



RiverBender Blog: Hanging Out With My Best Friend (AKA My Grandfather)

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
December 28 2023 12:07 PM



My grandfather and I are best friends.

I don't know if he knows that, but I firmly believe it. We have spent a lot of time together one-on-one, watching the news and sipping coffee. His is black, mine is pale with all the milk and sugar I add. We make a sweet team.

When we fall into silence, it's comfortable, but I try to keep up a steady stream of chatter anyway. I'll talk about anything and everything and, above all else, nothing, as he politely listens and tries not to nod off. And, inevitably, we get into some odd conversation topics.

I start by mining my life for interesting ideas — “Work is going well,” “Listen to this funny story from the RiverBender.com office,” “My cats did the silliest thing this morning” — but when I run out of anecdotes, I start casting around for other topics. Maybe it's natural, but I end up thinking about my own interests, and then I end up giving impromptu run-on speeches about crystals.

This poor, saintlike man. He indulges me. I make us cups of coffee, which leads me to my friend's new Nespresso machine, which reminds me of going to Maeva's Coffee recently, and then I'm telling an anecdote about how the Milton Schoolhouse is supposedly haunted, and then I ask the real million-dollar question, which is, “Grandpa, do you believe in ghosts?”

This man is a former Marine. He is now stuck talking about the power of incense and the downsides of dating apps. I tell him about the books I'm reading that he absolutely does not care about, then dive into a story about a friend who recently moved to California.

But this — mentioning California — is actually a calculated move.

Like a lot of grandparents, my grandpa tells me the same stories again and again. I know exactly how to guide him to the stories I want to hear. I can almost recite them word for word, but every now and then, a new detail emerges that gives me a completely new understanding of who this man is and the life he lived that led to him sitting in his armchair, chatting with his granddaughter.

In this case, mentioning California will prompt him to tell me how much he doesn't like California, and then he will tell me about the things I'm really interested in: his past, long before the rest of my family existed.

He tells me about traveling with his father, a man I never met. My great-grandfather was an adventurous photographer and his son (my grandpa) was always along for the ride. They drove out West to Arizona and hiked the Grand Canyon. “It's nice,” Grandpa tells

me when I ask for details, which feels like a completely inadequate way to describe the Grand Canyon. Kansas is “flat and kind of boring.” San Francisco is “too crowded.”

Don’t mistake these descriptions as indifference; on the contrary, his eyes light up as he talks about his travels. He gets especially excited when he speaks about his family. He tells me about his wife — my grandmother — as she was when she was my age, stories about dating her, their first house, the little red convertible she drove, the motorcycles they used to ride together up the River Road. I can see my reflection in these stories. These are the people who led to me.

My grandfather is my best friend, whether he knows it or not. We might have completely different interests and we might be completely different people. But we share a history. I have his eyes. He has his stories, and one day these lazy coffee mornings will become my stories, too.