

One Stitch at a Time

By Victoria Z. Lubas

Knit, knit, knit. Purl, purl, purl. And repeat. This was the rhythm of my bi-monthly visits with my grandmother. The few hours of both relaxing and knitting, with *I Love Lucy* or *Barwy szczęścia* playing in the background, were my quintessential Saturday nights. These evenings may have seemed boring to an outsider looking in, watching my *babcia* teach me to knit new things. But for me, it was anything but. I've made scarves, a vest, a skirt, and am in the two-year-long process of making a sweater. My mind focused as, stitch after stitch, I increased the length of the garment, my fingers dancing around the needles.

With Ricky Ricardo's shouts of "mira que tiene cosa" in the background mingled with my grandparents' laughter, I continue to add to the sweater. I knit and purl, knit and purl. But I would need help. I didn't know how many stitches to add or drop when creating the arm and neck holes, or how long the ribbing on the sleeves' cuffs should be. I needed my *babcia*'s guidance. My grandmother retreated from the land of confusion, an unfortunate side effect of her pain medication, and guided me in creating the shape of my sweater. In half-English, half-Polish, we managed to communicate through the yarn. We invented our own terms for the stitches, "in front, in back" in place of "knit and purl", and inserted stories between the lessons.

In English, and with a few feeble attempts at Polish, I would tell her about my week in school. I would explain my work on the school newspaper and how I was working on the layout of the print edition. I recounted the grueling bowling match that we won by just a pin. I would tell her how my classes are going, show her pictures of my artwork from my Honors Studio class, and dramatically reenact how I fell in the hallway while my various bags and books crashed to the floor. In between sips of her tea with lemon, my grandmother told me stories of

her childhood in Poland. She explained how she used to knit with bicycle spokes as I attempted to straighten out my bent needle. I learned of the fear she experienced during World War II when her father would risk his life and go out at night to dig up potatoes. Later, we'd decide between pizza and pierogi for dinner.

The tales of her life inspire me and make me hope I will be able to visit Poland one day. The strength and bravery she developed during her youth were always clearly present in her vibrant personality. As she fought her confusion and deteriorating mobility, and even after she passed away, I am inspired to continue to fight for what I want and need in the world. Every time I write the name Victoria on a quiz, application or form, I am reminded of my Babcia Wikcia's determination and strength of character.

I know she would have been just as proud as my grandfather was to hear I was accepted to NYU. Even when we are tired, and the language barrier makes a conversation too difficult, I enjoy sitting with my grandfather in companionable silence. I enjoy telling my *dziadziu* what I learned this week in my Elementary Polish class at Columbia University. I describe wrestling with *dopełniacz* and show my newly-expanded vocabulary by going through the items in his fridge. During these visits, I continue to contemplate my weekend, the coming week, the rest of the school year and my future life. The gentle sounds of clicking needles and grandparent giggles in the background comfort me. Regardless of how my week goes, I know my visit will be a good one when I see the sheer joy on my grandfather's face because "Wikcia has come to visit." I knit, knit, knit, and purl, purl, purl, growing closer with every stitch to the woman I will be one day.