

On the Pier in Boca Raton, Florida with my Grandfather

The wooden bench creaks as I sit down next to my grandfather.

I ask to hear stories

of his childhood in West Virginia.

This is the first time I am visiting him here in Florida,

and as we look at the crashing waves,

he tells me of his youth and of those glorious mountains.

He never mentions he's under mountains

of grief. He won't say this because he is my grandfather,

and I won't ask. So we stroll along, his hushed voice like sweeping waves,

his eyes glistening as he brings life to the old stories.

He never wanted to move to Florida;

at night he dreams of West Virginia.

This, he says, was boyhood in West Virginia:

mowing lawns for ten cents and catching bluegill in rivers that split the mountains,

and it's not the same in Florida

even though there are fish, because that particular stream, the memory of my grandfather—

he pauses. It's too much to tell these stories,

too much for memories to crash on him like waves.

I look at my grandmother on the beach, her feet buried in the hot sand. She waves

at us and looks back at the shimmering sea, her mind far from West Virginia,

far from her own stories—

modeling and winning pageants and how she could have left those mountains

if she hadn't loved my grandfather,

how at night she used to dream of moving to Florida.

So here on the pier in southern Florida,

between the silence and the roaring waves,

I study the sun-and-soil colored eyes of my grandfather.

This is the man who first brought me to West Virginia,

the man who taught me how to fish with a stick and shoot a gun, who made mountains

out of words and crafted them into stories,

and he begins again to tell stories

of life before Florida,

the days of breathing in the mountains'
air, hunting squirrels with BB guns, skipping school and river rocks, feeling waves
of love for the girl from the diner, raising two West Virginia
boys and becoming a grandfather.

How the generations roll in faster than Florida's waves.
When my kids have kids, I'll bring them to the mountains in West Virginia,
teach them to bait a hook and write stories, hoping they'll see me the way I see my grandfather.