

## Candidate 2 evidence

### The Ruby Jubilee

#### Wedding Day:

Any photographs of my grandma and grandad together are stiff. After forty years of marriage I can only place a handful in my palm. The photo taken from their wedding is the largest; a suit and a white dress in a photography studio, their faces rigid as they look off into the distance towards the same point, as ordered by the photographer. Towards their future. The black and white photograph is aged, the contrast in the tones has faded into an almost singular grey; like two little tin men sitting rigid beside each other, with no sense of heartbeat underneath their wedding get-ups.

Growing up, my exposure to relationships was limited. My parents were separated, my auntie and uncle lived abroad, and the only real relationship I saw on a daily basis were my grandma and grandad. Except theirs wasn't a real relationship. Arranged marriage, certainly in its fundamentals is only a façade of love. Marriage based upon efficiency of and comfort of two families has slowly faded out of tradition and norm – does that mean that I will be happier? Or does an unhealthy choice make you more upset over time; the idea that you caused harm to yourself and it wasn't someone else's doing. Because then all the blame rests on your own shoulders.

#### 10 years: TIN

Tin does not rust. It does not wear down.

Does that matter, is that significant, if something was broken in the first place?

Flicking through old photos of carefully stacked in a little tin box, I am reminded that they once too, were in love – albeit not with each other. A black and white photo of my grandma at a university dance, dancing the polka with a man in a shabby looking suit, his hair slightly messy, his profile arguably unattractive to say the least and yet – at times my auntie or my mum will lightly tease my grandma about him, but there is nothing light about the way she becomes shy and her eyes light up with a kind of childish glint like a 14 year old girl with a high school crush. She laughs, and that's that.

I wonder – are we always searching for that one right person, or is everyone at one point the right person to us, just with time affection wears away like cliffs crumbling apart after years by the sea? Would that childish glint have stayed, had they gotten married, had children, had spent 40 years together?

Another black and white photograph – it's small, a candid of a woman who is standing smiling to the camera. This woman to me exists only in this photograph – I have never known of her before. On the other side of the photograph is a message written in messy handwriting and blue pen – a silly two sentence poem on love – and '*forever your sweetheart, Helena*'. Dedicated to my granddad. The photograph isn't any dirty secret, it's not hidden in my

granddad's wallet nor journal, it just exists. On the pile of photographs, I've seen it, my mum has seen it, my grandma's seen it – and had to accept that she was never the one. Just like my granddad had to accept the same thing. He is a more reserved person, so we don't tease or question him about the photograph – in any way, it seems to me too tender and painful to probe at. Insensitive.

Ten years into a marriage, I wonder if the figures in the photographs still seemed real to them both, like a kind of unreachable dream and better reality, if their memories were of colourful dresses; greens and pinks and blues or had they receded into the black and white image of a photograph?

Maybe there was a reason the photographs weren't thrown out. In some sense it seems to be almost traditional, to get rid of your old lover when you find a new one, yet unlike the traditionalist marriages of Communist and heavily Catholic Poland this tradition didn't seem to be heavily present in their household.

#### 20 years: CHINA

The ideals behind a marriage borne out of the efficiency of two families shatter like fine china under twenty years of pressure. Everything is fragile and in all the wrong ways. The porcelain lays in pieces, big shards and smaller ones scattered across the room. Two children, in whom every crash is engrained a lot deeper than is thought of at the time, the predator and the prey, the families behind it, the church behind it, the neighbours with glazed over eyes they all are fragile; the whole situation is fragile. When the bowl lays shattered across the room it rests peacefully on the cold floor.

And still persistent hands keep moving them, keep picking them up and gluing them back together into a bowl they know will shatter again sooner or later.

How fragile and delicate, and beautiful, like the finest china the nature of love can be.

#### 30 years: PEARLS

Somewhere along the way, my sister and I were born. The presence of grandchildren seemed to soften my grandfather around the edges, or maybe it was a matter of age, since the presence of his own children did not do anything to stir his meeker side. Regardless, my early childhood was composed of evenings with the stench of alcohol in the air, doors slamming shut and loud arguments, which came out as dim as they travelled through the layers of walls put between us and him. The violence itself had dissipated, both from his hands and seemingly from the mind of my grandma.

Whilst pearls are a symbol of hidden beauty inside, matured over time, sheltered by the shell of a dull oyster the world itself had tumbled upside down on its axis, or maybe that's just how the world was, because the thing my grandma kept closed off in a dainty, shiny trinket was the ugliness within. Like pearls form year by year, layer by layer into a beautiful miracle of

nature so each act of violence, each argument, each Sunday outing and family gathering formed another layer over their two figures. . The presence of the Catholic Church and the unforgiving society it had built around itself. The old Polish mentality, which still lingers around the prospects of love in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the biblical devotion which seemed to place divorce as a greater evil than any sin mentioned in the Ten Commandments. All of this dripped like melted wax to harden into an unbreakable form from which neither could escape.

#### 40 years: RUBY

They like to play cards in the evening, and into the early night as well. Sometimes at 1am, when I'm going to the kitchen to get myself some water I pass by the faint sounds of cards flipping, slapping against the table, the quiet hush of light bickering under the warm glow of a lamp. My grandad is often snappy, my grandma always laughs it off. She makes him dinner, and tells him which medicine to take, and cleans their house.

She seems to be fond of him. It's like an acceptance type of love. Maybe not even a type of love, just acceptance. Affection built around the extent of time spent together, and not necessarily around moments spent together.

Last year they celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Forty years stretches out like a treacherously long road in my grandma's eyes as she mentions it in passing. More than twice the time that I've been alive for, more time than that and all of it shared with someone you despise more and more each passing day. For such a long road, does it lead to somewhere beautiful and meaningful? Or is it a dead end?

Neither gifts nor kisses nor loving words were exchanged to celebrate the ruby jubilee. Ruby, to represent the ever-present passion and love still existing after forty years spent together. Ruby for blood, and smashed glass bottles, lives lost amongst the chaos, Ruby; the colour of my grandad's skin exposed to years of drinking. Ruby; aggressive and loud.

The red of the past has dissipated in the present, the calm *after* the storm. The sky is still grey and the concrete still damp, with the presence of a looming reality that a storm has just passed but an indifference to that fact because it has already passed.

My grandma's attitude to the whole ordeal always made me sad inside. Society taught her that she was to accept her life, and still forty years later nothing has changed. Divorce, running away, fighting back; all these things were out of her reach throughout her youth and now it's too late. There's no point. She's a very straightforward person.

What's the use of complaining about a storm after it's passed?