

Thomas and Anna's Tribute to their Grandad

I'd like to share some memories of our Grandad with you.

He was such a fun grandad to have when we were young. Anna and I greatly enjoyed our regular visits to Nan and Grandad's. If ever we couldn't find him in the house he would be in his greenhouse where we would run out to see how long the cucumbers were growing or help him pick the reddest tomatoes (and ogle at the flies hanging on the yellow sticky tape).

He was also an essential member of our baking team. Nan knew the recipe, and Anna and I would do the measuring and whisking and decorating, but we couldn't make any cake without taking the mixing bowl through to Grandad to beat. He could beat really well because he kept himself strong using his little red arm-strengthener, and he would monitor my and Anna's muscle size by giving our flexed biceps a squeeze. There was some satisfaction when he declared that our walnuts had grown to eggs, but they never matched his coconut biceps. I guess this slow progress drove Anna one day to demonstrate her strength by pulling his arm-strengthener the wrong way, and breaking it.

Grandad and I had a unique goodbye too. We would hold up our fists in a boxing pose (he taught me a little bit of boxing) and then he would try to get a light punch in on my head, while I would try to punch his stomach. He would always find my weakness and pounce when I was trying to get a jab in and swamp me with hugs and kisses. I wonder whether he was teaching me bad technique so that it was easier to get his reward of a kiss goodbye.

One of his traits that I most admire was his love of stopping strangers in the streets for a quick natter, and succeeding in making them laugh with his...questionable... jokes. As a youngster I was in awe of how my Grandad was able to bring a smile to these strangers' faces. He would sometimes even tell me during a call to write down a joke he'd come across so that I could use it with my friends. I hope that I have inherited this ability, though with a rather different supply of jokes.

It was clear that family was the most important thing to Grandad, and he looked out for us, and cared for us as best he could. When we were younger he and Nan used to call us every Sunday for our weekly chat, and he made us feel so special for doing so. When Anna and I left for university our dad set up a system for him to be able to communicate

with us weekly by Skype, by just sitting in front of a laptop (which he called a 'television') and seeing us appear ready to talk – or, as he became more hard of hearing, to type messages on the screen (often prompted by him saying “Can you use your fingers?”). In this way we were able to keep in touch regularly even when far away, which meant a lot to him and us.

Though Grandad didn't have the most to give, he gave a lot. He would follow horse racing, and we'd pick our horses together (I never understood his choices because my choices had far prettier caps), but instead of giving his bet money to the bookies he put it in a box for Anna and me to share at Christmas.

Each Christmas we would give him a box of chocolates and each Christmas he would take one and then hand them back for us to enjoy and would be offended if we suggested he take them home with him. He would do this with his meals too – after choosing the biggest dish on the menu (usually a dilemma between fish and chips and roast dinner) he would straight away offer his plate round and scrape over half of his food onto our plates.

Grandad had classic advice regarding exams: take a deep breath before you go in, do the easy questions first. Nice advice, but interesting coming from someone who had never done an exam before. This fact was made a little clearer when, in response to me telling him I was struggling with some complex mathematical ideas in my final year at university, he reminded me “You can always ask your mam and dad if you're stuck.” Despite this well-meaning but not-so-useful advice, it was the words of his: “Just try your best, I'll be proud of you either way”, echoing around my head that provided me with some comfort in each exam.

From the wall in his living room dedicated to photos of Anna and me, to saving every cherished picture we drew for him, to shouting out “That's Thomas!” from the audience whenever I entered the stage in a theatre performance, he showed how proud he was of us. He was also immensely proud of my Dad and worshipped my Nan, often telling us how lucky he was to have had her in his life, and after she had passed away he religiously kissed a photo of her every morning and night.

While I am devastated that Grandad has died and will miss him in so many ways (for example, already this month I will miss trying to decipher what he would write in my Christmas card – not even he could read his writing sometimes), I know that he was not sad to die. We are comforted in knowing how content he was with his life, and will always have many happy memories and know that he lives on through us. He found his happiness and filled his life with it.