Grandmaji's Secret Recipe

Watching her grandmother make a chocolate cream soda, the author discovers the true meaning of contentment.

YOU DON'T ALWAYS need a pilgrimage to a Himalayan mountaintop to find contentment. Sometimes all you need is a visit to your grandmother. In the *Yoga Sutra*, Patanjali tells us, "By contentment, supreme joy is gained." When I think about contentment, I realize that my 90-year-old grandmother, Floranz, embodies it.

Grandma makes every second count. Since she lives so far away from me, I see her only once or twice a year. No matter; when she opens her door and holds out her arms, gathering me into her tiny, frail frame, I know she is absolutely present with me. After a three-hour visit, I feel as though we've spent a week together. She will see only one person at a time, because she believes it's the only way you get a "real visit"—and she's right. When we were growing up, my brothers and I always looked forward to going to see her for our own individual visits. She made each of us feel that our time with her was sacred. Grandma and I share the same birthday and, although she's never said it, I've always secretly felt that I was her favorite. But I realized some years back, to my amazement, that each of my brothers also secretly feels the same way. She has a way of making whoever she's with feel treasured.

In our multitasking modern world, it's a revelation to be with someone who is religious about not doing more than one thing at a time. You should see Grandma make a chocolate ice cream soda, which she does every afternoon around five o'clock. It takes her twice as long as it would an average person. She scoops the ice cream and pours the chocolate syrup with total raptness. She infuses every aspect of her daily routine with the same care and attention. Watching her inspires me to seek that same level of awareness in my yoga practice, and in everything I do—to make it as fresh and sweet each time, so that it takes on more significance with each repetition. I see now that no matter how many times you do something, it can be meaningful if you are present.

No one can rush Grandma. Once, at an elegant restaurant, a snooty waiter sighed, tapped his foot, and looked exasperated at how long it was taking Grandma to read the menu. She crooked her finger and he leaned forward. "Do you see that corner?" she asked, pointing to the far end of the room. "Yes," he said, somewhat puzzled. "I would like you to go stand in it," she said. "When I am ready to order, I will beckon you over." Sure enough, he stood in that corner until she was ready.

Grandma definitely knows her own mind and is true to herself in everything she does. Although she has lived alone since her husband died 45 years ago, she is the least lonely, most contented person I know. She was still a young woman when her husband died, and I once asked her if she'd ever considered remarrying.

"No, Katherine," she said. "I had one very satisfying marriage. That was enough." She cherished her marriage while it lasted, and now she cherishes her solitude.

According to Swami Satchidananda, "Contentment means just to be as we are without going to outside things for our happiness." He could have been talking about my grandmother. She is at home in the world, no matter what she is doing. I take refuge in her presence, and in the feeling that there is nowhere else I'd rather be. ■

Freelance writer Katherine Pew recently completed the Jivamukti Teacher Training Program and teaches yoga at Yoga People in Brooklyn, New York.

JOHN S. DYKES