

**“My Grandmother’s Hair”**  
by Cynthia Rylant

When I was living in my grandparents’ small white house in Cool Ridge, West Virginia, I loved to comb my grandmother’s hair. I was a thin, blondheaded little girl, and I would climb up on the back of the couch where my grandmother was sitting, straddle her shoulders with my skinny six-year-old legs, and I would gently, most carefully, lift a lock of her soft gray hair and make my little pink comb slide through it. This always quieted us both, slowed down our heartbeats, and we would sigh together and then I would lift up another lock.

We talked of many things as I combed her fine hair. Our talk was quiet and it had to do with those things we both knew about: cats, baking-powder biscuits, Sunday school class, Mrs. Epperly’s big bull, cherry picking. The striped red dress Aunt Violet sent me.

But we didn’t always talk. Sometimes we were quiet. We would just think, and my small hands would move in my grandmother’s hair, twirling, curling, rolling that soft grayness around. We thought about good things, the big clock in the living room ticking, and sometimes my grandmother would shiver and we laughed.

I often put bobby pins in her hair, made pin curls with them, and the rest of the morning or afternoon my grandmother would wear these pin curls I had made. Later, I’d watch as she stood before her mirror, taking them out one by one, and her gray locks would be tight as bedsprings and would dance if you pulled on them. But when she brushed through these tight little wads of curl, her hair became magic and grew and covered her face like a lion’s mane. I thought many times that I might grow up to be a hairdresser, twirling ladies’ gray locks into magic curls and watching their faces light up as they saw themselves change.

But I became a writer instead. And used my pen like a little pink comb, and got quiet, and thought good thoughts, and twirled and curled and rolled words into good stories. The stories became books, and with the same hands I had once combed her hair with, I handed these books to my grandmother and watched as she turned the pages one by one, the big clock in the living room ticking.

Sometimes she shivered and we laughed.

There are many ways to learn to be a writer.