

Love is Alive

As we publish a history-themed issue, I'm thinking about one of the women who made my own history possible.

WHEN I WAS three days old, my dad had a heart attack, and while my mom was by his side at the hospital, my grandma, Pearl Kaltenbach, cared for me. When I got older and learned to speak, I couldn't pronounce her last name, so I called her "Pocky." Forty years later, I still call her that.

Most of my memories of Pocky are funny ones. When I was a small child, I was in her Okmulgee living room throwing a battery and trying to catch it—but instead, I accidentally whacked my grandma with it. Without a thought, Pocky whipped out her dentures and exclaimed that I'd knocked her teeth out: "Look what you did!" I wiggled out; my family roared with laughter.

Man, Pocky's laugh. I never felt more successful as a human than when I got my grandma laughing. Some of our best memories as a family are times when she'd start laughing so hard she'd cry. As she's gotten older, I've taken to ribbing her about what she gets up to with the ladies who take care of her. "Pocky," I'll ask, "Are Lillie and Gerthie taking you out drinking later? Y'all gonna pound some tequila shots up at the bar?" Pocky's teetotaling self will look up at me with mirth in her eyes, her face turning a little red, and say, "No, I don't do that." No drinker, Pocky: She's been a faithful and regular Church of Christ attendee her whole life. Pocky loves Jesus, y'all.



My grandmother, Pearl Kaltenbach (née George) in an undated photograph from the 1940s

Because of COVID, I hadn't seen my grandma since Christmas 2019. But I recently got a call that she didn't have long, so I drove to Prague to see her. When I entered her bedroom, her wig and glasses were off, and her teeth were out. She saw me, her eyes got real big, and she smiled. In that moment, she looked just like a baby, and I kissed her on the head, thinking of how she cared for me when I was a newborn. I sat next to her bed and held her hand, telling her how much I loved her, how thankful I am to have known her, how I think about her every single day.

My grandma died on May 29 of this year. I could fill this issue with stories of all she's seen and survived. For everything bad she's endured—and it's been a whole lot more than most—her goodness and wonder and ability to love others has remained intact. What a spiritual feat that is.

As you read this history-themed issue of *Oklahoma Today*, I hope you'll think about the people in your life who came before. If they're still alive, I hope you'll go see them. Ask them their stories. Record them if you can. If they're not still here, I hope you'll close your eyes, bring them before you in your mind, and honor them for what they gave. Pearl Kaltenbach will be a part of my soul as long as I live, and I'm not sure I've ever typed a sentence that's made me feel more proud than that.

NATHAN
Nathan Gunter, Editor-in-Chief
nathan.gunter@TravelOK.com



NATHAN GUNTER

Okie Notes

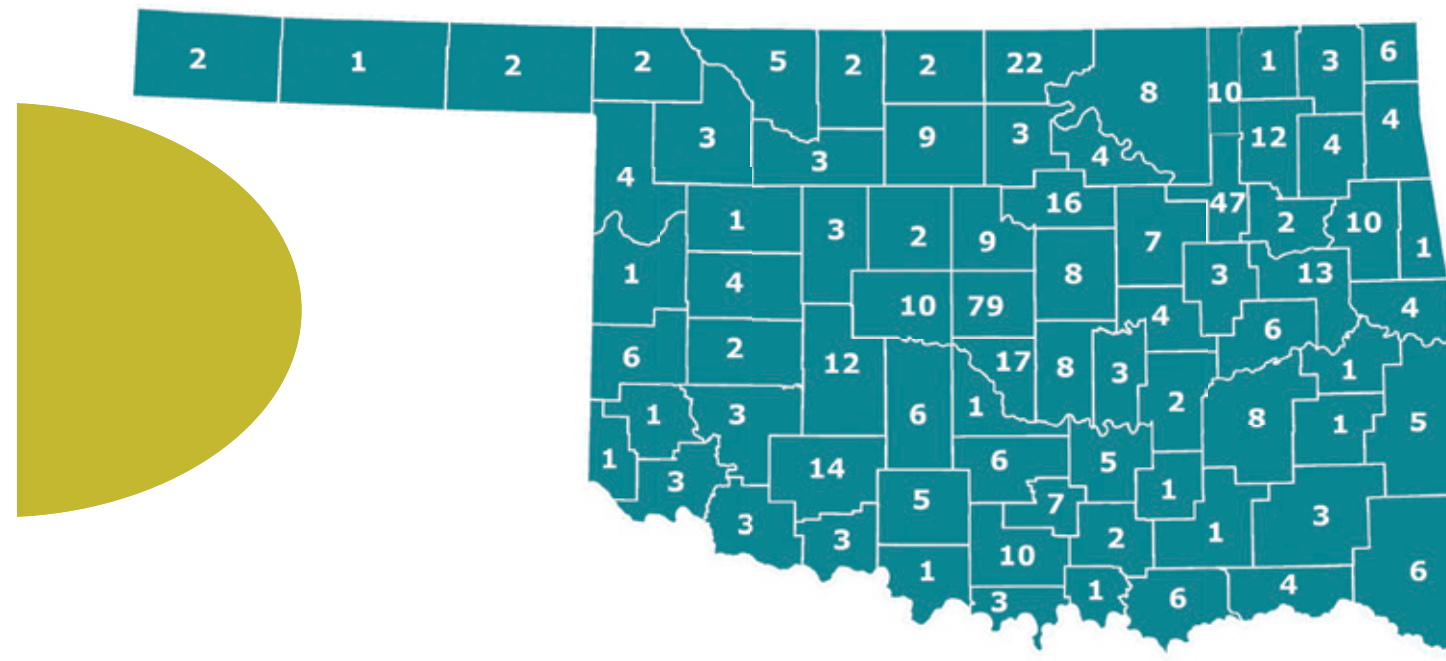
HERE ARE SOME OF THE MOST EXCITING OKLAHOMA EXPERIENCES I'VE ENJOYED RECENTLY. WHAT ARE YOURS? EMAIL ME AT Nathan.Gunter@TravelOK.com

- Maybe the most delicious bites of food I've ever tasted were the Pork Belly Pops at Chamber (above), the restaurant in the **Tulsa Club Hotel**. tulsaclub.com
- The **Junction Coffee** bus parks in my neighborhood every Wednesday and outside Kerr Park, across the street from my office, every Thursday. Check 'em out at junctioncoffeeokc.com.
- My friend Auvrey and I had a magical night of dancing and revelry at **Angles**, the legendary Oklahoma City dance club. anglesokc.com
- Megan and I loved watching Comanche artist **Eric Tippeconnic** paint his newest mural in one of my favorite Oklahoma towns, Colony. You'll read my feature about Colony in our November/December issue. colonyok.com
- It was good to see the **Oklahoma City Dodgers** beat the Sugar Land Space Cowboys, who had the Astros' José Altuve for the night. okcdodgers.com

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Number of museums (estimated) per county.



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