Pears

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Pears

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"A sweet, balding, elderly man waited patiently, crouched on all fours, behind the couch. His skinny frame, with yet a rotund belly, cast a shadow on the living room floor. He would remain there until the pinnacle of our camp-out, when he would come slowly crawling towards us. This happened every night as my grandfather, Pops, would join my sister and me in our elaborate world of imagination as 'Smokey the Bear' There were always pears; Pops loved pears."

Cover Page Footnote
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“A camping we will go, a camping we will go, hi-ho and off we go, a camping we will go.” We sang this song as we got in line for our parade down nature trail. Nana stood first, with plate of fruit in hand; I was second, because I was the oldest, and Shannon was last. I felt important as I stood behind Nana. I watched her blonde curly hair bounce as we skipped, danced, and frolicked through the house. We made our way through the kitchen, around the dining room table, and past the “bears’ den.” We finally made it to our desired destination, our beloved, makeshift campsite.

Sitting around the living room campfire, made of ugly brown couch cushions, Nana told stories of growing up on the farm. We listened intently and wide-eyed, while munching on our delicious fruit. We enjoyed hearing those stories; but we were greatly anticipating the visit from “Smokey the Bear.” All of a sudden we would hear it, a growl and a gruff from behind the couch. It was Pops, on his hands and knees, pretending to be a bear, only to appease his innocent granddaughters. Shannon and I would leap to our feet; we were being attacked! It would always go the same way.

I screamed at the top of my lungs, “Oh no, a big scary bear is trying to steal our food and kill us; save us Nana!”

Shannon and I ran to cower beneath Nana, as Pops continually got closer, pawing and huffing at the ground, “Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr."

“He’s coming, he’s coming, what are we going to do?”

Suddenly, Nana said, “Wait, look closely, that’s not a mean scary bear, that’s just Smokey coming to say hi!”

“Yay! It’s Smokey. Let’s go feed him his pears.”

With that, Shannon and I would rush to feed Smokey his daily dose of pears. We would literally take three pears at a time and stuff them into Pops’ mouth. He would choke on them and spit them on the ground as we force fed him way more pears than was humanly possibly. Then, we would go for rides on Smokey’s back and pet his balding head as if it were full of brown fur.

Soon after, the night would quickly draw to a close, but there was still more fun to be had. Shannon and I would place a pillow behind his head and tell him to lie back against the wall. Then, just as he went to put his head down, we would remove the
pillow and Pops would bang his head, hard. He screamed in agony; we laughed hysterically. This trick never got old. Pops would pretend to be hurt, and we would sympathize, but he always did it again, and again.

We got to hear a final bedtime story, upstairs, with Smokey himself. I never knew what story I was going to hear about - was it going to be about the gang of skunks Pops once duelled with, the adventurous bull, or Blacky the crow?

Pops began the tale, "Once upon a time, early in the morning, I went outside to feed the cows. On my way to the barn, I found an injured crow with a broken wing lying on the ground. There was something magical about this crow; I could feel it."

"A magical crow, Pops, really?"

"Of course, Lindsay, he is magical. I named him Blacky, and nursed him back to health, feeding him seeds and pears.

"You fed him pears?"

"Oh yes, Blacky likes pears as much as I do. As soon as he could fly again, I let him go, but I knew that wouldn’t be the last of Blacky. From that day on, whenever I was in trouble, Blacky knew it, and he would come to return the favor. So girls, whenever you feel lost or scared, look up at the sky and listen for that wondrous ‘caw, caw,’ and know that it is Blacky."

"Will Blacky always be there, Pops?"

"Yes, girls, whenever you need him, he will be there."

More than ten years later, I was sixteen years old, and it was a cold and brutal morning in November. Pops was in the hospital after having received a heat defibrillator. The doctors were hopeful, and he seemed to be getting better. I had spoken to him on the phone the night before, and he was doing “just fine.” Before Nana and my mother could make the one-hour drive out to the Syracuse hospital, Nana had to make one last essential stop. She absolutely had to go back to her apartment to get pears. Pops wanted those pears, he needed those pears, and she couldn’t leave without them.

They entered the apartment just as the phone rang. It was the doctor calling, “Wallee has just gone into cardiac arrest; we are doing the best we can, but it is not going well....”

The tone in the doctor’s voice indicated that the worst had happened. My mother, being a nurse, knew that Pops had probably died because doctors never tell family about death over the phone. In haste, the pears were left abandoned, in the refrigerator, as Nana and my mother rushed out the door to embark on a tense and tearful ride to hell. Vomit rose in my throat as I heard my Uncle Joe utter words I had been dreading to hear, “I am just calling about the funeral arrangements...” That was all I needed to hear, I knew the fate that had been sealed. Nana didn’t make it to the hospital in time; and the essential pears were never received. Smokey never ate his last pears; they remained forgotten and rotting at the bottom of the refrigerator.