`March 26, 2018

For Chicken Soup for the Soul

Submitted to Grandparents on March 26, 2018

**Here's Johnny!**

My early teen years were wrought with strong emotions, tears, and perpetual heartache. It was my retreat to Grandma's house each summer that got me thru this age of discovery. As the oldest of four children, I will be forever grateful for the love and acceptance Grandma gave me during our time alone together.

The bus ride to Grandma's began my adventure. As I ascended onto the first step of that bus, I felt both proud of myself for being able to travel solo and scared half to death. I suppose that made it such a grand adventure. I sat towards the front of the bus, where I had my eyes on the bus driver, giving me an illusion of being safe. I prayed that a lovely old lady or a mom-looking person would sit next to me, just no freaky Deadheads, please! My backpack is filled with everything needed to travel over 12 hours on the Greyhound Bus. Settling into my seat, I'd make sure that I had not lost my wallet or bus ticket. The doors close with a gasp of air, and then you hear the bus groan as it gathered up the muster to get going, only to hear the squeal of brakes as we stopped at the first stop sign, making that first turn towards the many destinations on board that day.

After 12 hours of reading Nancy Drew mysteries, eating Twizzlers, and drinking way too much Dr. Pepper, the destination, the Aberdeen, South Dakota Greyhound bus terminal, couldn't arrive soon enough. Descending off that final big step and walking into a long hug from Grandma, I let out a small sigh of relief for having made it. Standing beside the bus and waiting for my luggage to be retrieved from the bus's underbelly, we catch up on my ride.

We walked down the back alley to her house and came in the back door. Her house always smelled like a combination of the neighborhood bar and a tree you might find elves living in, and you could taste the anticipation of what cookies are in the cookie jar! The cookie jar was a pink pig with a red checkered scarf tied around its neck like a bib, and it said, "Go ahead, make a pig of yourself." The smell of cigarette smoke baked into the walls did not bother us. It was just how her house smelled.

Grandma was known for her baking. Her orange rolls were my favorite. Over the years, I have thought

about making them from her recipe, but baking isn't my thing. Eating is a different story!

When the cookie jar ran empty, no problem, the deep freeze in the basement was filled with those large Highland Dairy ice cream buckets filled with replacement cookies!

Most of our day was spent doing ordinary things. Walking to The Piggly Wiggly for groceries, picking veggies from her garden, or just sitting and talking at her worn kitchen table. The table sat under an embroidered picture that said, "Of all the roads both east and west, the one that leads to home is best." That embroidery work now hangs in my kitchen, and if you smelled it closely, you would smell Grandma's house.

Besides being a superb cook, Grandma was fantastic with a crotchet hook. She taught me how to do a single stitch, and then we moved on to the double stitch. Once I mastered those, she taught me the shell stitch and then the mother of all, the Granny Square. I discovered that crocheting boosted my self-esteem, made me feel more confident, fulfilled, rewarded, and empowered. What she taught me about myself while gently guiding my hands thru skeins of yarn, well, that is a comprehension gained that is an heirloom to be treasured and passed on for many generations.

We always ended our evenings the same way, with The Tonight Show. We'd finish up the dishes, eat a piece of pie, a cookie, or a sweet roll and grab our yarn and hooks to settle into the brown floral couch and crotchet our current project while waiting to hear those famous words spill out of the TV into our evening…." Heeeeeere's Johnny!".

It would be nice to say that I have outgrown my potent emotions, tears, and perpetual heartache. But those things are part of who I am, a sensitive soul. I have come to a place where I no longer apologize for this, and, just like Grandma did, I accept myself just as I am.