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Medical students creatively interpret



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Now a third-year medical student at the University of Michigan, Shilpa Gulati recounted her experience after meeting with a member of a memory loss program.

TALKING TO JUNE

Shilpa Gulati

When I first meet June, she is glowing. Unadulterated excitement dances across her face as we exchange the most routine pleasantries and begin to scout out a room for our interview. The Center reminds me of my kindergarten with wooden tables and chairs, colorful walls, and sing-song voices echoing down the halls. As she tells me about her favorite group activities, her lips stretch out into an indiscriminate smile, her default expression, her child's pose.

A distraction hurries past us and June pauses with the hint of a lost thought. We share a moment of confusion before she turns to me, eyes searching for a reminder of our previous direction.

I take her hand and we move down the hallway again slowly, because June takes small, steady steps. A strip of tape is lobbed over the door jamb into the game room so we don't have to turn the handle; these senior-friendly measures are embedded throughout the center, unannounced but conspicuous.

We take seats around a wooden card table. I ask her about her daily medications and the routines that help her maintain the remnants of her independence. I learn about how irritated she feels when she has to rely on others. She shows me her Alzheimer's bracelet; if she is lost and then found, this has instructions to return her home.

As we skip between subjects, June's attention undulates. I can't detect any discernible change in her expression; her pupils might dilate, or maybe her wrinkles relieve by a millimeter or two. She's there and she's not, in an instant, with no warning.

June has a husband, a retired construction foreman who takes good care of her. When she met Karl, he was a customer at the diner she worked at, and while she didn't know about her Alzheimer's yet, she could sense something was wrong. I cringe reflexively at this, the beginning of a devastating disease overlapped with getting to know the love of her life. I feel even guiltier when I notice that June is still smiling.

"I'm happy though, you know?"

The program coordinator knocks and drops her head between the door and the jamb, slowly drawing it back to reveal a stocky gray-blond man, the prototype of a lumberjack. "June? Karl is here to pick you up."

June's taut lips collapse into dry folds as she draws them into a frown. "That's not Karl."

There is a silence, broken moments later by her innocent giggle. "I'm kidding! Hon, we're having so much fun, can we have a couple minutes more?"

June turns back to me to confide: "He's an angel."

“I’m happy though, you know?”



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Jonathan Awori is an Assistant Professor of Theatre and second-year medical student who composed this poem after completing a class assignment to interview a member of a memory loss program.

PIECES

Jonathan Awori

Hippie. Aneurysm. Collage. New Haven. Santa Fe. San Francisco. Ann Arbor.

I can't remember really anything to tell you.

Communist. Webster's Dictionary. Latin. French. Aneurysm enlarges.

What do you get out of your art?

No one has ever asked me that before. It satisfies a deep need.... I'll write that for you; here, let's use this bright paper.... I saw her words in her handwriting and caught a glimpse of that need.

My father never left the communist party. They made him leave his job as a professor and then he went to work for Webster's dictionary defining words.

The irony. That a man sidelined by a label, a single word "communist," should move on to defining words. His daughter, Mary, inherited his penchant for language, studying Latin and French. Aneurysm grows even bigger.

I wish you were here every day; I'd remember more stuff.

Had she really forgotten?

Do we really have memory loss or is our memory only misplaced, waiting for the most unlikely of triggers, a medical student on a fall afternoon asking a few questions?

Mother. Died. High school education. Father professor. High school diploma versus PhD. You know how that is. When Mom died, that's when I started making art. She always used to make art. She made art all the time, but Dad was a reader and a thinker. So you know....

Did you start studying art to connect to your mom?

That's a nice thought, but really, I think it was about trying to figure out who I was.

Bachelors. Masters. Doctorate. I never did anything with them

Why San Francisco? I was a hippie . . . followed some man probably . . . aneurysm about to explode

Look at my cards . . . I like to use different textures.

What do you want people to get out of your art?

I hope they like it.

Aneurysm explodes . . . life in fragments . . . thoughts in pieces . . . exploditus . . . mahemium . . . reperio . . . detoner . . . grabuge . . . decouverte!

Who am I?

Starting again . . . l, l, l, lear-nn, --ing e-e-e everything.

SHAPES OF MEMORY LOSS

University of Michigan

Aneurysm rupture, the stats: 1/3 dead; 1/3 vegetables; 1/3 make it. I'm one.

What is your favorite kind of art?

Collage.

And that made perfect sense. Mary's life, a scattered, scintillating journey before the aneurysm rupture was even more diffused after the event. Now she puts the art pieces together, facing different directions on the cards she creates, each piece an incomplete part of something else, making no sense on its own.

But when she lifts up the completed card to show me, there is a precarious coherence, a fragmented beauty, a life still being lived . . . and forgotten . . . and remembered.

I wish you were here every day; I'd remember more stuff.



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Amanda Wong is a second-year MD/PhD student at the University of Michigan Medical School. This piece was written based on an interview generously granted by a member of a memory loss program. Amanda imagines herself as the son, a physician.

UNCONVENTIONAL ART

Amanda Wong

“What are you listening to there, Dad?” My dad was sitting at the kitchen table, with ear buds in his ears, fidgeting with some black, pocket-sized device that looked like an audio cassette player. I figured maybe he had dug up his Walkman, out of nostalgia, to listen to old tapes of his. He often used music to get him in the mood to do what he did these days to pass the time, which is what he had done, and made a career out of, his whole adult life – that is, making “unpopular art.” Those were his words. “I am a creator and purveyor of unpopular art,” he would declare.

With all of my dad’s talk about unconventional art, and his recurrent monologues on the importance of producing art that provides commentary on the social and political issues of the day, one could mistake him for being part of the generation that came of age during Woodstock and the Civil Rights movement. But the 60s and 70s were actually a time when he was working for a commercial art company, while I was growing up. These days, when reminiscing on my teenage years, I often feel, with a twinge of regret, that my dad was born a generation too soon, and that it should have been he rather than I to have been young during those times.

Still, Dad has no dearth of stories to tell from his own childhood. He was born in the year 1930, the year after the Great Depression had started. To this day he can relate with great clarity stories from his past – of the effect the death of his older brother had on him in his childhood; of his chance to visit the North Pole while he was stationed in Alaska during his service in the Korean war; and with the most vivid detail, of the day he met his wife, my mother, and the days they passed together until 18 months ago when she passed away. It’s just the more recent stuff, like what he had for breakfast this morning, or where he misplaced the iPod I got him for his last birthday, the short-term, trivial stuff, that recently has had a hard time sticking.

“I’m not listening to anything,” my dad answered grumpily, still playing with the device. “I haven’t been able to hear anything since my hearing aid got stolen.”

Oh no, I thought, he had lost something again. Next it was going to be his bifocals, and he’d be at his art deaf and blind. Truly unconventional. The contraption he was holding, then, must be some sort of replacement hearing aid. “Is that what you got to replace it then?” I asked, ignoring the fact for now that the hearing aid he lost was a \$900 premium hearing aid that my wife, Barb, and I bought him after he had come back from the doctor six months ago saying that his doctor recommended that he get one.

“Yeah. My hearing aid was stolen,” my dad repeated. “Hearing aids are too damn expensive, so I went down to the Radio Shack and bought myself this piece of crap. It’s a Stereo Amplifier Listener. Got it for \$26.99,” he said, with a mixture of pride and disgust.

Who would want to steal your hearing aid, was what I wanted to say. But not wanting to sound like I was accusing him of lying, I asked instead, “Are you sure you didn’t just misplace it somewhere? Have you looked around for it?”

“No, because it was stolen. It was Hilda.” Hilda was my dad’s home nurse aide.

“That doesn’t sound like something Hilda would do,” I responded. “Have you checked your bedroom?”

“Hilda’s a great gal and all, but hearing aids are expensive. Her parents are hard of hearing too.”

This took me a second to process. “So you’re saying Hilda stole your hearing aid so she could give it to her parents?”

“That’s right. Hilda stole my hearing aid, ‘cause her parents needed one. So now I’m stuck with this piece of crap.”

Which parent would Hilda end up giving it to, I thought to myself. She'd have to choose favorites between her mom and her dad. Maybe they'd share the stolen, prized hearing aid. But because he seemed content playing with his new Stereo Amplifier Listener, I left my dad alone.

Usually I tried to take Dad's memory loss lightly, to view these incidents with bemusement, rather than concern, which was the approach my wife took. It was only after her urging, in fact, that I had asked my dad to move in with us last year. Barb and Dad had always gotten along, which was a good thing. I was grateful to never have had to negotiate the nasty politics that normally plague the relationships between spouses and in-laws. But sometimes I felt guilty that maybe Barb cared about my dad more than I did. Or at least that she had the appropriate emotional response to his symptoms of memory loss, instead of the colder, more objective one inspired in me. As a doctor who took care of patients with much later stages of dementia, I knew that the memory loss my dad was experiencing put him at most in a mild stage of Alzheimer's disease. Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether patients who display mild symptoms – having trouble recalling recent events or conversations, for example, or demonstrating forgetfulness about where one has placed objects – actually have Alzheimer's disease.

I knew that Dad wasn't just "getting older," which is the diagnosis patients often prefer to hear. But a part of me couldn't help rooting for him, for his mental prowess, to hold on for longer. As with most things in life, perhaps part of this was out of self-interest. There is some component of genetics that comes into play in acquiring neurodegenerative diseases, and so rooting for him in part meant rooting for myself.

My dad, who had stepped out of the kitchen a few minutes before, came walking back holding a different object in his hands. "Hey son, take a look at what I found," he called.

"Your hearing aid?" I supposed hopefully, though I knew in all likelihood it was not. My dad was a stubborn man, not one to openly admit to mistakes. Had he actually found his hearing aid, he probably would have simply continued using it without ever mentioning that he had found it. Such an utterance would implicate him in an act of forgetfulness that he, like I, preferred to overlook for the time being.

Ignoring my comment, or perhaps not hearing it – it was always hard to tell which was the case – my dad handed me a picture frame. Inside was a photo taken from when I was a little boy. It was of me, my dad, and my mom standing next to a sculpture my dad had created for a public library in Louisiana, where we had lived during my childhood years. The structure featured a couple of children admiring a spiral of books. For a man who boasted about specializing in unconventional art, my dad had made a lot of conventional pieces.

But maybe that was the point. That one must understand what makes art conventional before reimagining it into something unconventional. In fact, as his son, perhaps I was guilty of committing the opposite crime. In spending my days in an academic medical center taking care of patients with the most complicated, unusual, and unconventional of conditions, I seem to have missed, or chosen to miss, a strikingly conventional case, in one of the most important people of my life, standing right in front of me.



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Greg Jaffe, a second-year medical student, stepped in to the first person role in his fictionalized remembrance based on an interview conducted with a female member of a memory loss program.

EVERGREEN

Gregory Jaffe

I used to make ‘em carry me. Faked ‘em out all the time. This was back when I was a child in a place called Evergreen, Alabama. I grew up on a farm where we grew stuff, mostly corn. I was the youngest, you see, the baby of the family, and my siblings wouldn’t let me work; they were afraid I’d mess something up. But at the end of the day I’d pretend I was tired, and I’d go to cryin’ too, and make ‘em carry me. I’d ride home on their backs.

I used to work over at the museum, I was a supervisor. Kids would always be reachin’ out and getting fingerprints on the glass on the paintings, things not to be touched. My job was to keep ‘em clean. Worked there for six years. People used to ask me, “Why a museum?” I just liked the pictures, I guess, thought they were really nice.

The things that are important I put on a “don’t forget” list. Taking pills, going to doctor’s appointments, paying bills. And if I forget things, it doesn’t bother me much cuz if it’s not on the list, it must not have been important!

My friend Thelma introduced us, my husband and me. He liked to dance, and I liked to dance too. He always had this look on his face like he was up to no good, causin’ some kind of trouble. My how we used to dance, practically ‘til the sun came up.

I live with my daughter and her husband out here now. I’ll tell my daughter I can move out soon, go to live in a retirement community. She says to me softly “Oh Mom, don’t do that.” What a nice girl she is.

I’ve got what they call a delayed memory—I’ll remember something just a few days later. I’ve got a trick, though. The things that are important, I put on a “don’t forget” list. And it don’t bother me much if I forget something, cuz it must not have been important!

Obituaries? I don’t keep ‘em around. Want ‘em out of my mind. If they lying around, they bring back too many memories. I don’t really know dates either; I can just say it was a long time ago.

I’m headed out to Pensacola in a week to visit my sister Clemmy. I’ve got lots of nieces and nephews out there, but they all grown now. I used to live out there when I was a teacher; I like living up here more though, like the quietness of the place.

I’m what you call a “retired person” now; used to work in the big museum. Six years I worked there, made sure the glass covering the paintings was clean. Kids always be touchin’ the glass, getting fingerprints on ‘em. I was a supervisor, you know.

I remember the call, came ‘round midnight: “Ma’am you got to come down to the emergency room, your son has been in an accident.” He was out with his friends, hit by a man who was drunk. I don’t like talkin’ ‘bout that much though.

I’m the baby of the family. Had five brothers and sisters: Clemmy; Edna; Erma; James; and Harry. I’m headed down to Pensacola soon, haven’t really been down there since Clemmy passed. The weather down there is real nice this time of year.

The things that are important, I put on a “don’t forget list”.



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Thomas Filardo, a second-year medical student, wrote this reflection based on a class-assigned interview.

KAREN

Thomas Filardo

In his essay, *The Lost Mariner*, Oliver Sacks writes about a patient of his who was, for all intents and purposes, stuck in 1942. This man is incapable of forming new memories and begins each day anew without any memory of the events of the preceding decades. And even within each given day, he cannot hold a conversation or task for very long. Sacks is dismayed to realize that in this man, he sees a lost soul, a person completely without an identity in the present. Through his story, Sacks makes us look into ourselves and ask: without memory, what am I?

It is in this context that I think about Karen.

Karen is a delightful woman in her 60s. I sat down and talked with Karen and her husband, Mark, a long-haired man with a more reserved, if not unfriendly, air. We were meeting at the Center where Karen was a member of a group for those struggling with memory loss. Karen's hair framed her face and she smiled at me with a familiar kindness through her reading glasses.

With her easy air and exuberant personality, Karen is perhaps not the first person who would come to mind when you think about memory loss. But in the first moments of our discussion, it was clear to me that something was going on. For Karen, the details just won't seem to crystallize. When she tried to answer a question like "How long have you and Mark been married?" or "How long have you lived in the area?" the glow of the memory – the person, the place – could be called to mind; that diffuse, pillowy cloud of emotions is untouched. But what Karen could not seem to do was drill down and gather the details without help.

Karen therefore described most everything from the recent past in the vaguest terms. When asked about a certain person in her life, they were invariably "wonderful." Without prompting, Karen couldn't remember the couple's recent trip to Montana to the part of the state dotted with lakes made by glacial movement. It is an annual trip they have made for more than a decade, after a cross-country drive once happened to take them through the region. And while she remembered that the recent trip was very relaxing and that the scenery was beautiful, she couldn't tell me about anything the couple did in particular without her husband's help. Except for how delicious the ice cream was. Apparently the couple ate a lot of ice cream on their vacation.

Karen worked for many years as a nurse. When I asked what kind of work that entailed, she answered simply, "I helped people." I asked her if she could be more specific, maybe give me an example of a specific patient she helped or a memorable day on the job, but she passed by the question. She insisted, "It has always been my job to just help people who were in need."

I guessed that it had come time to ask the difficult question I had been preparing, and Karen's work gave me a clear avenue in which to ask.

"So I would imagine you have worked with a lot with people who have suffered from memory loss. Can you tell me what it's like to have difficulties with your memory?"

Karen didn't react differently to this question than the others. And while her smile didn't falter, it did sadden. "I don't." She started again, "No. I don't think I have any memory problems." Mark pointedly looked away.

I was surprised, and quickly changed the subject. I noted that every time Karen would hit a block in her memory and struggle during our conversation, Mark would help her by providing the "jog" for her memory. And in each of those moments, Karen was not thinking, "Why can't I remember these things?" but instead treated each omission as something that was on the tip of her tongue, a natural little blip of forgetfulness isolated from the others.

The lost mariner is admittedly an individual in a much different scenario than someone like Karen. However, what she seems to have lost is the ability to integrate the details of her daily life. The details of her present, things we take for granted as guiding forces, the things that imbue our daily activities with direction, are inaccessible. But it was clear that I had not gotten the whole story, for Karen exuded the confidence of someone for whom their purpose in life is still firmly cemented in place.

I dug further. “Karen, what do you like about coming to the community center?” She said, simply, “I’m here to help.” To Karen, her role in the group is the one she has always taken on; she is a helper. She volunteers her time to do what she knows best – what she has done tirelessly for her adult life – which is to work with older folks who could use some support. And perhaps this is the best explanation for why Karen denied that anything is wrong – at the core, with the aid of a solid support system, her purpose in life – to help – remains untouched by illness.

In all of this, it was easy to focus on the limitations in Karen’s memory. But to the contrary, in the short period we spent together she revealed to me a lifetime worth of memories, the kinds of things that shape a life in a way nothing else can. She remembers her marriage to Mark, 10 years after they met. A wedding which for he, a professional chef, busily organized the food preparation during their wedding reception. They still joke that she was alone in far too many of the pictures, including the one of her tasting the first bite of wedding cake. She remembers taking the train from Detroit to Chicago with her mother as a child, and how the sound of the train rattling through her neighborhood at night filled her dreams with a sense of adventure.



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This poem was conceived of after Brittani Jackson, a second-year medical student, interviewed a memory loss group member.

THE ONES LEFT

Brittani Jackson

We are the waking men.
We gaze through one-way glass with wide eyes.
We watch you stir on the other side of us
With dried up words.
The timer runs but do not be roused from your good sleep
It is our alarm. Not yours.

We are the waking men.
Shaking men.
Prodding, pulling, pleading men.
We rise through sundown.
To rock you, hold you to our heart and
sing haunting lullabies into the caverns of your ears.

We are the sleeping men.
Frantically searching for cover
from the daylight streaming in through dirty windows.
Wrapped up in cozy dreams
that no longer seem familiar.



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Emily Smergel, a third-year medical student, wrote this piece after interviewing an individual living with memory loss. Reflecting on the interview, and then thinking about the writing process with one particular person in mind, brought forth the idea of how disorienting it might feel to not remember. She wrote the piece with that in mind.

THIS IS YOU

Emily Smergel

You were nervous. Almost shaking. Were you anxious about revealing your story? Worried that you would forget key events in your history? Tense because we were strangers with you in an unfamiliar place?

When you spoke it was faint, but you were solid. “I was diagnosed with dementia. I have dementia. One of the questions I wanted to ask was how you get it...and then I found out that it can run in families. And now I’m here.”

You worked for years organizing, keeping track of things, and being responsible for remembering. Your intonation and pauses hinted that you must have known something was changing. You said that you had to write things down (you still do). Dementia skipped a generation; your grandmother had dementia. Does that connect you to her? You remember spending time with her when you were 10. And you remember not understanding why she would repeat herself. A diagnosis did not exist until later.

“My father raised us girls to work hard. Get a job. Take care of yourself. Be independent, because he might not do it for you.” You had a good childhood – playing on the beach, picnics, strength, morals, determination. You are number two of five girls and one boy. When you spoke of your father’s death you had that sense of sadness that occurs right before tears. You miss him. Details of that day must still be clear for you; you remember being in the hospital. You were a little girl when it happened, still playing with dolls, even though exactly what age you were is forgotten. A trivial point, perhaps.

You followed through for (because of) your father. You were self-sustaining and raised your children alone. After you divorced your husband, you did not allow your family to fall apart or to become poor. You are their mother. Your children went to college.

You write for you now; you’ve been told it will slow things down. Maybe writing organizes your memories and makes them permanent such that they won’t be lost once they are forgotten. You write stories that are true life. You write stories about your family, your life.

“They take me around with them. Like a baby – that’s how I feel sometimes.” Just once did you allude to a feeling of having given something up, of having left behind a life in Virginia for one that could not be yours in Michigan? Just once.

Would you write about your illness? “Yes, but I think it would be the last thing I write about.” Which is interesting since dementia is a disease of memory and of personality. In saving your illness for last, your spirit is portrayed. A spark of a taunt, teasing dementia, saying that you will still be able to write your story.

You write for you now; you've been told it will slow things down.



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Sarah Williams, a second-year medical student, creatively helped a member of a memory loss program recall his past while she contemplates her role as a student doctor.

EVERYWHERE'S A MOUNTAIN

Sarah Williams

Where have we been, and where are we going? Often times we're headed there together.

The memory center welcomes you with an older, sweet receptionist seated by the door. The way she looks at you, inviting but slightly concerned behind her glasses, you begin to worry that she might be one of the many patients here hoping to regain something of their past. Then you wonder if it's about regaining the past so much as it is about gaining something of the future. Holding on to memories is a skill we need to move forward, strangely enough. The patients come here for help. So looking at the receptionist you worry that she might not be able to answer the question "Where should we go?" as you stand there in your untrained medical student place. The clothes don't quite fit yet.

But she offers you coffee, and this is just fine. Then she offers you a seat somewhere, and this is also fine, although everywhere the vinyl seat covers are worn through to the cloth. There are white fabric runs showing through the teal. Not spared the recession, you think, or maybe not so much money for keeping old memories alive. Maybe you have it wrong about money, and it's all about how many have sat here before you.

Eventually, you're brought to a room where a small man is standing next to a file cabinet rearranging a set of paper maché bowls that could otherwise be mistaken for paper maché eggs, broken across their egg middles and colored red, blue and white. He smiles like you've caught him in the act. A trick being played on the room's owner.

You meet the man. Thomas Frederick Curtis III. He tells you he's from "West by God Virginia," which is to say West Virginia. Although things are getting harder and harder for him to keep straight, he never forgets to add "By Gawd!" to his West Virginias, naked of their holy shroud. You've never heard of "West By God Virginia," and he tells you the name is from the state's secession from Virginia. From West Virginia being carved off from a piece of Virginia like God with a wood knife, deciding to save a good part. By God, and just in time. The old rot log was left behind.

And the way he describes West Virginia you imagine something crafted by God in his early days. "Everywhere there's a mountain," he tells you. Green trees, choking scrub growth. Up, up, or down, down; up and down, depending on how things are seen. Life perpetually fights on the slant, everything threatening to roll away and onward, no rock or root or foot spared that one force.

Thomas was born the youngest of twelve with a view of perpetual mountains. For his mother, you want to imagine a grade so steep to the house's foundation, the marriage bed, that the little boy just fell out of her, easy as gravity into her arms. Elsewhere, and slightly preceding this birth, a young woman labored in a different fold of the green valley blanket. She fell in love with a rich man visiting a resort in Jackson's Mill. Then he left, and she saw only mountains where his beautiful head had once been. She took to imagining that beautiful head still, hovering there in her arms like her baby was. Soon it didn't take much imagination at all.

"He had a Henry Ford face!" Thomas the third explains to you, when you're confused by his only living sister having been married to Henry Ford. Henry Ford's beautiful, unmarried mother gave him the name.

As for Thomas the third, he grew against gravity, learned from strong men. He helped his dad "cut filth" along the hillsides, keeping the pastures tidy of scrub growth and green debris. Some filth was hay, grown for the horses and cows, although there was more and more of a certain kind of animal that carried plenty of men and didn't need hay at all. One day Thomas's father was driving a load of hay into town when a pack surrounded him. The automobiles zoomed by so quickly they spooked his father's horse wagon and the whole hay load collapsed onto the man driving a swampstick pole right through his chest.

"He survived alright," Thomas tells you. "By God he was tough."

SHAPES OF MEMORY LOSS

University of Michigan

But with the spinning of those black wheels, the moment finally came where Thomas rolled away from the old mountain, not for lack of roots but for lack of work. He rolled toward the industry of Michigan, and you imagine him doing it with something of a smile, the way a bright copper penny could be mistaken for smiling, whirling along its edge in a penny funnel.

“My grandpa worked for GM,” you tell Thomas, and he looks at you confused.

“What does that stand for?”

By the time you’re finished saying “General Motors,” there’s a good smile on his face. Having taken up work at the Ford factory in Wixom and retiring there after 43 years, Thomas’s old competitor has a place right next to “By God!” it seems. Loyalties to Ford and God are intact, just like they were forty years ago.

Of course he drove a Ford. He started out on the line and then worked his way up to supervisor, where he made good money and then retired. The union liked him, and he liked them. No problems there. A very nice story that he is still able to tell, but few are able to live these days in Michigan.

After saying your goodbye to Thomas, you think of what keeps memories around for good, or what waves a white handkerchief at them as if a boat were wanted to take them away. Make ‘em drift by God!, onward and languidly away. You think of your grandfather, entirely unforgettable. You think of the many afternoons spent at his side and stories told and fondness for listening to others. Then you think about Thomas’s winking moment, believing it would be easy to forget General Motors, having seen what you’ve seen. Chained factory gates. Old plants bogged down like wet shoeboxes that have windows to break. And those windows are broken all down the line of the building like so many failed chain links made of glass. The senior Henry Ford died. At some point later, the other Henry Ford died, leaving Thomas’s sister behind. It’s easy for you to forget what it once was. You never saw it the way Thomas saw it.

Now the time has come to leave the memory center. You’re at the door, pausing, maybe wondering where you’re off to next on this fall day. Those doctor clothes, those ideas for the future. Up and up? Down and down? A little of both, being the practical person that you are?

“Everywhere in Michigan is a mountain, sweetie,” you half expect the receptionist to tell you, “Watch your step, and feel free to visit, anytime.”