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## Spirit of Excellence

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## Spirit of Excellence

*Rachel Masi*

As the lights dimmed and they began to talk of the winners, her picture came on the screen. The video showed her in her element, the very beauty of her smile and care for everyone around her while she performed the simple act of playing with children. To my grandmother, Mickey Segal, this is how life should be. If it were up to her, no one would be older than six.

That night my grandmother won the Spirit of Excellence Award along with six other honorees. She was pleased to be honored and accepted the invitation humbly, but this honor meant nothing to her. Nana wrote 19 books on child development, and she founded the Family Center and the University School. This year she retired as Dean of the Family Center. She is famous in the world of education and will remain a professor at Nova Southeastern University. But she has never spoken to me of her accomplishments or her success.

These things I know only because I have asked and listened to other relatives. Once I was asked by a friend of my grandmother's if I knew about all the great things she has done for the school and others who surrounded her. At that time, I answered her with a simple, "Yes, I should know."

And then it occurred to me that I *do* know my grandmother-- I know of her as exactly that-- my grandmother. She never cared for me to know her as the founder of this or the author of that. To me she is the lady who always played dolls with me and had more toys at her house than I did at mine. She taught me how to play ping-pong and jacks, how to throw a tantrum, and how to live.

At heart, my grandmother is a child and I believe that is what makes her so good at what she does. I admire my grandmother for her strength, devotion, and love for all. As the tape rolled that night and the narrator spoke of my grandmother, a tear came to my eye. The year was a hard one for Nana as she suffered from a stroke the year before, but she never showed any signs of defeat. To her it was only another obstacle. I have come to realize how my grandmother has touched so many, and that night it all seemed to come together.

That evening in September at the Omni Hotel, Hillary Clinton was the keynote speaker. I had been looking forward to hearing her speak and maybe getting the chance to shake her hand. The most powerful woman in America was staring me in the face. After she ended her speech, I was able to shake her hand as she departed the ballroom. Wow! I shook Hillary Clinton's hand! (She has soft skin, if you were wondering.) That was a moment I will never forget. At first I thought this was the most exciting thing that could happen. I could not wait to tell all my friends about the evening, but when I did, I found myself speaking mostly of my special grandma. And I realized that the truth is I would rather hug my grandmother and tell her I love her than spend an hour talking to Mrs. Clinton about her role in the White House.