

## Forever in My Heart

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### 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Personal Narrative 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

The sun shone brightly through my window. Feeling the light and warmth on my face, I reluctantly opened my eyes. Exhausted, I slowly sat up in my bed. After a few moments, I notice my mom sitting on the edge of my bed. She turns to face me, her eyes puffy and red, as though she's been crying. She gently places my hand in hers, " I need to tell you something about your grandfather."

I sat in silence as my mom spoke. Images and words flashed quickly through my mind like a strobe light. I closed my eyes tightly and wished myself awake. Regretfully, this is not a dream; my grandfather is dead.

On his morning walk, my grandfather collapsed in front of a neighbor's house. The neighbor found him unresponsive and called 911. By the time he arrived at the hospital, it was already too late. He was placed on life support to allow the family time to make final arrangements.

I rushed to get ready, throwing on a pair of black Lululemon leggings and my burgundy Brandy Melville hoodie. I threw my hair up into a messy bun while running down the stairs as quickly as my legs would carry me. The overwhelmingly strong scent of incense and people everywhere caught me by surprise, forcing me to take a step back. I found my dad and insisted that we go to the hospital immediately. However, my dad refused my request. In that instant, I felt like a tea kettle - steaming hot, my face red as an apple, blood boiling, and my eyes welling up. I stomped back upstairs, slamming my foot down on each step harder than the previous. It probably sounded like a herd of elephants, but the commotions downstairs muffled the sound.

Over the years, I watched my grandfather change from a strong, outgoing, powerful man to someone quiet, frail, and weak. When I was little, he would watch me dance. Every time he saw me, he had a beaming smile, and his face lit up with joy.

Meanwhile, his health was deteriorating due to complications from his diabetes. He had multiple surgeries and required kidney dialysis. Barely able to move and exhausted from his treatments, he often just laid on the couch. No matter what was happening and how much he changed - I still loved him.

Tables covered in food, music playing in the background, and people in every direction I turn. Flowers and photos surrounded my grandfather's casket. People I'd never met kept approaching me, giving me their condolences. Each person shared something about how my grandfather spoke of me - an accomplishment, a photo, or a story.

Four Buddhist monks entered the room; after lighting incense, they began chanting. Most people sat in chairs; my family was on their knees in front to pay their respects. The service is long, and my knees ache, as does my heart. The funeral procession begins, headlights on, neon colored funeral sticker on the windshield, cars honking as we move to the burial site.

At the burial, no longer able to contain my feelings; tears stream down my cheeks. My aunts approach me and tell me tears will bring bad luck into our home; instead, I should be happy and celebrate his life. I bite my tongue, clench my jaw, and press my lips tightly not to speak these words aloud, "My grandfather, who I loved very much, is dead. A man you thought of as a burden, while my parents and I continued to care for him. How dare you tell me not to mourn my loss."

As I approached his grave, holding a burning stick of incense between my palms, I respectfully bowed three times and said goodbye. Next, I grabbed a handful of dirt from the fresh pile of earth that had been dug that morning and tossed it gently into his grave. Finally, I placed a flower into his grave. My grandfather's final resting place is on top of a hill surrounded by graves of people he knew. The view is beautiful from this spot, so peaceful and serene. The weather was perfect, sunny with a gentle breeze. Benches dedicated to loved ones, tombstones, and mausoleums sprinkled over rolling hills of green grass and flowers.

Our house was quiet and empty, and I saw things my grandfather left behind. His butter yellow Polo jacket hung on a dining room chair, multiple prescriptions on the counter, a bright yellow hospital bag of personal belongings near the front door, his reading glasses, and an empty coffee mug on the living room table. I placed my hand over my heart and whispered to myself, "you will be forever in my heart."

Feeling as though I could not grieve and forced to hold my feelings in, I decided to dance a solo in his honor. I knew right away what song to choose, Red Ribbon by Madielyn Bailey. The song is about healing after heartbreak.

My costume was a black leotard with sheer mesh inserts, embellished with cherry blossom appliques and rhinestones. Red ribbons tied around my waist, neck, and my hair. After I danced it the first time, everyone came up to me, hugged me, and told me that it was so beautiful that it moved them to tears. When I told them my connection to it, they hugged me even tighter. Even

though I could only perform this dance twice before the Coronavirus shut everything down, my heart felt full. Finally, I was able to honor my grandfather in a way that not only made me happy but those around me as well.<sup>4</sup> Not a day goes by that I don't think of him. He is resting in peace and no longer suffering in pain. Some days are still emotional, but my anger is gone. I will never forget my grandfather and how important he was to me. Beautiful memories of him will live on forever in my heart.