

Dinners with Grandma

Word Count 1060

I share a lot of meals with my grandmother. Never mind, she's been dead for more than 20 years.

Newly unemployed and on the heels of becoming an empty nester, I had unearthed Grandma's silver flatware buried in the basement.

"Save this for a rainy day," Grandma told me years ago.

We obviously had different understandings of what "rainy days" meant, assuming it was for times when money might be tight and cash would be welcomed. However, when the moment came to sell this treasure, I discovered the utensils weren't *exactly* "silver."

While disappointed about hauling 12 sets of silverware back home, I quickly warmed to swapping the forks, spoons, and knives I had kept from my divorce with Grandma's fake silver for a sense of positive nostalgia.

Besides the "silver," I've held onto photographs, handwritten letters, and an antique diamond ring so gaudy it would frighten Freddy Krueger. After Grandma passed away, I received the remaining pieces of the prized tea set she had shipped to me when I was in my 20s. Those porcelain gifts have been proudly displayed in, what else, China Hutches for more than three decades.

Artifacts are lovely, but the memories of being with my mother's mother feel cozy like a blanket. Side-by-side, we would spend Saturdays at the beauty shop where she had her hair-colored black like night and styled with enough Aqua Net for the week that not even a category 5 hurricane could move a strand.

While my grandmother was being pampered, one of the "girls" would hoist me onto a booster board--a "seat" that fit across the arms of the salon chair--so my tiny head and long, knotted chocolate brown hair reached inside the sink, to magically fix what *Johnson's and Johnson's No More Tangles* never could.

Afterward, we would pilgrimage to the bakery for sugar-free cookies (Grandma explaining, “You know, I’m pre-diabetic.”) yet somehow manage to wolf down candy hidden in drawers that she didn’t think anyone knew about.

My grandmother was an excellent cook, and I loved helping her in the kitchen when she labored over meals for my grandfather and me. From fried salmon patties to sauteed chicken, even her baked potatoes, loaded only with butter and salt, cannot be rivaled. Often, as a special treat after returning from prettying ourselves for the day, Grandma would make her famous baked apples, laden with cinnamon and topped with black cherry soda, for dessert. I’ve long given up on butter; however, hot apple, anything, brings me back to tugging on my grandmother’s apron, asking for seconds of this gooey delicacy.

Now, as I set the table for meals or pull a random fork out of the drawer, I smile and wonder what it could be like to be a grandmother myself.

Don’t tell my kids, but it’s the next job I hope to have. There is something about being a grandparent that fills me with anticipated joy. Hearing the melodic sound of toddlers learning to talk, asking questions, sharing their wonder. All while not worrying about shuffling them from school to sports to birthday parties as a single working parent. Or panicking at 9:00 p.m. on a weeknight for the inevitable complicated science project due 12 hours later. Maybe it’s simply the possibility of going back in time and getting a do-over.

Wanting to be a grandparent seems to be another one of those rites of passage —a feeling or need that arises at a certain point in one’s life. For instance, my ex-husband’s dad told us as teenagers, “Sixteen-year-old pregnant girls aren’t cute.” But a mere 10 years later, still dating each other, my future father-in-law had a change of heart. “I’m not getting any younger here...you don’t need to be married to give me grandchildren.”

You see, for most of my life, I didn’t want children of my own. I babysat and loved *other* people’s kids, but for me, having a narcissistic mother, an absent father, and then wedged

smack in the middle of a complicated blended family, work had always been my respite from reality.

But at 29, married for several years, my biological clock and brain finally connected and all I yearned for was motherhood. Yet, as soon as I wanted kids, I kept losing them. Not like forgetting them at the mall but miscarrying. And then my first baby died soon after birth. So, when I actually became a full-fledged mom, I couldn't help but mother *every* child.

Had I known my children would become well-adjusted adults, I may have relaxed a little more while they were growing up. Neither offspring would classify me as a “helicopter” parent but perhaps an “over” parent. If only there had been “Parents’ Anonymous,” I could have attended. “Hi, my name is [blank], and I am an over-parent.”

Friends would come over for meals, and I'd cut their toddler's grapes in half. Or, we would be at a restaurant, and there I was, slicing dangerous hot dogs with Hibachi-chef precision. Or the time when I snatched a mylar balloon away from a toddler's mouth while his poor, unsuspecting dad strolled him around the store where I worked. I mean, really, it was as though he was asking for trouble! I've been more than happy to let people poke fun at me rather than know the sorrow that caused my risk-averse behavior in the first place.

My kids survived, in part, because of, or despite, “over-parenting,” and I'm pleased to report that both express how I positively supported and guided them from birth through adulthood. Knowing how they genuinely feel is especially comforting when evening rolls around each Mother's Day, and I've yet to hear from my brood. Both justify their silence with the fact that Mother's Day is a made-up holiday—and they love me *every day*. Still, would a handmade card or phone call kill them?

Becoming a mother has been the highlight of my life. A gift I never expected when I was younger and one that continues to warm my everyday.

Now, I look forward to loosening the reins with the next generation, ever so slightly, if (or when) I am lucky enough to become a grandmother. I'll be the one setting the dinner table with

keepsakes from my own grandparents' home, pocketing candy, and wielding a sharp knife--just in case.

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