



# Eva

by: J.L. McGoldrick

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Not every story in my life is peaches or cream. The following isn't really a story; it's more of a confession. It has festered from a sad memory into a horrible nightmare. I know now "many years later" that this fate wasn't totally my fault. I was young when it all began, I am not trying to make excuses, and I should have stopped it somehow.

It was started by nature or God or whatever you believe really runs this show, and finished by the same sick twisted son of a bitch. It's because of these events that I don't really believe in organized religion. It doesn't offer any tangible relief; all it does is sap you of your money and make you suffer for things that you shouldn't.

Anyway, I'm starting to lose sight of my target. You are probably thinking, "why write about something that bothers you so much?" There are a lot of reasons not to write this story and only three reasons I should; the three reasons far outweigh the others.

The first reason "and these are from least important to most" is to purge my soul once and for all of these demons that wake me from a sound sleep. They haunt me like a lost soul waiting for a ray of sunlight that will never come.

The second reason is to try and help anyone who may be having these same problems or causing them for someone else. I am doing it to try and show them the error of their ways and to stop a vicious cycle. The pain caused by such heartless acts doesn't recognize age, race, wealth, or health. It will catch you unless you are a completely heartless beast. "I know you aren't."

The third reason was enough to make me write the story all by itself. I needed to make a permanent record of some kind to keep my memories "good or bad" of a woman who meant everything to me. And how when she needed me the most I turned my back on her.

There are very few people in your lifetime that you can honestly say would do anything for you. Even fewer still that would die for you, or go through hell so you don't have to feel the slightest pain. Everyone has at least one or two, but you don't have many, definitely not enough to waste.

This is my story of such a lady...

My grandma great lived in a small one-bedroom guest cottage behind my grandparents' house for as long as I could remember. The living arrangement was perfect for her. I don't think she ever drove; I don't think she even knew how to. My grandparents would drive her to the store, or they would just pick up what she wanted when they went.

Her place was great. The bedroom had two twin beds; one was hers, the other belonged to my grandpa great. He had passed away when I was very young, but she never moved his bed. The beds faced west, and on the entire north wall were closets filled with their clothes. The south wall had a sliding door that led to the patio overlooking the yard. She would sit there and watch my brother (Robert) and I play for hours. There was a tiny bathroom with just enough room for a sink, toilet, and shower. I used to love counting the small octagon-shaped tiles in there. The living room was connected to the kitchen. She had a hide-a-bed couch where we used to sleep every weekend and as many school nights as mom would let me.

She didn't have a big T.V. or radio; she enjoyed reading to us so it didn't matter. I guess what I'm trying to say with such detail is for such a small place it was always comfortable and it was home. I would have rather been there than anyplace on earth. Disneyland was just a mouse house compared to grandma great's.

I only have a few moving memories left of the time we spent together in the cottage; the rest are just snapshots. I can remember lying in bed next to her, telling her about my day at school. I must have been about 8 or 9 years old. I know I was still going to Savanna elementary. She would listen so contentedly; looking back now she was an angel. I used to spice up my stories as young boys often do with sword fights like Luke Skywalker or daring car chases like Starsky and Hutch. She never once told me she didn't believe me or made me feel like I was anything less than the center of her universe.

After our talk about how great both our days were, she would lead us through our nightly prayer (Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray to God my soul to keep; if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take—amen). Then off to sleep we would go.

Another memory still fresh in my head is of our breakfasts. She would always make sure we were fed well. I can still see her making peanut butter, jelly and butter sandwiches, or Spam and scrambled eggs. To this day I still love that Spam and eggs!

I don't have much of a recollection as to when she started having trouble, but I would guess it was around 1980 or 81. I was 12 or 13 and in jr. high school. My memory of some of these events is not very good for many reasons. You see I wasn't really aware of how serious Alzheimer's disease is. Many things in my life were changing at the same time. Junior high is the training ground for adult responsibility. I was also going through the physical changes every boy and girl goes through in their early teens. Yes, puberty! I can still remember how odd it was having hair and things start showing up. I was chasing girls and looking forward to becoming a man in high school. Go ahead and laugh out loud; I am too...

Anyway, it wasn't until shortly after these changes started taking place that my parents decided to see just how responsible I really was. They said I could stay over at my grandparents' house while they all went to bowling on Monday nights. I wasn't alone for long though; I invited my best friend Tim. We would order pizza from Triple Crown pizzeria, and then the party would begin. First we would eat the whole pizza and drink a six-pack of soda by ourselves.

Then we would watch R-rated movies all night or until my grandparents got home around 11 o'clock. We had it made!

I don't remember exactly when, but during the last year or so grandma great was moved out of the cottage and into a retirement/convalescent home. After a few months her condition degenerated more, and she was raped by some sick low-life piece of trash. (You would be surprised at how often these things happen to the elderly in those places.) My grandparents immediately moved her back home and into one of their guest rooms. This was the first time I remember seeing what Alzheimer's was really doing to her. There were times when she was her happy loving self and then there were times when she didn't know where she was. Even seeing these changes I didn't really understand that she had no control over this.

As a young boy fresh to the world, such things don't register correctly or at least they didn't with me.

In the beginning when she moved back I thought she would be supervising my Monday nights, but that thought did not last long. Let me explain a little bit about how my grandparents' house was set up. The grounds were huge, just a little over an acre. The property had lots of open ground, with a long circular driveway that stopped at the front door. A large tree line blocked out the street and outside world.

The house was a ranch-styled home, modest in size. It faced west. As you walked in the front door the living room was on the right with the kitchen directly behind it. There were three bedrooms to the left of the front door and down a long hallway. My grandparents' room was the first one on the left, with the bathroom directly across from it. At the end of the hall on the left was the room my grandparents gave to my grandma great. Across from it was the spare room.

Now that you have the layout of the house let me explain that as a child I was deathly afraid of that hallway. Because at the end of it was a set of upper and lower closets that I knew contained the boogeyman. Besides that the hallway was always a little dark, with no windows and only one light halfway down its length. It didn't bother me much as a teen, but now I have nightmares about that hallway. And no, it is not because of the boogeyman.

When grandma great first got back, on Monday nights she would sit on the couch while I sat in grandpa's recliner. We would eat pizza and watch T.V., but I don't remember paying much attention to her. I felt kind of like she was cramping my new grown-up style. Soon, as all Alzheimer's victims do, because I wasn't paying enough attention to her or keeping her interest, she began to wander. I never thought much of it, until one Monday night I got yelled at really good for letting her go out without keeping a good eye on her.

I was a freshman in high school by now, and this was really starting to become a job on Mondays. My grandparents sealed the sliding door that exited the north side of grandma great's room, so she couldn't get out without help or being seen. Shortly after my little talk, grandma great started having more bad days than good. It got to the point where she didn't know any of us half the time.

On Mondays when I would get there grandma would normally have already served dinner. Grandma great would either be sitting in the living room or in bed. There wasn't a lot in her room anymore. Just a bed and a dresser with an old radio on top, maybe a few pictures but that was about it. It wasn't a bright room, and it was a far cry from the place she once called home.

She started spending more time in her room; once this happened I called Tim and our Monday night rituals started again. With one small change, instead of girlie movies we started inviting real girls over as young boys would. I never really thought much about the isolation and loneliness of a nine by nine room before.

The times that she would come out (for a drink, to use the bathroom or to see what was going on) I would usher her quickly back to her room as not to disturb our fun.

Then one Monday night a few months later something happened that would forever change my life. The evening started as usual; parents & grandparents left. Tim arrived shortly thereafter; we ordered pizza and called Tina and Sharon. We were all having a great time when from the hall came a cry like nothing you could imagine.

I have two sons of my own now; even as infants their cries weren't even close to this scream. It was the sound of a person in complete terror. A cry as though the angel of death had made himself known and there was no escape possible. I ran down the hall as fast as I could; I was so afraid I couldn't speak when I opened the door. Her room was pitch black inside; the only light was coming from the hall behind me.

As I entered I forgot to turn on the light. There in the darkness sitting up in her bed with her eyes wide open like she was looking for some way out of the darkness was my great grandmother.

She didn't even notice that there was light or that I was in the room. When I finally gathered enough strength to go to her and touch her hand it broke her trance, but she fought to get away from me. She pushed and fought as though I was the face in her nightmare. I was no longer the little boy who held her spellbound with a smile, or the boy she would dress and send off to school with the promise I could sleep with her again that night.

I was the BOOGIEMAN in the dark to her. It took me a while to calm her; I held her hand until she fell asleep. When I left the room I kept the door open, and I went back to the living room where everyone was gone; they even left the front door wide open. I closed it, turned off the T.V., sat down on the couch and cried.

I never again forced her to stay in her room; she rarely came outside anyway.

Shortly after that she lost her mobility; the disease didn't take her until a few years later.

The last few years of her life she spent as happy as she could be. My grandparents hired a wonderful couple to take care of her. They expanded the cottage to a two bedroom, so the people could be with her 24 hours a day. They were so good to her and good for her. I never could bring myself to really talk to her after that night. I used to think she wouldn't have understood what I was saying, but I know now she would have.

What would I have said?

I would have told her that I would die for her, run through hell for her, and that I loved her. That I was sorry for not being as strong as she had taught me to be. And I would have asked her to let me spend the night with her one more time just to hear her say "Now I lay me down to sleep I pray to the lord my soul to keep, If I should die before I wake I pray to the lord my soul to take—amen."

