Leola Clayton Burr

April 30, 1922 ~ September 24, 2016

I want to tell you a love story. It's about my mom, who passed away at 94 on September 24 from Alzheimer's. She was a great woman who lived a life that I really admired and respected. She grew up dirt poor on a little spud farm in Idaho during the Depression. As she used to say, "We didn't have two nickels to rub together." She graduated from high school at the top of her class at 16, and made her way to Salt Lake,Äîwhich she thought of as The Big City,Äîand got a good office job. All on her own. When she was 18, she spent part of her hard-earned money every month to pay for a $1,000 life insurance policy, so that if anything happened to her, it wouldn't bankrupt her folks to get her home and buried. How many teenagers have you ever known whose sense of responsibility was that keen? That never changed.

An early marriage to my dad, Keith DuBois, was interrupted by World War II, when he spent 27 months in the Navy island-hopping across the South Pacific. Tough stuff that I don't think he ever got over. When he got home, the last thing he wanted was to settle down with a wife and small boy, so he took off for the bright lights and big cities. My mom was heartbroken, but she just kept calm and carried on. For years, she worked long and hard hours to keep a roof (a very small one) over our heads. I never once heard her complain. She just took care of us with a smile on her face and love in her heart.

Enter Loren Burr. My stepfather. They married in 1956 and in my eulogy for him at his funeral in 1991, I spoke the truth: "Loren and my mother were blessed to have each other. And they both knew it,Äîand treated their love accordingly. They were devoted. I don't think either one of them ever once imagined not putting the other one first. If they ever said a cross word, I'm not aware of it. And I doubt they did. They were just,Ä¶plain old fashioned,Ä¶good to each other. With every word. With every action. I've always told my friends that I thought Loren and mother had the best marriage I've ever seen."

And they had a spectacularly good time doing it. Loren was a CPA who played a key role in building the Salt Lake office of Ernst and Ernst (now the multinational firm, Ernst and Young), and was the Salt Lake partner for several years. They were always surrounded by all their best friends they really loved who were building up Salt Lake in that postwar era (when they weren't playing golf or bridge). It was a pretty noteworthy group that included the Skaggs, the Sweets, some of the Eccles, the Rosenblatts, the Garffs (Mother used to say, "Ken would sell you a car at the dinner table.") and two of my mom's favorites, Ami and Herman Franks, who I still want to believe shares part of the blame for Bobby Thompson's home run. (If you're under about 50, just Google it.)

Loren shared his passion for history and adventure with my mom, as they traveled the world and he meticulously kept count of all the cities and historical sites they visited. I still have their map with several dozen pins marking their stops in Europe, Asia, The Middle East, South America and the Soviet Union. Their photo albums show two

people who had an equal appreciation for ancient ruins and modern nightspots. I used to say to her, not bad for a girl off the farm in Idaho.

In her late fifties, when my stepfather's kidneys began to fail, my mother was so distressed that he was forced to spend three days a week, six hours a day, in the hospital for dialysis, that she volunteered to become one of the first people in the world to participate in the experimental program at the U. to find out if a spouse could withstand the psychological strain of administering dialysis to a loved one. She passed all the tests to become a dialysis technician and kept my stepfather alive for 13 years operating that hospital gear that filled an entire bedroom in their home. Three times a week, six hours a day, for 13 years. Just the sight of all the IV-drips and bottles of blood was enough to bring my stomach up, but I never once heard her complain. She was just happy that she could help to take care of Loren.

Meanwhile, Loren devoted his skills and what remained of his energy to a long list of community organizations. I was always amazed at his roster. For his last nine years he was, for instance, treasurer of the Arthritis Foundation,Äîand Loren didn't even have arthritis. And they also managed to keep up their active social lives with all their friends they loved. It was a heroic performance by both of them. They were magnificent.

In the 20 years after Loren's death, my mother maintained her friendships, her independence and her remarkably healthy lifestyle. Almost 365 days a year, rain or snow, she was out taking a brisk two-mile walk through her neighborhood and chatting up all the neighbors she'd come to know and love. When she was 83, she took a bad fall and the orthopedic surgeon told her that she might never recover her ability to walk without assistance. About three months later, she was happily back to her brisk walks, quite nicely unassisted, thank you very much. When she was 88, she told me she'd had enough of the rain and snow and asked me to get her a treadmill, which she actually used every day. I was impressed.

When she was 90, Alzheimer's began diminishing her capacity to care for herself, and she very reluctantly made the decision to accept assisted living at Sunrise on Highland Drive, a decision neither of us ever regretted. Just FYI, the facility and staff at Sunrise are excellent, and the director, George Wright, is a great man. I'm happy to publicly thank everyone there for all their help and kindness to my mom for the last three and a half years, and I feel the same way about the beautiful Natalie and the hospice staff from Inspiration for these past few months.

After years of living through my mom's Alzheimer's with her, I can say that she owns the best line I've heard about the disease: As we were leaving her home of 35 years to move her into Sunrise,Äîone of the saddest moments of both our lives--she looked up at me and said, "Butch, it's a tragedy when your heart outlives your brain."

My real name is Larry, but I never heard my mom call me anything but my family nickname, Butch. It was the last word she ever spoke to me. She has one surviving younger brother, Gene, in Charlotte, N.C., and a bunch of terrific nieces and nephews in Idaho and California. They all come from that good Clayton pioneer stock, descended from William Clayton, who was close to Joseph Smith and among that first group of pioneers who arrived here with Brigham Young.

Like most of her generation who grew up in the Depression, my mom was very frugal. And she was very modest. She never felt the need to draw attention or acclaim to herself. She would be horrified to know that I was, as she would surely say, squandering most of her life insurance policy to publish a very long tribute to her. But that's okay, because she would forgive me for that, as she did for all my other excesses over the decades. She knew that I had a bit of my dad in me,Äîyou know, those bright lights and big cities,Äîbut she never let that come between us. In fact, I think she secretly kind of enjoyed it.

For years, even at Sunrise, she proudly displayed a beautiful photograph of her and a bunch of her bridge pals standing in front of the Playboy Mansion with big smiles on their faces. I knew it was one of the last places any of them would have ever expected to spend a delightful afternoon I arranged for them as welcome guests. My mom and I laughed about that for years.

I can only say to my mom as I say goodbye: Thanks for everything, Mother. You're the greatest. My hope is that I was able to share your story, and your love story with Loren, in a way that would allow others to appreciate,Äîand enjoy for a moment--the really wonderful life you led. If anyone ever deserved a long and heartfelt tribute, it was you. Now I'm saying goodbye. With all my love, Butch.