LEARNING TO LISTEN AGAIN

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[Assignment: Write an essay describing a concept of “moving” that may have changed you in a significant way.]

At one time or another, each one of us has wanted to go back in time and try to correct a mistake or try to change something. This feeling is often experienced after the loss of a loved one. Ever since I can remember I was the apple of my grandpa’s eye. He taught me so much about life and how this crazy world of ours works. After his death, I was forced to move on and learn to listen again.

My first memories of my grandfather date back to when I was around four or five. I can remember spending a majority of my summer with my grandparents in nearby Union Mills, Indiana. I would always look forward to seeing my grandpa every summer because I knew that he would always have something new to tell me about baseball or farming. There were no other kids my age, so I was forced to entertain myself the majority of the time. I would play on the old farm machinery or dig through all of the things that they had in their attic like old musical instruments, old pictures of my father and uncle, and numerous antiques that my grandma had collected throughout the years. But there were certain times of the day that I spent with my grandpa.

Every morning usually started out the same. If I could manage to get up at five, I would help my grandpa with his pride and joy, his garden. At that time, I thought that it was the biggest garden in the civilized world. I would help him check over his carrots, lettuce, corn, beans, tomatoes, and other normal garden variety vegetables. He would also show me the dried tobacco leaves that he had grown. Even then I knew that he was very proud of being a farmer. This was the first of many lessons that I learned from Grandpa Joe: be proud of who you are and what you do.

He also had a passion for what was in his eyes the greatest game of all time, baseball. After tooling in the garden for what seemed a couple of hours but was actually only about twenty minutes, Grandpa and I would play catch with an old ragged torn-up baseball that every dog in the neighborhood had had in its mouth at one time or another and old catcher’s mitts from the twenties. Even though this particular ball did not have many of its seams left, he could tell me how the seams on a ball would make the ball turn or move in a certain way depending on the fingering and the air. This was another lesson taught to me about baseball--how to throw a curve ball--but this was only half of the lesson. I would like to forget the other half, but I find it impossible. I learned how to chew tobacco; and after turning a light shade of green, I also learned that I did not like it.

At the end of the day, around dinner time, I always tried to eat succotash: a mixture of beans, corn, and whatever else my grandma felt like throwing in the bowl. This was a favorite of my grandpa. After dinner, I always tried to figure out the game of solitaire. My grandpa
would sit for the next few hours playing this game with a deck of old, faded blue and white Bicycle playing cards. We talked about school, if I liked it or not, and if I would like to play baseball when I was in high school. During one of these chats, I learned that my grandfather had dropped out of high school as a sophomore. He still managed to marry my grandma, have two children, own a home, and beat alcoholism and smoking. Despite his success, he always stressed that I finish school because life without a high school degree was not easy, even in his day.

I cherished these times with my grandpa, but our relationship changed as I grew up. When I got into middle school, I started dating and did not go out to their house as much. I always felt like I was too busy to get out there and see him, even though I only lived twenty minutes away. If I went out there at all, it was usually to help him with moving a couch that he had just finished reupholstering or to mow his lawn. This continued and got worse when I started high school. I started working and the only free time I had was on the weekends when I would usually go to the high school basketball game on Friday night. I was growing up and getting older, and little did I realize, so were my grandparents. I found myself seeing them only for special family functions or at a funeral, which only happened about three times a year. Sure, I still managed to say hello now and then, but I was not listening the way I had before. I thought that I had heard it all before, and it was just courteous for me to pay attention. When my grandpa’s health started to go downhill, I realized that I would not have those same opportunities to be with my grandfather like I had when I was younger. I tried to see him in the hospital as much as possible, but he could not remember if I had been there for several hours or just a couple of seconds. He was no longer able to tell me about the good old days in the hills of Kentucky or tell me stories about my dad.

On August 23, 1991, Joseph A. Adams, 84, died of complications from a stroke in La Porte Hospital. My heart sank that day. One of the greatest men of all time died, I lost my best friend, and I wanted to go back and do it all over again. In the ensuing days after his funeral, I was able to keep a light brown hat with a small colorful feather on the side that he always wore. I tried not to believe that he was indeed gone and that all I had to remember him by was a hat and a guitar with a couple of strings missing. I now realize that I still have my memories of him and I can still remember everything he ever told me about life and baseball. I have learned to listen to my father’s memories of Joseph Adams and I have learned to appreciate someone while he or she is here. These days the old garden where he sat shielding his bald head with a Chicago Cubs hat and wiping the sweat off of his old wire-rimmed eye glasses is nothing but a plot of dirt, and the old catcher’s mitt is cracked with age, yet to this day I can hear him talking and laughing with me. I’ve learned to listen again.