

I Learned from My Grandma That the Seeds of Greatness Are... by Denis Waitley

My grandma, Mabel Reynolds Ostrander, and I shared one of those special relationships as rare as a double rainbow. She was fifty-three when I was ten. That's when we planted our first "Victory" garden together during World War II. We planted seeds together—in the soil and in each other.

Grandma lived eighty-seven seasons without a complaint. I was forty-four when I last saw her. But I remember every mince and lemon tart, every bite of "made from scratch" apple pie, and every lingering wave of her hand as she stood (out of sight or so she thought) behind the rayon, Priscilla curtains in the little house at 718 West Pennsylvania Avenue in San Diego, California, where I was born and raised. As our station wagon full of kids and contentment would slowly pull away from the curb, we would all look back at her and wave—and I would gaze at her fragile silhouette through the rear view mirror, wishing I could frame her there forever, just that way—wondering how many more Easter and Christmas dinners we would share.

Most of all, I remember my grandma and me planting seeds. We planted squash, beans, corn, watermelons, beets, pansies, mums and other flowers. I'll admit I rode my bike those twenty miles each Saturday more for the bonus of the conversation and the homemade pastries than for the vegetables and flowers. But no matter how full I was after I ate, I was always left hungry for more of the wisdom and optimism she shared with me.

I'll never forget the day we tasted our first harvest as a result of crossing a plum tree with an apricot tree. The ripe fruit was pink, not purple like a plum, nor orange like an apricot; but a combination of both. "Gee, do you suppose they'll be any good?" I asked. "Why of course they will be wonderful," she chided. "Didn't we do the planting, nurturing and pruning?"

Sure enough, they were delicious, even though they were different than any fruit I'd ever seen before. "That's because they are uniquely unlike any other fruit you'll ever eat. They are plumcots!" she exulted. "You always get out what you put in," she continued as we sat under the tree eating most of what we had picked.

"Plant apple seeds and you get apple trees, plant acorns and you get majestic oak trees, plant weeds and you will harvest weeds (even without watering), plant the seeds of great ideas and you will get great individuals," she said softly and intently, looking directly into my eyes. "Do you understand what I mean?" I nodded, remembering I'd heard her say the same thing before, in different ways.

I learned from my grandma that the seeds of greatness are not special genes, dependent on the gifted birth, the inherited bank account, the intellect, the skin-deep beauty, the race, the gender, or the status. The seeds of greatness are attitudes and beliefs that begin in children by observing, imitating and internalizing the lifestyles of significant role models and heroes.

"Model your thoughts and actions after men and women who have been passionate, excellent, honest, unselfish and creative in their service to others," my grandmother had counseled. Armed with that affirmation, I ventured forth to sow and reap my own legacy in life.

I've traveled the world to the seven seas.
I've been up at the top and down on my knees.
I've been blessed with abundance and plenty of weeds.
But I've never stopped caring about others' needs.

As you tend your own garden, unlike any other,
Remember the words of my lovely grandmother.
"If you're hoping to harvest a life of great deeds,
Remember you first have to plant some great seeds."