

## Pass It On®...

### Everybody's Grandma.

*Connie might have said there was nothing special about her. Her grandchildren and their friends will tell you a different story.*

Connie would tell you she was not very good at choosing husbands. As a schoolteacher in South Carolina, she worked hard to ensure her students were up to grade level. She'd lived through the Great Depression as a child and understood the value of a dollar and an education.

Unfortunately, her first husband didn't. He was interested in activities that didn't yield an income and died young, leaving Connie with two young daughters. Her second husband brought stepchildren into the family, but he left after a few years, and Connie raised the kids on her own, including her stepson.

When her sister died, Connie took in her kids as part of the family, too.

"She was always steady," Connie's daughter remembers. "She had to be."

That steadiness was what the grandchildren appreciated. A lot changed between when Connie raised her children and when it came time for them to raise their own. The world was more confusing, but to Connie, it was the same as it had always been. Kids needed someone to talk to, play games with and laugh with. They needed to learn how to work and take responsibility for their choices. After that, it was all about love.

With her short gray hair and curious, warm eyes, Connie became such a fixture in the family that the neighborhood kids began to befriend her as well. She helped with their homework, laughed with them as they played neighborhood games and was often surrounded by young ones at the community pool.

"She always brought enough food to share and had a good stash of treats in her purse," a friend remembers with a laugh. "And if you sat long enough, she would give you a good talking to about health food."

As the grandkids got older and entered that blender of emotions called high school, Connie became

known as the Oracle, or Con-Jon or Club Connie. Her modest home became the place for teenagers to drop by, grab a sandwich, talk out their concerns, get a little help with homework or just hang out. They'd sleep on her floor, two or three at a time, and Connie would make them breakfast. She doled out encouragement and never judged. She'd seen hapless and unmotivated people in her life and knew that the best way to get someone to live up to their potential was to offer a kind word and a gentle nudge toward a better decision.

When Connie became bedridden, the teenagers-turned-young-parents still dropped by to visit. They helped in the yard and marveled at the boxes of memories stacked in the house. To an outsider, there was nothing of worth in the home, but Connie had collected valuable memories and tokens of affection and stored them to revisit when her health began to fail.

"She never stopped smiling," her daughter said.

At her funeral, there were more young people than old, a generation that had grown up on folksy wisdom, maternal encouragement and a squeaky laugh that meant you were going to be all right, no matter what.

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By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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