

Pain from an Old Wound

By Mohammad Khan

The sweat from my palm made it difficult to hold the phone as I stood waiting for a good photo.

“Make sure to get a good one of us and grandma”, says mom from out of the frame of the photo.

I grumble in response, not seeing the purpose of these photos. “Alright”, I say to my mom, grandma, and brother. “3..2..1” I take the photo. They quickly huddle around me and my phone. I hand my phone off to my younger brother and step away from the group. My brother takes more photos with grandma. Mom stands with me.

“Why do you take photos of everything?”, I said. “It eats up space.”

“Life is short”, she says. “Why not remember some great moments.” We watch my brother and grandma take a photo by a fountain. Everyone around us are walking throughout the zoo and enjoying the beautiful sunny day.

“C’mom”, says mom. She pats my shoulder. “Let’s go home.”

Night falls on our old home as my mom puts my younger brother to sleep. I’m with my grandmother on the porch enjoying the night air. Mom joins later.

“Did you get the clothes from the dryer”, asks mom. I shook my head and got up to finish one last chore.

The dryer was empty and I had forgotten to do today’s laundry. I put the clothes into the dryer and cleaned out the lint. I couldn’t reach the lint further past the lint filter, so I left it. I hit start on the dryer and headed to sleep.

I was so groggy from the day and fell fast asleep, so I didn’t hear it when it first happened.

My mom shook me awake and shoved a book in my arms. I couldn’t hear what she was saying, she kept yelling for me to run. I got up and stumbled my way through the hallway. I didn’t wake up until I felt the heat from the wall. The walls were scalding and soft. The fire spread through the hallways and burned part of my arm. And that woke me up enough to get out of the house.

I jumped through the front door and landed on the concrete, still clutching a book. A home in flames stood behind me. I tried standing but the smoke inhalation prevented any movement other than coughing. I felt the arms of the paramedic carrying me away. The book nearly slipped through my hands, but I held on with the last amount of strength.

“And that’s all I remember”, I said lying on the hospital bed with two officers at my bedside.

“Thank you for the help. Do you need anything”, asks an officer.

“No. How are my family?”

They look at each other and stay quiet until one has the bravery to speak up. “We don’t know. You were the first conscious.”

Another officer enters the room and gestures for them to follow.

“excuse us.” And I was left alone the room.

The room was quiet except for the IV drip. My skin burned slightly from the skin grafts on my arm and back. My arms felt heavy and tired as if I was carrying something.....the book? Where’s the book? I flip the covers of my bed and frantically look around. It’s on the table beside me. The book was coated in an ashy gray dust and smelled of burnt paper and charcoal. The title has seared off. I flip through the pages. It’s a photo album.

Photos and mementos filled the pages. My first birthday. The birth of my younger brother. Grandma’s recovery in the hospital. The photos never stopped filling the pages. I never knew my mom had taken so many.

A doctor walks, weary from the day’s work. She sees the photo album and speaks softly.

“Would you like to see your family?”

