

Grandma's Quilt

Tiffany Streifel McCone

My maternal Grandmother made a quilt for each of her grandchildren. Grandma Emma didn't much care for the patchwork variety. She liked to take two large pieces of fabric and sew them together around the edges, one piece solid, the other with a print. She then would sew an elaborate, beautiful pattern which could be clearly seen on the solid side. She always matched them carefully; my Grandmother hated it when colors clashed. I remember the room she set up in when she was working. The whole piece was suspended on four pedestals, taking up most of the space in the room. Then, she would draw out the pattern she wanted to make and stitch by stitch, she would hand sew it; turning two insignificant pieces of cloth into something beautiful.

I received my Grandma Quilt when I was eighteen. It was my high school graduation present from her. When I went off to college my mama asked me, "Do you want to take your quilt from Grandma?" I replied, "No, I'm not ready yet." My Grandmother was still very much alive, but I knew it wouldn't be that way forever. Some part of me knew that this quilt was a gift to be treasured for the rest of my life, even when I was young and thought I had the world figured out. I knew that the moment I took possession of it, I would have to officially be a

"Never have children, only grandchildren." Gore Vidal ~§~ "I always

grownup, because only a grownup could care for such a precious thing.

A few years later, after my Grandmother had her first stroke, I moved to San Francisco. She was very much changed from the woman she used to be by that time. She was the type of woman who never forgot a birthday, who made every one of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren sure they were her favorite. After she had the stroke, she had a hard time placing us. You could see recollection in her eyes at that time, although that seemed to fade over the years. When I was packing up my life to start a new one, my mama called. She inquired, “Do you want to take your quilt from Grandma?” I replied, “No, I’m not ready yet.”

After a couple of years living in San Francisco, I got the call from my mama. Grandma had passed away. I wept. I got a plane ticket. I went home to say goodbye. It was one of the most difficult things I have ever done; not only having to say goodbye myself, but having to watch my mother say goodbye to her mother. I kept thinking that, one day, I would need to do the same myself. My mother was my Grandmother’s only daughter; I am my mother’s only daughter. It is a bond unlike any other, and to see it broken by death is unbearable. I stayed a while, and when I was getting ready to pack up and head back home, Mama asked again...“Do you want to take your quilt from Grandma?” I replied, “No, I’m not ready yet.”

Years passed. I reconnected with Joel and moved to Seattle. He and I got married. I was quite settled into my life. For one reason or another – I don’t recall what at present – we had to take the truck back to North Dakota for a visit. When I was home spending some quality time with my mama, she said “Tiffany, the quilt from Grandma is still here. I think it’s time you take it home now.” I paused for a moment, and then said “Okay, do you have something I can put it in to keep it safe?”

give my grandkids a couple of quarters when they go home. It's a bar-

She put it in a plastic trash bag for me. I packed it in the cab of the truck because I couldn't stand the thought of throwing it in the back. I brought it into my house and immediately put it into a drawer. I had it now, in my possession, but I still wasn't ready for the responsibility.

In its warm, comfy drawer it remained for four years...until this evening.

I was in the process of washing the sheets and making up my guest bedroom. It is a room that is closed off to the cats and the dogs...for the most part even to Joel and me. We rarely have cause to go into this room. After I put the clean sheets on and fluffed the pillows, a strange notion hit me. I went into my room and opened the drawer and there it was, still sealed in the bag that mama put it in. I carried it to my spare room and gently took it out. I spread it over the bed, solid side up. I traced the pattern, noticing that there were still ink marks from when Grandma first drew it out. I looked at the stitches, each sewn by her very own hands.

I lay down upon it, thinking about my Grandma Emma. I remembered how I would pick strawberries in the garden and would come inside, SO excited to eat them. She would help me wash them, then put just a bit of sugar on them and set them in the refrigerator for a while. They tasted better that way. I remembered the smell of her house. I remembered how she would burn toast and then scrape all of the burned bits off saying, "It's still good!" I remembered playing Aggravation with her, and how she would let me win because she knew if I lost too many times in a row I would quit playing; she loved playing that game so much. I remembered the salmon-colored suit that she wore on Sundays and her red pants and how she always had the perfect accessories to go with everything. I remembered how it felt when she touched my face and told me that I just didn't know how much she loved me. I remember

how utterly comfortable and safe and loved I felt whenever she was near.

I let it all wash over me. I wept. I smiled. I missed her terribly.

Then, I got up and finished making the bed. I knew that she would not approve of the way the color of the quilt clashed with the sheets, so I threw the duvet over the top, keeping its presence there my own little secret to cherish.

I have been changed a little bit this evening. I became more of a grownup. I think Grandma would be pleased.

Saturday Nights

Alice King Greenwood

Saturday night dinners
 evolve from lidded bowls
 of leftovers tucked into
 nooks and crannies of the frig.
 Sometimes the contents merge
E Pluribus Unum style
 in my soup pot, sometimes
 share space in the microwave,
 creating instant smorgasbord

– like quilts that Grandma sewed
 from fabric scraps
 left from home-made dresses
 or cut from Grandpa’s pants,

wouldn't have given us grandmothers.” Linda Henley ~§~ “Becoming

the parts not frayed or shiny,
dull blue squares, brown or gray,
spiked by red yarn tie-tufts
at the corners

– like fragments of Palmolive,
Ivory, Camay, Lifebuoy,
too small to wrap a cloth around,
water-worn slivers
trapped in wire baskets,
shaken into dish-washing suds.

Saturday nights I think of
Grandma and Grandpa, and how
they would have loved microwaves
and electric blankets
and bottles of green liquid soap.

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To My Little House

Violet Greene (1896-1985)

When I am gone from here someone I may not know
will sit in this same place to read and sew.

Someone perchance I've never seen
will sleep in my bedroom and dream.

On this shady porch enjoy the cool breeze,
from this kitchen window watch the moon
rise through the trees.

Another will come and go through this same door
but it will be her home, not mine anymore.

I accept this inevitable end,

I only hope whoever comes to stay
loves you as much as I did yesterday.

What Granny Left Me

Pat Kelsey

A hurried trip today brought back many memories, and not just of the distant relative whose funeral I attended with my son and his twins. After paying respects and assuring of our love and prayers, we decided to take a detour on the way home. David wanted his twelve-year-old boys to see where his Granny and Pops had lived for sixty-one years.

We knew the place had been abandoned for a long time, but really seeing for ourselves what time had done to the old house almost made me wish I hadn't gone. The little house, whose mortar held rocks brought by friends and family from all over the world, was very sad. The roof was full of holes; the sleeping porch was missing one of its two walls of windows. Of course there was dust and trash everywhere. Someone had used the house to store tools and parts of farm machinery.

As I stood in the middle of the kitchen, I could see something in the top back corner of the cabinet my mother-in-law had been so proud to have built. I stepped to get a closer look and realized it was Granny's last "sprinkling bottle," from before the days of steam irons, electric dryers and wash-and-wear fabrics, when women sprinkled clean, dry clothes with a little water, rolled them up in an old towel or blanket for an hour or so, then ironed them.

I could almost see my mother-in-law, standing over the clothes, shaking that bottle gently. She not only did her own

have one person who knows how to bless us despite the evidence, Grand-

ironing but that of people in her community for many years, so I had seen her doing that chore often. The sprinkler top was very worn and bent for she had used it a long time. Holding Granny's sprinkler, my mind went to other activities that had filled her kitchen, hub of the house. Granny was almost always there, cooking, baking, ironing, washing dishes. I think she did a lot of her praying at that sink. She always left two or three items to wash the next morning – said she felt better starting off the day that way.

I could also see Granny bringing in buckets of milk from the one or two cows she kept. She strained and set the milk to cool before we scooped off the thick, pure cream on top. Granny provided her own beef from calves she raised and pork from her pigs. Eggs and chicken came from her hen house and we fought over her fried chicken, the “cream of the crop.” Her garden supplied an endless array of vegetables, including the turnip greens that were a tradition for our Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners.

I shook my head to think of all the work done in the little kitchen. All the canning, preserving, pickling, batches of jam and jelly cooked up can never be counted. Granny provided from her own hands so many things we take for granted these days. All was done with a gentleness of hand and heart, with love for making a home for family and the pleasure of having something to share with unexpected visitors.

And Granny did take pleasure in her tasks. She always whistled under her breath as she worked. I asked her once what would she do if she couldn't whistle. She thought a minute, then said, “Well, I'm not sure I could work!”

I walked out the door of the little rock house and noticed Granny's old Maytag wringer washer lying in the weeds out back. If it could talk, it would not only tell you more stories about Granny's hard work but about the time she leaned over too

mother was that person to me.” Phyllis Theroux ~§~ “It's one of na-

far and the wringer got part of her! Good thing Pops was close by that day because she had to holler for help when she couldn't reach the handle. She always said, "I won't tell what got hung, but it wasn't fun!" But she laughed anyway.

It was time to go. I picked my way through the weeds back to the car, thinking of what Granny had left us – not much in material things, but that sweet lady took me under her wing when I was a young bride. She taught me to cook and bake and so many other things more valuable, like trusting the Lord to take care of us, looking on the bright side of life, laughing a lot, working hard and spending wisely, putting the needs of her home and family as the most important duties of her day, and 'sprinkling' love everywhere, to everyone.

I knew all that, but the old sprinkler bottle helped remind me. Granny was some lady. I hope I never let her down.

Self-portrait

Becky Haigler

The older I get the more I see their faces in my mirror — grandfathers' noses, grandmothers' jowls, mother's hair and hands, the piercing blue of daddy's eyes. On the inside I am still 25, slim and straight, strong and too independent, but anyone who meets me now gets the benefit of generations of gentleness settling into soft folds, taking the edge off some of the selfishness. Most days.

ture's ways that we often feel closer to distant generations than to the

Horse Racing With Pappy *Linda O'Connell*

I'm four. I sit with Pappy on the porch in the evening breeze.
Cicadas sing; Pappy hums to the music of the rustling leaves.

"Horses are coming. Listen!" He whispers in my ear.
I look up and down the street; no horses do I see or hear.

Pappy drums his fingers in a rhythmic clop-clop-clop.
I laugh and squeal and watch as Pappy's "horses" trot.

Pappy says, "I'll race you." I say, "Again-again-again!"
I cannot make my fingers go as fast as Pappy's can.

Pappy's horses pound the rail; and when the race complete,
Two winded horses laugh out loud. My Pappy can't be beat!

There!

Johnsie Noel

The distance between tall stands of summer corn to my right and the creek bank at left, spans a mere two lanes as the car races toward my dream destination. At least it feels like racing, what with windows unfurled and hair dancing in a tangled mess around my face. The air is heavy with corn, manure, and the breath of a balmy July hanging over the asphalt.

Dappled patterns play across the windshield and my face as I move in and out of shadowy canopies lining the creek. My favorite among nature's umbrellas is the weeping willow; with her slender arms cascading down to water's edge in folding falls of foliage, ebbing and flowing against the summer breeze. I don't see it yet; when I do I will know I am almost there.

A few more miles to go, I extend an arm out the window and the rush blows it in wavy patterns; to and fro, undulating over and under. I cup my hand and stop the air, only for a moment, before she regains control and pushes me away. My skin tingles from the intangible assault. I wonder if I can touch a passing car, but become afraid to take the dare my mind so dangerously tosses upon my tongue. "What would happen if..." I whisper to no one.

The car slows her assault on the asphalt, macadam, as we call it here in the mountain valleys of my old haunts. No one has heard of macadam in the southern tier where bastardized words succumb to the drawl. They also think it silly when I call

children don't stay young forever, which is good because Pop-pops have

Pine Creek, C-R-I-C-K. But that is what I have known and forever how it will cross my lips. As the car begins to roll forward I know just one more bantam bridge and then I will see my childhood willow and the millstone by the mailbox that greets the drive and invites us in.

I love the signaling sound four tires make as rubber meets the gravelly granules lining the drive. It is like the homespun popping and metallic pinging of popcorn beginning its eruption on the edges of a hot oiled pan. It is the cue my grandmother awaits; the signal to alight from her *Readers Digest* in the living room where the grandfather clock rhythmically counts out the days. She has never missed greeting us at the back door or waving goodbye from the front.

As car doors slam upon our arrival I linger in my stretch, shut my eyes and breathe in the scenery. A local dairy cow bellows hello from a nearby pasture, the babbling brook that giddily tumbles to the crick gurgles in salutation, and the hickory tree drops a few “Welcome Home” gifts to the ground; their smell is rotten, pungent, green and familiar. I am there...

Ready to step the flagstone stairs leading to her back porch I am jarred from nocturnal concoctions by the sleep-jerk of my leg and the frantic waving of my hand above my head, both unawares that I was dreaming and still trying to say – here. Here. I am over here. As cobwebs roll back into the ceiling, cotton-headed and trying to right my brain, I roll over pulling the comfort of covers with me and remember she died five years ago, the grandfather clock along with her no longer counting out his days. The last time I truly traveled down that road I found it so disconcerting, the back door devoid of her smiling embrace. It had been years since my presence last helped her move from *Readers Digest* reverie to arriving family. I still visit, but now only occasionally when my dreams allow and each wave hello is really a solemnifying goodbye until I truly arrive

only so many horsey rides in them.” Gene Perret ~§~ “When grand-

there, beyond memory's gatekeeper, and tell her how much she meant to me...until I truly arrive – there."

Start Them Young!

Ginny Greene

Cutest picture
comes to mind
baby Maddie, cuddled
in Daddy's lap,
listening to his voice.
He's reading to her,
not fairy tales
as expected, but
stories from the book I wrote
about her Mama and
her aunties, growing up -
history lessons
begun early.

Thirty Years After

Jim Pascual Agustin

All the children knew
when he opened his mouth
there'd be a sudden smell
of warm earth after a downpour.

His voice hovered between
rasp of dry leaves
and snap of brittle branches.
Even when he was quiet,
his long fingers still on the thick
wooden ledge, we felt
the weight of his eyes
slowing down our marbles.

He was just an old man.
We taunted him
with our noise.

All he had was a cane and a bad aim.
Those unstable legs once took him
through jungle and hostile countryside
in times of war, to get my mother
to safety. Or so I'm told

Thirty years after his passing.

One-Sided Conversation

Donna Stone

Oh, yes, I know, he doesn't talk, he doesn't appreciate you, you are tired of doing all the work in this relationship. Listen here, at the very least he puts up with your mouth and that's a great feat, if you ask me.

Listen, girl, do you want to know what love is? It is not that dream you are chasing after. That man does not exist. You think you want someone who is the end all and be all, and if that's the case, your search isn't for a mortal man.

Love isn't hearts and flowers. Love is washing dirty socks and working hard to pay bills you didn't make. Love is making doctor's appointments that he won't make for himself while he fights you every inch of the way. It's letting him fix the plumbing when you know something's bound to go wrong... again. Love is choosing to keep trying when all you really want to do is run away as fast as you can. What? Doesn't sound too attractive? Well, the sweet is there too, along with the bitter. Where, she says, where. Everywhere.

One day you will watch him hold the child you made together. Suddenly you will love your man more than you ever loved anyone before. This love isn't the giddy romance you think you want. It is real love that burns itself into your heart so deep it can never be erased.

you all day and now the day was complete." Marcy DeMaree ~§~

He will bring you grocery store carnations on Valentine's Day. He will give them with eagerness and longing, echoes of infant manhood shyly courting and the sweet young thing accepting the gift. And you will fall some more.

You will return home from a trip away, and he will crush you to him and fiercely whisper, "Don't ever leave me again." You will see his fear and longing, and be surprised by its intensity. Then you will understand what true passion is.

When you throw a pot of face cream and burst into tears because he won't talk to you, he will get a cloth and wipe up the mess without comment. You will learn to appreciate his silences.

You will mourn and move apart, unable to find each other in the storm of grief. Things will break that cannot be mended, but you will gingerly pick up the shards together, and stand side by side.

When your eyes are hollowed and blackly shadowed with illness, he will lay his hand on the sharp bones that were once a full, soft cheek. He will tell you everything a woman longs to hear her lover say, without speaking a word. The years of beauty that he sees will be reflected in those gray-green windows to his soul. He will give you strength to go on, and you will live.

So you decide what to do. Complain and cry. Talk a bit. Feel sorry for yourself. Then dry your tears and go home. If you think it's worth the effort to search out the gold.

Banned From Glory Land

Karen Beatty

In 1944 my Mamaw Reece wasn't known as a big talker, but at Sunday services at the Born Again Church of Jesus Christ in Colliersville, Kentucky, she was usually the first to raise it. The Holy Spirit never failed to move her, and she was – praise Jesus – wholly sanctified by the Lord.

“Hallelujah, I am so glad that Jesus loves me,” she would begin wailing.

According to my Mother, the next thing you knew, “Mamaw was a-stormin’ the aisle, speakin’ in tongues, her red hair a-flyin’ ever which way.”

Though I never met Mamaw Reece, I could picture exactly what Mother meant in this description, because in the 1950's I often witnessed just such whooping rejoinders and flinging of bodies unto the altar at the beckoning of the Lord, especially during the weeklong tent revival meetings where Mother's eldest sister, my Aunt Eula Reece Patrick, was a pastor. At age ten I was entranced when “Sister” Eula Patrick preached to the fine church ladies, who would lift up shaking and moaning – arms extended upward, palms exposed – and cry out to Jesus for salvation and the greater glory. No hip action was permitted among the virtuous, of course, so the gyrations of the ladies were confined to the arms, shoulders and feet.

My Mother said my Mamaw, Sarah Lovely Reece, died of “the consumption.” I never understood exactly what that meant,

generation.” Lois Wyse ~§~ “Uncles and aunts, and cousins, are all

but apparently Mamaw was all skin and bone when she passed, and it went pretty hard on the younguns and Lacy Rae Reece, my Papaw. Papaw had sired nine children with his beloved wife before she died at the age of 35.

Over the years, I gleaned lots of stories about Mamaw Reece. In her lifetime, she enjoyed a reputation for being God-fearin' and more than a little touched by the hand of the Lord. Mamaw was known to the neighbors as a healer – one able to lay on hands to dispel illness and bad spirits. (Her gift never seemed to work in her own interest, though, especially with regard to Papaw's alcoholism.) A quiet and humble woman born and reared in Sow Holler, Sarah Lovely Reece was fiercely protective of her kin and kind. According to the historical society, she was part native American – a direct descendent, through her own mother, of Golden Hawk Sizemore of the Cherokee tribe.

Upon her death there was no doubt that Mamaw Reece was delivered to her rightful place in Glory Land. Mother said the most accurate accolade bestowed upon Mamaw during the eulogy at her church was: "Sister Sarah Lovely Reece put her faith in Jesus and sacrificed her life for her children." Always, the family and the Lord. My mother, Flo-Anna Reece Jenkins, would likewise choose that as the template for her life. For one not so inclined, like me, such sacrifice is a punishing act to follow. As a young child growing up in the Appalachian Mountains of Colliersville I felt obligated to embrace fundamentalist beliefs; besides, I desperately wanted to feel the spirit. As I approached adolescence, however, I gave way to my inner skeptic. I wanted to say to Aunt Eula and others, "I ain't lost, so how kin I be found?" But I never had the nerve. I also secretly wondered if all those so-called holy-roller folks really believed, actually felt religion, or just played at it. According to my observations, being saved didn't seem to influence people's

very well, and fathers and mothers are not to be despised; but a grand-

behavior. As far as I could tell, there were just as many drunks and sinners at church as in jail. And in my judgment the church people were always being born again, saved again, and falling to their knees in repentance after they had committed their particular transgressions. It seemed to me that if they truly had religion, they wouldn't be acting so bad to begin with.

By the time I was twelve years old, I had determined to make the most of my earthly days, as I did not appear to be destined for the rapture and the welcoming gates of Glory Land. Of course I never discussed such issues with anyone in Kentucky. To utter blasphemous thoughts aloud would surely have resulted in the true believers condemning me to the pits of Hell, instead of their just obviously allowing me to languish in earthly sanguinity, along with the other designated "left behinds."

Certainly, every effort had been expended to set me on the road to salvation. I heard plenty of preaching and praying and praising and supplicating at Aunt Eula Patrick's tent revivals, from the Freewill Baptists, and from the Methodists. A few years after Mamaw passed, Mother switched over from the Born Again Church of Jesus Christ at Sow Creek to the United Methodist Church in Colliersville proper. Though we lived on the bank of the Churnin' River, behind the Freewill Baptist Church, Mother resented and snubbed the Baptists, who billed themselves as "the only true believers." Neither Mother nor her Daddy, Papaw Reece, ranted about being saved or born again, but they were both proud to be counted among the righteous. In their daily routines, time was allotted to read the Bible and recite prayers. Still, all that preaching and praying and churchin' seemed inexplicably lost on me. Getting caught up in a rousing gospel spiritual was the only kind of rapture I could fathom, and I was only able to find God in the silences, never in the talk of prayer.

mother, at holiday time, is worth them all." Fanny Fern ~§~ "It is as

Sometimes, when I attended services with Mother at the United Methodist Church, I imitated the posturing of the devout, but I never managed to authentically find the passion for public worship in my heart, mind or soul. I figured that was one of the few turns of nature I had inherited from my Daddy.

On the other hand, if the “teachin’ and preachin’ were not reachin’” me, the music certainly was. I always felt connected to the Holy Spirit through gospel music and also through Mother’s singing about the Lord and the mountains. “Singin’s twicet prayin’,” she said. Mamaw Reece had taught mother songs for all manner of moods and circumstances. When she was feeling playful, she would clap and stomp and warble to us children, “Gimme that old-time religion, it’s good enough for me!” When she was sad or lonely, she would sing a melancholy hymn like: “I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses, and the voice I hear falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses.”

In her latter years, when Mother seemed more of the spirit world than the earthly one, she relied on the old traditional hymns, the ones with sentiments of affliction like: “On a hill far away, stood the old rugged cross, the emblem of sufferin’ and shame.” I was appalled by the words, but the music and the spirit were locked into my very soul, and, like my Mother and Mamaw Reece, I often sang my sorrow and joy, even if the words were considerably more secular. While I will never enter Glory Land in the fundamentalist sense, I guess I have to conclude that a part of me will surely dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

grandmothers that our mothers come into the fullness of their grace.”
