

MENDING MARKS

By Joi McLaughlin

Dedicated to my father: Rush McLaughlin

Sitting on the corner of the sofa,
with his eyes fixed on the latest rerun of *Bonanza*,
my grandfather would hear pattering feet
and see a flash of small figures zoom past him
and run out the screen door.
“Close the door, ya lettin’ the flies in!”
he thundered as the screen slammed against its frame.

On any given afternoon,
I’d find him sitting in that corner
and even in his absence,
a glass half full of Pepsi would be sitting on the table stand nearby,
just waiting to be emptied upon his return.

He'd be sitting there,
drinking, while holding the glass in his three-fingered left hand,
the other two he lost during a machinery accident on his job.

This was the image my five-year-old eyes captured.

Now at twenty-one, I find myself standing beside him,
holding a can of lemon lime soda
as he drinks from a straw.



He drinks and I watch.
I never imagined I'd be visiting him here,
in a nursing home,
after doctors removed a part of his left leg infected with gangrene.



I visit during meal time.
The first thing he grabs off of his tray is the strawberry ice cream.

He scraps the cup down to the very last bit.



Not leaving a single trace of what was there before.



Knowing I brought cake, that's the second thing to go.

He asks "Did your mama cook this?"

Sadly, I say "no,"

But it made him smile nonetheless.

His contentment lets me know that he's a bit ok at the moment.



Yet spending so much time in his bed,
leaves him surrounded with reminders of a new reality.



A bedside controller to alert nurses for assistance.

A wheelchair at the foot of his bed.



I ask him if I can see where they removed his limb.
He solemnly oblidges.



I take a close look at the area.





I notice an aged scar on this thigh.
He tells me that a bullet grazed against his skin,
when one of his neighbors shot their gun in their yard after a dispute.

I notice his nails had grown quite long while he was in the nursing home.
He ask if I have a pair of clippers.



I go down the hall
and grab a pair from the nurses' station



and begin clipping away.

We talk for a while and once I'm done,
I show him one of my art sketchbooks.
His notices a few photographs and drawings of family members
and begins asking about them.



Seeing familiar faces brings a little piece of home to him...



but it isn't long until he begins to drift off as he does every afternoon.



His eyes begin to shut.
He drifts into a deep sleep.



I leave him there

and watch him rest peacefully.



As I walk out,
I read the plaque at his bedside.



My mind immediately drifts back
to those afternoons running through the frontdoor to go play outside.

He'd be sitting there in the corner of the couch,
drinking and watching *Bonanza*.
My grandfather.

Back then,
the greatest lesson I seemed to learn from him
was to simply close the door behind me
but now, as I look at him,
I realize how many he opened for me.
I could not be without him.
It is only a privilege to be able to spend such special moments with him.