

Dear Grandma,

You never met me, never even knew I'd exist, but I wish we could have met. I used to hate my middle name, and the way my brother would make it rhyme with my first name. It didn't matter that it was yours, and that it was my parents' way of honouring your memory.

The dead were always wonderful in life—we enhance their qualities, ignore their flaws. Perhaps it is a superstitious hangover from the days we thought a disrespected ancestor might return to haunt us. But even with this cynical knowledge in mind, both my father (your son) and my mother (who doesn't suffer from superstitious thinking) speak highly of you. You were loved, and your loss was a tragedy.

I know I take after you in some ways. My height and shape are decidedly not of my maternal line (I'm a teeny-weeny daisy among statuesque sunflowers). I wonder what else we might have had in common. I get the feeling you were more patient than I, more generous, more giving. More motherly. But that was taken advantage of, was it not? Had you set firmer boundaries, would you still be alive? But... would you be remembered with such overwhelming love, if you'd said "no", if you'd put yourself first every now and then? It's the ones who give and give and give until there is nothing left for themselves that people tend to adore. Selflessness is the pinnacle of womanly attributes. I hope you managed a little selfishness in your life, some private joys just for you.

I no longer hate my middle name. Occasionally I think of you, a person who's shaped my life in thousands of tiny ways before I was even conceived, a person I'm connected to only through genetic descent and nostalgia. I want to know your thoughts, the darkness that must have been hidden beneath the surface. Your life, sadly, was defined by the indignity inflicted upon you by others. We could have talked, in that awkward way of grandparents and grandchildren, and you would have seen your grandchildren grow up and have their own babies. I know my dad got his strong sense of family from you... if I'd met you, maybe I would feel the same. But your family, without you, succumbed to rot, and from that I got my sense of ambivalence to blood ties.

People are never exactly who they seem to be to others. Who were you, really? You're a myth, a legend, a saint, a martyr, my namesake. We humans move through time linearly, so to me you're an echo of the past, but the quantum spooks say time is unconstrained by our perceptions. I think of that, and my mind breaks a little.

I can't say I love you, because I don't know you.

But I love the concept of you. I love your echoes. Maybe that's enough?

With love, atemporarily,

S. G.

About the writer:

S. G. Larner is an Australian writer and poet, who is currently studying a Masters of Information Science. Her work has appeared in Aurealis, Apex, Tincture Journal and SQ Mag. She's not a fan of institutions, traditions or authority. You can find her at foregoreality.wordpress.com