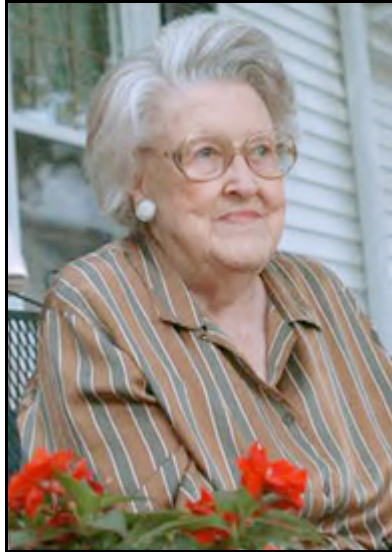


# Who Was My Grandmother?

Well, she was special. Everyone's grandmother is...

by Susan Lundquist

*My grandmother passed away Friday, July 21, 2006, at 103. Though I have lost someone special, I never want to forget my grandmother's story. I am grateful for her life.*



Lorene Sumner (later Lorene Fisk) was born on a farm just North of Odessa, MO, March 14, 1903, where her Grandfather Barker lived in a two-story home with the family cemetery behind. Her 12-year-old uncle Dave used to carry her on his shoulders down the hill to country school. During her youth Lorene was baptized in Odessa as a member of the Christian Church.

Her father died when she was 13, so Lorene helped her mother raise chickens for a living. In 1918 they moved to Independence, MO, where they took in boarders. Lorene started school at the brand new William Chrisman High School around the corner from the home of a future United States president.

After high school, Lorene worked as a bookkeeper on Independence Square at Stewart Electric Co. She rode "The Goat " (a streetcar) to Fairmount Park and enjoyed dancing in the pavilion on warm summer nights with her friends. One evening a man named John asked her to dance, which thrilled her until she discovered his two left feet.

She actually met her husband (my grandfather) John at a confectionary (an ice cream parlor/candy store) on the Square in the mid-1920's. This place was where local young gentlemen and ladies went to socialize after school and work. Lorene said it was good, clean fun!

On July 23, 1927, Lorene Sumner married John Fisk, the son of country schoolteachers.

Lorene stayed home to raise Lita Lou, born 14 months after the wedding, while John finished his law degree at the University of Kansas City in 1929. She was an exemplary wife, mother and homemaker. When her daughter came home for lunch, Lorene would iron Lita Lou's school dress in the middle of the day so Lita was always dressed properly!

Lorene became active with PTA in the 1930's and drove teenagers to 'Teen Town' dances she helped chaperone at the Truman Memorial Building. In 1944 Lorene, John and Lita Lou moved to a new home on North Main Street.

When Lita Lou left for college at the University of Kansas, Lorene began her work as a bank teller for 13 years. She stopped working in 1959 once Lita was married with three children (who became the apples of Lorene's eyes). Her grandchildren (including me) called her **Nonny**.

When we were small, Nonny let us play secretary with the real telephone at her tall desk. She placed a piece of tape over the dial-tone button so no calls were actually made, and we could 'pretend talk' for hours! We also played "kitchen" (using the large radio as our stove) and "cooking" with real dried

beans. This worked well until Susie stuck some of the beans up her nose and Nonny panicked. Somehow we got them out and that was the end of the beans!

Nonny watched her “story” (soap opera) every day on "*As the World Turns*.” I remember seeing her set up bridge parties for friends. Saturday night was Lawrence Welk at 6 o'clock sharp.

She had a row of antique glass apothecary jars to the left of the kitchen sink. The smallest jar was full of Red Hots, then Brach's butterscotch candy, next was crackers, and finally, homemade cookies helping round out the other delectable snacks. She reached in to pull out a cold glass bottle of fresh water from the little white 1950's Hotpoint refrigerator, and there was always REALLY fresh frozen Sealtest vanilla ice cream in the freezer for a hot summer night!

On overnights, we climbed into Nonny's big bed (with soft pink sheets) surrounded by fancy red wallpaper. There was an antique German clock resting on a shelf over her bed that became part of our bedtime ritual. She wound it and played us folk tunes. Nonny always insisted that Susie, the youngest, sleep with a bedrail, even when Susie tried to convince her she was TOO OLD for that!

Nonny and Granddad had two apartments over their house that they usually rented to schoolteachers. Once, Nonny had a handsome U.S. Navy male nurse, Bill Wagner, stay in one of the apartments. He was later assigned to work for former President Harry S. Truman.

The house was spotless, and her cars were in pristine shape – the white 1964 Grand Prix, the Buick Skylark, and her cream-colored 1984 Chrysler New Yorker (a "talking" car).

She also ironed her sheets and Granddad's pajamas during the seven years she cared for him after he fell out of bed and broke his hip in 1977.

In 1992 Nonny fell and broke her hip, but thanks to therapy, Dr. Hummel, and the great care provided to her at the old Independence Sanitarium & Hospital, she returned home to North Main Street in Independence (not far from Ginger Rogers' childhood home) with an Electric Stair Glide. This helped her up and down the stairs in her apartment for the next 13 years.

There were life changes to make: Her old Zenith console TV was replaced by a 54 inch BIG screen TV. They replaced the old wall phone with a cordless one carried around in the basket attached to her walker. Until she was 102, Nonny balanced her checkbooks with a Telesensory machine that enlarged the print to make it more visible. She gracefully adapted to the changes.

In many ways she was not ordinary but extraordinary. Extraordinarily, she managed her decision making until the last two weeks of her life with the aid of hospice...a helpful team. She led a high quality of life to the end, surrounded by those she loved who knew her best...her caregiver of over four years, Rose, her daughter, Lita, and youngest granddaughter. Nonny's three grandkids, six great-grandkids and finally, great-great grandson Neal, crowned the final generation. Her legacy lives on...

*If you'd like to feature a similar article on our website or would like to read the entire December 2006 Piece of Mind Newsletter, please contact [Rachel@edcgroup.org](mailto:Rachel@edcgroup.org).*

