

## I Remember You

Looking upon the house my grandmother once lived in brings feelings of emptiness and happiness all at the same time. The paint that is slowly chipping away reminds me of all the hard work my grandfather put into every board that was nailed together and every coat of paint that was applied with his own two hands. Many memories have been developed into long lasting impressions at this house, but the one that meant the most was the gracefulness, thoughtfulness, and courageousness of my grandmother. Her name was Gertrude Harriet Dahl. Gertrude mothered nine children, one of which was my mother. I find it very bizarre how you sometimes forget how much someone means to you until they pass away.

While growing up, my main domain was her house; Monday through Friday had a new adventure to conquer, and every day was just as great as the last. Grandma would work outside in the garden all day long, and I would run through the corn stalks thinking she couldn't see me. No matter what event was going on, she never seemed to get stressed or upset. I admired her for the carefulness of her nimble fingers and for her gardening skills. She always seemed to know when the carrots were just ripe to pick, and what seemed to be the "right" weeds to pull. She was a typical housewife.

Since my grandfather passed away three years before I was born, I never had the chance to see what kind of wife she was to him. A few of my aunts and uncles have told me stories about his drinking problems and his workaholic tendencies. I'm almost positive Grandma handled it with acceptance and tried everything in the world to be there for him anyways. I hope I am that accepting when I get married. As I was growing up, I never knew my grandmother had nine children, until one Christmas my mother told me about her sister Peggy, who was twelve when she passed away.

I guess Peggy hit a drop off down by the river, and she never survived the swift water. I became very upset that not a single soul, especially my grandma told me. As time went on, and as I became older I learned to admire her hardship and learned that she never talked about it because she was ashamed—ashamed of an incident that she couldn't help, and disappointed in herself for not being there because Peggy snuck out. It takes courage and strength for someone to raise the rest of the kids when something this devastating happens in life. My grandma overcame this.

She is also strong for getting through years of diabetes. With painful shots everyday and rigorous diets, bad health hung above her head like an anvil. Constant weight gain and depression was never absent. She was flawless on the outside, but we all knew her pain on the inside. On special occasions such as Christmas, our family would shower her with gifts. We all tried to make her happy and let her know that she was appreciated for being a great grandma and mother to us all. She knew she was special to us.

I know as a kid, I often got jealous of all the gifts she received and wondered what it would be like to be in such great lime light as much as she was. Towards the end of one's life, the appreciation from others really adds up, and that's what I want for anyone that feels like they have done well in life. Anyone could tell grandma felt the same way. She didn't care much about herself compared to how she cared for others. For example, when my mother gave birth to me, from day one, she was a single mother. My grandmother helped with anything she could to help raise me, from babysitting while my mom worked two jobs, to teaching me about life lessons. She always managed to attend my most important orchestra concerts and have a hearty meal ready by six thirty sharp. I wanted to be just like her. I remember one specific night when she went to bed, I went into the bathroom to look in her medicine cabinet. This is where she kept her bright red lipstick. I never put it on, but I imagined how it would look on me. That lipstick didn't make her look elegant, but she made the lipstick look elegant.

As her thin light brown hair turned gray, I saw her energy fizzle down, but her love for life stayed strong. I could tell her ending days were near. There was one last summer where I stayed with her for bible

camp. The camp was only a week long. This very week is when I had my first real connection with her. I knew that every night before she went to bed, she would lay across her comforter and dangle her feet off the edge while she did some crossword puzzles.

She would leave the door cracked just a little bit, so I had just enough light in the living room, so I wouldn't get scared to fall asleep on the couch. I slowly got up from the couch and tiptoed into her room. She looked at me and invited me to lay down with her and help her out. We stayed up late, and for the very first time I felt like I connected with her—a connection that my aunts and uncles never had, because there were too many of them. As years went by, I prayed that she would be in my life to see me graduate high school, go to college, find a great job, and, some day, see my children.

Unfortunately, those days fell short. On the last day of finals of my freshman year in high school, I received a message. When I walked up to my history teacher to hand in my final, the phone rang. It was my mother, and she was in the office. I knew right away that it was my grandmother. I left school right away to see her.

When I walked into her room, I didn't know what to say. I waited a couple minutes to gather my breath and told her that I loved spending time with her and I was going to miss her. I told her about my day, because I knew that's what she would want to hear. Soon after that, my whole family came in. We all gathered hands and I could feel the love in the room for my grandmother. Her willingness to put anything before herself, and the love she shined upon us, now shined upon her.

As she slowly slipped away from life, I felt at ease and our family became at peace with one another. I carry myself today with the same kind of pride my grandmother had. I learned that courageousness, thoughtfulness and gracefulness go a long ways. Wearing fancy red lipstick looks beautiful, but it's the person inside that really counts. Grandmothers don't mind hearing the same story over and over, but other people do. Every tear adds to an ocean, making a cake is mostly about licking the bowl, and making others happy should be everyone's goal in life.

I'm positive she would be more than happy to hear that if she was here today. Gertrude Harriet Dahl was a magnificent person. Lucky to be her granddaughter? Yes. Even luckier to learn life lessons from a distinguished woman? Even better. Thank you.

May 9, 2006