



MY ANGEL MOTHER

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RE: Abraham Lincoln



USING PREPARED MATERIAL

Some Presiding Officers may have difficulty expressing themselves in appropriate words. While there are many very worthwhile addresses and ceremonies available, the Presiding Officer must be willing to select them with great care and she must be willing to spend some time adapting the presentation to her own particular way of speaking. Taking the time to make a presentation a part of one's self by digesting it carefully is invaluable. The Presiding Officer should substitute other words for any that are difficult to use. If a sentence does not exactly express the matter in the way that the Presiding Officer thinks it should be, she should adjust it to suit her own particular needs.

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GILBERT PUBLISHING COMPANY
Gifts and Supplies for Lodges
15626 Detroit Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44107

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This address has been prepared to use in commemorating Lincoln's birthday. This address features some of the less known aspects of the life of Abraham Lincoln and emphasizes those virtues exemplified by his natural mother and stepmother, which contributed to his rise to greatness.

EVERY AMERICAN, NO MATTER HOW POOR or humbly born, can find in the gaunt, homely figure of Abraham Lincoln a great source of inspiration. Lincoln was a man who knew poverty as a way of life throughout most of his childhood and early manhood. He was, in a very real sense, a self-made man. Through the years, the story of his life and achievements has heartened many as they have struggled to overcome the difficulties with which life presented them.

Everyone is familiar with Abraham Lincoln's famous quotation, "All that I am I owe to my angel mother." The one thing that no one seems to know is just to which person he was referring. Lincoln was blessed with a natural mother and a stepmother who both seem to have been the most lovable kind of persons.

Poverty Was a Member of the Early Lincoln Household

Lincoln's natural mother was a woman of singular courage and patience. We do not know exactly what the circumstances were, but evidently Lincoln's father was never able to provide very adequately for the family.

Some biographers seem to think that Lincoln's father was a shiftless ne'er-do-well. Others suggest that Lincoln's father was a man of modest abilities who pitted himself against the odds of poor soil and a bitter climate and came off a weary and beaten second best. The little family moved from place to place evidently in hopes that new circumstances would turn the face of fortune in their direction.

When we say that the Lincoln family was poor, this is something of an understatement. At one time the family lived through an entire winter in the three sided shelter with a fire blazing on the fourth side to ward off the wandering wild creatures and the biting cold of the bitter mid-west winters.

Lincoln's own mother died during a raging epidemic and for a while Lincoln's little sister tried valiantly to take on the duties and responsibilities of the lost mother. After a while, Lincoln's father remarried and this seems to have been something of a turning point in Lincoln's life.

Lincoln Standard of Living Upgraded

The new Mrs. Lincoln entered the Lincoln household amid great excitement. She had brought with her, not only her own children by a previous marriage, but household furnishings the likes of which the little Lincoln children had never seen. She had brought dressers and chairs and the little Lincoln children could only stare in amazement. Previously, the family had sat on blocks of wood and had huddled together around the fire to keep warm.

The second Mrs. Lincoln was quite a manager. With her help and guidance, the Lincoln family seems to have fared much better. Mr. Lincoln seemed to provide more adequately and Mrs. Lincoln kept the little family scrubbed, clean and well fed. Their physical needs were taken care of, but most of all, the second Mrs. Lincoln loved and cherished Abraham and his little sister with the same love and devotion with which she showered her own natural children. Mrs. Lincoln said that no one ever had a better son than Abraham.

Even so, Lincoln did not lead an easy life. Everbody was needed to keep the family going. He worked chopping wood, farming and clearing land. When the opportunity afforded itself, Lincoln was hired out to the neighbors at a quarter a day. As was the custom in those days, his wages were paid to his father.

Life Began to Hold More Promise

But, life was better and held more promise and challenge than it ever had before. As great good fortune would have it, Lincoln's stepmother could read and write and this was the equivalent of a very good education during this period of our country's history.

Mrs. Lincoln took time from her pressing and urgent household demands to teach little Abraham how to read and from that point forward, Abraham let no moment go by in which he could read and study.

Just as Lincoln turned twenty-one, his father decided that he would like to relocate in Illinois. Abraham stayed

on with the family until the land could be cleared, a home built and a first crop harvested. It was at this period of Lincoln's life that he became known as the "Rail Splitter." One of the fascinating but less known stories about Lincoln concerns this nickname.

After Lincoln had helped his family get relocated in Illinois, he wanted to start out on a life of his own. However, he did not have a whole suit of wearing apparel to his name. Neither did he have any money. Close by, there was a woman who made her living by weaving a material known as "jeans" which was a coarse, heavy fabric suitable for work clothes. Lincoln agreed to cut four hundred rails for every yard of cloth which she would make for him.

Early Background Engenders Our Respect

Recent historical novels and researches have made the events of Lincoln's adult years familiar to almost everyone. But the severity of his early life, his capacity to concentrate on possibilities rather than on the adversities of his own personal circumstances would qualify him for a place in our hearts even if he had never become President during the crucial years of the Civil War Period.

Lincoln never allowed his politically prominent position to keep him away from the ordinary individual. If it can ever be said of anyone that he maintained an open door policy when it came to being accessible to the people he served, it can truly be said of Lincoln.

Even throughout the demanding, decision packed days of the Civil War, Lincoln maintained this easy access policy. The mourning wives and mothers of service men found him able and willing to aid them in their moments of great personal distress.

His compassion for the weakness of human beings is well illustrated by his treatment of individuals brought to trial for falling asleep on duty, or for displaying cowardice during battle. At one time he is reported to have said that if a man had been burdened with cowardly legs that one could hardly criticize him for running from the thick of battle.

Lincoln Held to High Personal Standards

Although Lincoln was charitable of weakness in others, he judged himself with hardness and conformed to the highest personal standards of behavior. Immediately after having given his familiar Gettysburg Address, Lincoln displayed his great humbleness when he said, "I have failed again."

He had no realization that the words he had written with a heart full of anguish and a tormented spirit would go down in history as one of the world's great masterpieces. His eminent co-speaker wrote to him the next day and said that he wished the speech he had given in two hours could have dealt with the issues at hand as well as Lincoln's speech had done in two minutes.

Perhaps, when Lincoln said, "All that I am I owe to my angel mother," he means those two lovely women who took

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the time to nurture the potential for greatness that was inherent in the little Abraham. Tonight, as we honor this man, one of our nation's truly great men, we honor also, those women who made it possible for Lincoln to become one of history's most distinguished figures.

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5-9-64 [PRINTED
IN U.S.A.]



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