

RONNIE R. BROWN

## Family Ties

While her grandmother's mind  
slipped away,  
her mother and aunts  
argued, debating where  
the old woman should go  
and when and how. Hours  
spent on long-distance  
conversation. Hours  
in which each recreated  
history.

The only thing  
on which they could agree,  
was the making of a memory album,  
expensive, leather-bound,  
they purchased it  
as a group,  
each claiming so many pages  
choosing photos, mementos,  
present and past  
to try and fix their place  
in their mother's waning memory.

When she died  
they descended as one  
each anxious  
to take back her share.

They beamed  
as the social worker  
spoke of how their mother had carried it  
everywhere, pointing to picture  
after picture long after she'd lost  
interest in nearly everything  
else. Pointing  
even after her power  
of speech was gone.

But the album that was given back  
was tattered paper,  
cheap, filled  
with images of strangers.

It took more than a month  
for the staff  
to track their album down  
and hours of patient coaxing  
before the social worker  
could pry it free  
from the arms  
of another old woman  
who kept insisting  
the people within  
belonged  
to her.