

An old golden frame with a wallet-size black-and-white photograph sat on the corner of my father's dresser among the spare change and nail clippers. "That's your grandfather," my dad used to say, and, glancing at the photo, he told me family stories set in a location miles away.

My paternal grandfather grew up near Brookside Farm in Middlebrook, Virginia, raised his family on Grand Boulevard in Boone, and died at the young age of fifty-two. Occasionally, as a child, our family left the panoramic views of the High Country to visit our distant relatives in the Shenandoah Valley. After a long ride in the back seat of our family's blue Subaru, I knew we were getting close to our destination whenever, looking out my rear triangular window, I saw an old Presbyterian church—a sacred place where my great-grandparents worshipped inside its beautiful sanctuary adorned with stained glass windows, and laid to rest generations of the family in the adjacent cemetery. During our visits to Virginia, our family of four held babies in living rooms, bottle-fed piglets in backyards, and sat around tables where the rolls melted in our mouths. Although I never met my paternal grandfather, I grew to love him through the stories, pictures, and sacred places he called home.

In the 1940s and '50s, near downtown Boone, my paternal grandparents raised their two sons next door to the home of the town's Presbyterian pastor, his wife, and their four children. In the 1960s, both my grandmother and the pastor experienced the death of their spouses. In due course, the pastor asked my grandmother to marry him; she said yes. They sold their current homes on Grand Boulevard, bought a house above Appalachian State University's football stadium, and enjoyed twenty-five years of marriage together.

Throughout our childhood, my sister and I spent countless hours with our grandmother and step-grandfather. We worshipped on the same pew with them, spent many Saturdays and summer weeks at their house, and enjoyed Sunday lunches around their dining room table. I heard my retired step-grandfather, Pop, preach a sermon in the church and watched him live out daily sermons in the world through his love for others and humble walks with God. He helped me understand who God is and who God was calling me to be.

Fast forward to the year 2008, I had graduated from college and seminary. My husband, Reed, and I had celebrated our seventh wedding anniversary, and we were raising two little girls. In discerning my first ordained call in ministry, we participated in weekend interviews at two churches, one in North Carolina and one in Virginia. We agreed to listen for the Holy Spirit's guidance each weekend and discuss our thoughts on the journey home.

The interview weekends were structured similarly at each church; however, our conversations differed during the journeys home. While returning home after the second interview, with the Blue Ridge Mountains in our rearview mirror, Reed turned to me and said, "I guess we are moving to Virginia."

We accepted the call and contacted our friends and family regarding our move. Many people were surprised, while others were disappointed. My father's response was supportive. He said, "April, Fishersville will be a wonderful place to raise a family." Dad was right, Fishersville is a wonderful place to raise a family. We have served God and raised our two daughters here for nearly fifteen years.

This February, I returned to the quaint town of Middlebrook. As it was in childhood, I knew the destination was close whenever the old Presbyterian church appeared, this time from the front passenger window rather than the rear one. During the visits with extended family and friends, I held babies in living rooms, toured my great-grandfather's house, and enjoyed homemade vegetable soup at the Middlebrook Merchant.

I am grateful for God's call upon my life in ministry and mission, for my family, and for our home in this beautiful place. According to Frederick Buechner, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." May you listen for God's voice, trust in the Spirit's guidance, and follow Christ to the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep hunger.

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