

"Nana-isms" By Jannette Morrow

Pastor Russell, our sister Jacqueline, myself and our many cousins were blessed with a wonderful grandmother, Mother Helen Cook, who went to be with the Lord several years ago. She was affectionately known to her children, grands, great and great, great grandchildren as Nana. During her long life of 98 years, she taught and influenced not only her large extended family, but a host of Sunday School and Vacation Bible school students, children's choir members, friends, neighbors, members of her church family, clergy and lay people alike. Like all good moms and grandmas, Nana had her cadre of 'sayings' that she used for every situation. The older I get, the more I appreciate the Godly wisdom that she was teaching us. Here are just a few of her sayings that she was fond of repeating:

1. *"Let your word be your bond."*

Psalm 15:2 states that "He who walks with integrity . . . and speaks truth in his heart" will abide in God's tent. Proverbs 12: 22 adds that "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord," and Galatians 5:22 says that faithfulness is among the fruit of the spirit. These days, when it is so socially acceptable to be careless with the truth, it is easy to 'forget' about the promises we make to God and others. Nana always told her children to "say what you mean, and mean what you say." I learned from her not to make promises that I had no intention of keeping, and if I honestly couldn't do something I had said, then to be truthful and say so.

2. *"Have broad shoulders."*

I often heard Nana say that she kept "broad shoulders." The reason for this was because she had many difficulties of her own, plus those that she shared from the lives of others - children, brothers and sisters in Christ, and even neighbors. Burdens would pile up, and when she couldn't carry anymore, she would take them to the Lord. "Then I let my shoulders droop." Her concerns would fall off her shoulders into the hands God who would take care of them all. I Peter 5:7 tells the Church " . . . casting all your anxiety on Him [Christ], because he cares for you." Nana knew that she did not have to bear her troubles alone, but that Jesus was there to share them.

3. *"A dog that will bring a bone, will carry a bone."*

It took me awhile to figure out what this meant but one day Nana explained. "Be careful what you say to somebody who always comes to you with a story about somebody else's business. If they can tell you what somebody said to them in private, what do you think they will do with what you tell them?" In other words, Nana was telling me to not only beware of listening to gossip, but also of spreading it and things someone might say to me in genuine confidence. While there are some secrets that cannot be kept ( child abuse for example), most broken confidences only cause mistrust and damage to relationships. Proverbs 17:9 states that ". . . he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends." Proverbs 20:19 says that a "slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip." Chapter 25, verses 9 and 10 plainly warn against revealing the secret of another "or he who hears it will reproach you, and the evil report about you will not pass away." Nana believed in keeping secrets. She once told me "there are things that I know [about people] that will go to the grave with me." And she kept that word.

4. *"You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar."*

Admittedly, this saying, or a variation of it, is a somewhat common one, but Nana used it often, and for good reason. While sometimes it is necessary to be firm or hard on someone, it is often just easier to be nice - and the outcome may be better. Many of Nana's stories had to do with occasions when a little unexpected kindness on her part turned into something good. For example, a "Please, when you get the chance, may I have . . ." got her a lot more help from the nurses and aides during her several hospitalizations than other patients who were rude or demanding. And, while working as arts and crafts director at her senior citizen center, ( yes, Nana was employed by the City of New York in her mid eighties) a kind intervention, a well-timed compliment or just a quiet polite and positive answer often calmed down someone who was angry, or kept a bad situation from getting worse. Proverbs 15:1 advises that "A soft answer turns away wrath," and chapter 12 verse 25 says a "good word" makes the heart glad.

5. *"Nobody is indispensable."*

Nana was a natural leader. Even when she wasn't in the position of leadership she was often a trusted ally of the one who was. But she never had the notion that she was the only person who could do a job, or that a particular program couldn't go forward just because she wasn't there. "One monkey never stopped any show" she would say "and that includes me, and anybody else." Nana never took leadership or the people who helped her for granted because she firmly believed that the same God that put someone in a position could remove them and put someone else in the same spot of need be, and the 'show' would simply go on. Proverbs 16:18 states that "Pride goes before destruction." And no one, as Paul says in Romans 12:3, should "think more highly of himself than he ought to think."

Our Nana was a woman of God, full of good sense and love for those around her - a true Proverbs 31 lady if ever there was one! I hope you enjoyed reading a bit of her wisdom as much as I used to enjoy hearing her tell it.