

They Should Build a Statue to My Grandma: The American Woman

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By: Peter Jedick



Since the PC crowd is busy tearing down statues to famous Americans, I have a replacement to propose: My grandmother, Mary Jedick.

Yes, seriously. The older I get the more I think about her life and what a great American she was.

Mary Gracon, her maiden name, was born on a farm in Pennsylvania in 1891. When she turned 16 her family sent her back to their village in Poland to find a husband. There she married my grandfather and namesake, Peter Jedick.

He was considerably older than her and according to family legend it was an arranged marriage. Most of what I know about her came from my high school years. As the only grandchild who lived near her that

could drive, it was my responsibility to go over to her house and cut her grass.

She would reward me with some homemade bread and chicken noodle soup, all made from scratch, before going back to watching her beloved soap operas on tv.

Over lunch she would tell me story, after story, after story as I slowly ate her repast. I guess she was pretty lonely living by herself after the life she'd led. Here's what I could piece together about her life from her stories and other family lore. As hard as it is to believe, this wasn't that long ago.

Grandpa was a teacher in their village in Poland. He was well respected as an educated man but he gave that up to work in a coal mine in Pennsylvania so they could come to America. They eventually saved enough money to buy a farm on the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio.

She was a hard-working farm girl, but he wasn't much of a farmer, so he got a job as a fireman on the railroad. The fireman had the hot, back-breaking job of shoveling coal into the train engine's steam furnace to make it run.

They sold the farm, prime real estate today, and bought an up and down two-family double house on the west side of Cleveland.

Here's where the fun begins. You need an active imagination to appreciate their lifestyle. They started raising a family and my grandmother birthed nine children on the dining room table.

No maternity ward for grandma. She did it with the help of either a doctor who made house calls or a midwife. She did lose two babies, twins, probably because they were under weight, and she didn't have a neo-natal unit in her house to help her.

Besides, can you imagine what it was like for her to raise a baby with all those other rugrats running around the house? Much less two of them? Or just to be walking around pregnant all the time? I don't know a lot about women, but I know from experience that they're different when they're with child.

I forgot to tell you that their half-a-house only had two bedrooms, one bathroom with a large bathtub, no shower, a large kitchen, a large dining room and a small living room. How the hell did anyone go to the bathroom and where did they all sleep?

I once asked my dad and he said his parents used one bedroom, the girls shared the other one and the guys slept wherever they could find a spot to lie down.

And then she had to feed them, clothe them, send them off to school and keep them from killing each other. My dad's siblings weren't saints by any means. I picked up some tidbits on how she did it because of two experiences.

First, my parents let me go shopping with her once when I was in grade school. Neither of my grandparents ever drove or owned a car. She called them "machines."

Try shopping for seven kids without a car or even a nearby supermarket. We had to take two buses to the West Side Market, which is an historic collection of meat, produce and bakery stalls under one roof.

And how did she carry her items home? She didn't take an Uber. Instead, she put them in a metal wire two wheeled cart that she had to drag on and off the buses and pull home from the bus stop. Try doing that a few times while you're pregnant.

After she died, I bought her house off the family estate to start raising a family of my own. There I found some clues to her lifestyle. There were a lot of glass jars in the basement that she used to preserve the peaches from the backyard peach tree. They came in handy for fruit in those long winters.

Then I discovered a huge tree stump with a flat top also in the basement. So, I asked the relatives what that was for.

"Oh, that was where grandpa chopped the heads off the chickens."

What? Young people today probably never heard the expression: "you run around like a chicken with its head cut off." That's where that came from.

Where the live chickens came from, I never thought to ask. The West Side Market? A neighbor? Maybe she raised them herself in their tiny backyard.

My grandfather would behead them, pluck the feathers, clean them and then hand them over to my grandma. No frozen packaged chicken breasts for them.

In fact, come to think of it, even grandma's refrigerator was a tiny thing with an even smaller freezer. Did my dad and his siblings ever eat anything besides chicken soup? I wish I'd asked them.

And how did she clothe them? There were no trips to the department store. The clothes were handed down from kid to kid to kid until they fell apart. And guess who kept sewing them back together? Not grandpa.

Oh, and how about washing all the kids' clothes and grandpa's dirty railroad gear? No fancy washer or dryer for my grandma. Her washing machine was still in the basement when I bought her house.

It didn't have a rinse cycle. She had to take the clothes out of the washtub, then push them through a ringer that squeezed the excess water out of them.

And since she didn't have a dryer, she had to either take them outside to hang on the clothesline or, in the winter, drag them up two flights of stairs to the attic clothesline. One time I visited her when she was 80 years old, and she was still hauling her own clothes up to the attic.

Which reminds me of one last item. Her attic was above the second floor of their double house. That floor had the same blueprint as hers and it was usually occupied by another family living above them with similar dynamics. More kids making more noise and sharing their postage stamp backyard.

Fortunately, my grandparents owned the house, so the rent was an extra source of income that came in handy paying the mortgage during the Great Depression.

But they were still so poor that grandma would send the kids down to the nearby railroad tracks to pick up pieces of coal that fell off the coal cars, then use it to augment their coal fired furnace.

My grandmother was a pretty, petite lady with large farm-girl hands who raised seven inner-city children, and their dog "Kaiser," under extremely tough conditions. They never collected welfare, food stamps or government assistance and they never used abject poverty as an excuse to get in trouble or break the law.

Her children all went to school every day and to church every Sunday. How she got them all there I don't have a clue. But they all became upstanding American citizens. And except for the son who drowned as a teenager, another sad story, all the boys served in World War II, as did all the girls' husbands.

Another one of my chores was to take grandma to the cemetery on Sundays. It was her habit to visit the twins, her teenage son and her late husband as often as she could. She missed them terribly.

My grandmother died when she was 87 years old. It was during a terrible blizzard, one of the coldest days in Cleveland's history, that she caught pneumonia from sweeping the front sidewalk with her broom. Why? Because she believed it was her responsibility to help the neighborhood children walk to the nearby grade school.

So that's why I believe that someone should build a statue to that great American woman, Mary Jedick. Make it a tribute to all the women of her generation who lived similar lives. Maybe call it: "The American Woman."

But then it struck me. They would probably tear her statue down too.

Why?

Because she didn't believe in abortion.

Peter Jedick is a historian who has six children of his own, and is also a best-selling author of the book: [Why America Is Bankrupt](#).

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