

Grandma's Advice

The decision to forgive is personal. It's confusing, for grief numbs senses, grows days long and labors under nights' full memories awakened.

To forgive lays claim on what happened and that it happened really and that somebody is responsible. But if we can't do this; forgive, then thoughts that whoever caused us to suffer is suffering too becomes a salve when feelings of hate fester. People say it's a process. It takes time.

Twenty-three years ago. A speech was written. A plea to the family of the victim. It was written a thousand times in the mind, staring at a yellowing jail cell ceiling but then committed to paper, folded three times and tucked in the breast pocket of a white dress shirt only wore once.

But the words, when the time came, they wouldn't come out right, tripped up on something inside that couldn't bear the burden. They couldn't stop a mother from sobbing or the judge from saying the case resulted in a tragic waste of life; the victims and yours. I watched the turn of events.

And so began a narrative. Two identities trapped in one young frame of mind. One part felt nothing (Not that anybody asked how you felt because they don't and won't. Remember this.) And because of this, you thought maybe you died too. You wondered this in a nightmare way, not the ones where you kill other people you don't know, or the ones where people tried to kill you then wait for you to wake so they can kill you again.

It's the one where nobody says 'It'll be okay' because for a spell, I'm not there and nobody recognizes you. You're not the kid who won Aycock Middle School's fifth grade talent shoe or whipped anybody at foosball at the Boys and Girls Club or pissed every bed sheet in the hallway linen closet. You're not the person framed and hanging on the wall in my living room

behind the T.V. that I watch sometimes instead of Wheel of Fortune and wonder what got into you.

Since you may be dead, I might as well go on and tell you: You fucked up. If this nightmare turns out to be true and years and years and years from now, if someone decides—for God knows what reason to give your sorry ass a chance to see the light of day, but before asks: How do we know you want do it again answer the best you can. If not, sit up straight and keep your mouth closed. They'll call you murderer, violent offender, Defendant, Appellant, Condemned. They may have mercy on you, but they will never call you a victim, baby.

And whatever you do, don't say anything about not knowing right from wrong. They will kill you. If you're lucky, you'll remember nothing.

Then, you could remember everything. You could feel everything, find yourself overwhelmed with guilt, and this too you deserve even as a teen trying to hurt like adults do. In prison you'll take classes, good classes with good names for kids like you; at-risk, justice-involved, marginalized. People you'll try to help if you were released.

By then, you'll have spent most of your life behind bars. You'll watch the news twice a day, lose faith in your former understanding of how the world works and remain convinced the only way you'll survive on the outside is deep in the woods, where you can't hurt anyone. By then, I be gone myself but I leave with this:

They'll probably never forgive you, educated or not; young or old. But you may forgive yourself. This is not a *probable* may but a *permissive* one, for this you are allowed. The decision to forgive is personal and it takes time because twenty-three years ago, just like the judge said, you killed yourself. And now it's time to heal yourself, rise from the dead. Good Luck.