

# In the Ords: CSUMB Literary Arts Journal

---

Volume 5  
Issue 1 *Fall 2021*

Article 11

---

12-2021

## Like Always

Elizabeth Wiles  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/ords>

---

### Recommended Citation

Wiles, Elizabeth (2021) "Like Always," *In the Ords: CSUMB Literary Arts Journal*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/ords/vol5/iss1/11>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in *In the Ords: CSUMB Literary Arts Journal* by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csumb.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csumb.edu).

# Like Always

*ELIZABETH WILES*

**My grandfather is 90 years old today.** We are throwing a big party at the golf club. The theme is “country,” and everyone arrives in bandanas, flannels, and cowboy boots. My grandparents are rather popular within their senior circle, so there is a great turnout. Papa greets everyone by their first name. He hugs and takes pictures with funny looks on his face. He makes all of his jokes and, like always, manages to be the brightest in the room.

After Grandma, Papa asks my mother to dance. She smiles, both sets of beautiful green eyes shining brightly. The voice of Willie Nelson carries them to the dance floor, and Papa leads Mom in a Two Step. They laugh and Papa spins his youngest daughter, both grinning toward me as I lift up my camera. When the party starts to die down and everyone has filtered out of the country club, Papa follows them out to the parking lot and, like always, waves them goodbye as they drive away.

**I am 17 years old today.** We have a family dinner planned tonight to celebrate. Like always, Papa picks me up at the bus stop. His black truck is visible through the trees and much larger than he preferred. But it fits more family than his old red Frontier, and he seems to be okay with that. Papa waits outside of it, leaning against the tailgate to greet me. He makes comments to my peers as they step off, joking with them like always. They are

kind, laughing in return. I step off the bus, say hello to my grandfather, and hurry into the passenger seat as inconspicuous as I can. It is embarrassing, but I suppose that is the point.

**I am graduating from high school today.** Everyone is bustling around my grandparent's house, getting ready and charging their phones for pictures. I am wearing a dress, black lace covering golden silk. Papa is wearing a light blue button down, tucked into his jeans and the belt buckle I gave him for Christmas. But he has been sick the past few days, battling nausea and stomachache. He walks up to me, hugs me, and says he is sorry that he cannot make it. I understand. With the way he has been feeling, he would most likely miss my walk anyway. Still, my eyes water.

Papa makes a point to feel better for my graduation dinner, which takes place a couple days later. We take photos, my mother cries, and I do not realize how special this meal really is.

**I am going back home today.** I moved to Monterey for college a couple months ago, and I am just now driving to visit my mother and grandparents three hours away. It has been too long. I don't recall where the time has gone or why I have not strived to spend more back home. I am caught up in my studies, my boyfriend, and all the new things college has exposed me to.

When I arrive, I learn that Papa has been having some trouble remembering things. I learn that he is now unable to drive, the new truck sitting in the garage, large and unused. He greets me with only a small curve in his

lips. His green eyes do not shine and barely meet my own. While I was busy becoming something brighter, he began to fade away. But I am here now. While he is right next to me, I have never missed him more.

When the weekend comes to an end and it is time for me to head back to Monterey, I hug Papa goodbye. I tell him that I love him and promise to come back every other week. He asks me where I am going. I gulp, fighting the tears that tempt the lids of my green eyes. I remind him that I go to school in Monterey. I tell him I work in the college admissions office and am planning on becoming a teacher. He smiles and says that sounds like “a pretty good plan.” We walk out together and, like always, he stands in the driveway to wave me goodbye.

**Today is an ordinary day.** Months have passed and I continue to visit home almost every other weekend. I received a call a few days ago. My mother told me that Papa had fallen, and he now has to use a walker to stabilize himself. Only his ankle was hurt, and I am relieved. When I arrive, he is asleep on his recliner. I lean over, waking him to let him know I am here. He looks at me kindly, gives me a hug, and asks where I have been. I take a breath and remind him that I go to school in Monterey. I tell him I work in the college admissions office and am planning on becoming a teacher. He smiles and says that sounds like “a pretty good plan.”

When the weekend has gone by too quickly, I hug Papa goodbye. I tell him that I love him and that I will be back the following week. He nods. My mother and I walk out together. We look at each other for a moment, and then the empty space beside us. I hug her goodbye, but we do

not part. Instead, I hold onto her, letting the tears flow and sob into my mother's shoulder. She holds the back of my head, crying too.

**My grandfather is 95 years old today.** I have driven from Monterey to visit almost every weekend. On the way and every time, I worry that I will arrive and Papa will not know my name. I worry that he will not know my face that I have made a point to display pictures of on the coffee table near his recliner. I worry that I will break down, begging him to get better when he does not even remember that he is sick. But when I arrive, I wake him to say hello. He looks up kindly and, like always, smiles back at me.

The family comes to my grandparent's house. We celebrate 95 years of the greatest man in the world and, for the first time in a long while, his green eyes shine. Later that evening, I walk into the living room. Papa is sitting on his recliner, hooked up to oxygen and sleeping. I halt. My mom tells me he is fine and just uses it before going to bed. But amongst the ticks of the meter and rough inhales of the oxygen canteen, I think back to Papa's 90th birthday. I think back to him laughing and dancing with my mother. I think back to him picking me up at the bus stop, and how I would give everything I had for him to embarrass me just one more time. I think back to my high school graduation, the empty seat next to Grandma, and how it will most likely remain empty at my bachelor's commencement. Papa is not fine. I am not fine. I am watching him fade into nothing and into someone I do not recognize.

**Today is an ordinary day.** I am packing to go visit my

mother and grandparents. I worry that, when I arrive, Papa will not know who I am. I worry he will not recognize me the way I struggle to match him to the photo I took at his 90th birthday. I worry he will not be around to take another with my diploma and I, and that he will not make jokes to my college friends after the ceremony. Still, I continue to visit almost every other weekend. I still say hello to Papa and remind him where I live now. I still hug him goodbye and, like always, he smiles back at me. I still walk out with my mother, and we still cry sometimes. I still know that, even though Papa does not shine as bright as he once did, he is still the greatest man in the world. I still know, and will never forget, that he loves me like he always has.

**Today is my grandparent's 75th anniversary.** I am in town. I have been for a couple days. Papa isn't doing well, and the hospice nurses estimate five days before he passes. I stare at him on the hospital bed in the living room, and I don't believe any of it. Papa isn't fine, but he will get through this, just like he always does.

Family members come in and out, and everyone is crying, but Grandma cries the most. She has had 75 years with the greatest man in the world, and he is slowly fading from it, leaving her alone. Of course, I tell my grandmother that she isn't alone and that I love her like I always have. I tell Papa that, too. I hold his hand and his hazy green eyes open. I smile down at him.

I am 22 years old today. It's morning time, and Papa is gone now. He lays still, and I think about how he never once forgot me. Tears burn my tired green eyes, and I lean down to place a shaky kiss on Papa's forehead.

I thank him for everything. I tell him that my college friends would have loved to meet him. I tell him it's okay that he can't make it to my bachelor's commencement. I promise to smile and make my own green eyes shine like his. But as the pain in my chest wells, as I try to say goodbye to the man who has always been there, I tell him that I love him. Always.