

My Grandmother, Dawn Dutto

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What I Learned From My Grandparent

My Grandma, or when I was younger, Dama, has always been a big part of my life. Throughout the years I've heard short stories about her life from everyone, but now that I'm old enough, I just realized the lessons that she teaches me, are ones that had to do with *her own* life. My grandma was born as Dawn Venia on January 31st, during the Second World War in Harlingen, Texas. Today, she's tall with curly, collar length brown hair, brown eyes, and a bright smile wherever she goes as well as a hyena like laugh that could've done well in the Lion King.

My grandma grew up in southern Texas where her brother was born, and then after World War II, her and her family moved to Ashland, Wisconsin, where her little sister was born. When her sister was two, they moved back to Texas where it was warmer.

From what my Grandmother described Wisconsin was, "I remember the cold air that hurt to breathe and the ice that crunched under my snow boots. To get out of the back door, I walked down a path with snow piled over my head on both sides." That was when her brother became very sick with asthma, and back then, all they could give you for your lungs were shots, shots, and more shots, and the doctors said he wasn't going to live much longer. Her parents, my great-grandparents, Grandma and Grandpa Venia, wouldn't believe what they were told. My Grandma said, "Refusing to believe the death sentence, my parents sold everything except some of our clothes, packed us into an old '49 Ford and left Texas." They traveled around looking for good air that my Grandma's brother could breathe in without dying. "We were nomads driving and driving, looking for good air that he could breathe." My Grandma's family ended up in southern California at one point; they slept, as did her little brother, all through the night. California was now her home.

Her first Californian home was small with two bedrooms, a tiny bathroom, decent kitchen and living room. In the neighborhood that she lived in, there was only one television set, so her, her brother, and her sister listened to the Lone Ranger and Superman on the radio. My Grandma said, "They were my heroes." Since it was during the Korean War, all the kids wanted to play like soldiers. They dug fox holes and tunnels to hide and play in next to the houses, but eventually they had to stop because a few kids had died when the tunnels collapsed on them. "I remember spending my summer days on roller skates and under trees. There were no electronic toys, cell phones, TV's, air conditioners or fast food restaurants." This was her first life in California.

Grandma Dawn went to six schools before graduating high school. She had three different elementary schools in her early years, and during those years, they moved a lot after her little sister died of childhood diabetes when she was only ten years old. In her last high school years, she lived in the high desert where she learned to love books and reading because there was nothing else for a teenager to do when twenty miles from nowhere. After graduating from high school in 1961, she was accepted into Cal Poly, down in San Luis Obispo. "Most girls didn't go any further in school. They were expected to get married, stay home and take care of their families. I wanted more. I wanted an education and I wanted



to be a teacher. I never wavered from my goals. I loved college, did well, and graduated in four years.” It was there, at Cal Poly, that my Grandma met my Grandpa, Gary Dutto.

Her and Grandpa Gary married on June 19, 1965, during the Vietnam War days which didn't help my Grandpa with a job. Men were required to register for draft, and no one really wanted to hire someone who could possibly get sent to war and never come back. This is how they came to the Central Valley, Tulare County. She taught at Selma Unified School District and at Eric White School until, in 1968, her oldest son, Darren was born. That was when she became a stay at home mom. Three years later they added two little girls, Kimberly in January, and Kristen in December. And then another three years passed before they added another boy, Daniel. She went back to teaching once they moved to Tulare, after moving away from Kingsburg. She then taught for twenty-five years; one at Palo Verde, and then the next twenty-four years at Sundale. While already having a family of six and working, but Grandma didn't falter with words or actions when a young fifteen year old girl, Sam, needed a home. She might not have been blood and bone, but Grandma Dawn would never deny that my mother wasn't , and isn't her daughter. “We added another child during this time so we were a family of seven.”

My Grandmother has got to travel all over the place, and though I envy that fact, I love to listen to how she talks about the places she's been. It's a long list, but here it is anyway: while traveling with Tulare Union Band, she's been to Mexico, New York, Disneyland, and was able to see the Rose Parade with her own eyes, right then and there. “I was able to support my husband in his work and did a lot of traveling with him. We went to England and rode the famous Orient Express across England, had dinner in castles and visited the royal mews where the kings' golden coach is kept. I have visited Viking burial mounds in Denmark, walked along the arctic coast line and seen cold stone bunkers built by the invading German forces and visited the statue of the Little Mermaid. I have touched the feet of Saint Patrick at the Vatican and marveled at the Parthenon. My coins were tossed in the Trevi fountain and sure enough, I recently returned to Rome. Who knows where I will go next.”

Now though the traveling was awesome in the time that my Grandmother had been retired, but her time here in Tulare has never been done since September 18, 1998 when my cousin Keegan was born, making him the oldest Dutto grandchild. In order of the fourteen grandchildren, my grandmother as Keegan, me (Chloe), Garren, Gianna, Wyatt, Grace, Henry, Liam, Audriana, Madison, Bella, John, Evan and Simon. “...it all amazes me to think of all the beautiful grandchildren we have. There are fourteen to be exact and they are fun and cherished above all.”

Well, now you know about my Grandma Dawn. You can get an idea of what she looks like, and who she is. You know about her life just as I, and I know that I put not one lesson into these paragraphs above, but what I had said were lessons from my grandmother were nothing compared to the ones I realized through her life, through my Grandma's eyes, and here they are.

1. Say what you can, do what you can, and love who and what you can when you can.
Definition of what I think it means – She lost her sister when they were both young, before they could really do anything, and I'm sure my Grandma would have done some things differently if she had known what the future held.
2. Adapt – Even if you're negative towards it, it may lead you somewhere good.
Definition of what I think it means – My grandma had to adapt to a new learning procedure and life, but she got through it and it led her to my Grandpa and her family.
3. Be happy with the time you've got before something big comes.
Definition of what I think it means – My grandparents only got three years before my smart uncle came along. Not a lot of time to be a couple.

4. Have something you love, treat it with love, and it will never run away.
Definition of what I think it means – My Grandma might've had rough times, but she showed she cared for her kids, and they never left. She showed my mom she cared and she never left.
5. Life will never stop; you might be annoyed in the beginning, but you'll always live it in the end.
Definition of what I think it means – My Grandma got peace, then fourteen grandchildren who are never out of her house. I don't know how she felt in the beginning, but I know she's happy now.

Lessons are what we see, read, learn, are taught, not something that comes naturally. You may understand it when you're 8, or when you're 88, but lessons will never stop coming, and we will never stop understanding them, one way, or another.