

“Grandma to Grandma”

My brothers say I'm a lot like my grandma. Grandma Scott was short and chubby with twinkly blue eyes and a ready smile. Although she had had a bad heart for as long as I could remember, in the summer she puttered amongst her flowers, and kept her screened back porch welcoming with lovely pots of ivy and geraniums and chintz-covered wicker furniture - a cool spot for a tuna-fish sandwich, (made with white, albacore tuna, no less), potato chips, and a from ours, you had someone who listened nonjudgmentally and who cared about what you had to say.

The house itself was not inviting to the outsider. It was a 1930s dark brown brick, two storeys tall, enveloped by mature leafy trees and protectively embraced by overgrown bushes. The backyard, which extended to a point, was always shady, except at the point, itself. Inside, however was a different world. Grandma loved the color green, so there were shades of that color throughout her house - celery green carpet, and a light green brocade couch with swirly patterns attended by a dark brown leather wingback chair and another with a Parisian print of those tiny men and ladies with their pointed legs. The heavy, lined draperies in the living room hung from floor to ceiling, closed in the winter by the late afternoons and patterned with Birds of Paradise in colors of tan, green and burgundy. Grandma had an ebony-colored baby grand piano in the corner of her living room, that she would play for an hour at a time. She even taught me to play a little bit on that piano. She loved music. This was an era before fancy, music only stations, but the radio always accompanied our chats with symphonies or operas. Thinking back now, she lived such a quiet life. I don't ever recall her being not at home when I dropped by for a visit and a Coke.

When Grandma was in her early 50s, she had open heart surgery. She showed me her scar. She had been shockingly cut from breastbone to spine. Although I was fifteen at the time, and full of plans for my life, I was scared to death that I would lose my beloved grandma. However, Grandma's life was spared, and I stopped holding my breath. I was her only granddaughter, and my mom had just birthed my brand new baby brother and was unable to help, so when Grandma needed assistance after surgery, I was ready and willing. I went straight there, after junior symphony practice every Saturday for six months. I ate a wonderful "tuna salad on white bread without the crusts" luncheon and then spent the whole afternoon cleaning for her. Every week, I had to move all of the furniture, except her baby grand piano and her large bed, to vacuum. I cleaned bathrooms and floors, and I ironed sheets and grandpa's undershirts in her Mangle--a two-roller contraption that wanted to flatten fingers as well as the sheets. And we talked.

Grandma would follow me from room to room, pointing to areas that needed extra diligence, while we dreamed of boys and trips to London, and romance novels and plays. If I was struggling with parental restrictions or which boy to date when two were vying for my attention, I went to Grandma. When I wanted to accompany my Girl Scout troop on a camping trip to Europe for ten weeks in the summer before my senior year of high school, I went to Grandma for moral support and strategies with which to approach my parents. I probably whined and complained more than I should have, never thinking of the fact that I was whining and complaining about Grandma's beloved son.

Of course, everything changed after high school graduation. It had been a turbulent time in American history, with assassinations of respected American leaders every few years. The war was in full swing and in January the lottery was announced. Both of my brothers just younger than me were chosen within the top fifty birthdates, but I wasn't worried - I knew they'd get out of it. Grandma however was petrified. It was one of the few times she talked to me. She recalled when my dad had volunteered in an earlier war, and how frightened Grandma had been during the whole two years he was in the South Pacific. Now America was fighting there again, and Grandma was mad about war. I didn't understand, and I was planning for college. I was not a good listener.

Now I'm a grandma like my grandma in some ways. Although I'm not a stay-at-home grandma, and my favorite interior colors are red and gold with lots of dark wood wainscoting, unlike Grandma's calm celery green, I want to be welcoming like her. Although "tuna salad on white bread without the crusts" would probably not be a treat to some of my grandchildren who prefer sushi, Pepperidge Farm Goldfish, made with whole grain, is a pretty tasty snack. Although I can't be at home every afternoon in the cold winter, because I don't arrive home from school until 5:45, I can be available on weekends. Most importantly, if the occasion arises, I can be available to listen. I can be that calm, unjudgemental adult, who keeps my opinions about my grandchild's escapades to myself and doesn't call Mom to tattle. I have no idea what the future will bring, but in this way, I'd like to be like Grandma.

MMAPS for my vignette, "Grandma to Grandma"

Mode: A memoir of my grandma, my dad's mother, and how she has influenced my behavior with my Michigan grandchildren (8 of my 20 grandchildren are Michigan grandchildren)

Media: Computer generated document with, hopefully, pictures of Grandma Scott around the borders, in color, if I can manage it. I will be taking pictures of existing pictures that I have and transferring these pictures from my camera to the computer, to this document, a new skill that I have been trying to master

Audience: The 2015 CRWP SI participants, and my three brothers - 2 of whom knew her well

Purpose: To refresh our memories so that they don't fade away, about our growing up years and what Grandma meant to me (and us, individually.)

Situation: This began as a vignette, a suggestion from my daughter to write about a family member, deceased long enough ago that the memories would not be painful. Then Liz, I think, suggested that I link my grandma to myself. Then I wrote what I thought was the first half of the vignette and submitted it to my writing group, and Kim suggested that she wanted to know more about Grandma's house. In an "Ah Ha!" moment, I realized that Grandma was defined by her house. I only remember her in her house, or at our house as a guest. Almost all of my interactions with her were just her and me, in her house. So, I am expanding this vignette as a short, short story, perhaps.