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### **Breaking the Cycle**

Thump, Thump, Thump! My heart is in sync with my stomping off beat feet. The hairs on the back of my neck are rigid and stiff. As I looked about the bleak, rough room I gazed at the faces of my loved ones. Their faces held the essence of an aching soul. In that moment I became disconnected from my body, floating like a cloud above the ever teary and glistening pupils. Everyone's mouths were moving in speech but their sound fell on deaf ears. It was as though time had come to a screeching halt. Over and over my mind attempted to grasp the situation: "could this really be happening? Am I dreaming this? Perhaps if I close my eyes I will awake in the warmth of bliss." Just then I could see more family members strolling through the dark tunneled hallway. Suddenly, it dawns on me: "this is not a dream, it's real, my grandfather is going to die!"

The hallway became boreal; the walls ooze with presence of turmoil. The once faint, glooming lights now pierce the dry, fragile eyes. Our faces are over come with sadness and fear as we await the doctor. He is an older gentlemen dressed in a professional, manly suit. Just when I think I can wait no longer he enters through the old, blue and yellow chipped doors below the Intensive Care Unit of the Chilliwack General Hospital. Curiosity clouds my mind as I attempt to analyze and interpret the situation through this man's interaction with my father.

My father is a strong, stoic man filled with tradition. His mane is long and black with a mohawk on top. Life's tragedies and experiences are written in the wrinkles and lines of his face as his eyes portray a conflicted sorrow.

Soon after their conversation I approach my father, with a deep gasp I am able to mutter: "dad, what did the doctor have to say?" My voice is low and shaky. He replied as calmly as he could: "well it doesn't look good, they're going to take him off the life support and see if he can support himself as soon as your aunty Debbie get's here." Debbie was a daughter of my grandfathers. She had a long journey to travel and little time to do so. However, time seemed to trickle here as though we were living the life of snails.

When Debbie arrived our family, which by then consisted of about thirty people, were allowed to stand by my grandfather's bed side as the doctors disconnected him. I felt as though I were a part of a movie where by some strange miracle he'd survive. There was an extreme silence in the room for a brief second, as though everyone was afraid to breathe in fear that he may need that air. We all stayed by his side praying and holding his hand. A half an hour later the nurses had us exit the room and said they would call us in if anything became worse. Upon exiting I felt a sense of relief and hope that he'll make it through.

I plopped myself down on the maroon, stiff couch. I could feel my fiancé's hand gently stroking my own in his effort to comfort me. As I stared at the old, heavy television with a wooden trim, I remembered special moments with my grandfather. He

was always telling me dirty adult jokes and calling me chubby. It never affected me in a negative way; I always just thought of it as one of those corky grand-daughter grand-father relationships. There was this one time my grandfather came over before Christmas and brought my sisters and I purses. I remember telling him . . . Just then my memories were interrupted by: “the nurses want us to come back in.”

We all returned to his side, instantly we all peered at the white square box. His pulse and heart levels were decreasing at a steady pace. Tears were escaping our already strained eyes and whimpers sneaking through the cracks of our lips. It was time to make the decision. After speaking to the nurse my aunty Gloria returned to my grandfather and removed his oxygen mask. Slowly, but surely he was passing away. We were engorged by a colossal misery and despair filled the room as the agony from our hearts travelled in the air. “Good bye dad, rest in peace, and now you’re with mom!” was repeated over and over by each individual family member.

I grasped onto my mother, father and 4 siblings, holding them close and tight. Although we were all filled with a deep sadness, there was a great strength present. It was the strength of a family standing together and holding each other up. There is nothing more powerful or greater than the love of a family uniting.

The little box now screamed and the once squiggly lines were replaced with straight flat lines. His chest moved no longer, his eyes teared no more and his nose breathed no more.

It took a while before most of the room cleared, but I soon got my turn to say good bye and stand by his side. I lifted the cold, plastic notch for the head side rail to lower it. As I placed my hand on his head I realized how peaceful he looked. Oddly, I found myself wanting to shake him and say: “grandpa wake up, wake up grandpa.” I was startled by his warm, wrinkly skin. Gently, I grazed his grey, brittle hair with my shaking and nervous finger tips. My brain felt as though it had entered a deep sleep waiting to be awakened. With each and every passing stroke I could feel his warmth slipping away and replaced with an arctic, clammy sweat.

Many moments had passed before I was able to say good bye. I kissed his forehead softly and whispered into his ear as I held his hand: “I love you grandpa and I wish you didn’t have to go I will miss you.” My eyes were filled with tears and my cheeks were red and tender. As I pulled the green curtains back to exit his bed side, I thought the worst was over. I thought I had said my good-byes and I felt satisfied with that.

A couple of days had passed and I plowed through them as I would any other day. Work kept me too busy to acknowledge the situation. After work I would gather with my aunts, uncles, cousins, sisters, brothers, and parents. During the gathering there was so much to do and people to see that, again, I was just too busy to grieve. Then, the day came for his funeral. I made a mental note to myself: “do not cry, be strong, your family needs you, especially my dad.”

Strangely, I began thinking how whenever someone passes away people only tend to remember the good about that person. They could have done some pretty horrible things to the ones around them, but they will only be remembered as good. My grandfather was not always the most beloved of men. Before my time he was a frigid and violent man, a manly man. He believed men should not cry and tested the limits of his sons a many of times. Young girls were the victims of his lustful needs, many of whom

were related. His wife, the mother he was returning to, underwent the most unspeakable of abuses. There lay the reason to the confusion in my father's face. He knew a man of two faces: one was kind and generous, while another held the fork of the devil.

I knew the kind man for the most part, although I had heard of the man with the pitch fork. I too was confused. Although this man had committed many astonishing offences I could not help but feel remorse. The remorse I felt was for my true grandfather, not the man that was an outcome of years of abuse, racism, and oppression.

My grandfather was a result of many circumstances created by the ethnocentric ideas of the Canadian government. He attended the Kamloops Residential School during the peak of its abusive trail. While attending the school Sexual, Emotional, Spiritual, and Mental abuse were more often practiced than the curriculum. Later in his years he entered the army. He wanted to fight for his country and defend the people. His heroics were short lived because in order to defend the settler's of Canada in World War II he would have to give up his own identity. He would have to give up his Indian Status in order to become a citizen of Canada and join the very people that raped and beat his people in a very imaginable way. Only to return to the same racism he had left behind. Although he had the status of a Canadian citizen his colour would always be that of an Indian.

It was not this man I remorse, but empathized. I loved and mourned the man beneath this hard, bitter shell. In more ways than one his journey of oppression and racism affects my life. The cycle of abuse is reaching its end and he was a pawn or stepping stone its journey. I witnessed the result and power of family, loyalty and love through the actions of the many people my grandfather had hurt. Hearts are grand and forgiveness is achievable.

Nevertheless, my plan appeared successful. I was staying strong for my loved ones. Just then the slideshow of my grandfather began. I clenched my brother and my fiancé's hands. My lip began to whimper and quiver and my eyes were overcome with a glossy glow. Soon I was crying, however, it was more a joyful cry. As though to honour my grandfathers happy moments.

After the slide show, it was time to view the body one last time. Friends and distant relatives are always the first to view the body and the immediate family is always the last. They removed the Canadian flag from his plain, wooden casket and his bouquet of red white and blue flowers. Inside the casket were the stereotypical Aboriginal designs. I could see his body from my seat, but it didn't appear to affect me. In fact, I felt as though all was well and that he is suffering no longer. People kept passing by and offering their condolences to the family. Greatly we thanked them and allowed them passage to exit. When it came time for me to view the body I was grief stricken.

I began walking towards the casket, but when I got to a certain point my body began retracting. My fiancé was holding me from behind and I could feel my body pushing against his as I tried to step back. I kept telling my feet to move forward, but instead they would do the opposite. Everything had felt so easy because, without even knowing it, my mind was in denial. I could feel the words slipping from my mouth: "no, no, no grandpa, no, no no," as the tears poured from my face as though I were experiencing my own tsunami. "It can't be, it can't be, don't go grandpa."

My body began to fall and crumble into a little ball and I was crying so much that I could only see a fuzzy outline of a box. Then it occurred to me: my grandfather, Moody Michell, died on June the 1<sup>st</sup> of 2008 from a lung infection and pneumonia. He was a

member of the US and Canadian army as well as a beloved family member. My heart will never be the same, but not all was lost. On the day of his funeral I felt the love and strength of not only my family, but an entire community coming together. I now have no grandpa to tell me about the good old days. Instead I have a father that has become an astounding grandfather.