

Some memories of Geta Aileen Smith Pollack Gatterman (full version)
- from her daughter

I join you in spirit (and hopefully on Zoom) today from Portland, Oregon, a short drive away from the wild Oregon coast. I used the promise of a trip to that coast (without success, I'm afraid) as a lure to try to get Mom to come out to see me....she loved the ocean, loved water, and so many of her favorite adventures in life involved water in general, and the ocean in specific. In a few weeks, on my birthday, I will go to the coast to remember and honor her life ...to carry her memory and hold it in love next to the awesome power and majesty of the great Pacific Ocean.

Indeed, many of my most cherished memories of Mom involve water.

When I was a very small child, we were stationed in Rhode Island. There was a tiny creek somewhere near the house we lived in, and she would take me there often. I remember being fascinated by the trickling current. I have a vivid memory of squatting by the water edge, with her squatting next to me, holding my hand. There were brilliant autumn leaves falling into the water and caught in the rocky edges of the stream bed. I was three years old.

In New Jersey, where Mike was born, the biggest treat of all was going to the Boardwalk. I loved the rides and the water and the sandI remember Mom sitting happily on a towel, smiling at the water sparkling in the sunshine. She was always prudently covered up with long sleeves and a hat....even in the days of 'maximum tan is the way to go!'. That fair, freckled skin didn't tan, and she knew it. It never stopped her from heading straight towards water and a sunny beach any time she got the chance.

During the Viet Nam war, we were stationed on Guam, where David was born. Although Guam definitely had its challenges, she absolutely loved it there. We went to the beaches and rushing tropical rivers all the time. The day before we were scheduled to get on a plane and fly back to the States, she and I walked along the water's edge in Agana, the capital city, where tiny waves washed gently back and forth on a sandy stretch literally feet from the sidewalk along Central Drive. We sat down on the sand. She gazed out at the ocean, and shared with me how much she loved it here, how grateful she was to have experienced it, and how she would miss it. We both cried. As we were walking back to the car, she mused about how she realized she'd never cried about leaving a place before, and that it surely meant something important. I remembered that moment and those words when I unexpectedly started crying when leaving Portland after visiting in the summer of 2012.

When I graduated high school, she and Dad took us (me, Mike, and Dave) to California, with lots (and LOTS) of ocean activities. I was so excited to see the ocean after so many years that I ran down the beach in San Diego and threw myself into the water. I absolutely ruined my brand new beautiful dressy watch that I'd gotten for graduation, and I was afraid she'd be upset. She just laughed and handed me a towel that she had grabbed from the car. I remember her standing in the sun and smiling at the deep blue water of the San Diego bay.

When Mike graduated high school, she pushed through Dad's cost and danger objections, and they took us on a 10 day rafting trip down the Colorado River. She told me recently that there were times on that trip where she was thinking "Oh my god what have I done - I've put my entire family in danger - this river is DANGEROUS!"....and indeed it was. But it was one of the most amazing trips imaginable, and totally worth it, even the scary parts.

Sorry, Dave, when you graduated high school, they took you to London (for a soccer thing, I think). I wasn't along for that one, so I don't have a water memory of Mom for that. But my guess is that you do.

Another water memory, much more intimate and quiet - was her absolute delight in operating the irrigation turnstile on the ancient acequia that watered my South Valley property in Albuquerque. One irrigation day, she came down to the house, and we walked her out and showed her the entire process. As she turned the wheel to open the gate to our ditch, I watched her face as the gate cranked open, and the life-giving silver thread of water trickled, then deepened, then flowed down the ditch and onto my property. I could see the weight of ancestral memory and wonder as she turned to me with those clear blue eyes, and said, simply, "Thank you for this."

And although she didn't want me to leave New Mexico, she understood when I shared that part of what drew me to the Pacific Northwest was water. Rain and rivers and mist and oceans. She understood the power and draw of water. I am my mother's daughter.

Today and in the days to follow, we will remember and share many wonderful memories of our mother, grandmother, sister and friend. She was a good mother and grandmother, a loving sister and friend, smart, protective, dutiful, and fun loving. She made a lovely home, was a great cook, and shared freely of her time, attention, resources, and laughter.

She was also a woman ahead of her time. She thought for herself, and while she did what she believed was her duty her entire life, she also refused to just conform and let others do her thinking for her. She quietly flew in the face of societal pressure to sit down, be quiet, and let the so-called experts tell her what was best and what she ought to do.

She left her small town home as soon as she graduated highschool and went to the big city (Tulsa) to work

She married, and then lost her young husband to a heart attack shortly afterwards

The young widow then went to college, where she met her next husband and our father, a handsome young Naval Aviator named Dean.

She left college, married, had children, and traveled the world.

She returned to college, and finished her degree while caring for a preschooler, and heavily pregnant with her second child

She weighed 'expert' advice against her own common sense, and made her own decisions. She

breastfed when doctors were saying 'bottle is better'. She kept me inside when the mosquito fogger trucks went by in New Jersey, although authorities said 'it was perfectly safe'. When Mike was showing signs of reactions to chemicals as a very young child, she did her own research and pulled him off of processed foods, sugars, and food dyes...although the pediatrician pooh-poohed the idea, and she was mocked by other adults in the family. He got better, and science vindicated her years later.

On July 21, 1969, she woke Mike and I up in (what was for us on Guam) the middle of the night, took us to the living room, and she sat us down in front of the TV, where we watched the first lunar landing, and the first steps of the first man on the moon. She said "I want you to see this, and I want you to remember it. When I was a little girl, this was science fiction. Today, it is real and it's happening right now." I remember, Mom. Thank you for waking me up to watch history and the future come together. Mike, you might have been too little to remember...but it happened, you were there, and I remember for both of us. Dave....you were actually there, too, but only 4 months in utero. But you were there.

She fought for a bottle bill to increase recycling and decrease litter in New Mexico. She worked to preserve ancient petroglyphs from the encroachment of a major roadway project. She served on the City Planning Commission, where she regularly went nose to nose with city power players and officials when she thought they were on the wrong track. She was refined and courteous...but she never backed down. When she returned to work after David graduated high school, she had the opportunity to work on something that combined her deep love of history, politics, Native American and Hispanic culture, AND law - she worked as a paralegal with the Special Master to adjudicate water in northern New Mexico. And she absolutely loved it.

Towards the end of her life, the world got much smaller. She sold the family home, moved to an apartment, and continued to work on her years-long project of organizing family portraits from both sides of the family...preserving history for those who come after. It mattered to her....this woman of vision was also a woman of roots. I remember her saying to me "If you want to know where you're going, it's very important that you know and remember where you came from." And even as life narrowed in on her and drew to a close, that sharp and inquisitive mind continued to expand.

For the past couple of years, she and I have been Zooming a couple of times a week. Just a few months ago, she said "Do you want to know what I'm doing?" I said "Of course".

She was reading a book called "An Incomplete Education" which basically has large amounts of information about subjects not generally provided in depth in the schools anymore - art, music, civics, history, et cetera. She was zeroed in on an entire section of the book about science...specifically, physics. People, I spent most of July and August discussing the theory of relativity, string theory, and quantum physics with my 90 year old mother who couldn't drive, couldn't see or hear well, and whose day to day life was confined to 4 walls and periodic trips to the doctor....but whose mind and spirit was sharp and engaged and wide-open curious. We

picked it apart and debated. I ran around the internet and found supplemental information for her, I shared my screens and we worked on the Zoom whiteboard. When she was satisfied she'd learned enough, she mailed me the book.

I'm about halfway through the "History of American Politics" section. Haven't quite gotten to the Physics section yet. I'll get there.

In our last conversation, she was getting ready to have the procedure she underwent on Oct 3rd. She was feeling very ill, but really wanted to visit, so we did. She was so tired, and expressed it over and over to me. She said that all she really wanted to do was lie down and sleep, but people kept getting her up, that she had to get up and do things. She just wanted to rest.

Mom...it's time to rest. May you walk on sandy shores next to warm and inviting turquoise waters. May the sun warm you, and when you want to sit on a porch and gaze at your garden, may a gentle rain fall on a garden ripe with beans and corn and tomatoes and squash. I wish for you purring cats, stacks of books, lots of iced tea, and chatty visits with fascinating people who don't stay longer than you want them to. I wish for you a joyful reunion with all those you've missed who have gone before you.

To those of us who remain here, I want you to know that Geta loved you. She loved her children. She loved her brothers and her sister. She absolutely adored her grandchildren. And she loved this beautiful, wondrous, wild world....and she did her best to leave a legacy of responsible and caring stewardship.

Decades ago, I asked her one day what her all-time favorite quote was. On the back of an envelope, she wrote it out and gave it to me. It looks like something was splashed on it (coffee, or maybe tea?), the paper is yellowing, and the blue ink is fading a little, but the words in her graceful handwriting are clear. I keep it in my needlework box, and I see and read it almost every day. I share it with you:

Think Big
Talk Little

Love Much
Laugh Easily

Work Hard
Give freely

Pay Cash and Be Kind
It's enough.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson.....as lived by Geta Aileen Smith Pollack Gatterman

