

“Saints I Have Known”
by Julia Lont

I know that when you are asked to speak on "saints in my life" choosing to speak about your own grandmother is a little bit like taking the easy way out. Most of us see our own grandmothers as saints, and, well, I'm no exception. So, here goes...

One saint in my life was my grandmother, Edith Drost. She lived from 1908 to 1997. She spent all of her life in the Midwest as a teacher, a minister's wife, home-maker, mother of three, and grandmother of eight. My strongest memories of her were as a hostess for family gatherings—like on holidays, or for Sunday dinner. I have many fond memories of her in a domestic setting: canning peaches, setting the table, washing and drying dishes, knitting, pruning roses, and so on... She was so skillful with a paring knife, she could peel an entire apple in one piece. Having lived through the depression, I remember her re-using before re-using was really cool. She'd carefully wash plastic margarine containers, ziplock bags, and pieces of aluminum foil to use again. One of the more bizarre re-uses I remember was the way she would cut off the top elastic band of her thigh-high nylons that had got a run and put it around her board games to keep the lid from coming off. Then she'd take the sock portion of the nylon and wrap it tightly around wire coat-hangers to give them a bit of padding. All in all, she was a generous, dutiful, fun, hospitable, clever, and industrious woman whom I admire.

This passage from Proverbs was read at her funeral: (Proverbs 31: 10-14, 20-21, 25-29)

*A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.
The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.
She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.
She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from far away.*

*She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.
She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson.*

*Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.
She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue,
She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.
Her children rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her:
Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.*

When my grandmother died in 1997, I had just recently graduated from college. I felt myself to be an independent, liberated, young feminist; and while I had read and heard read this passage from Proverbs before, I had always dismissed it as "one of THOSE passages." You know, the ones you wish weren't there because you think they are outdated and/or offensive in some way. I had always thought this passage meant something like "As a woman, your duty is to do housework and make life easier for your husband and family." But at Grandma's funeral I suddenly came to realize the beauty and strength of the woman described in this passage. Being

a kind, generous, committed, and resourceful woman like my grandmother is not something to deride, but something to aspire to. It's not about submission, it's about generosity.

“Saints I Have Known”
by Ted McCann

Several weeks ago the phone rang and Allie answered. “Dad it’s for you,” she said. I asked her, “Who is it?” “Dorothy,” she replied. My immediate reaction was “OH, NO, the church wants me to do something else. Tell her I’m not here!” But no, I answered. Dorothy asked me if I wanted to speak on Laity Sunday about Saints I Have Known. I told her I’d think about it, and let her know. When I started to think about the idea of Saints I have known, I couldn’t help but think of one of my coaches. Coach Bob was a teacher and coach of mine who had a strong influence on me as well as a profound influence on hundreds of other teens growing up. But before I tell you more about Coach Bob I want to tell you a story.

As a teen I went to a college prep school that was a working ranch in northern Arizona. When I was there, I had to serve on the Disciplinary board. The DB Board was a big deal because we voted on suspensions and expulsions. It was made up of three students, three faculty members and the Dean of Students, who would vote only in case of a tie. Coach Bob was the Dean of Students.

One of the cases that came up before the DB board involved a classmate by the name of Frank. Frank had been caught in a room with two other boys who had been smoking pot. The two other boys admitted to smoking it, but Frank claimed he had just walked into the room and hadn’t been doing anything. Frank was known to be a partier who would smoke pot, even though he wasn’t a real stoner.

The DB board argued back and forth over the situation and whether Frank was telling the truth. In the end, after a long and very heated discussion, a vote was called and taken. It was a tie. Coach Bob was going to have to break the tie—something he didn’t like doing. I thought I knew what would happen, but when Coach announced his decision I was surprised and more than a bit annoyed. He had voted against a suspension. Frank got off with a strong warning and work hours. I was upset. None of us knew for certain if Frank had been smoking, but few of us students doubted it. When you’re a teenager trying to figure out for yourself what is good and what is bad, it doesn’t help when the black and white world you’re trying to hang on to becomes more gray. I felt let down by Coach Bob. I thought he was smarter than that. I was mad because Frank managed to weasel his way out of something while the other two guys owned up to it. I got over it quickly because at boarding school there is always a feeling of “us versus them: students against teachers. However, it is an experience I still remember.

I’m going to ask you to bear with me before I get to the point of this story because I want to tell you a bit more about Coach Bob.

Coach Bob, who is now retired and living in Colorado worked, taught and coached at Orme School for close to thirty years. He is a midwesterner, and a coach who fits many of the positive

stereotypes of both. He is smart, quick to smile, and always has a twinkle in his eyes. He played quarterback at Wake Forest and, to this day, can still easily bench press more than his own weight. Coach Bob was my math teacher, my football and basketball coach and my advisor. At a boarding school these things take on added weight because teachers are your advisors, parents, and police all rolled into one. At Orme this was even more so because we were living together on a ranch in the middle of “nowhere Arizona.”

Coach Bob did what good teachers and coaches do: he connected you to something bigger than yourself and made you a better person while doing it. Nowhere was this more apparent than on the football field. Our tiny school of 200 students always had a winning record and routinely would beat the best. Ninety percent of the boys ended up playing football because of the program he created, and this included skinny kids like me who never dreamed of doing it. Hard work and commitment were what he stressed. He was definitely “old school.” However, before I lose you to the cliché of the tough football coach, I’m going to tell you that Coach Bob didn’t yell or scream or bully his players. There was something about him that made you just want to try harder. You didn’t want to disappoint Coach Bob—either on the playing field or in the classroom.

He inspired you through a quiet magnetism that subtly emanated from him. It was like he had a strong steel core. I would find out that this core is his faith in God. The thing that stayed with me the most about his faith was that he never proselytized. Coach Bob and his wife led an Fellowship of Christian Athletes group on campus and, if you wanted to, you could find out what he believed in there. It was open to everyone, and a lot of people would go. But most importantly, coach taught by example; he never tried to convert you. I guess that’s the most unique thing about Coach Bob: he taught and lived by example. For years he helped kids grow up and gave of himself in the best ways he knew how by coaching, teaching and serving as a mentor.

This brings me back to my story about the “I didn’t inhale guy,” my classmate, Frank. Several years ago I, along with many other alums, flew back to Arizona for Coach Bob’s retirement party. We both stayed at the same hotel, and it was at breakfast the following day that I had a chance to talk with him for a while. We talked about a lot of things, but when I asked him about how things were at Orme he was dismayed at some of the changes that had happened over the years. The worst he says is the zero tolerance policy now. Kids get kicked out all the time and there’s no chance to learn from mistakes, and he told me a story about such an instance. I’d like to say I had an epiphany at that moment, but I didn’t. It wasn’t until I sat down to think about the saints I have known that I realized what a deep man Coach Bob is. He probably knew, just like all of us, that Frank was smoking pot but he was willing to face the ire of fellow teachers about his decision to give a young kid a chance. Giving people a chance, despite their mistakes, sounds like something a saint might do.