

League of Utah Writers



Magazine Article

Statewide Contest

"You Know How Grandma Is"

There can be a world of love between you and your mother or your mother-in-law, but you can still be worried when the children stay with grandma. Maybe she uses too much fat in her cooking or lets the children stay up so late they are cranky with you the whole next day. Perhaps you know a few worries are trivial but maybe a few aren't. Maybe grandma has different religious beliefs or her politics are not what you want your children to hear. Or maybe she doesn't dress until noon, which is simply not acceptable in your home.

In her book, 'Mother of My Mother,' author Hope Edelman remembers, "Marcia, you've got to listen to me," my father pleaded. "That kind of behavior is not normal." Her mother looked away and answered in words that describe everything and nothing, "You know how she is." The powerlessness you can feel when dealing with a grandma is almost as great as the strength of the stereotype grandma can hide behind....

...Humor is strong in favorite stories. Marlene's grandma called her when she was feeling sick with her first pregnancy and asked, "Do you have something you didn't take with a spoon?"...

...Words and examples fly from a grandma's generation, over the heads of children and land as poignant memories on grandchildren. They learn in many ways. One of Sue's grandmas bought her Nancy Drew mysteries and taught her to enjoy the "Grand Canyon Suite." Her other grandmother, "lived in the deep south and was extremely prejudiced against black people. This was during the '60s. I was living in Maryland at the time where my school and all other parts of my life were fully integrated racially. I had friends who were black. When I'd go to visit my grandmother in the summer, it would hurt me to hear her talk so negatively about blacks. My mother told me I was not to argue with her because she was old and had a different frame of reference and wasn't likely to change her mind. I accepted that and I loved her very much..."

...Whether words melt like butter or have a sharp edge, they are said in a space of recognized family membership. As grandchildren sit by us at family gatherings, in our kitchens and living rooms or as we drive down a street, they are gathering information outside of their parents, school and playmates. In these "feeling places," as Dr. Kornhaber writes, grandchildren learn who and what we are...

..."Be authentic and real," are words Ellen wants to be learned. I believe that is what is felt when Leslie remembers her Grandma Annie as she looks at a lace tablecloth Annie made for her daughter, Bernice. "I love to get it out and look at all that intricate crocheting, and appreciate the love and effort that went into making it." I'm sure when Terry bakes Irish Bread that she learned from her Grandmar, she is being authentic and real. There are four octagon shaped prints that hang in my study from my grandma's living room. When I quietly gaze at them I remember the peace and serenity of my grandma's house...

...I wouldn't be surprised if my son has had to say, "You know how she is," as an ingratiating apology or bald description. My best hope is that he and my daughter-in-law affectionately laugh and only slightly roll their eyes, because the alternative universe I can provide will only give their daughters more love and more ways of choosing their way in the world.

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