

Laura Friesen Rothstein

Dear Pauline,

You already know how much I admire and respect you and how much I enjoy talking with you. An essential part of every visit to Clay Center for Leslie and me is to spend time talking with you. After each visit, we always marvel at your attitude, your energy, your wit, your intelligence, and your zest for life. I always think of you as being the same person I remember from 1967 when I graduated from high school and left for college.

Mitch Albom's book "Five People You Meet in Heaven" is about how people can touch our lives and make a difference. You are one of my "five people I'll meet in Heaven" because you made a difference in my life when I was at a critical age.

You were my wonderful piano teacher – once a week at 8 am, even in the summer. My piano recitals taught me confidence. Your encouragement for me to practice taught me discipline and seeing the result of that discipline. (Some weeks were better than others, of course.) I remember your working with Jeanette Gingles and me to prepare a duet recital piece for a talent presentation at a summer church retreat. We were awesome! I still play that piece when I can find a duet partner.

You were my choir director, both in junior choir with the maroon robes, and later in high school. I couldn't really sing very well, but it helped to have Susan Strom singing alto in my ear so I could at least carry the tune. You made sure we had those sweet nutrolls from the bakery on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday to thank us all for doing two services.

I turned the pages for you one year at the Singing Christmas Tree, and marveled that you could play those fast and challenging chords for the Hallelujah Chorus. I still love to hear it after being introduced to it at those performances.

After leaving for law school and becoming politically involved, when I'd come home for a visit, you, Grace, Mom, and I would have lunch and we'd talk about politics. You were all so open-minded and willing to talk about ideas even if you didn't agree with them always. We could use some more of that these days.

I also recall how when Dad became ill in October 1993, and had surgery with such short notice that none of the four of us could be there with Mom for what turned out to be a very difficult day for her. I called Grace, and told her what had happened, and that Mom was there alone in Salina, and needed someone to be with her. Grace called you, and the two of you were there within a couple of hours. That meant a lot to Mom, and it meant a lot to all of us.

But the reason you will be one of my “five people” is the example you set when you took the Finch family into your home when Mrs. Finch died. Like everything else you’ve done in your life, you just did it because it was the right thing to do. I happened to have my piano lesson that morning and was so impressed by what you did. That was the first time I was ever aware of race and how attitudes about race can make a difference. I have made much of my own work about trying to change the historical effects of race on our world. You started my thinking about that.

Your whole life has been an example. You are generous, you are kind, you are no-nonsense, you are funny and fun, you make beautiful music, you are a great role model, and it is one of the best parts of my life to know you.

Have a happy birthday. I’ll be thinking of you.

*Love,
Laura*