

Eulogy for Nana – September 22nd 2006

When Mom asked me if I wanted to do this, I was not sure if I would be able to. I didn't know if I'd be in shambles or if I'd be able to keep my composure. On top of that, I honestly felt confronted with the task of expressing the deep, eternal love that I feel for my grandmother. There truly are no words for the love that I had for her, and if I tried to explain it I would surely not be able to accurately describe it or do it justice. So instead, I realized that this needs to be more about honoring Ellen DeCatherine Willhoite Breeck and about celebrating her 93 long years here on earth.

She was born on August 30th 1913 to Hallie and George Willhoite in Drenon Springs over in Henry County. She was one of 7 children. There were 4 boys (Virgil, Marvin, Fred, and J.B.) and 3 girls (Mae, Ellen D., and Lula Gayle). She was the 2nd youngest and the last to die. She was a Leo.

Her nephew Donald Willhoite determined that it took 106 years for the Willhoite kids to stop causing the rest of society trouble! This was calculated from the time Uncle Virgil was born in 1900 until the time my grandmother died in 2006.

Ellen DeCatherine Willhoite Breeck had many, many aliases. My sister Miriam and our friend Ashlea tried to tally them up. I'm going to run thru the list briefly.

- * Nana (which is what her grandchildren call her)
- * Ms. Breeck
- * D.D.
- * Aint L
- * Ellen
- * Aunt Ellen
- * Ellen D
- * Mother
- * Aunt D.D.
- * The Deed-ster (which is what Ashlea started calling her)

Nana is survived by her daughter (Carolyn) and her 3 grandchildren (Hallie, Micah, and Miriam). Most days, she called my mom "Hallie D.", and she called me "Carolyn Mae". She called Micah "Michael" and Miriam "Marin".

Nana had 24 nephews and 19 nieces.

Here's a fascinating example of how long her life truly was.

Roy Lee was her Nephew, he was the son of her sister, my Aunt Mae.

Robert Lee who is Roy Lee's son is her great nephew.

Lee Ann, Robert Lee's daughter, is her great, great niece.

Conner and Ryan are Lee Ann's two sons. They are her Great, Great, Great Nephews! They came to see her on a weekly basis and to get cookies. They called her Aunt D.D.

I need to give you a little history about the matriarchs who preceded me. My mom and grandmother lived with my great Grandmother Hallie DeCatherine in our family home on Hawkins Street. My great grandmother raised my mom while my grandmother worked. My mom lived with her grandmother from the time she was born until she was 20 years old. My great grandmother eventually became bedridden and my grandmother cared for her while working at the same time. Toward the end of her life, my grandmother had the help of her sisters in caring for her. Hallie died when my mom was 23, in our family home. After her death, my mom and dad moved in with my grandmother. Nana worked at Kawneer on 36 (on the way to Madison). When my mom got pregnant with me in 1978, she decided to retire so she could raise me while my mom and dad worked. I also had the wonderful opportunity to spend countless hours with her sisters, Aunt Mae (who taught me to use scissors) and Lula Gayle who was basically like my second grandmother. I lived with her until I was 18 years old. My brother and sister were born in 1992, and they lived with her until this week.

From hearing this history, you should feel comforted in knowing that God has ways of ensuring we are repaid for our good deeds. My grandmother took care of her mother and she was repaid for this by the care her daughter provided for her. This family truly has been blessed by this strong tradition. Nana was blessed by the love she gave and received. Living in the home with her grandchildren was an indescribable opportunity, not only for her, but for us. The impact that has on children is immense. The love and respect that her daughter and grandchildren had for her was what kept her going in her later years.

She had so many nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.... At this old age of 93, for someone to stay so closely connected to her family and community of friends.... It's a rare and inspiring event. It's a model for how I hope to live my life.

She had a tremendous and undying faith in God. Larry tells me that she prayed every day for her friends and loved ones, both living and deceased. After living 93 years, a person watches a lot of loved ones depart, only to be replaced by the next generations. She missed all of her loved ones so much. Her sister Lula Gayle was her best friend. After she died, my grandmother was pretty sad and very lonely. It takes serious faith in order to endure so many losses and still sustain a happy demeanor. She had a child-like, extremely youthful spirit. She loved to have fun. Miriam, Micah, and Ashlea really brought that out in her.

My mom sacrificed a lot of her life to be with my grandmother. The doctor and many others suggested on numerous occasions that we put her in a nursing home. But my mother refused.... And it's a good thing she did, because I refused too, and I would have had to drop out of college and move back to Carrollton in order to take care of her! My mom honored and respected my grandmother, and she went above and beyond any arbitrary standard of care that is set by the medical profession. She should have no regrets.

As Larry mentioned, my mom and grandmother would get into lots of little fights. But then minutes later, they would act like nothing even happened! It takes a lot of love and a good sense of humor to be able to leave the negativity behind and just move on.

I also wanted to say some things about my grandmother that really summarize her personal character.

She would yell at us grandkids for everything we did!

- * Coming in the house wet after being in the pool
- * Getting out toys that she thought made a mess (even on Christmas days, she'd fuss at me for getting out my new toys because they were messy!)
- * Opening a window or leaving a door open because of the flies. She hated flies. She always hated "those ole' hateful flies!". She'd stalk them through the house with a fly swatter obsessively. She hated them!

She loved little cokes in the glass bottles. She would send me to Jaspers every day when I was a kid so I could get her a little coke. She always gave me 50 cents so I could buy myself a 100 Grand candy bar too.

She loved Cinnamon rolls with icing, Butternut bread, raisin bread, apple pies from McDonalds, and Bob Barker. I always had a dream of going out to LA and getting on the Price is Right so she could root for men to win something. Her favorite games were Plinko and the Yodeling man.

She canned vegetables, made amazing vegetable and beef soup, made hundreds (if not thousands) of jars of raspberry jelly from berries grown in our back yard. She made the best homemade chocolate icing I've ever eaten and she could never tell you what the recipe was because she created it from scratch out of her mind.

My grandmother absolutely loved to dance. She and Lula Gayle would go out on the river boats almost every weekend to go dancing. She always did the Charleston for me when I was a kid, and I thought it was so funny! She taught Miriam and Ashlea how to do the two-step when they were all standing around and talking in the kitchen. I've always had a love for dancing and spent the

earlier part of my 20's going out on every opportunity I had to dance the night away. My brother Micah would dance for my grandmother and really turn it on. She loved to watch him dance. He made her laugh so hard. About a year ago, she was in the Carrollton hospital and Micah started dancing for all of us and he just couldn't stop. I should also note that Micah systematically removes his clothing until there is nothing left but his boxer shorts! We all laughed so hard at him we were in tears.

She was also the most bossy and feisty lady I've ever known! She threw little fits like an 8 year old.

She talked non-stop, too.

She did not want me to get married. She told me to stay single all my life! But Nana came to love and adore Aron, especially when he had his face clean shaven and did not have on a hat. Every time I came home she asked me where Aron was if he was not with me, and she always assumed he was working at the orphanage. She thought he was a sweet person.

Miriam told me she always yelled at them for playing hide and go seek, and that she yelled at them for it just last weekend.

Micah was her DRINK MAN. She always commanded him to get her a glass of ice water or a SWALLER of coke.

We also need to give thanks to Larry who came to my family at a time when we were most in need of him. He helped my mother care for my grandmother over the past few months just like she was his own mother. We thank you for that, and we are extremely fortunate to have you as part of our family.

Jackie Ray told us that Willhoite means "I will prevail". My grandmother is a fine example of this name fitting the person. She had a strong constitution, undying will, deep commitment, and an unbelievably strong heart - LITERALLY. Her heart beat for about 45 minutes after she took her last breath on Tuesday morning.

She always professed that she was going to live until Jesus came. We were at her bedside when she died on Tuesday, and I know Jesus come to take her home. Her family has been in heaven waiting for her for a long time and now they are reunited.