

Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities

Volume 1

Issue 1 *Celebrating Writers and Writing in our
Communities*

Article 37

October 2019

Last Song

Ethan Fischel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rwc>

Recommended Citation

Fischel, Ethan (2019) "Last Song," *Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 37.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rwc/vol1/iss1/37>

This Narrative is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. For more information, please contact kyle.morgan@humboldt.edu.

Last Song

By: Ethan Fischel

She could not catch her breath and instantly fell into my father's arms. Her breathing was agitated, and her eyes were full of tears that trickled down her cheeks and onto my dad's tan shirt. Her face turned bright red, and she couldn't articulate the right words to explain what had happened. Neither Brendon nor I had never seen our parents wrought with such emotions. My father tenderly comforted my mother and combed his hands through her brown curly hair. I was confused. I stopped noticing the noises around the campsite. It seemed like the campground kids stopped playing and the dogs ceased barking.

It was summer break and my family and I had traveled southeast to Lake Almanor. We had never rented an RV for our summer vacation. Staring out into the picturesque scenery, I began to appreciate my surroundings. Trees danced in a conga line as we approached the campsite. Birds serenaded each other with their harmonizing sounds. Clouds formed big smiles above and appeared to be laughing with me. The gravel popped with each turn of the camper's wheels as we came to a screeching halt. I was happy. As soon as Dad stopped the RV, my brother and I quickly opened the door and ran excitedly toward the water with all of our toys. While my Dad came with us to supervise our multitude of games, my mom leisurely walked to the front office building to check her messages.

I was five years old. Camping allowed my brother and I to feel free, play hide and seek, tag and catch at every stop on our vacation. While I always found the best hiding spots in these forested playgrounds, my brother, Brendon, always caught and threw balls with slightly better accuracy than me. I remember this one ball that could have been the symbol of our youth. It was plastic and yellow with holes throughout. It couldn't be mistaken from our other wiffle balls, as it had survived the strong jaws of our dog, Gus, who had accidentally chewed on it mistaking it for his toy. I wore my favorite swim trunks that I had received as a birthday gift from my grandparents the year before. While my swimsuit had blue stripes, my t-shirt was bright orange with a green grasshopper on it representing the Greensboro Grasshoppers. I ran everywhere with my black sandals with white stripes made by Nike. My brother happened to be wearing the same t-shirt in white as my mom liked to dress us similarly. After ten or fifteen minutes of the intense game of tag, I was ready to rest. Then, suddenly, my mom came running to our campsite crying hysterically.

"Why is mom crying?" I asked with my high pitched five year old voice.

"What happened, Dad?" my brother softly asked.

"Boys, Aunt Lizzie has passed away."

Flashbacks of my mom's sister came pouring into my brain. I remembered the Times Square apartment that we visited in the fall of last year. Her studio apartment was barely 100 square feet and it looked like it had been through a recent earthquake. While my bathtub at home had rubber duckies, bubble soap, and animal shaped sponges, her bathtub had mounds of clothing piled on top

of one another. All of her operatic music papers were scattered on the floor. I remembered Aunt Lizzie to be tall with pale skin and blue eyes and a big voice. I learned years later she was only 5 foot 1 inch tall and a great opera singer. During her visits to California, she perfected her imitations of famous actors or family members in her big extroverted way. Years later we reminisced that those scenes were some of the highlights of her stays in our home. One of my dearest memories of my aunt came from the Yankees singing toy she gave during the prior Hanukkah.

As my brother and dad consoled my mother, I felt confused.

My brother remarked, "I'm sorry, mom" and patted her softly on the back.

"She's at peace now," my father delicately explained.

No one else in the family had ever died since I was born, and I didn't know how to feel or act. Why was I not crying like my mother and father? Why was I not comforting my mother in an empathetic way like my brother? My brother who was seven at the time seemed to understand the significance of the situation. While Brendon simply knew that this was not a time to joke around or irritate our parents, I however, felt lost like a child who can't find their parents in a crowded subway.

I blinked and my parents had packed the RV for the immediate ride home because my mom needed to fly to Florida for the funeral. On the way home everything was solemn to me. The clouds now frowned in my direction. The birds now whined as if they were crying. The trees appeared bent, as if mourning themselves. The silence was deafening. The once animated RV on our trip toward Lake Almanor, now turned lethargic and heavy.

Imagine a female combination of Jerry Seinfeld and Luciano Pavarotti. That was Elizabeth Ann Connor. Not only did we lose that day one of the most loving people in our family, but the world lost an amazing opera singer and comic. Later our family learned that at the young age of 46, Aunt Lizzie had overdosed accidentally. Now, while my mother doesn't mourn every day, birthdays or the anniversaries of her sister's death really saddened her. Whenever we go to synagogue, we stand up and announce her name for the mourner's kaddish. Every year we light yahrzeit candles on the anniversary of her death to keep her memory alive. While we no longer take vacations to Times Square, we do visit her grave site yearly where she is buried next to her father.

Aunt Lizzie's death changed me and my family forever. I could no longer feel safe that my parents or my brother would be permanent parts of my life. Who was to say that my mom would remain healthy? Who was to say that my brother wouldn't fall sick? As a child you think that what surrounds you is fixed and constant. But time, maturity, and experience make us face the impermanence of life. I have since lost my Grandpa Mort, my Great-Grandpa Mort and my Great Grandma Molly. While they passed in their nineties after long fruitful lives, the death of Aunt Lizzie at the young age of 46 felt more like a life stolen from us forever. Looking back now at his tragedy, I realize that one must treasure every day, every experience, and every person in the family with the same passion and affection as the day before. No household is exempt from sudden tragedy and loss. But the way in which families choose to honor those that pass can help to keep memories of those individuals alive forever.