

“Mother’s Day Meditation”

Reading: “Lucinda Matlock” *Edgar Lee Masters*

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.
We were married and lived together for seventy years,
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,
Eight of whom we lost
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,
I made the garden, and for holiday
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,
And many a flower and medicinal weed—
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.
At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,
And passed to a sweet repose.
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you—
It takes life to love Life.

This morning, we’re grateful for the women who raised us ...

The women who worked (often extra shifts), the women who cooked (and put food on the table even when there wasn’t much in the house), the women who studied at night school and learned on the job, the tough, savvy, opinionated women, the women who despite the setbacks, the divorces, the wayward husbands, never lost hope, never stopped loving, never gave up, and bore us (usually squalling and over our own protests) into being.

Many of us have been blessed by women like that, and that’s why many were touched last fall when Barack Obama’s maternal grandmother, the woman he called “Toot,” after “tutu,” the Hawaiian word for granny, passed away the day before the election. Born Madelyn Lee in Peru, Kansas, in 1922, Toot had Cherokee blood according to the family tradition, as well a mix from European forbears. Her parents were strict, no dancing Methodist types, but as a young woman she was attracted to another sort of man--gregarious, fun-loving Stanley Dunham, a furniture salesman from across the tracks who could reportedly “charm the legs off a couch.” Madelyn never went to college, but worked in a B-29 assembly plant during the war. Then, in search of employment, she and Stan moved around, from Vernon, Texas, to Ponca City,

Oklahoma, eventually settling on Mercer Island outside Seattle where she rose to become vice-president of a local bank, a position she continued to hold after the couple moved to Hawaii, where they began to care for their grandson Barry after their daughter's marriage to a Kenyan father came unglued. "She's the one who put off buying a new car or a new dress for herself so that I could have a better life," Obama remembered. "She poured everything she had into me." He recalled her coming home dead tired at the end of the day, slipping off her business suit, getting into muumuu and slippers, lighting a cigarette and pouring herself a drink—having traveled a long distance from her teetotaling childhood, and journeyed spiritually, too, opening her heart to an African son-in-law and black grandchild when intermarriage was still illegal in more than half the nation's states. Just before Christmas, Toot's ashes were scattered after a private family goodbye at Honolulu's First Unitarian Church—for ours was the faith that Madelyn Dunham claimed and called her own.

I see so much of my own mother in her story. Tid, as we called her, was a lot like Toot. Same generation, same feisty independence, same challenges of balancing work and family, self-care and caring for children, same indomitable determination to make it in a world where women and minorities were considered lesser creatures. And I see the same courage and pizzazz in so many of the powerful women of this Unitarian congregation—in memories of those like Peggy Hyde and Evie Carter and Puss Welsh and Dorrie Senghas, Louise Hirss and Erna Heiningen and Doro Sims—smart, funny, wisecracking, self-made irreverent women who managed to have so much energy left over at the end of the day, after having that martini and getting dinner on the table to go the extra mile to be leaders in their communities, change agents, businesswomen, educators, activists, role models for the next generation.

They speak to us. Though gone now, they ask us, "What's this I hear of sorrow and weariness, regret and discontent?" There's no time for despair. There's too much to be done.

We give thanks this morning for all those now in sweet repose who in their day rambled over the fields where the larks sang, who spun, wove, kept the house, nursed the sick, labored in factories, protested injustice, partied hard, made the garden, ran the churches and shouted to the wooded hills ...

For our grandmothers, our mothers,

The Madelyns and Lucindas,

Women with a love as strong as death,
Woman with hearts as big as life.