

## Grandparents Speech

As you just heard, my name is Jess; I'm sixteen years old and in year 11. I am part of the Girl Guide movement and have just helped to establish a 14+ unit in South Canberra. I have three grandparents, my mum's parents, and a Nana, my dad's mum. Sadly my Darby, my dad's dad past away in 1998 from cancer. I love my Grandparents very much and the reason I so readily agreed to speak to you all today was so I could show everyone just how much respect and love I have for them.

So what exactly is a Grandparent? A four year old would tell you it was someone who took you on the bus and bought you Smarties, an eight year old would tell you it was someone who spoiled you when you went to stay with them, a twelve year old would tell you it was your mum's parents and the people you took to Grandparents day. So what do I, as a sixteen year old think a Grandparent is? A Grandparent is someone who has had amazing life experiences, someone who has a world of knowledge and wisdom and would happily share that with you, someone who takes you to get your hair done when you stay with them, someone who buys you pikelets, someone who lets you get your ears pierced two, three, four more times than your mum would like, someone who no matter how many times you've heard it before can still tell a story and hold your attention for the entire time. A grandparent is more than knitted sweaters and comfortable shoes, more than lavender hand cream and Devonshire Teas, even more than bus trips to Bowral and going to Seniors Tuesday at the Movie theatre. A grandparent is there to talk to when mum and dad won't listen, a grandparent will take you to that extra dance rehearsal when mum and dad are busy, a grandparent

celebrates your small victories when others cant be bothered. In other words, a grandparent is the person at 70 who you want to be at 17.

The theme of this forum is Happiness and Heartache, so I thought that it would be fitting to tell you of my first ever broken heart, especially as it involves my dads dad, my Darby. I'm not exactly sure why our family call him Darby, depending on who you talk to the story goes that when my cousin Rebecca was a tiny girl she was staying with my grandparents for some time and picked up on my Nana calling my granddad 'Darling', but being only very little it came out Darby. My Darby's name was John Hull, but anyone who knew him called him Jack. Jack was from a small town in NSW near Camden and its sad to say I don't know much about his childhood. When he was 17 he lied to recruitment officers and joined the Army, like many at the time. He fought on the Kokoda trail and then later in the War he was fighting in the Markham Valley at Nadzap Airport when he caught a bad case of Denghi Fever and once he finally regained consciousness in hospital he asked the date and it turned out that he had already turned 21! He used to like to tell the story of during his time in the Valley he lay on his back and watched the Kitty Hawks bomb the hills around him. He was then sent to Rabaul and even through the destruction he still though it was a beautiful place and ended up living there for twenty years! My Darby was a great man, I have so much love and respect for him and his soldier friends that fought in the Second World War. My Nana and he had two of five children born there; one of them was my dad. Darby dealt with so much in his life and his experiences have taught me to have the utmost respect for my elders. This is why his death in 1998 was such a low point in my life. We had been living in Cambodia for most of 1997/1998,

and had not seen him since he and my Nana came to stay with us in our time overseas. We had only been back in Australia for a couple of weeks and I was still trying to cope with the culture shock of a small town when my dad found out that Darby was very sick, he flew to Redcliffe that night. The next day we found out that Darby had died. I was only eleven and my sister was seven, so even though we were both sad it was hard trying to explain to her that we would never see him again. I remember that night lying in bed after a phone call to my dad and thinking about everything he would miss seeing me do. He would miss my first day of high school, he would miss my sisters dance recitals, he would miss my basketball finals, he would miss my school formal, he would miss my sisters first day of high school, and he would miss my graduation. It was only when I turned twelve a few months later that I realized that it was not the fact that he would miss all these things in my life, but I would miss him being there. He would always be there with me, even though I couldn't see him. Yet the realization that he would not be there, that I wouldn't see him again was so devastating. We went up to Redcliffe for the funeral and it was one of the strangest experiences of my life. I had never been to a funeral before and this was not what I had expected. My sister and I were the youngest there by about seven years, and at eleven, I had never seen an adult cry. I didn't look at the body, as mum said it wasn't Darby anymore, it was just a shell, and that Darby was always going to be here with us. And I believe her. Grandparents are always the first ones to celebrate your successes, the first to support you when things don't go according to plan. And even though he wasn't there physically, he was there. He taught me many lessons, he built many of the values I hold today, he taught me that smoking was bad and respect was good. That people of other races are just as beautiful as us and that

anything other than Cheese Rolls and Roast Chicken for lunch just isn't good enough.

I would like to think that I was luckier than most kids my age. A lot of my friend's parents are divorced and I am lucky enough to have two. And although I love my mum and dad very much, I don't need anyone else on my back, I need someone who is going to support my choices and be there for me when they are not necessarily the right ones. I would like to think that my Nana was a perfect example of how Grandparents are pillars of strength and support. A little after Darby died, my Cousin fell pregnant and she didn't have a partner. When I found out the news I was ecstatic but being younger I did not realize the implications of what being a single mum was all about. My cousin had lived with us and I always thought that she was a strong and self-supportive person. Yet in this time of need she found herself lost upstream without a paddle. My nana provided that paddle in the form of unquestioning support. Some may say that Grandparents do not have the same worries for children that parents do. I think that this is only a half truth. Parents worry about their child's health and safety constantly, but where a parent may feel that they have failed in protecting their daughter, a grandparent's life experiences have taught them that the last thing a single mother needs is to be reprimanded, or looked down upon. They can provide the support that a parent may not be able to supply at a moment's notice. Nana took my cousin under her care and provided a crutch to get her back on her feet. Her son, now three is the most beautiful baby in the world and I know in my heart that this would not be the case if not for my Nana. And not only does my Nana support, she is a true inspiration. Her many years in Rabaul also changed her life, in Redcliffe the Queensland

town in which she lives; there is a high population of Islanders. Nana is a constant source of energy and without her many of our Islander friends would not have made a living in Australia. I even got a cousin through her connections! My cousin Emily is thirteen and even though our skin is a different color I have never questioned our relationship. My Nan is always there for me. Last year, around my sixteenth birthday I experienced a very messy falling out with a group of friends and I was a total mess over it. My Nana wrote me a beautiful letter saying that she would always be there for me and whenever there was something I couldn't tell my parents, I should tell her. She said that she loved me very much and that I was a beautiful person. This was just the medicine I needed; she restored confidence in me that had been missing along with my so called friends. I think that support is a big must in the cocktail that is Grandparents.

So I know the kind of person I want to become, but how do I become that person? I become that person through the wisdom of my Grandma. My grandma's name is Minnie and I think that her story is the best so far. She lived out in Winton in a Pub run by her parents, she then joined the RAAF, met my Granddad, got married and had seven kids! Sadly, her first baby, Robert, only lived for 8 days, but my Grandma was a strong woman and ended up raising six of the most well adjusted adults I know. I think that she is really the kind of person I would like to be one day. Even though we don't agree on a lot of things, such as whether gay is a better word than queer and how many piercing I should have, I listen to what she has to say like it was the gospel. I remember her telling me when I was young that young ladies do not say 'bucks' they say dollars, that helping someone else was ten times better than helping yourself and that women have exactly the

same rights as men and I was never to let anyone to tell me otherwise. My grandma and I don't always get along, and sometimes even fight, but I probably have more respect for what she says than any teachers, any philosophers, pretty much anyone. Until I was older I never really was able to understand just how true her words of wisdom were. Really, all women needs in this world are those three things. Women do not say 'bucks' they say dollars, this is a prime example of etiquette. If a lady has etiquette, if she is polite and sophisticated then she gains the respect of those around her. Helping others is ten times better than helping yourself. My Grandma set up a senior's café in the Tuggeranong area and was pretty much running it for many years, until recently when they lost funding for it. It was a sad time for my grandma but this taught me just how selflessly it was possible to give, if we were all this selfless then the world would be a much better place. And finally that women have the exact same rights as men. Even though my grandma was a 'house wife' she was still an active member of the community, she was a Girl Guide leader, and she was not held back by any expectations of her. She lived to her full potential and still does. I hope that when I'm seventy I am like her, but Shhhhh, don't tell her, it would wreck the status that we have. She still thinks that teenagers don't care! Believe us, we do, and if she ever stopped giving me these pearls of wisdom I know I would not grow to my full potential.

So in the cocktail that is Grandparents we have the respect from Darby, the Support from Nana and the Wisdom of my Grandma, what's left? FUN! We all need to have fun! I love having fun! Sometimes society presses upon us the idea that at sixteen we need to be adults. And granted I do like to be treated like an adult sometimes, I'm still only a kid. Hey, I'm only sixteen!

I'm still young and while I'm young I want to be young. I don't drink, smoke, have premarital sex or do drugs. I do love a good party every once and a while, but what I love most is being a kid. My grandpa taught me from a very early age that no matter what the circumstances it is possible to have fun. When I was little he took me to the movies, the hobby store, McDonalds, the park, he bought me toys, and he let me play with his trains, even now he still takes me out to the movies or lunch. He told me once that if you're a kid, you should be a kid, so that's exactly what I'm going to be, a kid.

One of my favorite songs tells us to, "accept certain inalienable truths, prices will rise, politicians will philander and you too will get old. And when you do you will fantasize that when you were young prices were reasonable, politicians were noble and Children respected their elders. Respect your Elders!" Well I certainly do. I love my grandparents more than anything and the values they have instilled in me have paved my life towards being a respectable adult. So what do I as a sixteen year old think a grandparent is? A grandparent is a comfortable mix of respect, support, wisdom and fun. Thankyou.