

## Granny



This is what my father wrote about her:

*I suppose Mother Jane was approximately 40 years old, about five feet six inches tall and weighed around 130 pounds. She had blue eyes, a rather fair complexion, long black hair with some gray, and a very beautiful smile that she used rather effectively. She also had a very pronounced frown whenever the occasion called for it. Of course, I am sure all five year old boys have a beautiful mother.*

She never went to a movie, flew on an airplane, or drove a car.

When her husband, Issac Yancey, died she slipped into the background of other households.

Each month she got a little money from the government which she used to buy Tuberoso snuff, little blue jars of Noxzema, and crochet thread. She dipped the snuff with small twigs whose ends she frayed like toothbrush bristles. She rubbed the Noxzema on her hands to help alleviate arthritis pains. She crocheted the thread into intricate doilies, table cloths and bedcovers.

She even disappeared when reading stories to her grandchildren. Decades later I can only remember her disembodied voice and the tales she told. I can't see her face. It was as if the stories read themselves.

She was not a person but a presence.

I first remember her when we were living in Baltimore during the war years. I might have been four or five. She appeared from nowhere in the back yard where I was trying to hammer nails into a board. She seemed tall and stern. She offered advice about how to drive nails (probably the same advice my father offered 30 years later when I was one of his carpenters). Then she tried to straighten the nails I had bent. I remember thinking how ugly the nails had become and knowing that nothing was going to make them right again. Then she disappeared back into nowhere.

When we went back to Shelby after the war, she lived with us most of the time. Finding a place to put her always seemed to be a problem. Sometimes she shared a bedroom and a bed with my sister or me. After my sister started having problems with bed wetting, Granny got her own bedroom.

I never realized that Granny might want to work until the day on Lee Street when the commode overflowed, probably as a result of something I had done. Granny grabbed a mop and started swishing up the water with large vigorous strokes, displaying strength I didn't know she had. Then my mother made a dramatic entrance, yelled something and Granny retreated back into herself.

Granny stayed in herself until she got Alzheimer's. Then she started coming out until there was nothing left inside.

The symptoms first appeared when we were living on the farm, several years before my mother died. One day Granny wandered down the dirt road that went by our house, headed for South Carolina. The young doctor sat in our living room and said in sympathetic tones that she was becoming senile, which is what most Weathers do if we live long enough.

When my mother got sick Granny went to live with Uncle Paul and stayed there until we came back from Florida with a new step-mother who could help look after things. Then, Granny moved back in with us.

The disease had progressed in those five years. She wrapped small hard pieces of excrement in toilet paper like little ears of corn, and hid them in her dresser drawers. Although a picky eater before the disease set in, she now ate anything, including, once, a napkin that I pulled from her mouth. She repeated the phrase "Oooh, oooh I smell peaches. Here come's Johnny with a hole in his breeches." And she had imaginary conversations with someone named Lawson Botts.

Always trying to find something to brag about, I once made a comment to my girlfriend, Diane, about the memorable old lady living in our house. Diane hesitated, then screwed up her face in a pixie smile and said, "But she is so old."

A couple of years later, after my step-mother had had enough, I went with my father to take Granny to the mental institution in Morganton. It was the only place that would have her. Some doctor, as a favor to the family, must have declared her insane. She sat in the back seat and nobody said anything, not even my father.

After a month or so, we brought her back to his house. She lay in the spare bedroom for a week, unmoving, staring at the ceiling, and then was pronounced dead.