

When I think about Mom's life, one of my favorite parts is that so much of what came to define her began with a yes.

She did not start out as someone who spent her time camping, hiking, or planning the next trip. She had always loved swimming, but she had not grown up pitching tents or sleeping under the stars. That part of her life came later.

It began when Daddy suggested that they spend their honeymoon camping across the western United States. Mom had never slept in a tent before, but she said yes, and 11,000 miles and 27 flat tires later, something had shifted. What began as an unfamiliar trip became the start of a life shaped by time outside, long drives, and the kind of stories that only happen when things do not go exactly as planned.

After a year and a half in Japan, where they lived on an Air Force base, Mom and Daddy returned to the United States and chose Colorado as their home. They did not have much money, but they had an unmatched drive to get out and see the world, so our family vacations became camping trips through Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, and the California coast.

Those trips taught us that a good life did not have to be fancy. You needed somewhere to go, people you loved, something to cook dinner on, and enough patience to get through the parts that went sideways.

When I was six, Mom and Daddy bought into a ranch partnership near Hot Sulphur Springs, and before long the ranch became the backdrop of our childhood. Over time, the drive, the routines, and the time together felt less like a getaway and more like part of the life they were building for us. We spent our days outside in every season, riding horses and fixing fences in the summer and tobogganing down the snowy hillside in the winter. Every day we would come in for dinner dirty, tired, and deliriously happy.

Christmas at the ranch had its own kind of magic. We cut down a tree, strung popcorn, and made ornaments by hand. None of it was elaborate, but Mom made it feel special. I think all of us still love Christmas because of those years and because of the way she made simple things feel full of meaning.

That was one of Mom's gifts. She knew how to turn everyday moments into lifelong memories, and usually into a good old-fashioned teaching moment too. She knew experiences did not need to be perfect or polished for them to matter. They just needed to bring people together and help them feel capable, included, and glad to be there.

And Mom was never someone who wanted to keep a good thing only for her own family. Once camping and time outside had become such an important part of our lives, she wanted other children to have that chance too.

That is what led her to Girl Scouts, and once Mom became a leader, she gave herself to it completely. All three of us were in her troops, which often had more than 30 girls, and somehow

Mom created a space that felt organized without losing its sense of adventure. She taught her scouts practical skills like building a fire, setting up a tent, and making s'mores, but those skills were only part of what she was really giving them. She was helping them trust themselves in situations that were new, uncomfortable, and a little intimidating.

Mom did not stop when we aged out of scouting. She became involved with the Denver-area Girl Scout council, served in many roles, and eventually became president of the board for 12 years. Daddy shared that commitment too, and together they gave their time and leadership to something they believed could change lives.

Years later, when I had two girls of my own, I became a Girl Scout leader in Steamboat and found myself passing along many of the same experiences Mom had given us. We camped, climbed mountains, and tried unfamiliar things, and I got to watch my own daughters grow in confidence because they had been given the chance to try.

That was a gift Mom gave me twice. First, she gave me those experiences as her daughter. Then, years later, she helped me give them to my own girls.

And through all of it, Mom was still there. She cheered me on, suggested activities, and encouraged me when I was unsure. She had a way of knowing what kind of support I needed without taking over. Sometimes it was a practical idea. Sometimes it was reassurance. Sometimes it was just enough of a push to help me trust myself.

Looking back, I can see that she was not only helping me lead a troop. She was helping me become a leader. She showed me how to prepare with care, then step back enough for young people to discover what they were capable of on their own.

That is one of the most meaningful things Mom leaves behind. She began as someone who had never camped before, but because she was willing to say yes to that first trip, she opened the door to a whole way of life. Then, again and again, she held that door open for other people.

Because of Mom, her daughters grew up loving the mountains, handmade Christmas traditions, and trips where the best memories were usually the least planned. Because of Mom, generations of young people learned to trust themselves more than they had before.

That is how I will remember her: as someone who made ordinary things feel like traditions, helped people find confidence by letting them try, and built a life by saying yes, then bringing the rest of us along.