

My Grandpa, the Savior

2nd Place

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Food had piled in and more was coming. That's the silver lining of every funeral, I guess. Roast beef, peach cobbler, cherry cordials. Cherry cordials, those were his favorite. He would have the ones with the gel, not the cream. Maybe that's why I loved cherry cordials so much, because I loved him so much.

December 25, 1989, baby's first Christmas. It was my first Christmas. We weren't the wealthiest family in the world. As a matter of fact, I don't know that anyone in Dingess was very wealthy at that time. We lived on a hill in my grandparent's old, drafty house. Meg, a year older than I, was able to sleep with my mother in the front bedroom. I was too young to sleep in the bed with the two of them, and it was far too cold to sleep in my playpen away from the heat. With those things considered I was placed in the living room next to our little gas heater. A bright green "1:27 AM" glowed from the VCR, as I lay cold and shivering in my makeshift bed. Being our only source of heat, the little heater wasn't much help to that drafty, old house, and it wasn't much help to me. Cold, hard plastic is no place for a baby, so I decided to let the world know. Hearing my heartbroken cry, Grandpa came and lifted me from the cold and into his warm, white, cotton t-shirt. Knowing I couldn't take the iciness of my playpen and knowing he couldn't make it any better, he laid me in between him and my grandmother. I nestled into what would become my refuge for the few cold months that followed.

The drive to Dingess is terribly long. I hadn't made this journey since September. The leaves were beginning to fall, making it a bit more scenic and a bit more tolerable. At almost any other time this trip would be near unbearable. This particular trip was unbearable. It was now November, and the only thing bringing me back was the death of my grandfather. It is sad how time flies and it's sad how much I had hated this trip.

Grandpa always made the long drive tolerable. He would always have me captivated by stories of travel and adventure, most of which I figured he had made up. As he would talk he would slowly decelerate. He never noticed, but it always made me laugh quietly to myself. I remember, he'd be in the middle of some tall tale and then a sneeze would come on. You always had to be prepared for moments like these. He'd slowly start to suck in air and then in one quick forward motion he'd release the sneeze and accelerate by at least 10 miles per hour. The sudden force would shove me back into my seat and my Grandpa would let out a loud burst of laughter. I never knew how much I'd miss that laughter.

We slowly rounded the "never-ending curve" and I realized how far we had actually come. Right past the chickens and across from the cows sat my Aunt's little mobile home. I walked in and was nearly knocked over by the noise and overwhelming smell of cigarettes. The musky atmosphere hinted travel. I was greeted with hugs, kisses, and what seemed to be millions of condolences. While greeting my relatives, I spotted my grandmother at the kitchen table smoking her USA Gold's. I bent down to hug her and she looked up at me through tear-soaked eyes and said, "He didn't mean to leave us, Bug, he really didn't." I softly told her I knew, and she held me there for a few moments as we both gained our composure, ready to face the masses.

Grandpa was my savior throughout the early years of my childhood. I was quite possibly the clumsiest child in our family. Every time I attempted something, the result was always the same. I was bruised, broken, and scarred on more than one occasion. Being a mountain girl, I was always running around without shoes. My heels could take it; I was tough. I was proved wrong one summer afternoon, when my heels decided to fail me. I remember being chased, and then I remember a sudden sharp pain hitting my foot and shooting straight into my leg. I fell over and in tears cried out for help. Hearing my cry, Grandpa ran over and lifted me into that same warm, white, cotton t-shirt and away from the pain. This wouldn't be the last time he rescued me, or anyone else for that matter.

The days that followed his death were terribly painful. I've never been good at saying goodbye, and this goodbye was final. Family members sorted my grandfather's belongings. He had managed to pack tons of useless objects in that tiny little trailer of

theirs. It actually made me very angry to see these people messing with his things. In my eyes, everything needed to stay where it was. But, the truth of the matter was, he wasn't coming back to claim any of it. My mother had asked me what I wanted, if anything. At first I said nothing, but then I realized I couldn't let anyone else have the baseball game my grandfather and I had held so dear. That was the only thing I asked for and the only thing I received.

Every few days or so I'd walk to Grandpa's after he got off of work and we'd play baseball. He had a Super Nintendo, the second best game system in my opinion. We would always argue over who would play on the Braves' team and who would play on the other, slightly less cool, team. He would usually give in and I'd select the "A", and the game would begin. He was the best baseball player in the world, even if it was just electronic.

The wake and funeral went by in a flash. I kept busy and my best friends kept me strong. At the funeral my aunt told of a phone call she had received a few days before. A lady had called to offer her condolences and told my aunt a little story. The lady's five-year-old son had called her on the first of November in tears. Through sobs he told his mother that the mail-man had died. The lady then told my aunt that about a week before his passing, my grandfather, in the words of her tiny little boy, had saved his life. The little boy was riding his bicycle and hit a rough patch of gravel. He wrecked and slid into the middle of the road. My grandfather jumped from his mail truck, ran to the little boy and lifted him into that same comforting, warm, white, cotton t-shirt and out of harms way. As my aunt told this story, tears rolled down my cheeks. My grandfather, the savior.

I watched them lower him into the ground. I said my goodbyes, all the while my heart was ready to break through my chest. I'll never be able to really let go. I know that for sure. He was my rock, my hope, my inspiration. He was everything I had ever needed. He filled in for everything I had ever lost. He was the most brilliant and passionate man I have ever known. He'll always be the thing I miss the most.