

A Hands on Grandpa *by David White*

When I think about my Grandpa, it's the little things that stick out. The moments that we remember always seem like the most trivial times when we are in them. A day in the garden, hitting golf balls at the driving range, sneaking eggnog up to one of the grandchildren who was sent to his or her room. Moments that seem so ordinary as they fly by end up being the ones that stick with us years down the road.

For me, and for all of the cousins really, our Grandpa was a hands-on grandpa. When we did something together, it was really together. Whether it was making pottery downstairs in the basement of the old house, reading to us or building things with those plastic straws and six-sided jacks, it was always together. I think it's appropriate that a lot of the memories I will carry of Grandpa have to do with food. Grandpa's cheese straws, Grandpa's smoked lamb, his apple crisp and apple rings. And who can forget the first time we were each extended the ultimate privilege – in the time-honoured fashion, the first time we each were asked to mix the Grandpa Juice. Food, in my mind, is something to be shared, and I think that Grandpa would agree. But of course, Grandpa shared much more than just food. He shared his garden, his table, his toys and supplies, and of course his time. I never realized just how selfless he was until I read the piece my dad and uncles put together. I certainly never remember Grandpa talking about it. But then he was always more interested in what we had to say, what was going on in our lives. He was always willing to share our day.

When I found out that Grandpa was going to die, it was a rough time. It was in the evening, and I decided then and there that I needed to take some time to think, that I needed to go for a walk. I went out my front door, going nowhere really. Across the street and a few doors down from us is the Sackville Baptist Church, and as I crossed the parking lot there was a little girl, who couldn't have been older than 5 or 6, playing with her dad. As soon as she saw me she called out "Hi, James!" It took a moment or two to realize that I was James. I had never seen this girl before in my life, but to her, right then and right there, I was her friend James. So I waved, smiled and said hi, and she kept playing so I kept walking, and I didn't think about it much until later, when I got home and my roommate, all excited, called me into the kitchen. There was a friend's surprise party the next day, and she had been baking the cake. It was a layered cheesecake, and she was over the moon thrilled to show me, the baker of our house, her masterpiece. She had no idea the news I had just received, and neither did the girl from the parking lot. For them, life was going on without the slightest hitch. I think that it helped me a lot; after all, it's hard to be sad when you are surrounded by happy people. And at any rate, I think Grandpa would rather not have us sad anyways.

That day was a Friday, and there was a conference at the school that weekend that I had already planned to attend. It tied in with a summer research project I have planned, and that night there was a documentary screening. I figured I'd still go, and I could sit in the back in case I had to leave in a hurry. The film was called *To Make A Farm*, and I think Grandpa would have liked it. A lot of fresh vegetables, and farmer's markets, and farmer's wisdom. The part that I think he would have liked the most was the part where one lady starts talking about why we make bonds. As humans, we go through life getting attached to a whole host of things, some more important than others. Books, pets, sports teams, and of course, each other. What this lady was saying was that when we form a bond with something, we have two goals in mind. One is to make our own lives better, and the other is to improve the life of whoever we are bonding with. During his life, Grandpa made a lot of bonds, with his red currant bushes, with his dogs, and of course with all of us here today. In one way or another my Grandpa touched each and every person in this room, and our lives are all better for it. I think it is incredibly fitting that many of my memories with Grandpa come back to gardening. Isn't that just like him. You sweat a little, get some dirt under your fingernails, and plant some seeds. They are very small, and for a while there's no sign of them. You might even forget that they are there. But then one day a couple sprouts poke their heads out, and before you know it the results of that seed are more than you can ever imagine. Some of the seeds that my Grandpa planted have come up already, but I'm sure that there are many more that are still waiting out the late frost, biding their time for the perfect moment to show their heads.

In closing, I just want to share a quick passage that I'm sure many of you have heard. I think it fits well with a hands-on Grandpa, a Grandpa who never raised his voice, who always warned us well before he was anywhere near getting "cross," a Grandpa who took us to mini-golf and farmer's markets, and who always kept us well fed with those individually wrapped Werther's Butterscotch candies. A Grandpa who showed us how to make slug traps and Grandpa Juice. When I start my garden in a few weeks I'll have a few tricks from him, and a lot of memories. This passage is from Corinthians, I've heard it many times but most recently in a Stuart McLean story, and it fits well with a Grandpa who made it clear, from day one, that he loved us all.

Love is patient, Love is Kind
Love is not jealous or boastful
It is not arrogant or rude
Love does not insist on its own way
It is not irritable or resentful
Love does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right
Love bears all things, believes all things
Hopes all things, and Love never ends.

I love you Grandpa, and I'll miss you. But I'm glad that you had a good life, and I think that you've made each one of our lives better too. Thank you.