



NANA

by Kathleen Satterlee

A memory: sitting on Nana's lap at our kitchen table, peeling and slicing apples. First, she would peel the ripe skin into long, red spirals that would fall to the floor. Then she would slice a piece off, and, holding the slice between the knife and thumb, salt it and slide it into her mouth. Then, came my piece. It was fun taking the apple slice from the knife, because it was something most grown-ups wouldn't allow children to do. I couldn't wait for the slice to drop into my mouth.

It was always juicy, and a bit tart, and very refreshing. The apple finished, she would put her chubby arms around my slight body and rock me in a chair. She would teach me songs, none of which I remember, and usually put me to sleep. I would often nestle my head into her smooth cotton dress and just listen to her sing.

Nana was my babysitter when I was a child. My mother always worked, and Nana stayed with my sisters and me until I was nearly eleven. She never seemed to change or age during those years. She was a plump woman of an undetermined age, who was more of a grandmother than a babysitter.

She always wore faded cotton dresses, soft and worn. She would wear old black galoshes to the house and would carry her slippers in a small carpet bag. Around the house she wore these slippers, with rolled stockings that never stayed up. She had a smell about her, different from anyone else I knew as a child. She smelled of cosmetic powder, which is a very sweet smell, and of fresh-baked cookies. Her speckled hair was bobbed short and permed in very loose curls. She had a round rosy face that laughed all the time. To hug her was to hug many fluffy pillows, which I could never quite put my arms around. Her walk was a slow deliberate shuffle, the perfect gait for my small legs. We would often walk to the park at the end of the road. She would swing me for hours, and then we would walk back to the house.

I was lost when Nana left, and I had my mother there every day. There were no more salted apple slices to taste, no more soft dresses to lean my head on, and no more walks. But, I would go to visit her often at her house. She lived by a lake, with a beach for a front yard. She had a house full of windows and rustic furniture. The house was very old, but in a homey way.

There were fat cushions everywhere, and surprises around every corner. The kitchen was always warm from baking. On the counter near the stove sat a white pig cookie jar that was always brimming, waiting for eager hands to steal some cookies.

Often, we would ride in her rowboat out into the lake. The water was always clear and smooth as a mirror. Just by leaning over the edge, I could see my reflection. We would often drift into the middle of the lake, and look at clouds, or watch a spider on the bow make its intricate web by spinning and twining, spinning and twining. The spider finished, I would scoop water in my palm and splash the web. The spider would scamper off and leave his laced network glistening in the sun.

I haven't seen Nana very often in the past few years, but, when we do meet, we share several affectionate hugs and kisses. She still looks the same as when I was a child; the dress, the galoshes, the speckled hair, the rosy cheeks. My thoughts of her are filled with love, delight, and warmth. Whenever life's problems make me sad and irritable, I think of her. The softness of my memories smooths all the rough edges of my busy world. And whenever I want to become a child again, I will go to the kitchen and get an apple. I'll take the apple to the nearest rocker and peel it into long, red spirals. Then I will slice and salt each piece, and eat it from the knife.

Billy's Burden

by Tammy Graham

Billy was raised to
believe in himself and his future.
With pressing ever onward and
looking only up, Billy forgot to
live for the day and to believe in
the present.

One day, like a hand from
heaven, the wind slapped Billy's
face. The stinging brought tears to
Billy's eyes. The pain of the
startling trip into reality was harsh.

With each tear shed a new thought
emerged from within Billy's soul.
But, with this new knowledge
came only sadness.

Gone was the security of being blind.

Now is the burden of wasted time.

Billy's burden.