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## Reflections on Imperfection & Triumph: A Tribute

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My Grandma Peggy died in January, only six weeks shy of her 100th birthday. Going through her belongings with my cousin Kimmie caused me to reflect on her life and gain some valuable insight.

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We found several exquisite gowns Peggy had saved from the 1930s. Since I only knew her in her “Grandma years,” the gowns offered a chance to see her in a different light. She was once a beautiful young lady who went to parties looking gorgeous in elegant dresses. I wonder what it was like for her when she was a single woman in the 30s, before she married in 1939. I imagine she had a lot of fun.

At their 40th wedding anniversary party, we watched home movies of Peggy and Bill playing ping pong on a cruise ship underway to their Hawaiian honeymoon. They are full of laughter and abundant with love and happiness. My mom was struck by how happy her parents looked and said she saw different people in those movies than what she remembered of her parents. After they had a family, Peggy went to Bill’s secretary at the beginning of every month to ask for money to run the household. Otherwise, Bill would spend everything, not leaving money for food or bills. We came across a picture of Peggy with 3 of her 5 children, the youngest still a baby. Peggy is looking at the baby and the older two girls are looking at their mother. The unhappy, withdrawn look on Peggy’s face is painful to see. It struck me in contrast to holding my own babies which was pure joy. If she was as unhappy as she looked in many old pictures, it would have been difficult to be emotionally available to her children and that would have been hard for them.

I imagine being married to Bill was a less-than-joyful union for Peggy. Bill was an MIT educated engineer (“Not the kind of engineer on a train”, I was disappointed to learn as a child). He was an inventor. He inherited commercial properties but rather than furthering his father’s success in real estate, he sold the properties and used the proceeds to fund his inventions. When he died, he had spent everything and even borrowed on his life insurance, leaving Peggy only the house. My grandparents also suffered a tragedy when their only son was murdered at age 16.

After Bill died in 1985 Peggy came to life. She acquired a dear friend, Katherine, and they became inseparable. She loved sports and played tennis into her 80’s and bowled into her 90’s. She was competitive, loved to play games and to fish and swim in Lake Coeur d’Alene. She had a dry sense of humor which was delightfully funny.

As we were sorting through Grandma’s things, there were a few beautiful antiques which were slightly damaged: a cut crystal pitcher with a crack, an exquisite Limoges platter hand-painted with blue flowers that had a sizeable chip on the edge, a silver gravy boat missing a chunk on the bottom. None of this impacted the functionality of the pieces; they were beautiful items that were slightly damaged. When Kimmie asked if I wanted them, my first impulse was to say no, they were damaged. I immediately devalued them and didn’t want to own them. Then the Limoges platter with the blue flowers sparked an insight: this platter is like Grandma, like me, like lots of people. It’s not perfect. Maybe it wasn’t always handled with care. It got a little damaged in the decades of its existence, sort of like Peggy, who didn’t seem very happy in the years she was raising kids and married to Bill. “So what do you want to focus on,” I asked myself, “the chip on the edge or the beautiful lines of the piece, the delightful blue flowers and the fact that it comes from your Grandma?” Suddenly, I saw the platter in a completely different light. The platter became a symbol of celebration and triumph over Peggy’s struggles: not getting the love she wanted in her marriage, being a less-than-present mother, losing her son and struggling for many years. She had a rough go; and who hasn’t? She prevailed. She outlived her husband, found a companion to love and share fun times with and reconnected with her sense of adventure and humor. This is a story of victory! The chipped platter, the cracked pitcher, the damaged gravy boat are treasured because they represent the beauty of imperfection and Peggy’s legacy of resilience and humor.