

It Was All Good

By Kelly Mullins

An old man sits in a rocking chair on a porch, resting in the sounds and scents of the fresh new summer day. The sun paints subtle pictures on the front lawn penetrating his senses with the fresh, heady earthiness of new life, promising the lazy day that summer's warmth often brings. The air is free of breeze as if the whole of the world holds its breath in anticipation of another day of stories and memories running vividly through his mind's eye.

This is how he spent his days, now. He had done everything. There was nothing left for him to do, even if he could, but sit and remember it all. There was nothing left to do but relive it all; replay and re-love it all again and again. He was a blessed man, with a heart filled with joy, happiness and love. It had not been a perfect life in the strictest sense of the word, but it had been perfect for him and he would passionately deny having any regrets whatsoever. So in that sense, it was a perfect life.

As a child, he desired knowledge. The world was new then and demanded his exploration. Though he had not remembered it for most of his life, he remembered it vividly now.

He could remember seeing the world *as* its smallest pieces and each piece an entire universe within itself. A baseball may *just* be a ball, but to him it was so much more. It was rich textures, smooth, yet easily gripped. We might see a stitched seam, but when he traced that same seam with his clumsy little fingers, he saw it had no beginning, nor end, that went on forever. He was amazed at the fact that a blade of grass felt sharp and pokey by itself, but a whole lawn felt soft on bare, little feet. The universe

was a place for him to experience and explore and he loved nothing more in life than discovering new ideas – that is, new to him.

Sadly, this part of his life didn't last very long. Before he knew it, he was a boy. He was curious and strong. He was independent and full of ideas and energy. He had explored the universe and now wanted to command it. His imagination was vibrant, as the new life sprinkling the landscape of Spring is vibrant. He could see things in his mind and place himself directly into those visions, whether with his buddies or alone. He could be a superhero one moment and a space-man in the next. He could save the world and invent the most fascinating objects with detailed plans scribbled on notepaper. He was an artist and drew the most wonderful pictures. Nothing could stop him. He was the very concept of confidence.

Again his boyhood was not but a wisp in the spirit of his entire life, for he quickly went from boy to teenager. As a teenager, his confidence shook from day to day, sometimes violently and probably measurable by a Richter scale. It was during this time in his life that he made probably one of the most important discoveries in his life: girls are not like boys. Girls suddenly became strange and wonderful creatures, wholly unknowable and mysterious. They had special powers that he marveled at. They altered since his boyhood, even the girls he had known his whole life.

They began to grow hips that he was afraid to touch during dancing lessons in P.E. class. Their faces changed as well. He began to see their faces in a different light. Their lips became full and soft; sometimes he could not take his eyes off of them when a girl spoke, unless he noticed her eyes. His gaze would become locked on her eyes, and he would be lost in hypnotic trance watching the subtle ways those eyes would narrow when she smiled. He had never noticed before how girls' eyes smiled all on their own.

The only salvation from this trance would be if he noticed her chest. This was most curious to him. Unfortunately, his eyes were constantly wandering to girls' chests, and when this happened, horribly embarrassing events would soon follow. He was often grateful for a book to carry to hide the embarrassing bulge in his pants.

Thankfully, his teen years passed quickly as well, and he became a young man. When he was a young man, he fell in love...often. He understood the phrase as well, because when he fell in love, he fell from the brink of sanity and became obsessed and enslaved to love itself. Love was all there was. But the love he fell most definitely deepest into was the love he felt for one woman he met in his senior year of college. Sarah was a sophomore, barely 20 and more beautiful than anything he had ever experienced. They spent every possible moment together. They ate together; napped together under the warm summer sun in the shade of the tree he had carved their names into. She was everything to him and would be for the rest of his life.

Though he wished it could have been longer, he didn't regret his transformation into a man. Sarah became his wife and soon after they began their family with their first child, Eddie. He was the first college graduate in his family. His parents and older siblings worked until the day they died and didn't have time to go to college. He had a good job that allowed him to provide comfortably for his wife and children and gave him the time he needed with them. These truly were the happiest years of his life.

During this phase, he and Sarah had 3 children, each a year apart: Eddie, Lizzie and the baby, Sandra. He loved watching his children experiencing the same phases of life and did all he could to help them get the best they could from each phase. Sarah stood by him every step of the way, and slowly the confidence of his boyhood began to return.

He remembered the day, the very moment, when he moved on to the next phase of his life. It was when his baby girl Sandra put her car into gear and pulled off down the road on her way to college. He stood there for an hour afterward, watching, wondering how it had all slipped by so fast. Not even Sarah knew about the days he would spend out in the garage, weeping for the loss of his youth and his children. If only he could have it all back to do again; he wouldn't change a thing.

He was now middle-aged. He remembered mocking the men that bought a new sports-car and left their wives for younger versions, obviously wanting for a youth they squandered. Though he did not do either, he did understand now what it was. He loved Sarah, with all of his heart. She was a good woman; a good person. He couldn't stop obsessing about how easy it used to be to fall in love, to be free to just enjoy life. His days now were filled with emptiness and he felt lonely.

His children were all gone and his body no longer allowed him to do the things he used to do. He couldn't stay up all night playing poker with the guys. He couldn't drive all the way to their destination on long trips; he eventually always had to stop for a rest. He was losing the freedom he took for granted when he was young and didn't have a family to occupy his time. Time was all he had now and he didn't like it – not one bit.

He was a very lucky man though, and Sarah understood this. Maybe she just understood him and knew exactly what he needed. He didn't know it, but she had been saving money for years, and she spent it all on a cabin out in the woods. It was something he had always dreamed of. He remembered the day she took him to see it. He didn't know where they were going, only that she had a surprise. When they finally made it up the long, winding, washboard driveway there stood before him a dilapidated, run down, heap of a wooden box that barely seemed to hold up the roof.

It became a legendary fight between them. One the family would talk about for years and refer to it as “the time they almost split.” He was angered that she spent so much money on something so worthless. Over time, however, he realized that what helped him through his rough middle years was the time he spent pounding away on that old cabin. It gave him something to do. He had never properly thanked Sarah for that gift, and as he sat there remembering he offered a small prayer to her. It was a prayer of thanks and he hoped that wherever she was, she heard him.

It was a weekend he and Sarah spent in that cabin that he received the call from his son-in-law, Kevin. It was in the middle of the night and Kevin was just not his favorite person. Sure he was a decent man. He had an ok job and provided for Lizzie and he supposed she was loved and in love, but Lizzie could have done so much better. He supposed that he couldn’t think of what type of man would have been acceptable to him, so he kept it to himself and tolerated Kevin as best he could. He thought he would even like Kevin were it not for their relation.

The call from Kevin woke him up from a deep comfortable sleep – the kind you can get only when you are in a cabin in the mountains – and he answered the call maybe a bit to harsh.

“What the hell is this,” he growled into the phone, “it’s three o’clock in the goddamn morning.”

“Dad,” he heard Kevin’s voice, shaky as if he had been crying, “It’s a girl.”

“What...” it took a moment for the wee-morning announcement to sink in, “What’s a girl. Oh...”

The realization struck him like a ton of bricks - as the saying goes – and Kevin’s next words were the catalyst that sent him into the next phase of his life.

“You’re a Grandpa, now!” Kevin said, his voice tapering at the end of the sentence, indicating a new bout of weeping.

“Oh, my boy,” he said to the phone, feeling the lump in his throat as his eyes blurred from welling tears, “my boy, my boy, my boy! You’ve done well. We’re on our way.”

He hung up the phone and woke Sarah, gently, and told her the good news. They sat in the bed holding each other weeping together and sharing a new future memory together. It was the memory of the birth of their first Grandchild. They would soon take on the persona given to them by their children and the world. People would no longer call him by his name. Most often he would now be Grandpa, and it was good.

Over the years that followed, he watched his granddaughter grow, as well as the multitudes of grandchildren that came after. He relived his life as a young man vicariously through his children and his youth through his grandchildren. He was happy again. Had he thought that a different time was the happiest years of his life?

Eventually, His grandchildren grew up and some had children of their own. Slowly, he became the old man he is today. He now spends most of his time sitting in a chair, on a porch looking out at the lawn. Sometimes, children played on that lawn. Sometimes, the early bird was pulling the worm out of that lawn. But most often, that lawn was a stage where his entire life played out before his eyes.

Occasionally a big event come around that invites the entire family to the house he spent most of his life in, that Eddie now owns and takes good care of, as a good son should. One such event was Sarah’s death. She too was an old woman and died quietly in the night, with a full heart and happy soul. Of course he was sad, but he knew she was ready and that they wouldn’t be apart for too long. She was preparing him a place in Heaven.

He was lucky during that time to have so many unique and lovely people around constantly him, that at least for a while the gaping hole in his life that Sarah's absence created was mostly filled by his loving family.

He now finds himself looking at people he should know, but doesn't. Perhaps they are great-grandkids or great-great-grandkids. Maybe they are wives or husbands of his descendants; he just doesn't know. What he knows is that what surrounds him on these special events is a legacy he had never had any clue he was creating.

Today, however, was a quiet day. No children played on the lawn. The early birds had all already done their morning duties. He was only reminiscing and content with it. He was an old man; old by anyone's standards. Perhaps his time left here wasn't very long, but what more could he possibly hope to do? He had done it all. Maybe he would leave this world soon, but it wasn't going to be today, and probably not tomorrow, and when it did, he'd go quietly, knowing that it had all been good. It had all been so very good.