

My Grandmother's Diary

Part 1

My Nan passed away three and a half months ago. A quick timeline of her life for reference's sake: She was 62 when my Granddad passed away, she was 77 when she started going senile, and she passed away at 84 (literally two weeks before her 85th birthday, which was a grim day).

Her death hit the family pretty hard; losing the matriarch is a painful blow to any species, especially one such as ours who are so obsessed with attaching traditions and superstitions to everything we can. But to lose that beacon of gentility within the family, y'know? The understanding one, that worshipped sacred well of endless love. For that to go, it grinds you to a halt. Or well, it did for the rest of the family. It was like they were surprised the world was still going now that she wasn't.

Don't get me wrong. I *loved* that woman with my whole heart, and then some. But, I must admit, I personally didn't speak to her all that much because, by the time I was old enough to actually maintain conversation with adults, she'd crept ever so gracefully – as graceful as such a transition can be – in to the dreaded realms of senility.

I mean, perhaps anyone reading this will have experience this already – and of course, my personal case isn't universal. But, the chunk of you that have, are or will experienced, experiencing or experience this will have an understanding of the effect that comes from such a loss.

She didn't lose the plot, so much, but she did lose herself in a manner. I'd never been able to step foot in that house without her scooping me up in my younger years – earliest memories of her all consist of me being plomped on a chair, and a knitted sweater thrown over me – or being led in before plomped on that same chair, decorated with her kisses and soon holding a plate of cookies and a glass of iced orangeade. I remember as a child, we'd visit with cousins galore for birthdays, Christmas, Easter, and even Hallowe'en (my fave, of course, and probably why I was so drawn to this sub). She'd give us all the usual, "Aren't you getting tall?" and "Aren't you going to break hearts?" as all that generation like to throw out at anyone they call grandchildren, and I'd not, wear my sweater, eat my cookies and drink my orangeade and play with my cousins as the adults got to their business.

We kept ourselves entertained with the birthday presents of whoever's turn it was, or some random, rigid ornament of times gone by, or old frayed doll, or games we'd plucked out of the endless selection our imagination would proffer. Nan's house for us was a free for all, and we loved it.

My Mum and Dad, my aunts and uncles, friends of the family or whoever else had found themselves at the home would all stay put in the living room – fire roaring and crackling away in the early nights of winter, or windows plunged wide open, both front and back of the house, to listen as the birds chirped in heraldry of the sporadic, but welcome cold zephyrs that would sail through (each one, without doubt, commented on by all the adults, "Oh, *feel* that *breeze!*")

Now, every adult present would have their teas, coffees, lemonades and cokes and, now I think about it from a pushing-thirty perspective, they never allowed us to have some. So, maybe as we kids were battling, arguing, and plunging in to the aforementioned myriad facets of our unshackled and uninhibited imaginations... they were doing what adults do best to mourn and forget the fact they lost theirs: alcohol.

I'll ask next time I visit home.

Regardless, they'd sit and listen as she would effortlessly hold the stage – which for her was a well worn-in, tea-stained, moth-eaten chair. The rose and tulip print that danced around the item of furniture with gangly stems, and meeting here and there to let their petals delicately kiss, were so faded by the numberless seasons of sun, that it almost felt like an echo of a chair.

If I was to venture even further in to pretention, bypassing 'petals kissing', I'd go as far as to draw some foreshadowing from the echo of the chair, and my poor old nan becoming an echo/ghost of her former self.

But I shan't.

She would sit on that precarious thing, overlooked by more photos that depicted the entire family tree, from a black and white crumbling portrait traced back to a date I can't recall, to the most recent fallen leaf, Uncle David. (I should check if they will be collected by anyone, and if they'd carry on the tradition, adding her sweet face to the album of my entire ancestry). Below the portraits and photographs were knitted teddies, first loose teeth, first worn shoes and oddities of love and sentimentality she'd hoarded and surrounded herself with over the years. And surrounded by so many muses, she'd tell her stories.

Most of her stories were purely anecdotal – a complaint she'd had about a neighbour or 'so-and-so, you know, Maggie's Grand Niece' who did such a such. She knew, being a sweet, dainty lady as she was, that if she threw in either eff, or blind, that the others would howl. Some of them were stories she'd heard, and masterfully recited with perfect punchlines. Some were made up, as far as I've been told. All crowd-pleasers that she'd refined for maximum response – pure nonplussed wonder, bellowing laughter, hysterical crying – like a true, wise bard.

Long story short, as we'd be playing, she'd be holding their attention with words. Just words. Perhaps this is telling, but I was in awe of how she commanded unadulterated focus from those, my parents included, when we would vie so hard for it, so often. If I ever found myself listening to one, I usually didn't understand (even though I'd mimic the reaction of the adults so I felt at one with the group), but that trancelike state she conjured: No bickering, no arguing, no talking over one another as they were won't to do. Just pure enraptured faces, mouth agape, hungry ears devouring every word served from her mouth.

Maybe that's why I wanted to tell stories as I grew older, or perhaps I'm trying to force some semblance of homage to her in a convoluted fashion because I feel guilty that, when I reached an age where I *could* have developed a proper bond with her, I upped and moved away to study. Regardless, as the years trawled forward, so too, did my love for stories in all manners, and the effects they have on people – from morality lessons to escapism, I enjoyed them all and my brain has a pedestal carved out for my Nan.

Fast forward a couple of years, and here we are. So, I moved away at 18 and I've lived in this city since. My Nan would have been, say 75-76, and thus just about to get her diagnoses – but the lead up to Uni and the slow fallout afterward, I was pretty much not privy to. As I said, we only really visited on occasion even when I lived there – other than that, she was left to her own devices, which as far as I was concerned, was more than okay with her. I could have moved back to help out, but the family were there, she had help in abundance. And I had my own circle of independence in the city, my own life, my own friends and job and deadlines and whatnot – what could I have done? I was too late, during and post-uni to try and establish that bond – or [insert excuse here]...

Sorry, I know I'm rambling on here, but maybe I'm just putting off asking for the help because I truly don't want to know, but to cut a lot of unnecessary details out, as they were going through her stuff (which I also took as a sobering reminder, as you should, that in the muted silence of death, your belongings and affectations will whisper stories and secrets of their own – accurate or not. An innocent item can be linked to seedy falsehoods, so, if that's isn't an argument of minimalism, I don't know what is.)

In their searching, they found a sizeable locked chest, which they promptly and unceremoniously broke, and within were a collection of stories that she'd written.

And I guess I use the term 'collection' lightly, because, geez, her oeuvre consisted of more scribbling and discarded attempts than I've ever read, made, attempted or all three combined; crumpled, crumpled-then-uncrumpled, faded, folded, straight and stabled, neat, messy – each one an insight in to that woman's mind at a particular time, with a peculiar something or other that took her fancy.

Much like those she told in life and sound mind, they're mostly scribbled anecdotes, or 'diary' entries without date or point of reference to place them in her timeline.

But, there're a few more substantial pieces. A few poems that aren't all too bad, a few lengthier short stories, and even a couple of novel attempts. Considering she'd had no formal training, as far as I knew, they were pretty solid attempts – and that's coming from a literary hopeful. I suppose years beyond mine, and exposure to generations and countless novels (she had a new book each visit, and some of them were within such a short timeframe) cultivate a natural storytelling style, no?

My family, all of them told me they'd read through them. But, with the sheer volume and complete disorder, it'd be an immense undertaking. It's taken me just under three weeks to even collate the paper together, never mind piece together the smaller projects she embarked on. No easy feat when some of the paper is so old its read to crumble (perhaps, not crumble, but its integrity is well and truly faded).

There's been a lot of shuffling, rearranging, a lot of scouring endless sheaves hastily bound together with no reference to one another – taking them apart and trying to deduce which is linked with which. To make matters worse, she seemingly only wrote with one damned pen, meaning I've been offered no assistance from beyond the grave in regards to ink type or colour.

And, even when I manage to complete a literary puzzle that she inadvertently birthed, some of the writing is so illegible that I can barely make some chunks out. So, I assume the family who have 'read them' just scanned bits at random, took their quick fix of sentimentality and then moved on to the more, uh, valuable trinkets and relics they really cared about.

One thing is for sure, this one piece, they didn't read, or at least took no heed to if they scanned over an excerpt because, though not particularly gruesome – at least by today's standards – it has truly hallowed me to the core, and gave advent to such in unignorable present worm of doubt. It's been niggling and eating away since, and thus, I'm here.

I'm currently working on transcribing the whole thing in to text, because a lot of it is rife with the aforementioned illegible writing, marring some words, sentences or even paragraphs. I'm having to cross-reference hasty scribble with drowsy scrawl, and doing my utmost to link a word by a similar drooping tail, sharp stroke, sudden peak or curious squiggle.

Is it *bed* or *bad*? Is it a conjoined *lad*, or even *fed*, *fad* or *had*? Or am I attacking at the complete wrong angle, helplessly confusing myself and losing a whole letter on the tiniest nuance that she'd pick up as her own art, but is lost on me, and therefore, the word is gone forever? It's infuriating work, and slow to boot.

I'll admit, there're a few bits so far I've had to abandon completely because even with a magnifying glass, it's too difficult to work it out. But, perhaps for those sections your shrewd minds and eyes would permit me to upload them with the story, and then you can work through each obscurity that has defeated me, and decipher them as a community?

I'm just tentative to bring the writings to my family because, if the narrative *is* based on truth, and this gives detail to what she got up to in the fifteen years of solitude (or so we thought) from widowhood to senility, it'll not only break the family, nut subject us to a whole shitstorm of questioning, police searches, forensics, and, well I shudder to continue but I imagine it could go as far as exhumation!

I just can't do that to them, not based on a whim.

But... I dunno.

From what I've researched, some of the details match up with local cases... and, well, as per my point 1.) about seventeen novels up, I'm sincerely unsure this is her using her spare time to write fiction, or a direct 'diaries of a _____', y'know?

Maybe I'm attaching more than I should to her 'dear journal', disorganised style (again, no direct dates but clues enough for me to do the math on certain stories, whenever I finish transcribing), or maybe – hopefully not – this is a legit account of a demon's malice (not literally, it's not a supernatural story) avoiding all suspicion, and hiding safe and comfortable in the gentle, dainty, warm and welcoming frame of a woman whom, as far as my naïve mind knew, gave and received only love.
