

Mama's REFRIGERATOR

How did my mother use a strange yellow refrigerator to teach us? By allowing it to show us what matters most.

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I don't remember seeing my father cry during my mother's funeral or at any other time during her last few days. He seemed to be the one in charge of consoling everyone else. But one night after the burial, I saw my father weep in front of our old refrigerator, as he looked at all that Mama had put there. The refrigerator was covered with mementos of my mother's life.

When my parents got married, they bought the refrigerator secondhand. My mother took it upon herself to paint it a strange yellow color I have never seen on any other refrigerator. (She also ended up painting the floor, some of the other furniture, and a new dress.) But we actually saw the strange yellow color only when the refrigerator broke down, had to have a new part, and Mama took everything off of it.

Its color was hidden because my mother covered it with all sorts of things: a good cartoon from the newspaper, a well-known saying, my dad's picture, scriptures to be memorized, the ticket from the cleaners, an ad for some product, a letter to be answered, a recipe, the shopping list, the ward telephone directory, and even our report cards. As we got older, she put up lists of weekly assignments, schedules, and messages for the family. We didn't have a chalkboard or a bulletin board, so

our parents also posted gospel pictures on the refrigerator.

In February, my mom would put up a big heart with all our names written on it; in March, her wedding picture and a list of some things she would like for her birthday. June she dedicated to Dad, because it was the month of his birthday—she did the same in the month each of us was born. In September, a Mexican flag was displayed. In November, the month in which my parents remembered their ancestors, Mom put up pictures of loved ones, providing an opening to talk about them. In December, she displayed a small nativity scene she had fashioned out of cloth.

Each time one of us went on a mission, Mom stuck a missionary photo on the fridge and didn't take it down until our return. When Mom's only brother died, she displayed on the refrigerator a picture of the two of them together and never took it down. She didn't ever mention it, but to see her so profoundly contemplating that picture, we knew how much her brother meant to her.

Together, the refrigerator and my mother united the family.

Today in my own home there is a refrigerator that, although new and not a strange yellow color, is learning its duty of uniting and teaching the family. The old photo of my parents' wedding, another of my aunt, and the formless artwork made by my little children hang there. And when I see these objects, I think of my mother and thank her for teaching me to understand how a refrigerator can nourish in more ways than just keeping food cold. **NE**

