

In A World Of Her Own  
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Aunt Charlottle was my grandmother's younger sister. And she had led a hard life. Her husband, Uncle Travis, had been killed in The Battle of the Bulge and had been buried in the American Ardennes Cemetery in Belgium. She had been left to raise her three year old son, Henry, all by herself. We have a set of black and white photos in a drawer dated "September 5, 1950" of the time that Aunt Charlotte took Henry to Europe to visit the grave of his father. Henry was seven years old at the time.

She never remarried. She raised her son with an iron fist and heart of gold. And he grew up with the image of his own heroic father always guiding him in the right direction. Henry graduated at the top of his class at Roosevelt High School in 1961. He gained a congressional recommendation to Westpoint and graduated 1966 in the class of cadets. No sooner had he graduated, than Uncle Sam shipped him off to Vietnam. Henry never returned either. The government could not even find his remains to return home.

That was too much for Charlotte to take. She lapsed into some sort of silent awake catatonic state. She was neither alert nor asleep. She was unresponsive to anything external. She would not respond to questions or conversation. But at the same time, if presented with food, she would feed herself. Yet, unless given her meals, she would not seek nourishment.



Nobody in our family knew what to do with her in this lifeless "in-between" state she lived in. At first, she was sent to the state hospital, but after a short stay there, my grandparents brought her to their home in Dallas to live with them. But in 1975, both my grandmother and grandfather died in quick succession after brief illnesses.

Instead of haveing her sent back to the state hospital, my parents decided that Aunt Charlotte would come live with us. I remember riding with them to pick her up and driving back to our house in Houston. I had just turned eight years old. Aunt Charlotte was 80 at that time.

My dad and his brothers built an attached private apartment on the back of her house to live in. It had a small bedroom, bathroom and living area. That's where Aunt Charlotte moved into. We just referred to it as "the back room".

Mom and Dad fixed her meals. I would take the plate out our side door and walk around to her room and give her each meal. I spent many evenings with her sitting and eating at her small dining table in the back room. I would ask her questions, but she never responded. I'd talk randomly to her about stuff like Star Wars, what I was learning in school and other meaningless trivia.

We even had a T.V. in the back room for her to watch. Sometimes , I would tune it in to "The Price Is Right" or "Wheel of Fortune" but she never seemed to notice it was on. She spent her waking hours sitting in a rocking chair, looking out the window. In her lap, she kept a small tattered bible. Inside the bible, was a silver star military medal that had



been given to her Henry posthumously. She often held the medal tightly in her hands, rubbing and caressing it like a set of prayer beads.

She looked out her window all day, each day...every day. She peered deep into the sky silently. Sometimes, way above, she'd spot a faraway airplane, quickly thumb through her bible, put her finger on a verse, look back out the window and quietly mumble some few syllables in a language known only to her.

The days turned into weeks. The weeks turned into months. The months turned into years. Aunt Charlotte remained locked in her world, except for those few mumblings directed toward distant aircraft.

And then one day, seven years into her life with us, while I was sitting across from her in the back room eating meatloaf and mashed potatoes that the silence was interrupted.

"Young Man!" I heard a woman's voice say.

I stood up quickly and turned around.

"Young Man!" said the voice again. "I'm talking to you."

I did another one hundred and eighty degree turn. I looked at Aunt Charlotte in her eyes on the other side of the table. She was standing straight up smiling at me.

"Young Man." She said a third time. "What is your name?"

"R..R..Robert." I said stuttering back at her.

"And who are you, Robert?" she asked.

I thought about the question for a few moments and said.

"I'm your great-nephew, I suppose."



"You're Jerry's son?" she snapped back at me referring to my father.

"Yes, mam." I said.

"Well, Robert, great-nephew, son of Jerry...I'm ready to talk now."

My heart began to race. My jaw nearly dropped out of it's socket in my skull.

"I said I'm ready to talk now." She repeated then leaned over the table, smiled at me from ear-to-ear and added, "Are you ready to listen?"

I took in a deep breath, cleared my throat and said "Yes, mam. I am."

"Very well then." She proclaimed sitting back down in her chair. She smiled, patted her palms on the table and said "Let's begin!"