

## Memory in a Thousand Recipes - Hua, Year 7, NSW

When grandpa died, he left no will, he left no last words, he was gone.

Grandpa was a mysterious person. If you call him quiet, you're wrong. If you call him loud, you're more wrong. The old man had been on many adventures, faced countless labyrinths in his way, starving, The Cultural Revolution, working wealth rather than health, and trying hard to maintain a family.

In less fruitful times, he would sit on the dinner table on a stool, and watch the Chinese TV show 回家吃饭, where countless famous chefs get invited to share a unique meal, which will show their way to countless citizens' plates. They fascinated him, the dishes, the perfection, and the tester's reaction. It was a series on regular television, but on our old, pixelated television, where the voices were high pitched, and the crack in the middle didn't give good vibes, it was live.

And that meant it was then or never.

That got grandpa's hand racing, and in minutes of motivation poured through the words and embarked to the paper, a recipe would be written. Recipes were all he was interested in, though 90% never got tasted in his mouth, he loved it, and wrote and wrote.

He wrote when he was in the middle of a deep fever from Covid 19. He wrote when we watched the hail fall outside the windows one cold night. He wrote the day before going to hospital and never coming back again.

Fate is so perplexing, and has so many paths. It's like a tree, with first the main trunk, then spreading out twisted and twirly are the branches. Once you choose a branch, the gates to the others shut. Why did Grandpa choose cooking? Why choose washing the dishes and cleaning the tables after another one of my big spills? I don't understand. I don't think I ever will. Did he ever consider going out to play bingo with the other elderly?

All I know is, he inspired me. He inspired the inner voice inside me to call. To call for a deep thought of my future in a single walk around the suburb. Which paths of my own tree should I choose and which should be locked forever? I know trying out all the puzzles, answering all the questions, solving all the sudokus this world has to offer is like painting a thousand portraits in a single night. The art is simply toddler's work, the itch will not be properly scratched, the details are missing. There's simply not enough time.

But all I want to do in my next 60 years or so is to live a meaningful life.

I want to cross the oceans, but also to have a home waiting for me with open hands. I want to relax under the brim of an umbrella, but also rinse clothes with rough hands. I want to try

delicate cuisines, but also balance my time with messy assessment handwriting in passionate hands.

Perhaps it was the countless potentials that were reaching out to me, perhaps the curiosity of trying a hobby approved by my grandfather. Either way, I pointed the arrow of my time and energy to the bullseye of cooking.

At first I had no idea where to begin. Should I start finding a notebook to list my own recipes, or maybe ask my mum to teach me the elements of cooking under her gaze? I was like a baby bird with no mother to guide it how to fly down the nest. Cooking is fun, especially when you get to the tasting bit, but it can also be dangerous.

On one night, precisely, mind trapped within a barricade of void, unsure, uncertain, unclear of what to do. I slowly crept on tippy toes to the garage. With a clipboard in one hand and the other in a clenched fist of determination. I steadied my hand on the peeling wood door. Open. The door obeyed. Revealing a new atmosphere, silent and cold. The air was frozen and ominous, with everything still, except for a distant leaking water tap.

Drip, drip, drip.

My eyes darted around. I felt like I was eating boiled potatoes in Van Gogh's art. Where the colour is so cold and tight in your heart, with only a tiny bulb hovering amidst the emptiness of a tough evening, giving light. But the tiny bulb was not the garage lights. Instead, piles of scattered papers on the table, blown apart by the night's breeze. Longing to be reunited neatly again. It might've been a bit messy at first glance, but otherwise, perfect.

The wind gave a push, and one page scampered around the floor, like the lead dancer in a ballet performance, it twirled and skipped, while the others followed. They first came out orderly, but then filled the stage, with the spotlight running over the leader, as it bowed- at my feet.

It was mysterious, how they seemed to be waiting for me, how I opened the door at the right moment to see the show, how that one page fell at my feet. Exactly there. Could it be fate? Could it be destiny? Could it be grandpa?

'Hello, I've been waiting for you. Bend down, why not read me? I've waited for this moment.'

I've waited for this moment too.

My trembling fingers ran across the page, and with it came a trail left behind on the dust blackened surface and read the blurry heading.

*4/7/ 2004, Best Macarons. Ingredients: Almond Flour, Egg Whites-*

It stopped there, for I couldn't go anymore.

Tears streamed from my eyes, dribbled down my cheeks and ran in between the dust. A thump in my throat emerged again, and the small forgotten feelings found familiar forts around me. I felt like a fish in a tank. A butterfly in a jar. A fox in a trap. A hen in a cage. These feelings, can I find a way past them? They're the beast of my labyrinth, they're the walls, they're everything in my way that tries to stop me. I want to pass this level. But I really can't when my tears form a sea that strands me. When my grief forms a soldier who slays me.

Slowly, I picked up the rest of the recipes. Replacing my thin pajamas which were flying in the wind's direction, a heavy stack of new treasure now covered me warmly. Though each paper is thin and light, a thick stack's weight can easily beat your stamina. Like wool. One piece of thread can only make a knot, a whole yarn ball can make a blanket.

One carefully written recipe can fill a tummy, a pile can fill a table to the tippest state.

If I was Blackbeard, the gold was in my hands. If I was Newton, I just proved the law of gravity. If I was Jesse Owens, my efforts became a shiny medal. Time to take the beacon back to my bedroom stool.

I have a mission now.

I'll take my time and learn all the cooking methods. I'll become a famous chef and own a famous restaurant and serve famous people. I'll earn my way to the TV show 回家吃饭.

Grandpa, wait for me. Wait a few years, and when you open your television in heaven, whether old and pixelated, whether new and flawless. You'll see me.

Gosh, there were at least a thousand of them.

I looked down at the forgotten recipes.

My mission is to make them well known again.