

Grandma 1917-2009

Written November 6, 2009

What brings us together today is Grandma's death. But praise the Lord, He has overcome death to bring us life, everlasting life. So let us use this time to remember Grandma's life here on earth and to celebrate who the Lord created her to be. I am thankful that Grandma lived a long life. I am thankful Grandma kept records of her life, like her courtship to Grandpa and writings about her children. I am thankful for Grandma's spunk, like the time when Grandpa asked her to pass the salami at the dinner table and she picked up a piece and threw it at him with a matter of fact attitude like "here you go." I am thankful for Grandma's ability to laugh at herself. Rarely have I ever heard Grandma say a bad word, but when she out of deep frustration at us grandkids' playfulness late into the evening hours yelled at Bre, "Get the hell upstairs!" we have never let her forget it. She didn't take herself too seriously to get upset by our mocking, but even laughed when we teased her and although rarely, she complied to our requests for her to reenact such an uncharacteristic phrase. But most importantly, I am thankful for Grandma's stability. This is what I want to focus on most.

Let's talk about Grandma's marriage to Grandpa first because **her** stability is not as accurate as **their** stability. Her commitment to their marriage of 54 years continued after Grandpa's death. Remembering him and longing to have him near in her memories only makes sense after learning to become one for 54 years. In fact, I think it was only in the last two years that she started to seriously consider the nursing home director's proposal for marriage. But on a more serious note, as a newlywed learning the challenges of becoming one, I cannot imagine Grandma's challenge of learning to become one-half after a strong, steady commitment to Grandpa.

Next, I want to talk about the stability of Grandma and Grandpa's home, or better known to the family as The Farm. They lived at the farm since 1952. I must be honest when I think of not having Grandma's presence with us any longer, great sadness arises because it feels even more real that the farm is no longer a home, our home. It became that when Grandpa passed on and Grandma moved into an apartment, but for some reason it feels even truer now that Grandma has passed on as well. We know home is not

the wooden structure, cement foundation, or vinyl siding, but it is the people cooking meals, the welcoming hugs after a long drive, and the laughter of family together. Grandma and grandpa are the only Kerkvliets I know that have lived in one place for 48 years. Their home, the farm, was a stable place with regular meals. Every morning I woke up in the first room just upstairs from the dining room and heard people talking at the table over the usual cereal, toast, and banana breakfast, I would get out of bed and rush downstairs, so I wouldn't miss another minute. I think my childhood excitement didn't arise from looking forward to the simple food, but out of great anticipation to be part of the family bond I so strongly felt at the farm.

Lunch at the farm was nothing glamorous either, but it was time in the middle of the day when everyone would come together. I remember we wouldn't eat until Grandpa came in from working on whatever project he had on the farm, and he always had a project. I can remember it so well. I would usually help set the table by putting the once white placemats decorated with oversized smiling vegetables onto the extended beautiful dark wooden table. Grandpa always had the end seat, which was extra sturdy with arm rests and a cushion. Whichever grandkids were around would continue to place the glasses, plates, and silverware on the table along with the plate of bread for sandwiches and usually a jar of Grandma's homemade canned pickles. This would be the first meal where we were all together before eating occurred, so we would say grace. Usually Grandma and Grandpa would softly and quickly speak a memorized prayer ending with the sign of the cross, and then we would eat.

Dinner would be similar to lunch but the food usually was a bit more glamorous, like hot ham and potato bake and steamed fresh green beans from the garden. Or maybe if it was one of those really special times when all the family was present, we would remove the puzzle from the fold out table and set the kids table and the big table while Uncle Steve prepared his famous spaghetti. It didn't matter who was cooking, there was always dessert. I am pretty sure every Kerkvliet has a sweet tooth that grows in at the age of 7 because it is with us for life. And we all know Grandma never lost hers every time we took her to Perkins and she'd eat one-tenth of her meal but all of her pie. Dessert at the farm was usually a Schwann's ice cream treat, such as a sherbet push-up or fudgsicle. We would take our choice treat and make our way into the living room to

watch the rest of the nightly news and wheel-of-fortune as we chewed on the little plastic umbrellas remaining from the push-ups. We usually would then gather back around the now freshly cleared and wiped table to play a card game such as May I, Royal Rummy, or competitive solitaire with as many people who were daring enough to compete against Grandma's quick eye-hand coordination. Yells, screams, and laughter were common sounds during this table gathering. Once the games were finished we returned again to the living room and the smell of popcorn would soon fill the air. This may have been the only time Grandpa fiddled around in the kitchen. He would quietly bring us each a small wooden bowl of popcorn he made in the popcorn maker, and we would continue to stare at the tv, mindlessly eating our popcorn gift.

There were many patterns besides mealtimes that Grandma and Grandpa led at the farm that gave our family members struggling with chaos such as divorce, moving, and other changes a place of safety, predictability, and wholeness. They showed us contentment and dedication with keeping one job of time-consuming labor on a dairy farm. We participated in the stability that Grandma and Grandpa had in attending and serving in one church body. They demonstrated stability in their economics by not purchasing more than they were able, or even much more than they needed. There was something special about having the same set of dishware, old pictures on the wall, and bed sets as we ventured back to the farm each year to explore the nooks and crannies we were so familiar with. Grandma and Grandpa's simplicity brought us stability. They also conveyed stability in their quietness. Maybe they learned that the best way to tame the tongue was to rarely use it. I have no memories of them talking negatively about each other or others, and this integrity of speech provided us stability as well. But most importantly, no matter our distance or actions, Grandma and Grandpa demonstrated stability in their love for us. This is why I want to celebrate Grandma's life today. Let us continue on, remembering her love, her peace, her steadfastness, let us continue to reap what she would want us to from her life, the stability she has helped us to have in all of our lives. May the peace of Christ which was the foundation of Grandma's life be with you.