

## Tiny Metal Objects

Objects are often tied to memories – they strengthen each other in the elaborate pathways of the mind. Songs, smells, tastes: the list is endless. Nostalgia and reminiscence can become fused instantly; sometimes, the bond breaks like a weak weld, and other times becomes permanent.

For me, rings are wrapped around specific memories adorning the space of my lifetime. Maybe it's

*their intricacy*

*their uniqueness*

*their fragility.*

No one else worldwide is wearing the same set simultaneously – my stylistic decisions make me irreplaceable. I value the concept that rings are constantly with me, right in view, closing around my fingers like tiny armor plates.

Maybe it's the way they're like temporary tattoos – meaning can also be far subtler than more permanent avenues of self-expression. Rings have the arcane ability to signify far more than meets the eye – silent statements that shout in their own way. Or maybe it's because they can be

*lost and found*

*lost and forgotten*

*lost and mourned.*

Delicate rings are often prone to wander, even in the care of a vigilant wearer.

There's a part of me that's convinced that I'm overly sentimental and unduly attached to inanimate jewelry pieces. I hope the truth of it all is simply that I love wearing tiny metal objects.

All these feelings are genuine and unshakable: they define me far more profoundly than I previously realized. Looking into my jewelry box, a swirl of memories rises like a cloud.

*I imagine the rings as tiny slivers of silver linings.*

*I revel in their diversity and the evolution of my taste and personality.*

*I see snapshots in time of places and people who were with me when I got them.*

Sometimes, memories haven't been discovered in ages, and experiencing them brings waves of poignant longing. Other times, it's only been a few days since I smiled or laughed or cried at that moment when...

I think of the rings I was wearing as I held Grandpa's hand in his last hours. There is an image that shines brighter than the others in my memory. It portrays a quiet moment when Grandma stepped outside his hospice room for an emotional respite.

My hands were clasped around his, and the light from the open door reflected off my beloved tiny metal objects.

On my right middle finger was the fishbone ring that caught on everything until I framed it with two other silver bands. That fish was a personal reminder to stand tall, straighten your backbone, and be strong, no matter the situation. It may seem like an odd association with a line of bones – of mortality, but it braced me through those fleeting final moments shared with Grandpa.

Next to the fish on my pointer finger was a ring comprised of many twisted golden layers; it was connected throughout the spiral but not on the ends like I'd expected rings to be. I wondered how it stayed on, but it did. Now I suppose that's a metaphor for the worst life brings;

whatever the situation or circumstance, I will endure.

There was the silver left-hand pinky ring I'd slid around my finger last minute, only barely being held on by the joint as my finger's volume shrank in the coldness of that palliative care room. I'm sure it was as comfortable as possible for my grandfather, but it was sterile and frigid for me. The Indiana winter yet to melt into spring was no match for that feeling of perpetual frostbite – I realized that was how death felt on the outside, to those only witnessing it.

Polishing the image has proven pointless. I've lost count of the other rings I see in that cerebral picture – simple tiny gold- and silver-filled bands stacked together like longtime friends. The differences in surface patterns could only be seen upon a very close inspection. Their variegation was meant for me; I knew where I'd gotten them and why I cared. Sitting there with Grandpa's fading life force, those moments of bliss were forgotten, slipping away just like him.

I shudder at the uncanny way those rings held the warmth of my hands, vividly scalding me as Grandpa's own became cold. His fingers slowly transitioned in hue from red to blue, like a subtle watercolor wash or tide rolling in at nightfall. Looking down at those pieces of metal filling up my fingers, I realized that after he was gone, they would be there; they couldn't leave me so easily. My hands were holding Grandpa's, needing his firm, reassuring squeezes. To this day, I don't know if those motions were more to calm my soul or his. It vexes my brain to try and answer that question still burning through it each time the memory loops back into salience. Perhaps actions truly do speak louder than words.

I remember his last breath and his strong grip on my hands suddenly slipping away. Searing realization of knowing he'd never squeeze my hands again and tell me I wore too many rings, that I'd be going off in metal detectors forever unfurled inside my soul. Silently, I promised Grandpa that I would never forget how life is transient, how it's something to be

guarded far more than traditional items of wealth. Over four years later, the sentiment still exists.

After moments lost in the vacant space of a heart no longer able to beat, Grandma removed the wedding band from Grandpa's finger and closed her palm around it. With a stifled breath, she whispered the words of the vow that the piece of jewelry represented for almost sixty years. Grandma spent a few agonizing seconds trying to fit his ring onto any of her fingers and ultimately failing. With another ragged gasp, she held it to her heart and slipped it into her pocket.

Unsure what to do next, I rotated those many rings around my fingers. Mazed in a stormy sea of grief, I physically was unable to do anything other than fiddle with those tiny metal objects. I didn't want to leave Grandma alone with her heartbreak and the body of the man she loved, but what more could I do? How could I provide tangible, empathetic comfort when all I felt was palpable emptiness?

After a time that seemed like seconds and years, I whispered to Grandma that I'd be outside. I knew she'd need some time to say her goodbyes privately. I'd imagined my own inside the room for days, not wanting to miss his last moment. But I paused in that physical threshold and whispered my final farewell, feeling as if one more was needed. The same cold of that hospice room followed me to the family waiting room and settled into my soul for weeks. I knew it wasn't the rings on my fingers causing the sensation, but my hands felt chilled to the bone, like Grandpa's as he took his last breath in this world.

The memory of that fated day still evokes pain; it slices through my heart and makes me shiver like unheated steel. I've learned that it's stainless; the sting refuses to dull. Being a witness to the transition between this world and the next changed me; it forced me to consider in what ways youth is often wasted on the young. I wondered for months if my last remaining slice

of childhood died with him. I felt older at that moment, far older than I'd ever felt while blowing out candles and making wishes.

It's easy to see now that I had put on all those pieces of jewelry as physical reminders to strengthen my soul for the road ahead on the path of bereavement. The rings I wore the day Grandpa traded this life for the next told a story of all I'd survived until that point; all I hoped to overcome that day and whatever would follow after he was gone.

During my thesis defense – a week after his passing – I wore only the set of three rings with the fishbones at their center, futilely trying to curb the nervous habit I'd developed of playing with the plethora of rings on my fingers. I also worried twisting around the metal would be distracting for my committee, a deleterious habit that stemmed from the guilt of missing Grandpa's burial and the chance to support Grandma simply to graduate. The sensation was as piercing as wearing too small rings, which make deep dents in the skin and feel like they're squeezing the fingers into a permanent numbness.

Those rings etched into my memory of holding Grandpa's hand are now lost; I had to take them off at work one day for manufacturing safety compliance, and they were never found. I mourned for days and couldn't understand why at the time. Weren't they just worn metal bands, some even desperately needing polishing? I see now it wasn't the lack of physical accessories that deeply wounded me – it was the feeling of a complete loss. My last proverbial piece of Grandpa vanished along with them. Like his spirit, they're somewhere else, perpetually out of reach. Now I think of his memory and must rely on my mind's images alone. In a gold-plated moment mixed with grief and hollowness,

*I got the fishbone ring remade.*

*It's not the same.*

*It feels blasphemous to wear it.*

Perhaps this is the reason I still wonder why I so ardently adore tiny metal objects. A month before the day that marked four years after Grandpa's expiry, I knew which set of sixteen rings would be with me. My jewelry pieces weren't hidden on a chain close to my heart like Grandma's newfound home for their wedding bands. They were all in full view, showing me that I have many more memories to be made and experiences to be felt. And I am more than my experiences. I am as strong as carbon steel, unique as tooled gold, and extraordinary as polished diamonds.

On Grandpa's Remembrance Day, I gazed into my jewelry box and considered what makes me select specific rings each morning. Was there something driving those visual decisions? While the concept of them becoming tactual shielding was important, the choosing of the rings is more subconscious than I could explain. I found I often start at my pinky fingers and work my way to the pointers, selecting rings I think together are aesthetically pleasing. Present-day favorites or newly acquired pieces always seem to make the miscellany, whether that was my intention or not.

It wasn't long ago that I realized I still perform that unconscious exercise I did before holding Grandpa's hand on his last day with us. I stack on the metal; I apply ring after ring when I want to remember I'm stronger than I feel at that particular heartbeat. Another compelling element discovered was that I always remove the rings when I return home – the action is one of the first I perform. I don't need steeling in my sanctuary: I am content with letting the memories lie in wait for another dawn.

Serenity is a vital concept when considering my jewelry choices. Not all my retrospections tied to inanimate artisanal designs are laced with melancholy, sharp like metal

improperly buffed. Quite a few are glimmering through my mind, like light reflecting off a diamond – sweet bursts of stars. Memories come in many sizes and finishes, after all.

I smile at the irony of the class ring I was so excited to get and couldn't afford. I think of it now and wonder if it's too late to purchase one, if it's too ridiculous of a notion. My undergraduate college experiences have been tarnished by the marching of time – over five years have passed, bittersweet echoes blending into the realm of hazy nostalgia. I'm not even the person I was back then; I certainly don't look like her anymore. Each day seemingly brings new waves of sterling silver hairs overtaking the auburn in my curls. But the concept of belonging to the class still gleams around the corners of my mind, unforgotten.

These days, my right ring finger is often filled with another object of adornment that would have to be evicted. The specific ring that would have to be laid to rest inside my jewelry box is a dainty silver bow, a reminder delicately tied around a finger encouraging the wearer – encouraging me – not to forget. And forgetting is something I never want to do. That delicate ring invites me to remember that I am loved, strong, and not nearly as fragile as I may seem. For a reason I can't quite comprehend, I often need reassurances from tiny metal objects.

When I look back on those undergraduate years, I recognize that I filled that void of fitting in with the class of 2017 with other items of personal adornment. While not accessories directly tied to individual accomplishments, the rings I was wearing when I graduated shone like the pride I felt for myself and my peers. I remember their sparkle, their celebratory clinking as we repeatedly clapped to commemorate our achievements. To this day, I love applauding with fingers filled with metal. The twinkly sounds make the emotions sweeter, like the sound of clinking together champagne glasses in a shimmering toast. The sounds made me wonder if others feel a similar attachment to personal adornments; mercifully, the idea was something on

which I did not long have to muse.

I reflect on the class ring I found in Grandpa's things that wasn't his. Grandma doesn't know where he found it. Maybe it was on that Florida beach trip when he was mildly obsessed with metal detecting; maybe it was left in the space he used to open his model boat business. Grandpa kept it safe in the drawer where he kept his most valuable personal possessions, but he never told Grandma it was there. A secret unearthed after his body literally returned to the ground. Even though the ring was well-worn, places made smooth by unknown adventures; the green center stone still shone as if lit from inside its core. Enough of the engraving was left to determine the school and give my search a starting place. Although they were rather mundane designs like buildings and letters, the worn nature of the surface appeared more like mythical ruins and long-forgotten runes. Careful cleaning revealed more secrets to help decipher the ring's original wearer.

Soon enough, the hunt led to a tangible clue. I found its owner through the initials on the band, *KFS*. Over fifty years had passed since he lost it, and he couldn't remember where. None of Grandma's ideas jogged his memory. He tearfully reminisced about the sadness of losing his class ring and the extreme wonderment of seeing it in his mailbox after so long. It was like welcoming an old friend after years apart, scarred yet familiar, mysterious in their transformation, yet instantly recognizable. Maybe this concept is why Odysseus has remained vital throughout history – his journey reveals how time and tide craft their own devices in the lives of mortals. Odysseus seems to be a metaphor for wanderlust, personal growth, and returning home. Perhaps Homer also kept or held onto objects as corporal ties to ephemeral milestones.

I envision the ring I hope to receive one day that will be tied to a new life chapter shared



especially with another. A physical promise to be carried over the vein directly leading to my heart. Hopelessly romantic, perhaps, but the concept sparkles; maturity has yet to tarnish the idea. It will be built on a simple foundation of a golden band and platinum prongs, celebrating diversity through this mixing of metals. It will have three diamonds; the center stone will be slightly included, showcasing that perfection is overrated and impossible to achieve (yet still shamelessly trying to attain it).

Most importantly, it must match the other rings I'll be wearing, the memories that shaped the woman receiving such a specific piece of jewelry – that shaped me. It must celebrate growth while respecting the process; it's a lot to consider for such a tiny metal object. I understand I could purchase one of those unique adornments myself; it's just a beautifully crafted thing, after all. But then, the concept of indelible promise is lost. The action

*seems strange,*

*silly; unnecessary –*

*so very desperate.*

The materials fashioning my future engagement ring will be timeless; unlike the wearer, they will lack an end date – I suppose all dreams should follow their inherent resolve. While a little verbose for the circumference, I think Grandpa would've found the sentiment the ideal inscription on his wedding band – a personal promise that life continues after the sand stops falling. He would've probably chuckled and said it's an apropos pun that life fits along a circular track. Temporal time would be rather dull indeed without the luster laughter brings.

I laugh when I clean my rings and watch the gloomy hues become resplendent. They have been given new life: they're ready for more adventures. Their cleansing makes them sparkle yet never removes the wear of time. My tiny metal objects frequently excite me for more

experiences that will create mental souvenirs of their own right, in their own time. The future is bright, twinkling – incredible.

Memories come and go through the intricate passageways of the mind. Many are paired with stronger emotions than others and refuse to become worn or decayed. Metal is no different. Rings hold a sense of completion; start to finish. Combinations of physicality and abstraction are crafted to guarantee that all will be fulfilled. Some will even surprise their wearer and end up right back where they began.

**Bio:**

Claire Hider is a recent graduate of the Master of Arts in Professional Writing (MAPW) Graduate Certificate Program at Kennesaw State University. Passionate about art, she enjoys crafting with literary and painterly mediums.