

Goodbye to one of the original great dames

When the telephone rings at my house at 6:25 a.m. it's never good news. And when it happened Saturday morning I knew what was coming.

My mother was on the phone, as I expected. She really didn't have to tell me any more but she did so anyway. It was her task and she was bound to see it through. That's just how she is.

My grandmother, she told me, passed away that morning in Charlotte at age 94.

As I said it was expected. My grandmother had been in declining health since the day after I last saw her in December. It was on a Saturday afternoon a couple of weeks before Christmas when that occurred. We took her some chocolate chip cookies my wife made. Grandma loved those. She couldn't resist anything with chocolate really.

We had a great visit mainly because my grandmother was as alert and sharp as I had seen her in two years or more. She passed around the can of cookies once to my aunts and uncles then consumed the rest before day-break on Sunday.

When we left she reached out her hand to touch my face and reminded me that I was her first grandchild, which made me golden.

She had herself a time. As it turned out, it was a last hurrah. Late last week she went into Hospice care at the retirement village in Charlotte she called home after moving there from Danbury in 1991. It was a matter of time from that point.



Madison Taylor

Not long after my mother's phone call Saturday I posted this message to my friends: "RIP Nancy Lee Dunlap Taylor Rodenbough: Family matriarch, working woman, civic leader, Democrat and one helluva card player. You were a great dame grandma."

Yes, by almost any standard my grandmother had a remarkable time on earth. Born in 1914 in Walnut Cove, she came along at a period when opportunities for women were scarce. Despite that, she entered the

working world after giving birth to my dad and two daughters and became a fixture at the Stokes County Courthouse in the Clerk of Courts office.

She was a major player in political and civic life in Stokes County not only helping my grandfather become elected to the state House but also serving on the Stokes County Board of Education. She told me in December that she was on the board when the controversial decision was made to close the school in Danbury, which wasn't a popular move in her hometown.

"My name was mud for a long time after that," she said.

She was a founding member of the board tasked with overseeing the construction of the first and only hospital in Stokes County—Stokes-Reynolds Memorial Hospital located at the point where Danbury ends and the road to Hanging Rock State Park begins. She was also instrumental in bringing a library to Danbury.

I was able to watch my grandmother up close because growing up we lived almost a stone's throw

apart. All the kids in town spent hours playing basketball at a goal set up in her side yard and we had the run of her house when we needed something to drink. If we had a question and she wasn't home we simply walked up to the courthouse and asked.

Later, after I graduated from college and she suffered a mild stroke, I stayed at her house for about three months until she was comfortable being on her own again. We ate popcorn and watched either sports or movies on TV. We had ourselves a time.

It's hardly a coincidence that we shared a passion for sports—particularly baseball. Once cable TV came along she watched the Atlanta Braves each and every day until her eyesight failed. She adored Greg Maddux. Even though I'm a St. Louis Cardinals fan, she never held that against me.

We had lots more in common. We could talk movies, books, politics and ACC basketball or football. Grandma and her sister Mary were tremendous bridge players and were once considered among the best

around. Nobody wanted to take them on. I certainly wouldn't.

Grandma was stylish, too. She had the first Ford Mustang I ever saw. She gave it to me when I turned 16 and bought herself a Cutlass Supreme.

And I still remember what she said when I asked how she liked living in a cityfied retirement village after being in Danbury for so long. "Well," she drawled in that measured way of talking common to the Dunlap clan. "I like this place all right, except it's got too many Republicans—and Yankees." I never told her that I occasionally vote Republican. She happily reconciled herself to the fact that I married a Yankee.

I was, after all, her first grandchild, which made me golden. In her eyes there was very little I could do wrong.

Goodbye Grandma. And don't worry, I'll keep an eye on the Braves for you.

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