

The Part of me I Never Knew

Throughout my life everyone has talked about my Great-Grandma Belle. She died before I was born, yet her spirit somehow is alive within our family. Her name stands strong, but her image is blank for me.

They have shown me pictures of her. Her eyes look just like mine. Golden-brown. Her teeth were crooked, and I'm trying to fix mine with braces. Her eyelashes were long, dark, and curly at the ends, and mine are the same way.

They have given me the quilt she made that has been passed down from generation to generation. It is made out of the softest cotton that was dyed sun-yellow, sky-blue, and grass green. It rests lovingly at the foot of my bed.

They have prepared for me her fabulous potato knishes. They are better than the famous Mrs. Stahl's knishes from Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. They are so fluffy that they almost melt in my mouth.

They have talked about her endlessly. She is a family legend. Belle was born in Russia and came to this country when she was only 8. She learned to read English perfectly, even though she only had an 8th grade education.

They said she loved to dance. I love to dance, too. I imagine us listening to classic show tunes from *West Side Story* or *Fiddler On The Roof* and then my favorite radio station Z100, while dancing the night away. She'd teach me the swing. I'd teach her hip-hop and jazz.

They said she loved to read and tell stories. I love to read, too. I imagine us sitting on the couch huddled together while she tells me stories about immigrating to America and the old country. We'd read Little Women together. She would introduce me to books she read when she was younger.

They said she loved animals. I love animals, too. I imagine going with her to the zoo and aquarium. We'd watch the enormous whales swim underwater, and we'd observe exotic birds soar through the air.

They said she loved watching movies. I love watching movies, too. I imagine us sitting in a dark movie theater eating freshly popped popcorn and watching the latest "chick flick". On nights when she'd visit, we'd rent old black and white films, and sit arm in arm on the couch staring at the screen.

They said she loved to cook. I wish I could cook, too. My mother remembers helping my Great-Grandma Belle prepare meals. I imagine baking the best chocolate chip cookies you have ever tasted. I never do this with my mother or grandmother, so I would love to do this with her.

They said she loved to brush and style hair. I love to do that, too. I imagine her sitting in a big old armchair with me on the floor between her legs, as she braids my hair. She would also brush my hair delicately, and she'd twirl it into a perfect bun.

If she were still alive, I'd get her to teach me the things no other adult seems to be able to do. I'd get her to show me her secrets of poker, how to embroider small, perfect stitches, and how to crochet scarves and doll blankets of purples and pinks.

I want to see my Great-Grandma Belle's image once because that piece of my heart isn't clear. I want to know the Belle everyone talks about. I want to know her like my mother and grandmother did. I want to be one with my Great-grandmother, Belle.

Belinda