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11th Grade

The Unfinished Puzzle

On a warm summer afternoon, my grandma's ashes were laid to rest beneath the earth. She was finally able to be a part of the lavender sunsets she loved. It was a peaceful day as the light breeze danced around us with the addition of a couple birds singing. After we all finished singing the hymns, the pastor said his prayers, but everything was a blur that day so I could not exactly remember the contents of his prayers. The green fields of Rose Hill Park Cemetery were beautiful. But I stood with a resentful face among others dressed in black. This is basically all I remember from my grandma's funeral. Knowing that my grandma would pass away soon because of her cancer, it gave me time to prepare to say goodbye. After her passing, everyone practically slipped back into their normal lives as if she had never existed.

Filled with a multitude of emotions, I decided to apply for a summer job despite my mother's disagreement. The first couple weeks of working were rough but I eventually got used to it. Interacting with customers and dealing with my busy work life helped distract me from the pain of my grandma's passing. Summer break quickly flew by and I returned back to school. A sense of emptiness started to fill me. My life at school became a mess and my grades dropped drastically. My mom would get really mad or cry for hours watching me throw my future away. She sometimes would embrace me and sobbed as she pleaded me to return to my old self. Despite my mom's pleas, I didn't care and just let my life fall apart day by day. As the semester came to an end, my mom, most likely got tired, and gradually stopped nagging me. To no surprise, my grades that semester were terrible. That night, I tossed and turned, unable to sleep

from the waves of shame and embarrassment. To make myself feel better, I decided to drink a cup of warm milk. While I was pouring, I accidentally spilled some of the milk on my feet. The feeling of the warm milk splashing the soles of my feet was strangely comforting. Tears started streaming down my face. I slumped down on the cold tile floor and cried like a child all night long. The longing feelings for my grandma took over me, as I was engulfed with the old memories I had with her.

The moment I was born, I became inseparable with my grandma. My mom was a hardworking woman and was always tangled in a busy work life. Because of this, my grandma would take care of me most of the time. I vaguely remember hearing my grandma singing her folk songs while I looked out at the world unfolding outside in my green stroller. Sometimes, my grandma would stop as she was pushing my stroller and teach me the name of every plant growing on the sidewalk. Or sometimes, she would buy me a large cup of strawberry ice cream without my mom knowing. Unlike your ordinary Korean grandmas, my grandma really loved American food. Every week, my grandma would ask me if I wanted to go to McDonald's. I would always say yes and excitedly grabbed her hand as I dragged her towards my stroller. Before we left, I pinky promised her that I would keep it a secret from my mom. However, on the days we stayed home, she always fed me warm rice with homemade side dishes. She always taught me not to be a picky eater. When we waited for my parents to come home from work, she told me stories about her childhood instead of reading those boring children's books. I always had a hard time falling asleep. So, my grandma would pat my back gently and hum various lullabies. Despite her attempts to put me to sleep, I still could not sleep. So, she would stir a spoon of sugar into a glass of warm milk. I would drink all of it and lick off the milk mustache it left. The warm milk eased me and always put me to sleep. The splashes of warm milk on my feet

made me remember longing for my grandmother again. When I was eight years old, my grandma moved into her own home. The first few months without her were extremely depressing and difficult but she would always visit once in a while. Every time she saw me she secretly folded up money and slipped them into my hand without my mom knowing. She would also stay by my side and gently pat my back anytime I was upset. My grandma served as both a shelter and a pillar of support for me.

Last year, my grandma collapsed from terminal cancer and spent her last month in a hospital bed. I always avoided visiting her with the excuse that I was busy. But I was actually extremely scared. I was afraid that my grandma wouldn't recognize me. One day, I built up the courage and went to the hospital to see my grandma. She was very thin, curled up in pain and was barely able to look at me with her weary eyes. The strong medicine slowly erased her memory bit by bit, and now she could not recognize anyone. My grandma was lying down on the gray hospital bed facing the wall. She never noticed me kneeling next to her, bawling my eyes out, hoping that she would talk to me. That was the last time I ever saw my grandma. A few days later, I was given the news that she passed away in her sleep. I hated her at that moment. She could've held my hand one more time. She could've looked into my eyes one more time. She could've whispered my name just one more time. I was so angry at her for leaving me without saying goodbye or acknowledging me. After losing my grandma, the feeling of emptiness kept creeping up on me. The world surrounding me was still peaceful but the world inside of me had collapsed. All I wanted to do was just die. But there was nothing I could appease my resentment and sorrow.

Sometimes you realize that an answer lies in the most unexpected places. My younger brother started crying because he lost a couple pieces of his puzzle he worked hard on. He kept

on complaining about it and chased me around the house expecting me to find the pieces. It got really annoying, so I drew the missing pieces on a piece of paper and cut it out for him. The next second, my brother went back smiling and reconstructing his puzzle with the pieces I drew for him. As I watched my brother get carried away into his own world of puzzles, I realized that the missing puzzle piece was not truly lost. It was only then that I finally understood the reasoning of my grandma's silence. If, on the day I saw my grandma for the very last time, she had miraculously turned around, held my hand, and noticed me, the story with my grandma would have ended perfectly. But my grandma's silence meant that my story continued just like an unfinished puzzle. I was too young to realize my grandma's great intentions. My grandma wanted me to piece together the puzzle pieces of my life. With the time my grandma was still alive, she helped me piece together many parts of my childhood. If there were pieces that didn't seem to fit, I was able to find the right match with the kind heart of my grandma. Some days, I felt burdened by the scattered puzzle pieces, but it was my grandma's encouraging words that helped me get through them. She gave me the courage to take on challenges life threw at me, and always made sure that I was valued. The puzzle pieces of my life were all slowly coming together. I now realize that my grandma left me with the quest of finishing the unfinished puzzle of my life, hoping that any obstacles in the way would help me grow and mature. My grandma had no intentions in abandoning me, but only did this because she truly loved me.

What is the future image that God desires for me? I have asked myself the same question multiple times. Of course, it would not be the worldly success of attending a good college, getting that dream job, or being financially successful. My grandma always told me to be an honest and responsible person who is hard working. She also taught me to forgive, and be nice to others no matter what. However, the last lesson I learned before her death was to live a happy

life while challenging myself in different ways. I believe that it was all God's plan for my grandma to care for me during my childhood. God's plan is enlightening, flawless, and powerful. So, is my future already decided for me? I like to think of God's plan as an unfinished puzzle. We grow and learn by putting the pieces of life's puzzle together. In the midst of this, the puzzle of my life slowly but surely gets completed under God's overflowing love and protection. God never gave us a completed puzzle to start with. He wants us to take on challenges of life, enjoy new experiences, and live your life to the fullest. Although it can be challenging at times, I believe that God's plan is not about worldly success. It's all about faith. I firmly believe that as a Christian, God wants me to grow through positive challenges and overcome the obstacles of life without the fear of failure. We all must live our life diligently to complete our own puzzle. When all the pieces merge, creating the most beautiful picture of life, we must live it, walking the path that God paved for us. The day the puzzle of my life gets completed, I know I will be able to confidently say that I am a child who walked the steps of God and brought glory to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior.