

Pass It On®...

The Electric Influence of a Good Mother.

Nikola Tesla was, in many ways, the stereotype of a mad scientist. His mother was kind, curious and loving. She encouraged him to look beyond his humble beginnings to the world stage.

The last name that is most famous today for the car that bears his name began as a knowledge-obsessed schoolboy. One of five children, Nikola Tesla was intelligent and curious about the unknown forces in the world: electricity and magnetism.

His father, an Orthodox priest, hoped his son would become a man of the cloth, but Tesla was more interested in the hard evidence of what existed and was yet to be harnessed. His mother, Georgina, was an intelligent woman in her own right, an inventor of gadgets that made difficult house chores easier.

"I must trace to my mother's influence whatever inventiveness I possess," Tesla reflected. "My mother was especially gifted with a sense of intuition ... an inventor of the first order and would, I believe, have achieved great things, had she not been so remote from modern life."

The small hovel Tesla grew up in was dimly lit by the frugal candles: a piece of braided thread dipped in wax and inserted into a turnip. By this pale light, Tesla watched his mother tinker, listened to his father read and let his imagination run off into the unyielding woodlands in which they lived.

Those woodlands played a role in who Tesla became. On the day of his birth, there was a great thunderstorm. The village midwife, terrorized by the thunderclaps and lightning, decreed, "He'll be a child of the storm." To which the mother in labor answered: "No, a child of light."

Tesla's mother led the effort to raise money for her son's education. It was she who inspired his curiosity and defended his unorthodox personality. She taught him to pursue that inner voice of intellectual longing, perhaps one she herself had no means to pursue.

Tesla became what many physicists call the father of the 20th century. His work on the alternating

current, induction motor and wireless technology influenced Edison and Westinghouse Electric. He theorized wireless communications and even demonstrated a wireless boat. His developments in a brushless electric motor are still in use today, as are his early developments for the incandescent light.

For all his scientific breakthroughs, the fortune he earned and spent, it was his mother he remembered most fondly at the end of his life. In her final weeks, he sat with her for days without sleeping, not wanting to miss her passing. He had abandoned a lecture circuit in Paris to be with her, his first inspiration, his guiding light. Her last words to him were: "You've arrived, Nikola, my dear."

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