SPEECH FOR GRANDMOTHER’S FUNERAL

FOR

JOSEPH MUENCH

Hello everyone. Here we are at the memorial service for my Grandma, Mary Barry. I’m really honored to have a chance to speak to all of you and share some thoughts about the woman who made my life so special…. and don’t forget…the rumor has it that I was her favorite grandchild…although who could tell? She wasn’t much for displays of affection for anyone, but if you watched really carefully and read between the lines…. lines like “Go pound the sand,” or letting us know that some one is “full of what the birds eat,” you can see the love and devotion she gave to everything she did. If you looked up “warm and fuzzy” in the dictionary, there’s a really good chance her picture would **not** be there, but I can tell you-as her **favorite** grandchild… (**Wait a little and give a wink**) that I can certainly say that she was **my favorite** grandparent. This will be quite a weekend for our family and friends and although it won’t be quite like the movie, “Four Weddings and a Funeral,” … (**If you want to be funny you can say**) unless of course, three of you here surprise us and elope… (**Wait for the laugh**) I want to celebrate the life and legacy of my grandmother. Of course we all know that she probably would not be too happy about this tribute since she did her best to live her life under the radar. I say she was a force to be reckoned with, a one-of-a-kind character, and an honest, candid, no-nonsense reminder of the good that can exist in all of us.

Grandma wasn’t much for displays of affection, in fact I think she really hated the thought of demonstrating love or even using the word, but her actions spoke so much louder than any words would have done. It’s funny that as I look back on her life and what she taught me and meant to me, so many seemingly random memories pop up. I remember the time I was eight years old, and Grandma took me on a cross-country trip to Washington DC…. by Greyhound bus. Three days each way. That’s a lot of bus and it’s really a lot of Grandma, especially at eight years old. We bonded as we rode on that bus and when we got to DC, I’ll never forget what happened at the Lincoln Memorial. We took a break to have a treat- a yummy, delicious rocket pop-the most patriotic Popsicle I had ever seen. While sitting on the steps and savoring this icy fantasy on a stick, the red part fell off and landed with a big **SPLAT** on my shirt. I panicked and started to cry and was promptly treated with a large dose of Grandma Mary’s cold reality when she said, “What are you worried about? No one here knows you!!!” And she was right. It was more important to have that precious moment with her than worry about the dirty laundry I would be taking home with me (**If you want to make a joke, you can say**) Sorry Mom!! (**And wait for the laugh**).

I remember the little things about her that meant so much to me that have become, in the past few weeks since her passing, the **big** things that taught me so many valuable life lessons. I remember how we used to go to K-Mart and have ham sandwiches and cheesecake while we waited for that truck with the blue light to signal the end of snack time and the beginning of serious bargain hunting. I remember how much she loved to knit. I didn’t realize that knitting really does have such symbolic meaning, but she lovingly and painstakingly made blankets for all of us. My part in the process was to take the skeins of wool and unravel them and then roll them into neat balls of yarn so that she could knit more easily. Even that gesture had meaning and was a moment to treasure-boys don’t usually knit-although if I said that, I would get a real earful from Grandma… like “Who cares? It’s nobody’s business!!” but she brought me into the process in a way I could find acceptable. When you look at your blankets, think of Grandma and remember-I probably wound that yarn!!

She could never figure out why anyone would waste money on V8 juice so she taught me how to make it myself…of course as her **favorite** grandchild, that proprietary recipe is a secret between us… so you’ll never be able to pry it from my lips!! (**Wait for the laugh**)

I will always remember how she would drive over to my shop to sort of hang out while getting her digs in that she wouldn’t see so many Action Rental trucks on the road, but she saw plenty of trucks from the competition!!! Well guess what Grandma?? The guys at Action make better grandchildren!!! (**Wait for the laugh**) She might have pretended to stop by just to schmooze, but I know it was her quiet way of watching over me, making sure I was okay, and letting me know how much she loved me.

My grandmother had a way about her. There wasn’t anything she wouldn’t do for her children or grandchildren or friends or neighbors…. except, well…. like I said, the one thing she wouldn’t do was verbalize how much she cared, but she was a woman of action and few mushy words, and remember, her actions spoke volumes. She knew how much I loved cheesecake, and every birthday, she would make me my own personal cheesecake so I wouldn’t have to share with anyone.

The most important thing I remember about my grandmother turned out to be the way she taught me the two of the most important words in my life and they were very simple. While others might give hollow pep talks that didn’t really mean much to me, when I spoke to Grandma about things I wanted to do and feats I wanted to accomplish, she would simply say, “Why not?” No arguments, no pep talks, no false hope. Just plain and simple openness and optimism. **WHY NOT**? I can’t even begin to explain what a gift that has been. Whenever I had to find my way through life, whenever the odds seemed to be against me, I relied on that mantra that came from the strongest woman I knew. **WHY NOT**?

Now that she’s gone, there is an irreplaceable hole in the world. Mary Barry was an honest, real, rock for all of us. She was a simple, no nonsense reminder of what it means to be **authentic**. She didn’t put up with anything from anyone and she didn’t dish it out either. She kept her feelings to herself, but deep down, I know she probably did that because she really loved all of us so much that she couldn’t bear to express it in words. That kind of shallowness was for sissies. She demonstrated her undying love for all of us all the time. And whether she was baking for us or knitting or watching over us or dragging us cross-country on a Greyhound bus, there was nothing like being loved and watched over by Mary Barry.

In this day and age of instant friendships and overly expressed superficiality, my grandmother’s spirit and raw honesty will **never** be replaced. I’m just so grateful to have been so close to her and to have learned the lessons that have made my life so much richer. I feel the void she has left and I realize it is now up to me and my brothers and sisters and cousins to share the legacy she so selflessly shared. And remember- I was there when she took her last breath and she shared her last great not so secret… she wants you all to know I was her favorite!! Here’s to Mary Barry… may she find the real sweet spot in heaven where people are honest and real and where the streets are paved with endless rounds of Milky Ways, Mentos and potted plants. Thank you all.