

G-R-A-N-D-M-A

Megan Smith



Lingering scents of laundry soap, sweet fruit, and dried garden flowers always greet me when I go to Grandma's house. Nostalgic family memories are piled onto the kitchen counters, musty blankets, and the groaning wood chairs. When aunts and uncles pause conversation for a moment to catch their breath and the basement has quit its rumbling, my ears detect whispers of clicking, clicking, clicking that spell out familiar words.

Small wooden Scrabble tiles smoothly slide across the light stains spotting the white linen cloth and click against each other in laughter.

H-O-M-E

Slight depressions of the painted character tickle the tips of my little fingers.

S-U-G-A-R

I spell out words with my eight year-old vocabulary.

C-A-T

I form another with the wooden game letters stolen from the box they came in.

B-L-U-E

Grandma's version of Fast Scrabble abandons the game board, and we form personal crosswords from the tiles we draw from a pile in the center of the table.

L-O-V-E

I study my grandma.

Her thin white hair needs a cut, wispy like a pulled apart cotton ball.

Round, dark, metal, bejeweled clip-on earrings have

pulled down the lobes of her ears.

Thin lips painted with coral pink that will leave a faded kiss on your cheek.

Plump fingers and stubby fingernails that she chews out of boredom.

Her hands are worn with a lifetime of being a farmer's wife and school teacher. Soft lines crease at the joints of her hands that prepare whole meals by memory for her family.

I can rest my chin on her head when we hug. Even though Grandpa called me "Big Tall Sally," I take after my mom in height and, at twenty years old, top out at five foot four.

Her favorite bright pink and orange plaid-patterned blouse over a white top with shades of pink and orange buttons sits on once broad, tough, working shoulders. On her nightstand in the bedroom, there's a ten year old portrait of Grandpa and Grandma, and she is wearing this shirt.

I swear that the tennis shoes she always wears are retired bowling shoes, because of the white and blue leather sewn boldly together with thick red stitching.

She logged eighty one years around the Earth mid-January and, as far as I know, isn't planning on quitting any time soon.

C-O-N-T-I-N-U-E

Early morning light greeted me as I rolled out of bed. I usually like my spring break days to start later than usual. In all honesty, I would like all of my days to start later. I am not a morning person.

However, this morning is a special exception.

I get away with the shower I took yesterday, my thin yellow hair pulled back into crisscrosses of a French braid. Morning air nips at my nose when I leave the warmth of home,

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and my breath billows like a dragon as I drive down the road.

I let myself into the house and greet Grandma in her kitchen. A kiss on the cheek to Grandpa watching the news in his recliner. They were awake four hours before me this morning. Maybe I'll grow up to be a morning person.

Her car is easier for her to get in and out of, and it is honestly more reliable than the junk car I parked in the driveway. She doesn't notice that I wipe the thin layer of dust off the radio display.

The drive down the country highway to Fort Wayne is filled with my voice describing class projects, relationship status updates, and much speculation on my future.

G-R-O-W

I learned to steal words from the children's books I read. My two older cousins and I play against Grandma while we wait for everyone to arrive.

C-A-S-T-L-E

Smells of the kitchen drift over to the dining table where we play. Judging by the grand selection of pecan pie, sugar cream pie, monkey bread, and cake hiding the counter top from view, it's probably one of the aunt's birthdays.

Another E that I cannot yet use.

D-R-A-G-O-N

I pull a Q tile from the pile.

Finally, I can use that U.

Q-U-E-E-N

Now, disease clouds her once bright eyes and modern medicine cannot resurrect the lost sight. Her thick bifocals do almost nothing for her. She reminds me again that she cannot see. When I can, I drive her to the bank, to the post office, to the

pharmacy, to the grocery store. I still have time.

I don't think I could spell out Macular Degeneration with Scrabble letters.

Parking at the hospital involves a few hawk-like circles before scoring a space three rows from the sliding door entrance. The sterile air greets me as I give a smile to the elder receptionist and we shuffle to the elevator. Third floor please. Bing, bing, arrival. Through another door, and it's a standard doctor's office waiting room. I find a seat facing the television mounted above the door to the back rooms. A rerun of M*A*S*H comes on after an annoying lineup of over-marketed products. Hand sanitizer and oranges touch my nose.

When Grandma sits to my right, I snap a selfie with her before she is called back. I post the photo to Snapchat with pink heart emojis. I disinterestedly watch the throwback show, scrolling through my Facebook feed, watching the battery life tick down. Besides the conversation of television and shuffling of papers behind the check-in counter, the waiting room was empty.

Then an older couple walks into the room, and Grandma walks out from the back. All done!

Legally, she's blind. Colors have ill-defined shapes and tend to blur into the objects surrounding her viewpoint. Life goes by through the corners of her eyes, her ears fine-tuned to make up for the lost vision.

Shopping is her escape from the house. Her half of the closet is a bold rainbow of C.J. Banks and Kohl's outfits compared to Grandpa's buckle jean overalls and faded neutral shirts. Whenever I compliment a new piece of colorful fashion, she says, "Oh, why thank you! It just spoke to me in the store! It

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called out to me, ‘MARIANNE, MARIANNE.’ And now I have it!”
If she can see it, she can wear it.

We go to the classically favorite Bob Evan’s for lunch after her appointment. At eleven-thirty in the morning, it is more of a popular nursing home cafeteria. I order a bottomless cup of coffee and a stack of buttery hot pancakes while she has ice water and blueberry crepes.

She tells me of the road trips Grandpa and her used to make.

A summer with friends in Arizona.

A wintery week escape to Louisiana.

A spring sprint to Nevada and California.

The only two states she has yet to be in of the continental forty-eight are Washington and Oregon. Ironically, two states that I have been to.

I know that my younger self has heard these stories before, but now I listen with understanding of places, relationships, distances, cars, and travel. Come to think of it, these stories were the mustard seeds planted in my heart a lifetime ago, left forgotten with the assumptions of staying rooted in my small-town hometown.

I credit my global wanderlust to the tales of my grandma and grandpa crisscrossing the country more times than I have in years.

Their lifetimes inspire mine.

G-O

I still have that photo we took together in the doctor’s office in Fort Wayne. It took me forever to track it down in my photo storage. Her crooked smile hides a jolly laugh that we shared in that moment and her glasses magnify her blue eyes that look

just to the left of the camera.

There is a plastic gallon bag filled with Scrabble tiles on my living room bookshelf that I like to break out in my spare time and play Fast Scrabble by myself.

Her mind is still here, even if her sight is not, and I am grateful for that.

I know time is against us, and one day she will be gone before I am ready.

But we have now. We have our memories that I will treasure forever. One day, I can tell my children and grandchildren of a strong, adventurous woman who shaped my life. I can only hope that I will be the same kind of woman to my family.

No matter what, she will always be my
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