

Memories of a Grandmother

Written by Kathleen McCarthy
Tuesday, 27 March 2001 18:00

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My grandmother passed a year ago March 27, 2000, but it seems like last week. I am amazed at how intense the memories still are, and of course the pain of her passing. I loved her so much, and delighted in her persona. She was truly one of a kind, so there is no way to replace the void she has left. I keep thinking about how fortunate her grandchildren are to have had such a foothold in terms of our heritage. Grandma was always able to bridge the gap of generations, not only between hers and ours, but ours and her parents and grandparents.

Nothing I write here will ever do justice to the grandness of Gretchen McCarthy. Her good friend Elaine Gottlieb passed this past month, nearly a year after grandma. I have so many memories of Elaine and all the tremendous ladies who were my grandmother's friends because I had the joy of living with Gretchen for 25 years. In a sense, her friends became mine as well. These women epitomized an era of elegance and grace, most especially Elaine. Grandma always lauded Elaine for her exquisite sense of style, her warmth and fun nature. Their generation knew how to live and how to socialize with flare and great fun. Much of our generation simply doesn't participate anymore, at least not in the same way. My grandparents' generation held parties that were huge and inclusive. Everyone joined in; the more the merrier was evidenced by the enormity of the events and the guest lists. The gatherings were extravagant. Such events provided tremendous entertainment and a large social network that allowed the participants to enjoy one another outside the confines of a purely professional structure. The music, the fabulous food and décor, the glamorous attire, the laughter and great wit made for unparalleled stories and lifelong memories.

But grand isn't just about extravagance. It is also about spirit and joie de vivre, about compassion and forgiveness, about tenderness and generosity, about humor and intelligence. These things all describe Grandma, and there is still so much more. She approached most things with brutal honesty that had a solid underpinning of wisdom and truth. Things were simple for Grandma; she didn't convolute her opinions with a lot of analysis or second-guessing. She sized things up quickly and with amazing accuracy. It took me many years to appreciate how clear thinking she really was. Because much of her assessment came in the form of criticism, it could be tough to swallow, but I can't count the number of times that I have thanked God that she bothered because she influenced me enough to steer me away from potential

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disaster toward the good in my life.

I find myself engaging in activities that she used to do in her last years to feel closer to her, such as saying the rosary, working crosswords, and voraciously reading. She was always enormously interested in business topics, especially in what my father was involved in (they talked endlessly about such matters), and my aunt's spectacular itinerary of volunteerism, fundraising, and professional and personal involvement in the arts and culture of Milwaukee. I never saw anyone more proud of her children and grandchildren than my grandmother. Nor was there ever a grandmother more enjoyed by her family than Gretchen. Of all the things that Grandma valued most in life, humor was at the top of the list. There wasn't a conversation had where laughter didn't enter into it. She was quick-witted and so appreciated the same quality in her children and friends. She had fun with everyone; anyone who knew her will attest to it. It is absolutely one of the best ways to remember someone you love because there is more joy than sadness in it. So don't be surprised to find me sitting quietly smiling, it's because I am reminded of one of the countless moments of amusement we shared together. I suspect she is smiling too.

A Word About Ray Teeple

I remember a few years after we started the Reader, I was sitting in my office having one of those days where I was firmly on the pity pot, complaining about the disinterest of the world relative to the vital issues that impact our lives, blah blah blah. The mail arrived and I looked down to see another letter from Ray Teeple, who consistently wrote me letters, of which I only printed a handful.

I opened the letter to read about several different topics that had caught Ray's attention that particular week. I instantly felt ashamed that I was lamenting the lack of interest when here was a gentleman who unfailingly participated by submitting information he felt compelled to share. I later learned that Ray was disabled, and that the effort of typing, copying, mailing, and generally disseminating his information to all of us did not come easy for him. Yet he persevered. Looking at his most recent letter, I felt regenerated, re-inspired, and tremendously grateful to him for his efforts. He was a true activist. He was consistent in his views, and he generously shared the wealth of information that he came across. He must have read endlessly, because he was always sharing an article, a page from a book, data that he considered need-to-know information. In other words, he did his duty as a citizen. He cared enough to try and educate the public about issues that confront us daily. I didn't always agree with Ray's perspective, and I didn't print most of what he sent me, but I did read it, and I was always appreciative of his efforts. Ray Teeple passed recently, and this community lost a strong American. He will be fondly remembered for his civic vigilance and persistence. I just wish there were a million more like him.

Where is the Line?

As nearly 300 acres of development in Davenport moves forward at next week's council meetings, the score is three for it all, regardless of any negative impacts—Aldermen McGivern, Sherwood, and Brown. At least one alderman is firmly opposed because he believes the impact

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of the development is not in the community's best long-term interest—Aldermen Hean. The rest are waffling because they don't know, don't do their homework, or who are merely posturing, as is the case with Aldermen Englemann (who openly admits he has unanswered questions and concerns, but continues to vote in favor of the development regardless). No amount of infrastructure improvements agreed upon to date between the city and the developers will improve traffic at 53rd Street and Elmore Avenue—it will simply maintain the status quo, and by most standards make it worse, but the public isn't hearing that part of the story. THF came out of the gate with sales tax numbers that were misleading. If the projects were so meritorious, why would they need to exaggerate the figures? More importantly, how can the council approve projects for which they have no way of knowing, let alone assuring, the outcomes, especially when the outcomes could potentially severely hurt the community? If the projects are good for Davenport, they should bear the scrutiny the public is demanding. So far, we have held an illegal public hearing relative to creating two SSMIDs for developer THF, so that will have to be held again because it is in direct violation of procedural due process. Why does this council tolerate such a lack of proper protocol? Why does the city flagrantly disregard lawful or procedural due process, as they have done with these SSMID petitions, and more frighteningly, with the abrupt and heinous termination of city attorney Mike Meloy, who had an unblemished 22-year career with the city of Davenport? At what point does it become unacceptable to the taxpayers of Davenport? How can we expect to attract new residents with a modus operandi so disrespectful and personally destructive to our own city employees? Where is the line is? And where are the letters, the phone calls, and the demands from the public for an end to such unprofessional, unaccountable conduct?