

## *The Gift of My Grandfather*

*Poppy Let's Go Fishing*

*T. Joseph Dunham*

When skies burn with lightning, when thunder crashes the world like a falling mountain to earth, I am with my grandfather again. In the hardest days of my treatment for cancer – a battle we shared – a thunderstorm was miracle medicine to me. I can hear him talking to me in the thunder, and I remember those nights when I was a boy, laying together listening to corybantic storms.

Henry Ford Hume, my maternal grandfather, saved my life, and through his teaching made me the man I am today.

It was just after my remarkable remission from cancer – my chances of survival were small – when my grandmother told me about a dream she'd had when I was going through radiation treatment at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, when my tether to life was thread slender, when I was suffering the most.

“Buck, I didn't want to tell you this when you were going through radiation,” my grandmother said. “I had a dream about your grandfather. He was talking to me at Core Creek.”

“What did he say?”

I understand why she didn't tell me. They knew how I was suffering, how the chemo had burned my body, the radiation, when I was fighting the lymphoma raging in me.

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*sort of sprinkle stardust over the lives of little children.” Alex Haley*

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He was my world when I was a lad. On Saturday mornings, he'd come to get me in his Blue Chevy Station Wagon, and we'd be off on our adventures for the day. We'd stop for bait at Bart's – a fishing store in Tullytown – crossing over the train tracks, where he'd tell tales of steam locomotives – a favorite subject of mine.

“Why is it all black and sooty under the bridge?” he'd ask every week.

“From the steam engines going under it.”

With night crawlers or maggots in hand, we'd drive up Big Oak Road to Core Creek Park, following forgotten roads through the farm fields until we came to a stone bridge built in the 1700s. He'd grab his wizened fishing rod – a brown fiberglass pole with a cork base and flip reel. Then we were off to his favorite spot on the stream for trout.

In the sunlight, his skin was the color of red clay – the heritage of his Sioux mother of whom he seldom spoke – and decorated with myriad moles of all sizes. I inherited those moles and see him in my own body. His hair was a raven's crown of black feathers, and when traveling, he always wore a green John Deere cap complete with an emblem of a tractor. Though he had resigned smoking two decades since at the request of his dying brother, a hint of rich tobacco I could still smell about him.

We trod the muddy trails, following the course of the Core Creek, through the brittle wood until we came to a grassy clearing. At a bend in the creek, the water was deep, calmer. Much of the bank was closed by grass and sassafras, except for a dirt embankment, decorated in tracks of deer, raccoons and other animals that used the spot to take a drink.

We tried a bobber and bait for a while, but nothing hit it; so we took out the secret weapon: a black-feathered lure. He cast out, reeled it in.

“Always keep the lure just at the surface, and never reel it in too fast. Jiggle it a bit so the fish see it.”

We repeated the maneuver over the next hour. Some days we might only catch a sunfish or two, usually the same one coming back for seconds. Other days we’d bring in rainbow trout or small mouth bass. We waited, watching. I didn’t know it then, but this was one of many lessons he would teach me – patience, timing, waiting for the right moment.

Finally Poppy looked at the sun and declared it to be nearly noon. He never needed a watch. We walked back to his blue station wagon, talking of arrowheads he’d found as a lad from the Lenape tribe of Native Americans that hunted these woods and naming all the wild berries just starting to ripen. He taught me of the natural world and its wonders, to respect it. He was always teaching me, imparting to me his essence, passing his fire to me.

Then we were back to his apartment for a lunch of what he called sardukes and orange juice. Sardukes was his word for sardines in oil. My grandfather had composed his own lexicon, many words I still use today. We’d watch *The Three Stooges* and cartoons most of the day.

“Television is too violent. All that bang bang, shoot ‘em up. Violence just hurts people.”

I noted this. He taught me about peace. I’d only known violence from my father, anger. On the days when my father was home, fighting with my mother – punching walls and yelling, filling my heart with fear – I would furtively call my grandfather.

“What’s wrong Buck?”

I didn’t need to answer. He knew.

I’d climb out my bedroom window and wait at the corner of Thalubush Lane. In a few minutes I’d see his station wagon, and he’d take me away.

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Henry Hume was born in Virginia to a poor family with eight siblings. They came north to Pennsylvania seeking work and a better life. He married his sweetheart Rose. He served in Europe – a guard at Bletchley Park – the most secret facility in England where they were deciphering German code – then served in Europe as part of the occupation force and then in Japan. When he came home, he worked for Falls Township – paving roads, cutting grass and doing maintenance – and fathered my three uncles and mother.

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I was twelve when he had surgery for his hernia. The surgeon discovered his colon was malignant with cancer. This was the beginning of our battle, a struggle I would one day take from his shoulders so he might rest. The Doctors gave him a year. He defied them and lived five more, battling cancer in various incarnations, fighting with the strength of storm. His only wish was to see his grandchildren grow up, to make sure we were safe. He showed me the power of love – a strength I would need to battle the cancer when my time came.

I boiled in my anguish, my helplessness, watching the cancer whittle away this great man I loved, this divinity of my childhood. I prayed for some way I could take his pain onto me.

In 1996 his cancer had progressed into Lymphoma, and he was fading, growing weaker like a spending spring in a watch. A short time before he died, I found a golf ball sized lump under my ear, which was surgically removed.

The cancer had come into me. Large Cell Lymphoma burns through you like a brush fire, and according to various scans, in a week, I had tumors throughout my body. This cell type kills quickly, a matter of months. If I had any chance of living, I had to start chemo right away.

“Don’t tell him,” my mother forbade. “He’ll try to stay.”

And I didn't, but he knew.

A few days later he was admitted to hospital to make him comfortable. He slept and had brief frissons of consciousness but was too weak to speak. I went to him, sat by him, took his hand. My hand was no longer a little boy's. We now had the same hands – spotted in moles.

He was desperate to speak to me, to wrestle the fetters of weakness that silenced him. His hand clenched mine. He wanted to tell me many things of life, of his love. I knew already, for he had always told me.

“Poppy,” I whispered. “I know you love me. I'm going to be okay.”

And he grunted loudly with all of his remaining force, the last of his essence. His eyes sprung open and then they closed. He slept and did not stir again. Over the night, his breathing grew shallow.

Then he slept.

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My own battle then began. I had no time to mourn him. That summer, I endured rounds of chemotherapy, heavy in dose. In the fall and winter, I would travel into Philadelphia for a daily treatment of radiation. He was always with me. And we beat it. I had taken the burden from him so he could rest. And though the treatment destroyed my body, my soul is alive because of Henry Hume.

When I think back to the dream my grandmother told me of, I still yet weep.

“What did he say Grammy?”

She told me: “Let me come get Buck. Let me take him fishing so he doesn't have to hurt anymore.”

And she had yelled at him in the dream to let me be, to not take me. She wanted me to live because she knew.

I would have gone with him.

## *Almost a Century*

*Mary Belardi Erickson*

For Elmer J. Smith, 1883-1979

Grandpa taught country school in his youth  
 before raising barn and family.  
 Of habit, he rocked evenings, reading  
 the city's newspaper  
 by the sturdy dining table.  
 Here times, his left hand rested.  
 His Irene had purchased furniture  
 with her own teaching money.  
 He didn't talk about her dying, her later sixties.  
 During weekly toils his words were a frugality  
 prompting work.  
 On Sunday's he became country philosopher,  
 as in his letters courting Irene.

Later at 96, his voice soft, his eyes a well,  
 he murmured my name.  
 I needed another quarter-century to fully understand.  
 Fewer are like him--getting rooted in the land  
 and mostly leaving it as God made it.

Grandpa lived through the 1970's  
 when Mustangs first sped on freeways —

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*erweight portable museum." Susan Sontag ~§~ "What is it about*

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slowing some for the trend in cloverleaves.  
Long-last, creaks in knees, Elmer Smith retired the farm.  
He moved to town, staying at my mother's.  
When I visited home from college,  
    he asked if in the city *I saw the elephant* —  
fancifully large, running the circus circle faster than life.  
Its image slows and sways,  
    daintily bending trunk-sized legs to bow.

Grandpa's thick white hair the topper,  
    he thumped his cane from his new rocker,  
a ringmaster for a parade past picture-window.  
He took his hoe  
    to rid his daughter's lawn of any dandelions.

## Granny's Face

*Joy Harold Helsing*

As crinkled  
and comforting  
as the worn wicker chair  
she rocked us in

## *Keepsake*

*Renee Emerson*

Where the chain-link fence meets to hem  
our land from theirs, my mother  
planted the bulb of an iris  
she dug from the wasted  
garden of my great-grandmother.

Still a child, I thought it was her grave;  
the bulb balanced on her forehead, roots  
stitching through the alcoves of her  
eyes, crevice of her mouth. The stalk:  
hard-toothed enamel, hint of bones  
underneath. The flower: color  
of communion wine.

She would have never extended  
these hands, petals cupped  
to catch what comes, soft as her skin  
tampering to soil  
through decay, the takings  
we imagined in the summer nights  
in our cool beds, the hum of cicada  
stretching on and on. This embalming  
I understood, not as her open hand  
but open eye – colored, reoccurring.

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*God's gifts to children. And if they can but see, hear and feel what*

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## A Small Town in Normandy

Liza Granville

“What can I do to cheer you up?” asked Megan. Three years had gone by since Gran’s passing, but her grandfather seemed more at a loss than ever. They’d always been very close. She hated to see him like this. “Is there anywhere you’d like to go? Just say. The car’s outside. You know how much we enjoy our outings.”

“That’s a sweet thought, Megan, but there’s nowhere.” He sighed. “Can I pour you another cup of tea, *bach*?”

“Please.” But knowing how much her grandfather hated the thought of being a nuisance now that he no longer drove, Megan persisted. “What about Bristol? It would only take an hour to get there. We could see a show and have dinner somewhere nice afterwards. Call it an early birthday treat.” And when he gently shook his head, she added, a bit more forcefully: “I’m sure there must be somewhere, near or far, that you’d like to visit. Come along, David Williams, I insist on knowing!”

“Do you indeed?” He laughed for the first time that afternoon. “That sounded just like your grandmother talking!”

“Well, she’d want you to be out and about, enjoying yourself.”

They were both silent for a few moments, remembering her, then David said, very hesitantly: “There is just one place... but, no, it’s a silly idea, out of the question. And it would take far too long. Forget I mentioned it.”

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*these people have to give, they can mature at a fast rate.” Bill Cosby*

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“You’re not getting away with that, Gramps. Tell me.”

“Normandy,” he said reluctantly, much to Megan’s surprise. “To tell you the truth, I’ve been meaning to go back for a very long time.” His eyes turned dreamy, as if looking at some distant memory. “I always promised myself I would.”

David looked up and caught her expression. “There, Megan – I can see by your face that you hate the idea. Didn’t I tell you to forget it?”

“I don’t hate the idea,” fibbed Megan, thinking of the memorials to the Second World War. Try as she might, Megan couldn’t raise any enthusiasm for guns, tanks and battle strategy or, indeed, for a chapter of history that seemed so very long ago and far away. “You know how much I love France. I’m always happy to go there. I’m simply surprised because you’ve been to the Landing Grounds before.”

She knew that several years previously he’d gone with a group of other Second World War veterans to visit Sword Beach as well as the American sites at the Utah and Omega beaches. “But if you want to see them again...”

“I don’t.” David looked a little flustered. He moved the teapot and fiddled with the sugar bowl. “It was something else left undone. But it’s not important.”

“We’re going,” said Megan, resigning herself to a week of battle tours. At least as a freelance translator, her time was her own. She could always catch up with work on her laptop in the evenings if necessary. There wasn’t much else in her life; hadn’t been for a long time. Not since Steve’s heartless departure. Her heart still ached at the memory. Megan repressed a sigh and forced a bright smile. “And that’s that.”

“Now just a minute...” began her grandfather, but the way his eyes lit up belied any protest.

“Just tell me when. I’ll make the arrangements. Where shall we stay? Caen?”

And that was where the mystery had started.

Caen, with its central position and many war connections seemed the perfect choice. Besides, it had other attractions that appealed to Megan: links with William the Conqueror, the Peace memorial, fantastic shopping, good restaurants, Calvados...

But, no, her grandfather insisted on staying in a little town called Sainte-Mère-Église, out in the countryside over fifty miles from Caen. When pressed, he muttered something about wanting to see the lie of the land.

More battle strategy, thought Megan, and looked it up on the net.

And she was right. Lying on Route N13, Sainte-Mère-Église had occupied an important position during the invasion. It was the first town in France liberated by the Allied forces. Her grandfather had never been forthcoming about his time as a soldier; quite the reverse, in fact. Perhaps things were about to change.

And they were. But not in any way that Megan could have foreseen.

Her first inkling of what lay ahead came when she found her grandfather poring over a Sunday paper colour supplement. Glancing over his shoulder, she was surprised at the subject matter.

“Developing an interest in men’s fashion, Gramps?”

“Er... well... I don’t want you being ashamed of me.”

Megan laughed. “As if I would!”

“Thought I’d buy something smart for our trip.” His eyes slid to the open paper. “Some of the chaps modeling these clothes are no spring chickens. No reason why I shouldn’t take a leaf out of their books, I suppose?” He eyed her doubtfully. “Am I at risk of making myself ridiculous?”

“Not at all,” Megan assured him, hurriedly composing her face. Her grandfather always dressed smartly. And after all, no

matter what his age, why shouldn't a man care about his appearance? "Want me to come shopping with you?"

"Thank you, *bach*, no." Her grandfather's chin went up. "This is something I have to do on my own."

"I see." His grimly determined expression suggested a man readying himself for combat rather than a trip to the Mall. Megan bit her lip and beat a hurried retreat.

Although they frequently spoke on the phone, it was not until the day of their departure that Megan caught her first glimpse of the new David Williams. Her jaw dropped.

She'd imagined him purchasing updated versions of his usual summer blazer and cavalry twills; a couple of new ties, perhaps, in more daring colours. Not so. Today he was wearing a natural linen jacket over a soft blue shirt that exactly matched the colour of his eyes. And were those really chinos? And... loafers? They were.

It didn't stop there.

The severe side parting had disappeared. Her grandfather's snowy white hair was now cut very short, and – Megan was certain of this – had some sort of gel applied to make it stay in position. What was more, his aftershave smelled somewhat more expensive than the family's usual Christmas offerings.

"Well," said Megan, when she finally regained the power of speech, "you look absolutely wonderful."

David surveyed himself in the mirror. "The French are very stylish," he said vaguely. "Shall we think about going, *bach*? Wouldn't want to miss the ferry."

Sainte-Mère-Église turned out to be little more than a village, consisting of one main street with a church and a large town hall. Everything seemed geared to the memory of D-Day. All the cafes and bars – even the boulangerie – had battle-related names. And yet, in spite of the tourism, the place managed to retain its essential character. Passers-by greeted each other with

friendly courtesy. In cafes, men sipped coffee and cognac and leisurely put the world to rights. The pace of life was different here: it was simply French.

Megan sighed deeply. “Lovely.”

“I knew you’d like it,” said her grandfather.

“It’s a wonderful place. I’m surprised you haven’t come back before.” Megan gave him a searching look. “Why now?”

His eyes shifted. “It wouldn’t have been fair to your grandmother.”

“No, I suppose the war didn’t interest her either.”

“It wasn’t exactly...” David hesitated. “What’s the name of the place we’re staying in? I could do with a nap before dinner.”

Their little pension overlooked the church square. Painted a startling white, it had green shutters and window boxes full of scarlet geraniums. A plump cat sunning itself on the doorstep gravely accompanied them to the reception desk and a warmly welcoming proprietor.

A delicious meal and a good night’s sleep wiped out the stresses of the long journey.

Megan was woken early by the sonorous tone of the church clock. Throwing open her shutters, she discovered a bustling open air market now occupied the square below. The stalls were piled high with summer fruits, with butter and Normandy cheese, sausage. They would have a picnic lunch, Megan decided. Shopping for local delicacies in the market would be the perfect start to the day’s exploration.

Her grandfather had already left his room. Megan wasn’t surprised: he was an habitual early riser. She found him outside, eating breakfast in the pension’s sunlit courtyard. Not only that – Megan smiled to herself – but he was chatting animatedly to the woman serving his coffee. That was no surprise either. David Williams was a true Welshman: oratory was in his blood.

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*phoned my grandparents and my grandfather said ‘we saw your*

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However, the topic of conversation did surprise her. Unwilling to intrude, Megan hovered, half hidden by a bushy fig tree.

The waitress frowned. “Blanchard, monsieur?”

“Yes,” David nodded furiously. “Oui, Madame Yvette Blanchard.”

“Ah, oui!” The waitress bent closer, speaking rapidly. After a minute or so, she turned to pick a leaflet from a display, spread it on the table and marked something with a pen. At this distance Megan was unable to catch any of the words until the woman straightened, smiled broadly and cried: “*Bon chance, monsieur!* Good luck!”

As soon as she’d gone, Megan slid into the chair opposite her grandfather. “Good morning, Gramps. Good luck with what?”

“Ah, Megan, there you are.”

Megan looked at him curiously. She couldn’t recall ever seeing her grandfather even slightly put out before, never mind blushing. Without another word, she helped herself to coffee.

“The croissants are very good,” he murmured, pushing the basket towards her, “and still warm.” Megan selected one.

“That apricot preserve is homemade,” he added. Megan merely smiled. And waited.

Her grandfather narrowed his eyes. “You learned that silent trick off your grandmother, too,” he growled with mock ferocity. “Either that, or it’s in the genes. I know it well. My Gwynn couldn’t stand secrets either.” His expression changed abruptly. “I never kept anything from her, you know. She knew the things that happened here were part of another life, another time.”

“Tell me,” Megan said, gently. She took a deep breath. “Tell me about Yvette.”

And in his deep melodic voice, David Williams began to outline the events of June 1944. As always, nothing was said

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movie.’ *Which one?*’ I said. He shouted *‘Betty, what was the name of*

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about the actual fighting beyond the fact that he arrived soon after the liberation of Sainte-Mère-Église.

Some of the town's buildings had been set alight and were still smouldering. Others lay in ruins. The young soldier found Yvette cowering in the cellar of a shelled house. He'd only a few words of French; she spoke little English. And yet something had sparked between them: an understanding that gave them hope in that terrible darkness; a tenderness that had no need of a common language. Love at first sight, he insisted, and Megan quickly turned her face away so her grandfather shouldn't see the bitter cynicism that L-word aroused in her. They had but a few short days together before David's military duties took him further into Normandy, towards Saint-Lô, the battles at Falaise, and ultimately Paris.

He'd promised to return. It was not that simple.

The war was over by the time David Williams stood again in the square of Sainte-Mère-Église. There was no mistaking the hardship the population was suffering but these people were proud and rebuilding had already begun.

"And Yvette?" Megan asked, softly.

"Married," her grandfather said, a catch in his voice, "and who could blame her? She is a widow now, but then the future was more than bricks and mortar."

He'd gone home to Wales.

"And then I met your grandmother and found real happiness." David returned her gaze very steadily. "Love isn't a once in a lifetime thing, Megan, whatever they tell you. There will be someone else. I know how badly you're still hurting over Steve, *bach* – I've seen it in your eyes, no good trying to hide it – but it's time you opened your heart again. I had to. And I never once regretted it."

Megan's eyes filled with tears. If only she could believe that. She looked away, not trusting herself to speak.

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*that movie I didn't like?" Brad Pitt ~§~ "Sometimes we take for*

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“So now I propose to finally keep my promise of more than half a century ago to Yvette. Where did the years go to? It seems like yesterday.” Her grandfather shook his head, clearly amazed by the fleeting passage of time. He took Megan’s arm. “I’m a little scared. Will you come with me?”

They strolled slowly and mostly in silence through the busy, flag-bedecked streets of Sainte-Mère-Église.

It has been so long, thought Megan, an unimaginably long time. Yvette’s probably forgotten him. It’s almost certain that they won’t recognise each other. How embarrassing it will be. Poor Gramps, how can I soften this blow?

Yvette’s home was on the outskirts of the town, a pretty house covered in creepers and fronted by a cobbled courtyard. White doves sunned themselves on the roof. A very small, very elegant woman, her dark hair coiled into a neat chignon, stood watering lilies growing in huge terracotta pots outside the open door. She turned at their approach showing a face that, whilst lined, still retained a sweet femininity. Megan heard her grandfather’s swift intake of breath.

“Yvette?”

The woman stared, shielding her eyes from the sun. Then her hand flew to her mouth; the can fell to the floor with a loud clatter. For the space of a heartbeat it was as though time stood still.

“David?” Yvette cried. “*Non, ce n’est pas possible!*”

Megan’s grandfather stepped forward. “Yvette, yes, it’s me...”

Some magic happened. The years seem to fall away. David stood proudly erect and held out his arms. Without hesitation Yvette gracefully ran to him. They were no longer two elderly people, simply lovers reunited after an overlong parting.

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*granted what our grandparents do for us. They've done a lot for me*

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“I’ll meet you back at the pension,” Megan said, hurriedly, a lump in her throat. She had no wish to intrude on this special moment.

But already they were being shown to a shady table. Introductions were made. A bottle of wine appeared. Toasts were drunk as David and Yvette sat, holding hands and reminiscing. Totally absorbed in each other, it was almost impossible to believe that they’d not seen each other for fifty-odd years. Perhaps true love did exist... for some.

After a while, Megan again made her excuses. “I have some work to catch up on. Besides, I’d really like to look around the market.”

“Pardon,” said Yvette, her dark eyes contrite, “we ‘av so much to talk about, your ‘andsome grand-père and me.” She paused. “I ’av the good idea. One moment, please.” Yvette disappeared into the house, re-appearing a short time later with a tall young man, dark and intent and intensely Gallic. “This is my grandchild, Pierre. He will be most happy to be your guide.”

“There’s no need...” began Megan, but Pierre was already greeting her in the time-honoured French way, kissing her on both cheeks like an old friend.

“Very happy indeed,” said Pierre, his dark eyes sparkling with appreciation as he surveyed her blonde hair and slim figure. When it became clear that he wouldn’t take no for an answer, Megan gave in gracefully.

Pierre’s English was perfect and he proved a wonderful companion. Even though Megan would have preferred to avoid all things military, this proved impossible in Sainte-Mère-Église since the town set such store on the memories attached to D-Day. And it didn’t matter because having Pierre beside her made everything interesting. History came alive. It had been a long time since Megan had experienced anything so close to having fun. While she explored the market Pierre pointed out the effigy

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*as far as keeping my head up and heading in the right direction.”*

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of the parachutist trailing from the church's steeple and told her the tale of John Steele, an American paratrooper, who'd accidentally landed there, dangling helplessly above the German defenders, deafened by the tolling of the bell and feigning death.

"There's something else I must show you," said Pierre with a smile. Behind the church gushed a vigorous spring. "This is dedicated to Saint Mewan who, like you, came here from Wales. The waters are supposed to be healing. The old women say that it strengthens the heart."

Megan cupped her hands and drank a little of the ice cold water. Maybe it was her imagination, but something equally frozen deep inside her seemed to react. And the realisation came that Gramps was right. Painful or not, it was time to let her poor wounded heart heal.

In the Airborne Museum that thought and Pierre's vital presence made Megan look for the first time at the faces in the poignant photographs and realise how very young the servicemen were, how far from home, and how great and steadfast their sacrifice had been in the name of freedom. Not all men were like Steve. Not all men shirked their commitments.

"*Bien*," said Pierre, when they finally emerged, "enough of the past. Come, now we'll go to my favourite café for lunch."

What a fairy tale ending it would be, thought Megan, if Pierre and I fell in love and completed the circle that started in 1944. She smiled. It could never be. He was good-looking, intelligent, charming... with a very sexy accent, but there was no spark, no electricity.

Not that love at first sight really existed. It was a myth. Megan didn't understand what had happened between her grandfather and Yvette but she did know it was the exception, not the rule.

Pierre dived into a small restaurant where a group of young people greeted him enthusiastically. He introduced her in rapid

French. “This is Megan. Her grandfather fell in love with my grand-mère during the war. They met again today. Now I think he will stay. Very romantic, eh?”

“Stay?” whispered Megan, considering the possibility. But after all, if Yvette and David still loved each other, why not? The ever present ache in her heart increased with the recognition that, beneath layers of cynicism borne of despair, she also yearned for love like theirs, capable of transcending space and time. Megan snapped out of her reverie as Pierre began reeling off a list of his friends’ names.

“That’s Paul-Henri in the corner with Marie; next to her is André, then Anton, Jules and Marcel. Last but not least,” he gestured towards a quietly good-looking man engrossed in his newspaper who glanced up, smiling, did a double take and kept his eyes fixed on her face, “meet Luc.”

And as Megan, smiling hesitantly, met Luc’s eyes, she felt her heart do a double somersault and finally understood.

## *Birth*

*Joy Harold Helsing*

Child of my child,  
welcome  
to this old world  
you make more beautiful

## *Depression Glass*

*Alice King Greenwood*

Squinting eyes betrayed my weakness  
and Mama guessed I needed glasses.  
I could use her old black frames,  
she said, to save on costs.

I hated those old-fashioned things  
and begged for new, bright golden rims.  
“Little girls don’t wear black frames,”  
I pouted, obstinate and vain.

Scarce dollars made frugality  
our necessary friend, and Mama  
penny-pinched with dogged zeal,  
her own new coat postponed another year.  
I didn’t mind the hand-me-downs  
or half-soled shoes or undies sewn  
from flour sacks, but I could not  
endure black frames.

And then it came, that day  
I pulled the prize out from its case  
and raised the glasses to my eyes.  
Through golden frames I chanced a glance  
at Mama’s shining face, and traced in it  
the splendid secret of her sacrifice.

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*took us to the Moon the first time. Now it's time for us to go back to*

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## *Pictures After Dinner*

*Juleigh Howard-Hobson*

It is 1974. I am at my grandmother's house. My Uncle Anthony, who just got married and moved away, is over here. He is staying with his mother and father, Great Uncle Charlie and Great Aunt Lily, but still, today for dinner he comes over here. His new wife does, too. And Great Uncle Charlie and Great Aunt Lily, they come over, and my Great Aunt Nora comes over here, and my cousins come over here, and my Aunt Ginger and my Uncle Tim, who are the parents of my cousins, they're over here, too.

We eat.

Lithuanian food. Potato pancakes, duck with sauerkraut and mushrooms, cheese dumplings, pickled beets, pickled cucumbers, pickled mushrooms. After dinner there is honeycake. The great aunts make coffee. They cut nice big slices of cake. My mother and the young aunts, they drink iced tea, and say, "Just give me a small piece of the cake."

My uncles, the great ones and the regular ones, they drift down to the cellar and play pool. Uncle Anthony stays up here with his new wife. She is from Colorado, her hair is straight and blonde and her teeth are straight and shiny. She didn't have any cake. She drank some iced tea, not much though. She smiles at everyone.

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*the Moon to stay, and then head straight for Mars." George Whitesides*

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The great aunts take the dishes off the table and put them in the sink to soak, then they say “Come on” and we all go in the parlor and they take out the family pictures.

For Uncle Anthony’s new wife. To show her. “Sit here, next to us,” they say to her. She smiles and sits. They pat her smooth tan hands with their old yellow wrinkled ones, and then they open the big brown leather album with the black pages.

Thin tissue paper separates the pages from each other. The leather smells like a shoe store. The black page edges are soft and worn, almost like cloth now. There is a cobweb pattern embossed in the tissue paper. It’s hard to see because it’s really old, but it’s there. I know.

The cousins and me, we sit on the laps of the great aunts as they turn the pages and stop to point there, there, there at the black and white pictures. Each page, they point... There is Tom. That is Al. There’s George, Ike, Patty... This one is of me... This is her... That is us.

My mother and my Aunt Ginger go downstairs to play pool. Uncle Anthony excuses himself. Where? The bathroom, maybe. We look at the old family photographs for a while longer, the new aunt, the old aunts, my cousins, me.

Then, my grandmother says, “Well, time is getting late, where is that husband of yours?” My new aunt smiles and gets up. Everybody gets up. I don’t get up; I shift over and sit by myself on the couch. My grandmother puts the photograph album on the coffee table. They go and look for Uncle Anthony.

I pick the album up.

I turn the pages by myself.

*Hello Tom, Al, George, Ike, Patty.*

## Tea Party Times

Alice King Greenwood

In her gingerbread-ornamented house, Grandmother prepares the parlor for the arrival of friends. A linen cloth and crocheted doilies adorn the round table where a monogrammed napkin rests beside each plate. Books, pens, note paper are laid out. Exactly at three o'clock the house begins to fill.

Ladies unpin and remove their broad-brimmed hats; their long skirts rustle as they seat themselves in the hard, high back chairs around the table. Aging fingers slip from gloves and reach out to receive their cups. Each demitasse is made of fine white china, daintily embossed with tiny pink flowers and swirls of gold. From matching pot, the hostess pours warm ginger tea and serves light sugar cakes, as sweet to the taste as poetry to the ears.

The ladies share small books of literature, some leather-bound, some aesthetically illustrated, brought for the perusal and enlightenment of the group. Shakespeare, the Literary Society agrees, exudes charm and wit; the Brownings – intellectual prowess and the greatest virtue, love. How pleasantly the hour passes as each friend reads a few lines of verse she deems most delightful.

My granddaughter is coming today, and I must get everything ready for our tea party. I spread a crocheted doily on a low table flanked by two child-size chairs. I find two flowered

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*around people who had a hard time. A whole lot of my inspiration just*

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napkins trimmed with lace and lay them, folded, beside the miniature plates.

Exactly at ten o'clock she comes skipping into the house, excited and bubbly, ponytail flying. She chooses to sit in the little blue plastic chair, and I take the other. Soft fingers grasp her demitasse cup made of fine white china, daintily embossed with tiny pink flowers and swirls of gold. From a matching pot, I pour cool raspberry punch and bring out a plate of Twinkies cut to bite-size pieces.

Nearby is a well-worn copy of *Mother Goose*, and after the party we look at it together. I start reading where I left off last time. Then she recites from memory her favorite rhymes while I listen to her performance with feigned amazement. Together we let the words roll trippingly off our tongues and let the rhymes tickle our ears until we can't stop laughing. Too quickly the hour passes, and she must go home.

I carefully wash and put away the dishes, trying to visualize another time, another generation, when these same little cups will grace other hands – the hands of lovely ladies and lighthearted girls who love to have tea parties.

## *Life Lessons*

*Blanche Ledford*

The threads of time unravel  
a patchwork of names:  
Mary Townsend, Malinda Linn Stewart,  
and Aveline Chambers wearing

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*came off of growing up around a small town and the things we did. I*

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flour sack dresses, sitting  
around the quilting frame  
teaching me life skills.

They taught me the song  
of generations: to thread a needle,  
stitches no bigger than pinpricks,  
choose a color scheme,  
create my own shape.

They taught me patience:  
to match the seams,  
correct my mistakes, pick  
out threads with fingernails,  
take your time, don't waste cloth.

My grandmothers showed me  
to keep house in Log Cabins,  
beware of the Drunkard's Path,  
light of the Lone Star,  
and the sacred bond of matrimony  
in the Double Wedding Ring.

## Grandpa Dances

IF Miller

At 6 p.m. like clockwork  
he came, washed his hands,  
muttered a *bruche*\*  
tossed back a *schnapps*\*  
and ate from the plate  
Ma set out for him.  
His mask face  
never looked up.

When he died in my arms  
on the subway platform  
he looked the same  
though his eyes were closed.

Last night  
he closed his eyes  
and danced on my ceiling  
hands above his head  
swayed in ecstasy  
stamped the ground.

When I greeted him,  
he ignored me  
and sang a *nigun*\*.

\*In Yiddish, *bruche* is blessing; *schnapps* is whiskey; a *nigun*  
is a wordless song intoned as a prayer.

## Mother Willow

Karen Kelsay

You are the gentle willow, who I often  
thought looked weak. Your strong-willed  
child that made her loud debut among  
your branches, hanging

in the adolescent wind, has grown.  
Your leaves have turned a softer lemon-green.  
Sparrows gather on your quiet sleeves  
to nest. It's peaceful in your presence.

Once, I could not see enchanting shadows  
that you cast. Your bark is deep with lines,  
and catkin clusters free themselves  
to float across the twilight's dark divide

where little drowsy seeds prevail  
along the moonlit trails.

## *Both Sides of the Coin*

*Carol McAdoo Rehme*

Life,  
my grandmother used to say,  
Makes  
some people bitter  
rusts their ambitions  
hones their suspicions  
sours their dispositions.  
They let it  
corrupt  
their souls.  
On the other hand,  
said grandmother,  
Life makes some people  
better  
shines their cognition  
tones their intuition  
sweetens their composition.  
They use it to  
refine  
their souls.

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*more potent, nay, more present than the living man.” Antoine de*

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## School Days

Janet Hartman

I was eight years old and wanted to play “teacher.” With no siblings or nearby playmates, who could I pick to play “student?” My seventy-four year old grandfather, of course.

He lived with my parents and me. Normally I called him Grampa, but when I morphed into teacher he became Charles. I heard tales of the bright red hair and mustache he wore as a young man nicknamed “Red,” but they and the name were only memories. Now, his thick, pure-white hair combined with his silver-rimmed glasses gave him a distinguished look. During our lessons, his face always had a serious expression. If he thought this game was silly, he never let on.

With an art board across my lap for a desk, we covered math and spelling. His spelling was surprisingly good for a Czech immigrant used to his native phonetic language. When he gave a wrong answer, I imitated the teachers I saw on TV. “Charles!” I shouted, slamming my fist on the board. “You must pay attention!”

Sometimes I punished him with homework to do after school – writing the same word a specified number of times. Each time, the number increased until one time he stopped part way through, set down his pencil, shook his head and said, “That’s too much.” He refused to write any more.

What could I do? I couldn’t suspend my only pupil, so I modified the curriculum instead: natural history replaced

spelling. Fascinated by horses, I selected a volume from my encyclopedia and asked him to read aloud the evolution of the horse. He paused at the word “eohippus” and looked at me with questioning eyes. I wasn’t sure how to pronounce it either, but my position of authority demanded that I fake it. After all, he wouldn’t know if I said it incorrectly.

Remembering my teacher’s instruction to “sound out” new words, I said “Ee-oh-hipp-us.”

Grampa returned his attention to the page and moved his lips in silent preparation to tackle this strange word.

“Ee-oh-hippus,” he repeated, and continued reading.

Because I had started piano lessons that year, I could provide my student a well-rounded education that included music lessons. While I played the piano, he sang, but in a gritty voice and little off key. My repertoire consisted of very simple songs. I often wonder what he thought as he dutifully sang, “Sing Polly Wolly Doodle all the day.” I’m sure he would have preferred playing the accordion he brought with him over 30 years ago from Czechoslovakia, but the leaky bellows wheezed.

When lessons ended for the day, I rang a bell and announced, “Class dismissed.” Like all students, even good ones, he relaxed with a smile, his patience finally rewarded.

I don’t remember how many hours we shared this way. I learned things from our lessons they didn’t teach in school, and I assume he learned things, too. But I had to reach adulthood to appreciate what he taught his only granddaughter: love requires patience; appreciate the uniqueness of individuals; and always be open to new things. I sometimes wish I had inherited more of his saintly patience. Maybe it comes with age.

## Little “g”

*Brenda Bellinger*

My earliest memories take me back to my grandparents’ home in Norwalk, Connecticut. It was a rambling, two-story colonial with a front porch that wrapped around one side. In true early New England fashion, the house had both an attic and a cellar. As a very young child, I lived there with my mother in an apartment upstairs above her parents, who were known to me as Nana and Med (short for “Amedee”).

Med was a sales manager for Burroughs Corporation and he did some of his work at home at a large desk in the cellar. Sometimes, if he wasn’t too busy, he would let me use his typewriter. Inserting a sheet of paper, he would roll it around the platen and secure it with two rubber rollers on a metal bar. While waiting for him to push me up to his big desk, I’d be impatiently twirling myself around on his swivel chair, enjoying the smell of Bay Rum. At last, my chubby finger would hover over the keys in their little round metal frames, until I found the one I wanted. Med would tell me to press the key quickly and firmly but I always did it slowly at first. Through the curved, open front of the old Underwood, I’d watch as the metal arm bearing the chosen letter would rise and beat itself against the black fabric ribbon, leaving its impression on the paper. I’d hit the return lever a couple of times to raise the paper so I could see the imprint of the letter, or more often than not, it’s shadow.

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*enough. ~ Irwin Shaw ~§~ “Because who can describe the look that*

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As I began to learn the alphabet in school, I wondered why the letters weren't in order on the typewriter keys. Med explained the design to me. He knew all about typewriters and adding machines. I remember going along with him a couple of times on business calls. With his thick, wavy, salt-and-pepper hair, he was so handsome in his suit and tie. I was always amazed at how quickly he could type, using all of his fingers and without even looking at the keys!

Nana would see me off to school each day, weaving a ribbon that matched my outfit through my long red braid. Often she would pin a navy French beret at a jaunty angle on my head. If the weather was nice, I could walk down the street to meet my friend Charlene and we would hop over the stone wall and race across the cemetery to Tracy School where the "R" in "Tracy" hung upside-down.

In first grade, I began to write letters and form words on those never-ending sheets of beige newsprint with two heavy blue lines separated by a dotted line. Back home, in the cellar, I'd try to type the same words and then check the shape of the letters against my own. The lower case "g's" troubled me. I'd pull the sheet of paper out of the typewriter and sit on the cellar steps and practice the little "g's" over and over again with my pencil while my grandmother's iron hissed under a cone of light from a bare bulb overhead. I loved the way the steamy smell of ironed sheets, dried outside on the line, chased away the mustiness of that cellar.

Whether she was in the kitchen, outside hanging clothes on the line or ironing in the cellar, Nana was always wrapped in a colorful apron. She was a short, round, bosomy grandma who wore her long silver hair braided and coiled into a bun. When she was in sixth grade, she dropped out of school to help her mother take care of the house and her ten siblings. Every once in a while, she and Med would converse in French if they didn't

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*triggers the memory of loved ones? Who can anticipate the frown, the*

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want me to know what they were saying. Nana had a few unique expressions of her own such as “Perish Forbid!” – a combination of “Perish the Thought” and “Heaven Forbid.” She was a wonderful cook and I have many of her recipes, written in her own hand, stored in her old biscuit tin on my shelf. For me, these are like secret formulas for time travel. With the first taste of her sweet pepper relish or shrimp-stuffed celery sticks, I’m a child again in her cozy kitchen.

Some of my fondest memories of my grandparents and that home in particular, revolve around the four seasons of the East Coast. In the fall, Med would rake all of the red and gold leaves in the front yard into a huge pile within jumping distance of the porch. In the winter, he and Nana would contribute bits and pieces to help dress the snowman I’d made next to the driveway. It seems she was forever drying out my boots and mittens. After the weather warmed in the spring, Nana would remove her apron, put on a little lipstick and a sweater and come to call for tea in my playhouse in their backyard. Med loved waxing the metal slide with waxed paper so I could slide down faster. During summer storms, he and I would watch lightning from old wooden rocking chairs on the front porch. In between claps of thunder, we might hear the side screen door bang shut and Nana would appear with a tray of tea, toast and grapes.

During these early years, my mother worked as a switchboard operator at the Frost Building in Norwalk. As a young single woman, she had a busy social life and was sometimes gone for several days at a time. I’d been aware that Mom was dating and I was introduced to a man named John who’d caught her fancy. He drove a fancy white convertible with red leather seats. Nana and Med thought he was a bit wild and not suitable for their daughter or granddaughter. One day, I was asked to make a decision that no child at the age of eight should have to make.

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*smile, or the misplaced lock of hair that sends a swift, undeniable sig-*

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I remember sitting on Nana's bed downstairs, feeling the nubby texture of her white chenille bedspread beneath my fingers. She and Med closed the door and asked me if I was happy there and if I wanted to continue to live with them. They told me they didn't want me to leave. I was confused and didn't really understand what they were talking about. They stepped out when Mom knocked at the door. She came in and offered promises of a different place to live (in California!), a new dad and probably brothers and sisters. I would fly on an airplane and maybe, someday, be able to come back and visit Nana and Med. I can still see the fringe of the bedspread brushing the wooden floor as I swung my legs back and forth, my mind racing. Mom told me I could choose to stay with Nana and Med or go with her and then she left the room.

Nana and Med came in once more. This time, Nana sat next to me and put her arm around my shoulders. She wiped my tears with her apron. Med sat in the chair and he looked very unhappy. That was probably the most difficult moment of my childhood. Everything seemed to be happening so fast and I didn't know what to do! Looking back, I can't tell you why I decided to go with Mom and John, her new husband to be. What rationale would an eight year old use? Could I have given up everything that was comfortable and familiar for a promised ride in an airplane?

It's been more than forty-five years since my mother and I boarded that plane to meet John in San Francisco and it all turned out for the best. Three little brothers did come along and we are all a very close family, especially Dad and I. It took a few years for Nana and Med's hurt and bitterness to subside but over several visits back and forth, they grew to love and respect Dad when they saw what a wonderful husband and father he became. I only wish they had lived long enough to see what fine

grandparents their daughter and her husband became to my own four sons.

Recalling the early years of my childhood, my fingers still hover over the keys. About that letter “g” I used to struggle with – two words immediately come to mind: grateful and grandparents.

## Windows

MaryEllen Letarte

“Do coffins have windows?” Katie asked,  
while playing with her red haired doll.

*No, coffins don't have windows  
but you have windows in your mind.  
You can see Grammy there.*

“Will you take me to Grammy’s grave?” she asked.

We found Grammy’s stone,  
pink granite embedded with a wedding photo.

Katie skipped around the grave,  
touched the cold stone,  
stared at the old photo.

“There must be windows, she said.”

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*faith we have, we lose people. But you never forget them. And some-*

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## *My Grandparents Retire*

*Catherine Zickgraf*

Grandmom  
spent her last year in a chair  
like a conscious statue, a blinking stone.  
She inhaled the dust and the ancient air  
that would lay on her skin in the tomb  
of her home.

She used to  
fill up her kitchen with breeze  
through her curtains, with sun she trapped  
in her hands on the porch, setting seeds  
to drink in the glow of her sill —  
and she mapped

the sites  
retirees should see.  
But Grandpop was afraid of leaving those walls.  
He locked them both in when it was time to flee  
time cards, steel sparks, “blacks”  
in the halls —

afraid of death  
from a crash or polluted air,  
afraid of a freedom he didn't understand.

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*times, it's those memories that give us the faith to go on.” Unknown*

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And she died a slow death while safe in her chair  
like a throbbing, blue limb in a  
taut rubber band.

## *Salting Down*

*Sheryl L. Nelms*

it was Grandma  
dipping wash rags  
in salted  
water  
one after  
another  
on through the magnoliad night  
before his funeral  
that kept Grandpa  
from turning  
kept him decent  
for the burying  
she said

*things i got**Lena Judith Drake*

for Gertrude

i stayed home sick from school, and watched a movie.  
 it made me cry when the mom-dinosaur's shadow  
 implied she was dead.  
 it made me grip my brass vomit bowl, tiny white nauseous  
 fingers.  
 but grandma brought me a teddy bear valentine pencil. it  
 wasn't valentine's day,  
 but i liked it anyway.  
 we watched baseball together  
 and i got red socks out of my drawer to root for the wrong  
 team. i put one on her foot, too,  
 and she joined me. we were rebels.

she met an old man at the supermarket, she told me.  
 they were flirting,  
 and did i have any puppy love? i didn't  
 have crushes on boys yet, but i wanted to,  
 so i told her, yes, christopher.  
 i imagine the store, now, my grandma in a sweater  
 and big fingers with rings, brushing his.  
 she was all cushion and warmth, all of her, not just parts.  
 i knew this, eight years old. i bet he did, too.

she was a widow  
of my grandpa who hit her, and she was happy now, she told  
me.

she sang *a capella* in the street before marriage.  
do that, she told me,  
instead of marrying, do that. but if you don't,  
hit back.

i ate with my fingers and she told my parents, let her.  
before people had forks, they ate with fingers.  
are your fingers clean? see, her fingers are clean. let her  
eat her mashed potatoes. and have more butter,  
it was \$1.99 at farmer jack's today.

she dropped a huge, fake gold earring in the toilet bowl  
with a clunk, and i flushed it by mistake. she let me keep the  
other.

she got me dollar store off-brand barbies from china.  
their hair stuck out and their legs were hollow,  
but i liked them anyway.

when she died, they handed me my inheritance:  
a wicker basket, flopping and weighted down  
with rotten-smelling jewelry, fake and peeling,  
cotton scarves, dishes with wet dirt on them.

this was from her house, not her.

real things:

she left me with an appetite.

she left me with some polaroids.

she left me with disobedience.

she left me with a poem.

## **Batons**

*Maryanne Hannan*

Only a grandmother's hope is worthy of the name,  
materializing, as it does, against the odds. My grandmother,  
as a young woman, stands on the riverbank,  
ice skates over her shoulder, going out, no doubt,  
to prove the family legend: that she could out skate any boy.  
I used to love that photo. After Sunday dinner,  
I'd take it from the shoebox in her buffet, study  
her chiseled beauty and a river, on its way to a mighty ocean,  
frozen for her performance.

Put that thing away, she would say. It was nothing like that.  
Then she might or might not look at me, and either way,  
I'd squirm, knowing she wanted me to be pretty  
and get good grades. Or maybe she would look at my mother  
who was waiting to wash the dishes.

But now that I'm a grandmother, it makes more sense.  
A good skater knows a baton is not a burden,  
and all you're really hoping for is another  
with skates as sharp  
as the river is long  
as time allows  
as heart holds out.

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*just breathes and swallows memories like the seasons change - sending*

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## *Fireflies and Pickles: A Requiem for Summer*

*Thelma Zirkelbach*

Last week I stood on the porch of my sister-in-law's house in Iowa and, for the first time in sixty years, saw fireflies. Like miniature signal flares, they guided me back to a time when fireflies meant summer, just as pecans signified fall and bluebonnets spring. It was a time when life was simpler, rules clearer, and children played unguarded in front lawns and neighborhood parks.

When I was a child in Austin, Texas, my summer uniform was a pinafore. Later I graduated to shorts and cotton shirts, but I never wore shoes. The rule was that I could begin going barefoot the day after my birthday, May 23. On the twenty-fourth, when I kicked off my sandals, the grass felt prickly against my soles, but I would soon grow used to it and no longer notice.

My summers in those pre-air conditioned years seemed endless. Days floated by in a haze of heat, languor and uniformity, broken only by a few memorable events.

Every summer my father would put up pickles. They were sour, so sharp that sniffing one would curl my tongue and fill my mouth with saliva. I've never found their match among the dills and sweets that fill supermarket shelves today.

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*showers; beating flowers into the mud. And nothing is forever in this*

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Mother owned the kitchen. Daddy didn't show up there except at pickle time. He was a businessman, a working man, known around East Austin as Mr. Alec. He and a partner owned the D & S Service Station. They worked tirelessly six and a half days a week and sold more gas than any station in the South.

World War II raged during my childhood, and it was difficult to get help at the station because so many young men were away in the army. So Daddy and his partner Joe did everything – pumped gas, changed oil, fixed flats, cleaned windshields. Daddy also took care of the accounts, “checking up” every evening, entering numbers on an ancient adding machine that he didn't need because he could add faster than it could. He was famous around town for that.

With all the work he did, he didn't have time for hobbies. But he did love pickle-making. Cousin Harry, who was married to Daddy's niece Ada Belle, joined him for the process. Harry was slender and dashing, with a mustache that made him look like the movie star, David Niven. I thought he and Daddy made a great pair as they worked together in the kitchen on a hot summer evening while crickets buzzed in the dark outside and Mother and Ada Belle gossiped in the breakfast room.

Mother's task was washing the cucumbers in the afternoon, drying them and lining them up on the kitchen counter. I helped her, grouping the cucumbers by size, with the “babies” in a special place where Daddy and Harry could grab them and slide one or two into the almost-full jars. I liked to run my fingers over the bumpy vegetables while I worked.

When the men took over the kitchen, they filled the jars and added vinegar and all kinds of mysterious spices. They laughed and joked as they worked. I sat on a stool and laughed, too, even though I didn't understand some of the jokes. I watched them cap each jar, then take them to the pantry. Daddy would stand on a ladder and Harry would hand up the jars to put on the top

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*place.” Unknown ~§~ “You never know when you're making a mem-*

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shelf where they would sit for weeks while the spices worked their alchemy and the cucumbers turned into pickles. One summer a couple of the jars burst and made a terrible mess in the pantry. My mother threatened to put an end to pickle making, but she never did. I think she loved the sour treats as much as the rest of us.

During the rest of the summer, the days didn't vary. I would be up early, hurrying outside to savor the last leftover cool of night before the heat took over. In the morning we would play on our side porch, which caught a faint breeze and was, my mother often boasted, the coolest place in Austin. There I would spin fairy tales for my little sister or play elaborate pretend games with neighborhood friends. We were shipwrecked on a deserted island or princesses lost in the forest and rescued by handsome knights. Sometimes we would don our swimsuits and run through the sprinkler, shrieking and giggling when the spray of cool water struck our warm skin. One summer the people who lived behind us raised chickens and I spent hours sitting cross-legged in the back yard watching them. Other times my friend and I would crawl through an opening under our house, sit on the cool, damp ground, inhale the odor of mildew, and imagine we were in a cave.

At noon we would have lunch. Daddy would come home for that meal and I loved to have him "fix" my iced tea with just the right amount of sugar and lemon.

Early afternoons were too hot to be outdoors. I would curl up with a book or sit in the dining room listening to my mother's favorite radio soaps, *Stella Dallas* and *Portia Faces Life*, as the scent of newly ironed cotton clothes wafted in from the kitchen. Sometimes I played jacks while I waited for the soaps to end and the adventure series to come on. *The Lone Ranger* was my favorite and I spent hours listening to the adventures of "the daring and resourceful masked rider of the plains." I loved his

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ory." *Rickie Lee Jones* ~§~ "You will look back on the times you

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strong, deep voice and pictured him dashing across the prairie on his white stallion. The romance of the old West fueled my dreams.

Late in the afternoon my sister and I would take baths and after dinner we would head back outdoors. Sometimes we and our friends would produce “dramas” and coerce our families into attending. I especially remember playing the witch in “Hansel and Gretel.

Other evenings we would get our bikes and pedal through the neighborhood. Today I notice that children walk to schools and parks accompanied by parents, but in those trusting times, no one worried about our being out alone at dusk. If anyone were fearful, it would have been my nervous mother, but she never seemed uneasy.

When we returned, the fireflies would appear. We would chase them, clutch their hard little bodies, and gently lower them into glass jars covered with our hands. Once their lights blinked on and off a few times, we let them go, watching them disappear into the night, trailing starlight.

Then we’d sit on the fender of Daddy’s car and watch the real stars until bedtime. We wondered what life held for us but never imagined trials or tragedies, just more summers suffused with the scents of jasmine and newly cut grass, and our own children playing on front lawns as we did.

Sometimes we’d pile in the car and Daddy would drive us to a drug store that had curb service. Girls in crisp cotton uniforms brought malts or milkshakes on trays that fastened to the driver’s window.

Other nights we’d go to the drive-in. We’d sit on the hood of the car and watch black and white movies with Loretta Young, Gary Cooper, or James Stewart. Daddy would sit outside with us, smoking a cigarette. He’d toss it on the ground and I’d watch its orange glow fade away.

---

*laughed and you will cry. You will look back on the times you cried,*

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A few weeks ago on the outskirts of Dallas I saw a functioning drive-in theater with four screens. I wonder who attends these old-fashioned movie theaters now. Do they drive out to revel in the summer breeze as we did or to catch a glimpse of the past?

I wonder, too, where the fireflies have gone. Are they still here, their lights hidden by neon? Are they an endangered species, succumbing to pollution, over-development? Some do survive in small towns like Maquoketa, Iowa, where my sister-in-law lives and where children still play in yards on summer evenings.

Here in the city, few know about fireflies. Parents no longer sip cool drinks on the front porch; they watch the tube or surf the Internet. My granddaughter Gabriella among them, children are cocooned inside, eyes focused on the television or computer, ears fastened to cell phones or iPods. During the day they attend day camp or summer enrichment programs, their hours as rigidly structured as they were during the school year. Their time to dream, to pretend has vanished along with the fireflies

If I could have a wish for Gabriella, I'd wish her the magic of a long ago summer, with her hands squishing in wet soil to make mud pies, her legs scraped from the bark of the willow tree she climbed, her mind sparked by imagination. But since there are no genies to grant my wish, I bequeath her a glimpse into those long, lazy days of yesteryear through my words.

## *First Grandchild*

*Mike Gallagher*

Ethan's first month  
a learning curve  
steep for all.

born early  
impatient  
like his dad.

a shared dimple  
together we will  
explore the world.

but still beautiful his wind-blown smiles.

through her son  
humbled  
by a daughter's love

legs pedal: life's cycle begun.

his hunger  
scorns  
mother's modesty.

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*will always keep memories of them in your heart." Unknown ~§~*

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how soon  
he milks  
maternal instincts

Granny chuckles  
what big eyes  
you've got.

fingers meet  
found  
the sense of touch.

## *Grandpa, King of Checkers* *Wynne Huddleston*

There were many wooden cases  
of Dr. Peppers in Grandpa's country store.  
When they were empty he'd turn them over  
to make a table and chairs for playing checkers.  
He was king at blocking the board, but  
when he played with me, we didn't keep score;  
he'd show me where I should make my next move,  
and explain why. He taught me how to patiently  
play out every possibility in my mind first,  
and what would happen if I jumped too fast  
without thinking about the consequence.

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*"Memory is the greatest of artists, and effaces from your mind what*

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## *Nana Tells Tales*

*Sonia Hendy-Isaac*

she complains,  
even now, about the hours she kept,  
& the chaos of the nights spent  
behind the bar of the Tartan Club.  
She frequently falls to the occasion  
when her body was lithe & childless,  
& her stockings peeled themselves  
onto the trestle table of the function room;  
when she could demand the attention  
of any man present; before she met him.  
A granddad whose knee I never sat on;  
the man who never allowed her stockings  
to do anything, but wave to the neighbours  
from their dance on the washing line.