

In the light

'She taught us by what she did'

By Pat McCarty
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Thanksgiving this year had a special glow for Arlene Berger, 74, and her family.

They gathered for the holiday meal in the new house the Flushing Township resident, severely brain-damaged in a 1994 traffic accident, shares with one of her sons, his wife and two children.

Her house was built with funds from her accident settlement, and her family is determined life will be as meaningful as possible for the woman left with physical as well as mental impairment.

Her progress has been awesome, as has been the help she's received from others, according to two of her five children.

Raymond, 47, the eldest of her four sons, and David, 32, the youngest, this week recounted details of their mother's accident and her life of righteousness.

With 15 years separating them, they hold different views of how their mother's faith affected them.

"I used to mock her; my other brothers did," Raymond said of his youth in Flint.

David said, "She was the most giving person, many of us thought to a fault. I remember a couple of times she didn't know how she was going to pay her bills, and when I asked her about how she had spent her money,

she had given some to this person, some to that one."

Raymond concurred, "We thought she was being used. We told her there ain't no God and to quit giving everything away. ... But we weren't thinking like she was."

Their Bible-reading Baptist mother was living up to the passage: "Give, and it shall be given to you." (Luke 6:38)

"Now she's on the receiving end," said David. "Because of the way she was before the accident, people want to do for her."

Church members are showing up to care for her to a degree the family never could have imagined.

"She gave everything away her whole life, and now her kids all want her to have an enjoyable life," David said.

It was not just her older sons who derided her faith.

Raymond, a Flint truck plant employee, recalls his late father chasing ministers away from the door.

"He had been anti-religious. He worked and he drank. I didn't really know him until I was old enough to drink, old enough to go to the bars," Raymond said.

In 1981, their father had a massive heart attack. His wife's church prayed for him, and he survived to embrace salvation.

He lived the last two years of his life a Christian.

Raymond said he also has

been saved and has seen the difference faith has made in his life.

"That was a miracle," he said. "I never thought I'd see my dad in a church. I never thought I'd see myself in a church."

David, on the other hand, attended John R. Rice Baptist Academy in Davison and went on to graduate from a bible college. He teaches at Bridgeport Baptist Academy during the day and works at Delphi Saginaw Steering Systems at night.

He was the assistant pastor at Landmark Baptist Church, where his mother was headed Feb. 24, 1994, when her car was hit in the driver's side by a Jeep Cherokee whose driver had run a red light, he said. He was notified that his mother had been taken to Hurley Medical Center, where she was in critical condition.

She underwent two emergency surgeries in short order.

A CAT scan showed 11 brain hemorrhages and blood on her brain stem, he said.

"She was in a coma the whole time," David said. "After three months the doctors told us she might not ever come out of it because of her age and the length of time since the accident."

Her children were told of the probability that she would never be able to walk, talk or feed herself.

"Well, you ain't God," Raymond told them.

After three-and-a-half months



JOURNAL PHOTO/STUART BAUER

David Berger (middle) and his brother, Ray, are grateful for the progress made by their mother, Arlene, since her 1994 traffic accident.

at Hurley, she was moved to Riverbend Nursing Center in Grand Blanc, where she stunned David by allowing nurses to walk her in "baby steps" the first day.

She progressed out of the coma. Raymond remembered first noticing her fingers tapping to the inspirational music tapes her family supplied.

Raymond and David recall the times she responded with an "I love you, too" to each of them.

Arlene Berger received three months of therapy at Riverbend before transferring to McLaren Regional Medical Center to build skills she would need for living at home.

His brothers and sister back

David up in caring for their mother, who lost her left eye and use of her left hand in the accident and now has an erratically functioning mind with an IQ of 40.

"A lot of people live for themselves, don't do for their kids. And then the kids don't do for them," David said. "She taught us by what she did."