

Grandma's Cedar Chest-Barbara-D-Parks-Lee-District of Columbia

The boy watched as his grandfather brought his meagre earnings home and laid all but a pittance on the kitchen table. After he had taken out his week's allowance of five dollars, the rest of the earnings went into his grandma's cedar chest. This was the way the family always operated, their norm.

When the little boy turned seven, he was able to operate the family's push lawn mower. On Saturdays, he was out early, before the heat and humidity of the day would make hard work being outside and active. He charged two dollars fifty cents to mow people's grass, and on this particular Saturday, he'd cut three yards and earned seven dollars fifty cents.

Following his grandfather's example, he laid his earnings on the kitchen table. His Grandma told him to put two dollars fifty cents in his pocket so he could enjoy some of the fruits of his labor.

"Boy, you done worked hard and might want to go to the movies or buy yourself a treat. Let's put the rest in the cedar chest."

Over many years, the cedar chest was a normal receptacle for the major parts of the family's earnings. The habit of saving, of being frugal, later allowed the little boy, now a grown father and grandfather, to put himself and all of his children through college. Grandma's cedar chest now sits in a place of honor in his house.

Beside it is Grandma's scribbled handwritten thoughts she had jotted down when her grandson graduated from high school. He had placed it in a frame, for shortly before he graduated from college, his grandma died.

It was the only thing he remembered his grandmother ever writing, for she had never finished school. She had struggled to learn to write when she asked her grandson to "teach me how to make those letters. I've had a hard time tryin' to write those letters. I need you to hep me learn to read so I can read my Bible."

Every night, after dinner, he and Grandma worked hard. Her arthritic fingers struggled, and he massaged them as they continued to work, letter by letter, word by word.

Grandson sighed and tried not to cry as he read her words aloud:

*Our people's struggles, sufferin', and hard work had
hopes of better lives for y'all chirren.
So many made ways out of what seemed no ways,
sacrificed or did without so y'all comin' behind
would never be without. Times was hard, boy, but
a new day is here. Changes be happenin'. New sacrifices
be comin' to show the way for y'all to follow.
The struggles y'all overcome now will
make life better
for your chirrens' chirrens' chirren...
"Boy, I'm so proud of you."*

Tears blinded him, as he looked back in awe at how far his grandparents' lessons had taken him. "Grandma, you and Granddaddy made a way out of no way. No, Grandma, I'm proud of **you**. Thank you."

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