The Mystery of Grandma's Painting

by Marlo E. Schuldt

As a young child I often visited my Grandma and Grandpa Olsen. Sometimes my visits were all day so my parents could take a day off and go fishing without worrying about their curious little boy drowning in the Snake River.

These baby-sitting visits gave me the time to explore and search for hidden treasures in my grandparent’s old house and small garage out back.

On one of my safaris, I snuck into the little garage, bravely fought my way through all the big catface spider webs to discover grandpa’s 10 foot cane fishin’ pole. He was a master fisherman and told some whopper ‘big fish’ stories.

As Grandma and Grandpa grew older, they allowed each grandchild to request one keepsake. Grandma had many beautiful things and some were valuable. It didn’t take me long to make my request. I was too young to understand value or write so when grandma took the painting down and wrote my name on the back. I was thrilled!

For some strange reason I became very attached to a rectangular picture that hung above the oval doorway to the huge dining room where the annual family Thanksgiving dinner was held.

Grandpa always started dinner with the following instruction before the pandemonium ensued, “It’s ok to reach across the table as long as you keep one foot on the floor.”

As a child, I would stare at the painting trying to understand its message.

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I guess it was the red clover and daisies that captivated my attention the most.

I soon noticed many of the objects had more than one name written on the back. I guess grandma didn’t have the heart to inhibit anyone from asking for what they wanted.

I really worried someone else would write their name on the back of the beautiful little painting. I secretly hoped the painting would be too high above the door for anyone to write on it.

I was elated when the day came and grandma surprised me with the painting I had admired since I was a young child taking those naps looking up at it until I dozed off to dreamland.

Now years later I safeguard that old print that was painted in 1901 as though it were the original painting.

Recently I carefully removed the cardboard backing to see what was behind the print. I uncovered an even more mysterious heirloom from a different era.

I discovered that grandma had saved soap labels in order to get the print from a soap company.

I examined all the different paintings she had to choose from and tried to understand why she picked this one since grandma’s painting was not even shown, just a name.

I did some research on the internet and discovered the name of the soap company, who the artist was and that the song, “Love at Home” was a very popular song of the day.

Even more surprising, I was able to download two recordings of the original song recorded by Thomas Edison from the Library of Congress.
Now many years later as I study the old picture, I can easily identify the message in the painting and long for the carefree days of my youth. The old print still sends a very powerful message:

The smell of clover in the summer.
Humming a special song.
A letter from home.
The stark and simple beauty of the daisies
A good book to lift our spirits

Finally, I reminisce to the words of the song, “Love at Home” and what it meant to me as a child and now as a dad and grandpa.

So why have I taken the time and effort to share this quaint little story from my childhood with all of you?

I used this example with the hope of drawing you into my little story and connecting with you as though you were one of my children or grandchildren.

I’m sure you have some similar stories you would like to preserve and share.

It’s a nice way for our kids to identify with us when we were their age. Children rarely view their parents as children. Now you can share the “little child” that is hidden inside along with your dreams and aspirations. Simple stories are the best since everyone can more easily identify with basic growing up experiences.

Grandma’s old painting has a message that is even more relevant in our day of high stress and technology diversions.

I think the old soapbox print is still trying to tell us what is really important, “To stop and smell the clover” and to focus our attention on the important little things of our life and family history.
Grandma and grandpa Olsen as I remember them in the 1960’s when I went for visits to their home as a young child and dreamed about the painting that hung over entrance to the dinning room.

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