

Sometimes it's hard to find the words for my grandma. She was bigger than words. She outlived words. Some people move through life in a straight line, not just what they do, but how they feel while they do it. My grandma covered so much distance. Geographically. Intellectually. Emotionally.

She thought about things a lot. And from many perspectives. Not other people's necessarily, but from differences inside herself. She had highs and lows, some imposed or offered by outside circumstances, but most from an internal dynamism: a complicated rhythm of joy and sorrow, bravery and fear, energy and emotion.

She was well traveled and not just because she grew up in Ohio, studied in Oregon, matured in San Francisco, burned bright in New York, loved the Southwest, and found her peace, her place, and her family in Jamaica Plain.

I knew her best for her final act when she learned how to die in Seattle. We spent a year together in her daughter's home, and then I visited her most days for the ten months she spent in the last home she'd live in. When she first arrived in Seattle she was drained from the journey, nearly blind, and very confused.

We spent that first year trying to help restore her sight, and hold on to her mind and keep her strong. She bravely endured many acupuncture sessions which did bring back much of her lost vision. And she reeled in her consciousness from the far off places. And she walked and exercised everyday.

She had to give up control over lots of her life. And she didn't really enjoy that, but she proved to me in the way she thought about things, the beautiful way she expressed herself and the way she could still make decisions up until the end, that she never stopped being a strong, self-determining woman.

It is strange to talk about my grandma, because over the course of her long life, she was so many different women. What was it that connected them all? A body? A mind? A soul? The way she could turn a phrase? She spoke like a poet: approaching an idea from an odd angle with humor and a flourish. She kept up a grand vocabulary, and deployed it in unexpected ways. Even as it diminished she kept communicating with a lyricism that was finally expressed simply in the movement of her

hands.

I watched aspects of her I thought were essential fade away. All these things that defined her could be eroded by the waves of time and age, and she just seemed more herself than ever. And I'd realize I'd been thinking of her too narrowly, too shallowly. I could not say which contradicting part of her was the her, herself. But I think I know what she would've said: that she felt most herself, here in this garden in Jamaica Plain.

While we were living together, while she was still brooding often, she said to me once, "I wish I was 25 years younger." I chuckled with the smugness of youth, "why just 25? If you're wishing, go big. 25 years ago, you were still 65. Why not wish to be 65 years younger?" She said, "No, it was so hard being young. Work, kids, sex, it was too crazy back then." She said when she was separated from the madness of youth and the accompanying overwhelming responsibilities, she was able to finally be herself. She managed to have a long act in Jamaica Plain. And she thought it was the best time of her life. She loved her pyrotechnic time in New York City, but she also loved having it behind her.

In the last year of her life, I got to see her keep thinking about her life, not always brooding. Often she oozed wise humor and gratitude. Still, when she moved into her last home, at first she was very angry. She wanted to leave, she felt trapped and institutionalized, though this home was the farthest thing from any kind of institution. She felt she'd lost her last shards of self-determination. But she kept thinking about her situation. And one day she told me, "I've realized the only thing making this place miserable is me." And just like that she stopped fighting her environment, started relaxing and a great expansive peacefulness defined her final months. I was shocked. No matter how much her faculties diminished she used whatever she had to think, and think deeply about the world and her place in it.

Earlier when we were living together she asked me, "why can't I die? It's such an easy thing. What's wrong with me? Why can't I just do it?" But she lived through all the painful times when the confusion was overwhelming and unsettling and when her body ached terribly. By the end she had chosen to stop fighting to understand the world. Her pain no longer held her attention, nor did the anxiety of dementia. She was accepting things as they are and enjoying each simple joy as it came her way. She found peace in a simple breeze, and in each

breath.

I cannot explain what it was that united all the different acts of her life. I cannot say what her essential characteristics were. She was too grand, too ever changing. I am just grateful I got to know her.