

teen ink

By teens, for teens

February 2025

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Heartstrings & Healing

The Many Faces of Love



ARTWORK BY
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BUMPS

ARTICLE BY ANONYMOUS

This isn't about a bump in the road or your perfectly slicked-back ponytail. This is about my great-grandparents — Grandpa Bumps and Grandma Bumps. My family has always called the Heitman grandparents Grandpa Bumps and Grandma Bumps. That was because whenever they would hug and kiss goodbye, they would also gently bump our foreheads together. They both passed away a few years back, yet I still have so many vivid memories with them. There are memories that connect to certain objects and mostly their importance in my life.

For the first long 8 years of my life, it was just my sister and me. My sister, Jada, is three years older

than me, and we were always close growing up. We were the only children my parents had and the oldest grandchildren of my mom's parents. During these years, my sister and I got all of the attention, and I would be lying if I said that I didn't miss it sometimes. Now, we have two younger brothers who seem to always steal the show. Back when we were younger, Jada and I would have sleepovers at our Grandma Norma and Grandpa Mike's house almost every weekend. Our Grandma Norma also babysat us during the summers and after school each day until our mom picked us up. To keep us busy while we were with her, we would visit her parents, Grandpa and Grandma Bumps.

Going to Grandpa and Grandma Bumps' house was always so fun, and there are so many things that come up in my daily life that remind me of them. Random objects like strawberries, hens, bubblegum, dominoes, woodwork, Werther's Original candy, and cows are things that I correlate to my grandparents and their home. They didn't live too far out, but they lived in a very small and rural town north of O'Fallon called Josephville. Their cute, small, farm-style house came with a large yard, which gave us plenty of room to play. Their neighbors had cows that would hangout on the fence line and moo at us while we were running around.

Grandma Bumps had a good-sized garden, and Grandpa Bumps had a huge shed. My Grandpa Bumps was a farmer and woodworker throughout his whole life, so he made and sold beautiful wood work. Anytime I see wooden yard ornaments around the holiday season, it reminds me of his art and all of the extra inventory that he would hang up in his shed or put up in the yard. Speaking of his profession, it makes me think of his thumb. While working with wood, he accidentally cut half of his thumb off in a table saw. This would always scare me when I was younger, and he never failed to make sure that I saw it.

Grandma Bumps had a garden from which she grew all of their fruits and vegetables. Almost every time we would visit, she would have us help her pick strawberries from her garden. It would take up a decent amount of our time, and we would get to talk and laugh our whole way through it. Anytime that I eat strawberries now, it reminds me of my Grandma Bumps. This is not only from the memories that I have from picking them with her but also because she was so sweet. She was always doing her best to make us happy and had the sweetest compliments to give us. She would always say, "Your hair is perfect, darling," and "I would love to have beautiful blue eyes like you."

Grandma Bumps was the most thoughtful person I know. She had seven kids total, and the majority of them also had grandchildren. She would host holiday gatherings every year in their super unique split-level basement and made sure to get every single person a gift that they

would love. Sometimes they were even handmade. She loved to sew, and she was very good at it. I would ask to sit on her lap and "help" Grandma with sewing stuff in her free time. She had a fake hen pin cushion that was a realistic size. My mom ended up calling dibs on that item when she passed, and we use it now when my mom is sewing. Grandma Bumps also always kept a huge bucket of the Double Bubble Bubblegum and Werther's Original candies. The first thing I remember doing every time we arrived was running to grab a piece of bubblegum.

Other times, instead of sewing or picking strawberries, we would play dominoes. She loved playing dominoes, and it was the first game I had ever been taught. Grandma Bumps loved to bake and sell cakes her whole life. While we waited for things to bake in the oven, we would kill time playing dominoes. It was so simple, but she made it so fun. We also got dibs on her dominoes set when she passed, and we still use them to this day. I will never bake without thinking of her. She taught my mom all of the secrets, and now my mom bakes and sells cakes and cupcakes as a side job. Grandma Bumps was really the best.

They have also influenced my music taste. In the background, they would always have old country music playing on their stereo. Anytime they felt like it, they would find each other and slow dance to the song. This painted a picture of true love. They loved each other so loudly, and now I only try to do the same. Now, I love country music, and certain songs with a certain beat remind me of them and their dances together.

Not a day goes by that I don't miss Grandma and Grandpa Bumps. They were truly an inspiration. They were the people that I looked up to as a kid. All of their hobbies and side hustles have made me a hard worker as a reminder that you're never doing too much. I wish that my younger brothers could have them to grow up with as well. There are so many things that remind me of them, and I'm so thankful that I have items of theirs to hold close. I wish that they had more time here to watch me grow into the young adult that I've become, but I know that they're always watching over me and dancing together in Heaven. ♦



Pieces of Us

ARTICLE BY ANONYMOUS

ARTWORK BY ANONYMOUS

Last night, as I lay in the comfort of my bed, something inside of me finally shifted. It was as if a switch had finally been flipped, or maybe it was the fact that it had now been long enough for it to stop hurting when I looked at all the pictures. But I realized I had truly let you go. Not in the way I used to say it to appease my friends, but in a way that felt real. For the first time since August, it no longer hurts to see you in the halls. When I look at you now, I no longer trace the memories of that night or even the memories we once shared together. Or even feel the weight of what we once were. I had really let you go.

I've always had this urge to help people — maybe it's just how I'm wired. Even after everything ended between us, that instinct didn't fade. I still wanted to be there for you, to offer whatever support I could. I remember hearing from one of our friends about everything that had happened to you since we last spoke. At that moment, all I wanted to do was reach out — send you a message, and remind you that you'll always have someone who cares and is there to listen. It took more self-control than I'd care to admit to hold back from sending that message. I knew that reaching out would only add more to your plate, and that was the last thing I ever wanted to do. And if I'm being honest, I don't think you wanted to hear from me either.

The truth is I knew we weren't meant for each other or even to last—nothing does, after all. But the real question that still lingers in the back of my mind is why I allowed myself to fall for someone I knew would hurt me, even if it was never his intention. I've spent the last four months trying to answer that question, but no matter how many times I ask myself, I know I'll never find the answer. I was chasing someone who was running from me, glancing back just often enough to make sure I was still behind. I know it was for the best — finally letting you go, I mean. And I know deep down, it was what you wanted, too. Still, I find it difficult to let go of things. But more than anything, I struggle with letting go of the people I once loved. Everything I ever let go of has claw marks on it. Everyone I've ever loved has taken a piece of me with them as they walked out the door.

That's exactly what you did — took a piece of me with you. When I met you I thought I was ready, ready to fall in love. I wasn't looking for much but

that's right when you happened. I am so tired of writing about you, and here I am again, doing just that. Every "On My Mind" and almost every prompt has somehow circled back to you. Every page that I wrote you were on it.

If this was your plan all along, I wish you wouldn't look at me like you could maybe love me again. Like the thought of children that weren't my own — having the brown eyes of the boy I loved at 17 didn't rip my heart out. Like I didn't drive to your house when things were falling apart on my end. Because, honestly, when I was with you, all the chaos in my life faded, and for a moment, I knew everything would be okay because at least I had you. I still remember spending hours running my fingers through your blonde hair while you rested your head in my lap because I thought you were the best thing that had ever been mine. I don't understand how all the moments we shared together turned into longing glances in the hallway. Was it all just a waste? No, it wasn't — because loving someone is never a waste. And you definitely weren't.

Every moment with you felt like a breath of fresh air in a world clouded with smoke. Each moment we shared was never wasted — whether it was sharing both of our first kisses together, meeting each other's families, or even watching you talk about football with my dad. Even in the bad moments when all we had was each other. I just enjoyed being with you, because you were my best friend and that was the worst part. When my car got hit last night, you were the first person I called, and you came right away to make sure I was okay. I don't understand it either, but the first thing my mind went to was you. It had been a while since we'd spoken, but in that moment, I knew you still cared enough to make sure I was okay.

I know we'll always care for each other, but it's best for both of us to let go. Letting go of what we were, and more importantly, my best friend, was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. But deep down, I know you deserve more than I can offer. And someday, I'll be everything to somebody else, too. I'm terrified to fall for someone again because I know I'll compare every person to you. Every time I look into brown eyes, see someone wearing the same glasses you did, or hear a song you used to play with me, I'll be transported right back to you. ♦

A SPIRITED DANCER

POEM BY RILEY SMITH,
TOLEDO, OH

A follow through the heart,
A star in the wings,
For I never know what this
dance will bring,
Following goes through
the floor,
When your a dancer told
to dance no more,
A turn just once follows
the story to be told,
All the movements we
faced have drawn us old,
All the criticism we take
have to unfold,
The many times we dance
are a few too much,
The many times we leap
are grand in a lunge,
Calling our names,
While our backs are
in a hold,
All the pain in our spine,
Is a story that's written
in gold,

To the child I know,
Once soft and bold,
To what you became to be,
Has yet to unfold,
Once a dancer
always a plan,
When a dancer there's
no turning back,
Different times make a
special place,
Special people take a
difficult pace,
To be a star,
One needs to shine,
If another takes the light,
A new spirited
dancer forms,
And we learn through
the night,
A dancer recognises
new storms.

ARTWORK BY
SUSANNA HUANG,
MERCERSBURG, PA



FINDING YOUR PASSION

HOW DANCE BECAME AN INTEGRAL PART OF MY LIFE

ARTICLE BY VISMITI IYER,
BANGALORE, INDIA

Sometimes, I have these urges — to do something simply because everyone else around me is doing it.

In more intellectual terms, this is known as the "bandwagon effect."

But yes, at the distinguished age of eight, I attended my first kathak class because I didn't want to feel left out in my new apartment with my new set of friends, who had all simultaneously joined this dance class.

Four years and two institutions later, I positively hated Kathak. Maybe it was because of COVID-19 that made everything online; maybe it was the seeds of self-doubt that planted themselves and grew their gnarly roots. Maybe it was just the one-step chakkar, which felt as daunting and unachievable as climbing Mt. Everest. I cannot be certain what caused this enigma, but I was struggling to understand why I was dancing.

My mom pushed me to attend the classes, I became equally determined to push back, and blamed her for my failures. In retrospect, if she hadn't intervened, I would not have continued to dance and my life right now would be colorless and dull, much like your average corporate job.

I reached 9th grade; now I had bigger things to worry about things such as my sleep schedule and the fact that I had to actually talk to people face to face. Kathak took a step down on my list of things to worry about, and somehow, during those months, it started getting easier. I looked forward to dancing, and I wanted to be the best at it. Not to mention, I could now do ten one-step chakkaras.

As I danced, the sound of each tabla beat resonated deeply within me. My body swayed naturally to the

melody of the sitar. The jingle of my ghungroo bells drowned out any anxious thoughts and feelings. My mind was fully engrossed, and it felt exhilarating. It felt serene.

Once I experienced it, it was a high I couldn't leave. I worked harder than ever, but most of all, I enjoyed every second of it.

I WANT TO SAY THAT FINDING A PASSION CAN TAKE TIME. TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME. IF YOU DON'T GIVE UP, YOU'LL DEFINITELY PERSEVERE.

Now? I procrastinate chemistry worksheets by dancing to my heart's content. And guess what? Those group of girls that I joined Kathak for, most of them left a long time ago and I don't talk to them.

Well, what I intend to convey with this isn't that you should do something purely because of parental pressure and societal acceptance. I want to say that finding a passion can take time (...and sweat, blood, tears, and maybe even a mental breakdown). Take it one day at a time. If you don't give up, you'll definitely persevere. Try whatever you can — quit if you want to — but give your best in whatever you do, and you'll figure it out. ♦

PHOTO BY
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