My Grandfather

Kim Lacina

1 Every day people are born and people die. Human beings come into this world and leave it—most without their names being immortalized in any history books. Millions of people have lived and worked and loved and died without making any great claims to fame or fortune.

2 But they aren’t forgotten—not by their friends, not by their families. And some of these people, some very special people, are not forgotten even by those who hardly knew them. My grandfather was one of these very special people.

3 What made him so special? Why is he remembered not only by friends and family but even by casual acquaintances? Very simply, because he was the essence of love. More than that, he was the essence of what I think of as “active” love. Just as his heart was not empty, his words were not empty.

4 He didn’t just speak of compassion. During the Great Depression he took homeless people off the street into his home when they needed a place to sleep. He gave them food when they needed something to eat. And though he wasn’t a rich man by any means, he gave them money when they had none. Those people off the street will remember the man who had enough love in his heart to share with them all that he had.

5 He didn’t just speak of tolerance. During the 1960s, when his peers were condemning those “long-haired hippies,” I can remember riding in the car with my grandfather, picking up dozens and dozens of those “long-haired hippies” who were hitchhiking, and going miles out of our way to give them a ride somewhere. Those men and women will remember the man who had enough love in his heart to bridge the gap between his world and theirs and to practice the spirit of brotherhood.

6 And he didn’t just speak of courage. He proved his courage time and time again. He proved it to a little girl who was trapped in the basement of a burning building. He pulled her out of the flames and gave her back her life. And that little girl, now a grown woman, will remember the man who had enough love in his heart to risk his life for a person he didn’t even know.

7 He also proved his courage, in a more personal way, to his family. In 1966 he was told he had leukemia and only a year to live. He immediately started chemotherapy treatment, and I don’t know which is worse—the effects of the disease or the effects of those treatments. In the ensuing year we saw his hair fall out, we saw his skin turn a pasty shade of gray, and we saw him lose so much weight that he seemed to shrivel up into half the size he had been. We didn’t want to see him go out that way.
And we didn’t. He fought that disease with all his strength and all his courage. And despite the pain he endured, he never complained. I think about him when I catch myself complaining about my “tons of homework” or a “terrible headache,” and suddenly that homework or that headache doesn’t seem so terrible after all.

He lived through that first year, and he lived through eight more. And that disease never stopped him from working, and it never stopped him from caring. All through those years of suffering, he continued to show compassion and tolerance and courage.

He died in 1975. And though he left this world without ever making the pages of a history book, he still left the world a great deal. He left to the people who knew him a spirit to exemplify life—a spirit of unconditional, selfless, and truly inspiring love.
**My Grandfather**  *by Kim Lacina*

**Commentary**

Presented in an introductory public speaking class, “My Grandfather” illustrates how a commemorative speech should focus on the essence of its subject. Rather than presenting a biography that simply recounts the facts of her grandfather’s life, the speaker deals with what she believes to be his most praiseworthy qualities. The speech also shows how students can use clear, simple language to convey meaning and to arouse emotion. Here is a synopsis of the speech:

**Introduction:** The introduction consists of paragraphs 1-3. Because many previous speakers had dealt with famous people, paragraphs 1-2 were especially effective in capturing the attention of the audience. At the end of paragraph 2 the speaker announces the exact topic of the speech, and in paragraph 3 she presents the central idea—that her grandfather was the essence of “active love.” The last sentence of paragraph 3 helps to clarify what the speaker means by “active love” and provides a smooth bridge to the body of the speech.

**Body:** The body of the speech begins in paragraph 4 and runs through the next-to-last paragraph. Three main points are developed: “He didn’t just speak of compassion” (paragraph 4); “He didn’t just speak of tolerance” (paragraph 5); “He didn’t just speak of courage” (paragraphs 6-9). The parallel wording of each main point reinforces the speaker’s ideas and gives coherence to the body. So, too, does the repetition and parallelism in the last sentences of paragraphs 4-6. Throughout, the speaker gives her ideas life with specific examples that illustrate her grandfather’s “active love.” The language of the speech is clear, familiar, and concrete. Most of the words consist of one or two syllables, and there are few wasted words. The speech moves crisply from idea to idea. When delivered in class, it also picked up considerable emotional power as it proceeded.

**Conclusion:** The conclusion consists of the last paragraph. By stating that her grandfather “left this world without ever making the pages of a history book,” the speaker relates back to her introduction. This gives the speech a sense of unity and signals that the speaker is about to conclude. The final sentence ties the entire speech together by rephrasing the central idea clearly and vividly.