

All Things Wise and Wonderful

PERSONAL ESSAY & MEMOIR

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On May 16, 2019, I wrote in my journal, “Grandma Sofia died, and the sad thing is, I can’t remember the last time I spoke to her.” I scrawled those thoughts down and then scanned my room, looking for reminders of her presence in my life; I quickly noticed how few of my possessions were remotely reminiscent of her.

In complete honesty, my grandma had always been a source of shame for me; because of her raspy voice from decades of smoking, her missing lower jaw (the result of a car accident), and her seemingly endless consumption of TV, I had severely misjudged her life. I let my naïve impressions of her stand in the way of building a stronger connection between us. So, I felt angry and overwhelmed as I grasped the reality of having lost the opportunity to rebuild our relationship.

Searching through old birthday cards and pictures was just an attempt to rid myself of the growing guilt of being an unloving granddaughter. As the regret firmly grabbed me, I discovered a book series she had given me for Christmas in 2013. I opened the books and found notes from her at the beginning of each. Those heartfelt words allowed me to reflect upon our relationship to see the instances throughout it when I deviated from whom I wanted to be.

In the first, *All Things Great and Small*, my grandmother had written, “Dearest Abigail, I hope you love these books as much as your aunt and I did. Loving you, Gramma.” Reading this in the wake of her death, I remembered my disappointment when I had originally received it due to my childhood materialistic ideologies, but she knew that I loved animals, and these books featured a veterinarian working in the Scottish highlands during the 1920s. I had initially failed to recognize she had wanted to share her love of these stories with me like she had

with my aunt. So, rereading those words, I cried at the thought I had never truly reciprocated her love.

The second, *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, offers a shorter note: “Did you love the first book? Love, Gramma”. It took me six years to read those books; if I had read them sooner, we could have discussed the novels before she fell into poor health.

The note in the final book, *All Things Wise and Wonderful*, has been hanging above my desk since I read it last year. “Hi Sweetie, Well, the last one. He has several more books. I hope when you mature that you help the animals. They’re worth it! Loving you, Gramma.” The confidence she had in my decisions to explore environmental conservation or veterinary medicine pains me because she had a faith in me that I did not understand. Still, these words bring me joy. My parents have discouraged me from pursuing a career in environmentalism, but my grandma knew the importance of nature and always tried to instill that in me.

There is nothing I can do now to change how I acted, but I’d like to think that I have since developed as a person to recognize the irrelevance of materialism and the importance of unconditional love. I looked over hundreds of photographs of my grandma’s life and finally started to appreciate that there was actually so much more to her character than I had previously seen: love amidst two divorces, close friendships despite long work hours, and a steady dedication to her family, even if it meant she had to quit art school at 18 to provide.

I am awed she raised two intelligent, loving children on her own, and rather than feeling embarrassed about my grandma, I’m finally learning from the strength, independence, and love she showed in the face of adversity. Great and small; bright and beautiful; and wise and wonderful: these are words I now associate with my grandmother. ■