

Joy in Acceptance

September 2021



The secret of inner peace is accepting things as they are...
~Paramhansa Yogananda

People have always asked my maternal grandmother Joan, or Popo as I called her, how she was able to keep her joy-filled, happy-go-lucky attitude throughout her 100 some-odd years of life on this problem-ridden Earth. Most attributed it to good genes, and perhaps there is some truth to that, but after she left her body peacefully 2 weeks ago, it is clear to me that her joy came from a tremendously generous heart that allowed her to roll with the punches and accept everything, good or bad, in equal measure.

Popo was born in 1918, a year of great change. It was right after the end of WWI, the war that was supposed to end all wars (but didn't), and the beginning of the Spanish Flu pandemic. When I was still in the crib, Popo would tell me stories from the Second World War, and though there was inevitable suffering and loss in her stories, the lasting impression was an underlying joy and sense of humor. The world according to Joan was full of wonder and great food: sharing chicken roasted in the earth, and juicy watermelon cooled from the well.

Even when she spoke of losing her baby girl, who would have been my mother's older sister, Popo was able to cherish the sweet memories while accepting a greater hand at work. She was grateful for the prosperous times, had a lot of humor for the hard times, and always had an anecdote about food.

As Paramhansa Yogananda once said, "A good rule in life is to tell yourself, 'What comes of itself, let it come.'"

Having been brought up without ever entering a kitchen, Popo learned practical skills during WWII, becoming an excellent cook and astute head of the household. I did not see war-time Popo until 9/11 happened. She quickly assessed the situation once we knew New York was under attack and immediately had me accompany her to the grocery for essentials. In awe, I followed Popo, my hero. If there were ever an apocalypse, you'd want Grandma Joan in your corner. She was ready for anything because she didn't waste time or energy resisting change. Popo simply accepted each moment as it came.

As I take this time to adjust to her physical absence, Popo's joy continues to diffuse through me. Her joy was what made home home, as well as the wonderful smell of her food. At her memorial, my cousin reminded us of how we'd all love to listen to her jokes, of which she had many. Then in meditation a few days later, I felt the comforting presence of Lahiri Mahasaya, who comes to me when I'm sad like a loving Grandpa. But this time who should I see next to him but Popo! My surprise melted in their joy. They were laughing together, as if sharing a joke. The joke's on us for sure!

To end in Popo's own words (translated from Chinese):

*Who knows where one's Life is headed
As a bird alights only to take off again
Making a fleeting imprint in the snow
Before flying away again in no particular direction*