

The farm always had a certain smell to it. It's lingered there ever since I was little. It flows through my grandparents' house, around the tractor in the garage, through my aunt and uncle's house next door, infusing the corn maze between them, and permeating the town and the brick church on the corner. It lingers at the cabin, leaching into clothing and anything else on which it could get a grip. The smell was here now—in the small building in the middle of town.

I didn't know what this building was a couple of days ago. I had been passing it all my life, but the sign's letters were worn out, vines creeping up the sides. I had never cared what it had to say; I didn't think I would ever need to. Yet, on that fateful day, I ended up in that worn-down building with only one room. The room had seemed so big when I first walked in; the only people in there were the people who had known me since my first breath, surrounded by posters filled to the brim with pictures and the urn sitting along the far wall.

Grandpa Charlie was diagnosed with stomach cancer in late 2020. One day after I had gotten home from school, I walked upstairs to find my mother huddled on the phone, her eyes red and face still dripping with tears. I didn't know the whole situation at first, but as I looked over her shoulder I saw her looking up the survival rate of stomach cancer survivors. Around 42% of people who are diagnosed with stomach cancer live over a year, 19% live over five years, and 15% live over ten years. The odds were not in his favor.

He died in June of the next year shortly after spending two weeks in the ICU; the funeral took place not too long afterward.

My family arrived there an hour before the wake started, making final touches to the gifted flowers that surrounded the walls, perfectly placing wind chimes, and having last-minute conversations about any picture that caught our attention. His love surrounded us: how much he loved fishing, that house, that dog, that hat . . . us.

Then the people started coming in, a couple at first, dripping in like scattered showers. But then as more and more people started to enter, suddenly it poured with people, flooding the entire room. I stood at the end of the line next to my mom for a little while, talking with the people making their way through the room. I didn't know more than five people coming through, but all of them had a personal story featuring Grandpa Charlie. Somehow he had made a major impact on all of their lives, leaving a little bit of himself in them. Hundreds of people passed through that room that day, all bringing with them the lingering scent I had grown up on.

My grandpa changed so many lives over the years. Meeting all the people he knew and loved made me realize that I had never known the full him, because to me he was just Grandpa. He wasn't a coworker, a friend, a cousin, a businessman, a high schooler, a brother, a partner, or a college roommate. I knew him only in terms of what he was to me until that day.

In his death, my grandpa somehow taught me more about life than all my prior years had. Grandpa knew not just to exist in some dull life, keeping to himself. But to love with an overflowing grace like a downpour of rain falling onto arid fields. Grandpa's life taught me to leave a drop of myself in the people I come across on my journeys, wherever they might take me. To live is to be someone worth remembering.

(638 words)