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### Buried Treasure

Growing up I was taught to enjoy the little things in life. I was taught to value and appreciate all my belongings whether they were new, used or old. When people think of treasures they often think of gold, diamonds, gems, and pearls. To me, a precious memory with a loved one comes with more karats than gold. About a year ago, I uncovered some treasure of my own, but instead of finding gold my treasure had mold.

A year after my father passed away, my siblings left me with the responsibility of cleaning out and organizing his belongings. From washing his clothes to donating his shoes, I spent days if not weeks organizing. Toward the end of getting everything in place I proceeded outside to the back yard to clean out a pile of torn, worn out, water damaged boxes that were being covered up by a ripped up faded blue tarp. As I began to uncover the tarp I noticed that the boxes were more rotted and damaged than I thought. I remember thinking to myself, “why would my dad keep all this junk?” There must have been about six or seven black widows just in the first layer. It took me about three hours to finally reach the bottom of the pile.

I carefully pull out a dusty black vintage looking suitcase. I cautiously examine it from top to bottom making sure it had no spiders. However, I knew it wasn't my dad's suitcase. I'm not sure if it was the style of it or because of the way it was stored that assured me it wasn't his. Inside I find a variety of outdated shirts, pants, and shoes that smelled like wet rags and mold. I quickly convinced myself to throw away the clothes because of their condition. As I grab the

last handful I reveal a small military style messenger bag stashed in the corner. The bag was olive green with a tan trim and the shoulder strap still attached to it. Even though the bag was full of cob webs, somehow the smelly outdated clothes protected the messenger bag from the outside elements. All I can see is a bunch of papers sticking out of it. I open the bag and shuffle through the wad of papers revealing receipts, letters, poems, and business cards. After reviewing some of the letters I realized why my dad kept all this “junk.”

The pile of boxes and suitcase belonged to my deceased uncle. My uncle passed away when I was in middle school. It seemed my dad kept his stuff and eventually forgot about it. I remember going through the papers till finally reaching the end. The only thing left was a crusty, folded up, newspaper clipping with dark mold spots on it. When I unfolded the piece of paper my eyes immediately opened wide and my jaw dropped to the floor. In big black bold letters, I saw my grandfather’s name followed by a passage from the bible. Buried under a pile of junk in the back yard I discovered my grandfather’s obituary.

When I was a year and six months old my grandfather was on vacation in Mazatlán, Mexico. Shortly after leaving one of his favorite restaurants he suffered a heart attack. Unfortunately, he passed away before paramedics could get to him—he was sixty-four. I always felt like I missed out on my grandpa. Like I got robbed of time with him. I always thought of him as an eighty-year-old man, so finding out he died at sixty-four was hard and disappointing especially since my dad passed away at sixty-one. Stories of my grandfather still echo through family gatherings. As soon as one person mentions his name everybody begins to smile and start to share their stories of him. I’ve heard about the grocery stores he owned in Juarez. About how all his family and friends loved and respected him. About his huge appetite and infatuation for a well-cooked steak with a baked potato on the side. Also, how he would show unconditional love

to all sixteen of his kids without making any of them jealous. Yes, I said sixteen. Everybody describes him as big and bold, yet loving and gentle. Nobody messed with him, yet everybody wanted to be around him. My mom told me a story about how he held me in his arms when I was a baby and how he would make fun of my messy hair. Even though I don't have any memories of him, I still love the fact that he held me and showed me that unconditional love that everybody talks about. Finding his obituary made me feel proud and strong. It made me feel closer to him and gave me a feeling of closure, comfort, and satisfaction. It was like finding a missing piece of a puzzle.

I look back on the day I found my grandpa's obituary and it still shocks me now. I know if I would have waited any longer it would have never survived. I wish my dad knew what he had laying in his back yard. I know he would have appreciated it as much as I do. The once buried treasure now sits, framed, on a table, in my living room constantly reminding me to appreciate and value those little things in life. It reminds me that we are never too young or too old to learn a life lesson. When people think of shiny gold, I think of that piece of paper grimy with mold.