

GRANDMA MUELLER

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[Assignment: Describe a person you have known well in a way that allows your readers to form a clear image of that person's personality as well as his or her physical image.]

(1) When we are young we believe we will live forever. I certainly believed this not only about myself but also about my great-grandmother. If someone looked as if she could live forever, it was certainly my great-grandmother who had lived through so much. My great-grandmother was a strong-willed woman who witnessed four wars. As a child I took pride in saying I had five grandparents. My teachers would always give me a blank stare. I always enjoyed explaining why and how I had five grandparents.

(2) My great-grandmother was affectionately called Grandma Mueller by all of her great-grandchildren. Actually, she wanted to be called this because she felt that great-grandmother made her sound old. There are certain memories I associate with Grandma Mueller, which, in my mind, capture her essential personality, specially her strength. Every time I visited Grandma Mueller she would describe the Great Depression and the effects it had on her family. She would recount the events that caused my great-grandfather's successful furniture store to capitulate to the dying bank. She always warned, "Always count every penny you've got cause you'll never know when it'll be your last." The events of the depression had hardened this strong-willed lady.

(3) I also associate Grandma Mueller with the miniscule apartment she occupied. Grandma Mueller's tiny, five room apartment was crammed full of beautiful oak furniture, the only remnants of the furniture store. Grandma Mueller insisted on living alone and everyone admired her for her independence.

(4) Whenever I visited Grandma Mueller, I pressed the little bell adjacent to the large wooden door. After the buzz of the door bell, there was always a pause. Suddenly, the door would swing open and a small aged woman with glistening white hair would greet me with a hug and a kiss. She was tiny and frail and supported her aging body with two metal crutches. She moved slowly across the room because she had a severe hip injury in the mid 1960's, leaving her with a limp. She had slipped while crossing a busy street, breaking her hip, and always reminded friends and family that a young black man was the first person to rush to her aid. This frail limping woman, invariably so cheerful and life-affirming, had amazing resources of inner strength.

(5) On these visits, as I sat and talked with my Grandma Mueller, I would examine her shiny silver bracelet adorned with charms. As a curious young boy, I would attempt to read each charm. I would point out that there were two types of charms and three different colors. Then would come the familiar explanation: "Brian, you see the red ones are for my children; the bronze ones for my grandchildren, and finally the silver ones are for great-grandchildren. Each one is shaped like a boy's or girl's

head." Then she would tell me what I wanted most to hear: "This charm has your name on it . . . you were my first great-grandchild."

(6) Then, and to a young boy it seemed so suddenly and unexpectedly, Grandma Mueller was placed in a temporary in-patient nursing home facility. The doctors told her that she had been doing too much for her age and that she had to slow down. Within a week, they told her, she would return home, but would have to remain under strict supervision.

(7) A few days later, my mother decided to visit my Grandma Mueller while she was in the nursing home. I remember that crisp autumn day in September vividly. My mother asked me if I wanted to accompany her. My first response was, "Yes, sure, I would love to." I was happy to miss school until I remembered I had to play in a football game that day.

(8) My mother said, "There'll be other games. Why don't you come along?"

I said, "I'll visit Grandma Mueller as soon as she gets better." We lost the football game. Grandma Mueller died in her sleep the next day,

(9) Now I am left with these memories and a new understanding of the special role Grandma Mueller filled in my life. I suppose there are other Grandma Mueller's in other families--to be cherished while they are alive and to be remembered after they are gone.