

A STRUGGLE WITH YOUTH

As a youngster it was so exciting sitting and watching grandpa chopping fire-wood. He would sit me far enough away to avoid being hit by pieces of flying wood chips. Grandpa parked his car across from the woodshed. I would sit on the running board and watch the beads of perspiration as they flowed out of his forehead like tiny rain drops—then forming together in streams through his face. Head in hand, I watched the large ax gliding through the air, gaining speed rapidly on its way down and digging deeper and deeper into the wood with each blow. I could hear him grunting from swinging with such great force. It was fascinating to watch, him being so tall and strong and the wood being so small and weak. I often enjoyed the thoughts of someday being so tall, strong and kind like grandpa.

Grandma was a very strong-hearted religious woman. She had the most beautiful garden in the whole world. When I wasn't helping grandma plant seeds or plants I would run up and down the rows of corn, letting the giant leaves hide me as they would a tiny beetle. Sometimes by mistake, I would roll over or step on some of her plants. She would get very angry and threaten to send me out of the garden. But I was always thrilled and overjoyed when helping grandma in her garden.

Seeing my grandparents only on weekends was so depressing. I wished so bad that I could stay with them forever. I even wished that I could have disburdened myself of that stupid little boy who lived next door to us. And it would have eliminated my stay with my mean old aunt Ula, who kept me each day while my parents were at work.

Monday through Friday were days wasted to me. I could have been out to grandma's helping her in the garden. Each week I waited for Friday to come. I knew after dinner mother would pack me a little bag, give me a nice bath and then we would drive out to grandma's. Entering the driveway, I couldn't sit still. While holding my bag in one hand and trying to open the door with the other, mother would take me in her arms and tell me the "dangers-of-opening-a-door-while-the-car-is-still-moving," speech. I could barely wait to get inside and give up or sacrifice a kiss for goodies that grandma had saved for me. Grandma seemed to have baked the most delicious cakes and pies in the world! Grandma also made many clothes for all the family. She was always sewing. On a little stool grandpa had made for me, I would sit near grandma and watch in full excitement. I sometimes would fall asleep listening to her soft sweet motherly voice singing old religious songs as her foot moved the peddle up and down on the old sewing machine.

After finishing breakfast and the chores on Saturday, away grandpa and me would go, bringing along Mike, grandpa's dog, given to him almost three years earlier. Mike was a very well-trained large brown German Shepherd. We would start by walking through grandma's garden, then across the fields, through the woods and down by the little pond that grandpa and some of his friends had dug. As we walked along, picking up everything that my little hands would fit around, I would throw it as hard as I could at any and every-thing, trees, fencepost, or birds, never hitting anything and never caring, just happy to be there. Sometimes, almost hitting grandpa, he would never say stop; occasionally he would look back and say "be careful, Son." With my hands behind my back, I would try walking in his foot steps. Realizing my legs were too short, I would soon give up.

After church on Sunday grandma would fix a big dinner. Rev. Hewitt, his family and some of grandma's friends always seemed to have been there for Sunday evening dinner. I was not allowed to eat at the table with them. Grandma would put me on my little stool, away from the table, with my dinner and a glass of milk, on an unpainted old box grandpa had thrown together for his son, who was away in school at the time. It was probably used years ago by him, when he was just a little boy like I then was.

After dinner they would all sit around and talk about Mrs. Jones, Sister Sarah and her kids, things happening in and around Church and many other things that I had no understanding of. I would leave the room, most of the time before grandma could tell me. Whenever there was company in the house I spent that time enjoying ball playing or running back and forth through grandma's garden, with Mike chasing me. I would try hiding from, him though he always found me. Times I even tried making a pony out of him.

Mother and father always came late on Sunday evening to take me away. I never wanted to leave. While they were inside chattering or gossiping and saying good-bye, I would sit on the side of dad's car and cry. Mike was always close by. He stared into my face with such gentleness and curiosity, as if trying to say "what's the matter? Tell me, maybe I can help!"

Then came the big heartbreak! While having a glass of water, I overheard mother telling grandma that she was going to send me to school with Ruby, my sister for the rest of the school session. She said that by sending me to school with Ruby, I would become more interested and familiar with the school and get use to being among new and different faces. It was May then and I would be starting as a student the coming September.

So glad I was, after finding out later that there were only a few more weeks before school would be closing for the summer. I know my sister was glad also.

The summer pasted extremely fast. I became very nervous. Each time I thought of having to go to school I would lose my appetite. With only weeks before school was schedule to begin grandma had made all of my school clothing. I knew that it was the end. I probably would have run away, but I had no place to go, And I would have been too afraid to even try. Mother had taken me to the store and bought me a new jacket and a cap that snapped to it. Snapped to the cap was a pair of goggles used to shield the cold wind from my eyes when having to walk to school on cold windy mornings. She even bought me a pair of boots like grandpa's

My first day of school mother got me up very early--dressed me, then stood me outside the door with a little bag of goodies held tightly in my hands. Stumbling along behind my sister, I cried all the way to school. She would yell to me "hurry-it-up, will you?" "Can't you walk any faster?" Between my teacher, sister and her friends, I was finally placed in a class of twenty of more faces staring at me being dragged through the door and crying my little heart out. Each time I would leave my classroom, wheather with permission or unseen (excaped) I was captured, usually behind the coat rack in my sister's classroom. It was so different adjusting to this scary and confusing life. I could not except the fact that I was growing up. Maybe I just didn't know how. I just wanted to be that little boy that grandma and grandpa knew before this all happened to me.

There weren't many changes, that I realized, doing my first and second year. The weekends, holidays and summers were not quite the same anymore. Mike had been killed. Grandpa had sold most of his land and was thinking about selling the rest, so he could move into town. I had started laughing and playing with a few kids some of the time.

Reaching the fifth or sixth grade I had somewhat adjusted, to a point. I got into a lot of mischievous devilment, though, I paid for it all, I received numerous amounts of beatings in grade school. First, by my teacher, then my principal which was passed on to my mother. I had then begun to enjoy school, but in too many different ways.

At the age of thirteen, I had begun somewhat to feel my way through life. My views and outlooks had changed tremendously. I was beginning then, to understand some of the things my parents had constantly reminded me about growing up. I was in junior high--had made the high school basketball team, the honor-roll and felt as though I was well on my way. It was about that time then when I first realized just how much I was really enjoying school.

My high school years were so exciting and very enjoyable. They went by so much faster than I wanted them too. There were the high school dances, parties, trips, football and basketball games. The girls, the junior and senior proms, visiting of different schools and many happy moments spent in classrooms and workshops, now, memorable dreams of the past.

Life at times was so disturbing, with only three days before school would be over, the same nauseated feeling from twelve years back had found its way inside me again. I didn't want to leave school--a life in which I had become so adapted to.

It was very puzzling to think how much I loved school and its surroundings, after having struggled through such difficult beginning.

Graduation came. The farewells, the handshakes, the tears, the saddened hearts, so much for a young boy to try to grasp. After receiving my diploma I somehow, found myself standing face to face with grandma and grandpa.

My mind moved like flashes of lightning. I could see grandma peering through the rows of corn in her garden, trying to find me. I could see grandpa, Mike and myself walking through the woods watching Mike chasing after everything that would run. I could not hold back the tears as grandma's arms reached out for me. Grandma and grandpa stayed that night at our house. They, among others, had watched me grow from that little boy playing in the dirt in grandma's garden, to a young man that they all seemed so proud of.

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So beautifully done - and so well tied together - you've had a real effect on me. I read, empathized, understood. You've communicated so sensitively -
I hope you pursue writing -
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