

Snapple Caps

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My grandmother held onto everything. Mismatched silverware sets and dishes, dried up tubes of watercolor paint and crusty brushes, dozens of porcelain Yadros packed in water-damaged cardboard boxes. My favorite treasure sat on the kitchen countertop, a liter-sized jar of thick glass packed to its brim with Snapple caps. Each was washed carefully to dissolve any sticky residue and the fun facts remained original no matter how many times we read them. Burning compulsion melted as I pressed into a cap with my thumb, the click-snap indication of a broken seal always satisfying. The jar contained surprise, pleasant in its simplicity, sundry details, and meticulously (seemingly carelessly) composed did you knows. A collection of treasures crammed into a dusty container of rusted clutter.

My grandfather was a yeller. He called the cops on my father when my dad refused to move our family car out of the way to prevent his own dad from furiously driving home with my grandmother in the passenger's seat. I woke up and heard the rumble of voices through my bedroom door and watched the police car pull up through my window. I saw my grandfather leave, eyes blinded by red visioned fury as his tires wailed and their car careened down the street.

Real Fact: They visit for you.

My mother tells me, her fingers curling against the curved backrest of one of my grandfather's handcrafted rocking chairs. He gave my mother, his daughter-in-law, not daughter, a new piece of his carpentry in place of an apology for every regret

that followed every lost temper. While some homes are cluttered with receipts, mementos, and never-to-be-read magazines, ours is scattered with oak coffee tables, cherry cabinets, and a hope chest given prematurely for my wedding day. His ghost lives in the fibers of presents given with an expectation that he would die before the occasion. Regrets and a bruised history are why we have so many rocking chairs.

I do not remember my grandmother before she faded. I was either too young, or she was too sick, so the memories that stuck were never shared. I am told I inherited her skin and I can clearly remember her voice but not her personality. She lived with my Grandfather even when she couldn't recognize him anymore, and threw those mismatched dishes and silverware sets at his head. Eventually, it was recommended that she stay in a special care unit for dementia and Alzheimer's. When she was separated from my grandfather, I saw him cry.

Real Fact: A fish can drown.

My grandfather was a simple man. Every pair of socks were rolled into careful bundles and arranged in rows like a pan of cinnamon buns. The hanging lamp above the kitchen table was a stain-glass dome. Every shard he meticulously soldered together to bring images of dragonflies and spring flowers ablaze with electricity. My grandfather changed after the separation from my grandmother. He visited my grandmother every day, arriving at her room before she was made ready for breakfast. He carried around a blow-up donut cushion with pride, grinned wickedly at my brother's mortification when he proclaimed

it alleviated hemorrhoid pain. Losing her and still seeing her breathe triggered an outpouring of love. He chose my grandmother's urn and got one to match when he passed away a month after her. He clutched the pot to his chest as if he could feel her through the cold metal. Is it wrong of me to feel grateful for his love, so potent in the final years of his life, when it meant I had to trade knowing her?

Real Fact: While rabbits have near-perfect 360-degree panoramic vision, their most critical blind spot is directly in front of their nose.

I do not remember my grandfather before he bloomed and emerged from the mud, reaching to grasp sunlight through thick fingers. Or at least, I do not remember clearly. Potent images surface to my mind, but it's like swimming through murky waters or trying to see through a smoke fire.

I saw my grandfather die. My parents let me into the hospital room despite the nurse's warning. Children only remember the machinery: the tubes and the heart monitor, and forget embers of searing life. My parents insisted. I would remember everything. I will always be proud of you, I whispered to him and swallowed as he closed his eyes against a wave of tears.

Real Fact: Love hurts.

My grandparents' house was sold before they moved into assisted living. It was a contemporary home, built by my grandfather and packed with secrets and surprises. A curved staircase wrapped around a cylindrical wall littered with alcoves. The floors didn't match up to compensate for high ceilings and stairways that lead to single rooms. A garden surrounded the house, a tangle of ferns and cement statues, cherry trees, toadstools, and a cherub with red eyes boring into the driveway. Junk was difficult to sort. A handmade set of drawers infested with mildew was donated. A simple sketch made by my grandmother was professionally framed. I have no idea where the jar of Snapple caps ended up. Probably in a landfill. The ice tea bottles remained packed in boxes tucked away in

the basement-- their lips naked and open, collecting dust without their caps. I cannot remember the last time I had a Snapple, but when I hear the click-snap of a cap, I can taste iced tea sipped with breakfast, sugar-free because they were both diabetic, or gulped to wash down sandwiches, hoagies, or burgers. Anyone could cringe at the syrupy tea, always peach infused and peppered with the sharpness of chemical additions-- But when I take I sip, I can't help but find comfort in something so consistently and resolutely, unwaveringly sweet.