

## THE GENERATION BEFORE

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Every summer when I was a child, I went camping with my dad, uncle, grandma and grandpa in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Every summer we set up camp at Little Lake State Campground, site #11, the one with the best access to the water and a fallen log where we could tie up our kayaks. We found a sturdy cedar branch that would be a good makeshift broom, and we always swept the pine needles into a pad where we could pitch our tents. And we lived this way for a week or 10 days at a time, waking up each morning to drink hot cocoa and watch the fog raise over the lake, going to sleep each night listening to the gentle whoo-whooping of the saw-whet owls and the monotonous buzz of cicadas.

When we finished our time camping, when the Klepper kayaks were folded up and stored, when the camp stove had been cleaned, when the tents were dried out and folded, we picked up that cedar branch again and swept the campsite. Grandpa always told me that we had to leave the campsite better than we found it. This sweeping the campsite became a ritual to me, a tidying that went beyond packing out our trash. For me, it became a way to bless the land and the next people or animals who enjoyed that place. A “paying it forward” that cost us nothing but time and attention.

My grandparents were like that. Thinking of the next generations to come. Born during the Great Depression, sometimes I found their propensity for collecting items annoying or just plain weird...but everything had a use, every action served a purpose, nothing was wasted. For example, my grandma Betty, a diminutive woman who claimed she was 5'4" her whole life but ended up being about 4'10", often found the sleeves of her shirts too long. An avid sewer, she would take the scissors and cut the sleeves to be an appropriate length for her. And then, because she was not one to waste material, she would make herself pockets with the trimmed fabric. Not ONE pocket, but multiple pockets. This tiny woman wound up having shirts that had four or five pockets neatly sewn on where before there were none. She never had to carry a handbag, she always had enough pockets to store her keys, tissues, glasses cloth, spare barrettes and anything else she had a mind to.

After grandma died, I shared this story about her pockets with a friend who pointed out that grandma was not only making an item of clothing more functional, but she was also sticking it to the patriarchy. In case you haven't thought about this recently, or ever, clothing meant for women often lacks pockets. By some accounts, pockets ruin the figure of a woman. By others, women don't need pockets because we can carry everything in our handbags, of course! Why would we need gender equity in clothing?! And my grandma was making a statement about this injustice by sewing her own pockets.

The cedar branch and the pockets are my heritage, the gifts from those who have gone before. The call to "see differently" that Tim talked about is not only important for those of us who are here now to do as we look forward to the next generations. It is also important for those of us alive now, especially those on the younger side of things, as we recall the past, as we remember ourselves in order to figure out where we are going. Though I wondered at the necessity of sweeping our campsite thoroughly, and was struck embarrassed and skeptical about my grandma's multiplicity of pockets on all her clothing, I now understand those oddities as gifts, lessons for me about how to be generous to those in the future, how to pave the way for those who come next. I see grandma's insistence on pockets as an endearingly obstinate way of her telling me to observe the world I have inherited closely, and not to be afraid to change the game to make space for myself.

What do those of us present here and now plan to leave to the generations in the future? Perhaps we leave what the generation behind us left. Wonder at the grandeur of the planet, and the knowledge that we humans play a role in the wellbeing of all created life. Keen observation and critical thinking, enough to realize that the world must not be how it is; and of course, the willpower to take the scissors into our own hands, to approach the sewing machine and fabricate a new reality of equity and justice.