

GRANDMA'S HANDS

I close my eyes and can remember Grandma's hands as they gently stroked my head and lulled me to sleep. Those hands swept the hair out off my face and held me close as we rocked. The front room's blue carpeting swirled in a Berber pattern that looked like floral puffs swelling up from the floor. The afternoon sun played across that carpet as we rocked in and out of shadows.

Grandma's hands were hardworking hands, but they never showed their wear. Her nails were of a medium length and usually painted a soft, pleasant shade of something. Those hands made me raisin toast each morning, and washed my face each night. They fed my pet turtle, and replaced him with a goldfish when the turtle lost all his color and seemed to turn to stone. I can see those hands covered with flour as they made cookie dough from scratch, dotted with iodine as they bandaged my knees for the umpteenth time, and raised in the air as they brought a long-neck bottle of Dr. Pepper to Grandma's parched lips.

Those hands made all the beds and had wash hanging out on the line to dry before 9:00 a.m. They darned socks, crocheted blankets, and stroked the family cat. In a time before email, they wrote letters by hand and kept a ledger of all household expenses. It was Grandma's hands that did all the packing before every family vacation, held her cards close to her breast during a rousing game of Crazy 8's, and left one dish in the microwave (unserved) each Thanksgiving. They picked flowers, turned the crisp pages of all my favorite books, and still seemed to always be cleaning, sorting, or straightening something somewhere. Plus, they gave a mean neck massage! Grandma's hands held me up when I needed them, and let me go when I needed that too.

Today, those hands look different. Consumed by the disfigurement of arthritis, Grandma's hands are more boney than before. You can see each vein and contour, and her thumbs look particularly sore. Although she cannot do most of the things she used to, Grandma stays busy. Her hands now hold my babies, loving them and rocking them to sleep. The nails, still painted delicately, move to and fro as they play Pat-A-Cake and This Little Piggy. Her grip is a little shaky and she asks for help to pick some things up, write a check, or carry a hot cup of coffee. But in every deed and every gesture, Grandma's hands are a constant expression of care.

My children only know Grandma's boney hands. And they have only seen her needing someone to lean on when coming or going as quicker legs pass her by. But they have known her heart, and for that I am eternally grateful. My children do not mind waiting a little longer for Grandma. She spoils them you see, and considers it her privilege to do so. When I try to convey that she is really their Great-grandma, they just giggle and say they know she's great.

I have learned a lot of life lessons from Grandma. She strokes my hands now and encourages me to be to my own children all that I appreciated and admired in her. I look down at my flour-covered, iodine-dotted hands, reach for a Dr. Pepper and smile.