

Newpord

Jeffrey T. Spinazzola

It's amazing what fifty dollars of groceries and an open window can do for the human spirit. My grandson came by the other morning, and since then, the world has looked a whole lot brighter.

You see, if his grandfather had only taken out some life insurance, I would have at least wound up broke instead of plain hungry. You can't exactly ask your own kids for pocket change to bag a few groceries. Their father may have been a bum, but I wouldn't want to disappoint them after all these years.

So I called up my grandson. Along with being a good kid, he's kind of to himself, which means he probably won't let the cat out of the bag.

He comes over and brings some of his shirts. He's an accountant in the city, and I like to press his shirts from time to time, the electricity bill on an iron being pretty low. It's something I can do for him. Not exactly a fair exchange when you consider all the snow he's shoveled over the years: his grandfather was a no good bum.

"Nonnie," he says, as he drops the bag of laundry and gives me a hug.

That's what they call me, they call me Nonnie, but I'm getting old so you'll have to excuse me on the dialogue. I don't remember who said what or what we were doing with our hands

"Surely, two of the most satisfying experiences in life must be those of

when we said it. I'll just tell you I got him to check out the bathroom after I gave him something to eat. The window had been stuck in there from the moisture and the paint and a really long winter. So I got him in there to crack it open for me. And he did it. As far I'm concerned, that makes him the best, and besides, without being able to open the window in the morning, it gets too damn hot in there after a shower.

The kid's also a flatterer. At least that's how I'd explain him worrying about me getting peeked in on with the window open. Sure there are some surprisingly horny old fellas in the neighborhood, but even if they were to rouse up the strength necessary to pull themselves onto the sill and sneak a peek, I don't think they'd bother staying there for long.

So the kid cracks open the window, and I thank him, and we spend some time sitting on the porch. He likes lemonade. He always asks if I got any around, which is why I always do, and he probably likes wind chimes, too, because I catch him, from time to time, looking over to the neighbors' porch where the wind blows from and where there hangs some seashells.

It's either that or he's got a crush on the girl next door. Either way, I'm happy. He sips lemonade, I'm reminded of his worthless grandfather, and then I give the kid another hug to hold him over until the next time.

"Anything I can help you with before I go?" he says. I remember this particular phrase only because it's what he always says just before he gets up from the porch swing. Fine, so it's really just a couple of folding chairs, but with the wind blowing and the two chairs touching who would know?

I tell him there is something he could do for me. Sure I feel embarrassed, but he's the kind of kid you know is going to make you feel as good as you can about this sort of thing. So I tell him I could use about fifty dollars a week for groceries because his grandfather wasn't as great as we all pretended. He was

sweet and faithful and all that, but he could have left me some money to bag a few groceries. The kid, of course, is a sweetheart himself and invents this whole thing about his grandfather making him a deal when he was younger, about taking care of me if anything ever happened. He says the old bum actually helped him out of some trouble, a few thousand dollars for some kind of mistake, and that it was expected he'd return the favor. The whole thing is enough to make me feel at ease about taking the money, but let's face it, the worst thing this kid ever did was lie to his grandmother.

After he leaves I go into the kitchen where he brought the glasses. Sure enough the money's there, right above the sink, tucked into an empty toothpick dispenser. The kid is a saint, and I already know I'll never have to ask again.

The only problem is that grandmothers like to brag. It's this thing that happens on Friday afternoons in the beauty salon. All the old girls spend a couple of hours in curlers, reading magazines, bragging about their offspring. It's like a game of poker. We ante up twenty dollars apiece--money we should probably be spending on something else – to feel like young girls again. Each girl puts up her money, which is only in theory for the haircut, and we lay our stories out for everyone to hear. Winner takes all. No, not the money, but something better: the right to be Queen for a week.

This is the same sort of thing that happens when you're young, except now you're not talking about your own adventures because no one is proud of how many pills they managed to pop since the last haircut. So you talk about your kids or your grandkids or nephews, whoever has either won some kind of award or deserves one for being an angel. Only you can't tell them the kid paid for your groceries.

So the girls go on with their stories – nothing worth wasting your time on here – and I know I've got them all beat. They can

sort of sense it, too, which is why, when they're finished, they bury their heads in the magazines they're too myopic to be reading anyway.

No one wants to be bested.

I tell them how it was. How he took me down to Newport last Saturday to show me the mansions. I tell them about the lobsters we ate, which had to be two pounds apiece, and about his beautiful girl. They're all wrapped in it now, and I don't mind embellishing because it's true in spirit. Besides, he did tell me he'd take me to Newport, which it turns out is where he goes, on a good day, after coming by my place. It's only an hour or so away, and he's a lot more adventurous than his grandfather who I used to holler at all morning just to drive me down to the mall for some exercise.

So there we were along the beach, the three of us, and my grandson tells me that I remind him of one of those beautiful ladies in an old novel and asks my permission to marry his girl. Right there in front of me with the ocean in view and the sun setting behind, he proposes.

Of course, I'm waiting for them to drop their magazines and pronounce despite themselves that – ain't no doubt about it – I'm the one. Instead, they give me this look of suspicion like they can see all the way to the folding chairs. The whole thing makes me want to jump out of my curlers. Even the hairdresser, who usually pretends not to listen, stops what she's doing.

"There ain't no place such as Newport," one of them says, and I'll never forget those words. "It's Newport. Newport, Rhode Island."

And let me tell you, while I'm sitting there in that chair, knowing I ain't got enough money left after paying the bills and buying the groceries and fixing lemonade to take the bus down to the mall to remind myself how much I miss them walks with

the old bastard, let me tell you, I'm not about to let one letter stand in my way.

“It’s Newport. It’s Newport, Rhode Island. And it’s a lot nicer than that Newport. The waves are bigger, the breeze smells of mint, and they serve the reddest lobster you’ll ever see. No, you won’t see it at all because while you’re all stuck in that other place I’ll be strolling with my grandson and that beautiful girl of his through those wide streets of Newport.”

And the ladies all go quiet because, let’s face it, they know how long a week can be.

Fragment

Carole Creekmore

Fondly saved and folded flat,
Firmly pressed between pages,
Bloodless, bleached memento
of blossom and beauty.
Faded piece of time,
Loved and left
in place
of
distant
memory gone...

love their children; there is no grandfather who does not adore his

Caramels and Ginger Ale

Kerín Riley-Bishop

Memory can be brutal; invasive,
or tenderly nudge its way in.

White Shoulders.

Tall trees.

Winding driveway in the woods.

Horses in green pasture.

Scent of grease and gasoline.

His perfect white flat-top,

soft and tempting to our fingers;

patting grandfather's head as long as allowed.

Baby doll.

Old black leather trunk.

Dark paneled walls,

highboy dresser, chenille bedspread

and the end table next to the sofa;

glass bowl crowded with Kraft Caramels.

“Karen, would you like some ginger ale?”

“Yes, please, Grandma!”

grandson.” Victor Hugo ~§~ “If you want to civilize a man, begin

Miss Daisy Drives Herself *Terry Sanville*

On a hot summer afternoon, Grandpop stretched out on his Barcalounger and watched the Pittsburgh Pirates shellac the Saint Lewis Cardinals on TV. A dripping bottle of Falstaff and a half-empty bag of Spanish peanuts rested on the glass-covered end table within easy reach.

“Just leave me alone ta watch my game,” he complained.

“But Grandpop,” I whined, “we’re outta ice cream.”

“That’s not my problem.”

“But... but can’t ya drive us to that dairy near Knott’s Berry Farm? We can buy some Chocolate Chip.” I tried pleading and hoped that the mention of his favorite flavor would pry him loose. But getting Grandpop out of his chair on weekends was near impossible. He worked five ten-hour days at the broom factory and his old body hurt bad. I heard him moaning at night when the fog caused his lumbago to act up.

“Why don’ ya get that damn lazy Albert to drive you kids,” he said.

“Ah, Rudy’s Pop drove us last time and —”

“Paul, don’t swear in front of the boy,” Grandmom chided. From her spot on the sofa she watched TV, crocheted, and kept an eye on the street traffic.

“If you’d learned to drive, Jewel, you could take the boys.”

“Why don’ ya teach me?” Grandmom shot back and grinned.

with his grandmother.” -- Victor Hugo ~S~ “It’s funny what hap-

“You’re too old,” he said and chuckled. “They won’t give no license to a 70-year-old lady.”

“Bet they will,” Grandmom said. Her eyes twinkled as she worked the coarse white string into a complicated pattern with her crochet hook.

That night after going to bed, they talked loudly about Grandmom learning to drive. For the rest of the summer, Grandpop drove his bride of fifty-one years to the new subdivisions south of Huntington Beach, just off the Pacific Coast Highway. In the cool evenings, he showed her the art of steering, braking, signaling, and parking. I never saw Grandmom in action by herself before the summer ended and I went home to start sixth grade.

But the following summer, the first thing Grandmom showed me after I’d barged into her kitchen, lugging my suitcase, was her newly-issued driver’s license. It had a photograph of a tiny lady in glasses with bright red lipstick, heavily rouged cheeks, and a broad open-mouthed grin showing off perfect false teeth.

On that first Saturday of my annual vacation, Grandmom offered to drive Rudy, Jeeder and me to Santa Ana to get ice cream at Pringle’s Drug Store while she shopped. Pringle’s had my favorite flavor, Rocky Road, and they weren’t stingy about loading up their cones.

As we got in the car, I noticed a few things different about Grandpop’s green ’54 Mercury. The rear wheel skirts had been taken off and stupid-looking “curb feelers” clipped to all four wheel arches. They made the Merc look like some weird insect with two sets of antennas. Also, the left taillight had been broken out and a piece of red paper taped over the hole.

Watching Grandmom get into that car got us kids laughing. Rudy and Jeeder giggled in the back seat as I tried to shush them.

“Ya want some help, Grandmom?” I asked, riding shotgun.

pens when you become a grandparent. You start to act all goofy and

“Nah, I can do it,” she wheezed. “Jus’ takes me a minute.”

She opened the Mercury’s door, grabbed onto its huge steering wheel and hauled her four-foot-ten-inch body onto the bench seat, leaning on the horn with a flabby forearm. Once inside, she rearranged her ankle-length flowery dress. Her head barely cleared the seat back and her feet just reached the pedals.

We tore out from the curb, Grandmom squealing the tires. As the original low rider, she gazed at the world through the steering wheel, stared straight ahead, and used the car’s mirrors to keep us on track. She wore bifocals and constantly bobbed her head to focus on the road, then read the gauges. On Highway 39, we rolled along at 70, the Merc feeling like a heavy hide-a-bed sofa on wheels. Nothing much fazed it, which was great because Grandmom wasn’t good at avoiding potholes or patches of rough road.

But once we got into Santa Ana, she braked hard. I relaxed and sucked in deep breaths as we motored sedately through heavy traffic and looked for a parking place. Every time Grandmom made a right turn, she’d pull close to the sidewalk, making the curb feelers scream. More than once we bounced over the corner, sending people waiting for the traffic light scrambling. Our gang learned some new swear words as well as variations of the single-finger salute. Through all this Grandmom stared straight ahead, unaware of the commotion outside, using the horn to clear the road of a wayward pedestrian or motorist.

We cruised along Bristol Boulevard in the inside lane. I spied a parking spot at the end of a cross street.

“Look,” I said and pointed, “there’s a space.”

Grandmom twisted the wheel and pulled to the right. There was a soft crunch and the Mercury slipped sideways for a moment before straightening.

I cranked my head around. “Ya hit ’em. I think ya hit him,” I said excitedly.

“Oh shush,” Grandmom muttered. “I’m gonna pull over and see.”

She muscled the car into a loading zone along the side street and we got out. A royal blue ’57 Oldsmobile pulled in behind us. A skinny old woman, dressed in a burgundy suit and fluffy blouse glared at us from the front seat. She wore a little hat with a fishnet veil. Gold-rimmed glasses rested on a big nose. She slammed the Olds front door and strode toward us.

“Just what in God’s name did you think you were doing back there?” she demanded.

“I was jus’ trying ta get a parking space,” Grandmom said and frowned.

“Well, did you ever think to signal before making that turn?”

“If you hadn’t been sneakin’ up in my blind spot, I woulda seen ya.”

“I was not sneaking anywhere. You just didn’t look.” The skinny woman glared at Grandmom.

“Well I was in a hurry ta get to Bettendorf’s. They’re having a fabric sale and —”

“Being in a hurry is no excuse, can get someone killed.” The woman paused, then sighed. “I just came from there. They’ve got some really nice material – and cheap.”

“Lord, I know,” Grandmom said. “I have all this sewin’ to do for my family back East – got a slew of grandchildren in Philadelphia.”

“Well you should see the cotton prints I just bought. Are your grandkids girls? I found these Simplicity patterns that are just darling, dresses, blouses and such.”

“I got four girls and three boys to sew for and less than a month till we go. And now the car...”

Grandmom stared at our Mercury's rear fender with its new crease made by the Oldsmobile's chrome bumper.

"Come on. Let me show you what I bought," the woman said and motioned to her car. "Don't worry about these machines."

Grandmom waddled off with the skinny lady to look at fabric, a grin returning to her face. She stared admiringly as the woman reached into her back seat and held up floral prints. They chattered away. I inspected the Olds front bumper. One of the posts had a trace of green paint on it, but nothing else was damaged.

"What are they gabbin' about?" Jeeder asked. "I thought we were gonna get ice cream."

"Just hold on, Jeed. They're talkin' sewing. This could take awhile."

We climbed back into the Mercury. I turned the key and found a radio station that played rock and roll. My sister had started listening to the stuff at home and I thought it was really cool.

Grandmom returned finally. "That's a sweet woman. She told me not ta worry about the car. But you're Grandfather's gonna be mad."

"Just tell him he can drive us next time if he complains," I said, and Grandmom grinned.

She found a parking spot to her liking and we all piled out.

"You boys go to Pringle's down thataway and I'll meet you back here in an hour."

I watched her hobble side-to-side down the tree-shaded boulevard toward the garment district. It was strange to see Grandmom walking by herself without Grandpop, a tiny lady alone in a city full of cars and stores.

Within the hour we returned to the car, our T-shirts stained with various flavors of ice cream. About a block down a woman overloaded with packages came out of a shop. I couldn't see her

face, but from her walk and the blue rose print dress, I knew it was Grandmom. Rudy and I got out and ran to help with the parcels.

“Should be enough... for the folks in Philly,” Grandmom said, gasping for air.

On the drive home, we rolled the windows down and let the hot air off dusty bean fields blow over us. In light traffic, we headed into the sun. Grandmom sang a Polish song, loud enough to be heard over the wind’s roar. She’d come to America before the 20th century, sailed on a wooden schooner from Danzig in the dead of winter, depending on sailors and an experienced captain to keep her safe. Now, she steered us boys and that boat-of-a-Mercury back to our safe harbor in Huntington Beach.

Within a couple summers, Grandmom’s hips and back got so bad that she stopped driving. But she stayed proud of what she’d accomplished and eagerly displayed her driver’s license whenever a shop owner, bank teller, or anybody else wanted to see some form of identification. She lived another twenty years, and died the same year I bought my first new car.

grandfather once told me that there are two kinds of people: those who

Mamma's Tattoo

Stephanie Bell

Tattoos hurt. I don't care what anyone else says. Sure, after awhile, you get used to the constant stinging, but there are still parts that make you hiss in pain. I've tried to tell my Mamma this when she sat in the chair next to the tattoo artist, her sleeves rolled up and her upper arm exposed to him, but she wouldn't listen. She made up her mind and there was no changing it.

"I'm going to do one line," the tattoo artist said. "So you can see what it feels like." He pressed the foot pedal near his chair. The loud buzz of the needle echoed through the parlor. Mamma grabbed my hand between her fingers. She squeezed them with a good portion of her strength. I squeezed back, giving her an encouraging smile.

"Are you ready?" the tattoo artist asked, taking note of the look of terror on her face.

She nodded. Her hands were shaking and her eyes were closed so tightly that it looked like she had more wrinkles than she actually did. She was praying under her breath. I could see her itching to reach into her purse and pull out her rosary.

The tattoo artist made his first line on her arm. Mamma let go of my hand and blinked. A look of relief spread across her face. "Hey," she said, her voice was no higher than a whisper. "That wasn't so bad." She let out a little laugh at the end.

I smiled at her. I wanted to warn her that the first line never hurts and that everyone has that reaction when they first get a

work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first

tattoo and that the real pain would come after a few minutes of sitting there with the same needle still digging into your skin, but I bit lip and nodded.

My grandma, Mamma as she liked to be called, was the only woman that I had ever met that would get a tattoo at the age of sixty-five to spite her daughter – my mom. She claimed that she’s been meaning to get a tattoo, but I had a feeling that it had something to do with my mom’s reaction to my new tattoo, a small smiley face with three eyes.

“What do you think Dorothy will say when she sees this?” Mamma asked, nodding her head toward her shoulder, which the tattoo artist was still digging the gun into her skin.

I giggled. “She’ll probably try to send you to a nursing home.”

Mamma laughed before she scrunched her face in pain. She grabbed my hand again, her clipped nails dug into my hand. I let out a silent scream as my knees buckled. “Ouch,” I hissed to myself.

“Is this your first tattoo?” the tattoo artist asked.

Mamma nodded, her grip tightening. “Yes – goodness gracious, that needle is annoying.” Her voice was harsh.

The tattoo artist and I shared a laugh. “It does get a little aggravating,” he agreed as he removed the needle from her arm, let his foot off of the foot pedal, and dunked his gun into the black ink. “If you need me to stop, I can.”

Mamma shook her head. “No, I want to get this over with.”

“There’s not much more,” the tattoo artist promised. “It’s not a big tattoo.” He pumped the foot pedal by his foot and continued to trace the outline of the tattoo on my grandma’s arm.

“You know I’ve lived through two wars, four pregnancies, became a widow twice, lived through a stroke and nothing compares to this.” Her arm was shaking because she was

group; there was less competition there.” Indira Gandhi ~S~ “If the

squeezing my hand so tight. She shot a dirty look at me. “I blame you,” she hissed. A smile was spread across her face.

“I know,” I smiled back at her.

It was a few minutes before the tattoo artist pulled away his gun for the last time. He cleaned ink from my grandma’s arm and rubbed the tattoo with A&D ointment. He let out a low “all done” and handed a mirror to Mamma so she could see the final result.

“Do you like it?” he asked her approval.

She smiled. “I love it, but it’s not my opinion that matters; its Elizabeth’s.” She turned around in her chair so I could see her arm.

I smiled and let out a strangled laugh. “I love it,” I said, trying not to get teary eye.

Tattooed on my grandma’s arm was a picture of a smiley face with three eyes.

Bouquet

Joanne Faries

little fist curled around
short stems
handful of yellow
puff balls
presented with love

grandma clapped
exclaimed over her gift
filled a paper cup with

The Neufelds of Beaver County, Oklahoma

Becky Haigler

Store keepers in their town,
they “carried” many families
through Depression days.
Gold rims of his glasses
match the oval picture frame.
Broad shoulders in soft tweed
bend protectively toward her
stylish bob and pleated silk.

Only their eyes, focused
beyond the camera, betray
a hint of loss. Three fine sons
no guard against grief,
no antidote for influenza
that carried away a daughter.

within him, he would have stood humble and awe-struck before his

Little Things

Jim Wisneski

While a thick white ring of smoke slowly pushed towards the yellow-stained ceiling, I stared into the old man's eyes listening to a story of hunting that has been repeated so often it almost feels like a family heirloom.

Seated across the table in the Sunday-dinner-aroma-filled kitchen was my grandfather, inhaling on a cigarette. When he turned his head to the right to catch a glimpse at the latest standings of a NASCAR race I saw the uneven hairline left from giving himself a haircut with a pair of scissors and a mirror. It crept up behind his round ears and met with his thick hair slathered against his scalp with a layer of grease. Dressed in his usual attire he wore a black t-shirt with a pocket in the left breast tucked into a faded pair of black Levi's. A brown leather belt with a white-waved design hung loosely around his waist. The bottoms of the jeans were rolled up two times. Next to him was a pair of black slippers lined with brown-and-tan checkered pattern.

"I got three buckets of ashes, Jim," he said in a low voice.

His tobacco flavored breath mixed with a heavy stench of Old Spice, creating a one of a kind smell that stuck not only in my nostrils, but in my memories. Another of his gifts was that it was impossible to say "no" to any request when he drew that classic smirk across his face. As he pushed off the table to stand up, his once-muscle-filled arms barely functioned. Once

soul." *Kahlil Gibran* ~§~ "My grandfather always said that living is

completely standing, he kicked out his left foot, then his right. I began to chuckle, remembering how my cousin and I used to call it the “chicken walk” as kids. As he slowly made his way to the basement door he bellowed out a thick cough.

The cold January air hit my face as I stepped outside onto the concrete porch with a bucket in each hand. I suddenly began to miss the warmth of my grandparent’s house. My grandfather didn’t like to cut his own grass or shovel snow. He didn’t like raking leaves in autumn or walking ten feet to the road to put a couple buckets of ashes out. He did like to do the little things, like keeping his small blue house full of heat in the cold. After lugging the buckets out to the road, I turned back toward the house, and there he was, standing on the porch, in his socks, holding the door open for me.

I shut my eyes, and took the last step into the house, and felt the warmth crawl across my body, chasing the January chill away. Upon opening my eyes, I found myself embracing my grandfather, with his uneven hairline and smell of tobacco, and nothing felt so perfect.

Legacy

Jeremy Rich

Hot air pushes my face
Scenery blurs by

“You know,
Grandma got lost

like licking honey off a thorn.” Louis Adamic ~§~ “When I was little,

Last week...
Couldn't remember
The way home"

Window grows tall with
The push of a button
Hum of engine is
Muffled
Air's breath is silenced

Hand lightly on her forearm
Hard squeeze for good measure
Without words
I say I'll never let go

"Found her a mile out of town
Scared and embarrassed"

Trees in peripheral still march by
Sorrow saturates my chest
Silence hangs
Like dirty drapes

Gaze wanders to the sky
Point to the horizon
Clouds hang like cake crumbs
On a blue table cloth.

"I've been looking at clouds lately"
She says.

Grandma's Memory Course

Dorothy Leyendecker

Improve your memory in just two weeks
Said the catalog I received.
My eyes lit up I jumped for joy
This is exactly what I need.

I'll learn to quickly recall a name
And what to buy at the store.
I won't have to write a phone number down
Like I had to do before.

My trash will always be out on time
I'll remember to feed the cat.
I'll learn how best to rhyme my verses
I'll have all the rules down pat.

I'll be so proud when the course is done
And I see myself smarter then when I begun.
But the day it started was full of woe
Cause when it came I forgot to go.

High Above The Polo Grounds

J. Michael Shell

Gramps could speak English, but we grandkids loved his right-off-the-boat Italian accent. Sometimes, I think he hammed it up a bit just for us. Grandma, on the other hand, knew five English words, which were, “You eata, you so skinny!” Of course, she also knew the grandkid’s names, and that allowed her to construct six word sentences such as, “Mikie, you eata – you so skinny!”

We all loved Grandma, and the continuous meal that was always being served while we were there. But we hung onto Gramps like the Roma tomatoes he grew hung onto their vines. Gramps was full of stories that we couldn’t get enough of. He was also full of promises that he always kept. One of the greatest promises he made to me was to take me (for my first time) to see the New York Mets play baseball.

I couldn’t have been more than four or five. The Mets, if I’m not mistaken, were even younger. A snarly-old, gramps-looking character was managing those infant Mets. His name was Casey. I knew, even at four or five, that “Casey” was a baseball name. I knew that there had once been a “Mighty Casey,” who had come to bat. Apparently, like Gramps (who had been a Mighty Soldier in World War One), Casey had grown old. Now he was managing the Mets, speaking a language even harder to understand than my Grandfather’s Italian-English. “Mikie, you

“My great-grandfather used to say to his wife, my great-grandmother,

wanna go see-a da Mets? We go see-a da Mets-a next time-a you come!”

Gramps had promised me, which made it a sealed deal. Khrushchev didn't even have missiles in Cuba yet, so almost nothing catastrophic enough could happen to alter the fact that the very next time I showed up at Gramps' house, I was going to see the Mets play baseball! Unfortunately, this presented a problem for my father. It was early spring when Gramps made that promise, and it would be a couple of months before we made it back up to Westchester from Jersey. This meant Dad had to endure the question, every day for sixty days or so, *When are we goin' to see Gramps? When? When? WHEN!!? Gramps is waitin' for us! Gramps wants us to come now! Grandma's pro'bly cookin'!*

My old man got a chuckle out of this for about three days. Then he started hiding from me. Finally, one afternoon, he showed up with a calendar he'd gotten from the Colonial Bakery up on Route 88. I knew it was from the bakery, because on every page, above the days and their numbers, was a picture of some kind of baked confection. But it was the page with the tray full of crumb-buns on it that mattered. On that page, Dad had circled the number seven, which was a Friday. That day, he told me, when he got home from work, we were going up to Gramps' house for the weekend. And on the day after that, onto which he'd drawn a circle with lines and stitches to represent a baseball, we were going to see the Mets. Then he turned back a couple of pages and pointed to another day. "This is today," he said, then he drew an X through it. "Every day, when you get up, draw an X through another day, and when you get to the one with the circle, we're going. Got it?"

I got it. The next morning I got up and drew X's through all the days till I got to the circle. When Dad got home I handed him the calendar. "Let's go!" I told him.

who in turn told her daughter, my grandmother, who repeated it to her

The day on the crumb-bun month of the calendar finally did arrive, and I think it was a bigger relief to my old man than it was to me. Forty-six “are-we-almost-there’s” into the ride to Westchester, I fell asleep. Dad swears, to this day, that he didn’t spike my Kool-Aid, but Mom remains mum on the subject. I woke up on Gramps’ couch to Bruno San Martino beating the crap out of Haystacks Calhoun. “Mikie, you wake-a up?” Gramps laughed, sitting there next to me.

“You so skinny!” Grandma added.

That night, after Grandma’s Herculean efforts to fatten me up, Gramps told me what going to a ballgame would be like. He had his World-War-One-Soldier story-telling voice on, and I was entranced. “Mikie, you know how it’s a smella when I’m a cuta da grass? Datsa howa da base-a-balla field she’s a smella. Whena dey hitta da base-a-balla, it’s a cracka like-a thunder. Dey hitta da foula ball, and you catcha in-a you base-a-balla glove.”

“I don’t got no baseball glove, Gramps!”

“You gotta no base-a-balla glove? ’Ey Mal,” Gramps said, addressing my father. “How come-a Mikie gotta no base-a-balla glove? Wassa matta you?”

“He’s four, Pop,” Dad told him.

At that point the conversation reverted to pure Italian, and became heated. The only part of it I understood was when Gramps called Dad a “chooch.” Then he got up and went out to the garage. I was about to get up and follow him when Dad said, “Sit!” He was still looking at the T.V. when he said it, but his finger was pointing right between my eyes, and I knew that finger would go off if I moved.

About ten minutes later, I heard Gramps coming back in, shouting, “I’ma finda!”

The “base-a-balla glove” Gramps found had once belonged to my father. It was flat as a short-stack of pancakes, with three fingers and a thumb – all as big as bloated sausages. The web

was the size of a silver dollar, and the lacings that remained were so frayed they looked like pipe cleaners. When my old man saw that glove, he rolled his eyes. “When-a was I-a give-a you disa glove?” Gramps asked him. Then to me he said, “Here-a Mikie, you catcha da foula ball in-a you fadda’s-a glove.”

The next day, before we left for the Polo Grounds, Dad took me over to White Plains and bought me a beautiful, Rawlings outfielder’s mitt that looked like a leather bushel basket. I could wear the thing up to my elbow. Even now, I can close my eyes and smell that brand-new mitt, and the neat’s-foot oil my old man rubbed into it.

I don’t know where the tickets to my first major league baseball game came from, but I’m pretty sure somebody had given them to Gramps. I suspect this because both my Father and Grandfather seemed surprised about where our seats were located. The Polo Grounds are gone now, and that game was the only one I ever attended at that ancient and hallowed field. All my subsequent attendances of Mets games were at Shea. So all I have to describe that grand stadium are memories recorded through four-year-old eyes hovering barely three feet off the ground. To me, it was the biggest place that ever existed – covering at least half the planet and rising up into the stratosphere, which is where our seats were located.

Instead of the smell of fresh-cut grass, I inhaled the heady scent of tar, which covered the roof of the overhang in front of us. Even the Mighty Casey, were he to inflate in his baggy manager’s uniform to his most powerful, youthful physique, could never – with an entire oak log much less a mere bat – belt a ball up to where I was waiting with my brand-new Rawlings outfielder’s mitt. Nonetheless, from my perch high above the Polo Grounds, I waited. The players on the field were no bigger than the plastic soldiers strewn around my bedroom floor, but I had no doubt that one of them would produce that crack of

ter, that to talk well and eloquently was a very great art, but that an

thunder and send my foul-ball up into our ethers. Sometime around the fifth inning, however, my patience waned and I asked, “When are they gonna hit me my foul, Gramps?”

My father laughed. “They couldn’t shoot a ball up here with a bazooka!” he said.

Gramps scowled and called Dad a chooch again. Then he said, “It’s a come-a, you wait-a. You wanna bagga peanuts?”

I did, and Gramps took off to find me some. When he came back, I saw that he had the peanuts, but he didn’t give them to me right away. Then, all of a sudden, he turned and handed them to me. I took them in my right hand, as my left hand and most of its arm were up in my new mitt. Just as I got hold of those peanuts, I heard the crack of a bat, which, considering the physics involved in our distance from home plate, had probably actually sounded a second earlier. “Mikie!” Gramps yelled. “Hold up a you base-a-balla glove! It’s a foula ball!”

Gramps reached over and pulled up my mitted left arm. The next thing I knew, there was a baseball in that mitt, and the fans around us were laughing to beat all hell and saying, “Nice catch, kid!”

When I looked down into my glove, I saw my very first major league baseball up close. It was perfect and white and new – so new, in fact, that it still had a little price tag stuck to it. Major league baseballs, I now knew, cost a dollar.

Story Circles

Carole Creekmore

They live and love and die in our tales —
Old lives flicker in and out of new ones —
Memories creak and softly sigh.

Faces appear and sharpen —
Circling in symphony, tightening hearts —
Knotting memories into place.

Hovering briefly, anchored for a flash —
They swirl and whisper
The meaning of it all.

The Dress

Mary Krauss

I sit alone in the attic room
safe from clamoring siblings
lulled by new spring rain pattering the roof
and quiet smells of past lives.
I reach for Grandmother's wedding dress,
holding it to me
running hands over satin and lace
breathing cedar smells from its resting place.
I dare slip it on
looping many buttons
and tiptoe down to Mother
with creamy fabric
trailing the stairs behind.
She looks up at me
and smiles.

father was dishonest, but he will brag a little if he discovers that his

A Love Story

June Rose Dowis

Unfolding the yellowed page
She slips back in time
To the girl she used to be,
My Darling Ellie, passion penned
She smiles at the first indent,
I wanted to tell you I love you
Loved you since that first day,
Still a flutter at the fading words
As she glances to her side,
If you'll consider an oaf like me
I'm asking Ellie, will you be my bride?
A single tear trickles down
Caught in the crease of a smile,
Sixty-five years trailed her "yes"
And now it's time for goodbye;
Returning the note to a tattered purse
She gently removes her shoes,
Close beside him in a sterile bed
Mortality alters their vows

The Gift of Time

Elisabeth Brookshire

About the time I turned six, my Grandmother Krauskopf, moved from her large Victorian home into a small cottage down the street from our house. We knew her as Oma, a German term for grandmother. I often padded bare-foot across the vacant lot between the two houses and let myself in through the back door of Oma's little home. There were always cookies in the cookie jar and a warm greeting for me.

I was the middle child of five girls (four of us born within five years) and understandably, my mother and father had a limited amount of time for individual attention. I loved to spend time at Oma's house basking in her love and eating cookies. She baked delicious oatmeal cookies with pecans, sugar-glazed snicker doodles, crunchy chocolate wafers and tart cut-out molasses cookies. A batch of cookies didn't last long at our house, but they were plentiful at Oma's.

When Oma worked in her garden I helped her pick the beans and cucumbers. We walked between tall rows of corn and stooped over raised beds to pick thimble-size sweet red strawberries. As we strolled through the yard past the flower beds, she would patiently name the flowers and plants she loved. Among them were purple bachelor buttons, large green elephant ears, pastel colored Gerber daisies, red and orange cannas and chrysanthemums and pansies in their seasons. A

porter of the universe, the father, the mother, and the grandfather."

large oak tree intertwined with fragrant wisteria vines shaded the green lawn.

During the hottest part of the day we stayed indoors. Oma took out her crochet hook and a ball of string and taught me to make simple chains while she worked on a tablecloth or doily. If Oma had a quilt set up, she would let me put in some stitches. I now realize she probably pulled them out after I had gone home; but if she did, I never knew it. As we worked together side by side Oma would tell me interesting stories about her childhood growing up in the little Texas farming community of Wolf Creek. Some memories were sad; her sister Lina died of pneumonia at age sixteen without the aid of a doctor because the flooded Pedernales River was too high to cross. There were happy memories of frequent visits to the ranch by her cousin, Chester Nimitz, later Commander of the Pacific Fleet in World War II. A signed photograph of the Admiral was always kept on display in her dining room. Other memories reflected duty. When Oma's brothers were called to fight in World War I, she became her father's ranch hand tending the cattle on horseback. She learned to shoot a rifle and she was still a good shot with a BB gun when squirrels threatened her garden.

On days when Oma was busy with canning or telephone calls, I entertained myself. A cabinet in the corner of her laundry room held some of my father's childhood toys and books. I played Lincoln logs and pick-up sticks and when Oma had time, we played a game of Chinese checkers. Hours were spent looking through Oma's postcard collection. As a budding writer, I wrote my own messages on old greeting cards imitating the sentiments expressed on the postcards from years gone by.

Occasionally I was allowed to spend the night. We watched the *Lawrence Welk Show* on the black and white television in her living room. When it was time for me to go to bed, Oma would say, "Lizzie, why don't you go warm up the bed for me?" I

crawled in between the cool sheets and fulfilled my duty carefully moving around the bed in search of cool spots to warm with my body heat until I dozed off

A row of cars parked on the street in front of Oma's house signaled that she was hosting the Canasta Club. After the guests departed, I scampered over to her house hoping for leftovers. When it was Oma's turn to host the club she made exotic foods like tomato aspic and congealed chicken. These were dishes never served at our house. Best of all were the desserts: moist German chocolate cake or homemade pies with fluffy meringue . Everything was served on her best china and crystal. After feasting on the tasty morsels, I helped her clean up the dishes. Oma would wash and I would dry and then carefully place the plates and stemware in the china cabinet and nestle the silver flatware in a velvet-lined case.

Each visit was different and I always went home with a smile on my face. Oma showed me through her example that happiness can be found at every stage of life. Certainly hers had not always been easy, but she chose create a quiet life that resonated with contentment in simple pleasures. Oma taught me that there is satisfaction in working with my hands to create something beautiful and useful. I learned that each day can be full and rich when we have family and friends, work to do and time to share. Surely the best gift I ever received from my special grandmother was the gift of time.

What Comes With Age

Tess Almendarez Lojacono

People whine so much about getting older.
It's true our bones ache,
Our eyes must work much harder now
Just to take in the faded images
We used to blur with gin.
And it's much more difficult
To hide the silver
The wrinkles
The skin that drapes instead of clinging to our shapes.
Old men still look at women
Just not at us anymore.

But with time passed
There also comes a knowing,
A certain confidence in understanding
That what we don't know
Was meant for someone else
And what we do know
Is enough.
And wonderful surprise —
You are there
Waiting, patiently beckoning,
Beloved.

run. My generation's out of breath. We ain't running no more." Stokely

Fishing with Gramps

J. D. Riso

I walked with Grandpa across the sleeping meadow towards the river. Night had not yet separated into sky, earth, forest, and beings. The tramping of our feet through the dew-soaked grass stirred up a doe. Her white tail flickered and then disappeared into the darkness. I held my fishing pole with both hands as I followed the glow from Grandpa's cigarette. It bobbed through the air like a plump, drowsy firefly. It was always best to fish before dawn, when the fish were least expecting it. That's what Grandpa always told me.

Grandpa paused, took a drag off his cigarette, and looked up at the indigo sky. "Those twinkling pinpricks in the heavens are nothing more than gateways, you know," he said. "Someday I'll be on the other side winking back at you. Letting you know I got my eye on you." He rested his hand on my head for a long moment and sighed. "Don't ever think you're alone, Daisy."

I wore a white dress to his funeral. A lone beacon amid a wailing field of black. Adolescence had sprung on me, leaving me sullen and bewildered in the face of such grief. I had been by Grandpa's side when he died, along with an entourage of tearful relatives. I was the only one who had noticed when he tried to speak from the depths of his coma; so intent were the others on their own sorrow. His lips trembled. His face was taut with anguish. He didn't want to leave when so many depended

on him. I laid my hand on his and squeezed. He closed his eyes and drifted away.

Somehow he got trapped in between realms; anchored by despair at the things from which he could not spare the living. Walking alone across the meadow, I think back on my turbulent life. No descendents will ever follow my beaten down path. I stare up at the vacant night sky; trace apologies in the air with my cigarette. I have always been responsible for myself, Grandpa. Let me lead you to that elusive portal, over the threshold, into the silent immensity.

The Color of Summer Trees

Heather Ann Schmidt

When I was young,
I gathered calico squares
the color of summer trees
and began to sew

like my great-grandmother did.

When I wanted to imagine
what she had been like,
I would go in my parent's room
and run my fingers along
the dimpling of her embroidery,
feel the colors
folded at the foot of their bed.

they thought it was the radio, but our grandfather told them it was

I dreamt of laying my quilt
over my daughter
if she fell asleep on the porch
or spreading it on the grass
for a concert
in the park.

At night I opened my windows
and lay on my bed
joining fabric with thread,
covering my knees —

and, like a long letter,
it was finished one day
and had to be folded.

Preacher Man

Barbara B. Rollins

Summer Nineteen Aught Two, at fourteen
Ike camped alone, clearing forty acres.
A young Latin teacher corralling hellions,
he gleaned respect and got control
carrying a boulder students couldn't budge,
could have tried for Olympic pole-vault fame,
but fame was small in Erath County, Texas.
A circuit riding preacher, Ike rode old Frank
to Megargle, Windthorst, Telephone, Rule,
and looking back to mule carts from moon flights,
one more jaunt – to Heaven.