

Homemade Medicine

Emily Updegraff

Grandpa filled gelcaps with his own mix
of dried herbs. Before clean food,
before expensive organics, before
wellness became photogenic,
he was a health nut. I asked him
why did he grind dried leaves
the color of new hay,
why did he make his own medicine.
I don't remember his answer
but I know they were meant to remake him
after all the years of alcoholism.
I wonder if he intended to swallow
a homemade pill for every drink
he'd ever had. He lived as clean a life as
I can imagine. He shaved sometimes twice a day.
He turned off our trashy soap operas because,
he said, they chased away the spirit of the Lord.
He talked to God out loud,
as to a friend. He said
he never stopped wanting a drink.
I long for a change of heart.
But I know from the pills that
it's not what you want that matters,
it's what you reach for.