

ARCHIVES OF A MAN

By Suzanne Farrell

My father died the week my kindergarten class learned the letters “LMNOP,” how to write them in lower case and upper case, how to sing them in just two notes, how to slip the “U” card in at the end so that Mrs. Thurlow would say “LMNOP-U!” and make us all laugh. For a while I believed the alphabet stopped there. “LMNOP-U!” When I entered first grade a few months later, I was introduced to the rest of the alphabet and the world simultaneously opened up and ended. I was introduced to myself—I could now write the “z” in “Suzanne.” I had big things to learn. My childish understanding of my father, garnered through repeated interactions, collapsed in on itself and became locked in a single photograph of fuzzy image and diffused light.

For several years after my father’s death, I didn’t understand my mother’s obsession with collecting and storing his stuff. She became, and still is, his curator. She is the caretaker of our Graceland, packing away his tools and clothes in vacuum-sealed containers, displaying his medals and softballs in handcrafted cases. She has supreme authority in decisions about value. His beloved orange Keds, his unsanded wood projects, the model ships he painstakingly glued & all are worth something. She has busily framed, stored, buried, and frozen. She is a Collector. I call her Momorabilia.

My mother is also my father’s archivist. Her sticky notes declare what is what—“Checks signed by Daddy for nursery school” or “Payment for the piano.” She is the librarian of a silent

