

Where There's a Will, There's a Way *Renie Burghardt*

Before World War II put an end to it all, my grandparents, who raised me, and I had been a prosperous family in our country, Hungary. Apa, (Hungarian for Dad) my grandfather, who was the only father I knew, was a judge in the small town where we lived. They also owned a farm where I often watched Apa till the soil with the help of his two oxen. He never shrank from hard work, and he took great pride in providing well for his family. Then – pouf – the war came and everything was gone, just like that!

When the war ended, life did not improve for the people of Hungary. Soviet occupation and the new communist government brought with it new atrocities and hardships. Because Apa spoke out against these atrocities, he was soon in danger of being imprisoned. We fled to freedom in the late fall of 1947.

A refugee camp in Austria then became our new home. Called a Displaced Persons Camp, Camp Spittal housed hundreds of destitute refugees. Although the camp was dismal and cramped, we were grateful to God to be there, for we had a roof over our heads, were clothed with donated goods, and fed daily.

So what did it matter that we didn't have a penny to our name?

fect granddad is unafraid of big dogs and fierce storms but absolutely

However, it mattered a great deal to Apa. He hated living off the charity of others; hated not being able to buy me the book I had glanced at longingly when we passed a bookstore in town.

Just beyond our dismal camp home was another world – a beautiful natural world of mountains, clear, cold streams, rolling flower-carpeted hills, and small farms dotted with grazing animals. It was this other world that ignited my imagination with its beauty and gave my heart hope. So I often slipped away from the crowded world of the camp, and roamed the hills and valleys, explored and grew to love nature, and filled my stomach with wild blueberries or other of nature’s offerings. On one of these rambles, I soon discovered the beautiful river Drau, just a half-mile walk from the camp, where I would often sit mesmerized at the surrounding mountains, and dreaming my childish dreams of better days. It became my favorite retreat, and one day I told Apa about it.

“A river?” he asked with great interest. “How far is this river from camp?”

“I’m not sure, but it takes me a half-an-hour to walk to it,” I replied.

“Good. Tomorrow I’ll go to the river with you.”

“Oh, Apa, you will love it,” I said enthusiastically. “It’s the Drau River, and it’s so beautiful!”

“I have always loved rivers. Rivers benefit people and animals,” he replied thoughtfully.

The following morning, Apa and I set out on our walk to the river Drau. Once we were there, I splashed around in the shallow, clear, rushing water, while he walked up and down the bank. After a while, I noticed that Apa was cutting some branches from the river willows growing all along the bank. By the time we headed back to camp, he had a large armful of them.

“What are you going to do with them?” I asked, on our way back to the camp.

“I will weave some baskets,” Apa replied. Suddenly, I remembered that in the past, Apa’s hobby had been weaving. He had made a beautiful settee for Anya (Grandma) and an adorable table and chair for me when I was five. But in the course of the war, all that had been forgotten.

“And what will you do with the baskets?” My curiosity was aroused.

“I will try and sell them to the Austrians.”

Soon, Apa found some old boards and bricks, and set up a worktable in front of our barrack. Then after peeling the willow branches, he began weaving his first basket. A large crowd soon gathered around to watch him. Some boys volunteered to get more willow branches for him.

“Thank you,” Apa told them. “And when I sell my baskets, I will pay you for your help.”

Within a short time, there were six beautifully woven baskets ready for market. Apa hung them on a long stick, flung them over his shoulder, and (to Anya’s dismay) looking like a hobo peddler, off he went to town. He returned a few hours later with the hobo stick minus the baskets. He had sold them all! Then he reached into his pocket and pulled something out, handing it to me. It was the new story book I had been longing for!

“Oh, thank you, Apa,” I shrieked, giving him a hug. “I can’t believe you were able to buy it.”

“You are very welcome. And never forget – where there is a will, there is always a way,” he said. Then he went off to pay the boys who had helped him gather more willow branches.

Apa continued with his new venture all summer, and even gave free lessons in basket weaving to anyone interested. After he sold the next batch of baskets, he bought himself a fishing pole, too, and a large frying pan, and building a fire outside the barrack, cooked a batch of the large fish he caught in the beautiful Drau River, and shared it with our neighbors. (Later,

he shared the fishing pole and frying pan as well!) It was most unusual to have the aroma of that frying fish wafting through the camp, where barracks were lined up like soldiers, and helpless people lived their lives in them, hoping and praying for something better.

My dear Apa's example was an inspiration to many at that camp. His motto became my motto in life, and it has always served me well!

Geode

For my grandfather

Carla Martin-Wood

Today I'm remembering a walk we took
down a wooded path when I was four.

The girl across the street had found
a mystical marble in those deep woods,
a cat's eye big enough to fill my tiny palm,
and I couldn't stop looking at it.

So I begged you to take me down that path
to see if there was such a marble,
just for me.

We walked all afternoon,
but there was nothing to be found,
except an ordinary rock that you picked up

energy that my grandchildren have - if only for self-defense." Gene

and gave to me.

It was plain, ugly, and covered with dirt,
not the same as the magickal orb of my desires.

Disappointment starred my lashes,
but I tucked the stone into my pocket,
not to hurt your feelings.

We walked back home silent.

There was no marble on that path for me,
and four years old I couldn't understand.

Then you knelt before the front steps like an altar.

Now, hand me that ol' rock, Baby Gal, and I did.

Your hammer swung down hard, cleaving it in two,
and inside: *a galaxy, a universe, a multitude of stars*
that I believed you'd made just for me,
but you just grinned and said,
If you look real close, you'll find stars everywhere.

On my wall today, photographs –
friends of every culture and persuasion,
across the globe, in my heart.

And on my shelf,
malachite, kyanite, and peacock ore,
all collected in that gulf of years that separate
me from you, and all of these,
your legacy of stars.

Grandpa's Car

Ginny Greene

An old car, his Model A sat two hours
each Saturday in front of our house while
he visited. Always old, it turned moreso
when I turned teen and knew shame vivid red.
There I was, humiliated, hiding
in its plush brown depths on the way to park
or zoo, so hoping no one I knew would
see me in that ancient flivver.

He sold
that old car (finally!), bought a powder blue
1956 station wagon, still
a Ford, loyal as he was. No longer
blushing, I sat in the front seat of his
car with its modern gadgets and sleek lines,
no longer ducking low when passing by
schoolmates.

But things change as we grow up, and
don't you know I'd be thrilled these days to be
seen sitting next to Grandpa, motoring
down the road in his putt-putt Model A.

have been out of town." Gene Perret ~S~ "One of the most powerful

Gran'pa Makes Beer

B. J. Adams

Heller Guyewski stepped out the backdoor and down the wooden steps of the clapboard house he had built sixteen years earlier. He carried a small box with empty bottles, a funnel, a siphon and other paraphernalia. A white towel hung from the pocket of his overalls.

Close on his heels he heard the footsteps of his four-year-old granddaughter, Marie. The pair crossed the yard between the cistern and the well and passed the grape arbor and vegetable garden where beans bloomed furiously and clusters of green tomatoes drooped from the vines. Before they got to the wire fence that enclosed the stockyard, they heard the grunts of a piglet. Through the gate they trooped. Clucking chickens scattered. Marie, in the pink frock her grandma had sewn, ran to the sty and released the piglet, which she had made her pet.

“Come on, pig,” she said. “We’re gonna help Gran’pa cap his beer.” The piglet chased its tail in excitement, snorting and further agitating the chickens. The cow mooed and stomped its feet at the commotion. Marie turned to run after Heller. The piglet unwound itself and chased after Marie. When the trio reached the back of the garage, Heller swung open the door to the dingy storeroom. The aroma of stored onions and potatoes greeted them. Marie and the piglet rushed in ahead of Heller, who went straight to a crock sitting on a small table. He took off

handclasps is that of a new grandbaby around the finger of a grand-

the lid. The smell of freshly brewed beer mingled with that of the vegetables.

Heller tasted a sip of brew. "Yes, it's ready," he said and began setting up his bottles.

"I want some, too," said Marie.

"No, this is beer. It's no good for you," said Heller, in his mixture of English and Ukrainian sprinkled with Polish.

"But you got some, Gran'pa. Please, Gran'pa."

Meantime, the grunting piglet rooted around the storeroom. Potatoes and onions began to roll around, knocking into the firewood laid out to dry.

"Marie, take the pig outside," said Heller.

"OK, Gran'pa. Then can I have some beer?"

"No. I said it's no good for you."

Lower lip protruding, Marie shuffled out the door leading the piglet. Heller continued work. The beer foamed as he siphoned it into bottles. He had hardly started when back came Marie.

"Please, Gran'pa. I want some beer, too." Then, seeing the foam, she said, "Bubbles! I want bubbles."

Heller thought, "A little foam? No harm there." He reached for the spoon and scooped some. "Here. A little foam won't hurt you."

"M-m-m, that's good." Then the piglet returned. "Pig wants bubbles, too," said Marie. "Can pig have bubbles? Please, Gran'pa. Please." So Heller plopped a spoonful of foam on the floor. The piglet lapped it up and looked for more. Heller gave it another dollop and continued working, occasionally giving a little more foam to Marie and the piglet, which soon lost all interest in the potatoes and onions.

When Heller had finished tending the beer, he picked up the crock and utensils and turned to leave. Marie, who was by now sitting on the floor, could hardly get up. When she did, she took

two wobbly steps and fell. The piglet snorted and stumbled aimlessly, tripping on logs.

“Oh, no,” thought Heller. “No, no, no.” He put his equipment down, guided the piglet out, picked up Marie, closed the door and carried her back to the house. Molly, Heller’s wife, was in the kitchen dipping warm water from the reservoir on the side of the wood stove to wash dishes. Marie started crying.

“What’s happened?” asked Molly, also in a mix of English and Ukrainian with Polish overtones.

“I don’t feel good,” said Marie.

“What’s wrong?” asked Molly.

“I only gave her a little foam.”

“You what?”

“It was just foam.”

“What are you thinking? She’s just a baby!”

“But I didn’t give her anything to drink. It was just foam.”

“Just foam! You should know better,” Molly lapsed into Ukrainian as she dried her hands.

“I didn’t give her anything to drink. It was just foam,” repeated Heller.

Molly reached for Marie and stood her on the floor. “Come, little angel.” Molly held her hand to steady her. “Gran’ma’ll put you to bed.” Molly glared at Heller, then slowly took Marie from the kitchen, cooing words of comfort.

Heller called after them, “I didn’t think it would hurt.” Then realizing the hopelessness of his situation, he called, “I need to wash my crock,” and left the house. He herded the piglet back into its sty, gathered his things from the storeroom, and set them on a bench by the well. He lowered the bucket and thought, as he drew up the water, “Yes, I should’ve known better.”

He washed his equipment and set it on the bench to dry, then took a pouch from his pocket and rolled a cigarette. He lighted it, drew in the smoke, held it a moment, exhaled and felt a sense

of calm return. The cigarette brought memories of his brother, Fred, who had lived next door, whose widow and children still lived next door. Sometimes Heller and Fred would take a break from work to enjoy a cigarette together. It was Fred who had first come to Texas – to Anahuac. It had been Fred who persuaded Heller to leave their village of Verbytsia near Lviv to join him in 1911. Eighteen long months passed before Molly and their three children could join him. Heller puffed the cigarette. At that, he had had borrowed money from his employer because he was afraid war might break out before he could get his family to Anahuac. He snuffed the cigarette. Fred had died four years ago, in 1924.

Heller filled the water bucket again and carried it into the kitchen where by now Molly was washing dishes. He carefully replenished the reservoir and, as he turned to leave, he put his arm around her shoulders and gave her a little hug. She smiled at him and shook her head.

What Did We Know of Loss?

Carol Ayer

We behaved as we were supposed to,
stayed quiet and still.

We didn't kick the seats in front of us
nor torment each other
the way we did in the car.

“Grandparents are there to help the child get into mischief they haven't

But the words were empty to us.
What did we know of loss?
We lost marbles in summer
and sunlight in winter,
not people we loved.

Our mother cried softly
behind her black veil.
But when the priest spoke of dust and ashes
we thought only of our fireplace,
the chimney, and Santa Claus.

(We never could understand the difference
between Santa Claus and God.
Both remained unseen,
familiar only through drawings,
each requiring us to be good.)

At the reception we ran free,
laughed and twirled on the lawn.
Inside, we stole bits of cake and tart,
then climbed the stairs to play Battleship.

It wasn't until Christmas
that we finally grasped the truth:
Grandpa was gone
and he wasn't coming back.

Even then, we were more interested
in what we had received
than what had been taken away.

What did we know of loss?

To Dettner (My Grandmother)

Diana M. Raab

You took your life in the house where
we lived together forty years ago.

I was ten and you sixty.
Your ashen face and blonde bob
disheveled upon white sheets
on the stretcher held by paramedics
lightly grasping each end, and tiptoeing
down the creaking wooden stairs
you walked up the night before.
But now your body descended to the ambulance
and sirens swarmed like vultures
around the place I once called home.
I wonder why you left in such a way,
as the depression gnawed
at your gentle heart, which cared for me
since my very first push into the world.
I've learned from you
never to give up, but to find
a passion and thank you
I did
I live to write
so I shall never die.

have learned to keep the house tidy, the oldest grandchildren are on

The Power of Writing

Diana M. Raab

At the age of ten I found my grandmother dead in the room next to mine. On that sunny summer New York morning I knocked on her door to ask permission to go swimming in a friend's pool. I called Grandma's name, but she lay in her bed, beside the window. On her stomach sat *The End of the Affair*, by Graham Greene and a pair of reading glasses. I touched her face; it was stone cold. With a child's intuition, I sensed something was seriously wrong. I ran out of the room to phone my mother at work.

Within minutes, emergency vehicles lined our ordinarily quiet residential street. Two uniformed men carried my grandmother, strapped to a stretcher, down our creaky wooden stairs. I prayed they wouldn't drop her.

There wasn't much talk about my grandmother until one day more than twenty years later when my parents were moving from my childhood home in Queens, New York. While packing up their belongings, they stumbled upon her retrospective journal which she'd written after emigrating from Vienna in the early 1930's. Only after reading the document did I understand the deep roots of her depression, which tormented her entire life, and eventually led to her suicide at the age of sixty-one.

I tucked the journal away and ten years later pulled it out after confronting my own bout with depression. I wondered

hand to tear it to pieces." Christopher Morley ~§~ "Her grandmother,

about the genetic roots of the disease. In the end, the details of her tragic life drew me closer to her spirit.

My grandmother was orphaned during World War I at the age of twelve. While disturbingly unsympathetic soldiers marched through her hometown, she'd witnessed Russians killing a little boy on her childhood street. She wrote about trekking for hours across the countryside to the infirmary to find her mother dying of cholera. On the floor lined with bodies she had to identify the one belonging to her mother – an unimaginable task for anyone, especially a child.

Months later and barely fourteen, my grandmother immigrated to Vienna only to live in an orphanage, while working full-time in a bank and attending school. The pages of her journal shared the depths of her compelling survivor story.

While reading I realized how I'd never connected with another woman in the same way. As a child, I was an extension of her and even more so as an adult after her passing. With her own passion for the written word, she planted the seed for my passion for writing. She taught me the power of reading and how writing can make you feel better, as evidenced by her daily journaling and the propensity for leaving notes on the kitchen table. In fact, I vividly remember the morning she taught me how to type. One Saturday morning before breakfast, she invited me into her room.

“Have a seat,” she said, pointing to her vanity chair.

“I’m going to teach you how to type. This is a handy skill for a girl to have, plus you never know what kind of stories you’ll have to tell one day.”

She stood behind me, her reflection in the mirror – dark roots framed her bleached-blond hair and her glowing smile revealing the rather large space between her two front teeth. I wasn’t surprised to learn years later that as a young woman she’d won beauty contests in Vienna.

as she gets older, is not fading but rather becoming more concentrated.”

She took my right hand and positioned it on the home keys, carefully placing one finger at a time on each letter, repeating the same gesture with my left hand.

“This is the position your fingers should be in. When you become a good typist, you won’t have to look at the letters. Let’s see if we can type your name.”

With my left middle finger she had me press on the “D.” Then we moved to the right middle finger and moved up a row to type an “I.” Then my left pinky pressed the “A,” a tricky maneuver for a novice typist. She then instructed me to move my right thumb down to the bottom row to type an “N.” Then my left pinky typed the final “A.” I glanced up at the paper to see the impression of my efforts and then proudly looked up at my grandmother’s face in the mirror.

earing my mother say that my independence made my grandmother feel less needed, made me feel bad. “You see, you did it!” she said, squeezing my shoulders.

“Like anything in life, the more you practice, the better you’ll become. You must work hard to get results; you’ll learn that soon enough, my love.”

That moment-in-time marked my own lifelong commitment to writing. Days after learning how to type I alternated back and forth from writing stories in my journal to typing on Grandma’s Remington, much in the same way I do today – alternating from journal to keyboard. Thanks to Grandma, in college, I earned extra money typing term papers for other students, and as a young mother I chronicled my kids’ early years. Finally, as a breast cancer survivor and victim of depression, I wrote a memoir based on those experiences.

I had never thought about my grandmother’s depression until after my diagnosis when I met my own depressive demons. I had always feared depression more than death. In my twenties, thirties, and early forties, I veered away from any discussion

about depression. To me it was the poison that killed my grandmother and also infiltrated my mother's life. I never wanted depression to touch my life or my children's. My commitment to that concept dissipated. I seemed to grow less and less in control over my emotions. At the time, it was difficult to ascertain if my bouts of depression were due to premenopausal issues or my new diagnosis, or a combination of both.

I began reading about depression and its genetic component. I think some people, (and I may be one), prone to depression as a result of their genetic pool, and that trigger can spring us into the depressive realm. This is what happened to my grandmother as a result of her turbulent childhood and turbulent marriage.

Manic-depression is so common – afflicting about four million Americans. A few years ago I picked up *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* by Kay Redfield Jamison which provided me with tremendous insight into the disorder. Jamison is a psychiatrist also suffering from manic-depressive disease. Being affected by the very disease she treats her patients for provides her with compelling insight. In her book, she works hard helping the reader slip into the psyche of the depressive personality. She sums it up by saying, “My hair, like my moods goes up and down.” For many years, Jamison took lithium and said that once she accepted her illness, instead of fighting the concept, her life became much more bearable.

When we look for reasons why a loved one would take his or her life, we rummage through our memories, large and small, poignant and delightful, dramatic and banal, horrible and wonderful in the search of answers. After arriving at the end of my grandmother's journal I understood how a slow accumulation of a history filled with hardships and horror could result in sudden actions, seemingly inexplicable, yet somehow logical, such as suicide.

proper selection of grandparents.” William Osler ~§~ “Most grand-

Perhaps Labor Day Weekend in 1964, the day she took her life in the room beside mine, marked the end of summer and the beginning of my new school year, or yet another traumatic argument with her distant husband. That year also marked The Beatles coming to America, Jack Ruby sentenced to death, and South Vietnamese forces initiating the largest attack of the war against Communist guerrillas.

Although my grandmother chose to finally give up after a life spent in hardship, her life story was one she felt compelled to share in her retrospective journal. I'm glad that she wrote the journal and relieved that she chose to keep it tucked away in her closet, since she could have just as easily destroyed it. Had she done that, I never would have found it and writing her story would not have been possible.

Writing and studying my grandmother's life has been my way of keeping her alive. Sharing her story has also been a compulsion to understand who she was, what she had been through and why she ended her life. After reading her journal and knowing her for the first ten years of my life, I realize that there were many aspects of our personalities and sensibilities that were similar. We were both strong and resilient women in the face of disaster, and we were both caretakers.

Reading my grandmother's journal reminded me of the intrinsic value of writing and the value of passing on stories from one generation to the next. I believe that we stand on the shoulders of giants, but if we didn't know their stories, we wouldn't know that. My grandmother's journal was the greatest treasure she could have ever left me. Her words and life experiences have and will continue to inspire my own writing, as I hope my words will do for future generations.

Barbara and Louise

Rebecca Anne Renner

In August '04, Louise Roberts lost her left breast,
and she wasn't a woman anymore.

She was a scar,
a new padded bra,
a look in the mirror like self loathing,
but lower
around Estee Lauder rosa rosa lips.
Anything less just wasn't good enough.

Four years ago last July,
Barbara Renner got the news
and never doubted it.
She should have died in December,
then in May,
then in 2008,
and she never doubted it,
and she never gave up.

Louise Roberts told me to smile
and cross my ankles in front of men
and never let them know you're on to them.
She told me my breasts should always smell like
vanilla or lavender or both.
Anything less just wasn't good enough.

dren don't make a man feel old; it's the knowledge that he's married to

She willed me a sapphire bracelet,
her cheekbones,
a family full of gauzy photographs
and nothing more.

But Barbara Renner gave me her spirit.
She forgot her hair again today
and laughed about it,
'oh poo'.
She should have died last Sunday.
But she boiled peanuts with me today
and told me how much
I don't look like my mother.

But I look like Louise
and her Montreal air
and her daughter
and her cheekbones.

But all the Renners down the line
have green and gold eyes
and families made of cloth and skin and warmth,
not gauzy photographs.

I asked my Dad,
what makes our side of the family different?

He told me:
Love never divides.
It always multiplies.

Rainbow

Joanne Faries

skeins of yarn
pastel lilac or rich burgundy
small crochet hook
wielded by gnarled fingers
by touch, by memory
flick of the hook
transformed a line into an
afghan

nana's fingers danced
a loop pulled, no dropped stitches
hours of production
created cozy comfort

now on this cold damp day
I unfurl her art, her masterpiece
huddle under it for warmth
for peace
for her memory

parents is remembered not with rose petals but in the laughter and

The Dressing Table Discovery *Sarah Charstley*

My Gran looked more like a Mum than a Gran. A Mum with a few extra wrinkles. She was the epitome of style and elegance. Whenever she went out she wore a smart leather coat, a pair of shiny high-heels and diamond earrings that shot rainbows from the side of her head when they caught the light. Her make-up was always immaculate and accentuated her high cheekbones, large emerald eyes and perfect white teeth. But the thing I loved most about Gran was her hair: the way it rose into the air, all gathered-up and twisted high above her head like a dark shiny crown. She wore it in the same style every day, there was never a strand out of place. Gran's hair made her look like a movie star.

“Gran, how long is your hair when it's down?” I was eight-years-old and snuggled up next to Gran on her cozy leather sofa.

“As long as a piece of string,” Gran smiled, her lips forming a wide line across her face like a layer of pink icing on a cake.

I sipped from my mug of hot chocolate, pondering Gran's words.

“I bet you've got the longest hair in the world. I bet you look even more beautiful with your hair down. Like a princess.” I reached up and tried to touch the summit of Gran's hair, but she ducked out of the way.

“You're far too young to bet and I'm far too old to be a princess,” she chuckled.

tears of their children and their children's children. It is into us that

“You’re not that old,” I scoffed, “You can’t be, you’re too pretty and your hair is too dark and shiny. Old people don’t have hair like yours. Katie Sullivan’s Gran’s hair is thin and blue. Katie’s scared her hair will turn thin and blue like her Gran’s when she’s older. I said I don’t have to worry because my Gran’s hair is thick and brown.” I took one of my own wispy chestnut locks and twisted it around my finger. Gran stood up and held out her hand:

“Right young lady, enough chattering. Time for bed.”

I took her hand, admiring the long pointed red nails that sparkled like rubies at the tip of each finger. I wondered if Katie’s Gran had red fingernails too or whether they’d turned short and blue like her hair.

I woke in the middle of the night with the sneezes and a runny nose. Staying in the countryside always set off my hay fever. Gran usually left some Kleenex on my bedside table along with a glass of water and a biscuit, but that night she’d forgotten. I wasn’t allowed in Gran’s room without her permission, but considering this a medical emergency I decided to creep in and find some Kleenex.

With only the faint glow of the hallway light to guide me, I tiptoed towards Gran’s bedroom. Once inside I headed towards the silhouette of the large wooden dressing table. I ran my hand over the surface of the antique dresser, but the Kleenex weren’t there. They must be in the drawer, I thought, feeling underneath for the handle. Eventually I found it, opened the drawer and slipped a hand inside. My fingers brushed against various hard objects: tubs, tubes and bottles of lotions and perfumes that made Gran smell like a summer’s garden. Then at last, something soft. I grabbed the pack of Kleenex and as quietly as possible began unwrapping the plastic packaging. At that moment a light flicked on next to Gran’s bed.

“Ooo’s there, wha’s goin on?” I spun around towards the bed, but instead of Gran there was a small pale old lady I didn’t recognize.

“Emily, wha’s the matter? Are you all right? Wha’ on earth are you doing of?”

I stared at the wizened figure, too startled to reply. The old lady reached towards a cup on her bedside table and to my horror took out a set of teeth and placed them in her mouth.

“Put that down, you naughty girl! What are you doing? Put it back at once.” It was Gran’s voice now, but it couldn’t be Gran because the person in her bed was virtually bald.

I turned around and was about to put the Kleenex back into the dressing table drawer when I realized it wasn’t a Kleenex packet after all. In my hands was a transparent plastic bag and inside the bag was something brown and shiny. Thinking it was some kind of dead animal I screamed, dropping the package on the floor. That’s when I saw what it really was.

“Sorry Gran. I...I was just looking for some Kleenex. I didn’t mean to...” I stopped, not knowing what to say next. Neither of us spoke as I picked up the package, placed it back in the drawer and quickly left the room.

The next morning at breakfast Gran looked as radiant and youthful as ever. Neither of us mentioned what had happened in the night and as the years went by, I began to think that maybe, just maybe, it had all been a dream.

Great-Uncle Luther

Becky Haigler

The world may not remember Luther Elms.
His loving family's left without a trace —
no metal plaque, no ashes in an urn.
No gravestone marks his final resting place.

Like many farm boys in the Dust Bowl time,
in hopes that he could send some money back
to Mother and children left at home,
young Luther hopped a freight to look for work.

The family never saw his face again.
Two postcards from a western logging camp
and faded memories of a neighbor's friend
who might have worked with him at Hoover Dam

are all that's left. His branch the broken tree
will soon escape last niece's memory.

Faith Under Fire

Sally Clark

Having lived through the Great Depression, my grandmother did not waste any amount of food, no matter how small. Two bites of Jello, a spoonful of green beans – every morsel was stored in the refrigerator and served again at the next meal. When food finally became too old to serve again, she fed it to the chickens.

When we sat down for lunch that day, most of the dozen or so dishes on the table looked familiar. Absorbed in searching out the last bit of macaroni and cheese from dinner the night before, I barely heard the phone ring or my grandfather answer it.

What I did hear was the tension in his voice, “Rosie, get the girls. Get in the car! Now! There’s a fire!”

A fire in any circumstance is dangerous, but when you live in the middle of an oil field, it’s life and death. In the early 1960’s, my grandfather worked for an oil company, manually recording the oil production of operating wells. My cousin and I spent a two week vacation there together every summer, deep in the piney woods of East Texas. That summer, we were six years old.

“Hurry, girls, get in the car. NOW!” I had never seen my grandmother so frightened. She actually left food on the table without putting anything away, as she pushed us out the door.

My cousin and I raced to the car. My grandmother jumped into the driver's seat.

"Where's Paw-Paw?" I asked.

"He has to go with the other men to try to put out the fire," my grandmother said. I looked over to see my grandfather hurrying to the faded green pick-up the oil company provided for him to drive.

"Where are we going?" my cousin asked.

"As far away as we can get." My grandmother shoved the gearshift into drive and hit the accelerator.

As we raced down the black-topped roads, heading for the nearest town, I heard my grandmother do something I had never heard any adult who standing wasn't in a pulpit do before. She prayed right out loud.

"Lord, please save us. Please save Paw-Paw. Please put out the fire and don't let it spread," she pleaded. Then she commanded the two of us in the back seat, "Pray girls. Pray for your Paw-Paw and for all the other men."

I don't know which stunned me more – the fire, the escape, or my grandmother praying in normal, conversational words, as if God were riding along, holding our hands and sharing our anxiety. Then my cousin startled me even more. Right there in the back seat floor board, she got down on her knees, folded her hands, closed her eyes, and prayed right out loud, too. I sat speechless, embarrassed at my lack of faith or words.

The rest of the day is a blur. I don't remember where we drove to or how we became aware that the fire was contained; all was safe, including my grandfather, and we returned home where the food was still sitting on the table. None of those details have stayed with me over the years; just my grandmother's faith that God that was not far away, waiting, and listening. He was real, up-close, and personal.

That truth has never left me.

you eat all your peas – that's what my grandma taught me." Lord

Blood Loss

Jayne Jaudon Ferrer

Like Leviticus,
the list of who beget whom is
so endless it numbs my brain.
I choose to focus on one:
Tugalo, the rascal.
He of the river,
he of the pranks,
he of the fiddle
and moonshine and mule plowing
deep into share-cropped,
strawberry-pungent,
sweat-soaked, Southern soil.
He whose laugh-laced life was
cut short
by a poorly (or, perhaps, a well) aimed
shot in the dark.
He whom I never knew
but do so long to have known.
Oh, Grandfather, we would have been
such very good friends.

On the North Porch

Sheryl L. Nelms

twin rinse tubs
steam in the October morning
as Gram poles
clothes
from the Maytag
flops them
into the wringer
runs them
through
two hot water soaks
a final squeeze
then flapjacks
them into
her bushel basket
for her red-knuckled
hanging
on down the line

Comfort Food

Megan Hicks

Grandpa Long, my mom's father, made the best bread in the world. I think that's one reason why, when Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners rolled around, we were always careful to brag heartily on my Grandma Hicks's dinner rolls.

My father's parents, the Hickses, lived in Edmond, Oklahoma, about a quarter mile from my mother's dad, Herman Long. Grandma Hicks would have choked before admitting to a competitive streak, but she was proud of her cooking in general and her dinner rolls in particular.

They were good. I can see her pinching off golf ball sized lumps of dough with those spotted, knobby hands that dug beets and hooked rugs and wrung the necks of chickens. Hands shiny with a film of Crisco. She'd pinch off two or three little dough globs and roll them in shortening before snuggling them into their aluminum muffin tin nests. That rich, thick aroma of yeast bread baking made me swoon. Grandma's dinner rolls were mighty fine – golden, steaming, smeared with butter and homemade spiced peach preserves.

But Grandpa Long's bread was in a class by itself. White bread. Dill bread. Cheese bread. Tomato bread. Rye. Salt rising. And my favorite – sourdough.

He started his sourdough bread with a fermented "sponge," about the consistency of pancake batter, that made the dough rise. The sponge lived in a Mason jar in the fridge. It had been

a gift to him from my Aunt Beryl – his oldest daughter. The one who held the keys to his heart as no one else had ever done.

Beryl died too young, too suddenly, too needlessly, and Grandpa could never speak of her death. The closest he could come to it was, “Since Beryl ... went away.” “Now that Beryl left...”

When my Aunt Beryl died, I was nineteen, living on the West Coast. I only saw my grandfather at Christmas. I remember that first Christmas, and every other Christmas I spent with him after that, until he was unable to cook anymore...

The night before Christmas Eve, before he went to bed, he set that Mason jar full of sourdough starter out on the counter, so it would reach room temperature by morning. And in the morning, he'd stir more flour and water into that spongy goop, let it bubble up, take out enough to start another batch of bread for the next time he baked. Then he'd spend the rest of Christmas Eve tending dough, shaping loaves, baking, inhaling, warming his house, feeding his soul with memories of the daughter who had “gone away” too soon, with the keys to his heart.

Haiku: Wheelchair

Becky Haigler

disinfectant haze
at the end of a long hall
an empty wheelchair

screaming and yelling like the passengers in his car.” Will Shriner ~S~

Where Muscadines Grow

Wynne Huddleston

My Grandpa is fruit and flowers and fun.
With a cape jasmine pinned to his jacket
and donning a hat, he offers me peppermint
that he buys from the peddler's wagon.
Deaf, not dumb, he gives me secret winks,
prickly pear hugs, green apples, purple
plums, and teaches me how to play with
funny things like roly polly bugs. Then he
shows me where the ripe muscadines grow
heavy on the vine across the dirt road.

Circle of Loving

Judy Callarman

Tiny Texas great-grandmother, her veined hands
spotted with age, light glistening from her glasses,
round black-rimmed, her flowered dress,

Will the circle

dying, gives me her gold watch and thin gold wire
pin spelling her name, Lela, tells me to be a good girl,
to mind my mother and father, to love others.

be unbroken

Her only daughter is my grandmother Jane, hips
wide from the ten children, the last three
together in one birth, hands cooking, soft voice

By and by,

singing, killing chickens, endlessly washing,
devoted to loving, exacting justice rightly in her
eyes but hurting one in secret. Years later, she,

by and by

dying, cared for by that very one, knows
she was wrong and in weak whispers, gives
the gift of truth and asks forgiveness in return.

Is a better

My Oklahoma grandfather I never knew, sad
and anxious beyond cure, saw his danger
to my grandmother and the eight children,

home awaiting

left the dry, windy farm to live in a lonely place
to save them from himself, dying, asked them
for nothing, gave my mother memories

In the sky,

of crisp apples he brought in surprise and he,
in love reaching to button her high-topped shoes —
her mother praying, Lord, help me take care
of these children I love.

in the sky

Each act of giving a treasure, a piece of self
with cost beyond knowing – perception comes
only in the heart's deepest love.

Whoop! Laudy

Barbara Breedlove Rollins

Grandmom nabbed the only Breedlove
fit to know except the ones she raised.
She wed the greatest preacher, tolerated
few others. Yet all err. When Pop misspoke
he was corrected mid-sermon from the choir loft.
Coca-Cola burned her throat but she gorged
on jalapeños. Three saccharine tablets
to a goblet of tea – squashed in spoon
with little finger – pepper coated biscuits...
In her closet stacks of sugar sacks
horded against the next Great Depression.

done, she becomes a grandmother.” Edward H. Dreschnack ~§~ “Have

Grandma's Gypsies

Sheryl L. Nelms

she fed a whole tribe
once
they came begging
at her back door
she took them
to the cellar
loaded them up
with jars and jars of
fermented dill pickles
they went away happy
never came back
she said

children while your parents are still young enough to take care of them.”

We Always Have Eggs

Julie C. Judes

We called her Nani. Not Nonna, not Gramma, not Grandma, but Nani. Cotton house dresses hugged her impressive bosom, stockings and sensible laced black shoes encased her skinny legs and her feet. Curly gray hair framed her face, and her hazel eyes looked out from behind spectacles. She had a rumbling laugh and she pinched my cheeks, as grandmothers do. She passed away in 1979.

“My father was born in Bohemia. I was born in St. Louis in 1892. I had three sisters.”

She loved to eat candy, she loved to play cards, she loved me.

Bits and pieces of Nani have stayed with me, as colored confetti thrown at a party. One sentence, however, that Nani frequently spoke to me has not only remained in my memories, but has tremendous meaning for me.

“We always have eggs.” What did it mean, this sentence?

Nani told me many times that I was always welcome to visit her. She wouldn’t prepare a gourmet meal for me. She was not a gourmet type of person. There would be no muss or fuss. She was not a muss or fuss type of person. Humble, no-nonsense, practical, and down-to-earth, she would scramble up eggs when I came to visit.

It did not matter to Nani that I was not a straight A student, it did not matter to Nani that I had a bad complexion, it did not

matter to Nani that I was not popular in school. I was her granddaughter, she loved me, and I was welcome at her house.

“We always have eggs.”

He Winds The Clocks

Peter D. Goodwin

Always attired in a tie and jacket
his dress, his daily routine timed precisely;
once a week, he wound the clocks.

He could have died
decades earlier, when an enemy
shell destroyed his leg.

Or the times he braked his car
in busy traffic, pushing the brake
with his missing leg.

Or the times he climbed a long ladder
to clean out the gutters,
locking his tin leg in place with every step.

Or the many times he fell
his tin leg
in the wrong place.

But he lived a long life
acting as if his tin leg was whole
a smile covering his curses,

done, you'll only tell you grandchildren the good things. If they ask me

his routine his religion
dressed precisely
the clocks wound and on time.

When his family returned
from the funeral
All the clocks had stopped.

Grandpa's Mamma, Mammuccia From Castlevetere*

MaryEllen Letarte

She was here – a hologram from the past.
Her half smile beckoned,
as sure as a queen from her throne.
Her eyes, faded, deeper than I could know.
Her hair, silvery braids, tilted
like a tiara too heavy to wear.
The video keeps the tradition of silence
like her words locked in the old country,
like her words every holiday when she
put a dollar in my hand.

Today she rests in my mind in a magical blue dress.
I want to hear her voice.

*good kind mamma

Becoming Nana

Brenda Bellinger

A ribbon woven into my long, red braid
The sizzle and steam of her iron in the cellar
Handmade calico curtains for my playhouse
Warm raisin pies with a lattice crust
I thought only trinkets and memories were left,
 until I saw her impatience in the twiddle of my thumb
Now, she looks out of my mirror,
 her jaw set as I remember
I am slowly becoming the person
 that my children never knew

Haiku

Gerald A. McBreen

Grandma's red porch swing
frosted in snow
creaks softly

Pawpaw's Pastime

Sharon Hogan Ellison

Sometimes he sat in the shade on the east side of the house. Other days, he sat on a bench at the back of the house. Occasionally he sat in the open garage, out of the weather. Once in a while, he would sit on the front steps. I can see him now: denim overalls, a Prince Albert can tucked into his front pocket, a handkerchief dangling from his hip pocket.

“Whatcha doin’, Pawpaw?”

“Whit’lin’.”

“Whatcha makin’?”

“Nothin’ special.”

“Then why are you doing it?” Little girls ask a lot of questions.

Why would someone just sit and whittle and not make something? It didn’t make much sense, but what do kids know?

Using his knife, Pawpaw would make little baskets out of green acorns from the double-trunk oak tree in our front yard. I could hang one small basket on each of my tiny fingers and my imagination was kindled. He couldn’t make them if the acorns were too dry, which happened all too quickly in the hot summer sun. He also used that knife to clean his fingernails, which always seemed quite dangerous to me, and he would laugh about that.

But when he was just sitting there whittling, I remained puzzled. It seemed such a waste of time.

Often, he would stop whittling, gaze off into the distance, then begin again. While I wondered what he was thinking about, I never asked. There were times when he actually whittled the end of a Number 2 pencil. He was our pencil sharpener!

“Why do you do that, Pawpaw?”

Shoulders raised and dropped. “I just like it, sugar. It relaxes me.”

Why would he need to relax, I wondered. He lived with us, and yes, most mornings he cooked breakfast for Mother, Daddy and me, but as far as I could tell he didn’t do much else. Well, sometimes he fixed lunch and supper for us, too, but that was because it was what he wanted to do. It wasn’t like he had to. He would go fishing with my dad or some of his friends, but he didn’t have to go off to work each morning like my daddy.

Since I was a child, he always seemed quite old. Looking back, I realize he was in his late 50s...not really so old in the great scheme of life.

In my mind’s eye, I see him resting there in the shade, nicking and notching a piece of lumber or a tree limb, with the shavings spilling off his lap onto the ground. He didn’t bother brushing them off until he was finished. Then he would go out and tend our big garden with Daddy, or tinker around in the garage doing the things men do with all their gadgets and thingamajigs.

But whittling was Pawpaw’s pastime. He had earned the right to rest whenever he felt like it. He had raised four children after his wife died. No easy task in the thirties and forties. He did some things wrong, but he also did lots of things right.

I don’t know about you, but I haven’t seen anyone sitting around whittling in many long years. Too many things occupy our free time now. Computers, iPods, MP3 players, DVDs. Pawpaw’s life was not so complicated or full of things to fill up his days.

Perhaps we all need to take a moment to do nothing except relax. That's what whittling did for Pawpaw.

He was able to relax, enjoy the fresh air and his own thoughts while his hands were occupied.

May you find your own pastime, where you can reflect on the moment, on years gone by, and maybe even on things to come.

I get it now, Pawpaw.

My Grandmother's Generous Arms *Judy Brand*

My grandmother's generous arms
rocked my newborn life,
nurtured my growing pains,
contained my giggling spirit,
soothed my bruised feelings,
pillowed my sleepy head,
hugged me as a graduate,
embraced me as a bride,
Now I have arms like hers,
A gift from gravity and quite a surprise.

In the Garden

Jeremy Rich

His vast garden of perfect rows and delicate stems tended by
big hands like freshly pulled carrots stained with rich earth
standing still as a stalk
catching hummingbirds at the feeder
with the gentle deftness of a magician,
strong delicate paws
like snatching bubbles floating in the welkin
slight grip wielding, brittle glass tacks
“You can’t hold it too long
its tiny speeding heart
can’t handle the strain”
throwing his hand to the heavens; willing the bird’s flight
like scattering ashes in the wind
lacking his finesse
Life grabs with a crushing grip
holding too tight.