

Intro

1. When I think of Grandma, my overwhelming feeling is one of warmth. And the place that comes to mind is the incredible home that she created at Windmill House. I know, from talking to my cousins, that this was the common experience of all her grandchildren.
2. So let us, as grandchildren, take you through that special shared memory.

A Visit to Grandma

3. *The opportunity to spend time on Windmill Hill was special.*
4. *You would get that excited feeling in your stomach as the car pulled up the sloping drive, the garden unfolding in front of you: the long, familiar front of the house; the section of the lawn where we'd spent full days playing kick the can or capture the flag; and the orchard – a gigantic maze of blossoming fruit.*
5. *Grandma - or Mama to some of us - would always be there ready to greet us, familiar in her beautifully coordinated shirt and long skirt, a colourful cross hung around her neck.*
6. *Waving from the window, she'd wait for us to career into the kitchen, totally upsetting the balance of whichever task (there was always a task) that she was completing at the time. She'd give us a hug - hold us by the shoulders and tell us how much we'd grown - and then ask how everybody was.*
7. *Nine times out of ten, the answer was – we were over-excited...!*
8. *Now I don't know how Grandma developed quite so many ways of channelling over excitement, but it was pretty extraordinary to see. There was a poster in her downstairs bathroom - '20 rules for parents' - which advocated constant activity for children to tire them out (whilst encouraging them to be very, very respectful of how hard it was to be a parent!). It was an approach which she seemed to take to heart.*
9. *When she felt the time was right – and Grandma had a sixth sense for knowing when the time was right - she would whip out a set of small blue plastic bowls. These were the strawberry picking bowls. And they meant competition.*

10. *For those who haven't visited Windmill House, the placement of the strawberry plants around the garden is ingenious. They're tiny – about the size of a fist. And they're located in nooks and crannies, spaced in such a way that you need a strategy to get around before they are snaffled by your competitors.*
11. *It was an ingenious way of keeping grandchildren occupied, and, of course, a recipe for sibling rivalry. We revelled in it.*
12. *Once the picking was done, we'd run back into the kitchen. We'd hand in our produce, and be rewarded with sponge fingers, breadsticks, and tiny orange lollies turned out of an ice cube tray.*
13. *This room was a place of many, many happy memories.*
14. *You could wander the kitchen and see the wedding photos of all of our parents. The door where you could measure your height, drawing yourself up as tall as possible in order to get the edge on the cousin who was coming up fast behind you.*
15. *The cupboards beside the aga where smaller cousins, and once...members of the Hampshire Constabulary, would hide, squeaking with excitement as they were hunted by Grandma, parents or older siblings. The Cousins, not the Hampshire Constabulary!*
16. *The kitchen was also always full of industry: Grandma might be bread-making, or mending, or even giving the aga a once-over with the tiny vacuum cleaner that she kept specifically for that purpose.*
17. *The first scenario was definitely the most exciting.*
18. *Grandma never made bread without setting half aside for the attention of her small assistants. And when we were ready, she would get set up, placing a huge bread board over the double-size sink. She would watch as we formed the dough into over-elaborate structures, making encouraging comments but (and now, as an adult, I recognise this) unquestionably aware that our complex efforts would turn to large unrecognisable blobs during baking.*
19. *There would be a group effort to lay the table. And then supper would be served.*

20. *The way that grandma cooked was characteristically French. Everything would be precise and delicious and beautifully presented: a half avocado seasoned with oil and balsamic; home-made soup with vegetables from the garden, served in a porcelain dish with seed-studded brown bread; tiny roast potatoes with their skin still on, crunchy as you bit into them. Cups of ice-cold water poured into iconic silver mugs.*
21. *The meals were always delicious. And sometimes treacherous.*
22. *Grandma was passionate about not wasting things. From the deep freeze containers of vintage bolognaise to the fridge full of Copella bottles that were repurposed in the late 90's, the evidence of this was everywhere. I don't think a single grandchild ever actually saw Grandma drink a fresh bottle of Copella.*
23. *Nowhere did she apply the anti-waste rule so strongly as at the supper table.*
24. *For a twelve-year-old, there is a difficult balancing act between wanting more (of course we did – we all wanted more) and risking not being able to finish a second helping.*
25. *To fall into the latter camp was to be relegated to watching your cousins tuck into apple puree, crème anglaise, and tiny, crunchy meringues, cooked until they were crispy on the outside but chewy on the inside. All whilst you sat grudgingly behind the collateral broccoli that you'd accepted in exchange for more roast chicken.*
26. *Even insects were no exception to this 'waste not, want not' rule. James has an excellent story of taking a large portion of jelly only to realise that there were ants (or in grandma's words, 'extra protein') suspended in the mix. No wonder we've all turned out so tall!*
27. *Finally, it would be time for bed. Grandma would do the goodnight rounds, kneeling with each of us to say our prayers before we went to sleep. We'd have a rousing chorus of 'Yes, Jesus loves me' and 'Thank you for the world so sweet' before climbing into bed, ready for grandma to bestow a "God Bless you" and a cross traced on your forehead.*

Other memories

28. All of this is just a small window into everything that grandma gave us.

29. She blessed us with her character: The encouragement with which she supported our various pursuits - ask Elizabeth about the bassoon, or Alex about his underground apple leather business. The patience with which she which she dealt with our various childhood exploits - ask George about "the daffodil incident". And of course, the joy with which she welcomed Susie, Freddie and Sarah into the family.
30. She gave us her humour: The time she smuggled rosaries into Saudi Arabia (Hugh); agreed to have curry for Christmas dinner (Freddie); had to defend her sewing scissors at airport security (Edith), cast out a ghost at Burguret (Madeleine, Hamish) or had a run in with security whilst on a choir trip to the Vatican (Alex and Kit).
31. And, absolutely crucially, she gave us her faith: whether it was going to mass on Sunday (the closest that I've ever got to turning up with a celebrity...) or welcoming Nick, and other members of the 5am club, to sit with her early in the morning, praying the rosary as the sun rose.

Final Section

32. After Grandma's death a lot of people asked me – as I'm sure they've asked all of you – how I felt. I guess that I've learned that putting a label on what you feel isn't always possible, and you can feel many ways at once – this big unfolding sense of gratitude and sadness and love and grief. But the thing that I am sure of is that Grandma is where she should be right now. And that she has infused all of her goodness into this family in an incredible and lasting way that we will all carry with us.
33. I think I'll leave you with a last word from Madeline, who speaks for all of us when she wrote:
34. *'Grandma Elise was quite simply the most loving, most patient and most caring grandma anyone could ever wish for; and the fact that she managed to ensure every single person felt this love was incredible.'*