

A Gift Of Grace

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She's sitting on the edge of her front porch on a late summer afternoon, petting her cat and talking to my mom. The lawn spanning in front of her is lush and green, no small feat in the harsh West Texas terrain. Flowers in shades of pink and red line the sidewalk and roses edge the side of the house. She looks like she is laughing from deep within her soul. She is my grandmother, and she has been dead for almost a decade. But this picture, like so many others, is etched into my brain. And she is as vivid as the flowers in front of her house.

Her name was Grace. Jonathan Fox says, "There is something in the concept of grace that does not seek for perfection so much as find the perfect in what is." My grandmother was Grace. Originally from a large, close knit family in the lush, green woods of East Texas, she lived away from her one brother and many sisters in the middle of dust and cotton fields with a jealous, abusive man, and still found the beauty of life. I know this because she almost always smiled. Not the fake smile you get from receptionists or debutantes, but a deep smile that rose up from her core. Her smile was warm and loving, like the glow of a candle on a dark, rainy night.

Grandma Grace emanated love. Love beamed off her like the West Texas sun. You could walk into a room and feel it--not just me, not just family, but everybody. She had that kind of presence. When she hugged you, you could feel that love fill your soul. She almost always had some stray cat that had found its way to her farm taking refuge in her food, and eventually in her attention. Not many people can tame a wild country cat, but she always managed to. Grandma Grace could make you feel like there was something magical about being alive just by being around her.

Red. She loved the color red--and pink. Those colors were alive. Her flowerbeds and her closet were aflame in reds and pinks. I don't think she saw much point in buying something if it wasn't red or pink or didn't go with something red or pink. It's almost as if by choosing those bold colors she committed a secret act of defiance against the bleak West Texas horizon that seemed to never end. We would tease her about her limited color scheme, and she would just laugh, like she knew something we could never understand.

Grandma laughed a lot and her laughter was infectious. In his later years, my grandfather took to peeing 'al fresco' beside the garage when he and Grandma would come home from town (a 30 mile drive). It embarrassed her that he peed outside for everyone to see. She asked him a number of times to hold it until he got inside the house. He told her that he couldn't wait, probably because he got a thrill out of annoying her. One day, just when he was focussed on the stream he was making, she reached over and honked the horn. He must have jumped three feet in the air, and she laughed with the glee of an eight year old. He was furious, but all she could do was laugh at him. He always made it to the bathroom after that.

I have hundreds of memories of my grandmother floating around in my head. Sometimes I'll catch a glimpse of her smiling at me, or I'll catch a whiff of her Rosemilk lotion. And sometimes, like right now, I feel her love shining down on me. In moments like this, I don't so much long to see her again as I just cherish the memory. Perhaps this, too, is a gift of her grace.

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