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## Almost Summer

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Figure 1: *Sunset by the Sea* by Delinda Watkins

# Almost Summer

Hailey Hopkins

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Keywords: Education, Grandmother, Family, Reflection

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SOMETIMES what a person repeats in their story is what the narrative is really about.

My grandma, one of my best friends since I could remember. The person that taught me my biggest passion, baking. The person that would sit down with my sister and cousin and me, and paint our nails so that we could feel like big girls. The person that supported me with anything I did. The person that pushed me to work for my dreams and goals, no matter how many times I was frustrated with her for doing so. All my life I have heard my grandma talk about things that were out of my reach to understand, but now sitting here in front of her listening to her story, I finally understand. I had heard only bits and pieces of this story during different parts of my life, but hearing it all put together forced me to truly understand my grandma, and why she became the way she is today.

I grew up with my grandma, always going to her house and playing in the pool and always helping with gardening, so their home brings a lot of nostalgia. The kind of nostalgia that brings warmth to your entire body, the kind of nostalgia that brings a smile to your face. I have a lot of memories on the metal bench in the front yard, which is where I am coincidentally sitting while interviewing my grandma. Sitting in front of her, hearing the wind blow through the crepe myrtle tree, the hummingbirds flying near the humming bird feeder and the birds playing in the bird bath out front, I asked my grandma to tell me a story. Like the crepe myrtle tree who thrives in warmer climates, so does my grandmother, living in Southern California for most of her life. I had never realized until now, but my grandma is definitely nothing like a hummingbird, but strong and fierce in anything that she did, anything that she put her mind to. Hummingbirds are the only birds that can fly backwards, the smallest migrating bird, and also coincidentally migrate in late spring (Fun Facts About Hummingbirds). These small things make the hummingbird incredibly unique and ultimately set them apart from every other type of bird. She sat there with her bright green eyes glimmering in the almost summer but late spring heat, hesitant at first, and told me a story about how different people she met changed her life.

She started off explaining to me the dynamics of her family, most of whom I have never met because they live on the East Coast. I've always wanted to go to the East Coast to meet the family I have

only heard about in stories and seen in pictures, and to also see the sights of the East Coast. My grandma always tells the story about how she would take her kids there for the summer, and stayed in their house on the beach in Brigantine, New Jersey, a story that feels like a dream. Unfortunately, the opportunity never arose because my family is always busy with sports and other things. Nobody in her family of thirty four, except for herself and one cousin, had ever gone to college. In fact, in her words "So, education was not in my family's background. In fact, I think it was kind of looked down upon, like a negative" (George).

In my life, I don't think I could ever imagine having college being looked at as a negative. In fact, it was quite the opposite. Because my grandma went to college, she was one of my biggest supporters in the college process. From a small age, she made sure that it was engraved in my mind that I was going to go to college, and that college was the thing that would lead me to being successful in life. The college journey for my grandma was different than many, she was born into a family that didn't ever go to college, so for her, college wasn't a choice at all even though she loved school so much. My grandma even loved school so much that she graduated high school as a junior. She was only seventeen at the time because she would go to summer school every year, just so that she could have school year round. She explained to me that after expressing her feelings about wanting to go to college, it put herself on "thin ice" with her family so she moved out. After being told that she couldn't go to college despite her love for school, my grandma had several jobs before her journey through college, some of those being a cashier, dentist receptionist, a grocer, substitute, and then a banker. My grandma learned so many skills through those many jobs which had given her a lot of insight and the many experiences that she had shared with me and my siblings helped us grow and try to figure out what our lives had in store for us. This led to whether I wanted to go into medicine or work at a desk job, or whether my sister wanted to become a veterinarian or doctor or teacher. I never really realized how much an impact my grandma had on my life and decisions until now, and to me, it seems like a good thing because of how successful she has become. It's clear to me that my grandma is a smart, determined woman.

My grandma had three boys at a young age, and that made the



Figure 2: My grandma and I standing outside the Sacred Heart Church in Seattle, summer of 2019.

college process that much harder for her but didn't stop her. In the midst of the 1980's recession, my grandmother finally made the first steps to go to college. Thankfully, her job, as a dental assistant remained unaffected by the recession, which had stolen jobs from the manufacturing industry (Steffen Müller et al). She took her three boys down to the community college, and signed up for her very first college classes. Sitting on the porch of their home telling me her story, my grandma started to tear up as she told me that her husband at the time wasn't supportive at all with her dreams of going to college. That he went as far as laughing at her when she studied and throwing away her very first Dean's List certificate. It broke my heart beyond belief hearing this, because it was one of the many things from this story that had never been spoken about. It also made some recent events click into place. During my very first semester at California State University Monterey Bay, I made the Dean's List. At the time my grandma jumped for joy and nearly cried when she found out, and she had told me how proud I made her, and continued to make her. In all honesty, I did not really think that it was that big of an accomplishment since I was only barely getting my feet wet in my general requirements. Now knowing that my grandma wasn't supported at all and even got her first Dean's list certificate thrown away, made me feel grateful that she was so happy for me. It made me feel grateful that I had her and my

family as such a great support system, because many are not as lucky enough to have that like I do. It also made me realize that my grandma is such a strong person, something I was aware of before now, but listening to her story made that crystal clear

At this point, hearing my grandma start to cry, all my senses seemed heightened and I could feel the cool, yet warm Southern California breeze on my skin and the warmth of the sunshine's rays. I felt connected to my grandma even more so now, as she told me the parts of her life that were so emotionally draining, grateful that she had the courage to speak about things that she had never really told anyone. She explained to me that after she realized that her husband wasn't supporting her college dream she knew that her marriage was on thin ice. It was only a matter of time before the ice broke, which pushed her even harder so that she could support her kids.

My grandma explained to me that a couple years later, she was taking her final class to be able to transfer from the community college to California State University San Bernardino. At this time, California State University San Bernardino had just had their twenty year anniversary (History of CSUSB). It was the same year that President Ronald Reagan was in office and survived a assassination attempt (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica). Her last class happened to be a computer programming class which took place of her math requirement. Being one of two women in the class, she had to work harder than anyone there. A couple days before her final in the class, she found out that her husband was having an affair and kicked him out. I was never aware of this all, one of the many things that this interview brought to light. I immediately looked down at my grandma's hand and saw her beautiful wedding ring glistening in the California sunshine. It brought me some comfort knowing that my grandma is now happier than ever in her current marriage.

Her husband left her drowning with her own thoughts of what she could have done to avoid this all, and without a dime, leaving her to raise their children on her own and in the midst of finals. With my finals, I am already stressed beyond belief so I couldn't imagine how my grandma felt on her own with all this going on. Life went on of course, and my grandma had to finish off the class by taking the final. Already on thin ice, distracted by her thoughts of her now destroyed marriage, she knew that she was going to fail the class

and started to cry, and left the class without finishing the exam. At this point in the story I was confused on how this one class in all of her college experience was so relevant, but as the story progressed my confusion and questions were answered. After my grandmother left the class, her teacher ran after her and stopped her to see what was going on. In her words, "He said, you logged the most hours in the Hopkins 6 lab than any other student I have ever taught in my career, what's going on?" I told him what happened at home and that this was the last class I needed to transfer. He shared with me that he was also a family and marriage counselor, and told me that he couldn't even imagine how hard everything I was going through was. What are the odds of that? He told me not to worry, and that I would not fail the class as I had demonstrated never missing class and extraordinary effort in lab hours, and he would not let me fail"(George). Her professor gave her encouragement and took a chance on a young mother who was going through an incredibly hard time in her life. By believing in her, my grandma began to believe in herself which is one of the most powerful things that anyone could do. My grandma's computer programming professor was one of the people that changed her life.

This angel from above gave my grandma the courage to do what she could with what she had. She raised her three boys all on her own, and continued going to college. She finally got her Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from California State University San Bernardino, and then got accepted into Chapman University's masters program. Finishing the rest of her classes was a challenge because she had to work around her kids schedule and also had to work around her work schedule. It took her six years to get her AA and to finish her Bachelor's degree because she had so many things going on. During this time she had a job at Citizens Business Bank, which led my grandma to write her senior thesis on whether or not Citizens Business Bank should establish a government services department. In 2002, my grandma explained that her senior thesis was the key the board of directors at the bank needed in order to open that department, and they did.

Getting a master's degree helped more than my grandma could ever imagine. It gave her the opportunity to move up higher in the ranks at the bank, and gave her some credibility that was crucial in the male dominated department of finance at the bank. This

credibility led her to get more customers within the bank, and to establish trust in a scarily untrusting world. Besides that, it made my grandma happy because she was able to provide for herself and her kids without depending on anyone else, a goal of hers that she struggled with in the beginning. It never really occurred to me that finance was male dominated and that my grandma would once again have to work harder to get higher in the ranks, but the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. She explained to me that because she worked so hard for her education, she has her Master's degree hung up in her office. That it brings a surprise to males when they waltz into her office unknowingly of someone so smart.

My grandma has been a very faithful person all of her life, relying on faith to lead her in the right direction, and that's how she helped raise all of her grand kids. I am so thankful for my grandma raising us this way, because it allows me to channel my faith when times get rough. It also gave me strength and confidence in myself, which is what I imagine it did and continues to do for my grandma. When she was going through the divorce with her husband, she began going to church again with her boys, and this is where she met another angel who changed her life. She met an older woman by the name of Sister Claire, who she began confiding in. Sister Claire helped give my grandma the push she needed in order to finish her schooling, the advice she so desperately needed and also gave her the opportunity to strengthen her faith. The way that my grandma describes Sister Claire, is what I imagine an angel to look and be like. Kind, honest, selfless, smart and glowing with faith and love for God. Unfortunately, Sister Claire is not alive Hopkins 8 today, but before she passed away she started a convent in New Mexico to help people in need, which inspires my grandma to help people that she can. After hearing this part of the story I can say with confidence, that Sister Claire inspires me too. Sister Claire changed my grandmother's life.

Today, my grandmother has been with Citizens Business Bank for twenty four years and is a Sr. Vice President and manager of government services, the department she helped open. Growing up I never knew that my grandma had started a whole new department at a bank. Realistically, I didn't even know that was a thing that could be done by someone that at the time, and done by someone who wasn't even at a high position in the bank. Hearing that my



grandma did that while single handily raising three boys, made me more proud of her than she could ever understand. It takes a kind of strength to do something that nobody has done before, and my grandmother seemingly did it with grace.

I grew up with my grandma, at her house every single day. You'd think that in doing so, you would get to know them like the back of your hand. After hearing my grandma's story I have learned this isn't the case. That getting to know someone only goes so far, until you hear the stories that they have to share. I am so glad to have heard my grandma's story because I feel like it created an even tighter bond between us. It allowed me to understand her in a more grown up way, something that I had never gotten because I didn't even know the right questions to ask.

My grandma's advice seems unique and unlike anyone else's that I've heard, because of her unique experiences. Advice and experiences unique, almost like a hummingbird. I had always valued my grandma and all of the advice and wisdom she had to offer, and my family did as well. We even went as far to call my grandma the "fountain of knowledge." This nickname was said sarcastically one day and just stuck. Having this conversation with her made me value the advice given ten times more, and I am so proud to have this woman as my grandmother. If it were not for her computer programming teacher or Sister Claire, my grandma would not be where she is today and wouldn't have this powerful and inspiring story to share.

## Author Bio

Hailey Hopkins is a student at CSUMB. This essay was written as part of a first-year composition course.

## Artist's Statement

### *Sunset by the Sea* by Delinda Watkins

*Sunset by The Sea* is a depiction of the California coastal views along Highway 1. The Bixby Bridge, a landmark of Big Sur can be seen in far-left corner – showcasing the beauty of the Central Coast.

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