

Remembering Her

by Jennifer Woods

As I was wrapping last minute presents and retelling hilarious family stories with my sister, I could not think of anything that could upset me two days before Christmas. Then, the phone rang. I figured it would be a friend or out-of-town family member calling to wish us a Merry Christmas. My father answered the call and said with excitement, "Hey Rabbit!" After a long pause, my father's face suddenly turned from a wonderful smile to a look of disappointment. My father discontinued the conversation with my uncle and hung up the phone. After a long, gut-wrenching silence, Dad asked my sister and me to stop wrapping presents because he had an announcement to make. He said, "Girls, I have some bad news. Mama is sick in the hospital and they don't think she's going to make it." How could this be happening?

The next day, December 24th, Dad and I drove the 200 plus miles to Lewisburg. I had yet to wrap my 17-year-old mind around the daunting thought of my grandmother not being with us anymore. As we neared the entrance of the hospital, I said a brief prayer, for I had no clue what to expect. "God, please let her be okay. Amen."

Seeing her lying there unaware of our presence broke my heart into thousands of small pieces. I bent over her cold hospital bed, grasped her still hand ever so gently, pressed my lips on her barely warm forehead, and softly whispered, "I love you" in her ear. Her comatose state prevented her from responding in any way. This was a vast contradiction from the boisterous, strong woman I'd always known. I couldn't help but wonder if she was able to feel me holding her hand or hear my loving whisper. Deep down I knew this was my last touch and words to the woman I so lovingly call Grannymaw.

It was difficult for me to leave her side, and I cried the entire way to the car as my father wrapped his arm tightly around my shoulder. In the car, we both broke down crying until our personal reservoirs were dry. My father is a superhero in my eyes, and I

had never seen him cry until this day. He was so upset that he could hardly speak. We both knew that she would not be with us much longer, for her feeble body was giving in.

On the two hour drive home, we attempted to try to lift our spirits by telling funny stories that involved her. I remember two particular stories very vividly. When I was a child she nicknamed me “two cakes o’ soap” because she thought my bottom was very tiny and reminded her of two bars of soap. We recalled another time she accidentally made Kool-Aid with salt instead of sugar. She served it at a family picnic and everyone’s faces turned sour. That night we shared many great stories of her strength, perseverance, crazy sayings, and abundant antics. However, the stories were a mere diversion that barely took our minds off of the inevitable.

I tossed and turned in bed thinking about how wonderful she was while I drifted in and out of sleep. The thought of her not being around haunted me and kept me from an uninterrupted slumber. The next morning, my mother quietly entered my room and the sound of her tears woke me. Her voice had a profound sadness and with a sorrowful look in her eyes, I knew that Grannymaw had passed.

Three years after our loss, my father and I were doing last minute Christmas shopping for family members and close friends. As we were sorting through a rack of ladies’ robes, my father looked up at me and quietly said, “It’s just not the same without Mama here. It’s hard not to buy her a gift even though she’s gone.” I knew the exact feeling he was experiencing. During this time of year, it is difficult to have the holiday spirit when you feel a sort of emptiness.

We walked in and out of stores at the mall and shared more stories of her. We rehashed some of the same memories we told the night before she died. Except this time we talked about how hard she worked in the kitchen of the Lewisburg jail to support her five children. Being a single mother of five had to be difficult, yet she somehow seemed to make everything okay. Dad and I laughed about how he wore hand-me-downs from his brothers and sometimes his pants did not meet the tops of his shoes. “We may not have been rich and may have had to wear hand-me-downs, but we were always well fed and clean,” my father explained.

As we were wandering around the mall, we decided to go into Littman Jewelers to look for gifts for the women in our family. While we were looking through the fingerprint smudged glass for the best possible gifts, we came up with a wonderful idea. We decided to purchase something in honor of Grannymaw's life. Because she was a single mother and could not afford to even think about family heirlooms, we wanted a substantial piece of jewelry to pass down from generation to generation.

While browsing the solitaire earring case, I saw the perfect pair of princess cut white diamonds radiated with a light I had never seen before. I looked at my dad with big doe eyes and said, "Let's make earrings into two pendants for me and Christi!"

Dad enthusiastically replied, "That's a great idea!" I chose the sparkling pair of one carat earrings to be turned into two pendants for me and my sister. As we left the mall, a new sense of holiday spirit filled our once empty hearts.

On Christmas day, our family passed out gifts to one another. Everyone was laughing, my sister was putting on her lab coat and stethoscope that she just unwrapped, and we were all thanking people for the gifts. Suddenly, my father got a serious look on his face and held out two small beautifully wrapped silver boxes with maroon ribbons tied in perfectly centered bows. My sister and I knew what they were, and we slowly reached out for the gifts. We opened them simultaneously and immediately placed the identical diamonds around our necks. We did not have to say anything because all three of us knew what the other was thinking. My sister and I walked over to Dad and placed our arms around him, hugged him, and shared a smile full of every emotion under the sun. That Christmas, we all felt Grannymaw's presence and now we have tangible items that represent every aspect of her life. To this day, we keep her close to our hearts.



