

Madam Speaker, it is such a privilege for me to stand in this Chamber to honor and speak words of tribute to a beloved lady, born Mae Cardella Fox on a cold December day in 1913. Mae was the essential coal miner's daughter and grew up in a small miner's camp close to Habersham, Tennessee.

When she was only 11 years old, her mother died of pneumonia. Being the oldest daughter at home, she bravely embraced the crushing challenge at her age of maintaining a household and cooking for her siblings and her father.

When she was 16 years old, just as the Great Depression was falling upon America, she married another coal miner by the name of Earl Carr. The two of them were deeply committed to each other, and by themselves alone, using only hand tools, they built their first home, a log cabin on Pine Mountain above Morley, Tennessee.

When Mae was still in her twenties, her husband Earl was in a terrible accident when a coal mine caved in, killing many of his friends and breaking his own back and disabling him for life. When rescue workers reached him, he had already begun to dig himself out.

To take care of her severely injured husband and family, Mae began to take in laundry and clean houses, and she said she canned every kind of berries that grew in the Smoky Mountains. The older children gathered and sold holly at Christmas time, and the entire family gathered coal that fell from the tipples where the train cars were loaded. They said sometimes the workers would deliberately throw out coal for the families.

As the children grew in number and in stature, the family would travel to Florida in citrus season to pick oranges. It was there that my first memories of Mae and Earl Carr were born. I can remember at 4 years old waking up before daylight and climbing into a tarpaulin-covered truck, called a doghouse, and going to the orange groves to help pick oranges with Mae and the rest of her family.

To find better work, the family moved to Colorado, close to Juanita Franks, one of Mae and Earl's married daughters. While they were there, a grandson with a missing palate and a cleft lip was born to Juanita. Mae lovingly helped feed this little baby with a pill cup and an eyedropper until surgery could be performed. Madam Speaker, this is only one small instance of all of the acts of love and devotion this precious woman bestowed on every member of her family.

Mae Carr loved Jesus and her family more than anything else in life, and in all of the joys and struggles of their lives and 64 years of marriage, Earl and Mae Carr became the patriarch and matriarch of a family that would number 11 children, 47 grandchildren, 76 great-grandchildren, 22 great-great-grandchildren, and two more on the way.

A few days ago, in her 94th year of life, I was called to the bedside of Mae Carr, who as it happens, Madam Speaker, is my precious grandmother, and who was called home to meet her Savior on February 7, 2007.

Among her last words to me were those contained in a phrase I had heard her say many times before, and expanded just this once. She said, ``Trent, the truth will stand when the world is on fire; and the truth will still be here when the world is gone."

Madam Speaker, if all of us in this institution and this world could learn the reverence for truth and the love for humanity personified in this four-foot-eleven coal miner's daughter, the entire human family would be nobly transformed.

I will cherish those final moments with her for the rest of my life, because her mind at the time was still keen and perfectly lucid, and I was able to tell her not just how much I loved her, she already knew that, but I was able to tell her how much we were grateful for her 94 years of loving all of those about her, for loving life, and for making this world a better place to live. And, most importantly, Madam Speaker, I was able to remind her that indeed her life was a profound victory and that all of her dreams had come true.

Because you see, Madam Speaker, Mae Carr's dreams, though profound beyond words, were simple dreams: a family to love and nurture and support, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and even great-great-grandchildren who would learn her heartfelt love for God and her fellow human beings. Her family now stands as a living testament to her life and her noble dreams fulfilled. And her greatest dream, Madam Speaker, is also now fulfilled as she stands in the presence of her Savior and has heard His eternal words of victory, ``Well done, my good and faithful servant."

The truth will stand when the world is on fire, and the truth will still be here when the world is gone. Mae Cardella Carr.