

**Adeline S.**  
Canyon, California

*In Memory*

Mixed medium cyanotype and bookmaking

In preparation for my final project, I researched the nature of memory and why we remember things the way we do. I focused on the time in my life when my grandfather was dying of lung cancer; I was 9. This was an intense and formative but also beautiful time for my family and I. I conducted interviews with my father and aunt who were his primary caretakers during this time, and used quotes from them as well as myself in the final book and zine set that I created. During my project, I reflected on the way that memories feel like dreams when there is nothing solid to connect them to. I used Photoshop collages and cyanotype to create blurred images that, to me, look like what it feels like to look back on a memory that has started to fade away. I chose to create a book because I felt that the permanence of binding my work into a book contrasted with the impermanence of the images in an interesting way. I created a set of zines to symbolize the event that took place and the synthesized version that I remember. Including writing in my book helped me tell a non-narrative story about a specific time in my family's life. This project allowed me to reflect on a formative period of my life, as well as feel closer to my family and the stories that we share.

# The Nature Of Memory



Adeline S.

The Oxbow School

OS46

The year is 2014, I am nine years old, and my family is in the apartment of my aunt Raphaele, who had rented it from a world famous mandolin player who was in Germany with his second wife. We needed an apartment quickly because we needed a palace to take care of my grandfather who would undergo brain radiation, and my grandfather lived way out in the country, too far to drive every day. My childhood best friend's dad is a famous chef, and his family knew the mandolin player was going out of town. I didn't know any of these details until I began this project. I was too young, and my attention and awareness was in a different place. What I do remember is that the apartment had a dark kitchen and a closet filled with clothes belonging to a girl a few years older than me. I knew that my great-uncle, Grandpa's brother, whom I had never met before, was sitting on the couch next to Grandpa, and I was standing some distance away, maybe in the hallway or the doorway. This memory stands out in my mind so clearly compared to the ones which surround it. It's as if my memory is one needle in the haystack of reality. But that one needle seared into my mind, as if it was red hot. I was wearing flared blue jeans and a light blue shirt embossed with a big white peace sign in the middle. I see myself from above. I hear my great uncle talking. His voice is so similar to Grandpa's that I'm almost confused as to who is talking and who is listening. How could I have never met someone so clearly so close to him, to me? My great uncle, in what seems the most casual, and almost callous tone, asked Grandpa "where do you want to be buried?" This question slapped me awake. I knew grandpa was dying, but the question felt almost too real, and I was not ready for it. My dad remembers (but I don't) Grandpa saying he had always thought he would be buried on Cape Cod, with "mommy and daddy", but that maybe that was "past now" I have no memory of his answer, only of the starkness of the question itself. It's like I was a fly on the ceiling whose awareness had been swatted flat by the intensity of the question. Perhaps I just didn't hear. Had I just turned away to talk to my mom, or had my little

four year old cousin asked, as she did constantly, “Adeline, do you want to play?”. Attention turns on so many possibilities. And of course I know, I may never know.

In this project I am exploring the topic of memory and the ways in which remembered, forgotten and absent memories from our childhood continue to impact our lives. I have set out to explore the way that people who experienced the same event can have profoundly unique experiences and memories. This project looks at one year of my life. It was my ninth year, the year between my grandfather's diagnosis and death from lung cancer. For this project I interviewed my dad and his sister, my aunt, who were his primary caretakers. I also compare their experiences with my own.

### **Section I - My father whose name is Canyon recounted his memories as follows:**

My story begins before my dad got sick, when he was still working at Children's Fairyland in Oakland. He liked that job, his shop was organized and he had a picture of Penelope and Adeline pinned up on the wall. He was close to the people he worked with and had a purpose there. He drove his Saab and supposedly drank less, although it was later discovered that he had hidden bottles of vodka in his room off the back of the house. He spent a lot of time alone in that room and was otherwise busy with work. He would come over (to our house next door) for dinner a lot, but would usually come over a little late and leave a little early. We were living next door to my parents at this time and Adeline felt very comfortable at their house. He would read to her on the floor after dinner and I remember that although his alcoholism made him distant, he was always a good listener. It is at this point that my sister Raphaëlle and her husband Mike and their then 4 year old daughter decided to move to Canyon from Los Angeles. They got an apartment in Oakland and I began to plan how to convert the downstairs of my parents house for them to live in. I

remember the day when I was working downstairs and my dad came in to offer some advice about which drill to use on a particularly difficult issue I was having with a concrete wall. I noticed that his speech was a little slurred and he seemed to stumble. I was worried that he had been drinking. Raph and Charlotte also noticed that something was wrong but he would not admit it. Instead he was spending more and more time in his little room outside alone. After a lot of painful silences, my mom finally convinced him to let me take him to the doctor. We drove to the emergency department, and along the way he said, "It's probably cancer". I looked over at him, as we were passing "The Farm", an old homestead on the way out of town. and said "yes, that might be true". We drove the rest of the way out of the canyon and over the hill to the city. I have no memory of talking. In the ER the same doctor who had years earlier diagnosed my sister with MS, provided him with the same callous if merciful diagnosis. He said, "you probably have lung cancer from smoking your whole life. It has likely metastasized to your brain. I'm going to order an MRI to confirm and we'll do a lung biopsy. I'm admitting you to the ICU because you have some swelling in your brain" He left and my dad and I sat in the room. He cursed at nobody in particular. Later that night my mom came into the ICU room. He looked at her and said "I'm sorry, it's like your dad all over again." This was because her father had died of a brain tumor when she was a little girl. The next day I decided I had no choice but to fully include my daughter in what was going on, because my parents lived next door, and there was no way she would not become fully aware very quickly. It was a painful decision and a difficult conversation to have. I took her to play basketball and explained that Grandpa had cancer and that he might ,but he also might not. She grasped the idea completely. We cried together and I told her that we were all going to care for him together. Within the next couple days my dad was staying at the apartment that Raph and Mike had rented so that he could get to the hospital for radiation treatment. My little niece

Penelope, who was four year old, and was too young to understand what was going on, was there too. I felt thankful to have my sister there and to not be grappling with this alone. My father was borderline estranged from his family, sort of a geographical estrangement. So I was surprised when his brother, my uncle Richie, came to see him. I had only met him once before. The pain of my fathers disconnection from his family was not something new and in a weird way, my uncle coming felt good. I felt cared for. I also felt proud that he could see my dad had a good life and a good family. He saw that we were going to take care of his little brother, and that we were not the “crazy hippies living in the woods” that he thought we were. One morning my sister and I walked through the neighborhood to find donuts. Our family has always shared a ritual of finding donuts to dip in coffee when we are away from home. The world felt surreal to me at this time. I wondered how everything could just continue while my father was dying. Before he got sick we lived in two houses up a long dirt trail in the woods. Once he got sick we built a road so that we could drive him home, and I took a leave from work to care for him. During the day my mother and sister would take care of him, with the girls hanging out together there after school. At night I would come down to his house and stay up with him all night so that they could sleep. He gradually grew more confused. One day when he got dressed and tried to walk out the front door and up to our house, I had to pick him up and carry him back inside. It was like lifting my own child. It went on like this for months, as his body continued to waste away. He and I would sit, often in silence, sometimes making small talk, which was all he could manage at that point. We would watch television shows together and talk in circles about football, which he could barely understand. Toward the end he began to refer to me by his older brother's name. One night he and I stood in the darkness of their little living room, he was confused and was shining a flashlight into the corners trying to figure out where he was. He could barely stand on his spindly legs. Something

triggered him, I still don't know what, and he broke down sobbing, crying out for his little sister. Crying that he had abandoned her. In all my life I had never seen such an outpouring from him. I tried to be strong and hugged him, but inside I was quite shaken, and sort of quickly got him to bed. I flopped down into a chair in the dark and I sobbed too. I was overwhelmed with the sense that if there were people in this world who I loved, I had to tell them without delay. On the night he died my wife materialized moments after he passed. I asked how she knew to come down to their house, and she said, "I knew because it started raining"

## **Section II - My Aunt, Raphaelle recounted as follows:**

I moved to the bay area from LA in July or August. I couldn't tell you the exact date. Mike, Penelope and I were living with my parents in the same house and there were a couple days when it was clear that someone was throwing up in the bathroom, it was clear to me that something was off. I told my brother that something was wrong with our dad and we thought that maybe he had a stroke. Canyon took him to the hospital and he was diagnosed with lung cancer that night. I had only been there for a couple of weeks and the way time moved felt very strange. It was a very fast and traumatic diagnosis. I stayed with my mom that night and fell asleep in her bed. Later I went to the hospital with Canyon before we knew what was totally going on. We thought it was a stroke. I feel like I undermined my dad's fear and it still makes me sick to my stomach to think about it. Time was moving so strangely and my dad was so sad because he was aware of the fact that he was dying. When he was in the hospital I got into bed with him and showed him pictures on my phone of Adeline and Penelope. He said how beautiful they were and I fell asleep next to him. It was just so sad, it felt like my heart was breaking. We could not get him up the trail so there were a couple days where we stayed at a family friend's house in Canyon. He would get up and try to

escape, so I resorted to chasing him down the road. I rented this apartment in Oakland, it was very big and dark and my mom and dad moved in so that we could take him to the hospital. Him and my mom slept in the back bedroom and Mike, Penelope and I slept in the little girls room under her bunk bed. His hair started to fall out. Canyon, Jeanne and Adeline would come over every day and Adeline would play the violin for him. I would go to the library and bring him back books to read. I asked him what he would like to do and he said he wanted to go to the beach but it was clear to all of us that he was too sick to do that. There was a night when I ordered a huge amount of Chinese takeout. He was too sick to actually eat a lot, but I think it made him happy. Another time I went to Fentons Creamery and got him a sunday. He sat eating it at the kitchen table. We lived in that apartment for four months. My uncle Richy came, and that was very strange and stressful for me. He described to dad what it is like to die and they talked about their past. Richy came to Canyon and wanted to see my dad's room. He seemed horrified about how dysfunctional it was but I couldn't stop him from seeing it. Later my dad said I shouldn't have taken him out there, I don't know how I could have stopped it. I called my boyfriend from highschool, I told him my dad was dying and he wanted to come and see him. Donny (grandpa) , and our family in general, is very private so I told him not to come. I still feel bad about it. Reading our emails later it is clear to me that Donny was like a father to that boyfriend, but it was clear to all of us that dad only wanted his family around. Together dad and I looked up places in New England (where he was from) and talked about the places where he had been happy.

We had to build a road up to our house because otherwise he would not have been able to make it up the trail. Once we got him home he started to decline very quickly. We worked in eight hour shifts caring for him. I remember specifically Adeline sitting at the dining room table and my brother yelling at her to finish her homework. It felt strange to me that she was just supposed to



keep doing homework as her grandfather sat dying in the corner. We were all there together a lot of the time in that house. The girls would sit on the floor and play together. I bought a lot of food and we got that hospice bed and put it in the computer room. That room is Penelope's bedroom now. During the day he would often fall asleep and wake up again confused and asking why I was there with him and not at work. I didn't want to tell him that it was because he was dying. Having the hospice nurses there scared me. I felt like they were going to see something wrong with the way that we were living. My dad was also afraid of them, he thought they were going to take him away or hurt him in some way. I was trying to get unemployment for my mom but it was impossible because our house does not have a real address. One of the hospice nurses told me that once he stopped being able to drink he would have about three more days to live and this turned out to be true. On the night he died we were sleeping up the hill at my brother's hours in Adelines room. I don't remember how found out he had died, but I came down the hill and slept with my mom. In the morning I called my oldest brother and told him he was gone, that was the first and last time I spoke to him during my fathers decline. The coroners came in black suits and were so lovely. They took his body away and left a plastic rose on the bed. It sounds so corny but when you come into the room and nobody is there it is just so strange and that rose is meaningful. I keep it with his ashes. I do remember dipping donuts in coffee, and that a couple days later we had a Shabbat dinner with all the people we had been keeping away from for all the time that he was sick. "What does Penelope remember?" She does not remember a lot. She knows we lived in two apartments during that time but only remembers the one where she burnt her hand on the stove. She remembers sitting in bed with him. His death definitely impacted her, but I think it's good for children to be around death, even if they don't understand it. She was able to see that we all came together as a family to take care of somebody we love.

### **Section III - My Account**

I don't remember my dad telling me grandpa was sick. I remember the little apartment that my aunt Raph rented when they first moved to Oakland. I remember Penelope fell and scraped her nose on the driveway. I remember that Raph would help me do my homework at the kitchen table and there was one night when we sat on the floor watching "Say Yes to the Dress" late at night waiting for my dad to bring him back from the hospital. I remember feeling very aware of the way that Penelope did not understand what was going on. That her mind simply was not ready to grasp a concept like death. She was just too little. I remember the last time he ever read to us. We were sitting on the floor. He never read the words on the page, he would just make up a better story. I remember whenever I slept over at his house he would put chocolate under my pillow. I remember coming home from school on days when Raph was taking care of him. We would watch Grandpa's mystery television shows and eat boxes of mac & cheese. My mom bought us a box of animal crackers and a case of chocolate milk to wash it down and to give us a little treat. This would have been unheard of before grandpa was sick. And I knew that my homemade granola making organic mom was doing it to help us get through the very tough time. There was a school assignment where we were asked what we would do if we won the lottery, and I said I would start scrapbooking. Raph thought this was funny, and now I can see that she was right to laugh. I remember feeling very aware of the difference between myself and Penelope. We were both kids, but I understood that he was dying and she did not. There can be no bigger divide in perception. There was a children's book that explained death and we read it to Penelope, but she didn't make the connection with grandpa. It was called "everything dies" and was a picture book with trees and animals. My dad would go down every night and sit with him so that my grandma and aunt could

sleep. If I could stay awake until I heard him leave, my mom would let me get up again and watch the show “*H2O just add water*” until I fell asleep on the couch. On the morning he died I watched with Penelope from the upstairs window of my house as the white undertaker van pulled into the driveway. They went into the house and took him away. I didn’t know what was happening. I remember wanting to leave that room where we kids were alone and I was watching this through the window. I remember that I was looking at it all through the woods. I could not stop watching. I wanted to be there with my family, and they were not keeping it from me, as much as maybe from Penelope. I wasn't allowed to take Penelope down the spiral staircase because she was too little and I couldn't carry her. When I did get there later, I saw that the undertaker had left a plastic rose in the room where he died.

I remember the next day at school the boy I had a crush on told me he was sorry my grandpa was gone. It meant something that he said. Nobody else said anything. I imagine now that his mom told him to say that, but at the time it felt good.

In this project I have tried to organize and integrate my memories into some kind of coherent “story”. In doing so I have come to realize that there is not one story at all. Not only are there different stories from each of my family members but there is also my story as a child, which is now mixing with a developing broader perspective as I enter adulthood. I now know that my own memories of this time, while valid as to how I felt, were those of a child who could not fully grasp everything I was seeing. My grandparents are centrally important to me. I was raised so close to them that in many ways they served as second parents. So while my memories from this time feel very dreamlike, floating without a linear thread to link them, I hold them very dear because they are now all I have left of my grandfather. I wonder if what I do remember feels more clear because it has intense emotion connected to it, or perhaps that makes it all less clear. I often return

to the image of being in that upper room. Of my looking back and forth between the window, seeing the white van, then the man carrying his body down the hill and to Penelope, sitting there on the couch drawing. How I knew then that I did know that he had died, and that she really could not understand it. And I remember standing in the kitchen with my grandpa. He gave me a glass of milk with sugar in it. It was an unspoken treat we shared. In *The Forgotten Childhood: Why Early Memories Fade*, by Jon Hamiklton it is stated by Carole Peterson from Memorial University of Newfoundland. that “ some early memories are more likely than others to survive childhood amnesia”. According to her, the memories from this time that hold more intense emotion are easier to remember in greater detail. This seems to be true for me. I also learned that the way parents and family members talk about an event helps to give shape to the memory. There are things that I might remember on my own, but my dad is able to give them shape and set them in a distinct time period. Sometimes memories feel like dreams when there is nothing solid to connect them to. The process of interviewing my dad and aunt has solidified some of my own memories, and it's possible that the same thing happened for them.

My personal experience seems to resonate with the thesis of *The nature of early memory, an adaptive theory of the genesis and development of memory*. I find useful the explanation of the nature of childhood memory and how we forget and remember different things. In it, Hilary Mantel stated “ some people have tried to convince me that my early childhood memories are not authentic. Our brains, past and present coexist; they occupy, as it were, adjoining rooms, but there are some rooms we never enter. We seem to have lost the keys; but they can be retrieved”. It seems that our memories, even the ones we do not have a recollection of, might have an impact on who we become and the way that we live our lives. She goes on to say that “ hidden away in each of us is a permanent record of our past". Through the process of interviewing my family members I have

solidified and “broadened” my own memory. I have been able to create a collective memory and record of our “shared” past/present/future”

It is interesting to me how people can experience the same event so differently depending on the developmental stage that they are in. During my research I found myself deeply interested in how memory changes based on positive and negative events. I can identify several memories in my own life that feel more vivid because of the intense emotion that is connected to them, such as the one I mentioned earlier. These are the ones which feel like I am watching the events from above and not actually in the moment. My dad also shared intense feelings about that specific moment. Through this process I feel that I have gotten to know my grandfather more completely. I still wish I got to know him better. I wish he was still here to see Penelope's first middle school dance, or me graduating highschool. But there is a part of me that knows that the dreamlike memories that I do have might have been the best part of him. I got all the love and was not yet able to see the more painful aspects that make up every person's life. I know that there was a dysfunctional aspect of him. What a great thing to be a grandchild, and a grandparent. That pure simple relationships can, and for me did, exist. It would not be until years later that I would understand the addiction and the trauma that kept him alone in his room. That I would understand his alienation from his own family or why he didn't want anybody there to say goodbye. I have to reconcile my childlike dreams with this reality. So the memories that connect me to him are now bittersweet. And I think bittersweet might be what adulthood looks like. In talking to my aunt and father I have been able to create a more clear portrait of what that time in our lives was like. People are beautiful and complicated, and the way that we remember them depends so greatly on where we are in our own lives. As an artist, the way that I remember informs what I create. This project has allowed me to solidify this moment in my life, to cross examine my perspective with the

memories of others, and to create a fuller picture of the events that took place. Memories, especially in childhood, can be painful and beautiful in their vividness and in their opacity. They are the only way we connect to our pasts, and by sharing them, to the people that we love. This project has helped me do both.

## Works Cited

- Hamilton, Jon. "The Forgotten Childhood: Why Early Memories Fade." *NPR*, NPR, 8 Apr. 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2014/04/08/299189442/the-forgotten-childhood-why-early-memories-fade>.
- Howe, Mark L. "The Nature of Early Memory." *Oxford Scholarship Online*, Oxford University Press, <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195381412.001.0001/acprof-9780195381412>.
- Lindsay, D Stephen, et al. "Adults' Memories of Childhood: Affect, Knowing, and Remembering." *Memory (Hove, England)*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Jan. 2004, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15098619>.
- Steinzig , Canyon Keniv Blue Yarrow. "Interview with Canyon Steinzig ."
- Steinzig, Raphaelle Noor Yasmin, " Interview with Raphaelle Steinzig"