

Made of Memories

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When the car finally comes to a stop, I swing open the car door and race to the porch as fast as my seven-year-old legs could take me. A rush of excitement fills my body as I race up the steps to the front entrance. I knock on the old, wooden door as it suddenly opens. Behind it stood my grandmother, as always. She was waiting for me with a warm, welcoming smile. I wrap my arms around her waist, hugging her harder than ever before. When I finally let go, I turn to my left, knowing who will be sitting in the old, brown recliner. It's my Paw. His hair still sparkled white, and his goofy smile still lit up the room. I raced into his arms, almost knocking him over, as he braced himself. I grabbed his hand, pulling him to his feet and said, "C'mon, Paw! Let's go play!" He stumbled a little, telling me to slow down. I couldn't slow down. There was a huge room filled with toy cars, stuffed animals, and princess dresses, waiting for me. As we entered the room, I peeled off my tight, blue jeans and itchy tee shirt. I found my pink, sparkly, princess dress that draped over the toy box. As I put it on, I felt the soft, silky material on my skin. I felt like a real princess, like I always did when I came over. My eyes drifted over at my Paw. As he sat on the bed, I couldn't help but notice how different he looked. His eyes looked far off, and he looked exhausted. I thought to myself, this was the first time my Paw had ever looked old. I didn't think anything of it, though. He was my Paw. He would be fine. Little did I know how drastically things would change in such a short amount of time. From this experience, I learned to take any opportunity to spend time with the people you love because you never know when those opportunities will be gone.

Meanwhile, when they told me why he looked the way he did, I wasn't very worried. I was only seven, and lung cancer didn't seem all that bad. I only really started to become concerned when I watched my Paw struggle for every breath. He couldn't walk to the kitchen anymore without gasping for air. The doctors had told him that he would have to depend on oxygen tanks. He carried them everywhere. He also had to wear this bright, green breathing tube that went up his nose. I hated that breathing tube. I couldn't look at him without being reminded of how sick he was. Later, I sat there on the couch watching him as he stood to walk to the bathroom. My grandmother was helping him along as he stopped for air ten times to make it to the hallway. I saw the hurt in his eyes and realized how weak he was becoming. My heart sank for him. I hated watching him struggle. It seemed like yesterday he was covering me in a pile of stuffed animals, or I was dressing him up as a princess with earrings and a crown. I really missed my Paw. I missed him coming home from a long, hot day of golfing, and him telling stories about how bad he lost. I missed him dancing on the gigantic, tool box on the porch as we pull out of the driveway. I knew he missed me too because he still tried to play in the back room with me, even when he felt his worst. He sat on the bed, oxygen tanks beside him, and watched as I raced small toy cars across the carpet. I knew he felt awful, so I didn't act upset when my grandmother told me he couldn't play the next day. Even though, inside me, it hurt. I've never missed anyone the way I missed my Paw. I tried to spend every moment I could with him because I knew he was getting worse. He took all the chemo treatments he could, and they only worked for a small amount of time.

Furthermore, when my mother told me Paw was in the hospital, my mind raced with millions of thoughts. When will I be able to see him again? Will he still look like Paw? The answers to my questions came the next day when I was told we were going to Paducah to visit

him. The ride there felt as if it took a lifetime. When we finally arrived, we parked the car and walked through the parking lot. As I walked through the automatic doors to the main lobby, my eyes drifted over to an old lady sitting in a wheelchair, in a deserted corner, all alone. She peered through her thick, square glasses at me. I noticed she had oxygen tanks by her side, just like Paw. I felt bad for the lady, considering she didn't have any family with her. I couldn't begin to imagine not coming to my grandfather at times like this. We kept walking down the shiny, marble floor, finally reaching the elevator. "Press four," my mother had told me. As the elevator slowly crept upward, I took in what was becoming reality; my Paw's health was declining rapidly, and there was nothing I could do about it. When we finally reached room 439, I knocked on the door and was greeted by my grandmother. She looked very upset and stressed. She didn't have the same smile she always had when I came to the door. Past her, my Paw was lying in a hospital bed. It was as if all the life had been sucked out of him. "Go say hi," my mother had told me in a soft voice. I was honestly a little nervous because I had never seen him like this before. It felt as if my legs weren't moving as I crept toward him. "Hey Paw," I said in a monotone. "Well, hey there, Carly," he replied softly. I asked how he was feeling, and he said, "I'm feeling okay." Although, I could tell he was lying. He had huge bags under his eyes, and his skin was very pale. I hated seeing him this way. I hesitated for a moment, then spoke to him. "I love you, Paw," I said softly. I hugged him tight, not wanting to let go. I didn't know if that would be the last time I'd have the chance to tell him that.

Moreover, I sat here in this lonely cemetery, with a cold breeze brushing against my face. Shivering now, I listened to the soft hymn of "Amazing Grace," as it flooded the deserted area of the graveyard. In the background, I heard the faint, muffled cries of family members and friends as it echoed in my ear. The tall, stone graves, protecting the ones who have passed stood watch

over the ceremony as the old preacher spoke softly behind a dark, brown podium. Paw's shiny, blue casket lay closed surrounded by vibrant baskets filled with flowers from family and friends. I thought to myself, so this was goodbye. Goodbye to all the laughter, happiness, and memories that we've made over the past seven years. Goodbye to all the weekends we spent outside jumping on the trampoline or swinging as high as we could on the swing set. Goodbye to bike riding lessons and first aid kits. Goodbye to earsplitting cheers that motivated me to play each softball game to the best of my ability. All these small memories shaped me into the teenage girl who I am today. I thought, I sure would miss my grandfather and all the things he did to make me smile. He would forever be a part of me, no matter if he was with me or not. As I analyzed all this in my head, I was startled by my grandmother putting her arms around my shoulders. Everyone had left for fellowship and I hadn't even realized. I was here all alone, just me and my grandmother. I felt empty and lonely, sitting here beside her. Somehow, I knew she felt the same way. Paw was everything to her. She had witnessed him at his worst. She saw him struggle every day for every breath and every step. I looked up and saw tears streaming down her face. Then, I realized, I was crying, too. However, this would be a lot harder for her than it was for me. Although, it would definitely be a journey for the both of us.

In the end, I finally came to the realization that it wasn't goodbye to my Paw forever. He'd always be with me some way and somehow. He'd always have a special place in my heart, no matter what. Our time together was limited, and I wish we could have had more time to grow closer. It never crossed my mind that March 2nd, 2013 would be the last time I would tell him I love him. I now know that every minute you spend with the people you love is important and shouldn't be taken for granted. Tomorrow is never promised, so take advantage of the time you have now. I can't bring my Paw back, but I can take all the things he's taught me, all the

memories we've made, and all the tools he's given me to help me down the road. For instance, being kind, loving God, putting others before yourself, and always keeping a smile on your face for the people you love, are only a few of the many things my Paw has taught me in a short seven years. I am made from the many memories we have shared, and they are part of who I am and forever will be. From racing around in golf cart, to building pillow forts, we have made a lifetime supply of memories that I will always keep close to my heart. From this unforgettable experience, I learned to take any opportunity to spend time with the ones you love because you never know when those opportunities will be gone.