Kate Stanton – Her Story

The Kate Stanton Inn is a tribute to the memory of my grandmother.

She was my rock and my hero.

Kate Stanton was born to an Irish immigrant family in 1880. She was the middle child of seven; William, Mary, Josephine, Kate, Julia, John and James. When Kate was old enough to question why she was named Kate and not christened with a saint's name, she took herself to the town hall and had her birth certificate permanently changed to Catherine Agnes Stanton. But to all in my lifetime who did not call her *Mother* or *Nanny*, she was Aunt Kate.

The family was poor, and Kate was forced to leave grammar school before the age of 10 to work in the factories in her home town of Middletown, Connecticut. She learned to sew on a Singer treadle machine, and contributed her share of earnings for food for her siblings. Her lack of formal education was always a painful and self-conscious loss to her; I remember so clearly watching her struggle with a Webster's Dictionary open on the dining room table each time she sat down to write a

letter. But everything that my Nanny lacked in education, she made up for in courage, determination, strength, talent, and heart.

Kate's older sister Josephine died at a young age, when they were all just children. William and Mary lived long, albeit lonely lives. It was Kate's younger siblings who succumbed to tuberculosis when Kate was a grown young woman. And she fearlessly cared for each of them in her home. Julia died first, followed by *Jack*. Then her beloved baby brother *Jimmy* fell ill with the dreaded disease, and she nursed him with her heart broken by the impending loss. She loved to tell the story of her gracious and considerate brother, who used to beg her to turn her head away when he was gripped by the wracking cough that TB victims suffered. She would tell him that she was unafraid, and hold him in her arms to support his frail body and head. He died in those arms, and she was blessed with both the knowledge that she served without concern for self, and the gift of immunity to not contract the disease. She always believed it was her attitude that strengthened her and her lack of fear that protected her.

Kate met Thomas Murphy in 1898. He was courting her older sister Mary, the way young men did in those days – they sat on the front porch stoop and watched the world go by in their

small town. Kate set her cap for Tom and handily won his attentions. She not only accepted Tom's proposal of marriage, but they eloped to New York City in 1900. That was an unheard of escapade in Middletown, CT., particularly for a Catholic couple. At any rate, the marriage was subsequently blessed in the church and each of them had won the ultimate prize.

Kate was a tall and stately woman, who was beautifully graceful on the dance floor. Dancing was her passion, but Tom Murphy was not interested or talented in that art, so she rarely got to glide along a dance floor after he entered her life. In her 80's, she would waltz to the music of Lawrence Welk in her living room, fascinating her grandchildren with her grace. She told us that even though our grandfather would not dance with her, he often told her she had a damned good looking leg for an old lady. That was good enough for Kate.

My grandfather was handsome, soft-spoken, hard-working, venturesome and talented with his hands, but it was his inventive spirit that kept him down in his workshop in the basement throughout the years – that and a probable need to escape the strong objections and iron rule of his wife. He had a need to try new ideas, take the next risk, gamble against the odds of originality; but Kate kept their collective four feet on the ground and guarded the family's security with all her might. She liked to tell of those inventions that failed humorously, as

well as those that my grandfather could have made the family fortune with, had she not stood in the way. But she always said if she took a drink with my grandfather, or allowed him his dreams, they would have been penniless.

Kate knew she had wander lust and called herself a gypsy, but she worked right alongside her husband, he running his own roofing business, she in the factory sewing piece work during the war. She was a woman before her time – giving birth to two baby girls in the early 1900's, then a son, my father in 1915, while she worked outside of the home. Because she was incredibly coordinated and adept with her hands, she brought home more pay than her husband, which was a not so secret source of pride to her.

Kate always had enough to feed the hungry during the Depression, to drop a coin in the collection basket at church, and to give a little each month to her favorite charity for St. Jude's Children

She raised her own children well, facing the sadness and overcoming the hardships of her first child born with a birth defect, and then ultimately two of her children physically handicapped. She saw all three of her children married, and fostered several of her grandchildren. She was an engaging grandmother, and I numbered among those who basked in the security of Nanny's home; where the floors were clean, her

aprons were starched, the wash was wrung out by hand in the kitchen sink and hung out on the clothesline to dry, the radiators spit out a warm 80 degrees in the winter, the food was plentiful if simple, and the aroma of her home baked bread wafted throughout the tenement requiring that she make all the neighbors their favorite warm loaf, pan of fresh buns, or cinnamon raisin bread.

And her lap was always available for bedtime stories.

Nanny dreamed of travel, and even had a stash for a trip to Ireland not long after my grandfather died in 1950. But the furnace went out in the 3 story apartment building they owned, and she handed over the cash for its replacement, happy that she could afford what was most needed at the time. She often went to New York City, and on into New Jersey to visit dear family friends, with myself as her companion; but that was the extent of her travels. My fantasy was to grow up and make enough money to buy her a car and hire a chauffer; but even I went on to follow my personal dreams, to fall in love, and to never give her all that I had wanted for her.

There are countless tales about how I loved and admired my grandmother. In the 7th grade, we had to write an essay entitled "My Hero". I wrote it about Nanny and got an A+. I showed the paper to her to read, and in my shyness, I prayed that she

would understand that I didn't want her to think I was proud of my grade, but that I was so very proud of her.

And so I honor her, her values and her memory

in dedicating my life's dream

to

Kate Stanton