

## **Life's Journey: Melissa Hickey**

A wrinkly, age spotted hand rose from the murky water, wavered, then slapped down again. The hand belonged to my ninety-two-year-old daughter.

I remember the day my girl was born, I died seconds after giving birth. My spirit hovered above the delivery bed. She was so tiny, so alone, so motherless, that I decided to stay.

My little one began her journey like other babies, in crystal blue water, only because of my sudden demise she had to swim harder against the current. Consistent in her stroke, she swam unscathed until she reached adolescence. Below the surface, where she couldn't see a bunch of stingers were circling. Their long tentacles reached out and stung her body, causing tears. "Stay brave," I called, "this will pass."

And pass, it did. By her mid-twenties, the stingers were a distant memory. She swam on. It was me who spied the massive rock sticking out of the water. "Watch out," I yelled, but focused on her journey. She didn't hear me. Bang, she swam straight into it, and sank below the surface. "Swim, swim," I screamed from the sidelines, "don't give up."

She reappeared minutes later. A man had her in his arms. He held her, and guided her onwards. She welcomed his support. For years they swam together. My daughter's hair turned grey and wrinkles formed on her face. One day a white light descended upon them and spying the face of his long dead mother, the man rose up to greet her. Now my daughter was alone. With wide eyes, she swam in circles, unsure which way to go. "Help me," she moaned.

Younger, smooth skinned hands materialised, grabbed her and pushed her forwards through the choppy waters.

With less than ten kilometres to go, her brow creased, and she wriggled free of those helping hands. "Go away," she shouted. "Who are you, who am I, I don't know who I am?" With slow and uncoordinated strokes, she dog paddled aimlessly through the filthy, rubbishy waters of Alzheimer's, towards death.

I waited. She came towards me, her fingers reached out and touched the finish line. She looked up and saw me. "Mum," she cried, recognising me in an instant. I reached down and yanked her spirit from the water. As we embraced, a white glow shone done, and the voices of our deceased loved ones called our names.

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