

## Nanna, Reflections Upon ...

*I* remember Nanna – petite, soft in heart and body, comforting. Always high-heeled, dressed in a dress, hatted when leaving the house. Her tiny feet crossed at the ankles when sitting. With a demeanor of ease, she is a safe person, an accepting person, a person whose love blanketed me in all seasons.

Nanna's basement apartment in Evanston. I am three or four years old. The furniture is dark, tufted, scratchy. There is a long hallway with a hardwood floor that I slide on in my slippers. Once in that hallway I remember whooping, the remnants of full-on whooping cough. Oh, no, not another whoop! I remember a worry that I was not well yet. I vaguely remember a kitchen and kitchen smells, with Nanna stirring something. I like being in this place, though the overall atmosphere is dim, below ground level. I am content.

Now we live in a big rented house in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. It is Christmas and Nanna is visiting, staying in one of the many extra rooms of this white clapboard abode. The house is part of a large abandoned acreage owned by the Maytag estate. Outbuildings still contain horse tack, bridles and saddles hanging empty in straw-strewn stalls. I am eight or nine, and I can wander this seemingly vast expanse to my heart's content. When Nanna arrives all is even more well than before. She brings extra cheer, heels clicking on kitchen tiles, my mother and she side by side, baking odors filling each room.

Finally we are living in our newly built house in Evanston. Nanna's presence is even more a part of my life. We attend church together – Evanston Gospel Chapel, blue and white and wooden pew-ed. I sit with her at the “Breaking of Bread” service. I see her near the front at the annual Christmas program where I am singing a solo, “Dear Little Stranger”. She is the one who gathers me from the downstairs Sunday school room while my parents scoop up my brothers. The church basement smells like coffee and sweet rolls. Church women strip tables of white paper, its crunching sound mingling with the squeals of little kids. It is crowded with people who know Nanna, who know me. I wait on the periphery as she interacts with other ladies, all hatted and high-heeled and fancy-dressed like she is. I don't remember being impatient. I am too busy eavesdropping on their conversations. She will accompany us home for Sunday dinner. We'll smell the beef roast when we enter. Nanna and I will set the table with the Sunday dishes, the “good” silverware. (In later years I visit Evanston Chapel and am shocked at how tiny it is! A diminutive red brick Williamsburg-like replica, still smelling like coffee and pastries!)

It is Christmas again in our house in Evanston. I am going on thirteen, in the 8th grade. A multi-lighted tree, all red and blue and green and gold, stands in the corner of the living room. Tinsel drapes on every branch. I have opened my favorite presents, horse and dog books – *Lad a Dog* by Albert Payson Terhune and *The Black Stallion Returns*, by Walter Farley. After we sing carols around the piano, I will be able to

hole up with my new reads, propped in my tiny bedroom under the eaves. But my parents have a surprise! I am thinking it is going to be a new baby. At least that is the first thought I have when they say the word “surprise”. My brothers are 9 and 7. I feel a thrill at the very idea! The surprise is not a new baby but rather a move to California, where I will go to school for most of the second semester of 8th grade. This is because of my mother’s ongoing struggle with kidney disease and her doctor’s directive that she seek a warm climate. Seems my parents will look for a permanent place to live in Southern California. My heart sinks when I hear this news. The surprise is an unwelcome wrench from my school life, friends, and particularly Nanna. I paste on a wan smile. I do not lament aloud. In the era in which I am a child, one does not wrangle for position, bleat or plead or offer opinion. We leave for a rented place in Laguna Beach in early January.

Six of us are traveling to California riding in an ample, early 50’s sedan. Nanna is with us. Without Nanna I would be bereft. Her very presence is sweet solace, no words needed. I am content to live in the moment. I do not play out the fact that she will stay a mere month, that my nearly daily contact with her at this critical juncture in my life will end. I snuggle closer to her softness, her regard, her unconditional care for me. And I am glad. 🌿