

Susan Bradshaw Brooks

My memories are from the 1970s.

Grammy

My ancient little gray-haired “Grammy,” Bertha Bradshaw, had outrageously ambitious plans. Grammy had a dozen children, but she lost three of them to childhood illnesses. She and Grampy raised my dad, his seven sisters, and his one brother on a farm in Grayson County Kentucky. The Grammy I remember from my childhood in the 1970s always wore a homemade calico print dress with an apron over it. Perched in the top front corner of the apron was a safety pin or two. I never really knew whether that pin was holding her apron up or if it was just there waiting for the next quick mending that one of us needed. With her long gray hair pinned back into a bun, support stockings, and sensible, well-worn, plain-toed oxford shoes, she was ready for the day’s work.

Often, Grammy was sitting in the kitchen shelling the dried corn into a bucket to feed the chickens or snapping green beans into the apron pocket resting on her lap. At dinner times she was there preparing a wholesome meal from her mason jars filled with homegrown fruits and vegetables. Her table was always spread with food. If we weren’t eating, there was a cloth covering the food on the table that would keep until the next meal, foods like cornbread and preserves, beans and potatoes, bacon and fried chicken.

As a child I didn’t appreciate the food so much at Grammy’s, except for the cornbread and biscuits with gravy or jelly; but now I realize how much love was put into those made-from-scratch meals, and how amazing my grandmother was, to provide such abundance for us all—I don’t know how she did it.

When she wasn’t in the kitchen, she was quilting in the living room while she visited with us. I was fascinated as a little girl with the neat little stacks of colorful fabric carefully cut into geometrical shapes. The smallest scraps would be made into a work of art. Nothing was wasted in her household. These colors and shapes were hand sewn into intricate patterns with elaborate color schemes and then quilted into soft, sturdy bed covers. On cold evenings we kids would pile into the high, soft feather beds upstairs, and snuggle under the warm quilts until we sank into a dreamy sleep.

My grandmother’s most outrageous plan was to make full-sized quilts for each one of her grandchildren. When a new grandchild was born, she would start planning a quilt for him or her. Grammy’s goal was all but met before she died. Every one of us except the youngest grandchild received a quilt from her when we got married or left home, and that youngest child received a quilt from his Aunt Wilma, who had been taught by Grammy.

Each Christmas, Grammy made more outrageous plans. She was determined to buy every last one of the grandchildren something, though it strained her budget incredibly. One year all of the granddaughters got a powder makeup compact. She really couldn’t afford that, and we didn’t need it; but my grandmother could—and would--do just about anything she set her mind to, including squeezing money

out of a turnip she had grown in the garden. All of this she did after my grandfather had passed away, for he died when I was a little girl, and I barely remember him.

I gradually figured out that some would've considered Grammy to be poor, but I never think of her in that way. Her home was filled with handmade treasures, and the table was always full. My grandmother was an artist and a craftswoman, an organic farmer, and a good country cook. She was the mother of a dozen, and a grandmother to dozens more. Her ambitious plans were all accomplished through steady hard work. Sometimes, when the work was done, singing and fiddle-playing filled the house. In my memory, that old house echoes with music and the laughter of many children. Grammy probably would have said, "I reckon I've had a good life." I reckon she did.