

ACROSS THE GENERATIONS  
– INCLUDING –  
A TRIBUTE TO MY GRANDMA: ANNIE KING HICKS GIBBEL (1879-1960)

Among the many proverbs that Solomon spoke is this one: *Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children (Proverbs 17:6)*. I like that verse very much, for it brings to my mind a happy, smiling family that spans three generations, with each member loved and valued, each contributing to the well-being of the others. And there are such families, all around the world. Let me tell you what brought me to this pleasant topic.

In the autumn of 2006 a high school student, who was required to take part in a community service project, came to Sky View with a proposal. She wanted to start a literary journal from the contributions we residents would give her, a project she hoped we would continue after her required work was finished. I was among those whose writings were published both in the fall and the winter editions of the journal. Several people wrote interesting articles about their grandmothers and so, in anticipation of the spring edition, I wrote a story about my mother's mother. But the third copy of our magazine was never printed. My alternate plan, so it would not be wasted, was to give the story to my children as part of their family history Christmas gift. Then in December several Bible stories about people interacting across the generations popped into my mind, giving me the idea of turning my grandma's tribute into an essay. Once that plan was solidified, further thoughts came flooding in, confirming to me that God was behind this project, making it something I MUST write, as well as WANT to write.

It is now mid-January, 2008, and my introduction is almost finished. Next I want to tell you about the Bible stories on which I've been meditating. After that, Lord willing, I will print the story I wrote for the journal, concluding with some further comments and concerns relating to the story. I'm glad you are reading this with me. To God be the glory!

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The cross-generational story that immediately came to mind is that of Timothy and his family, first mentioned in Acts 16: *[Paul] came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him (v. 1,2)*. When the work at Lystra was over, Timothy left home and traveled as a co-worker with Paul and his team. Later, when they were working in different areas, Paul would write instructive, encouraging letters to Timothy, two of which are part of the New Testament. In the beginning of 2 Timothy, Paul, whose martyrdom was near, did a bit of reminiscing, including this: *I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also (1:5)*.

Perhaps Lois and Eunice became believers during the first missionary trip, when Paul and Barnabas had preached and performed miracles in Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium. The Acts 16 story took place years later, when Paul was re-visiting the region with Silas. In the time between the trips, I can picture Grandma Lois and Mom Eunice not only teaching Timothy the faith, but living out their faith before him as well. The boy responded by becoming a believer himself and by letting that faith affect his lifestyle, proving it to be sincere. The family maintained a connection with the other believers in the area who readily vouched for Timothy's good character.

So close was the faith relationship between the missionary and the young man that Paul called Timothy his son, and gave him this advice: *Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity (1 Timothy 5:1,2)*. Wonderfully satisfying and edifying relationships that span the generations can be developed among God's people anywhere. Let's form "family" ties with people of all ages, for God's glory – and ours.

I like the story in the beginning chapters of 1 Samuel about the priest Eli taking young Samuel into his home and training him to serve God at the Tabernacle. This came about because of a promise Hannah, Samuel's mother, made to God. There is a lot of love in the story.

Luke 2 records two instances where old people interacted with the infant Jesus in the Temple. First, there was a godly man named Simeon who was told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. The same Spirit pointed out the correct baby to him. Listen now to Luke:

*Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will not be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul, too" (Luke 2:28-35).*

The second person was an 84-year-old widow named Anna. She was a godly prophet, just like Simeon. *Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38).* Blessings and love flowed freely from God across the generations that day, enveloping the baby Jesus, his parents and the old prophets – a heartwarming scene!

Still another cross-generational story is from the book of Ruth and concerns Naomi; her daughter-in-law, Ruth; and Ruth's newborn son, Obed. Since I told that story in detail in my essay, " 'Til Death Do Us Part," I will reproduce here only the last section, concerning the birth of the baby. Ruth's husband (Naomi's son) had died, and she was now married to another man named Boaz. When a son was born to them, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that Naomi was very much a part of the new family unit, although not a blood relative:

*The women said to Naomi, "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:14-17).*

Can you picture the love and faith of Naomi and Ruth reaching not only to Obed, but also to Jesse and David? What a wonderful cross-generational story this is! And the Bible contains many more, just as heart-warming. Moses said in Deuteronomy 7:9: *Know that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.* This sounds as though God not only notices the faith and love of devout believers, proved genuine by their obedience, but that God also uses it to benefit the descendants of such people. The Old Testament history of the Israelites contains many instances where, long after they died, God tempered his actions for the sake of David, whose heart belonged to God, or because of the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All these thoughts bring questions to my mind:

1. Were there people in my background who had such intimate relationships with God that I am still benefiting from them today? I think the answer is yes, on both sides of my family. I am deeply grateful to those ancestors! And,
2. Is my relationship with my Lord the kind that will benefit not only my grandchildren, but also THEIR grandchildren, and THEIRS? That is what I want! "Let it be, dear Lord, let it be."

And now it's time to introduce you to my Grandma Hicks Gibbel. Here is the article I wrote about her, with some concluding thoughts added.

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When I was born in April, 1933 to William and Florence Hicks Ziegler, four people became grandparents for the first time. Dad's parents lived about 12 miles away from our home in Annville, Pennsylvania and Mom's parents lived on a farm in Maryland. In 1938 my dad bought a double house in Annville and Mom's parents sold their farm and came to live next door to us, much to our delight. Grandpa Hicks died in 1943. Grandma stayed there until 1947, when she married Ira Gibbel and moved away to his farm. She was 68; he was 72. A few years later Dad had a new house built for us and sold the duplex. When she was widowed for the second time in 1954, Grandma came back to live with us. By then I was only home for summers and holidays, and in 1957 Leo and I married and moved to Alabama. Grandma died in my family's house in 1960 at the age of 81.

Every time I think of Grandma Hicks I see her with a smile on her face. She had such a warm, welcoming personality and, of course, had many friends. And Grandma loved children. She shared her ample lap and soft arms not only with her grandchildren, but with the neighborhood children as well. She had five children of her own; my mother was the second one. I have five children also, two of which were born before Grandma died. She took her love for children into the church by teaching a preschool Sunday School class for many years. I was privileged to be one of her pupils. Later on, she would come next door on Saturdays and give me construction paper and a pattern of something that would illustrate the Bible lesson for the next morning. My job was to trace and cut out enough so that each child could have one to paste into their quarterly scrapbooks.

I wonder now how much her example influenced me into becoming the person I am. I taught first and second grade in public schools before my marriage and often taught children of various ages in Sunday School. I have always enjoyed working with construction paper, scissors, paste, tape, etc. and especially loved making scrapbooks. I must have made – or helped others make – hundreds of them in my lifetime, often as missionary projects.

Grandma Hicks had a deep-rooted faith in God and was a faithful church member. Her father had been a minister and a traveling evangelist, holding week-long revival meetings in various places. As a young woman, Grandma used to travel with her father to take care of his clothing and help with the music in meetings. She could read the old shaped notes and could harmonize; she sang tenor in quartets. I find it interesting that in her old age Grandma became a preacher's wife, for Ira Gibbel was a minister. I'm sure she knew exactly how to fill that role!

In Annville, beginning when I was preschool age, I used to sit next to Grandma in church. She shared her hymn book with me and, using her finger as a pointer, helped me make sense of the music. I could hear her singing harmony. I began singing alto at age 10, and at 12, joined the church choir. Music, both vocal and instrumental, played a large part in my life and I can trace the roots of both back to Grandma Hicks.

Grandma was skilled in all sorts of crafts, another interest she passed on to me. Sometimes she took me with her to the Wednesday morning quilting bee at the church. Once while there she told me something profound: "We may look like old ladies on the outside, but inside we are just young girls." I never forgot that and now, in MY old age, I can say, "How true, Grandma! How true!"

An incident after she returned to live with my family after Grandpa Gibbel's death reveals so much about Grandma's outlook on life – and death. It took place in the summer, when I was living at home after having been away. Early one Saturday morning my young brother Bob came downstairs, knocked on my first floor bedroom door and said, "Grandma wants to see you." I went upstairs and found her lying on her bed, fully dressed. "I've had a stroke," she said. She explained that when she realized what had happened, she knew she'd have to see a doctor. So she went downstairs, took a bath and got dressed! After she was back in her room she sent for me. "I want you to tell your mother," she said. "You can see it's not bad. I can still talk." And she smiled so serenely. This was such an intimate moment between my grandma and me. I was thrilled that she trusted me to remain

calm and to help my mother do the same! Before long the doctor was at the house. Grandma was ready for him and was soon on her way to recovery.

End of the article. And now, the conclusion of the story:

Leo and I, with 18-month-old George and 6-month-old David, left Alabama and moved to New York in February, 1960. Of course we went to visit my family. Grandma was frail by then, having had more strokes. But her mind was as sharp as ever; her eyes still twinkled when she smiled; and she never lost the ability to talk. By April she was bedfast and in May the doctor said she had about a week to live. Grandma exceeded the doctor's prediction, giving us one more chance to see her. We arrived on a Saturday afternoon, planning to stay until the next afternoon.

With my mom and aunts, I took turns sitting with Grandma while she alternately slept and talked. On Sunday we had a real treat: my Aunt Sarah, Grandma's daughter, arrived from Philadelphia to visit her mom. Grandma was delighted, and that made it easier for us to leave. Five hours later we were back home in New York. As we were entering the house, the phone rang. It was my dad, with the news that Grandma had died. "She wanted to see you once more," Dad said, "you and Sarah. Then she could go." My mom reported that she and one of my aunts had just finished washing Grandma when she sighed once and was gone.

I know where she went! She went to Heaven to the place Jesus had prepared for her! Only her body was left behind to await the great Resurrection Day. And I KNOW that I will see her again, not for a brief visit, but for an eternal one. Meanwhile I treasure and am nurtured by the spiritual investment she made in me – across the generations. Thank you, Grandma!

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As I thought about Grandma's story, some real concerns surfaced in my memory, things I have not addressed directly in any essay to this point. These issues profoundly affected me at various stages of my life and they continue to confuse many people today. This section certainly reaches across the generations; Grandma and, indirectly, her father, my parents and I were all involved. First I will describe the problems; then I will tell you how God led me out of the confusion.

My family on both sides belonged to the Church of the Brethren, a plain, anabaptist denomination developed in Europe in the 1700s. Grandma's father, J.Y. King, was a Church of the Brethren (COB) preacher, although he started out as Amish. The COB has changed a lot since the 1940s and early 1950s. I don't know what its official doctrines are now, but I do remember much of what I was taught in the Annville, PA COB during my growing up years. Three main issues on which I came to disagree with my church's position are those surrounding salvation, security, and the definition of worldliness. Besides believing in Jesus, baptism and church membership were also taught as essential components for salvation. (Baptism in the COB automatically made you a member of the church.) I have J.Y. King's Bible plus some of his sermon outlines and yes, he taught that baptism was necessary for salvation. As for the security of the believer, well, there was none. I remember hearing my father say, "I refuse to believe 'once saved, always saved.'" (He changed his mind, later.) Of course that meant we could never be sure we were going to Heaven when we died. What if we had some unconfessed sin on our account at the moment of death? Add to this mix a long list of things we were to avoid and things we were to do in order to be separate from the world, including distinctive dress, and stir in enough Bible verses to make us think all these teachings came from God, and you may be able to understand the churning some of us had inside. Certainly God knew all about it, and in time he worked it all out for his glory.

My Aunt Sarah's daughter Louise, two years younger than I, began attending an independent Bible church in Philadelphia during her teenage years. There she heard clear presentations of the gospel message and soon became a solid believer in Jesus. What's more, she believed that "once saved, always saved" was true! I was both intrigued and afraid. And then when I was twenty, halfway through college, in a dramatic moment that I have written about many times, God revealed to me not

only that I was saved, but also that I was God's child FOREVER! "Eternal security" was a glorious reality, not just wishful thinking!

Louise and I understood each other very well. We were "evangelicals" at a time when that term and others such as "saved" and "born again" were descriptive of a "new" movement in our country fueled by an evangelist named Billy Graham. How I devoured the Scriptures in those days! Not only did I read the Bible, but I also listened to Bible teachers on the radio, especially Dr. Barnhouse, M.R. DeHaan, and Tom Westwood. I read Christian books as well and began attending Baptist and independent churches. Somewhere along the line I heard the "Jesus ONLY" teaching. I interpreted it to mean that if you do not believe in Jesus ALONE – if you trust in Jesus PLUS ANYTHING – then you do not have salvation. Louise and I had nothing to worry about; we were trusting Jesus only. I was concerned about others, though.

Then came the day I resigned my membership in the COB. It was the summer of 1956, and Grandma, widowed for the second time, was living in our house. The evening that the elders of the church came to discuss with me the letter I had written explaining why I wanted to resign, my parents and Grandma sat in the living room with us, anxious to hear what was said. When we finished, Mom commented, "You must admit she knows her Bible." Grandma's comment was, "I'll take my chances with the Church of the Brethren." Uh-oh! Did that mean Grandma was not saved? Louise and I talked about this. We would liked to have known that somewhere in her life our Grandma had said words similar to these: "Lord Jesus, come into my heart and save me. I give myself to you." Since we did not know, we prayed for Grandma's salvation, sometimes on our knees.

Over a period of time God used the Scriptures to open my mind to the wideness of God's grace. I found the most striking answer in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas had been preaching in Antioch, and many Gentiles became believers in Jesus. Acts 15 begins like this: *Certain individuals came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."* Paul and Barnabas, knowing this teaching had to be stopped, went to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders there. Next we read this: *Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."* Peter spoke up and persuaded the council that such was not the case. But the thing that stood out to me is that the people with the mistaken idea about how to be saved were called BELIEVERS! God reads hearts. He knows who loves him and saves by grace through faith those who come to him, even if they bring some wrong teachings with them! Hallelujah! (Long before I saw this truth, I had come to realize that Grandma certainly was a believer. I knew when she died that she had gone to Heaven and I would see her again when I got there.)

One issue remains to be discussed, and that is the endless list of things that some churches impose on their members, whether to help gain or maintain salvation, or to shun worldly ways, thus pleasing the Lord. Grandma, following the rules, wore plain dress, including a white lacy head covering which she topped with a black bonnet in cooler weather. The only time her head was uncovered was when she was washing her hair. My answer to the problem of legalistic rules of any kind came from Romans 14:1-15:7 and the book of Galatians, where these very things are discussed. In Romans Paul calls believers "weak in faith" who think, for example, that they may not eat meat. In Galatians Paul really scolds the church for allowing other traveling preachers to come in after he had left, bringing with them a "gospel" that included all sorts of regulations that Paul had not taught them. Instead of refusing these new teachings, the church began to practice them, giving up their joy in the process. For this essay, the important point is that in Romans and in Galatians the salvation of the people involved is not questioned. What variety there is in God's family!

The Romans passage that I mentioned is bracketed by two verses that start with the same word, a word that tells us how to deal with such a varied family: *Accept those whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters (14:1). Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God (15:7).* This marvelous passage begins by stating that there ARE disputable matters in which Christians may differ. Christ accepts every one who believes in him, no

matter which side of these matters we believe to be true. If we follow his example and accept one another, his family will be living in unity and love – and God will be praised: a worthy goal, indeed! Here are two more things that I have learned from experience:

1. Sometimes a rule that you have embraced because your church teaches that it is required by God turns out to be a wrong interpretation of the Scriptures. With new understanding, you change your behavior and move forward. For example, I went from believing literally that women were to be silent in the church to becoming pastor of a church! My advice: Do not let resentment or regrets about the past be a part of who you are now. The Lord knows your intention was to obey HIM, thus proving your love for him. With God, love is NEVER lost!
2. If you now believe something different from before, but your conscience will not let you change your former behavior yet, wait until your mind and conscience are agreed before making the change. For example, I was taught that a woman should have her head covered in church. When I heard a different interpretation that considered the cultural atmosphere of the time, I knew I no longer needed to wear a hat to services, yet continued to do so. Even after we began attending a church where the women did not wear hats, I covered my head for a year, until my conscience no longer condemned me. I would NEVER advise anyone to go against their conscience!

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Now for a few final comments on the story. I am intrigued by Grandma's second marriage at the age of 68. Some of her children were not happy about that marriage, and could only see Ira Gibbel as the man who took their Mama away. I was 14 years old when the wedding took place, old enough to enter into Grandma's joy. My mother always referred to Ira as Mr. Gibbel, but to me he easily became Grandpa. A retired farmer and still an active preacher, he retained a spirit of adventure at age 72. For example, after the midday wedding reception was over, the new couple headed by car to Florida from Pennsylvania, choosing to let attendance at the annual COB conference double as a honeymoon. I imagine Grandma LOVED being at the conference. She enjoyed meeting people and was very much interested in the COB. A whole new world opened up to Grandma when she married Ira Gibbel!

In one way, a new world also opened up to me at that time. It was fun to have a farm in the family again; five years had elapsed since my dad sold the farm on which we had lived for a year during World War II. Grandpa Gibbel shared a house with one of his daughters and her family, with both having separate quarters. One day, probably when I was 15, I had one of the most exciting experiences of my life: an overnight stay at Grandma's house! I had never been away from my family overnight except the three times I had been hospitalized for surgery. Dad drove me out to the farm one day and picked me up the next. Between trips I had a foretaste of the time I would move into a college dormitory and then out into the world – and I LOVED it!

I am the granddaughter of Annie Hicks Gibbel  
In more ways than one, as you can easily see.  
Her spirit reached out across the generations  
To nourish, to inspire, and to educate me.

THANK YOU, GRANDMA!