**Adult – long form #2**

**Gone Fishing**

“Micheal…Micheal...come on son, it is time.” As the sleep cleared I gradually became aware that it was my grandfather, trying to wake me without waking my grandmother in the other room which, given the size of their cabin, was no small feat. After rising from my bed I quickly made it up, and then made my way into the dimly lit kitchen with its pots and pans motif wallpaper, to find my fishing partner for the day already seated at the table and enjoying our breakfast of champions: Little Debbie Snack Cakes and hot beverages of one’s choice (his instant coffee mine hot chocolate), and minimal banter.

It was not that we did not talk. Or, that we would not talk. Because, in reality, there was a pretty solid chance that in a few hours I would be carrying on at a mile a minute. But now was not that time. And this was not my first rodeo as they say. I had been ‘up north’ at the cabin for several weeks by then that summer and we had actually settled into somewhat of a routine. Up before dawn, breakfast, fishing, tinkering, lunch, reading, afternoon naps, mischief seeking, more fishing, more dinner, more sleep. Wash, rinse, repeat.

As we exited the side door into the dim light of early morning I enthusiastically bolted for the boathouse to retrieve the essentials: boat seats, nets, stringers, bait, buckets blah, blah, and blah. Finally, we set off down what I imagine to be one of the most picturesque country lanes in the entire state of Michigan. Eventually we would emerge from a towering Great Northern Woods canopy and the lake itself would gradually come into view. A quick scan of its mirror-glass surface usually revealed that we would be the first anglers to break it: a fact that my fishing partner seemed to take great pride in.

As the *old man* of the lake he had become something of a legend in those parts (or at least in my mind). And as the morning progressed, what would begin with just us in our little V-bottom boat, would gradually transform into a larger and larger flotilla of curious anglers not so discretely hoping to gain some insight or clue into my grandfather’s fishing strategies for the day. It was only years later that I came to appreciate the humor of this cat and mouse game that saw boat after boater slyly attempt to strike up seemingly innocuous conversations from across the way …

“How’s the luck been Lawrence” They would ask? As they maneuvered their boats closer, contorting their bodies into comical positions while trying to catch a glimpse of the color or style of bait on my grandfather’s fishing rod.” Oh, not so good,” he would usually reply (regardless of fact). Then just as they came within sighting distance he would lean his elbow against his rod so as to nonchalantly slip the tip just below the surface of the water and far away from their prying eyes. “Got a couple of nice large-mouth yesterday over by the Holt place though,” he might offer… (again not always entirely truthful). “Not doing to good today though. I think maybe we might head over there and give it another try. Micheal “pull the anchor up,”  he would bark. Then we would wish them luck as our small Johnson outboard would sputter to life and we would begin slowly motoring away.

Rounding the nearest corner, we would typically change direction again, and head for entirely different parts of the lake. Through the mist of time I can still picture him peering over his shoulder slyly, with a slight grin, as if we were in some Hollywood-esq type chase scene. Only at five or six miles-an-hour, tops…on a closed lake…with only one access ramp…and no real villains…or actual pursuits. Looking back, it is hard for me to say which he enjoyed more. Catching fish (which he was very good at) or playing the game with the other want-to-be *old men* of the lake (which he was even better at)?

And I now also firmly believe that he was (at least in the beginning) probably the one actually hooking most of the fish that I thought I was ‘catching”. And that once he had set the hook he would then just hand the rod to me and wait…wait while I carried on like only I could about how cool it would be if fish could fly, so that we could just shoot them with grandma’s 22 rifle or how whippoorwills didn’t have lips yet they still managed to whistle. Eventually though, even the fish would grow weary of my drivel and raise enough Caine to get my attention, which would in turn set off a full blown four- alarm- hullabaloo as I would excitedly bring the world up to date as to the particulars of my situation. ‘'I got one, fish on! I got one, fish on!” I would bellow while careening from side to side. “I think it’s a big one!” (I thought they all were) “Easy Mikey,” my grandfather would counsel. (Always the tactician, not wanting to give away location I’m sure). “Nice and easy kid, nice and easy, you got this.”

I learned a lot on those summer sojourns so long ago. I learned how to swim, and how to water ski. I learned how to drive a speedboat, and how to fish…sorta? And I even learned about the joy of reading. But most importantly I learned about and got to know two of the most significant and beloved people of my lifetime. They were honest hardworking “salt of the earth” farmers who spent their modest lives working way too hard for way too little. And while some are blessed with two sets of grandparents, they were it for me. But what a pair they were.

They had the will, the character, and the patience to mentor a poor, shy, clumsy kid into an only slightly off kilter young man. And while summers at *the cabin* grew less frequent as I grew older and my thoughts turned to girls, friends, and parties and such, I will never forget my time with them. And I have tried to live up to their wonderful examples in my own life and with my own children and now my grandchildren. But the simple truth of the matter is that one of my deepest regrets in life is that I never got the chance (before they succumb to the ravages of age and cancer) to tell them just how important they were to me.

So my parting advice to any with eyes to hear is this. Life is short. Shorter than you think. And it will likely be filled with people just like them, parents, grandparents, family, friends, and mentors who will leave deep and lasting impressions. So please take the time to let them know just how important they are before it’s too late. Because tomorrow is never promised. And sometimes at least in part our lives are defined by regrets that we can not remedy and words that we did not say. So from the depths of my heart and with endless appreciation I would like to sincerely thank my grandparents for giving me what only they could…their time. Lawrence and Jane (Jennie) Lolmaugh of rural Buchanan/Gun Lake, Michigan.  Thank you very very much and I sure do miss you guys.