GRAMMA

Ti Headd

[Assignment: Using ideas from the essays we have read, write a personal narrative--your own "if only" story about a time when you did something you now wish you could go back and change.]

(1) When I was seven, no one frightened me as much as my grandmother, but she was still a person that I loved very much. The confused but deliciously thrilling mixture of emotions she invoked in me on those humid Mississippi nights was enough to last a lifetime.

(2) Gramma was real old, with wrinkles so deep that if you looked too long they seemed to swallow you up. Her hands were white with years of abuse, and her fingers were all knobby too. Her vocal cords were so worn that when she talked it sounded just like a saw cutting through a tree trunk.

(3) Each summer I would be packed up and told, "You're going to visit Gramma. Won't that be fun?"

(4) "No!" I would screech in my mind. Gramma was always wanting to kiss me on the mouth, but her teeth were real yellow, like those crayons my mom bought me. She always smelled so mediciney too, like old Ben Gay mixed with witch hazel. She'd always croak out, "Girl. Come give yo' Gramma a kiss." Then she'd shuffle her ample weight over to me to kiss me. It might not have been so bad, maybe a whole lot better, if I could only forget those cakey teeth.

(5) Well, one summer I stayed with Gramma in that dank, weathered gray house in Mississippi, and Gramma got sick. My mom always said that if you don't brush your teeth, bacteria would rot your mouth, and then your body. And Gramma's mouth sure was rotted.

(6) That bacteria sure did a job on old Gramma. She got real sick during the last week that I was there. A nurse came to live with her, and relatives kept coming to see her. I didn't realize how sick she was so I just figured that it was her birthday or something, but I noticed that they didn't bring her any presents.

(7) One day there were no visitors and the nurse had gone to do some grocery shopping. I was sitting on the creaky front swing trying to cool off in a sticky breeze when Gramma called.

"Girl," she croaked.
"I'm not going in there," I said to myself. "She just wants to kiss me with those old cakey teeth.
"I want some water, girl. Bring me a glass of cool water." But still I wouldn't move. I didn't want her to breathe on me with those teeth-bacteria.
"Girl," she rasped. "I know you hear me!" Still
I didn’t go. My heart was beating so fast that I thought it would pop out of my chest. I was refusing Gramma!
"Where’s my water?"

(8) I decided I wanted to see her actually begging for her glass of cool water, so I crept stealthily across the creaky porch into the house and down the hall to her bedroom door.

(9) Gramma was lying under a huge mound of hand-stitched quilts rasping, "Girl!" and she was breathing really hard. Her lips were white and chappy looking reminding me for some reason of tree bark. Frantically her hands clutched at the air and again I thought, "Boy! Those bacteria!"

(10) Two days later my Gramma died. Quietly, reverently, people came and spoke of my Gramma. I overheard one man say that she died because she had dehydrated because of a bad case of flu.

(11) On the way home I asked my mom, "What’s dehydrated mean?"
"Lack of fluids," she said. When I heard that all I could remember was how I had denied Gramma that glass of water and how I was her murderer.