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The Foreign Inner Flaws

Sometimes remembering people is the easiest thing in the world, other times a memory will never come to you no matter how much you try to conjure it up in vivid details. It is surprising at times at what you remember when something so small, something so insignificant is presented to you. A flower... a ring... a shirt... a song. I have these moments when I remember, but they never last long and are never as often as what others have or what the media imagines them to be.

One of the clearest memories I have of her is when we were surrounded by a horde of her family members that I had rarely seen except on a few occasions. We were sitting in our own little corner in a hospital room, the scent of cleaning products and the sick thick in the air. Her brothers and sisters all surrounded the figure on the bed, not wanting to let the inevitable goodbye to happen. At the time my mother was outside the hospital with my great-grandmother talking and trying to help calm her down though she was going to lose her husband that before night fell. The bags under my grandmother's eyes stood out against the sickly paleness of her skin, her lack of sleep evident in that moment. None of us had gotten much sleep that night. We leaned against each other, my head just right under her chin, and her arm behind me as warmth was put back into my arm. My thought in that moment was to give any support I could give to my grandmother, even if that was just to give the smallest of human contact. Her gray-tinged hair was sleek back with dried sweat into her regular ponytail. Our eyes locked, her head swaying above mine, and we just laughed. "There must be something in the water," she says to

me, eye-lids half closed but her smile was as wide as the sky. Her statement just made me laugh harder and still makes me laugh today. It is in moments like these that I see a lot of my mother in my grandmother.

The death of my great-grandfather shook his wife and kids, their cries at his bedside and around the room filling all space they could, swallowing you up in the wave. The death occurred when I was not in the room, but when entering, and I took space up next to my grandmother and held her, my mother near us. My grandmother rocked me with her, tears spilling down her cheeks while mine stayed dry, no emotion coming out. I was indifferent to the scene before me and about my grandfather being gone. This reaction didn't seem unusual to me at the time. I loved my grandfather and I have few memories that stand out when I think of him, but I would have thought I would have shed some tears. But alas few were shed; as was the case less than two months later.

It was one of those rare days in April, after the feel of spring begins and where a coat should be worn, but you ignore the light chill of wind and just let the sun shine on you. The smell of dirt, grass, and sunshine fill your senses even now. My parents were planting flowers around the house as my grandmother and grandfather pulled up in their car, their dog Duke riding in his usual place in the back of the car. To this day the reason for their unannounced visit escapes me, but I feel the joy I felt then every time this memory is conjured up. My mother, grandmother, and I all were on the porch my dad had built years before (and since has remodeled in the past four years), bullshitting about nothing in particular while my grandfather waited in the car.

“Grandma, I got my prom dress the other day,” I say to her through the nonsense. Prom was less than two weeks away and finally after getting my dad to take me shopping I found the

perfect dress for me (though it was neither the perfect size nor length for my frame). “It’s black and long. Do you want to see it? It’s in my room.” Her smile and nod were all I needed to bounce back into the house to put on the dress. No one had seen me in that dress before. Not my dad when I tried it on and decided that it was the dress I wanted. Not even my mother could convince me to put it on after I got it, the giddy feeling of getting a dress having lost its appeal to me then. (I was not sold on the idea of wearing a dress growing up—after I was forced to wear them when I was much younger—so actually wanting a dress was a big deal for me. It is not a feeling I often get.) But that day I wanted to put on that dress for my grandmother. There is no logic that I can think of that made me do it. The two women’s reactions were gratifying enough. Showing my grandmother the dress was the best decision of my life at the time because that happy little girl excited about going to the prom was the last image she saw me.

When my mother got the phone call from my grandfather I remember the tone of her voice and the disbelief that ran through her. The anger in her tone stands out to me because she had just gotten home late from work and she didn’t want to go out again. I remember cold running through my veins, literally one of the only times I have ever felt this, as I heard her on the phone with her dad before she left to find the ambulance at my grandparents’ house and my grandmother dead. My brother Justin, the youngest of the four boys in my family, answered the phone and got the news our mother held for us. My brothers Justin and Trent and I all headed out—me briefly telling my sleeping father that we were going to the hospital—and in that ride was the only time a tear emanated from me as the song that played at my grandmother’s funeral played over the radio. It was the first time any of us kids had heard the song. I can’t hear it without thinking of that moment and my grandmother.

That is the only time I remember crying and feeling any emotion about any of my grandparents' death (my great-grandfather before her and my grandfather—her husband—a year later). After that I've never really felt any emotion about their deaths. I didn't cry when I had my mom in my arms, her crying her eyes out over her mother's death. I didn't feel any sadness as I saw my grandmother's body hours after her passing (and the same with my grandfather's body after he died). I didn't feel anything. I was numb, no emotion that could be described in words, and was for a while now. My whole thought was that life moved on and I couldn't stop to think about the dead. (It wasn't until recently memories of my grandmother have brought up emotions that I didn't feel at the time and that I don't get when I think of my grandfathers.) This felt unnatural because I should have felt something over their deaths. That's what every normal person does: feel sadness or anger or something. This one day after telling the shell that was my mother to get over my grandmother's death, the idea that I was a cold-hearted bitch ran through my mind a lot because my mother's reaction was as hostile as the words I shot at her.

I still wrestle with that feeling of being a cold-hearted bitch and my mother's reaction burned into my mind and playing on repeat, but all those things I said and all the nothingness that rested in my heart were my own way of dealing with their deaths. I had my own life, my own future to think about and it was happening so fast that I had to think about that stuff and not get dragged down by the death that surrounded me. There is nothing wrong with that. Yes it is not the textbook image of how someone is grieving should react, but it is still a reaction. Human emotions and their reactions are as uncontrollable as Mother Nature. We just have to let them do what they need to so we can continue on and swim in the open sea.

Writer's Commentary

I used a lot of personal details to include with this essay to try to make my point that the way a person grieves doesn't have to be this iconic sad person who cries at the funeral and anytime they think of the loved one they lost. Don't get me wrong because I know many people do this because I have witnessed that first hand, but I just wasn't sure how I could incorporate that in this piece just yet. So overall a lot of the details I put were there to set up to make room for my thinking outright more so than my point (at least this is how I think of it as). I think my thoughts were best articulated after I start talking about my grandmother's death. Dakotah mentioned this to me through her written comments—and I would agree with her—that the scene when I talk about my prom dress is an emotional one that I think had some great little thoughts within that conveyed that emotion. Where I was least effective in my thought I would have to say the conclusion mainly because that is usually where I always struggle, but really because I feel like my voice changes and becomes more assertive. I say this mainly with the last couple sentences of the paragraph.

I would say that really all the details I included in this piece lead to my thoughts because I never really sat down and thought about how I never felt anything after my grandparents' deaths was anything but grieving. I know when I talk about showing my grandmother my prom dress, saying that it was the best decision of my young life is not one that I have ever thought of when I think of that moment, but writing this it is very true. It brings me happiness that she got to see that when she didn't get to see any of the other big milestones in my adult life. Another passage that sticks out to me is the one that starts at the top of page 4 and talks about me not crying and that. I believe it is here that I start talking about what grief is and how I should react

versus how I did react. Again this is just something I never thought about until the need to write this essay came about.