot long. I spent the entire day reviewing every document in the file, and because I took that time, I had mastery over the details of the case that no other lawyer had. Mom taught me that.

Find yourself in caring for others.

Mom always had a big heart for children and the elderly -- those more vulnerable than the rest of us. But her love for animals is what really made her stand out. A few memories are particularly important to me. The first is when I came home after our first dog Vivian had died. Mom broke down into tears and said over and over to me, "We didn't give her the life she deserved." She remembered how we raised her when we didn't understand dogs -- sticking her up in a laundry room, where she was forced to sleep on the cold floor by herself -- and she was so remorseful over that fact.

A second memory came when mom first watched an exposé of factory farming on 60 Minutes. She called me, weeping, and said, "I can't believe what they do to those little birds. What can I do to help?" I told her, first, that it would be easy for us both to become vegetarian, but also pointed her to some nonprofits that I thought were doing good work in the area.

But mom always shared her greatest love for her two kids. I was not always a good son. Heck, I was not always even a mediocre son. Those who know me, also know that I am headstrong, rebellious, independent-minded, and sometimes quick to anger. Amy is less intense than I am but has similar independence of spirit. Mom struggled so much to understand both of us, but what always shined through, no matter how big the cultural gap, was how much she loved us. And though she left the family and country she cared so much for, the love she felt for her children was enough... enough to give purpose to her life.

There's a lesson there for all of us. We get caught up in money, in our professions, in all sorts of goals that don't actually bring us (or anyone else) true meaning and purpose. But the thing that matters most is the people we love. And it is in this regard, that mom really shined.