

Grandma's Parting Miracle

This inspiring true story by Ann Hauprich was originally published in The Evangelist newspaper in December 1994 -- now nearly a quarter of a century ago.

There was little point in going to see Grandma on that bitterly cold December night four years ago.

For the two previous years, she had been bedridden and practically comatose. And, on those rare occasions when her eyes were open, they stared off blankly into space.

I wasn't so sure what good a prayer from the fallen away likes of me would do, but Grandma would be turning 100 in about a week, and I felt it important to at least bring a card and some flowers to help brighten her room in honor of the impending milestone.

As a good friend steered my car along the snow-covered roads en route to the hospital in Albany, I found myself apologizing for the inconvenience.

"Thanks for driving me tonight," I started. "I wouldn't have asked this favor except my night vision is getting really bad. Anyway, they think my grandmother's in a coma . . . I won't stay long . . ."

Then, choking back tears of shame, I made a confession. It wasn't just the driving I needed help with: I needed moral support.

"They say my Grandma has tubes in her nose, IV in her arms and doesn't even recognize her own children anymore. I haven't seen her since Easter, and my Mom doesn't think she's going to make it though the night. I just wanted to see her one more time — to tell her that I love her, and," my voice breaking, "and that I'm sorry that I haven't been there for her lately the way she was always there for me."

As we drove, I tried to tell my friend — who had never met my Grandma — what this great lady had been like in her prime. For the frail, tired, silent body we were sure to encounter in that hospital room would not be my grandmother. Her aging earthly shell, yes — but not her soul, not her spirit, not my Grandma.

No, the more I reminisced, the more I came to realize an important fact: my Grandma might be dying, but she was not about death. She was about life, and to enter her room in any other frame of mind would be to do her a tremendous injustice.



Clockwise from top right: Catherine Tiernan Bopp as a preschooler ca. 1894, on her First Communion day ca. 1897, as a bride in 1914, with youngest daughter Audrey Bopp Hauprich and granddaughter Ann in 1974 and as photographed in natural light by Ann ca. 1980.

Born into a devout German-Irish Catholic household on December 15, 1890, Catherine Tiernan Bopp had devoted the best years of her life to the service of others in and around the Albany Diocese. Her many acts of kindness and charity were done quietly, never expecting anything in return. From feeding strangers at the family dinner table during the Depression to decorating altars and sewing vestments for priests, it was all just part of being “a good Catholic.”

Though the Lord had called the first two of her nine children home during infancy and another just out of his teens, my grandmother had never questioned His will. Instead, she planned picnics and Christmas parties for underprivileged children and sent money to aid the mentally handicapped — her way of thanking God for the healthy minds and bodies of her six surviving children, and later her nearly three dozen grandchildren and multitude of great-grandchildren in whom she took enormous pride.

Before old age crept up on her, eventually robbing her of the ability to walk and verbally communicate, my Grandma was a champion speller and math whiz who could deliver rousing recitations of epic poems, sing lively Old World tunes and dance jigs and polkas around Lawrence Welk.

Even well into her late 80s and early 90s when Grandma was a resident first at The Teresian House in Albany and later at Our Lady of Hope in Latham, people would wonder aloud at how amazingly sharp she still was. “Nothing gets past Catherine Bopp.” That’s what people used to say.

But I knew her crystal clear blue eyes would not open again much less twinkle with glee. Never again would I hear her voice or see her sweet smile. For all intents and purposes, Grandma was dead. And it was this morbid thought that had almost kept me from filling the empty chair beside her bed that dark, cold winter’s night.

Upon entering her sterile, almost barren, room, I felt an overwhelming urge to hold my sleeping grandmother’s now swollen hand one last time.

As I gazed upon her pale face framed by short, thinning white hair, I thought about the faded photographs I’d seen of her looking so radiant in the hand-stitched wedding gown that had emphasized her delicate 18-inch waist, her long, dark hair fashionably arranged beneath her elegant bridal headpiece. No fairy tale princess was ever more beautiful!

It had been a long time since I’d last prayed out loud, but I felt compelled to do so now.

Remembering how Grandma and Valentine J. Bopp, her husband of 50 years, used to pray the Rosary aloud together every night, I cleared my throat and began: “Our Father, Who Art In Heaven.” And then: “Hail Mary, Full of Grace . . .”

Was it my imagination, or was Grandma trying to squeeze my hand? I wasn’t even sure I was saying the prayers right, but with each “Hail Mary,” I became more and more convinced that Grandma could not only hear me, but might actually be silently praying along with me. Could it be?

Then it happened: a small miracle that proved beyond any doubt that Grandma could not only hear what I was saying — but completely understood every word. Not only had Grandma opened her eyes, but they were staring directly into mine.



Paul, Valentine, Caroline, Leonard, Irene, Audrey, Catherine & Kenneth

Catherine (second from right) with husband and six surviving children ca 1944.

Even more revealing, they were brimming with tears — though I'll never know whether they were of joy or sorrow. Perhaps they were a mixture of both. The important thing was I now knew for certain that Grandma was still very much alive and with me in body, mind and spirit. This was, indeed, a miracle — one that would forever change my life and the way I would look upon death and dying.

Unable to speak because of the large lump in my throat, I tried to hum — then softly sing (however off-key) some of the Christmas carols I knew to be dear to Grandma's heart. First Silent Night, then Away In A Manger. Tears continued to fill her eyes and mine, and I ultimately did more humming than singing, but as time went on, a tremendous peace came over me — and my grandmother.

Only when she had returned to a sleep-like state did I dare gently kiss her forehead and whisper: "I love you, Grandma." I never did say "I'm sorry" — but somehow I felt Grandma knew that I was and that she had forgiven me.

A few days later — on December 8, 1990 (The Feast of the Immaculate Conception)— an emotional phone call came with the news that Grandma was gone.

She was "with the angels now," said my mother, choking back tears of her own. How she had loved her mother — her "Mama" as she used to call her. And, how she would miss her. Every Sunday for as long as I could remember, they had "connected" — either by phone or in person. Even those many months when Grandma appeared to be in a coma, my mother and father had faithfully looked in on her after Mass each week. Only now did I realize how important those visits had been.

Perhaps Grandma had sensed their loving presence, even if she hadn't been able to acknowledge it. For God alone knows what we are capable of feeling — and hearing — deep within our mortal hearts and our immortal souls.

Here comes the Bride ...

*... as presented
by Brookside!*



Tiernan/Bopp/Hauprich Bridal Gown unveiled at county history museum

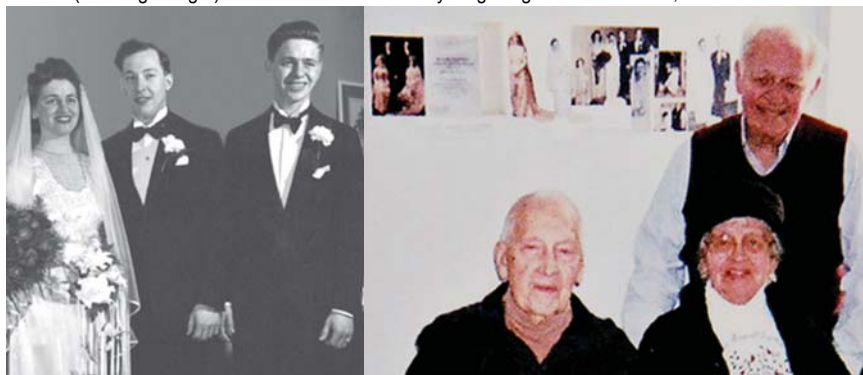
Something wondrous unfolded on the 100th anniversary of the marriage of my maternal grandparents. The satin heirloom gown that had been made with love in every stitch by Catherine Tiernan (who then had an 18-inch waistline) for her February 1914 wedding to Valentine J. Bopp was chosen to be showcased as part of a 2014 exhibit at Brookside Museum in Ballston Spa. Also displayed were Catherine's century-old honeymoon nightgown and her then stylish sleep bonnet.

Exhibit materials noted that Catherine's daughter Audrey subsequently wore the gown when she and Donald G. Hauprich exchanged vows of Holy Matrimony in March 1948. An exquisite collage commemorating the 1914 and 1948 unions that was created by Mary, the youngest of the 10 Hauprich children, greeted visitors as they arrived inside of the history museum's main entrance.

Museum goers also learned that Mrs. Hauprich, who was a teacher at Malta Avenue Elementary School in Ballston Spa from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, wore her mother's antique sleep bonnet as part of a Bicentennial celebration in 1976. She and her Grade 5 students also donated a quilt to Brookside that year. But that's another story for another book. What I cannot resist sharing inside the covers of this one is about two hearts that are still beating as one after 70 years. (Kindly turn the page.)



Brookside Exhibit Curator Kathleen Coleman (top right) puts finishing touches on a 2014 bridal display that included the wedding gown worn by Catherine Tiernan Bopp in 1914 and by Audrey Bopp Hauptich in 1948. Among the many who came to view the exhibit were 1948 Best Man Leonard Bopp (seen with Bride and Groom Donald and Audrey Hauptich) and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Among them were Kiersten (kneeling far right) and Jessica with her three young daughters Alessandra, Gabriella and Julianna.



Two hearts began beating as one during Albany Light Opera rehearsals in 1946

It may be too late to present the director of the 1946 Albany Light Opera Company's production of "The Merry Widow" with a bouquet of flowers.

But it's never too late to award a literary standing ovation to Georgene P. Kerchner for the role she played in the love story that began to blossom between Audrey Miriam Bopp and Donald Gilbert Hauprich in the autumn of 1946.

The reason? It was Ms. Kerchner who insisted the just turned 21-year-old Audrey and the then 22-year-old Donald would look good standing beside one another during select scenes of the operetta.

The first rehearsals for the production took place in the LaSalle School Auditorium on Western Avenue in Albany on September 4, 1946 and continued until the show debuted at Philip Livingston Junior High School on November 21, 1946. A second performance took place on November 22. A third is believed to have followed at the Albany Institute of History and Art.

The group subsequently presented composer Humperdink's opera "Hansel and Gretel" at Christmastide during which Audrey sang and danced sporting a gingerbread cookie costume while Donald applauded from the audience.

When asked in July 2015 to reminisce about the early days of their courtship, Audrey vividly recollected receiving a dozen long stemmed red roses from Donald on Thanksgiving 1946 – around the time she was involved in the "Hansel and Gretel" show.

Affections between the couple deepened after Donald's childhood friend and neighbor Willie Kratz and his fiancé Ethel invited the former "Merry Widow" chorus members to join them in playing cards at the Kratz home on Second Street in Albany. A gallant Donald offered to walk Audrey home to the Bopp residence on Hollywood Avenue. Many a moonlit stroll was to follow as the couple enjoyed many a subsequent card game as well as attending concerts and other cultural events together.

Upon their arrival at Audrey's home, the couple would sometimes converse in her family's parlor – until Audrey's kid brother Len made a dramatic entrance — yawning and stretching as he poured himself a bowl of cereal as he proclaimed: "*Morning already?*"

In fairness to Audrey and Donald, it was usually not later than 10 or 11 p.m. – but little Lenny got the message across that it was time for his future brother-in-law to take his leave. Other times, the adolescent would jokingly proclaim to his sister's beau: "*You're a card and you really need to be dealt with.*"

The date the couple became engaged (March 14, 1947) was engraved on the inside of the diamond ring that was worn by Audrey when Donald slipped a gold band on the same finger on March 27, 1948.

The rest is the stuff of which wholesome Hollywood romance movies of the 1940s were made – including having Len Bopp serve as Best Man at the couple's wedding. On March 27, 2014, Len beamed as he posed with his big sister beside the gown their mother, Catherine Tiernan Bopp, had made for her 1914 wedding and that Audrey wore when she became Donald's bride 34 years later.



Donald and Audrey Hauprich are blessed with memories of a courtship that began on a truly harmonious note 70 years ago. The black and white photo of the young couple was taken by Hasbrouck "Hap" Dougherty in Kingston, NY ca 1946 while daughter Ann snapped the color portrait above after her parents renewed their vows of Holy Matrimony on their golden anniversary in 1998. Youngest Hauprich offspring Mary Hauprich Reilly later gifted them with a heavenly picture she created of their beloved St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Ballston Spa, NY. Don and Audrey joined St. Mary's Parish upon settling in the historic upstate village in 1968 and both sang in its choir until several years ago. (They also once performed *True Love* as a duet in a church musical.)



AUTHOR'S NOTE: This story took on a whole new meaning after my parents were hospitalized on the same day in November 2015. At the very time my father was being treated for a cardiac event in the Saratoga Hospital's ER, my mother was experiencing a mini-stroke on the third floor. I'm elated to report they both recovered. Reasons for celebration during 2016 included the 70th anniversary of their first date and the 68th anniversary of their wedding. To read more about Donald ("A New Millennium Dad in a Father Knows Best World") and Audrey ("Schooling at Mother's Knee"), visit www.LegaciesUnlimited.com.