

Just More to Love

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Course: ENGL 101

Instructor: Mr. Chris Genre

Essay Type: Personal Narrative

Though he was an overwhelming five hundred pounds, my grandfather was a very neat, well-kept, respected man. His thick, ash colored hair always had to be just right. From the direction of the part to the brand of hairspray which held it in place, everything had to be just so. His shirt was always tucked in, and his belt always matched his shoes. Because of his huge girth, he had a seventy-eight inch waist, his legs reminded me of a penguin's- short and stubby. Everything about him amused me-from his love for the holidays to the way he continuously chewed ice and the incessant manner he had of rubbing his feet together.

Although he was my father's stepfather, he loved us as if we were his own. Several times throughout the year, he would organize what he called "family time," which involved all thirteen grandchildren who gathered in one place to socialize. He also had a great love for holidays. For example, we all spent Christmas Eve on the levee looking at the bonfires, and for days preceding Christmas, we rode through town enjoying the lights and decorations. The pleasure he took in the holidays was immense. Instead of the normal "the woman does the Christmas shopping" attitude, he insisted on going with my grandmother to make sure she got just the right gifts for everyone. He found great joy in traveling to different places, but he was also just as happy to stay at home for a vigorous game of Rook. As long as he thought we were having fun, he was happy. I remember his saying, "Okay, all those who love me must give me a hug." He was gentle and kind, but most people could only see his tremendous size.

He was not the type of man to defend himself when others ridiculed him simply because he knew he was overweight and "looked different." As people strolled by and invariably commented on his size, he simply whispered. That man is just not happy with himself. That's why he teasing me," or jokingly say "She just doesn't know good-looking when she sees it." All of this was his way of dealing with the blind ignorance of others, reaffirming his positive self-image, and loving the life his God given him. Despite the way he acted on the outside, however, we knew he secretly wished he could change his physical appearance.

After years of being laughed and pointed at, he finally decided to do something about his size. After much agonizing and numerous professional opinions, he decided to have a corrective surgery. Soon after his research on possible surgical methods ended, he went into the hospital. Our entire family was there to support his decision and to cheer him on, pushing to the backs of our minds all the risks his doctors had informed us about. Despite our awareness of the risks, we knew he would benefit from the procedure.

My grandfather never completely recovered. Immediately after his surgery, his body began to shutdown. It was shocking to us because he had absolutely no health problems going in. We were able to see him a couple of days after the surgery, but he was in a state which must have been degrading for him-and it was most definitely traumatic for us. His always clean, neat hair was oily and matted. His beautifully full, pink lips were now cracked and bleeding. Only a dazzling white bed sheet covered his wasted body.

On December 4, 1998, just eleven days before his birthday and during the most joyous times in his life, my grandfather died. The man who had spent so much time making us happy—who lived for us, who smiled and was full of life—was gone. But even on the day he died, he taught me a valuable lesson. If we love someone, we should tell the person often. I sometimes

wonder if he knew just how much we loved him. All I have left are the memories we shared and the lessons he taught me, but they are good memories, and they are exceptional lessons. My grandfather was an astonishing man.

Unfortunately, my son will never get to meet my grandfather, but I will instill in him the love for people my grandfather so diligently instilled in me. I never looked at him as "fat" or "different." I simply viewed him as more to love. Even though he is not physically with me anymore, I still do things with him in mind, wondering if he would approve or disapprove; I try to make the choice I think he would admire. He taught me life; he taught me love; and he taught me what was right. This remarkable man is my idol—my grandfather.

Charity Noto's major is undecided at the moment. Christopher D. Genre was her instructor.

Mr. Genre's Comments: *In a Remembered Person Essay, I ask students to go beyond mere physical descriptions of a person, although they are still important. I ask students to describe the inner characteristics of a person, not through telling, but rather by placing the character in an action or situation which shows their inner character. Charity paints a telling portrait of her step-grandfather, but never relies merely on telling the reader. Small anecdotes about her grandfather, as well as some of his habits, gave Charity's story a much more powerful presentation that it would have if she had simply told the readers that he was neat and kind. More importantly, she maintains a significance to her story which travels from beginning to end. She uses her story to play on emotions without crossing the line into melodrama and makes a telling point in her conclusion. Charity has written an excellent story, not just an essay about someone she remembers.*