

Childhood memories of my mother – Gayle D. Taylor
For my mother and
For my kids—Roxane, Sam, Peter, Hilary, Michael
by
Dee Taylor

To a little kid, a grandma is always a grandma---old, doting, kind, spoiling, out-of-fashion, wise and past their prime. Little may be known of those “prime” years or youth when grandma’s productivity was at its peak. Let me introduce you to Grandma Taylor through my own memories.

In 1952, we lived in New York City in Queens---specifically in Flushing, Long Island. The apartment site was not far from where the 1964 Worlds Fair was to be held and close to the future Shea Stadium. We lived in a reddish brick apartment complex of three or four stories and had to walk up stairs to get to the apartment. To do the family wash, 34 year old grandma would climb a flight of stairs to the roof, exit out a door to where there was washing equipment in a small pent house structure and wash lines stretching

across the top of the flat roof (there's a story about how I was stranded on the roof once). Grandma was very friendly and outgoing with other tenants. She seldom left the apartment area. Grandpa was seldom around, busy working on the requirements for his PhD. at New York University. Grandma was close to her Aunt Madge Stevenson (half-sister to Grandma's father Ken DeWitt) who with her husband Guy was living in New York. Grandma had lived with the Stevensons for a few years in San Francisco in the early 40's. Aunt Madge and Uncle Guy were classy people of means and Madge taught Grandma many points of etiquette, entertaining, and culture.

During the summers of my first and second years, Grandpa taught summer school in Vermillion, South Dakota. Grandma again made many friends there and to this day takes her taxes to Sid Gilbert, a missionary in South Dakota at the time and later a CPA who set up a practice in Provo.

When I was four, in 1954, we moved back to Provo where grandpa took a BYU job in the School of Commerce where among other things he taught accounting. The house where we lived before and after the New York stint still sits on 11th East in an area called University Park. This is the same house I came home to following my birth in December of 1948. I apparently didn't leave the house until March of 1949 because of the severe winter that year. The house is just a half block from today's Kiwanis Park. It was a temporary home for several months until grandma and grandpa found another home with more room. Some of Grandma and Grandpa's best friends lived just across the street, Barbara and Oliver Smith. Oliver taught at the Y and Barbara, a niece of David O. McKay was a homemaker with several small children. For church we went to the Social Hall, kitty corner from what was then Smeath's Market, now the area which is home to the J-Dog hotdog stand. The Social Hall later became the Language Training Mission where I lived for two months and was recently torn down

for newer buildings. We then went to the 13th Ward, a new chapel on 7th North and 10th East.

Not soon after, in 1954, we moved several blocks to 73 North 500 East to a Dutch colonial home where we would live the next thirteen years. The home was built in the early 1900's. Grandma would put her stamp on the house and it became one of the prettiest and stately homes in the area. It was here that I observed my mother's many talents, dedicated Church work and marvelous personality and neighborliness. She immediately set out creating a beautiful garden in the large backyard. She and grandpa dug out a rectangular patch back towards the "Little House" (a fairly large playhouse which was used for storage as well as a sort of clubhouse for the kids), which she turned into a gorgeous rose garden with over 20 bushes. She knew the names of all the rose varieties. She established flowerbeds around the yard and they flourished with daisies, hollyhock, black-eyed susans, petunias, pansies, phlox, potted geraniums, marigolds, ferns, nasturtiums, lilacs, iris

and others. There was a concord grape arbor on the length of the north side of the yard parallel to the clothesline grandpa had built. She would bottle grape juice from the grapes during many summers. On the west end, between the rose garden and the little house was a peach tree surrounded by orange poppies. In front of the little house, facing south, was a sometime vegetable garden tended by grandpa and irrigated by water from the ditch running along the west border of the property. Each week we received a water “turn” that flooded the entire back yard. The rest of the yard was hand watered since there were few sprinkling systems in those days. On the south side of the yard, behind the garage was a green apple tree that we could climb to get on top of the garage and jump off. That side didn’t get full sun because of bushes and the fence separating our yard from the Jensen side. Grandma would plant pansies and shade perennials back west to the tall Dutch Elm tree near the southwest yard boundary. At the back of the house there was a small porch at the back door leading down three or four steps to a semi-circle red cement patio dominated and shaded by a

large poplar tree. The patio had white wicker furniture which grandma and grandpa had purchased used, then restored and painted. There was also a picnic table and a charcoal grill.

Grandma made the early cushions for the wicker furniture and later had new ones specially made. Around the patio perimeter were planted geraniums and the sidewalk leading from the porch south to the garage was separated from the garden by a white picket fence. To the north was a forsythia bush.

In later years, after a trip to the Northwest and Victoria, grandma had constructed a begonia house in the backyard in which she grew beautiful tuberous begonias. There must have been 30 or 40 plants of vivid reds, yellows, whites, and oranges. The structure was later transported to the Oak Hills home where all continued to enjoy the beauty of the begonias.

The grass was always well tended, watered by the irrigation or by grandma pulling around a hose and sprinkler throughout the

summers. Fertilizer, in the form of manure, came from Uncle Paul's Cherry Hill Farm and was applied front and back almost every year.

Grandma engineered the beauty of the yard and visitors would always marvel at how well it appeared. The summer business school galas in the backyard were always a hit. Garden flowers were at their peak. Gayle's Beans were always served along with other treats of grandma's making. She always liked getting the butterflake rolls from the Provo Bakery. The entertainment was different every summer and included Polynesians juggling flaming swords and John Paxman doing a whistling routine with his belly-button. Other visitors at other times were entertained with the same panache.

At the front of the house, near the curb, two or three tall ash trees guarded the property. Between the flower beds and the front of the house were an Oregon grape bush, a Pyracantha, and fitzers.

Marigolds, salvia, geraniums and coleus were often part of the front beds. No yard in the neighborhood has ever looked better either then or now, fifty years later. For most of the years we lived there, Grandma would rise early on Sunday and voluntarily prepare a floral bouquet for the chapel.

Grandma was no different on the inside of the house. She ran the household. She created a home filled with charm, redolent of love for flowers and good cooking. Inside the house from the front you enter a little foyer where there was the upright piano and a writing desk just below and beside the banister and staircase (the piano and desk are still around). On the north side of the room at the base of the stairs there was a window where grandma placed five or six glass shelves she had had cut. On the shelves she would have her collection of African violets. She would propagate new violets from a leaf with its stem poked through aluminum foil into a glass of water. The violets were stunning when in bloom. I was always conscious and curious of the violets. I spent many hours on the

stairs playing “marble men” with my hundreds of marbles, and “army men” with my vast collection of rubber soldiers. Later, she would put some of her collection of crystal vases on these shelves. At the bottom of the stairs there was an old restored school desk with some knick-knacks on the wall above it.

Speaking of vases, grandma amassed a large collection of pitchers and vases most of which she still has adorning the east and west windows of her Oak Hills home. This knack for placing unique pieces of interest and beauty throughout the household enabled her to create a museum-like setting, though one which was warm, inviting and comfortable.

Always a master entertainer, grandma’s Sunday dinners in the chandelier-lit formal dining room would include guests of many stripes. Students, out-of-town visitors and foreigners at BYU would be invited. The cooking was always delicious, prepared and presented exquisitely. Grandma had several types of place sittings

with crystal goblets, crystal with red rims, red glass glasses, white milk glass, and other settings. In Egypt she bought a set of “muskie” glass from the bazaar. Most of this set broke during the transport back to the states. Her china had been given as a gift from grandpa’s brother Uncle Richard. Her silver was always shiny and carefully put away in purple, flannel cloth covers. Her table settings and center pieces were perfect, much of which she had learned from her Aunt Madge.

Her dishes were always tasty and diverse. Whether entertaining or not there was always a healthy entrée, a salad and a dessert.

Memorably items include sliced banana’s with powdered sugar, Danish Dessert, chipped beef or tuna and peas over rice, rice pudding, tapioca, heated canned tomatoes with toast mixed in.

Baked potatoes (grandma made the best twice baked potatoes in a potato boat, usually when there were guests), chicken and rice casserole, tuna potato chip casserole, enchilada dish, tacos, hamburger patties, chicken were all staples. There were always

vegetables and there weren't many I didn't like. Her Jello salads were artistically made in molds of different kinds and sizes, filled with different fruit combinations and usually presented on a bed of lettuce. On Saturday afternoons we had barbequed hamburgers with Fritos and grape lemonade served on TV trays while watching programs such as Ozzie and Harriet and Leave it to Beaver in Dad's den. Grandma would often make root beer floats for us. Pizza was new but sometimes we would make a Chef-Boy-R-Dee creation. Dessert was often bottled fruit she had put up during the yearly canning season. We had a basement full of bottles of peaches, pears, apricots, plums, cherries, and Concord grape juice. She also put up amazing dill pickles. During the bottling season I would go with her to purchase Mason and Kerr jars with the screw on caps and lids. She would buy these at Safeway which later became OP Skaggs on the block of the Taylor Bros. building. The fruit would come from various orchards in the Orem area. Most of Orem at that time was comprised of fruit orchards. I remember many times accompanying her to the orchards and returning home

with bushel baskets of peaches, apricots, pears, apples, and cherries. She would also grocery shop at Ernie Hanson's market on 4th East and 2nd North or the new IGA store on 9th East where the Gold's Gym is now and where Michael has worked-out.

These were the days before eating out, so she would do a lot of cooking. When we did go out it was usually after the afternoon Sacrament meeting when we would go to Cooks Ice Cream for a ten-cent double-decker or the Frost Top Drive-In for a cold mug of root beer. Of course there was Sawaya's Zesto on Second North and University. Sometimes we ate there as a family, but it was within walking or bicycling distance of the house. Those 5 cent French fries and soft serve cones were great. On occasion, we'd drive out to Payson where there was a favorite burger drive-in. Trips to Salt Lake were infrequent but we usually ate at a nice restaurant such as Bratten's Grotto or in ZCMI. In Provo, a highlight was Mexican food at the El Azteca above Olsen's bakery and across from the former Rowley's (This is in the same area as

Hundley's Garage and J-Dog). Grandma always enjoyed greeting Brother Rubio the owner.

Dishes that she prepared for more special occasions were meatloaf, roast beef and potatoes (most Sundays), a rice, beef broth, and button mushroom creation that I particularly liked. Her scalloped potatoes were the best. When she started putting Lipton's Onion Soup mix in with the roast beef the taste was fantastic. She'd prepare pork chops with rice in a tasty casserole. Gayle's Beans were always for picnics and outdoor occasions. She'd make ice cream parfaits in crystal goblets with layers of different kinds of ice cream and fudge layers. We'd have a homemade cake almost every Sunday, often one with coconut, nuts, and brown sugar topping. Steve and I would pick off the frosting and leave the cake it was so delicious. We also liked it when she made marble cake with chocolate frosting or ginger bread with applesauce, whipped cream and maraschino cherries. Angel Food cake, lemon pudding or lemon squares, and a great lemon merengue pie

were often on the dessert menu. Her homemade ice creams were made with the hand crank freezer and they were delicious. She started making Greta Romney's 3 sixes ice cream at this time. We were also big on popcorn in the old days before electric poppers were common. Holiday treats included white divinity and her famous buttermilk fudge which was to die for.

Grandma had a multitude of friends. It seemed she knew everyone in town. The neighbors all loved her. On the north side were Cora and Roy Helm. They were an older couple and we could see their house and talk to them through the kitchen window. There was only a little wire fence separating the two homes and it was easy for a little kid to jump the fence---in my case to go to Gail Kelsey's, Dana Smith's, Buddy Murphy's, the Bushman's, or the Bagshaw's. Up above the Helm's was a rented apartment where a British gal, Muriel Thole lived. She worked at the Y and after she moved out, an Iranian family----The Sahlari's---moved in. They

had a nephew named Jiman who I palled around with for a few years. We had many of them for dinner over the years.

To the South was the Jensen home. Ralph and Faith were also older and had a faithful spaniel dog named Snookie. Across the street were the Farr's, the Curtis's, and on the corner a Peck woman. On Center and Fifth East a vacant lot became the Gibson home (brother of Channel 4 newscaster Roy Gibson). Around the corner was widow Vera Jensen, an older but great friend of grandma.

Other friends were countless. All of there social groups were just filled with great people. Grandma and Grandpa were in many social groups. The names go on and on. When they would come over on Sunday evenings or other nights I would often sit at the top of the stairs out of site and listen to their discussions. There were the Paxmans, the Bowens, Chuck and Harriet Peterson, Paul and Margaret Harmon, Tom and Fern Cheney, Greta and Antone

Romney, Barbara and Oliver Smith, Blanche and Coy Miles, Enid and Neil Peterson, Carl and Edna Young, Conan and Arminta Matthews, Elaine and Neff Smart, Loren and Maureen Bryner, Stew and Sarah Grow, Byron and Edna Done, Philys and Mark Allen, Ab and Jennie Swenson and many others. They were all from such varied backgrounds and enriched each other's lives. Only a few are left---the Paxmans, Paul Harmon, and Sarah Grow.

Nieces and nephews were always welcome. David Vance with his gold Spider Corvair was a frequent visitor and later introduced us to his girlfriend and later wife Lynn. Karen and Diane Dana were regulars, as were the Skinners, Ernest, Mabel and family. Others were invited over as they came to school or passed through town.

Of course there were the friends in the Ward. Chauncy Riddle was the bishop when we moved in. Clyde Weeks and Richard Pratt were later bishops under whom grandma served as Relief Society President. As Relief Society President in the 8th Ward grandma

established some enduring friendships. After moving to the Oak Hills Fourth Ward, she continued to meet socially with the Eighth Ward ladies for many years. Marie Bullock, Jesse Bushman, Veneita Kelsey, and Sister Trotter were just some I can remember. She kept good friends from our Egypt days in 1963-4. Ford Foundation people Buzz and Kay Parrish, Jim and Barbara Lipscomb, and Mary Habib (a Coptic Christian) stayed in touch for many years and visited our home in Provo.

As for education, although grandma did not graduate from college she kept on learning. Her stenographic skills were among the best. She took shorthand and was responsible for typing grandpa's entire PhD. dissertation (100's of pages) without an error, an amazing feat given grandpa's undecipherable writing. She was an ardent letter writer, by her beautiful handwriting keeping in touch with dozens of people she had known through the years, even back to high school friends. She would take summer school classes at the Y and enjoyed classes such as Ancient Greek Literature. She

would read Homer, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides for the classes taught by renowned professor Marshall Craig. She enjoyed British and American literature. She was a big fan of the literature study promoted by the Relief Society in the Relief Society magazine in those days. One of her complaints about the coming of the correlation program was that study of good literature was not included in the new teaching materials. She spearheaded the formation of a book club in the Oak Hills ward which continues to this day, the group having read over 100 books by well-know authors.

Her hobbies included sewing, knitting, crocheting, furniture restoration, needlepoint. She would make all of her own clothes. I remember many boring afternoons going to Taylor's Department Store in Provo or ZCMI or Auerbachs in Salt Lake sitting amidst bolts of fabric while she pored through pattern books. Later the dining room table or floor would be covered with the paper patterns, material and scissors. We would go to antique stores

where she would buy old chairs and other pieces. She would purchase stripping materials, sand paper, and rubber gloves, restore the furniture and then take them to have one of her needlepoint works tacked on. Some of these chairs remain in her home. She worked on restoring larger furniture pieces which still adorn her home.

She took a ceramics class and made some beautiful pieces. She and grandpa were devoted welfare workers often spending time at the cannery in Provo. Grandma worked at the new Provo Temple for 18 years and holds a temple recommend to this day. During the early years on 5th East she also worked at the Bishop's Storehouse.

Grandma loved music and the arts. The Dean of the College of Business was Herald R. Clark. He was a mentor of grandpa's and at the BYU was responsible for bringing in cultural and artistic groups to the university. The yearly programs included some of the best talent in the country. Symphonies, plays, musicals, art

exhibitions were all part of life for Provoans who sought culture. Grandpa and grandma seldom missed these performances. She harangued Steve and me sufficiently that we became somewhat proficient musicians (he more so than I). She pushed us for several years and at every opportunity made us play for visitors at home or in church. She'll never stop talking about the piano and trombone duet of "O Holy Night" Steve and I played for a Christmas Eve party in 1963 at the home of the Lipscomb's in Egypt in 1963. When our family finally bought a stereo console for our home in the late 50's, grandma purchased LP's that were the best of the classics. I remember an album of the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra with Eugene Ormandy, Ravel's Bolero, Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony with George Szell's Cleveland Orchestra, operas and other uplifting music. Though we often watched the Hit Parade program on TV starring Gisele MacKenzie, Snooky Lanson and others, or Perry Como, she'd always prefer the classics. Lawrence Welk, of course, was always her favorite, and grandpa's too for that matter.

Ample evidence of her love of Egypt is still found throughout her home. Paintings, lithographs, brass trays, reliefs, books, coffee tables, a mother-of-pearl inlaid screen all speak to her love for that adventure in 1963-4. She became an expert on Egyptian history and took many opportunities to explore the ruins of the ancient dynasties. She still reviews the books she has gathered about Egypt.

As you enter her home the first picture you see is Grandma's portrait as a young woman, just married I think. It was painted by Alvin Gittins, a famous Utah artist. Each time you visit her, it's good to remember how much she has accomplished since that portrait was drawn. I've surely forgotten many things, but you couldn't ask for a better example of a woman who has given her all to love, knowledge, beauty, work, and service. Please see her how she is and how she was. It is quite a package. She is truly worthy of our love and respect.