



Lee Nourse: November 2015 Barefoot Writing Challenge Winner

Words Like Lanterns Illuminate My Path

By Lee Nourse

The impulse to become a professional writer emerged in my early teens. But decades would pass before I figured out how to make a living writing.

My grandmother had no idea that her words would have such a great impact on me. They ultimately propelled me into the action of pursuing my writing goals.

She was unaware of my writing dreams all her life — even after she confessed her own dreams to me. So how, then, would she have been able to encourage me to follow my dreams?

My grandmother lay silently on her death bed. All I could hear was her labored breathing. Rhythmically, air went in through her nose — then silence — and out it came through the same passage. Occasionally she'd gasp with open mouth to take in air.

I'd been sitting at Grandma's bedside for two hours. Once in a while, she'd stir and mumble something. I was never quite sure if it was the morphine talking or her memory. Suddenly, the clarity of her words startled me.

In that dimly-lit hospice room, she uttered "I wanted them to publish my poems."
"What Grandma?" I was alert again. "Who did you want to do that? Where?"

“My high school.” She said matter-of-factly. Her eyes opened wide now, her voice stronger.

I felt at once intrigued and sad. She seemed to be reliving a part of her life that she’d buried deep within her soul. Buried for 69 years — since her tenth grade. Back in rural Manitoba, Canada where her family had landed when they immigrated from Russia three short years before.

A child of Russian immigrants, she spoke not one word of English. But she attended the local school from day one. Children in those days either sank or swam. Schools didn’t provide ESL (English as a Second Language) classes for immigrant students like they do now.

The sun sank lower as we talked well into the evening. She told me how she’d written in high school with hopes of seeing her words in print. She worked hard toward that goal of getting published in the school paper. Sadly, it didn’t happen.

Memories of her mission became my own. I vowed to myself that night before falling asleep. “I will write no matter how tough the obstacles,” I vowed in honor of Grandma’s passion. And her desire to get published.

Years later, when I stumbled upon AWAI, I felt compelled to learn as much about copywriting as I could. My appetite for all things copywriting has been voracious! The more I’ve learned, the stronger my need to declare myself a professional writer once and for all.

I have my late grandmother, Anne Enns, to thank for confiding in me in her final hours. Her words have been lanterns illuminating my own path to the writer’s life. Grandma’s dreams have encouraged and merged with my own dreams. They have evolved into my own actionable writing goals.