

## **No Time to Ask**

By Karin Livingston

She lay there in her hospital bed, a once large, vibrant woman now reduced to flesh and bone by the cancer that riddled her body. They said that she might last six months; she might last until tomorrow.

All that mattered to her now was that she could hear her grandchildren coming down the hospital hall. She pulled herself into a sitting position against the pillows and took a deep breath.

When the children, ages 11, 13 and 16, burst through the door they halted, shocked by her gaunt appearance. That didn't last long. One look into those sparkling eyes, and they knew their grandmother was still with them.

Mom and Dad remembered that they needed something from the hospital gift shop, and they left the little group in the room. They had promised the grandmother this private time with her grandchildren. Left with Nana, the youngsters struggled to smile and be brave as she gathered them around her on the bed.

Nana had a story to tell.

She had started Meals on Wheels in her town, and much of her life had been spent feeding the elderly in the community. If she wasn't driving the food around by car, she was helping serve dinner at the senior center. She watched over her clients, made sure

they ate a good dinner, and picked up their plates and silverware when they were finished. She made a lot of friends over the years.

“Now, I always told them, ‘Keep your fork. The best is yet to come,’” she said. “And they did because they knew dessert was coming.”

She paused and hugged her granddaughter, the youngest of the three. The girl fought back tears and the older boys didn’t look much better off.

“None of that now, I don’t want any town criers around here,” she said, shaking her finger at them. “I’m 75. I’ve had a good life.”

A woman of deep faith, she used this visit to assure the youngsters that heaven was real and she fully expected to go there. After 15 minutes or so, the parents returned, anxious that the children had worn out the now frail woman.

Nana was, in fact, tired. She lay back on the pillows, her eyelids drooping. “You remember what I told you now,” she said, shaking her forefinger at the children. “Don’t forget.” As she drifted off to sleep, the family tiptoed out of the room.

That was Nana’s last conversation. She died the next day.

Nobody had expected it to happen so soon. They weren’t ready. They hadn’t had a chance to ask about last wishes, especially about what to do at her funeral.

However, arrangements were hurriedly put together and thousands who remembered Nana’s good works attended the service. Still, many people worried that the funeral might not be exactly what she had in mind.

The grandchildren weren’t worried, however. She had asked them for one thing.

A fork went with Nana in the casket. The best was yet to come.