

My Nan, Lillian Mary Townsend

Late last night, I reluctantly sat down to write this tribute to Nanna, having put it off for days.

It was not because I did not want to but rather, I didn't really know what I should write. What I could say that would express the bottomless feeling of grief and loss that has gripped so many of us here today?

Today, we gather to mourn her passing and we feel a terrible, aching sorrow because we can no longer touch her, hear her or see her. We are confused, disorientated and lost. We have lost a mother, a grandmother, a great grandmother, a friend. Someone whom we respected, loved deeply and will miss tremendously.

Her warmth, her enveloping hugs and her laughter still resonate deep within me, and, like all of us assembled here this morning, I'm still wrestling to comprehend that she has finally gone.

My earliest memories contain her physical presence, her wisdom, grace and good advice and the knowledge and assurance of a great and endless love. Her constant interest and attention to my life, her grandchildren, Arabella and Mietta, and my Christian faith form some of my best memories of her.

And while today we mourn her passing, we must never forget that she also lived as well, and her life was bound up with Christ and His resurrection:

Romans 8: 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”[j]

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This passage of Scripture makes it crystal clear that nothing can separate us from God's love and the promise of eternal life. And my Nan believed that to be true also, without a shadow of a doubt.

Lillian Mary Townsend lived a very long, rich and storied life. She was unfailingly optimistic, good spirited and had a generous and loving heart. Her unwavering faith in her Lord Jesus Christ and the Bibles' message of His sacrifice, death, resurrection and ascension back to Heaven defined who she was and how she lived.

Her life was clearly guided by the Holy Spirit, because the fruit was clear to everyone who encountered her in life.

Galatians 5: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.

My Nan had a soft heart, and a warm embrace for the ones' she loved. She was always the first one to console, to encourage me to keep persevering when I doubted my course, and to be there for me in prayer. To me, she was the living embodiment of Christian love:

1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

And so, while today we may weep for her, feeling broken and distraught, I have a firm and unshakable confidence that she has passed over the boundaries of Heaven and is finally at home with her God.

There, she has attained her peace. There is no more pain, no more fear, no more doubts, nor weariness, sickness, or strife. She has been set free of her earthly body and is alive, in glorious form, strength and vitality. She waits at the edge of Heaven for us to follow her lead, having gained eternal life and the mantle as a daughter of the Most High King. She is where she has always belonged, amongst Heavens' angels, in perfect union with God.

And she longs to have us there alongside her, to share in her glorious transformation and to experience for ourselves Gods' unfailing grace, mercy and love towards us.

My Nan was my hero, my Christian role model and her memory will glow brightly in my heart forevermore. Someday, because I hold fast to the words of Jesus and believe in His resurrection power to snatch me out of Deaths' hand, I know I'll see her again.

And on that day, I will rejoice with her.

May our God keep you, protect you, bind up your anguish and ease your grief. May He show you comfort, mercy and bring you to a place of peace, acceptance and hope.

In Jesus name, I give thanks for the life of Lillian Mary Townsend, the memories she made possible and the love that she freely shared to all, amen.