



I call them “nana-isms”, and I carry them with me wherever I go and find them useful no matter what situation I am in. They are, in essence, beautiful pieces of wisdom expressed so simply yet poetically, that it’s almost impossible to consider them as anything but the truth.

**Who she is and how they met:**

96-year old Jessie Lichauco is a lady who has lived through, seen and experienced so much of the world. Nana, as her grandchildren fondly call her, met and fell in love with my grandfather while he was on a Philippine government independence mission to the United States. After receiving a marriage proposal, she came to the Philippines by boat in 1933 at the age of 19 in order to explore the country she would live in. She currently enjoys life as a mother of 7, a grandmother of 18 and great grandmother to 3. Nana is someone who has met

every president since the time of the last Governor General, including Aguinaldo, and is known to take strangers into her home without question because she feels it’s the right thing to do.

**Nana’s Heart:**

Guided by an admirably solid set of principles and a heart that seems to overflow with possibility, this is a lady who has done more than touch people’s lives- she has left an invisible imprint, that will last a lifetime. My grandmother’s life experiences have ranged from living in Manila during the war, being a diplomat’s wife in London in the 1960’s, maintaining a home in Belmont, Massachusetts for her children that were studying abroad, and lastly living the past 63 years in a home on the Pasig River in Santa Ana.

**Their life together:**

It is at this grand old home on

# Nana-isms

Sunshine de Leon recounts words of wisdom shared by her grandmother about love and marriage...

the river that I now sit and reflect on all the lessons I have learned from my many moments spent by “nana’s” side. I have found her “universal” thoughts useful not only in my life but often catch myself quoting her as I share advice with friends.

I never knew my grandfather, he passed away a few months before I was born. However, their marriage was the perfect union of opposites – my grandfather, Marcial Lichauco, was rational, organized, detailed and very intellectual, and my grandmother, well...is all heart. Having never been, as she says “willfully unmarried”, this widow proudly wears her wedding ring and says that she has been married 75 years, 38 years with a husband and 37 years without!

**Nana and Marcy:**

When I ask nana about her own marriage, she explains her belief that she and “Marcy”, as she calls him, were “guided” to be together and that although they were opposite in character, the thing shared in common was adjustability. Nana emphasizes that there are compromises every step of the way, that you cannot always have exactly what you want, and that in everything you do, you must think not just of yourself, but how it affects others. “The words ‘I want and I don’t want’ are not really permissible for a



happy marriage and a happy life”. Sometimes you have to settle for contentment instead of happiness. There are moments of happiness in every life, but it is mostly contentment.”

Some of those greatest happy moments were when Nana and my grandfather were exploring the world together. They traveled for 8 years before they had children and while they were still young because, in her words “they wanted to still walk over the cobblestones instead of being wheeled over them.” Nana believes that it’s better to have the memories of the trips and remember them together rather than always looking forward to them.

**Eternal love:**

The love she still feels for my grandfather is clearly evident today by the name she gave to a puppy she adopted a few years

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ago. Nana named her whippet "Gem" because she always told her husband that as long as she had him by her side, she needed no other jewels.

When it comes to finding the right partner to build your life with, I have been constantly reminded that there is a great difference between love and compatibility and it's important to have both, but if you have to choose, choose compatibility. Being a romantic at heart, this was the one piece of wisdom I always questioned. With her characteristic patience, Nana reminds me that love is an overwhelming emotion and as such, often overshadows any common sense. It is important to understand that loving someone does not necessarily mean that you are compatible with him or her for a lifetime! Compatibility ensures that there is something else beyond the emotional and physical and this is what allows friendship to exist within a couple. "I was a developing entity under your grandfather's presence" Nana has often mused.

**Nana's wisdom:**

My grandmother continues sharing her wisdom by explaining that a good marriage is always in a state of being able to make fire – like when you have hot coals in the fireplace. Her eyes sparkle as she paints a picture we all know but don't always recognize, "In this state, you can always play around with the warmth and embers of the hot coals and ashes to rekindle them into flames of love and desire. The problem with having continuous flames is that the fire will inevitably extinguish, yet if you don't have fire in your relationship, there is nothing to build on." Sometimes, she adds with a very serious look on her face, "people make the mistake of treating marriage like a commodity – like something beautiful to possess and hang on the wall, which eventually you pass so many times that you no longer notice it. Love is not something that should



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be taken for granted – it can't be ignored and over the years needs maintenance and care."

It's important to not only look at the commitment as forever binding, but to look at your decision from all directions and not to be bedazzled by just any one thing. And if there is ever any doubt once you have accepted a proposal, it is NEVER too late to change your mind. Nana states with a matter-of-fact practicality, "You can still change your mind at the altar – just excuse yourself and gracefully exit. Do yourself that favor as it's much easier to undo a wedding than a marriage."

**Marriage:**

The essential ingredients to a healthy partnership are respect, trust, friendship and affection. You must know each other's quirks and not try to change them, as well as feel comfortable with each other and not be guarded all the time. It is, she reveals, very possible to love someone but not like them, but that love allows a person to overlook any disappointing traits and habits. In addition, my grandmother believes without

question that tolerance is the key to making any relationship work and on the contrary, it is an inability to forgive and let things go which can be the most poisonous element. She emphasizes this point by mentioning that bringing things up that have happened in the past when having an argument in the present is particularly harmful.

When you marry a man or woman, you also marry their family so my grandmother recommends that the next step is to gradually endear yourself to your in-laws, and to your mother in law in particular. Since a mother has devoted her life to taking care of her child, a certain amount of apprehensiveness and fear of losing a certain place in her child's life is to be expected. To avoid any difficult situations, she advises that a wife, for example, not expect her husband to abandon his family and not be jealous of any closeness he has to his mother. She explains, "There should be no competition because you both love the person in a different way and one does not substitute the other. Respect the

parents and appreciate their love for their own child."

Sitting on the porch overlooking the enormous rubber tree, Nana and I watch the constant flow of water lilies and boats passing on the river. I feel fortunate that I have a person and a corner of this busy world of ours where I can go to for an education to help me with the ways of life. Whether the concerns I come to her with are mundane or more serious in nature, my grandmother has always had either an answer, which makes the problem so much simpler than it seemed, or one that just makes me burst out in laughter. Her ability to slow down and learn from her experiences has taught her to look straightforward, above, beyond, through and under all at the same time, and perhaps this is where the power of her wisdom lays. As I close my eyes for a second, I remember the most powerful words she so often said to me, "Just be patient and true to yourself, and you will see that things have a way of falling into place. Open your eyes, and your heart and everything else will follow." 