

## My Grandmother's Garden

Brittany McCreery

At my grandparent's house, between the toolshed and what we called the "dollhouse," was a small but abundant garden filled with beautiful flowers. I have this memory, an early memory, with a few frames strung together flickering like old film. I'm walking in the garden, my grandfather not far behind. He didn't walk much longer after that.

As a little girl, I couldn't really grasp what had happened after my grandfather's stroke. Why he could not manipulate construction paper and scissors into magical works of art anymore. Why he would no longer walk with me to the railroad track when we heard the train coming. Why he could no longer help me line the rails with pennies, wait for their flattening, and turn them into jewelry charms. Why he could only stutter out phrases now. Why he was so visibly frustrated when trying to participate in conversations. I shied away from sitting in his lap any more. I didn't know where my grandfather had gone. Sure he was there, in the same chair as always, outwardly. But the man I had loved visiting wasn't there, at least not that my young elementary school self could see.

I remember being sad when he passed away, but not tearful. I understood enough to know that after his multiple strokes and functional loss it was "better this way." But there was more behind the lack of tears. I had detached

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myself from him in some way. It had been so long since I had really been able to talk with him, to adore him the way I did as a little girl. I didn't go to the funeral; there wasn't money then for my whole family to make the trip north. Maybe I would have cried then? In the following trips to Ohio to visit my grandmother it just seemed like he wasn't sitting in his chair anymore, that's all.

It wasn't until later, much later, through my grandmother's and father's stories that I could see all that my grandfather was and what he had accomplished. My grandparents moved to the small town of Delaware, Ohio from remote farm country in West Virginia in pursuit of jobs along with my great grandparents and grandfather's brothers. My grandfather expanded their two-room turn-of-the-century house by hand-building a sun room, porch, second story, and garage. He and my grandmother founded a church in their town. To this day, when my family visits that church we are regarded as royalty because of the groundwork my grandparents laid. And, most importantly, I learned that my grandfather loved spending time with me when my family came to visit from Florida.

Not until medical school, when I heard the term "Broca's aphasia," did I begin to understand what had happened to my grandfather. Not until I learned about the progressive decline the sufferers of multiple strokes undergo, could I appreciate why my grandfather seemed to have been taken away from me a little more each time my family visited. After seeing several stroke patients in my clinical

experiences, this wave of guilt washes over me. I hate myself for having an understanding and caring for these patients that I never had for my grandfather. I could have done so much more, though who expects so much from a little girl? Nevertheless, my guilt is there.

It's summer time in Ohio. I'm standing in what remains of the garden. The flowers are scattered now and there is not as much color as there once was. Yet, I find comfort in the beautiful blooms that thrive there. I have good memories in that yard. Piling up leaves in the fall and jumping in, building the greatest snowman of all time, enjoying all the things I couldn't in Florida. My grandfather was there for those things. I sigh, another wave of guilt washes over me. I whisper a prayer. I apologize. I ask for forgiveness. I tell my grandfather I love him. I wish I could have had more time sitting in his lap. I wish he could have taught me how to build things the way he did. I wish I could have heard his stories in his own voice. But, from now on, I'll understand.

■ **Brittany McCreery** is a fourth year medical student. She is a Tampa, Florida native who has wanted to pursue a career in medicine since she was a little girl. In addition to her love of science and medicine, she also enjoys exercising the creative half of her brain, most often through poetry and painting.

*Hydrangea in my Grandmother's Garden & Lily in my Grandmother's Garden*

Brittany McCreery



## She Smiled

Cathaley Nobles

All I saw at first glance  
Was a time long since passed.  
It felt surreal—  
Then she smiled.

A small thin charcoal face  
Etched by the lines of time,  
Reflecting the life she's lived—  
Then she smiled.

Eyes so round and clear,  
Revealing all the love she's yet to give  
To all the world that passes her by—  
Then she smiled.

Her hugs not yet weak and feeble;  
Her mind unclouded by memories  
Of those who had to leave her behind—  
Then she smiled.

Nearly a century she's lived,  
Her days no longer measured in hours.  
Unattended by those she once attended to;  
No calls or visits to express love or concern.  
All she's ever owned decaying around her,  
To this fast world she's unattached and unnoticed—  
Yet she smiled.

We need to save her  
Before her smile is lost.  
Not only to validate her life  
But to serve as a reminder  
Of all we have to smile about.

On 2-13-12 God called her home  
And she was smiling!

■ **Cathaley Nobles** is a community contributor to HEAL.