

Well, Now I Guess I'm An Adult - My Coming of Age

Patricia Rinckenberger, Illinois

I stood looking out of the dormer window wondering why the world outside hadn't changed. How could that be? Mine had. Nothing would ever be the same.

Word had come that Grandma Kendall had just died. She was gone, even though we had talked on the phone that morning. She sounded like she always did but we both knew that her body was failing. Cousins had flown in to gather at the hospital. I wanted to be there, too, but we had visited her a few weeks before while others hadn't seen her in a long time. The oldest grandchild, I thought it would be selfish of me to be there now. There were already too many people in the room who didn't realize that she was so very tired. My heart ached.

Grandma's gone. Now there is only Mom, then me. It hit me! Guess I have to be an adult now! A mother myself, there had always been that two-generation insulation, even when I had turned forty. Now, there was just one layer. Things would be different.

Fast forward to years later when Mom left. The advance of time had propelled me into more of a leadership role in the family but always respectfully, behind Mom, number two, not in charge, not yet the last. After months of countless trips to and from a city university hospital at all hours, bedside vigilance, FMLA leave from work, and living in a twilight zone, it was over.

The early morning sun was rising as I drove home, Staring into the sunlight, I affirmed that now I was the last, the matriarch of the family, the adult. Mom's journey was over. She had made her choices, now I would make mine.

It wasn't long before the phone calls began, . . . little brother stepped on a nail, what should he do? He had always called Nurse Mom. Cousins called needing the support Mom had given them while others asked about family history, tales, and things I often didn't know or couldn't remember. I was now the head of the family. Honest in my responses, I told them what I knew and what I didn't, listening, sharing my time as I followed the path of those who had gone before me when they were the adults. Now it was my turn. I am the last.