

ENGLISH: *CREATIVE WRITING*

A Hand to Hold

Concept of belonging explored in my narrative:

Significant relationships, affected by the context of an individual, can provide a sense of comfort and security beyond even their culmination, through which personal identity can be developed.

“I love my grandma lots and lots because she always plays cards with me and gives me lots of cuddles”.

I smiled at the childish scrawl on the page and at the accompanying drawing underneath it produced by my own hand many years before. Not much of an artist even then, I couldn't help but feel the simple drawing epitomised our relationship. Standing together, holding hands, my grandma and I gazed out of the page, from a garden, unconventionally drawn using a random assortment of brightly coloured crayons. There was grass up to our knees and flowers with petals as large as our oversized fingers. The smiles on our faces stretched in that absurd open-mouthed fashion only young children think is possible, but which for me suitably expressed our affection for each other.

The smile slowly slid off my face, a tear following not far behind as it finally struck home that the child in this drawing would never again hold her grandmother's hand. I vowed in that moment to remember my grandmother as my five year-old self had envisioned her - a comforter, a mentor and a friend.

Throughout my life, no matter what the occasion, I can picture my grandmother's figure in every scene, slowly shrinking over time as gravity and age caught up with her and I myself grew taller. She did not mind, claiming my height had come from her father. For a reason I still do not understand, this always frustrated my own father. My grandmother was quick to realise this and took full pleasure in exploiting the fact. It developed into almost a hobby of hers to attribute any favourable quality of mine to herself, and any flaw to my dad. She would wink at me conspiratorially during her light-hearted jibes, to include me in her fun. I loved it. I felt like the co-star of her little game, in my place by her side, reserved exclusively for me.

Scrolling further back through my memories, I can remember her supportive presence at all my various sporting championships. I now realise what I never could have known in the naivety of my youth and, at the time, simply took for granted. The confidence her encouragement and belief brought, gave me the strength to achieve success, in my determination to make her proud of me. A fiercely competitive woman, she always told me jokingly that if I entered a competition of any kind, it was my duty as her granddaughter to win. Anything less and I momentarily became my father's daughter instead – at least until my next victory when she could claim me as her own once more.

Even as her health began the slow, steady decline that comes with aging, she remained the sole constant in my life. Despite worsening hearing, she never missed a single piano recital, so ecstatic she was to see me, her granddaughter, on stage. She told me that music had helped her through trying times during her life, and hoped that my talent, inherited from her, of course, would do the same for me. She told me that I could play as well as Beethoven himself, only with a cuter smile and far superior relatives.

The day eventually came when my grandmother was forced to leave her two bedroom apartment on Musgrave St with its harbour views and move into a far more cheaply furnished 'retirement home'. Her physical state was rapidly deteriorating, making the challenge to care for herself

unmanageable, a fact that she fought with a vengeance, something I see as a true testament to her strong character.

Her time at the nursing home was short. She did not fit in amongst the other “potatoes,” as she called them, quickly tiring of the same looped conversations with those who were capable of forming recognisable words. The lack of mental stimulation quickly wore down her resolve, and left her frail. On one of my last visits to her, the odour of disinfectant failed to conceal the building’s underlying reek of decay, and I was left feeling physically ill at seeing her in such a reduced state. Not even my grandmother, the strong, assertive woman that I had looked up to my whole life for inspiration, could escape the uncompromising claws of death.

Just like so many others throughout my life that have come and gone, leaving behind their own individual imprint of ideas and values, so too now has my grandmother. And whilst the trace my grandmother has left behind is etched far more deeply than any of those whom have passed before her, I realise now, staring down at the stick-figured woman in my hand, that although the security and comfort of her physical presence is no longer accessible, her passing is something that should not be resented, but embraced. After all, what is death but just another part of life, and how lucky am I to have spent what time I have with such a remarkable woman?

Just as the colours in my drawing have not faded over time, neither will my love for my grandmother.

It seems to me that brightness can be found in the most unlikely of places, and if I ever want to find my grandmother, all I have to do was visit the unconventional garden of my memories.