

CERTIFICATE OF DISTINCTION WINNERS

Kimberly Gotches

Los Alamos, NM

Caught by a Stranger

"I need to talk to someone—anyone," I tell the nursing home attendant.
I'm on a mission to complete my first college assignment.
"Aloma likes to talk," she says.
While I'm waiting, I notice I'm wearing two different socks.
In rolls Aloma—her white hair is swinging in a braid behind her wheelchair.
We stare at our feet. I'm not the only one with two different socks.
"Ummm, how are you?" I ask.
"Fine as frog hair," Aloma says. Her wrinkles make her look like she's smirking.
"Frogs have hair?" I try to focus. "I need to know your life story," I say. "How long will that take?"
"Take it easy greasy. You've got a long way to slide," Aloma says.
I glance at the clock.
"I'll tell you what. You get me a can of Pepsi, and we'll talk," she says.
I sneak in the contraband. Aloma pours half into a plastic cup for me. She sips from the can.
She tells me she once nursed a bear back to health. She curls her arthritic hands into claws and snarls in low tones.
"Tell me more," I hear myself say.
She tells me about the boyfriends she hid under her bed.
I laugh, and I'm hooked.
I tell Aloma I miss my family.
She nods. "Me too."
When I take a tap dancing class, I practice in her room for hours while she sings songs from the 50s.
She helps me see I'll survive my first romantic breakup.
I'm there when she gets married at the age of 70; I'm there when her husband passes away.
Aloma and I become family.
When I graduate, I move back home. I visit as often as I can and write letters.
She writes back, yet her responses become less frequent.
One day, I receive a call from a social worker.
"I found a pile of letters in Aloma's drawer—all from you," she says. "I thought you'd want to know."
Aloma is gone.
When I visit the cemetery, I can't find her grave.
"It's the family's responsibility to buy a marker," the social worker explains.
For six months I save. Finally, I buy the headstone to mark her final resting place.
When I visit, I know where to find her, and she knows me. I'm the one wearing two different socks.

—

Khan, Zunnash

Mirpur, Azad Kashmir, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan

ACT 500, SCENE 657 Maybe...

My great-grandmother was still alive when I was born, so my unconscious has some of her memories retained. Often, a vision of her hovers in front of my eyes while I'm asleep...

In our lawn, she sat smiling, her eyes jolly. Everyone played around her, and it was a beautiful, starry night. She had something like a box in her hand. She got up and dug a small hole beside the giant oak, and buried that object in the ground. Then, she told everyone that it was a 'time capsule',

something in which people stored common items from their time, to leave as a message for future generations. The laughter and enjoyment then resumed around her...

Never before this time, did I wonder that it might be real. So, I got up from the bed and walked my way to the lawn. The same giant oak tree still stood here wondrously. I dug the ground near it. A foot deep, I discovered the box wrapped in plastic. I took it out and opened it carefully. Inside, there were two stained, rustic earrings, an old writing pen and a small bottle of perfume, which radiated its sweet scent that belonged to the times captured. This was gold for me. I liked the idea of how an entire era of time could be cherished, for generations to reminisce about. Never before did I feel so connected with the times so long ago...

Then I happened to look up at the sky. Stars still twinkled like diamonds embedded in a dark-blue web. My breaths went deeper as I felt a quote from generations back coming to life: "All the world's a stage" (Shakespeare). It felt as though time has erased the old actors from the scene, and we were the new ones acting on the same stage, endeavoring to leave our mark.

—

Aaron Larsen
Roseburg, OR

Finding My Voice – A Grandson's Cherished Memory

When I began living with Granny and Grandpa Grit during the Great Recession, my passion for music was still alive. But due to the whirlwind of changes in my life at that time, my self-confidence was severely lacking.

Consequently, I'd tip-toe past Grandpa Grit down the stairs, gently closing the door behind me so no one could hear me sing. It takes courage to sing in front of someone you love and admire. Before the stroke paralyzed half of his body and stole his voice, Grandpa spent decades playing bass guitar and singing in local country bands. Just the thought of him shooting me a critical look terrified me.

After my music session I would creep up the stairs and make a sharp left turn down the hall towards my bedroom. Typically, I was able to escape to my room without being noticed.

One day, however, as I crept up the stairs, I noticed that the tv was off. That was different. Maybe Gramps went to bed, I hoped. At the top of the stairs, I shot a quick glance toward his chair and froze. Our eyes met. "I'm doomed!" I thought. He gently wagged his finger toward the bookcase across the room in front of him.

My eyes scanned the bookcase from top to bottom. There I saw it. A scraggly old blue spiral binder. "Is this what you want?" I asked. Grandpa nodded his head.

"Tis doo" he said, patting the arm of the chair. He wanted me to sit down. After I was seated, he opened the first page of the music book and began to sing. It was "Big, Bad Leroy Brown". After the first verse, he nodded at me to join him. Together we sang over thirty songs in that chair. When we were finished, he patted me on the shoulder. I felt renewed. Grandpa liked my singing!

When we experience big changes in our life, it's easy to slip into a murky swamp of self-doubt. Rock solid pieces of our identity turn to mush. In those times it's critical to have someone in your life who can remind you of who you really are.

I was meant to sing and there was no use squandering my talents for fear of criticism. That night I thanked God for Grandpa Grit and marveled at how a man robbed of his voice had helped me rediscover mine.

—

Jack Levine

Tallahassee, Florida

Grandma Minnie's Legacy.....A Grandson Remembers

The fish girls at the Fulton Fish Market knew their place: behind a two-foot cutting board with sharp knife in hand. Scores of fish girls were lined up in long rows, each hearing orders barked at them by growling restaurant stewards. From sunrise until dusk they filleted fish by the hundreds, earning pennies per fish, with an occasional tip.

Minnie Golub was 18, already a two-year veteran fish girl when she was invited to a nighttime meeting. The year was 1909. What kind of meeting? She wasn't sure, but her friend said marble cake would be served. Incentive enough for Minnie.

The small tenement apartment felt cramped with ten girls sitting around. A large woman with a feather hat stood above them, making a speech. The speaker's arms waved for emphasis, but none of the girls understood the words. The speaker spoke English, a foreign language to the Russian immigrants.

"You know," Minnie smiles, "We didn't understand what she was saying, but she was such a good speaker, we agreed. When she nodded "yes," we nodded, too. When she shook her head "no" we did the same."

After about 10 minutes, one of the girls who spoke some English stood up and translated.

The speech was about suffrage..."Women work as hard as men, sometimes even harder.

We raise children, wash clothes, and cook meals. Men don't. Men vote, we can't. That's got to change!"

The message was heard, and the marble cake eaten down to the crumbs.

The next day on the fish line, Minnie mentioned the meeting to the next girl, saying the word "voting" in English. Overhearing the conversation, a burly steward leaped over.....

"His mustaches were long, covering up some bad teeth," remembered Minnie. "Why would anyone give you stupid girls the right to vote?" he snarled.

Minnie recalls..."I had this knife. Just like I did 200 times a day, I sliced in at the head, of the fish. But instead of looking down, I looked right at the man as I ran the blade down the backbone. At the tail, instead of pointing out, I pointed right at the man."

His ugly smile turned to a frown. The silent threat was felt and responded to in equal silence.

From then on, Minnie Golub was a suffragist. Upon earning her naturalized citizenship in 1919, the same year the 19th amendment passed, she counted the months until she could cast her first vote.

That day came in November, 1920. For the next 62 years, until her death at age 92, Minnie never missed a vote. She remembered the discrimination...being thought of as a lesser person because of her gender. Minnie was an activist with style and strength of resolve.

Her legacy of activism lives in me. Fighting for what's right, learning how to make a difference, and making sure that others feel a sense of power, are hallmarks of democracy's greatness. Thank you, Minnie for your inspiration and guidance.

—

Luke Miller

Gulfport, MS

My Father Showed Me This

Schick, schick, schick. Quickly, deftly steel scrapes against stone. I peer over my grandfather's shoulder, as my he sharpens his meat-cutting knives. His hands fly. Eyes in the distance, he doesn't even look at the whet-stone. Experimentally, he tests the edge with his thumb. A few more passes, another test, and he decides it is good.

I ask, "How did you learn to do that?"

He says, "My father showed me this." He looks through his knives and selects a small knife with a stained handle and a chipped blade. I sit beside him as he demonstrates how to sharpen steel against the stone. With an admonition not to cut myself, he watches as I attempt to sharpen my little knife. He gently corrects me. "Try to keep the same angle against the stone." "Don't press so hard." "No hurry, son. Take your time."

After watching me for a bit, he goes back to butchering. After a minute, I begin to feel more and more confident, and I begin going faster and faster because I want to do it just like he does. *Schick, schick, schick.* I slice my hand. Ashamed, I go show him the wound. He carefully inspects it and says, "It doesn't look too bad. I've done it myself. Plenty of times." He helps me clean and bandage the cut, and he goes back to cutting. I sit back down. I begin to try to sharpen the knife again, and I notice him watching me while he works, but he leaves me alone after a reminder to go slowly. It seems to take forever, and, just when I begin to get the knife sharp, I do something wrong and dull the blade. Hours later, as my grandfather is carefully wrapping the meat in butcher paper and writing on the packages in careful print, I nervously present him the knife. He carefully inspects the blade and gives it the test with his thumb. With a nod, he hands it back to me and says, "Good job." Years later, I am in my kitchen slicing vegetables for dinner. The knife is dull, and I pull the stone out of the drawer. *Schick, schick, schick.* My hands fly while I listen to the radio. My son is drawing at the table. He looks at me and says, "What are you doing, daddy?"

I say, "My grandfather showed me this."

—

J.P. Odgers.

Oklahoma City, OK

The Gift

It was hot with the occasional gasp of a breeze as my daughter, Jenna, and I walked Louisiana's Mansfield Battlefield site. 150 years earlier the Confederate's last victory of the Civil War took place here.

Jenna was doing research for her high school senior project, a video documentary about the Union Army's ill-fated Red River campaign. We talked in whispers; the stillness of the day was a reminder that we were on sacred ground.

This subject interested her because her great great grandfather was one of the Union soldiers that fought here. His name was William Enos. He fought at Vicksburg, and after the Battle of Mansfield he endured 14 months as a Confederate prisoner in Texas. When the war ended, he returned to his farm near Springfield, Illinois; the same farm my grandfather and my mother were born on.

Jenna and I stood by a rail fence where Private Enos and his regiment had been overrun and captured by Confederate troops. "I bet it was hot and muggy just like today when they fought," she mused.

"I expect so," I answered. "They must have been miserable in those heavy uniforms."

"Actually, their uniforms helped beat the heat," she explained. "The wool cooled by evaporation. It wicked-away their sweat."

I take quiet pride in her knowledge of such things.

We silently studied the various battlefield plaques. We read about the Union's mistakes and the Confederate's resolve. We read about the men on both sides who were killed, wounded or taken captive.

It was a lot to grasp.

We finished our tour and walked toward the car. "It's frightening to think about," she said somberly. "A Civil War soldier had a seven percent chance of dying. That's one in fifteen, the worst odds of any U.S. war. If William Enos had been killed at Vicksburg, or by that fence row, or if he'd gotten sick and died in the POW camp . . . I wouldn't be here. Four generations of our family would never existed."

"It does make you realize how narrowly precious life is," I replied.

"It's more than that," Jenna answered, as she gazed across the battlefield. "It's a blessing. Life is a gift one generation bestows upon the next."

As we got to our car a puff of wind stirred-up a trace of dust. Then the breeze was gone, as fast as it had arrived.

—

Andrea J. Fonte Weaver

Sudbury, MA

What Intergenerational Means to Me

Let me take on you on a journey through my life as I've come to understand and appreciate intergenerational.

Intergenerational was my grandma living across the street from us and my nonna teaching me to make homemade pasta.

Intergenerational was Mrs. Pelosi the woman next door treating me as a grandchild.

Intergenerational was my time with my great-aunts and -uncles including Vinny taking me to his garden and Mela telling me about how she experienced God.

Intergenerational was my relationship with Mrs. Smith – the retiree from whom I rented a bedroom.

Intergenerational was my weekly visits with my great-aunt Antonette who taught me to sew, and it was my dinner with Grandpa before we watched Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy and reruns of MASH about the Korean War.

Intergenerational was the pen-pal program where children and older adults wrote letters to each other which I leaned about during an internship.

Intergenerational. There was a word for my life experience, a field of study for something I held so dearly.

The intergenerational field studies and advances the process of creating and cultivating relationships between people in "skipped" generations – those who are varied enough in age to be considered grandparent and grandchild – and to ensure that the programming benefits all. This field grew out of necessity as many societal changes diminished the intergenerational relationships that used to grow naturally in our extended families and communities.