Golden Earrings
Betty Kreinik 12/21/2024

It's December and it's very cold outside. I am 20, but so tired from a full-time job and going to College at least three nights a week.

I am finally at home, stepping into a warm living room, and my mother is calling out greetings and telling me she has dinner for me. And we chat about her grandchildren (my nieces and nephews), what I'm doing at work, and how I'm doing at school. Finally, we get to the subject. I reached into my purse, took out a small box and handed it to my mother. She looked at me curiously, opened the box, and saw a pair of golden earrings. Mama said, “these are yours; why are you giving them to me”? My answer was because they are so beautiful -- my gift to you this season. She protested.

“There is no argument”, I replied. “You have to take them, enjoy them, and make me happy.” So, the earrings became hers.

The years after that went by so quickly. I was determined to get my bachelors degree. Then, on another snowy December, I met my husband on holiday leave from the army. Six weeks later we were married, to everyone’s surprise.

This started a nomadic career for the two of us, and for the children we later had, moving from place to place. Still, wherever possible, I took any kind of course I could, including correspondence courses.

My mother went on with her life as grandmother. When my father passed away, she was forced to live with my younger sister. The golden earrings remained in her possession.

A note about my mother: she was a survivor and of protector of the children and grandchildren. I would see her in person during our military career perhaps twice or three times a year while assigned in the States, but always staying in touch by phone.

When she was 80, she called to say she needed to see me. We arranged a meeting and sat at the kitchen table. At 80, she decided to distribute to her children whatever she had that was of value. I accepted the return of the golden earrings and assured her that I would pass them to one of our daughters.

About my mother…
She was an immigrant who entered the United States at Ellis Island when she was 10 or 12 years old. She went to school as long as the family could afford to live without her contribution to the household. She never lost her accent and had a wonderful knack of telling stories about Sicily where she was born. She learned English well and was proud of her academic standing.

My mother passed at the age of 83. She had had two small strokes. I think she was ready to leave us and made the decision to go. I knew it, I felt it, and it was okay.

As promised, I passed the earrings on to our first daughter with the same instructions my mother gave to me. "Keep them as long as it pleases you”.

Several years later, while sitting near my kitchen window, looking at the street below, I began having my first and only panic attack. I was surprised to feel the presence behind me. There was no one there but a flash of my mother. I relaxed, smiled a small smile, and said, “Thank you Mama”.