

Creative Writing Contest 2022
“My Good Hair Day” by Hailey MacMillen
2nd Place – Creative Non-Fiction

As I peeled my eyes open and crawled out of bed, I made my way down the old, creaky wooden stairs of my great-grandparents house. A morning at Grandpa’s meant powdered sugar donuts and a sip of coffee, if I were lucky. As a six year old this was like heaven. I opened the door of the stairs that led out to the main room to see Grandma Ruth and Grandpa Sam sipping coffee at the kitchen table. I spotted the donuts on the table right away and could almost taste the sweetness in my mouth. I pictured myself eating them and my lips and face being covered with the sugar before I had even approached the table. My donut fantasy quickly came to an end when I heard, “Go comb your hair! It looks like hell!” I looked up to see Grandpa Sam half-scowling at me. Grandma Ruth said her usual, “Now Sam!” with her lips pressed tight and eyes peeking out over her glasses at him. *Why does he always care what my hair looks like? I just woke up. What does he expect?* but I went into the bathroom anyway and tried to tame my curly mane as best as I could.

After breakfast I started to think about how every single time I went to Grandpa Sam’s house, my hair wasn’t right. Yes my hair was curly and often out of place, but how could he say that? It never changed either. Every time I saw Grandpa Sam, something was wrong with my hair. I tried to make excuses for his being crabby, because I knew my great-grandpa was like a cantaloupe, hard on the outside but soft on the inside. Many people would classify him as a grump or rude; however, I knew that he had another side to him. He was very strict, but only to see the best in people. He was also opinionated, and I never blamed him. I told myself that that was how he was raised. Grandma said he worked in a factory with all men and his attitude

reflected that. I never really knew what she meant by that, but maybe that was why he said mean things about my hair. Maybe he was so sick of being in a wheelchair that it made him complain about everything. Or maybe he wanted to run around like me. I bet he missed running around. As long as I remember, Grandpa Sam couldn't walk. Mom told me he had a thing called Multiple Sclerosis that made it hard to move his legs. That was a really big word and I figured it had to be something bad. I hated Multiple Sclerosis. That sickness made Grandpa Sam crabby and it probably made him not like my hair.

At age twelve, for the first time, walking into my great-grandparents house was not the warm welcoming feeling that I had gotten every other time I visited. The house was packed with almost all of my family members, but I was not excited to see them. We were saying our goodbyes. It was time for Grandpa Sam to let go and be free of his pain from the disease he had been suffering from for almost 20 years. As I walked into the family room that had been taken over by a hospital bed, monitors, and multiple tubes that looked like thousands of snakes fighting for their prey, I couldn't move. Did I really have to say goodbye to Grandpa Sam? *He looks so thin and weak; it looks like life has been sucked from his face. I can't do this.* I looked up at my mom who then gave me a reassuring look, tried swallowing past the newly formed lump in my throat, and walked towards his bed. I took his frail hand in my own and looked into his sad, helpless eyes and said, "Hi Grandpa" in a sweet, soft voice. He looked at me and said, "Your hair looks beautiful," then rested his eyes in exhaustion. The lump in my throat was there more prominent than ever. It felt like I had just swollen a golf ball and there was nothing I could do to move it. My eyes swelled and tears flooded my face and I looked up at my mom who was also crying.

Neither Mom nor I could form sentences. The only thing we could do is cry. Eventually we gained the strength to walk away from Grandpa Sam's bedside to talk to my great-grandma. I told her what he had said about my hair and she shed a tear as she said, "Well, by golly, he hasn't spoken in I don't even know how long. It has got to be a month by now!" At that point I realized how much it meant for grandpa Sam to tell me that my hair looked beautiful. Not only that, but it made me reflect on the many times he said my hair looked like hell. All of the family members that had once filled the tiny old house had slowly trickled out, so my mom and I said our goodbyes and left the house to go back home with tears in our eyes.

On the car ride back with my mom, I could not stop thinking about why he said my hair looked beautiful just this one time.

"Mom, I don't even know what to think. Can you believe he told me my hair looked beautiful?" I finally asked breaking the silence.

"That's pretty special, Hail. I think he knew he had to tell you before he passed. I bet that meant a lot to him," my mom replied still appalled by the situation.

"But why did he always say that he didn't like it before?"

"Your great-grandpa has always been a confusing man. He never meant to hurt your feelings. He loves you very much and wants the best for you." I had no words, so I just kept silent. The rest of the ride home was quiet and I just thought about what had happened with Grandpa Sam. I knew that he only said those things because he wanted me to appear my best. That moment would not be nearly so special if he had always told me my hair looked beautiful. All of the excuses for his behavior were not simply because he was family, but because deep down I knew that he was like a hard-shelled fruit and I loved fruit.