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A haunting familiarity

As a child I was blessed with a grandmother I lived with and loved more than life itself. She died soon after the birth of my first daughter.

When I was in grade school in Baltimore, each October she created a day for us that was joy personified - lunch at Hutzler's department store, followed by live entertainment at the Hippodrome, where the likes of Eddie Cantor, Jimmy Durante and Al Jolson performed.

On Oct. 20, 1991, at the same time of year as my grandmother's and my annual adventure of long ago, my husband and I agreed to include our home in the annual Center City Residents' Association House Tour. An event occurred that afternoon that I have never forgotten. Toward the end of the day's tours, an elderly woman with gorgeous blue eyes approached me. She said our home was beautiful and explained that she especially loved a teacup in our dining room. Her eyes misted as she told me that her mother had one like it. Moved by her kindness and a strange and haunting familiarity, I decided that the teacup she admired must be given to her, and I went to find it.

But when I returned, she was gone. It was then I realized that my visitor's eyes were the exact color of my grandmother's, and that her familiarity was an exquisite graciousness that each shared.

Now I don't believe that the visitor was a messenger from my grandmother, or that my sweet guest was sent by a mystical force. But I do see her visit as a reminder that kindness - if you allow yourself both to give and receive it - creates the strength to endure, and it cushions life's inevitable cruelties, betrayals and injustices.

SaraKay Smullens
Philadelphia