

Zoë

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My Admirable Person

Some people find aspirational role models in a specific school teacher or a certain celebrity, others with an aunt or a neighbor. However, I have had the good fortune and immense luck of not having to search very far or stepping foot outside to find the person I aspire to be similar to in life; I found “my person” in the woman who raised me, my Nana. In fact, there is no other person that I would deem more worthy of being someone’s inspiration, and no one else that I believe possesses the multitude of laudable attributes that Nana conveys every single day without fail. From my earliest memories to the present day, I have aspired to possess even a fraction of Nana’s generosity, compassion, strength and nurturing tendencies.

Rarely have I encountered someone that is more generous than Nana; her frequent acts of unprovoked kindness towards others, even complete strangers have been truly praiseworthy over the years. Specifically, I remember an interaction at a birthday party for my best friend’s mom Melisa that Nana and I attended a few years back. Shortly after our arrival, I ventured out to find my best friend and start a round of bowling, while Nana sat down at a table filled with colleagues from Melisa’s workplace. After a few hours, and as the party was wrapping up, I noticed the scarf Nana had been wearing was gone. Immediately, I probed for information; she loved that scarf! Nana proceeded to tell me how one of the women at the table had commented on how the colorful butterflies on the scarf reminded her of something her own grandmother used to wear as she was growing up; so Nana, without hesitation, had untied the scarf from her neck and gently

handed it over to the woman to keep. “But Nan, that scarf was silk! And you had it for such a long time!” I remember exclaiming after learning about what she had done. Nana just smiled at me and took my hand in hers, “She liked it, so I gave it to her. Anything you can do to make someone else’s day is well worth it. I liked that scarf, but she liked it more and it would bring her more happiness than it would to me.” Not only had my Nana given away a pure silk scarf that she had since the early 1970’s, she gave it to a complete stranger; I was baffled. Then again, I have come to realize that Nana’s generosity is a fundamental component of her personality and a gift that flows naturally onto others.

Nana’s compassion is something that I have benefited from my entire life; whether we are together at home, or speaking over the phone with a thousand miles separating us, I know that I can come to her with anything and she will be the person I can lean on. Her compassion came into play in particular during my first semester of college. I had struggled with attention issues my whole life, and was given the long overdue diagnosis of ADHD and started on counteractive medication about a month after starting classes at Notre Dame. Although I thought that all things would get better from that point forward, the first prescription I was put on wrecked havoc on my body; I couldn’t sleep, couldn’t eat, sweat profusely all the time, and was constantly shaking. After three straight days without sleep, I decided to call home; Nana immediately expressed her concern for me and recommended things I should try to feel better. But what really got to me was her statement that she wished she could take all the pain I was feeling and deal with it herself, so I wouldn’t have to. She didn’t cry, but I could hear in her voice that she was feeling my emotions alongside me. Nana asked me if there was anything she could do, and if I needed her to send anything or come to the school. While this was not necessary to offer, it made me feel comforted to know she would drop everything and fly a

thousand miles to help get me through my adverse reaction. Fortunately for my grades, I heeded her counsel and had my medication switched shortly after our conversation to a prescription that is better-suited for my needs. Nana's compassion during this time made me feel significantly more comfortable with dealing with the medication adjustment process and reminded me that if I couldn't deal with things myself entirely, I still had her to lend me sympathy and love in times of need.

The personal strength my Nana embodies is one of the characteristics that I admire most. Despite many occurrences of hardship experienced over the years, her strength was most exemplified as she was cared for my Papa, her husband, as his health and mind deteriorated from Alzheimer's Disease. My Papa was always a lively, vibrant man, with great physical capacity, full of happiness, and most importantly Nana's soul mate. It was really hard for me to see him waste away over the course of four years, but I can only imagine what it must have felt like for my Nana. Notably, during the final week of his life when he had lost all means of communication and was only able to lay in bed, I encountered her greatest feat of strength by far; although my Papa was no longer responsive, she continuously told him she loved him, retold stories of their life together, and even turned on a favorite song of theirs, Freddy Fender's "Before the Next Teardrop Falls," all without letting her emotions encompass her. I cried numerous times, but she always stayed on the task at hand, making sure Papa was comfortable and doing as well as he could be, and never let the sadness caused by his declining state affect his care. Nana's innate strength held her up and kept her functioning, and had I not experienced it during this time, I am not sure that I would have understood just how strong of a person she truly is.

Nana is probably the world's biggest nurturer. Although that's a bold claim, she has an astounding way of bringing people into her life and making them feel like they are cared for, regardless of whether it is actually needed or they are capable of caring for themselves. For instance, during my senior year of high school I snapped my ankle during a dress rehearsal of *Legally Blonde*, the musical I was starring in at the time. Although I was seventeen at the time, my Nana took care of me as if I was an infant; she padded and re-padded my crutches, constantly elevated my leg, always made sure the remote was near me so I could watch reruns of my favorite show, *The Walking Dead*, cooked up a storm to make sure I was eating food that was comforting to me in my pain, and checked up on me as frequently as every ten minutes. Naturally, I reassured her numerous times that I was capable of taking care of myself, and she didn't need to worry so much, but she persisted. Despite having the ability to take care of myself, I credit Nana's impeccable care to my quick recovery from my injury and getting back on stage for my final high school performance in record time. Nana's nurturing, despite sometimes excessive, is a tendency that benefits everyone in her life and greatly increases the quality of life of those that surround her.

My Nana possesses the qualities of an overall exceptional person; there are not very many people in the world that are like her. Her warmth and love come naturally to her and exude from her all the time, like water running in a stream. I truly believe there is not one negative thing anyone can say about her, and I hope that as I continue to grow as a person, I get more and more like her, and discover that I have the same nature as she does. A person can only hope to have someone they love so much in their life, and to have the person I love the most be the person that I aspire to become more like, is something that keeps me aiming higher and higher each day.