

Preservation - A Worthwhile Endeavor

I am fortunate to have young parents and grandparents. Until I was 25, I had a great-grandmother. Because of that, perhaps I have always taken memories for granted. I hope that a future generation does not rely on my documentation of my family to fill in missing pieces.

Nine months ago my grandfather was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He is 76 and I do not know life without him. He lives in Mississippi and he is being treated at a research hospital in Birmingham, where I live. My teaching schedule has allowed me to spend a great deal of time with him. In the fall I took him to chemotherapy. Christmas break I drove him to radiation and knitted in the lobby until he finished. During spring break and since, I have sat by his side while he recovers from surgery... which was an unsuccessful attempt to remove the cancerous tumor.

Just this week, I woke from a disturbing dream. I was breathing heavy and I had been sobbing in my sleep. It wasn't until later that I recalled the details and the reason for my sadness. In my dream, I had forgotten my grandfather's face. I was trying to find him in a crowd of people and I couldn't remember his face.

With regards to the built environment, I have always been incredibly sentimental. I often refer to buildings as having souls and energy. My office is in a building that was built in the early 1900's. She is sympathetic to weather conditions. She groans and her windows rattle on blustery days. These experiences cannot be replicated in the static environment of new construction nor can they be appreciated in a photograph.

For experience alone, I believe that preservation is a worthwhile endeavor. Buildings and places exist as backdrops in my memories. Preservation is a way to present others with the same opportunity.

As time marches onward, it becomes increasingly difficult to remember in vivid detail the places that frame my memories. Photographs shed some light but nothing replaces the experience of being in a space.

Today as I sat in the hospital room. I stared at him while he slept. I remember when his head had a little more hair and the lines on his face were a little softer. He was tall and strong. The frail man lying there was hardly recognizable and I strained to remember his face.