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Project 4: Profile

We Saw Her Through the Window

We could see her rocking, in the same familiar chair, in the same familiar way, gazing dreamily out the picture window as we drove towards the house. There's Finney, Dad would say in a peculiarly proud voice. Still rockin.'

Finney was Margaret Finney, my great-grandmother. "Born the 24th of September, 1890" she would say with pride, being the oldest living member of our family. When I was born, Grandma Finney was in her 80s and lived with my father's parents. She recognized her role as matriarch.

Like a queen, she would politely inquire about the goings-on in your life and offer advice or opinions she deemed appropriate and necessary. My mother remembers that before I was born she and my father were considering naming me Sara, and no one approved, except Grandma Finney. "A good, sound, old-fashioned name," she said determinedly. The case was won; I was named.

Our first bonding moment.

When I was a wee child Grandma Finney and I spent many hours together. I would walk shyly into the living room, where she sat, and wait for her to invite me to sit down. She would see me, smile, and say, "Well Sara, come over here and sit a while with me. I'll just move my hip over and make room for you." We would then shuffle around the cramped chair, find a comfortable position, and heave a sigh of relief.

It was story time.

Her parents, originally from Scotland, had traveled to Canada on a boat to start a new life for themselves. She was the youngest of four girls and "the only one with bright red hair!" From the tales she related to me I gathered she lived up to her redheaded disposition.

The roof story comes to mind.

Grandma and her sisters decided to slide down their roof for fun one day, though their parents strictly forbade them to do so. Nevertheless, their parents were gone and the roof, with its smooth, sloped surface so ellnear to the ground, beckoned them to try it "just once." So, all the girls took one turn sliding down the roof, figuring that their parents would not know ~ha~ they disobeyed. The moment of truth came when their parents returned and questioned the girls on their activities while they were away.

"They knew," chuckled Grandma Finney. "How?" I asked, utterly amazed.

According to Grandma, the girls hadn't realized that their bottoms were all sooty and stained from the rooftop their parents saw them and "put two and two together." We were not punished, she said, but we did have to take a bath.

I always got the impression that "little Maggie" was the instigator in that episode.

How often did I hear that story? How often did I hear other stories like it? Not often enough. Grandma's stories were a gold mine rich in humor, wit, excitement, and history. They allowed glimpses into the past-

Grandma's past- giving us a window we recognized as very valuable and special. I would sit next to this ancient lady and imagine her as a young girl. flowing red locks instead of tight grey curls, blithe movements instead of slow, unsure steps, getting into mischief with her sisters just as I did with mine.

Picturing these things was easy to do-Grandma was always a girl at heart. But all was not joy for her.

The story of Jean comes to mind.

Jean was Grandma's oldest child.

She was struck by a car at the age of seven. Grandma saw the whole thing.

At the hospital, Grandma said that Jean promised her that she "would never cross the street without looking both ways again." She died shortly thereafter.

The death of Jean had a significant impact upon Grandma's life. That the man who had hit and killed her daughter never offered any condolences to her or the family haunted her for the rest of her life.

Further losses awaited Grandma; she was widowed twice and lost her only son to cancer. When she died at the age of 100, my family and I marveled at her existence. That she had lived so long and endured so much was a beacon of hope for us. Where did she derive her strength?

The story of Grandma herself comes to mind.

Though she has passed on in the physical sense, Grandma's spirit remains bright and alive in our hearts and our memories. I once heard that a person is never truly dead as long as someone remembers them. At family gatherings each one of us has a unique remembrance of Grandma which is inevitably shared at one time or another ("remember how

Grandma used to dance and sing at the piano?" ". now Grandma, SHE was one hell of a pool player! .. "). The pieces of Grandma that we lost when she died were never really lost- they were hidden, in each of us. They come together when we come together as the family that knew and loved her, as she knew and loved us. We were her strength.

Today, when I see the chair that used to rock back and forth in Grandma's timely fashion, the chair that I used to squeeze into with her so I would have a prime view through the window and see (the things) she saw, I position myself in it, carefully, and begin to rock. I close my eyes and imagine that she is there, sitting next to me, and we are picturing four little girls and a steep, sloped roof. (it is easy to do; Grandma painted a vivid Picture)

"Remember," she used to say, "when God closes a door, he always leaves a window open."

The door which opened to Grandma may have been shut, but she allowed us to peak through a window into her soul. And Grandma, to me, is still rockin.'