

## "I'll Be Seeing You"

by Alisha Geary

The organ music flowed over and around me, buoying me up but tying me down to a place and time I didn't want to be in. After two months of waning, my grandfather had finally surrendered in his battle of cancer. Now I was in a church waiting for the funeral service to start. I had dreaded this day, not just because it meant Grandpa was really gone, but because of the part I had to play in his funeral.

My uncle Brad shook as he walked up the stairs to the pulpit to read the obituary. As if he was dreading the journey to vocalizing his father's death. "Our beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend, Ivan DeVar Geary, died . . ." I had never heard my uncle, my wisecracking, too-smart-for-his-own-good-uncle cry. As he reached the word we all knew that the inevitability of death had set in. ". . . died after a long and courageous battle with cancer. He was born February 13, 1924, in Smithfield, Utah, the only surviving child of . . ."

*April 24, 2000*

*Grandpa passed away today at eight-thirty p.m. I was able to spend a little time with him yesterday. Mom came and got me Saturday at about eleven. We drove all night to get home. I knew from her voice that he was much worse. As I drove, I kept praying that he would still be alive so I could see him. I know this is important to think and write about, but I don't know if I can do it right now.*

*When we first arrived he didn't know me. He didn't know anyone. Grandma had lost it. She cried and shook like a child. It was so strange. When it was time to leave I went to say goodbye and he knew me. He opened his eyes and grabbed my hand. I told him how much I loved him and he knew. I know he knew. Grandma said he couldn't speak, but as I stroked his hand, he pulled me close and breathed the word "love" in my face.*

*Somewhere in that dried husk of a body was my grandpa and best friend and he wanted me to know he understood what I was saying. I know that he was clinging to the thought that death would come swiftly and in his sleep. It did. This was a good thing. He is free now. He is with his mother and father and with his sister, little Maud. Families are forever. I cling to that idea. I can't write anymore, not tonight.*

Brad cleared his throat again and continued with the obituary. I closed my eyes, stretching my awareness, searching for some cosmic residue that might be my grandfather's spirit. Why? Why did he have to pull me into this? I couldn't answer my questions, only he could and he was silent. I listened to my grandmother snuffle, fragrant and weepy, holding tightly to my hand. I knew she needed me but I wished that I hadn't escorted her into the chapel. I would never be able to keep my composure sitting next to her.

*April 20, 2000*

*My father says grandpa looks like a skeleton. He is just skin and bones. If you held him up to the light, you could see the hollows and indentations illumined and rosy. Some people don't really die. They just disappear. A little more of them is gone everyday. He is dying of cancer of the colon, as we speak. I was unable to go home to see him this weekend because of the logistics of getting to Logan from Ephraim.*

*I got news that Grandpa has just been transferred to a hospice home to die. I don't know how long he has. I want to see him before things get any worse. I wish I could spend Easter*

*with him. This is his favorite time of year. I have to tell him . . . I have to tell him how much he means to me. I don't think he really knows what he has done for me. I have so much to ask him.*

The squeak in Brad's voice brought me out of my reverie. "His high school years were spent participating in football, track, drama and as a drum major of the band. During World War II, he served as a forward observer in a cannon company. He served in the European Theater of Operations and saw action in the Battle of the Bulge, Collmar Pocket of the Rhine River Crossing." Brad was controlling his emotions nicely. I didn't know how, I wished he would tell me how so I could get through my part. "He received the Bronze Star for meritorious service in connection with military operation in the Belgium, France, Holland and Germany. He served in the Army from March 1943 to January 1946."

The names of the battles were familiar to me, but mysterious. They took me back to when I was eleven, when grandpa got sick, and we decided we would spend as much time with him as we could. He started talking about spending Christmas Eve smack in the middle of the Battle of the Bulge. He didn't ever talk about the war and there he was, seated on the overstuffed sofa, telling us about the mud and the cold and the fear. I received an all too clear picture of what war really was. He spent Christmas Eve in a foxhole. I didn't know what the names meant or what exactly a foxhole was. I listened though as he talked, uninterrupted, with a husky voice about the planes strafing overhead and how, "peace on earth," became a very special phrase. I guess he talked about it because he knew that he would eventually have to die. He lived through a war and two bouts of colon cancer; he has shown bravery in everything he had ever done. This bravery did not hold back death though.

*December 24, 1999*

*Christmas Eve was just lovely. I am so glad that I went. Grandpa was really impressed that I came. He asked all about my tonsillectomy and how I felt and what I remembered. He was really upbeat so I asked him about his lumbectomy. He just needed to talk to me. He knew I understood. He was so scared to suffocate. The tumor had grown around his windpipe and was beginning to cut off his air supply. They had told him they might not be able to get the whole thing, but they would try. He kept talking about suffocation and I realized that he needed to voice his fears so he could move on. He always does that. He talks to me.*

*I guess we really are kindred spirits. We found comfort from each other and somehow I made it better for him. This is probably one of the last times we will get to do this. He is sure that this is his last Christmas. I hate to admit it, but in the pit of my stomach and in my heart of hearts I know he is right. I feel like there are only a few months left and it scares me. I remember the look in his eyes. He wasn't afraid of death, he was afraid of how it would come. I promised him and willed with all the fiber of my being that he would die in his sleep, peacefully. Please Lord; let him die in his sleep.*

Brad choked out the last few lines of the obituary. "Internment will be in the Ben Lomond Cemetery, with military honors accorded by the VFW Honor Guard. Thank you for all that you our friends and family have done for us and for Dad." As he walked down the steps from the pulpit his face cracked and tears trickled down his cheeks. I too began to weep softly. It was all too much for him. Grandpa was really gone.

My dad's oldest brother Steve passed Brad on the way up the stairs, paused at the top and took a deep breath as if to brace himself for what he would meet as he approached the pulpit. He

spoke of Grandpa's integrity and his habit of breaking track records. He talked of his father's last moments when he finally dropped off to sleep after laboring for breath in a strange place that was not his home. How he slept for about ten minutes then opened his eyes peering into the corner of the hospice room as if he could see someone he knew. His eyes widened and he exhaled softly and it was all over.

*November 28, 1999*

*My father's father has cancer for the third time. He is over seventy-five and weak because of his other bouts with colon cancer. There is a tumor growing around his windpipe and more cancer has infiltrated his lungs and liver. He has decided that this will probably be the end. He has accepted his imminent death calmly though I know he is afraid. The problem is I am afraid. He told me that he wants me to sing at his funeral.*

*I feel honored; no other grandchild is doing anything in the service. But for the first time I am reticent to do anything he has asked me to do. I have held his hand as he gritted his way through the repercussions of radiation. I have gone with him to work and climbed down musty smelling holes to check water. I have even tasted his experimental mincemeat pies. I know he asked me because he loves me and because he needs me to do this. I have done more brave things for him than for any other person. This one will take more than courage or bravery. If I sing at his funeral it means that he is really gone.*

*In the past he has always helped me find courage I needed. When I was sick he helped me grit my teeth and bear it. He helped me to have the courage to enter the State Science Fair. He helped me deal with his Cancer. He knows about courage. And yet, I am scared to death.*

Uncle Steve finished his eloquent remarks and I knew that it was my turn. Mom pinched me and took away all my tissues. "You can't cry if you don't have tissue," she whispered as I stood and made my way out of the pew. All of a sudden I was the one who was mounting the stairs to the pulpit. A sob escaped me as I realized that the moment I had been dreading for over five months was finally here. I had known he was going to die and I thought I had accepted that fact. But my heart screamed with anguish as I walked up those steps. Death had finally broken into my close-knit family circle.

The flute soared and the piano spoke of hope and love. As I stared out over the heads of my family and friends and perfect strangers whom I loved because they loved my grandpa and I searched again for something. I found it. Two measures before my intro I heard something. "I need you to do this for me. You will not cry."

I began to sing. The old World War II song brought me hope. "I'll be seeing you, in all the old familiar places. That my heart and mind embraces all year through." I felt him there, holding me up, feeding me courage, and willing me not to cry. I didn't dare look at my Grandma, or my mom, or my dad. I knew that if I did the sweet communion would cease and I would weep. But I didn't. All of the courage of my grandfather's life poured into me and out of me and through me and I did not cry. I couldn't. I was too busy paying back my grandfather for his courage.

I am a traveler on a journey unknown. I followed a path that I never knew and only discovered the journey I had made after my traveling companion was dead. My grandfather was that companion. Sixty years separated us and eight years had bound us together, made us inseparable. We walked the path side by side. He walked with me through happiness, he walked

with me through sorrow, and he walked with me through sickness and pain and fear. I realized that not only was he my companion, but I was his. That was why I was here. I was there for him just as he was there for me, and that was why I was singing his mantra of the war and of his life. I knew I would not be alone on my excursion because he had given me one last gift to remember him by--this song.

*I'll be seeing you in every lovely summer's day  
In everything that's light and gay.  
I'll always think of you that way.  
I'll meet you in the morning sun  
And when the night is new,  
I'll be looking at the moon,  
But I'll be seeing you.*