

Essay Submission for the 2026 Barlow Miles Westcott Scholarship

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I don't look like my mother. I don't look like my father. My hazel eyes stand out in my brown-eyed house. My naturally light hair is often dyed over matching my brother's. Somewhere in the mixing pot of genetics, I won the recessive presentation. However, there is one exception.

Ms. Linda Vincent, my grandmother and my twin.

In my childhood home, there is a room divider covered floor to ceiling with pictures of every family member since the camera was invented. Papa Loman sits like a king in his Air Force uniform. Great-Grandma Rosie's hair is tied into intricate buns I always thought looked like Princess Leia. And if your eyes trace to the bottom, you will see the picture I used to confuse for myself. Her name is not Linda to me, it's Nana. And she is absolutely extraordinary.

Linda Vincent was born January 12th, 1942, to Charles F. Hopkins and Emma Christina Cooney. She was born in Providence, Rhode Island, growing up with two siblings: Nancy and Charles. She married Adrian Ronald Vincent in 1960 and had three children: Theodore, Maureen, and Michelle. And in 2005, she became my grandmother.

Nana moved from Rhode Island to Oregon around when I was born, settling into a condo, whose address ran consecutively, 678, to my childhood home's 2345. Nana took me and my brother on "Nana Wednesdays," a weekly adventure every summer break from school as children. And every Saturday morning, my mom and I go pick her up for coffee and a walk around Riverfront Park.

I have always been extremely close with Nana.

In November 2023, I went to Providence for the first time. For me, it was mainly tied to her. If Providence was a 50 minute train ride from my college campus in Boston, I couldn't not see where my grandmother was born and grew up. Providence became one of my very favorite day-trip places to go.

Over the course of many more trips to Providence, my mother, who is the Assistant Historian of the Oregon Society of Mayflower Descendants, encouraged me to see some of the sites that are important to my ancestry. I found a sign in Roger Williams Park with

the original settlements of Providence and I pointed out Stukely's lot in a picture to my mother.

Another spot I sought out was the First Baptist Church in America, which stands tall and white against an often bright blue sky. This church is where Stukely Westcott was a founding member. A church is an important landmark for the Westcott heritage as Stukely was ordered to leave his former home of Salem, Massachusetts, by the "General Court" and later was ex-communicated by the church there. Upon arriving in Providence, the church was a sign of finding a second home and committing to it full force. Stukely demonstrated incredible commitment to always moving forward, finding his way to great achievements and success by taking challenges in stride.

Nana has done her fair share of both.

After starting her career as a realtor, she went back to college at age 39 at the University of Oregon, receiving a Bachelor of Science in Business. From there, she worked in fine jewelry and then as a successful Mortgage Originator in the banking industry. She and my grandfather separated before I was born and I've always seen Nana as an independent, strong-willed woman who could rock business clothes and cycled through a wide variety of hair colors and styles over the years. To me, Nana always epitomized class and independence.

Though the latter trait has been challenged in recent years. When I was in middle school, on a Nana Wednesday, Nana forgot we had ordered at a restaurant. I remember me and my brother being so confused when she asked us to close our menus so the waiters wouldn't think we were still deliberating. She didn't believe us when we told her we had already ordered, asking us: "Well, what did I get?" Later, Nana was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

It is a truly incomparable experience watching someone slowly lose their short term memory. We have been incredibly lucky with the pace of Nana's Alzheimer's progression, as it has been nearly 10 years since that lunch and she still can crack a great joke and hold lovely conversations. But Nana Wednesdays have long since stopped. Over the years, her mind and body have blurred the lines of what exactly is having difficulties and it has caused her to deal with chronic pain we struggle to find solutions for. When she walks she grabs mine or my mom's arm tightly, and we walk in the smallest steps. Saturdays switched from coffee and a walk, to coffee and a drive.

Back to Providence, I find a sort of peace walking down the canal sidewalks and thinking about this city who knows a version of my grandmother that no longer exists. The one who could run if she wanted to but might frown at the idea of willingly going for a jog outside. The one who could remember the names of people in shops and at work. It feels to me when I'm in Providence, that there's promise there. I think there are similarities in the way it held Stukely Westcott safe and kindly when he was rebuilding his life from the ground up, to the way it holds me to closeness and community of my grandmother.

I can only imagine the challenges that must come along with starting a city from scratch, of being part of an original settlement. Of losing your son upon arriving and being excommunicated from your church. And yet, Stukely Westcott went on to help form a civil government in Providence, move to Warwick, and hold many leadership positions within the community there. He moved forward again and again and through it built one of the greatest American lineages.

I went back home for winter break and just like I've done every time I'm home, I went over to cut Nana's hair. I brought smoothies with me: she likes mango or peach. And I started the cut she's opted for in recent years, a blunt bob she asks for "just below the ears."

And when I'm with Nana like this, chatting about school and work and home, it's easy to forget about Alzheimer's. It doesn't loom heavy in the room like a ghost, it's as though it steps outside the door and lets us have that time together. Laughing, as Nana proclaims, "Seems like you've been cutting for a while! I'm going to have no hair left!"

It sometimes strikes me how infrequently Nana complains about losing her memory. She's definitely aware of it, sometimes repeating a question and following it up with "did I already ask you that?" But oftentimes she just treats it like a fact that is. As though the real important focus for her is hearing how her daughter and granddaughter's weeks have been, getting good coffee, and seeing if anything's new around town. The other stuff, the memory, the loss of it, that's just something that is.

I see this great capacity for moving forward in both Nana and Stukely. Both were approached by large challenges and met them with consistent forward momentum, with a focus on what is actually important to them. For Stukely, he faced the loss of community and responded by building a new one. For Nana, she faces losing her memory and responds by being present in the moment.

I hope to meet challenges in my life with the same forward movement, the same confidence in myself that any challenges will not be the thing that defines me. I want to show the same independence and class I have long associated with my grandmother as I finish my schooling and move into a post-graduate world.

In my career aspirations working in Parks and Recreation, I will undoubtedly approach many challenges while planning events and maintaining natural spaces. I hope to work through these challenges while giving the people I work with grace and setting an example I would be proud for people to follow.

Learning about my family's genealogical history through my mother's work has introduced me to many inspiring ancestors, who have shown me that the blood that runs through my veins has persisted through periods of history where even survival was not always likely. I have found stories of resilience, integrity, and perseverance. And like you've seen here, they echo in my family today.

Nana is one of the most inspirational people I know. One of my favorite people on this Earth. And I hope that future generations look at her story, like I look through Stukely's, as a tale of getting back up again, and making it all work out through anything.

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