An Unanswered Question
by Carrie Oliver

Looking into the room. Her heart stood silently crying. He is leaving, after all these years of making sure he has the love, encouragement and support he has always needed. Only the unmade set of bunkbeds remain with the empty dresser. On the mirror of the dresser remains a photograph. The only photograph of his father. The one thing her son seemed to treasure, she never understood why.

Looking into the room. The memories drift in and out of her mind silently of a question once asked by her son, "Mom, what have you ever done for me?" Her son was about fifteen when he asked her this question. At that time she had no idea how to answer it. Now her thoughts of this question were flashing aimlessly. I did everything possible; I worked endlessly at odd jobs; I strived and studied with inhuman hours to get my college degree in engineering to improve our lives. She wondered why such a question? Would there be an answer? Then she thought of her son in the baseball and football games. She was always there. She played catch with him, hit the ball to him to improve his catching, even tried to help him with football, though she knew nothing about it. She supported him and encouraged him. She always made sure he had what was needed.

Looking into the room at the heavy sight of the emptiness, the question kept pushing its way through. "Mom, what have you ever done for me?" Her tears began to flow. She just did not understand that question. What did she not do?

Behind her, the soft fall of footsteps became apparent as she heard her son's voice, "Mom, I'm ready to go now. Thought I'd...Why the tears? I'm just moving around the corner. It's not like I'm moving across the country." She looked at her son: "The tears? Oh these tears are because of a question you asked me when you were fifteen. I never understood why you asked it." "What question was that, mom?" She answered, "You asked me, 'Mom, what have you ever done for me?' Why such a question?—Do you know your father's photograph is still on the mirror?" He answered, "Yes." "I thought you treasured it? Why did you not pack it to take as well?"

He looked at his mom, surprised by the questions. He did not expect her to be so quizzical. So sentimental. This was not like her. She had always been strong and supportive, always striving to make him realize what was within his reach or even her own. He thought for a minute before he gave her his answer.

"Mom, when I was fifteen, I tried to understand why you and dad are divorced. I just could not understand why he never visited, why he never called and why he never loved me. I tried to blame you but you just would not let me. No matter what I did or said you always supported me. You gave me the strength to realize who I am.

The photograph, well, I thought it would solve this problem. It did not.

Mom, the only thing I realize today is that you stood by me, supported me and helped make me what I am today. The only thing you never gave me, and you could not, was a dad. But I realize I was very lucky. I got both, a mom and a dad, all wrapped up in one, you."

Looking into the room. She again saw the picture. This time she walked over to the mirror, removed the picture and put it into the top dresser drawer. Lifting the emptiness of the vacant room.