

# **Grandmothers**

**By**

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**I once told Father Schneller, our Pastor, why I am so fond of St. Ann Parish. He was somewhat surprised when I said, “It’s because St. Ann is the Patron Saint of Grandmothers!”**

**In case that leaves you a little confused as well, let me explain.**

**Frequently I tell a joke about my grandmother (Filomena Ziviello Barbieri) that goes like this:**

**My grandmother died in 1960, but that doesn’t mean anything—she sits right here on my right shoulder watching everything I do and say. If I get angry about anything, I can’t cuss in Italian or English, she hits me on the head—so I cuss in German. If you hear me pound the table and say:”Ach du lieber himmel!” it’s because she doesn’t understand German.**

**I made that up!**

**But here’s a story I didn’t make up—it’s the absolute truth, told me by my Grandmother, her sister Rose (Ziviello De Bellis), and my Mother, Mae (Mafalda Barbieri Falco).**

**I was supposed to be born in August of 1932. My mother had already paid the hospital fee for my birth in Philadelphia. But on the Fourth of July, it got rather hot in the city, and no one had air conditioning at that time. So she called my Grandmother who had a summer house in Wildwood, a barrier island off the coast of New Jersey. She asked if she could spend a few days with her until the heat died down a bit. “Of course!” my Grandmother replied, and my Mother travelled by ferry and train all the way to Wildwood, ninety miles away.**

**What neither my Mother nor my Grandmother knew was that one of my uncles, her younger brother, Adolf, (actually named Ottavio because he was the eighth child of my grandparents), was also in Wildwood and had saved some cherry bombs left over from the Fourth of July---to “scare the ladies!” One of the ladies he scared was, of course, my Mother.**

**Within a few hours my Mother started to go into labor. My Grandmother was frantic. Wildwood had no hospital at that time. There was no way my Mother could make that arduous journey back to Philadelphia by train and ferry, and the road north to Atlantic City (forty miles away) had not yet been paved. Driving there to get to a hospital, even if someone with a car had offered to do so, would have taken my Mother over a very bumpy dirt road.**

**Finally, my Grandmother located a doctor who was on vacation in Wildwood. He agreed to come. “But,” he said, “I have a 6:30 dinner engagement.” This was on the afternoon of July 7<sup>th</sup>.**

**Can you guess what my Grandmother did? Think about it. What would you have done?**

**At exactly 6:30, she went up to that third storey bedroom where my Mother, my Aunt Rose and the Doctor, were awaiting my arrival. And she locked the door of the bedroom!**

**That’s right! She didn’t plead with the Doctor to delay his departure. She didn’t in any way try to talk some sense into him. Instead, like any frightened Mother, about to be a Grandmother, she acted. Without hesitation! She kidnapped the Doctor!**

**She knew there was not a thing he could do about it, because if he reported her to the authorities, he might lose his license. But no harm done. According to everyone else present that evening, I only kept him waiting fifteen minutes.**

**Why did my Grandmother behave so radically and abruptly? Was she crazy? Maybe. You see, my Mother had already miscarried two other infants. And even though I only weighed five pounds five ounces at birth, I was the only one she had succeeded in carrying to term (almost).**

**The story doesn't end there. Years later (1964) when my Mother was on her deathbed from lymphatic cancer, going in and out of a coma, she looked up at me and asked: "Where's my little boy, where's my little girl?" Both I and her sister (my Aunt Violet Barbieri Carbone) who was also present, knew exactly what she meant. So I said: "We're here, Mother. We're all here." My Aunt and I wept. My Mother closed her eyes peacefully, and a few days later she died.**

**So that's why Grandmothers (and Mothers) mean so much to me.**

**Today, when I go shopping at Sam's or wherever, and I see a woman with a toddler at her side or an infant in a cradle in her basket, I say to her: "Have you told that child that all Mommies go to heaven?" They laugh and usually say something like "Not yet, but I will." And I reply—"You'd better! It's important!"**

**And that's why I love St. Ann!**

