AN UNANSWERED QUESTION

by Carrie Oliver

Looking into the room. She stood silently crying. He is leaving. After all the 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 quite understood why.

Looking into the room, her memories drift through her mind 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 of how to answer it. I did everything possible. I worked odd jobs, studied endless hours to get my college degree to improve our lives. She wondered why such a question?

Is there an answer? Then she thought of her son in the baseball and football games. She was always there. She had 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 empty room, she again thought of the question. "Mom, what have you ever done for me?" Tears began to well up in her eyes. She just didn’t understand that question. What did she not do?

Behind her, her son’s footsteps became apparent. "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 the question you asked me when you were younger. I never understood why you asked it."

“What question was that?”

She answered, "You asked me ‘What have you ever done for me?’"

“What kind of a question..."

“Do you know your father’s photograph is still on the mirror?”

He answered “Yes.”

“I thought you treasured it? Why didn’t you pack it to take with you?” She asked.

He looked at his mom, surprised by the questions. He didn’t expect this from her or for her to be so sentimental. This just wasn’t like her. She was always strong and supportive.

He thought for a minute before he gave her his answer.

“Mom, when I was younger I tried to understand why you and dad were divorced. I just couldn’t understand why he never visited. Why he never called. Why he never seemed to care about me. I tried to blame you but you just wouldn’t let me. No matter what I did or said you were always there. You stood by me."

“The photograph, well I thought it would solve the problem. I thought it would let me see what I didn’t have but really wanted. Huh, the dreams of a kid.

“Mom, I realize now it didn’t help. But there is something I realize today: that you stood by me, supported me and helped make me who I am today. The only thing you never gave me, and you couldn’t, was a dad.”

“But I realize I was very lucky. I got both, a mom and 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.