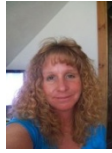


Keeping the Strangers Out and Why I didn't Give Up

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Georgia Baker Fitch

I'll never forget the look on my grandmother's face when she told me, while living in the nursing home, that I could live in her house and take care of it for her as long as I kept the strangers out. I promised her that somehow I would do just as she asked. In my mind, this meant something deeper than just keeping out strange acquaintances or passer-bys. It meant that I was to keep this house in our family. I have strived to do, what my grandmother requested back in the year 2004, because of how important this house was to her and to me.

My grandmother (Georgia Baker Fitch) was placed in a nursing home in the year 2002. We knew that she would be living the rest of her days there. It was a very hard decision for our family to make, but it was what we had to do for grandma's sake. I can only imagine the sick feeling she had in the pit of her stomach from being taken out of her home. It breaks my heart to think of her having to feel that way. I had plans to bring her back to her house when the end got near because her lifelong dream was to die in her own house; the house her parents (Charlie and Verna Baker) owned, the same house she grew up in, and the same house she lived in 90 percent of her own life.

Grandma believed that all of her family members who lived in this house, but had already passed on, were still here with her. She was afraid that if she died anywhere else, they wouldn't find her. We assured her that they would find her wherever she was. Unfortunately, my grandmother passed on and I didn't get to bring her home for the occasion. I thought that I would know when it was going to happen. I was wrong. She was a tough cookie. After all, she beat my mother at three games of dice an hour and a half before she passed away. I still have the score sheets from those games. Grandma Georgia died February 22, 2004. God Bless her. She was 89 years old. It is now May of 2009 and grandma's house is mine. It took a lot of fighting and tears to keep it, but I kept my promise to grandma.

My great-grandparents (Charlie and Verna Baker) bought this house in the year 1923 where they lived the rest of their lives and raised my grandmother (Georgia) and her siblings (Clara Lavaude, James Edwin, and William Donald). They had two other children, Charles Raymond who died November 2, 1922 at the age of two, before they bought the house, and an infant daughter who died September 7, 1927 at the age of one day. William Donald died on February 17, 1933 of appendicitis. He was 16 years old. His funeral service was held in this (my) house. Clara Lavaude grew up and had a full family of her own before passing away on September 2, 1971. James Edwin grew up and also had a full family of his own and built his house behind this one, and located just across the street from Thompson Park Swimming Pool. Before he built his house, there was a little store in its place that was owned by my great-grandfather Charles. Charles and Verna sold pop and candy out of this store for the Thompson Park Pool patrons. James Edwin (Uncle Eddie) died May 23, 2000. His wife, Naomi still lives in the house they built in place of the little store. She and I are still very close.



Charles & Verna Baker



Charlie & Verna's Little Store

There was a short time when the little store was converted into a small house where my grandma Georgia, grandpa Bernard, and their two daughters lived before Uncle Eddie built his house in its place. It was then that my grandma Georgia and her husband Bernard Fitch then bought the house next door to uncle Eddie's house.

Both of these houses are directly across the street from Thompson Park's swimming pool. My great-grandparents were still alive at this time and living in the house I live in now.

Grandpa Bernard came home from WWII in a bad way. It wasn't long before he shot himself in the upstairs bedroom of the house he and my grandma Georgia lived in next door. Grandma was left with two children to raise and one on the way (my mother). Afterwards, grandma Georgia decided to buy a house downtown on Prospect street. Awhile after that, my great-grandma Verna became very sick. This devastated my great-grandfather Charlie who was the maintenance man for the Thompson Park



Georgia & Bernard

Swimming Pool at the time. Story has it that he loved Verna so much, he couldn't bear watching her die before him. Great-grandpa Charlie took his own life on June 2, 1956 by hanging himself in the basement of Thompson Park's swimming pool building. Great-grandma Verna died on October 19, 1957.



Charles & Verna's Home
Then Grandma Georgia's House
Now my house
My mom (Barbara) on her horse

After her parents died, grandma Georgia moved back into the family house where she raised her three daughters (Verna a.k.a. Cookie, Marlena, and Barbara) and lived there up until the last two years of her life when she was placed in the nursing home. After playing those three games of dice, and thinking that grandma would be ok for the night, my mother Barbara went home for the evening. Aunt Cookie came soon after and was with grandma when she died. Aunt Verna a.k.a. Cookie (named after my great-grandmother Verna) passed away September 17, 2007. She left me her 20 years of research on our family history. What a wealth of information I have.

Once grown and having families of their own, my mother and her sisters had to work. Because of this, my sister and I, along with our cousins, spent just about every day here at grandma's house, which in turn, made it home to us as well. I'm sure you can see that a lot of my family history is structured within the walls of this house. If only these walls could speak. They would definitely have many stories to tell. Between the year 1923 and today, this house has been a place for weddings, funerals, births, and deaths of many of my family members. I finished raising my children in this house and now I have grandchildren who are enjoying it as well. My grandchildren are the sixth generation of my family to pass through this house and I am still making sure that no strangers get in.

Right after my grandmother Georgia's death, Medicaid made a claim on this house for over \$100 thousand due to her stay in the nursing home. The probate judge ruled that the house had to be sold for no less than the value the auditor's office had it listed as being worth. At this time, I had to find a way to prove that the house wasn't worth what the auditor had listed. When I



Charlie & Verna's House Passed down to Georgia
Grandma Georgia Had Aluminum Siding Installed

went for a loan to buy the house the bank requested a termite and septic inspection, along with an appraisal. We proved that the house was not worth more than \$16,000. Medicaid agreed that they would accept 80 percent of that which totaled \$12,800. The bank approved me for a loan for this much, but now there is another problem. After extensive research, I found that the new Ohio State laws have new stipulations concerning the sale of a house when the septic system is not up to code. This new law states that the owner has to bring the septic system up to code by paying for it out of their own pocket unless a buyer comes along that will buy it as is. After getting an estimate for the cost of a new septic system, which was the only way to bring it up to code, I found that a new septic system would cost up to \$12,000. There was no money in my grandma's estate account to cover this. This brings the value of the house down to just about nothing, which made Medicaid back off knowing they wouldn't get anything out of this house. I made an offer to the probate judge to buy the house as is for \$4000. I told him that there was \$2500 owed to the estate lawyer and \$1500 due in back taxes and that the \$4000 would cover that. He agreed and I bought the house with my income tax return without having to get a loan from the bank. The house was paid for and became totally mine in the year 2005. I won but that wasn't the end of the problems.



After the 2006 Fire
Workers have torn off the old aluminum siding and are getting ready for new vinyl siding. The inside has been totally gutted and remodeled.

On October 14, 2006, my house caught on fire because of the old fireplace. Since that day, with the help of family and friends, I have spent the last three years completely remodeling the entire house. As of the beginning of this month of May 2009, the house is completely finished and ready for another six generations of my family. I have so many people to thank, but above all, I thank God! I know that He and grandma Georgia were with me making sure that I got it done. Today, this little \$4000 house is probably worth about \$60,000. Maybe more since it is located just on the border of Thompson Park.

I'm sure you are wondering why I put myself through so much stress and hard work to keep this house. You are probably asking yourself by now, "Why didn't she give up, pack her stuff, and move to a rental or maybe buy another house?" I didn't give up because of the love my grandmother Georgia had for this house we call home. I didn't give up because it didn't matter where I lived throughout life, no place felt like home the way grandma's house did and still does to me. I didn't give up because of the look on my beautiful grandma's face when she asked me to please keep the strangers out. Above all, I didn't give up because I believe the way she believed. Even though grandma has passed on, I believe that she is still here with me along

with my other ancestors who lived here. She has joined them in watching over us. Like my grandma, my dream is to live here the rest of my life and when my time comes, I want to die here too. Hopefully, she and the others will find me.



Charlie & Verna's House passed down from Georgia to Amy (me, her grand-daughter)

Please excuse the dates on the above pictures. I didn't set the date on my camera. These pictures were actually taken just this month of May 2009.