

My Home in the Quilt

It was the day that I left Marietta College, the first university I had ever attended. After cleaning up my room for the whole day, I was so tired that I sat on my bed and looked around to see if there was anything that I forgot to put in my luggage. At that time, my roommate stood up, went to the corner of the room, lifted up a bag, and insensibly asked, “Do you want me to throw it away?” The dark brown bag was very ragged, which made me wonder if it had actually held something that was very old. Suddenly, my eyes were stopped by the red words embroidered on the bottom of the bag. These red words were my name. They lay delicately on the bag as if trying to tell me that they were from my grandma. At the very moment I opened the bag, I saw the familiar print pattern on the quilt that my grandma had once made for me. I quickly grabbed the quilt back and hugged it tightly. A special aroma arose from the quilt that quickly spread and filled the air of the room. This familiar smell instantly brought back memories from my entire childhood. The scent is a mixed aroma of new cottons and soap. It is a smell that conveys so many things and so many stories, a smell that represents my sense of belonging.

The bag in the corner of my room became the inspiration that evoked all my memories from being home. Opening the bag, I saw the exquisite quilt that was sewed stitch by stitch by my grandma. The patterns and colors were faded to white, and there was dust on it from not being touched for a long period of time. However, it seemed that my embroidered name on the quilt planned to tell me something, and that the retained fragrant smell was aimed at pulling me back from the cold modern world to my warm home, the place I yearn for wherever I go.

At the moment that all my memories were evoked from the scent, I was so ashamed that I had almost thrown away the quilt that my grandma made for me, which used to be so important in my childhood. When I was a little kid, all the clothes that I wore and the beddings that I used

were from my grandma. I loved the unique style of my grandma's needlework setting me apart from others. However, I gradually lost my love for the homemade quilts as time passed. There were countless varieties of beautiful, machine-made quilts and sparkling, glittered clothes in shopping malls that I could buy with money. Everything was changed when Chinese people started heading to a new, "modern" world. They exchanged all of the old things that they used to love with advanced things created by cold machines. Yet my grandma was still there, sewing quilts and clothes for me tirelessly, but I no longer used them anymore. I left the bag of the quilt that was made by her in the corner of my dorm when I entered the college. I had been lost in the new world and had walked farther and farther away from where I belonged for so long before I discovered the quilt in the corner of my dorm. Smelling the familiar aroma of the quilt made me realize that the quilt, for me, is the most valuable treasure, emitting luminescence by itself and standing against the test of time. The quilt reminded me of all the memories about my grandma's delicate sewing and the spirit that belongs to my family.

The smell of the quilt that my grandma sewed for me made me think about the winter nights in my childhood. The winters in Beijing were extremely cold, so at that time, the happiest moment was when I jumped under the handmade quilt, which was like a place created by my grandma where she waited to tell stories to me. It took me back from the freezing night to a warm place to relax. The quilt was delicately made by the special, soft fabric with a unique aroma in it. The smell stayed in every inch of the fabric: in the embroidered pattern on the quilt, and in every stitch that connected two cloths. The stories that my grandma taught me were about how tough times in her life made her learn how to sew. When grandma was young, our family did not have much money to buy clothes and beddings, so she learned how to sew by herself. She was always so happy to tell me how she made needlework for the whole family, from my

grandpa to my mom to me. “You need to draw and cut each cloth exactly to make a quilt that keeps you warm,” she would always tell me in her stories. In her mind, sewing was not as easy as combining two pieces of cloths together; it was a way for her to express her love to the family. Listening to her story with the special perfumed aroma from the quilt was the happiest thing for me at that time. I recognized that sewing was such a special thing for my grandma, which made the quilt a warm place where I felt so safe and satisfied.

The feelings of being safe and satisfied in the quilts changed when I went to kindergarten. My parents were very busy at that time so they decided to send me to a boarding kindergarten, which meant I could only go back home once per week. At that time, I remembered the clothes and bedding that I took to kindergarten were always so different than others’ because they are all made by my grandma. I had colorful pants with cartoons while other kids wore simple grey and navy sweat pants, and my outer clothes were so much easier to put on and take off than others’. I also had a lovely flower pattern and embroidered name on my quilt, while others had ordinary quilts which were bought in the market. It seemed that my grandma tried her best to make everything that I use better than others’, so she put all her effort into making me all of her crafts. At the time when I was in the kindergarten, I thought I was so different than others because I had all unique garments and fabrics that were made by my grandma. The clothes and beddings had their own story, a story that belonged to my family, which made me know where I belonged. I knew they were neither from the market nor by other people’s hands. They were from my family, where I belong no matter where I go.

The story was told by the sound of the sewing machine, which sometimes lasted for the whole day. Sewing clothes for my mom and I took most of my grandma’s time. On the weekends that I was home from kindergarten, I saw her feet on the pedal of the sewing machine moving for

the whole day when I sat on the floor and played with my dolls. The sound of the sewing machine repeated again and again for the whole day, like a caring melody that stayed in my mind. Sometimes grandma stopped for a while and turned back to look at me. "It's almost done! You will have new clothes to wear!" She said this with a big smile on her face. It seemed the only thing that she did was trying to sew more things for me. The more she finished, the better she felt. On the days I went to the kindergarten, my grandma was so silent. She did not talk much while my parents told me to take care of myself, but all she did was pass the case that had all the clothes and quilts that she made for me. That was her unique way of expressing care to me, just as she made all the needlework for the rest of our family. She passed along her care through every stitch she sewed with all her passion, through the special aroma that was left in the quilt, and through the action of passing me the needlework, although she never said "take care." Using the things that she made for me made me feel like being home when I was in kindergarten. Smelling the scent of the quilt, I felt I was the little kid who waited for grandma to tell stories in the place where I belong.

My grandma was in front of the sewing machine making me quilts and clothes for ten more years. Every winter she would bring the quilts that she made for my mom and me to us. My family's living condition became better in later years, so there was actually no need for grandma to make quilts for us. Nevertheless, she kept on sewing clothes and beddings by herself. Making all the needle works for us became her style of expressing her care. However, growing up as a teenager girl, I gradually abandoned wearing the clothes that were made by my grandma because they were not as "beautiful" as the ones in the shopping mall. So every week when I got money from my mom, I would rather buy a lot of clothes in the shopping mall than look at the clothes that my grandma made me. When I told my grandma that I decided to go to a college in America,

she made me a quilt to take abroad. At that time, I thought it was funny to take such a big quilt in my luggage. “There are plenty of quilts for me to buy in the market, they are really warm,” I told my grandma.

So when I arrived in my dorm of my first college in the States, I put the quilt that my grandma gave me in the corner of the room because I thought I could buy a new one much more “beautiful” and fashionable than my grandma’s needle work. With my gorgeous clothes and trendy machine-made beddings, I got lost in the huge world and strayed away from my home until the day when I opened the bag and smelled the special fragrant aroma that lingered in the quilt. Long before I found the quilt, my grandma had passed away. Finding the quilt again made me remember all the care that my grandma gave me through her sewing. I cannot hug her or talk to her anymore, but I can feel a hint of her loving spirit. It seemed that she poured all her effort into sewing what she wanted to say to us in her stitches, which made us all listen by using the needle works that she made. I realized that I was so wrong to put away the gifts made by her. There are no other things in this world giving me the same kind of feeling as the handmade needle works give me. The quilt and all other creations made by my grandma are a tie that connects me and my family, and always pulled me back to the place where I belong no matter how far away I am from home. Every stitch sewed by my grandma expressed how much she loved and cared about me, even though she is not here with me anymore.

Walking on the streets in Pittsburgh, I look at all the well-made clothes and needle work in the shop windows. The things in the shop windows, sparkling attractively, are desired by all who walk on the street. But for me, the expensive, well-made things in the window shine beautifully, but coldly. Every stitch of the clothes conveys no meaning compared to the needle work that my grandma made me. My grandma expressed her spiritual value for unique home-

made items to me by giving me all those ingenious crafts. Although the world is changing so fast, the warm home where your heart belongs should always be found. I found my home in the quilt.

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