

ADULT WINNER

SWINGING THROUGH LIFE

BY ANNA SKUDARNOVA

My grandfather did not live long enough to know that his wife could build a sturdier swing than he could. It seemed as if every summer when I visited my family in Ukraine, my grandfather spent half his time reconstructing the swing that he built for his grandchildren. He would wrap old rags and attach metal wires to various parts of the swing. But somehow, these solutions never lasted more than a few days before they, too, gave out.

The wooden seat of the swing always cracked, no matter how many times it was replaced, and the rusty iron bars that held up the whole contraption left blue-flaked paint on my blistered hands. The swish of air that the swing provided felt better than any sort of air conditioning on those hot summer days. The swing creaked, our dog Jack barked, the sprinkler noisily watered the plants, and my cousins yelled at me every time I got on that swing.

I ate the freshest kind of cherries, strawberries, snap peas, cucumbers, sand, and blood all while swinging on grandfather's swing. The vegetation came from my grandparents' surrounding garden, the blood from being kicked off the swing by my cousins, and the sand from falling in the nearby sandbox.

My grandmother flew to America to visit us the summer that my family bought our first house, and consequently, our backyard. Her main goal for the summer was to make my grandfather turn in his grave by

planting a garden and building a swing that were more successful than his had ever been.

The swing she built was upheld by two sturdy trees that would not rust. She chose plastic ropes from the hardware store that would not blister hands. Traumatized by the many times my grandfather's contraption had broken while I was mid-swing, I asked my grandmother if her swing would ever break.

"Never in a lifetime," she stated proudly in Ukrainian.

All throughout my preteen years, I ran to grandmother's swing when I was upset. With tears streaming down my face, I rebelliously flung off the jacket my mother always forced me to wear. I relished the bite of the air against my skin that the swing provided. The swing creaked, the birds chirped, the squirrels scuttled, and the fallen leaves crinkled in the wind, as I swung myself into dizziness. I liked to see the world that did not make sense swirl around me. Like a mother rocking her child, grandmother's swing rocked me until I was calm, and my tears dried.

A year after my grandmother died, my family sold that house with the swing still sturdily hung in the backyard. Grandmother was right, her swing could outlast a lifetime, or, at least, her lifetime. And I am sure the first thing she did when she was laid to rest beside my grandfather was tell him all about it.

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO SHARED SHORT STORIES WITH US!

We received almost 40 thoughtful, well written submissions that covered a variety of topics, and we enjoyed reading each one. With only 500 words to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end, sentences had to be carefully constructed to be impactful and convey meaning, with no room for verbosity. We truly enjoyed "visiting" the succinct worlds you created, which inspired us to think and feel a wide array of emotions.