

## **It Still Looks Like Grandma's House**

Nestled in a short brick wall, the tiny, old iron gate had thin rectangular bars that ran vertical like the door of a cage. Stretching across the top was an elegant fixture reminiscent of a curled handlebar mustache with a small spire in the center. Every time the gate was opened, it would whine, and you always expected to hear it clank shut a few seconds later. It was taller than me and bore my weight easily when stuck my foot on the bottom, kicked off and rode it until the hinges threatened to fling me back the way I came.

Beyond the small gateway stretched several patches of soft grass lined in elaborate cement walkways. The walkways all branched off and led up to the staircases or front doors of nearby apartments.

In the center, like two sentinels guarding the yard, stood two young trees. Rarely did they have thick leaves, yet near the end of spring you could always find small pink and white flowers speckling the grass below their slender branches.

Off to the left stretched a miniature sidewalk that led to a staircase. At the top of the staircase was someone's front door. To the right stood a sectional of hibiscus bushes that barely reached my shoulders, the waxy leaves always reminding me of the leaves Dorothy saw when she first arrived in Oz. Sometimes it was in bloom, sometimes it wasn't, but when it was the sweet-smelling flowers were a clear milk-white that seemed attractive to bees. Also on the right and slightly ahead stood an old staircase extending up to apartment number four: Grandma's House. The old iron railing was painted a creamy hue to match the building and had two small hanging mailboxes that rattled in protest whenever someone climbed the steps. Grandma's front door faced west, which was perfect because, if I spent the night or stayed late enough into the evening, it allowed me an unobstructed view to enjoy the fireworks from Anaheim Stadium(now known as Edison International). The screen door was old and creaky, its aged handle floppy  
That is how I remember Grandma's House.

A little more than six years later, I stand shocked at what I see, at how strangely perfect everything is. Except for the screen door, the gate and the plants that have all grown, nothing has changed!

The familiar iron gate, probably ridden one too many times by a large person, sags on its hinges so badly that it no longer swings freely. I have to push it up and forward in order to close it. Gone is the metal lock that created the familiar clank, but my mind fills that gap. Off-white paint speckles the worn black metal as if the little gate didn't like its paint job and shook all the color off the way a naughty puppy shakes mud off its fur. I notice that I'm almost as tall, if not taller, than the poor metal entranceway. I also notice two of the vertical bars running down the gate's center are gone. Why are just two bars missing? Why not four? Or three? Or one? Could it be the missing bars represent the absence of my Grandma and Grandpa?

I look to the right and find the once-small hibiscus sectional now towers over me. It still has all of its waxy green leaves, but no flowers have started blooming yet. Then I see the same old stairway leading up to the Grandma's front door. Though the screen door is newer and brighter, it resembles the old one. The bold number four still adorns on the wall next to the beer-colored porch-light fixture.

The two trees in the center of the yard still exist, but their branches have grown in my absence like curious fingers reaching up to grasp God's hand.

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Suddenly the air is so still that I swear I'm in a photograph. I stand below the smaller tree in the center of the yard, wrap my arms around myself and survey the area with a lump in my throat. Are my eyes deceiving me? Is the place actually different, but my mind is tricking me into seeing it the way I think it should look? Or is everything really pretty much where I left it all those years ago?

I've noticed the same situation in myself. All my life I've been relatively the same old me. Same long hair. Same blue eyes. Same heart-shaped face. Same heart-shaped mouth. Same chocolate addiction. Same short temper. Same obnoxious laugh. Same twisted sense of humor. Same tendency to daydream.

Grandma's house, so rarely untouched by Father Time, is a very clear reflection of what I feel inside: I don't have to change myself in order to continue growing as a person.