

For Grandma

"I'm glad you got to know me, as more than some old woman." My grandmother said this to me on what would be one of our last ambling drives through small towns and woods in southern Maine. I of course scoffed, as I had all the other times she made references to her end. Some things were immutable, I thought. The sun rises in the east, sets in the west, and Marjorie Jamback would be there to see it, forever.

My first memories of her revolve around typical "grandma" things. The smell of rising bread, warm stacks of pancakes in the morning, followed by an assault with a wet face cloth down the back of my neck. We had a deep connection from the beginning, and I knew early on how deep and wide her love was.

I really got to know her as I got older and began visiting her alone. We would talk for hours, about anything. Her interests were wide, and even though she always insisted that she wasn't too smart, she always had thoughtful and wise reflections to offer.

Many would describe my grandmother as fearless, but I can tell you that she was anything but. She shared with me her doubts and insecurities, and issues with self-worth would be a constant in her life. This did not dissuade her from reinventing herself so many times in her life. She dove in headfirst again and again, every time feeling intense anxiety, but forward she went. This is not to suggest that she was in anyway meek. She had a deep sense of pride, always standing on her own two feet, as small as they may be. She also had a fiery temper, one that I piqued a number of times, particularly when I did not live up to her expectations of me, which were often quite higher than my own.

Her guiding principle, and the core of her being, was empathy. Everyone who knows that particular sparkle that would come across her eye while sharing good news, hopes and dreams, or a good joke knows this to be true. She couldn't help but feel all the joys and sorrows of those she cared for, and she gave herself wholly and genuinely to those in need. Her sense of the inherent dignity and worth that belongs to every person gave her a profound passion for justice and is reflected in her lifelong political activism.

She lived every day with principle. Always doing what was right and greeting everyone with kindness and respect. It wasn't the easy way, but for her, it was the only way.

It is now the responsibility of all of us who loved her to continue her legacy, to recognize and validate the worth of every person we meet. Simply put, to give a damn, and show it.

Each of us has a voice in our head, one that calls us to do what is right for ourselves, for each other, and for the whole world. For me, that voice will always be hers.

Goodbye, and thank you, my greatest mentor, confidant, and friend. I'm glad I got to know you too.

I will love you and miss you forever.

Doug