

Riverwest Elders Remember Their Grandmothers

At 90 years old, she was a featured soloist at the 1937 Chicagoland Music Festival in Soldier Field!

Mother's Day Remembrances of my Grandmother

from Thallis Hoyt Drake (now 96)

Mary Electa Stocking (1848-1940) was born in Michigan, the youngest of twelve and -- eventually -- mother of seven. Life took her to Chicago where she was among the throng that witnessed the funeral cortege of Abraham Lincoln in 1865.

In 1867 she married George Harris Fergus. Later she told of frantically wheeling her first two children in a baby buggy away from their home during the Great Chicago Fire, in October of 1871.

Her youngest child, my mother (1888-1964), was widowed in 1935, after which my sister and I spent a great deal of time with our beloved "GrandMary", as she was known to everyone. She showed us how to sew and embroider, drilled us on our multiplication tables, played cards and, with her guitar, taught us many of the Civil War songs she knew so well.

At 90 years old, she was a featured soloist at the 1937 Chicagoland Music Festival in Soldier Field!



Grandma's Candlesticks

from Stuart

On Friday, October 28, 1892, between 5:30 and 5:40 pm, an explosion occurred at the Union Oil and Paint Co. at Water St. and St. Paul Ave. The resultant fire spread quickly, urged on by strong winds.

Living with her family in the adjacent neighborhood was a young Jewish girl, Anna.

As the fire consumed the wooden structures in the surrounding area, the family realized their home would soon be reduced to ashes. The only hope was to flee as quickly as possible. The items the family chose to rescue were the brass Sabbath candlesticks. No time to pack other things. By midnight, 440 buildings covering a 20-block area had been burned. Families, mostly Irish, sought shelter in hotels, schools or with family elsewhere. Five people were killed. The fire was visible in Chicago and Sheboygan.

Anna grew up and married an assistant Milwaukee City Attorney, and bore several children, one of whom was my mother. After her husband's early death, Anna opened a dry goods store, the family living above the store. I knew grandma well, but she rarely spoke of that fire. She lived to be 93 and was much loved by all the family. The candlesticks are now in the possession of our older granddaughter as her own legacy.



Riverwest Elders Guiding Vision: *We are a diverse group of Riverwest and nearby neighbors, over 50 years old. We come together to share wisdom, live to our full potential and give back to the community."*

"Bousha". And Rose

My Grandmothers

from Eileen Ciezki

We called my maternal grandma "Bousha". Agnes came to this country from Poland in 1913, and met my grandpa John, who was also an immigrant from Poland. They had 13 births and 10 children survived. I remember my Bousha was round as a dumpling, a pierogi. And I loved that only she called me "Eileenka". She had a heavy accent, spoke mostly Polish and was the best chicken soup maker and the warmest hugger. I lost her in my life when I was only 10, but photos of her and grandpa are always nearby.

My paternal grandma, Rose, lived a much longer life -- 93 years. I was blessed to have her in many chapters of my life. Her parents emigrated from Poland, so her English was very good, no accent, but out came the Polish whenever she wished a private conversation with grandpa. Together they had 6 children.

Family gatherings with 10 aunts and uncles and eventually 26 cousins always fit in their small south side bungalow. I remember her faithfulness and devotion; she attended 4am mass every day at the church only a block away. Her 8pm bedtime seemed very early to me but made sense for her early rising.

I still yearn for her potato dough prune-filled paczkis. She was an awesome sweets baker and always let me and cousins help. Church breakfasts for the Catholic Order of Foresters were under her direction. And all the girl cousins were recruited to help in the kitchen as early as 6am, then go to Mass, then afterwards help serve breakfast.

Sleepovers were the best, with shopping trips by bus, down Mitchell Street. Oh, the love and the memories! Photos of Rose and Alex are always in the living room.

...she invited us to lunch in a charming little restaurant and I remember having hot cross buns. This Easter I bought a package of hot cross buns from Sciortino's bakery, in memory of Esther.

My Grandmother Memory

from JoAnn

My grandmother memory is really about my step-grandmother, as my biological grandmother died of pneumonia when my father was 9 years old. My grandfather then married Esther Jacobsen.

When my dad was 12, my grandfather was killed getting on a streetcar in Chicago. The children, including my father, were shipped out to children's homes as my stepmother had no money to care for them.

Esther became a private duty nurse and eventually cared for the wife of George Havens, who was an architectural engineer at Marshall Fields. The wife died and Mr. Havens asked Esther to marry him, although she was several years older. She did, and eventually outlived him as she lived to almost 105.

When my sister and I were living in a children's home in Chicago, and Esther and her husband were living in Evanston, Illinois, she invited us to lunch in a charming little restaurant and I remember having hot cross buns. This Easter I bought a package of hot cross buns from Sciortino's bakery, in memory of Esther.

P.S. They were delicious!

"It begins out there where I chop off the chicken's head."

Where Our Food Really Comes From

from Mike

My grandma knew where food really came from. When some people think of their grandmothers, they might remember a place to go for freshly baked cookies, right out of the oven. I remember something else.

As a kid, I accompanied my mom to the grocery store many times. Canned goods, cereals, cookies, fresh fruits, and veggies, all exactly labeled and tidily organized on shelves. Fresh meats in cellophane, looking clean and sanitized, nothing like any real creature that had ever been alive. Only the chicken bore a trifling resemblance to something living, but then only to my own pale, hairless, goosebump-covered forearms.

So, imagine my surprise when, visiting my grandma on her farm, she gave me the gritty backstory of those white cubes floating in the chicken soup she had spooned into my bowl. How does a chicken end up like this? I wondered. "You see," she said in a factual tone as she opened the backdoor, revealing the chicken coop and old flat-topped stump with the rust-stained surface. "It begins out there where I chop off the chicken's head." Thanks to my grandma, I learned early on where our food really comes from. My grandma was reality



They shot a chicken with their bow and arrow and rode off to prepare their meal.

Life Long Ago

from Joe

My paternal grandmother was born in 1875 on her family's farm, located in what is now the Bishop's Woods area of Brookfield, Wisconsin. Before she died in 1950, she told a story of when she was a young girl. Some Indigenous Indians on horseback rode into the farmyard and said that they were hungry. They shot a chicken with their bow and arrow and rode off to prepare their meal.

RW Elders May Calendar

May 9, East Library 2320 N Cramer St., Corner of North Ave & Cramer

Noon-1:30 pm "The Nuts and Bolts of Estate Planning"

Presenter: Jennifer R. Imediegwu, Esq.

**Attorney at Law -Member National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
The Leopolds have heard her presentation and were very impressed.**

May 25, Noon- 2pm

4th Thursday Birthday Lunch

Milwaukee Sail Loft 649 East Erie Street

On the River near Lake Michigan

Riverwest Elders Remember Their Grandmothers



Most of the *jjajjas* (grandmothers) arrive at the garden on foot; others ride on the back of a boda-boda (motorcycle), holding fast to the young drivers.

Every Grandmother - A Library

It is a warm day in Kangulumira, a small Ugandan village. The red clay soil in the community garden is soft from the previous night's rain.

Most of the *jjajjas* (grandmothers) arrive at the garden on foot; others ride on the back of a boda-boda (motorcycle), holding fast to the young drivers.

These grandmothers, left – in the words of one of the *jjajjas* – “isolated, abandoned and alone” to raise their grandchildren after the AIDs-related deaths of their adult children, have become part of Grandmothers Beyond Borders, a Milwaukee-based non-profit dedicated to lifting the lives and easing the hardships of Ugandan women elders and their families.

In finding each other through GBB, these women who have lost so much to AIDS, famine and warfare, malaria and upheaval, have regained their desire and determination to make a better life for the youngsters in their care. In finding each other, they have found the capacity to reach out and support those in even greater need.

They embody the power of community as they form collectives, as they share and distribute seeds and seedlings and tend their garden plots, as they make micro-loans for sewing projects and craft supplies, as they sit together under the shade of a banana tree to weave baskets to sell at markets. They have become grassroots elder women leaders in their villages.

On this day in April, they greet a small group of GBB board members visiting them from Milwaukee by chanting “You are welcome... You are welcome” while extending their hands and arms in friendship and sisterhood.

They have gifts for us: carefully folded banana leaf packets, each one filled with roasted ground nuts, tied with sisal.

A gentle rain covers us in a mist that sparkles when the sun peeks through.

One of the grandchildren runs up to us to say hello. He looks from the *jjajjas* to the visitors and tells us, “In school, we learned that every grandmother is a library. When we lose a grandmother, we lose a library.” Then he runs off to play with the other children.

As our visit ends, we help the grandmothers pack up their belongings. Some will return home on foot, others on the back of a boda-boda. Watching the *jjajjas*

board the motorcycles, one member of our team observes, with a bit of amazement in his voice, “There’s trust on both sides of that equation.”

These women elders may not be related to anyone in the group of visitors, yet the connection of the heart is as strong as any we have ever experienced in our personal family trees. Each one is our grandmother – and our library.

Janine

It is good to get beyond our mental and physical borders and see the world anew.

Your grandmothers in Uganda share the same caring for community that the grandmothers in America can and should emulate.

The simpleness of life without all the paraphernalia that clutters the west is evident in your description.

Humankind exists because of the library of our minds and language we share. Age brings wisdom that looks back and forward at the same time. I like the connection it makes across the globe.

Vince



Bloodroot

Sanguinaria canadensis

Illuminates our family of origin's divine strengths and weaknesses so we are free to choose our own way



Listen to Riverwest Radio --Your Neighborhood RadioActive Station, FM 104.1

She wore black dresses, a sweater over her shoulders, perhaps a pearl necklace. We assumed she planted the garden and cleaned the house in the same dresses, but with a full apron, of course.

My Grandma Katy

from Lorraine

My grandmother, Katy (Koos) Jacobs, was a very quiet, regal sort of woman. She wore black dresses, a sweater over her shoulders, perhaps a pearl necklace. We assumed she planted the garden and cleaned the house in the same dresses, but with a full apron, of course.

We knew her in the early 1950's as a 35-40-year-old woman. To us, she was “Grandma”. She kept the candy jar filled, served a glass of juice or coffee to visitors, and kept the wood burning kitchen stove hot for a winter cup of tea. “Us kids” would run into the kitchen just to see the flames when the door opened for the new log.

Grandma never got down onto the floor to build a Lincoln Log cabin or sat at the kitchen table to color a picture with us. She would call and we’d go over to pick fresh tomatoes, green beans, peas, and potatoes.

When the currants (not the newspaper, but a berry) ripened, we all had to come along to help pick them. It was an endless task of lifting leaves and seeking the ripe berries hidden beneath. My sister and I would start out with enthusiasm, but soon grew weary, eventually just giving up to go follow a cricket or look for carrots to pull.

My grandmother was a woman of her time. She lived her life as the proper daughter of a successful family-owned sod farm in Racine.

Angie, Maimie, Naomi

My grandmothers were Adensam and Bushell -Angie and Maime- but Grandma to us. Maime would bake an excellent home made bread every week and Grandpa would deliver it. And a treat of caramels to boot.

Angie would make pan sized potato pancakes cooked with lard as shortening. Cousin Johnny was chubby, cousin Vince was skinny and lanky.

I could barely wolf down one but Johnny would always go for two. Grandmas like the kids to be chubby.

Grandmas start out as mothers. And here is one, mother, grandma, and great grandma. Dear to so many. Written when she was still here. Her answer to Eudemon's question, speaks to her life and purpose in it

Vince

Naomi - What is happiness?

The mythos of Eudemon...exploring the liminal spaces of Riverwest...meeting the ordinary folk and having a good time.

Eudemon turned around and turned around again and he was in another place: a place where time was taking a stroll.

Four women on the far side of 80 sat in a kitchen-like room. Eudemon sat down with them. Lunch was just finished. One of the ladies was remarking how good that meat was, and could someone please find

out what it was so they could have it again.

One of the ladies was Eudemon's mother. She was with these stranger friends because of that little problem with memory that turns time upside down with old things seeming so near and new things so confusing. Eudemon engaged the group in conversation. Next to him sat Lou, short for Louise. Lou was a flirt. “Would you believe I'm almost 90,” she said. Ruby sat on the other side of Eudemon and smiled and rolled her eyes a bit at Lou.

One lady sat quietly, not even volunteering a name, as if what does it matter, having a name.

Eudemon's mom, Naomi, kept talking about the still life pattern of the wallpaper valance. She found it fascinating.

Lou offered up opinions on her place in time: “Age has nothing to do with anything. It's the way you want to present yourself, and I'm not going to believe my age. The hell with the calendar. I'm playing forty. “I like freedom and when you get married you're not free. I paddle my own canoe.” Lou stated she had had several husbands.

Eudemon pondered on what happiness was to these ladies caught in their own time warps. So he asked them. Ruby said, “Happiness is being with people you like.” Simple enough.

Lou offered, “Happiness is being with someone who is happy.” Contagious.

And then Eudemon asked Naomi, his mom, what happiness was.

She turned her head. She seemed a bit confused. But then she smiled and said,

“They all applauded when they brought out the cake that I made. I felt like a million dollars.”

Everyone smiled.

Eudemon felt a tug back into his time and space and he stood up and said goodbye to the ladies.

Lou with a wry smile called out, “You only go around once. And once is enough.” Eudemon strolled the halls with his mom.

Picture boxes were on the walls with sepia images of young women getting married and babies and children and a life distilled into a few photographs in a box.

He kissed his mom goodbye.

He turned around and he turned around again and looked at his mom.

But her eyes were gone and she was in another place and time.

Fragrant Wood Violet Now showing in your woods *Viola soroia*



The fragrance of flowers. violets, roses, lilies of the valley, cherry blossoms, often remind us of sweet memories.

Lilacs in spring
Apple blossoms TOO