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Ice Cream Cones

by Kristin Moore

The old engine of Grandpa Mike's station wagon puttered into the Dairy Queen. It was a tradition for us to go there for dessert whenever the family visited. "Cup or cone?" Grandpa asked. He always knew my answer but asked anyway.

"Cup, Grandpa," I answered laughing. We sat on the graffiti-covered bench and ate our melting ice cream. Like most grandparents, he told me crazy stories about my family from a long time ago, the olden days, he called them. Out on the golf course one day, a bird landed on his head, shocked him, and all his hair began to fall out. Even though we consider him bald, he did have some hair left around his big shiny bald spot. He stood over six feet tall, a giant to a young girl. He looked like one of those jolly old men you see dressing up like Santa at Christmas time.

Grandpa loved golf. To make things even better, he was excellent at it. You could usually find him at Edgewood Country Club, his second home. Everyone knew him there, and everyone knew us because of his talent. Plaques and trophies filled the den at Grandma and Grandpa's house in Birmingham.

"One of these days I'm gonna take you to the course and teach you what I do best." Grandpa said this all the time. I never had a strong interest in learning the sport, but because my grandpa wanted to teach me, I looked forward to the adventure. We never made it through a whole lesson or game, but I do remember going to the driving range and learning to swing.

Grandpa owned a carpet store in East Detroit. Probably not the greatest job to have, but as his own boss, he did well for his family and four kids. My family went out to visit the store every so often. My brother and I got cookies from the back room. Then Mike, my brother, and I would go off and play cops and robber games. The robber would try and make it to the back room to steal more cookies, while the other one would pretend to
be grandpa, the policeman, and catch the cookie snatcher. We chased each other over all the carpet piles stacked around the store, like it was the Grand Canyon. It was always a great way to con more cookies out of Grandpa in the long run.

Sometimes, after the store closed, we got to ride in the big station wagon. The back trunk flipped into two small seats, just perfect for Mike and me. My brother always got the bigger seat. Upon arriving home, Grandma put out freshly-made mostaccioli on the table for us. We ate till our pants burst, but stuffed down our dessert anyway. After dinner, Grandpa turned on the television to the sports channel--golf, of course. He always sat in the same orange and yellow plaid chair with me on his lap. "You know, you’re my favorite granddaughter," Grandpa told me every time I visited.

"I’m your only granddaughter, Grandpa; that’s not funny," I’d reply with a giggle. I always pretended to hate when he said that, but he knew that I loved it.

One day in April of 1987 my mom and I had just got home from school. "Kris, come inside. We need to talk for a minute." Ma managed to slip her words out in a quiet, concerned voice.

"Did Aunt Issy die?" I thought to myself. "What’s going on, Mom?"

"Come, sit down," she said. We went into the family room and sat on the love seat. Mom spoke with the saddest tone I had ever heard her use. "Grandpa Mike is gone."

"Huh, what are you talkin’ about, Ma?" I laughed. "That’s not funny, shut up!" Tears started to roll down my cheeks. I dragged myself up to my room, as if I didn’t know my way there at all. I climbed into my bed, and curled up under my flannel blanket, as my mind and body fell into a numb trance.

Grandpa Mike lay there so peaceful. Everyone kept quiet, like on Thanksgiving when he used to take his after dinner nap. He used to snore kind of funny. I could never fall asleep at their house because of the strange noises he made. I thought to myself, "Why couldn’t he start snoring or do something? Only sixty-four years old, he had so much more to live through. His family, friends, sport, and career still needed him. Six months away from getting a second granddaughter, and time could not help any of us." We stood by him saying our last goodbyes. I refused to let him go and could not bring myself to even glance at him. My mom took my hand and led me to the bathroom. Tears of confusion trickled down my cheeks. I
couldn't understand myself.

"It's okay," Mom assured me. I never did look at him, and I can't remember saying goodbye. I knew to let it go, though, because I could feel him in my heart forever.

A strange thing happened a few months ago. Just another summer day for my friends and me. We made our usual stop at Dairy Queen. We all wandered up to the window and stared at the list, deciding what our taste buds craved. I always knew what I wanted, but looked anyway. "Two scoops of mint chip, please," I requested.

"Cup or cone?" she asked. Karen, I remember her name, did not realize her question had two meanings to me. I dug out a smile for her, as thoughts and memories flashed through my mind like a laser show.

"Cup, please." I never did like my ice cream in a cone.