

Bumps

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I don't really remember my grandpa dying. I remember my mom missing Easter to go to Florida when I was six years old. I remember my dad forgetting to set the Easter baskets out before my brother and I woke up. But I don't remember anyone telling me that he passed.

A year later, my mom stuck my older brother and me in the back of her Toyota mini van and we drove to Clearwater, Florida where we stayed in an old wooden hotel. The hotel was huge, painted bright white, and sat right on the edge of a bay. A long, flat Florida road stretched in front of the hotel, so people could walk along the water. There was a restaurant and a bar on the lower floor of the hotel that now reminds me of Dirty Dancing. It felt like a place someone might spend all summer learning to dance and falling in love.

My grandmother left her apartment to stay with us at the hotel. She left it for good actually. She stood in the doorway one last time with a white, lace-trimmed hankie in her hand, her lips drawn tightly together. We packed up the last few things that didn't make it in the moving van (a jade duck, a glass candy bowl, a painting of an Asian garden). Just after he died, we scattered my grandpa's ashes into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Now all she had left of him were photographs and an old Navy raincoat.

The road back to Alabama was bumpy. The interstate rose and fell like the ocean where we had thrown the ashes into the water. It was a homecoming for everyone but my grandma. The only people she knew in Alabama were my mom, my dad, my brother, and

me. I didn't know it then, but every bump on the road between Clearwater, Florida and Birmingham, Alabama shook something in her head. Something that reminded her of the loss of my grandpa. If only I had known about the bumps. I could have held her still.

My brother and I often rode our bikes to our grandma's apartment and did a secret knock on the door. She slowly came to the door, opened it, and kissed both our foreheads. Her White Shoulders perfume tickled our noses as she insisted we take candy from the glass bowl. After sitting back in her beige recliner, she asked us how school was, how Dad was, how the dog was, and finally how Mom was. Even as a child, I noticed the unevenness in my grandma's voice when she talked about my mom. She was irrationally scared that something would happen to my mother, just like something happened to my grandpa. Her anxiety took over. She was a puppet controlled by medications with scary names.

As time progressed, she became anxious all the time, constantly craning her neck to check all of her surroundings. When we went out to eat, she would angrily ask the waiter where our food was only five minutes after we ordered. My brother and I, with our teenage insecurities, were embarrassed of her and stayed at home. My mom had to deal with both her children's immature feelings and her mother's irrational actions. The bumps began to unsettle my family, too.

A few years later, we spent another spring break at the Gulf of Mexico. I remember sitting on the couch in the rented beach house, just me and my grandma. She told me stories of my mom and my uncles; she laughed and carried on like she was 20 years younger. I got a glimpse of the vibrant, loving mother who raised four children on a

tight budget by secretly adding powdered milk to their milk jug and by sewing my mother's wedding dress herself. Being on that unbroken Florida land mended her mind. She was near my grandpa, away from the jarring hills of Alabama.

Even before the cancer took her with one last giant bump with one last giant bump, my grandma was gone, lost somewhere inside her mind. We all loved and missed my grandma, but my mom said that grandma had left a long time ago. She must have gone back to Florida where the roads are flat and smooth.