

A Granddaughter's Essay

By Deborah Kogler

Think back to the day that you had to take your first official driving test. You were probably sixteen years old; scared but confident that you would pass it. Chances are that a parent or grandparent took you for your test. Now reverse this and imagine you as a middle age adult taking your grandfather, who at the age of 92, had to take a re-examination road test with the local sheriff.

My grandfather, Nelson, had to do this. Unfortunately, my uncle, his son, “anonymously” reported him to the department of motor vehicles in a distant state claiming that he was a hazard on the road. Out of the blue, my grandfather received a letter in the mail that he had to take a road test again. The letter stated that he had been reported as a hazardous driver.

I honestly cannot say that he was a hazardous driver, after all he was a farmer and had been driving since he was 10 years old; his eyesight, mental status and mobility were excellent for a man his age; and I always did the driving when we were together. His only aging fault was his bad hearing. I never observed him having trouble driving and in the past five years he only drove locally, a radius of about 20 miles. Unfortunately, with underlying financial motives, my uncle felt that he should no longer be driving; and so instead of taking the time to carefully sit down and broach the subject empathetically and as a family unit, my uncle decided to just report him.

When I received the phone call from my grandfather, I knew that something was not right. He then read to me the letter that he had just received. As he was reading the letter, I could hear him getting choked up and even pausing as he was reading it. My heart just ached for my grandfather. I knew immediately that my uncle was behind this, but didn't say anything at first. After trying to calm him down, I said I would call and find out what exactly we had to do.

One week later, I, the middle-aged granddaughter, rode with my grandfather to the department of motor vehicles to take his driving test. We had to make sure that we had his license, insurance card, vision report and birth certificate with us. We pulled up in his little red Ford Escort and waited our turn in line. There were three cars in front of us and grandpa begrudgingly pointed out every person in that line was sixteen years old.

Grandpa's turn came and I was told to sit on the bench and wait for them to return. Finally, after twenty very long, heart pounding minutes, I saw the red car coming. Ah, he's back. As grandpa approached the stop sign, the trooper had him stop. He motioned for me to come to the car and then told grandpa to stay put. The trooper walked to the back of the car and spoke with me. These words I will never forget, “Sorry Miss, but you will have to drive home. I am confiscating his license for now”. The trooper handed me his report and explained to me what grandpa needed to do next, said good luck and then kindly excused himself and got into the next car in line.

As I walked to the drivers' side of the car, I saw my grandfather just sitting there staring straight ahead, his hands on the wheel, of course in the ten and two o'clock position, and he was just shaking. I opened the door for him and he got out, handed me the keys and then got in to the passengers' seat.

I proceeded to drive us out of the parking lot, stifling my tears and biting my tongue. Pulling over I read the report aloud to grandpa. Grandpa then told me step by step everything he did and of course his opinion of the trooper. Then he just broke down and cried. I had never seen my grandpa cry like that, not even at my grandmother's funeral, and I will never forget that heart wrenching moment. It still haunts me to this day.

I know it was partially because he felt humiliated that he "flunked" his test, but also that his entire lifestyle had just changed. He sobbed uncontrollably and just squeezed my hands. I could feel him shaking so, and did all I could to hold him tightly and tell him it would be alright. How many times had I heard him tell me that, and now here I was telling him the exact same thing! Yet I knew it would not be alright.

Finally, we released each other and I started to drive away, holding his hand and trying to tell him in a confident tone that everything would be ok. Yet he continued to cry and shake. Finally, I saw an ice cream parlor, so I stopped, told him to stay in the car and I would be right back. I went in and bought some ice cream cones for us, got back in the car and said; "You used to buy me ice cream cones when I was upset, now it's my turn. "He looked at me with bloodshot eyes, tears still flowing down his soft cheeks and said; "Debbie, thank you, but this is the last nail in my coffin."

Six months later my beloved grandfather died. I am convinced that this episode is truly what drove him to his grave. In my heart, I know that the whole situation could have been avoided had the approach to his senior driving been handled with more empathy and planning; and just maybe my grandfather would still be here!

Debbie Kogler

Deborah Kogler, Granddaughter

Author's Note

Ms. Kogler is also the owner of Magnifiers & More,
specializing in the sales of low vision products.

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