

These hands

These hands are old and frail,
Twisted by arthritis into claws,
Age spots and knotted veins,
These furrowed hands of Grandpa's.

I stare into the crevices,
And marvel at the scars,
What stories, secrets do they hold
Of my grandfather's memoirs?

Once supple, strong, and steady,
They placed a ring upon Grandma,
They changed my mother's diapers,
And built her cradle with a saw.

These hands bathed my aunts and uncles,
They played catch, and tied their shoes.
They wrestled, hugged, and signed the bills,
And tenderly bandaged every bruise.

These hands gave my mother to my dad,
And later, they held me.
Soon after, they began to quiver,
And slowly Grandpa lost his memory.

Faces, places he didn't recognize,
Stories and jokes he no longer told.
His gait and balance now falter too,
The product of becoming old.

Who is this man, my progenitor,
Sitting demurely in his chair?
What tales, what wisdom can he impart,
When his mind is elsewhere?

His memories aren't really gone,
They're etched into his hands.
They live on in his loved ones,
The legacy of this man.



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—Clay Rice, MD