



Five Generations: A Legacy of Love

by Laura Urista

One of my most treasured possessions is a black-and-white photograph of five generations of women in my family. Over the years several people have mentioned to me how unique and rare it is to have a five-generation photo. Pictured above are my great-great-grandmother Mietz (seated in the middle), my great-grandmother Fiebick (seated on the far left), my grandmother Olga (affectionately called “Grandma Dee Dee”) standing, and my mom, Charlotte Jean, holding my oldest sister, Sandy, on her lap. This photo was taken in the summer of 1946.

I wish I knew more about these wonderful ladies of my lineage. I do know that great-great-Grandma Mietz and great-Grandma Fiebick both lived to be over 100 years old. Grandma Dee Dee lived to be age 96 and my Mom lived to be age 86.

Grandma Dee Dee used to tell me she was “thankful we come from good German

stock.” In the late 1800s my great-great-grandparents were among the many “Germans from Russia” who fled to the United States in hopes of a better life for their family. They homesteaded in Wells County North Dakota, near the town of Fessenden, where my sister Sandy still lives to this day.

I enjoy watching the “Little House on the Prairie” TV shows, and I regularly record them. Set in the late 1800s in Minnesota and North Dakota, these stories by Laura Ingalls Wilder give me a glimpse of what the lives of my great-great grandparents might have been like—homesteading, farming and raising a family amid unsettled land, harsh winters, wild animals, in an area still inhabited by Native American tribes.

I can’t even imagine the hardships they faced every day of their lives, just to survive and raise their family—the next generation.

I feel so blessed that I had a close relationship with Grandma Dee Dee. I can still hear her soft German accent as she sang a lullaby to me: “*Du, du, liegst mir*

in herzen” (you, you live in my heart). When I was a teenager, she left me with many cherished words of wisdom that have served me well in life.

I especially remember one time when my dad (overly zealous for the “one true church”—the one he belonged to, of course) ridiculed Grandma Dee Dee for giving a little money to several small churches in Fessenden. He said she was foolishly “casting pearls before swine.”

I felt bad for Grandma, and after Dad left the room I asked her why she didn’t stand up to him. She smiled at me and said, “It’s more important to be kind than right. Don’t worry, dear. God knows what He’s doing with my money. I think all these churches are doing a little good for our town in their own way. God will use it for good.”

Those words deeply resonated with me, and the sharp contrast of the kindness shown by Grandma Dee Dee compared to the judgmental, critical spirit displayed by my dad made a strong impact on my young mind.

What’s so important about being “right” anyway? I know so

many folks who continue to loudly argue with others long after they've made their point, all in an effort to have the last word and be "right." It's almost as if they are addicted to being "right" while smugly concluding everyone else is "wrong."

And of course, legalistic religion further fans the flames of that addiction to be right and appear better than others, so that those enslaved by toxic religion really do believe God "is on their side."

Kindness—A Fruit of the Spirit

Kindness is a fruit of God the Holy Spirit. No amount of being theologically correct, or belief in the "right" dogmas can impart kindness.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Laura ("Gaga") with Grandbaby Heather, December 2017.



Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:22-25).

Christ lives in us, and as we surrender to him, he loves through us—enabling us to treat others with the Spirit-filled heavenly kindness, grace and love that's beyond our human efforts to produce on our own.

Letters to Heather

Now I'm a Grandma myself, and my granddaughter Heather (age 20 months in the photo below) calls me "Gaga."

I hope that someday Heather will come to see me as an example of love, grace and kindness and a valuable source of wisdom—like Grandma Dee Dee was for me.

I'm writing a book titled *Letters to Heather*, and I pray that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to her someday. I'll share an entry from last December as a preview here:

"Dear Heather, Pops and I are so excited to see you again! We sure wish you lived closer! But for now we are just happy we can see you whenever we are able, and even more so on special occasions.

In just a few days you'll be here to celebrate Christmas with us.

Right now all you can really understand is that we love you and we have yummy foods, pretty clothes, toys, books and other presents for you and your parents.



Laura's daughter, Tawny, with "Dee Dee", July 1989.

But someday you will learn the deeper meaning of this special day that represents the birth of baby Jesus, our Savior, the son of God who loves you even more than Gaga and Pops!

Through God's son, Jesus, he made a way for us all to be together with him and enjoy his love and his presence forever.

Heather, when you get back home and I can't be with you, it makes me really sad. I wish I could be with you all the time and I miss you SO MUCH!

I think that's how God feels when we do things that separate us from Him—things that aren't good for us or others. He's not angry with us or ready to punish us, like some people might say.

He loves us all and misses us. He wants us to do the good things that will keep us and his other children happy and healthy. But we'll talk more about God's love in the future. Big hugs and kisses!

Love, Gaga." □

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