

Goodbye to the Past, Hello to its Future

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Today, in the arms of my cousin, my grandfather's violin walked out the door. Enroute to Colorado to the next generation, it will be treasured and with any luck possibly be passed on to the generation after that. Now that it was promised to another branch of my mother's family, never to return to my home again, I was conflicted and surprisingly sad. This tangible remnant of my family's history and more importantly, my dear grandfather, had been in my possession for most of my adult life. Although I had seldom taken it out of its case, this morning I felt a sense of urgency for more time, one last moment alone with this instrument my dear Grandpa Kendall held as he played fiddle at countless barn dances, sometimes with my infant mother and her mother in tow.

After opening the case, I sat across the narrow room taking it all in, trying to photograph it into my memory as I held my cooling first cup of morning coffee. The faded velvet glistened in the lamp light, cradling the warm wooden instrument with two remaining catgut strings held by a still functional bridge. A few original horsehairs clung to the fabric caressing the bows that had originally held them.

Inside the small covered cubicle at the end of the case lived Grandpa's small pitchpipe that he used for tuning, unlike any I have ever seen in my music career. Guess I didn't get my perfect pitch from him! An earlier bridge, now split, kept it company along with a few clamps for the chin guard.

For perhaps the first time in my now long life, I picked up the instrument I have treasured and held it in playing position, possibly the first time I've held a violin since my freshman year of undergrad. Why had I not done this before? I had to learn to play a member of each instrument family so in my string class, I chose violin and actually became pretty good at it. Should I have had Grandpa's violin restored and taken up playing again? No matter, it was too late now.

With a sense of finality, I resolutely tucked it under my chin while attempting a selfie with the other arm. Not a master of the latter, I preferred my awkward attempt rather than breaking the spell by asking someone else to take a photo. This was my time to be alone with Grandpa via his fiddle. It was just us, no one else was welcome to share in this moment. Mission accomplished, I returned the violin to the worn case with its peeling black surface. My cousin's husband later said that look added to its charm.

After breakfast, son Mike held it tenderly with confidence. I noticed there was a bit more care than the professionally respectful way he has held countless instruments before. Even though he was not alive to meet his great, great grandfather, he also felt a quiet need to interact with it before it left our lives for good. I smiled as my musical son shared his thoughts to those of us in the room while he maneuvered the violin and described what he saw from his expert point of view. Feeling somewhat out of body, seeing the prized instrument that been like my own for so long in his hands transitioned me to the passage of time that was taking it to the next

generation. It was going to one of his second cousins who, as a violinist, will always treasure it. She is honored, one can't ask for more than that.

A few years earlier, when she and her parents traveled here for her important interview at the University of Chicago during her doctoral program, she couldn't hide her nervousness the morning of the big day. Before leaving for the city to take her to this moment that her family had gone to great lengths to facilitate, I mentioned to her mother, my dear cousin, that perhaps Grandpa's violin would be a good distraction. Quietly I went upstairs to retrieve it from the shelf where it has lived since moving to this house. With her parents lying in wait, I urged Eva to sit on the couch and handed her the case as I told her to whom it had once belonged.

I will never forget the look of wonder on her face as she opened the old latches to discover the surprise inside. For a moment, she forgot all about the big interview in Chicago as she gazed upon the family treasure while her mother and I described what it meant to us. At the time, she couldn't imagine that one day it would be entrusted to her. Others might have seen it as an old worthless violin that was past its prime but she understood. Today she was overjoyed when her mother called to tell her that I am giving it to her to treasure and protect for those of us who remember and to honor Grandpa's memory. Perhaps one day, she will pass it on to one of her children. Its new Colorado home will be the fourth Kendall generation, but I suspect it may not be the last.

I have no idea how many times I have looked at the picture I took that morning but it is good to be reminded of the experience. Grateful for the private time I had to say goodbye, I am at peace. I still have Grandpa's beautiful mandolin that will one day be my son's. Today, he masterfully held both. My heart is full. The family music lives on.