

The Journal of a Lifetime

It's cool when you're a kid. You don't have many responsibilities. You can sort of come and go as you please. No one really messes with you or gets in your business. And school isn't the worst thing in the world either. I mean, where else can you wake up, eat some breakfast, and meet up with all the friends you're ever gonna know in your life, and see them all in one place? Nowhere. *It's actually pretty awesome.* You're young enough to still play, but old enough to know what work is. The universe that surrounds you is tiny, but the world you live in is huge. It's the place where you're growing up. And it's yours and no one else's. No one can take *that* from you.

Being a kid involves collecting baseball cards, and hiding things in the drop ceiling of your bedroom, eating junk food, and getting your after-school clothes as dirty as possible. It's about learning how to push the patience of adults without going *too* far—just to let them know you're there. It's about packing a light backpack and shuffling off into the woods to build forts made from tree branches and random pieces of wood that people discarded.

Being a kid is everything that doesn't involve the ordinary. In fact, in my short lifetime, it's been all about the journey, without a care on the planet. I don't put too much thought into what I want to become or what my purpose is. There's no time for that stuff. My only concern is what I'm

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going to do next. Oh, and me, there's me. Let me tell you about that.

I'm Raymond Locke, and it's my twelfth birthday. This is what I got from my grandfather. It's a worthless journal. He says it will help me remember my childhood and document my life as an adult so I can "reflect" on it. I don't even know what reflect means.

My grandfather, well, he is one of a kind. After all, I guess I should respect him. He *was* the person who raised me from a baby, ever since the accident with my parents. He told me a lot about them as I was growing up, but obviously, I never had a chance to get to know them. I wish I did. I mean I can't *miss* them, because I never *knew* them, but Grandpa has pictures of what they looked like in several frames scattered across the house. The same situation goes for my grandmother. I lost her at a young age as well. There are pictures of her and Grandpa hanging up, and he has a really pretty one hanging above his bed. They looked genuinely happy in that picture. So you see, in my young life, my grandfather is all I really have.

He has this gray and white beard that's neatly trimmed. A bit of it hangs below his chin, but most times, he keeps it looking sharp. If you didn't know him, you'd think he was a famous fisherman. Most of the time Gramps likes wearing his favorite hat. He has several that my grandmother gave him as presents. He really cherishes those hats. I consider him a simple man when it comes to clothing. He wears flannel shirts

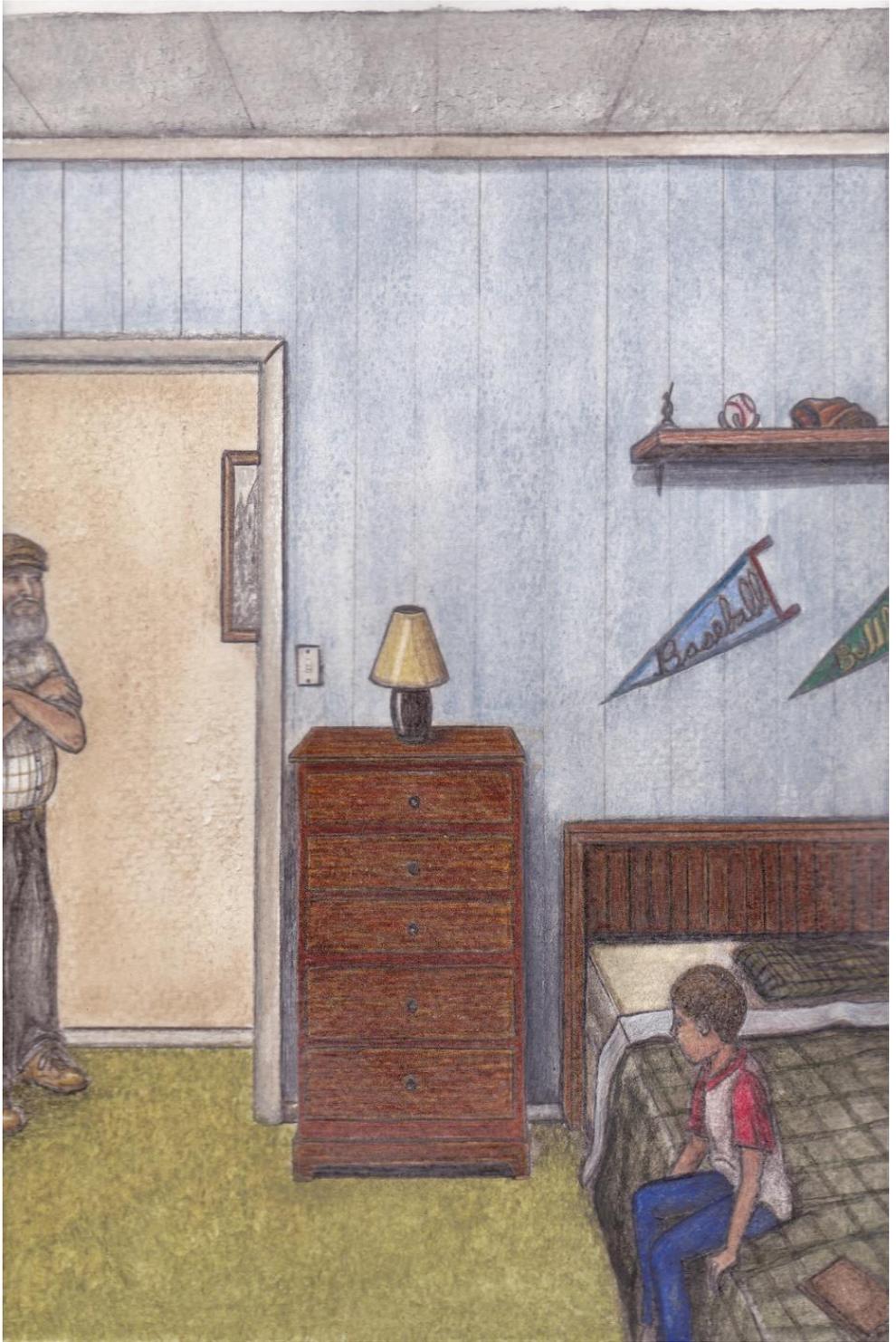
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and solid color pants with various combinations of brown or black shoes.

He's one of the most thoughtful guys I know. Even when he knows I'm wrong, he makes me think I'm right. If you need a shoulder to lean on, he's the guy to use. He might even give you the shirt off of his back—if you ask him nicely! And candy? Oh, he's got that covered. He keeps little bowls of the stuff on the kitchen countertop and on the coffee table. You could say we have a bit of a “sweet tooth” here. I've caught him several times snoring on the couch, and next to him, on the coffee table, were more than several crumpled up candy wrappers. Guilty!

Gramps never gets too angry and he loves to smile. He has a laid back attitude, but I wouldn't mistake that for being lazy. Oh no, that'd be the last thing you should do. He keeps up with the landscaping and insists that he cut the lawn. I guess it's his comfort zone, and no one touches another man's lawn!

Many people know him, and he takes great pride in that. If you did know him, you'd call him D.L., short for Don Lee, but his closest friends call him “Sage.” He's a wise man, and his nickname reflects that. His friends have called him Sage for as long as I can remember. They know they can't beat him with their brains. He'll outsmart anyone. Now me, I just



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call him Gramps! I had to ask him if he'd help me get started on this journal, to which his response was, "With pleasure."

So this journal I received from gramps—I guess it's okay. He's insistent that I write in it and keep it for the rest of my life. He says that since we're such a small family (and by small family, I mean him and I), I should document all the important things that are happening in my life. He says I can look back in the journal when I'm older and have reflection time. Again, I don't know what that means, but gramps is a smart man, and I believe what he tells me.

Gramps, are you sure it was a good idea to give this to me? I can just write and write and write. I can put all of my random thoughts down on *these* sheets of paper and I can jot down anything I want. You told me to document things, right? How about this: This. Journal. Is. Boring! But seriously, I do respect Gramps, so I'll grant him this wish and keep him happy. *I will* take good notes and write important things down. It might be sloppy and it might be unorganized, but I'm going to try my best and fulfill this request given to me by my Gramps.

Getting this journal from Grandpa was so random. I wonder what was so important that he felt it necessary for me to keep a journal. Maybe his father gave him one, but he chose not to write in it? Maybe now that my grandpa is an older man, he wishes he had something to read? I mean, think of all the memories he has of Grandma and my parents. Maybe he had

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tons of good friends growing up, and they made lots of memories, but by not having his own journal, that's what they are—just memories. So sixty years later, grandpa handed me the keys to this journal, and now I just have to drive it.

Grandpa and I recently took a fishing trip to the Missouri River in Chamberlain, South Dakota. It's about 70 miles west of Mitchell—perfect for some catching up between Gramps and me.

According to him, it's a hot spot for delicious looking trout, which include your rainbow and your brown trout. Plus, it carries a tasty selection of small and large mouth bass, and both are yummy treats. You'll find all sorts of fish species in that river, but we mainly bait the hooks for the trout and bass.

Once we catch those treasures, Gramps sure knows how to cook them up. He told me that my great grandfather taught him how to gut, clean, and cook all sorts of fish. Some of the fish you bake, some you fry, and some you slather up with some of the sweetest unsalted butter you can find and throw them on the fire. Out here, it's a rite of passage, so I'm going to do my best to follow in his footsteps and learn from the best!

My grandpa loved his fishing, and I must admit, I did too. We always had a great time along the Missouri river. Fishing was our way of getting lost without wanting to be found. We didn't have house phones or mailboxes to check for bills and junk letters. There were no Western Unions or bank tellers. The only communication we had was face-to-face

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conversation, and maybe the occasional interruption from a squawking red-tail hawk.

Gramps called this trip “the mancation.” We told each other jokes on the car ride to the river. We ate these small pieces of fruit flavored candy and chewed on sunflower seeds (taken from the special candy bowl dish). We liked to travel with the car windows all the way down so we could spit out the empty shells.

Sometimes, he’d let me grab the wheel to get the sense of being a “man.” I wasn’t...but it felt like it. He’d say, “Ray, take the wheel, let the highway be your home.” Occasionally, he’d lay off the gas pedal, pretending we were out of fuel. I’d freak out and let go of the wheel in a panic, and only after he stopped laughing (and I caught my breath again) would he regain control of the car. It definitely made for a good chuckle. And stories? Well, you know the answer to that. He was always good for those.

On the way up to our fishing camp, he told me a story about his first date with Grandma. I couldn’t wait to hear this tale. My Grandfather was a heck of a storyteller. Maybe all grandpas are, but my Grandpa tells it best!

He said that before their date, it had been the worst day of his life. He was working for a sign painting company as a production assistant. It was one of the worst rain-soaked days he had ever seen, and he was at the tail end of a sixty-hour

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work week. Booming thunderstorms were bringing buckets of rain that day. He said there was no letup in that charcoal sky.