In Kristen Iversen’s tale of her personal experience living near a secret government operation, readers discover how dangerous keeping issues veiled can be. Although life is stressful and sometimes painful, Kristen finds escape through Mark Robertson, giving readers hope and a sense of reassurance. In my own life, I, too, found reassurance through another person: my grandmother.

At a time in my life, my grandmother’s house was the place to be. She knew everything from sports trivia to how to bake meat loaf. Her most important specialty, however, was helping me keep up with my academics. Whenever I saw something that was satisfactory, she saw it as failing that particular assignment. She taught me to be adventurous and to not be afraid to take that extra step to succeed. From my perspective, seeing someone who truly believed in my capabilities was astonishing because she saw a more creative and talented person that I could not see. This opened my eyes and from then on, I drove myself to think outside the box and to step outside of my comfort zone.

Similar to the way my grandma did for me, Mark gave Kristen that sense of adventure. “Mark is my escape” (146). Mark’s rock climbing abilities forced Kristen to step outside of her comfort zone and face her fear of something possibly going wrong. After reassurance from Mark, Kristen gained enough confidence to take that extra step. That sense of trust for Kristen was building and their relationship was getting stronger by the second.
My grandmother also reassured me by promising to keep my family together. Every Wednesday, she would host a dinner with my family and extended relatives that live in our little town in Ohio. She never wanted our family to be separated for any reason. Family was her motivation and what drove her to become a caring and loving grandmother.

Mark was a lovable man who would never harm a soul. When Kristen asked Mark if he would have gone off to fight in the war, Mark replied, “No, I would have been a conscientious objector” (147). Mark may have been argumentative about the war efforts in Vietnam and the plutonium business in Rocky Flats, but he was more passionate about peaceful protest. Through Mark’s peaceful qualities, Kristen was able to talk to him about any problems or difficulties going on in her life. He became that extra family member in a sense: He was there for her no matter what. All of her stress could finally be alleviated just by talking with Mark. She no longer had to bear all of the secrets alone.

I was confined within a “standard” of work in academics. Just getting it done and it being satisfactory was how I made my way through school when I was younger. My grandmother helped me spread my wings and she inspired me to step out of my comfort zone. She made me want to learn what else there was out in the world that would expand my common knowledge. Satisfactory was not good enough in her eyes. I soon realized that it was not good enough for me either. She wanted me to become excellent, just like Mark wanted for Kristen. He wanted her to live up to her full potential and to see that there is a life outside of her comfort zone. He knew that she had potential and could accomplish much more than what she gave herself credit for. My grandmother is an inspiration to me because she knew my potential. I could not thank my grandmother enough for showing me that speaking out can change someone’s entire aspect on life and open their eyes. I believe that Mark was able to do this for Kristen and this is why I can relate to her so well.

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