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Meek, Lowly, and Humble

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I. Never let the truth get in the way of a good story. At least that is what my grandpa always says. So, my grandfather is a great man.

II. When my grandfather entered the Navy, he was only seventeen. He had a tattoo put on his left bicep, "I love Dolly," stamped forever, engulfed in a gray green heart. When he came back from the Korean War, Dolly was married with two kids. He showed her the tattoo at their thirtieth high school reunion, and she gasped. He was still a hero.

III. The navy only began his travels. Once, when I was very young, he sat me on his lap with a globe. We played a game where he would spin it and I would point to a place, stopping the centrifugal motion. Then, he would tell me about the matching adventures in that location, from tasting beer made out of pig spit in Ireland, to salving an Incan Civil War with a kazoo in Bolivia. He even happened upon Noah’s ark in the Kyrgyzstan Mountains and brought back a lock of Noah’s hair. It was already in his will, to be inherited by his favorite youngest granddaughter.

IV. Grandpa managed a factory that ran Barberton, Ohio. Men feared my grandpa, as their jobs were all in his hands. He let my dad and his little brother Todd walk around the factory, but only in reverence and silence. That was his domain. People knew Walt Pierce, just like they knew the feeling of hunger.

V. He attended all of the boys’ football events. He never missed a game or a practice. My dad recalls him sitting in the bleachers, everyday, arms crossed, watching.

VI. He offered to buy the grandkids all cars upon turning sixteen, but my parents were afraid of spoiling us. We apparently needed to learn discipline. We needed to earn it the way Grandpa made Dad earn it.

VII. He backpacked the entire Appalachian Trail when he was seventy.

VIII. Grandma Alice’s parents did not attend their wedding. When I asked why, she hesitated. “Did they not like Grandpa?” She shook her head at the kitchen table, and replied, “Well I’ve never known anyone to dislike Walt.” She snickered bitterly as she sipped her Earl Gray tea.
IX. Dad had to convince my Uncle Todd to invite Grandpa to his wedding...

X. because two weeks after he divorced Grandma Alice, he married someone else.

XI. She still asked for him when she found out she was dying of cancer. “Is there anything we can get you, Mom?” my dad had asked. She answered, “Just bring me Walt. He’s the only one who really understands me.” Grandpa took her to tests and treatments. When told, “Family only,” he replied, “Oh, of course. Alice is the mother of all three of my kids.”

XII. And Grandpa was almost there, when she died. I was the one who ran to find him walking around the hospice, trying to guess the name of all the perennials, “...Ajuga chocolate chip, Merigold, Hoki Peony...” By the time we got back to Grandma’s room, it was all over, and Dad told us it was time to go home.

XIII. A month later, Grandpa rescued a wild Airedale Terrier from the pound. Grandpa named him Tyler and tamed him after just three days. When asked how, Grandpa simply said, “I made a mean bet with him, and I won.”

XIV. Now, he recites Walden Pond to Jake. None of the women in his life ever liked poetry. “...I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan—like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion...” Afterwards, Grandpa clears his throat and retrieves his red hanky from his back right pants pocket. He wipes his blurry eyes with it, and sticks it back into the opposite pocket, dirty.

XV. When I ask him to describe himself, Grandpa sits a second and looks to a corner, wiping the sweat underneath his fishing cap. Then he smiles and nods slowly, contemplative. It is then that he laughs, deep, raising his coffee cup to toast, “Well Punkin, see, I’m meek, lowly, and humble.”