

## Dropping Bombs

I squeeze my mom goodbye for probably the fifth time that day. We have caught up on as much as we could; I fill her in on finals and work while she fills me in on the lives of my step siblings. She lives in Pennsylvania, and I always hate to see her leave. Our goodbyes always seem to drag out this way, as if we are never really ready to say goodbye for real. When I was growing up, I never expected to have such a healthy relationship with my mother; I hug her one final time and tell her that we're actually leaving this time.

"You know, I grew up with an alcoholic. If you need to pick my brain, or ask any questions, give me a call." She says as a goodbye with the snap of a Tupperware lid. Her comment makes me stop in the doorway of my grandmother's kitchen. It almost feels like it is the first time I have heard the word "alcoholic" spoken in the home before. On top of that, her nonchalance catches me off guard.

"Are you sure?" I ask, surprised.

"I think it's about time we talk about his story, don't you? Just let me know."

Later that evening, I text my mom and she reassures me that she's totally fine with answering some questions. The anxiety I feel about starting a final project over from scratch is quickly overcome by the inspiration and curiosity I feel about the prospect of learning more about this person, my grandfather, who meant so much to me. Growing up, my brother and I never knew our grandfather as an alcoholic. We knew him as the man with the booming laugh, the one who never turned down a good joke, and the one with the very best hugs; never the alcoholic. But I always knew he was a fighter. When we were younger, he beat throat cancer. Because of this, it made it even harder to believe that we lost him to cancer just a few years ago.

I take a deep breath and send her the short list of questions I could come up with. Hitting the 'send' button on the email was harder than I expected it to be. Now that the opportunity was in front of me, a part of me was afraid to hear what my mom had to say. I wasn't afraid that my opinion of any of them would change-- that thought never crossed my mind. Hearing about those you love hurting and suffering are never easy stories to hear. But when it comes to life, you have to take the good with the bad and make the best of it. That was something he would have done anyway.

My first question: Did he start drinking during or after the war?

Whenever the topic turns to Vietnam or the way our soldiers were welcomed home comes up, my grandpa was always my first thought. Much like his alcoholism, the war was another topic that always seemed to be strictly off limits. Because of this, I often wondered if his drinking started because of Vietnam. Although, before he passed, the war was something that he started to talk about more freely.

Her response: His drinking definitely began *in* Vietnam. The military and the war were the beginning of his addiction. After the war was over, the soldiers coming home were unwelcome and accepted with little celebration. This combined with the demons he brought back from Vietnam hurt him too much, and he turned to alcohol.

This has always been an image that bothered me, and one I tried to forget when it came to my own family. In my head, I saw the general public at least welcoming *my* family back home with open arms. I knew this wasn't the case, but imagining the opposite is just too difficult.

My next question focuses on her. "How old were you when you first knew he was drinking?"