

Grandmother

By JIM CHAPLIN

It was a typical fall evening in late November. A frosty chill hung in the air. As I prepared to retire for the night, I entered my grandmother's bedroom to say goodnight, as I did each evening.

Rays from a streetlight shining through the window dimly lighted the room. I could make out the frail old woman's torso, as she lay almost motionless on the bed, the silence broken only by her shallow breathing.

As I approached her bedside, in almost a whisper, she asked, "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," I said, "how are you?"

"Tired," came the feeble reply.

"I won't keep you then, you need your rest," I said, as I knelt to say a brief prayer by her bedside, the same one I had said for as many nights as I could remember.

Then, rising to my feet, we said goodnight to each other and I left the room.

Nineteen years earlier, my father, prompted by my mother's inability to cope with a newborn, had brought me to live with his mother.

Although she had raised her family and was approaching her sixty-first birthday, she unselfishly accepted the task of starting over with a two-month-old grandson.

Now she was completely bedridden, unable to perform even the simplest of tasks. She could not sit up in bed without assistance or even feed herself. Her mind, however, remained sharp, which must have made her situation more difficult, but she voiced no complaint.

This tiny but once robust woman had wasted away to skin and bone, her body wrecked by the pain of severe arthritis. Yet, for over a year and a half, she had clung tenaciously to her meagre existence.

Although I always had great affec-

tion for my grandmother, it was not until years later that I truly understood and fully appreciated the sacrifices she had made. Now that I am the age she was when she took on the task of raising me and I have a grandchild very close to my age at that time, it has become even more apparent how onerous her sacrifice was.

Life had not been easy for her but being a woman of great faith and courage, each day had always been taken in stride.

Born in 1882, she had witnessed the turn of the century, two world wars, and many life-altering events.

As a young girl she took piano lessons and in later years her piano would be her one source of comfort but that too eventually fell silent, as the arthritis rendered her fingers unable to play.

In 1902 she married,

and over the next forty years raised nine children and lost three others at birth, including a set of twins.

She had lived through the great depression and experienced the loss of a family farm.

A few years after that loss, my grandparents acquired a small piece of land on which they built a modest home. It had no indoor plumbing, not even running water. Heated with wood and coal and poorly insulated, if at all, it was drafty in winter. There was often frost on windowsills and sometimes even on furniture when we awoke on cold mornings.

It was, however, one of the warmest homes that have ever existed.

From my grandmother I learned that I could do anything to which I set my mind. "Can't is a cowardly word," she would say, when I indicated I was unable, or perhaps unwilling, to perform some task.

She admonished me to "be a leader, not a follower," words of wisdom that have served me well over the years.



Author Jim Chaplin bounces on his grandmother's knee at the age of five months, shortly after she took on the job of raising him.

kith 'n' kin

When I was eight years old my grandfather died. After his death and on a meagre government pension of only forty dollars a month, my grandmother managed to maintain the home and to keep me fed and clothed. I can only imagine the personal sacrifices she made.

Within a few years her own health began to deteriorate but she did not complain and continued the necessary daily tasks to maintain a warm and loving home.

When she suffered a gallbladder attack and had to be hospitalized for surgery, my aunt, one of her daughters who had never married, returned home. She assumed the dauntless task of helping to raise me and to give the home care that my grandmother so greatly needed and deserved.

Grandmother's health continued to decline and the arthritis took its toll, finally confining her to the bed in which she now lay.

Her main goal in life was simple. Oft times I had heard her say she wanted to live to her eightieth birthday.

The true reasons for that goal I will never know but it was a goal she seemed determined to achieve. Not a lofty one by most

people's standards but under the circumstances of her life, possibly out of reach,

However, can't was not a word in her vocabulary. That night, without a whimper or complaint, the one who had so little but gave so much, quietly passed away, one day after her eightieth birthday.

Jim Chaplin is a free-lance writer who has contributed both print and broadcast media.



Jim Chaplin cradles his new granddaughter, Meredith.

HOLY ROSARY ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
 139 Martin St. Milton, Ontario • 905 878-6535
www.holyrosaryparish.ca
 Our faith community welcomes new parishioners!
 Lord's Day Mass Times: Sat. - 5:30 p.m. Sun. - 9:00 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

Sacrament of Reconciliation Saturday, December 11, 2004 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. 4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Thursday, December 16, 2004 8:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Saturday, December 18, 2004 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. 4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Tuesday, December 21, 2004 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Thursday, December 23, 2004 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Advent Music Service Sunday, December 12, 2004 7:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Solemnity of Christmas Christmas Vigil Masses for Families with Small Children Friday, December 24, 2004 5:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Solemn Midnight Mass Friday, December 24, 2004 Carol Service - 11:30 p.m. Solemn Midnight Mass 12:00 a.m. Masses During Christmas Day Saturday, December 25, 2004 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. There are no afternoon or evening Masses anywhere in the Diocese of Hamilton on December 25, 2004 Feast of the Holy Family	Sunday, December 26, 2004 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God Holy Day of Obligation in Canada Friday, December 31, 2004 5:30 p.m. Saturday, January 1, 2005 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. There are no afternoon or evening Masses anywhere in the Diocese of Hamilton on January 1, 2005 Solemnity of the Epiphany Sunday, January 2, 2005 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.
---	--	---

Unconditionally Guaranteed
THE Dorland-Haight
 GALLERIES INC.
 The Pursuit of Excellence

\$10.00 off any purchase over \$50.00

REGULAR FRAMING
 Moulding, 2 mats, glass & backing
 20" x 24" from **\$99.00**

\$20.00 off any purchase over \$100.00

ARCHIVAL FRAMING
 Moulding, 2 mats, Conservation glass
 20" x 24" from **\$129.00**

Gift Certificates Available

905-875-1751

144 Main St, Milton Krinkle Ornaments • Gifts • Antiques • Original Art • Prints