

Nana's Memorial

Thanks to Sara and Mom.

I didn't know that our trip to Massachusetts last year would be the last time we'd see Nana alive. We had heard her say for the last twenty years that she was ready to die. She'd say, "I don't know what I'm going to die of. The arthritis surely won't kill me. And the doctor says my heart is fine." She'd say it so matter of factly, without a tinge of melancholy or regret. She wrote to me, "Oh the joys of living too long – I've concluded that no one should live beyond 90."

Nana was devastated when Dad died of cancer eight years ago. She must have thought over and over again that, "it wasn't supposed to happen this way." She never thought she'd outlive her own child, nor did she expect to outlive all of her peers and nearly all of her friends.

I think that these losses must have made Nana very lonely at times.

Nana was visiting the family home in Bedford some years ago. After the meal had been cleared away, we asked about her upbringing. She told of growing up with a very stern father, who was critical in many ways. I remember one comment vividly. She said "I don't really know if my father loved me. I think he did." "Ouch", I thought to myself.

She also told of being dressed in white as a baby and not being allowed to touch the ground for fear of getting her clothing dirty.

I asked Nana about her courtship by Granddaddy. She said that his courtship consisted of several well-chaperoned dates, followed by a proposal that consisted primarily of an accounting of his assets and ability to earn money.

Nana was always proud of her education. She valued education and profession very highly. She was very proud of attending Goucher College and her being a teacher.

I suppose that it was a mixture of her regard for education and her upbringing that led her to do something very cruel to me. As a child, I received frequent letters from Nana and Granddaddy Al. My parents encouraged and cajoled me to reply. After a while, I didn't want to send them any more letters because they would be returned to me with the grammatical and spelling errors corrected in red ink.

While Granddaddy Al would send his letters to me typed, complete with white-out and hand printed corrections, Nana always sent her letters to me in longhand. I still cherish her letters to me and will keep them for my children and their children to read.

Nana also loved to knit. We would receive hats, scarves and sweaters for our birthday or holidays. I just wish I enjoyed the same hues of bright purple and pink that she did.

As education was always very important to Nana, she was certainly very proud of her son, who attained a master's degree. I know she was at first proud of me when I, too, attained a master's degree in engineering, then very disappointed in me when I decided to change careers to become a chiropractor. I know she was disappointed because she would not write or talk to me for a year after I made that decision. I think that later she came to accept my new career as a decent one, but still second class compared to engineering.

Nana could be very critical of others and unabashedly racist at times. Most of the family cringed in the face of this.

It was for the best that she softened her demeanor in her later years. Perhaps she finally realized that her behavior drove her family away. But it was that softer, gentler Nana that my children got to know. My daughter Camille, who is seven now, and my son Daniel, who is five are with us today. They both had affection for Nana.

Nana would light up when I would bring the kids for a visit. She would have been very anxious to see us as she'd wait for us by the front door and smile warmly. She loved getting a hug from them. Of course, she'd parade them around Carlton Willard beaming with pride. She'd have to show them off to all her friends.

Despite having a lot of trouble understanding the high-pitched voices of small children, she delighted in watching them bounce off the walls and run in circles. Camille took an interest in seeing her knitting and spent a lot of time looking at her sweaters and other knitted items.

Camille really liked Nana and is very sad that she has died. When she heard that Nana had gone into the hospital, one of Camille's first responses was that she wanted to see Nana right away. One of the hardest things a parent has to do is explain to a caring child that we can't just jump up and take a cross-country flight.

So, even though we didn't get to say goodbye to Nana before she died, we can do it today. "Goodbye, Nana. Thanks for being our grandmother."