

My grandmother's **HANDS,** my grandmother's **EYES**

A. S. Compton

She has the sweetest smile that speaks the words she can no longer say. Whenever I greet her she exclaims a delighted “ooh!” and touches my arm as I hug her.

She sits, but I don't think she watches. She speaks, but does not finish her thought. When our eyes meet she has something to say, but the words do not fit together. She is always happy to

see me, but she has not spoken my name in

a few years. My grandmother has Alzheimer's disease. My grandfather has early dementia.

There was a time when she was the best friend a little girl could have. She sewed doll clothes and painted wooden horses my grandfather had carved, and remembered what was happening in my life. They took me on exciting trips—to the ice cream store, a restaurant, or a play. My grandparents never missed a choir performance, church play, or school production in which any of their grandchildren took part.

We enjoy the sunshine on the patio in front of her nursing home. I have been searching for pieces of her that have been passed down to me. We share long slender fingers and distinctly wide fingernails. She gave me my hands that love to sew. She has a wedding band now wire-thin from 60 years of wear. I hold the hands that made my doll clothes and painted pictures, as she

now fidgets; her fingers repeatedly brush my own diamond, barely

two years old. Sitting with us, my grandfather tells the same story he told ten minutes ago. She watches him, smiling sweetly.

It is easy to come to God in frustration through this time. My grandparents served him faithfully; how can he let this happen to them? They are precious people to so many; why does God have to hurt us with their slow deterioration? It is a tragic way to bid farewell as they slowly forget us and each other but as they gradually leave us, I continue to learn from them, and I have found much for which I can thank them.

*As they gradually leave us,
I continue to learn from them*

My grandfather loves his wife with loyalty and care through an illness his own mind cannot grasp. He is an example of unfailing love, as a husband, a father, and a grandfather. He tells me stories and gives advice and it no longer matters that he forgets I am an adult. Pieces of him are slipping, but everything about him is genuine, and every time I visit he blesses me.

My grandmother has lost parts of her mind, but sometimes if we sing hymns or talk about God, the cloud lifts and she returns to us. She blesses me and praises God for who he is, for who I am, and for letting her see me again. She doesn't

remember my husband, or that I am a student and a writer, or any of the things I use to define me. In her childlike innocence she looks through my own designs to see just me. In those rare and beautiful moments I think she sees me with God's eyes; everything I hide behind is wiped away and I am simply her precious little girl.

God lives in my grandmother and sees the world through her eyes. I have learned it is a privilege to watch my grandparents age; it is a privilege to meet God in an Alzheimer's patient's eyes.

I have my grandmother's hands, God has her eyes. ✍



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