

Inside These Walls & The Meadowlarks Song

by Exie Romero

I see Dawn and Jerry Grillo as my grandparents, the older couple knew my parents before my birth. They love me like a granddaughter, so their other grandchildren became as close cousins to me, and my sisters. Their oldest grandson, Devyn, and I have grown close, and his Dad, Greg Grillo, built a beautiful home near his own parents. Making it easy for the kids to come over to nana and grandpa's' whenever they wanted to.

Everyone left the house earlier, to spend some time in my grandparent's garden. Nana's undoubtedly giving away her lavender to mom. And Dad's probably showing grandpa which pepper plant they should replant in their new home, once they buy one. They ask if I would join them, but I decline the invitation and stay inside. As I look around my grandparent's house, the home I grew up in, the words "*don't get attached to material things*", skips into my mind.

I watch the ceiling fan, far above, spin away at a familiar tempo; at the rhythm I'm used to. In this moment nothing has to change, I assure myself. But this assurance lasts for only a precious moment before dismay chokes my throat. Sighing, I wish that this wasn't the last time I would lie on the living room floor. The inviting space that was once filled with piano music, kids, and dogs is now bare. Even the midday sun, smiling through the nine large windows, feels different. There's a silence I'm not used to, not in this house.

No longer are there compositions of Bachs', or Debussy's, flowing from the computer speakers up stairs. *Maybe that's what's missing right now*, I wonder. But inside I know that there's more missing, making this experience strange.

Now lying in this dead air I list the concert of sounds that brought life to my memories. In addition to the compositions of Bach and Debussy, there was the daily sloshing and whirring coming from the laundry. The washing machine that always seemed to be in use. A lot like the beautiful Meadow Lark who sang each new day, the house never seemed to fall silent. I feel a grin creep onto my face as I also recall the oven timer that never seemed to shut up. Mainly because nana was out of earshot ninety percent of the time. The eternal blaring would finally be followed by her scampering up, or down, the stairs. Always like a numbat on a mission. The regularly operating washing machine, I remember, was occasionally joined with the humming of the dishwasher in the afternoons. That's another thing, in the afternoons, the phone rang off the hook. Nana's family would call from Australia, the kids would call wanting to come over, and these would be followed by the infamous telemarketers. Telemarketers who never got the hint. As funny as it was to hear grandpa half yell during skype sessions, and the sharp barking that emitted from Nica and Buffy, when they chased pheasants, or the UPS guy, I realize that I loved them all. Sighing again, I roll onto my stomach, and let the sunlight rest on my eyelids. As noisy as the house was, I'd give a good much to have it all back. But instead, I reminisce the odd choir, and pull myself back into those familiar sounds.

Nana's always been a busy woman. As thin, and as small as she looked I could always find her at work. In and around the large house, she'd move at the pace of dancing aboriginals. The door would constantly be opening and closing, as she glided from task to task. There were times both the dogs, and I didn't know where she was. If the mixer was flying away, I'd find the counter covered in flour, but no nana. I'd walk past the running washing machine, turn off the

faucet she left running, and it turns out she was downstairs looking for her Bowen massage instruction booklet; unaware the phone was ringing.

The sunlight feels warmer now, and I let myself sink into the carpet more, into the smells the house once consisted of. Because of these memories, I will forever associate the scent of lavender with nana and grandpa's place. It's nana's favorite flower and was always found throughout the house. Whether as dried flowers, or as extracted oil, the smell of lavender soon became part of the house. Then there was always the smell of freshly baked something, usually bread. And the smell of cranberry cookies, which before cooled, were suddenly replaced with crumbs; evidence that us kids had raided the kitchen. A hungry little army of five. Thanks to the washing machine, there always seemed to be the faint smell of cleanness floating around the house.

The sweetest of smells came from their candles, a welcoming vanilla bean scent. During the holiday season the candle's sweetness blended in with the smell of christmas cookies, and watercolor paints. All of us kids would frost the cookies, then sit through a full lesson, lead by nana, on how to use watercolors on something other than each other's clothing. Which happened whenever we goofed off. We'd be told, once again, why knowing how to paint a Douglas Fir was principal to Christmas watercoloring. And I could recite that reason if I hadn't been busy making faces at Devyn.

Squinting my eyes open, I wish I could collect all those smells, that brought me joy, and keep them in a small box of my own.

Curling onto my side I shiver in the midday sun. As usual the A.C. is turned down to an insane temperature, cooling my arms. Which as unpleasant as it is, is another thing I'll miss. *Feelings*, I wonder, that's one more concluding and most important thing that I'll miss from this house.

Like the way the aloe plants' leaf, felt against my fresh knee wounds, cool and goey as grandpa applied it, and healing as he gently pulled away. There also was the feeling of rough carpet on your bottom as us kids would hold our "who-can-slide-down-the-stairs-on-their-butt-the-fastest" contests. Chase would usually beat us by rolling down like a ball. Then there was always the happy feeling of a warm shower, that lasted ten minutes longer than necessary. Since mom and dad weren't rapping at the door, urging me out. And there was always, always, the amazing feeling of Goose Down Feather comforters, to hug you once out of the shower.

But the best feelings were the ones that started in your heart. For example the feeling of excitement as we'd run up the walkway to nana and grandpa's house on our first day out of school. Or the daring feeling of gliding on their slick wooden floor in the kitchen, with your socks on. Then the feeling of a cool, or summer warm, breeze swirling around you, because nana couldn't stand a house without open windows. The best feeling being the whole Christmas experience. With our tradition of polishing silver, frosting cookies, snowball fights in the dark, and the feeling of music tickling my bones like sugar. I don't think I appreciated these feelings as much then.

Back on the living room floor I feel my fingers clench. *Why do I have to say good-bye?* I nearly ask aloud. *I don't want to leave, I want my grandparents to continue having Christmas here. I want to come back here each summer to have dinner at the Gazebo, and hear the Meadow Lark sing each morning.* Feeling sudden anger I shoot up, seated. *It's not too much to ask. I try to confirm. Nothing has to change, the house can stay, nana and grandpa can manage*

it. And everything will continue as it always has. As it should. I sit in silence watching the clouds float in the dark blue sky. "You're being selfish, Damaris," my mouth suddenly utters.

I release my fists. I'm suddenly ashamed.

It is too much to ask. I realize, nodding. During the last couple years I've been a witness to the struggles of my grandparents. Grandpa's pace when mowing the various lawns around the property had slowed increasingly. Though nana maintained her quick tasks, she looked more and more tired, and was constantly forgetting things; like the faucet running, which flooded the laundry room last month. I've seen the way they worry about leaving the house when on vacations. It's always on their minds. Of course it's too much to ask, twelve years of maintaining such a beautiful home, full of guests, dogs, and grandkids took it's toll on them. *They can't manage the whole place anymore,* I understand. This is why I feel ashamed. I knew I wasn't fond of change when the adults decided to move the Christmas tree downstairs this one year, it felt weird. There had been various times that little changes- things to tradition- really bothered me. But until this moment I didn't want to face it.

Letting out an exhausted breath I pause. Like water, peace suddenly floods my veins and mind. And I realize that I can let this place, this house go. *It doesn't mean forget the memories, the sounds, the smells, or the feelings.* I comfort myself. *But it means coming to terms that though once a home, it's still a house, a material possession. Something I shouldn't get attached to. They need this, my grandparents need to be given rest and peace for maintaining such the beautiful household that I could safely enjoy.* I stand up and walk over to one of the large windows, overlooking the Gazebo below, where we had our summer dinners. And though it feels dumb I talk to myself, "You're lucky to have grown up where you have, but more lucky to have grown up with whom you have." I turn my back to the window, and slip my hands into my pockets. *I haven't lost either of them,* I remind myself of my grandparents. *And I'm still not an adult yet, therefore I'm not done "growing up". These precious people are still here and there's adventure, more memories to make in these coming years.* Like a dam bursting my heart runs with gratitude, and still some distant sadness, but I suddenly feel renewed. Change, I realized, will be constant. But time, and these loved ones won't last forever. In this moment I can officially say I let go. I got over my hurt (or hissy-fit I was having) and, in a sense, changed because of change.

"Chase and Devyn just came over, Maris said she'll be here soon, wanna come on out Dama?" Turning I walk towards nana's soft Australian accented voice. Nodding I smile. "All righty then, Damarinda, when we get back from Australia this next year, we can all go camping and biking." She promises, her bright blue eyes dance as we walk outside into the loving sunlight. "We don't have to worry about 'the place' and you and Dev can practice driving the van." I laugh, as she closes the door behind us. "Dev and I'll have our licenses by then." I remind her. "Oh yes, I forgot! Wow. You kiddos are growing up fast." She exclaims laughing.

Pausing, I watch her with her wild hair, trot across the lawn towards the garden where the others stand chatting. As I watch her I notice a lighter bounce in her step. Like the selling of the house had finally lifted it's weight of responsibilities from her small shoulders. *Gosh, how I love her,* I think smiling and then thinking the same about my grandpa as I hear his hearty laugh. Lowering my head, I'm still smiling, *she forgot that Devyn and I would already be sixteen by the time that they return... She forgot.* "I guess for now, some things won't change." I state grinning to myself.

Lifting my face to the kisses of the early afternoon sun, I hear a Meadow Lark whistle it's short melody. Whether it's meant as a goodbye or a welcoming to new change, it doesn't matter anymore. I have this moment, to be with the ones I love. And, in the end, that's all I need.