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Journalism

Viva Las Vegas

I could walk to my grandparents' house from my highschool bedroom in my sleep. I guess I should explain now that living four doors down from their house is the reason for that but I'll never want to stop finding my way back there, as I have my whole life. Their house is a typical suburban home in many ways, down to the "beer fridge" out back that's definitely older than I am. You'll also notice the random assortment of A&M memorabilia scattered across the house (Gig 'em!!). You can tell that even though the Reeves family currently only has an SU almost-grad and a future Texas Tech student so far, it is inevitable that one of the 6 remaining grandkids is going to end up as an Aggie either by choice or by getting so used to seeing maroon they'll just wander to College Station eventually and start taking classes. Anyone seeing this house for the first time would think *Texas born and raised, right?* Most elements of their personalities and home reflect someone who's definitely comfortable in this state, and they are! But if you look more closely, you'll see the *Kachina* dolls that line parts of the bookshelves in the living room-memories from their childhoods in New Mexico. You'll also notice that the myriad of paintings that my grandpa has finished usually incorporate some aspect of New Mexican culture-especially the distinctive landscape and mountains that you just don't see in North Texas. Their whole house is a blend of the lives that they used to have in New Mexico, and the life that they have created here in Texas. My

Grams met her “person”-my Grandpa-in the state where they both grew up and went to college, but the life that they both created for themselves is in Texas.

It felt weird when I told my grandma that I wanted to “interview” her, almost like we both knew it was a foreign word that wasn’t going to do justice to the kind of conversations that we’re always having that leave me walking away wondering, *how did I not know this already?? So cool*. So I have made the conscious decision to only allow things that she tells me over the next few days into this article, because when I’ve spent hours learning about my grandma’s life in the past, there’s always been the tiniest, almost imperceptible element of “me,” where I’m thinking about how interested and entertained *I* am, so I’d ask more about things *I* wanted to know about.

Now, I’m stepping back and recording everything and asking as few questions as possible. All I even needed to do was explain the basic idea of this article and old yearbooks and boxes of photos were being taken out. Within minutes I was so engrossed in her vivid recollections of growing up in Las Vegas, New Mexico (no, not the one where “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas,” and I’m really glad it’s not for this article’s sake), that the round glass table where we’ve already spent countless hours talking throughout my whole life could have just faded away. I felt like I was four again, slouching after dinner in the egg-shaped 70’s-style spinning chairs, while watching the green-checkered wallpaper spin around and around until my grandparents’ voices brought me back to earth. The walls are yellow now and the whole kitchen has gotten a decade-approved facelift, but the stories still come to life as they always have and always will, and suddenly I can imagine that I’m not even in Arlington, Texas anymore as the stories from her childhood whisk me away to New Mexico.

Just flipping through these photos and yearbooks, I feel like I'm right there with Grams, watching her get her picture taken as she poses for homecoming court in 1959 with her teased bob and thick-frame 60's-style glasses. She remembers how she was *so* glad to be rid of them when Granny (our name for her mom), *finally* let her get contacts later on. I'm right there as she goes ice skating on the pond that froze over every year in front of a centuries-old mission that really looks so much like a castle you could have convinced me it wasn't in New Mexico at all. As she shows me a black-and-white postcard of the Las Vegas town square focusing on the "Spic-N-Span," I can almost taste the soda pop and great food of one of her favorite places to eat during childhood. Her recollections of the Dairy Queen that her family owned where she'd get free soft-serve and popcorn make me want to hop in my car and get a blizzard at the one off of I-35 right now. I can imagine I'm right there cheering her on as she recalls how she made her skirts shorter the minute she went away for college (*ankles*, what a *scandal*). I'm laughing as she's getting into shenanigans with her ADPi sorority sisters all while hoping she'll be back by curfew. (Side note: colleges back then had a curfew for female students but not males...?!)

The box full of pictures was only a way to get started, but they helped to really make the fact hit home that times really have changed, but my Grams' spirit has not. The first picture she shows me is old and worn, but you can tell that it brings back fun memories of her childhood. It shows two little girls, both not even old enough to be 10, standing side-by-side and smiling at the camera. The sides of all the pictures we're looking at are smooth, almost like pieces of sea glass that have been tossed around in the ocean for years. I can't help thinking about how the sea glass that you pick up on the beach that's ready to be made into jewelry and put in jars

for collection is always strikingly beautiful, with smooth edges from years-even decades-of being tossed around by the ocean. When you pick it up and turn it over and over in your hands it's amazing how so many years of tumultuous waves and tosses and turns can create something that's smooth and pristine. If you take it out of the water too soon, the edges are jagged and rough-not horrible, but not ready yet. I guess what I'm trying to say is that this is what these pictures reminded me of. Time and motion made the edges smoother and less defined, as the person in them grew to become the woman that she is today. I can imagine how my grandma must have felt in the picture I'm holding, breathing in the dust in that tiny backyard on 4th street while she played with her older sister, Linda and their friend from the neighborhood. "So, in the backyard, there was a back porch and on the back porch was a wringer-washer that mother used until she got an automatic," she recalls as she points to different parts of the backyard. Her iPad and iPhone are sitting right next to her as she remembers these things, and I can't help but think how interesting it must be to be surrounded by technological innovations that my generation has always known, while still having the memory of how things used to be.

Grams laughs as she remembers the chicken coop on the other side of the backyard. The two of them knew that when their dad came home, he would wring the neck of one of those chickens and wait for it to stop running around with it's head chopped off ("It wasn't knowing where it was going-- it was on its way out" is the humorously factual way she explained it) until it was time to prepare it for dinner. I didn't even think *aww how sad for the poor lil' chicken* but *hahaha, Me too! That's my image of myself when I've tried to put my thoughts on paper for journalism articles this summer.* I definitely got my sense of humor from her in the way that I'm not afraid to *not* take myself super seriously all the time. I feel

like we're very similar in how we view the world, but I'm realizing that it's more than just sarcasm and humor, but the ability to be resilient, which she could definitely give me another lesson or two on.

I'm seeing that I can trace this resilience back to a childhood in New Mexico with a hardass of a mom who took no shit because when you grew up in the Great Depression as one of thirteen siblings, raised some of them while being a kid yourself, and got married in secret and ran away at fourteen all while struggling to make ends meet, you really are just "RIGHT, no if's, and's or but's" sometimes. Her mom's first husband was not her dad, who she married later. She didn't even find out about this marriage until recently after the whole family kept it as a strictly *hush-hush* type of thing that people knew about, but just didn't bring up. She started asking questions based off of the obituary of a funeral, where she noticed that her mom had a last name that wasn't her married or maiden name. "When you do the math of how she was in the obituary-she was 15 then-she would have been married a full year before that. Can you imagine? Fourteen?" The respect that Grams has for her own mother is clear as day in how she keeps coming back to stories about her. They aren't breaks from her talking about herself, but rather key pieces of information in understanding how she grew up to be someone who could be free-thinking and independent enough to move to another state right after graduation, but also someone who had patience with her students as a teacher and compassion for her grandkids.

This isn't to say that she and Linda didn't try their best to get around their parents strict rules. Grams smiles as she recalls how the two of them had chores that they HAD to get done every day OR ELSE, and they weren't really supposed to just "chill" during all of their free time,

but when they weren't in school of course they didn't want to do dirty dishes and laundry all day, so they'd hide their "completed" chores in the cupboards and other nooks and crannies and keep an eye out for her car coming home for lunch. Then they'd turn off *Leave it to Beaver* and pretend they'd been cleaning all day when really they'd just do it super fast at the last minute. Is it really *that* dishonest when the process is genius and the results are the same anyway?

Growing up in New Mexico had an enormous effect on my Grandpa, too. "Ba," which is the nickname myself, my sisters and my cousins all use, recalls growing up after the Baby Boom and living in Alamogordo. This isn't far from where the Manhattan Project took place, and he recalls being conscious of this as he grew up. "Sometimes, the cows were lighter on one side than the other," he told me to emphasize just how much of an effect this had on the environment. So radiation was literally dye-dying cows and this is the first time I'm hearing about it? Really? Ba's beliefs and values were shaped by having a dad who spent 21 years as a US marine. Both being raised by strict parents who they had a lot of respect for seems to be something that my grandparents have in common, as well as being New Mexican-Texans who have more than completely found their place here.

Above all, I'm realizing the life that Grams lived in order to eventually move to Texas, where she's been ever since. Not because she was running away from a life that literally sounds like small-town New Mexican *Hairspray* to me, but because she knew what she wanted to do with her life, and she knew that she knew that the right place was where both her and my grandpa could find jobs that they liked. Looking at their relationship as a whole as well as how long it has lasted, it seems that when you have the right person, making a life with them

is really more about figuring out where you can both be happy-not a place on the map, but a feeling that shouldn't go away even when you know the city so well you can't go anywhere without bumping into a former student. And after all of our conversations both throughout my life and the ones that will continue tomorrow, I'm starting to see why my grandparents have been married for 50 years even though they didn't even need an extravagant party to commemorate it.

I forgot that I was interviewing for a "story" within 5 minutes. Actually, I never even said the words "go" or pressed *record* because neither of us made the active decision to start the interview process, and I just realized that it was already happening. I'm okay with that because I don't need to be the best "reporter" when I have a subject that doesn't need good reporting to get a good story because all she needs to do is talk about life. The last thing Grams told me was, "when I do 'tree' [tree pose] in yoga, I use this image to focus on balance: my mom, the rock, the foundation that kept me grounded and my Daddy who elevated me and encourages me to soar." The message that I hope anyone would get from reading this is that you may not know my Grams, but you do know people like her. She is forward-thinking and not willing to live in the past just because it's "comfortable," but she also will never lose touch with her past, her home, and her parents who she loves and deeply respects, which is visible in the stable life that she had built for herself with a husband who has travelled with her to multiple countries across the world. I can't really be as objective as a stranger here, but I'm learning from someone who I've known my whole life all over again, which I didn't think was possible but I'm definitely not mad about it.

Author's note:

I wish I'd gotten the tip to order this paper into "decades" sooner, because that would have made this whole thing more cohesive (thank you class discussions, I'll definitely use this idea next time). I'm going to need to brush up on my sentence structures before my grandma inevitably wants to read this because she was a seventh grade english teacher her whole life and I know she'll know the difference between an article with a cool story and an article that actually does the story justice. She's even the only one I'll correct* myself for in my texts if autocorrect mixes up "you're" and "your" or anything because I know I gotta do better than the students I've spent my whole life hearing stories about. It was honestly so hard not adding all the funny stories that she's told me about her former students and the daily humorous mishaps of being a teacher, but I felt like the things she told me during our actual interview show more about who she is as a person. I also was conflicted about wanting to interview both grandparents and make into two sections, but that would have turned into a capstone-length paper, so for now I'm going to sit with all the information that I just learned but didn't put in the paper as I flip through my great-grandpa's WWII scrapbooks.