By Anne Lambert

When I was a child, Mom taught me to question everything.  She was a mother who never minded the eternal "why." She made me consider the possibilities myself, jumping in only when my maturity or knowledge couldn't encompass the entire issue.

When I wanted to do something, I had to review all possibilities within my limited scope.  "What would you feel like if someone did that to you?" was a question always asked when I reacted to an issue or event.  She guided me, made certain I attended church and Sunday school and had a solid background of character and morality.

On my thirteenth birthday, all that changed.  Mom called me into her room after school.

"Anne," she told me, patting the bed beside her, "I want to talk to you."

"What's up?" I asked easily, self-assured in my new-found teen status.

"I've spent the last twelve years giving you a sense of values and morals," she began.  "Do you know the difference between right and wrong?"

"Yeah, sure," I replied, my grin slipping slightly at this unexpected opening.

"You've now entered your teens, and life, from this point, will be much more complicated," Mom told me.  "I've given you the basics.  Now it's time for you to begin making your own decisions."

I looked at her blankly.  What decisions?

Mom smiled.  "From this time on, you'll make your own rules; what time to get up, when to go to bed, when to do your homework, and who you select as companions and friends will be your decision now."

"I don't understand," I told her.  "Are you mad at me?  What did I do?"

Mom put her arms around me, hugging me close.  "Everyone has to begin making her own decisions in life sooner or later.  I've seen too many young people let loose from their parents make horrible mistakes, usually when they're away at college and no one is there to give them guidance.  I've seen them go wild, and some have ruined their lives forever.  So I'm going to give you your freedom early."

I stared at her, dumbfounded.  All sorts of possibilities occurred to me.  Staying out as late as I wanted, parties, no one to tell me I had to do my homework?  Super!

Mom smiled again as she stood and looked down at me.  "Remember, this is a responsibility.  The rest of the family will be watching. Your aunts, uncles and cousins will be waiting for any possible misstep.  You'll have only yourself to blame."

"Why?" I asked, elated that she trusted me so much.

"Because I'd rather you make your mistakes now, while you're at home and I can advise and assist you," she replied, hugging me.  "Remember, I'm always here for you.  If you want advice, or just to talk, I'm available any time."

With this she ended the conversation and the birthday proceeded pretty much as the previous ones had, with cake, ice cream, presents and family.  I knew quite well she wasn't stepping out of my life entirely, merely giving me space in which to stretch my wings and prepare for the flight I'd someday be taking.

During the coming years, I made my share of mistakes, the same ones all teenagers do.  I neglected my homework periodically, stayed up late occasionally, and once attended a party I had reservations about.  Mom never berated me for them.  When grades slipped, she quietly pointed out that my chances for the university I wanted to attend would slip as far as my grades did, the lower they were, the poorer my chances of acceptance.  If I stayed up late, she cheerfully chided me for my sour mood.  After the party she simply asked me what I would picture those friends doing in ten years.  Did I wish to share this future with them?  Undoubtedly, I did not.  When I saw this, I invariably altered my behavior to compensate.  She was always ready with advice on how best to mend the tears in the fabric of my life.  I never resented her as so many teens do.  In fact, this brought us much closer.

A few years ago, I took my daughter into my room on her thirteenth birthday.  We had a similar talk.  We, too, have remained close during her teens.  My son had a similar discussion with his dad at the same age.  My children made many of the same mistakes that are the milestones of growth and maturity, but many others they passed by because they thought about it and came to us to discuss it first.  They looked at us as mentors rather than jailers, and we've all been better for it.  The continuity of life and wisdom has remained unaltered in this family for years and if I'm not available, my children will seek out my mother for advice.

Honor, love and respect for the wisdom of experience are valued in our family because of the wise words of my best friend, my mother.