



Jeannie Smith on the Blessings and Challenges of Motherhood

by CARRIE CAMP
photo by MICHIE TURPIN

BECOMING A MOTHER IS A JOYFUL EXPERIENCE FOR MOST WOMEN—but it was especially happy for Jeannie Smith, mother of two now-adult daughters, Gina and Shana.

“For a period of around 8-10 years I could not have children,” Jeannie said. “The doctors thought I would never be able to have any children. And then after a while Gina was given to me. I consider her a blessing.”

Four years later she was blessed again with the birth of her second daughter, Shana.

Jeannie said one of her primary concerns while her girls were young was to ensure they had a better quality of life than she had growing up on a farm in Michigan. Though Jeannie had loving parents, the demands of farm work and taking care of younger siblings limited her options. But being a single mother for several years brought challenges for Jeannie.

“It was difficult trying to provide for the girls. I worked during the day and tried to be a mother at home at night,” she remembered. “I wanted to be there with them when they went on field trips and camping. I always wanted to be a part of what they were doing.”

Though she made quality time with her daughters a priority, logistics of being a single working parent meant she could not be with them as much as she liked. So Jeannie found creative solutions.

“It was a daily challenge for me to provide diversion. They took dance lessons, and they were in Brownies and Pioneer Girls,” Jeannie said. “My younger daughter Shana always says, ‘Mom I never knew if I was Baptist, Presbyterian, or Methodist, because you had me at every church’s Vacation Bible School in town!’ It was an ‘ecumenical childhood,’” she

laughed. “I had to have somewhere safe for them during the day while I worked!”

Despite her struggles, Jeannie possessed an inner strength and an unyielding faith that God would take care of her and her daughters.

“I had tenacity. No one in my family had ever graduated from high school—I was the first one. I kept at it. I got scholarships to colleges, but I didn’t go because mom and dad needed my help at the farm.”

Now a mother herself, Gina has a deeper understanding of the altruistic love her mother gave her.

“I realize even more how selfless she is. And I also understand better the sacrificial love of a mother,” Gina said.

Jeannie’s generosity and kindness are the qualities Gina most admires in her mother.

“I appreciate her heart for others. She is a giver who would do anything for anybody,” Gina said.

Jeannie now spends the majority of the year living on the “Second Mile Ranch” in Stockbridge with Gina who trains horses and teaches riding lessons. Adding in Gina’s husband Mel, senior pastor of First Baptist Church Jonesboro, their three children: Christa, Steven and Sarah, half a dozen horses and two dogs, they have quite a busy household!

Jeannie laughs about the way her relationship with her daughters has changed now that her girls are grown up. Especially her relationship with Gina.

“Now she’s the mother and I’m the child!” she joked.