

Candidate 4 evidence

Ebbing Away

My Granny had been a mum of four children, owned her own catering business, and then looked after Grandpa and us. She was capable and intelligent. The changes weren't noticeable at first, misplaced keys, lost glasses, double booking lunch. Minute things, things any person might do. Then slowly, but surely, things began to deteriorate. I watched helplessly as her awareness slipped away like sand falling through my fingers. I was powerless to stop it.

As a child I looked forward to my visits to Midfield Lodge with great anticipation, the prospects of a vast array of glittering, jewel-like sweets, the salty spray of the seaside, and the enticing aroma of her cooking that never failed to make my mouth water. She stood at the door with her spotty apron, arms flung wide, ready to envelop me with her comforting hug. Long hours were spent roaming the beaches nearby, collecting stray pieces of driftwood with waves frothing at my ankles, meticulously singling out intricate shells, which I would proudly present to Granny, avidly seeking her approval. My love of literature stemmed from outings to a cosy, intimate bookshop nestled in an alleyway in Edinburgh where Granny would wait patiently for me to pour over the vast assortment of books for hours and hours, allowing me to escape into new worlds. But her cooking, oh her cooking, was her passion; there was always a comforting aroma of casserole bubbling away on the stove, the scent of freshly baked cakes enshrouding the kitchen, or a warm glow surrounding her house from mellow candle lit dinners. It was this that brought our family together, laughing and joking round tables laden with enticing food.

Disorientation and confusion slowly started to seep into everyday activities, once effortless tasks became a struggle. Following a treat outing at a nearby pub, the waiter, a lanky teenager, who can't have been much older than me, expectantly held the card machine out for Granny, who obligingly entered her card. Then there was a pause. Her fingers hovered over the numbers as her muscle memory failed to kick in, her eyebrows drawn tightly together in concentration. A bewildered expression briefly crossed her face before my Aunt hastily stepped in, "Don't worry mum, I've got it". Granny apologised profusely, embarrassed and stumped at why she had failed to carry out the mundane task.

The incidents increased with frequency and humiliation; getting lost in the empty darkness with her dog, Bertie, or driving five hours for what should have been a twenty minute journey to a friend's house. It became impossible for her life to continue as it had. And so, when the house next door to us became available, the solution seemed obvious, that Granny would live there. Saying goodbye to Midfield Lodge was hard, the house held so many precious memories of Grandpa and the time they spent together, saying goodbye to the community she was part of was painful but the greatest loss was leaving her life of independence.

Visiting, Granny would always greet me in her tartan armchair by the fireplace, wrapped tightly in a knitted cardigan with a broad, affectionate smile, eyes wrinkled at the corners,

tucked snugly away in the corner of the living room. She was eager to chat, to know what was going on in my life, to make sure I was happy, and armed with snacks, we would sit and watch *The Crown*. She was isolated, far from her friends and as she struggled more and more with using her phone, the connection she had with her old life became strained. Her face lit up when I popped over, which was not nearly enough. Ashamed, I found it a chore at times, going over late at night, drained from a day of sports and school, taking her dinner. I regret the days I was short with her halted speech as she failed to grasp the details of the story she was recounting, or was impatient when she was just trying to understand what was happening in our lives. I could have acted differently, I could have spent more time with her; visiting her was a small part of my day, but it might have been the only friendly face or company she'd had during hers.

My phone screen lit up. I was engrossed in *Bridgerton*, the dying embers from the fire still glowing, radiating heat on this dusky, biting evening in late April. I tore my eyes away to glance at my phone, a message from Mum, "Come next door, everyone's here x". My heart dropped. A small part of me had expected this, Granny's mobility and speech had been worsening for weeks. It pained me to see her clarity and awareness of her condition. Friends travelled to see her and she, uncharacteristically, refused to see them. They were turned away. She was embarrassed by the situation, lying in bed (still wearing her pearls), with limited speech, unable to host, to get dressed and take care of them as she normally would. And so, as I gently pushed open the door to her bedroom, it was family that crowded around my Granny who lay shrouded in her duvet. Tears blurred my vision as I sank onto the chair beside the bed, gently clasping her slightly clammy hand in mine. Her face seemed to light up when she saw me, and shifted closer, "you'll make that chocolate cake and bring me a slice won't you?" Everyone burst into relieved laughter, as though a great tension had been lifted, and I was smiling as I brushed my tears away with my sleeve. That was my last memory of Granny.

Whilst she isn't here anymore, and I can't talk to her or ask the questions I wish I could, her outlook on life will stay with me. She believed that time should be spent doing what you enjoy, too short to spend it otherwise. Her friends were treated as family; family and friends valued over anything else. But most importantly, she taught me that caring and hosting is a gift.