

## Who's Going to Read to Me?

Michelle opened Grandma's bedroom door and tiptoed inside. Grandma was asleep, snoring gently. Michelle walked close to the bed and her eyes filled with tears. At the age of 70, Grandma was proud of her youthful looks. But, about two months ago, she stopped asking Mom to dye her hair black. Now the two inches of white hair on either side of her middle part made her look like a skunk. Her skin was still free of wrinkles, but it was pulled tightly over her cheekbones. Grandma had lost a lot of weight since her illness had become serious.

Michelle needed to talk to Grandma, who had not read to her in months. Since she was a toddler, Grandma had read to her every night before bedtime. Even when she had learned to read, Grandma still loved to read her. By the time Michelle was seven, she thought it was babyish to listen to Grandma at bedtime.

"I can read by myself, Grandma," said Michelle.

"You don't enjoy my reading?" asked Grandma.

"I do, but I can read, and I can get books from the library."

"I read you books you probably wouldn't pick yourself. If you do enjoy my reading, I'll continue until you feel strongly about it."

Michelle loved Grandma too much to object. Now she was ten and she had not asked Grandma to stop. Besides, Grandma read the books so expressively, especially with the dialogue parts. She used different voices for different characters, and the story came alive for Michelle, as if she were watching a movie. She could picture the scenery and the characters just from Grandma's voice. It was true, too, that by herself she would not have picked "The Wind in the Willows," "The Wizard of Oz" or "The Little Prince."

Grandma stirred and opened her eyes.

"Michelle," said Grandma, yawning, "How was school today?"

"Fine. I got an A on my book report."

"Then why do you look so sad?"

"Grandma," blurted Michelle, unable to hold back her question, "When you die, and I don't want you to die, who's going to read to me?"

Grandma looked startled by the question. Then her face relaxed and she said, "I'm old, and I'm not afraid of dying. I do wish I could read to you much longer, but we know that is not possible. Come here and sit down on my bed."

Grandma took Michelle's hand and kissed it. She continued, "Try some audio books from the library. You may find a reader that you like. I read to your mother too when she was young. Ask her to read to you. She would love to."

"OK, Grandma. Now go back to sleep."

Michelle went to the library to find stories that Grandma would have picked. There wasn't much of a selection of books for her age. She did find audio books of "Little Women" and "Huckleberry Finn." The narrators spoke clearly, not too fast or too slow. After all, they were professionals, but there was no magic in their voices, nothing that stirred her imagination. Was it because she wasn't next to Grandma with her eyes closed? Was it because she couldn't hear Grandma flip

the page and anticipate what was next? Maybe Mom could provide that magic.

"Mom," asked Michelle, "Grandma can't read to me anymore. Will you?"

"I loved her reading, too. Let's start tonight."

Mom picked "Anne of Green Gables." She said, "Your grandma read this book to me when I was your age."

Michelle snuggled



next to her mother who read almost as well as Grandma. But her mother choked up and stopped several times.

"I'm sorry, Michelle, this brings back memories and we know we won't have Grandma around much longer."

The reading session ended in hugs and tears. Michelle would have to find another reader.

The next day Grandma seemed better when Michelle went in to see her. She asked, "Did you find a reader you enjoy listening to?"

"I like Mom's reading best, but she is too sad to read to me."

"Well, you'll find someone someday. Right now, I want someone to read to me. My eyes are so tired. You pick the book, something I might not pick for myself."

Michelle thought about it, and then said, "How about the first Harry Potter book?"

"Great choice, Michelle!"

Michelle found the book, then snuggled next to Grandma under the blanket and began to read. Listening to Grandma all these years had left its mark. She gave each character in the first chapter a distinct voice: Mr. Dursley a booming one, Mrs. Dursley a shrieking one, Professor McGonagall a strict one and Dumbledore a calm authoritative one. Images of what she was reading were in her voice. After a few pages, Grandma nudged her and said, "Why did I wait so long to ask you to read to me? I love the way you read."

When Michelle had finished the first chapter, she saw that Grandma was tired. She put the book on the night table, gave Grandma a kiss and was about to leave the room when Grandma opened her eyes and said, "Michelle, I think you have found a reader!"

"You mean me?"

They looked at each other and smiled.

—Fanny Wong, Chinese American grandmother, New York.

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## Caldwell

The strong arms of Caldwell  
Grip my hand,  
Tugging me to come  
See the profound site

I look at him,  
A strange twinkle  
Kindling in his eye  
Full of awe and mystification

He points and tells me to look  
And I look,  
Only to see the bright day  
Turn dusk and dawn

I sit and watch  
For hours under  
The beautiful clouds  
And the misty fog

My dear brother  
Turns towards me  
Tired yet sleepless,  
He lays his weary head on my lap

Taking refuge near  
The short-cut grass  
As the bay  
Bids him farewell

I stand up from  
The damp soil,  
Reluctantly leaving  
The stunning day to end

As I head home carrying  
Caldwell  
Sound asleep in my arms

Morph to cries of pain,  
death  
As many hearts sink  
Below the waves

Disappearing forever  
With their dreams.

—Ethan Nguyen, 13, Vietnamese American, Florida.

Art by Paula Gregovich, Oregon.

