

Allison Rizzetta – Flowers by Kings

My summer is recalled in measures of coastal heat waves and petals, small talk and snippets of what I have hereby come to know as ‘moral floral’ teachings. Flowers by King’s in Virginia Beach has been family owned for 80 years, a legacy preserved by their unwavering dedication to provide truly quality flowers to people. Portraits of Grandma & Grandpa King still hang over the lush display of dish gardens and orchids in the front shop. It has been an honor to work under the guidance of the businesswomen who have inherited, and now operate the shop- they who *always* make their customer number one, even if living up to that promise at times calls for personal sacrifice. King's business model is one that I will hold with me, long after the humid air has settled in this place- just like I'll remember their moral floral snippets such as "cleanliness is next to godliness," "it's either feast or famine" and our many meaningful discussions ranging from business practices to politics, family to religion, and how, at the heart of it all, one's personal beliefs are often reflected in the way one's small-business is run.

Throughout the summer, I received the opportunity to tour wholesale operations, nurseries and other floristry shops, each one sharing their own stories and wisdom, and always, a friendly smile. Something mysterious inspired everyday to be a little different than the last, and I was always left wondering what tomorrow would carry. A fresh shipment of 'Spiders' and 'Birds' to be processed?-terrific! A new baby arrangement to be designed in a pot that looks like a chicken?- lovely! A lesson in the pros and cons of joining a wire-service?- I never knew! And these exhalations could go on and on. I'm ever-thankful for the chance I got to spend at King's (where I asked approximately one hundred thousand questions along the way that the ladies not only put up with, but answered with genuine enthusiasm). This summer has been a formative one for me, as I have learned much about myself, as well as the floral industry, but maybe most of all, I learned about the goodness and the power of connecting with people.

I am left with a haunting appreciation of the character of those human relationships, which cannot be quantified by any of my rolling words, but only expressed through, perhaps, the essence of a flower. How many times did the whole shop pause work to herald the arrival of the boisterous wholesale delivery man, who even came in on his day off to buy flowers for his girlfriend, while we were encouraged by his mischievous but ever-joking smile, not to tell his wife (like the passing of a secret daisy mum from one hand to the other). And how often did we smile when the good old boys from the car shop next door came in to chat about the weather (together, we were like an unruly, but delicate, summertime bouquet)?

Being in the shop often felt more like being in the midst of a book than a job; everyone had a special story to tell. Mama King often spoke of her first trip to Virginia Beach, where she found that the seafood made her so nauseous that she almost headed back to North Carolina- thankfully she didn't, because she also found the man that would marry her into the business (how uniquely beautiful life is, like Mama's favorite flower, baby's breath, that the meeting of one person can change the course of a life). Her daughter shared the hardships, as well as the joys, of greenhouse growing for the shop, and a plethora of knowledge of horticultural plants (symbolized by a tray of poinsettias, their joyful Christmas beauty displayed only after the long struggle to fulfill their finicky requirements for periods of darkness). I have even heard some of the tail ends of customer's tragic plights, but I have also seen the beauty and comfort that is derived from the careful creation of a sympathy arrangement (I recall a spray of flowers and seashells for a little boy's grave, who passed many decades ago).

I have come to my own conclusion that the florist industry is not one to enter for any of the misguided desires for glory or power or money, even, but rather because one has the simple, and heartfelt desire to help people express love, in shades of blooms. This line of work requires an intense desire to give, and give, and give, and in return, receive the blessing of playing a role in someone's story.

These things only skim the surface of all that I have seen and heard within the flower shop, and I will surely use them as I carry on my journey toward the future, although even I do not know exactly where that will lead. Come Christmastime, I will be visiting the shop again, but until then I will hold this summer close to my heart.