

PLAYTEST PATREON

# GRAN



jameslukeburkecreative



# WHERE DO I EVEN START THIS ONE?

**My Gran was a wonderfully Creative woman. She possessed such an eclectic mix of gifts and talents that seemed to trickle down the Family Tree to all of her grandchildren. It meant that she always had in interest in whatever you were doing, and you somehow thought Gran found you the “most special”.**

Gran comes up a lot in my work, and it's not just childhood memories and pensive journalling, her carefree spirit is there too. Gran was such a character, and at the risk of sounding like I'm making her up, I will just share a few stories that kind of summarise how she was.

1. Her middle name was Fay, but she hated it, and made sure people knew she was “Marilyn Madeline”... The alliteration was one thing, but the fact that she had never actually legally changed it, and sold this falsity to so many (with such passion), I find hilarious.

2. She was fiercely competitive, but also completely delusional about it. We used to have colouring competitions, which I'll write about later, and she would blindly copy my piece and proceed to tell everyone that I had, in fact, copied her.

3. She didn't shy away from a project, although she did shy away from research and planning. Gran could take a beautiful \$25 skirt and \$45 worth of beads to create a beaded skirt fantasy that looked like it might have cost a stunning \$40! But she loved it, so that was all that mattered.

4. And lastly, velcro dots. Ever the handy-woman, there wasn't a problem Gran couldn't solve with velcro dots. Wobbly table leg? couple of velcro dots. Uneven pant hems? velcro dots. No glue? velcro dots... Even though Gran has been gone for a few years now, the velcro dots keep re-appearing...

I don't know if it's relevant to mention, but I grew up in a household with Gran, Mum and Aunty. Three incredible women in their own rights, but I guess it might help to know that Gran was a constant in my life and so pivotal in how I developed as a confident Creative.

As quickly as I developed a passion for drawing and crafting, Gran taught me how to sew. Not only did she show me how, but she would take me to Spotlight and let me pick out patterns for her to make... for me... \*cough cough Dorothy dress.





Chanel No.5 painting in my journal, a memory of Gran's perfume

I never felt ashamed for expressing myself to her, I actually think she encouraged a lot of it out of me. I have come to realise how rare that is. I didn't buy the supplies to make ruby slippers with the money I didn't have, that was Gran. I didn't spray paint those roller skates gold, that was Gran... all I did was roll down the footpath singing Xanadu at full voice. Hahaha

She was super encouraging. She was my stage mother [dance mom] as well - and she was crazy in all the best ways. She would make sure I had Coke and Twisties at competitions for energy, even though it was strictly forbidden by my dance teacher. She would buy the VHS tapes of the performances and re-watch them with me OVER and OVER again. She helped me make my own costumes and watched me perform in the living room, never once laughing at all the teen angst I was "emoting" (she also never got angry about all the black marks on the carpet from my pirouettes). She would make notes in her program about my competitors and apparently every competition I didn't win was rigged... She loved watching me dance, and I loved to dance for her.

Gran was a swing dancer, so she did take a lot of credit for my dance career. She also loved to create things and used to say "I taught him everything he knows". I do give her credit for that too, as I'm sure without her nurturing encouragement my story might be quite different.

The colouring-in started before I can remember. Every summer my family would holiday on the Mid-North Coast of NSW at a place called South West Rocks. It's a sleepy beach town and even thinking about it makes me feel relaxed. Because Christmas falls in the summer for us we used to take all of our new toys to SWR, a bonus that made the 6 hour road trip much more bearable. My Christmas gifts were generally barbies and art supplies... nothing has changed.

We would have colouring competitions between all of us, my cousins, great aunts, siblings, Gran... and a simple afternoon playing with pencils is now a nostalgic piece of my past that inspires me to this day. Gran was super competitive and often we would submit nearly identical pieces hahaha. This extended beyond just family competition too! Don't tell anyone, but Gran and I competed against each other in a Woolworths (grocery store) colouring competition. We went under alias'. I used my sisters name and she used my cousins. I won. Gran came second. Gran claimed it was "rigged" and had absolutely nothing to do with the 6 hours I spent shading every inch of that piece of paper. P.S. My sister blackmailed me for the prizes so it's not like I actually won anything. She threatened to tell them she didn't do it if I didn't hand over the rewards, like I was going to keep the tiny scooter for myself... Haha!

In any case, I loved South West Rocks for many reasons - colouring competitions, the bakery van and it's custard tarts, Scripture Union Family Mission craft projects, jumping off the bridge at Back Beach, BINGO and crab hunting. It was the best two weeks out of my year and towards the end of the holiday we would have a massive family get-together BBQ, over time turning it into a themed costume party. We would be given a letter and have a couple of days to create a costume for the BBQ. All of our family would turn up to the caravan park looking like crazy people (not a challenge for my family), and we would have burgers and a sausage sizzle whilst watching a slideshow of the Christmas we had two weeks prior. This is where Gran's real creativity, and velcro dots, showed up!



It may sound simple enough to get a costume in a couple of days, but South West Rocks doesn't even have a McDonalds, it's not like there was a great resource for costume supplies. That's where Gran taught me to fossick for treasures in Op-Shops and junk stores, looking for the potential in what seemed like nothing. I don't think I could ever enter an old Baptist Church hall and not think of Gran taking me to a "fill-a-bag" book sale in SWR. But the foraging and collecting skills I learnt from her are still useful to me today, when Steve and I piece together "She Leapt off the Page" projects.

The last one I attended was the "C" theme. Gran made a little yarn wig out of wool and masking tape to transform herself into a "Calamity Jane Cabbage Patch Kid"... Apparently just being Calamity Jane wasn't enough. I wanted to be a Cabbage patch kid too :) So did my cousins.



That was the thing about Gran; she was infectious! Around her you felt more energised and more worthwhile. She was so simple and so transparent. She was the Gran that managed to spoil all of her grandchildren, and all of us felt like her favourite.

One of the most difficult moments of my life was having Gran fly out to Tokyo Disneyland and watch me perform. At this point she had been told so many times "4 weeks left", "3 months" or "8 weeks"... I couldn't comprehend the thought that my biggest supporter might be supporting me for the last time that day...

Joke was on the doctors, she had TWO YEARS after that trip! She had a blast visiting and I finally got to show her the dream I was living that she helped me achieve. All of those costumes she made, all of the competitions she attended, the dance classes she drove me to every night, the countless times she paused cooking dinner to review my rhythmic gymnastic ribbon routines in the yard were all worth it!



Gran, myself and my sister in Tokyo at Karaoke, giving you Evita realness with our fave "Don't cry for me Argentina".



Mum, myself, my sister and Gran trying our best to take a nice family photo.

The last time I actually spent with Gran was at my brothers house, colouring and babysitting my nephew. It was like looking at a memory. My Gran, a can of coke and a colouring book with a baby Burke enjoying her presence. She had photocopied a bunch of my drawings and was peacefully colouring them, requesting yet again that I make her a colouring book. We had coloured almost every book imaginable, twice, and the "adult colouring book" phase hadn't struck yet.



It was a truly bittersweet moment when I completed my MerMay colouring book, and even more emotional to have my mother here experiencing



A familiar sight, and my last memory of Gran.

When Gran passed she didn't leave much, she wasn't one to place a lot of value in Earthly possessions. I kept her costume jewellery for photoshoots with my sister and her colouring supplies. Ironically, half the supplies I inherited were my missing pencils :)

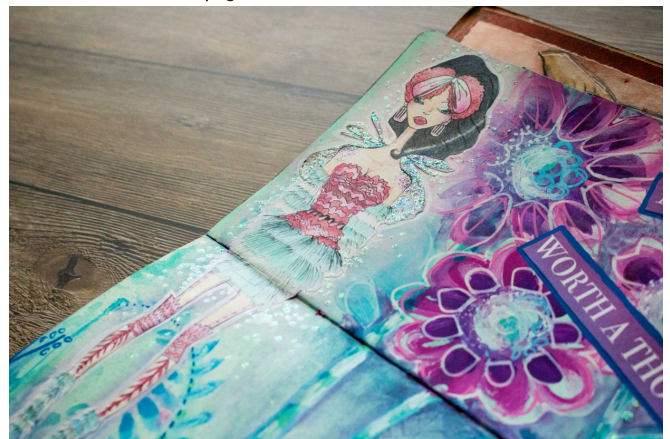
The most precious, tangible piece of inheritance I received were her colouring books and pages. Photocopies of my drawings that she had coloured over and over and over again. I put them in a folder and planned on keeping them safe forever, but I couldn't enjoy them in there. One day, after discovering this new-to-me world of "art journaling" I decided to put them in my new Dylusions journals. I figured they'd be safe inside there, but I'd also get to enjoy the memories every time I flicked through the pages.



I had no idea just how many times she managed to colour the same images.



I added to her works, colouring their skin, adding some shading or paint. I love that these pages became a true collaboration between us.







I want to wrap this up neatly, but re-reading the blog post back I can think of countless memories I haven't even mentioned, and my emotions are running so high I can't figure out how make sense of all of this.

So I'll just leave you with this.

My Gran was incredible. She was Creative in so many ways that I picked up throughout my life and I've never taken for granted all that she taught me; be simple, be transparent, just do it and if you love it, that's all that matters... It's OK not to win, but it's rigged. hahaha, be resourceful and don't look at things as they are, but rather what they "could be". Don't place so much importance in things you can't take with you when you leave. Give. Give all you have and all you know to others. Gran shaped so much of who I am and why I am.

Thank you for letting me share this with you. As Gran would do, I'll leave you with a verse from her favourite book in the Bible.

**Proverbs 3 5 - 6 :**

**Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.**



Marilyn Burke  
28 / 3 / 1945 - 18 / 3 / 2013