

"THE MAJESTIC"
A SHORT STORY
BY JOEL BAPTISTE

THE MAJESTIC

Binoculars at night, that's how I remember it. Looking back it seems like such a crude way to catch the moment, but it must have had some reasoning if my grandpa had them out. Ruben Hernandez is my step grandfather, the only grandpa I have ever known. He worked on the Space Shuttle Project at Rockwell International, when I was just a young kid. He would always tell me fantastic space stories that would boggle my young mind and keep me thinking abstract thoughts. If a boy could ever have a hero growing up, my grandpa would surely fit the bill. That being said, I still didn't understand why we were standing in the street, at night, with a pair of binoculars.

One summer, the whole family was briefed that someone might come by asking questions about grandpa. He was up for a classified clearance level at work. Rockwell could do thorough investigations, possibly talking to us all before they cleared him, even our neighbors.

Woa! Space Shuttles, and classified clearances, I was convinced that my grandpa was one of the most important men around. And there was no end to the cool things that he would teach me. The adventures that we would have in his backyard alone could put other kids stories to shame.

He also had a green thumb, I mean he really knew what he was doing when it came to growing things. He once taught me how to sink a two inch PVC pipe flush with the ground, at an angle towards the root ball of a fruit tree. All that one had to do for the tree to get a perfect drink was to plunge a hose into the pipe and let it fill up a few times. My grandpa's plum and peach trees always had the best fruit in our neighborhood.

Out in front of his house there was a bevy of rose bushes, always perfectly manicured, as if they were sacred bonsai trees. Some days before school, my little sister and I, would run over to his house and he'd clip a few roses and birds of paradise for us to give to our teachers. We would regularly surprise them with these beautiful arrangements. To tell you the truth, I doubt that I would have ever passed grade school without them.

Growing up, I lived across the street from my grandparents. I would go over to their house every day when I was young, involving myself with whatever job grandpa was doing that day. These simple tasks around his house became my daily adventures, and we had so much fun doing them together. Summer time is when I really had the most fun. When you are young, life holds a whole new world from June to August.

I'm convinced that summertime in Orange County is the closest thing to an utopian dream as one can get, and I have since been all over the world. I would often show up in grandpa's backyard to find him assembling some crazy contraption, like a broom stick with a glass mason jar duct taped at one end of it.

"What'cha making grandpa?" I'd ask.

"Son, this here is an instrument of death." He'd quip back at me.

I didn't know what this creation was going to do, but it looked pretty cool, and as always-I was all in. He put some sweet smelling insecticide in the jar, and then added about three inches of scalding hot water.

"That should set 'em." He said, while glaring through his glasses.

"What can I do grandpa?"

"Follow me, we got a whole nest of 'em over here." And he took off around to the back of the house with me in tow, a death party of two.

"See that up under the roof there?" He pointed with a nod of his head.

"Looks like mud, wait it's a bird nest grandpa!"

"Son, that's a wasp nest, and today it's us or them. These damn wasps have been trying to get your grandpa for years, but they don't know who I really am."

That's how my grandpa would talk, it really kept me in the mission. He got up on a step stool and slipped the jar over the nest. Holding the jar flush with the roof, he slid it back and forth, knocking the nest loose into the poison solution. He would screw the cap on the jar for a few minutes and shake it.

"Air tight, we don't want any stragglers to escape and come get us." He'd say.

When he was sure that they were all dead, he would take out the nest for us to inspect. Words couldn't describe the excitement in the air as we dissected the nest. All of these wasp larva, trapped in tiny individual hexagons, with an opaque cap on top for a roof.

"There must be a hundred of them, we did good getting this down." I said to him. I kept thinking that any one of these guys could have stung my little sister, grandma, or possibly even me and grandpa.

After those adventures, as if it was too heavy of an event, he would always take me and my sister to Thrifty's for ice cream. I'd get mint chip on top with original chocolate chip for the bottom scoop. If we didn't go to Thrifty's for some reason, he had this big freezer in the garage that was full of pop-cicles, where we'd get our pick.

We were really close until I got into Jr. High.

so there we were, about nine O'clock at night, in the middle of the street between our two houses, and holding a pair of binoculars. My Dad and grandpa are pounding beers and having a good 'ol time. Doesn't seem strange at all, right? Our neighbors were probably closing their blinds by now and wondering what the hell we were doing out there.

"You see it Fred?" Grandpa asked my Dad.

"Yea, I think I got her, man would you look at the tail on this sucker!"

"Fred! Get your ass in here. What the hell are you old men showing our son out there at this hour?" My Mom screeched from the kitchen window.

I was getting upset. I wanted to see what all the buzz was about. I wanted to be a part of what my Dad and grandpa were doing, I sure as hell wasn't getting anything more than a sip of pop's beer, not with Mom paying attention like that.

Just then grandpa handed me the binoculars and directed my aim up towards the night sky.

"Can you see it son, it will be bright with a long tail".

It was 1986, I was nine years old, and what we were watching was Halley's Comet streak across the sky.

"I don't want you to ever forget this night." Said grandpa.

"You'll be in your 80's before it comes back." Dad chimed in.

"What do you mean?" I said.

Grandpa explained that, "Halley's Comet is in an orbit that brings it in view of the Earth only every 76 years."

Dad went back into our house, probably to take a leak or to calm my Mother down, either one was the result of all the beers that he and grandpa were downing. I stayed out there with grandpa for about another hour. That's when he unloaded one of the craziest stories on me that I had ever heard. I just listened as he started to talk:

"You know the world is so different now, my life is so different since the last time I saw it. I think that this has been one of the greatest periods of change between the three times I have been keeping track of her."

"What do you mean grandpa?"

"Listen close, it was 1910, I knew it would still be along time until technology would get up to rocket propulsion. That's the first time since the accident that I saw the Majestic, I had one thing on my mind still, getting off this planet."

"What's the Majestic?" I asked.

"My boy, what this world knows as Halley's Comet, is really what remains of the MAJESTIC, a 300 foot galactic super cruiser on a mission to find hospitable places to grow food.

Entering this galaxy, the ship hit some debris at a high rate of speed. Sections of the ship started to loose pressure and we couldn't fix it. The rear of the ship started to implode like a crushed soda can. Because the main thrusters were in the rear, the ship lost power and started to drift in open space."

"Come on grandpa, how do you know all of this?" I smirked.

"I was the ship botanist. We drifted for what you would call two years. The gravity of Earth started to pull us towards it's orbit. With no way to control our movements, asteroids began to collide with us, tearing apart what was left of the ship. As sections were collapsing, the Captain, my friend, told me to try and stabilize the ship. I knew we were dead. I thought of myself only. I took an ejection pod straight into this atmosphere, not even knowing what it was like on Earth. It seemed the better choice. There were three pods, but I believe I am the only survivor of the Majestic's crew.

Halley's Comet is just the remains of my ship, a super heated mass of precious metal, still cruising through space and time. It's orbit allows you to see it every 76 years."

I just continued to listen in silence, stuck on his every word.

"Right around the time of your birth, rocket technology was good enough for me to start working on a way back home. The new project that I am being cleared for is an organic fuel technology that I invented."

"Your not serious grandpa, you wouldn't leave us even if this is true." I said.

"I'd never leave without saying good by some how, in that you are right! But last week I decided to stay. Until I met your grandma, Muriel, I was like that hulk of metal up there. Looking at my old ship tonight, I know I am making the right decision. This is the first time I have seen it when my return is possible. Getting off this planet isn't even on my mind anymore. She freed me from my prison. She is sick now, I can't fix her, but she needs me now more than ever.

I worked my way into these missions at Rockwell so I could make my move. I have seen things you couldn't understand son, but your grandma taught me the simplest lesson...To be needed. I don't want you to ever forget this night."

"Ruben, another beer?" My Dad came back out carrying two bottles.

"Fred, you've read my mind." And he twisted off the top of another beer.

Mom called me in to get ready for bed. I remember being mad that grandpa saw me as a game while drinking with Dad, our special time was ruined

Years went by and my grandma finally succumbed to Alzheimer's disease. It was 1999, I was living up in Northern California when Dad told me that grandpa sold everything and took off in a motor home. No one has seen, or heard from him since the funeral. Everyone deals with loss in their own way, I know he really loved grandma a lot.

Time has passed. My family has dissolved. I had not spoken to my little sister in over 15 years, my parents long since divorced. That was pretty much my view of family around 2012. I had pretty much forgotten about all of that stuff, or chose not to deal with it. That's when I had the most supernatural experience that I have ever had. My grandpa came to me in a vivid dream, we talked all night, and he told me that we all needed each other. He then told me good by, and I immediately awoke with a new feeling of him being gone. I never really felt my grandpa was gone before that.

It's 2061, I am 84 years old now, all these things are just old memories to me. As I lay alone in bed this morning, these things seem to be coming back to me, but I don't know what to do with them. I put it out of my mind as I tell the Apple Communication System to dictate the news:

"The growing food shortage has been solved... A Botanist in Mexico has developed a genetic alteration that will triple the yield production, without compromising the classification or nutrient factors... Seed production to begin immediately. Botanist says "it was just an accident"; wants to remain anonymous. Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.

The Colorado Deep Space Telescope, in Pueblo, Co. Took photos of Halley's Comet this week. The high resolution of these photos has revealed what we once thought was a comet, appears to be pieces of man made components. Photos reveal geometric angles which are irregular in natural formations, in addition to what appears to be a melted door hatch...Scientists are baffled. "This changes everything" Stated one anthropologist.

I started to cry. In that instant I was 9years old again. I suddenly remembered everything my grandpa had told me, he really was my buddy. As I gathered my emotions, I started to reflect on my own life, and all the things he tried to teach me. It was like the seed suddenly broke open in me. I realized that I chased every selfish dream I ever had, forgetting the last thing he told me that night so long ago. I reached all of my goals, I had done it all, but I was still alone. I had everything, and nothing at the same time. I was just like him before he met grandma.

I had misinterpreted what was of value in life, and time was almost gone... It wasn't Orange County, or the past that was utopian, it was family. I sat there thinking. I understood that to keep anything really big, I had to give it all away at some point, even my pride.

I had created this world I now lived in and it was too hard for me to see a world without prisons of need, my needs. It finally came to me. It wasn't ever about me, I had been doing it all wrong! It is about being of service, being needed.

I told my system to find and call my little sister. I refused to live one more second in the prison I created for myself.

"Apple Systems has located your inquiry, Do you wish to contact?"

"YES." I whispered...