

Genemare Bateman Mitchell was born in Salamanca, NY on February 7, 1920. She celebrated her 97th birthday this year; a strong woman, having outlived her 3 siblings, her husband, her grandson and nearly every one of her friends. She might say her secret to longevity was a daily ritual of morning headstands and drinking some weird-awful yeast concoction from the old country.

I grew up living just across the street from my grandparents for the better part of my life. Their home was the hub of family and friend gatherings, most often taking place on their side porch during the warmer months or at the kitchen table, where you were guaranteed a good political debate, a stiff Manhattan and a slice of the best apple pie you've ever tasted.

Grandma loved being social. She had wonderful friends and enjoyed playing cards and going to picnics and parties. She loved wearing high heels, she loved her church and church family and she loved Bill Clinton.

She rolled her eyes at helicopter parenting or going to the doctor, never fussing too much over fevers, cuts or broken bones. In times of trouble, she comforted us the best she could. A good foot rub was the cure for most anything...I'm not sure she ever knew how truly healing and restorative that simple, intimate offering was.

A child of the Depression era, I once interviewed her on the subject for a school project. I have to say she wasn't very helpful. Not ever having had much, she didn't seem to notice any lack or feel she missed out on anything growing up.

She lived her life this way. My grandmother was very frugal. We all remember her making bread pudding or her famous pies seemingly out of nothing. In her refrigerator would be maybe a jar of Miracle Whip, some celery, a few saltines and somehow she would manage to make a dinner

out of that. She most certainly believed “A fool and his money are soon parted.”

I would give anything to go back. Back to those holiday dinners of my youth at my grandparents’ house, *when we were all there*, where the wood burner kept the house so hot you could barely breathe and you could smell the varnish melting from the furniture; and my grandfather would be swearing for one of the kids to get out from in front of the television so he could see the game.

In my mind’s eye, I can still feel the motion and gentle sway of the glider on the side porch; and there was a perfect view of the courthouse clock, which served us all well because the porch was often a stop in between errands or running from place to place. And Grandma would stop whatever it was she was doing to sit, talk, visit and offer you a drink.

Unless she had bridge.

My grandmother enjoyed over 30 years wintering in Florida with my grandfather and in later years with her sister June. Some of us had the great pleasure of driving the Ms. Daisies on their annual pilgrimage to Cape Canaveral. Highlights include: teaching them to pump gas, working the air conditioner or settling on a radio station, exploring the art of tipping at a restaurant and frequent, emergent restroom stops.

Most of us remember Grandma always having her purse. It was almost like her shadow. Even when she was just coming across the street for a stick of butter, she’d bring her purse and she was FOREVER rummaging through it.

We have her purse displayed over in the parish hall along with some of our family photos. Maybe you could take a turn rummaging through it and figure out what it was she was always looking for.

My cousin Heather was unable to be here today, but was hoping to convey something about Grandma, which you probably already know, which is what a spectacularly unique and fundamentally cool woman she was.

Grandma was once the person who hoped her plane would be hijacked in the 1980's so she would then be able to visit Cuba during the embargo. She was also the person who hid in the bathroom after getting a terrible case of the giggles while trying to place an ad on the local radio program, Potpourri.

She was a glamorous lady, yet whose frugality knew no bounds; she thought clothespins could function as braces on Jim's teeth and Molly's crib could be converted into "studio" bed by taking off one of the sides.

However, we think the most lasting and telling legacy is that Grandma, along with her beloved sister June, did an outstanding job at cultivating a family who were and are the best of friends and who genuinely love to spend time together, and when they do, they know untold amounts of fun, love, laughter and sometimes fighting will be had in equal measure. We would like to leave you with Grandma's favorite saying:

It'll all work out.

And given that she lived to be 97, we certainly would like to think she is right.

