

Kate Houselog
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Dear Robert Munsch,

Every night before I went to bed, my mother read me, Love You Forever, and she would cry. My sister and I never understood why she cried. Recently while looking through my old things I found your book, well-worn and dog-eared. A faint smile came across my face as I remembered my past nightly bedtime story. I read the book. And I cried.

I'll love you forever,

One of my earliest memories is when I was taking a nap at my grandparents' house and being the rambunctious tyke that I'm sure I was, I kept opening my eyes to look at what was going on around me. And each time I did, my grandpa would shush me and gently close my eyelids with his pointer finger until I fell asleep.

I'll like you for always.

Five years ago my grandpa suffered a massive stroke. The doctors said that the only reason why he survived was because he was so strong. And he was knowledgeable that he fed with his collection of National Geographic magazines. But in the next few days when we were allowed to visit him, there was no evidence of the strength of intelligence Papa Louie used to exude. His stroke left his entire left side of his body paralyzed. The physical therapists were hopeful in the beginning. They said he would walk into Christmas Mass in a year. They were wrong. For five years my grandpa was trapped in a wheelchair and with a brain that was most times nonsensical. But God, sometimes he was clear. So clear it made us hopeful for a recovery. But the next day he would be foggy again. Mr. Munsch, one time I asked Grandpa why his family moved to Dubuque. Do you know why? His father, my great-grandfather, was threatened by the mafia in Chicago because my great-grandfather refused his fruit store to be "protected" by the organization. Papa Louie came from a strong family, and when he was clear-headed and told me things like that, I could see the strength in him fighting to live.

As long as I'm living.

My grandpa died of complications due to the stroke this summer. I went to his wake and funeral in a sling because I broke my collarbone a day before he died. I knew he was very sick when I broke my collarbone, but I didn't know I wouldn't ever see him again. I remember wondering what he would say. Maybe,

"Hey, Pug Nose (that's what he called me), what'd you do to your arm? Did it hoyt? Ya know what? Dinnit hoyt me a bit!" he would tease me, then he would laugh his contagious wheezing laugh until we'd all join in. But that never happened. I miss my grandpa. And as the holidays are coming up, the entire family is feeling the void he left.

But the physical therapists will be right after all, just a few years too late. Grandpa will be with us at Christmas Mass. He's always with us.

My Papa you'll be.

Thanks for the memories,
Kate Houselog

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