1999 First Place Personal Narrative

Just a Simple Bowl

The simple bowl is deep cherry wood with a silver rimmed bottom that reflects my face upside down as a result of the polishing it has received over the years. The grain is worn, but still radiates the strength of the tree that it came from. As I run my finger over the inside of the cavernous salad bowl, it picks up some of the olive oil residue from the homemade Italian dressing that has seeped into every little grain of the bowl over years of use. Never subject to washings; we only wiped it out with a paper towel, to better flavor the crisp Boston bibb lettuce salads that it delivered at every family dinner. Just as the wood bowl, my grandmother was weathered and cracked by the trials of life. I could not be around her without leaving with a trace of her inner wisdom that came from experiencing life. And like the bowl, she delivered savory moments of life that left us yearning for more.

When my grandmother died this bowl was the one thing I wanted. An avid jewelry collector, my grandmother owned a large collection of beautiful jewelry. As the oldest granddaughter, I was entitled to receive some of her jewelry. However, my thoughts continued to reflect on the old cherry salad bowl. The salad bowl reflects my grandma like no precious stone or gold necklace can. My grandma is a functional, no-nonsense person. I always knew I could obtain an honest, if not blunt, opinion from her. And yet I always felt her love and concern for my well being and success.

Receiving clothing for birthdays and Christmas is never cool when you are young. However, I never minded getting clothes from my grandparents. My grandma always picked out the coolest name brand clothes. I looked forward to each Christmas or birthday morning running downstairs to the gift wrapped professionally with a perfectly matched fancy bow that laid just right over the upper corner of the box. Inside would be an outfit so stylish that it begged to be worn. Accompanying the clothes would be a small white box with a red rose bow that flopped over the sides of the box. Inside this box would be a ring from her collection or another piece of jewelry she had picked out for me. However excited I was for the presents, the excitement quickly turned toward thoughts of the upcoming meal she had prepared for the family. It did not matter what she had prepared for the meal; the kitchen always had such delectable scents that wafted through the air and just settled over the house. My mouth was in a constant state of salivation and my stomach waited expectantly for what was sure to be another meal that left my stomach uncomfortably full and yet yearning for more. And yet, no matter what she made, the best part of the meal that you always took thirds or fourths from came from the salad bowl. A simple salad served with homemade Italian dressing and fresh crumbled Roquefort cheese, it was what reminded me best of grandma.

My grandma had survived a hard life, and yet managed to raise four responsible, well-educated, and successful children. All this she did while working as a respected psychiatric nurse and a state mental health board member. Although she had had and was still overcoming trials in life, I always knew she would be there and cared about me and my life. As my brother and I grew older and were unable to visit my grandparents as often as we had in the past, they came down to see us as often as possible. I could always depend on my grandparents seeing a few of my softball games or being there with me on other important occasions.

As I went through school making new friends and strengthening old friendships, I was always like a lighthouse to my friends, new and old. Friends were drawn to me to share stories, seek advice or viewpoints, or unload
stress and anxieties. I felt similar to Lucy from the Peanuts comic strip in that I should be carrying around a sign that read, "Psychiatrist, 5 cents." My friends took a special interest in my religious beliefs and values. They drew close to me for my strong convictions on the afterlife and for my certainty of what lay in store for us after death. I was a comfort for them. I was especially sought out when one of my friends' loved ones died. I particularly remember the time when one of my friends named Kathryn had a grandfather who was dying. I talked with her throughout the time he was in the hospital and Kathryn knew she was losing him. And I was there when he died, explaining to her how she would see him again someday. Every day during my senior year friends came and sat in the hallway by my locker on the dirty white tile floor. We spent most of the time laughing as we discussed the hilarity of our lives. Space became a problem as more and more friends came, clogging up the hallway and stemming the flow of traffic through the area. I remember the looks on other student's faces as they climbed over us, wishing that we would find some other place to start the day. The morning after Kathryn's grandfather died was no exception except the mood was more somber as Kathryn and I leaned against the cold clay brown metal lockers and talked about her loss. I remember feeling that it really wasn't so big of a deal for him to die because she would see him again. However, I took care to show sympathy and concern for my friend and her loss. I had all the Sunday school answers ready for her to explain how we will see our loved ones again. Because the answers and explanations came out almost like instinct, I felt that I believed all I was telling to Kathryn. When another of her grandparents died a month later, I was there again to offer sympathy for her "supposed" loss. Once again, I never felt truly bad for her loss, only a sadness that my friend felt so bereaved.

I remember September 23, 1996 clearly. I was at Scott's Body Shop in St. Charles, a town about forty minutes away from my town, waiting for my dad to pick me up. I had taken in our Toyota Previa minivan for repairs because two months before it was smashed by a little black Dodge Stealth while parked in the street in front of our house. It had been hit so hard that it was almost totaled and was still having problems even after being worked on for two weeks a month and a half earlier. I had started my senior year a month earlier and I eagerly awaited all the senior activities that would take place over the course of the year and the awesome year that is just supposed to happen when you are a senior. The day was a typical early fall day. The air was crisp enough to leave my nose tingling as I breathed but just warm enough to wear a long sleeve t-shirt and jeans. The leaves were in the process of changing colors and I could smell the passing of summer into fall in the air. It was around four o'clock when my dad picked me up in his Volvo.

As I climbed into the front passenger seat he told me that grandma had died. It didn't hit me at first. I tried to figure out who grandma was. Then the reality of the situation slammed head on into me. My chest sank lower and lower as I sank lower and lower into the black leather seat. I sat still for the first five minutes of the ride back to my dad's office. Then the tears started to flow. I am not a crier at all. The last time I really cried was when I broke my nose badly in softball and was on the way to the emergency room with my dad. My dad said it was okay for me to cry; he wouldn't think I wasn't tough anymore if I did cry. But the real reason I started to cry was because a friend of mine had broken her nose a week earlier and looked hideous with her grotesquely swollen face. I was crying because I didn't want to look like she had looked. This time the tears were for something that really felt like it was going to rip my heart out. My throat ached as the tears silently slid down my face and dripped onto my shirt. As my dad went into his office to gather together some work for the days he would be gone to take care of my grandma's funeral, I sat out in the car, not caring when people walked by and stared at the girl with red puffy eyes and a running nose sitting crying in the front seat. After waiting for my dad about a half-hour I fell asleep. When we reached home I proceeded to cry again into my pillow as I wondered if she knew how much I really loved her. I had last seen her three weeks before and felt regret that I didn't take full advantage of the time I had had with her. I told her I loved her as we hugged before she left for home, but was it like I had expressed how much I loved her? I feared her not knowing how I truly felt for her, and now it was too late to tell her. The next day at school was rough. In first period English we had to write about heroes. I couldn't think clearly so I spent the class writing my feelings about my grandma. The tears dripped onto the paper as I silently expressed my love for my grandma and the rage I felt about losing her at a young age. My classmates around me tried not to stare at this "tough" athlete who was bawling for no reason and sniffing through the whole period. At the end of the period I cried to my teacher as I explained to him why I couldn't
write on heroes that day. Next period was gym with all my friends, including Kathryn. In the locker room I cried after everyone had left; only to be comforted by one of the Special Olympians I worked with every day. I cried or slept through every other period that day. No kind words from my friends or teachers helped my sorrow. How did they know how I felt? They hadn't loved her like I did. The words from church lessons came time and time again to my mind. I would see her again. I didn't care if I would see her again. I wanted her now, in this life. Screw what the gospel says. I could care less about its explanations for not sorrowing at death. Death sucks. And I want my grandma back now. I went to church angry at the gospel, its teachings, and life. I felt as though it couldn't possibly understand how I felt. The principles concerning death were just hollow, empty words. How could I rely on such words that were doing nothing to help the hole in my chest that was getting heavier and heavier each time I remembered my grandma?

I realized even though I believe in some principles of the gospel because they are beliefs ingrained in me through personal experience, other principles I never truly believed. These principles, like those surrounding death, were simply words that I spouted out when asked about what I believed. It was through the harsh, real-life experience of losing a loved one I realized I did not truly believe in them. Now that I have gotten over my rage at losing my grandma, my only comfort is to know I will see her again. Being some one who forgets past ill feelings easily over time, I don't dwell on her death, but I do think of her often. Also, not being an overly emotional person, I seldom cry. However, it felt renewing to cry as I remembered my grandma as I wrote this paper. I think now I would love to go to the temple and be baptized for her. That is the best thing I could do to show my love for her. It would also give me a better chance of seeing her for a long time when I join her on the other side.

What I most look forward to is having that cherry salad bowl to dish up some Boston bibb lettuce with homemade Italian dressing and Roquefort cheese. It represents the love I had for my grandma and the hope I have to cater love for my future family as we sit around a dinner table and enjoy our lives together.