

Time's Game

The experience of losing my grandpa to the hard grips of cancer caused me to reflect inward. If anything, the moment I realized our time was limited taught me to take no one for granted in the game of life.

The day was overcast, as I got into the car with my mom. Pawpaw had called a night or two ago, complaining how no one had come to visit in a while. We were not free before. One night there was a new episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race* releasing; the other night we were too tired. Exhausted from the day's events, we delayed going again the next day and the next. Then one day, our schedule was free to go take a quick visit if it did not drag on too long.

The roads bent and rose as we made our way to his house. We passed the last gas station before civilization began dissipating, and the only thing measuring distance traveled was the flowered, cross memorial on the side of the road and then that one random gate. After all that, we made it to the house.

Brownie, the dog that is rounder than dog, was wagging her tail immensely at us, but she kept a shy distance. She had not been an inhabitant of the home for long, but already I had a kindred bond with her. Brownie followed behind as we opened the rickety screen door to enter through the wooden door.

I was immediately bombarded with the familiar smell of childhood. It drove all my other senses out for an instant and commanded the spotlight. It caused me to feel the love and joy that once was. I remembered my first puppy, Ella. When I would be playing outside with siblings because the world had not yet called for us to be anywhere else. It had not yet planned what tribulations we might have to endure. The memory jotted the illusioned warmth of a whole family into the canvas my memory was painting. It even caused me to think of grandma Ninny.

The memories flood in of how she would be solving jumbo word searches while watching her game shows.

Trekking on, I stumbled into the kitchen, and made my way through to the living room. I saw Paw sitting there and greeted him with a loud, "Hello!" He had trouble hearing then, as would any eighty-four-year-old man. Mom did most of the talking because he never was able to hear me the first time. The usual questions were presented. Only sometimes did the answers vary, but for some reason I had decided to focus on the conversation.

"How are you feeling today?" Mom asked.

"Not good."

Oh. Was that the usual answer? His voice was not always like that, *was it?* There was a raspy-ness that grounded me back to this dimension and seemed to open my mind to his world. He explained how his mouth was experiencing insufferable pain. Like stabbing wounds, mouth cancer was infuriatingly feeding off any good health that remained within him. The parasite within was robbing his joy and visions of hope.

Paw asked me to get him a beer from the fridge. He even wanted me to put a little salt on the top. I was more than ready to hurry and pour his glass. He deserved to be catered to even if it were for a drink that would only have provided him with more sorrow. I sat it down and watched him. His mouth, slightly dis-formed from multiple procedures, slowly ascended to meet the glass's rim. It was as if he was asking the rim for approval and waiting for a response. The glass did not approve though; it caused him to wince and shout a little after the swallow. It burned. He confessed how badly he wanted to get drunk by any means. I realized, at that moment, the beer did not just burn his mouth. It burned my heart to see one of my most beloved childhood figures

in such a desperate state to escape his trials even if it had brought on more agony. I almost felt responsible for bringing the beer in the first place. How could I have denied his requests though?

I wanted to leave the room and escape until I stopped to analyze the situation. It would have made me feel worse for Paw to see me hurt because of his state. He was already powerless and saddened by baldness, low stamina, and how hardly anyone understood him anymore. He had even explained that he did not want to die, but if he went to sleep and never woke up, that would be okay. He would have been overjoyed to see Sandra again.

I looked over to my mom who seemed to have been keeping herself well composed. Pessimism had gripped our lives. The house was no longer bright.

Ancestors up until the family members who built the house itself were forcing me to notice all the heartache inside it. A funeral poster for Sandra Daughtry, who I remember as Ninny, sat in a chair at the dining room table only paces away from me. I noticed Paw sitting on the couch where my brothers and I colored little glass animals that hung on the window behind. The animals were chipped and faded. The wooden floor Paw's feet depended on seemed bent from how much he had to stay couch bound. It was the same floor where I used to play board games, until food was ready. I got an idea to ask Paw for his famous gumbo recipe. It was something I thought he would always be able to show me and then possibly my kids. He was all too ready to share it, even though he struggled to relay it to me. His difficulty articulating words caused me to stare and try and understand every syllable trying to hang on to every word. I did not write it down, which was a mistake, but I could not. Time had dominated the playing field. Everything seemed too short. I needed to get as much knowledge out of him. I wanted to acquire any fraction of a precious memory: war stories of Vietnam, what the 50s were like, or the 70s, 80s, and how he met Ninny so my kids could know the story of how two of my most loved

family heads met. I wanted to achieve any artifact within the realm of possibility before it was too late.

Time had been playing the game of life long before me. It laughed at any feeble attempts I took to demise the course it had chosen. That day, I had gotten a gumbo recipe I would not even remember. Maybe, that would be the only thing I had gotten the chance to get. I knew from then on that I could never let myself be in the same position again. I learned from this experience to cherish the people I love more than just the moments I may be losing them.