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WRIT 177-01

Guardian Angel

My grandfather taught me how to draw before I was even two years old. He taught me how to make paper crowns and how to build and fly my own kites. We didn't have much to say to each other, but in the silence we understood one another.

Abu was a tall and big man, 5'8 to be exact. He loved to eat everything that was placed in front of him and it showed. He had a round face and a bicycle seat for a nose. His hair had fallen with the years and the only bit left of it stood gray and curly. He always wore a neutral colored plaid shirt tucked inside some dressy long pants that fell baggy around his chubby long legs. His skin color resembled the one of those that work all day in the fields, toasted by the hot and warm sun of the Caribbean. But in reality, the only field that he worked on was the 4x5 ft. front yard of his house, where he occasionally went out to cut the grass. He was a shy man, but I could tell he loved me even though he wasn't the best at showing affection. Whenever my younger sister and I went to my grandparents house for the weekend, my grandma would open the door to receive us. Her white short hair perfectly combed back and her arms tossed up to the air as she would scream and do her happy dance. Her broad chest moving side to side while she held us in her embrace. Abu would slowly walk to the door and before he would blow a kiss on our cheeks (raspberry style) he would always say "purry, purry", which had no meaning at all, except an indirect way of telling us how much he loved us.

As my sister and I grew up, the visits became less and less frequent as we found more interesting things to do like going to the mall or movies with friends. We would still call them one or twice and tried to visit them at least once a month, and they were always present at the

important events like holidays, birthdays and graduations. They didn't have a lot of money but they always went the extra mile to make me and my sister happy however they could.

My grandfather liked to obsess over different topics depending on the different seasons. One time he wanted to be a photographer and bought the greatest cameras, when that passed he would read everything that had to do with the government and then it was everything that had to do about aliens and their existence in this world. He later started to collect things in the garage that had no use at all.

As my sister and I drifted away from them, so did my grandfather's mind from his body. He was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2012, it was still in an early stage and the degenerative stage could be postponed for a while longer with the appropriate care. With time, you could really notice the change, not only mentally but also physically.

Set on achieving my dream career as an artist, I decided to go and study animation at SCAD in 2013. This had been something that I had wanted to do for as long as I could remember. On every break I would go back to Puerto Rico and do all of the required family visits first and then the friend's ones. Abu had gotten worse, he didn't always recognize me. Most of the time my grandma would have to say: "Look the girls came to see you!" and then he would reply with a: "Aaah our babies!". But him recognizing us would only last for a couple of minutes, an hour if it was a lucky day. He started seeing things too, he would complain of seeing water on the floor and sometimes rats running around and one time the government invaded his backyard and broke the fence down. But what really broke my heart and made me realize there was no going back, was one night when we went to have dinner at Macaroni Grill. The tables were covered in paper and the waiter gave us crayons so that we could draw on them. My grandma encouraged my grandfather to draw my dad, and so he did. One second he

concentrated on drawing my dad and the next he had forgotten what he was doing and started drawing me on top of my dad's drawing. In this moment I realized how different my grandfather had become, how I would never be able to share my favorite hobby with him, a hobby that now turned into my future career. It hurt that the man who taught me the basics of everything I knew could no longer appreciate my progress or see how much I had grown. I could imagine how proud he would be of me if only he was in his right mind.

While I studied at SCAD, things started to change more and more. He was placed into a home for the elderly because it had become too difficult for my grandma to take care of him. He was a big and strong man, and she was a small woman who didn't have the strength to bathe him everyday, or put up with his aggressive episodes that he had when he felt lost and didn't know where he was. Because of this the family decided to move him to a place where he could live in better conditions and we could still visit him every day.

On a late Thursday night in May 2015, I received a call from my dad. Abu was dying and this was the last chance for me to say good bye. Without thinking I got on the next plane to Puerto Rico. That flight from Savannah to San Juan was the worst ever, my hands were sweaty and my heart was pumping fast. I didn't know what I would find when I got there, and that scared me the most.

Abu was a tall skinny man in a hospital bed. He only ate through a tube and his face was long and bony, his bicycle seat for a nose was still there. He had no hair and he wore a long white and blue coat. He opened his eyes when I reached him, but then closed them again. I stayed next to him for the whole weekend, praying to God that he would take him away so that he didn't have to keep suffering. Abu left this world, the day after I left P.R. to return to Savannah.

