



# 2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program High School Teen Essay Contest

## Emily Arena

### A Dime is Worth More than ¢10

Right from the very beginning, my grandfather played an important role in forming my early childhood years and memories. He was known to me, and later to my sister, as Poppy. I'm not quite sure whether he picked the name or if my parents did, but it was the name that stuck. Poppy was incredibly involved in my life, and as he and my grandmother lived rather close by, we saw them frequently. In fact, every Wednesday on his way home from his job, he would stop at our house to spend some time with us before heading home. Unfortunately, on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001, my grandfather went in for a biopsy and a week later it was confirmed that he had nose cancer. December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001 happens to also be the day that my mother gave birth to me, and despite having a procedure done, he was still able to be at the hospital to support my mom and see me for the first time.

About a month and a half after being diagnosed with nose cancer, Poppy underwent a surgery to remove his nose in an attempt to stop the spread of the cancer to other parts of the body. Rather than walking around with a hole on his face, he had a fake detachable nose that he could take off whenever he felt the need to. As a toddler, I found it immensely amusing and would beg for him to remove it. It certainly elevated the "gotcha nose" games to the next level

that I'm sure not many children got to experience. It was just one of the many things that made my grandfather the unique, interesting individual that he was.

There are certain things that I remember about my grandfather more than others. One that particularly stands out to me is his money sock. Every time he would come visit my family or we would go to his house, he would give me a sock full of different types of change. He would then sit on the floor with me and go through every single coin and help me count it to figure out the exact amount of money. I was fairly young when we would do this, probably no more than three years old. As one can imagine, counting money with a toddler is a very time-consuming activity, yet he patiently sat through every second of it and never once got frustrated. Another little game that we would play is we would draw shapes with sidewalk chalk out on the driveway. He would name a shape, and I would run to it as fast as I could. Looking back, it sounds pretty basic, but at the time I thought it was one of the most fun games ever invented. I'm sure Poppy found it a bit mundane and repetitive at times, but he never once denied me from playing it. My grandfather was one of my biggest idols, letting me get away with things that my parents never would. A few times, he would let me sit on his lap while he was driving in the neighborhood and I would steer the wheel while he worked the pedals.

When the cancer started to take a toll on my grandfather, he was put in a nursing home where professionals could take better care of him. To make him feel better, my mother took my sister and I to build-a-bear workshop where we got to choose stuffed animals and say special messages to give to him. At the nursing home, he would watch hours upon hours of *Judge Judy* on the television in his room. While I didn't find pleasure in *Judge Judy* then as I was only a toddler, I watch her often now and think about my grandfather every time I do. Throughout his time in the nursing, my sister and I would often do crafts with him. One of these crafts was a sweatshirt with our handprints on them which he was to be buried in. From August to November 2005, my grandfather lived in the nursing home on hospice. On November 19, 2003, the day after my sister's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday, he passed away. As a family, we like to believe that he deliberately waited until the day after her birthday to let go because he did not want to taint that day for her in the future.

There are little things that we do to keep the memory of my grandfather alive. Every year on his birthday we buy Entenmann's devils food crumb donut to celebrate as it was one of his

favorite snacks. Furthermore, we would plant Narcissus Tazetta Ziva Paperwhites in a little glass vase with colored marbles to honor his memory. Whenever we see a dime on the ground, we take it as a sign that he is looking out for us and making sure that we are safe. I only knew my grandfather for a short period of time, but every single one of my memories of him is positive and fills me with joy. I wish that I had gotten to have a longer relationship with him, but I know that he is looking down at me from heaven and is proud of the person that I have become. No matter what, I know he is keeping an eye out for me and guaranteeing that I am happy and safe.