

Throughout my life, I have been forced to view memory through the eyes of my loved ones. As a kindergarten student, I saw my great-grandma, grandma Gigi lose herself when she had a stroke only days before we had to say goodbye. I recently watched my grandma Marga struggle with Alzheimer's for years before she passed. I began to understand what it felt like to be forgotten. In my research, I dove into how memories work, and how our brain decides what it needs to remember for survival and what is only filling needed space.

I created a series of three paintings to represent beings fading away. I chose to paint my own siblings who have made me who I am today. Who I never want to forget me or I to forget them. When researching Alzheimer's I learned that a patient's memory is slowly lost. I chose to paint the simple portraits in black and white to show one aspect of them is already gone. I chose to spray the paintings with frosted glass, to showcase them further being lost to the mind. This medium was very unpredictable and different for each portrait. Memory is still a mystery to us and forgetting is different for everyone. No portrait is the same.

The layer of the new material is cracking and pooling in different ways. In each portrait, specific aspects of the person are more clear than the rest. As one forgets small pieces can still be found deep in their brain. A specific characteristic that they are remembered for. The fog of the layer showing one may be faded, not fully themselves, but still remembered. Until eventually the fog takes over.

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To Be Forgotten

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Once upon a time, there was a little girl. She loved summer as she knew she could visit her favorite place. She would wait and wait to count down the days until she could see it once again. But this year was different. Something was missing. Someone was missing. This year she wasn't visiting her grandparents. Just her grandpa. And when she finally was there in her grandpa's small condo with her family looking over her tiny pictures on the walls it almost, just almost felt the same. But as the time reached to say goodbye and she happily walked out the door she saw the old mailbox. Across it, she read her grandpa's name, yet directly under it words were missing, and in their place was the outline of her name. For the first time, she understood what it felt like to be forgotten.



My whole life I have been fascinated with the intangible idea of memories. I have always wondered where our precious moments went. How they could be filed away in our small brains to be later accessed. I have never understood how microscopic connections could together build a movie of our lives to be played over and over again in our dreams. The truth is, I never considered the fact that some of our moments aren't saved. Our brains must pick and choose what is and isn't stored in the filing cabinet.

It was even harder for me to understand when I learned that there isn't just a single place that holds our memories. Specific areas of the brain are used to store a variety of different memories. For example, emotional responses reside in the amygdala while memories of skills are in an entirely different region; the striatum (Greshko). Not only are memories spread throughout the brain, but there are also distinct types of memories. Memories consist of short-term memories that last no longer than hours, long-term memories that last for years, and working memory, which keeps information in our mind for a limited amount of time by repetition.

Every summer I visit Copenhagen, Denmark, to see my family. A couple of years ago, my parents had to explain that my grandma Marga wasn't her usual self. One summer night we had dinner in a small cottage restaurant near a grass field with fenced in cows and slugs all over the ground. My siblings and I



ran through the greenery and bet each other who could get closest to the largest cow. When we sat down for dinner was when I started to notice those changes. Marga did still remember who we were, her voice was the same, she looked the same, but every once in a while she would forget and speak danish. My siblings and I had never learned danish, we always fought with my dad about

how we wished we did but Marga knew that, right? There were times when it got to be worse. I remember seeing the look in her eyes and wanting so bad to explain to her why everything was so confusing. I knew I couldn't do anything to help, but I hated that look.

Marga had dementia. Dementia is a term for conditions characterized by a loss or decline in memory and other skill sets that affect a person's performance of activities. They can also affect how one behaves and their feelings or relationships. Marga specifically had Alzheimer's disease, which accounts for 60-80% of dementia cases (Alzheimer's & Dementia). For most cases like Marga, AD begins slowly. She began to have trouble remembering specifics of what is happening or what recently happened. It is concentrated in the parts of the brain, controlling thought, memory, and language. Soon she had trouble remembering names or forgetting what she was in the middle of saying. Things only got worse, she had difficulty speaking or reading and writing. Her neurons were slowly losing connections until they finally shrank and died off (Alzheimer's & Dementia).

That trip to Denmark was my last time seeing Marga. A few months later, my dad got a call that she had passed away. The idea of it was all so strange because it had felt like we had lost her forever ago. It had been a long time since I had seen the Marga I wanted to remember. I had wished there was something doctors could have done or changed to save that Marga until the very end. But there was nothing. There are currently no medicines to slow the progression of AD. There are limited approved medications to help treat the symptoms, but even those can't stop or



reverse the spread of AD and often are only valid for a few months or years (NIH). Some patients diagnosed with AD experience unexpected "mental clarity" called "paradoxical lucidity." Paradoxical

lucidity is a moment in time, usually lasting no more than several hours, where patients appear to have no symptoms of Alzheimer's (NIA). But even that isn't a cure and likely only brings more confusion to the patient and their family.



Marga wasn't the only family member I had who suddenly lost herself. When I was about three or four my great-grandma, grandma Gigi passed away. We had expected it would happen long before it did, she was 96 and had lived a full and healthy life. I remember I was the only one of my siblings who was willing to visit her in Texas. I guess at that age I never understood what was happening, I knew she was at the doctor's, but I don't think my little mind was even close to comprehending the fact that she would be gone soon. Grandma Gigi, like Marga, had trouble with her memory through her last days. She began to forget

small things. But why do we forget?

I have always wondered why some moments stick in our brains and can never be erased no matter how much we wish they did. Ronald Davis, a neurobiologist at the Scripps Research Institute in Jupiter, Fla explained, "We're inundated with so much information every day, and much of that information is turned into memories in the brain, we simply cannot deal with all of it (Sheikh)." Forgetting is arguably just as important as remembering like memory is an active mechanism in the brain to clear out unnecessary information, making room to retain new ones. Dr. Davis continued, "If the memory is really important to the organism, or to us as humans, then this attention or emotional interest will come in and

act like a judge, telling the brain, 'Keep this one, protect it (Sheikh).'" If we didn't forget, we wouldn't have the power to recall the most critical moments in our lives.

Unlike Marga, Grandma Gigi didn't have dementia; she had amnesia. Amnesia causes one to forget past memories or cause confusion about a patient's current situation. Amnesia varies in severity and is usually a result of brain trauma such as stroke, brain tumor, or another form of head injury. I asked my mom about what grandma Gigi remembered in her last moments, and she recalled, "She had the sharpest memory ever right up to the end. She had a stroke and then passed away about 10 days later. The stroke made her forget things as she was coming in and out of consciousness. She wasn't sure about time those last



days. If something had happened 50 years before she felt it may have only been a few years. She would still remember most of it, like who we were, thankfully, but she thought she was in the hospital for knee surgery and didn't realize she was on the hospice floor until we had to tell her the truth." Although she remembered me up until the end, Grandma Gigi's stroke made me lose a piece of her, and like Marga, she wasn't entirely herself when I had to let her go. We watched her life be played out and tumbled through her head until she had to let go.

Although Marga and Grandma Gigi weren't the people I knew my whole life when I lost them, I will always remember them for the people they were, before they forgot. Marga's kind voice and love for my grandpa and Grandma Gigi's poofy white hair and kindness. The truth is selfishly I hope they too remembered me for who I am in their last moments. The idea of being forgotten is terrifying but amplified

when you're forgotten by a loved one. Reflecting on their lives, I wonder what I will be remembered for what I want to be remembered for. I hope to be remembered for who I am up until the last moments. I never want to be blurred or faded or have pieces missing. I want to be remembered exactly how I remember them before they lost fragments of themselves.



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