

My grandparent story is 34 years in the making. Not many people are as lucky as I am, at age 34, to still have a grandparent alive, let alone, see on a weekly basis. My grandparents, John and Ruth Borthwick, moved into The Village of Tansley Woods in Burlington, ON, on July 4, 2013; they were called “pioneers” since they have been there from Day 1 of the building’s inception. That was a significant day for our family. My grandparents moved out of their centrally-located townhouse and into their new home. That evening, many of us met in the still-unfinished retirement home for dinner in a special room for our family; the doors weren’t even open to the public yet! My grandparents had a lovely 2 bedroom suite with a great view. When they moved in over 6 years ago, it started a new tradition; I would visit them every Wednesday for dinner, conversation, and to provide some help around their suite. My Grandpa passed away in December 2014 and we held a celebration of his life in the Ruby restaurant in the 10th floor of the Village of Tansley Woods. It was very touching to connect with the people who came out to remember him fondly.

Sharing over 300 meals together over the last 6 years has given me a newfound appreciation for my grandmother, who I already loved and admired very much. I grew up knowing my Grandma was a generous, kind-hearted, forgiving, intelligent, and savvy woman. I admired her ability to beat anyone at Scrabble. I had a much better command of the English language since she knew so much about grammar, syntax and sentence structure, and would share her knowledge freely. She and my Grandpa came to my grade 8 classroom for a celebration of Grandparents’ Day, excited to be involved, be engaged in my school, and meet my friends. They were regular fixtures at my basketball games and figure skating competitions. They supported me in every step of my journey. I have treasured memories of ringing in the new year on December 31, 1999 with all four of my grandparents at my parents’ house. I was a teenager then and I knew how fortunate I was. When I graduated from my dietetic internship in Ottawa in 2008, all four grandparents made the trek to attend my graduation. I really was lucky! My Grandma’s 90th birthday open house at The Ruby showed how family members and friends from the Village and the community came out to celebrate her. The ripple effect of who you affect over the years is large.

My Grandma was always an amazing cook. She won a Hamilton Spectator newspaper contest for her "Sumptuous swiss steak" recipe in 2005. I remember helping prepare food with her in her kitchen in Burlington when I was a child. I can still picture her sitting in her chair, peeling vegetables at the table with her apron on. She always had a keen interest in food and nutrition, and her passion for home cooking and healthy meals definitely encouraged me to be a dietitian. She was eating wheat germ before it was “cool.” She had a vast collection of cookbooks and recipes, and gifted me several over the years, including cookbooks for kids when I was a child. Receiving a book from my grandparents was always a special gift, since it was lovingly inscribed with a message and the date. I admired her participation in civic life, as a volunteer and past president of the Burlington Historical Society. She and my Grandpa contributed to books about the history of Burlington, and a DVD on the Brant Inn, a nightlife hot spot in the 1940s and 50s. I admire the picture on the wall in her room of her and my Grandpa at the Brant Inn, in their 20s, with four friends. It looked like quite the place!

You will find my Grandma and I eating dinner together each Wednesday at Tansley Woods. We share stories – sometimes of the current day, maybe what I did at work or about an upcoming vacation – and she connects me to my family roots, passing on anecdotes from her childhood in Hamilton or days at McMaster University. I read her our favourite columns aloud from the Hamilton Spectator newspaper, and we may play Scrabble or do a crossword puzzle. Grandma enjoys Jeopardy, and I feel proud whenever she yells out the correct answer before the contestants. Our relationship has certainly deepened over these past few years, and my love and admiration for her has grown. I can see that aging is difficult, and you need a true village of support to ensure you are healthy, happy, and feel engaged and included.

I have so many stories to tell about my Grandma and memories to share – like how it was very important to me that she attend our intimate 16 person wedding two years ago, or how she celebrated my educational successes with me, or how we went to the Keg to celebrate my grandparents' 60th wedding anniversary – and they all speak to her character and disposition. She doesn't complain about her aches and pains, and dealing with macular degeneration is difficult and scary, but she remains the positive, cheery, "go with the flow" woman I have always known. She has provided sound and sage advice, and she and my Grandpa generously supported us as we bought our home in Burlington. In short, my Grandma has always been a pleasure to be around, and has made so many family occasions special and memorable over the years.

We both gain so much from our weekly dinner dates, and I hope they continue for many years to come.