

My grandma Muriel would've turned 100 this year, on November 1. It's been 14 years and I've wanted to put her into words many times since then, and I think about what she taught me: swimming, bowling, Scrabble, reading Beatrix Potter.

A Brooklyn girl through and through, she graduated from Brooklyn College and later moved to Massapequa with my grandpa so that he could start his veterinary practice.

As a mom, I'd heard she could be a lot. But as a grandmother, she took the top prize. She kept our family together, making sure we each saw our aunts and uncles and all of our cousins. She had a special relationship with each of her grandchildren, and I cherished the one we had.

Specific moments stand out: Trips to Sports Plus where we played Skee-Ball and rode the Tilt-a-Whirl while she played in her senior bowling league. Her pink ball that stood out, a reminder that she was still here. Her dressing me as Molly from American Girl, red ribbons, braids and all, while my uncle walked in and asked her she was crazy. Her waving her hand at something she thought sounded ridiculous.

In third grade, she gifted me an *Atlas of the World*, a book which became my prized possession. On our weekly phone calls I would gab to her about all the different countries I discovered and she tested me on all their capitals. Not too many others would listen to an 8-year-old laugh about how funny it is that the capital of Luxembourg is Luxembourg.

My dad, her third oldest child, died when I was not yet 2 years old, so she filled in all the gaps that I didn't remember. Framed pictures of him, my aunt and uncles covered every shelf and plastered available inch of wall space in the guest room where the grandkids would sleep.

Even after we all became teenagers, the Lego Duplo boxes were still there, all the Happy Meal figures we collected in one basket.

What my mom restricted at home, my grandma let me have in bounds. She let me watch hours of Nickelodeon and MTV, and she took me to several PG-13 movies in theaters that I probably should not have been watching as a child.

But amid all the brain rot, she still made sure I got my dose of culture, introducing me to classic films she owned or recorded on videotape: "Mary Poppins," "Bye Bye Birdie," "On the Town," "Hans Christian Andersen" (with Danny Kaye, who she proudly told me was a Brooklyn boy). I watched Jeopardy with her every night of my stays, and she knew the answers to most questions.

Although you NEVER ate food from the freezer, which, as my cousin would say, was filled with war rations. One Fudgsicle I opened revealed sticky remnants that clung to the wrapper, a sign that it was about five years past its expiration date.

Sometimes she drove me nuts. While on a shopping trip with me at Wet Seal, she tripped on a clothing rack and blasted the sales associates. Although she was rightfully angry, I cringed, not wanting to be there. She later sued the store and then won.

Another time we went to the mall when I was 12 years old and, wanting to be by myself, I wandered into American Eagle without telling her, and she freaked out and fetched a security guard. I rolled my eyes and told her I was fine.

She got lung cancer without having smoked a day in her life, a cruel twist of fate. Shortly after her diagnosis, I saw her for the first time in three years. My once plump, energetic grandmother, although still in good spirits, was now about 30 pounds lighter, hunched over, her hair thinning.

The last time I spoke to her, I called and her nurse answered the phone. She handed it to Grandma, who now sounded weak, her voice raspy, almost a whisper. Before we hung up, she said to me, "You're the light of my life."

I knew she didn't have a lot of time, so I wrote her a letter a few days later. I told her all about college, my then-boyfriend who I was sure was a keeper, and that I missed her. On the way to his fraternity event that night, he stood with me as I dropped the letter in the mailbox. As soon as I closed the opening, I had an eerie feeling that she would never get to read it.

Just a couple of hours later, my sister called me to tell me that Grandma died. She had been in bed at home, peaceful.

There are so many questions I wish I could ask her, and so many tears that I feel like I haven't shed. I was proud to be her "bubbolah."

Last year I went bowling with my family. I'd had a few beers and every time I'd walked up to the lane's edge, ball in hand, I flashed back to when I was young, hearing her telling me to aim for the middle line and stand just to the left of it. I got a turkey (three strikes) that day. My grandma would've loved that.