

Until I Felt the Wind

Caroline Frederiksen
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Dear Reader,

Until I Felt the Wind series encapsulates my relationship with my late grandfathers encountered through the wind. By combining home videos, artifacts, and imagery related to my grandfathers with symbolic representations of their spiritual presence within the wind, I translate my grief into a celebration of life, family, and legacy.

Both of my grandfathers, Raymond Brooks and Rand Frederiksen, were beloved by friends, family, and myself. Raymond, my maternal grandfather, passed away 16 years ago and Rand, my paternal grandfather, passed away 6 years ago; yet, our family still feels their unwavering presence in various ways. Details from their lives reveal deep connections to the wind.

Raymond, a pilot and sailor, depended on the wind. Rand grew up in west Texas, a land of sand storms and windmills. Because, as they say, “grief is love with nowhere to go,” I searched for a way to send them my love. By drawing parallels between their lives and my present existence, the wind acts as my translator, sending messages between worlds.

Sincerely,

Caroline

Dear Skypoppy,

I wish I remembered you better.

But I don't remember much from first grade though. I don't remember being told of your passing either, but I remember the news triggered a memory of the last time I saw you. After a visit, we drove away waving goodbye to you and Nana standing on the front porch waving back and blowing kisses. I haven't thought about that moment in a long time.

I remember bits from the funeral. Nana placed you in an open casket. I remember you looked so peaceful, almost like you were sleeping. Somehow, at 7 years old, I understood death — you were not going to wake up. Mom said it was okay to hold your hand so I did. It was cold, stiff, and bloated. But, I wasn't scared or faced by any of it. Rosemary and I sat on the kneeling bench and watched friends and family pay their respects to you and share their condolences with Nana. We stayed with you for a while until Mom told us we needed to give people space to say goodbye. We went to a room off to the side and out of the way. At the cemetery, we climbed out of the cars like clowns in the Brooks family circus. Mom said that because you were in the Air Force, you got a military salute with guns. I think the soldiers fired three blanks. Birds scattered as the booms echoed through the tall pines. We made you cards and taped strands of our hair inside. After they lowered your casket, we kids dropped those tokens of ourselves into the grave. Aunt Jen said we will always be with you. We sat back down in the black folding chairs that wobbled on the uneven dirt.

I remember one Christmas several years after you passed, the whole family visited you after a large snowfall. Nana poured holy water over you. When she went to church, she'd fill a medicine bottle with holy water. I'm sure you aren't surprised. As we laughed, she replied, "I like doing this and there is nothing he can do about it!" She also brought a little tree for the flower pot next to your headstone and we decorated it with Shrink-a-Dink ornaments that each of the grandkids made. Then, we built a lifesize snowman of you complete with a Crayon smile and cigar, aviator sunglasses, a toy plane on the shoulder, and pine needles for the little hair you had left. I don't know who started it but the next thing I knew, we were in the midst of a snowball fight. The whole family — all four kids with their spouses, the seven grandkids, and Nana — were laughing

hysterically, running around, and having a blast. It was like a scene from a heartfelt Christmas movie.

As you know from watching over us, I have been sailing for several years now. I immediately felt a connection to you when I sailed. I started out on a Sunfish sailboat on the lake at a sleep-away camp. The wind whispered in my ears. My eyes watered but the breeze brushed away my tears. I turned my head to face the wind, closed my eyes, and soaked in the sun. Doing something you loved and shared with the family made me feel closer to you.

Since you passed, two more grandsons were born. Julie named her son after you; so, now you have three name-sakes including me. I hold that honor close to my heart.

I wish I had more time with you but I know you would be proud of the young woman I have become since you last saw me fifteen years ago.

I love you a bushel and a peck,
Caroline

Dear Papaw,

I miss you.

Honestly, I am angry that you died. I am angry Vanderbilt couldn't get it together fast enough to give you the experimental treatment in time. I can't believe that treatment has now become standard with a high success rate. I know you would not want me to carry this anger. I bet you forgave them. Maybe it wasn't even all their fault but part of my grief became anger.

While you were in chemotherapy, I played lacrosse in school. During the conditioning part of practice, I would think to myself, *this is not pain, Papaw is in pain, you are not in pain*. I pushed myself further. I ran harder. Sweat ran into tears.

My grief was mainly sadness. As they say, grief is love with nowhere to go. Now, my grief is less painful.

I miss your hugs and the fastest Frederiksen pat. I miss the Sprite and popcorn that would be waiting for us when you picked us up from elementary school. I miss being called "sugar" and even "sugar-booger." I miss the smell of your cologne. I miss your biscuits and making soup with you. I miss the goofy Southern sayings, your silliness, and grace. I miss your laugh and making you laugh. I miss being able to see the pride on your face and the love in your eyes.

The last time I saw that look on your face was when I showed you my first contact sheet from the first roll of film I had ever shot, processed, and printed in the dark room. You had just gotten home from the hospital and settled into hospice care. I was so excited to share it with you. You were still strong enough to hold the sheet and talk a little at a time. You asked each of us grandkids what we wanted to do with our lives at that moment. I told you I wanted to be a therapist.

I miss our conversations the most. You had this remarkable ability to listen and learn. When we talked, I felt like my opinion really mattered. You challenged me to think critically and thoughtfully by asking questions. I admired your ability to slowly change people's minds with questions alone without imposing your own beliefs onto them.

I used to think the paintings in your house of windmills standing over vast fields and canyons were mysterious and melancholy. Those Texan windmills now remind me of you. They can weather through the worst storms and survive ever-changing landscapes. I wonder if the western desert scenes reminded you of your hometown. I feel a connection to Lubbock, Texas, yet it feels distant and lonely. Of course, with dust storms and tornadoes, the wind has a potent presence in Lubbock. I wonder if you felt a spiritual connection to the wind.

I remember your inurnment vividly. The five of us Frederiksens and Nana Brooks piled into your car. We were silent until Vaughn Gap Road when Nana asked a question to distract us from the grief. The sky was bright despite the storm. Thick raindrops splashed on the windows. When we arrived at the cemetery, we realized we had no umbrellas. But you stored umbrellas in every door of the car. I cried. Your thoughtfulness and consideration for others is unmatched.

It was the last time I felt your love... Until I felt the wind.

Tears welling up and stifling heavy breaths. A light breeze brushes my face. Your embrace. My strength builds again.

Love you bunches,

Caroline

“Cannons and Windmills”

David Frederiksen, 1988

Windmills will always remind me of my father.
When his high school classes got boring,
Like high school gets,
He would look at the windmill,
Standing in a field outside his school.
It is still there,
But the field is a parking lot now.
Through my high school windows, I would stare
At the two civil war cannons on either side of the flagpole.
When I was eight,
My father and I built a model windmill,
But my mother has it now.
Windmills can weather the changes around them,
And I guess they will always remind me of my father.

—

Lt. Colonel Raymond J. Brooks, “Skypoppy”

October 29, 1929 - September 12, 2008

Maternal Grandfather

U.S. Air Force Jet Fighter, United Airlines Pilot, Recreational Sailor

Dr. Rand T. Frederiksen, MD, “Papaw”

November 21, 1941 - February 26, 2018

Paternal Grandfather

Cardiologist, Photographer

Caroline Ray Frederiksen

May 29, 2001 - Present

Granddaughter

Photographer, Aspiring Art Therapist

This project does not begin nor end with the deaths of my grandfathers. My work lives and breathes like memories without definitive boundaries similar to Jonas Mekas's film *As I Was Moving Ahead I Occasionally Saw Glimpses of Beauty*. Despite Mekas's documentary style, the viewers grasp his emotional connection to the subject matter.

Similarly to the letters from Chantal Akeman's mother read aloud in the film *News From Home* that reveal the sore longing and attempts to send love across an ocean, I am translating my love for the deceased into moving imagery.

Barbara by Christian Petzold, *Mirror* by Andrei Tarkovsky, and *Boyhood* by Richard Linklater all relate directly to themes of personal narrative, memory, and familial relationships similar to *Until I Felt the Wind* with the addition of grief.

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