

Kaki Lupas

Ms. Parrott

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AP Language

### Parallel Journeys

I interviewed my grandmother, Grace Graci Lupas, on May 11, 2008. I am her first-born granddaughter and namesake. I was most interested in my grandmother's childhood because it was much like mine but still very different. Like mine, the first 18 years of her life revolved around a closely-knit family and the importance of ambition and a good education. My grandmother was born into a hard-working Italian family on July 4, 1931, in Pittston, Pennsylvania. She was the last child of ten children in her family. Growing up, she was spoiled by her five brothers and four sisters, nurtured by her mother, and cherished by her father.

My grandmother's mother and father were born and raised in Italy. They decided to travel to the "land of the free" shortly after their first daughter was born to pursue the American Dream. Louie Graci, my grandmother's father, came to the United States first. He wanted to establish a stable job before sending for his wife and daughter. When Louie got a job in Pittston, Pennsylvania, his wife and first-born child traveled over the Atlantic Ocean and through Ellis Island to join their husband and father in the mining town. My great-grandfather Louie built a beautiful house for my great-grandmother, also named Grace, in Pittston where they raised their own family.

When the Great Depression shocked America in 1929, the Graci's lost their beautiful home. The family rallied and all nine children worked any job they could to maintain a comfortable life. Along with his shift in the coalmines, Louie worked as a butcher and stone mason to make the extra money that the family needed. The girls even began to run their own dress making company. With the money from Louie, great-grandmother Grace, and the children's salaries, the family was able to buy an even bigger home than the one Louie had built; their new 14-bedroom house had more than enough room for one more. On Independence Day in 1931, my grandmother, Grace, was born. About that time, the dress company took off. It became extremely successful and soon the family had their own factory. Connie, the most driven sister began traveling to New York City to buy beautiful dresses for new design ideas and to sell in Pittston.

The family dress business only grew in success during my grandmother's childhood. In first grade she remembered being noticed for her family's success and especially for her beautiful clothes. One day in particular the first grade teacher called up little, six-year-old Grace to her seemingly large, teacher desk. The teacher proceeded to give little Grace a note saying, "Grace, take this to Mrs. Horns, please." Little Grace did just that. When she handed Mrs. Horns the note, Mrs. Horns looked at her, smiled and told her to take the note to the teacher next door. It did not take long for my grandmother to figure out what was happening. Though she was only six years old, she was smart and realized that her teacher had written a note to each teacher about Grace's beautiful, one-of-a-kind dress and sent her to deliver the note

to show off the dress. Teachers and peers were impressed with her clothes throughout middle and high school.

Like me, my grandmother always admired her father. She worshipped the ground he walked on, and he adored her. She said she remembers waiting for her father to come home from the mines every day and walking up the hill in front of their home to meet him. She remembers one day in particular when Louie beat her over the hill. When she started to run to meet him, she tripped and fell hard on the gravel. Louie quickly ran over to pick her up and carry her home in his arms. Being held by her father on this day was a very memorable event in her childhood. This instance defined her relationship with her father. Their relationship was rooted in love and trust.

My grandmother's fondest memory of her primary schooling was an incident in third grade. Back in the early 1940's there were no local libraries in or near Pittston, Pennsylvania. This was especially unfortunate for the nine-year-old Grace Graci who loved books just as I do. She loved to read and was undoubtedly bright. One day, her third grade class decided to make their own library in the classroom. The third-graders collected books in orange crates from around their school and homes and organized them in their class. Third-grade Grace was elected by her class to be librarian. "I was thrilled," she said. This was the most memorable and cherished accomplishment of her childhood because of her love for books.

Though she seemed like a serious, grown-up, little girl, young Grace was still just a kid. She loved playing with her older brothers and often tagged along to the

baseball and football games. She looked up to her brothers so much and longed for them to accept her as one of “the boys.” One day while they were all playing at the baseball field, the brothers decided they would give little Grace some attention and show off their youngest sister’s intelligence. They gathered their friends around the little girl and quieted everyone. The boys told little Grace that if she would recite the entire Preamble they would give her five cents. Of course, she was not going to pass up the chance to gain a nickel, so she agreed. She recited the Preamble flawlessly. Everyone was impressed.

My grandmother has vague memories of junior high school. She said she imagined she was as “awkward as any other middle school student.” She only remembers that the mine where her father worked caved during those years. No one was hurt, but the middle school was ruined because it was close to the site of collapsed mine. Because of this the children that had attended the school were bussed across town to a new school. The school was similar to their previous one. The school was not diverse; it consisted of mostly Italian and Polish children. Though the children were bussed in the morning, there was no bus in the afternoon and the children had to walk the long way back home. She recalls being thrilled to be able to ride the bus in the morning and not bothered by the long walk back home in the afternoon, because they had previously walked to and from school.

My grandmother was especially noticed in high school. She was beautiful and smart. She had such nice clothes in high school that a rumor began to circulate that her father was in the mafia. She says that this was a ridiculous assumption because her father was a “pussy cat.” In fact, he was in the Italian Calvary before coming to

the United States and her brothers were lieutenant colonels for the state police. She said, "There was no messing around in our family." The allegations against her father and her family did not trouble Grace. She said, "The family was comfortable but not rich by any stretch of the imagination." But she did get a car when she was seventeen, and she did not get just any car. Her parents bought her a red and white Ford Sunliner convertible.

My grandmother went to the prom every year and was voted the most popular senior girl the year she graduated. The school also prophesied that she would be "most likely to model for Powers." She enjoyed being on the yearbook staff and hanging out with her life-long best friend on Saturday nights. Throughout high school she dated a dreamy heartthrob named Tom Moore. He was athletic, smart, and a year older than she, but he pursued her. He even pursued her after high school despite several rejections and continues to send her birthday cards every year to this day.

Before graduation my grandmother was having the same anxieties as I am now. She was worried about keeping up with high school friends and leaving her family. She worried about the unknown and whether or not people would accept her in the next chapter of her life. But I learned something from my grandmother today. She said, "God always takes care of you." A simple statement I thought. It was one I had heard many times before today, but for some reason today it struck me. Maybe it was the peace in her voice or her testimony fresh on my mind, but for once this statement comforted me. More than I had realized, my grandmother and I are just

alike. Like her, I have grown up with a father who always provides, a mother who always comforts, and siblings who are caring and loving. Like her, I learned at a young age that ambition is important for worldly success but that life is only satisfied by relationships, most importantly, a relationship with God. Today I feel ready to move on to college. I am thankful for my grandmother and that I was able to connect with her story.