

Matt Shaffer:

Mom provided me a life form

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

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here are so many critical things his mother taught him about how to live a meaningful life, says Matt Shaffer, that it's difficult to remember them all. That said, the soft-spoken and gentlemanly Shaffer, the superintendent of Merion Golf Club, has much in common with his 87-year-old mother Miriam.

"[She provided me] a life form," Shaffer says of their relationship.

Shaffer grew up in the kind of small town that John Mellencamp sings about in his heartfelt tune of the same name. If Shaffer could add a verse to the song, it would be in tribute to his mother, who still lives in the town of Martinsburg, Pa., population 2,500.

Shaffer, 52, is the youngest of four children. He has two sisters and a brother. He says his mother and father, Luther, provided him and his siblings with a "real strong home life." Shaffer credits his parents with providing "the foundation" of his life.

Miriam was a stay-at-home mom. Matt says one of his earliest memories of his mother is how loving and devoted she was to tending to him when he was ill.

"I was sick a lot when I was kid with severe asthma

and allergies," he says. "She took really good care of me."

Matt also remembers that Miriam was strict and forthright, which garnered her kids' respect.

"My mom is not a very big person, but we towed the line when she talked," Shaffer says.

There was nothing fancy about his upbringing, says Shaffer, who was raised as a Mennonite. His mother placed a major focus, however, on living by the golden rule. "Treat people like you want to be treated," Shaffer says.

Shaffer probably never would have wanted to be a golf course superintendent — and work 12 hours a day during the playing season and not take many days off — if he didn't have a strong work ethic. He doesn't remember his mother drilling it into his mind that he had to work hard to succeed. She took a more subtle approach while planting the seed that hard work and commitment to finish the things you started will get you to a lot of places in life.

"She would say, 'Before you go hunting, you have to finish your chores,'" Shaffer says. "It was an unwritten thing. And you didn't challenge her because you didn't mind doing your chores."

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Matt Shaffer and his mother Miriam. "She encouraged me to be an adventurer," Matt says.



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Shaffer

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Shaffer is confident in his abilities as a superintendent, something he attributes to his mother.

"She encouraged me to be an adventurer," Shaffer says. "She knew I couldn't stand to be in the valley, and I had to go to the top of the mountain to see what was on the other side."

Shaffer says his mom also taught him about humility. "She instilled in me that it's not important to boast."

The most important thing his mother taught him, Shaffer says, was the ability to forgive others for their mistakes. Shaffer says he never holds a grudge.

"I could have a big blowout with someone and an hour or two later I'll go up that person and say, 'Hopefully that's behind us and we can move forward,'" he says.

Miriam told Matt that forgiving oth-

ers goes hand in hand with being at peace with oneself. Hence, Matt has found it easy to forgive.

"If you're full of malice and you're bitter . . . well that just fosters ill feelings, which doesn't make you happy," Shaffer says. "And then ultimately you're just a miserable individual. And that's no fun."

Shaffer likes to think he lives an honest life, and he attributes much of that to his mother's influence. "I remember her saying, 'God is watching and He has a good memory,'" he says.

People who know Shaffer know he's a pleasant person to be around. Shaffer says that comes from his mom, too. She has the gift of gab — in a good way — and is an engaging conversationalist.

"She can talk to anybody," Shaffer says. "Today when I stand in front of an audience and give a speech, I'm nervous initially. But then I settle in like we are having a friendly conversation."

Miriam also taught Matt and his sib-

lings to read, as in novels and plenty of them. Shaffer says he reads about 50 books a year.

"We're all voracious readers," he says of his family members.

If there's one regret, it's that Shaffer doesn't see his mother and father enough. He lives about a five-hour drive from his hometown and sees his parents about seven times a year.

"I can't get home enough," he says. ■

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family operated a small farm when they were young. The brothers remember their mother working on the farm, sometimes for 12 hours a day and in the hot sun.

"It was work that nobody should have to do," Michael says.

Pat loved school. And despite only making it through the eighth grade because she had to go work for the family when she was a teenager, she championed the importance of an education. Michael, who graduated from Providence College, says his mother instilled him with the value of continued education. "It's why I became a certified superintendent," he says.

Vinny says he was the weaker student of the two brothers. "But all through school mom was the one sitting beside me and helping me with my homework," he adds.

Pat lives in a retirement community in Providence. Her boys stop by to see her as often as they can.

"She's had a tough life, and it was never easy," Michael says. "But she smiles every day."

The two brothers love to talk about their mother. The way they speak of her — what she has taught them and given them — is indicative of their ongoing appreciation for her.

"Whatever it took for her sons . . . she did it," Michael says. "And she still does." ■

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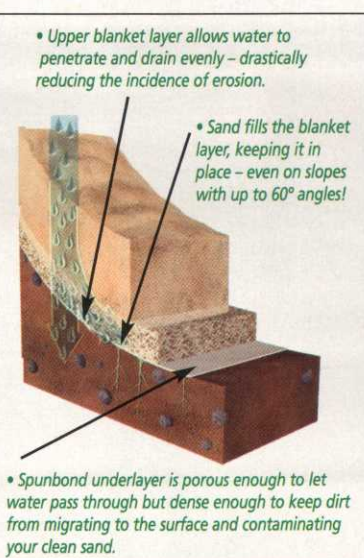
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