

My grandma's name was Ana, born in 1898, the second of six siblings. She lived at home and cared for her elderly mother until her mid-twenties. Living at home, she worked as a secretary for a steamship company, typing and transcribing in Gregg Shorthand. She was soft-spoken, a temperate woman. Seeing her on her knees by the bedside in prayer was the norm. I witnessed her faith in action. She expressed love and devotion by being a "doer of the Word and not a hearer only," forever willing to help others. Even during the times when I'd see her wincing from the pain in her knees and feet, she'd still make treats to hand out or write cards and letters to encourage someone.

Grandma suffered from arthritis. If ever she mentioned that her feet hurt, my grandpa, whom she affectionately called her "*flor de té*," would prepare a tub of warm water and Epsom salt for her to soak them in. My grandma blamed the tight pointy shoes she wore in her earlier years for causing her aching feet and overlapping toes. All her current shoes in black were odd-looking and clunky like the ones worn a long, long time ago. I enjoyed playing in them.

*Clip-clop. Clip-clop.* Grandma's shoes echoed as I walked in them across the tile floor.

"Mary," Grandma called to me, sitting at her sewing machine, rubbing her eyes. "You have good eyes, dear. *Por favor*, thread this needle for me."

With one eye shut, I squinted, concentrating on the task of getting the string into that tiny hole. "Grandma, does Mama know how to sew?" I mumbled, pursing my lips with the tip of the thread in my mouth to moisten it—the way I'd seen Grandma do—making it easier to go in the eye of the needle.

"I taught her, *pero* she dun like to."

*I wouldn't either, it takes too long.* "All done," I said, giving the threaded needle back.

Grandma wanted me to learn how to sew, but I preferred sitting on the floor, playing with her sewing stuff instead. I either sifted through the Mason jars she kept filled with buttons of all sizes or rummaged through her large, round tin can packed with spools of colorful threads. Inside also were porcelain thimbles, a pincushion, and even a wood darning egg for sewing Grandpa's socks.

We had chores to do. The weekly wash we did at the laundromat, a short walking distance away. Once home, Grandma ironed all bed sheets,

linens, pillowcases, cloth napkins, and even Grandpa's white hankies on her chrome-edged dining room table. I helped her to fold but knew I didn't like ironing.

"Mary, it's good that you give me a hand," Grandma said as she sprinkled water over a napkin before ironing it. "You must learn to do these things yourself one day," she added.

*Gonna get me a maid for that,* I thought.

Overall, I liked helping Grandma with chores. She saved S & H Green Stamps that I enjoyed pasting in a book. She did many things differently from the way I saw Mama do with her time. Even when she was busy, Grandma always talked to me. I studied her. I thought it funny the way her mouth moved, her lips still closed, whenever she read. I marveled how her fingers typed fast and hard on the keys to her black manual typewriter.

In retrospect, Grandma liked my curious mind and eagerness to learn. When she gave me a small, white leather Bible for my own, I felt special.

"*Mija*, have you been studyin' your Bible verses?"

"Yes, ma'am. I learned it all."

"*Bueno*, let's hear it."

"The Lord is my Shepherd . . .," I began. As promised, when I finished, she gave me a crisp, two-dollar bill.

"Can I take my nap now?" I asked, yawning.

"Go ahead, dear. You may. I'll wake you before dinner."

Sometimes I watched Grandma in the kitchen cooking and helped by peeling carrots or potatoes using her peeler. I didn't like it much, but Grandma enjoyed making Chicken á la King. I watched the way she washed and chopped white onions, celery stalks, bell peppers, and cut up a boiled chicken once it cooled.

"It's good that you pay attention, dear," Grandma said, wiping the chicken grease from her hands on her apron. "*Señoritas* must know how to cook."

"Why?" I asked, rubbing my eyes burning from the onions. "Mama doesn't."

"Even so, you had better learn, young lady," she replied, throwing everything into a pot, adding milk. "You dun want to become *vaga*."

"What's *vaga*?" I asked.

"It means lazy. You dun want to be that; you'll have a family to care for one day."