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**"A PERSON CANNOT BECOME WHO THEY NEED TO BE BY REMAINING WHO THEY ARE!!" By Wesley I. Purkey, Federal Death Row.**

My great Aunt Ga-ga who adopted me when I was kid, who didn't weigh a buck-five soak and wet, inundated me with an assemblage of words of wisdom, which has left an indelible imprint on me. These "golden sayings" were generally flaunted when she was trying to school me on the importance of obtaining and continuing my education, and the need for learning from past mistakes. I thought her fervour for driving home these lessons bordered on the crazy, but if there was anything crazy about this lady it was that she was "crazy like a fox"! One of her favourite sayings that is still deeply embedded in my heart today is that- "*a person cannot become who they need to be by remaining who they are.*" It has taken many years and experiences for me to fully comprehend the true meaning of these words, but in my opinion no words ring truer.

With a slight smile and a chuckle, without animosity or criticism, Ga-ga would patiently listen to my rather pathetic and ridiculous excuses offered up to justify my stupidity. I realise now she relished these fertile opportunities for reiterating lessons that she was trying to instil in my life. Unfortunately I was so engulfed in my own ignorance, believing that I already knew everything, more often than not these lessons fell on deaf ears. Exercising unconditional love, unflappable patience and enormous tolerance, she remained undaunted by my deep seated obstinacy. Through astute tenacity, little by little, she began to penetrate my

seemingly impenetrable ignorance, and I began to recognise the enormity and the value of the lessons this lady was trying to teach me.

After one of the many bungling screw-ups I committed, Ga-ga declared that the root cause of my problem was what caused the majority of suffering, prejudice, hatred and violence throughout the world- "unadulterated ignorance." Furthermore, she proclaimed, the best medicine for ignorance and suffering was found through education, education and more education! She was unwavering and passionate in this declaration, and maintained it throughout her life- the only true way to eliminate suffering, both in an individual's life and in the world in general, was to nip the main culprit in the bud- ignorance! She emphasised the point that true growth in a person's life, comes when they are willing to recognise the depth of their own ignorance and see the suffering it is causing to themselves and other people. She also emphasised that people need to learn from their past mistakes and to stand completely responsible and accountable for them. She also said that once the person has demonstrated accountability and responsibility, that they need to move past those mistakes, no matter how dire they may have been, because, every moment looking back is time wasted for a person to move forward!

Despite Ga-ga's absence from this world for almost two and a half decades now, her unconditional love and precious lessons continue to have significant impact on my life today. She is so very dearly missed, but not forgotten. Other lessons that still stand out in my mind today are- that a person's true worth is found through the empathy and compassion they show others; that it is through helping others that ultimate happiness is found; that a person need not worry about the efforts required for achieving their goals, because the most important effort is taking the first step; that a person who relies on the opinions of others will remain restless and discontented throughout their life; that an empty head rattles the loudest; only a fool values the opinions of an idiot! But the one I find superlative to all the others is- "*a person cannot become who they need to be by remaining who they are.*"