

## GRANDPA

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By James Collins

In 1956 Grandpa celebrated his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday. Four years earlier, he had retired from Wall Street at the grand old age of 82. He had a full life and experienced many world shaking events. He lived through the Spanish-American war, World War I, the great influenza plague, the depression and World War II. During all these events, he helped support and nourish the family. Now in his waning years he finally settled into retirement. He liked his naps, he liked his books he liked a party and occasionally he liked a drink. If a party was held at home and he did not have to go out and travel there and back, he would increase his drink intake from a few to a few too many. This night appeared to be one of those events.

The McCoy family and the Collins family had known each other for years and were very good friends. Owen McCoy and I were the best of friends and had been since we were 12. After high school, we attended college together and were the binding force between the families. Between Christmas and New Year's families got together for informal parties. This year the McCoy's invited my mother, my 16-year-old sister and myself to their house for a brief cocktail party consisting of hors d'oeuvres and drinks. My father was also invited but was working his second job at the time. We looked forward to the event and showed up at the appointed hour on a Friday night. Mr. and Mrs. McCoy attended, as did Owen, one of his sisters and Grandpa. Everything was grand. Christmas music was playing in the background large trees sat in the corner of the living room and the aroma was magnificent. The tree was fully decorated with tinsel glass ornaments ribbons popcorn and the perennial Angel with the star at the top of the tree. Under the tree, sheets of white cotton made it look like snow. It was a wonderful Christmas scene. Conversation covered the families, the neighbors, current events, politics and stories full of humor and memories. The food was plentiful as were the drinks. Grandpa's interest was more to the liquid side of the presentations. He had some of the best stories because he had the most experience of anyone in the room. When Grandpa talked everyone listened. Most people suffered during the recession and the wounds were still sensitive even after World War II when the massive business expansion made everyone feel comfortable. The McCoy suffered go back there again like everyone else, but Grandpa worked in Wall Street most of his life had been nimble and though he had been hurt like everyone else he was a much better shape and maintained a job throughout the entire event. It was because of Grandpa that Owen's father got educated as an engineer and they were able to afford a house.

When you ingest a lot of food and liquid no matter who you are eventually, you have to use the facilities. It was Grandpa's turn. He excused himself, stood up, and holding onto his cane, he staggered his way off to the bathroom. The conversations continued as did the laughter. We heard the bathroom door open and shortly thereafter Grandpa wobbled into

view. As he moved the cane forward, he slipped and fell headfirst into the Christmas tree. The collision was noisy. You could hear breaking glass and the sound of the tree hitting the wall and then the floor. Everyone jumped up. Grandpa was the center of attention as we were all afraid of him being hurt by the fall. Everyone was speaking at once. Immediately, the three men lifted Grandpa by the shoulders and put him on the couch. He sat there for a moment or two with his head down on his chest taking deep breaths. When he lifted his head, my 16-year-old sister exploded in laughter because Grandpa sat there with a bright blue one-inch diameter glass ornament centered on his nose. His glasses had been broken and apparently, he could not see the new attachment to his nose. All of the grown-ups were snickering and trying to cover their mouths but nobody said anything to Grandpa.

Grandpa was obviously in shock and immediately reached for his drink to calm his nerves. As he raised the glass to have a sip, the upper part of the glass hit the lower part of the ornament and he could not raise the drink far enough to get any liquid. My sister went into hysterics laughing. My mother had a take her out of the room while my mother was laughing and covering her own mouth. While Grandpa continued trying to get a sip out of the glass, you could hear the click every time he raised it to his mouth. This went on for a full minute and Grandpa who got very exasperated said to Mrs. McCoy, “Peg, there is something wrong with this drink. I think the glass is broken can you replace it for me.”

Peg promptly poured another drink in a wide mouth glass and handed to Grandpa. He still could not get it passed the ornament on his nose. I went over to Mr. McCoy and said, “Tom, should we take Grandpa off to the side, tell him what happened, and remove the ornament from his nose?”

“No Jim, Grandpa has been the guardian of this family for generations. We cannot do anything to him, which would embarrass him or make him feel uncomfortable because he is getting old. In this family Grandpa can do nothing wrong. We will just ignore the ornament on his nose and go on as if nothing happened. We will let the party go on for another 20 or 30 minutes and then we will quietly close it down. Grandpa will doze off to sleep, and we then we will remove the ornament. Please tell your mother of our plan so she does not feel uncomfortable. Twenty minutes later the party ended we all said our goodbyes and Grandpa with the ornament still on his nose, waved to us from the porch. This was a Christmas party that would never be forgotten. When Grandpa passed, we talked about it at his wake, and we all had a good laugh, which he would have enjoyed.

**THE END**