I Am An Adult

I once heard it said that you are not officially an adult until your last grandparent dies. I do not even remember where I heard it or who said it—maybe I read it. At the time, I thought about the absurdity of the statement—not being "officially an adult". I can vote, I am a college graduate, I can get married, have a job, have a mortgage, have multiple credit cards, be a parent, buy a car…all the things that signify adulthood. It seemed such an illogical statement because some people lose their grandparents before they reach a double digit age or may never know their grandparents at all. However, I recently learned that I was not officially an adult until my last grandparent died. With the bereavement of my grandmother came the realization that now I am an adult.

As an official adult, I realize that nothing will ever be the same again. I cannot go back to the days of Sunday dinners at Mamaw's house, with the piles of shoes at the front door, the little kids running around playing, the tv blaring with whatever sport was in season, the overlapping conversations and laughter, the time with family. Those things are gone. I cannot go back to a nap on the blue couch in Mamaw's living room or sitting on the porch swing or singing in perfect harmony while we do the dishes in the bright yellow kitchen or stopping by and eating a sandwich and having a conversation on the front porch while watching the birds eat the seed from the feeder Papaw built. The peaceful feeling of walking into the house that helped shape who you are, of knowing that your cares and concerns and worries become lighter and less significant when you step through the threshold of Mamaw's house. Those pieces of my childhood are now gone. And I am an adult.

Now I know that I am the second oldest generation in my family. My parents are the "elderly", and I am the next oldest generation. I am an adult. I help with the decisions. I am an executor of someone's estate. I am included in the medical decision making. I am an adult. My parents are the elders and I'm the second oldest generation—an adult.

As an adult, I know life goes on. I know that things change—constantly. Some changes are gradual and take place over a long stretch of time. Sometimes you don't even realize the

change is occurring until you wake up one day and think, “Oh, that’s different! When did that change?”. Or you pull out the photo albums, or scroll through last year’s photos on your phone and see how time has marched its way across faces and bodies. Then some changes are like a rug being pulled out from under you, leaving you sprawling on your behind trying to figure out what just happened and what your next move should be. The lesson I have learned is that sometimes change is a combination of the two—gradual but instantaneous. You know the change is happening because it’s a daily part of life and you can observe the changes from day to day and week to week and month to month. Even with that knowledge, one day you still find yourself breathless, sitting on the floor, trying to figure out your next move, or if you can move at all because the gradual, abrupt change has left you confused and angry and sad and hopeless. Then you have to decide if you stay down because too much has happened or if you drag yourself up and keep moving on and adjusting with the changes. The reality is, neither decision is an easy one.

Whether you pick yourself up or not, life goes on. Time keeps marching on. What used to be the Sunday dinner where everyone gathered has now become a few of us at Mom’s house. Christmas dinner had everyone gathered with their own branch of the family. It wasn’t brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins at Mamaw’s house. It was mamaws and papaws having Christmas dinner with their kids and grandkids and great grandkids at their own houses.

Life goes on, time keeps moving, and I am an adult who still has her grandmother’s number in her phone; I can’t bring myself to delete it. It has her picture from her birthday, sitting at the kitchen table, smiling. I called the number the other day just to see if anyone answered. I’m not sure what I would have done if they had, but no one answered. I heard the tone and the automated voice that said, “This number has been disconnected”. I guess I was just hoping—wishing—I could hear her voice again, to have some part of her back.

I pulled in the driveway of her house one evening last summer. More than anything, I wanted to ring the doorbell and walk into the house, but I knew the door would not be opened

for me. She wasn't sitting in her recliner watching the birds in the bird feeder. The outside of the house looked the same. The chairs on the porch, the sign beside the door. The cherry tree in Mamaw's yard continued to grow—a small twig of growth out of a dead stump. The lilacs continued to grow and perfume the air. The roses grew and bloomed. All proof that life goes on. Not that I actually needed that proof, but it was still there.

I think the most difficult thing to grasp is that I thought I was paying attention. I thought I was enjoying and treasuring all the moments and the memories, keeping them both in photo form and in my mind. I thought I was making the most of the time I had. Now that I am officially an adult, I realize it is not possible to fully treasure all the moments. I cannot be fully in the moment and at the same time have my mind telling me to "treasure the moment". Instead, I record the voices and faces when I can. I say "I love you" and give hugs. I put down my phone and join the conversation. It's what an adult does.