

Viola Simonson Gertgen (1924-2017)

Mom was a country girl.

She was baptized and confirmed in this country church Nordland. She often said she wanted her funeral at Nordland also.

She went to the 1 room school house a mile down the road from where she grew up. One of the earliest memories I heard her tell was how, in 2nd grade, the traveling music teacher told her "Viola, you can't sing." Nowadays, that is probably grounds for a lawsuit and a safe space, but the teacher was right. Mom was not a good singer. But she more than made up for it with other talents.

That was kind of ironic because Mom was the spitting image of the great singer Judy Garland back then. When I watch the Wizard of Oz and see Dorothy singing Over the Rainbow with Toto on the hay rake, I always think of Mom, the young girl on the farm. And Mom loved dogs, like Toto. When Dennis and I were still home, we had Taffy. Then they had a couple of springer spaniels, couple of cocker spaniels, an Irish setter Hennessey, and finally their last dog, the little Shih Tzu Muggy. There's a picture of Muggy on Mom's side of their gravestone.



Mom also loved horses. I've seen pictures of her as a girl, on the horses including Vance's horse Clipper with a huge smile on her face. When we went for country drives and we would see horses in the pasture and she would say "Oh horses! Let's pull over." We would pull over and watch for a few minutes.

Mom was pretty shy. After high school, she went to business school in Willmar. Her teacher told her "Viola, you are my best student, but you have to speak up in class. You know the answers." She lived with an older couple then and the husband told her "Viola, you run like a deer." when she would run home after college. As she got older she would say, "Boy I sure wish I could run like that again."

Out of business school, she went with some friends to work in the Cities and they saw that Boeing was hiring. So she took off with some friends to Washington state to be a Rosie the Riveter. As she told it, the riveter was on the outside of the plane and she held the heavy part that flattened the rivet on the inside. She said sometimes people would say, "I can't get my hand back in there to do that." and her supervisor would say "Get Viola, she'll get her hand in there." She usually worked where the wing attached to the fuselage, a pretty important part to get right.

Mom loved heights. Dennis and I did not inherit that gene. When she was a kid, she would climb to the top of the windmill. There were no safety harnesses, or a cage around the ladder. She would sit up there and just see as far as she could. Her dad would see her, and not call 911, or start yelling, but he would just say like a soft spoken Norwegian "You be careful up there." It was a very different time.

Mom was somewhat of a perfectionist and it served us all very well in whatever job she did. I remember going to my first day of my first real job at age 15. She said "You make sure you do a good thorough job for your boss." She also insisted I go to college and



found some small scholarships for me, for which I am grateful every day.

Dennis remembers driving home over the big hill, and always seeing Mom in her garden. She would have up to 24 tomato plants and lots of other stuff and nothing went to waste. She canned or froze everything.

Dennis also remembers that she, like the other Simonsons, never said a bad word about anyone. If you said someone looked or acted funny, she would say, "they probably can't help it."

Since we're talking about Dennis, I've got to tell this story. Mom was painting the white shed on the farm when we lived with her brothers Lowell and Vance. I think it was Vance's car, but Dennis was about 6 and thought Vance's black car need painting also. Back then it was very slow drying oil based paint. Mom saw him and cleaned off all the white paint with turpentine so no one would know. Vance went to town and got gas. Back then the station attendant pumped the gas. He came up to Vance with white paint on his hand and said "What's this about?" Dennis was very thorough with painting behind the gas filler door and Mom didn't think to look there.

Granddaughter Christy remembers being in the garden with Grandma, picking cherry tomatoes, and all the good things she made from the garden, like raspberry sauce. She says it was a real treat when Grandma, Grandpa and I came to visit her at Florida Southern College one winter. I think it was the only time they ever saw green grass and warm weather in the winter. It was a real treat for us also.

Grandson Denny remembers the great Thanksgiving meals with his family and Carolyn, Lowell, Vance, Carol, and Randy, especially the great turkey dressing. She always made extra dressing so for Denny to take home. He also remembers the stories of going to Spicer in the winter, under a blanket, with her dad driving the horse team and sleigh across Green Lake. And then the stories of being a telephone operator plugging in cables to make connections. "Number please?"

Great grandson Chase was here for a few weeks last summer and visited Mom several times. I'd bring him up in phone conversation and she'd say "He's sure a cute little guy."

Mom had pretty bad arthritis, which kept her in a wheel chair the last couple years of her life. Before that, we would go to the doctor for something unrelated, and she would ask "Do you have anything to help my bad knees and hips?" One doctor suggested a cane, and she said "I can barely walk, and now you want me to carry a stick around?"

If Pops said "Let's go fishing", Mom would always say "Oh, I want to go." Pops went to Canada many times fishing with different people. One time he and my Mom and I think it was Juliet and Curtis were fishing on the big lake in Canada and a storm came up. That night they built a fire and spent the night on an island. I'm sure my Mom was at least one who did not want to risk trying to get back to the resort.

One time Mom came home and asked me to get the mouse out of the car. I said "How do you know there is a mouse in the car?" and she said "It started running around when I was driving." I said "Didn't you freak out?" and she said "I'm a farm girl. A little mouse doesn't bother me."

When they sold the farm and moved to town, they picked a house with a cornfield across the street. Mom loved to



watch the crops get planted, grow, and get harvested to stay connected with the farm. Later in life she would always say “I wish I could go back and live on the farm.”

Mom always had flowers, pansies and pink geraniums were her favorites. When she needed help, it was so fun to buy flowers in the spring with her. She was so excited and wanted exactly the right shape and size and color. She really enjoyed shopping for flowers.

When coming home after cleaning houses, she would often stop at a nursery just to look, and maybe buy something. I remember she said one husband said to his wife “Don’t you think Viola should get a raise for the good job she’s doing?” Mom would never ask for a raise herself, but she got the raise.



When Mom’s memory got bad, I would sort of know HOW bad if she said “Kevin” when we ended our phone calls. If she forgot who she was talking to, she wouldn’t use a name to say goodbye because she didn’t want to offend the caller. If she said “Kevin” I knew she remembered it was me. Our last phone call was on the last day she was able to get out of bed. I said “I love you Mom” and she said “I love you too Kevin”. She remembered.

I love you Mom.