

The Memories We've Had and the Words You've Lost

Millie Hopton

Ten years ago, the beautiful parents of my father passed away after their devastating battle with dementia; the disease of the brain causing a gradual decrease in the ability to think, remember and speak. My Grandmère and Paba.

With my very minimal memories of my grandparents, and my ever-growing desire to know them better, I began exploring our many long-abandoned photo albums. These enabled me to capture the essence of their lives, however, by getting in contact my cousins, aunts and uncles, I collected words from them that describe Grandmère and Paba. These taught me of their rich lives and experiences as a journalist, a teacher, an art guide, a sailor, and a pilot, and gave me a strong understanding of their morals, ethics and characteristics. My fascination to explore devastating disease that took them led me to research the biological effects to the brain. I worked to convey my captivation for the way Grandmère and Paba's personalities and beautiful quirks became increasingly prevalent throughout the period of their decline.

During my visit to Hobart's Mona Gallery, Julius Popp's electronic installation of raining words, known as *'Bit.Fall'*, particularly stood out to me with its simplicity, yet incredible underpinning message. With this, artist Fiona Hall's *'Slash and Burn'*, of knitted video tapes elegantly transforming the detritus of war life into art, and Sadako Sasaki and her hopeful story of creating 1000 paper cranes were of exceptional influence when creating this piece. I wanted to espouse the characteristics of these pieces while injecting my own artistic characteristics to make the piece more unique.

I experimented with origami, followed by a number of experiments with different mediums to create paper boats, to represent Paba's time at sea, which led me to the creation of a thousand postage stamp boats. The time-consuming process of collecting, soaking, drying, folding and threading postage stamp boats to silk, with ink written words, created gentle colour, which beautifully complemented the handmade paper which I constructed into a book. Each page contains a story or a memory; from a quote, to a painting, to a thought. I aimed to create a subjective interpretation for the audience.

Colour and texture were hugely important in the communication of this piece. The delicate quality to the piece is reflective of Grandmère and Paba's gentle dispositions, and the beautiful quality of their lives. As the focal point, I positioned the boats in a dainty, yet tangled disarray to mirror the fragmented state of their minds and lives once they began suffering dementia. Like Popp, the 'falling' words and boats represent the words and the memories Grandmère

and Paba lost in their dementia. The soft, pale, complementing colours portray my admiration of their wonderful and well-lived lives.

Through creating this piece my aesthetic has both stretched and varied from the themes of portraiture and painting with which I usually work. I have developed patience and an appreciation for elongated time working on a piece, as having put in the effort, a successful product has emerged. The final composition represents the stories of my Grandparents, the memories we shared, and the words they lost. I have created this piece to not only display my affection for them, but to celebrate their lives, and to make up for the many years I will miss them. Let it rain.