

BLOGGER | KAREN WALROND

## Words to Love By

My grandmother told me what happy wives know



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Photographs, from left: Karen Walrond (2); Gregor Schuster/Zefa/Corbis

Almost exactly eight years ago, I announced my engagement to my now-husband, Marcus. Soon after that day, while I was in Trinidad visiting family, my grandmother—who was 95 at the time—pulled me aside. “Karen,” she said in her soft voice, “you realize that as a good wife, you should always make sure that your husband looks good. Iron his clothes, and lay them out for him every day. Make him a good breakfast every morning. But there’s one thing you must never forget,” she said, leaning toward me conspiratorially. “*You must never shine a man’s shoes.*”

I smile with bemused affection whenever I think of that day. For as long as I can remember, until she died peacefully this year at age 102, my grandmother spoke to me about love and relationships. And though much of what she said seemed a bit outmoded (in eight years, I don’t believe I’ve ever ironed my husband’s dress shirts), I found a kernel of wisdom in all that she ever told me: *Make your husband feel loved and cared for. But do not let him think that you are his servant, or that you are in any way beneath him.*

When I was a teenager, I lived with my grandmother for a couple of years. I cherished those quiet moments when we’d sit and enjoy guava cheese (her weakness) as we talked about my future, what it had been like to date my grandfather,

and how much more valuable happiness, family, and friendships were than money. I remember watching her pay the man who helped tend her garden. Afterward, she’d invite him to help himself to as many of the mangoes or avocados on her trees as he could carry, to take home to his family.

If there’s one woman who truly went out of her way to show me what love should be, it was my grandmother. Now that I’m a mother myself, I do my best to recreate those moments with my own daughter. She’s only 5, but even now, while we snuggle in bed (as we do every morning), I talk to her about how her friends should treat her, and how she should treat her friends. I talk to her about what I hope for her when she grows up and decides to have her own family. I tell her stories about how her father and I met, and how much we love each other. I tell her how I felt the first time I saw her tiny face in the hospital. When we’re out and about, I often try to do something nice for a stranger—simple things like smile and hold the door open, or buy coffee for the person behind me in line—just so she sees that love can, indeed, be all around.

One day, I might even tell her about a man’s shoes. ■

