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Wilma Mankiller
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Dear Wilma,

Bill, Brad, and I thank you for your call. It cheered and comforted us.

It's difficult to accept that Mom has graduated. It happened so unexpectedly. She was only eighty--a ripe old age for most--but we expected her to live into her nineties and maybe make it to a hundred. Of course, her living to eighty is about twice the life expectancy of someone who lived a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago when people didn't live much longer than an anthropoid ape--about 35 to 40 years.

So she was around for a good many years--fourscore.

To me, Mom was like a great and mighty sun putting out warmth, nourishment, and unconditional love. She provided the gravity that held the system together. Dad, Bill, Brad, and I revolved around her. Dad was like a bright comet, who streaked across the sky and said, "Come join me, and let's go find out what's happening. If it's not happening, let's make it happen."

Suddenly and very unexpectedly the great and mighty sun went out. I felt like a cosmic orphan--a feeling that was probably intensified by the fact that I've now lost both of my parents. I felt cold, lonely, lost, and wondering what happened to the gravity. I spoke to my best friend, Hoite, who expanded on my analogy. He said that if parents do their job and wisely and lovingly transmit and their children do their job and receive, then the children are going to realize--if not before their parents die then after--that they are suns...that they are the centers of new systems...that their children are the planets revolving around them...that some day they are going to die and their children will become the new suns. And so on...and so on...and so on it goes--like a flat rock skipping, but never stopping, across the surface of a glassy smooth lake.

Several times recently I've reached for the telephone, wanting