

GRANDPA'S BURP

By
Carol L. Bluestein

Awaiting the birth of my first grandchild, I feel the full impact of nature's continuum. In preparing to embrace this new person, I wonder what of me or my late husband, Michael, will be obvious and what will emerge as the child grows up. It seems quite natural that it is part of a grandmother's responsibility to bring an historical awareness to the next generation, to impart the sense of how it was, and therefore, how it is.

"Tell me a story about Grandpa." I hear the words already and I am not so sure what I would say. Obviously, I have several years to work all this out, but the waiting has triggered less than immediate concerns. So, in anticipation, I search my recollections for an anecdote that might command the full attention of my grandchild and yet impart some appreciative insight.

"Let me see," I will begin, "there are so many." Then, I will bring the child close enough to snuggle in the crook of my arm, lean comfortably against a stack of pillows and in my best grandma voice, begin...

Many years ago, on a beautiful sunny morning, Grandpa Michael and I were eating breakfast and reading the newspaper. Our dog, Ginger, was sleeping under the table.

I remember Grandpa would be the first one up and out of bed and he would be busy every minute. He would first put the coffee on, make his toast and pack his lunch between bathroom stuff and getting dressed. When he was done, he would go to the kitchen, butter his toast. While the butter melted, he would tie his tie, using the upper oven door as a mirror. Then, he would eat breakfast and read the sports page.

Grandpa loved the sports section. He knew all about the local high school, amateur and professional athletes. He would point them out in crowds, watch them play and, on occasion, compete with and against them. Grandpa was a wonderful athlete and bridge player. Once in a while, he would even see his name listed in the local basketball, golf or tennis results. He was even mentioned in bridge columns, locally, regionally and nationally.

When he was done, he would brush his teeth, give me a kiss and go off to work. Grandpa Michael was very organized. He followed the same routine every day he worked and he did not like anybody to get in his way, not even me.

This special morning, something was different. We found ourselves eating breakfast at the same time. But routine was routine. He did his usual things and I did mine. We ate in silence, Grandpa and I, at the breakfast table, with our dog, Ginger, sleeping at our feet. It was so quiet I could hear his soft munching of toast, his sipping of hot coffee and the gentle rustling of the newspaper as he turned the pages. The sun was shining through the window, dust specks dancing in the rays. It was peaceful and quiet when the most amazing, loudest, longest burp in the whole wide world blasted out of Grandpa's mouth and echoed through the house.

It was not unusual for Grandpa Michael to burp. In fact, his tendency to burp during and after meals was a fact of our lives. As his low, grumbling stomach sounds would start, your mom, aunt and uncle would start giggling and laughing. They would even try to imitate Grandpa but no one could ever do it as long or as loud.. As time passed, everyone gave up and Grandpa's burps were hardly noticed anymore.

However, on this particular morning, this burp, like a fog horn, was a record breaker. It was the loudest burp I ever heard. The dog was so frightened that she jumped to her feet, barked and ran out of the room. I was so surprised I spilled my coffee. And, when I looked up, Grandpa was still reading his paper as if nothing had happened. I tried to forget the burp and return to reading, but it was impossible.

I began to smile. I couldn't believe Grandpa Michael was unaware of just how loud his burp was. The more I thought about it, the funnier it became. I began laughing to myself because I didn't want to embarrass Grandpa.. Soon, my whole body was shaking. I kept my head down and even tried to hide behind my book. When I could stand it no longer, I stole a look at him. To my amazement, he was also having trouble keeping a straight face.

He looked up with his eyes dancing and a crooked, half smile and saw me looking at him. As our eyes locked, we both dissolved into hysterical laughter. Every time we tried to stop and get ourselves under control, we would just start laughing again. We laughed together, until we cried and our sides ached.

Even after all these years, I can still hear him laughing and see his wonderful smile -- his eyes full of fun and love. He had a remarkable ability to enjoy his life and his family. And, my dear child, I want you know that Grandpa was always very proud of his family and, if he were alive today, he would be very proud of you.

Now comes the big hug and a kiss, but in all probability, my grandchild will be sleeping - too young to understand although comforted by my voice. In this moment of peace and contentment, I will close my eyes, feel the tiny breaths reverberate throughout my body and smile.