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Footprints to Shadow

Since the beginning of human existence, there have been conquerors, and with conquerors there are defenders. During the course of antiquity, come weapons to defend a civilization's existence. My grandfather was my defender and my hero in my big green eyes; he was my moral compass, and with him I felt safe. Like a door opening in my mind, I can see my grandfather's big shining smile. I can see a flicker of his gold fillings as he smiled, and I can picture his elevated deep-rooted physique. When he was around, there was always humor accompanied with a profound teasing; besides, I was the apple in my grandfather's eyes. We would sit and play board games and converse for hours. There was always a candy bowl set out with butterscotch sweeties. I can still taste the harmony, an overwhelming melt-in-my-mouth, and I would eat the whole bowl while talking with grandfather. Every time I came to grandfather's house, the candy bowl was always bursting to the top. While sitting across from grandfather, I noticed he always had an old holster attached to his belt, and wherever grandfather went the holster did as well. I spent my weekends with both grandfather and grandma. To my grandfather I was never a burden, I was what he cherished most. My grandfather was my best pal, and I looked up to him.

On a muggy rainy day, I looked down at my grandfather's belt. I asked, "What is that grandpa?" He looked at me. I studied his fine lines, and I could sense his emotions drifting from humor to a river rushing like white water rapids, and his feelings of fast flowing memories

entwined through his wrinkled facial expressions as he paused for a moment. Grandfather replied, "Let me tell you a story."

As if I was traveling back in a history portal, he told me he was a colonel in the army during World War II while on a mission in Germany. As he witnessed the area and viewed the boulevards with the crushed structures from the mortar rounds, he felt compassion for those who had lost everything. As my grandfather continued walking he came across a Nazi soldier who he suspected to be a Kriegsmarine who was laying on the ground unconscious and seemingly not breathing; he concluded the fellow was dead. Detecting the holster, he unfastened the metal buckle and noticed a CZ27 pistol and pulled it out from the holster. I could sense the memories and the sorrow written on his face.

Grandfather said, "This was mine and one day it will be yours. It kept me safe, and will keep our family safe."

Grandfather took off the holster and offered it to me. As I felt the smoothness of the leather, and I realized how old it was and what it had gone through. I examined the holster: it had a marked date ingrained in the leather of 1942 and a stamped eagle, beneath the feet was a swastika. I removed the cover as if it was a present on Christmas day. With anticipation, I pulled out a cold, all-black metal pistol. I held the pistol with respect and delight. I looked over the pistol and noticed it was worn down in certain places. The barrel was etched with "Bohmische Waffenfabrik." As I turned it to the side on the ejection chamber there was one more eagle with a swastika in its feet. I pondered to myself, what pathway had this pistol journeyed?

This pistol had been in a war with a conqueror, and I viewed my grandfather as the defender of humanity. He had been in Germany fighting for freedom from a tyrant, as well as brutality done to the human race, fighting and leading his brothers in arms. That pistol had

traveled a road with two different warriors—one who survived and one who did not. The pistol was used to protect, and it was used to unshackle the prisoners of a conqueror. My grandfather was one of the defenders; he did this not only for his job but also for his principles and values. I never felt anything but safe with my grandfather and his companion on his belt.

I think it made my grandfather feel safe. I'm not sure what my grandfather experienced in the war, and I never asked. The only time my grandfather used the pistol was target shooting at the range. When I think back on my grandfather, I see the pistol and him as allies in my memories. I feel my grandfather's presence, charisma, and familiarity when I see that old shabby holster and pistol. I visualize my grandfather coaching me to shoot with this pistol. My grandfather engendered me with a respect for its power, security, and taught me to always use my wit. I could always count on him to defend me from anything.

I would sit with my grandparents all day. I would follow my grandma around the house and my grandfather would always have his martini with one green olive sitting by his side. I could smell the vermouth and hear the shake of the ice hitting against the metal shaker.

My grandma would tell him "Put that thing away!" "That pistol will not be accompanying us for dinner."

Grandfather would wink at me, and tease grandma until she would get mad. Grandfather only took his pistol off when he went to sleep, and it would sit beside the bed on his nightstand.

The day grandfather passed away was the day I lost my defender and my hero. That day is etched in my mind—the day I lost my best pal. In my thoughts grandfather is intertwined with the pistol he bequeathed to me. I remember all the good stretches we shared. I hope to share many experiences with my grandchildren one day, and perhaps one day they will see me as their defender. Grandfather gave me more than a legacy. He was devoted quality time and I will

always remember what a great soul he was. When I shoot that pistol, I see a vivid image of my grandfather in my mind. He is always with me through thick and thin: he left me his footprints to shadow in life.