

# PAPA, WHERE ARE YOU? I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE

*personal essay*  
Jessica Mack / senior

My life has changed so much over the past years since we moved my grandfather, my mother's father, back to Athens from Thomasville, Georgia. My family and I took in my grandfather who is suffering with dementia. Dementia is described by different groups of symptoms such as the affection of memory, thinking, and social abilities.

My grandfather has been dealt with dementia for about ten years now I think, and it has been a struggle. He had two strokes before he moved back here to Athens, and those two caused him to have short-term memory loss, which means if I told him what yesterday was, five minutes later he would have forgotten what I said and would have asked me to repeat what I said about 10 times. As years went by, he started having seizures, and at the time we didn't know he was having those until his doctor actually saw him have one. My grandfather had so many seizures that we started to know the signs and what to do, but apparently one of those seizures he had a few months ago was not a seizure, it was another stroke. The stroke he had this last time affected his eyesight, and now he's blind, but the doctor says it can possibly be fixed, which is good. As of now he can't see, so we have to do everything for him. Doing everything for him means feed him, bathe him, clothe him, and other things as well, which is something new for me because I'm used to him being able to do everything himself.

You're probably wondering where I'm going with this. This is such a transition for me and my family. My grandfather was a very smart man; he was a school teacher and a pretty good one too. He was very well known in this community, everybody knew him as Mr. Hightower or Mr. High for short, the biology teacher. He gave pop quizzes every day, and when you got to the test, you knew everything. One day, one of his former students came up to him at the store and told him thank you, and of course he asked what he had done. The man said, "You're the reason why I'm a doctor. You made science interesting and easy to understand, so I decided to major in biology and went from there to medical school and I want to thank you." What that guy said showed how he greatly affected people and changed lives. There are hundreds of others who have similar stories about my grandfather. The sad thing is that he doesn't and can't remember anything he taught to those people.

Dementia is a dreadful disease that robs its victims and its victims' families of so much. It's heartbreaking to see its awful effects. Many times I have seen the hurt and sadness in my mother's eyes as she is caring for my grandfather. She says he was always her protector, and now she has to take care of and protect him. She always said she didn't know how she would act when the day came that he would not remember her name, but unfortunately that day has come. There are days when he knows her, and there are days when he simply refers to her as "Ma'am". I can tell it really bothers her, but it's the reality of our lives these days. There is no known cure, and to my knowledge, we don't exactly know what causes the disease. Our main focus now is to make sure he knows we love him, give him the security he needs, especially since his eyesight has gotten worse, and support my mom in her efforts.

My grandfather is in good health, it's just the dementia. The doctor said he doesn't see anything to keep him from being here many more years. Day by day it is a battle for him, my family, and me as well. All we can do is pray and keep him going and not give up on him.

## OMNIPOTENT

*acrylic / charcoal*  
Clare Wislar / senior

