

# A Visit to My Folks

Dedicated to my late father, David Kidd

By: Brian Kidd Copyright: 2012

When a person is in his 20s or 30s, youth is not a distant memory. Part of that youth oftentimes includes the house one lived in as a kid—its rooms echo distant memories of growing pains and juvenile jubilee. Just the thought of one's childhood home can remind someone of innocence and possibilities, dreams and aspirations—of hope.

However, today, in American society, a person's childhood home can be a painful reminder of the state of the United States and its growing flummoxed and befuddled citizens. Although most people do not mind visiting their childhood homes, the thought of having to move back with your parents as an older adult can be devastating and humiliating—especially for those who have given it their best shot to make it in a society riddled with economic duress and a growing class-division between the haves and the have-nots.

Every time I visit my folks, I feel that I am stepping into the Twilight Zone and that any moment Rod Serling will poke his head from around a corner and announce, "Your next stop, The Twilight Zone." Unfortunately, this never happens and I am left to wonder: How did things end up like this for my family?

I usually visit my parents every Sunday afternoon and stay there late into the night. Before leaving my quaint little Seattle apartment for Woodinville, east across Lake Washington, I always get an eerie feeling of what awaits me. I know that my mom, a retired Health Unit Coordinator, will tell me that my brother, in his early thirties and living at home, is driving her crazy. My dad, a banker (and one of the smartest people I have ever met), will ask if I want to watch The McGlaughlin Group, which will undoubtedly lead to us arguing about politics. My brother, well, he will probably still be in bed, even at 3 p.m., recovering from a night of binging on narcotics, most likely heroin.

But don't you dare judge him! My brother is one of the smartest, funniest and caring people you will ever meet. Before he started using, people would tell me that he could walk into a room and brighten everybody's mood: Some have even compared him to the late, great comedian Rodney Dangerfield, with his witty, zany humorous quips and rambunctious, playful ribbing. He is one of the few people I know that can talk shit to someone and have the target of his smart mouth laughing hysterically.

However things have changed. It has affected all of us. The thing is, his story is not uncommon, unfortunately. A compound fracture that cracked his leg's tibia and fibula led to a prescription of Oxycontin, which eventually led to full-on heroin addiction. Sure there are probably a dozen other reasons he began habitually using drugs, but the OxyContin definitely whetted his appetite for Smack—the poor sap,

I think about how my mom, newly retired, has to stay at home with him all day. Some have told my parents that they should just kick him out and let him hit rock bottom. That seems to be easier said than done. He stays out all night. He sleeps most the day, waking up to shoot up and maybe eat his Toaster Strudels. My dad, of course, is at work most of the day. And me, well I am at work...well at least for a couple more weeks. You see my contract working for a major search engine company is about to run out.

One of the most memorable visits to my folks' house occurred on, May 13, 2012, Mother's Day. During this visit it became very apparent that the fragile thread that was holding my family together was unraveling. In hindsight, however, it was not all that bad and actually kind of amusing. I guess no matter what circumstances you find yourself in, some degree of humor is always evident.

I had spent the night at my folks' house, so that I could get up early and help my dad make his famous Mother's Day breakfast consisting of eggs, hashed browns, Danish muffins, and juicy bacon. My 90-year-old grandma had come to visit that morning and we were all anxiously awaiting the announcement from my father that breakfast was ready.

All of us that is, except for my brother. He had been out late the night before as usual, and was still in his room, with the door closed. When I visited my folks and my brother was in his room with the door closed, and his room seemed completely silent, my imagination would run wild with what he could be doing in there.

This imagination was fueled by what my parents had witnessed a few months before. Upon coming home from a movie, they called up to my brother's room but there was no response. I bet my dad could imagine 20 years or so earlier, the kid with a blonde head of hair with his headphones on, playing video games or slapping his Fender Precision Bass. However, those days were long gone. They had already suspected him of using drugs, most notably heroin, and it would be hard to imagine a 32-year-old man innocently playing video games or slapping his bass—which we later discovered he had pawned for heroin already.

“Peter, what are you doing in there?” my mom asked on that revealing night as she attempted to open his bedroom door. It was locked. There was no response.

“Pete, hey wake up mince meat, what's going on?” my dad inquired with a concerned tone.

With that, my father went and got the universal key that opened all the bedroom doors. Upon opening the door, the moonlight danced over my brothers slumbering body, as he sat somewhat upright, with a tourniquet around his emaciated arms—a needle lay close by. There was now no doubt in my dad's mind—he had been in denial before—about my brother's intravenous drug use.

“Pete, wake up hey!” my dad yelled as he shook his limp torso. But he stayed as still as a ventriloquist dummy.

“PEEEETER, Jesus Christ, oh nooooo!” my mom wailed with despair.

According to my mom, the look on my dad’s face when he saw my brother was so distressed that he thought my brother had died. However, he slapped his slack face for a few seconds and my brother groggily came too, with a serene smile on his baby face.

“Woah, hey guys...oh man I am so embarrassed,” was my brother’s only response, barely coherent in a vacant, almost distant tone.

My brother tried to convince my folks that this was the first time he had tried heroin, but even my dad did not believe him. After they tried to cajole him into admitting he was an addict, he scurried with an opiate induced stupor out of the house, and merely stated that he needed to see his girlfriend, Christina, and confess to her that he had done a bad thing. He drove away. His room was once again silent with a bed full of dread.

What had started out as something as seemingly innocuous as a broken leg, earned while trying to break up an alcohol-fueled feud at a party, turned into something that was breaking all of our hearts and breaking apart the family, slowly but surely.

“Breakfast is ready,” my dad hollered from the kitchen on that beautiful Sunday Mother’s Day morning.

My geriatric grandma—who could barely hear or understand anything that day—and I were the first to take our places at the table. My mom tried to summon my brother with her new favorite nickname for my him, “Bings,” (No matter how old you get, your mom will almost always view you like she did in your years of innocence and address you by often-strange yet somewhat humorous nicknames, the origin of which will usually only make sense to her.)

“Hey Bings, breakfast is ready you know and your grandma is here.” my mom said in a sort of accusatory tone. We all knew, besides my grandma, that he was probably sleeping off a night of narcotic use which had turned him into a nodding narcoleptic.

I could only hear his door open as my mom looked up the stairs, and by the expression on my mother’s face, I could tell he looked horrible and was not coming down for breakfast. I then heard him go into his bathroom.

My mom then told me my brother merely looked at her beneath heavy eyelids and made a weird farting noise with his mouth. I thought that was kind of funny, but his absence at the breakfast table made eating that delicious meal seem a bit sullen and surreal. He was now so in the throes of heroin addiction that he could not even make it down to breakfast to try and eat and at least say hello to his very old and thankfully a bit aloof grandma.

This was the same grandma that my mom had to drive around to her many doctor appointments for ailments ranging from bladder infections to low blood pressure. This was the same grandma who had read me children's books when I was a kid and fixed my clothes when they got holes in them or were missing buttons. However now she could now barely button her own shirt on some days.

I really felt sorry for my mom, recently retired from working at a hospital for about thirty years, having to juggle taking care of her aging mother and drug addled son every day, often getting verbally abused in both cases. Age had made my grandma regress to being a helpless child again, and Smack had made my brother regress the same. The only solace my mom could find was in the Bible and by watching T.V. evangelists. This was not the retirement she envisioned in her younger days.

Well that was good dad," I tried to sound as optimistic and uplifting as possible, despite the overbearing absence of my slumbering brother. It would not surprise me if he shot up and went back asleep as we were eating our breakfast.

"Are you done Welma?" my dad asked my grandma who had actually managed to eat a decent amount.

"How was the Sausage?" I asked only to be met with a quizzical, bemused look.

"What, you talk too fast sometimes, honey," was her only reply. But at least she was sort of laughing, Even though she was 90, her face was surprisingly devoid of heavy wrinkles, yet her mind had become stricken with dementia. "Oh, yeah, it was good." She never did ask why my brother had not made it down for breakfast, but I could tell that she knew something was wrong. But she was too old to worry anymore. The end is imminent for all of us, relatively speaking and she was not going to spend her final days stressed out about what she could not control. The thing is though, we all felt helpless to some degree.

"OK well I made the breakfast so YOU can wash the dishes," my dad pointed playfully to my mom. I ended up washing the dishes for her since after all, it was Mother's Day.

My father and I then went to the T.V. room to watch some basketball and political commentary programs, while my grandma and mom sat in the family room on the other side of the house and chatted. They also both read books. It amazed me that my grandma, who could barely follow conversations, was sharp enough to read her J.A. Jance novel. While my mom read a book about the latest diet craze.

"Do you really think that Obama should be re-elected, I mean come onnnnn!" my father half-teasingly asked me. "He's a fricken Socialist and is spending us into the ground. He has no concept of economics and how the government should spend its money."

My dad, a business major who had been a banker since the 1970s surely knew more about how money and economics worked than I did. It was true that since Obama was elected in 2008, the unemployment rate had not improved much at all. As far as his comment about the spending of the Obama administration, oftentimes my dad's loyalty to the Republican Party overrides his analysis of what the Democrats are actually doing.

"Well, all I know is that my contract at my job is up in about ten days and I still don't even have a job after that. I haven't even been granted an interview," I lamented to my father, who my uncle refers to as the eternal optimist. But the way he speaks about Obama, I prefer to refer to him as Dr. Dismal.

"Well, any company would be happy to have you. You are so talented and smart... You mean to tell me your employer isn't going to hire on from this contract?"

"No," I quickly replied.

"Well, there are jobs out there. I bet Amazon is hiring," my father tried to sound encouraging.

I just nodded back and told him that I planned to go into technical writing. I knew of some people that were getting jobs, some of which were on measly three-month contracts. What kind of company hires people for three-month contracts? To me, this was evidence enough that the job market has not been the same since the crash of September 2008. Sure it was anecdotal evidence, but it was evidence enough to me that if you want to work for some of the big companies out there, you have to jump through ridiculous hoops. It is worse than college.

"Hey is there a game on?" I quickly changed the subject. I heard Oklahoma City is playing today."

Even though Seattle's former N.B.A. Team, the Seattle Supersonics, had move to Oklahoma City, I still rooted for them, mainly because one of my favorite players, Kevin Durant, plays on the team.

"Ah who cares?" I could hear my brother stoutly shout from the hallway. It was about 3 p.m. and he was finally awake. He poked his head into the doorway, clad in only a T-Shirt and sweatpants. "Ever since the Sonics left, I don't see the point in watching N.B.A basketball anymore." He seemed more alive now.

"Well, he's alive," my dad joked. "So glad you could join us amongst the living."

I don't think my dad caught the irony in his statement. In fact, I had already prepared myself for the possibility of me getting that horrible phone call: your brother overdosed last night.

"Yeah, I am awake now tough guy. I will go ahead and pressure wash your driveway and the back deck so it looks good for dinner."

My brother, who had been unemployed for more than a year would do odd jobs around my parent's house for money: money that he would most likely just spend on junk.

"Yeah get out there and get to work," my father snorted.

Despite his youthful sense of humor and exuberance, I could tell that the last few years had taken its toll on my dad. Since 2008 he had lost both his parents and his job demanded him to be there as much as 12 hours a day. Even when my parents went on vacation, he would bring his laptop along to do work. This coupled with having to worry about my drug-addicted brother had made him lose more of his hair, and the remaining has begun to increasingly turn grey. He had also gained a lot of weight due to his eating habits, which had gotten worse and worse every year after he turned forty—that was twenty years ago. I used to worry that he was drinking too much. At one point he joked to me while resting a single-malt scotch on his immense belly, while slouching on the couch and commenting on the dysfunction of my immediate and extended family, "This is my we drink, son." It was a somewhat funny statement, but for a man who did not drink a drop at all until his mid-fifties, it caused me some alarm.

"Ah those ribs smell delicious," I dreamily said while walking into the kitchen. The sound of my brother pressure washing the front driveway could faintly be heard. I found it hard to believe that my bro could muster the strength to do anything in his current state, let alone manual labor. I am sure he was motivated by the prospect of earning money to pay for what he would one day refer to as a "hug from God."

"Yeah we need to get the table put together outside," my mom alluded to me to do it.

"Okay, one sec," I replied while reaching in my bag for a book I had been reading, *The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, by the late, great, Carl Sagan. It was a little piece of rationality in the seemingly surreal and contorted reality I found myself in. When one's mind is disorganized and distraught, there are not many things that can relieve the stress better than a Carl Sagan book.

My grandma, mom and I sat in the family room, which now had fresh, new cherry hardwood flooring and new leather furniture. My folks' recently remodeled house was aesthetically beautiful and hardly recognizable inside, however, the memories, new and old, that are contained within the two-story home's walls could not be erased.

Just as I was reading about different ways to think logically and dispel tricks of the mind, I glanced outside to see my brother grab the table umbrella and hoist it up in an attempt to insert it into the umbrella slot of the glass table. The umbrella, which was unfurled, seemed to be securely in the slot, but my bro struggled for a second—the umbrella waned to the right and CRASH. The entire table shattered into small pieces of glass. I dreaded his reaction, as his wrath is usually a frightening thing to behold. I expected him to start cussing and thrashing the table's chairs about. But he just looked at the Mother's Day catastrophe in front of him in shock and

merely let out a short “Huh, really, man...” He then sauntered off down the back deck’s stairs in disbelief.

I immediately attributed the accident to the drug use affecting his coordination, but in reality, it could have happened to anyone. He only wanted to help and make up for his absence at breakfast, but my brother’s kind gesture turned into what could be regarded as his recent life circumstances: shattered to pieces and seemingly impossible to put back together again.

Everyone was quiet for about ten seconds. I could only think about how lame it was that we could not eat outside now. I was really looking forward to enjoying my dad’s succulent grilled ribs with the fresh Woodinville spring air brushing gently across my face, carrying with it the new scents of bumblebee copulated and pollinated Fuschias, Gardenias and Orchids.

However, I did not want to express my agitation in anyway, because I knew that would make the situation worse. Surprisingly, my often-acerbic mom kept quiet as well while my dad just got a broom. My grandma was the only one who seemed completely unfazed by the event, either because she was so deaf that that the sound of shattering glass and subsequent loud thud was barely audible to her, or she was the only one to finally accept that she was visiting a nut house. Maybe it was a bit of both.

My bro reappeared in the backyard looking like he had finally accepted what had happened.

“Don’t worry about it,” my dad said to my brother while handing him a broom and dustpan. “Just try to get up as much glass as you can. It’s fine, we can just eat inside.”

“No, I can call my friend James. He has a table just like this that he was thinking of taking to the dump.” My brother than began frantically dialing his friend on his cellphone. However, the table had already been taken to the dump. He finally surrendered to the reality of this unreality and began sweeping up glass off of the synthetic deck.

Sitting at the same kitchen table that I had grown up with, a table that was about 20 years old, I began to reminisce about my upbringing. I remembered sitting at this table, eating my breakfast the day I graduated from high school. Being all of 18 years old, I felt that I was dreaming and that I was not old or mature enough to be thrown into what one person described in my yearbook as “...this stink hole of a society.” I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do with my life as, even though I was perfectly capable of doing better academically, I was just an above average student who spent his high school daze dreaming of rock and roll stardom and spending more time practicing guitar than practicing Trigonometry or Chemistry. I actually felt a bit of remorse about that. Flash-forward some fifteen years later and I still did not have a clear idea about my life’s purpose. Except this time I did not feel guilty—just frustrated and alienated: like I did not fit in anywhere.

“Yeah, my friend Xavier is trying to get me a job at his father’s construction business,” my brother broke the awkward silence at the dinner table as my parent’s fat cat Morie, a Russian Blue, jumped on my lap—he was after all a protein craving carnivore.

“I have been helping Xavier demolish a couple homes this week. I actually have to go help tonight after dinner,” my bro stated. I thought for sure he was lying. He could lie without batting an eye. He had become a master. I was pretty sure he was just trying to ensure my folks that he had some sort of work, but it was just an excuse to go out and get high.

Like me, my brother had attempted to make some sort of career for himself. Although I went to college and earned a nifty little Journalism and Music degree, my brother opted to put school on hold. However, neither of us had really spent much time working for any one company.

I could not blame my brother for not finding satisfaction with any job. It boggles my mind that entry level jobs at even the multi-million dollar corporations barely pay enough for one to live in a 600-hundred square foot studio apartment. It is undoubtedly a joke. I knew people that never went to school and were bartenders that made nearly twice as much as I do. College is only useful if you learn a trade—auto mechanic, electrical engineer, architect et-cetera-- or are going for your PhD—even people with far superior intelligences than mine were having trouble finding work.

Oh sure, companies will hire you if you have a Bachelor’s degree in the liberal arts or maybe even a Bachelor’s of Science, but unless you are a computer programmer, or are looking to go into health care, you are going to be underpaid out of college. Two things are for certain, people will buy computers and get sick. I often wish I was naturally inclined to be a doctor or a computer scientist. However, as my dad would say, you’re just not wired that way. Lately I feel that a couple of my wires have gotten crossed, and that at any moment, I would spontaneously combust, the result of a short circuit.

“Brian, you have been living in your apartment for how long now,” my grandma inquired while her hand trembled as she tried to eat her corn on the cob.

“Seven years,” I could not believe it had been that long. I lived on Capitol Hill in Seattle in a studio apartment. The neighborhood had changed very much since 2005, the victim of gentrification where encroaching condominium complexes had gobbled up historic bars and restaurants. Seattle was beginning to lose its character: almost becoming as antiseptic and banal as its preppy sister city, Bellevue: a city where buildings adorned with Microsoft emblems were ubiquitous and visible from the freeway, monopolizing the city’s skyline.

“I am looking for a new place though in order to save money. My rent is too much.”

My grandma just gave me an accusing look—like I was a schmuck. It was like she could not believe that I had not found my niche in life or had not gotten married. Maybe it was my



stubbornness that kept me from settling down and conforming to what society needed and would pay you big bucks for. However, I just kept trying to convince myself that we all find our way at different times on our lives. I definitely felt that I was on the right path, just in a funk.

It is in these sorts of moments that I think back to what my deceased grandpa, my father's dad, said in 2009. "You better find a gal quick and try to make sure she doesn't have like five kids. You're too old to marry someone who is right out of high school."

However, finding a wife has become less of a priority in my life. It was Kurt Vonnegut who stated that the reason why marriages were failing at such a high rate in modern times is because families had become smaller and more fragmented. Women did not have as many extended family members to talk to and men did not have as many family members to become pals with. Therefore, you were stuck being in your spouse's company all the time. This could take its toll on even the most compatible of couples.

It was hard to look in my mom's direction because I could tell that she too had noticed the bruising on my brother's long, lanky arms. He no longer attempted to hide the needle marks either because he had become less self-aware or maybe it was a subconscious cry for help. I just wanted to scream at him "What the fuck are you doing man! This was not in the plan. This is NOT the way our lives were supposed to turn out. What the fuck! Stop being a prick and get your life on the right track."

Instead I just ignored it. We all have our demons and secrets, the evidence of which is often hidden deep in our minds, unseen by most observers, even those closest to us. It just-so-happens that my brother's demons have physical evidence. However this evidence would probably not be admissible in court, to convict those from the FDA that approved of the use of Opioids to help with pain management or the doctors whose pockets were being lined with money from drug companies that knew darn well of the risks of marketing a synthetic opiate. How could they not have known the risks? They were basically creating a drug that acted on the Opioid Receptors in the brain the same way heroin and other opiates do. Were they nuts? Was this really necessary? It's one thing to give a wounded soldier an injection of morphine, but to give patients long-term prescriptions of a potentially addictive drug: that is insane. I guess comedian Chris Rock was right when he said that certain drugs are often illegal because the government or drug companies are not making money from them. And the so-called opium addiction cure-all drugs such as Methadone and Suboxone often do not work. I wonder, how many U.S. heroin addicts would not have turned to the needle had Oxycontin and other synthetic opiates never been invented? I would like to think that the government would make these drugs illegal, but they will still be produced somewhere. I guess is better for the government to have some control over these drugs than for them to be made in homemade labs, like Crystal Methamphetamine. It's like the invention of the Nuclear Bomb: the knowledge to produce this product is already out there, now it is a matter of trying to regulate it properly, which it hardly is, it seems.

“Yeah, man, as soon as I get a better job, I think I might go back to school and get a degree in business or get my real estate license,” my brother said. “I have a friend trying to get me another job in sales, but I don’t know.”

My brother can sell ice to an Eskimo, that is for certain. He had excelled in his sales jobs in the past, but always managed to get fired for behavioral problems. We all nodded our heads when he mentioned his plans, but no one really gave him a word of encouragement. I could not blame them: My brother had the potential to do great things, but it was hard for him to put in the long-term effort it often takes to succeed in the world. He seems to want everything right now. Maybe that is one of the reasons he had always been involved with drugs in some capacity. We live in the Elizabeth Wurtzle, Prozac Nation, where one must always be happy no matter what the cost. If you are sad, you are sick. I mean, come on, look at the world: What is there not to be happy about?

“Dude, do it man,” I spoke up in what most certainly must have sounded like a phony tone of support. “You need to get out there and start thinking about your dreams.”

I thought my words would make him smile, but they only induced a blank and apathetic stare on his face, slightly smeared with barbecue sauce.

Damn it, I began to feel that my entire family was just pretending. We were all pretending that my brother would just snap out of his addiction. We were all pretending that my Grandma’s health was fine as she pretended to hear and understand our conversations. We were all pretending that I would get a job and not have to move back home: a fate that literally made me feel suicidal. We were all pretending that it really mattered who we voted for in the upcoming presidential election in November. We were all, just, pretending that something was not horribly wrong with how our family had taken shape well into my and my brother’s adulthood. Heck, my mom liked to pretend that her fat cat was her grandkid. Something had to fill the void. “I want a granddaughter,” she would often say, partly as a motherly demand and partly as a motherly lament.

“I might just have to work two jobs.” I said trying to ensure my folks that I was going to try to do anything to avoid moving back home. “I saw my friend Jeremiah working at an espresso bar the other day. I guess he is working three jobs now, including his entry-level computer programming job at Google.

“Well, that’s what you have to do nowadays,” my father quipped.” You can thank Obama for that!” He was trying to get a reaction out of me. I just ignored him as I put my mitts around another juicy rib, washing it down with my favorite Jamaican Lager. My dad somehow would always intuitively know what my current favorite beer was, as it could change on a monthly basis.

“Now let’s not talk about politics,” my mom demanded while shaking her index finger in my father’s direction;

“Well, do you think Bush was much better? He was a . . . a . . . a twit!” my grandma spoke up, using a pejorative that I had not heard in more than 10 years—a pejorative that surely originated in different times. She must have been able to understand at least some of what we were talking about.

I then began to think about what presidents she grew up with. Being born in 1922, she was born when Warren G. Harding was president, some eight years before the Great Depression. She had listened to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s fireside chats as a teenager and was ten years old when Roosevelt delivered his New Deal speech on July 2, 1932. Nine years later, when the Japanese awoke a sleeping giant by bombing Pearl Harbor, she was 19—about the same age I was when Islamic extremists, terrorists flew planes into the Pentagon and World Trade Center. She was 23 in 1945 when Harry S. Truman approved of the bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with Oppenheimer’s babies. Her now weak ears were only 39 when she heard Dwight David Eisenhower deliver his exit speech in which he warned about what negative effects the United States Military Industrial Complex could have on this country. She was just on the dawn of her forties when John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas Texas. And she was not even a year older when the alleged Gulf of Tonkin offensive by North Vietnam gave Lyndon Johnson the authority to begin what would be euphemistically referred to as The Vietnam Conflict—not the Vietnam War. She must have been utterly disgusted, as most Americans were, when, upon reaching the mid-century mark in age, she witnessed on T.V. counsel to the President, John Dean, state that there is a “cancer on the presidency,” referring to the Watergate cover-up, followed by Richard Nixon’s famous words “Well I am not a crook.” He was a sneaky bastard, that was for sure. When Carter refused to let the United States be involved in the 1980 Olympics in Russia, to punish Russia for invading Afghanistan, she was nearing 60—her golden years. When Ronald Regan demanded Gorbachev to “Tear down this wall” referring to Germany’s Berlin wall in 1987, she was 65, what was then considered a Senior Citizen. When George HW Bush, Bush Senior, got us involved in the first Persian Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm, she was almost 70. When the charismatic Bill Clinton was being raked over the coals by Linda Tripp and Kenneth Star for allegedly sleeping with a white house intern, my beloved grandma was just more than three quarters of a century old. Never mind that during the Clinton administration, 22 million new jobs were created and the U.S. national unemployment was 4 percent—the lowest in 30 years. It was more important to the Republicans and the media to find out if our president, who is supposed to be a pillar of morality, right, was an adulterer. When the twin towers crumbled like sand castles in the wind, she was 78, almost 79. In March of 2003, my grandma, just more than 80, surely was in shock and awe, when Bush Junior, George W. Bush, approved of the first strikes against Iraq during the second Persian Gulf War. Then Secretary of State Colin Powell must have been too, since he resigned from his position after testifying before the U.N. that there were in fact Weapons of Mass Destruction being stored on Iraqi soil. Those weapons were never found.

Now my grandma is 90 years old. She is the only grandparent I have left. Her husband, a WWII veteran, died in 2004. She is widowed, nearly deaf, has dementia but she is still cognizant enough to state her opinion about what she thought of George W. Bush. If he was not truly a twit, he surely was, to me at least, a political puppet. He was a marionette on strings pulled by Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz. During his administration national unemployment rose to nearly ten percent and the national deficit increased to 4.5 trillion dollars. During Clinton's administration, the deficit had decreased to 401 billion dollars.

However, the numbers have not gotten much better during Obama's administration. In fact, besides passing a controversial and seemingly haphazard Health Care Plan and killing Al Qaeda's Osama Bin Laden (whose power within that terrorist faction had become negligible) Obama had not accomplished nearly as much as he had promised during his presidential campaign. Perhaps the young president was a bit naïve to believe he could turn this country around in a mere four years. To be fair, amongst Obama's other accomplishments were that he cut \$1.4 billion out of the antiquated Star Wars program and by the end of his first year his stimulus package created 2.1 million new jobs. However, as of July 2012, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate in the United States is at 8.3 percent—still not nearly as low as it should be. Moreover, the unemployment numbers do not show part time workers, contract workers and people that have given up looking for steady long-term jobs.

Regardless, his campaign slogan "the time for change is now" was certainly correct but his campaign posters reading "HOPE" could be seen around U.S. cities, with the lettering faded, as the message of hope faded as well.

"Oh come on! my father exclaimed with a teasing tone. "Obama is a pinko commie bastard. At least Bush wasn't trying to get the government involved in every facet of our lives."

"I don't care, he seemed like a dork," my Grandma retorted, using a word I am sure she heard my brother and I using when we were young.

"Ok, OK, that's enough. Do you guys want any more food?" My mom tried to change the subject.

"No thanks mother," my brother replied. "I have to go though pretty soon to go help Xavier with a couple things."

"Okay well be sure to say goodbye to your grandma," my mom said to my brother.

"Bye Grandma Welma," my brother said with a half-grin on his face as he rose to give her a hug.

"Goodbye dear," my grandma said in a sweet, soft voice. However, the expression on her face looked like she was a little confused as to why my bro had to leave so suddenly. I could tell she knew something was wrong with my brother, but she did not know exactly what. After retiring

from her city job, my grandma battled and beat alcoholism: Maybe she could sense that he was being elusive to indulge in the substance he was addicted to.

It is without a doubt that my parents and I knew that he was going to go out with his new buddies and do drugs. It was actually part of his routine now: He would wake up, lay in bed for hours, shoot up, come down enough to leave his room, eat something, usually sweet, play video games, eat dinner, shoot up, go out late, shoot up after the midnight hour, wake up and do it all over again. Any sober, non-addict would feel horrible if he or she was jobless, living at home and seemingly had no passion or desire to do anything but play video games. But in an addict's mind, at least when they are being enabled by someone who gives them a place to live and even food to eat—as my parents were doing—life could not be any better. However, my parents were very close to giving him an ultimatum if he wanted to continue living under their roof: either do not go out after 9 p.m. and look seriously for work, or we will have to ask you to leave our house. But for now, my bro was living any junky's dream—working odd construction jobs for his junky buddies, living rent-free, playing video games at his leisure and doing chores that my parents would ask him to do. He had only been a heroin addict for about a year now but, and his maturity level had turned into that of a teenager at best. In my mind, my brother had left somewhere a year ago, I see him, but he is not really there.

“So you are looking for new place?” my Grandma inquired as my mom began to pick the dishes off the table.

“Yeah, the cost of living compared to wages in this country is ridiculous. I don't know how people do it, really. I think I deserve more money for the work I do, and am trying to increase my skill-set to be more marketable. God, that word “marketable:” I suddenly felt like a mere commodity for any business that would have me—just another cog in the big business machine. My ego told me I deserved more than that—that I was better than that. However, maybe I was just a mere peon—a worker bee—a drone. I then was reminded of the brand name I had given myself to sound desirable to potential employers: “Poly-skilled Writer and Web Media Developer.” It was a fancy brand title I gave myself. However, it made me feel more pigeonholed than ever, albeit more attractive to prospective employers.

After dinner I helped my father wash the dishes as my mom and her mom, Grandma Welma, went into the T.V. room to watch some old Patty Duke re-runs. My dad made me one of my favorite drinks, a Gin Rickey and he poured himself a glass of his favorite scotch. Even though I was passively speaking with my dad, still joking about the upcoming presidential election, I could not stop thinking about my brother and wondering what he was doing at that moment. I heard rumors from his old friends that he was selling drugs to support his habit and even owned a gun. Just the thought of my brother selling drugs and carrying around a gun was enough to make my head feel like it was an anvil of tragedy on my slouching shoulders. I silently prayed to myself that the higher powers would protect him from harm.

“Who wants to take Grandma Welma home?” I could hear my mom asking from the T.V. room. “She is getting tired and wants to go back to her kitty cat?”

My grandma lived in an old-folks community in a nice apartment. It was only two miles away and I figured it would be the least I could do to take her home to her cat, a female Russian Blue with a very amiable personality. She was almost the female counterpart to my parent’s cat.

“I’ll do it.” I called out without hesitation.

“Hey sexy car,” my grandma commented as I turned on the ignition. I found it amusing my grandma found my car “sexy.”

“Yeah it’s a Volkswagen, German,” I replied.

“Oh those Germans, I love them,” my grandma said. I could not tell if she was joking, but she seemed serious. I guess my grandma’s affinity for all things German (probably besides Hitler) was unknown to me.

As I began driving I turned the radio to a local jazz station and Sarah Vaughan singing the song “Misty,” sounded over the German speakers. I purposely picked this station as I thought it might make my Grandma, a jazz fan, feel young again. She wore a peaceful smile on her face as I headed down into the Woodinville valley.

As she sat there seemingly content, I began to think about her current stage in life. At 90 years old, she was most surely aware that she was in the twilight of her life, although she seemed oblivious and/or apathetic about the Twilight Zone of an existence my family seemed to live. Although she was living comfortably, her medical bills were piling up and it would not be long until she would have to live in a group home with 24-hour care. At least she could afford that. It is not uncommon amongst some of my friends to have one or even two grandparents living with their kids. Many Baby Boomers have to take care of their aging parents, not spending their retirements the way they envisioned.

“Oh dear, could you please help me up to get inside, the door?” my grandma requested. “I can make it the rest of the way inside.

I grabbed a hold of my grandma’s arm and she gripped my right bicep to steady herself. I was amazed by her strong grip as I helped her step up the curb. She then gave me a quick kiss on the cheek and for a second, my mind reminisced back to a time before even my folks were born. I imagined her kissing my late grandpa, her husband, on the cheek as he left to be stationed in Italy in 1942. They lived apart for about three years before he returned to the United States and they got married.

“Good night, grandma,” I said trying to sound as sweet as I could. “I will see you on Father’s Day.” I assured her with a strong wave as she pushed the button to open the automatic door.

Driving back to my parents', I blasted the song "KoKo" by Charlie Parker. I then began to think of my brother again and heroin. I winced as I thought about the firm grip that heroin had on Parker, eventually taking his life. But my brother had a stronger support system, I kept trying to assure myself. I would not let him die. I would rather take my own life, if it would save his.

As I entered my parent's home, I suddenly realized that I was really emotionally fatigued by the day's events. However, I stayed at my childhood abode for a few more hours, watching various political news broadcasts and the Saturday Night Live from the night before, which my dad had recorded. He loves that show and despite being very tired and sort of depressed, I managed to laugh at a few of the skits, my favorite being the Quirky Girl skit with Zooey Deschanel.

"Okay guys, I love ya but I need to get outta here," I announced to my parents at about midnight.

Both my parents got up to give me a hug and I hugged them with as much strength as I could muster in my tired state.

"We love ya, kiddo, keep the faith," my dad said to me as I put on my jacket.

"I definitely will," I replied, "See you guys soon," I shouted back to the open front door as I entered into the brisk Woodinville spring air, approaching my grandpa-approved "sexy" vehicle. Both my parents waved goodbye.

Even given my family's current peculiar predicament and the strange stage we all found ourselves in, this was an even stranger visit than usual. However, for some reason I was not discouraged about my future or the future of my family members. The future was definitely uncertain, but I felt that I would make things worse if I fell into despair.

The Seattle skyline is so beautiful from the I-90 floating bridge. As I began speeding West, across Lake Washington, I felt a warm sense of hope fill my soul. And then I noticed a familiar-looking vehicle. No, it couldn't be. As I approached what looked like my brother's car, I noticed that there was a dent on the front passenger side, the result of a fender bender my brother had gotten in about six months before.

I slowed down and got behind the grey Japanese cruiser, and approached the vehicle on the left. I noticed that the car was swaying in its lane and if any cop saw this type of driving behavior, he or she would surely pull the ditsy driver over.

As I approached the Infiniti on the left, I peered inside the drivers-side window and saw my brother with a goofy grin on his face, slouching in his seat and picking his nose with a pair of tweezers. It was a strange habit he had recently developed. I tried to get his attention as he was merely in the adjacent lane, but he was too out of it to notice to me. About five seconds later, he took the Rainier Avenue South exit off of the I-90.

Surely my brother was not with his friend Xavier or going to visit him, as according to my brother, Xavier lived on the East side of the lake. Seeing him that night was a glimpse into his late-night, early morning life—chasing the dragon and flying on its back into the eternal bliss of Om—disregarding life, dancing with Death.

At first the scene was entertaining and kind of humorous--as if it was taken out of a chapter from a Hunter S. Thompson story—a young man dipping down the road, blitzed out of his mind careening towards the crime-ridden streets of the city, packing a pistol and looking to make some dinero. But this was happening in real life. It seemed more Bozo than Gonzo, with Bozo the Clown at the helm of a Japanese Luxury vehicle bombing down a moonlit bridge, eventually exiting to the seedy streets of Rainier Beach at 1 a.m—probably not the best place for a skinny blonde kid from the affluent suburbs to be.

I could not believe the coincidence. I was certain my brother was going down to Rainier Beach to buy and/or sell drugs. I thought about calling him, but was sure he would not answer his phone. I thought about trying to find him, but immediately disregarded that idea, as I was certain it would be near impossible to find him.

Instead, I just kept driving home to Capitol Hill. My brother and I were now moving in two different directions, what seemed like wrong directions. As John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" played on my radio, I could only hope that we would both find our ways again.