



# Stella and a Boy

*A Life of Selfless Love*

*In Loving Memory*

*101 Years of Love*

# How to Read This Book



This tribute draws from three voices. To honor each one, the text is gently color-coded throughout:

— **Deep purple text** carries *Stella's own voice* — the stories of her life as she told them, the memories she carried, and the words she spoke to those she loved.

— **Ford blue text** carries Nathan's voice — his memories of his grandmother, the stories he shared, the small moments only a grandson would remember.

— **Black text** is the narrative thread — the connective writing that holds the story together.

*Read it however you like — straight through, or in pieces. Every voice  
in here loved her.*



*She was born on a Kentucky farm  
and lived to be one hundred and one years old.*

*She raised four daughters,  
welcomed countless grandchildren and great-grandchildren,  
and chose, in her sixties, to raise one more.*

*She loved without keeping score.*

***This is her story.***

*Part One*

# Kentucky



Grandma came into the world on a tobacco farm in Kentucky, one of six children in a two-bedroom house where the boys and girls shared a single room and the well out back gave them their water. Her father chewed tobacco and worked the land for a dollar a day. Her mother heated water on the stove to wash clothes by hand and raised her children in a house with no electricity and an outhouse that froze in winter.

Her toys were old tires and broken-down bicycles. She walked two miles to school every day, the first mile just to get off the farm. Her grandmother made vegetable soup for the schoolchildren, and washing the bowls afterward felt like a privilege.

Her mother sewed dresses out of feed bags because they came in pretty colors. She made blackberry cobbler and apple butter cooked outside in a big iron pot. Her father brought home orphaned lambs to feed by hand when their mothers wouldn't.

*That was the world that shaped her.*

*Hard. Honest.*

*Full of love that didn't need words to be felt.*

She left school after the sixth grade. That's how it was then. By her teenage years she was already working — moving toward a life of her own, with the quiet determination she would carry every day of her hundred and one years.



*Stella in her younger years*

*Part Two*

# Before Chopper



She was fifteen years old when she married her first husband. They had three children together — and he was not a reliable man.

One day, he drove the family all the way out to Denver, Colorado. He left her there with ten dollars and three small children. Then he drove himself back to the place they had married, leaving her stranded a thousand miles from home.

Ten dollars. Three children. A city she didn't know.

She walked into a church. She told them what had happened. She asked for help. Strangers passed a collection. They raised enough to put her and her three children on a bus back home.

*That was Stella, even then —  
not bitter, not broken.  
Just brave enough to ask for help,  
and humble enough to receive it.*

She came home. She rebuilt. She found her way to Indianapolis, took a job, and tried to feed three kids on her own. She never forgot the kindness of those church strangers in Denver. It would shape how she treated everyone, for the rest of her life.

*Part Three*

# Chopper



My grandfather's name was **Henry Grant**. Everyone called him **Chopper**.

He had just come back from the war. He was a skilled pipefitter, doing plumbing work on apartments and houses across Indianapolis. He rode a motorcycle. And he loved karate — the movies, the moves, all of it. He would go around the Ford Motor Plant karate chopping his colleagues just for the laugh of it. That's where the nickname stuck. Chopper.

He heard about a young divorcée who had just moved back to town with three small children and no help. She was trying to feed them on whatever she could earn. He didn't know her. But he knew what hungry looked like.

So he started bringing her chickens. Whole chickens. Again and again. He'd ride up on that motorcycle, drop off a chicken so the kids could eat, and go on about his day.

*That was how love started.*

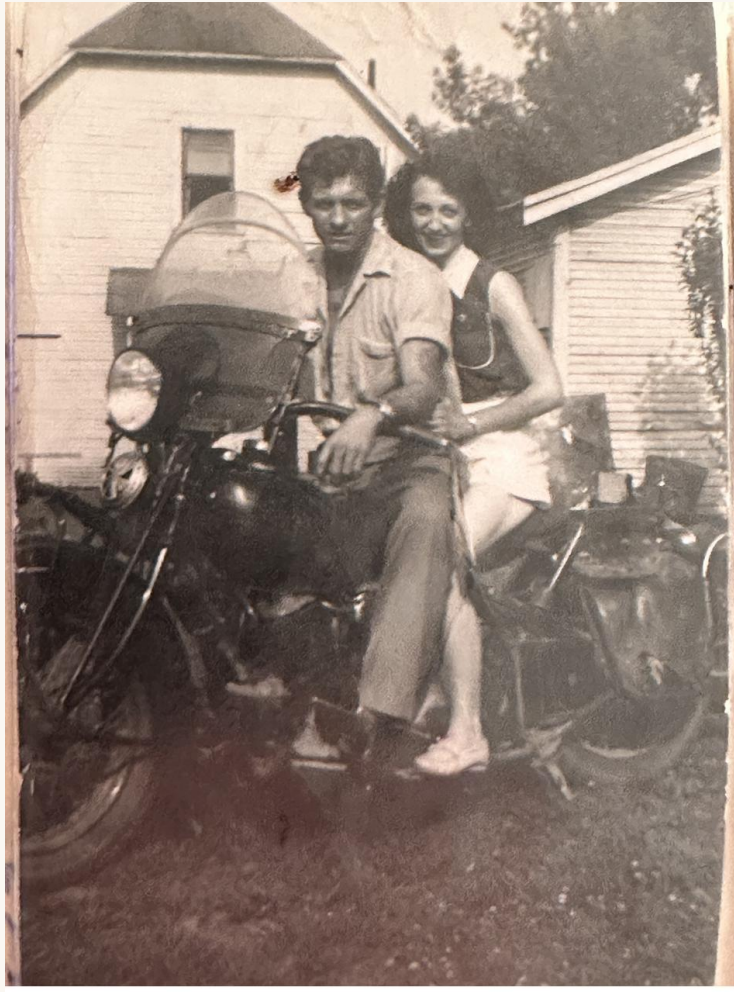
*Not with flowers.*

*With whole chickens, brought to a hungry house*

*by a man on a motorcycle*

*who asked for nothing in return.*

That kindness was what warmed her heart to him. She saw who he really was. And she let herself love again.



*Stella and Chopper — in their courting days*

They married. They lived on Gale Street for a few years, then built the house on the east side of Indianapolis — the one she would live in for the rest of her life. Chopper went to work at Ford and stayed there until he retired at sixty-two. He brought home his paycheck, his stories, and that quiet strength a working man brings home at the end of a long day.

Together they raised four daughters: **Jerry, Judy, Jeanie, and Edna**. Four girls, each one her own person, each one carrying a piece of Stella forward into the world.

*Life was full of love, with Jeanie and Edna having their own families. I know countless grandchildren used to visit grandma, and Christmas was shared amongst the family. I don't have those stories; those are not mine to share. What I can tell you is how Stella and a boy became close, and what she meant to me. She showed me what selfless love looks like.*

She always said she would have loved a son. The good Lord had other plans — but He wasn't finished writing her story.



*Stella and Chopper at home*

*Part Four*

# Home



Home was where Stella truly came alive.

She crocheted. She cooked. She made holiday cookies every Christmas. Her and Nathan would sit down and decorate them together. She kept stuffed animals on every surface and painted knickknacks on every shelf. *Footprints in the Sand* hung on her wall. Crosses watched over every room.

In 1967, she found her church — Eugene's mother brought her — and she never left it. Faith became the quiet engine of her life, the thing she carried with her into every hard day and every good one.

*She had a gift with babies.*

*They settled in her arms*

*like they knew they were safe there.*

There was nothing performative about it. She just loved them, plain and simple. She would rock them, hum to them, hold them long after most people would have set them down.

The grandchildren came. Then the great-grandchildren. Her house filled up at the holidays with daughters and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and you could see it in her face — *this is the life I built. This is what I have.*



*Family at Christmas — three generations together*

*Part Five*

# The Son She Chose



In her sixties, when most women are slowing down, Stella started over.

A great-grandson came into her life — Nathan — and she decided, quietly and without fanfare, that she would help raise him. She stopped smoking the day she brought him home. She made room. She made time. She made him hers.

She didn't do it for credit. She did it because that's who she was. The same woman who had walked two miles to school as a barefoot Kentucky girl, who had survived Denver with ten dollars and three children, who had built a home with Chopper, who had raised four daughters — she just kept loving. There was always more room in her heart.

*Nathan was the son she had always wanted.*

*And she was, for him,  
the steady ground beneath his feet.*



*Grandma and Nathan — the bond that defined them both*

She put a basketball hoop up in her driveway so the neighborhood kids could play. She brought ice pops out for every child who came over, no matter who they were, no matter where they came from. Her yard became the safe yard. Her house became the safe house. She loved every kid who came through her door like they were her own. Because to her, they were.



*With one of her beloved grandchildren*

*Part Six*

## The Everyday Rituals



The bond between Stella and Nathan wasn't built in grand gestures. It was built in everything most people would forget. The quiet hours. The shared evenings. The small care she gave, over and over, until it became the shape of love itself.

We played endless games of cards together. War, mostly — the simple game where you flip and the higher card wins. And the slap game, where you lay down cards and if they matched you slapped your hand down fast, and if you won you got to scoop the whole pile into your bounty. She would laugh so hard when I beat her. And she'd cheat just a little, sometimes, just to keep me in the game.

We watched a lot of daytime TV together. *Full House*. *Family Matters*. And every now and then she'd let me stay up late — past my bedtime — to watch Al Bundy on *Married... with Children*. It felt like a secret we shared. She'd sit in her chair, I'd sit on the floor or beside her, and the world outside that house just stopped mattering.

And whenever I was sick — whatever it was, flu, a cold, a stomach bug — the ritual was always the same. She'd make me lie down on the couch. She'd bring me a cold ice pack for my forehead. She'd bring me water, more water, food I could keep down. She'd sit beside me and rub my forehead and make sure I felt okay. Hour after hour. Just being there.

*That was love, distilled.*

*Not announced. Not performed.*

*Just delivered, every single time it was needed.*

*Part Seven*

## Her Words



Stella didn't give long speeches. She gave small truths. The kind of sentences you remember your whole life because someone you loved said them to you, just once or maybe a hundred times, in a voice that meant it.

*"Nathan, it's not how much you make,  
it's how much you save.*

*That's more interesting to me than anything else."*

She said it as much as he could stand. A grandmother born in a house with no electricity, who had once arrived in Denver with ten dollars and three kids, was telling him: *the world will try to teach you to chase the wrong thing. Don't.*



Whenever Nathan told her he loved her, she had her answer ready. Every time. For decades.

*"I love you more."*

It started as a game between them. It became a vow. Whatever Nathan gave her, she gave back more. That was simply the math of how she loved him.

*Part Eight*

# A Bond Unbroken



Some bonds are built by blood. Others are built by showing up, day after day, year after year, decade after decade.

**Stella showed up.**

She showed up when Nathan was a baby. She showed up when he was a boy testing the limits of her patience by hiding in clearance racks at the mall just to hear her panic. She showed up when he was a teenager learning to be a man. She showed up when he became the first in his family to complete college — a Big Ten student-athlete at Indiana University. She showed up at his wedding, in a wheelchair now but smiling, a corsage of white roses on her wrist.

She showed up at every milestone that mattered. And he showed up for her.



*Stella at Nathan's wedding — still showing up*



*Grandma, Nathan, and his wife — afternoons together*

After we moved back from New York City, I visited her every weekend we weren't traveling or sick. Every single weekend. That was the rhythm.

When my wife and I got married, Grandma made me a promise. She said she would work to hold on long enough to meet our first child. She would *try*. That was a real promise from a woman in her late nineties — not a casual thing to say.

She kept it.

When my first child was born in January, I brought the baby to her arms. She held him the same way she had once held me — soft, steady, the same hands that had carried four daughters and a great-grandson now cradling a great-great-grandson. Four generations breathed together in a single embrace.

*She had said she would try.*

*She always tried.*

*And she always kept her promises.*



*The promise she kept — her newest great-great-grandson*



*Four generations in a single embrace*

What made our bond what it was wasn't the years. It was the honesty.

I almost never told my grandmother a fib. I'd rather share blunt honesty. We had conversations that were very frank and very real — about my struggles, my marriage, my work, my fears, the times I was wrong. *Especially* when I was wrong.

And she, for her part, loved me whole. She knew my flaws and loved me anyway. That was her way with everyone she loved. There was no version of me she would turn away from.

Part Nine

# The Last Chapters



In her last years, she still found joy in the small things. A sunny afternoon outside. A visit from family. A pizza on the counter. A new baby to hold. The dogs curled up beside her in the recliner. A thumbs up from her chair.

She gave a lot of thumbs up in her last years. It became her signature — her way of saying *I'm okay. I love you. Carry on.*



*A thumbs up — her signature, her blessing*



*With Duncan and Donuts, who never left her side*

Even the dogs knew where the safe place was.



*Her 100th birthday — surrounded by family, crowned for the day*

She kept her humor. She kept her faith. She kept her love for every person who walked through her door. She sat with her daughters and grandchildren in her living room and they laughed together, the way only a family that has weathered every season together can laugh.



*In her living room — surrounded by family, as always*

*Part Ten*

# Going Home



On the morning she left us, Stella carried with her one hundred and one years of love poured out into the world.

Into her daughters. Into her grandchildren. Into her great-grandchildren. Into her great-great-grandchildren. Into a neighborhood of kids who knew her yard was safe. Into church strangers in Denver who once raised money for a young mother with three kids. Into a man on a motorcycle who brought her chickens because her babies were hungry. Into a son by choice who became a man because of her.

She lived a life that doesn't make the news. A life that doesn't get monuments. But it's the kind of life that quietly changes the world, one person at a time, for generations to come. The kind of life that proves the deepest love isn't loud. It's faithful. It's daily. It just keeps showing up.



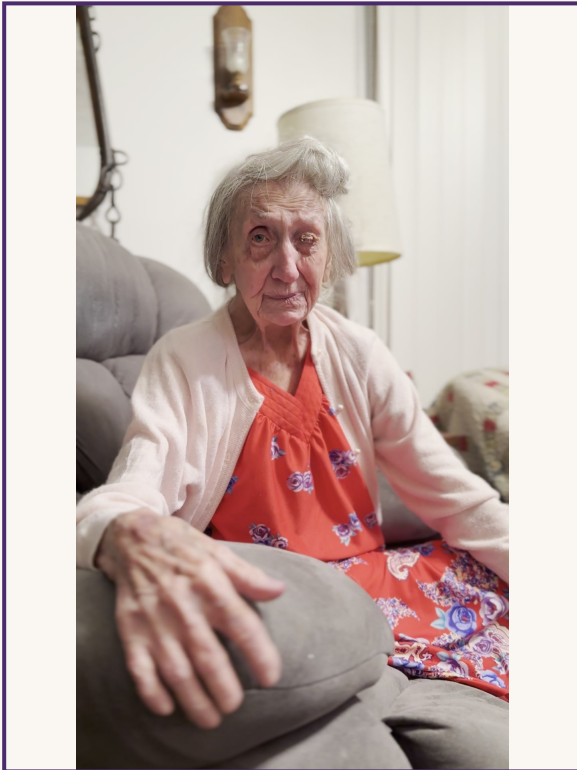
*Love isn't measured in what you say.  
It's measured in what you do, every day,  
for the people who need you.*

*She walked two miles to school as a girl.  
She walked one hundred and one years in love.*

*She is home now.*

# The Lord's Prayer

*In Her Own Voice*




*Scan with your phone camera  
to watch the video.*

Grandma's faith was the quiet center of her life. She found her church in 1967, and she never left it. In her final years, she recorded herself reciting The Lord's Prayer for the family — her voice steady, her words sure, the same prayer she had whispered over us all our lives.

*Scan the code above, or tap it in the digital version,  
to hear her pray it one more time.*

*[drive.google.com/file/d/1DzZlNoCg0Fa7lnAj6OKpbKuW\\_skAliax](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DzZlNoCg0Fa7lnAj6OKpbKuW_skAliax)*



*Monday night.  
Her last words to him.*

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*"I love you," he said.*

*She was barely lucid,  
But she opened her eyes,  
and with all the energy she had left,  
she answered.*

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*"I love you more."*