

Dragonfly Field

In 2013, I woke to my father shaking me awake with some of the worst news of my life. My grandfather had passed away in his sleep the night prior. For a nine year old, the thought of a loved one dying, especially my grandpa, was not something that processed right off the bat. But seeing my mother that day as she walked into the front door from filling the car with gas was a picture I will never forget. Her swollen eyes and hollow smile is the front cover of that day. The first thing I think of when thinking about the effects of my grandfather's passing. The visitation was the first time I cried. The first time it hit me that my grandpa had passed and I'd never see him again. So many things you take for granted when you have them, until the day you lose them. Years later, my mother told me she had had a dream closer to my grandfather's funeral. She said that she had been laying in bed next to my father and my grandpa had appeared next to her bed. Just standing there, staring down at her. She said that she had felt safe in his presence and that he spoke to her and had told her to tell my grandmother that he was alright and had found peace.

Symbolism is a powerful thing. It holds the strength to keep someone or something in loving memory forever, no matter the item, picture, or memoir. Dragonflies symbolize change, transformation, adaptability, and self-realization. For my family and I, dragonflies represent a little bit more. They are a constant reminder of my grandfather. Before he passed, my grandpa was an avid outdoorsman. He loved to hunt, fish, weld, pretty much anything that pertained to being outside in the dirt and grass. My fondest memories with him are fishing by the pond, a rod in my tiny fingers while he holds me up so I don't fall into the water, dragonflies zipping around my face as my cheeks become wind whipped. I look at dragonflies now and can only think of the collection of trucker hats and pocket knives my brother now has that once belonged to our

grandfather. I think of the hundreds of flannel button up shirts stored in his closet, one for each day of the year. I think of an old pickup truck parked in the garage, the leather smelling of cigarette smoke, a comfort smell to me now. The simple things in life that look so small and become so big once they are taken for granted. Now, we look at dragonflies and we gravitate towards them. We buy dragonfly jewelry, dragonfly paintings, dragonfly picture books, and some of us plan to get dragonfly tattoos in the future. Dragonflies have become the symbolism of our family. Something we think about almost every day just by looking at something in our homes or on our bodies. We have created something to help us think about my grandfather wherever we are, no matter what we are doing. I have found myself on multiple occasions being completely distracted by simply seeing a dragonfly zip by and watching it fly away.

My grandmother is a spitfire. You will never meet a more independent, strong-willed, active woman in your life. She's also the kind of woman to have a bucket list, and on my grandma's bucket list was the adventure of riding in a hot air balloon. In a field near Brookfield they have a Balloon Derby every August where they lift a bunch of hot air balloons into the sky. I don't know how the woman did it, but my grandmother happened to get herself a spot in one of those balloons. Before we knew it, the day was upon us and it was time for my grandma to scratch "hot air balloon ride" off her bucket list. The whole family was there to see it, nervous but very excited. It was a stressful day. The wind was picking up and, by the looks of it, the balloons weren't going to take off that evening because of it. Everyone was disappointed and upset for my grandma, thinking she wouldn't get to ride in the hot air balloon that night. But then, the wind stopped, the weather cleared and the announcement was made. The balloons would fly this afternoon. I stood by my mother and watched as my grandmother stepped into the basket, standing next to a man controlling the balloon. We both told her to be safe, and with a

silent prayer, they let go of the ropes and off they went into the sky. I remember me and my mom standing there, watching the balloon get smaller as it got closer to the clouds. And I remember being the first to look away. The first to look at the field around us. At the tall grasses growing around our ankles and shins. I elbowed my mother, getting her attention to look at the vision buzzing about in front of our eyes. She looked at me, confused, but I just pointed. I motioned towards the open field, and my mother went quiet. There were dozens of dragonflies the size of my palm darting around the grasses as me and my mother stood there. And we watched them as my grandmother scratched “hot air balloon ride” off her bucket list.

I go back every year to the Balloon Derby with my family, thinking I will see the same dragonflies buzzing around the tall grasses and dandelions sprinkled throughout the field. But I never do. They were there for that one day and never again. Religion is something you can’t see, therefore a hard concept to grasp. But I don’t believe those dragonflies being there was a coincidence, and I can only imagine the smile on my grandpa’s face as he watched my grandmother fly into the air in a hot air balloon.