Love and Loss
By Hannah Maki

Did you ever wish you could travel back in the past to a particular time in your life? A period that you distinctly remember as being one of the greatest? I certainly do. There was a time, not too long ago, when everything seemed to be unparalleled; when people were truly happy and lighthearted. From this childhood memory, I learned that you can never take anything for granted; not time, not people. You never know when they are going to leave you.

I remember, every Friday morning, my Papa Toivo would drive from Middleboro to pick me up and bring me back to his house for the day. This was before kindergarten, so I was around four or five years old. Each and every Friday morning before he arrived, my house was filled with excitement. The air was different than that of other mornings, because I knew I was going over Papa Toivo's. My joyfulness would dance through the air like butterflies. We would drive to Honey Dew and buy glazed blueberry donut holes, which were my favorite at the time. Once we finally arrived at his house, I went wild. It was my playground, my escape. Going there each week was the highlight of my childhood. Each Friday afternoon, Papa Toivo made me Annie's macaroni and cheese for lunch. The aroma of melted cheese would float through the air like leaves cascading from a tree during the fall.

The possibilities of what I could do at that house were endless. I could ride my bike around the neighborhood, play with the dollhouse, watch TV, play hide and seek, and so on. I could do these activities anywhere, but there was just something about doing them at Papa Toivo's house that made it special.

My younger brother later carried on the tradition of going to Papa Toivo's house on Fridays while I went to elementary school. The only time I would get to see Papa Toivo was when my family got together on holidays, such as Christmas, Easter or Thanksgiving. Even then, I could start to feel that the unbreakable bond we once had was growing weaker. This was only because we were unable to see each other as often as we once could. We spent a lot of time together when I was younger, and I wish I still had that friendship with him. Unfortunately, not all things stay green forever.

It was late fall, 2012. The crisp bitterness of the season hung in the air like a canopy. Dad came home from work with a solemn look; something was quite different from the cheerfulness he often displayed.

"What's wrong?" I asked him, knowing the answer would be disheartening.

He turned his head toward me and placed a hand on the spindle-wood banister around our steps for support. "It's Papa Toivo," he stated gravely. "He's sick."

"What?" I managed to make a sound, my voice muffled.

"They're not entirely sure what it is. But he's in the hospital right now, and they're taking good care of him." My dad trudged to the kitchen table, sat, and tears began to flow from his eyes. The drops of salty water made small puddles on the wood table. His shoulders were hunched and his head was in his hands. As for myself, I wasn't entirely sure how to feel. To describe it in one word, I felt numb. I was emotionless to all feelings. It was as if someone had pushed the pause button on my life. My ability to feel empathy, sympathy, compassion or anything else was gone. I hated myself for it. A gloomy and heartbroken atmosphere seemed to fill the room.