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There's something about a human being's ability to motivate and inspire others that is unparalleled. There's something about holding a hand that has weathered many storms, survived many wars, and guided many people that leaves a person changed. Something about being intimately connected with a powerful life is an experience that no amount of eloquent language can bring to justice. And this very something is what breathes new life into the ancient words of the Old Testament when the Hebrew author of Genesis proposed that man was created in the image of God. If these words are accurate, if these words hold truth, the observable effects of this supernatural act are abundantly evident. They are much too evident to ignore. For me, the culmination of this evidence rests in the person of my grandmother: my Mimi.

Traumatic events have the merciful tendency to blur a person's memory. I remember only in feelings. I remember in limited images that won't seem to leave. More specifically: I remember pulling at my hair for some sort of relief. I remember my misplaced hostility toward the attending nurse. I remember my feeble and weak knees giving way and forcing me to find relief in the seat behind me. I remember the rushing of emotions, the sense of injustice, the need for comfort. The stinging eyes overpowered by tears robbed me of my strength and so robbed me of my desperate desire and ability to be strong for my family. My beloved grandmother had found her way home to her Maker. But I couldn't let go of her hand. The contact immediately allowed my mind to flee to memories that brought comfort, memories that told the story of this

very hand walking me through every stage of life.

“Oh dear!” Mimi shouted with frustration. Now before you begin to think my grandmother’s parents were cruel, Mimi was simply a name that my linguistically challenged sister in her early youth had managed to create for my grandmother. Somehow it stuck. Mimi was perplexed. As me and my siblings clutched to her hands, my parents went ahead and made their way toward the elevator. You see, my elderly grandmother had this incredible quality. I often wondered if she had found that fountain of youth all those insane explorers were always chasing. But whatever the case, in her elderly years, she managed to stay in better shape than the average young adult. The elevator would simply not do for our Mimi. She grabbed us and made her way for the stairs. And up, up, up we went.

A child’s memory is a funny thing. To be honest, I have no recollection of where we were. But I suppose this memory is deeply imprinted within me because it represents the spirit of Mimi so well. Her whole life was about saying no to the elevators and heading up the stairs. This was a woman who knew nothing of short cuts or hand outs. This was a woman who worked for what she earned and painstakingly created a life that few can dream of building.

The same hands that guided me up those flights of stairs were always there to applaud at every event of my life. It would be impossible to remove the lasting feeling of looking out into an audience and seeing the beaming face of my biggest fan. In my earlier years, I was all about soccer. I wasn’t ever exceptional at the sport. By the time high school came around my usual position was somewhere on the bench next to the coach. But it didn’t really matter. Mimi was there. And when I went in the game and gave it my all for a mere five minutes, she was there. As I grew older, my time on the field transitioned to time on the stage. I began playing drums at church and became increasingly focused on honing this new gift. To be honest, I love playing

drums, and I love leading musical worship for my fellow youth. But I would be remiss not to admit that what I loved above all else were those clapping hands and that proud face of my Mimi. Her gentle and beaming face always managed to communicate, “I am proud of you.” To an insecure child, a child displeased with who he is and confused about who he’s supposed to be, there is no greater gift.

When those hands weren’t clapping at some event, they were tirelessly preparing food for the family. They were slicing a warm grilled cheese. They were peeling and pitting a fresh avocado for a massive salad. They were lowering a mozzarella meatloaf into a blazing oven. It was something more than food, when my grandma prepared it. It was a symbol of provision and sacrifice, a desire to serve her grandchildren. If it were not food, it was a check, a new pair of clothes, a card with an encouragement worth more than any monetary price. That was who she was. That was what those hands knew to do. They knew how to serve and to give. And they served and gave like no one else could.

As I clutched my Mimi’s precious hand, I couldn’t help but think about when those hands were filled with more life. My mind drifted to the several experiences of her grabbing my hands and rubbing them with a comfort and encouragement no one could recreate. As I progressed in school, my sole motivation was to ace a test or knock out an essay just to bring it home to her warm embrace. If ever I did well, it was promptly met by her with a phone call to everyone she knew proclaiming, “You will not believe how well my John-Michael is doing in school!” My heart cherished those words. She was an endless source of encouragement. I often think there is not a soul on earth who could encourage the way that she did. And those precious hands were but a tool in this aim. They were a means to encourage. They were a means to love.

It’s hard to encapsulate the pain of her passing. Unfortunately I think few can

comprehend. My observation has taught me that many grandparents are but distant relatives. It's an unfortunate reality, but it's quite prevalent. This reality is foreign to me. Mimi was more than a distant relative. She held an office as influential as a parent. And when that office became vacant, there was a corresponding vacancy within me. Finally, I let her hand go. I let her hand carry on to more important tasks, tasks of infinite value, clinging to the hope that one day I would rejoin with her in paradise.

Even as I write this paper, I'm driven by this inexplicable force. I'm driven to compose this memory of her with words that will bring her life justice, though not a sentence in this narrative brings any consolation to her passing. I want to do well. I want to take the grade home to her warm embrace. I want to listen in on her phone calls to everyone she can think of as she warmly boasts, "You just won't believe how well my John-Michael is doing in school!" But I can't help but be frustrated with the vast disconnect between my ability to articulate her impact and the reality of it. I've grown to realize that some lives carry such power and weight that they change the very way we live. There are some lives that you don't need to embellish at a funeral. There are some lives that no narrative and no human expression can accurately describe. There are some of us who decide to act upon the notion that man is made in the image of God. Mimi was one of these.