

“SLYTM”  
Weylan Deaver

It's different when they're gone. When a grandparent--your last living grandparent--finally passes on after a long life given to serving the Lord. There are subtle changes that find you unexpectedly. In saying a prayer, you begin to mention her name, as you have done for decades, then catch yourself in mid-syllable, realizing she's not on earth to pray for anymore. You ponder the strange fact that now you need to delete her from your phone's list of contacts--not just update her information, but actually erase it. There is something unnatural about deleting a grandparent from your contacts.

Wilma Ruth (Gibson) Deaver was born into the world March 19, 1924 and quietly made her exit July 31, 2013 at the age of 89. Her grandkids called her MeMe. As a youngster on my tricycle, she would go with me on trips around her block in Fort Worth. If there were a big puddle of water in the curb, I would enjoy pedaling through it. On returning to her house, she'd make me a piece of toast with honey on top. She introduced me to the wonder of homemade powdered sugar doughnuts. When I graduated to my first bicycle, it was her driveway where I put training wheels to the test. Later still, when we lived on forty acres in middle Tennessee, she taught me how to drive. We had a long gravel road and plenty of pasture for driver's ed. That she would devote herself to such a task is testimony to her love and patience. My grandparents owned a stick-shift Subaru (and later a stick-shift Renault) and I'll always be glad I learned to drive on a standard transmission, thanks to them.

No doubt the vast work done by my grandfather, Roy C. Deaver (1922-2007), was made possible because of MeMe, including his being the founding president of Fort Worth Christian School, and the founding director of the Brown Trail School of Preaching. Over his wide-ranging career, he preached across the country, edited publications, and taught in numerous preacher schools. In addition to upholding the gospel in many public debates of his own, he also served as a key helper to Thomas B. Warren in several of his debates. My grandmother was always content to be in the background, probably little realizing the full extent of the great good she was helping make possible. Introducing my grandfather at a lectureship in 1989, brother Warren said:

*"The Deaver and Warren families have been very close for a number of years. And Wilma Ruth is Roy's wife, and Faye, my wife, have had a rather running battle with us about our getting too flowery and too lengthy in our introductions of one another. They misguidedly believe that we brag on one another too much. And, so, Roy handed me this note tonight. It's signed by 'WD.' I suppose that could mean Wilma Deaver. And it says, 'Please make it brief and simple. One and one is two, no matter how you say it.' ....But I'll just say this. I don't know of a better Bible scholar than brother Roy Deaver. And I don't know of anybody else better to guard him than Wilma Ruth."*

She never got visibly angry. Her words were never harsh. It is true that she much disliked "unnecessary messes," and also true that we grandkids made our share of them, but we were always welcome at her door. If she caught you chewing with your mouth open, she would volunteer a correcting word. If she found that you liked a particular soft drink or candy bar, she would see that you were kept in good supply, at least while you were with her.

After I got married, Cheri and I would often, on a Friday afternoon, go to my grandparents' home for a dinner of fried chicken, then leave the kids with them while we got away for some time off. Turns out, Grandparent-Land was as welcoming to their great-grandchildren as it had been to us grandkids a generation before. I'm glad my kids have good memories of their great-grandparents.

Used to, I took some comfort in the fact I had living parents, living grandparents, living great-grandparents because each prior generation seemed to be an additional barrier between me and my own mortality. Now, there are no living ancestors beyond my parents, and it begins to sink in I am becoming an older generation, myself.

MeMe has gone on ahead, like my grandfather before her. In my mind's eye, they have already had a family reunion. Though the Bible says marriages does not exist beyond the grave, I wonder if they now appear to each other as on the day they were married--no wrinkles, no silver hair, no aches, no pains, no weakness, no age in the eyes, no raspy voice inflicted by a severe horse accident in the distant past. What conversations must be happening over there?

So, what in the world does "SLYTM" mean? It was my grandmother's personal trademark, of sorts. As far as I know, she made it up. No one else in the family used it, but she wrote it often. It would show up at the end of a handwritten letter addressed to one of us. It would be on the tags of Christmas presents bearing the names of her grandchildren. Maybe it deserves a small corner on her tombstone, though its meaning would be lost on visitors to the cemetery. It stands for "Still Love You Too Much!"

