

My Grandma's Parrot

By Laura Fox

Macaws live a long time, and my grandma's bird is no exception at 52 years old. Edie, a blue and yellow parrot, has been a member of the family since she and my grandad married.

Edie is present throughout the family photo albums as they transition from black and white prints through to blazing colour. Holidays with her swooping about my mother's head, birthday parties with us grandkids where she sat at the table, brighter than the balloons.

Eddie sang at Boxing Day karaoke sessions, she swore at the postman, and she mimicked the doorbell to such great effect that our grandma would curse at her several times a day for being so naughty. Whenever we were around Eddie, we were laughing, arms outstretched and encouraging her to fly around the living room with us. Grandma would sit grinning, encouraging Eddie's joyous whistles.

Once we were older, Grandma would bring us a biscuit with tea, and she'd bring one for Eddie too. Eddie would hop onto my Grandma's armchair and wait patiently for her to lower herself and get comfortable, before delicately accepting the treat from her ageing hands. She was her world.

When Grandma died, we didn't know what to do with Eddie.

How do you describe death to a bird? How do you explain that *their person* isn't coming back? How can you explain grief, that time heals, that they are still loved? That there will still be biscuits, that you can still sing at karaoke, shout obscenities at the postman, and learn a new doorbell?

Eddie, Grandma didn't leave you, you're a good bird.

At first, Eddie hopped about Grandma's armchair, shrieking her name. It was all we could do not to cry, hearing her distress mixed in with our own grief. We packed boxes around her. She, in rebellion, started to rip out her beautiful plumage. She left piles of feathers, waiting for her beloved Grandma, crying in a grotesque nest. She paced and bobbed and screamed, and once the house was clear, I lifted her into my arms and cradled her like a baby.

She stayed in our spare room and I hoped that we could revive Eddie the joker, that we could mend her loneliness and grief, her broken heart. I would sit in the corner chair and offer a biscuit, just like Grandma did, but Eddie wouldn't even turn to look at me.

Then one day, hearing a ruckus, I looked out into the garden. My youngest daughter had balanced a frail Edie on her arm and was trotting around the fence perimeter. Her arms were outstretched as I used to do, while she yelled 'FLY!' at the top of her little lungs.

The Edie of family photo albums reappeared in technicolour before me. She squawked and whistled, her patchy wings outstretched and head leant forward to embrace the wind. She had come back to life gripping onto my baby's arm. Edie had found a new friend - one who shares my Grandma's name.