



Poems, Banana Bread, & Tiny Keys

My grandmother taught me that memorizing can be good but that understanding is even better.



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To a young boy, it seemed like a pretty good deal. My grandmother wanted me to memorize poems. Every week when we came to visit, if I could recite one of her poems, she would give me a loaf of banana bread—a small loaf, just my size, made especially for me.

At first, my goal was just to get the bread. It was warm and wonderful, sometimes with nuts inside and on top, but always fresh out of the oven and timed for delivery when we arrived at the door. I can still smell the aromas of the kitchen, still see the larger loaves she baked for family, neighbors, and friends, still remember the delight on my father's face as my grandmother—his mother—offered him a slice.

And if I would repeat the poem she had taught me the week before, I got a child-sized loaf all for myself, with its crunchy, buttery crust; a soft-yet-textured middle; and hints of vanilla and banana. And was that cinnamon? I always wondered if she used cinnamon. All I had to do was repeat the poem, and the prize was mine.

Here is one of the first poems I learned:

*Have a place for everything,
And put everything in it.
Then when you need to find it,
You can find it in a minute.*

I have thought about that poem repeatedly over the years, most often when I have been helping my children learn to take responsibility for organizing their own space and put possessions in a place where they can be—unlike my car keys—easily found.

And when I would teach my children about organizing, I would repeat my grandmother's poem, remember her banana bread, and most of all, remember the gentle guidance she gave to a young boy by placing helpful thoughts in his head.

After a while, my goal shifted. Yes, I still liked getting the bread, savoring every morsel as I ate it with a cold glass of milk. But my goal became to try to understand the poem. I think it particularly pleased Grandma when I could explain the meaning and not just say the words. I know I pleased her when my actions showed that I understood—for example, I remember telling her one time how I had organized my room so that everything had a home, and how easy it was now to keep track of where things were.

Over the years, I have thought that Grandma's poems are not unlike the messages we receive from our Heavenly Father. They are often messages He sends through the scriptures, through His Son, Jesus Christ, or through prophets and apostles and other Church leaders. And I think Heavenly Father is pleased when I can remember the words. In response, He gives me spiritual bread that sustains and refreshes me.

But I think Heavenly Father is even happier when I show by my actions that I understand what His words mean. "If any man will *do* his will," the Savior said, "he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17; emphasis added).

Here's another poem my grandmother taught me, one I repeat all the time to my children:

*Hearts, like locks, open with ease
With the use of tiny keys.
And don't forget that two of these
Are "Thank you, sir," and "If you please."*

After all this time, Grandma, I think I can now explain some of the meaning of those words by offering my thanks to you. You used a tiny key to unlock my heart, and you taught me the difference between being a hearer and a doer (see James 1:22). For that, I am eternally grateful. ■