

**A Devoted Inspiration and Glowing Role Model:
A Biography of Amelia Catherine Grimm
By Noah Callahan**

When I think back to my time I spent living with my grandparents as a young child, the first memories that surface are the times my great-grandmother visited.

Once it was known that she would be coming over, all nine of my mother's siblings would excitedly rush around. Whenever Great-Grandma came over, other relatives would visit, to see her and catch up with the family. My grandmother's large house was filled with an indescribable excitement in these days. With cousins, aunts, and uncles I scarcely see, even as a toddler I was swept up with enjoyment.

Amongst all the unfamiliar faces in my grandmother's house, one that I never failed to recognize was my great-grandmother. She has short white hair that falls slightly below her neck and rectangular frame glasses. The most memorable part of her appearance to me was her smile. I barely knew her as a child and I was still drawn to her warm presence. As I got older and moved out of my grandparents' house, I got to see her less and less. I did hear about her from my mom and other relatives. I knew she had eight children, all having names starting with "B." I knew she spent most of her life in New Jersey and served for the coast guard, and even that she was an orphan.

Despite these small facts I felt I didn't know her as well as I should. In 2014 some of her children, my grandmother and my great aunts and uncles, hosted a surprise 90th birthday party for her. I was excited because I didn't

get to see her often, so it would be nice to catch up. Amidst the over one hundred family members and friends in attendance I only got to see her once and never spoke a word except for “Hi.” Recently, I was looking back on that party letting it sink in that she is now ninety-three years old. Knowing about her being an orphan, and her work with the coast guard, I was determined to find out more about what filled ninety-plus miraculous years of her life.

Amelia Catherine Grimm was born on September 30th 1924 in Holyoke, Massachusetts. She lived with her parents and her older sister Leigh, and her younger sister Peg. The first few years of Amelia’s life quickly proved to be challenging. Amelia’s parents weren’t financially able to support Amelia and her sisters so they had relatives, mainly uncles, around the house to help with various chores that needed to be done. Unfortunately, Amelia’s parents’ poor financial state grew to the point where they had to send Amelia and Leigh away to two different girls’ homes.

The time leading up to Amelia’s departure from her parent’s house was sad and difficult for her. Before Amelia knew she was going to be sent away as well she complained and cried to one of her uncles about the departure of her sister, to which he responded, “If your going to cry so much, then you can go too!” Eventually, the day came when Amelia would have to part ways with her family. She was only three at the time but was just as sad to be separated from them. Peg ended up staying with her parents despite the parting of Amelia and Leigh.

In 1927 Amelia was dropped off at the age of three at Mount Saint Vincent Girls' Home in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. In 1881 the Sisters of Providence founded Mount Saint Vincent. The sisters housed orphans, and children whose parents were unable to support them, like Amelia. Despite the difficult and saddening condition Amelia was put in, Amelia always had a smile on her face and tried to look at the glass half full. Amelia adjusted to her circumstances in time, and made many friends, as there were 150 children in Mount Saint Vincent. The children occupied themselves with simple pleasures such as various plays, which they directed, and games like hopscotch and tag. Mount Saint Vincent also possessed one singular roller skate for all one hundred fifty kids. The girls would take turns helping each other balance with both feet on one skate.

One of the biggest influences to Amelia early on was God. Mt. St Vincent was a catholic orphanage so the kids attended multiple services a week. Amelia became Catholic at the age of three, as Mount Saint Vincent was a Catholic orphanage. Mount Saint Vincent provided academic and religious studies, both of which Amelia assiduously pursued. She liked the prospect of learning. She was especially fond of late night classes that the elder children got to attend. The thought of being one of the "big kids" was so impressive to her. At the girls home the older children were allowed to drink coffee out of little tin cups. When Amelia was old enough to do so she would take sips out of the little cup with joy and a sense of achievement.

After ten long years of personal growth Amelia left Mount Saint Vincent. Amelia was set on attending high school, and finishing her education as most did not attend college back then. She had no clue how she would find housing while she was in high school, as she was too old to stay at Mount Saint Vincent but she left it to God and knew he would provide. "We all go through times, I think I still do it now but we always go back to trusting God, and put it in his hands and hand it all over to him," Through some connection Amelia got in contact with a family that was willing to give Amelia a home while she was in high school. Amelia immediately contacted them and quickly started work with the Warner family. The Warner's provided a bed for Amelia to sleep in exchange for being a caretaker in the latter half of the day.

Amelia attended West Field High School In West Field, Massachusetts. High school passed by quickly for Amelia. She made some friends and did well in her courses and eventually graduated at the age of eighteen. Amelia was eager to find a job once high school wrapped up because the Warners were having difficulty housing her with their monetary state. Amelia stayed with the Warner's for about a year until she found interest in a job outside of Massachusetts. One time Amelia was walking back from a local market and saw a poster with Uncle Sam sporting the American flag, pointing saying "We need you for the North Carolina coast guard" At that moment she knew God and Uncle Sam were calling her.

Amelia hurriedly started making arrangements to go to North Carolina. The Warner's were pleased with her plans and provided a home for her until

she was ready to leave. Amelia packed clothes, one day worth of meals, said her goodbyes to her friends and the Warners, and boarded the train to North Carolina. Amelia was anxious, as this was her first time she would be truly on her own. Nevertheless she was confident God would get her through it. And so He did. Amelia was on the train for a whole day before the train arrived at Elizabeth City, North Carolina. The coast guard quickly accepted Amelia, as they were desperate for volunteers with World War II starting. Amelia was assigned to be on patrol, which included spending most nights walking around the perimeter of the coast guard's facility.

Within a week Amelia went from being a normal high school girl to a member of the Elizabeth City Coast Guard in North Carolina. One night on patrol Amelia took notice of another guard on patrol. His name was Robert Joseph Grimm, and Amelia thought he looked lonely. She approached him and introduced herself. They made small talk and eventually became friends. They weren't able to converse too much when on patrol but started spending time together on their own. After a few weeks of seeing each other, Robert proposed to Amelia. She said yes, and they were to be married in five months.

They had a small wedding in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Everything was set for them to be wedded. It was a hot summer day and everyone attending was sweating. Unfortunately for the spectators, the wedding was dragged out longer than expected due to the priest being absent. After it was evident that the priest was not present, Amelia and Robert called him to find out he had forgotten completely about the wedding. When the priest finally

arrived he was sweating bullets. The priest stuttered throughout the ceremony and was shaking nervously the whole time. "I thought we would never get over the vows, God bless him," laughed my great-grandmother when recalling the day. Amelia was unsure if it was the fact that he was so late or the heat that caused his actions, but nevertheless they were just as comical.

Within a year of arriving in North Carolina Amelia was already married at 21, in 1945. Once Amelia and Robert were married she thought her time with the coast guard had ran its course, so she moved to Leonardo, New Jersey to start a family with her husband. Amelia entered Elizabeth City alone in the world hearing God's calling and leaving Elizabeth City, married to her soul mate. Leonardo was a nice little town, filled with town homes, and simple people to inhabit them. Life was quieter in Leonardo, which was just what Amelia was looking for after having a hectic upbringing. Robert quickly found work, and Amelia stayed at the house to tend to different chores.

On April 5th , 1947 Robert Joseph Grimm, Jr. was born. Robert or "Bobby" as he was called was the oldest out of eight children who were to be born in the following nine years. After Robert came Barry, Barbara, Brenda, Bernard, Brian, Bruce, and finally Bridget on September 23rd 1959. With Robert at work all day, and eight kids in the house Amelia had a lot on her hands. All of her kids attended catholic school nearby their house. They would all come home for lunch so Amelia had to have eight meals that they could quickly eat before having to return to class.

When the kids weren't in school they liked playing outside. Amelia often joined in their games and helped them put on plays. One time Barry planned to have a big entrance from the cellar but the door wouldn't open. So after waiting a large amount of time Amelia had to open the door to find Barry waiting patiently on the steps humming to himself, as if he was content being stuck under the door.

There was also an apple tree in their backyard, which was a key point of many of their games. The children climbed it and even descended from it to make a grand entrance for whatever game they were playing. One time Amelia was putting the kids to bed when she realized Barry, who was only five, was nowhere to be found. She was terrified and ran outside frantically calling him. She then saw his pajama pants on the sidewalk outside their house. Confused, she went running down the road looking for him. Eventually she came to the fire station where she found him with only a pajama shirt on. She brought him home to his siblings who all laughed at the sight of their mother carrying their bare legged brother down the street.

Amelia became acquainted with most people in the neighborhood especially the Smiths. The Smiths had eight kids. However their mother died and the father remarried and had another seven kids. Naturally there were lots of neighbors around for Amelia's children to play with. Often times the kids would go out in the field and come back bruised and dirty from one of their adventures. "Trying to keep white shirts white was the problem" commented my great-grandmother, while telling the story. There were often

many people in the house, as Amelia's children would have their friends over. However, sometimes it would become too much for Amelia to handle. Often she would suggest they play outside instead of gallivanting throughout the house. "I opened the door for the first eight kids who came in" my great-grandmother jokingly added.

On top of maintaining her children and their house, Amelia always found time to go to church and pray, and instructed her children in doing so. Amelia helped prepare the altar for mass on many occasions and sang with the choir. Being involved with the church put many opportunities in front of Amelia. Once Amelia was invited to sing with the church choir in London for the anniversary of D-Day. The children were sad to have their mother absent for some time but their father took time off to watch over them.

Amelia continued to stay involved in the church through the years and still attends mass every day. She also raised her kids to be faithful Christians and follow a life of God. As time went by and her kids started moving out and raising families of their own, Amelia started taking up her own hobbies, like reading and cooking. She is particularly fond of the author David McCullough and his work "*The Great Bridge*" and even encountered him on a few occasions.

To bring the family together after her kids began their own families Amelia started hosting family barbecues. These barbecues were immensely popular and even neighbors and friends came to them. Once Amelia hosted ninety-six people, most of which lingered on as they significantly enjoyed the

food. The lingering visitors were a slight annoyance, but Amelia was just happy to share her food with people she cared for.

Amelia's late life was very peaceful and filled with little disturbance. Attending college graduations was a joy to her as she was never able to attend college herself. Despite years of little stress, Amelia was struck with the loss of her husband, Robert Grimm, in 2009. She was distraught and greatly saddened by his passing, but just like she always did, she kept living and continued her life joyfully.

In recent times Amelia, or "Grandma Grimm" enjoys going on walks, attending church, and reading books when she finds the time. Her daughters Barbara and Brenda visit her for a weekend every month to keep her company. While visiting, Barbara and Brenda go on walks and garden with her.

Despite being the grandmother of over ten kids and great-grandmother of another ten, she never fails to call on their Birthdays. Whenever she receives a call from one of her grandchildren she always answers with "What's cooking?" Whenever talking to her I can't help but smile, for her natural happiness is radiant. As well as managing her own hobbies, she goes to church every day at 6 o'clock in the morning to prepare the altar. To this day Amelia avidly prays and worships God. Amidst her positivity, loyalty, and determination, when life proved to be difficult, I think Amelia Catherine Grimm is a golden standard for a Christian role model.