

Pa

Jordan Conlen Putnam, Grade 12
Stillwater High School, Instructor: Lisa Luskin

Waking up in the morning with the whole bed to myself, I toss and turn in my SpongeBob pajamas, as I hear the sound of things rumbling around right outside the door. The smell of fresh fruit and bacon is in the air, along with birds chirping on the bird feeder right next to the window. I can't help but be exhilarated, and hopeful for the day with my grandpa, the unknown but most thoughtful adventures just right outside the bedroom door. Until that is, I go outside the bedroom door and remind myself that I'm not a little girl anymore, and my grandpa passed away two years ago from a cancer that not only consumed and killed him, but also a part of me.

Unknowingly, my grandfather left a legacy. Maybe not one that the whole world will see, but one that I will never forget. Things that many people take for granted were things that I couldn't help but long for: the long car rides admiring nature, the moments where I would walk past his room and he was just lying in his chair listening to one of his thousands of records on his record player, the sound that his slippers would make as he was walking past the living room, and most importantly, the moments where he would tell me how proud he was of the person I was becoming. What he didn't realize was that his influence on me turned me into the person I've always wanted to be, but even more so the one I'm continuing to become.

There were some moments in the grieving process that I felt like I disappointed him or was letting him down. The reality was that I didn't really know how to help him. I just had to watch him progressively get sicker. Although a part of me knew it wasn't what I was doing or how I was doing things, I still felt like I was being useless and no longer making him proud. I think that was when I first knew I wanted to make a change in the world, even if it goes unnoticed. I started with little things like returning two carts back into the cart corrals instead of just mine and opening up the door for other people behind me. It became something I did second hand, and without even realizing, most of what I started to do was because of his influence.

Due to my relationship with my "Pa", I became a person that loves very hard, which usually is my weakness, but he taught me to use it to my advantage. Even when people are mean to you or judging you, just keep loving. Other people's actions shouldn't change who you are as a person, which is one of many reasons why I became interested in nursing. It is an outlet to keep loving and spread love, that will also help many in a variety of different ways, including the part of me that felt hopeless when he was continuously getting sicker.

Most importantly, the death of my grandfather taught me a lot about myself and who I want to be beyond what I once imagined. Even though he isn't around anymore and the grief can be extremely heavy some days, everything he said big or small has taught me new lessons that I didn't once understand. Along with a new concept of the world and the belief that my future doesn't have to stop inside my little town. Dreams may be bright, but if your work ethic and determination is even brighter, any and everything you could possibly want is within arm's reach.