

Music

Lilah: A leopard print sweater, big chunky earrings, and a clear confident voice. Elaine is 95 years old, a New York transplant originally from California, just like me. She and I bond over our bicoastal lives and the people we love, and she tells me about her past. She hands me a striking bowl, completely unique in design and like nothing I've ever seen before. Its translucent, presumably glass, shallow with a dramatically ruffled edge. Expanding outwards from the center in a sun-like shape, it fades from white to a soft pink. The bowl is covered in delicate and intricate orange floral designs and dots.

Elaine: It's a bowl that my mother was baptized out of, and so was I. So, she was born in 1898 - so its way over a hundred years old. She gave it to me when I was a teenager and, uh, I've always valued it, especially for the fact of the baptisms because we were obviously baptized at home, not in the church. My faith has been very important, her father was a minister - a Lutheran minister- and I don't know any more about it, but I've taken it with me every place I've gone. And I plan to leave it to my granddaughter after my death.

Lilah: Elaine tells me about her and the bowls' journey. She tracks their movement and transitions throughout her life and her changing homes.

Lilah: So can you tell me about when your mother gave it to you?

Elaine: When I was a teenager. So, let's see, I was born in '26 - so about '40, 1940 - somewhere around then. I think it was when we moved from one of our homes to another.

Lilah: *Mhmm*. So you said you've taken it everywhere you've gone. So what kind of places has it been?

Elaine: Well, it was with me in California where I was born and where she lived. And then when I was - at the end of my 45th year I came to new York for my job. And uh, so its been with me in my apartment for 40-some years while I was married.

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Lilah: Elaine shows me a number of pictures of herself and her family throughout her life. She hands me one photo of a number of young girls and asks me to guess which one might be her. I have no idea, but when she points to the girl with the massive bow in her hair it makes sense. She tells me her mother dressed her in it and I can suddenly picture her mother picking out the

perfect dress and bow to match. Elaine tells me more about her memories of their relationship and her childhood.

Elaine: I was always to get hair cut. “Tell them to the tip of the ear” and I wanted my hair longer and I'd say, “Just below the ear” and then she'd always say “Why don't they cut your hair shorter?” **Laughs**

Lilah: That's really funny. That's nice. She never caught on?

Elaine: I think she probably did. She was fairly astute. **Laughs**

Lilah: Elaine talks fondly of her mother, telling me of both her humor and sensitivity.

Elaine: I was born in the depression years - real depression. And, uh, I gained - I had polio. We had polio really really bad there in Los Angeles. I was five years old I guess. But she figured out that I was really sick. And, I remember going in the ambulance, really. I remember the whole episode. I was one of the lucky ones. I didn't have to go in a lung and I was able to walk

I think I was in the hospital a month and they had to decide whether it'd be the mother or the father that could visit the kids and so she came and my father used to come stand outside the hospital and look in the window

Lilah: We turn our attention back to the bowl I'm holding in my lap and I ask her about what it means to her to look at it and hold it.

Elaine: Well when I hold, hold the bowl -the object - it brings me close to my mother. And it was difficult to make the change in my life so late. Because I had been, not living with my mother, exactly - I had an apartment of my own. Uh, I lived quite a bit with my mother. And on weekends I would go from the city of Los Angeles out to her home in Whittier. And then we'd go shopping or we'd just have, um, a lovely weekend. I'd take - drive her to church. And, um, but it was a good thing that I did move. I prayed over it a great deal. The most I think that I've ever prayed about anything - to make the move. Because she could not believe that I was leaving and go - she said, “You're going as far as you can go. From ocean to ocean.” You always regret when you give anyone sorrow, you know. And she was very unhappy. But I just felt I needed a change

Lilah: When her position at an accounting firm gave her the opportunity to move, she took it.

Elaine: They at that time didn't have any women partners. They paid for my move. After I left then she got her own friends, you know. Because she was really living for me.

Me: It's hard to leave but when you left you kind of both got to start your own lives a little bit.

Elaine: Exactly.

Lilah: I ask Elaine if she ever went back to California.

Elaine: Many trips back and forth to California when my mother became ill. And she, uh, was very strong and the doctor would call me and he said, "I don't know but I think its getting near the end," and so I'd fly out, arrive about 2:00 in the morning, and rent a car, drive out to to Whittier to the hospital and sit by her bedside and she'd wake up and she'd say, "Why are you here?" **Laughs** So that happened a number of times. But unfortunately when she did pass on I was not there.

Lilah: Despite her mother's reluctance and her attachments in California, Elaine seems to have really found herself in New York.

Elaine: I love New York. I really became a New Yorker. I've always been having a strong faith. And I looked up a church right away. And, uh, I went to saint Peters in Manhattan, at 54th and Lexington. And it was an old gothic church, very old. And I just felt so at home. Then after I met my husband - he took an apartment across the hall from me. And we were married in the old church.

Then Saint Peters was, um - I think it was 1946 - was rebuilt. It was taken down and City Corp went up. So we had some years of transition with the church. So we were without a home - a church home - for a while.

Lilah: Was it a big part of your relationship with your mother - your faith?

Elaine: The faith?

Lilah: Yeah with her?

Elaine: **At the same time** Oh, yes. Yes. No, I have my mother to thank for my faith - for taking me to Sunday school

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Lilah: After telling me about her relationship with her mother, Elaine begins to explain her family and how its evolved throughout her lifetime.

Elaine: I missed the relationship with my father. He died of a heart attack at 46 and I was just 16. And at that time I think families weren't has together, you know. They didn't raise a child together so much. You know, the wife did the mothering and took care of the child - especially a girl. So I just - I really regret I didn't get to know him better.

Lilah: While her own family was small and isolating at times, the family Elaine gained later in life more than made up for it.

Elaine: I had no children of my own. I have three grown stepsons and six grandchildren and six great grandchildren now. I hadn't been interested in getting married. But, I met my husband in the apartment house when I moved in and gained this wonderful family.

Lilah: She shows me a photograph of three boys hanging on her wall near her bed.

Elaine: And those are the three boys when they were young. Of course I didn't know them then, but I love to have that picture.

Lilah: She tells me about her granddaughter, the one she plans to pass the bowl to.

32) The granddaughter lives here in new Rochelle and has three boys - my three great grandsons. And so I'm very close with her. She's wonderful. She's absolutely wonderful. She's an immigration lawyer as well as a mother of three boys and all through this pandemic its been really hard.

Lilah: Elaine tells me more about the bowl and various mementos. Some she's held on to and some she's passed on to others.

Elaine: I know its there. And, I don't say often, but I usually put cards in it. I just took the cards out to show you the bowl.

Me: Mhmm. How did you feel when you got it? Did it mean as much to you then as it does now?

Elaine: It didn't mean as much as it does now.

Me: No?

Elaine: No.

Me: When to you think that changed? **Elaine interrupts**

Elaine: I received linens and things from her when she passed on. And then when I moved from my apartment in Manhattan three and a half years ago I gave a lot of things to my granddaughter here. Furniture and I was so surprised one birthday we had at the house. There was a needlepoint tablecloth - small tablecloth - she had on the table. And that was my mother - my mother had done the needlepoint on it. So, a lot of things that are still around and I also gave her a beautiful plate my mother had gotten at the baby shower for me. And, uh, I give it to her because she really appreciates it. And we're very, we're very close. She feels, you know, we just have a closeness that we can - anytime she has special problems, we can discuss, you know?

Lilah: Elaine speaks with such love for her family. She tells me how important they are to her, especially in the last three years she's been living at Wartburg.

Elaine: Because I was an only child and this family has been very welcoming to me. And, after my husband died, they really closed ranks and were watching over me, and they have been. And that doesn't always happen when they have a stepmother. And so I've been very blessed.

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