From the porch swing

memories of our grandparents

A Silver Boomer Book

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to our grandparents:

Joe Holt Anderson, Jr.

Lena Lorice Kerley Anderson

Rhapherd Thomas Breedlove

Irma Lorene Richards Breedlove

etc., etc., in alphabetical order by couple

Other Silver Boomer Books

Silver Boomers

a collection of prose and poetry
by and about baby boomers

March 2008

Freckles to Wrinkles

July 2008

This Path

September 2009

Song of County Roads

September 2009

See page __ for our books published under

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Saturday Nights

Alice King Greenwood

Saturday night dinners
evolve from lidded bowls
of leftovers tucked into
nooks and crannies of the frig.
Sometimes the contents merge
E Pluribus Unum style
in my soup pot, sometimes
share space in the microwave,
creating instant smorgasbord

– like quilts that Grandma sewed
from fabric scraps
left from home-made dresses
or cut from Grandpa's pants,
the parts not frayed or shiny,
dull blue squares, brown or gray,
spiked by red yarn tie-tufts
at the corners

– like fragments of Palmolive,
Ivory, Camay, Lifebuoy,
too small to wrap a cloth around,
water-worn slivers
trapped in wire baskets,
shaken into dish-washing suds.

Saturday nights I think of
Grandma and Grandpa, and how
they would have loved microwaves
and electric blankets
and bottles of green liquid soap.

To My Little House

Violet Greene (1896-1985)

When I am gone from here someone I may not know
will sit in this same place to read and sew.
Someone perchance I've never seen
will sleep in my bedroom and dream.
On this shady porch enjoy the cool breeze,
from this kitchen window watch the moon
rise through the trees.
Another will come and go through this same door
but it will be her home, not mine anymore.
I accept this inevitable end,
I only hope whoever comes to stay
loves you as much as I did yesterday.

What Granny Left Me

Pat Kelsey

A hurried trip today brought back many memories, and not just of the distant relative whose funeral I attended with my son and his twins. After paying respects and assuring of our love and prayers, we decided to take a detour on the way home. David wanted his twelve-year-old boys to see where his Granny and Pops had lived for sixty-one years.

We knew the place had been abandoned for a long time, but really seeing for ourselves what time had done to the old house almost made me wish I hadn't gone. The little house, whose mortar held rocks brought by friends and family from all over the world, was very sad. The roof was full of holes; the sleeping porch was missing one of its two walls of windows. Of course there was dust and trash everywhere. Someone had used the house to store tools and parts of farm machinery.

As I stood in the middle of the kitchen, I could see something in the top back corner of the cabinet my mother-in-law had been so proud to have built. I stepped to get a closer look and realized it was Granny's last "sprinkling bottle," from before the days of steam irons, electric dryers and wash-and-wear fabrics, when women sprinkled clean, dry clothes with a little water, rolled them up in an old towel or blanket for an hour or so, then ironed them.

I could almost see my mother-in-law, standing over the clothes, shaking that bottle gently. She not only did her own

ironing but that of people in her community for many years, so I had seen her doing that chore often. The sprinkler top was very worn and bent for she had used it a long time. Holding Granny's sprinkler, my mind went to other activities that had filled her kitchen, hub of the house. Granny was almost always there, cooking, baking, ironing, washing dishes. I think she did a lot of her praying at that sink. She always left two or three items to wash the next morning – said she felt better starting off the day that way.

I could also see Granny bringing in buckets of milk from the one or two cows she kept. She strained and set the milk to cool before we scooped off the thick, pure cream on top. Granny provided her own beef from calves she raised and pork from her pigs. Eggs and chicken came from her hen house and we fought over her fried chicken, the "cream of the crop." Her garden supplied an endless array of vegetables, including the turnip greens that were a tradition for our Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners.

I shook my head to think of all the work done in the little kitchen. All the canning, preserving, pickling, batches of jam and jelly cooked up can never be counted. Granny provided from her own hands so many things we take for granted these days. All was done with a gentleness of hand and heart, with love for making a home for family and the pleasure of having something to share with unexpected visitors.

And Granny did take pleasure in her tasks. She always whistled under her breath as she worked. I asked her once what would she do if she couldn't whistle. She thought a minute, then said, "Well, I'm not sure I could work!"

I walked out the door of the little rock house and noticed Granny's old Maytag wringer washer lying in the weeds out back. If it could talk, it would not only tell you more stories about Granny's hard work but about the time she leaned over too

far and the wringer got part of her! Good thing Pops was close by that day because she had to holler for help when she couldn't reach the handle. She always said, "I won't tell what got hung, but it wasn't fun!" But she laughed anyway.

It was time to go. I picked my way through the weeds back to the car, thinking of what Granny had left us – not much in material things, but that sweet lady took me under her wing when I was a young bride. She taught me to cook and bake and so many other things more valuable, like trusting the Lord to take care of us, looking on the bright side of life, laughing a lot, working hard and spending wisely, putting the needs of her home and family as the most important duties of her day, and 'sprinkling' love everywhere, to everyone.

I knew all that, but the old sprinkler bottle helped remind me. Granny was some lady. I hope I never let her down.

Memorial Day

Sharon Fish Mooney

for Thomas Lewis Fish,
1908-1985

A plumber and a carpenter by trade,
you fixed old ladies' toilets in our town,
hammered together boards to fill our home
with shelves and chairs and tables square and round.
You never talked much to your wife, or me,
your daughter, who grew up an only child.

I used to marvel at your silent world
until the day I found the letters piled
away inside the cedar chest upstairs;
letters from army bases in the States,
others from London, England, Paris, France.
Your other life I now appreciate
as I begin to read between the lines,
interpret actions influenced by that war,
remembering now on each Memorial Day
the flag you carried, purple heart you wore.
You marched in the parade route on our street,
shared memories with others of like mind
who fought in battles that I never knew
existed, yet for you those ties that bind
us to the ages past were true and strong.
I read your letters over just once more
and look between the lines into your heart,
catch glimpses of the gentle man you were.

There!

Jennifer Bower

The distance between tall stands of summer corn to my right and the creek bank at left, spans a mere two lanes as the car races toward my dream destination. At least it feels like racing, what with windows unfurled and hair dancing in a tangled mess around my face. The air is heavy with corn, manure, and the breath of a balmy July hanging over the asphalt.

Dappled patterns play across the windshield and my face as I move in and out of shadowy canopies lining the creek. My favorite among nature's umbrellas is the weeping willow; with her slender arms cascading down to water's edge in folding falls of foliage, ebbing and flowing against the summer breeze. I don't see it yet; when I do I will know I am almost there.

A few more miles to go, I extend an arm out the window and the rush blows it in wavy patterns; to and fro, undulating over and under. I cup my hand and stop the air, only for a moment, before she regains control and pushes me away. My skin tingles from the intangible assault. I wonder if I can touch a passing car, but become afraid to take the dare my mind so dangerously tosses upon my tongue. "What would happen if…" I whisper to no one.

The car slows her assault on the asphalt, macadam, as we call it here in the mountain valleys of my old haunts. No one has heard of macadam in the southern tier where bastardized words succumb to the drawl. They also think it silly when I call

Pine Creek, C-R-I-C-K. But that is what I have known and forever how it will cross my lips. As the car begins to roll forward I know just one more bantam bridge and then I will see my childhood willow and the millstone by the mailbox that greets the drive and invites us in.

I love the signaling sound four tires make as rubber meets the gravely granules lining the drive. It is like the homespun popping and metallic pinging of popcorn beginning its eruption on the edges of a hot oiled pan. It is the cue my grandmother awaits; the signal to alight from her *Readers Digest* in the living room where the grandfather clock rhythmically counts out the days. She has never missed greeting us at the backdoor or waving goodbye from the front.

As car doors slam upon our arrival I linger in my stretch, shut my eyes and breathe in the scenery. A local dairy cow bellows hello from a nearby pasture, the babbling brook that giddily tumbles to the crick gurgles in salutation, and the hickory tree drops a few 'Welcome Home' gifts to the ground; their smell is rotten, pungent, green and familiar. I am there…

Jarred from nocturnal concoctions by my self-possessed hand waves frantically above my head. *I am here, I am here, I am over here…*it begs and pleads. As cobwebs roll back into the ceiling, cotton-headed, I roll over pulling comforts covers with me and remember she died five years ago, the grandfather clock along with her no longer counting out his days. The last time I truly traveled down that road I found it so disconcerting, the backdoor devoid of her smiling embrace. It had been years since my presence last helped her move from *Readers Digest* reverie to arriving family. I still visit, but now only occasionally when my dreams allow and each wave hello is really a solemnifying goodbye until I truly arrive there; beyond memory's gatekeeper and tell her how much she meant to me.

One Sided Conversation

Donna Stone

Oh, yes, I know, he doesn't talk, he doesn't appreciate you, you are tired of doing all the work in this relationship. Listen here, at the very least he puts up with your mouth and that's a great feat, if you ask me.

Listen, girl, do you want to know what love is? It is not that dream you are chasing after. That man does not exist. You think you want someone who is the end all and be all, and if that's the case, your search isn't for a mortal man.

Love isn't hearts and flowers. Love is washing dirty socks and working hard to pay bills you didn't make. Love is making doctor's appointments that he won't make for himself while he fights you every inch of the way. It's letting him fix the plumbing when you know something's bound to go wrong . . . again. Love is choosing to keep trying when all you really want to do is run away as fast as you can. What? Doesn't sound too attractive? Well, the sweet is there too, along with the bitter. Where, she says, where. Everywhere.

One day you will watch him hold the child you made together. Suddenly you will love your man more than you ever loved anyone before. This love isn't the giddy romance you think you want. It is real love that burns itself into your heart so deep it can never be erased.

He will bring you grocery store carnations on Valentine's Day. He will give them with eagerness and longing, echoes of

infant manhood shyly courting and the sweet young thing accepting the gift. And you will fall some more.

You will return home from a trip away, and he will crush you to him and fiercely whisper, “Don’t ever leave me again.” You will see his fear and longing, and be surprised by its intensity. Then you will understand what true passion is.

When you throw a pot of face cream and burst into tears because he won’t talk to you, he will get a cloth and wipe up the mess without comment. You will learn to appreciate his silences.

You will mourn and move apart, unable to find each other in the storm of grief. Things will break that cannot be mended, but you will gingerly pick up the shards together, and stand side by side.

When your eyes are hollowed and blackly shadowed with illness, he will lay his hand on the sharp bones that were once a full, soft cheek. He will tell you everything a woman longs to hear her lover say, without speaking a word. The years of beauty that he sees will be reflected in those gray green windows to his soul. He will give you strength to go on, and you will live.

So you decide what to do. Complain and cry. Talk a bit. Feel sorry for yourself. Then dry your tears and go home. If you think it’s worth the effort to search out the gold.

Quiet Song

Margaret Gish Miller

mother and daughter
still estranged

back to back
silent accordions

The Widow Plans with Her Husband

Bruce Lader

Change your place, change your luck
–Sholom Aleichem

Should we move to Eugene, Oregon
where the *mishpocheh* can live together?
We don't want to get tangled
in our children's lives. I'd get to nanny
my only grandson there, the baby
would give you such *naches*...

It's exhausting by myself, old age
like tons of ironing. Sometimes
my mother looks at me in the mirror—
when I'm lonely we shmooz.

Yes, Eugene has temples, but the town's
dead at night. In Fort Lauderdale
chaverim bet jai-alai, the trotters, play cards.
In life you take chances. What is money
if while you have health you aren't living it up?

A cozy house came on the market
next door to the kids—
a better investment for the golden years
we couldn’t find. It’s definite then.
I’m phoning them and the realtor.
Look at these photos. We’ll be a family.

mishpocheh—entire family
naches—great pleasure from pride
shmooz—talk heart-to-heart
chaverim—friends
bet jai-alai - You bet!

Horse Racing With Pappy

Linda O’Connell

I’m four. I sit with Pappy on the porch in the evening breeze.
Cicadas sing; Pappy hums to the music of the rustling leaves.

“Horses are coming. Listen!” He whispers in my ear.
I look up and down the street; no horses do I see or hear.

Pappy drums his fingers in a rhythmic clop-clop-clop.
I laugh and squeal and watch as Pappy’s ‘horses’ trot.

Pappy says, “I’ll race you.” I say, “Again-again-again!”
I cannot make my fingers go as fast as Pappy’s can.

Pappy’s horses pound the rail; and when the race complete,
Two winded horses laugh out loud. My Pappy can’t be beat!

Banned From Glory Land

Karen Beatty

In 1944 my Mamaw Reece wasn't known as a big talker, but at Sunday services at the Born Again Church of Jesus Christ in Colliersville, Kentucky she was usually the first to raise it. The Holy Spirit never failed to move her, and she was, praise Jesus, wholly sanctified by the Lord.

"Hallelujah, I am so glad that Jesus loves me," she would begin wailing.

According to my Mother, the next thing you knew, "Mamaw was a-stormin' the aisle, speakin' in tongues, her red hair a-flyin' ever which way."

Though I never met Mamaw Reece, I could picture exactly what Mother meant in this description, because in the 1950's I often witnessed just such whooping rejoinders and flinging of bodies unto the altar at the beckoning of the Lord, especially during the weeklong tent revival meetings where Mother's eldest sister, my Aunt Eula Reece Patrick, was a pastor. At age ten I was entranced when "Sister" Eula Patrick preached to the fine church ladies, who would lift up shaking and moaning – arms extended upward, palms exposed – and cry out to Jesus for salvation and the greater glory. No hip action was permitted among the virtuous, of course, so the gyrations of the ladies were confined to the arms, shoulders and feet.

My Mother said my Mamaw, Sarah Lovely Reece, died of "the consumption". I never understood exactly what that meant,

but apparently Mamaw was all skin and bone when she passed, and it went pretty hard on the younguns and Lacy Rae Reece, my Papaw. Papaw had sired nine children with his beloved wife before she died at the age of 35.

Over the years, I gleaned lots of stories about Mamaw Reece. In her lifetime, she enjoyed a reputation for being God-fearin' and more than a little touched by the hand of the Lord. Mamaw was known to the neighbors as a healer – one able to lay on hands to dispel illness and bad spirits. (Her gift never seemed to work in her own interest, though, especially with regard to Papaw's alcoholism.) A quiet and humble woman born and reared in Sow Holler, Sarah Lovely Reece was fiercely protective of her kin and kind. According to the historical society, she was part native American – a direct descendent, through her own mother, of Golden Hawk Sizemore of the Cherokee tribe.

Upon her death there was no doubt that Mamaw Reece was delivered to her rightful place in Glory Land. Mother said the most accurate accolade bestowed upon Mamaw during the eulogy at her church was: Sister Sarah Lovely Reece put her faith in Jesus and sacrificed her life for her children.

Always, the family and the Lord. My mother, Flo-Anna Reece Jenkins, would likewise choose that as the template for her life. For one not so inclined, like me, such sacrifice is a punishing act to follow. As a young child growing up in the Appalachian Mountains of Colliersville, Kentucky, I felt obligated to embrace fundamentalist beliefs; besides, I desperately wanted to feel the spirit. As I approached adolescence, however, I gave way to my inner skeptic. I wanted to say to Aunt Eula and others, "I ain't lost, so how kin I be found?" But I never had the nerve. I also secretly wondered if all those so-called holy roller folks really believed, actually felt religion, or just played at it. According to my observations,

being saved didn't seem to influence people's behavior. As far as I could tell, there were just as many drunks and sinners at church as in jail. And in my judgment the church people were always being born again, saved again, and falling to their knees in repentance after they had committed their particular transgressions. It seemed to me that if they truly had religion, they wouldn't be acting so bad to begin with.

By the time I was twelve years old, I had determined to make the most of my earthly days, as I did not appear to be destined for the rapture and the welcoming gates of Glory Land. Of course I never discussed such issues with anyone in Kentucky. To utter blasphemous thoughts aloud would surely have resulted in the true believers condemning me to the pits of Hell, instead of their just obliviously allowing me to languish in earthly sanguinity, along with the other designated "left behinds".

Certainly, every effort had been expended to set me on the road to salvation. I heard plenty of preaching and praying and praising and supplicating at Aunt Eula Patrick's tent revivals, from the Freewill Baptists, and from the Methodists. A few years after Mamaw passed, Mother switched over from the Born Again Church of Jesus Christ at Sow Creek to the United Methodist Church in Colliersville proper. Though we lived on the bank of the Churnin' River, behind the Freewill Baptist Church, Mother resented and snubbed the Baptists, who billed themselves as "the only true believers." Neither Mother nor her Daddy, Papaw Reece, ranted about being saved or born again, but they were both proud to be counted among the righteous. In their daily routines time was allotted to read the Bible and recite prayers. Still, all that preaching and praying and churchin' seemed inexplicably lost on me. Getting caught up in a rousing gospel spiritual was the only kind of rapture I could fathom, and I was only able to find God in the silences, never in the talk of prayer.

Sometimes, when I attended services with Mother at the United Methodist Church, I imitated the posturing of the devout, but I never managed to authentically find the passion for public worship in my heart, mind or soul. I figured that was one of the few turns of nature I had inherited from my Daddy.

On the other hand, "if the "teachin' and preachin' were not reachin'" me, the music certainly was. I always felt connected to the Holy Spirit through gospel music and also through Mother's singing about the Lord and the mountains. "Singin's twicet prayin'," she said. Mamaw Reece had taught mother songs for all manner of moods and circumstances. When she was feeling playful, she would clap and stomp and warble to us children, "Gimme that old-time religion, it's good enough for me!" When she was sad or lonely, she would sing a melancholy hymn like: "I go to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses, and the voice I hear as I tarry there, the Son of God discloses."

In latter years, when Mother seemed more of the spirit world than the earthly one, she relied on the old traditional hymns, the ones with sentiments of affliction like: "On a hill far away, stood the old rugged cross, the emblem of sufferin' and shame." I was appalled by the words, but the music and the spirit were locked into my very soul, and, like my Mother and Mamaw Reece, I often sang my sorrow and joy, even if the words were considerably more secular. While I will never enter Glory Land in the fundamentalist sense, I guess I have to conclude that a part of me will surely dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The Linen Press

Becky Haigler

A tall pine cupboard with smooth-sanded doors
Holds my grandmother's dowry of linens:
Shelf upon shelf of crisp, white fabrics,
Starched and ironed;
Folded with love, precision, and tissue paper.

Fancywork of lace, cutwork and appliqué
Fashioned by caring hearts and hands.
Years of lady-like pastime
Stitched and snipped
By circles of women enweaving their dreams.

Creases, threadbare from years of folding,
Mark tea-stained tablecloths and cuptowels,
Tear-stained pillowslips and blood-stained sheets;
Scrubbed and bleached
Till only the stain of memory remains.

What did we know of loss?

Carol Ayer

We behaved as we were supposed to,
stayed quiet and still.
We didn’t kick the seats in front of us
nor torment each other
the way we did in the car.

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

Restraint

Joy Harold Helsing

Dear one, I resolve
not to be a foolish grandma
forcing strangers to admire

photograph on photograph,
boring everyone with tales
of how you burp

I'll just secretly adore
your perfect face,
tiny fingers,
precious toes

Prayer and Pie

Carrie McClure

The soft folds in grandmother's face
look like the dough she kneads
with strong, floured hands. I watch
eagerly, my thin frame pressed
against the counter; silent, while she
forms the gooey mound into fine crust.
As she shapes it, she mumbles quiet
prayers. In the mixture I catch
the mention of my name. It is good
and sweet, like the rich custard
she pours into the perfect shell.

The Quiet Man

Peter Goodwin

She cherished the memory
of her gentle father,
who would never argue
with her mercurial mother.

He was a quiet man
reluctantly putting on his hat
and going for a walk
until his wife calmed down

She never mentioned
the time he put on his hat
went for a walk
and never returned.

A Gift From Mother

Pat Capps Mehaffey

With dread, I anticipated the full blast of dry, body-baking heat in the attic. Already I felt it escaping down the stairway as I climbed the narrow steps. July 1980 was unusually hot in the small West Texas town of Anson.

Slitting the strapping tape on the first dusty box, I remembered the day I packed, labeled and stored the boxes in the attic on a cold, snowy day in 1968. Mother died a few weeks previously and her house must be emptied because the new owners wanted to move in immediately. I gave the tools, furniture and furnishings, and clothing to the appropriate persons to be cherished and enjoyed, or maybe not, as they chose. The remaining items had no monetary value, yet Mother considered them her most treasured keepsakes.

I packed quickly on that long-ago sad day, only glancing at the diaries, birthday and Mother's Day cards, letters, telegrams, newspaper clippings, delicate handkerchiefs and gloves. Mother considered herself not properly dressed unless she wore a hat and gloves and carried a hanky in her purse. Struggling with tears, I put all her treasures away out of sight.

Now my three nieces planned to arrive soon for a visit and I wanted to share Mother's treasures with them. With their father dead, I would share his keepsakes equally among his children. At last, after all these years, I felt emotionally strong enough to

examine each item and read each word of correspondence. Many of the cards, letters and clippings pertained to my nieces' families. I knew each one would find special pleasure in reading them, and in having some of Grandmother's gloves and handkerchiefs.

Parting the cardboard flaps, I reached for the first tissue-paper-wrapped object, and memories rushed to my mind for I held a pair of barber's scissors. The eight-inch blades were still the same cold, blue-black steel but Mother's fingers had worn away most of the shiny coating on the handles. By angling them to the light, I read "Simmons-Howe Co., Inc – Germany."

Recalling with clarity how Mother valued her special scissors, a longing for days past washed over me. Mother often said, with great pride, "Child, these scissors were a free gift when your Daddy and I purchased a Home Comfort Range in 1928. I loved the stove, too, but it had a steep price tag."

Sitting on the floor among the boxes, I clearly saw Mother on Saturday evenings cutting Dad's hair, my brother's hair, giving haircuts to the seasonal hired hands, neighbors and anyone else who asked for cuts or trims. Several had beards and she shaped them, too. My nieces and I wore Buster Brown haircuts with bangs straight across the forehead, and Mother fretted that the bangs grew too fast even though she cut them short.

"I'm surprised you don't bump into the furniture," she commented. "I know you can't see where you're going."

One day when I was about 10 years old, the nieces' fast-growing hair and Mother's special scissors combined to cause me to get a spanking. Often I carefully observed Mother as she cut my nieces' hair. Confident I knew just how to do it, I draped an old sheet over each niece's shoulders in turn by age, and cut everyone's bangs off at the hairline, thus saving Mother a lot of time and trouble. For some reason, Mother did not appreciate

this act of kindness. In fact she promptly went into what can only be described as a “hissy fit.”

Another vivid memory was the day Mother caught me using the scissors to cut out paper dolls. She delivered a long lecture about how cutting paper dulled the blades and we must never ever use the hair-cutting scissors to cut paper.

Occasionally, the scissors appeared lost and no one could rest until the search ended when they were found. She always sent me out to the porch to look, in case I had sneaked them out to cut paper dolls again. We all swore our innocence and thankfully, each time the scissors were found again.

Mother spent her last few years as an Alzheimer’s patient. As the disease advanced, she lost the ability to speak sentences. She no longer remembered nouns. Even though she could not converse with anyone, she still asked for her scissors by opening and closing two fingers in a snipping motion.

Recovering from my reveries, I unpacked all the boxes, making a stack of memories for each of my nieces and one for myself. I tried to return each item to the rightful giver and divide all the treasures equally. Guess which of the four stacks received the scissors?

Yes, I still have them. Mother’s cherished barber scissors received many years of use, and I learned to cut hair quite well, because I had three little girls of my own, whose bangs grew very fast.

Heart-Keeper

Carol Lynn Grellas

Where that house stands vacant
now; some jays still make their nest
in juniper greens, small rabbits scamper
back and forth beneath the bramble
growth of blackberries, all windows
left unlit scenes, between a chain
of homes with turnstile-trees, old
mailboxes bent or warped from sun,
rows and rows but one with numbers
hanging from a tiny nail; a cockeyed
box with rusted marks that once
housed mail to a woman who
used to knit and sing, who opened
doors to vagabonds or any needy
thing. Her eyes the wettest blue,
no hue I've ever seen compared—
and music spilled beyond her door
she'd welcome you with patient smiles
but hidden deep were stories spared
long decades never shared, like secrets
saved for church, wrapped tight inside
a bible's leaf beside the pew. Where
that house stands vacant now, a woman
knew the way an orchard smells

in spring with apricots of golden-
fur adorning grass, where everything
of gardens made her laugh. I’d like
to write a poem, diarize her life
reveal divine details, untold years
diminished by her death and tell her
she lives inside me still. How every
day I see that house, instead of all the
nothingness within, I’m reminded
of a woman who I loved but never
had the chance to tell. I wish she’d
reappear again, swing open her front
door; an apparition hollow as a violin—
because I’d bow to soft unfettered
grace, beg the mysteries of her heart
until she’d let me in.

Why Grandma Bought That Car

Anne R. Allen

She dreamed of riding with Kerouac, with ToddandBuzz,
red-Corvetting down Route 66 —
freedom in her hair.
But she got snagged on white-picket biology/destiny —
and the goofy smile that farmer gave her,
along with his fragile heart.
She loved that smile more than her own self, a full forty
years —
till his heart broke for good and she buried him
in the root-clogged dirt of this old town.
But for her, the road's still there.
and in this dream, she's not riding;
she's at the wheel.

Making Way for Miss Mary

Barbara Darnall

When I was a little girl there lived in our town an elderly lady named Miss Mary Terrell. She was a retired schoolteacher, never married, who was much respected and not a little feared by the many former students and other inhabitants of our small West Texas town. (This was back in the days when adults and children alike were still in awe of schoolteachers.)

I was five or six, and Miss Mary was eighty if she was a day, when I first became aware of the rare and unusual position to which she had been elevated by the people of our town. You see, Miss Mary drove an old Model T Ford, almost as ancient as she was, in a manner that could only be described as "herding it between the curbs." When she was espied coming down the street, mothers on the sidewalk would snatch up their cherubs and duck into the nearest storefront, "just to be on the safe side." To say that she was a clear and present danger to everyone and everything in her path was, at the very least, a masterpiece of understatement. Neither cars, cats nor children could be considered safe when occupying the same right of way with Miss Mary.

One day, as my mother was taking me to town to buy new shoes – I wanted red ones, I remember, and my mother was holding out for more serviceable black – she suddenly pulled to the side of the road and parked a good two blocks short of the

shoe store. “Why are we stopping here?” I asked. “I’m just making way for Miss Mary,” my mother answered, and sure enough, as I stood up in the back sat and turned to look out the window, Miss Mary did indeed come meandering down the middle of the street in her Model T Ford. With head held high and eyes straight ahead, she seemed completely oblivious to the frantic scrambling of pedestrians and vehicles alike as they hurried out of her path.

Observing this hasty retreat brought to mind another peculiar occurrence which I had often found curious but never before understood. Every Sunday morning after church let out, Miss Mary would hobble determinedly to her car and set our purposefully down the street. Everyone else, however, stood around in front of the First Baptist Church visiting with one another and talking about the sermon, the weather, and whoever wasn’t there in a manner which indicated that we hated to leave good company and were certainly in no hurry to be on our way. A glance up the block would reveal our Methodist brethren similarly engaged. This fellowshipping continued unabated until someone would step out into the middle of the street, look toward town, and then call back to the assembled group, “She’s gone.” This was the awaited signal for everyone to scatter to our respective cars and drive the two blocks to the post office to collect our Sunday papers and morning mail, there being no home delivery of either in those more innocent days.

You see, it was Miss Mary’s custom to go by the post office after church, too, and in the past she had sideswiped, dented or otherwise raised the blood pressure of enough fellow churchgoers so that by the time I was old enough to observe this extraordinary phenomenon, the townspeople had already arrived at their own solution to the problem: they simply did not leave the church until Miss Mary had picked up her mail and departed, leaving the roadway free and relatively safe for the rest of us.

It was a small thing, to be sure, this practice of "making way for Miss Mary," but it was indicative of the care and regard in which people held one another back then. I don't think she ever knew why she found the streets so wide and empty whenever she chose to venture out, and certainly no one ever told her. It was all a part of the mystique, the benevolence bordering on genuine reverence in which we held one very special retired schoolteacher, in grateful recognition of her many years of faithful service. Many years later I saw England's Queen Mother ride in state down the streets of London, and the feeling of the crowd was much the same: "There goes somebody special, someone we love and hold in high esteem."

It may sound overly simplistic by today's more sophisticated standards, but it was her due, her recompense, her reward. We knew it, we who chose to honor Miss Mary in this particular way, and she knew it, too. Every time she navigated those wide, near-vacant streets in safety, we were saying "Thank you for being who you were in our lives." And every time her snow white curls, topped by the inevitable black hat and veil, nodded right or left in recognition as she drove past, she accepted our gift. Every time we "made way for Miss Mary," we felt a little glow inside, the enduring warmth that kindness brings. I learned it as a preschooler, watching in fascination as a Model T Ford zigzagged regally down the street of a small West Texas town, and the lesson has not faded with the years.

KP Duty

Glenda Barrett

“We’d better get in there
and wash those dirty dishes!”
my three-year old grandson says,
if he sees any sitting in the sink.
He rushes to get him a chair.
Side by side we start our jobs.
I squirt extra dishwashing liquid,
knowing he’ll like the extra bubbles.
He jerks the faucet from side
to side, until we get our sinks full.
He lets the water fall through
his fingers making tiny waterfalls.
I enjoy the warmth of my hands in
the sudsy water. It is so soothing.
Sometimes, we pretend we’re cooking
in the galley of a big ship. He calls me
matie. He’s the captain of course.
Our imagination, so alike, runs wild.
This job is not a chore to either of us,
We’re on an ocean voyage, fighting
pirates, landing on deserted islands
and trying to survive bad storms
with a plastic bowl for a ship,
and tablespoons for a paddle.

When we near the end of our journey,
I notice we have water not only on us,
but on the floor as well, and not just
a little. Laughter erupts from us.
Like my grandmother before me,
we have a deep connection, the kind
where it seems to only take a glance
to sense what the other is thinking
or feeling. How rare that is.
We finish up, and he feels grown,
while I feel the deepest gratitude
be able to carry on the legacy.

Feed Sacks

Bonnie Stanard

Grandma kept laying hens in a tin-covered house
and bought feed from a man
who made deliveries in a pickup truck.
He stacked in the shed sacks of cracked corn and mixed feed
in calicos and prints. In a closet
of her house, Grandma collected the cleaned bags.
There was hardly a dress
on the place but of feed sacks.
If threads showed in our clothes, we dug
through the designs to find duplicates enough
to cut out pattern pieces and sew an outfit.
When, in the affluence of time, we discovered
Sears Roebuck catalogue,
cotton cloth by the yard came with the mail.

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.

how soon
he milks
maternal instincts

Granny chuckles
what big eyes
you've got.

fingers meet
found
the sense of touch.

Duty Bound

Joanne Faries

she worked in a girdle factory
    Constrained
    Restrained
elastic to push and pull
nature's bounty

husband died at fifty leaving a
mortgage during the depression

    no Complaints
    no Regrets

she paid the bills
attended church
grateful for health
food, two kids, and a roof

dutiful contentment
unquestioning commitment

she never left the house
without wearing her girdle

Hero of My Heart

Karen O'Leary

Slight of frame, with shoulders stooped, the elderly man exuded the kind of courage few seek and even fewer find. His quiet strength and unwavering faith held his family of twelve together during the depression on a farm in rural Minnesota. The bond he fostered links those living yet today.

Church was an important part of nourishing his Christian beliefs and instilling values in his children. In the winter, he would park the family car a mile from home near a main road. When Sunday arrived, they hitched up a team of horses to a wagon, loaded up the family, and made the trek through the snow to their vehicle. If the car didn't start, they used the team to pull it until they could get going. From there, they would journey another four and one-half miles to their church for mass.

Money was tight for the rural family. They worked hard to obtain the capital to add an extension to their barn. Before it was completed, a storm blew in destroying the entire structure. Tears streaming down his face, the hard working farmer stood surveying the devastation. He squared his shoulders. God would provide. Neighbors and friends pitched in to help with clean up and rebuilding. They milked the cows outside until they had the framework up. By December of that year, a new barn replaced the pile of rubble. He carried buckets of feed to animals, milked cows, and spent long hours working in the field to provide for his family. For years, he wore copper bracelets around his wrists

that were said to help with arthritis. When asked how he was doing, he quickly responded, “I’m OK.”

When his grandchildren walked beside him, in back of him, and sometimes in front of him, blocking his way, he never raised his voice. A gentle smile would cross his face as he ruffled a little boy’s hair or helped a frightened toddler pet his dog, Fido. If he doled out a wink in the process, that child felt truly special.

At other times, he could be found bent over a utility sink washing eggs with a little girl standing on a stool beside him. He patiently demonstrated how to carefully place the fragile ovals in the carton slots, readying them for sale to supplement the other farm income. Though the task took him twice as long, he praised his granddaughter and thanked her for her help. She beamed. The two became kindred spirits.

After retirement, he told his son, “I’m not going to feel guilty about not going to church every day.” His faith was not confined. He carried it with him in his walk through life, showing others by example what it means to be Christian.

It was often said, “He would give the shirt off his back” to help another in need. He served without fanfare, letting others bask in the limelight. He donated his time and from limited treasure to assist with benefit breakfasts, church sponsored events, community projects, and individual problems. He gave freely, expecting nothing in return.

His mild mannered approach to life endeared him as husband, father, brother, grandfather, and friend. He preferred to build up rather than to tear down. To the troubled, his gentle touch was reassuring. When the world rushed, he took time to listen. During times of turmoil, he had the courage to stand up for what is right.

Those who knocked on his door were greeted with a smile and “Come in. Come in.” Though at times he had to be weary, his enthusiasm made those who entered feel special. Guests

rarely left his home without “lunch”, which was often a spread filling the table. Children were led into the kitchen to pick out treats from his candy bowl or the stash he kept in the cupboard.

One day, he listened with sad-looking eyes to the gossips that invaded his living room. “Have you tried walking in their shoes?” his quiet, calm voice sliced through the chatter, stilling them all. He allowed a few silent moments to pass before leading the conversation in a positive direction. His granddaughter sat in the corner, awed.

As a man of faith, he was slow to judge and quick to encourage. He accepted great grandchildren born out of wedlock and grandchildren’s divorces with the philosophy that everyone makes mistakes. He welcomed prodigals back into the fold with warmth. He did not pry, satisfied to let individuals share what they were comfortable with.

He usually relinquished center stage to his bubbly, outgoing wife. His eyes sparkled at the sound of her laughter, sharing her joy. He often faded into the background with a content look on his face, not caring that no one noticed him.

Yet, when a meal was served, the seat at the head of the table was saved for him, honoring his gentle leadership. If he tried to slip in another chair, his family was quick to protest, thus “the last shall be first”.

He treasured Sunday afternoons gathered around the kitchen table playing cards with family. Frequently, a child was seated at his side or nestled in his lap “helping grandpa”. In those special places, children were educated about more than just a game. They learned about patience, the honor of admitting mistakes, how to win and lose gracefully, and what it felt like to be loved. Frequently, several conversations were going on at once. If one near him yelled out, “Pa said…,” the others hushed, a testament to the respect they had for him.

Not claiming to have all the answers, he kept up on the news and chose to formulate his opinions based on fact rather that impression. He frowned on quick criticism, preferring to give others the benefit of doubt. Yet, he did not shy away from the truth.

He talked little about himself. His acts of kindness and ability to accept the imperfections in others were models for the world. His way of life is etched forever in my mind. The quiet man of strength and faith was Lambert Orth, my grandfather. Though he resides in heaven now, he will always be the hero of my heart.

On the North Porch

Sheryl L. Nelms

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

Layers of Living

Lynn Pinkerton

In the tenth week of my third year in elementary school, we moved into the house my grand-parents had built. The same house where my mother and her two sisters were born and grew up. The station wagon and moving van piled high, we trekked across town and set-up the base camp that would sustain each of us the rest of our lives.

The low-slung, sand-colored brick house sat on a big welcoming corner lot, across from the elementary school and a tree-packed city park. Three towering pecan trees, planted in faith many years earlier by my grandfather, stood sentry on the west side. Sprawling grass and flowerbeds surrounded the rest of the house, providing plenty of room for one last twilight game of hide and seek, and endless squabbles about whose turn it was to mow the yard.

We moved into the familiar territory and unpacked. Across the boxes were scrawled my mother's now legendary labels. Breakable. Very breakable. Very, very breakable. Decades later, none of us is clear on the distinctions, but do know that there are degrees to fragility…both in objects and in people. Some break more easily than others and should be treated as such.

I claimed rights to the front bedroom, the same room where my mom and her two younger sisters laid in bed and whispered dreams about beckonings beyond the city limits sign and tall handsome boys who would romantically whisk them away.

Being sprung free from sharing a bedroom with my younger brother, I relished the possibilities of privacy. Diaries. Secrets. A pink Princess telephone. Dreams and prospects.

The room was also witness to a terrifying childhood memory. It was the bomb-shelter era of I-will-bury-you-Nikita Khrushchev and we had seen a “Duck and Cover” film in school…public education’s well-intended, but ridiculous response to atomic bomb emergency procedures. One night, as I lay in the safe haven of my bed, a car turned the corner, flashing its headlights into my bedroom. A BIG flash of light. Someone had dropped the atomic bomb! Almost a half century later, I can hear the pounding of my heart and my footsteps as I bounded down the hall to the safety of my parent’s bedroom. The same room where my mom had sought the steadfast sanctuary of her parents.

We lived comfortably side-by-side with the friendly family ghosts of yesterday’s stories. Our Christmas morning magic shared space with the rich memories of long ago Santa gifts and stockings hung at a common fireplace. In the kitchen, our family sat down to steak dinners around our yellow-topped Formica table. The same space where my mama and her family gathered for Depression-inspired suppers of pinto beans and corn bread.

My barefoot brothers mounted stick horses, brandished six-shooters and chased each other down the canyons of our hallway. Several years earlier, on a routine visit to the bathroom one early November night, my amiable, Alabama-drawling granddaddy clutched his chest, slumped onto that same bare hallway floor, and died.

I regularly climbed our sprawling sycamore tree whose shade was almost as big as our house. It is the same tree, according to my grandmother, whose dancing leaves mesmerized my infant mother as she lay in her crib, gazing out the window.

The big backyard embraced the squealing sounds of summertime sprinkler baths, playing cars under the Dogwood tree, sun-dried sheets waltzing in the wind, growing a record-big okra plant that got my brother's picture in the paper, chasing fireflies with a hopeful fruit jar and the back porch where my mama, and her mama before her, stood watching the clouds and almost always accurately predicting rain.

It is the same backyard where a young me had watched in horror as my soft, sweet-powdered, lullaby-singing grandmother held a chicken by his neck, swung him in circles until he died, trapped his neck under a broom handle, yanked it off, plucked his feathers and plopped him into a pot of boiling water for Sunday dinner.

It was several houses and many years later that I began to glimpse the dual existence we all shared. In the cold winter days before central heat, my mama would get up before the rest of us and light the gas stoves, so our feet were welcomed by a warm floor when we got out of bed. In much the same way, the house I grew up in was warmed by the layers of living and love left by the family that preceded us.

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

Whoop! Laudy

Barbara Breedlove Rollins

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

Will and Testament

Ann Howells

You sit at the kitchen table, deep
in some new novel you've discovered.

I contemplate mortality. Will leave
to you my walnut chair, rockers chamfered
with lullabies and time. Diamond lavalier
passed down and down and down
this matriarchal line. And, rosebud china,
one cup chipped, carried from New York
by horse and wagon two hundred years ago.
These things are your heritage, but
I long to leave you something
more useful. You, with your predilection
for weather. You, who conjures thunder
and ice. I leave what we've shared: egrets
dazzling overhead like whispered prayer,
sunsets framed in the kitchen window,
frogs that chant through sleepless nights.

You sweep hair from your cheek,
an unconscious gesture, and I smile.

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.

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

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

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.

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.

Buttons

Lisa Rizzo

Grandma fell sick every summer —
huddled on the front steps in her housedress,
its white buttons like open eyes – witness to her depression.
If she felt strong enough, she went to church
in her good black coat adorned with large sparkly buttons like
shields.

Grandpa was a tall man never undone enough to laugh —
wore his hat on the back of his head and chambray shirts
fastened under his chin.
Canvas coat flapping against the stock of his gun,
he tramped the woods with his hound named John.

Grandma collected unused buttons in a Mason jar cracked
and no good for canning. She could dip her hands in anytime
Grandpa needed a shirt mended. He might sit across the porch
as she sewed,
both of them staring out at the woods across the highway,
silent and buttoned tight.

Don't Call Me Chicken

Wynne Huddleston

I remember Grandma Alice as a round ball of soft cuddles bouncing up and down in her rocking chair on the front porch, steadily waving a church fan with one hand, her plump, bare feet with perfectly angled toes (like mine) pushed off the floor to keep a quick, steady rhythm. The only thing sharp about her was the edge of her glasses when she hugged me, and maybe the lessons she taught me.

Whenever I spent the night with her I knew I'd wake up in the morning to the smell of thick rind bacon, steaming hot Cream of Wheat, and coffee with milk and sugar poured into a blue willow cup. The toast would be piled high with melted, orange hoop-cheese, or slathered in butter and topped with sugar and cinnamon. We also had fresh eggs.

One day she asked me to gather them. I didn't really want to – I was terrified of those chickens, so I told her I wasn't sure how to do it. She said there was nothing to it; just open the door and pick them up. I couldn't say no. I picked up the bucket and headed out the back door.

The chickens were in an old wooden, musty-smelling coop, and through the slats of the partition I could see into the shed on the other side where Grandma kept all the bows from the flowers that came from Uncle Basil's funeral. It was sad and creepy. My trembling hand flipped the little wooden latch up, and the door sprung wide open. The chickens, who had been

sitting in nests atop their empty prison cages, flew up into the air in fright at the disturbance…right at me, it seemed, clucking their jerky heads off. The coop was filled with feathers and beaks and squawks; I was scared half to death! But I knew I couldn't let Grandma down, so I focused on my task: get the eggs. Lowering my head and gathering my floating guts, I forced myself through the crazy, noisy, protesting clawing and scratching mob. I eased my hand into the nests, grabbed hold of the eggs, and put them into the basket without breaking them – all the while terrified that one would peck me.

Grandma probably knew how scared I was, but she taught me some important lessons: Be strong, determined, and have courage. Face your fears by keeping your eye on your goal...and don't drop the eggs while running away when you're done!

Where Muscadines Grow

Wynne Huddleston

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

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 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.

Rainbow

Joanne Faries

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

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

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

My Grandmother's Generous Arms

Judy Brand

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

Grandpa's Mamma

MaryEllen Letarte

Grandma Mamoucha
had blue eyes, deeper than I could know.

Her hair, silvery white, haloed her head
like a tiara tilted from too much wear.

She beckoned with a half smile,
sat straight as a queen on her throne.

Today she was here, a hologram from the past.

The video kept the tradition of silence,
her words locked in the old country.

Every holiday she put a dollar in my hand,
I kissed her, surprised my lips with her softness.

In her casket she wore a magical blue dress,
looked like an angel from My Golden Book.

She lies in my mind ready to awaken.

Little "g"

Brenda Bellinger

My earliest memories take me back to my grandparents' home in Norwalk, Connecticut. It was a rambling, two-storey 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.

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

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.

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.

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.

A Summer Day

Gary Bloom

Wind rattles the corn stalks
A plane is flying overhead
The radio is playing, my grandpa
Listening to the Twins game
On WCCO, “The Voice
Of the Upper Midwest.”
My grandpa sits
In a dusty green chair,
The ticking of a grandfather clock
Becoming louder
With each passing minute.
A Hamm’s beer is sweating
On the kitchen table.
I bring it to him
And he offers his thanks.
I remember
Him sitting there
And wish I would
Have thanked him.

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

Renie Burghardt

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm not sure, but it takes me a half-an-hour to walk to it," I replied.

"Good. Tomorrow I'll go to the river with you."

"Oh, Apa, you will love it," said enthusiastically. "It's the Drau River, and it's so beautiful!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Apa continued with his new venture all summer, and even gave free lessons in basket weaving to anyone interested. After he sold the next batch of baskets, he bought himself a fishing pole, too, and a large frying pan, and building a fire outside the

barrack, cooked a batch of the large fish he caught in the beautiful Drau River, and shared it with our neighbors. (Later, he shared the fishing pole and frying pan as well!) It was most unusual to have the aroma of that frying fish wafting through the camp, where barracks were lined up like soldiers, and helpless people lived their lives in them, hoping and praying for something better.

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

Granny's Face

Joy Harold Helsing

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

Gran'pa Makes Beer

B. J. Adams

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

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

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

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

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

“I want some, too,” said Marie.

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

“But you got some, Gran’pa. Please, Gran’pa.”

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

“Marie, take the pig outside,” said Heller.

“OK, Gran’pa. Then can I have some beer?”

“No. I said it’s no good for you.”

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

“Please, Gran’pa. I want some beer, too.” Then, seeing the foam, she said, “Bubbles! I want bubbles.”

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

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

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

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

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

"What's happened?" asked Molly, also in a mix of English and Ukrainian with Polish overtones.

"I don't feel good," said Marie.

"What's wrong?" asked Molly.

"I only gave her a little foam."

"You what?"

"It was just foam."

"What are you thinking? She's just a baby!"

"But I didn't give her anything to drink. It was just foam."

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

"I didn't give her anything to drink. It was just foam," repeated Heller.

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

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

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

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

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

Thirty Years After

Jim Pascual Agustin

All the children knew
when he opened his mouth
there'd be a sudden smell
of warm earth after a downpour.

His voice hovered between
rasp of dry leaves

and snap of brittle branches.

Even when he was quiet,
his long fingers still on the thick
wooden ledge, we felt
the weight of his eyes
slowing down our marbles.

He was just an old man.
We taunted him
with our noise.

All he had was a cane and a bad aim.
Those unstable legs once took him
through jungle and hostile countryside
in times of war, to get my mother
to safety. Or so I'm told

Thirty years after his passing.

To Dettner (My grandmother)

Diana Raab

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

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

The Dresing Table Disovery

Sarah Charsley

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Right young lady, enough chattering. Time for bed."

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

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

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

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

"Emily, wha's the matter? Are you all right? Wha on earth are you doing of?"

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

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

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

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

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

Geode

For my grandfather

Carla Martin-Wood

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

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

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

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

It was plain, ugly, and covered with dirt,
not the same as the magickal orb of my desires.
Disappointment starred my lashes, stung my eyes,
but I tucked the stone into my pocket,
not to hurt your feelings.

We walked back home silent.
There was no magickal marble on that path for me,
and four years old I couldn't understand.

Then you knelt before the front steps like an altar.
Now, hand me that ol' rock, Baby Gal, and I did.
Your hammer swung down hard, cleaving it in two,
and inside: a galaxy, a universe, a multitude of stars
that I believed you'd made
just for me.

You said something cryptic then, treasured now:
People are just like that rock, Baby Gal.

On my wall today, photographs:
friends of every culture and persuasion,
across the globe, in my heart,
and on my shelf,
malachite, kyanite, and peacock ore,
all collected in that gulf of years that separate
me from you
and all of these, your legacy
of stars.

Grandma's Gypsies

Sheryl L. Nelms

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

Haiku

Gerald A. McBreen

Grandma's red porch swing
frosted in snow
creaks softly

Faith Under Fire

Sally Clark

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where are we going?" my cousin asked.

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

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

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

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

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

That truth has never left me.

Blood Loss

Jayne Jaudon Ferrer

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

On the North Porch

Sheryl L. Nelms

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

Comfort Food

Megan Hicks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Always Have Eggs

Julie C. Judes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We always have eggs."

Becoming Nana

Brenda Bellinger

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

Pawpaw's Pastime

Sharon Ellison

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

"Whatcha doin', Pawpaw?"

"Whit'lin'."

"Whatcha makin'?"

"Nothin' special."

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

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

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

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

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

"Why do you do that, Pawpaw?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I get it now, Pawpaw.

Circle of Loving

Judy Callarman

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

Will the circle

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

be unbroken

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

By and by, Lord

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

by and by

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

There's a better

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

home a-waiting

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

In the sky, lord

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

in the sky

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

The Power of Writing

Diana M. Raab

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Barbara and Louise

Rebecca Anne Renner

In August ’04, Louise Roberts lost her left breast,
and she wasn’t a woman anymore.
She was a scar,
a new padded bra,
a look in the mirror like self loathing,
but lower
around Estee Lauder rosa rosa lips.
Anything less just wasn’t good enough.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the Garden

Jeremy Rich

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

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 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 winds 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 Newpord 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 Newpord, 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 Newpord," 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 Newpord. It's Newpord, 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 Newpord."

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...

Poem by Karen or Ginny........

Sol and the Dream

Ramona John

Solomon Jackson Caudle was my grandfather and my idol. Although he died when I was little, I remember trips with Grandfather to Burbridge's Ice Cream Parlor, the spot I suspected was Heaven. Lifting me onto his shoulders, he would carry me to the counter. We ordered double-dip cones, licking them quickly before chocolate ran down the sides.

A slight, white-haired man with a gentle smile, he didn't look like a star among trial lawyers in Missouri, where we lived, but he was. Mother had saved his letters, written before I was born, and I re-read them so often as I grew up that I knew them by heart. They revealed a warm, caring man.

When I asked Mother to describe what he had been like, she hesitated. "Colorful," she observed dryly.

She recalled one stifling August afternoon in the early 1900s, at the old stone courthouse across from his law office in Warrensburg, Missouri. A flutter of fans and the restless stir of the crowd overflowing the tiny courtroom broke the charged silence when Sol began his final argument in a murder trial.

He alternately thundered and cooed at the jurors, convincing them, as he was convinced, of his client's innocence. Finally, he thrust a human skull high above his head, invoking the judgment of God Almighty upon the true perpetrator of the ghastly deed. The bedazzled jurors returned a prompt acquittal.

Achieving his childhood dream of becoming a lawyer had proved difficult.

Sol's father, a Confederate veteran, had died soon after the Civil War. At eighteen, Sol made his way from North Carolina to Missouri, where he got a job and saved his money until he could afford to send for his mother. He bought and farmed a small piece of land to support the two of them. Eventually, he earned a teaching certificate and was able, during his spare time, to study law in a local attorney's office. At last, he passed the bar.

Grandfather hoped Mother would become a lawyer, too, a shocking idea in the early 1900s. She firmly declined. My birth rekindled his dream. If not his daughter, perhaps his granddaughter might follow him into the legal profession.

Mother and Grandmother kept his image alive for me as I grew up. I had no reason to suspect I didn't know the whole truth about my grandfather. Sol seemed better than Superman to me, and I wanted to be just like him. His dream for me evolved into my own.

Law school wasn't easy, but when I felt too exhausted to read another page, I thought of Sol. I remembered the obstacles Grandfather had faced to become a lawyer, and tried harder.

The day I took my oath as an attorney, my heart ached. Neither he nor my parents knew I had fulfilled our dream. When I stood before my first jury, unsure and afraid, I imagined I felt his soaring spirit within me. and found the strength to fight and win.

Ten years later, I returned to Warrensburg to wander through the building where his law office had been and the courthouse where he had practiced. I dropped by the Historical Society, hoping to find information about him.

The librarian helped me search. The first newspaper clipping detailed his marriage to Grandmother, "one of the county's most charming young ladies."

It also mentioned his appointment to the office of public administrator, calling him, "one of our rising young lawyers."

When she found the next article, the librarian paused for a moment, then handed the clipping to me. She looked away while I read.

"Caudle Pleads Guilty," proclaimed the headline of the December 18, 1903, Warrensburg Weekly Standard Herald.

My hands shook as I read. Sol had been indicted for embezzlement. In what the article called a "dramatic moment," Grandfather rose in court and pled guilty.

He had taken "small" amounts, totaling about four thousand dollars, from fifty widows' estates entrusted to him. He received a two-year prison sentence, and that same day, accompanied by a deputy, he left for prison in Jefferson City.

The librarian handed me other articles. I read on in disbelief, as the editorials referred to his shameful crimes as "misdeeds." One asked, "Is Sol Caudle really a thief – a bad man?" The editor rushed to defend him, saying, "We believe he is a criminal only because he committed what the law designates as a crime!" He emphasized that Sol didn't "dissipate or gamble or speculate, but used the money to take care of his wife, children and aged mother," implying that those facts somehow excused his actions!

I took a moment to fold away the remaining clippings that the librarian had copied for me and managed to thank her, struggling to keep my voice steady. She avoided my eyes.

Stunned, I headed to the cemetery, a quiet place atop a hill. Birds sang, and flowers bloomed, and peace covered the landscape like an early snowfall.

All of them are buried there – Mother, Dad, Grandmother, and of course, Sol. I sank to my knees.

One moment I grieved for something precious I had lost. Then I felt furious, betrayed. They had let me build my dream around a lie, the integrity and strength of my grandfather. They had even encouraged me to become a lawyer, like him.

So many questions. Was he ever sorry? Did he repay the money?

Did Grandmother think of leaving him? How did she feed her children during the long months of his imprisonment? I covered my face with my hands and wept. There would never be any answers.

Sol's story didn't end with prison. The next day, I found a later headline, "Sol Caudle Returns!" The Governor pardoned him, "at the solicitation of his many friends," and restored his full rights of citizenship.

"Sol received a warm greeting at the train from his devoted wife, friends and family," the story gushed. It went on to admonish readers that, "He will find that his friends here are ready to forget his error. – No good citizen will throw a stone in his way." Ah, Grandfatr, how did you inspire such loving support?

I returned to my life in Houston, far from those graves on a Missouri hilltop. Afterward, when I thought of Sol, I felt disillusioned and sad.

Weeks later, the mailman brought a clipping the librarian had overlooked. The headline read, "Sol Caudle Dies Friday Morning." It outlined his life.

After prison, Grandfather resumed practice and became successful in the following thirty years. He was City Attorney for a time and developed into a legendary trial attorney.

The Baptist church overflowed at his funeral, and the town's most prominent judges and attorneys were his pall-bearers. The

article concluded, "He was recognized by the bench and bar as a lawyer of keen discrimination, with a rare sense of justice and human nature."

Over time, as I grew, I realized what courage it had taken to return to those who had witnessed his disgrace and earn their respect once more.

Those he had hurt the most forgave him, Mother, who adored him, and Grandmother, who never spoke his name that her face did not soften in remembrance. When he died, a whole town mourned. Could they have cared so much had he not been, in the end, the man they always believed him to be?

In Grandmother's Bible, I found a typed quotation from an Edwin Markham poem:

"Ah, great it is to believe the dream
When you stand in youth by the starry stream,
But a greater thing is to fight life through
And say at the end, the dream is true."

Once again, I think of Sol with love. Not as my idol, for idols permit no flaws, but as the man who overcame his past and became the person I'm proud to call my grandfather. He won his last case.

Poem by Karen or Ginny........

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.

"You're too old," he said and chuckled. "They won' 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.

"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.

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

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

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 in 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 Faires

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

How many poem do you want in here? I've got some we can use otherwise.

Little Things

Jim Wisneski

With a thick, white ring of smoke slowly pushing 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 that slathered back against his scalp with a thick 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 one of his "small" favors, it was irresistible to say no once he threw his classic smirk across his face. As he pushed off the table to stand up, his once-muscle-filled arms barely functioned. Once 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.

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

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.

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’sa smella when I’ma cuta da grass? Datsa howa da base-a-balla field she’sa smella. Whena dey hitta da base-a-balla, it’sa 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

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’sa 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 upa you base-a-balla glove! It’sa 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.

He Winds The Clocks

Peter D. Goodwin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Legacy

Jeremy Rich

Hot air pushes my face
Scenery blurs by

“You know,
Grandma got lost
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.

Grandmother's Dollar

Ramona John

Today I had to empty Mother's cedar chest, so that it can be moved by the men who are coming to install new carpet. I hadn't gone through the chest's contents in decades, and it wasn't something I was eager to begin.

I was prepared for the rush of pleasure and pain memories of lost loved ones bring. Or so I thought. As I picked up Mother's glasses, I pictured them sliding down her small nose. Holding Dad's pocket knife, I could see him eagerly cutting the ribbon on Christmas packages. I read newspaper clippings, fragile with age, and smiled at fifty-year-old photographs which captured moments of our lives, and I was doing fine. Then I stumbled onto Grandmother's red leather billfold.

A zipper runs around three sides of it, and on a whim, I pulled the tab. Inside, I found two things, a picture of me and a one dollar bill. What I saw was love.

Grandfather had been a successful lawyer, until the depression hit, and clients stopped arriving at his office door. He died in the mid-thirties, without insurance or savings, and Grandmother came to live with Mom and Dad and me. I was three.

Mom always worked, and when I rushed home from school to the smell of chocolate cupcakes baking, it was Grandmother who had them waiting for me. When I ran inside with a skinned knee, she was always there with a Band-Aid and a soft lap to crawl up on for comfort. She was a formidable opponent at

Tiddly Winks and Chinese Checkers. That single dollar bill, which had been resting undiscovered in her billfold since she died in 1950, reminded me of all of those things. But most of all, it brought back memories of birthdays and Christmases when I was little.

Grandmother had no money except for her monthly $12 Old Age Assistance check. Yet on holidays she always hugged me and handed me a card, with a dollar bill tucked inside. I hurried off to the dime store, where it bought ribbons for my hair, or a shiny metal bracelet, or a huge box of crayons.

Here was one more present from my grandmother, a final dollar that said, “I love you.” But what could I buy with a dollar today? I wanted something I could keep, something that would remain a visible symbol of her love. Dime stores aren’t around any more, but away I drove to the Dollar General Store.

For an hour, I browsed. I found colorful candles, but once burned, they would be gone. A few paperback books were available, but none seemed right for the occasion. Even little ceramic figurines were two or three dollars, and I was determined to spend no more than the dollar she had left me.

Then I spotted a trivet with a white wooden border surrounding a tile, on which was painted, “Happiness is home made.” On the face of the tile were several pictures. One was a pie, which reminded me of all the blackberry cobblers she baked, and the peach pies, and the apple pies, because she knew they were my favorites. I thought of how she used to set aside strips of dough to sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar and bake as my extra treat. I remembered the holiday seasons when she stirred up luscious rolls of white divinity candy, with pecans instead of walnuts, just for me.

Home made? Dainty doll clothes, sewn by hand, turned up beneath the Christmas tree. I still have a peach satin nightgown trimmed in lace, her creation for a doll named Betty. Long ago,

she made quilts with tiny, careful stitches, to set aside for my hope chest.

I brought the trivet to the cash register, along with several other items I needed to buy, and told the cashier I wanted to pay for it separately. I showed him the dollar and explained why it was special to me. He rang up the trivet, took the worn bill, which had not been spent in over fifty years, and didn't even charge me tax.

That dollar bought a lot. It bought long-buried memories, and the certain sense that I'd just been given a warm hug.

Our grandkids will be coming to dinner soon. I'll bake a pie and set it on the trivet to place before them. It will remind me that I was loved, and it will say to them that love endures. Passed from one generation to the next, it goes on forever.

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.

A Love Story

June 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 its 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

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.

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.

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.

Cuckoo

Lynn Lyons

The first hardcover book I loved was *Heidi*. Peter, Grandfather, invalid Klara, even the goats, were my “only child” playmates. Switzerland was a magic place with alps and chocolate and chalets and cuckoo clocks.

My great grandparents lived on the second floor of my grandparents’ house. Sunday visits meant I had to spend some time in the tiny upstairs parlor, slipping and sliding on the horsehair settee, fidgeting until my mother released me from duty and let me run downstairs to play.

My great grandmother would rise from her rocker and shuffle to the dark oak sideboard. She would fuss for a minute and then ceremoniously set out a cut glass dish on the low table.

“I got some Humbugs,” she would say, pointing a crooked, trembling finger at the poop brown nuggets with faint white stripes. “Eat a Humbug,” she would command.

I learned to prepare myself by breathing through my mouth to dry my tongue and palette as thoroughly as possible. I hated Humbugs; the strong mint was fire in my mouth.

If my mouth were dry enough, I could use my tongue to poke the humbug between cheek and gum. I looked like a lopsided squirrel, but I could wait until the cuckoo popped out of his house which signaled that my time was up and I was free to run down the stairs and spit out the candy.Week after week, I stared so intently at the cuckoo clock that my great grandmother

mistook my interest. She didn't realize I was marking the minutes. She believed I loved the clock.

"Some day that clock will be yours," she said.

Now I had a vested interest in the clock. Someday it would hang on my wall and I could curl up with Heidi and Peter and Klara in my own little Switzerland.

Anticipated ownership made the forced marches up the stairs not so forced. I timed my visits to the later hours of the afternoon when the cuckoo's song was longer and more melodious.

The Humbug was not so much a tribulation as a ticket to a one-act play when the gears would grind, the double doors open and the cuckoo took center stage.

My great grandmother died when I was 16. She left no money, just a few inexpensive knickknacks, a lace collar and her cuckoo clock.

Now on my dresser, next to my well-worn copy of *Heidi*, sits the cut glass humbug dish.

Feed Sack Majesty

In memory of Mama-Teen

Carla Martin-Wood

"He only wears Armani now," my sister says of our brother
as we watch the children skate
in an icy Central Park.

Her voice drones on, mingles with traffic noise,
and I am drawn away
by a remembered song of cicadas, far off,
starting soft, then building to a crescendo,
the way they do.

On trips to the feed store, fall and winter,
Mama-Teen would take us girls
to pick up flour and feed in printed muslin sacks.
We'd pick the ones with pretty sprigged patterns,
while she hoped for something boyish
for my brother.

Chanel never searched so diligently for fabric,
nor stitched with such pride,
sundresses and shirts to last all summer.

I recall the four of us: three girls, one boy, running barefoot
through the long singing meadows of our childhood,
garbed in feed sack splendor,
real lilies of the field, and none were so arrayed.

We knew ourselves the undisputed owners
of the sun, the broad-faced moon,
and the oceanic waves of timothy grass
below the far hill where we played
through those green and shining seasons of forever.

I don't recall exactly when it was we learned the price of
things.
I only know I choose to keep, safe in my pocket,
the coins of honeysuckle summers,
the moon's wide smile,
and feed sack majesty.

Available......

The Faith Healer

Barbara B. Rollins

The McCarley Reunion was my project, start to finish. I'd researched the family line, gathered kinfolk from California and all over Texas for the weekend in June, 1991, written a family history, booked the hotel, recruited equipment and my sons for videotaping, and worried. Besides the appreciation and admiration I garnered, other bonanzas included finding my grandmother's cousin had extant photographs of my great-great grandparents McCarley.

The successful weekend wound down about the same time I did, exhausted. I pulled up a chair near my dad, Sam Breedlove, and his cousin Richard Elliott. Shoes off and no pen and pad in sight, I collapsed. And listened.

I'd learned long before not to ask Daddy famiy history questions – Mother knew more about his kinfolk than he did. Then again, Daddy's maternal aunt, five years his senior, had a passion and memory beyond belief, and on his father's side, I had the writings of my family-history-buff grandfather. Richard's demeanor was similar – two reticent men, sitting down and remembering.

Soon I dug for pen and paper, writing down funny tales of the their grandfather's mules and his harnessing them in reverse position and scolding them for not moving properly then apologizing when he discovered his error. Daddy told of going to the country and running from the field to the outhouse to the

chagrin of his country kin. Then with casual conversation about the man they loved, Daddy and Richard blew my world apart so when the pieces settled and were reconstructed, the arrangement would never again be the same. In talking about the man, they spoke as easily of his healing men and mules as they did of his leading singing at church and trying to steer a car by telling it, "Gee!"

I should have known. Richard's sister Catherine Elliott Cook had written a piece for the family history about their mother:

> During her childhod Lora was climbing off the roof of the barn at her Uncle Jim's, stepped on broken glass, and cut her little toe off. The skin at the top was the only thing holding it on. Her father put the toe back where it belonged and bandaged it. Using a saying from the Bible, he stopped the bleeding, and with time the toe grew back. This was done long before doctors had attempted it.

As my interest grew, Daddy, Richard and I sought out Richard and Catherine's brother, Ray, a preacher, who knew the prayers his grandfather used. We grabbed our videographers for the moment to save my scribbling rapidly. Ray said,

> Our grandfather Sam Richards was a man of great faith and he could take fire from a burn if any one was burned and also he could stop bleeding. He could stop bleeding in animals and in human beings and used passages of scripture from the Old Testament. Now to take fire from burns he would recite this (hope I can remember it):
>
> "Fire, I beseech thee in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost to come out."
>
> and he'd say it again:
>
> "Fire, I beseech thee in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost to come out."
>
> and the third time he'd change it just a little:

"Fire, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost I beseech thee to come out."

Now to stop bleeding he would use this incantation I guess you'd call it:

"As I walked by thee and saw thee polluted in thy own blood yea I said unto them let thee in thine own blood live."

And he said this three times.

"As I walked by thee and saw thee polluted in thy own blood yea I said unto them let thee in thine own blood live. As I walked by thee and saw thee polluted in thy own blood yea I said unto them let thee in thine own blood live."

and the bleeding would stop.

At that point on the tape Daddy himed in, "That's true!"

The cousins told of a time their grandfather received a telephone call from a neighbor who lived quite some distance away. His mule had run into a barbed-wire fense, cutting his shoulder severely. The mule was bleeding to death. Ray said, "They called our granddaddy and told him where the wound was and he made this incantation and the bleeding stopped almost at the moment. They had their watches on either end and by the time our grandfather had finished saying these words, the people at the place where the mule was said that the bleeding stopped."

In 1991 I had a masters degree in Christian Education, had been church staff for three churches, taught Sunday school – and Sunday school teachers. I knew of miracles, thought I believed in them. But healings in the Bible I could dismiss as from a different age and time, television evangelests were easy to dismiss, and occasional unexplained events – yeah, God did that. This? This was different. This was family. This was real. I've never healed by faith. I don't doubt I could, though. Not that *I* could, but that I could be the vehicle. But since that day, I've never had a good excuse for not getting out of the way and

letting it happen through me. I'm the great granddaughter of a faith healer. It's in my blood. God help me.

A Modicum of Faith

Barbara B. Rollins

Newborn as Shiloh roiled, Sam modeled wisdom, grace —
an unpretentious man. They trekked to Arkansas then on,
set up a church and scattered seed; a place
in Texas dawned a home, a farm from faith and brawn.
Sam served and sowed from youth through eighty years of
love, attuned to all of life, revered for prayers he spoke.
His unobtrusive faith invoked response above
the ken of prouder men while healing hurting folk.
Sam melded foot and severed toe, stanched blood with words
and healed a distant mule by speaking through a phone.
Example etched in children trust that undergirds,
and evenings he would sing, a radiant baritone.
A simple righteous man, a man I never knew —
Pacific battles raged as Sam progressed in peace,
a saint. And now Sam's grandson's daughter finds it true
that mountain moving faith exists and shall not cease.

The Mexican Skirt

Teresa Tumminello Brader

I asked to wear the skirt, a souvenir of a long-ago trip to Mexico, every time I visited Grandma. She tied its wraparound strings tightly around my waist and fastened the excess material with a big safety pin at the hip. "Frankie and Johnny were lovers…" Grandma's voice wavered when she hit the high notes. I lifted the heavy fabric up from the floor and spun around the den. Grandma clapped her hands together as she sang.

The likeness of a peasant woman adorned the front of the skirt. She wore a white chemise and an indigo blue skirt. A tanned arm curved gracefully around a terra cotta jug. Her black eyes stared outward and her crimson lips held a secret smile. Around the rest of the skirt was a village scene of muddy browns and deep greens.

One day Grandma gave me the skirt. I hugged her hard, luxuriating in the circle of her soft arms. I put the skirt on when she came to our house for Sunday dinner. She sang and clapped while I twirled around the family room.

Donning the skirt in the privacy of my bedroom, I became the Little Match Girl dying on the streets of Denmark. I was Bernadette gazing up at the lady of Lourdes. I turned into Little Nell trudging through the English countryside with her grandfather, fleeing the evil Quilp.

One Halloween I dared to wear the skirt out of the house. A white sleeveless blouse with a ruffle across the bust and gold

hoop rings in my newly pierced ears completed my gypsy masquerade. Mama dropped me off at the house of a friend, the leader of our group. Though the friend had proclaimed us too old for trick-or-treating, she commanded us to costume for her party. Sprawled on the sidewalk in the dark, we listened to "Seasons in the Sun" and "Billy, Don't Be a Hero" on a tape recorder. We chatted about the boys at school, secretly wishing they'd come strolling down the street, dreading it at the same time. I draped the skirt over my knees, finally feeling sophisticated enough to join in the perpetual gossip.

Even when alone, I started to feel silly wearing the now-fraying skirt. I placed it, neatly folded, on a shelf in my closet. High school yearbooks eventually filled the space next to it. Grandma stopped coming over for Sunday dinners, preferring to stay home. I visited her during my college breaks, noting the same plastic figurines of Mary and Joseph that I'd played with as a child still standing on the small étagère. After my daughter was born, we called on her great-grandmother every Sunday. From the comfort of her armchair, Grandma sang and clapped while the baby bounced on my lap.

In the hospital hallway the doctor told me Grandma was ready to go. At her request I propped her arms on the pillows, the search for a more restful position proving futile. I found an accessible spot on her cheek above the breathing tubes and kissed her goodbye. Remembering the skirt stowed away years ago, I retrieved its box from the attic. I pulled out the dry-rotted garment and buried my face in its faded colors.

The Soldier's Picture

Peg Russell

In Grandmother Jones's leather photograph album, along with formal photographs of her parents and brother and her own family, there is a portrait of a solemn young man. He holds a rifle, and wears a Union uniform, complete with the cap. Underneath the picture is written "Mother's Beau."

Why would Grandmother have a picture of her mother's former boyfriend in a family album?

Her mother was Susan Maria Knox, born in New York, where both sides of her family had lived for three generations.

Susan had fallen in love and was engaged to be married when her fiance joined the Union Army. When he was killed in battle, the young teacher was devastated. She grieved so much that her parents decided that a change of scenery might help her, and so Susan was sent to Sheffield, Ohio. There she met Sumner Burrell Day.

Ironically, he also had worn the uniform of the Union Army. An officer in the local guard, Sumner marched his men around the courthouse on Sunday afternoons. But, when it came time for the unit to go to war, his father paid a substitute $250 to go in his place. The substitute was killed.

Two years after the war was over Susan and Sumner were married in her home town of Russell, New York. They returned to Ohio where Sumner prospered, first in the lumber and timber business and then in real estate and constructing homes. He

helped found the bank and brought electricity to the area. Later generations would say, "Everything he touched turned to gold." About Susan, they said, "She had the brains in the family."

Now, over 88 years after Susan died, one of her great, great-granddaughters has her carved oak rocking chair and the unnamed first love, "Mother's Beau," still looks out from his place in the leather album.

Some Things I Want My Granddaughters To Know

Renie Burghardt

I live in a beautiful rural area, and when my three city girl granddaughters come for a visit, I want them to learn more about the natural world.

I tell my granddaughters about the wild creatures that inhabit my woods, fields and pond.

I tell them the names of the birds that frequent the feeders in the summer, or winter. I show them the great blue heron that visits the pond in hopes of catching a frog dinner.

They think he is "cool" looking. And so he is!

Later, we watch a red-tailed hawk soar gracefully above the field, and land on a limb of the dead oak, eyeing the chickens in my yard.

"Shoo!" I yell at the hawk, while my granddaughters giggle.

I show my granddaughters the beautiful raccoons and homely opossums that visit my yard at night. Sometimes we see an armadillo, too.

"He is strange looking," says Hannah.

I want my granddaughters to see the deer grazing in the field, especially the rare albino doe that is so beautiful it takes ones breath away. And early mornings, I want them to hear the wild turkeys gobbling. If we're lucky, we can catch a glimpse of them, too.

I tell my granddaughters about some of the scarier creatures that live around here. Like the huge blacksnake that sometimes finds his way into the chicken coop. I want them to know that although I may threaten the blacksnake with my broom, to discourage him from getting the eggs, I would never harm him. I tell them that the blacksnake, like all the other wild creatures, has a right to his existence, too.

In the woods, I teach them the names of the trees; so they know the difference between an oak and a hickory, an elm and a maple. We look up the names of wildflowers as well, and when we see butterflies alighting on them, we look them up, too.

I want my granddaughters to go outside with me on a clear, starry-night, and learn the names of the constellations. If we are lucky enough to see a shooting star, they can make a secret wish on it. Summer nights, I open the windows so they can hear the chorus of a country night, while fireflies flash their perfect lights.

I want my granddaughters to hear the eerie howl of the coyotes, and be glad there is still enough wildness left, where coyotes and other wild creatures can live their lives. I remind them often that the Creator of all this beauty would be pleased, if they worked toward preserving His beautiful creations, so their own grandchildren could someday enjoy it as well.

Stopping By

Mary Belardi Erickson

for Bob Moe, Sr.

He is a tall, older man with a new hip
and quizzical eyes always searching for story.
He notices the elderly shuffle on the grass;
this is something to wonder about.
It amazes him how when standing still, he sways
like a small fishing boat adrift on gentle waves.
The gear he carries just is that, something to tackle
with his somewhat comical regard —
the same notion as why fish don't bite in his small lake
where for years Sunnies, as if blessed, were plentiful.
The clear, deep gem of water keeps it secret.
No bother since fishing can bore him now
though a practice he did crave.
He does not feel sorry for having aged
when his meditative eyes
can see Sand Hill Cranes on his road
or many Canadian gosling's following, almost merrily
the line of their mother.
He welcomes sightings like these, he says
and the time now to gaze.
He says this with a twinkle, when he stops
and wobbles some while telling.

The Road to Chatham

Dixon Harne

Grandfather Hearne died when I was four, and family members say I can't remember that. But I do – and even before that, before he fell to heart problems. I can see plain as day that last Thanksgiving morning he came to the screen porch with his razor strap to warn us kids about all the racket – for the third time. He looked tall and stern when he shook that strap at us, and we scattered like field crows when Mimmaw Hearne banged her wash bucket with a wood paddle. And I can see the hospital room where he lay dying, the glucose bottle and I.V. hanging by his bed, the room fragrant with fresh cut flowers – chrysanthemums and roses, the same smells that followed us to his gravesite. I can see the deep hole, the mound of fresh-turned dirt, the crowd gathered round to watch the coffin being lowered to its final rest, the sobs and moans and awkward hugs – and everything awash with a black patina to my mind's eye.

Mimmaw was left all alone now and miles away from her family, but she would not leave her home of over fifty years, the only way of life she'd known. Her roots grew too deep in the rich Louisiana farmland to ever be transplanted. She had buried a good man, a good husband and father, a partner with whom she'd weathered the miseries of drought and crop failure, two world wars and the Great Depression. And hard work had earned them the respect of townspeople and neighbors. The Hearnes were, in fact, the very first settlers to make their way

through the rugged hills and forests and against great adversity to plow the virgin soil of Jackson Parish. Mimmaw's forbears, the Loflins of Alabama, would soon make their way to Jackson Parish as well, a settlement as yet still unnamed.

Lula Mae – that was her name – was a big woman, clean and tidy in every conceivable way. There would be no foolishness in the parlor, no arguing, and meals were served on time. I rarely saw her smile or laugh. She was a serious Christian woman who took her time on earth as an opportunity to prove her worthiness for the life hereafter. I know she loved her family, even visited us on occasion, when her gardens could be left to a neighbor's care. She raised most everything she needed, all tilled and sewn by her own hands – corn, tomatoes, greens, potatoes, melons, cucumbers, apricots, plums, even pecan trees that shaded the front and side porches from the summer heat. To everything a season, she might say. I can remember how we kids would secretly comb the rows in the heat of summer for "tommytoes" – what we now call cherry tomatoes – and devour them like sweet plums under the porch. If she ever knew, she never said so. Even her attire materialized from her own hands – calico and gingham dresses fashioned from cornmeal and flour sacks and Spiegel patterns. And oh the lace doilies on the divan and dressers and table tops, and the beautiful quilts and pillows stitched from the scraps.

So much of my memory of Mimmaw Hearne centers around food, for she was such a wonderful cook. No one has been able to match her collards and mustard greens or the chicken pie my dad – her only son – loved so much. No matter the occasion, when we visited there would be a big golden-crusted chicken pie just for my dad. Aunts, uncles, and cousins joined us for celebration every Thanksgiving at Mimmaw's house. That is, till the year she married the preacher man – a Methodist who went by the name Brother Garrett. From there forward, our

Thanksgiving celebrations would alternate with the Garrett clan. The preacher was a genial soul, a life-long man of the cross bringing The Word to congregants old and young at his small town church. For a while they lived in the parsonage, a white frame house Mimmaw tidied up fit to entertain the mayor or the governor. She saw to his every need and dutifully sat in the Amen section every Sunday morning at eleven o'clock and six P.M. and every Wednesday for prayer meetings – rain or shine. She lived her faith and prayed we'd all do the same.

Mimmaw insisted on keeping her own home when she remarried, just in case or for sentimental reasons – I know not – but when the preacher retired and gave up the parsonage, they had a place to go home to. Mimmaw was always happiest there at the old home place, where she spent her remaining years in her garden, puttering in her kitchen, or knitting away at a colorful throw or rug or Christmas shawl. Brother Garrett, though older, outlived her by several years and remained in the home till he passed on to his reward. The house and land eventually made its way to my dad and his two sisters – then to my dad alone. In the 1980s, he rented it to a nice young family who struggled at first but eventually managed to purchase the place outright, having no clue as to its history – that it was built by the very hands of my grandfather and his brothers on a choice section of rising ground owned by the Hearne family since the 1860's.

So much of our history still resides in the community of Chatham, Louisiana that it will – for at least another generation – remain the heart center of the Hearne family. And though I was city born and raised, I loved the countryside as a child and wish with all my heart that I could spend one more Thanksgiving at Grady and Lula Hearne's old home place. I can still feel the thrill of my tummy flutter as our car flew over the hilltops on the road to Chatham. (end)

At Long Last Love

Curtis C. Chen

Herman Hodges was a bit actor who played Uncle Kemble in three episodes of the popular television series *The Five Gables*. When he auditioned for the part, he was seventy-five years old, a widower, and dying from a degenerative heart condition. He didn't tell the casting director any of that. She laughed when he said he was a very mature twenty-nine, but she didn't turn him away.

Herman had always wanted to be an actor. He never forgot the joy of his first speaking role, as a magical pumpkin in his fifth grade Thanksgiving pageant. He had always looked forward to Halloween, but he'd never thought to build a whole character and not just a shell. His Halloween costumes became more elaborate all through high school, complete with backstory, motivation, and even a little skit he would perform while trick-or-treating.

But as Herman grew older, he found fewer and fewer opportunities to act. His parents and friends and wife and children always dismissed his interest as frivolous. Their doubts undermined his passion, and he gave up that dream and focused on making a home and raising a family. He never regretted that decision.

Years later, after his children had moved away and his wife had died, the now-retired Herman sold his house and relocated to a nursing home. Without anything or anyone to care for but

himself, he drifted through his days, going where the staff directed him and doing what they suggested. It was better than nothing.

One night, Herman's nursing home organized a Shakespeare reading – *The Merchant of Venice* – and the participants drew straws for parts. Herman got Shylock and stage fright. He forced the unfamiliar words through his trembling mouth, hoping he wouldn't faint before they got through the whole play. Had he ever felt this nervous in his life? Not when he proposed to Edith, not even when he had the "birds and bees" talk with their son Brian.

But partway through the reading, Herman stopped feeling nervous. In the play, Shylock's daughter Jessica eloped, and Herman remembered when his own daughter, Abigail, had married her first husband. She had been adamant about wanting to be with him, and her father's disapproval had only hardened her resolve. Herman understood how Shylock must have felt, and he knew how wrong both he and Shylock had been. Herman was angrier with himself than he had ever been with Abigail.

He let his anger pour out in his performance. Everyone had applauded at the end of the reading, and Herman felt something he hadn't felt in a long time.

He had always thought he enjoyed acting because it allowed him to be a different person. Now he realized that he had discovered himself in those characters. Even when he had played a pumpkin – trapped in one place, unable to move, always subject to the will of others – he had found the truth of it in his own fifth grade existence. Herman had allowed himself to feel more deeply on stage than he ever had in daily life.

Herman's first television role was in a thirty-second commercial for a local hardware store, playing the grumpy old neighbor who complains about his inadequate gardening tools. It took him a little while to adjust to acting for the camera, doing

the same lines over and over again, but it wasn't difficult. Herman only needed a few seconds before each take to summon the memory of Saturdays spent in his family vegetable garden. If he closed his eyes, he could imagine that the heat of the stage lights was the afternoon sun, and he almost expected to hear Edith calling him in for supper.

The casting call for a recurring character in *The Five Gables*' second season premiere came out just before Herman's seventy-sixth birthday. He had done several commercials by then, and played bit parts in a couple of sitcoms. He had earned a reputation for taking direction well. One of the nurses from the home drove Herman to the *Gables* audition in her own car. Herman didn't mind that she wandered off, hoping to catch sight of some movie stars on the studio lot, while he waited in a hallway. He didn't even care if he got the part or not. He just liked acting.

Nobody was prepared for the immediate popularity of Herman's character, Uncle Kemble. The day after the season premiere aired, the nursing home phone lines were jammed with calls for Mr. Herman Hodges. After his second episode, reporters from three different local newspapers and two wire services came to interview him. They were all turned away.

"One hit and he's already a prima donna," one reporter muttered while leaving.

"Give him a break," another reporter said. "The guy's old. I hear he's got a weak heart."

Herman was, at that very moment, fighting to inhale oxygen from a face mask and wondering how much longer he would be able to continue acting. He could feel his insides giving up a little more every day, but he still remembered how it felt to be Healthy Herman Hodges, and he could play that part very well. Nobody needed to know how bad it really was.

"It isn't fair," he whispered to himself late one night, unable to sleep. "I shouldn't be dying when I feel so alive."

Herman felt it happening the next day, on set. They were shooting the last scene of his third episode, a mid-season script titled "At Long Last Love." The show had originally featured a guest character, an old family friend who came to visit the Gable sisters and discovered that his childhood sweetheart lived right next door. After Uncle Kemble made such a splash with critics and audiences, the writers had changed the script so that it was Uncle Kemble who discovered the Gables' new next-door neighbor was the girl he had almost married fifty years ago.

Several of the cast and crew members had shed tears at the table read the week before, and many of them had congratulated Herman on scoring such a plum part so early in his acting career. He had gone home that night and listened to a recording of the Cole Porter song from which the episode took its title. Herman could remember hearing Frank Sinatra sing it, on the radio in his car, during one of his first dates with the girl named Edith who would later become his wife. She had died seven years ago in a car wreck, blindsided by a drunk driver. Herman hadn't been with her. He hadn't gotten to the hospital in time to see her before she went into surgery. He had never said good-bye.

The final day of shooting ran long. It was easy to lose track of time inside the soundstage, with huge lamps producing artificial sunlight. Herman was amazing that day. He didn't flub a single line, and they never had to ask him for a second take unless it was to try something different or fix a technical issue.

The last scene took place on the Gables' front porch, where Uncle Kemble and his childhood sweetheart, Gwen, said good-bye to each other. They had spent the entire episode getting reacquainted, and the TV audience would see their romance flowering again over the course of the hour, only to find that Gwen had a terminal illness. The director shot five takes before

he got the scene in the can. He had to keep cutting because the camera operator’s sobbing was stepping on the actors’ dialogue.

Herman didn’t mind waiting while they reset and did the scene over and over again. Angela, the actress playing Gwen, was quite attractive. He didn’t mind looking into her eyes and begging her to stay with him. Her eyes were a bright, pale blue – the same as Edith’s. He enjoyed the memories that came flooding back as he looked into those eyes.

“I can’t stay,” Angela said five times. “I’m going to get worse. I don’t want you to see me at the end.”

“I love you,” Herman said five times, with the face of a man at a loss for words.

“It isn’t fair,” Angela said. “I shouldn’t be dying when I feel so alive.”

Herman reached out and took Angela’s hand. She looked down, then up, and nodded. He smiled at her for the fifth and last time.

“Print that!” the director cried, once. “That’s it! We’re wrapped!”

Everyone applauded. Herman closed his eyes.

Herman Hodges, a bit actor who played Uncle Kemble in three episodes of the popular television series *The Five Gables*, passed away while doing something he loved. He was seventy-six years old. He lived before he died.

Grandpa's Days

Mary Belardi Erickson

Opening a puzzle marked one-thousand
of a muted-red farmstead having seen better days,
I let pieces fall through my fingers like the ripened grain
we shoveled and elevated into Grandpa's old granary.
Sometimes, while I watched from below, Grandpa and my
brother
climbed with tar bucket to patch roof, over filled
compartments beneath.
When the price was right, from storage Grandpa filled his
wagon
and hauled oats to be weighed and shipped by train.

Other days, I rode along in our farm army jeep.
Across the railroad from the town's elevator, Grandpa drove.
In the creamery's cooler, we tasted a paring of aged cheese
before leaving with a chunk wrapped in white paper.
Then just two blocks west on Main Street,
Frederick's Supervalu had boughten cookies Grandpa liked
for mid-afternoon lunches to last a farmer 'til supper.
If we needed some thingamajig from the hardware store,
my striped-bib wearing Grandpa talked farming before
buying.
When he needed his hair cut, we said hello at the barbershop
and waited on long, green vinyl benches.

At least once, proud to be Grandpa's girl
I got an unstyled bob and a bright red lollipop.

Out of town we rumbled in our breezy jeep.
We drove south a few miles on tar, before we turned back on
gravel.
No rush – swerve and slow and stop and stare at corn —
maybe Grandpa was plotting his next harvest
and maybe looking hard did make the corn grow better, faster
I must have thought, I really can't remember all
back when I was going on ten and Grandpa was going on
eighty
but still going strong.

Welcome

Madeleine McdDonald

I can't believe it's 10 years since we met
You haven't changed at all
And this is your husband and daughter
Welcome, all of you, welcome to my new home
Come on in
Shoes off, please
My carpet says thank you

Let me get a towel
To wipe that chocolate off her face
My new sofa says thank you

No smoking indoors
Not in my apartment
Go and smoke on the terrace, if you insist
My lungs say thank you

I see you're looking at the quilt
It was handsewn by my great grandmother
I must have told you about my great grandmother
She travelled all the way from Latvia in 1898
And she was pregnant, just imagine!
I wouldn't be here otherwise
Please don't touch the quilt, it's fragile
I hung it on the wall to keep it safe
My great grandmother says thank you

You're not going already?
I'll call the elevator
It's so good to welcome old friends
Hospitality is on old Latvian tradition
Goodbye

Haiku

Gerald A. McBreen

Grandma's red porch swing
frosted in snow
creaks softly

Gramma Might Have Told Me

Madonna Dries Christensen

Gramma lived in a one-room shanty that sat along a graveled road at the edge of town. The ceiling hung so low that medium sized adults needed to stoop when inside. As a child in the 1940s, the cottage seemed perfect; I felt like a doll in a dollhouse.

When I visited Gramma on summer afternoons, I sometimes found her on the front screened porch, sewing aprons or night gowns from feed sacks. She hummed as her head bobbed up and down over the sewing machine; up when the material glided along smoothly, down to inspect a seam or tear a thread with her teeth. I sat on the floor watching the treadle dance under her foot, staring boldly at the bunions protruding from holes cut in her felt slippers.

The pedaling stopped, and Gramma muttered, “Darn bobbin’s empty again.”

She leaned back and tugged combs and hairpins from her hair. At seventy her hair was still mostly dark. She pulled back the locks, damp with perspiration, and refastened a knot at the back of her head. Rising from her chair, she said, “Fetch a pail of fresh water and I’ll make nectar.”

Off I jogged to the pump in the neighbor’s yard. I lugged back the enamelware pail using both hands, sloshing water on my bare feet and on the worn linoleum floor.

Gramma filled a clear glass pitcher with water and added a dollop of cherry syrup. As I watched the water swirl red and white like a barber's pole Gramma tossed in sugar; stirred, tasted, added sugar, stirred and tasted again. When satisfied, she used a long-handled dipper to fill two glasses.

I took both drinks while she reached into the cupboard and brought out a handful of sugar cookies, lightly browned around the edges. We went to the porch, where, seated in rocking chairs, we nibbled our cookies and sipped our drinks. Outside, honey bees buzzed among the morning glories and four o'clocks, seeking sweet nectar of their own.

Gramma pointed a finger across the road. "Look at that big kid galloping around on a mop, pretending he's Gene Autry."

I knew the boy from school. He was my age; ten, and I saw nothing wrong with playing Gene Autry. He was my favorite movie cowboy, too. But I laughed along with Gramma because she thought he was funny.

A pickup truck rattled by, stirring up dust that filtered through the screen on a gust of the ever present Iowa wind. A fat housefly circled our heads, droning like a fighter plane. Gramma picked up the mesh swatter, but laid it down when the fly collided with the sticky paper strip dangling above our heads.

The boy across the street called, "Whoa, Champion," and dismounted his horse and went inside.

"Gene's going into the saloon to have a drink with the other buckaroos," Gramma said, and we laughed again.

I remember only that one conversation with my maternal grandmother, the only grandparent I knew. I took her name, Agnes, for my Confirmation name. She died when I was twenty, but we'd lost her years before to dementia. I often wonder what else we discussed, and I imagine a conversation something like this.

"Tell me about the olden days." I said.

"How olden?"

"When you were a little girl."

She might have begun with her grandparents, the McLaughlins, who fled Ireland during the potato famine and eked out a living in the Boston area before moving to a farm in Wisconsin. Then came the wagon journey when Gramma's grandparents and her parents moved to Iowa, in 1879, when Gramma was six. She talked about dust storms, grass fires, and tornadoes that swept across the nearly treeless prairie.

"Lightnin', though, that's the worst. Papa and my sister were killed by lightnin'."

"Really? At the same time?"

"No; that's what makes it remarkable." Rubbing her eyes, Gramma retrieved the memory. "Essie in eighteen ninety-two; she was only twelve, and Papa in nineteen aught nine, in the harvest field. My brother Linford was there. He was stunned by the jolt, but he brought Papa home in the wagon. 'Hurled from this earth to eternity,' is what the paper said about Papa."

"Who was he to me?"

"He'd be your great-grandfather, Henry O'Brien. A kindly man." She went inside for her photo album and found his picture, with his wife. "Bridget was Mama's name. She died four years later, a painful death from cancer. But she never complained. She was buried with her rosary and crucifix and a white lily."

"Who's that baby picture?"

"Hester. We called her Essie. She was a bright little girl; everyone liked her."

"The one who got killed? Were you a little girl when she died?"

"I was eighteen. A year later, I married Ed."

I had no memory of him. He died when I was four. In pictures, he is handsome, French Canadian he was. My brother

said he'd sometimes run into Grandpa coming out of a saloon. He'd dig in his pocket and offer my brother a piece of peppermint candy with lint on it. The treat was a bribe for silence; he was not to mention where he'd seen Grandpa. He sucked on the candies, too, a feeble attempt to cover his breath when he'd had a snootful. I wouldn't have asked Gramma about that, though.

"What was my mother like when she was little?"

"Oh, Maybelle was shy, quiet, like you. She had lots of friends and she loved babies. Goodness, she'd walk miles to see a new baby on a neighboring farm. Now she has a houseful of her own."

She showed me pictures of her brothers, whose band played at barn dances where she and her sisters and friends gathered. And her cousins, four Jones sisters, members of a popular all-girl band in the 1930s, who later gave up show business to enter the convent with their widowed mother. "All five at the same time," Gramma said. "Imagine that."

That led to a story about a McLaughlin cousin who disappeared in the 1920s. "Married with three daughters. Folks say he ran off with a young girl. She disappeared the same day. Clem borrowed his brother's car and called him the next day to say the car was at the Fargo depot. They must've got on the train and went somewhere. Nobody heard from them again."

After a while, I suppose I grew bored, as children do when old folks reminisce about people whose names children quickly forget.

Forgotten until years later, when my parents were deceased and I began searching for my ancestors. Forgotten until I began to study old photographs and read old obituaries, wishing I could recall what I'd heard about these people; details that would bring life to the names on my genealogy charts.

In questioning relatives, I learned things that neither Gramma nor anyone else would have told me when I was a child. My older sister revealed that Aunt Arlowene was not our aunt, but our first cousin. Gramma and Grandpa raised her after their daughter, Gladius, gave birth out of wedlock. If my grandparents knew who the father was, no one else in the family ever learned his identity, not to this day.

Grandpa's family supposedly figured in a horse thief tale in Canada. But no one knew, or was willing to relate details. The story remains unverified. That family skeleton grows dusty in the closet.

I asked Uncle Jack if it was true he'd been a bootlegger. Grinning, he said, "I might've done some of that during the Depression. A fella had to make a living one way or another."

I found information about the Jones sisters of the all-girl band, and contacted them. They provided me with details about their career, as well as pictures. I learned from them that their uncle Clem had never been found. Not until 2008 did we learn the full story.

To Aunt Goldie I said, "I remember hearing about someone who worked as a housekeeper for Mark Twain."

She laughed. "In our family? That's a new one on me."

If Aunt Goldie didn't know, no one would.

"Who was the girl who died just before her wedding and was buried in her bridal gown?"

Aunt Goldie thought for a moment. "Oh, yes, that was on your dad's side. She was to marry your dad's younger brother. Her name was Emma…someone. Or was it Elsie? That doesn't sound right either. Hmm, what was her name?"

Aunt Goldie couldn't remember.

But Gramma might have told me on one of those quiet, humid afternoons when we drank nectar and nibbled cookies and visited on her screened porch.(End)

Vespers at Mama-Teen's

Carla Martin-Wood

Safe beneath pink quilted coverlets
sweet with lavender and sun
I sink to slumber
in a world of summer lullabies
see the moon
naked and caught like a pearl
in the net of a sycamore tree
while somewhere
an owl hoots low, frogs croak, crickets hum
and her voice cracked with age
sings from the old piano
peace, be still for me
as a gathering storm
moves in from the sea
and I sleep sound
though not a stone is silent.

Most Beautiful of All

Sally Clark

When my granddaughter Sophie was five years old, she loved kindergarten – most of the time. But one rainy day when I picked her up from school, her face looked like the drizzle falling all around us.

"What's the matter, baby?" I asked her as she climbed into the car. "Did you have a bad day?"

"Don't ask me that, Grandma, I don't want to talk about it!" she thundered. "You always ask me that! Don't ask me anymore!" She scowled and tried to turn away so I could not see her face.

"I see," I replied, driving away from the school. I didn't ask her anything else.

While the lighting flashed around our car, she exploded, "My daddy says that I'm the most beautiful little girl in the whole world! No one is more beautifuler than me, not even Hannah. Hannah's daddy said that she's the most beautifulest little girl in the whole world, but he's wrong!"

"Well," I said, "all daddies think that their little girls are the most beautiful little girls in the whole world because they love them so much. You and Hannah are both beautiful little girls and both your daddies love you."

I could tell that was not what she wanted to hear. When we got to the house, we sat in the car, waiting for the rain to stop. I

tried to talk to her some more. She hung her head so that I could not see her eyes begin to puddle.

"Honey, why is it so important to you to be the most beautiful?" I asked.

She didn't want to answer me. She hugged her door handle and picked at something she thought she saw there.

I reached across the seat to touch her arm and asked again, "Why is it so important to you to be more beautiful than Hannah? What happened today when you and Hannah were playing at school?"

Sophie answered softly, "When I was talking to Hannah on the playground, she just turned away from me. I didn't even get to finish what I was saying. That's because Hannah is more beautifuler than me." Two big tear drops fell into her lap.

After a few moments, I said, "I know how that feels. People do that to me sometimes, too, and it always hurts my feeling. It makes me feel like I'm not as important as they are."

She raised her head, surprised that I understood how she felt. Climbing across the car to the shelter of my lap, we watched the rain splash against the windshield.

"Sophie, you are always important to me, and to your mommy and to your daddy," I whispered.

I didn't give her any answers that day and I didn't fix her problem. But resting her head on my shoulder, she knew that someone who loved her understood her feelings. It was enough to give her peace.

Violet

Karen Kelsay

Husband, I want to ripen into
a woman like your mother,
one who wiggles an arm
into the nook of a son's elbow,
feet twisting obscure angles
across frosty streets, refusing a cane.
Whose only hope from tipping
over in the lane with a dizzy spell,
is not a bottle of pills, but a bag
of boiled sweets.
A stiff-upper-lip kinda lady,
who jeers at heart attacks
and broken hips, and raises hell
when trapped in a ward with old people.
One who still makes tea each
morning over the burner, even though
she catches her sleeves on fire.
A woman with no riches, but a few
baubles of costume jewelry
and collection of miniature brass
animals, given her one mother's day,
that glint in sun like a row
of diamonds.

In Her Grandmother's Room

Weslea Sidon

The last thing she found was an apron
balled tight and stuffed behind the stove,
pitiful strings crinkled,
a weight of sooty grease welding
the fabric to the floor.

This meticulous kitchen —
each drawer relined each year,
each bit of linen refolded to ward off
the curse of crease —
where no one dared to spill,
or sigh as a cup of bitter tea
followed a stifled tale of heart break
down the drain. A drop of honey, a drop of anger
both invited vermin.

No one would have seen her yank the perfect bow,
wrench some crushing pain from kitchen sanctuary
and stuff it in a winding sheet of flowering percale.
She saw her now, but only rising afterward
turning to select another apron from a scented drawer.
She saw her smooth the apron front, and one or two
bold strands of hair, then let the kitchen door swing
shut behind her, silent on its gleaming hinge.

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.

***

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 Deer 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.

***

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.

***

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 someway 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.

***

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. END

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.

Grandma's Quilt

Tiffany Streifel McCone

My maternal Grandmother made a quilt for each of her grandchildren. Grandma Emma didn't much care for the patchwork variety. She liked to take two large pieces of fabric and sew them together around the edges, one piece solid, the other with a print. She then would sew an elaborate, beautiful pattern which could be clearly seen on the solid side. She always matched them carefully; my Grandmother hated it when colors clashed. I remember the room she set up in when she was working. The whole piece was suspended on four pedestals, taking up most of the space in the room. Then, she would draw out the pattern she wanted to make and stitch by stitch, she would hand sew it; turning two insignificant pieces of cloth into something beautiful.

I received my Grandma Quilt when I was eighteen. It was my high school graduation present from her. When I went off to college my Mama asked me, "Do you want to take your quilt from Grandma?" I replied, "No, I'm not ready yet." My Grandmother was still very much alive, but I knew it wouldn't be that way forever. Some part of me knew that this quilt was a gift to be treasured for the rest of my life, even when I was young and thought I had the world figured out. I knew that the moment I took possession of it, I would have to officially be a

grown up, because only a grown up could care for such a precious thing.

A few years later, after my Grandmother had her first stroke, I moved to San Francisco. She was very much changed from the woman she used to be by that time. She was the type of woman who never forgot a birthday, who made every one of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren sure they were her favorite. After she had the stroke, she had a hard time placing us. You could see recollection in her eyes at that time, although that seemed to fade over the years. When I was packing up my life to start a new one, my Mama called. She inquired “Do you want to take your quilt from Grandma?” I replied, “No, I’m not ready yet.”

After a couple of years living in San Francisco, I got the call from my Mama. Grandma had passed away. I wept. I got a plane ticket. I went home to say goodbye. It was one of the most difficult things I have ever done; not only having to say goodbye myself, but having to watch my Mother say goodbye to her Mother. I kept thinking that one day, I would need to do the same myself. My Mother was my Grandmother’s only daughter, I am my Mother’s only daughter. It is a bond unlike any other, and to see it broken by death is unbearable. I stayed a while, and when I was getting ready to pack up and head back home, Mama asked again…”Do you want to take your quilt from Grandma?” I replied, “No, I’m not ready yet.”

Years passed. I reconnected with Joely and moved to Seattle. He and I got married. I was quite settled into my life. For one reason or another, I don’t recall what at present; we had to take the truck back to North Dakota for a visit. When I was home spending some quality time with my Mama, she said “Tiffany, the quilt from Grandma is still here. I think it’s time you take it home now.” I paused for a moment, and then said “Okay, do you have something I can put it in to keep it safe?”

She put it in a plastic trash bag for me. I packed it in the cab of the truck because I couldn't stand the thought of throwing it in the back. I brought it into my house and immediately put it into a drawer. I had it now, in my possession, but I still wasn't ready for the responsibility.

In its warm, comfy drawer it remained for four years…until this evening.

I was in the process of washing the sheets and making up my guest bedroom. It is a room that is closed off to the cats and the dogs…for the most part even Joel and I. We rarely have cause to go into this room. After I put the clean sheets on and fluffed the pillows, a strange notion hit me. I went into my room and opened the drawer and there it was, still sealed in the bag that Mama put it in. I carried it to my spare room and gently took it out. I spread it over the bed, solid side up. I traced the pattern, noticing that there were still ink marks from when Grandma first drew it out. I looked at the stitches, each sewn by her very own hands.

I lay down upon it and I remembered my Grandma Emma. I remembered how I would pick strawberries in the garden and would come inside, SO excited to eat them. She would help me wash them, then put just a bit of sugar on them and set them in the refrigerator for a while. They tasted better that way. I remembered the smell of her house. I remembered how she would burn toast and then scrape all of the burned bits off saying, "It's still good!" I remembered playing Aggravation with her, and how she would let me win because she knew if I lost too many times in a row I would quit playing; she loved playing that game so much. I remembered the salmon-colored suit that she wore on Sundays and her red pants and how she always had the perfect accessories to go with everything. I remembered how it felt when she touched my face and told me that I just didn't know how much she loved me. I remember

how utterly comfortable and safe and loved I felt whenever she was near.

I let it all wash over me. I wept. I smiled. I missed her terribly.

Then, I got up and finished making the bed. I knew that she would not approve of the way that the color of the quilt clashed with the sheets, so I threw the duvet over the top, keeping its presence there my own little secret to cherish.

I have been changed a little bit this evening, I became more of a grown up. I think Grandma would be pleased.

Patchwork

Madeleine McDonald

Objects are all I can touch of you now
A silver ring
A pocket watch
A newspaper clipping yellowed with age
Dog-eared black and white photos
Of wartime uniforms and jaunty smiles

My grandparents

You never talked of the war years
I never asked
Until it was too late
I was too young to understand
You too entrenched in denial

I failed to know you

Yet you each gave me
One quarter of myself
Your genes sleep within me
Biding their time
I have no choice but to pass you on

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.

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 laid 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.

Painted Nylon Seams

Megan Engelhardt

There are age spots on their hands
and they have gotten shorter,
or I have gotten taller.
But these are the girls who painted nylon seams
on their legs, during the war, to go dancing:
who outlived their husbands,
and who rearrange their daughters' kitchens
every time they come to visit.
The grandmas always bring treats
– chocolate stars for me, cinnamon bears for my husband —
and sing hymns like they wrote them.

Imagining My Great-Grandmother

SuzAnne C. Cole

Amelia Groskinsky, born 1873, died September l883
Sarah Groskinsky, born 1875, died September l883
William Groskinsky, born 1877, died September 1883
Lara Groskinsky, born 1881, died September 1883

Three daughters and a son, ages ten, eight, six, and two – born, nourished, clothed, educated, sheltered from winter frost and summer swelter in Trenton, Iowa, until suddenly, in one month's time, all four died. I sit here trying to imagine what September l883 must have been like for their mother, my great-grandmother.

I never knew Christina Hoelzel Groskinsky, born in Baden, Germany, April 25, l849, because she died four years before my birth. I have a picture of her, though, a solid dowager in a velvet dress and a coronet of braids, leaning forward without a smile, as though imposing her will on the photographer. My mother says that as a child she feared this grandmother and her regular visits, for she was a grim, cheerless woman who refused to speak English or play with her five grandchildren. And when the four granddaughters became teenagers, she fought bitterly with them over trifles of deportment and dress.

But as I examine the genealogy pedigrees my mother's sister, a Mormon, has sent me, my heart aches for this unknown great-grandmother. What could it have been like to lose four children

to diphtheria in one dreadful month, your world narrowed to their beds, dripping water down their slowly closing throats, watching them struggle for breath? Did she have friends or neighbors, anyone to share the nursing, pray with her, hope for miraculous recoveries? What of Carl William, their father? September in Iowa, grueling labor for a farmer from first light to last, scant time to relieve or comfort one's wife, time only to fuel up with food and return to the fields.

A family story says he did drive the buggy into town for medicine at last, but while he was gone, two of the children died. So Christina would have witnessed their death agonies alone. Did she weep then, wrapping those cherished bodies in quilts to be carried to the graves their father dug? She would not have had the luxury of long mourning, for she would have hurried back from graveside to the bedsides of the surviving children until there was another small death – and then another.

Finally only one living child remained whose fever broke at last. Perhaps he sat up and asked for soup or water. She might have staggered to the door then and realized that the harvest had passed, the barns were full, but the house was empty. What would a home, once filled with the noise of five active children, sound like with only one? How was the unspeakable sorrow borne?

I know only what the genealogy records. Four years after the epidemic, Christina and Carl gave Albert, the lone survivor, a brother, my grandfather, Elmer Charley. But Albert could not give his heart to another sibling, and he and Elmer were never close. So both Christina, bereft of daughters for so long, and her youngest son must have been delighted when, five years later, at forty-three (Carl was fifty-nine), she safely delivered her last child, Carrie.

What then would have happened to this mother's heart when diphtheria also appropriated this belated, beloved child when

she was eight – old enough to help with the house, old enough to share secrets, old enough to laugh with her mother at the ways of men while darning their socks and patching their overalls.

My mother says the grandmother she knew was cold and harsh and unloving. Perhaps Christina was strangled by jealousy of her daughter-in-law's five tow-headed children. Perhaps it was impossible for her to take joy in the health and beauty of her own grandchildren, knowing how transient the life of a child could be. Perhaps she simply could not open her heart again.

And Elmer? My grandmother often told me I was his favorite because I reminded him of that lost little sister; only now do I realize the pet name he called me – Cooeyanne – combined "Carrie" and "SuzAnne." I never talked to him about Carrie, or the siblings he never knew, or Carl, or Christina. I wish I had. Now I have only black and white photos and data – names and dates, births and birthplaces, marriages, deaths, and gravesites. And a mother and grandmother's imagination.

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 —

slowing some for the trend in cloverleaf’s.
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 dandylions.

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.

Autumn

MaryEllen Letarte

Yesterday's leaves shrink, hang loose like Grandma's Hands.

Knowledge of tomorrow hides within the limbs
of children and oaks untroubled by clouds.

Grandfathers keep watch
under the darkened sky.

Trees shiver.

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.

Grandpa Dances

IFMiller

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.

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."

"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.

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

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.

"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.

"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

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

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

The Christmas Cake

Dixon Hearne

The autumn chill bit into the house deep enough that Mimmaw threw two quilts on my bed at night. She and Papaw slept closer to the kitchen, where the heat of supper lingered in the air a few hours more. There was nothing more reassuring than Mimmaw's nighttime reminder that the Lord loved clean, sweet-smelling children. To go to bed without washing was bad as cursing His name, she'd say, and this close to his birthday would make it twice as bad. Besides, tomorrow was Christmas Cake day.

All night I pitched and rolled and flung the quilts about the bed, fired up with excitement one minute then stinging cold the next. As far back as I could remember, I had been right here on Christmas Cake day. Papaw said I must be lucky, because of all the grandchildren I was the only one that seemed to choose the best time to spend the night. Papaw was the kindest man I ever knew, a giant of a person and gentle as a new calf. The two of them had already, perhaps unwittingly, shaped my notions of what goodness and love meant.

Come morning, I sprang from bed in anticipation of a stack of pancakes and a slab of honey ham that Mimmaw always seared just enough to draw out the best flavors. She shooed us from the kitchen at breakfast time, while she warmed herself to her work with a good amount of fresh-brewed coffee. Papaw was the first one up, though, lighting the gas heaters to back off

the night chill. We somehow managed to settle around the table just in time to watch the sun peek through the two case windows Papaw decided to install at the last minute when he built the house. Even on cloudy days, the view was pleasant – something for every season: apricot and plum trees, holly bush, and cape-jasmine runners that threw off sweet scents with the least puff of wind. Come fall, the big pecan tree would offer up my favorite ingredient in Mimmaw's Christmas Cake.

At seven o'clock sharp, Papaw left the house on his long walk to the paper mill, a metal lunchbox in hand containing leftover pork cutlets and hot water bread. I wondered if he knew when he set out that it was baking day, but secretly I wanted him to be surprised when he came home to a counter full of golden delights steeping in sweet spices.

Our first order of business was the pans – twelve, to be exact – stacked away in a bottom cabinet, items that saw light of day but once a year. "That's my special cabinet," Mimmaw said, "where I keep a lot of memories." There were other holiday-shaped items, too, but the Christmas pans meant the most, even with their nicks and streaks and baked-on age spots. "Like the twelve apostles," Mimmaw smiled, lining them up in rows. "A special number for any family," she added, with a far away look. While I did not know what she meant at the time, I could tell by the way she smiled and shook her head she was feeling warm and proud.

My first job was to smear some butter or lard evenly over each pan's surface. Mimmaw pulled out her enormous pressure cooker – big enough for a turkey – and placed it in the center of the Formica dining table, where she would work her magic to conjure heavenly confections with my helping hands. All the ingredients were arranged neatly at the end of the table, where we could draw what we needed one by one – sugar and salt and flour and butter, and small vials of red and brown and golden

spices that charged the air with holiday spirit. Mimmaw always started by cracking the eggs. “Three dozen this year,” she announced to me. “An extra three for little Lonnie’s first cake. He’s number twelve, you know. Ain’t that a blessfull number?” Mimmaw was a big believer in signs and messages. That’s the way she felt about the Christmas Cakes – one for each child and each one representing hope and renewal.

Next, we added twelve sticks of butter, one per cake – I was also in charge of keeping track of numbers. Once we got the eggs and butter whipped to a belching froth – done entirely by hand – it was time to add the sugar. “Brown sugar,” Mimmaw said to me, “helps keep the cake good and moist. But white sugar…white sugar is strictly for the sweetness.” To tell the truth, the brown smelled sweeter to me, but it just went to show that I shouldn’t judge things by one sense alone. Any way you looked at it, though, it took a lot more muscle to mix now than it had with eggs alone.

About half-way into it, Mimmaw propped her hands on her hips, mopped her brow with her forearm, and said to me: “It’s a shame we can’t use my mix-master, but we’d be three days making these cakes one by one,” and then let out a loud, round giggle. “Besides,” she said, “it’s more fun to watch it all come together at one time. Like having the whole family right here in my big pot for a while.” We both laughed at that. I kept seeing family faces in the batter’s sheen.

Once we had it all whipped and whirled and sweetened to a sin, the next order of business was getting the flour and soda and baking powder all double sifted and sprinkled into our concoction. This was the hardest part, and we each took turns beating the batter into submission with a big wooden paddle. While I beat and stirred, Mimmaw trickled in secret amounts of vanilla and lemon zest, followed by cinnamon and ginger and other exotic spices from the little vials till the aroma set my

tongue on point again. This all took quite a while, what with stopping along the way to sample it for any imperfection. To tell the truth, I could have cranked and stirred that paddle all day.

The final ingredients were my favorites – pecans and walnuts and cherries. Before we had ever cracked the first egg, we had sat down at the dining table and counted out two piles very carefully. We cracked and picked the meats and set them aside in separate bowls, twelve pecans and twelve walnuts for each cake – no more, no less. The only other ingredient that needed counting was the maraschino cherries that everyone loved so much. Mimmaw decided to throw in a few extra – to grow on. Her family had been raised on Christmas Cake, and all the new family members just naturally took to it. Besides, traditional fruitcakes called for liquor of some kind, and Mimmaw would never let it pass her threshold, let alone her lips.

One last scrape around the giant pot, and it was now baking time. I had all twelve pans lined up, just volunteering to pop themselves into the oven. Mimmaw had picked out the pans very carefully to fit her oven – four to a baking. Once we got the first batch all snuggled in, the remaining batter set patiently in the refrigerator for its turn. I was assigned to finger-sample the batter occasionally to be sure it hadn't gone flat, a job I performed with great responsibility.

In the meantime, Mimmaw was free to visit with Miss Suzie on the telephone and get her daily reports. I secretly imagined the woman could smell our cakes right through the receiver, even before Mimmaw announced to her it was Christmas Cake day. She laughed a good belly laugh and held her smile a long time, listening contentedly to the other woman and her harmless prattle. We whiled away a pleasant afternoon sniffing and sampling and plying the oven with fresh batter yet to be magically transformed. Thoughts of Christmas filled our hearts.

By the time Papaw made it home from work, the only evidence remaining from our glorious enterprise was an assemblage of beautiful golden circles all neatly arranged on the snackbar, just waiting to be stored in waxed paper and holiday tins. Elfin-like, the pans and bowls and utensils had all been washed and dried and spirited back to their places. And there was Mimmaw still at the stove, bringing gravy to a rolling boil for the chicken and potatoes she had managed to prepare, along with a pot of butter beans she grew and stored last summer. It came together almost effortlessly. It always did. Papaw thumped me on the head, like checking it for ripeness, and threw me a wink.

Outside, the sky had darkened early, signs of the settling cold and the long gray days ahead. But inside, in the warmth and light of 605 McCaskle Street, the season held all the radiance and hope of a spring day. I could not – and cannot – think of a warmer moment to recall.

Comfort

Joy Harold Helsing

Her tired, old hands,
marbled with veins,
worn from toil,
still have the strength
to wipe away
children's tears.

Tillie

Mary Krauss

Tillie looks out at me from
behind pinz-nez glasses
and a gilded frame of long ago.
A slight smile,
a thougthoughtful of her head
cheek resting on a long-gloved hand.
She seems to know she can sell
the tulle and rose-covered creation
that crowns her upswept coif —
the latest offering from her millinery store.
A strong, confident woman
circa 1910.
She couldn't vote
but surely participated
in the growing strength of women.
It is my loss
that you left the earth
the year I arrived.
I could have learned a lot from you,
my Tillie,
my grandmother.

Alone on a Train

Kimberly Hill

I awoke in a state of panic as the train lurched forward and the conductor called out the stop for Berlin. I looked to the window fearing the sight of a motorcade of tanks and a Mercedes-Benz leading Hitler through the streets with his hand raised at an angle giving and receiving a façade of respect, swastika banners flying ominously through the stale air, and rigid lines of Nazis soldiers sending the world their message of threat and intimidation. It was with relief that instead I saw crowds of trees starting to turn gold and orange from the impending Autumn season, tall grasses waving in the September breeze, and lines of telegraph poles along the train tracks. As I let out the breath I didn't realize I had been holding, I whispered "Berlin Connecticut. Of course. How would I have gotten to Berlin Germany from Taunton, Massachusetts by train?"

I was embarrassed that my thoughts had drifted to a place I had only heard about on radio news programs, despite having no travel companions to notice my bewilderment. I readjusted myself in my seat and smoothed the beige cotton dress against my lap to regain my composure. I then watched the real scene pass across the window as the train left the Berlin station. I was calm again, rocked by the familiar rhythm of the train.

I started riding this train nine long years ago, back in 1930, when I was only six. My father was without work since the carnival he worked for was closing down. He said folks had

nothing to celebrate anymore. In the passing weeks I could hear the desperation in my mother's voice as she demanded that Pa find a way to get us food. We soon became regulars in the line at the city mission to get soup for dinner. When my mother told Pa that I didn't have a decent dress for church, he went to the charity office to get a dress for me. When he returned with a bright orange dress, my mother was furious. Soon thereafter I was wearing my orange dress, riding alone on a train.

When I returned from my grandparents two months later, my father was gone. Not like when he was traveling with the carnival gone, but gone as in no signs that he ever existed. And so was my home. My mother brought me to a dilapidated old boarding house they called "Salamini's." White paint was peeling off the rotted clapboards of the tall white house with seemingly too few windows and doors for its size. The only feature that kept the building from fading into the bleak backdrop altogether was groups of men and an occasional woman congregating around the green door in front leading to the pub downstairs frequented by the factory workers. Uncle Larry was one of the men who frequented this pub. We were now living with him, my grandmother, Aunt Lorraine, and Aunt Meg.

The six of us had only one bedroom and a porch. There were two big beds in the bedroom, and a couch on the porch. With some of them working days, and some working nights, somehow the sleeping arrangements worked out. Uncle Larry worked at night in the factory. My mother earned some money scrubbing clothes and cleaning newly vacant rooms of the boarding house. My grandmother worked the evenings washing glasses down at the pub. Aunt Meg and Aunt Lorraine worked as seamstresses whenever they could find the work. I was a burden that got in the way around the clock.

The train gradually became my home, in that it was the one place I always returned to. My mother, and later other family members, would put me on a train to whoever would take me. All the places I have stayed over the years pass through my mind like the scenery blurring by the train window. At each stop I tried to show what a good daughter I would be by helping with the cooking, cleaning and wash. I kept my dress tidy, minded my manners, and only spoke when spoken to. But at the end of the day, as we all sat around table to eat dinner, I anxiously counted the slices of meat on the platter. I always knew that when there came a time when there was not enough to share, it was me who would have to go.

And the time for me to go always came. I would board the train, and watch though the window as my borrowed life passed me by once more. I prayed each night that I would find the family where I truly belonged. When I arrived at my Aunt Edna's, I foolishly hoped that since I was her namesake, she could find a place for me in her home. Perhaps even in her heart. But she could not even give me a place to live for more than a few weeks. As she packed my few clothes and hairbrush in my suitcase, Aunt Edna enthusiastically told me that I was going to my Aunt Millie and Uncle Edward's home on Long Island. She said all the school children in town were given tickets to the 1939 World Fair in New York, and that I was welcome to go.

As my body swayed with the movement of the train, I closed my eyes and imagined the World Fair. I envisioned my aunt and uncle, whom I did not even remember meeting, showing me all the attractions I had heard about on the radio. The fair promised a glimpse into "The World of Tomorrow." As I was dreaming of all the wonders the world of tomorrow promised, I fell asleep. And here I was now, recovering from my state of panic in Berlin. I shook my head again as I whispered "Of all the crazy ideas. Berlin, Germany..."

When I arrived in Flushing, I took out the slip of paper with Aunt Millie's address written upon it. Despite being fifteen years old and riding the train for nine years, I never grew accustomed to not knowing where I was going. I finally found my way to Aunt Millie's house, walked up her stone walkway to her charming white house with green shutters, smoothed the wrinkles from my beige dress, fixed a smile on my face, and knocked at the door. When Aunt Millie opened the door, I knew why I had never met her before. She was living in a different world than I. Her world did not revolve around simply trying to survive. Her hair flowed to her ears in chestnut brown soft waves. She wore a small gray beret tilted at an angle atop of her head. Her well tailored green dress belted at the waist was like the clothing I had only seen in my aunt's *Good Housekeeping* magazines.

"Well, you must be Edna. Come in dear. Would you like to sit down and have a glass of iced tea?"

As her high heels clicked upon the wood floor as she led me into the kitchen, I began my efforts to make a good impression. "Thank you Aunt Millie for inviting me to stay with you and Uncle Edward."

Aunt Millie graciously smiled. "You are welcome dear. We are glad we are able to help."

"And I am so excited about you taking me to the World Fair!"

Aunt Millie's smile faded, and turned to a sympathetic stare. "Oh honey, we're not taking you to the World Fair. All my students at the school were given tickets, and I had a few extra. I thought you might go on your own. There is a train that can take you right to the fair's gate, or you can walk. It's only about a mile from here." I felt all hope plummeting to the ground.

I had already done a lot of train riding in my past, and was tired of being alone on a train, so I decided to walk into the

"World of Tomorrow." When I passed through the gate of the fair, I discovered the "World of Tomorrow" shared one similarity with today; I was alone and had no idea where to go. I decided this time I would decide where to go for myself. I chose the grandest attraction on the map, situated in the center of it all, the Trylon, a 700 foot triangular tower, and the Perisphere, a globe shaped building as wide as a city block. The buildings promised visitors a glimpse into the future.

I walked through roads filled with couples strolling hand and hand, families with mothers holding their children's hands while fathers looked at the map of the fair, and school children marching in lines led by their teacher. As I took in all the sites alone, I tried to act as if I was merely separated from people who cared about me. I pretended I was simply waiting for someone as I paused to marvel at a spectacular fountain where a dozen jets of water were forced high into the air. I then closed my eyes and spread my arms to savor the mist blown at my body by the cool autumn breeze. I imagined I was flying free above the clouds and toward a better world. I then opened my eyes and was awed by the Trylon and Perisphere towering over me. It was as though the Trylon was reaching through sky.

I went inside the Perisphere and saw a model and film showing a vision of the year 1960, a world with seven lane cross-country express motorways taking people safely to their jobs and where old slums of the city were replaced with new thriving neighborhoods and parks. I was amazed at a TV set, which was like a radio set that included flickering images with the sound. I passed though the nation buildings in the Government Zone. I saw a world without Germany, the only super power without a building at the fair. The deep melodic voice of the film narrator echoed in my head "The future is whatever we propose to make it." The future promised prosperity, science, technology, and hope.

After visiting all the future had to offer, I went to the amusement area and visited my past. The ground thumping rhythmically as the cyclone roller coaster rushed by, dance floors filled with people dancing to the sounds of the big jazz bands, and carnival barkers calling attention to the Frozen Alive Girl and the Little Miracle Town of performing midgets brought me back to memories of my father. I wondered whatever became of him, whether he had found work in the carnival once again. I wondered if his life had brought him here to this future too.

And I wondered what future my own life would bring. As I listened to the sounds of excitement and laughter in the amusement area, I realized that what I wanted for my future was the thrill of living; life beyond just survival. I could not control that I was alone, but I could still find joy in the life that I had been given. There was happiness all around me; I just needed to find a way to make it my own. I looked up, shielded my eyes from the setting sun, and watched the gaily colored parachutes drift down from the 250 foot tower called the Life Savers Parachute Jump. The sounds of excited screaming called to me. I was enticed by this truly frivolous experience. I felt my spirits lift in anticipation.

I had the forty cents required to ride; money my Aunt Millie had given me for train fare. I would not be riding the train, at least not today. All I needed was to find another passenger to share the double seat with me, and after all these years, I was good at finding people to help me for short periods of time. I was ultimately paired up with a girl whose sister was too scared to join her on the ride. I was silent as I savored the suspense and thrill of the steady climb to the top of the tower. I could see the Trylon, the Perisphere, and all the future laid out before my eyes. I felt a sudden jerk as the parachute was released. And then I flew.

This poem is about

Ann Howells

– the orange, pierced, and the rind that unwinds
in perfect unbroken spiral beneath her knife
– the long grey hair, braided, twisted in a bun,
but never once, in all her life, cut
– the needlework that overflows, cascades
intricate and fine, to puddle at her feet
– the ungainly clay-colored corset she dons
each morning, its rows of hooks and eyes
– the jars of put up jellies that fill her kitchen
with stained-glass color in morning sun
– the grandson who fabricates empties found
in backs of drawers, beneath the mattress
– the apple doll appearance – little, bent, brittle —
yet nicknamed velvet bulldozer by her son
– the swan-neck rocking chair, arms stroked shiny,
worry-stone for idle hands

Ex Hale

Dana Huber

You, my grandfather
With the dry skin on your elbows
Loose now
With the skin in folds like plastic bags
With your eyes clouding and heavy-lidded
With your chest damp with drool.
You, my grandfather.
Today I sat and breathed with you, the slow breaths
Timing myself to you while you dozed, fitful, hands twitching
at remote
Bed grinding uselessly beneath you, going
Nowhere.
Whirr whirr whirr through the hot afternoon.
Each pause between the rise, after the fall
Made my throat thick, and I parted my lips
To say the words, to call the others
But your chest moved, the air flowed.
I could not keep your rhythm
And like car blinkers at an intersection
We moved in and out of sync with each other.

You are cargo to be moved now, silent, unprotesting
Speech one of the things left behind you
As you lighten the load

That atrophied muscles must carry.
(You, who carried me in one hand

(From the hospital.)

Leaving bits of you:
Talking, eating, drinking —
it was All
Too much work.
You fall in on yourself, your spine
Too burdened with your head, your wrists
Too burdened with your once-strong fingers, your body
Too burdened with this effort called life.

But your chest moves and the air flows.

how mch longe you typed, days ago already, I don't know, no
answers, there are none
there is only this waiting
your lungs filling, emptying, filling, emptying
and the bed going up and down, going
nowhere again
I still your fingers
You do not notice.
what time is it, what day is it?
time has lost all hold on you. There are no days
Only the seconds between breaths
and the hours between morphine
Which drips from your lips
And lands pink on the white towel.

I memorize the lengthening stubble on your face
While I wait for you to breathe, to stop breathing

But your chest moves.

Cigar

Hiram Larew

It's clear to me now
As eggs next to twine
Clear as six is to five —
I know exactly what he thought
Back then
At his age
Clear as close shaving
Because I have his feet

Moreover of late
Something from then keeps whispering to me
Like soap on a shoulder
It isn't him exactly
It couldn't be
But it's saying up close
To go further

I remember
Deep weeds at the faucet
Hay sacks in the back
And a hillside hardly belonging
But more than anything
There were my arms like string beans
That weren't good for much he surely thought
Except his future —
Something about me made him cough

If I do anything now
It's because he said so little
The surest sign of strength
Is quiet
Coming up the steps
And looking at me.

Life Lessons

Blanche Ledford

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

Kitchen Chore

Roxanne Hoffman

With a quick twist and twirl of the knife, a sleight of hand like The Kishefmakher [magician] plucking a spanking-brand new silver dollar with a flick of his white gloved fingers gleaming from behind an unsuspecting ear, or culling a cavalcade of pink-eyed rabbits, a flock of cooing doves, a rainbow of silk scarves, a bouquet of blue cornflowers and fresh cut daisies from his seemingly empty black top hat, Grandma Molly extracts the glistening orange peel in one long continuous spiraling curlicue, releasing its sweet and sour jasmine-like fragrance without marring the firm flesh of the fruit or spilling a drop of its tasty libation.

Dangled on the tip of the blade, she displays her trophy for me to inspect like a prized Barguzin sable pelt before dropping it into the bubbling contents of the steaming vat. Then she passes me the knife, hands me an orange and leans back in her chair to watch, hands folded behind her head, lips pressed closed but smiling, her belly rising and falling rhythmically, then rumbling with laughter, her cries resonating throughout the kitchen, as I squirt orange juice everywhere, squinting to avoid the sting, clumps of slimy pulp and bits of white sticky rind all over my hands, just managing to extract the tiniest bit of zest before the bright orange sliver slips from knife to floor. Molly passes me another orange to try again, nodding her head to give me encouragement and direction. Satisfied with my third

attempt, she reaches behind her back to tug open the kitchen drawer, and pulls out a second knife.

Orange by orange, we twist and turn, twirl and twirl, the kitchen filling with steam, brimming with sweet stickiness, the oranges' piquant scent nipping at our nostrils, driving us to work steadily until each orange is skinned. We pause only to blot our faces with our heavy bleached-white cotton aprons.

When we are done, we each select a peeled orange to reward ourselves, pulling apart sections, plunging the firm flesh in our mouths to release instant gratification, then take turns spitting out pits into the brown paper bag lining the garbage tin.

After a final stirring of the bubbling brew with wooden spoon, Molly shuts off the stove, slams down the heavy cast aluminum lid with a potholder to announce the chore complete, and sends me off, skipping, to wash up for tea with her kiss pressed to the top of my head.

I pass Great Grand Mama who is just rousing herself from her nap, stretching up from her rocker by the parlor window as she beckons me in Yiddish *"Kumzits, Libhober! Kumzits!"* with a wave of her hand.

"Ja, ja, ja! I coming, hold your horses!" I call back but all I'm thinking of is tomorrow's treat of candied orange peel as I stare at my beautiful orange-stained fingers, reluctantly reaching for a bar of soap, the lukewarm water cascading over my fingers under the sink, the scent of the oranges still tingling my nostrils as I discard the apron to come out to join her and Molly for tea.

I hear the gurgle, the final hiss of steam, the tea ready to bubble forth from the spout of the brass samovar into awaiting glasses, see Great Grand Mama seated at the dining table grinning with two white sugar cubes perched between her cigarette-and-tea stained yellow teeth, and Grandma Molly standing with a polished silver tray lined with white paper

doilies, piled high with babkah, rugelach and tertle. Ah, the sweet fruits of labor!

After Grammy's Death

MaryEllen Letart

"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.

She thought, and said, "Will you take me to Grammy's
    grave?"

We drove to the cemetery, found Grammy's grave,
its pink granite stone embedded with a wedding photo.

Katie skipped around the grave,
slid her hand across the cold stone,
stared at the old photo.

"There must be windows," she said.

I Don't Eat Spicy Foods Anymore

Tess Almendarez Lojacono

I don't eat spicy foods anymore,
Nor read the paper
Nor watch much TV.
I brush my teeth with warm water.
Take off my glasses when I really want to see.

At mass I sometimes can't make out the hymnal
And so sing the wrong words, loudly and off-key.
I walk my dog instead of running
And now and then
Enjoy a comfortable cup of tea.

One day soon I'll quit coloring my hair,
Garden more and chase the children less.
The books I read will all be poetry.
I'll look at my life as a movie,
Clapping my hands at the parts I liked best.

Lodgia

Heather Ann Schmidt

Pale petals fall from the snowball bushes
planted at the Fisher house...
and another season is passing
like you did in your dreaming.

And I will sing for you the song of your mother:

Ach śpij kochanie...

and you will be young again
walking down Main street in Chicago with Louis
like in that picture that hangs in your foyer.

We will leave the window to your bedroom open
in hopes you will visit us in the scent of
a Spring night such as this.

Your Grandfather's Leather Reclining Chair

J. J. Steinfeld

What happened to your grandfather's
leather reclining chair —
the one in your living room
by the small window
looking at the street
of lackluster dreams
a long-ago phrase
from when you were learning
to be a sardonic poet?
Who took it in the night —
shouldn't you have heard?
That impossibly magical chair,
you claim, it spoke
with your grandfather's voice
the chair your grandfather
wearily fell asleep on
while watching *Bonanza*
on TV week after week.
My father also watched *Bonanza*
Lorne Greene an unforgettable
Pa Cartwright—he was Canadian
you know, from Ottawa

where I stumbled
in and out of grad school.
Remember, Lorne Greene
was the “Voice of Doom”
on the radio, reporting
on World War Two,
your mother told you.
Your grandfather fought
my grandfathers perished
same war, different memories.

The Memory of Taste

Athena Strickland

I hadn’t seen that brand in years.
Three chews and the taste of the clove gum
Put me back at Grandma’s.
She always carried two packs
In the pocket of her apron
Along with stitched handkerchiefs
That she sewed
By the light of a kerosene lantern
Even though she had electricity.
She used it sparingly.
Every day at three her radio was tuned in
To an evangelist
Out in California.
She was strong in her devotion to him.

She mailed him a new dollar bill
Faithfully, every week.
He returned the gesture
By sending her a measure of prayer cloths
He'd personally prayed over.
Neither the cloths nor the preacher
Had the power to save Grandma
The afternoon she died
While napping on her divan
Two packs of clove gum in the pocket of her apron
A handkerchief in her hand
The kerosene lantern out
The radio on.

Missing.

Ken Staley

By the time I was old enough to know better, the Aunties – Ruth and Mabel – lived together for some years. From late summer until after Halloween when cold weather stepped in, the two sisters picked us up from the house and walked us down to Uncle Ed's store to wait for the school bus. In my mind, they were, and still are, sitting in their cedar rocking chairs just to the left of a dust encrusted screen door. On many school days, they fetched cups of coffee from the store, one for my little brother, Dakota, one for me, and an extra for the bus driver, most days. Thanks to the Aunties, we got hooked on coffee early, Dakota and I.

"Why you givin her a cup?" I demanded one day when I was particularly upset with the driver and didn't care if she got anything, much less a cup of Uncle Ed's coffee.

"Myrna Jane been haulin' the likes of your young butt around this county for generations," Ruth said. "I swain, she deserves a medal of honor, seems to me, but coffee is what we got."

Just fifty feet up the lane from a really bad curve in old Highway Fifty-two, squatted KENDALL GROCERY, its peeling, white-wash clapboar and tin roof streaked with rust pleaded for attention that never came. Uncle Ed's store was the best place in Boiling Cherry Hollow for a school bus stop. To us, it was always just Uncle Ed's Store.

In the late summer and early spring, the two Aunties perched outside on old, cedar rocking chairs. As they got older, shawls, old comforters and seat cushions joined them, but in my memory, every school day began with a walk to Uncle Ed's with the Aunties. Uncle Ed called them his cigar store Indians, but never in their hearing. He wasn't far wrong as Auntie Mabel always claimed we had Cherokee blood in our past.

Auntie Ruth may have been a might older, but it was the same, for all that. She braided her hair with colorful bits of cloth, the tresses hanging almost to her lap. Ruth went grey very slowly.

"See, it's kids that do it to ya," she said one September afternoon when it was too hot to stay inside the store. She let a handful of her tresses fall across her face like a theater curtain. Cross-eyed, she singled out the grey strands. "I paint them fresh every morning just to remind me."

"Really?" My brother, who still believed in Santa and the Easter Bunny, crawled into her lap to examine those hairs closer.

"This'n here is Eddie Earl," she said. "This'n here is my first grey hair. My son, Elbert, give it to me when I was still babyin. He gimme lots and I still get a new one now and then from El."

"Which one is mine?" He asked seriously. That got him hugged and a great peal of laughter from the Aunties. Auntie Ruth had little girl's laugh, a high giggle that she tried to hide behind her hand whenever it erupted. Auntie Mabel's cackle was a classic, witch-like chortle and the butt of many jokes from the gathering inside.

"You two tryin to lay eggs again?" Uncle Ed called from inside the store.

"He's the one," Auntie Mabel said of Uncle Ed. "I turned grey all at once and it's all his fault!"

Auntie Mabel once had lovely chestnut hair. Now she wore it in a tight bun pulled severely away from her face.

"Time was I had a friend who chased all the grey away," Mabel explained to Dakota, who was still examining Ruth's hair closely.

"Really? Where did she go then?"

They laughed again but Mabel wasn't quite ready to give it up just yet.

"Why her name was Miss Clairol," Mabel told him. "She lived in a bottle."

"Oh she didn' neither," Dakota lisped with his own bashful smile. He was still missing his two front teeth at the time.

"I swain, right hand afore God," Mabel lifted her left hand. "She lived in a bottle and came out about four times a year just to make your Auntie Mabel look pretty."

She cocked her chin to one side and up, batted her eyes at him, and put her hand behind her head, striking a 'glamour pose'.

"Did the bottle break then?" Dakota asked, now taken in.

Mostly, the Aunties taught us about life, in their own fashion. They sat in those chairs, day in and day out, and inspected every visitor to Ed's store without comment – well, mostly without comment.

"That's Daisy Richardson," Mabel hissed to Ruth one spring afternoon as a large woman went in to do her shopping.

"No!" Ruth said and turned for another look, but the dust that collected in the screen door didn't allow much more than a peek at her silhouette. "What happened to her?"

"Kids," Mabel leaned back, assuming an air of deeper insight, "and that no account man she shacked up with so long. She done had eight of his before he disappeared. You remember. 'Twas in all the papers."

"But she got so big," Ruth said. "I 'member her in high school as this little bird of a thing."

"Still would be, too, I'm guessin'," Mabel said. "But she got the women's problems and swelled up like a balloon. I heard tell she been seein' that herb doctor up to town, but don't look like he's helped much. She shoulda stuck with Aunt Fenny."

Another day, another visitor; a man this time, with a funny lurch and almost a hesitation in his walk. He came to the door, tried to peer through the dirty screen and opened it cautiously, like someone was about to scold him for doing so.

"Rory the simple," Ruth said after he stepped across the threshold and closed the screen gently, without letting it slam. "He rode the other bus when I was in school. Nice enough boy but jumped outta his skin at any loud sound."

"What's wrong with him? Is he a retard?" Dakota asked.

"Hold your piece!" Ruth scolded and reached out to flick his ear. Dakota yipped loudly. "God done scrambled his brains good when he was born. Ain't no call for you to be remindin him he ain't all there. He knows that already."

It was a mild October, I remember. An Indian summer crept up the hollow and made collecting acorns thirsty work. I remember clearly the pumpkins and corn stalks marking Halloween bunched together in front of Ed's store, along with bushels of acorns we collected. Uncle Ed paid us a dollar a bushel. It was easy money. We brought back two heaping bushels, leaving an acorn trail back up the path to out favorite oak.

"They gotta have their caps on now, hear? Them tourists love acorns and'll buy a ton of 'em, but they gotta have their caps on," he said by way of direction.

Dakota disappeared and I sat on a free spot on the rail, fanning myself, trying to get cool when the Aunties became all too human. Auntie Ruth reached into her pocket for her fixins', a ritual she usually started first thing every morning. She carefully laid two thin papers on her lap, took her pouch and

lightly sprinkled in the fillings, then deftly rolled the whole thing, slipping it into her mouth to seal the paper as a last move. Time was, she let Dakota or I light her smokes. I guess I was just too old for that treat now. Before this day, the routine was such a part of her that anything slightly sinister never entered my mind. I must have been a teenager by then, or very close, because what had always been Auntie Ruth's fixins now took on a whole new meaning. Ruth and Mabel always rolled their own smokes, explaining to me once that "the cost of store boughts is too dear to waste."

Truth was, Auntie Ruth's 'home grown' consisted of half tobacco and half sensimilla. Shock must have registered on my face. Ruth and Mabel laughed almost as loud as I'd ever heard them.

"How the mighty slip from their pedestals, eh Mabel?" Ruth said as she gasped for air. "Would you like some, Janey Sue?"

"I would not!" I'd heard the horror stories. I'd seen the burned out husks at my school, generally boys from bad families. A few years passed, and a child or two came, before I enjoyed the Aunties recipe of morning coffee and smoke.

About that time, Dakota brought out our Dr Peppers, filled with peanuts. As he settled on a chopping block, Ruth farted. It was a gentle thing, would have passed without notice and only slight embarrassment, but Dakota was there and still thrilled with bodily functions, the way young boys can be. With a snort, soda squirted from his nose.

"You farted!" He called when he could speak again.

"Why Dakota Edward James, I never," Ruth exclaimed indignantly. "If you please, sir, women do not fart."

"You did so," Dakota said. "I heard you."

"That warn't no fart," Mabel said.

"Was, too," Dakota said, a bit miffed at being called out.

"No it warn't," Mabel said. "That couldn't have been a fart. Ruth didn' go no where or raise up at all. Now this is a fart."

With that, she leaned over and passed gas – loudly.

Dakota howled with laughter. Ruth blushed just a bit, then leaned over and tooted two or three times, only to be answered by Mabel's trombone one note.

Our laughter brought Uncle Ed to the door this time, something rare.

"She farted," Dakota said as he pointed at Ruth, "then she farted. They been havin a battle of the farts."

"Musical ass holes, huh?" Uncle Ed snorted and returned to his circle. Laughter from inside showed that he'd shared the news. My guess is those old boys inside did their best to match the Aunties, but they had a long, long way to go.

The Aunties were sisters separated by less than two years and always a staple in my life. I can't remember a day in childhood that I didn't see them. I never really thought about why they were living together, or that happened to their husbands. I don't recall anyone ever mentioning the uncles.

Auntie Mabel went first, so slowly we hardly noticed for a few years. Ruth noticed.

"She just missing sometimes," Ruth said one day with a smile as Mabel picked at the front of her flowered dress. "Seems like these missing streaks get longer and longer. She just sort of takes off in her mind someplace. Wish I knew where that was."

Eventually, they had to take Mabel in for a physical. The news was very grim, so grim that they couldn't tell Dakota or me.

"You just keep a special eye on Mabel when she's around," Uncle Ed said a few days later. "You make sure she don't go wandering off somewhere."

"Why would she leave?" Dakota demanded.

"Never you mind. Your job is just to make sure she don't go alone."

Ruth followed close on, sure enough. Another trip out of the hollow, another grim diagnosis.

I was in high school by then and nearly at the top of my class. I guessed at first, then did some research. Sure enough, the Aunties had early onset Alzheimer's. Worse, for all they did for me and mine, there wasn't a thing I could do for them – but be there, I guess. I had a long talk with Uncle Ed about it.

"I can make it up next year," I said as I offered to stop school and sit with the Aunties. "Really, Uncle Ed, I can go down to the junior college over in Macon."

"No," Ed said flatly and would brook no further argument. "Look, honey, this could take years and years. The doctor don' know himself how long. You finish that high school and get your scholarship, you hear? We're proud of you and if you quit now, you're going to make a lot of people sad and angry. My sisters will be just fine as long as they remember where their chairs are out front."

Although Ruth started later, her deterioration came on much more rapidly. Within a year, whatever there was that made Ruth – Ruth, evaporated. Eventually, to keep Ruth steady and 'home', Mabel walked her to her chair every morning on a kiddie leash. I sat by her, day after day, usually reading a story. Sometimes Ruth demanded the Bible, although she rarely, if ever, attended services that I recall. She did so love the Psalms.

Mabel slipped away quietly, but much much further. Ruth seemed to have some deep-seated understanding of where home and hearth was. Mabel wanted to roam, to visit places she'd heard about but never seen. One Saturday when I caught her, she had an old grass suitcase, filled with flowers and two jars of molasses.

"Paris," she said when I asked where she was going. "Are you waiting on the train to Paris, too?"

"Why, yes, I am," I replied as I took her arm. "Why don't we just sit in the waiting room they have here. It's ever so much nicer than standing out here in the rain."

Ruth was given to fits of crying, which usually brought tears from Mabel as well. Crying over people that she'd never known, men she'd never met, I'm sure.

"Oh Cal, Cal," she wept bitterly one day from her bed. "Why did you go Cal? Where did you go? Why didn't you take me with you Cal?"

"Not that I know," Uncle Ed said that evening when he stopped by. "She dated lots of guys, true enough, but I don't recall a Cal."

It took three years – three very long years – before they were completely missing and unable to communicate at all.

Ed followed shortly on, although he's not completely missing just yet. We've put him in a home now. How I wish I had time to sit with him as I did with the Aunties, but life presses on without relief and Ed needs more attention than I can give. According to the nurses, he still gets up every morning at five and dresses for work in his store, going over lists of items and produce he needs to order. He sits in a soft chair near the fireplace and has conversations with friends, mostly long gone now. Still in all, he's sprightly enough for someone in his eighties.

Scooter Davis and his brother, Big Al, now run Kendall Grocery. It's still standing, much as it always has, at that sweeping corner just off State Route fifty two. Of course, the state has re-paved and widened the shoulders some, but the school bus still stops and my kids always meet me there at the end of the day.

“I sure do miss ’em,” Scooter said one hot August as we waited for the bus. He and Big Al sat in the Aunties’ chairs.

“They be missing, sure enough,” Big Al said. “When you suppose they comin back?”

I had no answer for him. They weren’t really missing, not truly. When things get too tense or too heavy, when life just seems too oppressive, one of us farts. Dakota and I still break into uncontrollable laughter when we’re together. And it’s their fault.

Wash Day

Bonnie Stanard

Every Saturday was the same
unless it rained. Early in the morning Grandma built
a fire under the iron pot and filled it
with water from the well.

By the time her brood awoke, she was collecting
the week’s wear from under beds, behind trunks,
and “the dirty clothes,” a corner hidden
by a cloth hanging on a string.

From one pile, she sorted to make
several she either soaked or scrubbed
in either the hot pot or the tin tub.
With backbreaking rhythm,
she dipped sheets up and down

and twisted each into a spiral
that coiled up her arm
while loose water flurried out the tail.

Towels followed undershirts, drawers,
and socks, and toward conclusion
denim followed twills and corduroy.

Overalls with oily stains simmered
until she lapped them across her paddle
to port them from the pot to the wash table
where a flogging raised steam in winter.

The twisted and cleaned clothes
stretched out in the sun
on wires strung between chinaberry trees.
At sundown, Grandma gathered and piled on her bed
whatever was dry until after supper.
As silence grew deeper into night
the swish and chuff of her ironing
arose as sound,
hardly audible her sighs.

Grandma Cass

Duncan MacCarthy Whitmire

It's the cigarette smoke that trails off the lit end and never gets inhaled. It's the deer that hesitates beside the road instead of jumping into your headlights. To Grandma Cass, life was the sum of all the things that could have killed you, and didn't.

When I was eight, Grandma Cass took me for my first trip into the city, an hour away by train. Waiting on the platform she smoked unfiltered Camels and told me at least half these rides ended in catastrophe. Her face looked skeletal in the sunlight and she gazed down on me with pale eyes.

"I been in one once," she said, "a catastrophe that is. Only thing kept me alive was I didn't have the panic in me."

"What should I do?"

"Nothing you can do." At that the locomotive skated into the station and she handed me my ticket.

We sat in one of the crowded cars and I looked around to take stock of the people on board. The weather had been dry for a while, and everyone's traveling clothes were tinted brownish gray with dust. Except for a worried-looking young mother, these didn't seem like the kind of folks who had the panic in them. They looked tired and bored, just like Grandma Cass.

I don't think I said two words that whole ride. Trains sound different to me now, but on that day the whistle was a trumpet,

the wheels clacking along the track were the hoof beats of the very end itself. I sat bolt upright, so still I didn't even dare pray.

Once – only once – I braved a look sideways. I turned my head to the window, but before I could face the glass the world went black. Our movement felt unbroken and the sounds were closer in the darkness. I was dumbfounded by how smooth our transition had been. There hadn't been time for fear, but cold guilt swallowed me so that I was numb. When we burst forth into renewed daylight I was confused, but filled with the second breath of redemption. I wanted to inspect the other passengers to see their reaction, but I dared not twist my head again.

There was a flurry of new sounds, and a spike of anticipation as we finally slowed to a stop. I looked around, expecting everybody to cheer that we'd made it alive, to hug and shake hands, but like Grandma Cass, nobody seemed too inspired by the luck of it all.

They all filed past, not one recognizing my confused and plaintive looks. Grandma Cass had fallen asleep and so I nudged her once the car had emptied and the fear of the train leaving with us still aboard surpassed my hesitation to wake her up. She was smiling, and it occurred to me I hadn't ever seen her do that.

Everything was still, except for my eyes as they searched the car, my person, and Grandma Cass for some sign of what to do. My fists clutched her coat sleeve and I felt the baking flush of fever on my forehead.

But it was worse than that. I smelled urine and figured I must've wet myself, like a baby, Daddy always said. One shameful hand pulled itself away from my grandmother's coat and searched the creases on my lap.

I was dry. And so I fell backwards against the window, my body limp as the panic flashed through me and evaporated like river water off skin in summertime. The air sat heavy and I

realized that this here would be my very first catastrophe, and it had come to sit along side me, silent, without flames or screams or chaos.

Coat

Janet McCann

My mother left me a mink coat,
tawny and soft. It troubles me
and I want to bury it in the yard,
say a few words over it, let it
return to earth, like any other
animal that lived its life and died.

But my husband would be disturbed by this
and think I'm nuts, so would the neighbors
and it would moreover seem disloyal
to my parents, my father who bought it
because the thought that's what men did
and my mother, who wore it in the innocence

of the fifties, when few concerned themselves
with animals, with exploitation, or
with even the earth itself and how we used it.
Maybe someday I'll do it, bury it
out back in a big box, and cause the man
next door who doesn't like me anyway

to call the cops. Meanwhile it lies
in the cedar chest, beneath a pumpkin costume
and witch's hat, a broken-framed pup tent,
a half-finished sampler by my mother's aunt,
a tattered quilt–all half-forgotten things
that I can neither own nor cast away.

Country Doctor

Ellen E. Withers

The ringing phone pulled him from sleep. He stumbled through the darkness toward the telephone.

"Dr. Gorrell? This is Minnie Sue Barber." Her voice trembled. "Johnnie Sims just rode up here and asked me to call. Martha's labored for hours and the baby's not come. They need you."

"Of course," he said. "Be there as soon as possible."

"The bridge is out, so he'll meet you at the stream with a horse."

A horse? He sighed. Another adventure into the backwoods for this old man. "Thanks for calling, Minnie Sue."

"Sorry to wake you, Doc."

"That's the way with babies."

He made his way down the hall, his head swirling with a plethora of medical maladies that might explain why Martha Sims was having trouble. She'd previously given birth to three healthy children with a mid-wife, so calling him meant a big problem.

In the bedroom, Jewell's disembodied voice came from the darkness. "Are you going to need me?"

His wife was an excellent, though untrained, nurse and she'd assisted him for years. But the rainy night and prospect of arriving by horseback caused him concern.

"I think it'll be fine without you. One of the local mid-wives should be there."

"Who is it?"

"Martha Sims. Been laboring awhile and nothing's happening."

She tossed the covers from the bed. "I'll fix you a bite to eat."

He nodded and dressed quickly, then went to his medical closet in the spare bedroom. Inside a glass cabinet, he chose several forceps from the instruments of his trade. Forceps were necessary at times, but because of the damage they did to babies and their mothers, he used them only when necessary.

A glance at the medications he had on hand made him feel better. Selecting several jars, he poured pills into small white packets, marking them for identification.

Jewell had his fried egg sandwich ready when he entered the kitchen. With a smile, he said, "Don't worry. We'll get this baby here safely and keep Mama, too." He hoped the bravado of his words hid his concerns.

Jewell's slight smile told him she saw through to his apprehension, but was too much of a lady to call him a liar.

His 1933 Buick was nearly ten years old, but would have to last until the war was over. He grinned when he pressed the dash-mounted starter button and the engine roared to life.

As one of two doctors in the county too old to be drafted, he received additional rationing points for gasoline and tires. Some months had been close, but he hadn't run out of either. *God, let it remain so.*

It was hard to eat his sandwich, steer, and see through the pouring rain, but made it to the road of the Sims place in record time. Their dirt road was rough as a washboard and the holes caused his car to dip at precarious angles. After a few minutes, his headlights illuminated Johnnie on his horse. He pulled as far

to the side of the road as he dared, gathered his bag and shot out of the car.

The rain was torrential. The brim of his hat kept it from his eyes, but with each movement, water cascaded inside his raincoat and soaked his clothes.

Johnnie rode close and said, “Thanks for coming, Doc.”

“Glad to,” he said and tossed his bag to him.

Johnnie settled it in front of him, then kicked his foot out of the stirrup for the physician to use.

With a groan, the doctor grabbed the offered hand and hoisted his 200 pounds onto the animal.

The two wet men made their way through the rain-swollen creek and over the bank. Soon, the lights of the house shined the way through the brush.

Johnnie dropped him in front of the house, where the doctor slung his coat and hat onto a rocker on the porch and pushed open the door without knocking.

Three lumps of sleeping children were on the divan. He followed the sound of whimpers to the bedroom, rainwater pouring onto the wood floor with each step.

Martha was half-sitting, half-lying on the bed while the mid-wife, Sarah Joseph, held her hand.

He was glad to see Sarah was here, as the other mid-wife had less experience. He turned to the expectant mother.

“Hear there’s a baby coming,” he said.

Martha looked at him with tired eyes, her hair as wet as his but soaked with sweat instead of rainwater. “I’m having trouble getting it here.”

“We’ll get it done.”

He visually examined his patient and immediately saw the problem.

“Martha, we’re going to wash up and get some things out to help you.”

"Thanks, Doc." Martha said in a voice weak from labor.

In hushed tones outside the door, he explained the problem to Sarah. "The placenta is in front of the baby, blocking the way to the birth canal. Placenta previa. It's rare, but we see it often with older mothers."

Sarah nodded, her brow furrowed in concern.

Johnnie entered the house and immediately made his way to them, his lips scrunched into a thin line.

"Johnnie, go and hold Martha's hand," the doctor said. "We'll be just a second."

With no hesitation, he turned on his worn boot heel and splashed into the bedroom.

"Normally, this is resolved by surgery but there's no way Martha or the baby would survive long enough to get to the hospital."

"What do we do?" Sarah asked.

"We're going to have to open her up vaginally as much as possible, then get the placenta out, and then the baby. As quickly as possible. Once that placenta is out, the baby won't have oxygen."

"Can you give her something for the pain?"

"Not much. She has to be able to push." He shot her a reassuring smile. "Let's get cleaned up."

They washed in the kitchen in silence, glad to have a moment to think. He'd never handled a placenta previa outside of a hospital and they'd all involved surgery. At least, he was familiar with the risks and had an experienced mid-wife to assist. The fact that Martha was a tough, healthy woman was a blessing, too.

Back in the bedroom, he opened his bag and found the packet containing a slight sedative that wouldn't knock the sense out of Martha. Sarah gave it to her, while he arranged his instruments.

"Martha, we're going to have to increase your birthing space, so I'm going to have to make some cuts. I'll sew 'em up when we're through. I hope that medicine will take the edge off of your pain, but I can't give you anything stronger until it's over."

Johnnie answered for her. "She'll be fine, Doc."

We worked with speed. Johnnie attended to Martha, while the doctor made the necessary cuts and Sarah assisted, wiping up blood and handling instruments.

The contractions were strong. At the next significant contraction, they had Martha push as hard as she could.

"The placenta is coming first," the doctor explained. "The baby's running second in this race." He used forceps to pull the placenta out of the way.

The baby's head appeared at the next contraction.

He'd counted the seconds since he'd delivered the placenta and the time to prevent brain damage was short. He placed the forceps on the baby, trying not to harm the eyes or mouth.

The head was wedged in the birth canal and, because the water had broken so long ago, there was little left to aid delivery. So much water outside the house, yet not nearly enough inside.

He applied gentle pressure and the next strong contraction helped push the head free, stopping at the shoulders.

Without hesitation, he cleared the airway and prayed for the baby to take its first breath, but nothing happened.

The next contraction served to slide the baby free and the young man fell into Sarah's waiting hands. The doctor grabbed the boy, blue from lack of oxygen, and flipped him over. With firm pats on his back, the intake of air was encouraged.

Silence.

The doctor dangled him upside down and tried again. Nothing! Turning the baby's face toward him, he carefully blew a puff of air into his lungs. The air lifted the baby's chest, so he

blew again and again. His fingers trembled. He prayed for a miracle.

Then it happened. He felt the chest rise and a tiny whimper of sound was heard, followed by a bellowing howl.

He placed the new young man into the arms of his mother with a grin. “Good work, Martha. He’s a fine lad.”

My Grandmother Numbered Her Eggs

James Vescovi

My grandmother, Desolina, numbered her eggs. I noticed this once when I went looking in her refrigerator for butter. I saw a half dozen eggs in the tray, numbered one to six. She'd written the numbers on the shells in blue ink.

There was much I didn't understand about my 89-year-old grandmother, who'd immigrated to America from Italy in 1930. She lived with my grandfather, Tony, in a small apartment in Queens, New York. For example, she liked to write words on scraps of paper. Sometimes it was to remind herself of things she needed to remember, such as *"Jimmy al vena a Sabato mesdi"* to remind her of my weekly visit every Saturday at noon. Other times I think she wrote things down because she had nothing else to do. I would find notes describing the weather: *Oggi piove, domani molto freddo* ("today, rain, tomorrow very cold").

My father, their son, came by occasionally to help them do their marketing. One afternoon, his mother handed him a shopping list that read:

pollo
pane
spaghetti
arancio
zucherro
sale

latte
pastene
rubato

He eyed the list. All the words made sense – chicken, bread, orange juice, sugar – except the last, "rubato."

"Cosa vuol' dire 'rubato?'?" he asked his mother. "What is this 'rubatto'?"

She slapped her forehead. "Oh yeah," she said. *"Papa l'an ruba, pover uom, tre giorni fa. Martedi.* Papa was robbed, poor man. Three days ago. On Tuesday."

"L'han rubato?!" my father asked. "He was robbed?!"

It now made sense. The Italian verb "to rob" is *rubare*. Desolina's memory was typical of people in their late eighties: While she could still remember the exact birthdays of her six siblings, who'd died long ago, she sometimes couldn't recall at night what she'd eaten for lunch. She had been afraid she would forget the robbery, and she knew that my grandfather, Tony, the taciturn, old warrior that he was, would never tell anyone.

My father, his eyes filling with tears at the thought of the robbery, turned to his father, who was sitting on the couch with arms folded.

"Pa, e vero?" he asked. "Pop, is this true?"

My grandfather shrugged. That made it true.

"Were you hurt?" asked my father.

"They just pushed me down and grabbed my money. I hurt my knee a little," Tony said. Little remained of his rock-hard stone-worker's physique. "The punks! If only I'd have been 10 years younger!"

Until they died in their mid-nineties, my grandparents had other surprises in store for my father and me. One day my father and I needed to get inside the *baulo* for some family records. The *baulo* was a pine-green steamer trunk that my grandmother had used to transport her possessions when she immigrated to

New York in 1930. It was now used to hold family records, as well as to store the sheets and pillowcases that Desolina had embroidered during her engagement to my grandfather and which she gave to my mother and sister in dribs and drabs and with great ceremony. Also inside was special costume jewelry, and everything was sealed in envelopes or wrapped in old fabric and sprinkled liberally with camphor.

Desolina, a short portly woman with skin as nearly as fresh as a baby's, complained whenever anyone had to get into the *baulo*. She as if it were some high-interest bank account that could only be drawn once a decade. She'd make you wait outside the closed door of her bedroom, where the baulo sat next to a radiator, and she called you back in after she'd procured the trunk's only key. No one knew exactly where she kept it.

While you searched for what you wanted, she'd hover behind you, saying *stay away from this* or *don't touch that* and hurry it up with and, *c'mon, what are you trying to find we threw it out long ago.*

As my father dug through the trunk for documents he needed to fill out medical forms, he began coming across sealed envelopes – some fresh and white, others yellowed and crinkled with time. He opened one. It held $220. He ripped open another; it contained $60. In a third was a crisp $100 bill.

"C'mon, basta, sera il baulo e lasa ster tut!" Desolina said to my father. "Enough. Close the trunk and leave everything alone!"

But he couldn't stop now. All he had to do was reach in, and he was in possession of two or three more envelopes containing cash. She kept yelling; he kept extracting envelopes. After he believed he'd found them all, my father brought them into the sitting room and dropped them on a table. Also spilling out was more than $2,000.

Tony was taking a cat nap on the couch, but the sound of envelopes being ripped open awoke him. He got up and tottered over. The table looked like the site of a craps game; there were $20s, $50s, and $100s stacked up with curling edges and held in place with a sugar bowl, an ashtray, and a wine bottle.

"Dovet le trova?" he asked. "Where did you find this?"

"Nel baulo," my father said.

"Nel baulo?!" Tony hollered, looking up in shock to the heavens. He trained his furious eyes on his wife, who stood sheepishly nearby. "What is all this money doing in the house?!" he cried.

"Io non so, I don't know," she said.. "I put it away and forgot about it."

"Porco cane!" he yelled, fists clenched. "What if the building burned down?!" He turned to my father. *"Cuanti soldi, Selvi?* How much is it?"

"Io conto," my father replied. "I'm still counting."

Desolina was the household keeper of the money. Every month, Tony cashed their social security checks, along with his pension check and an occasional check he received from the Italian government as a World War I vet. He brought the money home from the bank and gave it to his wife, who doled the cash out.

By the time my father had stopped counting, $9,600 had been fished out of the *baulo*. Tony was wagging a finger at his wife who, clasping her hands, was pleading for mercy. He kept pacing the floor, repeating, "*Nove mille sei cento scudi!* Nine thousand six hundred bucks!"

My father made one more pass through the trunk to make sure there wasn't so much as a penny left inside. He looked at his watch. It was just before 3 p.m. He raced to the bank to deposit the loot.

A year later, when my father again went fishing for something in the baulo, he found $1,900.

The Way of It

Sharon Lask Munson

A man gets used to things —
scent of a woman, her skin, hair
hands perfumed with onion, bay leaf
neck stretched, a nesting crane
as she peeks through small-paned windows
searching gray skies.

A man gets used to life —
head bent to sacred writings
a wooden chair, a bench
a glass of lemon tea
obeyed by his children
but distant from the chatter and joy
of their fleeting childhoods.

A man gets used to seasons
ciphering days and dreams —
walking narrow pathways
as autumn leaves
mark the year's passing.

He teeters on a tightrope —

unsteady jobs, a hopeful handshake
the comfortable sameness of town
the teacher, the butcher, the shul
a skullcap, as faint as clear mist
as weightless as the one thin strand of hair
that drifts toward first light
and morning prayers.

Memorial Service

Sharon Fish Mooney

The first to leave you was your youngest child,
lost to your memories of time gone by,
then one by one more relatives took flight;
once out of sight, then they were out of mind.
Then later you forgot your husband's face,
forgot his name as plaques and tangles wrapped
around your thoughts and you just wandered off
into a land where you'd not been before.
Though you misplaced sweet memories of your kin
and of yourself as you grew older, frail,
you still retained your spirit, gentle, kind,
your own true self, for us the tie that binds
us to you still, trusting that you now know
it's time for loved ones to remember you.