



A Glimpse into Grammy's Life

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Introduction

My interview was with Myrtis "Susie" Anderson. She is an 81 year old female who lives in Hopewell, Virginia. She is my paternal grandmother. She has lived in the Hopewell area her entire life. She has been married to Bobby Anderson for 60 years and had three children- Scott, Mark, and Lisa. Scott passed away shortly after his birth due to spina bifida. She and her husband raised their two children in Hopewell and still live in the same house. The three common themes from the interview were working hard, family, and resourcefulness. It was hard to pick just three from the 45 minute interview, but the ones I chose were the ones that stuck out the most.

Methods

The interview was conducted in Myrtis' living room on April 15, 2019. Her husband, Bob Anderson was also present and chimed in with responses occasionally. Before beginning the interview, I prepared questions based on stages of her life. I grouped questions focusing on her early childhood and adolescence, her adulthood, and her life after retirement. I made sure she was comfortable and had everything she needed before starting. I explained that the interview would be used by Longwood University and that it would be recorded, and then had her sign the consent form. I asked if she had any questions about the process and she declined. I took notes on my computer throughout the interview and did a voice recording on my phone. After conducting the interview, I transcribed it and coded it to pick out common themes within the transcript. I also asked Myrtis for pictures from her childhood and adulthood.



Common Themes

Working Hard: Throughout the interview, Myrtis stressed the importance of working hard and putting your all into everything you do. She discussed how it is crucial to take advantage of every opportunity you have, especially when you are in college. She said "study hard and take advantage of everything that you can while you're in college, because there's so much to absorb or either not just in the classroom, but outside the classroom. At your age, the world is a classroom." She also described the hard working nature of her parents, which taught her to work hard. She passed the same knowledge to my father, and my parents passed it down to my sister and I. My grandfather said, "our parents put clothes on our back and give us a warm place to sleep and uh put food on the table. And uh, well you know, that's what we got. At age 18 or 19 or 20, I felt like, you know, I had to get out of home and she did too."

Family: Another incredibly important thing to Myrtis is family. She grew up during the great depression and her family was never well off. My grandfather talked about how they didn't have TV, internet, or anything, but she interrupted and said "well no, but we had family." She had 6 siblings and they always played together. My grandparents got married when they were 21 and 22, and have been together since. They told me they had to work together, and sometimes it wasn't easy, but in the end, they still had family. Myrtis told me a story from when my dad was growing up and told me he was always the class clown. Finally, she took care of my sister and I during the week when we were little, when our parents were working. She values the bond she created with us, and said it was the best job she had (being retired and taking care of us).

Resourcefulness: Lastly, she spoke about making the most out of what you have. Even though she grew up in a poor family, she made the best of it and still made a life for herself. For example, her mother would make their dresses out of bags from chicken feed. She emphasized that you didn't have to come from money to be successful. Both her and my grandfather came from poor socioeconomic status, but they built a life for themselves and children. My grandmother worked at Thalheimer's department store and at a finance company in Petersburg. My grandfather worked at Safeway for 10 years and then got a job at Honeywell and worked there for almost 40 years. Their first apartment was unfurnished and they had hardly anything, but after working and saving money, they were able to buy a house and raise a family.



Connection to Literature

I focused on **cumulative disadvantage theory**, which states, "people who begin life with greater resources continue to have opportunities to accumulate more of them while those who begin with few resources fall further behind" (Quadagno, 2018, p. 248). Myrtis was born into a large family during a large period of economic despair. Her parents worked hard and were able to put food on the table for her and her siblings. She found a job once she graduated high school and did the same for her family. She worked for forty years before retiring and entering grandparenthood. The grandparent role is the strongest when the grandchildren are very young, and find this time the most satisfying (Quadagno, 2018). However, as grandchildren grow up, the amount of contact declines until adulthood (Quadagno, 2018). This is true because I feel that I have the strongest relationship with her now, as an adult. I look to her for advice and guidance and value our relationship more than ever.



Conclusion

In conclusion, Myrtis Anderson has had a successful life and worked from the bottom up. She has been a hard worker her entire life and has done everything she can for her family. She has taught me a lot of things throughout her grandparenting career and I value the time I get to spend with her. This interview allowed me to dive deeper into what I already knew about Myrtis and gave me more insight into her background and life. She values her family relationships and is the most caring person I know.

Resources

Aging and the Life Course: An Introduction to Social Gerontology (7th edition; 2018) by Jill Quadagno. McGraw Hill.

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