

Helen Mun
1800 Pineville-Matthews Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28270
November 16, 2011

Dear Mrs. Laure-Anne Bosselaar,

A few weeks ago, I was sitting in a congregation meeting when I noticed eleven year old Katy whisper to her father. In response, he shrugged off his jacket and settled it around her shoulders. Though I have seen such common yet tender gestures plenty of times before, in that instant my eyes began to sting with tears. I felt just like the speaker in your poem, "Community Garden," who observes something as mundane as a man caring for his herbs and feels a rush of inexplicable emotions. Just as she feels "his careful gesture clench [her] throat," my chest tightens at the ordinary affection between father and daughter.

I lost my father when I was eleven years old. Despite the shock and helplessness coursing through me at his unexpected death, I remained close-lipped about my loss. I lied and told my friends I missed school because I was sick. My school counselor summoned me into her office countless times with sincere intentions, but my short and impassive replies prevailed until she stopped calling me out of class. In retrospect, I realize I was trying to repress the brutal truth and continue as if all was well rather than embrace my circumstance. I was afraid that if I even breathed a word about my dad, I would burst into tears. When I finally decided to confide in a friend, I scribbled three simple words—"my dad died"—on the back of my English homework and hastily pushed it into her hands, averting my eyes.

My brother, who was five when my dad passed away, is in the fifth grade now. Even with him, and even today, I can't express the sudden stabs of grief that plague me every once in a while. Last week he asked me to help him with his biography project; he needed pictures of our family. We sat together on the floor of my mom's closet, surrounded by piles of photo albums that were filled with countless pictures of my dad. Normally I would have avoided them, but I saw Kevin solemnly staring down at them and decided to stay strong for him. Together, we faced the memories and slowly went through each snapshot of our father. He smiled down at Baby Kevin, wore his chef's hat proudly, and held me up on rollerblades.

My favorite one was taken in our apartment back in Los Angeles. Dad and I beam from the leather sofa, matching hearts cut from construction paper taped to our chins and foreheads. I keep it in my room and stare down at how silly we look—a grown man and a his little daughter, as skinny and gangly as he is. His love for me is apparent from his mere willingness to don the crooked hearts cut by the unsteady hand of a seven year-old girl. This illustration of a single moment deluges me with recollections of his smell, his jokes, his habits, memories that I've long since forgotten but now realize the true value of. I don't want to run away from the memories because they bring me pain. I want to embrace them so that I'll never forget.

Reading "Community Garden" was almost the same as looking at this treasured photo in the sense that it uncovers my tendency to evade the subject of my father's death. Instead of dismissing thoughts about my dad, I allowed them to build up around me. I

reflected on them. The speaker in your poem doesn't turn away from the torturous sight of the man, but rather faces it and admits aloud, "I never had a father." I know from personal experience how daunting it may seem to say something aloud. Thank you for this poem, for helping me to realize the importance of embracing my circumstance, of looking someone in the eye and stating, "My father passed away."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Helen Mun".

Helen Mun