

The Final Summer Night

“The sirens made an unforgettable wailing sound. I can still hear the ear-piercing screech of the old metal ambulance door quickly being opened by the paramedics.” I sat there sliding off the antique leather couch, growing eager to hear grandma tell the rest of the story. “It was the summer of 1960. A sweltering hot night in August, and my best friend Anne’s birthday. To celebrate, Anne’s friend from the town over was throwing “the biggest birthday bash of the decade” that night. At least that’s what she wanted it to be remembered as.” Grandma took a deep breath. “My girl group consisted of Anne, Tully, Marta, and myself. We prepared for the party at my place. My house was the best hang out spot, voted on by our friends. Anne and I planned to study at the cosmetology school in town after graduation, so we were the hairstylists of the group. We did everyone’s hair and attempted to do their makeup. We ate the pizza mom brought us,. We gossiped, laughed, and danced to our favorite songs on the radio. We had a great time when we were all together. I will never forget how happy they made me.” Grandma wore a great big smile telling me about times spent with her friends. I could tell she truly cared for them. “This party was our last with Tully before she left us for Columbia University. We had our whole futures ahead of us, with Tully and Marta leaving for college and Anne and I attending cosmetology school.” Grandma paused for a moment. I could tell this story was difficult for her to share, although she insisted on me hearing it.

“Anne drove us to the party in her brand new Ford Mustang. We blasted all of our favorite songs and let our hair flow free in the warm night wind. When we arrived at the party, we were greeted with “SURPRISE” from the guests and concoctions of different drinks immediately being shoved in our hands, waiting for us to try. Marta quickly left the scene to chat with her boyfriend, while the rest of our crew and some more stayed on the dance floor all night.

We were mingling with everyone there, playing new drinking games, and of course, dancing to the music. I loved parties with my friends. We had a great time together in high school. I had found my forever friends.” The tone in my grandma's voice was soft, yet growing serious. The look in her eyes told the rest of the story without her having to say a word. It was hard to tell if it was possibly guilt, or regret. Most definitely fear.

“We drank a lot that night. I lost track of time, and before I knew it, it was well past my curfew. My curfew was strict. We had to be home as soon as possible. Stumbling into the car, we managed to squeeze in a few more people than the Mustang could fit. Myself in the front, Anne driving and the rest in the back. I happened to notice Anne struggling to fit the key into the ignition. She was woozy, and kept missing the place to insert the key. I questioned for a second if it was safe for Anne to drive. When I finally heard the car engine rumble and Anne switch into drive, my thoughts about my angry mother came back into my mind. I would come to regret brushing off that thought in my head.” Grandma shook her head, and a single tear slipped out of her eye, making its way down her cheek. “Anne stomped on the gas and we zoomed in the direction to my house. She was swerving the car, barely avoiding hitting objects or cars on the road. I decided to turn on the radio, to provide us with entertainment for the ride home. What I failed to see before I turned it on, was that Anne was falling asleep at the wheel. The sound of the radio scared Anne and woke her up. She jolted awake, which caused her to drift into the other lane.” Grandma took a long sip of her water before returning back to the story. “We were just minutes away from my neighborhood when I heard the horns blaring. Anne had crashed into the car in the other lane, going 40 miles per hour. I heard the crushing of the metal and breaking glass. Everything became a foggy mess. With my head pounding and feeling a thick, warm liquid trickle down the side of my head, I shouted, hoping someone would hear me. I looked back and

everyone was unconscious. I looked to my left and saw Anne unconscious. I screamed and screamed, until my eyes started to become heavy. At that moment, everything went dark”. Tears were streaming down Grandma's face. They were streaming down mine too.

“I woke up in the hospital. I shot up, looking around. I immediately remembered what had happened and thought of my friends. I shouted. I was all alone in that hospital room. My mother burst through the door, smothering me with hugs and kisses. It turns out I was in a coma for a week, she told me. I asked if I could see my friends. She told me none of them made it, they all died instantly in the crash.” I gasped. “The guilt I have carried everyday for what happened to my friends, is something I would never wish upon anyone. I miss them so much. I will never understand why it was me, and not one of them.”