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Generations of Polish

Walking into my mother's bedroom, the first thing that I always encounter, which takes me from memories of the past to thoughts of the future, is a dressing table that has been passed down for three generations. Originally, this hundred plus year old table belonged to my great grandmother; upon her death, it was then passed to my grandmother and upon her death, it became my mother's. Sitting at this table, which is slightly scarred and worn with age, I can close my eyes and inhale the strong scent of furniture polish and the faint smell of dusting powder of several generations that seems to be engrained within its dark brown wood. Opening my eyes, I see staring back at me, from the large etched mirrors, a reflection of several generations of women who came before me.

One of my first memories of the dressing table was when I was about four or five years old and was invited into my grandmother's bedroom. Upon entering my grandmother's bedroom, I felt privileged and was given the honor of being allowed to sit at her dressing table.

My grandmother asked, "Deanna, do you want your fingernails polished?"

I responded with the quickness that only an excited child can, "Oh Yes!" Surprisingly, I was also permitted to open one of the seven drawers this table offered as my grandmother allowed me to choose my polish color.

"Go ahead," she said, "and pick a color. The polish is in the middle drawer on the left side."

Having taken several minutes making up my mind and being a small child who loved spending time with my grandmother, I replied, “Red, grandma, like yours.” Sitting there at the table and watching my grandmother polish my nails with such patience and expertise, I kept sneaking glances of myself in the large etched mirror and felt like a glamorous movie star. Once my nails were dry I was once again given the privilege of being able to open another of the table’s drawers.

“Let’s put some lotion on your hands, it’s in the bottom drawer” said my grandmother. The scent of that lotion, Jergins, smelled like my grandmother. Even though she has died, whenever I smell, even just get a whiff of that lotion, I automatically think of her.

Having been allowed to journey into two of the dressing tables drawers, I still wondered many times what was in the remaining drawers. With a child’s vivid imagination, I speculated on what secrets lurked or what treasures were buried inside. Even with a child’s curiosity, I knew not to venture into grandmother’s bedroom without her as it would be disrespectful.

Now that the table is my mother’s, when I go past her room, occasionally, for a second or two, I look toward the drawers and the same childish feelings arise and I wonder what treasures or secrets my mother has hidden in the drawers. Will these treasures and secrets be passed on to me one day as her mother passed them on to her? Maybe, but for now, I am quite content in being able to observe and admire this dressing table from afar. My own treasures and secrets will one day be placed into these drawers. However, I don’t rush that moment, as when I receive this much loved and treasured table it will be bittersweet as it will signal that another generation has passed on and a new generation has been honored with receiving this precious piece of family history.

As my daughter gets older, she too has shared with her grandmother, my mother, the joy of

being invited into grandmother's bedroom and being allowed to sit at and venture into some of the drawers. My daughter exclaimed to me, "Mom, Grandma let me see some of her jewelry, it was really neat." I have shared the stories of my grandmother and what I used to think about the dressing table with my daughter. My daughter has also expressed some of the same things I have, "Mom, what does grandma have in those drawers?" I simply reply, "Probably her treasures. You know your grandmother, she always has neat things in her drawers."

Surprisingly, my daughter responded, "Mom, when you are a grandma, will you polish my kids' fingernails?"

Immediately, I replied "Yes, and I will make sure that I always have a bottle of Jergins hand lotion."

In talking with my mom and daughter about this dressing table and bringing up stories about the table from the past, my daughter realized that being my only daughter, she would one day inherit the dressing table. After spending some time in her room, my daughter excitedly came out with a long, detailed list of treasures that she wanted to put in the drawers when the table becomes hers. Suddenly, with a look of shock and teary eyes, my daughter said, "Mom, when the table is mine, does that mean you will be dead?"

It took me a moment, and I quietly replied, "Yes."

She then stated, through tears, "Then I don't want the table, and I hope that you don't get the table for a long, long time"

With tear filled eyes, I too replied, "Me too, Jessica, Me too."

For most people, this table would just look like an ordinary old table, but to the women in our family, this table is a representation of history, togetherness and the simpler times that the older generation spent, one on one, with the younger generation. Though I don't rush the

moment, I look forward to the days when I can sit with my granddaughter(s) and share tales of polish and time.